

# Acknowledging One's Physical Disability in the Interview: Does "When" Make a Difference?

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The current research investigates acknowledgments that physically disabled individuals make in an interview setting, and examines whether the timing of an acknowledgment makes a difference to the impressions that evaluators form. A total of 137 participants watched an interview of a disabled applicant who (a) made no acknowledgment about the disability; or who acknowledged the disability at the (b) beginning, (c) middle, or (d) end of a job interview. Applicants who did not acknowledge or who acknowledged at the end of the interview were perceived less favorably than were those who disclosed earlier in the interview. Furthermore, participants' perceptions of the applicant's psychological well-being mediated the effect of acknowledgment timing on hiring-related outcomes. Results are discussed in terms of self-presentational strategies that physically disabled individuals might adopt and the importance of establishing one's psychological well-being early in the impression-formation process.

Today's workforce is changing dramatically (Hitt, 2000; Kate, 1998), with an increasing number of physically disabled individuals applying for jobs and attempting to gain entry into the workforce. Of the up to 53 to 54 million U.S. citizens who are disabled, approximately 80% report being unsuccessful at finding employment (Rubin, 1997).

Disability-related stereotypes (assumptions that the disabled individual is unhappy, poorly adjusted, incapable, or overly dependent) are still prevalent (Colella, 1994; Heatherton, Kleck, Hebl, & Hull, 2000; Hebl & Kleck, 2000; Siller, 1986) and may provide one of the central reasons why physically disabled individuals continue to have trouble gaining opportunities and experiences in the workplace (Hernandez, Keys, Balcazar, & Drum, 1998). Although it is likely that such stereotypes affect the entire job cycle, they may be most restrictive in the initial stages (e.g., pre-employment interviews) in which stereotypes may influence whether or not disabled individuals are even allowed follow-up interviews and organizational entry (e.g., Allport, 1954; Erdley & D'Agostino, 1988).

One strategy applicants with physical disabilities might adopt to increase their likelihood of being hired involves a straightforward acknowledgment of

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their physical disability. This strategy might be particularly successful since interviewers (and most nonstigmatized individuals) typically avoid introducing disability as a topic of conversation in the interview (Goffman, 1963; Wright, 1983). In addition, the Americans With Disabilities Act (Section 102.2.A of the ADA) has a *prohibited examination or inquiry clause* that guides the pre-employment stage and largely restricts interviewers from making inquiries as to whether an applicant is disabled or as to the nature or severity of the disability.

Given these restrictions, the burden of acknowledging rests on the disabled applicant. If the applicant does not acknowledge, interviewers might be guided by their stereotypes regarding physical disability and might view the individual as poorly adjusted, unhappy, fragile, and inefficacious (Wright, 1983). If the applicant does acknowledge, however, the stereotypes might be undermined, particularly if the acknowledgment comes early in the interview and prevents the activation or application of such stereotypes. While the strategy of acknowledgment from the perspective of the physically disabled applicant is an important topic of investigation, the characteristics associated with optimal acknowledgments have not been well documented.

Davis (1961) conducted one of the earliest examinations into the acknowledgment strategy and found that explicit statements about one's physical disability helped individuals to "break through" more quickly or to be viewed with something other than disdain, pity, and contempt. Additional researchers have found that acknowledging one's disability leads to more favorable impressions than not acknowledging (Farina, Sherman, & Allen, 1968; Hastorf, Wildfogel, & Cassman, 1979).

Impressions formed of disabled individuals are regarded even more positively if the acknowledgment is accompanied with a request for help; if the discloser has an upbeat, positive attitude; or if the uncontrollability of the condition is accentuated (Belgrave & Mills, 1981; Hebl & Kleck, 2002; Mills, Belgrave, & Boyer, 1984). Given that acknowledgment has been shown to be a successful strategy, the current research assesses not *if*, but *when* acknowledgments should be delivered within an interaction. This research topic has particular relevance in the job-interview domain in which physically disabled individuals report not knowing how best to approach their condition with interviewers (Wright, 1983). No known research has examined the timing of acknowledging one's disability. However, a related body of research has focused on self-disclosure and timing related to unveiling covert types of stigmas.

### Self-Disclosure and Acknowledgment

Self-disclosure typically involves the revelation of information about oneself that is not observable or initially known to the interactant. While disclosures are not necessarily alarming, the most intimate self-disclosures often are based on

knowledge that is not already known and has surprising and negative elements when revealed (e.g., having a prison record, being an alcoholic, having epilepsy; Jones & Gordon, 1972; Wortman, Adesman, Herman, & Greenberg, 1976). While self-disclosure is an essential ingredient in gaining intimacy in social relations (Collins & Miller, 1994), the disclosure of stigmatizing features that otherwise can be concealed is not likely to be a good initial interview strategy (e.g., Goffman, 1963; Griffith & Hebl, 2002; Wright, 1983). Thus, for concealable, covert stigmas, acknowledgments in the interview setting do not seem to be advantageous.

We differentiate *self-disclosure* from *acknowledgment*, the latter of which typically involves addressing what is already visible to the interactant. We propose that acknowledging one's overt stigma (e.g., being an ethnic minority, being elderly, being overweight, being physically disabled) may improve interview outcomes. The small amount of research that has been conducted on acknowledgments has focused on disability and shows that in social interaction paradigms, physically disabled individuals can benefit from acknowledging.

#### Timing of an Acknowledgment

Research examining the particular timing of an acknowledgment has been scarce and limited to covert stigmas. This somewhat dated body of research has revealed consistently that it is advantageous to delay acknowledgment of a covert stigma (e.g., Jones & Gordon, 1972; Peters & Terborg, 1975; Wortman et al., 1976). One exception to this rule occurs when the stigmatized individual is perceived to be responsible for the stigma (e.g., they deliberately cheated on a test, they chose to use drugs). In these cases, those who acknowledge up front seem to gain some evaluation benefits associated with truthful confessions (Archer & Burleson, 1980).

Given that overt stigmas are immediately visible, most interactants likely notice them, have questions about them, and may be distracted or influenced by them (e.g., Crandall, 1994; Langer, Fiske, Taylor, & Chanowitz, 1976; Livneh, 1985). For this reason, we believe that it is most advantageous for physically disabled individuals to acknowledge their conditions in the early portions of the interview. Thus, we predict the following:

*Hypothesis 1.* A disabled applicant who acknowledges his or her disability at the beginning or middle of the interview will be viewed more positively on job-related measures than will a disabled applicant who acknowledges the stigma at the end of the interview or who does not acknowledge at all.

*Hypothesis 2.* A disabled applicant who acknowledges his or her disability at the beginning or middle of the interview will be

viewed more positively on trait ratings than will a disabled applicant who acknowledges the stigma at the end of the interview or who does not acknowledge at all.

### Timing and the Impression-Formation Process

According to speculation by past researchers who have examined disclosures, acknowledgments may lead interactants to believe that disabled individuals who acknowledge are psychologically healthier because they have come to terms with the disability. Those who acknowledge show they are open with others and can talk about the disability without getting overly emotional or unhappy, or making others feel uncomfortable (Belgrave & Mills, 1981). Those who do this early in the interview may be individuating themselves more quickly from the disability stereotype (Kunda & Thagard, 1996).

For instance, a series of studies conducted by Hastorf et al. (1979) showed that a physically disabled man who acknowledged his disability in a way that revealed he was not overly sensitive and was open to talking about his disability was chosen as a work partner more than a physically disabled man who did not mention his disability. According to Hastorf et al., this acknowledgment may have led the interactant to believe that the physically disabled individual was well-adjusted and insightful enough to mention what was probably something an interactant wished to look at and learn about, but avoided doing so (Langer et al., 1976; see also Colella, 1994; Colella, DeNisi, & Varma, 1998; Stone & Colella, 1996). Although this has never been tested formally, it is likely that disabled individuals who are perceived as psychologically healthy and accepting of themselves will be given more consideration on job-related dimensions and will be perceived more favorably on trait ratings. Thus, we anticipate the following:

*Hypothesis 3.* The relation between timing and hiring measures will be mediated by perceptions of the applicant's psychological well-being.

*Hypothesis 4.* The relation between timing and trait ratings will be mediated by perceptions of the applicant's psychological well-being.

That is, evaluators who perceive the applicant to be a well-adjusted individual sooner in the interaction, which could be achieved through an early acknowledgment, might be more likely to rate him or her higher on job-related dimensions and positive attributes.

## Method

### *Participants*

A total of 137 participants (88 female, 45 male, 4 did not indicate their gender) took part in this Web-based study. Of the participants, 69 were White, and 68 were members of minority groups (33 Asian, 22 Hispanic, 7 African American, and 6 Other).

In order to try to get a diverse set of respondents, participants included college students from a small private southwestern university ( $N = 80$ ), college students from a large public southwestern university ( $N = 42$ ), and individuals from a large southwestern metropolitan city working in organizational settings with hiring capabilities ( $N = 15$ ).<sup>2</sup>

The first two groups of participants received partial course credit in exchange for their participation, whereas the last group did not receive any compensation. All participants were invited to take part in the Web-based study either through classroom announcements or e-mail invitations.

### *Preparation of the Stimulus*

Four confederates (2 female, 2 male), who ranged in age from 23 to 35 years, were paid to act the role of disabled individuals. A trained expert with disability issues ensured that they appeared credible. In addition, as a preliminary pretesting measure conducted prior to the actual study, 16 individuals were asked to watch one of the 16 videotaped conditions to confirm that no one was suspicious as to the authenticity of confederates' "disabled" status.

Those who watched videotapes with acknowledgments were asked to indicate what the applicant said about himself/herself. All 12 of the individuals who watched an acknowledgment reported the acknowledgment accurately. All 16 of the pretest participants were also asked if there was anything unusual about the videotapes, and none indicated anything unusual or suspicious. That is, all 16 participants believed the videotapes to truly reflect applicants for a job.

Confederates sat in a state-of-the-art wheelchair and were videotaped while conducting an actual interview that lasted approximately 8 min. They answered 15 questions commonly asked in interview settings<sup>3</sup> and were instructed to answer these questions honestly with respect to their actual lives and working experiences. We used multiple confederates to eliminate the possibility that our

<sup>2</sup>While we know the numbers of participants in each of the three population groups because we allocated experimental credits, we did not ask participants to indicate the group to which they belonged in their demographic information. We were attempting to maximize the anonymity of participants and mistakenly forgot to have them indicate this information. Thus, we collapsed all three population groups into one sample in our analyses.

<sup>3</sup>These questions were listed on a brochure distributed by Career Services at Dartmouth College entitled "Fifty Commonly Asked Interview Questions."

pattern of results could be attributable to idiosyncratic features of a particular confederate's background.

The only part that confederate applicants fabricated was a segment in the experimental sessions in which they included a reference to their disability and it having been caused by an automobile accident. Each of the confederates was told to acknowledge this disability in a way that seemed natural to him or her. Although there were some differences between each of the acknowledgments, most simply revealed that they had been hit head-on and that the accident was not their fault. No significant differences emerged across the ratings of the confederates, thus eliminating the possibility that effects were a result of specific wording of the acknowledgments themselves and allowing the results to be generalizable across different confederates' word choices and acknowledgment deliveries.

After the confederates had been videotaped, additional segments containing the different acknowledgment responses were inserted into the interviews using Adobe Premiere® (video-editing software). These segments were placed at the (a) beginning (after the first question; approximately 30 s into the interview), (b) middle (after the seventh question; approximately 3 min into the interview), or (c) end of the interview (after the 15th question; approximately 7.5 min into the interview), or (d) they were omitted entirely from the interview.

The 15 questions were always asked in the same order. Thus, the only difference across conditions was the position of the inserted acknowledgment. According to pretesting, each of these placements also appeared natural, regardless of where they were placed. To make the points of these editing insertions seem natural, consistent editing transitions (i.e., "fade-ins") were sliced and added before each question. All materials were presented over the Internet, and each condition was randomized using a Javascript® code.

### *Procedure*

Participants received a cover story consistent with that used by Hebl and Kleck (2002), stating that they would be part of a study exploring the success of an authentic workshop designed to improve the interviewing skills of applicants. They were told that the workshop offered programs for applicants with physical disabilities and that they would be watching an applicant who either had taken part or had not yet taken part in the interview workshop. They were instructed to play the role of the interviewer and to evaluate the applicant they saw.

After providing their informed consent, participants watched an approximately 8-min interview and then rated the applicant.<sup>4</sup> Three fourths of

<sup>4</sup>Although a fair amount of research has shown the importance of taking into account the disability–job fit when evaluating applicants (e.g., Colella et al., 1998), we kept the hiring evaluations more general in the current research and did not tie them specifically to one occupation or another, believing that this would allow for increased generalization in the data.

participants (those assigned to conditions containing an acknowledgment) also evaluated the particular acknowledgment. Finally, participants completed manipulation checks regarding the disability, acknowledgment, and timing of the acknowledgment. Participants were then debriefed and thanked for their participation.

*Hiring composite.* Seven items measured the extent to which participants felt the applicant would be an appropriate hire (Hebl & Kleck, 2002). The items were rated on a 7-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (*not at all*) to 7 (*very much*). A principal components factor analysis with a varimax rotation conducted on these seven variables revealed a one-factor solution (eigenvalue = 4.57). The variance accounted for was 65%, and a reliability coefficient revealed a Cronbach's alpha of .91. Thus, the seven items were combined to create a hiring composite. The specific items (and their loadings) involved evaluations of the extent to which participants (a) *liked* the applicant as an employee (.86), (b) liked the applicant *personally* (.76), (c) felt *positive regard* for the quality of the applicant (.91), (d) would *hire* the applicant (.88), (e) thought the interview went *smoothly* (.70), (f) thought the applicant would be an *intelligent worker* (.75), and (g) thought the applicant was *effective* in the interview (.78).

*Trait ratings.* Using a similar 7-point scale, 11 additional items measured traits associated with stereotypes of physically disabled individuals (Hebl & Kleck, 2002; Siller, 1986). A factor analysis conducted on these variables revealed a two-factor solution. The first factor—capable traits (eigenvalue = 5.69; variance accounted for = 52%;  $\alpha = .88$ )—included the following seven items (factor loadings included in parentheses): (a) capable (.79), (b) hardworking (.87), (c) trustworthy (.82), (d) self-disciplined (.77), (e) honest (.79), (f) talented (.64), and (g) strong (.57). The second factor—happy traits (eigenvalue = 1.37; variance accounted for = 12%;  $\alpha = .83$ )—included the following four items: (a) happy (.86), (b) sad (reverse scored; .88), (c) agreeable (.58), and (d) content (.70).

*Interpretation of acknowledgments.* Participants randomly assigned to an acknowledgment condition were asked to describe the applicant's level of well-being (Belgrave & Mills, 1981; Farina et al., 1968; Hastorf et al., 1979; Mills et al., 1984; Wright, 1983). Participants specifically indicated the extent to which they viewed the applicant as (a) self-accepting, (b) honest, (c) open about their disability, and (d) well-adjusted. To evaluate these descriptors, participants used a 7-point scale. These four items were collapsed into one well-being composite, as a factor analysis revealed one-factor solution (eigenvalue = 2.85; variance accounted for = 71%;  $\alpha = .86$ ). The loadings were .92, .75, .84, and .86 for self-accepting, honest, open, and well-adjusted, respectively. Finally, participants indicated the level of sympathy they had for applicants on a 7-point scale.

*Manipulation checks.* Participants were asked to describe the physical condition of the applicant (with an open-ended question), whether the applicant

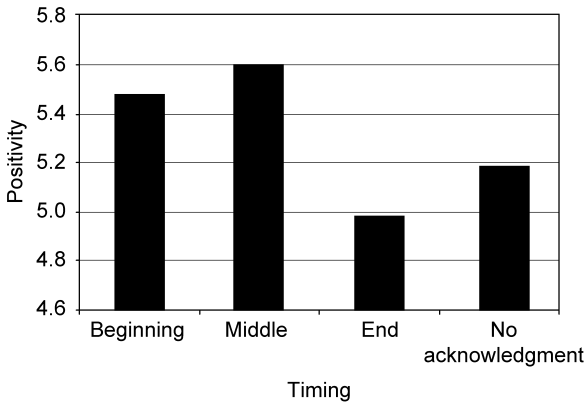


Figure 1. Hiring composite by timing condition.

mentioned this condition (on a *Yes/No* scale), and when during the interview the applicant mentioned the condition (on a *never/beginning/middle/end* scale). All 137 participants correctly identified the condition, acknowledgment, and timing of the acknowledgment.

## Results

To test our hypotheses, we examined how acknowledging at the beginning of the interview was perceived (on the hiring, capability, and happy composites) in comparison with acknowledging at the end or not acknowledging at all. Similarly, we compared acknowledging in the middle of the interview with acknowledging at the end of the interview, as well as not acknowledging at all. Although we conducted exploratory analyses comparing the beginning and middle acknowledgments, we found few significant differences between the two. When there was a difference, a slight preference was given to acknowledgments given at the beginning of the interview. Given the short amount of time between a beginning acknowledgment and a middle acknowledgment (often less than 3 min), it is possible that both acknowledgments were perceived as early-stage acknowledgments, although we will examine them separately in our subsequent analyses.

As shown in Figure 1, applicants who acknowledged at the beginning ( $M = 5.47$ ) were rated more favorably on the hiring composite than were those who acknowledged at the end ( $M = 4.98$ ),  $t(69) = 1.96$ ,  $p = .05$ . Those who acknowledged at the beginning also tended to be viewed more favorably on the hiring composite than were those who did not acknowledge at all ( $M = 5.19$ ), but this difference did not obtain significance,  $t(59) = -1.25$ ,  $p = .21$ . Those who



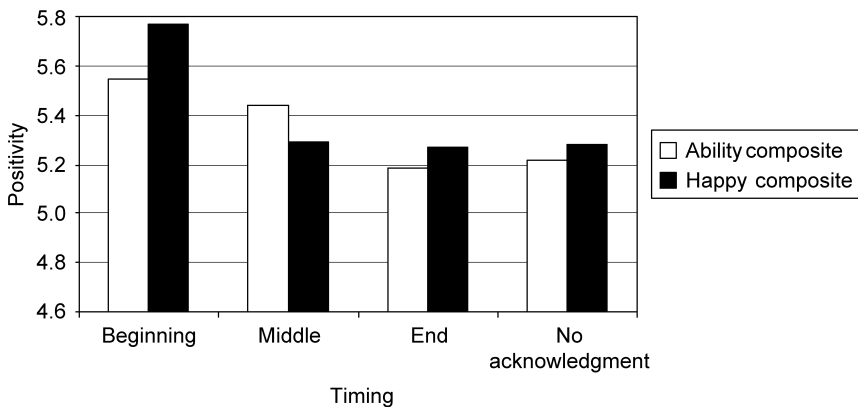


Figure 2. Trait composites by timing condition.

acknowledged in the middle of the interview ( $M = 5.60$ ) were viewed more favorably than were those who acknowledged at the end of the interview,  $t(74) = 7.24$ ,  $p = .01$ ; as well as those who did not acknowledge at all,  $t(64) = 1.96$ ,  $p = .05$ . The sum of these planned comparisons was reinforced by a significant overall one-way ANOVA on the hiring composite,  $F(3, 136) = 3.10$ ,  $p = .02$  ( $\eta^2 = .07$ ).

As shown in Figure 2, applicants who acknowledged in the earlier stages of the interview showed a weaker predicted pattern on both the capable and happy trait composites. With the capable trait composite, those who acknowledged at the beginning ( $M = 5.54$ ) were rated to be marginally more capable than those who acknowledged at the end ( $M = 5.19$ ),  $t(68) = 1.68$ ,  $p = .10$ ; and those who did not acknowledge at all ( $M = 5.22$ ),  $t(59) = -1.67$ ,  $p = .10$ . The expected patterns found on capable ratings between those who acknowledged in the middle ( $M = 5.44$ ) versus those who acknowledged either at the end,  $t(73) = 1.21$ ,  $p = .23$ ; or who did not acknowledge at all,  $t(64) = -1.12$ ,  $p = .27$ , did not obtain significance. The overall one-way ANOVA on the capable trait composite did not reach significance,  $F(3, 135) = 1.44$ ,  $p = .24$  ( $\eta^2 = .03$ ).

With the happy trait composite, those who acknowledged at the beginning ( $M = 5.77$ ) were rated to be significantly happier than those who acknowledged at the end ( $M = 5.27$ ),  $t(68) = 2.26$ ,  $p = .03$ ; and those who did not acknowledge at all ( $M = 5.28$ ),  $t(59) = -2.29$ ,  $p = .03$ . However, no differences were found on happy ratings between those who acknowledged in the middle ( $M = 5.29$ ) versus those who acknowledged either at the end,  $t(73) = 0.08$ ,  $p = .93$ ; or who did not acknowledge at all,  $t(64) = -0.54$ ,  $p = .96$ . The overall one-way ANOVA on the happy trait composite obtained marginal significance,  $F(3, 135) = 2.30$ ,  $p = .08$  ( $\eta^2 = .05$ ). One additional post hoc comparison conducted with Bonferroni's correction (Figure 2) reveals that acknowledging at the beginning was actually more

Table 1

*Results of Mediation Analyses*

Outcome variable (DV)	Step 1: Timing of Acknowledgment → Well-Adjusted (IV → MV)	Step 2: IV → DV	Step 3: (IV + MV) → DV	R <sup>2</sup> from Step 2 to Step 3	Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>
Hiring composite	$\beta_{MV} = -.24^*$	$\beta_{IV} = -.22^*$	$\beta_{IV.MV} = -.12$	.16**	.16
Happy composite	$\beta_{MV} = -.24^*$	$\beta_{IV} = -.19^\dagger$	$\beta_{IV.MV} = -.08$	.16**	.17

Note. DV = dependent variable; IV = independent variable; MV = mediator variable.

$^\dagger p < .10$ .  $^* p < .05$ .  $^{**} p < .01$ .

strategic in terms of happiness ratings than was acknowledging in the middle,  $t(59) = 2.31, p = .02$ .

### Psychological Well-Being as a Potential Mediator

To examine whether attributions of well-being mediated the relationship between the timing of acknowledgments and applicant ratings, we used Baron and Kenny's (1986) three-step test of mediation. The results are presented in Table 1. As described previously, the main effect of timing was significant for the hiring composite and marginally significant for the happy composite (Step 2). Therefore, tests of mediation were conducted legitimately for the hiring measure and were conducted in an exploratory fashion on the happy trait composite.

The mediating variable (well-being) must be regressed onto the independent variable (timing), and the resulting coefficient must be significant, which it is ( $\beta = -.24, p < .05$ ; Step 1). Finally, the effect of the independent variable on the dependent variable must be attenuated when the effect of mediator is controlled. For both hiring and happy, the effect of timing on the outcomes was diminished to a nonsignificant level when well-being was included (thus controlled for) in the regression equation. Consequently, attributions of applicants' well-being mediated the effect of timing on hiring, and the exploratory analysis shows some indication of the mediating effects of well-being on the happy trait composite.

In a final exploratory set of analyses conducted on gender and ethnicity of the participant, as well as gender of the applicant, we found only two main effects

involving participant gender. Female participants rated applicants as more capable ( $M = 5.50$  vs.  $5.05$ ),  $t(131) = 8.72$ ,  $p = .004$ ; and as happier ( $M = 5.52$  vs.  $5.16$ ),  $t(131) = 4.53$ ,  $p = .04$ , than did male participants.

### Discussion

Consistent with the speculations of past researchers (Belgrave & Mills, 1981; Davis, 1961; Hastorf et al., 1979), the current results provide one of the first empirical demonstrations showing that specifically timed acknowledgments from applicants with physical disabilities about their conditions can make a difference in the way they are evaluated. Specifically, more favorable impressions of applicants on a job-related hiring measure emerged when applicants disclosed their disability at the beginning or the middle of the interview, relative to the end of the interview or relative to when they did not acknowledge at all. Applicants who acknowledged at the beginning of the interview also tended to be seen as happier and more capable. No significant differences emerged on either the capable or happy composites between those who acknowledged in the middle of the interview compared with both those who acknowledged at the end or those who did not acknowledge at all.

The results also provide an explanation as to why acknowledgments may be beneficial. Attributions of well-being mediate the relation between the timing of disclosures and the hiring judgments that perceivers make. In particular, those acknowledging in the early stages of the interview are perceived to have higher levels of psychological well-being, which in turn lead them to be viewed more favorably on the hiring-related dimension.<sup>5</sup>

The sum of these results provides preliminary evidence that disabled individuals accrue benefits by acknowledging, but particularly so in the earliest stages of the interview. In fact, the data suggest that acknowledging at the very beginning of the interview may provide a slight advantage over acknowledging in the middle. The difference between the beginning of the interview (~30 s into the interview) and the middle of the interview (~3 min) does not, perhaps, seem substantial. However, applicants acknowledging at the beginning of the interview, relative to those acknowledging in the middle, were rated as being happier and produced outcomes that differed significantly from those in the late-acknowledgment or no-acknowledgment conditions.

These results support the idea that very small variations in behaviors can influence person-perception processes significantly. In an interview setting in which outcomes are based largely on initial impression-formation processes,

<sup>5</sup>An alternative explanation for the results is that earlier acknowledgments elicited sympathy (and more of it) for the applicants. This possibility, however, can be dispelled because there were no differences in sympathy as a function of timing (*ns*).

these results may be particularly striking. Specifically, the stereotypes of physically disabled individuals as being unhappy (Siller, 1986) and individuals' willingness to hire disabled applicants are malleable, and might be undermined by the upfront and immediate attention that a disabled individual gives to his or her own condition. Such disabled individuals are seen as open, self-accepting, astute to others' concerns, and honest with themselves and with others.

The timing of acknowledgments did not influence ratings on the capable composite. It is possible that assessments of participants may dichotomize (either consciously or subconsciously) their affective reactions (i.e., liking, wanting to hire, viewing as happy) from their realistic assessments of the limitations that are accrued by a physical disability. Recent research by Hebl, Foster, Mannix, and Dovidio (2002) revealed that sometimes there are inconsistencies between the results of hiring decisions and employers' interpersonal behaviors directed toward stigmatized applicants.

Given the large number of physically disabled individuals who currently are unemployed and looking for work (Rubin, 1997), the present research importantly begins to fill a void in the psychological literature. Deciding whether or not to acknowledge a stigmatizing condition in the interview setting is one of the main concerns reported by stigmatized individuals (e.g., Griffith & Hebl, 2002; Wright, 1983). Physically disabled individuals must decide not only if they should disclose, but must consider to whom, how, and when they should disclose (e.g., Griffith & Hebl, 2002). The present research provides preliminary evidence that disabled individuals might adopt the acknowledgment strategy and use it in the initial stages of social interactions.

Certainly such findings are important to consider in future research. It is likely that the results could be modified by a number of variables. For instance, recent research has shown that the responsibility one has for being physically disabled (i.e., someone else's fault, the disabled individual's fault) influences how others view the disabled individual, as well as acknowledgments from the disabled individual (Hebl & Kleck, 2002). It is also likely that other characteristics of the stigma, about the physically disabled applicant, and about the interviewer also influence the success of the acknowledgment strategy. However, the present results suggest that acknowledging can be beneficial and can give applicants with physical disabilities an edge in impression-formation processes and in being considered for a job.

We hope that the findings, limitations, and strengths of the present research will guide future research on the acknowledgment of disability. One limitation of the current research is that evaluating an applicant from a videotape might be different from evaluating an authentically disabled applicant in a face-to-face setting. However, the increased reliance that media technology is playing in the interview setting makes the current methodology relevant, particularly for physically disabled individuals who may use such technology in applying for jobs.

And while the profound effects involved in a dynamic, ongoing mixed interaction between stigmatized and nonstigmatized individuals might alter interaction outcomes (e.g., Hebl & Dovidio, 2005), the semi-interactive nature of the present study provides a first look at the impact of acknowledgment timing. Future research, however, might consider examining actual hiring-decision scenarios and examine face-to-face interactions.

Another limitation of the present research is the use of confederates as applicants with physical disabilities, and we hope that future research will utilize actual, ongoing interviews with real interviewers and authentically physically disabled individuals. Past research has addressed how some stigmatized individuals feel when acknowledging their stigmas. For instance, Major and Gramzow (1999) found that women who experienced intrusive thoughts about their abortions reported significantly less distress when they acknowledged their stigma. Similarly, Griffith and Hebl (2002) found that employees who are gay or lesbian and who acknowledged their sexual orientation in the workplace were more likely to report increased job satisfaction and decreased job anxiety. However, it is not yet clear how applicants with physical disabilities feel when they acknowledge their stigmas in the interview setting, and whether it benefits them personally as well as professionally. It is hardly surprising that authentic, face-to-face research has not been done, given the fact that access to such perspectives and hiring paradigms is highly difficult, given issues related to access, the illegal nature of any discrimination based on disability, and design complexities.

Furthermore, we feel that the present results provide a relatively valid examination into the impressions formed of applicants with physical disabilities. More specifically, none of the participants were suspicious with the cover story or the interview itself. Rather, many of the participants wanted to know if their ratings actually matched the ratings of "those obtained in the workshop." Given this degree of realism and the fact that approximately half of the participants worked in organizational contexts and had their own experience with the interview setting and hiring capabilities, we believe that our results add to the very modest amount of empirical research on acknowledgment and stigma. Furthermore, our design also provided the isolation and manipulation of variables with a high degree of control. Importantly, it revealed that even participants who observe a disabled applicant for fewer than 10 min are influenced by an acknowledgment. Given that acknowledgments are intended to put interactants at ease, the strategy of acknowledgment (and the effects of timing for that matter) may be even more powerful in actual ongoing interactions.

Another strength of the present study involves the use of multiple confederate applicants, which ensured us that the results were not a result of any idiosyncrasies associated with one particular confederate. Similarly, the various acknowledgments that were used differed in wording and delivery across applicants, although the within-confederate standardization allowed us to draw clear and

generalizable inferences about the effects of timing. Thus, the interviews were authentic, and the responses reflected people's genuine experiences.

It is unfortunate that we were not able to analyze the data with respect to the three different participant populations, as it is possible that those who have more employment experience and hiring capabilities react differently from a primarily student population. Future research might use employment experience as a covariate in the analysis of perceptions of individuals with physical disabilities and the acknowledgments that they make.

The present set of results suggests that applicants with physical disabilities may gain an advantage in the interview process if they acknowledge their conditions in the early stages of the interview. Those who acknowledged earlier were perceived to have greater well-being, which in turn led to more positive ratings. We believe that such acknowledgments undermine the stereotypes of disabled applicants as ineffective workers and unhappy people. We are hopeful that the current research will trigger the continuation of studies addressing how applicants with physical disabilities might improve the impressions they make in an interview setting and, ultimately, increase the rates with which they enter the workforce.

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