The Influence of Social Capital and Social Role on Starting Wage for People With and Without Disabilities

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Abstract
People with disabilities are arguably the most economically marginalized population in America. Employment does not address the problem unless wages reach adequate levels, suggesting the need for better understanding of factors influencing compensation in employment. The purpose of this study is to replicate previous findings on social capital and starting wage while also considering the influence of social role for people with and without disabilities. The responses of university health students to hypothetical hiring scenarios were analyzed using a three-way mixed ANOVA. Results support and extend prior research suggesting that social capital and social role have a positive influence on starting wage for both people with and without disabilities. Scenarios depicting social capital and positive social role resulted in an increase in hourly wage of more than US$1,500.00 per year than those with low levels of social capital and a negative social role. A similar but weaker relationship between pay and social capital existed when there was one degree of separation (i.e., the friend of a friend) between employer and new employee. Social role, along with social capital, is an important factor in starting wage decisions. Implications for the job search are provided.

Keywords
social capital, social role, disability, vocational rehabilitation, job placement

At a time when the nation’s collective attention turned to those in poverty, Whitten (1965) identified vocational rehabilitation as the nation’s original federally funded anti-poverty program. Although not a panacea to poverty and all its complexity, state-federal rehabilitation counseling has a significant influence on curtailing poverty for people with disabilities, arguably the most economically marginalized population in America (Tansey et al., 2015; Walls & Dowler, 2015; Williams & Edwards, 1971). Disability and poverty are closely tied, with disability often increasing health care and related costs while simultaneously limiting entry or stay in the labor market (Abidi & Sharma, 2014; Hughes, 2013; Winzer & Mazurek, 2015). In light of increasing wage disparities and economic instability, poverty is drawing the attention of researchers in rehabilitation counseling as a key area to address (Tansey, Dutta, Kundu, & Chan, 2016). The focus on employment and its compensation are essential parts of any lasting formula for reducing poverty. Recent research has highlighted social capital as a means for predicting and possibly intervening on employee earnings (Gilbride & Stensrud, 2008; Matrone & Leahy, 2005; Potts, 2005).

In a recent study with business students majoring in human resources, Phillips, Robison, and Kosciulek (2014) showed social capital to have both a statistical and real-world influence on the starting wage that they would be willing to pay new employees. Results showed the highest level of social capital to increase yearly earnings by more than US$1,500 for the full-time worker when compared with those with no social capital. Social role and specifically Social Role Valorization (SRV) provides a related yet distinct construct that may also serve to influence starting wage decisions (Wolfensberger, 2000). Despite its application in the area of special education to increase social standing, no research has been conducted to date relating SRV and employment or earnings in vocational rehabilitation. The purpose of this study is to extend the prior research conducted by Phillips et al. (2014) regarding the influence of social capital on starting wage for persons with and without disabilities by adding the complementary construct of social role. Specifically, in this study, we are interested in examining the

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unique and additive impact of these complementary constructs on the starting wage of individuals with and without disabilities. It is hoped that increased understanding derived from this study will help to inform vocational rehabilitation (VR) counselors and agencies in their use and emphasis on social capital and role in service provision.

**Theoretical Background**

**Social Capital**

There is a power in close human relationships that has been shown to influence our decisions. This power can serve as a form of capital, social capital, which can be used to alter a personal or business exchange. Social capital is defined as a person’s or group’s level of empathy for another person or group, such that “whatever affects one similarly affects the other” (Robison & Ritchie, 2010, p. 16). Thus, social capital between people or groups results in a sort of affective dependence where one person’s or group’s well-being is shaped by that of another. Social capital is often greatest among immediate family members and the closest of friends, as illustrated by the parent whose excitement appears to match or even exceed that of a child in her accomplishments (Robison & Ritchie, 2010). That said, social capital also exists to a lesser extent in more distant relationships, like those often formed in the workplace. The influence of social capital on financial exchanges have been demonstrated in the sale of vehicles, land, and, as previously described, the determination of a person’s starting wage (Perry & Robison, 2001; Robison, Myers, & Siles, 2002; Siles, Robison, Johnson, Linne, & Beveridge, 2000). In each case, the presence of social capital provided a financial advantage beyond that expected in an arm’s-length relationship where no social capital is present.

Phillips et al. (2014) also found social capital to influence starting wage in relationships with one degree of separation, or, in other words, the friend of a friend. The influence of relationships with one degree of separation, although less powerful than direct relationships, has implications for rehabilitation counselors and their potential to use their own social capital on behalf of others. The limited research on the use of social capital on behalf of others suggests the need for greater validation. See Robison, Schmid, and Siles (2002) and Phillips et al. (2014) for a more thorough consideration of social capital.

**Social Role**

Social role and the valorization of one’s social role were originally applied to individuals with developmental disabilities in the area of special education as a means to increase social standing and overall quality of life (Wolfensberger, 2000). SRV grew out of the normalization movement (Aubry, Flynn, Virley, & Neri, 2013). The genesis of applying SRV to individuals with disabilities stems from the belief that the concept of disability, or occupying a disability status, is devalued by society (Wolfensberger, 2000). SRV is a high level and systematic schema based on the premise that individuals’ well-being and overall welfare depends exclusively on the social roles they occupy. Theoretically, occupying socially valued roles in society such as husband, wife, teacher, athlete, employee, and student will generally afford individuals access to better resources throughout their life, resulting in elevated societal respect and increased social and occupational opportunities. In contrast, when individuals occupy devalued social roles such as welfare recipient, homeless, migrant, or felon, they are perceived as being less, therefore causing the individuals to be devalued by others resulting in loss of access and opportunity (Wolfensberger, 2000). In examining social roles, being devalued can be operationalized as assigning or attributing low value, or less value, than one attributes or assigns to entities of a same or similar class. The term valorizing or valorization refers to the process of adding value to something or someone, which potentially can lead to increased social role. Although the construct of SRV has been applied to the broader field of disability, to our knowledge it has not been applied to the specific area of vocational rehabilitation. Despite its lack of application, SRV has potential function in vocational rehabilitation as a means to increase employment outcomes for individuals with disabilities. Based on tenets of SRV theory, it is possible that highlighting the positive social roles an individual occupies will have a positive influence on employment and wage determinations through the increased perception of value that it may generate in those making hiring decisions.

The potential importance of social capital and role is arguably greater for people with disabilities than people without disabilities because people with disabilities tend to have relatively small social networks and occupy fewer positive social roles (Condeluci, Ledbetter, Ortman, Fromknecht, & DeFries, 2008; Wolfensberger, 2000). In addition, utilization of social capital and access to positive social roles may be particularly difficult for individuals with disabilities that may affect the ability to form close relationships (e.g., autism spectrum disorder, schizophrenia) that are important in obtaining and maintaining employment. Prior research has demonstrated that the social capital existing in one relationship can be used to positively influence the starting wage in another relationship (Phillips et al., 2014). This study provides an effort to validate and extend this research by reexamining the impact of social capital on earnings with a different sample population and by evaluating the impact and interactive effect of social role. The following research questions were addressed in this replication study.
Research Question 1: Do close relationships and relationships with one degree of separation act as social capital to influence starting wage for persons with and without disabilities?

Research Question 2: Does disability status or social role directly influence starting wage?

Research Question 3: Does disability status or social role interact with social capital in influencing starting wage?

It is hypothesized, based on theories of social capital and social role, that closer relationships and holding a commonly valued social role will be related to a higher average starting wage. Existing wage data would suggest that disability status will result in decreased pay; however, this was not the case in results of the study on which this replication is based.

Method

Participants

Participants for this study consisted primarily of undergraduate health care administration students in a large course at a public university in the Midwest. Health care administration students were strategically targeted for their knowledge and training in health care finance and understanding of labor costs within health care systems. A total of 262 students completed one of four versions of the starting wage survey, although six responses were excluded due to missing starting wage data. Table 1 shows participant demographics broken down by survey. Demographics from the original study conducted by Phillips et al. (2014) with business students who were taking a large human resources course are also provided for comparison.

Instrument

The paper–pencil instrument used for this study consisted of a brief demographic section (15 questions) and the Social Wage Survey (SWS; five questions). The starting wage survey was developed based on tenets of social capital and social role theory. For this survey, participants were asked to determine the maximum amount they would be willing to pay a newly hired bookkeeper in a small health care company. The scenario for the hiring decision was provided as follows:

You work for a small health care company that has hired a person as a new bookkeeper. The main responsibilities for this position include operating computers programmed with accounting software to record, store, and analyze company financial information, operating a 10-key calculator, producing documents, receiving records, and complying with federal, state, and company policies, procedures, and regulations, and compiling statistical, financial, accounting or auditing reports.
and tables for the company. The starting pay for this position can range from US$15.00-US$20.00 per hour. The average starting wage for this position is US$17.50, although it is typical for starting pay to fall above or below US$17.50 within the established range.

Participants could select the maximum pay from 11 options covering the potential pay rage in US$0.50 cent increments. The survey provided a pay range of US$15.00 to US$20.00 an hour. Wage categorization was consistent with state-level labor market statistics obtained through the Bureau of Labor Statistics at the time of the study (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2017).

As part of the instructions, participants were asked to

- think carefully about each hypothetical wage decision and answer as though they were actually going to experience the consequences of their decision;
- assume that in each scenario the new hire was able to satisfactorily perform all major tasks of the job;
- and assume that level of education, experience, and abilities did not vary between scenarios.

This approach was taken in an attempt to encourage future-oriented wage decisions while holding human capital (i.e., the skills, knowledge, and experience possessed by an individual) constant.

The five items in the starting wage survey ask participants to determine starting wage for the bookkeeper at five levels of social capital, namely, (a) a complete stranger, (b) a close childhood friend, (c) someone they do not get along with, (d) a complete stranger referred by a close childhood friend, and (e) a complete stranger referred by a local state agency. Based on the social capital paradigm, a stranger represents a neutral relationship where no social capital was expected to exist, a close childhood friend represents a high level of social capital, and someone they do not get along with represents a negative level of social capital. Being referred by a close childhood friend and by a state agency represent one degree of separation in which the social capital differs, with the referral from a close friend expected to carry greater social capital than the state agency.

The four versions of the survey were identical except that the bookkeeper was depicted with a different combination of disability status and social role across each one. In one version of the survey, there is no mention of disability and no mention of a valued social role (SWS). The second version depicts the bookkeeper as having an unspecified disability and no mention of a valued social role Social Wage Survey–Disability (SWS-D). The third version depicts a bookkeeper with no mention of disability and a parent of two kids Social Wage Survey–Social Role (SWS-SR). The fourth and final version of the survey depicts a bookkeeper with an unspecified disability and a parent of two kids Social Wage Survey–Disability and Social Role (SWS-DSR). As an example, Item 1 from the SWS read, “What is the maximum starting hourly wage you would be willing to pay a complete stranger?” whereas the same item from the SWS-DSR read, “What is the maximum starting hourly wage you would be willing to pay a complete stranger with a disability who is parent of two kids?” About 63 students completed the (SWS), 66 the SWS-D, 62 the SWS-SR, and 65 the SWS-DSR, for a total of 256 completed surveys. The internal consistency of these instruments in a previous study (without the inclusion of social role) were high, with Cronbach’s alpha scores of $r = .91$ and $r = .95$ for the survey for someone with no disability and someone with a disability, respectively. Cronbach’s alpha values for each form of the present study are as follows: SWS ($r = .87$), SWS-D ($r = .96$), SWS-SR ($r = .90$), and SWS-DSR ($r = .96$).

**Procedure**

One of the lead study investigators attended the large lecture class and distributed the research packets containing the informed consent, a demographic form, and one of the four versions of the SWS developed for this study at the beginning of class. To ensure an equitable distribution of the four forms of the survey, research packets were distributed in a sequential manner with the first packet containing the SWS, second packet containing the SWS-D, third packet containing the SWS-SR, and the fourth packet containing the SWS-DSR. This sequencing was continuously repeated, one through four, to the entire class. In compliance with approved institutional research board protocol, all participants were informed in writing that participation was voluntary and that they were free to withdraw without penalty, and that the type, amount, and quality of educational experience or student services would not be dependent or affected by their participation in the study. Participants were instructed to return the completed packets directly to the lead investigator who was not affiliated with the class in any manner outside of visiting the class to conduct the study. Data from the survey packets were entered and analyzed using SPSS version 21.0.

**Statistical Analysis**

A three-way mixed ANOVA with two between-subject factors (social role and disability status) and one within-subject factor (social capital) was used to address the primary research questions. To estimate the needed sample size, an a priori power analysis was conducted using G*Power version 3.1.9.2 (Faul, Erdfelder, Buchner, & Lang, 2009). A mixed ANOVA was entered with two independent groups (disability status and social role) and five repeated measures (the five levels of social capital), power at .80, and an alpha level
Table 2. Mean Wage and Social Capital by Condition.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level of social capital</th>
<th>Form of the survey</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>SWS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>n = 63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Complete stranger</td>
<td>US$17.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(1.14)</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(1.29)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Someone you do not get along with</td>
<td>US$16.76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(1.10)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Referred by close friend</td>
<td>US$17.66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(1.03)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Referred by local state agency</td>
<td>US$17.46</td>
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<td></td>
<td>(1.07)</td>
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of .05. The power analysis yielded a sample size of 96 for a medium effect size ($f^2 = .25$).

Results

Analysis began with an exploration and consideration of descriptive information. Preliminary analysis showed no statistically significant differences between participants in the four different groups in age, gender, race, or academic class ($p > .05$). Table 2 shows mean starting wage for the relationships varying in social capital and social role.

Employees without disabilities received the highest and the lowest average starting wage across the four scenarios. The highest pay ($M = US$18.73$) was given to employees with high social capital (close friend), a valued social role (parent of two children), and no disability, as hypothesized. The lowest pay ($M = US$16.76$) was given to employees with low social capital (someone they did not get along with), no valued social role (no mention of social role), and no disability. People without disabilities received both the highest and lowest reported wages, whereas people with disabilities were receiving wages in between these extremes.

A three-way mixed ANOVA with two between-subject factors (social role and disability status) and one within-subject factor (social capital) was used to address the primary research questions. This mixed design allowed for consideration of the main effects of disability status, social capital, and social role while also testing for three-way and two-way interactions between these variables. Studentized residuals suggest that there are no extreme outliers in the data (all scores $> \pm 3$), and a Q-Q Plot of those studentized residuals suggest that the assumption of normality was met for starting wage scores.

Research Questions 1 and 2 asked whether social capital, disability status, or social role influenced starting wage. Pairwise comparisons were performed for statistically significant simple main effects. Bonferroni corrections were made for comparisons within each simple main effect considered a family of comparisons. Mean starting wage was statistically higher with higher levels of social capital, $F(4, 1,008) = 99.126, p < .001, \eta^2_p = .282$. Pairwise comparisons showed significant differences across all other levels of social capital at $p < .001$ for the comparison between a stranger and all of the following: friend, someone they did not get along with, and someone referred by a friend. A stranger also received a significantly lower pay compared with someone referred by a state agency ($p = .003$). In monetary terms, and at the extremes, a friend made US$0.79 more an hour than the stranger and a person they did not get along with made US$0.36 less than a stranger and US$1.15 less an hour than a friend. As with the original study, there were no overall differences in mean starting wage between people with and without disabilities, $F(1, 252) = 0.019, p = .891, \eta^2_p = .000$. Statistical differences were found on mean starting wage based on social role, with holding a social role consistently resulting in greater starting wage, $F(4, 252) = 13.553, p < .001, \eta^2_p = .051$. Results showed that a person holding a valued social role was given an average of US$0.54 more per hour than the person without a stated social role.

Research Question 3 asked whether there was an interaction between social capital, disability status, and social role in relation to starting wage. The three-way interaction between disability status, social role, and social capital was not statistically significant, $F(4, 1,008) = 2.433, p = .059, \eta^2_p = .010$. There was, however, a statistically significant two-way interaction between social capital and disability status, $F(4, 1,008) = 4.924, p = .002$, and between social
capital and social role, $F(4, 1,008) = 7.069, p = .009$. There was no statistically significant two-way interaction between disability status and social role, $F(1, 252) = 2.244, p = .135$. See Figures 1 and 2 for a depiction of the significant two-way interactions.

To further explore these significant two-way interactions, the significance of disability status and of social role were explored across the different levels of social capital. There was not a statistically significant simple main effect of disability status at any level of social capital ($p > .05$). There was, however, a statistically significant simple main effect of social role at each level of social capital except that of a friend, $F(1, 252) = 3.724, p = .055$. The other main effects between social role and social capital were that of a stranger, $F(1, 252) = 19.864, p < .001$; for a person they did not get along with, $F(1, 252) = 12.242, p = .001$; for someone referred by a friend, $F(1, 252) = 11.118, p = .001$; and for someone referred by an agency, $F(1, 252) = 9.357, p = .002$. Mean starting wage was consistently higher for employees with a valued social role than for those without a valued social role, a mean difference for a stranger of 1.547, 95% confidence interval (CI) = [0.863, 2.230], $p < .001$; for a person they did not get along with of 1.227, 95% CI = [0.535, 1.917], $p = .001$; for a person referred by a friend of 1.035, 95% CI = [0.424, 1.646], $p = .001$; and for a person referred by a state agency of 0.960, 95% CI = [0.342, 1.578], $p = .002$.

**Discussion and Implications**

Participants in this study were asked to determine the hypothetical starting wage of a bookkeeper in a small health care company across five levels of social capital. The bookkeeper’s disability status and social role varied across four randomly distributed versions of the survey. Results were in harmony with prior research conducted with students pursuing business majors while also providing additional insights (Phillips et al., 2014). Mean starting wage was as theorized for each level of social capital and social role. Greater social capital consistently produced a higher starting wage, and holding a valued social role added to starting...
wage, although not significantly in a close friend relationship with high social capital. It appears from the results that social role can have a positive effect on starting wage for people with and without disabilities, particularly in the absence of social capital. A consideration of main effects showed that social role had a direct influence on starting wage whereas disability status did not. The significant two-way interactions suggest that disability status and social role have a different effect on starting wage at differing levels of social capital.

**Implications for Vocational Rehabilitation**

Findings highlight and provide additional support for the consideration of social capital and social role in vocational rehabilitation services as a means for reducing poverty through increased earnings at initial employment. Social capital had a significant influence on starting wages, particularly in the absence of a valued social role. The differences in pay represent both statistical and real-world significance. For instance, the bookkeeper who was a close friend and was not specified as holding a valued social role made US$1.39 more per hour (US$2,891 a year) than the stranger without a disability and US$0.65 more per hour (US$1,352 per year) than the stranger with a disability. One degree of separation still produced US$0.66 more per hour (US$1,373 per year) for the person without a disability and US$0.31 more per hour (US$644.80) for the person with a disability. Vocational rehabilitation counselors might more fully include social capital in their professional practice by assessing the potential social capital between the hiring company and (a) the vocational rehabilitation counselors themselves, (b) the client, and (c) the client’s close relationships. As noted by Phillips et al. (2014), the social capital that exists in the client’s network is often limited and issues relating to poverty and disability may restrict efforts to increase that capital. Our data suggest that vocational rehabilitation counselors have the potential to alter client compensation by taking greater responsibility for the development of meaningful employment networks within the community.

The Workforce Investment Opportunity Act (WIOA) emphasizes the importance of vocational rehabilitation providers developing meaningful relationships with employers as well as expanding the services that state vocational rehabilitation agencies can provide to employers. This legislation provides an important opportunity for reconsidering the way that agency policies and procedures might be shaped to foster the type of relationships between counselors and employers where social capital exists. Social capital cannot be measured by a count of Facebook friends or the thickness of a rolodex as much as it can by the level of empathy existing in each individual relationship. Developing relationships that are characterized by a high level of social capital may require some novel ways of doing business and demand a serious investment; however, results from this study suggests the benefits may outweigh these costs. Developing a strong employer network might be accomplished through counselor participation in local chambers of commerce, by serving as a resource on employment-related aspects of disability to employers and employment-related associations such as the Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM), and through maximizing relationships fostered in social settings outside of the workplace. Vocational rehabilitation agencies could support counselor efforts by providing counselors paid time for developing employer relationships and using agency resources to develop professional workshops that could be used to assist companies with topics such as disability diversity training and human resource workers with advanced knowledge and application of disability legislation.

Results also conveyed the influence of possessing a valued social role, particularly in the absence of social capital. As indicated, no known research had previously been conducted examining the impact of social role on potential earnings for people with disabilities, and the results of the study suggest that social role is a variable worthy of vocational rehabilitation counselors’ attention. The bookkeeper with a disability who was a complete stranger to the employer and possessed a valued social role received US$0.36 more per hour at hire (US$748 per year) when compared with the bookkeeper with a disability who did not have a valued social role. This effect was even more pronounced for individuals without disabilities, with those hired as complete strangers who had a valued social role receiving US$1.16 more per hour (US$2,413 per year) compared with those without a valued social role. Interestingly, a valued social role even shaped starting wage in relationships with negative social capital (i.e., someone the employer did not get along with). In this condition, people without disabilities earned US$0.76 more per hour (US$1,581) and people with disabilities earned US$0.46 more per hour (US$1,165 per year) at hire. Although not statistically significant, meaningful increases in starting wages were also noted for bookkeepers with and without a disability who were referred by a close friend. Increases of US$0.74 per hour (US$1,539 per year) were noted for individuals without disabilities whereas individuals with disabilities received US$0.28 more per hour (US$582 per year). The research suggests that increasing and highlighting valued social roles of vocational rehabilitation clients may have a similar influence on actual post hire earnings. The influence of social role on starting wages indicates the importance of vocational rehabilitation counselors emphasizing the various positive social roles that individuals occupy, and the importance of developing and facilitating the occupancy of positive social roles as part of the vocational rehabilitation process.
Highlighting social roles involves enhancing one’s image through the mention or demonstration of valued social roles. A vocational rehabilitation counselor could assist in this effort by helping clients to identify valued social roles they already hold and how those roles may positively influence the perceptions and behaviors of others. If helpful, counselors might help clients to recognize opportunities for communicating or demonstrating these roles in different aspects of the job placement process, particularly the interview. Increasing or obtaining valued social roles may also be part of the vocational rehabilitation counseling process. Quick efforts to increase the presence of valued social roles might include encouraging clients to volunteer with an agency or organization providing a valued service to society. Finally, research suggests that VR and other human services agency environments that reinforce principles of SVR theory facilitate the development of greater participation and the perception of valued social roles (Aubry et al., 2013). A rating system called PASSING was developed by Wolfensberger that can be used to evaluate an organization’s implementation of these principles (Wolfensberger & Thomas, 2007). Given the positive findings regarding social role on earnings in this study, future studies examining the impact of social role on the decision to hire seem warranted.

As expected, the highest starting wage was provided to those possessing high social capital and a valued social role. For bookkeepers without a disability, possessing a valued social role yielded higher starting wages across all conditions when compared with those without a valued social role, with a low of US$0.52 more per hour (US$1,802 per year) for an employee with negative social capital to a high of US$1.73 more per hour (US$3,598) for an employee who is a close friend. Although not quite as pronounced, people with disabilities experienced a meaningful starting wage increase as well, with a low of US$0.12 more per hour (US$250 per year) for an employee with negative social capital and a high of US$0.93 per hour (US$1,934 per year) for an employee who is a close friend. Importantly, for people with disabilities, being referred by a state agency, when combined with a valued social role, indicated an hourly increase of US$0.59 per hour (US$1,227 per year).

Similar to the previous study examining social capital and disability (Phillips et al., 2014), there was no significant difference in the starting wage for people with and without disabilities across the multiple study conditions. This is an encouraging finding suggesting that disability status may not be a significant factor affecting starting wages when holding human capital and predicted workplace performance constant. Although this finding appears to be encouraging, it is important to note that disability was not defined; it is possible that a specific disability, particularly one that is more stigmatized in the labor market, would influence determinations of starting wage. This is significant because research related to disability and stigma, especially research employing Attribution Theory, indicates that perceptions related to causation, control, stability, and productivity may be important factors that affect how employers perceive individuals with disabilities. Type of disability and level of employer confidence in the employee’s ability to perform the work would appear to be an important factor that needs to be examined in future research regarding social capital and role. It is highly possible that starting wages may vary depending on the disability type and related perceptions about causation, control, stability, and productivity.

Overall, the study results provide evidence that social capital and social role have an independent influence on starting wage and are important areas for consideration during the job placement process. This study provided an important extension of prior social capital research for people with disabilities by adding the construct of social role as a variable of interest. The differences in real wages resulting from social capital and social role provide important implications for addressing the poverty that is so frequently experienced by vocational rehabilitation clients. In the original study conducted by Phillips et al. (2014), the potential for using indirect social capital was highlighted as a solution when the consumer does not have direct social capital of their own. In this replication and extension, evidence suggests that a valued social role provides another conduit for affecting starting wage in vocational rehabilitation services, with or without the existence of social capital.

Limitations

Use of a convenience sample limits generalizability. In addition, the response of health administration students toward hypothetical hiring decisions must be cautiously applied to actual wage determinations. Whether current employers in this industry would respond similarly to the students is unknown. Also, a hypothetical situation such as this cannot account for or control all of the factors related to something as complex as wage decisions; it is possible that even wage determinations made by actual employers would vary between hypothetical survey and actual employer behavior. Also, social capital is a latent variable that cannot be directly measured. For the purposes of this study, as with the original, it was assumed that relative differences in relationship closeness reflected a difference in the magnitude of social capital. However, this assumption cannot be tested as social capital cannot be directly measured.

Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to examine the impact of social capital and social role on the earnings of individuals with and without disabilities. For both, people with and without disabilities, social capital and social role contributed
to increased earning, providing support that both constructs may be important factors to address during the hiring process. The study findings have particular applicability to vocational rehabilitation given in increased importance of the WIOA and its emphasis on building networks and leveraging resources to maximize employment outcomes. One of the significant limitations in this study was the use of college students who may not have actual hiring experience, and who may be more accepting or open to disability as part of the everyday experience. Despite this limitation, the study findings regarding social capital appear to be consistent with prior studies, and the findings regarding social capital are promising and require further examination. Furthermore, research in this area would appear to be important because both constructs can provide a basis for much needed theoretically based interventions addressing job placement. Areas for future research include a consideration of whether disability type may moderate the relationships between social capital, social role, and starting wage. It is possible that differing levels of stigma and bias associated with specific disabilities may influence observed relationships. Any research that approximates real business decision making will serve to validate these controlled studies. For instance, future research might target participants who are currently employed in roles that include making hiring and wage determinations.

Authors’ Note

Brian N. Phillips and David R. Strauser are the co-first authors of this article.

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