RESEARCH REPORT

Disclosing a Disability: Do Strategy Type and Onset Controllability Make a Difference?

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In hiring contexts, individuals with concealable disabilities make decisions about how they should disclose their disability to overcome observers' biases. Previous research has investigated the effectiveness of binary disclosure decisions—that is, to disclose or conceal a disability—but we know little about how, why, or under what conditions different types of disclosure strategies impact observers' hiring intentions. In this article, we examine disability onset controllability (i.e., whether the applicant is seen as responsible for their disability onset) as a boundary condition for how disclosure strategy type influences the affective reactions (i.e., pity, admiration) that underlie observers' hiring intentions. Across 2 experiments, we found that when applicants are seen as responsible for their disability, strategies that de-emphasize the disability (rather than embrace it) lower observers' hiring intentions by elevating their pity reactions. Thus, the effectiveness of different types of disability disclosure strategies differs as a function of onset controllability. We discuss implications for theory and practice for individuals with disabilities and organizations.

Keywords: stigma, disclosure, concealable identities, disability, selection

Individuals with disabilities face biases and if these biases manifest in hiring contexts they can limit individuals' ability to gain employment (Stone & Colella, 1996). For example, individuals with a variety of disabilities can be stereotyped as helpless, submissive, and incompetent and thus viewed as victims of their inabilities (Fiske, Cuddy, Glick, & Xu, 2002; Weiner, Perry, & Magnusson, 1988). As a result, observers often react with pity, sorrow, and feelings of compassion that invoke a desire to help (Cuddy, Fiske, & Glick, 2007) and, simultaneously, lowered performance expectations for individuals with disabilities (Colella, DeNisi, & Varma, 1997). Previ-

ous research has suggested that individuals with nonvisible disabilities can potentially mitigate such biases by concealing their disability (Clair, Beatty, & MacLean, 2005; Goffman, 1963; Ragins, 2008). However, by doing so they face the burden of keeping a secret (K. J. Jones & King, 2014; Pachankis, 2007; Smart & Wegner, 1999) and they might fail to receive necessary accommodations (Baldridge & Swift, 2013; Baldridge & Veiga, 2001). Extant research does not adequately address how individuals with concealable disabilities can strategically disclose their disability in a way that mitigates potentially harmful bias.

Disclosing a stigma (i.e., a contextually devalued attribute; Crocker, Major, & Steele, 1998) can take different forms. Research on the employment experiences of individuals with disabilities has revealed two commonly adopted strategies. Some individuals recommend discussing the disability as though it is a personal source of strength (e.g., an ability to overcome obstacles), while others suggest downplaying the disability as noncentral and instead emphasizing other personal strengths (Jans, Kaye, & Jones, 2012; Taub, McLorg, & Fanflik, 2004). In her theory of social identity impression management, L. M. Roberts (2005) identified two strategies that encapsulate the above approaches: *Integration* (i.e., emphasizing positive aspects of a disability) and *de-categorization* (i.e., de-emphasizing the disability and emphasizing individuating information). We build off this theoretical work and investigate