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Social Entrepreneurs with Disabilities: Exploring Motivational and Attitudinal Factors

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Abstract

The current economic climate demands more innovative approaches to increasing labor market participation for people with disabilities. Social entrepreneurship offers one alternative pathway to employment. However, little is known about the motivational and attitudinal factors influencing social entrepreneurship for people with disabilities. Using empirical data from focus groups comprised of social entrepreneurs with disabilities, and interviews with key stakeholders working in the fields of policy, disability, and business, this research frames its analysis in the intersection of disability studies and entrepreneurial studies to explore: what motivates people with disabilities to pursue social entrepreneurship, if they continue to encounter attitudinal barriers and discrimination, and whether motivational and attitudinal factors affect their social entrepreneurship. Findings indicate that despite social entrepreneurship having been promoted as a strategy for circumventing employment discrimination, the individuals with disabilities in this research continued to encounter attitudinal barriers and discrimination affecting their employment decisions. Future research should focus on interrogating what might be gained in the spaces where need and opportunity intersect and exploring the extent to which motivations overlap for social entrepreneurs with disabilities in theory, policy, and practice.

Keywords

Disability; Entrepreneurship; Motivation; Attitudes; Qualitative

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Introduction

We need to expand our thinking about what a viable employment choice is, what an entrepreneur is, and how successful this can be for people with disabilities. Given what the employment picture looks like, if this can be really viable for some people, then there really needs to be a change in attitude.

- Amy, National Disability Resource & Technical Assistance

Over the past two decades entrepreneurship has been promoted as an antipoverty strategy for addressing the prevalence of unemployment and underemployment among people with disabilities (Blanck, Sandler, Schmeling, & Schartz, 2000; Lind, 2000; Office of Disability Employment Policy, 2005). However, it wasn't until the Choice Access Project that researchers and policymakers alike recognized that people with disabilities had an interest in self-employment and entrepreneurship (Arnold & Ipsen, 2005; Callahan, Shumpert, & Mast, 2002). Indeed, a substantially higher rate of people with disabilities are self-employed (11.8%) compared to the general population (6.6%) (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2012). This critical juncture speaks to an area of entrepreneurial motivation that has been largely overlooked in disability employment research. Originally it was presumed that people with disabilities might

choose to pursue self-employment or entrepreneurship because of a lack of other available options (push motivation); not necessarily due to their interest, skill, or passion for starting a business (pull motivation). Part of the reason why it has been approached in this way is because self-employment assistance programs and entrepreneurship policy initiatives came about largely in response to the pervasive attitudinal barriers facing people with disabilities in employment; limiting opportunities for entry into the labor market and for career advancement. There is a paucity of research on this topic. Currently, it is not well understood what motivates people with disabilities to pursue social entrepreneurship, if they continue to encounter attitudinal barriers, and whether motivational and attitudinal factors affect their social entrepreneurship. This research uses a qualitative approach to explore these questions through focus groups with social entrepreneurs with disabilities and interviews with key stakeholders and experts working in the field. The objectives are to advance theory for future research and to identify qualitative factors, which can be operationalized and be used to approach this phenomenon quantitatively.

Background

As a discipline, entrepreneurship is focused on the emergence of new organizations and innovation. Social entrepreneurship is a sub-field of entrepreneurship gaining interest in the disability community (De Clercq & Honig, 2009; Reid, 2004); however, up to this point there has not been empirical research on the topic. While entrepreneurship and self-employment have been used interchangeably in the literature (Yamamoto, Unruh, & Bullis, 2011), there are significant conceptual differences between them. Self-employment is intended to employ one individual, with the goal of achieving financial self-sufficiency. Entrepreneurship is both profit-oriented and growth-oriented (Parker Harris, Renko, & Caldwell, 2013), intended to result in not

only job creation for an individual, but also the creation of other jobs that come with growth of the business.¹ In this way, entrepreneurship is both an employment strategy and an antipoverty strategy (Parker Harris, Caldwell, & Renko, 2014). What distinguishes social entrepreneurship from commercial entrepreneurship is that in addition to being growth- and profit-oriented, it also has a social mission that is central to the business. Social entrepreneurs are often motivated by their personal experience with social problems and unmet need. Subsequently, their business' mission becomes interwoven with social value (Austin, Stevenson, & Wei-Skillern, 2006; Bornstein & Davis, 2010). Social entrepreneurs with disabilities represent a source of innovation and productivity and, if afforded equal access and opportunity, social entrepreneurship is an employment strategy that can lead to economic self-sufficiency and empowerment (Parker Harris et al., 2013).

Attitudinal Literature in Disability-Entrepreneurship

Attitudinal barriers in employment result in discrimination regarding hiring, salary, work-related benefits, and promotion decisions for people with disabilities (Blanck et al., 2000; Braddock & Bachelder, 1994; Livermore & Goodman, 2009; National Organization on Disability, 2010). Consequently, many qualified persons with disabilities continue to be directed to sheltered and non-integrated jobs that do not allow for economic self-sufficiency, independence or social inclusion (Blanck, 2000; Blanck & Scharz, 2001). Of those individuals with disabilities who are employed (17.8% compared with 63.9% in the general population), few hold full-time jobs and considerably fewer compared with the general population (Blanck et al., 2000; Bureau of Labor

¹ Throughout the disability employment literature, the terms self-employment, entrepreneurship, and microenterprise are often used interchangeably. While a discussion of this conflation in terminology lay outside the scope of the immediate research questions, this poses a problem to developing a comprehensive agenda for research, programs, and policy (Parker Harris, Caldwell, et al., 2014).

Statistics, 2013; National Organization on Disability, 2010). Eighty-eight percent of people with a disability who are unemployed but looking for a job attribute their unemployment to not being able to find a job in their line of work (National Organization on Disability, 2010).

Job-related discrimination affects not only earnings and employment levels, but also occupational roles. Even after controlling for education level, employees with disabilities are disproportionately overrepresented in entry-level, unskilled, highly physical, and more hazardous occupations. These types of positions tend to have lower wages and greater risk of job loss or layoff. Correspondingly, people with disabilities are underrepresented in occupations that require proficiency in information, communication, and supervisory skills; positions associated with higher earnings and job security (Kaye, 2009). Entrepreneurship has become an attractive policy prospect because of the promise it holds for job creation and customization, circumventing attitudinal barriers.

One of the main barriers to entrepreneurship is the traditional-expectations barrier (Walls, Dowler, Cordingly, Orslene, & Greer, 2001), which people with disabilities can encounter among service providers in vocational rehabilitation (VR) and small business development due to lack of experience working with entrepreneurs or people with disabilities, respectively (Blanck et al., 2000; Callahan et al., 2002; Doyel, 2002; Hagner & Davies, 2002; Ipsen, Arnold, & Colling, 2003; Ravesloot & Seekins, 1996; Rizzo, 2002). This may manifest as low expectations of one's "ability" as a business owner and discourage entrepreneurial thinking (Lind, 2000). Little attention has been paid to theoretically and empirically developing this concept (Parker Harris, Caldwell, et al., 2014), yet the traditional-expectations barrier has been inexorably linked to success (Walls et al., 2001) as perceived barriers play a significant role in determining employment outcomes (Fabian, Ethridge, & Beveridge, 2009).

It has been theorized that entrepreneurs with disabilities experience a tension between the ability to blend-in, or conform, and the desire to be perceived as innovators (De Clercq & Honig, 2009). This has particular significance for people with disabilities who experience a similar tension between the need to conform, via mainstreaming or integration in society, versus the need for differentiation in arguing for equal opportunity. This expectation of normativity underlies a sense of entrepreneurial legitimacy. Within the disability context, entrepreneurial success is dependent upon societal reciprocity – what is viewed as legitimacy or being legitimated by others (De Clercq & Honig, 2009). There is a need for empirical research to explore these attitudinal factors and this research is a first step towards understanding the role of people with disabilities as social entrepreneurs themselves and not merely as the recipients of social entrepreneurial efforts.

Entrepreneurial Motivation Literature

Push-pull theory was first applied to entrepreneurial motivation in the 1980's (Amit & Muller, 1995; Kirkwood, 2009). Whereas pull factors are typically considered to be positively motivated, push factors imply that entrepreneurship is chosen under duress, despite one's preference and due to a lack of other options (Amit & Muller, 1995; Bates, 1997; Dawson & Henley, 2012; Gilad & Levine, 1986). Pull factors are widely believed to be more prevalent among entrepreneurs than push factors (Dawson & Henley, 2012; Gilad & Levine, 1986; Kirkwood, 2009). However, push factors played a stronger role during economic recession due to rates of unemployment and work-related insecurity (Dawson & Henley, 2012; Giacomini, Janssen, Guyot, & Lohest, 2011; Hughes, 2003). In 2001, the push-pull dichotomy was re-conceptualized as "opportunity-based" and "necessity-based" entrepreneurship (Dawson & Henley, 2012;

Giacomin et al., 2011; Hessels, Gelderen, & Thurik, 2008; Reynolds, Camp, Bygrave, Autio, & Hay, 2001).

Push-pull motivation has been studied with regard to gender (Hughes, 2003; Kirkwood, 2009) and the social mobility of immigrants and ethnic minorities (Bates, 1997; Clark & Drinkwater, 2000). It has been suggested that push factors are the result of blocked opportunities and status incongruence (Bates, 1997; Verdaguer, 2009), that entrepreneurship has the potential to correct this disparity to achieve status recognition (Reynolds, 2002), and therefore that entrepreneurship may affect minorities differently. As regards gender differences, push factors have been underestimated for women interested in self-employment and small business development. While they may not be the primary motivating factor, push factors do play a critical role (Hughes, 2003; Kirkwood, 2009).

Motivational factors for entrepreneurs with disabilities are often couched in the language of "benefits" of self-employment and entrepreneurship as an employment alternative (Blanck et al., 2000; Lind, 2000). These stated benefits comprise seven categories: 1) participation in the mainstream economy; 2) promotion of economic growth; 3) promotion of attitudinal change; 4) improved quality of life; 5) independence, autonomy and empowerment; 6) accommodations and flexibility; and 7) integration and social participation (Parker Harris, Caldwell, et al., 2014). However, these benefits do not equate to entrepreneurial motivation per se. Haynie and Shepherd (2011) examined the career transition of veterans with disabilities following traumatic life events and observed a strong link between career and identity during this transformational period. During the course of their research two types of motivations emerged: entrepreneurship as a career path based on perceived or real obstacles to other career paths (push) and entrepreneurship

as a career path based on satisfying some psychological need rooted in trauma and transition (pull).

Clarity in motivational factors is important to entrepreneurship policy design, which "tends to be framed around the predominance of 'pull' motivations" (Dawson & Henley, 2012, p. 714). Conversely, disability-entrepreneurship policy has been framed around push motivations. This raises a significant dilemma as policy developed to address pull factors and promote opportunity-based entrepreneurship will not adequately address push factors or support necessity-based entrepreneurs. In other words, this discussion and the findings that follow highlight that entrepreneurs with disabilities are located at an intersection where both entrepreneurship and disability employment policy come up short in meeting their needs.

Method

The research presented here is part of a larger mixed-methods project that involved the secondary analysis of a large-scale entrepreneurship dataset looking at the entrepreneurial entry of people with disabilities (Renko, Parker Harris, & Caldwell, 2015); analysis of the resource needs, barriers, and opportunities for people with disabilities to engage in social entrepreneurship (Parker Harris et al., 2013); and analysis of the socio-cultural and political-economic barriers influencing the potential of social entrepreneurship (Parker Harris, Renko, & Caldwell, 2014). For the current research, selected qualitative data from social entrepreneurs with disabilities and key stakeholders from policy, disability, and business fields were analyzed using a social psychological lens to explore the experiences of social entrepreneurs with disabilities; in particular, their experiences with attitudinal barriers and what motivates them to pursue social entrepreneurship. Focus groups with social entrepreneurs with disabilities and key stakeholder

interviews sought to explore the research questions: 1) do people with disabilities continue to encounter attitudinal barriers and to what extent do these differ from those encountered in their prior employment; 2) what motivates people with disabilities to pursue entrepreneurship as opposed to other employment options; and 3) how do these motivational and attitudinal factors affect their entrepreneurship? Qualitative methods were applied in approaching these questions given the appropriateness of methodological fit for exploratory field research in areas where theory is nascent (Edmondson & McManus, 2007). Participant recruitment occurred in conjunction with an initial portion of the larger project, the Community Resource Assessment, which assessed the information and resources available in to social entrepreneurs with disabilities in the Chicagoland area. This facilitated identifying contacts within networks who distributed recruitment materials in hard copy, electronic, and accessible formats.

Focus Groups with Social Entrepreneurs

Between May and June of 2011, four focus group discussions were conducted with social entrepreneurs with disabilities (n=27) in Chicago, Illinois using an open-ended focus group guide. The use of focus groups allowed the research team to gain an understanding of the perceptions of people with disabilities who are actively engaged in the process of social entrepreneurship. Insight gained through research with focus groups can be used to advise policy and program development; affording groups that have been systemically marginalized a voice in decisions being made that will impact their lives (Graham & McDermott, 2006; Madriz, 2003).

Criteria regarding potential participants were discussed and agreed upon by the members of the interdisciplinary research team to ensure that participants in the focus groups were representative of various stages of social enterprise development. A screening tool was used that

included a combination of disability criteria and business criteria and that has been described in more detail elsewhere (Parker Harris et al., 2013; Parker Harris, Renko, et al., 2014). Participants were working age (18 to 65 years old) and self-identified as having a disability, which spanned a wide variety of disability categories from physical disability to mental illness, traumatic brain injury, and autism.² Business criteria helped determine whether they were a social entrepreneur and what stage of business development they were in (see Parker Harris et al., 2013; Parker Harris, Renko, et al., 2014). The structure of the business could be a for-profit, a non-profit, or a hybrid social enterprise operating in the open market. Additionally, participants must have been integrally involved in developing the start-up idea.

Stakeholder Interviews

Interviews were conducted with key stakeholders (n=19) either face-to-face or over the telephone using an open-ended interview guide. Purposive sampling was used to select participants, which included local and state government representatives from disability, employment, education and small business departments; disability advocacy organizations and service providers; social entrepreneur organizations in the disability sector; and financial institutions (see Parker Harris et al., 2013; Parker Harris, Renko, et al., 2014). The use of an interview approach for data collection allowed participants to share expertise from their given fields and perceptions of how and why people with disabilities are participating in social entrepreneurship.

² Individuals with intellectual disabilities were not included in this portion of the research. In-depth dyadic interviews were conducted with social entrepreneurs with intellectual disabilities as a separate component of the larger project.

Analysis

Focus groups and interviews were audio recorded, transcribed, coded and de-identified.

Thematic analysis of the data was conducted using ATLAS-ti and index coding was used to identify core themes (Morgan, 2005). Initial coding began with sixty-four themes for the focus groups and thirty-nine themes for the interviews, which the research team combined and refined into nine master themes for both the focus groups and interviews through a process of independent coding and inter-rater agreement (Patton, 2002). During analysis two interrelated themes emerged that are presented in this research: attitudes and motivations. Further, thematic analysis revealed subthemes that appear to be qualitative factors affecting not only how people with disabilities are participating in social entrepreneurship, which has been the focus of research presented elsewhere (Parker Harris, Caldwell, et al., 2014; Parker Harris, Renko, et al., 2014), but importantly why they chose to pursue this particular employment strategy. The subthemes reveal exploratory qualitative factors presented below. The analysis proceeds thematically and contains empirical data from both focus groups and interviews. Pseudonyms have been used to protect participants' confidentiality.

Findings

Attitudinal Factors: Exploring Stigma & Discrimination

Stakeholders spoke about the stigma associated with disability, as it produces attitudinal barriers that impact social entrepreneurs with disabilities in a variety of ways. For instance, prejudice affects people with disabilities seeking competitive employment who encounter discrimination in hiring from employers that, "just see the chair or crutch and don't look beyond that" (Tammy, Small Business Development & Microenterprise). However, it can further disadvantage

entrepreneurs in business development activities such as applying for financing and funding. One entrepreneur with a disability interviewed noted:

It’s another strike against you when you walk into a bank and especially these days. Nobody is going to admit to it though. I definitely feel that if I walk into a bank cold and I’m starting a business and I have a business plan and point out that I have a visual disability, I believe that they would need to see some success before they would maybe invest more or support my company. I’ve seen it several times and it’s the same thing with potential customers. (Christopher, Disabled-Owned Business & Advocate)

Stakeholders expressed that often a person with a disability running and managing a business by themselves is seen as incapable of being successful or as an “incredible challenge.” There is also concern that the way people with disabilities are being involved in businesses is in a glorified position– as a disability token. For example, Darren explained that while the motivation behind creating a recycling micro-business may be correct, creating a job that matches one’s ability and limitations, it is often based on a charity model rather than creating a valid business that can stand alone regardless of disability: “Whoever designed that business rested on the idea that this is doing good so people will pay for it.... In some ways it set a good example and showed people what an adult with a disability could do, it was awfully reliant on others’ goodwill and I don’t think that’s how we want to represent disability” (Darren, Social Enterprise in Disability Sector).

The perception of VR professionals and other service providers towards people with disabilities who want to start a business can also be a site for prejudice and discriminatory treatment. For instance, one stakeholder who works with job seekers with disabilities gave the example of individuals who get “side tracked just going to a development counselor because it can be demoralizing and draining – if that counselor perceives them in a certain way, it can be very deflating” (Amy, National Disability Resource & Technical Assistance). Literature has shown that VR counselors do not encourage entrepreneurship as an employment option (Callahan, 2000; Kendall, Buys, Charker, & MacMillan, 2006). Further, when they do provide it

as an option, they do not necessarily know how to adequately support it (Hagner & Davies, 2002; Rizzo, 2002). Our research indicates that the motivations of agencies providing employment services may be different from that of their clients.

The dialogue among focus group participants confirmed stakeholder concerns, recounting repeated experiences of both perceived and actual discrimination. Of particular interest is that in response many of the social entrepreneurs with disabilities took on a sense of responsibility for changing attitudes through their entrepreneurship. Most participants echoed the sentiments of Martha (female) who said, "I have to change peoples' thinking that just because I have a disability means I can't be a business owner." What remains unclear is the extent to which this indicates an individual versus social responsibility. In other words, whether the participants felt the need to change attitudes to be seen and treated as equal business persons, or whether changing attitudes was ingrained as part of their social mission. It appears to be an interaction between these motivational factors, highlighting an area of research that merits further attention.

Disability disclosure emerged as a theme among focus group participants and appeared to be mediated by the visibility of one's disability. For individuals whose disabilities are not readily apparent, some social entrepreneurs may not want others to know that they have a disability. For instance, Louise (female) spoke of the tendency to "... keep it behind closed doors. I was like that for a while and it was hard to face." Several social entrepreneurs with disabilities had chosen not to disclose their disability in the past due to fear of discrimination or that they may lose their job due to beliefs that they will not be "able" to work effectively. For example, Nancy recalled one of the reasons she decided to pursue social entrepreneurship:

I worked in social services out in the field as a case manager. It got to the point where I couldn't do that job anymore, and it was difficult because it was a job I enjoyed doing. The last job I had I was working with homeless veterans and it was rewarding and I

didn't want the employer to know because I didn't want them to discriminate against me and they did. (Nancy, female)

Concerns regarding employment discrimination in hiring, advancement, and retention are circumvented to some extent by starting one's own business, thereby creating one's own job via customized employment strategies. However, social entrepreneurs with disabilities continue to encounter a disclosure dilemma. On the one hand, disclosure is necessary for accessing disability-related resources and incentives; however, on the other hand, the costs of disclosing one's disability can serve as a powerful disincentive when entrepreneurs encounter pervasive material, social, and structural barriers (Parker Harris et al., 2013; Parker Harris, Renko, et al., 2014).

For one social entrepreneur, the issue of disclosure led to the realization of her social mission in founding a business that provides consulting and advocacy services based on a framework of empowerment and raising awareness about disability:

I know a lot of it is fear and I think a lot of people, depending on the type of disability, may not even see themselves as disabled. I think people who have obvious things like wheelchairs, blind, or deaf - those are clearly defined in our society as disabilities, but I'm trying to get people to realize they may have other conditions that are disabling as well, whether temporary or permanent, and they are protected. It's a harder route to go because no one wants to set themselves apart from other people. (Joan, female)

Some social entrepreneurs who have impairments may not identify as disabled, which is not an uncommon phenomenon (Watson, 2002). Moreover, individuals may not integrate their business identity in the development of their disability identity (Gill, 1997); both "coming together" and "coming out" as a disabled-businessperson. As Judy (female) shared, "I don't even consider myself a person with a disability. I've dealt with mental illness issues, but there's a lot of controversy in the mental health community. If someone told me I could get help from the government for [my business] as a disabled business owner, I don't even think that would cross

my radar.” Judy was one of several participants who worked in the performing arts around topics of mental illness and is a well-known and respected business leader in the community. Yet, she had not considered identifying as a disabled-businessperson before participating in the focus group and interacting with other social entrepreneurs with disabilities. Interestingly, at the end of most of the focus groups participants began sharing contact information and business cards so that they could keep in touch. While this momentarily gave the authors ethical pause, it also spoke to a need for networking opportunities among social entrepreneurs with disabilities.

Expectations emerged as a theme among social entrepreneurs with disabilities and key stakeholders, but in very distinct ways. Stakeholders spoke about society’s expectations corresponding to the amount of opportunities and support available – if there are no expectations, there are no options available. However, stakeholders were primarily concerned with the expectations of the social entrepreneurs themselves and, moreover, that the expectations of people with disabilities be informed and realistic. While among focus group participants there was acknowledgment of the role that personal expectations play, there was also a broader discussion about the impact of others’ expectations.

The majority of stakeholders believed that there are low expectations being set for people with disabilities, encouraged by entitlement programs that serve an important purpose but that push people with disabilities into a passive role – getting support without having to give anything back. For instance, one interviewee stated that service providers and people with disabilities believe they should get grant funding to help start their business because they are disabled rather than based on the quality of business factors: “You should earn your way and if you have a great business idea, develop it out and get into the business. Leave your baggage at the door” (Marilyn, Disability Sector & Advocacy Organization). In this way, the creation of social

enterprises can be an ongoing challenge because there is a need to create opportunity that is accessible to people with disabilities, but without creating opportunities that are less challenging and less likely to be successful, "it's hard to know when we're accommodating the disability too much and making it a program instead of an enterprise" (Darren, Social Enterprise in Disability Sector). This is an important distinction to make.

Stakeholders felt it vital that people with disabilities going into social entrepreneurship be informed and have realistic expectations of what it will involve; in particular, recognizing that they will probably not be successful in their first attempt. Several individuals interviewed highlighted the importance of conducting a feasibility study. What this accomplishes can be paraphrased by one participant as trying to "talk them out of it first... that makes sure they understand how challenging it is and how flooded the industry they want to get into is" (Henry, Local Government & Workforce Development). This emphasis was not entirely surprising given that many of the stakeholders interviewed acted as disability and business service providers and, as such, their work focuses considerably on minimizing risk for the populations they serve. However, it may not be the most effective approach for supporting entrepreneurship (Doyel, 2002; Janney & Dess, 2006; Stewart & Roth, 2001).

An expectations barrier exists, wherein the expectations of people with disabilities about their own capabilities may be lower, particularly when they continue receiving feedback that they need "so much help and so much support, their interpretation on some level may be that they are so screwed up and have the odds stacked against them" (Sean, Entrepreneur with a Disability & Advocate). Some people with disabilities may not feel they can start their own business, and that can pose a significant psychological barrier. The current research indicates that people with disabilities may be disinclined to pursue employment options due to a lack of

entrepreneurial self-efficacy resulting from internalizing the expectations of others. It is also possible that people with disabilities may be excluded from many of the opportunities others receive to build entrepreneurial self-efficacy through practice, such as internship, apprenticeship, job shadowing, or mentorship. In effect, the low expectations of others can block opportunities for advancement and career development. As a result, the expectations barrier appears to be both a direct and indirect cause of low entrepreneurial self-efficacy. Focus group participants spoke of a need for attitude change in this regard:

I would agree - to change the hearts and minds of people when it comes to dealing with the disabled. The department of rehab paid for my master's degree but once I had that, then what? I haven't had a job and they didn't have any placement for me. They need to know that a disabled person can be just as functional and can do just as much as someone without a disability. Attitude change definitely. (Nancy, female)

For Nancy, there was an expectation that she could obtain an education. However, when it came to applying that education towards finding employment, there was not a clear pathway for placing someone with her qualifications in her chosen field, and Nancy turned to social entrepreneurship partly in an effort to pave her own pathway. These findings indicate a discrepancy between stakeholder accounts and the perspectives of social entrepreneurs with disabilities. Whereas stakeholders were concerned that people with disabilities were too reliant upon public benefits, participants with disabilities conveyed that such programs/services fell short in meeting their needs.

Fear also poses a significant psychological barrier for the social entrepreneurs with disabilities participating in this research. Not necessarily the fear of entrepreneurship itself, but rather the fear of issues like jeopardizing what little income they do have by losing disability benefits and healthcare that are often difficult to get to begin with. Further, it bears mentioning that the stress of how disability affects other aspects of one's life can impact one's

entrepreneurship. For instance, barriers in housing, social networks, and personal assistance can all affect how someone with a disability engages in social entrepreneurship.

A few of the social entrepreneurs in this research made a connection between the expectations of others and the perceived "ability" of their business to compete in the marketplace, not simply focusing on the individual themselves. Although, as one participant articulated, the very concept of competition is complexified by the context of disability:

The whole concept of competition is a difficult one for people with disabilities. Sometimes in a Darwinistic world, we're not seen as being able to compete and you get winners and losers, and we tend to be among the losers. We haven't learned how to mesh it all together in the disability community. I think we're very, very lacking in developing our own economic perspective. (Alan, male)

Alan's observation gets at the heart of what is problematic about applying deficiency models of disability in employment: failing to recognize the way that positions of disadvantage construct disabling environments. Additionally, social entrepreneurs with disabilities encounter normative expectations about what kind of business they should have:

Most enterprises that have to do with people with disabilities are typically not-for-profit so it's based on the charity model.... Some people have a charitable mindset and they get upset that I'm selling [apparel] from my basement and they think every dollar I make from this should go to some charitable cause. They don't understand I spend 50-60 hours a week working and still haven't been paid and I don't have money to give anywhere right now. One day I might profit off of it, but right now it's just doing what I love and making an honest living so that's been a major barrier. I'd say more than half the people that see the [logo] assume it's a charity, but [my business partner] was adamant that she wanted to change peoples' perspectives. It's a big paradox of problems that we face. (Samuel, male)

Social enterprises that address disability issues are often expected to be philanthropic, charitable organizations. It remains unclear to what extent this stigma may interfere with profit-generating activities. Samuel also spoke of instances where his organization's trademarked logo had been used by charitable organizations, without permission, to promote an ideology that went against

their social mission. In this vein, it also bears consideration to what extent the stigma of charity can interfere with social value-generating activities.

Motivational Factors: Exploring Push-Pull Motivation

In discussing what the stakeholders believed motivates people with disabilities to pursue social entrepreneurship, themes of both push and pull motivation were explicit. A few interviewees cautioned, however, that care need be taken in not generalizing or ascribing motivations, particularly if one has not "walked" [sic] in their shoes. Among focus group participants, the majority responded that they were driven by passion, interest, and caring deeply about a social issue. Yet, the discussion that followed was inundated with complex, intersecting push factors affecting participants' employment decisions:

We also have to eliminate the discrimination that we all fear and experience. There are laws, but they're not enforced very well. We talk about disability as an umbrella term for so many people - blind, deaf, physically disabled. We don't always come together so when we talk about disability we have to segregate it sometimes and tear it apart. There are also other constructs of race, gender, and sexual orientation and... there are correlates there. Poverty and things affect us. We have to look at business development in our geographic areas and in the city... there are lots of different ways of looking at it. (Alan, male)

The emphasis on pull factors appears to speak to the centrality of the social mission (e.g. the social value proposition as in Austin et al., 2006). It does not mean that for social entrepreneurs with disabilities participating in this research push factors weren't as important, nor does it mean that pull factors were more important. Rather, this finding indicates that because of the centrality of the social mission participants with disabilities may be primed to respond accordingly.

Six stakeholders suggested that people with disabilities turn to self-employment due to a lack of options such as real or perceived hiring discrimination who may be "shut out of other opportunities" (Henry, Local Government & Workforce Development). Motivation may be

stronger for those unable to find competitive employment through traditional channels. Also, this may be because of the belief that, unlike in other countries, the U.S. lacks adequate social provisions for people with disabilities. One interviewee stated that such motivations may not be the best reason to go into self-employment because it is a difficult way to earn a living. However, people do so because they see no other option (Marilyn, Disability Sector & Advocacy Organization). Further, it offers people with disabilities a way to mitigate barriers and to be more self-reliant. For instance, they can control factors that determine how they participate such as the hours they work, transportation, their work space, and management of medication.

Not everyone has the predisposition to be an entrepreneur – this observation is not unique to people with disabilities, as one interviewee said: "Not everyone is cut out to be a business owner, whether they have a disability or not. If you think that being a business owner or entrepreneur is something for you and you want to do it, then great but if you're just using it as an alternative to try out, you're probably going to end up being disappointed" (Christopher, Disabled-Owned Business & Advocate). However, several participants felt that social entrepreneurship presents an opportunity for people with disabilities who struggle to find competitive employment, but who have a unique skill set that would benefit them in starting their own business.

Conversely, two stakeholders interviewed felt strongly that motivation was less due to an entrepreneurial predisposition for innovation than due to individual interest; one interviewee felt it was closely tied to creative passion and, if nourished and allowed to grow, people can move forward towards achieving the dream or goal that entrepreneurship represents (Denise, Disability Sector & Advocacy Organization). In some cases, it was believed that one's experience as a person with a disability can serve partly as motivation for starting a business. For instance, the

motivations of entrepreneurs with disabilities starting businesses may be influenced by accessibility, in that they may be drawn to starting businesses around the issues of access, disability awareness education, or improving employers' or the community's access to the marketplace. Further, some people with disabilities who are self-employed may feel a sense of responsibility to "give back" to others with disabilities and help in creating opportunities. However, the belief was conveyed that someone should not choose a business entirely around their disability; it has to be a combination of interest, passion, and skill. While this does not have to be consistent with one's disability, it certainly can be. Both stakeholders and focus group participants commented that some individuals, regardless of disability, are inherently drawn to entrepreneurship and will seek out the necessary resources and supports to actualize it. Some examples of social enterprise ideas that participants had developed or were in the process of developing include a battered women's shelter that was accessible to women and children with disabilities, accessible affordable housing constructed using universal design principles, and greeting cards made by and for people who are blind.

The motivation for pursuing social entrepreneurship among people with disabilities appears to be the result of both push and pull factors – both passion and a shortage of other options for employment. While some of the stakeholders felt people with disabilities may be sensitive to creating social enterprises (Christopher, Disabled-Owned Business & Advocate), two individuals cautioned against making the generalization that people with disabilities may be more likely to start social ventures than others (Aaron, Professor of Entrepreneurship; Ross, Local Government & Disability Advocacy). One recounted that most of the individuals with disabilities they see who want to start a business were interested in generating income and having a professional life and as such would be likely to pursue for-profit businesses, not

necessarily social ventures (Aaron, Professor of Entrepreneurship). However, comments such as these speak to the general confusion and inconsistency regarding how the concept of social entrepreneurship is understood, defined, and ultimately applied within the disability context.

Discussion

First, our research found that the individuals with disabilities in this research continued to encounter attitudinal barriers and discrimination affecting their employment decisions despite social entrepreneurship having been promoted as a strategy for circumventing employment discrimination. Scholars in disability employment and entrepreneurship research need to problematize what might be lost by depicting need-opportunity and push-pull as separate and distinct in research, policy, and practice. Future research should focus on interrogating what might be gained in the spaces where need and opportunity intersect and exploring the extent to which push and pull motivations overlap for social entrepreneurs with disabilities.

Second, our findings show that what motivates people with disabilities to pursue social entrepreneurship is a combination of both push and pull factors; an interaction of need and opportunity. While further research is needed, this appears to be particularly true for social entrepreneurs with disabilities who must balance the desire to make a profit and become financially self-sufficient with their reliance upon public services and benefits, which limit asset development and savings, in order to do so (Parker Harris, Caldwell, et al., 2014; Parker Harris et al., 2013; Parker Harris, Renko, et al., 2014). The current research indicates that policymakers and service providers prioritize needs-based entrepreneurship over opportunity-based entrepreneurship, whereas for social entrepreneurs with disabilities unmet need appears to be a crucial source of idea generation and social value. Maintaining an illusory separation between

push-pull and need-opportunity, which often overlap and are not always distinct, may serve to maintain the status quo and the prejudices inherent within, thereby sustaining a disabling environment that limits and constrains social mobility.

Finally, motivational and attitudinal factors affect how people with disabilities are participating in social entrepreneurship on multiple levels, at multiple stages in their business development, from the idea phase to the decision to enter entrepreneurship and the start-up phase. It continues throughout business growth and even in the decision to stop working on their business and in whether to try and start another business after an unsuccessful attempt. Indicators of success in traditional employment are limited in their application to disability-entrepreneurship and must extend beyond measures of economic growth to include self-determination, quality of life, health, and other outcome factors (Blanck et al., 2000). This becomes further complicated when adding a social value component, which is itself difficult to measure (Austin et al., 2006). Yet, non-pecuniary motivations (i.e. not involving money) are particularly important for social entrepreneurs (Austin et al., 2006; Dawson & Henley, 2012); emphasizing the need to better understand the motivations of social entrepreneurs with disabilities. In particular, consider that program and policy initiatives promote necessity-based entrepreneurship as an employment strategy for those who are unemployed and reliant upon public benefits. The question remains, how much of a role do those initiatives actually play in the decisions of people with disabilities who are engaged in social entrepreneurship? Moreover, given that social entrepreneurs often are motivated by experience with unmet need and social problems encountered in their community, might these experiences with social need and problems be pecuniary for people with disabilities? Attempting to delineate between the two is

problematic when entrepreneurship is being considered not simply as an employment strategy, but also as an anti-poverty strategy for populations that have been disenfranchised.

While there has been repeated emphasis in disability employment scholarship on needing to understand more about motivation and attitudes, there has been a lack of research that would contribute to our knowledge on those subjects. In light of the current research, it bears consideration whether existing research in entrepreneurship may have included people with disabilities who did not disclose their disability status due to concerns about stigma and discrimination. Few examples exist of successful CEOs with disabilities. However, that does not mean that these individuals do not exist, but rather they appear to be actively passing in order to succeed in the business world. Additionally, it bears consideration to what extent the information collected in existing research has been biased by normative expectations of business ownership; that is, in who we see as business owners as well as in what we believe it takes to run a business. Many people with disabilities may not be in a position where they can work in excess of forty hours a week or may not be able to accumulate assets because they receive public benefits. However, that does not mean people with disabilities are not entrepreneurs. Social entrepreneurs with disabilities exist and are living in our communities, they are starting businesses to address problems and needs of those communities, and those who are successful are finding creative solutions to do so by leveraging various services. Sharing these stories and experiences with others has the potential to create an attitudinal shift in the way society views people with disabilities in employment; from seeing them as passive workers/employees, to seeing them as employers who have the power and authority to hire others (with or without disabilities) and create their own workplace culture. If supported adequately, this is the potential of social

entrepreneurship for people with disabilities as an employment strategy, as an anti-poverty strategy, and as a strategy for social change.

Conclusion

The purpose of the research presented here is to establish an empirical foundation for dialogue and to inform future research in the fields of disability employment and entrepreneurship, both respectively and where they intersect. Doing so necessitates taking these qualitative factors, which are exploratory in nature and emerged directly from the experiences of people with disabilities and key stakeholders engrossed in the praxis of social entrepreneurship, and operationalizing them for use in research, policy, and practice. For example, we now know that social entrepreneurs with disabilities experience stigma and discrimination that is distinct. This raises the question of whether antidiscrimination legislation, such as the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) provides adequate or appropriate employment protections for people who are pursuing entrepreneurship and social entrepreneurship. Additionally, the findings show that it would be beneficial to develop programs aimed at raising awareness and educating business service providers, VR providers, and financial institutions about disability-entrepreneurship in order to confront possible attitudinal barriers.

Operationalizing the expectations barrier itself becomes more complex. Perhaps the most vital component lay in recognizing it as a barrier, and one that can be measured to examine its impact on outcomes in employment. For instance, it is possible to use an existing measure, such as entrepreneurial self-efficacy, to gauge an individual's initial expectations. Subsequently, it would be possible to examine whether entrepreneurial self-efficacy changes over time as a result of various factors such as an increase in services or supports or access to an education and

training program specific to the needs of people with disabilities. This research is currently under way as part of the Chicagoland Entrepreneurship Education for People with Disabilities (CEED) project. More information can be found at www.CEEDproject.org.

With regards to push and pull factors, these have been operationalized extensively in motivation literature using questionnaires and scales that have been constructed to ask explicitly about one's motivation in leaving their previous position and/or deciding to start their own business. However, these have yet to be applied in disability employment research. Understanding variables such as how an individual felt they fit in with the corporate culture, whether their pay was commensurate with their work, or whether they had leadership, promotion, and advancement opportunities are essential to understanding the employment decisions that people with disabilities make. Moreover, they are critical to understanding the structural constraints placed on those choices. This has significant policy implications and, in moving forward, we need to develop programs that transgress policy silos to fully address both the push and pull needs of social entrepreneurs with disabilities.

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