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THE EFFECTS OF DISABILITY STATUS AND EMPLOYMENT LEVEL IN SHAPING
EMPLOYEE PERCEPTIONS: A VIGNETTE STUDY OF EMPLOYEES WHO ARE
BLIND

A Thesis

Presented to

The Faculty of the Department of Psychology

San José State University

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Science

by

Raymond Bennett

August 2022

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The Designated Thesis Committee Approves the Thesis Titled

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BLIND

by

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ABSTRACT

THE EFFECTS OF DISABILITY STATUS AND EMPLOYMENT LEVEL IN SHAPING EMPLOYEE PERCEPTIONS: A VIGNETTE STUDY OF EMPLOYEES WHO ARE BLIND

by Raymond A. Bennett

This study sought to understand the impact of disability status and level of employment (i.e., supervisor or employee) on ratings of performance outcomes and legitimately earning one's role. It was hypothesized that leaders with disability (LWD) would be rated as poorer performers compared to non-disabled leaders and that co-workers with disability (CWD) would be rated more favorably than LWD. It was also hypothesized that the perceived legitimacy of disability status would moderate the impact of disability status and employment level on performance outcomes. 102 participants read one of four vignettes describing an organization member they regularly interacted with and responded to items about them as well as their own beliefs. Vignettes had either a co-worker who is blind, a supervisor who is blind, a co-worker without a disability, or a supervisor without a disability. While the primary study hypotheses were not supported, results showed that people with disability (PWD) were rated higher on task performance and having legitimately earned their role compared to those without disability, and that LWD were rated as more likely to have earned their role legitimately compared to non-disabled leaders. Implications for future research are discussed, including a need to identify what moderating variables influence perceptions of legitimately earning one's role and performance for those LWD and PWD more generally.

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Introduction

Previous research has demonstrated the difficulty that those with disability face in acquiring leadership positions as well as the unique challenges they experience once in such roles (Roulstone & Williams, 2014; Wilson-Kovacs et al., 2008). Therefore, the topic area of interest in the present study surrounded perceptions of disability status at work and the ways in which such perceptions intersect with leadership. More specifically, the present study examined the impact of a leader possessing a disability status on perceptions of their performance and to what extent, if any, that perceived legitimacy of disability status has on such perceptions. In addition, research has noted the challenges experienced by workers with disabilities resulting from stigma and the ways in which challenges, such as stigma, contribute to disparities in work-related outcomes (Brooks, 2019; Samosh, 2020; Schur et al., 2017; Wilson-Kovacs et al., 2008). However, existing literature on the topic has not empirically tested factors related to perceptions of performance of employees with a disability when they occupy leadership roles. Therefore, the primary purpose of the present study was to examine employee perceptions of leaders with a disability.

Experiences of Disability at Work

A person with a disability (PWD) is defined as an individual who self-identifies as having a disability. The nature of one's disability can be categorized in many ways, including as either psychological or physical (Union of the Physically Impaired Against Segregation [UPIAS], 1976). Examples of psychological disabilities include, but are not limited to, personality, anxiety, or depressive disorders. In contrast, examples of physical disabilities may include blindness, using a wheelchair, or using a prosthetic limb.

Across all age groups, the employment rate is lower for PWD than for those without (Bureau of Labor Statistics [BLS], 2020). For example, in 2020, only 17.9% of PWD were employed in the United States compared to 61.8% of those without a disability (BLS, 2021). This trend remains regardless of educational attainment levels (BLS, 2020). According to the BLS (2019), PWD are less likely to hold management, professional, or related occupations than those with no disability. Other research highlights an over-representation of PWD in low-paid service industry positions (Wilson-Kovacs et al., 2008). PWD also experience lower levels of pay, job security, and poorer perceptions of management (Brooks, 2019; Schur et al., 2017), which in turn results in lower levels of job satisfaction (Schur et al., 2017). Taken together, these findings illustrate disparities in the experiences of PWD compared to those without a disability.

Disparities in pay, jobs, and the psychosocial outcomes of PWD may be in part explained by the stigmatizing beliefs held towards them. For example, research by Rodriguez and colleagues (2020) has indicated that employers are hesitant to hire a PWD for a variety of reasons, including employer fears and concerns about costs to the organization, a lack of knowledge about the rights of individuals according to the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), naiveté about typical resources and accommodations for employees with disabilities, and the experiences of those with a disability in general. It is therefore unsurprising that research has also highlighted that PWD often experience fear of others in the organization learning of their disability, particularly when applying for the job (Samosh, 2020). Further, when organizations do know about an employee's disability status, that employee deals with challenges associated with having an overprotective or paternalistic work environment. For

instance, PWD are not given constructive feedback as much as their able-bodied co-workers which, in turn, limits their development as an employee (Wilson-Kovacs et al., 2008). PWD also fear being treated as a token, which results in contributions of PWD at work being less sought after and minimized when received (Wilson-Kovacs et al., 2008).

Despite the disparities and unique challenges PWD face, they do hold employment and leadership positions, even if at a lower rate (Wilson-Kovacs et al., 2008), likely in part due to the strategies they have developed to advance their careers. For instance, according to Samosh (2020), PWD utilize their internal social networks, which can support their career success by providing employees with disabilities an option for mitigating accessibility issues through leaning on their peers for help. However, as the result of disability-related stigma, PWD may possess less access to these internal networks compared to those without disabilities, which in turn limits their access to career advancement opportunities (Samosh, 2020).

In addition to relying on internal social networks to overcome barriers, PWD deploy a number of self-management strategies in order to advance their careers (King, 2004). Self-management strategies refer to proactive steps taken by a PWD to benefit their careers, including engaging in self-advocacy and reframing their disability status to highlight their capabilities over their challenges (Kulkarni & Gopakumar, 2014). Furthermore, when people with stigmatized identities, such as PWD, are put in leadership positions, they often experience a glass cliff (Roulstone & Williams, 2014; Wilson-Kovacs et al., 2008), which describes the precariousness of the success individuals with stigmatized identities as leaders. Although there is burgeoning research examining how employees manage various

stigmatized identities, there is much less research examining how other employees perceive those employees who hold PWD status. Moreover, there is even less research examining situations wherein a PWD also happens to be their supervisor and the impact of them holding such positions on a PWD's perceived performance-related outcomes.

Thus, the focus of the present study is geared towards illuminating followers' (i.e., employees) beliefs towards leaders (i.e., managers or supervisors) with a disability (LWD) and whether their perceptions of disability legitimacy may play a role in this relationship. In addition, the purpose of the present study is, in part, to offer empirical evidence for such relationships.

The present study is intended to contribute to the literature in two primary ways. First, previous research has examined how one's perceptions of behaviors and attitudes surrounding disability status in organizational contexts impact beliefs regarding PWD's performance and legitimately earning their role (i.e., earning their role based off of excellent performance) (Bordieri et al., 1997; Cavanagh et al., 2017; Mitchell & Kovera, 2006; Nota et al., 2014; Telwatte et al., 2017). However, previous studies did not extend such considerations to examine how the perceived legitimacy of one's disability status impacts the beliefs of followers of an LWD regarding their performance and having earned their role (Bordieri et al., 1997; Cavanagh et al., 2017; Mitchell & Kovera, 2006; Nota et al., 2014; Telwatte et al., 2017). Furthermore, there are discrepancies in terms of whether the perceived legitimacy of a person's disability status will impact performance-related outcomes and in which direction. Specifically, some research suggests that those with less legitimate disabilities, which can vary depending on the type of disability, are less likely to be promoted

(Bordieri et al., 1997), while other research suggests that some PWD are perceived as more competent performers depending on the disability status and task at hand (Bordieri et al., 1997; Nota et al., 2014). Therefore, understanding whether and how disability legitimacy impacts perceptions of performance-related outcomes for PWD is an important gap in the literature to fill. By clarifying this relationship, the results of the present study may point to where organizations could expand their efforts to promote the well-being of PWD in their organization, namely by destigmatizing employee beliefs about disability statuses.

The second expected contribution of the study is to expand Identity Management Theory (IMT) by empirically testing suggestions made by previously published theoretical work. Specifically, IMT considers interactions between an individual belonging to a stigmatized identity group and an individual not belonging to that group (Lyons et al., 2018), but it does not consider the role, if any, that social hierarchies can play in shaping the outcomes of interactions between such individuals. Yet, social hierarchical status can impact interactions. For example, De Hoogh et al., (2015) found that team effectiveness was impacted as the result of the intentional interactions of team members based on their hierarchical status. In addition, previous studies have suggested that PWD will continue to experience stigma while occupying a leadership role, but such studies have not empirically tested this notion (Bordieri et al., 1997; Cavanagh et al., 2017; Nota et al., 2014; Smith et al., 2004; Wilson-Kovacs et al., 2008). Thus, the present study will directly test the effects of having a disability status while occupying a leadership role on performance-related outcomes and being perceived as legitimately earning one's role. This contribution is important because it expands understanding of the processes by which interactions between members of stigmatized

identity groups and non-stigmatized groups may be impacted by their roles in social hierarchies.

Theoretical Framing

A useful way to understand how individual beliefs and perceptions toward PWD are shaped within the work context may be through the lens of IMT. Originally posited as a theory relevant to understanding the role of cross-cultural communication strategies and techniques for people from different cultural backgrounds, IMT has seen extensions since its conceptualization (Cupach & Imahori, 1993). Such extensions have focused on the interactions between people inside and outside of stigmatized identity groups that provide a framework for the present study. Previous theory on stigma has defined individuals experiencing stigma as those lower in power relative to non-stigmatized individuals due to their possessing a given identity status (i.e., gender, ethnicity, ability, etc.) that is different from those higher in power (Link & Phelan, 2001; Parker & Aggleton, 2003). Specifically, an extension of IMT articulated by Lyons et al. (2018) suggests that the meaning attached to a stigmatized identity emerges from interactions between a member belonging to the stigmatized identity group and an individual belonging to the non-stigmatized identity group. That is, perceptions of PWD are the outcome of interactions between a person with a disability and an able-bodied person. In addition, the authors argue that the degree of stigma toward a given identity will influence the response to being stigmatized by someone who holds that same stigmatized identity (Lyons et al., 2018). In other words, if disability status is heavily stigmatized in a workplace, a PWD will respond more negatively, both

psychologically and behaviorally to experiencing stigma than if disability was not as stigmatized.

Furthermore, larger group perceptions can impact the outcomes of interactions between people with and without stigmatized identities. Larger group perceptions refer to the perceptions held by those in the local social environment (i.e., people who regularly interact with, or observe interactions with, a person who has a stigmatized identity). Specifically, how the larger group perceives stigmatized identity groups impacts the saliency of beliefs held by individuals within that larger group and, therefore, impacts the outcomes of interactions for PWD. As a result, the amenability of perceptions held by the larger group toward people with stigmatized identities influences the ability of a PWD to change such stigma because it can impact the beliefs held by able-bodied individuals in the organization (Lyons et al., 2018). This means that, if the beliefs of the larger group are favorable toward PWD, they have a better chance of reducing stigma they experience regardless of their organizational position. Therefore, the interactions non-disabled employees engage in/observe with a LWD or co-worker with a disability (CWD) will impact their beliefs about such individuals which, in turn, may impact their perceptions of an LWD. Being able to demonstrate this in the present study is important because it will strengthen the applicability of IMT by providing evidence of such a relationship existing in a context that considers individual beliefs within a social hierarchy since current extensions of the theory do not consider such factors. To better understand the context in which such perceptions occur, reviewing existing literature about performance-related outcomes for PWD at work is important.

Disability Status and Performance

Previous research indicates that disability status impacts real and perceived performance-related outcomes from the perspectives of non-disabled employees (Bordieri et al., 1997; Cavanagh et al., 2017; Nota et al., 2014; Smith et al., 2004; Walker et al., 2021). For instance, previous researchers have suggested, but not tested, that people may view LWD as achieving their leadership position as the result of the organization meeting a diversity quota rather than earning the role based on merit (Wilson-Kovacs et al., 2008). This is an important question to address because such beliefs toward PWD in the workplace may perpetuate stigma if this belief is consistently held.

In addition to beliefs about legitimately earning the position, people also hold negative perceptions of the performance of PWD. Previous research has linked experiencing stigma to poorer perceptions of PWD's task performance (Walker et al., 2021). Given that disability is a stigmatized identity, PWD are likely to be perceived as performing poorer than their non-disabled peers (Bordieri et al., 1997; Cavanagh et al., 2017; Nota et al., 2014; Smith et al., 2004). Further, PWD at work are also perceived as less competent employees (Bordieri et al., 1997; Cavanagh et al., 2017; Nota et al., 2014; Smith et al., 2004). Such perceptions of incompetence arise from assumptions regarding their ability to complete their work-related tasks. That is, some tasks are seen as more or less doable by a PWD for employees with various disability statuses (Bordieri et al., 1997; Nota et al., 2014). For example, previous research (Nota et al., 2014) has found that highly complex tasks (i.e., tasks requiring more cognitive or physical effort to complete) are seen as less doable for employees with intellectual disabilities compared to those with physical disabilities. These perceptions persist

despite PWD being rated more favorably in terms of their social worth (i.e., their social acceptability) (Nota et al., 2014; Louvet et al., 2009). Given that previous research demonstrates that people in organizations perceive PWD as having worse performance than their able-bodied peers, a clear link exists between possessing a disability status and their perceived performance from the perspective of others.

Unfortunately, negative perceptions and beliefs towards the performance of PWD may hinder their actual performance. Indeed, research by Walker and colleagues (2021) has demonstrated that people belonging to stigmatized identity groups demonstrate poorer objective task performance as a result of depletion in cognitive resources brought on by the increased effort to process discriminatory acts. Furthermore, real performance may be hindered via phenomena such as stereotype threat (Steele & Aronson, 1995). Stereotype threat is a psychological threat that occurs when one is in a situation or is doing something for which a negative stereotype about ones' group applies in a social context (Steele & Aronson, 1995). This means that people experience psychological threats as the result of others assuming they will perform in accordance with the negative stereotype associated with the group to which they belong. For instance, research has found that, in academic contexts, stereotype threat can reduce the performance of PWD on cognitive tasks (Desombre et al., 2018).

Taken together, the assumptions and treatment toward PWD result in a reduction in their actual performance due, at least in part, to both resource loss and stereotype threat. This reduction in perceived and actual performance observed as the result of experiencing stigma-based discrimination is consistent with IMT (Lyons et al., 2018) and may lead to a vicious

cycle of negative stigmatizing belief building and poorer performance. That is, if others view PWD poorly because they exhibit poor performance, they are less likely to support assertions made by PWD aimed at redefining disability in a positive light. Thus, the act of PWD exhibiting poorer performance may only serve to reinforce existing negative notions about their capabilities because non-disabled co-workers will be less likely to support changing their own negative conceptions about disability, according to IMT (Lyons et al., 2018).

While empirical evidence has tested differences in beliefs held toward CWD compared to non-disabled coworkers (Wilson-Kovacs et al., 2008), none has tested or clarified whether this relationship holds true if the PWD is a leader or supervisor. Previous research has demonstrated that LWD experience glass cliffs once they obtain leadership roles, thus their disability status impacts how they are perceived as leaders compared to a non-disabled leader (Roulstone & Williams, 2014; Wilson-Kovacs et al., 2008). In addition, other research has established that the perceived competence of a leader plays a role in determining if the leader is considered effective by their followers (Justis, 1975). Because previous research has found that PWD are perceived as less competent at work, a LWD is also likely to be perceived negatively (Bordieri et al., 1997; Cavanagh et al., 2017; Nota et al., 2014; Smith et al., 2004). Taken together, it is hypothesized that:

Hypothesis 1: LWD will be rated poorer on performance-related outcomes and be rated as less likely to have earned their role legitimately compared to a non-disabled leader.

Despite their utility for understanding the dynamic challenges faced and the impact of disability status on performance related outcomes, neither stereotype threat theory, empirical evidence, or IMT has considered the social-hierarchical role in which the type of positions

held by PWD and those held by outgroup members impact the performance-related outcomes of PWD. IMT does not consider that the amount of stigmatization may be impacted by the fact that the member of the stigmatized group (i.e., PWD) occupies a higher role in the given social hierarchy (i.e., leadership role).

This matters because of the role power plays in shaping one's perceptions. The degree to which someone has power (i.e., the ability to enact change despite opposition) impacts how others respond to their behavior in organizational contexts (Lucas & Baxter, 2012).

Therefore, given that a LWD has power, as designated by their role in the organizational hierarchy, non-disabled organization members should respond differently to the actions of such leaders compared to their CWD. However, previous research has highlighted that leaders belonging to other stigmatized groups (i.e., racial and gender minorities) face challenges when exerting their formal power as leaders due to a perception of illegitimacy in having earned their position (Knight et al., 2003; Lucas & Baxter, 2012; Ridgeway & Berger, 1986). As a result, this hinders the ability of a leader belonging to a stigmatized group to achieve goals while occupying a leadership role because followers are less likely to comply with directives (Lucas & Baxter, 2012). This, in turn, results in followers viewing such leaders with stigmatized identities as poorer performers due to their inability to achieve said goals (Lucas & Baxter, 2012). In response, such leaders attempt to overcome this challenge by using their formal power more often which results in followers viewing them more negatively (Bruins et al., 1999; Lucas & Baxter, 2012). This is because previous research has established that, when leaders use their formal power too often, it results in more negative perceptions of said leader which may impact perceptions of LWD (Bruins et al., 1999;

Lovaglia et al., 2005). Thus, previous research has demonstrated that the directionality of analysis based on an existing hierarchy has an impact on performance-related outcomes for those belonging to stigmatized identity groups. If this logic is extended to the experiences of PWD in organizations, it then follows that, due to the decreased likelihood of being perceived positively when a leader belongs to a stigmatized group, LWD should be perceived worse as a result of their holding formal power like leaders of various other stigmatized identity statuses (Knight et al., 2003; Lucas & Baxter, 2012; Ridgeway & Berger, 1986).

Hypothesis 2: CWD will be rated better on performance-related outcomes and being perceived as legitimately earning one's role compared to LWD due to having a disability status being more consequential for leaders.

Perceived Legitimacy of Disability Status as A Moderator

The degree to which a non-disabled person perceives the disability status of a PWD as legitimate may impact how PWD are viewed by others. In this context, the legitimacy of a disability is determined by how impairing a non-disabled person believes the disability to be. According to previous research, beliefs regarding the legitimacy of one's disability status impacts the likelihood of an employer hiring a PWD (Mitchell & Kovera, 2006). For example, employers are less likely to hire PWD who they perceive as having an internal cause of disability and view psychological disability as less legitimate (Bordieri et al., 1997; Cavanagh et al., 2017; Mitchell & Kovera, 2006; Nota et al., 2014; Telwatte et al., 2017). Internal cause of disability refers to how one attributes the cause of one's disability. In other words, if one attributes the cause of another person's disability internally, they perceive their disability as the result of their own actions whereas an external attribution indicates one

perceives the cause of another person's disability as out of their control (Mitchell & Kovera, 2006).

In addition, PWD with disability statuses perceived as less legitimate are also viewed as less competent and are less likely to be promoted (Bordieri et al., 1997). For example, previous research has found that employees with depression or obesity were perceived as less competent and less likely to be promoted (Bordieri et al., 1997). Given that coworkers may perceive PWD as liabilities to team effectiveness, their decreased likelihood of being promoted is not surprising (Wilson-Kovacs et al., 2008). If an organization were to use a method of evaluation relying on feedback from peers when determining the eligibility of promotion for a PWD, the negative perceptions held by their coworkers regarding their competence could be a hindrance. However, as demonstrated by previous research, not all disability statuses are viewed as equally impairing to a PWD (Bordieri et al., 1997; Cavanagh et al., 2017; Mitchell & Kovera, 2006; Nota et al., 2014; Telwatte et al., 2017). Therefore, the degree to which a non-disabled coworker perceives a PWD's disability status as legitimate may impact whether they view the PWD as a liability to team effectiveness. This inhibition of promotion opportunity may be especially pronounced for the disability statuses consistently viewed as the least legitimate (Bordieri et al., 1997; Cavanagh et al., 2017; Nota et al., 2014; Telwatte et al., 2017).

Despite the vast majority of research suggesting that the legitimacy of disability may have a negative impact on performance-related outcomes, other research suggests the opposite. For instance, employees with a physical disability are perceived as having a more legitimate type of disability and are simultaneously more likely to receive a promotion

compared to a PWD with psychological disabilities (Bordieri et al., 1997). This counterintuitive evidence suggests a need to further untangle whether the level of legitimacy has an impact on employees' perceptions of CWD and LWD performance-related outcomes.

Further emphasizing the need to address the conflicting evidence regarding the impact of the perceived legitimacy of disability status, IMT posits that if a disability status is viewed as illegitimate (i.e., not actually a disability), people with those disability statuses should not experience stigma resulting from their having a disability, which is not the case for all disability statuses (Lyons et al., 2018). Taken together and consistent with the previously mentioned idea that perceptions of PWD incompetence arise from perceptions of PWD's capabilities to complete their work-related tasks, the degree of impairment experienced by a PWD as perceived by a non-disabled employee is expected to determine whether PWD will be viewed as able to complete given tasks (Cavanagh et al., 2017; Nota et al., 2014; Smith et al., 2004). Therefore, perceived disability status legitimacy should function differently in terms of PWD's performance-related outcomes and whether they hold leadership roles. In addition, due to scarce empirical research considering the perceived legitimacy of disability status as a variable, the ability to predict directionality of such moderating effects is limited.

Hypothesis 3: Perceived legitimacy of disability status moderates the impact of disability status and employment level on performance-related outcomes and being perceived as legitimately earning one's role.

Method

Participants

Participants for the study were recruited utilizing a convenience sample approach with advertisements for the study posted on various social media platforms (i.e., LinkedIn and Facebook). Participants were 18 years of age or older, were currently employed, worked 32 hours per week or more, and had at least 6 months of prior full-time work history. A total of 216 participants were initially recruited, however, 114 participants failed to provide the correct answer to the attention check item (described below), thus their data were removed from the sample.

The final sample consisted of 102 participants with a gender breakdown of women 78.4% ($n = 80$), men 19.6% ($n = 20$), and non-binary 2% ($n = 2$). In terms of gender expression, 79.4% ($n = 81$) identified as cisgender, 16.7% ($n = 17$) declined to state, 2.9% ($n = 3$) left the item blank, and 1% ($n = 1$) identified as transgender. Additionally, in terms of racial/ethnic breakdown, 67.6% ($n = 69$) selected White, 10.8% ($n = 11$) selected Multiracial/Multiethnic, 10.8% ($n = 11$) selected Hispanic/Latino, 6.9% ($n = 7$) selected Asian/Pacific Islander, 2.9% ($n = 3$) selected Native American/Indigenous Peoples, and 1% ($n = 1$) selected Other. The average age of participants was 41.12 years ($SD = 14$).

Regarding identifying as having a disability among the participants, demographic information showed that 16.7% ($n = 17$) of the sample identified as someone with a disability while 83.3% ($n = 85$) identified as not having a disability. In addition, 60.8% ($n = 62$) of the participants said that they regularly interacted with a PWD, while 39.2% ($n = 40$) said they did not. Education information provided by the participants showed that they were relatively

highly educated since 37.3% ($n = 38$) had a bachelor's degree, 29.4% ($n = 30$) had a master's degree, 13.7% ($n = 14$) had an associate degree, 10.8% ($n = 11$) had a high school diploma, and 8.8% ($n = 9$) had a doctoral degree.

Regarding the work history of the participants, on average, the sample worked well above the minimum number of hours per week to be considered as full-time employed ($M = 42.6$, $SD = 7.9$, ranging from 32 to 70 hours). In terms of the position type held by participants, a majority were not in leadership roles with 60.8% ($n = 62$) having a manager/supervisor and overseeing nobody, 29.4% ($n = 30$) were supervisors/managers, 8.8% ($n = 9$) were self-managed, and 1% ($n = 1$) were independent contractors. The duration of participants being in their current roles showed that the majority of participants had been in their position for more than two years with 25.5% ($n = 26$) for more than 10 years, 23.5% ($n = 24$) for between two and five years, 19.6% ($n = 20$) for between six months and one year, 14.7% ($n = 15$) for between five and 10 years, 8.8% ($n = 9$) for less than six months, and 7.8% ($n = 8$) for between one and two years. Annual individual income information provided by participants showed that the sample consisted of relatively high earners with 25.5% ($n = 26$) earning between \$50-75k per year, 20.6% ($n = 21$) earning between \$75-100k per year, 12.7% ($n = 13$) earning between \$100-135k per year, 12.7% ($n = 13$) earning above \$135k per year, 12.7% ($n = 13$) earning between \$30-50k per year, 12.7% ($n = 13$) earning between \$15-30k per year, and 2.9% ($n = 3$) earning below 15k per year.

Lastly, the industry data showed that the largest group of participants did not work in any of the provided categories with 23.5% ($n = 24$) selecting Other. The rest worked primarily in

the fields of education 21.6% ($n = 22$), medical 16.7% ($n = 17$), government 15.7% ($n = 16$), service 9.8% ($n = 10$), technology 8.8% ($n = 9$), and finance 2.9% ($n = 3$)

Measures

Legitimacy of Blindness as a Disability

Due to the lack of existing scale on the perceived legitimacy of a specific disability status, items were created to measure this moderator variable in the present study. In order to develop these items, previous research that considered the topic of the perceived legitimacy of disability statuses was reviewed (Bordieri et al., 1997; Cavanagh et al., 2017; Mitchell & Kovera, 2006; Nota et al., 2014; Telwatte et al., 2017). The following three items were developed based on the review; “I think blindness is a legitimate disability”, “I think blindness impairs one’s ability to do things”, and “I think that, if someone is blind, it’s likely the result of their own actions”. The last item was reverse coded. All items were rated on a 5-point scale ranging from “strongly disagree” (1) to “strongly agree” (5). However, this three-item scale did not demonstrate acceptable reliability ($\alpha = .09$). Therefore, rather than using all three initially developed items, the item “I think blindness is a legitimate disability,” which most clearly captured the intended measure, was used as a single item in all analyses involving this variable.

Task Performance

In order to measure task performance, a modified version of the scale used by Griffin et al. (2007) was used. Previous studies demonstrated reliability for the scale as generally good and ranges from $\alpha = .83-.88$ (Griffin et al., 2007). The scale contained three items. Each item was modified to match the present study. The items were, “The person I read about carries

out the core parts of their job well”, “The person I read about completes their core job tasks well using standard procedures”, and “The person I read about ensured their job tasks were completed properly”. All three items were rated on a 5-point scale ranging from “never” (1) to “a great deal” (5). This measure of task performance demonstrated good internal consistency ($\alpha = .87$) which was consistent with previous research (Griffin et al., 2007).

Organizational Citizenship Behavior

Another variable measured was organizational citizenship behavior which refers to the likelihood of a participant engaging in tasks at work that go above and beyond the scope of their position. The measure was slightly modified to better fit the present study. Previous studies demonstrated reliability for the scale as acceptable to good with α ranging from .70 to .86 across several time-points (de Jonge et al., 2017). There were three items in this scale. The items were, “The person I read about is willing to volunteer to do things not formally required by the job”, “The person I read about is willing to assist me with my duties”, and “The person I read about is willing to help colleagues who have heavy workloads”. All items were rated on a 5-point scale ranging from “strongly disagree” (1) to “strongly agree” (5). This measure demonstrated good internal consistency ($\alpha = .81$) which is consistent with previous research using the scale (de Jonge et al., 2017).

Counterproductive Work Behavior

The variable interpersonal counterproductive work behavior was measured as well. That is, the degree to which one is likely to engage in counterproductive work behaviors toward others. Previous studies demonstrated reliability for the scale as good at $\alpha = .87$ in a sample of university students (Cohen-Charash & Muller, 2007). Participants were asked to rate the

degree to which they agreed with twelve statements regarding the likelihood of the person described in the vignette as engaging in such behaviors on a 5-point scale ranging from “very unlikely” (1) and “very likely” (5). The prompt was slightly modified to better fit the present study. The prompt for the statements was, “The person I read about is likely to”. Example statements included, “Interfere with someone else’s performance”, “Talk to others about the bad nature of someone else”, and “Backstab someone else”. In the present study, this scale demonstrated excellent internal consistency ($\alpha = .97$) which was consistent with previous research using this measure (Cohen-Charash & Muller, 2007).

Perceived as Legitimately Earning One’s Role

In order to measure whether one’s role was perceived to be earned legitimately; items were developed in the present study. In total, there were three items. The items were, “The person I read about legitimately obtained their role”, “the person I read about earned their role based off of merit”, and “the person I read about earned their role based off of their disability status”. The last item was reverse coded. All items were rated on a 5-point scale ranging from “very unlikely” (1) to “very likely” (5). Similar to the development process of the perceived legitimacy of disability status scale, in order to develop these items, previous research that considered the topic was reviewed (Bordieri et al., 1997; Cavanagh et al., 2017; Mitchell & Kovera, 2006; Nota et al., 2014; Telwatte et al., 2017). The three-item scale measuring being perceived as legitimately earning one’s role created for the purpose of the present study demonstrated acceptable reliability given that the alpha was above .70 ($\alpha = .71$).

Demographic Information

Participants were asked to answer questions regarding their demographic information. These questions encompassed gender, gender expression, race/ethnicity, age, disability status, frequency of interaction with someone with a disability, education, the number of hours worked per week, type of role within current job, tenure, income, and their industry.

Vignettes

The present study consisted of four experimental conditions. One condition contained a vignette where the person was described as someone who identified as blind and was their co-worker. A second condition included a vignette where the person was described as someone who identified as blind and was their manager. A third condition contained a vignette where the person's ability status was not mentioned and was described as their co-worker. Lastly, the fourth condition included a vignette where the person's ability status was not mentioned and was described as their manager. All the other information across vignettes was identical. See Appendix for the vignettes.

Procedure

Participants accessed the study via an anonymous survey link found on the online recruitment postings. Once participants accessed the link, they reviewed the informed consent page, agreed to participate in the study, and confirmed their eligibility. Next, participants were randomly assigned to one of the four experimental conditions to view a specific vignette. Randomization was achieved by using Qualtrics Survey Software and the experimental condition a participant was assigned to determined which vignette they were asked to read.

Participants were asked to imagine themselves working with the employee described in the vignette shown to them. The four different vignettes differentiated the experimental conditions by identifying the specific employment level and ability status that the participant was shown in their imaginary fellow organization member. This short vignette also provided information about this imaginary employee, including their core responsibilities and a description of how they achieved such duties.

After participants left the vignette page, they responded to an attention check item which consisted of confirming the disability status and the employment level of the person they just read about. Participants then were asked to think about the person they read about in the vignette when responding to the first set of survey items. Afterward, participants were asked to think about their own beliefs and behaviors when responding to the last set of survey items. Finally, participants were asked to provide demographic information. Upon completion, all participants were thanked for participating in the study.

Analytic Approach

A between-subjects design was used. As noted by Aguinis and Bradley (2014), a between-subjects design is an appropriate methodological approach for experimental vignette studies. In support of this conclusion, previous research has used a between-subjects design demonstrating the appropriateness of this methodological approach for experimental vignette studies (Allen et al., 1994; Andersson et al., 2015; Dray et al., 2020). Two independent variables were assessed: disability status with two levels (identified as a PWD or not) and employment level with two levels (identified as a co-worker or leader) which resulted in four experimental conditions. To assess Hypothesis 1, the effects of having a disability status

when in a leadership on performance-related outcomes and being perceived as legitimately earning one's role were modeled in order to examine the different levels of the first independent variable. In order to assess Hypothesis 2, the interaction and main effects of both disability status and employment level on performance-related outcomes and being perceived as legitimately earning one's role were modeled to examine the potential interactions between the levels of each independent variable. Lastly, in order to assess Hypothesis 3, the effects of perceived legitimacy of disability status in conjunction with the two independent variables on performance-related outcomes and being perceived as legitimately earning one's role were modeled to examine potential interaction effects between the levels of each of the variables. For the third model, as previously mentioned, the variable of perceived legitimacy of disability status was split into two levels (those with high or low scores) which facilitated analyses with the other two variables which already had two levels, respectively. Given previous research with similar study designs, the present study included 102 participants across four groups with each group containing a similar number of participants (Allen et al., 1994). More specifically, the experimental condition where the vignette had a co-worker who was identified as blind contained 28 participants, the condition where the vignette had a supervisor who was identified as blind contained 31 participants, the condition where the co-worker was not identified as having a disability status contained 23 participants, and the condition where the supervisor was not identified as having a disability status contained 20 participants.

Prior to assessing hypotheses, a data quality assessment was conducted in order to check for missing data and make sure the coding for each variable was accurate. To test Hypothesis

1, an independent samples t-test was conducted with the independent variable being disability status between leaders. To test Hypothesis 2, a series of two-way ANOVAs were run with the two independent variables (disability status and employment level) with each of the dependent variables (task performance, OCB, CWB, and being perceived as legitimately earning one's role) serving as the dependent variable in their own analysis, respectively. This allowed for the testing of both interaction effects and main effects for the two independent variables on each of the four outcome variables. If the interaction effect was not statistically significant, the simple main effects of each independent variable on each dependent variable became the focus.

Lastly, in order to address Hypothesis 3, a three-way ANOVA was conducted to examine the interaction effects of the two independent variables (disability and employment level) and the single-item measure of perceived legitimacy of disability status on each of the performance-related outcome variables. To facilitate this analysis, responses to the single item measure of perceived legitimacy of disability status were split into two groups, those with high scores and those with low scores, respectively. This was done after looking at the distribution of responses to the scale ($M = 4.60$, $SD = .60$). Given that all participants selected either "agree" or "strongly agree" in response to the single-item measure resulting in a range of 4-5, a low score was one where the participant selected "agree" while a high score was one where the participant selected "strongly agree". Participants who responded "agree" were coded as 0 while participants who responded "strongly agree" were coded as 1 as to indicate low or high levels of perceived legitimacy of disability status. Because the hypotheses set out to compare specific groups to each other, an LSD planned comparison

was utilized. In addition, because the use of LSD serves as a liberal approach to allowing more than one group to be used at a time in comparisons, this analysis was selected for the present study.

Results

Descriptive Statistics

Data quality was assessed by looking at manipulation checks and frequencies.

Participants who failed the manipulation checks were not included in the analyses. In order to compute the independent variables and include them in analyses, not having a disability status was coded as 1 and having a disability status was coded as 2 while the employment level of co-worker was coded as 1 and supervisor was coded as 2. Next, a series of descriptive statistics were computed to summarize the data and understand participant scores (see Table 1).

Table 1

Descriptive Statistics of Study Variables

Variable	Mean	S.D.
Task performance	4.32	.57
Organizational citizenship behaviors (OCB)	3.42	.66
Counterproductive work behaviors (CWB)	1.96	.87
Perceived legitimacy of earning one's role	4.23	.77
Perceived legitimacy of disability status	4.15	.48

N = 102

In terms of the performance-related outcome variables, task performance ($M = 4.32$, $SD = .57$), OCB ($M = 3.42$, $SD = .66$), CWB ($M = 1.96$, $SD = .87$), and being perceived as legitimately earning one's role ($M = 4.23$, $SD = .77$) all used five-point scales where the minimum value was 1 and the maximum value was 5. Similarly, the moderator single item measuring perceived legitimacy of disability status ($M = 4.15$, $SD = .48$) used a five-point scale where the minimum possible value was 1 and the maximum value was 5. However, no

participant provided a value lower than 4 on this measure. This indicated that participants rated the legitimacy of their imaginary organization member’s disability status as very high

Correlations Among the Measured Variables

A correlation analysis was conducted to examine the relationships among the performance-related outcome variables, perceived as legitimately earning one’s role, and the single item measurement of perceived legitimacy of disability status. The correlations can be found in Table 2.

Table 2

Pearson Correlations of Study Variables

Variable	1	2	3	4	5
1. Task performance	--				
2. Organizational citizenship behaviors (OCB)	.32 **	--			
3. Counterproductive work behaviors (CWB)	-.25 *	-.47 ***	--		
4. Perceived legitimacy of earning one's role	.20 *	.27 **	-.32 **	--	
5. Perceived legitimacy of disability status	-.02	.03	.15	.13	--

N = 102

* $p < .5$. ** $p < .05$. *** $p < .001$.

All the performance-related outcome variables and being perceived as legitimately earning one’s role were significantly correlated with each other. However, the single item perceived legitimacy of disability status measure was not significantly correlated with any of the performance-related outcome variables or the perceived as legitimately earning one’s role variable (p values range .070 - .908). Task performance had a significant and moderate correlation with OCB, $r(100) = .32, p = .001$, had an inverse moderate correlation with CWB, $r(100) = -.25, p = .011$, and had a weak significant correlation with being perceived as legitimately earning one’s role, $r(100) = .20, p = .044$. Similarly, OCB had a strong inverse

significant correlation with CWB $r(100) = -.47, p < .001$ and had a moderate correlation with legitimately earning one's role $r(100) = .27, p = .006$. Lastly, CWB had an inverse moderate significant correlation with legitimately earning one's role, $r(100) = -.32, p < .001$. Overall, these correlations demonstrate that the variables were correlated in the expected directions and indicate consistency in the way that participants tended to view the person in the vignette (see Table 2).

Tests of Hypotheses

In order to test Hypothesis 1 which stated that LWD would be rated poorer on performance-related outcomes and be viewed as less legitimately earning their role, a series of independent samples t-tests were conducted for each of the variables in order to compare scores of participant's responses in the LWD condition to those in the leader without a disability condition. The tests revealed there were no significant effects of leader disability status on task performance, OCBs or CWBs. Specifically, there was not a significant difference in the performance ratings for those in the LWD condition ($M = 4.42, SD = .46$) compared to those in the leader without a disability condition ($M = 4.25, SD = .78$), $t(49) = .98, p = .331$. There was not a significant difference in OCB ratings for those in the LWD condition ($M = 3.47, SD = .68$) compared to those in the leader without a disability condition ($M = 3.43, SD = .69$), $t(49) = .20, p = .840$. Additionally, there were no significant differences in CWB ratings between the LWD condition ($M = 1.88, SD = .89$) and in the leader without a disability condition ($M = 2.16, SD = .89$), $t(49) = -1.07, p = .290$.

However, regarding being perceived as legitimately earning one's role, there was a significant difference in participant ratings for those in the LWD condition ($M = 4.56, SD =$

.59) compared to those in the leader without a disability condition ($M = 3.91$, $SD = .77$), $t(49) = 3.41$, $p = .001$. That is, participants were significantly more likely to rate LWD as legitimately earning their role compared to leaders without a disability. This was contrary to Hypothesis 1. These results showed that Hypothesis 1 was not supported.

Hypothesis 2 stated that CWD would be rated better on performance-related outcomes and perceived as legitimately earning one's role than LWD due to having a disability status being more consequential for leaders. A series of two-way ANOVAs were conducted to determine the effect of possessing a disability status and employment level on each of the performance-related outcome variables and being perceived as legitimately earning one's role. A two-way ANOVA revealed that there was not a statistically significant interaction between the effects of disability status and employment level on task performance, $F(1, 98) = .32$, $p = .573$. Planned comparisons using LSD estimation revealed employment level did not have a statistically significant effect on task performance, $F(1, 98) = .24$, $p < .629$. However, the planned comparisons revealed that disability status had a statistically significant effect on task performance, $F(1, 98) = 4.22$, $p = .043$. That is, participants rated PWD ($M = 4.42$, $SD = .48$) as significantly better performers compared to those without a disability ($M = 4.19$, $SD = .66$).

For OCB, a two-way ANOVA revealed that there was not a statistically significant interaction between the effects of disability status and employment level on OCB ratings, $F(1, 98) = .07$, $p = .795$. Planned comparisons using LSD estimation revealed there were no simple main effects for disability status, $F(1, 98) = .31$, $p = .578$, or employment level, $F(1, 98) = .35$, $p = .554$ on OCB ratings.

In terms of CWB, a two-way ANOVA revealed that there was not a statistically significant interaction between the effects of disability status and employment level on CWB ratings, $F(1, 98) = .10, p = .747$. Planned comparisons using LSD estimation revealed there were no simple main effects for disability status, $F(1, 98) = 3.59, p = .061$, or employment level, $F(1, 98) = .15, p < .701$, on CWB ratings.

For being perceived as legitimately earning one's role, a two-way ANOVA revealed that there was not a statistically significant interaction between the effects of disability status and employment level on being perceived as legitimately earning one's role, $F(1, 98) = 1.74, p = .191$. A planned comparisons using LSD estimation showed that disability status had a statistically significant effect on being perceived as legitimately earning one's role, $F(1, 98) = 9.38, p = .003$. That is, participants significantly rated PWD ($M = 4.42, SD = .73$) as having earned their role more based on merit more than those without a disability ($M = 3.97, SD = .75$). However, a planned comparisons using LSD estimation showed that employment level did not have a statistically significant effect on being perceived as legitimately earning one's role, $F(1, 98) = .36, p = .548$. Given that none of the interaction effects nor any of the simple effects having to do with employment level were significant, the findings did not show support for Hypothesis 2.

Hypothesis 3, which stated that perceived legitimacy of disability status would moderate the impact of disability status and employment level on performance-related outcomes and being perceived as legitimately earning one's role, was not supported. A series of three-way ANOVAs showed there was no significant interaction among perceived legitimacy of disability status, disability status, and employment level in terms of task performance, $F(1,$

94) = .45, $p = .502$, OCB, $F(1, 94) = .25$, $p = .616$, CWB, $F(1, 94) = .01$, $p = .924$, or legitimately earning one's role, $F(1, 94) = 1.99$, $p = .161$.

Discussion

The goal of the present study was to determine whether LWD compared to leaders without a disability and CWD would be rated poorer in terms of legitimately earning one's role and performance-related outcomes (task performance, OCB, and CWB). Overall, the results of the study did not support the hypotheses that LWD would be rated more poorly on the outcomes of focus when compared to leaders without disability and coworkers with disability. Specifically, this study demonstrated that when compared to leaders without a disability, LWD were significantly more likely to be viewed as having earned their role legitimately. There was no evidence for differences in performance-related outcomes when comparing LWD to leaders without a disability, and no differences in these outcomes when comparing LWD to CWD. However, planned comparisons revealed that having a disability led to more positive perceptions (regardless of employment level) of having legitimately earned one's role and task performance. Taken together, the findings indicate that participants had more positive perceptions of PWD in terms of their performance and legitimately earning their role compared to those without disability.

The findings that LWD compared to leaders without a disability, and that LWD compared to CWD were not rated worse on performance-related outcomes and that both LWD when compared to leaders without disability and PWD compared to those without a disability were rated more favorably is not overtly consistent with previous research. Specifically, researchers have demonstrated that PWD tend to experience more challenges in leadership roles such as glass cliffs which describe the precariousness of their position (Roulstone & Williams, 2014; Wilson-Kovacs et al., 2008). In addition, other research has

found that PWD are viewed as less competent employees compared to their non-disabled counterparts (Bordieri et al., 1997; Cavanagh et al., 2017; Nota et al., 2014; Smith et al., 2004). Thus, the findings of the present study were inconsistent with the previous literature, suggesting new avenues for inquiry as described below.

In addition, the present study investigated whether the degree to which participants viewed the employee's disability as legitimate would impact their ratings on the employee's performance outcomes and earning their role legitimately. The results did not support the hypothesis that perceived legitimacy of disability status plays a role in such ratings. When the effects of disability and organizational status were combined with the perceived legitimacy of disability status variable, none of the interaction effects on task or contextual performance were significant. However, interpretation of this finding is limited given that the single-item measure used for perceived legitimacy of the disability status of blindness developed for the present study had heavily skewed responses. That is, all participants selected either "agree" or "strongly agree" when presented with the single-item measure of perceived legitimacy of disability status.

Theoretical Implications

In terms of theoretical advancement, the results of the present study offer nuance to the applicability of IMT. That is, the results of the present study showed that core assumptions of IMT, such as someone with a stigmatized identity always experiencing negative consequences of stigma (Lyons et al., 2018), are not always met in the case of disability status. Therefore, these findings expand the theory by clarifying that there are alternate

scenarios, and this opens an avenue for future researchers to investigate the nuances of the theoretical assumptions.

For instance, the tenet that those with stigmatized identities (PWD) would be viewed worse than their non-stigmatized identity-holding counterparts (non-disabled people; Lyons et al., 2018) was not supported in the present study. This suggests that having a disability in the workplace does not always mean that perceptions of the individual will suffer. Rather, having a disability status may serve as a positive influence on others' perceptions of individuals under certain circumstances.

One possible scenario might be explained through the social model of disability (UPIAS, 1976), which posits that PWD experiences barriers as the result of external forces (i.e., a society not designed with their needs in mind). That is, if participants viewed disability through this theoretical lens, perhaps they were less willing to attribute negative performance to PWD due to believing that such employees are more likely to experience challenges at work that result from forces outside their control (i.e., aspects of their job not being designed with their needs in mind) compared to those without disability. As a result, perhaps participants who viewed disability through this theoretical lens were more likely to believe that PWD need to put in additional effort to achieve the same outcomes, such as obtaining leadership positions, due to inaccessible working conditions compared to non-disabled people and, thereby, are better performers. Given that previous research has noted positive perceptions of PWD as it pertains to social aspects of work (Nota et al., 2014; Smith et al., 2004), perhaps this implies that such positive perceptions may be extending to perceptions of their performance in the workplace. However, this rationale is only a potential explanation

and therefore, further research is needed to draw more conclusive theoretical implications for the workplace.

Another potential explanation for findings lies within an extension of IMT posited by Lyons et al. (2018). The extension states that the existence of heterogeneous local environments may alter outcomes for PWD. Within this extension of IMT, heterogeneous means the levels of stigma toward a given identity are not consistently held by everyone so that one person may hold stigma toward said identity while another person may hold none toward the same identity. To further illustrate what this means, Lyons et al (2018) characterize the opposite situation as a homogeneous local environment which is one where everyone holds similar levels of stigma toward a given identity. Heterogeneous workplace environments where some people hold less stigma toward those with stigmatized identities than others may offer more opportunities for those with stigmatized identities, such as PWD, to effectively change perceptions of their stigmatized identity status for the better.

This is consistent with previous work that demonstrated that people who hold more positive attitudes about PWD at work tend to demonstrate more inclusive behavior toward them (Nelissen et al., 2016). Therefore, it is possible that the participants in the present study worked in environments where PWD often get opportunities to positively redefine their disability status which, in turn, could mean they may have experienced more situations where a PWD was effective in improving perceptions of their disability status. Unfortunately, data were not collected to examine this potential moderation. Thus, while this is not a conclusive theoretical explanation, the rationale provides a potential explanation as to why the

statistically significant effects of the present study were not consistent with basic assumptions of IMT.

Limitations and Future Directions

Despite the interesting findings in the present study, there are several key limitations. First, data were not collected that would allow for uncovering potential explanatory mechanisms, as described above, for the unexpected findings. For instance, the amount that participants interact with a PWD either within or outside of their organization, may have had a positive influence on their perceptions of such individuals. This is because previous research has demonstrated a link between holding positive perceptions of PWD and frequently interacting with them (Andersson et al., 2015; Brooks, 2019; Nota et al., 2014). In addition, attitudes toward the employment of PWD were not measured in the present study. This limits the findings of the results because, as previously noted, those who hold more positive attitudes toward the employment of PWD tend to view them more favorably (Nelissen et al., 2016). Alternatively, measuring whether participants worked in positive heterogeneous local environments could also potentially explain the findings. However, the above variables were not measured, thus limiting the ability to leverage unexpected findings towards mechanistic theoretical expansion.

There were also several limitations related to the methods. First, a conceptual limitation of the present study arose from not having a validated and reliable measure of perceived legitimacy of disability status. Despite examining previous research to develop the items used in the measure (Bordieri et al., 1997; Cavanagh et al., 2017; Mitchell & Kovera, 2006; Nota et al., 2014; Telwatte et al., 2017), the measure created for the study demonstrated poor

scale reliability. Furthermore, the responses to the single-item measure that was ultimately used in analyses were not evenly distributed. As previously mentioned, all participants had high scores on this measure (answering only with “agree” and “strongly agree”) and in order to assess the moderation, two groups were created such that “agree” was categorized as lower perceptions of legitimacy and “strongly agree” was categorized as higher perceptions of legitimacy. This narrow range of responses limited the interpretability of findings. In order to address this limitation, a more diverse range of responses to this measure of perceived legitimacy of disability status would be needed to assess this moderator as intended. This could prove challenging for future research given that physical disabilities tend to be perceived as more legitimate (Bordieri et al., 1997; Mitchell & Kovera, 2006). Still, a follow-up study designed to develop a validated and reliable measure of perceived legitimacy of disability status could enhance understanding of the ways in which perceptions about the legitimacy of a PWD’s disability status impacts perceptions of task and contextual performance.

Though the methodological approach of this study was consistent with previous studies that used similar designs (Allen et al., 1994), there were a few other methodological limitations. First, this study had a relatively small sample size due to practical limitations for data collection, including a lack of compensation leading to lower numbers of recruited participants. The lower number of participants may have resulted in an inability to detect smaller effects that existed. In addition, the convenience sampling method utilized may have impacted the results and generalizability of the study because participants who knew the researcher were more likely to be aware of issues regarding disability in the workplace or be

biased in their responses. That is, due to their increased familiarity with the experiences of PWD, participants may have been less likely to hold negative notions of having a disability compared to the general population.

Furthermore, characteristics of the sample showed relatively low levels of diversity along educational, racial/ethnic, and gender lines. This lack of participant diversity reduces the generalizability of the study findings. To address such limitations in future studies to further develop this line of research, efforts should be made to increase access to a sample not utilizing a convenient sampling approach and focus on increasing the sample size and the associated demographic diversity of participants.

Another direction for future research includes further investigating the relationship between power and possessing a disability status. Despite that this study failed to demonstrate LWD are rated more negatively compared to CWD, previous research has shown that those with stigmatized identities in leadership roles need to rely on their formal power more in order to enact directives and achieve goals (Bruins et al., 1999; Lucas & Baxter, 2012), suggesting there is more work to be done in this area. Future studies should use a similar methodological approach to determine if perceptions of task and contextual performance are impacted when comparing leaders of different ability statuses and their use of their formal power. Through clarifying this relationship in a future study, researchers may be able to determine if the perceptions of incompetence in a leadership role experienced by other stigmatized identity groups (sex, race, etc.) extends to an LWD, with different disability statuses, and due to their use of their formal power (Bruins et al., 1999; Lucas & Baxter, 2012). Clarifying this relationship in future studies may enable researchers to better

understand negative perceptions of performance for LWD based on their use of formal power which, in turn, could have practical implications for organizations.

Furthermore, future research could investigate what variables mitigate experiencing the negative results of stigma for PWD and expand the applicability of IMT. A variable worth investigating in this line of future research within IMT includes the frequency with which one interacts with institutions focused on the employment of PWD. This variable deserves consideration in determining when assumptions of IMT are met for PWD because previous research has shown that frequent interactions with institutions focused on promoting the employment of PWD result in more positive perceptions of such workers on the job or in the hiring process (Andersson et al., 2015; Brooks, 2019; Nota et al., 2014) and may foster more positive heterogeneous environments. By exploring this aspect of research as it pertains to IMT, future studies will shed light on when the theory is applicable and, thereby, shed light on how solutions to stigma reduction can be developed for organizations.

Conclusion

The present study sought to investigate the impact of possessing a disability status on perceptions of performance-related outcomes and being perceived as legitimately earning one's role for those in organizations at different employment levels. The results demonstrated that PWD were viewed more positively overall and that LWD, in particular, were perceived as legitimately earning one's role more than non-disabled leaders. These findings hold implications for the perceptions of LWD on performance-related outcomes and perceptions of legitimately earning one's role at work and hopefully, will aid researchers further

investigating this area of the literature to better understand the steps organizations can take to improve the experiences of such individuals in the workplace.

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Appendix

Vignettes

Vignette for Condition One

Imagine yourself working in an organization. In your role, you regularly work with others in your office. You have a co-worker who you interact with regularly. One of your co-workers identifies as a person who is blind. With accommodations, this co-worker is position. Some examples of their required duties are below:

- Responds to requests from others within the organization – the co-worker promptly responds to emails and phone calls most of the time and with an appropriate amount of professionalism.
- Follows up with clients – the co-worker usually follows up with potential new clients in a timely manner and is responsive to their questions and requests.
- Presentations – the co-worker usually arrives to presentations on time and is clear and concise when speaking in front of others.
- Project contribution – The co-worker often meaningfully contributes to ongoing projects which helps move them along.
- Generates reports – the co-worker usually completes reports by their deadline which requires them to pull together information and data from various stakeholders.

Vignette for Condition Two

Imagine yourself working in an organization. In your role, you regularly work with others in your office. Your manager identifies as a person who is blind. With accommodations, your manager is able to complete all the required duties of their position. In order to achieve objectives, your manager regularly relies on the fact that they are the boss when attempting to get others to complete their work. Some examples of their required duties are below:

- Responds to requests from others within the organization – the manager promptly responds to emails and phone calls most of the time and with an appropriate amount of professionalism.
- Follows up with clients – the manager usually follows up with potential new clients in a timely manner and is responsive to their questions and requests.
- Presentations – the manager usually arrives to presentations on time and is clear and concise when speaking in front of others.
- Project contribution – The manager often meaningfully contributes to ongoing projects which helps move them along.
- Generates reports – the manager usually completes reports by their deadline which requires them to pull together information and data from various stakeholders.

Vignette for Condition Three

Imagine yourself working in an organization. In your role, you regularly work with others in your office. You have a co-worker who you interact with regularly. Some examples of their required duties are below:

- Responds to requests from others within the organization – the co-worker promptly responds to emails and phone calls most of the time and with an appropriate amount of professionalism.
- Follows up with clients – the co-worker usually follows up with potential new clients in a timely manner and is responsive to their questions and requests.
- Presentations – the co-worker usually arrives to presentations on time and is clear and concise when speaking in front of others.
- Project contribution – The co-worker often meaningfully contributes to ongoing projects which helps move them along.
- Generates reports – the co-worker usually completes reports by their deadline which requires them to pull together information and data from various stakeholders.

Vignette for Condition Four

Imagine yourself working in an organization. In your role, you regularly work with others in your office. In order to achieve objectives, your manager regularly relies on the fact that they are the boss when attempting to get others to complete their work. Some examples of their required duties are below:

- Responds to requests from others within the organization – the manager promptly responds to emails and phone calls most of the time and with an appropriate amount of professionalism.
- Follows up with clients – the manager usually follows up with potential new clients in a timely manner and is responsive to their questions and requests.
- Presentations – the manager usually arrives to presentations on time and is clear and concise when speaking in front of others.
- Project contribution – The manager often meaningfully contributes to ongoing projects which helps move them along.
- Generates reports – the manager usually completes reports by their deadline which requires them to pull together information and data from various stakeholders.