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Factors influencing the decisions of women small business owners on hiring people with disabilities

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ABSTRACT

Despite the passage of disability rights legislation in the United States, individuals with disabilities continue to experience high unemployment and underemployment rates than their counterparts without disabilities. The purpose of the study was to examine the attitudes of women small business owners towards hiring individuals with disabilities, and to determine what factors influence their hiring decisions. A total of 80 women small business owners in a southwestern U.S. state took part in the study. The Employer Attitudes Questionnaire (EAQ) and the Marlowe-Crowne Social Desirability Scale Short Form-C (M-C Form C) were used to assess participants' attitudes. The results of a sequential multiple regression analysis indicated that the independent variables as a whole contributed 7.2% to the variance in the outcome of EAQ score. Scores of the EAQ were weakly correlated with scores on the M-C Form C ($r = .276, p = .013$). Working facilitates the development of a sense of self-worth, self-sufficiency, self-efficacy, and social networks. The bearing of unemployment and underemployment on the quality of life for individuals with disabilities cannot be underestimated. Women-led businesses offer a number of advantages for employees with disabilities, including their resilience to economic downturns, have a lower employee retrenchment rate, and possess a better understanding of employment and anti-discrimination legislation.

Keywords: Employment, attitudes toward individuals with disabilities, women business owners

INTRODUCTION

The passage of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) on July 26, 1990 solidified a piece of landmark disability rights legislation, aiming to prohibit any form of discrimination against individuals with disabilities in the spheres of employment, transportation, public activities, and telecommunication. While the ADA appears to have leveled the playing field and facilitated opportunities for individuals with disabilities to be fully included in society, the reality purports a rather different picture. For example, the 2010 U.S. Census shows among adults between the ages of 21 to 64, 33.4% of

people with disabilities are employed compared to 75.6% of people without a disability.¹ This really reflects that individuals with disabilities continue to experience direct and indirect employment discrimination.^{2,3} Title I of the ADA explicitly stipulates that employers shall not deny any qualified individuals with disabilities in recruitment, hiring, promotions, training, pay, social activities, or other privileges of employment on the basis of discrimination. Ideally, the ADA should have markedly improved the employment status of individuals with disabilities. However, this is obviously not the case according to the multitude of studies done since then that indicate the opposite effect. Harley and her colleagues point out that over two decades after the passage of the ADA, individuals with disabilities still experience higher unemployment rates and are more likely to hold part-time rather than full-time employment.⁴ The discrepancy in the national employment rate for individuals with disabilities is actually a stark contrast to those without a disability. According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, the employment rate for individuals with disabilities was as low as 17.8% in contrast to 63.5% for their counterparts without disabilities.⁵ Similarly, the U.S.

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Department of Labor showed that the unemployment rate of people with disabilities was almost twice as high as those of people without a disability.⁶ Although these statistics reflect some of the employment problems that individuals with disabilities face, they do not capture the whole picture. As Markel and Barclay noted, underemployment among this population also appears to be a serious concern.⁷ Underemployment occurs when individuals with disabilities possess the abilities required to perform higher-level skills of jobs, but instead are hired for positions requiring less in responsibilities and are thus paid lower wages. Underemployment contributes not only to a higher poverty rate among individuals with disabilities, but also exposes the flaw of the underutilization of productive manpower in our society.⁷ Therefore, the inequality of employment situations of individuals with disabilities still needs to be addressed and intensively studied.

Unemployment and underemployment of individuals with disabilities are well documented.⁸ Employment participation as a means of earning an income is critical. As Rosseler et al. explain, the employment status of an individual represents (a) incomes that support personal demands and desires, and (b) opportunities to participate in valued social roles. In other words, gainful employment not only provides the opportunity for an individual to support himself or herself financially, but also creates the opportunity to have and expand social interactions with others.⁹ Similarly, Schur emphasizes that employment can immensely help the integration of individuals with disabilities into mainstream society via increasing their social networks, civil skills, independence, and sense of self-efficacy.¹⁰ For example, employment could fulfill the individuals' own sense of self-worthiness, self-sufficiency, and achievement. In addition, employment status valorizes one's social position and commands respect from peers. This perception bestowed on an individual is particularly true of the American cultures, where people are often judged largely on the basis of their employment status and the types of jobs they hold. Last, but not least, employment status also has been identified by researchers as a critical factor influencing the quality of life among individuals with disabilities. For instance, Kober and Eggleton investigated the relationship between the quality of life and the employment status of 117 individuals with intellectual disabilities.¹¹ Their findings concluded that both the employment status and the employment type affect how the participants perceived their quality of life. Kober et al. further posited that the success of integration of individuals with intellectual disabilities in the community was attributed to the availability of employment opportunities; as a result, it greatly enhanced their feelings of social belongingness.¹¹ Examining the issues of unemployment or underemployment rates of individuals with disabilities, researchers must not just focus solely on the magnitudes of financial impact on this population, but also how community inclusion and quality of life could be affected by employment status.

Improving the employment rates and status of individuals with disabilities is complex. Similar to the general population, individuals with disabilities were also greatly impacted by the recent languishing economy. The effect of the economic downturn reduced the number of new job openings, stunted opportunities for advancement or promotion, and forced many companies to cut their existing workforce in order to survive. Consequently, job seekers with disabilities bore a large portion of the brunt of a sluggish job market as they competed with those who did not have disabilities. Any attempt to improve the dismal employment rates of individuals with disabilities requires a better understanding of the factors that influence the fluctuations of the labor market.

The demographics of business owners have changed dramatically during the past two decades.¹² For example, employers in the past were mostly White males. While this might still be true at most companies, the number of women-owned companies in the U.S. has steadily increased. According to the National Women's Business Council, from 1997 to 2007 the number of women-owned businesses grew from 5.4 to 7.8 million, which accounted for a staggering increase of 43.8%.¹² This surge in statistics suggests the need for more knowledge on female-owned businesses as well as women employers. Despite the burgeoning new trends of women starting their own businesses, there have been only a small number of studies conducted to explore the factors influencing the hiring decisions of women employers. In order to address this gap in the literature, this study focused on female employers, and the factors that influence their hiring decisions.

Three main reasons why the exploration of women employers' attitudes towards hiring individuals with disabilities are believed to be particularly promising include (a) the increase in the number of women employers is anticipated to be a trend for the future, (b) women-owned businesses have proven to be more resilient and responsive to faltering economic climates, thus, enjoying a lower turnover rate, and (c) women employers are more aware of the ADA regulations than male employers.¹² The increasing number of women-owned businesses indicates that they play an instrumental role in stimulating continuous economic growth and the creation of new jobs. Because most women-owned businesses are small in size,¹² they are better suited to make quick and deft moves in response to the ever-changing macroeconomic systems, particularly during tough times. In addition, many jobs in the United States are created by small businesses.¹³ Thus, there are motivators for researchers to devote more efforts to discovering the unique attributes of women employers, as findings from new research focusing on women-owned businesses would be beneficial to facilitate employment for individuals with disabilities. Using the figures inferred from the performance of women-owned companies during the global financial crisis spanning between 1997 and 2001, NWBC concluded that women-owned firms reported having lower numbers of retrenched employees when compared to all businesses.¹² Even more impressive was that they not only laid off fewer employees, but also had an equal or better

business survival rate in times of a difficult economy when compared to other business structures. This fact is encouraging since job retention has always been a difficult issue for employees with disabilities, and women employers might present a possible answer to the disparity. Lastly, women employers were proven to be more aware of the ADA and other disability related regulations. Using exploratory factor analysis to assess cognitive and affective reactions of 142 employers toward people with disabilities in the workplace, Copeland et al. found that female employers displayed a better understanding of the ADA and were more able to correctly identify ADA disability than their male counterparts.¹⁴ Similarly, McMahon and his colleagues also indicated that women employers demonstrated more understanding of disability related knowledge and tended to express more positive feelings toward individuals with disabilities.³

Although there is a plethora of studies attempting to identify the determinants of employers' proclivities to hire individuals with disabilities,¹⁵⁻¹⁷ very little research has been specifically conducted to examine what factors might influence those of women employers. For instance, Morgan and Alexander investigated the attitudes of employers toward hiring individuals with intellectual disabilities and concluded that employers who had had past experience interacting with people with disabilities tended to show more favorable feelings and were more likely to hire them as employees, when compared to the employers who did not have any experience.¹⁸ Peck and Kirkbride also concurred that employers with no past experience interacting with individuals with disabilities might hesitate to hire them because of their concerns about (a) possible additional costs associated with modifications needed to meet ADA regulations, (b) additional supervision and resources required for people with disabilities to perform the job effectively, (c) doubts about the possible loss of productivity due to the disability, (d) fears related to the termination procedure of employees with disabilities without being sued, and (e) worries about people with disabilities' possible skill deficits in social interactions.¹⁹ Although these trepidations could discourage some employers from hiring candidates with disabilities, some of these concerns might not be as fundamentally valid as they sound. Peck et al. refuted these notions by illustrating in their study that employers with past experience interacting with individuals with disabilities explicitly expressed that there were several advantages in their hiring.¹⁹ Noted advantages to hiring individuals with disabilities included their dedication to the job, consistent attendance, and lower turnover rate. These findings reflect that past experience played an important role in employers' acquiring accurate information about the employment of individuals with disabilities, and that employers' attitudes really affected their hiring decisions. Negative attitudes and misconceptions also adversely affected employers' hiring decisions. To this end, there were studies conducted to examine how stereotypes and biases could affect employers' decisions. For instance, Gilbride et al. found that, although many employers claimed to see employees with disabilities in a

positive manner, they nevertheless continued to direct prejudices toward individuals with certain types of disability, such as intellectual disability and blindness.¹⁶ As a result of these apparent prejudices, employers were found to be hesitant to consider hiring individuals with these kinds of disability. Another example of how employers' attitudes may negatively affect hiring decision could be found in the Thomas et al.'s study.²⁰ Thomas and his colleagues suggested that employer prejudices were often tied to the major barriers individuals with disabilities experienced while seeking employment. Employers' preconceived prejudices and biases might prevent employers from recognizing the true potential and abilities of the individuals with disability; more damagingly, they significantly skew employers' decisions when making a hiring decision. Hence, in order to promote equitable employment practices and to improve the employment rate for individuals with disabilities, it is crucial to analyze the attitudes as well as biases that employers might have.

Numerous surveys have been conducted in the social, behavioral, health, management, and counseling fields to develop a better understanding of how participants' attitudes and perceptions influence their decisions and response patterns. Nonetheless, the analysis of views and opinions is not always a straightforward task. Research participants may choose to respond to highly volatile questions by aligning with socially acceptable norms. Such concerns have been expressed by authors of many vocational rehabilitation studies that rely primarily on the use of self-report instruments to investigate employers' attitudes.^{11,16,19} The use of survey type instruments requires employers to answer questions honestly based on their own impression and beliefs. The process involves two critical elements in order to receive quality results: firstly, employers must have a good self-understanding of their own attitudes and secondly, they must be genuine and candid about their answers.²¹ Although most of instruments used for research have high reliabilities, they might lack good validity. For example, Hernandez et al. concluded their literature review with findings that suggest employers tended to express their willingness to hire individuals with disabilities more favorably than their actual hiring behavior portrayed.¹⁷ The discrepancy between the intention to hire and actual hiring of individuals with disabilities mirrors the hard fact that self-concepts sometimes deviate greatly from true feelings when one assesses his or her own attitudes. Moreover, Hernandez et al. attributed this phenomenon to the employers' desire to conform to social acceptance.¹⁷ In other words, employers tend to answer attitude inquiries more positively toward individuals with disabilities because they do not want to be portrayed as uncompassionate and unethical. Unbeknownst to themselves, however, employers might subconsciously allow their personal biases and stereotypical views to interfere with the decision-making process when evaluating job seekers with disabilities. Wilgosh and Skaret caution to not take the survey results at face value, as favorable responses might in fact be inflated by social desirability, or the attempt of individuals to present ones' self in

a favorable light.²² Furthermore, Schur, Kruse, and Blanck explained that employers' prejudices and discriminations toward individuals with disabilities could easily be masked behind their projection of social desirability.²³ As a result, attitude surveys usually yield higher scores when social desirability is not included as an indicator. Recognizing that spurious effects of social desirability might influence the research outcomes, this study attempted to control for such potential biases by adding social desirability as one of factors for the data analysis.

The purpose of the study was to examine the factors that affect the decisions of women small business owners when hiring individuals with disabilities. Specifically, the study addressed two research questions: (1) What are the attitudes of women small business owners towards hiring individuals with disabilities? and (2) What factors influence their hiring decisions? In this respect, the current study is an important attempt to investigate the attitudes of women business owners toward the hiring of people with disabilities. By investigating these research questions, the study sought to extend prior research about the determinants influencing business owners' willingness and/or reluctance to consider job applicants with disabilities.

METHOD

Participants

A total of 80 women small business owners took part in the study. The mean age of the participants was 37.32 years old ($sd = 10.12$, range = 20 to 67). A majority of them were married ($n = 47$, 58.8%), and the rest were never married ($n = 19$, 23.8%), divorced ($n = 8$, 10%), separated ($n = 4$, 5%), or widowed ($n = 2$, 2.5%). Fifty-five (68.8%) participants did not have a disabled family member while the other 25 (31.3%) participants had at least one family member with a disability. Eighty percent ($n = 64$) of the business owners were aware of the ADA, however, 20 percent ($n = 16$) of them had not heard of the legislation. The levels of educational attainment for the sample were moderately high as evidenced by the distribution: associate's degree or higher ($n = 22$, 27.5%), some college ($n = 33$, 41.3%), and high school or less ($n = 25$, 31.3%).

In terms of business size, the breakdown of the number of employees was as follows: 0 to 5 employees ($n = 46$, 57.5%), 6 to 10 employees ($n = 14$, 17.5%), 11 or more employees ($n = 11$, 13.8%); 9 participants did not report their employee numbers. About one-third of the participants had been in business for 4 to 10 years ($n = 26$, 32.5%), and the others consisted of less than 1 year ($n = 13$, 16.3%), 1 to 3 years ($n = 18$, 22.5%), and 11 or more years ($n = 15$, 18.8%); 8 participants did not report their business history. In regard to business type, 36 (45%) participants were a sole proprietor, 15 (18.8%) were in a partnership, and 18 (22.5%) operated as a corporation; 11 participants did not provide this information. The most popular business sector among the participants was retail and wholesale trade ($n = 32$, 40%). Other types of business sectors included services ($n = 12$, 15.0%); finance,

accounting and consultancy ($n = 11$, 13.8%); and other ($n = 18$, 22.5%); while 7 participants did not report their business sector.

Procedure

Upon approval from the Institutional Review Board, survey solicitation packets were sent to local chambers of commerce and women's chambers of commerce located in a southwestern state of the United States. The content of each packet included an introductory letter to prospective participants explaining the purpose of the study, the contact information for the first author of the study, the eligibility criteria of participation, an informed consent form, a questionnaire, and a return envelope with prepaid postage.

Measures

Employer Attitudes. The attitudes of women business owners towards the hiring of people with disabilities were measured by the 38-item Employer Attitudes Questionnaire (EAQ).¹⁵ The items are rated on a five-point Likert type scale ranging from 1 = *not a concern when compared to hiring a nondisabled person* to 5 = *a great concern when compared to hiring a nondisabled person*. The scores of each item were summed together, with higher scores indicating a less willingness of a business owner to hire people with disabilities. The Cronbach's α for the present study was calculated at .971.

Social Desirability. This construct was measured by the Marlowe-Crowne Social Desirability Scale Short Form-C (M-C Form C Scale).²⁴ Reynolds validated and shortened the original Marlowe-Crowne Social Desirability Scale from 33 true or false items to 13.²⁵ For example, one statement asks "I never hesitate to go out of my way to help someone in trouble." The possible scores range from 0 to 13 with lower scores indicating lower social responding, that is, avoiding disapproval. The M-C Form C Scale has a Kuder-Richardson 20 reliability of .76.²⁴ For the present study the reliability alpha was .661.

Demographic Information. The demographic variables pertinent to the study collected by the research team were age, educational attainment, business type, business sector, business size, number of years in business, awareness of the ADA, and the presence of a family member with a disability.

Data Analysis

A series of bivariate tests using Pearson's Product Moment Correlation were performed on the continuous and dichotomous variables of the study. A Spearman's rank order correlation was performed for relationships which included the ordinal variable of *Business Size*. The variables pertaining to education level, business type, and business sector were categorical and therefore were not included in the correlational analyses. A multiple regression analysis was performed to explain the variances of factors accounted for women employers' attitudes.

Age was a continuous variable defined in years. *Marital Status* was coded as a dichotomous variable as 0 = not married, 1 = married. The variable of *Education* was nominal and dummy coded (1 = record was classified into group vs. 0 = record was not classified into group) into two variables to represent three outcomes; (a) Some college, and (b) Associate's degree or higher. The group of "High school or less" was used

as the reference classification. The variable of *Business Type* was categorical and dummy coded into three variables to represent three outcomes; (a) Partnership, (b) Corporation, and (c) Missing. The group of “Sole proprietor” was used as the reference classification. The variable of *Business Sector* was dummy coded into three variables to represent three outcomes; (a) Finance/Accounting/Consultancy, (b) Services, and (c) Other or Missing. The group of “Retail and wholesale trade” was used as the reference classification. *Business Size* was an ordinal variable representing the number of employees for each business record. The variable of *Years in Business* was considered continuous and defined as the number of years the business has been operating. The variable of *ADA Awareness* was dichotomous and coded as 1 = Aware of ADA, 0 = Not aware of ADA. The variable of *Family Disability* was dichotomous and coded as 1 = Self or family member has a disability, and 0 = Self or family member does not have a disability.

RESULTS

The data set was investigated for the inferential analysis assumptions of absence of outliers, normality, linearity, and homoscedasticity as relates to the dependent variable derived from the Employer Attitudes Scale. Outliers in a dataset have the potential to distort results of an inferential analysis. A check of box plots for the Employer Attitudes Scale variable was performed to visually inspect for outliers. The box plots indicated 3 outliers (3.8% of the data). The variable was standardized to check for the presence of extreme outliers ($z = +/-3.3$), and none were found. A check of the mean ($m = 147.30$) and 5% trimmed mean ($m = 148.76$) indicated that the outliers were not adversely impacting the data. Because all outliers were in acceptable ranges of the Employer Attitudes Scale and were not adversely affecting the mean, all records were retained for analysis and the outlier assumption was considered not violated.

Normality for the scores of the Employer Attitudes Scale was investigated with SPSS Explore. The Kolmogorov-Smirnov test for normality indicated a normal distribution on the variable ($p = .184$). Additionally, a visual check of histograms and Normal Q-Q plots for the variable scores indicated a normal distribution. The assumption of normality was not violated. Assumptions of linearity between study variables and homoscedasticity, requirements for correlational analysis, were checked with scatter plots of the data. The assumptions of linearity and homoscedasticity were not violated. Multicollinearity diagnostics for sequential regression were performed using SPSS 21. No violations were noted and the assumption of an absence of multicollinearity was not violated.

Table 1 presents results of the correlational analyses. Effect sizes of the Pearson Product Moment coefficients (r) are (in absolute value): small = .10 to .29, medium = .30 to .49, and large = .50 to 1.²⁶ Scores of the Employee Attitude Scale were weakly directly correlated with scores on the Social Desirability Scale ($r = .276, p = .013$). The positive relationship indicates

that as Employee Attitude Scale scores increase or decrease, the Social Desirability Scale scores tend to move in the same direction. A significant, small, positive, effect was found between marital status and age ($r = .269, p = .016$). The positive relationship indicates that as a respondent’s age increases, they are more likely to be married. The variable of “years in business” was moderately and directly correlated with the variables of age ($r = .360, p = .001$) and business size ($r = .352, p = .001$). The direction of the associations suggests that the number of years in business for respondents increased with their age in years and also with their number of employees.

Table 1 Bivariate Correlations of the Key Variables

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. Employer attitude	–						
2. Age	.045	–					
3. Marital status	-.178	.269*	–				
4. Social desirability	.276*	-.027	.118	–			
5. Business size	.098	.079	.007	.020	–		
6. Years in business	.158	.360**	.083	.083	.352*	–	
7. ADA awareness	.169	.143	.025	-.139	-.035	–	–
						.001	

Note.* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$

A sequential multiple regression analysis was performed with the dependent variable criterion of Employee Attitude Scale score and the independent variable predictor of Social Desirability Scale score. Variable controls, which were entered into the model on the first step of the regression, were age, marital status, education, business type, business sector, business size, years in business, ADA awareness, and family disability. The Social Desirability Scale score was entered into the model on the second step. Table 2 presents the findings of the second step, full regression model. The first step, controls only, model had an R value for regression which did not significantly differ from zero, $F(14, 65) = 0.92, p = .544$, with R^2 of .165 (adjusted $R^2 = -.015$). The negative adjusted R^2 value could be due to the large number of independent variables in relation to the number of records analyzed. The second step, full regression model included the controls from step one and the Social Desirability Scale independent predictor variable. The full model indicated a significant change from the step one, control only, model $F(1, 64) = 7.06, p = .010$, with R^2 change of .083. The R^2 for the full model was .248 (.072 adjusted) and indicated that the independent variables as a whole contributed only 7.2% to the variance in the outcome of Employee Attitude Scale score. The independent variables of Social Desirability Scale score was statistically significant, $t(1) = 2.66, p = .010$. The size and direction of the Social Desirability Scale score coefficient suggests that a one unit increase in the Social Desirability score results in a 2.66 unit increase in the Employer Attitude Scale score. None of the other independent variables were significant for the dependent variable of Employer Attitude Scale score.

Table 2 Employer Attitudes Regressed on the Key Variables					
	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>	β	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
Age	.10	.35	.04	.29	.770
Marital status	-14.03	7.12	-.26	-1.97	.053
Education					
Some college	-1.09	8.34	-.02	-.13	.897
Associate's degree or higher	-3.64	8.87	-.06	-.41	.683
Business type					
Partnership	-10.37	8.63	-.15	-1.20	.234
Corporation	-8.68	9.15	-.13	-.95	.347
Other/missing	-5.23	10.10	-.07	-.52	.607
Business sector					
Finance/accounting/consultancy	-4.01	10.29	-.05	-.39	.698
Services	-6.92	10.41	-.09	-.66	.509
Other/missing	1.78	8.05	.03	.22	.826
Business size	.90	5.34	.02	.17	.866
Years in business	5.34	3.69	.19	1.45	.153
ADA awareness	15.10	7.94	.22	1.90	.062
Family disability	7.99	7.12	.14	1.12	.266
Social desirability	3.59	1.35	.33	2.66	.010
Constant	96.32	20.27			
Model Summary (N = 80)					
Significant F Change = .010					
$R^2 = .248$					
$R^2_{\text{adjusted}} = .072$					
$\Delta R^2 = .083$					

DISCUSSION

The purpose of the study was to examine the attitudes of women small business owners towards hiring individuals with disabilities and what factors influence their decisions. Women business owners are among the fastest growing demographic sectors of the economy and are increasingly responsible for the hiring decisions or establishing the employment policies of their employers.^{12,27} However, the literature reflects that as a group, the attitude of women employers towards hiring people with disabilities has been a neglected research topic. As employers, women-led businesses offer a number of advantages for employees with disabilities. They are characterized by their resilience to economic down turns, have a lower employee turnover rate, and in general, appear to possess a better understanding of employment and anti-discrimination legislation.

One interesting outcome of the study indicated that social desirability was the only statistically significant independent variable in the proposed regression model to predict the hiring attitudes of women business owners. Participants who had higher scores on the construct of social desirability also reported higher levels of willingness to hire individuals with disabilities. Social desirability has been indicated in psychosocial and behavioral research as potentially influential in the expression of negative attitudes. Our findings are quite consistent with those results of examining attitudes toward people with intellectual disability in Japan and attitudes toward refugees in Australia.^{28,29} People, regardless of nationality, tend to agree on

the practice of full inclusion of people with perceived inferior social status as long as it is "NIMBY" (not in my back yard). High profitability is what sustains the enduring survival of a business entity. Although women business owners may subscribe to the morality of social justice, they also must face stiff business competition at local, state, national, and global levels. The erroneous view that workers with disabilities are unproductive seems to prevail among the study participants. Another finding worthy of mentioning is the positive correlation between the size of a business and the number of years it has been in existence. As a new business grows in its stature, it will have to hire more employees to meet the expansion needs. However, business failure of new firms occurs at a far higher rate during the nascent phase as the owners must deal with a host of problems such as insufficient capital, unpredictable economic climate, and incorrect sales strategies.³⁰ Vocational rehabilitation counselors, therefore, ought to consider the stability of a business entity when placing their clients with disabilities to new jobs.

Despite the passage of civil rights and anti-discrimination legislation such as the ADA, individuals with disabilities continue to experience disparate employment opportunities. Particularly, individuals with disabilities, as a group, experience far higher unemployment and underemployment rates when compared to individuals without a disability.^{5,6,7} Furthermore, much of the new growth in businesses led by women is in smaller companies that are not necessarily subjected to the ADA. In American culture, employment is a defining characteristic of one's quality of life.⁹⁻¹¹ The impact of employment in our society is therefore more than financial gains for persons with a disability. Working facilitates the development of a sense of self-worth, self-sufficiency, self-efficacy, and social networks.⁹⁻¹¹ The bearing of unemployment and underemployment on the quality of life for individuals with disabilities cannot be underestimated. Research regarding attitudes towards the employment of individuals with disabilities reflects that employers' with experience employing individuals with disabilities tend to possess more favorable attitudes towards hiring individuals with disabilities than those without prior experience.¹⁸⁻²⁰ Additional research indicates that employers might respond to surveys in a manner that reflects their desire to be considered socially acceptable.^{17,22-23} Therefore, the results of this study have a potential impact on the preparation of rehabilitation counselors, the future research regarding employment of individuals with disabilities as well as women as employers, and practicing vocational rehabilitation counselors.

LIMITATIONS

A few study limitations should be noted when interpreting the findings. The relatively small sample size is an inherent weakness of the study. Another potential limitation is that both instruments are self-report scales subjected to response bias. Despite these limitations the study demonstrates that as women employers' social desirability scores increased their scale scores

on the EAQ measuring attitudes towards hiring people with disabilities also increased.

IMPLICATIONS

The primary goal of vocational rehabilitation counseling is to facilitate the employment of individuals with disabilities. However, employment does not occur in a vacuum. If vocational rehabilitation counselors are genuinely interested in facilitating the employment of individuals with disabilities, they must consider both the needs of the person with a disability along with those of the employer.⁸ Traditional vocational rehabilitation counselor education programs have emphasized the development of empathic counselors who are knowledgeable of the medical, psychosocial, and vocational implications of their clients' disability. Without detracting from this important knowledge and skill base, vocational rehabilitation counselor education programs also need to educate the prospective counselor about the worldview of employers, as progress towards improving the employment of people with disabilities requires a firm understanding of the worldviews of both ones' clients and employers. In practice, the employment of individuals with disabilities will only increase with employer cooperation, participation, and hiring. Therefore, increasing prospective counselors' understanding of business terminology, employer concerns, needs, perceptions, and marketing approaches is central to overcoming the potential objections of employers' hiring individuals with disabilities.

Finally, it is apparent that social desirability, the attempt of individuals to present ones' self in a favorable light, is a significant factor in an employers' attitude towards hiring individuals with disabilities that has been greatly overlooked in research circles.³¹ Developing a greater understanding of the employers' desire to manage their image, and how this interacts with employer attitudes towards hiring individuals with disabilities, is, in essence, an attempt to understand employers (in this particular study, women employers), from a marketing perspective. Additional research is indicated in order to target how vocational rehabilitation counselors can best use the employers' desire to manage their image to increase job placement and development success for individuals with disabilities.

In practice, the employment of individuals with disabilities will only increase with employer cooperation, participation, and hiring. Vocational rehabilitation counselors who understand the employer's perspective or worldview are in a better position to address employer concerns. Businesses owned or operated by women appear to have fewer concerns regarding the hiring of individuals with disabilities, possess greater awareness of the laws impacting the employment of, and are more likely to develop policies favoring the employment of individuals with disabilities. Pursuing businesses owned by women represents a reasonable approach for vocational rehabilitation counselors seeking to increase the employment opportunities for their clients with disabilities through job placement and development services.

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