

Acknowledging One's Stigma in the Interview Setting: Effective Strategy or Liability?¹

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The current research examines how members of stigmatized groups remediate hiring biases by adopting the strategy of directly acknowledging their stigmatizing condition within the interview context. In the first study, 125 participants responded to a videotaped interview involving an obese or physically disabled job applicant who either did or did not acknowledge a stigma. In the second study, 87 participants responded to scenarios that manipulated type of stigma, controllability of its onset, and acknowledgment. Results across both experiments reveal that applicants who did not acknowledge their obesity or physical disability in an employment context were not viewed differently from each other. However, if applicants did acknowledge, the perceived controllability of the stigmas strongly influenced how they would be perceived.

The workforce is changing. In particular, more and more diverse individuals are entering what was once a largely homogeneous Caucasian male workforce (Offerman & Gowing, 1990; Takamura, 1998). Not only is this change reflective of a current American demographic trend, but it is also being promoted through legislation enforcing diversity, such as the Americans With Disabilities Act of 1990 (1991).

Unfortunately, many types of diversity are simultaneously marks of social stigma, and the bearers of such marks face hiring and employment discrimination. For instance, overweight persons are perceived less favorably and are hired less often than are those of average weight (Klesges et al., 1990; Pingitore, Dugoni, Tindale, & Spring, 1994; Roehling, 1999). Physically unattractive applicants are seen as less qualified and as less likely to be hired than are attractive individuals (Cash & Kilcullen, 1985; Dipboye, Arvey, & Terpstra, 1977;

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Heilman & Saruwatari, 1979; Raza & Carpenter, 1987). Physically disabled applicants are offered fewer job interviews than are nondisabled applicants (Johnson & Heal, 1976), and recent data continue to show that employers resist placing disabled individuals in the workplace (Hernandez, Keys, Balcazar, & Drum, 1998). And finally, Black applicants are less likely to be hired and are rated less positively on a number of dimensions than are White applicants (e.g., Huck & Bray, 1976; Parsons & Liden, 1984).

This body of research on hiring discrimination raises the question of whether stigmatized individuals can take actions to undermine the stereotyped attributions and negative hiring biases that confront them. A large number of self-help, "how-to-get-hired" books offer advice that ranges from how one should dress for interview success to how one should self-present. Yet virtually none of these speak to individuals who possess characteristics that may be stigmatized. Should such individuals openly address their conditions in a job interview, or should they downplay or hide their stigmas? Are differentially stigmatized applicants perceived similarly if they do acknowledge their conditions to employers? Little research has addressed these questions. In fact, there is a remarkable absence of empirical research examining any strategies that individuals who possess stigmas adopt in the job interview setting (Colella, DeNisi, & Varma, 1998). Similarly, very few studies have examined the effects of demographic diversity of any sort within the workplace (Jackson, Stone, & Alvarez, 1992). Given the breakdown of many physical and legal barriers for physically disabled and other diverse individuals, the rate at which they are entering the workforce is large enough to warrant research attention on these issues.

The current studies attempt to fill this research void by assessing reactions to the utilization of one specific interview strategy: that of directly acknowledging one's stigma. While Experiment 1 empirically examines how perceivers who are asked to make employment personnel decisions react to acknowledgments in the interview setting, Experiment 2 highlights one mechanism that might explain how individuals asked to play the role of employers perceive the acknowledgment.

The Acknowledgment Strategy

Not surprisingly, most stigmatized individuals wish to avoid the disadvantaged outcomes (e.g., interaction termination, awkwardness, inaccurate feedback) that they receive in social interactions (Biernat & Dovidio, 2000; DeJong & Kleck, 1986; Hastorf, Northcraft, & Picciotto, 1979; Hebl, Tickle, & Heatherton, 2000; Hockenberry, 1995). One strategy to overcome this negativity might be to acknowledge the stigmatizing characteristic. That is, an individual with a dramatic facial scar might simply say, "As you can see, I have a scar on my forehead," or a physically disabled individual might note that, "I use a wheelchair." As early as 1961, statements like these were hypothesized to assist individuals

with overt stigmas to “break through” interaction difficulties and to be reacted to by their interaction partners without disdain, pity, or contempt (Davis, 1961; Weiner, 1995). In an employment context, acknowledging might also reduce stereotyping by straightforwardly addressing an underlying source of the tension that interviewers are not otherwise legally able to discuss (see American With Disabilities Act of 1990, 1991).

Acknowledgments of Physical Disability

Research conducted by Hastorf, Wildfogel, and Cassman (1979) provides initial evidence that acknowledgments can benefit physically disabled individuals. Specifically, participants interacted with a physically disabled man who either did not acknowledge his disability or acknowledged it by saying that

He realized people were afraid to talk about his handicap, but he encouraged them to ask questions, anyway; only in this way could his handicap be gotten out of the way so that people could really get to know him.

Participants preferred as a work partner the disabled man who acknowledged his handicap significantly more than they did the man who did not acknowledge. The authors suggested that acknowledgments by disabled individuals have this effect because they indicate openness, which in turn signifies adjustment to one’s life situation and is a precursor to forming bonds of friendship and other meaningful relationships (e.g., Collins & Miller, 1994).

Similarly, a series of studies by Belgrave and colleagues (Belgrave & Mills, 1981; Mills, Belgrave, & Boyer, 1984) examined acknowledgments from individuals who simultaneously requested help from a nonstigmatized interactant (e.g., “Would you mind sharpening this pencil for me? There’s just some things you can’t do from a wheelchair.”). In line with Hastorf et al.’s (1979) findings, participants indicated that they would prefer to interact with the disabled individual who acknowledged the disability rather than with the individual who did not acknowledge.

In summary, preliminary evidence reveals that acknowledgments from a physically disabled individual tend to be an effective social strategy, particularly when they seem to suggest openness or serve to increase the length of an interaction. However, these studies have not examined acknowledgments from physically disabled applicants in job interview settings. In the current studies, we examine such acknowledgments in an employment context.

Physical disability is just one of many visible characteristics that serve to stigmatize individuals, however. What is effective for one form of stigma may not necessarily be effective for another, particularly if the stigmas differ on important psychological dimensions. Thus, we next consider the stigma of obesity.

Acknowledgments of Obesity

Obesity as a stigma differs from physical disability in important ways, perhaps most notably in the extent to which it is perceived to be controllable (Cesare, Tannenbaum, & Dalessio, 1990; Weiner, 1995). Disabled individuals might be viewed favorably when they mention their stigma because it evokes positive feelings and the attribution that one is able to persevere in the face of unfortunate, uncontrollable circumstances (Wright, 1983). Individuals who mention their obesity, however, may heighten attributions of maladaptive, undisciplined behavior. Acknowledgment in this case might only serve to increase the salience of a negative feature that most perceivers think can and should be overcome (Crandall, 1994). Furthermore, reference to one's obesity might create awkwardness and discomfort on the part of others who suddenly presume themselves expected to feign the normative "No, you're not overweight" response.

A newly developing perspective on coping with being overweight makes the current research particularly relevant. Instead of focusing on dieting and weight-loss efforts (e.g., Brownell, 1982; Wadden & VanItallie, 1992), this new approach focuses on size acceptance among overweight individuals. Participants in this movement have formed coalitions (e.g., "International No Diet Coalition"), written books (e.g., *Journeys to Self-Acceptance: Fat Women Speak*; Wiley, 1994), and introduced new therapies (e.g., fat acceptance therapy, or FAT). Those participating in this movement are encouraged to celebrate their larger body sizes, to be more open with themselves and others about weight issues, and to freely acknowledge their obesity as something other than a taboo, denigrated characteristic. However, it is unclear whether participants in this movement would advise such bold acknowledgments in an employment interview setting. Acknowledgment and acceptance of one's weight status appears to be beneficial from the standpoint of the stigmatized individual in terms of self-esteem (e.g., Hammersmith & Weinberg, 1984; Leserman, DiSantostefano, Perkins, & Evans, 1994; Ryff & Keyes, 1995; Wright, 1983), but it is less well understood how open acknowledgment affects perceivers, and particularly potential employers.

A set of experiments conducted by DeJong (1980) shows that some forms of acknowledgment by obese women are perceived more positively than are others. Specifically, overweight women who acknowledged their weight but simultaneously attributed its cause to a medical condition (a thyroid problem) were rated lower in self-indulgence, laziness, impulsiveness, and dislikability than were those who acknowledged in the absence of the medical excuse. Such results support the notion that the attribution of controllability of the stigmatizing condition strongly affects the perceptions that others form (Weiner, 1995). One important limitation of the DeJong studies is that the acknowledgments of obesity were not compared with a no-acknowledgment condition. Hence, it remains unclear as to whether overweight individuals are perceived more positively when they say

nothing at all about their condition or when they acknowledge it in any number of diverse ways. The current research overcomes this limitation by employing a no-acknowledgment condition.

The few studies conducted thus far on acknowledgment suggest that, at least under some conditions and in some social contexts, the strategy of mentioning one's obesity might be successful in reducing interaction tension or in undermining negative attributions. As with physical disability, however, it remains unclear how this social strategy might affect outcomes in a more formal job interview setting.

The Current Research

The two experiments reported here investigate the effects of acknowledgments by having participants watch a job interview and make decisions similar to those that would be made by an actual interviewer. In both experiments, obese and physically handicapped applicants either do or do not acknowledge their stigma in the interview. Our predictions are largely guided by perceived controllability theory (Bordieri & Drehmer, 1986; Weiner, 1995), in that we argue that those who acknowledge an uncontrollable stigma (physical disability) will evoke sympathetic and empathic reactions while simultaneously being perceived as open and self-accepting. For a stigma that is perceived as controllable (obesity), however, we predict that the acknowledgment will serve only to make the characteristic more salient and increase the negativity of perceivers' attributions.

Thus, in comparing how obese versus physically handicapped job applicants will be perceived, we expect that when both acknowledge their stigmas, the physically disabled applicant will be viewed more favorably, reflected by a greater willingness to hire, more positive affect, and more favorable personality attributions than will the obese applicant. Furthermore, it is predicted that within stigmas, acknowledgment by the physically disabled individual will result in more positive outcomes than will the lack of an acknowledgment. For the obese applicant, the opposite pattern is predicted; namely, that those who acknowledge will be denigrated, relative to those who do not acknowledge.

Experiment 1

Method

Participants

Undergraduate students (70 males and 68 females) from a northeastern university volunteered to participate in the experiment in exchange for the opportunity to win a prize in a lottery drawing. Of the 138 participants, 4 were suspicious of the cover story, 2 did not fully comprehend the instructions, and 7 neglected to

complete some of the dependent measures. These participants, whose data were omitted from the analyses, were evenly distributed across conditions. In total, then, the data analyses were based on 63 men and 62 women. The mean age of participants was 20.6 years (21.1 years for men, 19.9 years for women), and none of the participants were obese or physically disabled themselves.

Procedure

Participants, varying in number from 1 to 3, were greeted by 1 of 2 female experimenters and were asked to sit at one of three visually isolated work stations, each of which had its own television monitor. The experimenter introduced herself and read the cover story that described a study investigating the interview process, within the context of "a job skills interview improvement workshop currently being offered at a local community center." Participants were told that the workshop's goal was to create more jobs for local residents (e.g., those who had been laid off, were re-entering the workforce, or had a physical limitation) by improving their interviewing skills. The participants would be asked to watch a 10-min interview conducted as part of the workshop experience. The participant was told that his or her task was to play the role of an evaluator and make hiring recommendations and generate objective feedback that could benefit both the applicant and the workshop itself. After hearing this cover story, participants viewed a videotape that depicted one of four different female applicants answering questions posed by one of four off-screen interviewers. Participants then completed a questionnaire and were debriefed, thanked, and dismissed.

Stimulus Materials

Four different conditions were compared in this experiment. In all cases, the job applicant was positioned directly facing the videocamera and addressed all of her answers a little to the left of the camera, ostensibly to the interviewer who was off-camera. In reality, the applicant was reading her answers from large cue cards held behind the interviewer's head. All applicants enacted both the role of a physically disabled individual for half of the conditions and the role of an obese individual for the other conditions, thus serving as standardized comparisons. For the physically disabled conditions, the applicant was seated in a state-of-the-art wheelchair and was dressed in professional attire. For the overweight conditions, the applicant wore an obesity prosthesis, which consisted of a theatrical-like costume of underclothing that was designed to give additional padding in each body part, with particular emphasis on enhancing the chest, stomach, and legs. The overweight applicants wore the same professional outfits as they wore in the disabled condition, only they were many sizes larger (i.e., a woman's size 20).

Individuals playing the applicant roles were given time to adjust to and feel comfortable with the different accoutrements they used (the wheelchair, the obesity prostheses). After they felt comfortable, the entire interview was practiced until both the interviewer and the applicant felt familiar with the script and appeared natural in their behaviors.

The interaction was then videotaped and edited such that each interview started with an approximately 2-min full body view of the applicant (either seated in a wheelchair, or with an obesity prosthesis and seated in an office chair). During this segment, the interviewer was heard, but not seen, reading preliminary information about the nature of the workshop and the interview process. The interviewer then stated that she would need to take a moment to focus the camera in on the applicant. This served as the rationale for transitioning to the interview itself during which only the applicant's head and the tops of her shoulders were visible on the videotape. The perceivers had been informed that they would see selected "segments" from the total interview, thus justifying the appearance of transitions within the interview itself.

For each confederate, responses to the same four questions were selected for inclusion, and across the disability and obesity manipulations, these segments were drawn from the same original videotape. Such questions and answers revealed academic background and performance, and prior work experience, all indicating that the applicant was a very average one. The acknowledgment manipulation was achieved by inserting a segment between the first two and second two "filler" questions. In this segment, the experimenter asked, "When people meet you, what is the first impression that they form of you?" In both the acknowledgment and no-acknowledgment conditions, the applicant responded that most people found her to be caring and friendly. However, in the acknowledgment condition, applicants began by answering the question with one of several different acknowledgments (i.e., "Well . . . people notice that [I'm overweight] [I use a wheelchair]," or "When people meet me, one of the first things that they notice is that [I'm overweight] [I use a wheelchair]."). These slight variations in acknowledgments were used to ensure that the results could not be attributable to any specific wording of the acknowledgment.

Finally, the interview ended as the camera zoomed out showing a full-body shot of the interviewee. Unbeknownst to the participants, this final segment, during which the confederate said nothing, served to remind them of the physical status of the applicant. These manipulations resulted in a set of stimuli for each confederate that was identical in the behavior that they displayed during the interview itself (with the exception of the brief acknowledgment segment) and in which the opening and closing scenes portrayed her physical status (obese or disabled). For standardization purposes, during the opening and closing scenes, the applicant said nothing but appeared to be listening intently to the off-screen interviewer.

Impression questionnaire. A questionnaire assessed four distinct sets of reactions to the applicant. First, participants were asked to provide their hiring recommendations. Participants indicated their general willingness to hire the applicant by responding to two items, the first of which asked them to circle their willingness to hire on a 9-point scale ranging from 0 (*No, I definitely would not hire this person. This person is not a good candidate.*) to 4 (*I might hire this person. This person is an average candidate.*) to 8 (*Yes, I would definitely hire this person. This person is an extremely good candidate.*). They also assessed how appropriate the candidate would be as an employee on a 9-point scale ranging from 0 (*not at all appropriate*) to 8 (*very appropriate*).

Next, participants were given a list of both six professional jobs (Cronbach's $\alpha = .82$) and seven nonprofessional jobs ($\alpha = .78$) and were asked to rate their willingness to hire the applicant for each occupation separately. A principal components factor analysis of the ratings revealed two factors, the first of which was a professional jobs factor (eigenvalue = 5.78), comprised of lawyer (.81), professor (.76), doctor (.74), corporate consultant (.70), accountant (.64), and researcher (.61). The second factor was a nonprofessional jobs factor (eigenvalue = 2.21), comprised of receptionist (.74), secretary (.71), phone operator (.61), administrative assistant (.60), sales (.66), and clothing store manager (.60). Finally, participants were asked to give their assessment of the applicant's level of general job skills by responding to two items (capabilities for the job and intelligence for the job; $\alpha = .70$), using 9-point scales ranging from 0 (*not at all*) to 8 (*very much*).

The second component of the questionnaire involved participants' affective reactions toward the applicant. Using 9-point scales, they indicated the extent to which they liked the applicant as a potential employee, liked the applicant as a potential friend, and, in general, how positively or negatively they regarded the applicant ($\alpha = .84$).

The third aspect of the questionnaire assessed perceptions of the applicant's personality. Specifically, participants responded to a 39-item inventory that Hull and Lehn (1999) argue captures the five factors of (a) agreeableness ($\alpha = .79$); (b) extraversion ($\alpha = .84$), (c) conscientiousness ($\alpha = .90$), (d) openness to experience ($\alpha = .70$), and (e) neuroticism ($\alpha = .83$).

Finally, a fourth exploratory set of items was included to assess personality traits that are congruent with stereotypes associated with the stigmas that the applicants possessed. These items were drawn from other studies that examined stereotypes of obesity and physical disability in this culture (e.g., Harris, Harris, & Bochner, 1982; Roehling, 1999). Ten items were associated with an obesity stereotype (slothful, low class, inactive, indulgent, undisciplined; and the reverse codings of refined, ambitious, achievement-oriented, disciplined, and active; $\alpha = .87$) and 10 items with a physical disability stereotype (i.e., peaceful, flexible, religious, reflective, emotional, sensitive; and the reverse codings of

unemotional, unreflective, excitable, and angry; $\alpha = .65$). Participants made their ratings using 9-point scales ranging from 0 (*not characteristic*) to 8 (*very characteristic*). All of the dependent measures were correlated at the $p < .05$ level, so we collapsed all measures into an overall positivity composite. However, we also analyzed our measures separately in accordance with a priori plans.

Manipulation checks. At the end of the experimental session, participants were asked (a) to recall the stated purpose of the experiment, and (b) to indicate if they thought the experiment examined anything else in addition to what they had been told by the experimenter. To ensure that the acknowledgment manipulation was successful, participants also were asked to report "what, if anything, the applicant said about her appearance." To ensure that the weight manipulation was effective, participants were asked to estimate the physical size of the confederates on two measures. First, participants viewed a scale comprised of six different stick drawings that ranged from very underweight (represented by 10) to average weight (represented by 50) to very overweight (represented by 90). Participants were asked to circle the figure that best corresponded to the applicant. Second, they were asked to circle one of five verbal descriptions, which ranged from 1 (*very underweight*) to 5 (*very overweight*).

Results

Manipulation Checks

The pattern of results reveals that the manipulations were highly successful. All 125 participants recalled the stated purpose of the experiment. In addition, those participants in the acknowledge condition indicated on manipulation checks that the applicant had indeed mentioned either her weight or disability status. For the weight manipulation, participants also accurately recalled the size of the applicant on both the stick-drawing scale and the verbal-description indexes. As predicted, overweight (ob) confederates, in comparison with physically disabled (pd) confederates, were estimated to be significantly larger on both measures ($M_{ob} = 72.02$ vs. $M_{pd} = 53.37$), $t(123) = 12.22$, $p < .001$; ($M_{ob} = 4.08$ vs. $M_{pd} = 3.18$), $t(123) = 11.54$, $p < .001$).

Overview

Given the fact that the dependent measures were significantly correlated with one another and to avoid the likelihood of an inflated Type 1 error, we first created a total positivity composite by computing a grand mean of each of the 78 dependent measures ($\alpha = .84$) that participants completed (neuroticism and certain stereotype items were reverse coded). Using this composite, we conducted a 2×2 (Stigma: Obesity vs. Physical Disability \times Acknowledgment:

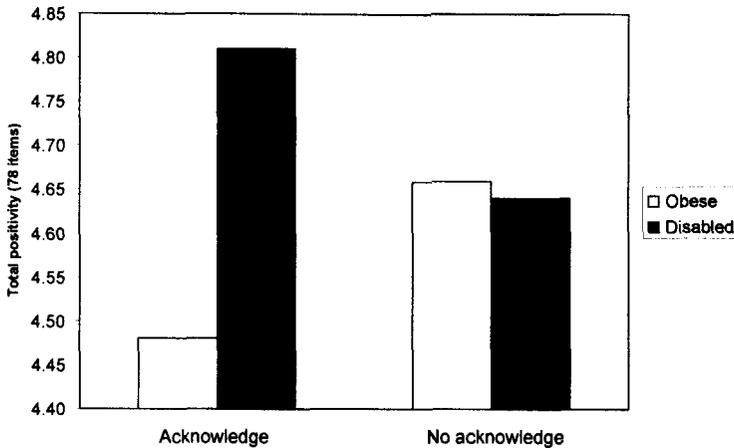


Figure 1. Total positivity in Experiment 1 accorded to obese and physically disabled candidates who either acknowledged or did not acknowledge their stigma.

Present vs. Absent) ANOVA. Figure 1 shows the pattern obtained on this composite, broken down by condition. The specific means, standard deviations, F s, and p values for this variable as well as all others that were analyzed are displayed by condition in Table 1.

No main effect emerged either on the total positivity composite or on any of the individual items for the acknowledgment conditions. Rather, the results reveal that the type of stigma becomes important in considering how strategic the acknowledgment strategy is. As can be seen from Figure 1 and the data presented in Table 1, there are significant differences in the way that physically disabled and obese applicants were evaluated when they acknowledged their stigmas. Obese applicants who mentioned their obesity were not viewed as positively as were physically disabled applicants who mentioned their physical limitation. When the applicants did not acknowledge, however, the two sets of applicants were not evaluated differently. If we focus on within-stigma comparisons, Figure 1 reveals a pattern suggesting that it is more advantageous for obese individuals to say nothing about their stigma rather than to acknowledge it. Physically disabled individuals, however, garner more positive interview-related outcomes when they do acknowledge than when they do not acknowledge. It is important to note, however, that neither of these within-stigma comparisons was significant ($ps > .11$).

Two other analyses were conducted on this composite. First, Figure 1 reveals a trend in physically disabled applicants being accorded more positivity than are obese applicants. While this was only marginally significant for the total positivity composite, it is a pattern that emerges consistently on the individual items.

Second, in an exploratory analysis of gender differences, no significant findings emerged on either the total positivity composite or on any of the individual items. Thus, gender differences will not be discussed further.

The significant findings on the total positivity scale justified a more detailed analysis of the individual composites. Thus, Table 1 presents the results of the 2×2 (Stigma: Obesity vs. Physical Disability \times Acknowledgment: Present vs. Absent) MANOVAs and ANOVAs that were conducted on (a) the four job hiring measures, including general willingness to hire, willingness to hire for professional jobs, willingness to hire for nonprofessional jobs, and evaluation of job skills; (b) affect, which is a composite of three individual items related to positivity toward applicant; (c) personality, which is comprised of agreeableness, extraversion, conscientiousness, openness to experience, and neuroticism; and (d) the sets of traits assessing the obesity stereotype and the physical disability stereotype.

Are Hiring Measures Influenced by Acknowledgments?

An interaction approaching significance on the MANOVA revealed that acknowledgments were more of a liability for obese applicants than for physically disabled applicants. The univariate analyses confirmed the significance of this pattern on the measures of general willingness to hire, the professional jobs factor, and the jobs skills variable. For each of these measures, the interaction indicated that if applicants did not acknowledge their stigmas, no significant differences emerged in their ratings. However, if applicants did acknowledge their stigmas, physically disabled individuals were significantly more likely to be hired than were overweight individuals and were viewed as having greater job skills than were overweight individuals.

Do We Like Those Who Acknowledge?

A significant interaction revealed the same pattern found for the hiring measures; namely, no differences in affect were expressed toward obese compared to disabled applicants who did not acknowledge. However, for those who did acknowledge, participants expressed significantly less positive affect toward overweight than physically disabled applicants.

Do Acknowledgments Affect Personality Attributions?

An overall MANOVA revealed a significant overall interaction that mimicked the pattern found on previous measures. Follow-up univariate tests revealed significant or marginally significant interactions on conscientiousness, neuroticism, and openness to experience. When no acknowledgments were

Table 1

Experiment 1: Ratings of Stigmatized Applicant by Condition

	Obese		Disabled	
	No (<i>N</i> = 22)	Yes (<i>N</i> = 40)	No (<i>N</i> = 23)	Yes (<i>N</i> = 40)
Total positivity	4.66 (0.47)	4.48 (0.53) _a	4.64 (0.44)	4.81 (0.41) _b
Hiring measures	MANOVA			
General hiring	5.14 (1.54)	4.35 (1.55) _a	5.40 (1.42)	4.98 (1.28) _b
Professional jobs	3.53 (1.25)	3.02 (1.28) _a	3.61 (1.25)	4.43 (1.39) _b
Nonprofessional jobs	5.48 (1.19)	5.26 (1.36)	5.83 (0.98)	5.82 (0.94)
Job skills	5.14 (1.31)	4.44 (1.57) _a	4.94 (1.10)	5.33 (1.20) _b
Affect	4.62 (1.42)	4.01 (1.62)	4.58 (1.56)	5.03 (1.33)
Total personality	MANOVA			
Agreeable	6.28 (0.87)	6.25 (1.10)	6.67 (0.90)	6.50 (0.79)
Extraverted	5.11 (1.06)	4.95 (0.92)	5.05 (0.88)	5.26 (1.03)
Conscientious	5.44 (1.04)	4.79 (1.36) _a	5.28 (1.24)	5.86 (1.02) _b
Open	4.61 (1.28)	4.04 (1.37) _a	4.13 (1.35)	4.78 (1.38) _b
Neurotic	3.34 (1.38)	3.83 (1.34) _a	3.54 (1.40)	3.13 (1.44) _b
Stereotypes	MANOVA			
Obesity	3.05 (1.09)	3.78 (1.30) _a	2.83 (1.24) _c	2.49 (0.98) _b
Disability	4.86 (1.02)	4.57 (0.89) _a	4.68 (0.86)	4.91 (0.88) _b

Note. Numbers displayed in the table represent averages obtained from ratings made on what) to 8 (*extremely, very much*). Differences in the degrees of freedom occur because some post hoc comparisons at the $p < .05$ value.

made, obese and physically disabled individuals were perceived similarly. But, when applicants did acknowledge, physically disabled applicants were rated significantly higher in conscientiousness, $t(78) = -3.99$, $p < .01$; higher in openness to experience, $t(78) = -2.40$, $p < .02$; and lower in neuroticism, $t(78) = 2.27$, $p < .00$.

Does Acknowledging Trigger Stereotyping?

The extent to which perceivers form stereotyped impressions of stigmatized applicants was assessed through responses to two sets of traits. Results from the MANOVA revealed a significant interaction, which replicated the pattern found

Stigma main effect	Acknowledge main effect	Interaction
$F(1, 119) = 3.04, p = .08$	$F(1, 119) = 0.00, p = .96$	$F(1, 119) = 4.15, p = .04$
$F(4, 116) = 2.70, p = .03$	$F(4, 116) = 0.50, p = .74$	$F(4, 116) = 2.32, p = .06$
$F(1, 119) = 2.59, p = .11$	$F(1, 119) = 0.43, p = .51$	$F(1, 119) = 4.80, p = .03$
$F(1, 119) = 9.09, p = .01$	$F(1, 119) = 0.37, p = .54$	$F(1, 119) = 7.22, p < .01$
$F(1, 119) = 4.36, p = .04$	$F(1, 119) = 0.27, p = .61$	$F(1, 119) = 0.23, p = .64$
$F(1, 119) = 2.59, p = .11$	$F(1, 119) = 0.21, p = .65$	$F(1, 119) = 5.34, p = .02$
$F(1, 121) = 3.10, p = .08$	$F(1, 121) = 0.09, p = .76$	$F(1, 121) = 3.65, p = .06$
$F(5, 117) = 1.23, p = .30$	$F(5, 117) = 0.01, p = .99$	$F(5, 117) = 2.60, p = .03$
$F(1, 121) = 3.40, p = .47$	$F(1, 121) = 0.31, p = .58$	$F(1, 121) = 0.14, p = .70$
$F(1, 121) = 0.54, p = .47$	$F(1, 121) = 0.01, p = .95$	$F(1, 121) = 0.88, p = .35$
$F(1, 121) = 4.34, p = .62$	$F(1, 121) = 0.03, p = .86$	$F(1, 121) = 7.73, p < .01$
$F(1, 121) = 0.25, p = .62$	$F(1, 121) = 0.02, p = .89$	$F(1, 121) = 3.31, p = .07$
$F(1, 121) = 0.84, p = .36$	$F(1, 121) = 0.01, p = .92$	$F(1, 121) = 5.84, p = .02$
$F(2, 120) = 6.04, p = .03$	$F(2, 120) = 0.28, p = .75$	$F(2, 120) = 3.65, p = .03$
$F(1, 121) = 11.17, p < .01$	$F(1, 121) = 0.55, p = .46$	$F(1, 121) = 7.11, p < .01$
$F(1, 121) = 2.04, p = .16$	$F(1, 121) = 0.03, p = .86$	$F(1, 121) = 2.41, p = .12$

9-point Likert scales ranging from 0 (*not at all, none*) through 4 (*moderately, some*) participants left particular items blank. Subscripts indicate significant differences in

on previous variables. This pattern was significant on the univariate interaction for the obesity stereotype composite but not for the physical disability stereotype composite. Thus, when applicants acknowledged their stigmas, the overweight applicants were accorded significantly higher ratings on the obesity stereotype composite than were physically disabled applicants. But if the two sets of applicants did not acknowledge, they were viewed similarly.

Within-Stigma Comparisons

The clear and consistent pattern shown in Table 1 reveals the greatest amount of difference accorded to disabled versus overweight applicants who acknowledge.

However, a second set of analyses could be conducted by examining differences within each of the two stigmas. That is, is there a difference between obese applicants who acknowledge and those who do not acknowledge? Similarly, are physically disabled applicants who acknowledge their stigma in the interview setting viewed more favorably than are disabled applicants who do not acknowledge? Across all of the variables, the pattern revealed that disabled individuals were accorded more positivity when they did acknowledge as compared to when they did not; whereas obese applicants were accorded more positivity for not acknowledging than for acknowledging their stigmas.

These within-stigma comparisons reveal that physically disabled applicants who acknowledged their stigma were significantly more likely to be hired for professional jobs than were disabled applicants who did not mention, $t(45) = 2.32, p = .03$. Physically disabled applicants who acknowledged were also marginally more likely to be accorded higher levels of job skills, $t(51) = 1.72, p = .09$; ratings of conscientiousness, $t(39) = 1.72, p = .07$; and ratings of openness, $t(47) = 1.81, p = .08$; than were disabled applicants who did not acknowledge. For obese applicants, those who acknowledged were rated lower in conscientiousness, $t(53) = 1.96, p = .05$; and higher in the obesity stereotype composite, $t(50) = 2.37, p = .02$, than those who did not acknowledge. Similarly, obese applicants who acknowledged were also marginally less likely to be hired on the general willingness to hire measure, $t(43) = 1.92, p = .06$; and were rated as having marginally lower job skills, $t(50) = 1.78, p = .07$, than were obese applicants who did not acknowledge.

General Pattern of Denigrating Obese Applicants Relative to Physically Disabled Applicants

Finally, a number of significant stigma main effects revealed that physically disabled individuals tended to be viewed more favorably than obese applicants. This was statistically confirmed on the measures of hiring for professional jobs, hiring for nonprofessional jobs, ratings of openness, and ratings of the obesity stereotype. This pattern was also marginally significant on measures of affect and extraversion.

Discussion

In response to the question of whether one should acknowledge a stigma in the interview setting, the results of Experiment 1 suggest that the answer is "It depends." The results did not reveal a single acknowledgment main effect for any of the dependent measures, suggesting that it is not consistently better or worse to acknowledge than to not acknowledge a stigmatizing condition. However, the consistent emergence of Acknowledgment \times Stigma interactions indicates that

when individuals decide to acknowledge their stigmas, some stigmas are more advantageous to acknowledge than are others. On most of the dependent measures that were examined, the two sets of stigmatized individuals were not perceived significantly differently from each other if they did not mention their stigmas during the course of the interview. However, when they did acknowledge, overweight individuals were rated less positively than were physically disabled individuals on virtually every measure that was taken. Relative to disabled individuals who acknowledged, obese individuals who acknowledged were less likely to be hired in general and for specific professional jobs; were perceived to possess lower job skills; were less likely to be liked (affect); and were more apt to be viewed as less conscientious, less open, and more neurotic. In addition, obese individuals who mentioned their stigmas were more likely to have the obesity stereotype applied to them than were obese individuals who did not mention their weight.

The pattern of means on most variables suggests that obese individuals who acknowledge are viewed more negatively than are obese individuals who do not acknowledge, while physically disabled individuals who acknowledge are viewed more positively than are those who do not. But while such patterns align with our hypotheses, the results are only significant in a few cases; namely, obese individuals who mentioned, relative to those who did not, were rated with less conscientiousness and more obesity stereotyping (higher ratings of a composite involving items such as unrefined, slothful, indulgent, and undisciplined). Physically disabled individuals who mentioned, relative to those who did not, were more likely to be hired for professional jobs and were perceived to be higher in conscientiousness. The sum of these instances reveals that physically disabled individuals are never denigrated for acknowledging their condition, whereas obese applicants sometimes are. That any such differences emerged is noteworthy, given that the acknowledgment was a very small fraction of the larger background, educational, and personal information that evaluators discovered about the applicant in the context of the 10-min interview.

Experiment 2 sought to replicate these findings and to explore a potential explanation for them. A number of differences between the stigmas of obesity and physical disability exist (e.g., statistical frequency in the population). Our own belief is that the results can be explained best by differences in the two stigmas' levels of perceived controllability. In line with Weiner's (1995) research, Northcraft (1980) found that perceivers believe physically disabled individuals are not responsible for their impairment, whereas obesity is viewed as a "self-caused problem." Relevant unpublished data from our own laboratory come from 74 college students who rated various stigmas on 8-point scales ranging from 0 (*not at all controllable*) to 8 (*very controllable*). In line with Weiner's and Northcraft's findings, students perceived obesity to be dramatically more controllable ($M = 5.99$, $SD = 1.47$) than physical disability ($M = 2.57$, $SD = 1.63$).

Earlier research conducted by Bordieri and Drehmer (1986) revealed that controllability of a physical disability can significantly impact employers' decisions. They had supervisors and midlevel managers read application materials of a hypothetical applicant who was disabled and was portrayed as either responsible or not responsible for the condition. When the physical disability was a result of some behavior on the part of the applicant, the employers were much more likely to apply unfavorable stereotypes to the applicant than when the disability was a result of some external cause.

In Experiment 2, a modified interview paradigm is used to assess the impact of perceived controllability of a stigma on responses to acknowledgments. Rather than view videotapes of ostensible applicants, participants were asked to envision themselves as interviewers in a job hiring context in which they receive information about the applicants prior to making hiring decisions. The use of this alternative paradigm allows us to test the replicability and robustness of the findings in a second setting. Although it is conceivable that this manipulation might be perceived as less externally valid than that employed in Experiment 1, it is important to keep in mind that participants were told that the information they were receiving came from actual interview experiences and that their opinions, reactions, and job interview decisions were being compared against those of actual interviewers. In Experiment 2, we found no participants suspicious of this cover story.

Experiment 2 differs from Experiment 1 in two other respects. First, the controllability of obesity and physical disability are directly manipulated. Consistent with the findings of Experiment 1, we predicted that participants would respond more positively to acknowledgments made by applicants with uncontrollable stigmas (physical disabilities) than controllable stigmas (obesity). Although evidence in Experiment 1 for within-stigma differences was not strong, we again examined these comparisons in Experiment 2. We predicted that participants would respond more favorably to observing physically disabled and obese individuals who had controllable conditions not acknowledge their conditions rather than acknowledge them. Similarly, we expected that participants would respond more favorably to hearing physically disabled and obese individuals who had uncontrollable conditions acknowledge their conditions rather than not acknowledge them. We assessed the favorability of responses by using measures congruent with those used in Experiment 1—that is, measures of hiring, affect, and personality attributions.

Second, we wanted to assess the perceptions and responses that participants had to the acknowledgments that half of the job interviewees made. Therefore, we asked participants, after they had rated the applicants on job-related measures, to indicate how they perceived the applicants' mentions of their stigmas. We predicted that acknowledgments of uncontrollable stigmas would be perceived to be more strategic, and would be received with greater sympathy and less hostility than acknowledgments of controllable stigmas.

Experiment 2

Method

Participants

Undergraduate students (38 males and 49 females) from a northeastern university volunteered to participate.

Procedure

Participants were told that they would be engaging in a study examining how undergraduate students, asked to play the role of interviewers, make hiring decisions. Furthermore, they were told that they would be reading actual interview protocols and that the hiring outcomes and evaluations of the candidates would be compared to their own responses. Following this cover story, participants were given a questionnaire that asked them to imagine themselves in two job hiring scenarios in which they are an employer who is interviewing an applicant for a position. Prior to the interview, they learn that the applicant is stigmatized (either obese or physically disabled) and that the stigma could have been avoided (obese: “has overeaten and does not exercise”; physically disabled: “did not choose to have a surgery that doctors felt was urgent”) or that it could not have been avoided (obese: “has a thyroid condition”; physically disabled: “suffered from a medical mistake made by doctors”). They were then given a summary paragraph of statements made by the applicant during the interview that suggested that the interviewee was an average candidate.

Embedded in the interview is information that the applicant either acknowledges the stigma or does not. Participants are not told exactly how the applicant acknowledges (to avoid any idiosyncrasies with acknowledgment wording), but simply that she has mentioned her stigmatizing condition. After the participants read each of the two scenarios for a particular stigma, counterbalanced across participants, they were asked to make hiring recommendations and evaluate the applicants on a number of dependent measures.

Impression Questionnaire

Participants indicated how willing they would be to hire the applicant, how much job skill the applicant seemed to possess, and how much they liked (affect) the applicant. Personality was measured by asking participants to evaluate the applicants on nine bipolar items: hardworking/lazy, happy/unhappy, self-disciplined/undisciplined, good/bad, restrained/self-indulgent, strong/weak, courageous/cowardly, open/closed, and honest/dishonest. All items described thus

Table 2

Experiment 2: Ratings of Stigmatized Applicant by Acknowledgment Condition:

	Controllable		Uncontrollable	
	Yes (<i>N</i> = 21)	No (<i>N</i> = 23)	Yes (<i>N</i> = 21)	No (<i>N</i> = 22)
General hiring	3.55 (0.84) _a	4.24 (1.04) _b	5.00 (0.88)	4.73 (0.92)
Job skills	3.81 (0.92) _a	4.26 (0.62) _b	4.83 (0.68)	4.55 (1.12)
Affect	3.62 (0.65) _a	4.04 (0.69) _b	4.88 (1.00)	4.57 (1.00)
Personality	4.14 (0.41)	3.87 (0.47)	4.89 (0.52)	4.36 (0.66)

Note. Numbers displayed in the table represent averages obtained from ratings made on indicate significant differences in post hoc comparisons at the $p < .05$ value.

far in the impression questionnaire were presented with a scale format mirrored after that used in Experiment 1. As in Experiment 1, these dependent measures were again highly correlated (all $ps < .05$), so again we calculated an overall positivity rating, but analyzed the measures separately, too. In scenarios that involved acknowledgments, participants additionally were asked to evaluate this behavior in terms of whether they (a) saw it as a positive strategy or liability, (b) viewed it as appropriate or inappropriate, (c) felt sympathetic or unsympathetic toward the applicant, and (d) felt hostile or not hostile toward them. These ratings were made on 7-point bipolar scales. Finally, participants were asked to indicate how controllable they perceived the stigma to be.

Results

A series of $2 \times 2 \times 2$ (Stigma: Physical Disability vs. Obesity \times Acknowledgment: Present vs. Absent \times Controllability: Responsible vs. Not Responsible) mixed ANOVAs, with repeated measures on the first factor, were conducted. In general, the results support Weiner's (1995) controllability mechanism as an explanation for why some acknowledgments are an effective interpersonal strategy and others pose liabilities. That is, the particular type of applicant stigma influenced the results much less than whether the stigma was perceived as controllable or uncontrollable. Rather, the more participants believed the applicant's stigma was a controllable one, the less likely they were to perceive the applicant favorably or to hire him or her. This was particularly true in the interviews during which applicants acknowledged. Because very few three-way interactions emerged, we will focus our attention on the results of the 2×2 (Acknowledgment \times Controllability) ANOVAs, displayed in Table 2 along with the means and standard deviations broken down by condition. In examining this table, it

Means and Standard Deviations

Acknowledge main effect	Controllability main effect	Interaction
$F(1, 83) = 1.11, p = .30$	$F(1, 83) = 23.82, p < .01$	$F(1, 83) = 5.88, p = .02$
$F(1, 83) = 0.20, p = .66$	$F(1, 83) = 12.69, p < .01$	$F(1, 83) = 4.05, p = .05$
$F(1, 83) = 0.09, p = .76$	$F(1, 83) = 23.97, p < .01$	$F(1, 83) = 4.08, p = .05$
$F(1, 83) = 7.53, p < .01$	$F(1, 83) = 37.24, p < .01$	$F(1, 83) = 0.19, p = .66$

7-point scales in which higher numbers reflected more positive values. Subscripts

becomes clear across all of the variables that the participants ascribed the most positivity to those job applicants with uncontrollable stigmas who acknowledged the stigma to potential employers.

Are Hiring and Evaluation Influenced by Controllability?

As predicted, participants were more likely to hire applicants and to rate them more favorably on job skills if they acknowledged an uncontrollable stigma than a controllable one. This pattern was confirmed by a significant Acknowledgment \times Controllability interaction, and follow-up t tests reveal that when the stigma was described as controllable, applicants were significantly more likely to be hired, $t(41) = 2.44, p = .02$; and rated as possessing marginally better job skills, $t(35) = 1.90, p = .07$; if they did not acknowledge their stigma than if they did. While not significant, the pattern of means reveals that applicants tended to be hired more, $t(35) = 0.99, p = .28$; and rated more favorably on job skills, $t(35) = 1.02, p = .31$; if they acknowledged rather than did not acknowledge an uncontrollable stigma.

Do We Like Applicants With Controllable Stigmas?

Similarly, a significant Acknowledgment \times Controllability interaction emerged indicating that participants liked best the applicant who possessed a stigma described as uncontrollable and acknowledged. Follow-up t tests on the significant Controllability \times Acknowledgment interaction reveal that when the stigma was controllable, applicants were liked much less when they acknowledged compared with when they did not, $t(42) = 2.10, p = .04$. The opposite pattern was found for uncontrollable stigmas, although the differences were not significant, $t(41) = 1.02, p = .31$.

Table 3

Experiment 2: Interpretations of the Acknowledgments

Stigma	Controllable		Uncontrollable	
	Obese	Physically disabled	Obese	Physically disabled
Beneficial strategy	3.76 (1.64)	4.10 (1.26)	5.19 (1.33)	5.38 (0.87)
Inappropriateness	4.24 (1.26)	3.81 (0.81)	3.52 (1.08)	2.95 (1.12)
Sympathy	3.91 (1.30)	4.14 (1.46)	5.57 (1.12)	5.67 (1.11)
Hostility	5.57 (1.21)	6.00 (1.18)	5.10 (1.48)	4.91 (1.26)
Controllability	3.10 (1.34)	3.95 (1.80)	5.14 (1.42)	5.10 (1.95)

Note. Numbers displayed in the table represent averages obtained from ratings made on

How Do We Perceive Personality?

A total personality composite was created by averaging the ratings obtained on nine variables assessing the personality of the obese applicant ($\alpha = .88$) and the physically disabled applicant ($\alpha = .82$). As seen in Table 2, no predicted Controllability \times Acknowledgment interaction emerged, although the pattern of means is consistent with the other variables showing that those who acknowledged a stigma described as uncontrollable were rated less favorably than were those who acknowledged a stigma described as controllable, $t(40) = 1.98, p = .06$.

Despite the fact that our predicted two-way interaction did not reach significance, a significant Stigma \times Controllability interaction, $F(1, 81) = 9.71, p < .01$, and a Stigma \times Acknowledgment interaction did emerge, $F(1, 81) = 4.40, p < .04$. The pattern of results suggests that physically disabled applicants were viewed similarly whether they acknowledged ($M = 4.94, SD = 0.67$) or not ($M = 4.81, SD = 0.75$), but more positively when their condition was described as uncontrollable ($M = 5.09, SD = 0.68$) than controllable ($M = 4.66, SD = 0.67$), $t(43) = -2.98, p < .01$. Obese applicants also were viewed more positively when their condition was described as uncontrollable ($M = 4.32, SD = 0.80$) rather than controllable ($M = 3.36, SD = 0.57$), $t(43) = -6.39, p < .001$; but obese applicants were rated more positively when they did not acknowledge ($M = 4.10, SD = 0.76$) than when they did acknowledge ($M = 3.59, SD = 0.81$), $t(84) = -2.95, p < .01$.

How Was the Acknowledgment Interpreted?

The pattern of the findings suggests that participants distinguished between the manipulation of the controllability/uncontrollability dimension more than

Stigma main effect	Controllability main effect	Interaction
$F(1, 40) = 0.99, p = .33$	$F(1, 40) = 19.87, p < .01$	$F(1, 40) = 0.07, p = .79$
$F(1, 40) = 5.51, p = .02$	$F(1, 40) = 9.41, p < .01$	$F(1, 40) = 0.11, p = .74$
$F(1, 40) = 0.78, p = .38$	$F(1, 40) = 22.18, p < .01$	$F(1, 40) = 0.14, p = .71$
$F(1, 40) = 0.26, p = .61$	$F(1, 40) = 5.99, p = .02$	$F(1, 40) = 1.74, p = .19$
$F(1, 40) = 1.55, p = .22$	$F(1, 40) = 16.65, p < .01$	$F(1, 40) = 1.94, p = .17$

7-point scales in which higher numbers reflect more of the listed trait.

between the types of stigma in making their evaluations. This was manifested by a number of controllability main effects, only one stigma main effect, and no Controllability \times Stigma interactions (see Table 3 for the means, standard deviations, and results of the ANOVAs). Most central to the purpose of this study, participants were asked how beneficial they believed the strategy of acknowledgment was for stigmatized individuals. They indicated that the strategy was significantly more beneficial when the stigma (regardless of whether it was obesity or physical disability) was described as uncontrollable than when it was described as controllable.

As predicted, additional controllability main effects reveal that participants perceived applicants who acknowledged controllable stigmas with less sympathy, more hostility, and as being more inappropriate than those who acknowledged uncontrollable stigmas. As noted previously, one stigma main effect also emerged. Specifically, perceivers saw acknowledgments from obese applicants to be less appropriate than acknowledgments from physically disabled individuals.

Finally, as a manipulation check, participants were asked to indicate how controllable the stigma in each scenario was. As we had intended, participants perceived acknowledgments that included a reference to their stigma's uncontrollability as less controllable than those that did not include such a reference.

Discussion

Experiment 2 suggests that acknowledgments concerning an uncontrollable condition are perceived much more favorably on the dimensions of being hired, being liked, and having favorable job skills than are acknowledgments concerning an uncontrollable condition. In line with the results from Experiment 1, the

present results suggest that acknowledgments of an uncontrollable stigma are not a liability, compared to acknowledgments of a controllable stigma. In fact, the results suggest that individuals playing the role of interviewers perceive acknowledgments of an uncontrollable stigma to be moderately strategic ($M = 5.28$, $SD = 0.87$, on a 7-point scale), compared to acknowledgments of a controllable stigma ($M = 3.58$, $SD = 1.08$).

Acknowledgments of a controllable stigma were also seen as being more inappropriate ($M = 4.02$, $SD = 0.78$) than were acknowledgments concerning uncontrollable stigmas ($M = 3.23$, $SD = 0.87$). Although personality ratings were more negative for obese than for physically disabled individuals, ratings on the hiring, job skills, and affective dimensions indicate that it is the perceived controllability of the stigma and not the stigma itself that largely determines whether acknowledgment is or is not a positive strategy for individuals in the employment context. Additionally, on the personality ratings, the stigma itself does seem to significantly influence the evaluations that are formed.

General Discussion

Obesity, in the absence of being explicitly labeled as controllable or uncontrollable, is perceived by most individuals to be a controllable condition; whereas physical disability is perceived to be uncontrollable (Bordieri & Drehmer, 1986; Weiner, 1995). Given such normative perceptions and the results of Experiment 1, acknowledgments of obesity seem to be a liability in the employment context, compared to acknowledgments of physical disability. However, when the perceived controllability of obesity is explicitly manipulated to suggest that it is uncontrollable, as was the case in Experiment 2, the negativity is attenuated and the acknowledgment of an uncontrollable condition becomes an employment strategy relative to the acknowledgment of a controllable condition.

Acknowledgments work similarly for physically disabled individuals in that the controllability of the condition is crucial to determining how applicants are perceived. Regardless of the stigma, applicants with controllable stigmas are significantly less likely to be hired, are more likely to be viewed as possessing lower job skills, and are liked less. Furthermore, acknowledgments of controllable stigmas are viewed as a liability and to be more inappropriate than are acknowledgments of uncontrollable stigmas.

It is important to note that the particular manner in which an applicant chooses to make an acknowledgment may have a dramatic impact on how it is received. Elements such as wording, timing of the stigma disclosure, and the specific paraverbal and nonverbal behaviors accompanying the acknowledgment delivery are likely to make a difference in interviewers' reactions. In the current studies, the impact of acknowledgment was consistent across two different settings: one in which an actual acknowledgment was delivered, and the

second in which the specific wording of the acknowledgment was not given but in which a more generic concept of an acknowledgment was portrayed. Increased generalizability may also be anticipated because the acknowledgment in the first study was delivered by four different confederates, all of whom articulated differently, used varying levels of eye contact, and had different accompanying behavioral mannerisms. Because the pattern of findings was consistent across all four confederates (no confederate differences emerged), we believe that our findings concerning the impact of acknowledgment in the interview setting are robust.

Our findings raise questions concerning how applicants with other stigmatizing conditions might benefit from acknowledging in the interview setting. Take, for example, the case of a Black individual who acknowledges his or her race to an interviewer. On one hand, such an acknowledgment seems almost ludicrous and may result in more—and not less—interaction awkwardness, despite the obvious uncontrollability of being Black. Such acknowledgments might make the interviewer anxious, heighten negativity, introduce prejudice, and bias the eventual hiring decision. On the other hand, given an appropriate interview question (e.g., “What is one of the most difficult situations you have faced in working with other employees?” or “Tell me about a situation in which you faced adversity and came out a winner”), it is plausible that such an acknowledgment might be perceived favorably and, indeed, put the interviewer at greater ease. Clearly, further research is needed focusing on cross-stigma comparisons and on specific contextual factors before any strong recommendations can be made concerning the utility of an acknowledgment strategy. What the results of the current studies do suggest is that this particular social strategy has the possibility of resulting in more positive or less positive outcomes in a job interview situation, and it deserves to be investigated more systematically than it has been to this point.

The current findings have potentially favorable implications for overweight individuals. Recent societal efforts have been focused, in part, on getting overweight individuals to accept, rather than alter, their condition (National Institutes of Health, 1998; Willmuth, 1986; Wiley, 1994). This movement was highlighted by the 1990 congressional hearings in which Representative Ronald Wyden of Oregon charged America’s weight-loss industry with deception and fraud. He argued that few overweight individuals are able to lose weight and keep it off (e.g., Wadden & VanItallie, 1992) and yet, the diet industry leads individuals to believe otherwise. The current results suggest that perceptions are not altered significantly if overweight individuals choose to acknowledge or choose to remain silent about their stigmatizing condition. However, the current results also suggest that if overweight individuals do decide to acknowledge their condition in a job hiring context, they will be perceived more positively if others believe that their condition is an uncontrollable condition, rather than a controllable one.

The current results imply that leaving people to rely on their own stereotype (i.e., that obesity is controllable) results in far less favorable evaluations of obese individuals who acknowledge relative to other stigmatized individuals who decide to acknowledge what might be perceived as a more uncontrollable stigma (e.g., blindness, minority status). This does not mean that interviewers will always react favorably to such obesity acknowledgments framed to suggest that obesity is uncontrollable. Certainly many people remain unwavering in their attitudes concerning issues of controllability, regardless of contradictory information, just as some tend to remain steadfast in their beliefs on other issues in the face of conflicting evidence (McGuire, 1985). However, Experiment 2 does show that many interviewers (including the bulk of the participants in the current study) are influenced by controllability information, and this influence is enough to result, at least at times, in significantly greater levels of positivity toward the applicants.

The traditional workforce is currently in a state of great change (e.g., Offerman & Gowing, 1990). Relative to the recent past, the next few decades will see a continued increase in the number of physically disabled individuals, women, ethnic minorities, older workers, and members of other stigmatized groups attempting to join the labor market. The current research highlights the importance of examining what strategies such individuals might adopt that make their employment more likely. The presence or absence of an acknowledgment can have a significant impact on observers' judgments of performance in a job interview context. More specifically, when applicants acknowledge their potentially stigmatized conditions to employers, the current research shows that employer reactions might be strongly influenced by the type of stigma one decides to acknowledge and by the perceived controllability of that stigma.

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