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Changing The Narrative: How People with Disabilities Overcome Discrimination in Employment Settings

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Changing The Narrative: How People with Disabilities Overcome Discrimination
in Employment Settings

by

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MSW Clinical Research Proposal

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In Partial fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

Master of Social Work

The Clinical Research Project is a graduation requirement for MSW students at St. Catherine University/University of St. Thomas School of Social Work in St. Paul, Minnesota and is completed within one semester to demonstrate an understanding of research. Students must develop a research question, come up with a conceptual framework and research design for the project that is approved by the research committee, and they must present the findings of their project in the spring. This project is not a master's thesis nor is it a dissertation.

Abstract

This research assessed the research question of how people with disabilities overcome barriers of discrimination in employment settings. The introduction focused on the overall impact of societal discrimination towards people with disabilities. The literature review narrowed the discrimination focus to how that discrimination arises in employment settings for people with disabilities and how it negatively impacts their opportunity to find work, and advance in competitive career settings. The literature also discussed the benefits of hiring people with disabilities which included factors related to reliable, hardworking, and unique perspective to use for workplace collaboration and discussion. A conceptual framework of the “persons in the environment theory” was used to assess the data with, and a total of 12 articles were analyzed using the grounded coding theory to find themes in the data related to the research question. Four main themes were found within the data and discussed in the findings section: (1) Pride in identity, (2) motivation and determination, (3) advocacy, and (4) benefits to the individual and employer. People with disabilities who grew up in an empowering environment were less likely to believe the narrative of incapability that society has labeled them with. They were more likely to be confident and persistent with advocating for their right to have an opportunity in competitive employment settings, when they grew up feeling empowered and in empowering environments from families, peers, and education settings. These themes were expanded in the discussion section where their implications for advocacy within research, social work, and the business world were explored. Further research is needed to further understand how people with disabilities overcome barriers of discrimination to obtain competitive employment opportunities.

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Discrimination Towards People With Disabilities in Employment

Stigma- The Problem

Stigma occurs when a built-in perception of disgrace is associated with a specific population. Stigma causes discrimination (prejudicial treatment and actions towards different groups of people) and lack of opportunities in employment. In *Keith Vs. County of Oakland* (2013), a deaf man named Keith was barred from being employed as a lifeguard even though he knew CPR. He could swim well. He knew the proper procedures and had all the qualifications and training needed to become a lifeguard. The Sixth Circuit Court of Appeals overturned the district court's decision to side with the county because Keith was capable of fulfilling the job requirements, and it was obvious that he had been turned away because he could not hear (Malos, 2015). This recent case demonstrates stigma encountered by the disability population from modern day employers. It suggests that discrimination towards people with disabilities is taking place in employment settings without consequences and without giving people with disabilities a chance to be successful. There are many different types of disabilities, and the focus of this research looks at a broad range of disabilities. Anything from sensory disabilities, learning disabilities, vision and speaking loss, cognitive disabilities, physical disabilities, and intellectual disabilities are focused on, because discrimination in employment opportunities negatively impacts job opportunities for each subset of the disability population.

2012 Bureau Labor Statistics from the Department of Labor bring attention to this problem, by reporting that 20.9 % of the civilian noninstitutional population with disabilities were employed compared to 64.2 % of the civilian noninstitutional population without disabilities (Persons with a disability..., 2012). Similarly, in Israel, 2007 statistics convey that

32% of people with disabilities were employed in comparison to 75% of people who do not have disabilities (Vinzer & Roth, 2013). This absence of people with disabilities in the work place adds to the stigma present within society simply because employers do not get the chance to learn about the population, leaving them to rely solely on personal biases and judgments that are not backed up by fact. Furthermore, research also shows that men and women with disabilities are respectively 75 % and 89% more likely to be involuntarily let go from their jobs than men and women without disabilities (Mitra, 2015). This may indicate that the stigma and discrimination from employers continues even after the hiring process, and that the decision to let people with disabilities go is based on the perception that they are not as valuable of employees as people who do not have disabilities. In the context of this research disability adheres to any individual who has a cognitive, physical, or developmental medical condition that interferes with the individual's ability to complete a specific task in the same way that members of society without cognitive, physical, or developmental medical conditions complete these specific tasks (In Merriam-Webster Online, def. 1). Other terms related to discrimination in this paper that come up are bias and social stigma. Bias refers to prejudice against a certain group of people (In Merriam-Webster Online, def. 1). Social Stigma refers to the extreme disapproval of a certain population based on socially characteristic terms that distinguish them from the rest of society(In Merriam-Webster Online, def. 1) .

Background

Over the course of history, society has put limits on the individual skills and potential of people with disabilities. Continuous labeling of people with disabilities as “worthy poor” alludes to society's opinion that having a disability is equated with an incapability of

independence and self-growth (Day & Schiele, 2012). The term “worthy poor” throughout history has referred to specific populations who are not able to help the fact that they are poor, and they are incapable of working and making a living for themselves (Day & Schiele, 2012). People with disabilities were always seen as worthy poor because society believed that they could not work for themselves because of their disability. Up until the 1980’s, people with disabilities were institutionalized where they were given no opportunity to set goals and dreams for their futures, and where they had no opportunities to obtain independence (Day & Schiele, 2012). The belief that people with disabilities are incapable of achieving the same level of success as people without disabilities bars the population from employment opportunity.

In today’s work place, policy instilled by the Fair Labor Standards Act makes it legal for people with disabilities to be paid below minimum wage for doing the same kind of work that people without disabilities do (Fair Labor Standards Act, 1938). These are policies that continued to be implemented with the passing of the Americans with Disabilities Act, which was created with the purpose of giving people with disabilities more opportunities in education and employment (Americans with Disabilities Act, 1990). Although the intent behind this piece of legislation was to make it more likely for people with disabilities to get hired and find work, there is a possibility that it actually feeds right into the societal stigma and discrimination of people perceiving people with disabilities as less. Research also displays a significant wage gap between the populations, with people with disabilities making 71% of the median wage that people without disabilities make (Baldwin & Choe, 2014). Hiring a person with a disability because they can be paid less does not necessarily influence employers to give people with disabilities a fair chance in the employment process. It could perpetuate an idea that people with disabilities are not as effective in the work place because of their life situation, and that therefore,

they can be paid less than everybody else. It may also provide a situation in which strong work ethics are taken advantage of by employers because they can pay the disability population less. Knowing this brings up an inquiry of whether or not policy over the course of history has asserted the proper steps needed to reduce discrimination towards people with disabilities by employers.

Prevalence of Work Place Discrimination among People with Disabilities

Research indicates that people with disabilities report more situations of overt and subtle discrimination in the workplace than people who do not have disabilities (Snyder et al, 2010). In a survey of 1,880 employees, with 90 of them being employees with disabilities, among those with disabilities 29.9 % reported situations in which they had faced overt discrimination, 31.8 % reported experiences of subtle discrimination, and 32.6 % reported issues in procedural justice (Snyder et al, 2010). Meanwhile, 91 % of the employees without disabilities surveyed reported being very satisfied with their jobs and that they did not feel like they had faced discrimination from their employer (Snyder et al, 2010). The discriminatory attitudes and the stigmatization of people with disabilities are still very prevalent. People just are not allowed to be overt and loud about it anymore. Reduced job opportunities convey the prevalence of lack of opportunity for people with disabilities during a time in which the Americans with Disabilities Act has been in effect for over 20 years. This lack of pay and lack of opportunity reflects a discriminative system throughout the country that disadvantages the disability population.

Impact of Workplace Discrimination of People with Disabilities

As of 2012, the disability population unemployment rate was 14% (the largest percentage of unemployment among a legislatively protected population) compared to 9% of unemployed

persons without disabilities. Also, people with disabilities were more likely to be underpaid (McMahon, 2012). People with disabilities of all cultural backgrounds suffer from lack of employment opportunities and stigma. This limits the contributions that people with disabilities can give to their community and it also negatively impacts their opportunities to feel satisfied and as if they have a place and sense of meaning in this world. It also negatively impacts financial stability for people living with disabilities. When they do not have the chance to work, they live solely off public assistance finances, which means that they live in poverty. Stigma also hurts parents of people with disabilities because when their child does not get an opportunity to be financially independent, the financial support of that child is often put onto the parents. Stigma harms employers, because they miss out on hiring employees that would add to business success. There is also a social justice issue present because people with disabilities continue to be marginalized by society. Keeping people with disabilities out of the workforce also negatively impacts tax payers because they are the ones financially supporting people with disabilities when they are not able to find work. Giving people with disabilities the same kind of opportunities in employment will benefit tax payers because tax payers do not have to provide as much tax-funded financial assistance to people with disabilities if the population is being given the opportunities to provide that for themselves.

Implications of Workplace Discrimination

The implications of this problem focus on the need for a change in how people with disabilities are perceived by the rest of society. This study is important for social workers because it relates to the social work value of social justice. This professional value emphasizes the importance of equal opportunity and treatment of diverse populations (NASW Code of

Ethics, 2008). Since people with disabilities are generally paid less and more likely to be discriminated against in the work place, that is social injustice. When people with disabilities are only given opportunities to work in sub-minimum wage workshops, they are often segregated from the rest of society. It is discriminatory and socially unjust to keep people with disabilities from being a part of society because they were born into a different life situation. It is the role of the social worker to advocate for equal treatment and respect for people with disabilities. Social workers also value the dignity and worth of each individual (NASW Code of Ethics, 2008). People with disabilities are not always given credit for what they are worth in terms of an employee and in terms of productivity. Social workers value the unique perspective, talents, and ambition that each individual has to offer. This research is important to social work because failure to recognize the contributions that people with disabilities offer to the workplace is also a social justice issue.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this study is to examine the impact that discrimination has on the disability population in terms of employment opportunity and advancement, and how people with disabilities overcome that discrimination. Research shows that attitudinal discrimination, institutional discrimination, and discrimination of the self all negatively impact the career opportunities and advancement of people with disabilities (Procknow & Rocco, 2016).

This study explores discrimination and how it impacts work place opportunities for people with disabilities. It also aims to disprove the perception that members of the disability population are incapable of being productive employees. The research question is how do people with disabilities overcome stigma in employment? To fully assess this question, the

researcher will use the process of a contextual analysis to assess themes related to the research question. By using this method, the researcher will pull themes and main points from newspaper articles that pertain to the influence of discrimination on employment opportunities and career advancement for people with disabilities.

Literature Review

Lack of Disability Representation in The Work Force

The Americans with Disabilities Act was implemented with the purpose of continuing more opportunities in the work force for people with disabilities. However, living wage employment opportunities for people with disabilities continue to be limited due to societal barriers and lack of necessary support accommodations. According to 2012 Bureau Labor Statistics from the Department of Labor, only 20.9 % of civilian noninstitutional population with disabilities were employed compared to 64.2 % of the civilian noninstitutional population without disabilities (Persons with a disability..., 2012). Similarly, in Israel, 2007 statistics convey that 32% of people with disabilities were employed in comparison to 75% of people who do not have disabilities (Vinzer & Roth, 2013). Although people with disabilities make up a significant portion of the world's population, they are continuously underrepresented in employment opportunities across the globe. In 2008, it was also reported that even though people with sensory disabilities make up 5.5% of the American population, only 3.4% of the workforce were people with sensory disabilities (Baldwin & Choe, 2014). Research also shows that men and women with disabilities are 75% and 89%, respectively, more likely to be involuntarily let go from their jobs than men and women without disabilities (Mitra, 2015). Research also displays a significant wage gap between the populations, with people with disabilities making 71% of the median wage that people without disabilities make (Baldwin & Choe, 2014). People with disabilities are underrepresented in the work force. This may make it less likely for people with disabilities to get a meaningful job opportunity as well as to keep that job opportunity long-term, because the lack of representation does not allow employers to

properly acquaint themselves with people who have disabilities. If employers do not have the opportunity to learn about what people with disabilities have to contribute to the workplace, in opposition to society's narrative of incapability, it is more difficult for the strengths and potentials of people with disabilities to be noticed. This is a barrier to employment. People with disabilities also get paid significantly less than people who do not have disabilities. This may be an indicator that people with disabilities who are receiving work are not receiving employment opportunities that are as meaningful and productive towards society as the opportunities given to people who do not have disabilities.

Employer Opinions as Barriers to Employment

Given the consistency of underrepresentation of people with disabilities in employment within different cultures and geographic locations, it is important to research and assess social stigma and discrimination as a prominent influence. Employers are hesitant to employ people with disabilities based on preconceived judgments of the label of disability (Vinzer & Roth, 2013). Employers are concerned about the cost and the time that would go into hiring and training a person with a disability, as well as with the perceived costs of healthcare and accommodations that go into supporting employees who live with disabilities (Vinzer & Roth). Instead of assessing the personal skill level and experiences of the individual, they make a decision based on their own personal definition of a label and make the choice to not hire the individual. A recent examination of human rights complaint cases sent in to the Australian Human Rights Commission, it was shown that a majority of the disability discrimination cases had to do with employment (Darcy, Taylor, and Green, 2016). These included accessibility,

hiring processes, misconception of cost for reasonable accommodations, and indirect as well as direct discrimination (Darcy, Taylor, and Green, 2016).

Benefits of Employing People with Disabilities

Employers who have employed people with disabilities are more likely to have positive attitudes towards the work efforts of the population and are more likely to hire them (Vinzer & Roth, 2013). People who decide to hire people with disabilities and give them a chance to complete the work, report being more than satisfied with their job performance (Employee, 2005). This is evidence that people with disabilities are just as capable of helping a business succeed as people who do not have disabilities. One of the reasons their unemployment rates are significantly higher than populations without disabilities is likely because of initial prejudice towards the label of the word, “disability.” Most employers who had never hired people with disabilities reported that hiring members of the population would be unlikely (“Employer Focus Research”, 2005). If the disability population is not sufficiently represented in the community and workplace then it is difficult for employers to understand the values and the benefits of hiring them. They are not going to look for an opportunity that they do not know is there.

Also in 2015, a Taiwanese study showed that a job environment and educational community that was accepting and supportive of people with disabilities correlated with success in employment (Chen, 2015). The attitudes, impressions, and thoughts people without disabilities have towards people with disabilities influences their success or lack of success in employment opportunities. It also indicates that educating the community and introducing them to this particular population would be helpful towards fixing the overall problem long-term. A study was done on 71 graduate students and results found that students who had friends with

mental health issues had less of a desire for social distance and restrictions towards the population (Covarrubius, 2011). The same kind of thing can be applied to people with disabilities in the community. If people get to know people with disabilities, the personal connection changes the initial perception of judgment.

Diversity

Hiring somebody with a disability assists in adding diverse and unique perspectives in the work place (Diversity Inc, 2011). Having diverse staff members who all have their own unique experiences and ideas contributes to the overall team collaboration as well as creativity and intellect that is needed to contribute thoughts and ideas that result in productivity for the work place.

Reliability

Studies have also found that people with disabilities are 85% less absent from work than employees who do not have disabilities (Ministry of Social Development). This indicates that employees with disabilities are reliable workers, a valuable asset for any business.

Productivity is High

Another benefit of hiring somebody with a disability is that their accommodation needs tend to be less than one hundred dollars, and then the work that the individual produces ends up benefiting and making more money for the company (Ministry of Social Development). Hiring people with disabilities improves the overall financial productivity and success of the business.

Structural Barriers to Employment

Other significant factors contribute to social and community exclusion include: transportation, group home and day program structures, and the opportunity to build meaningful relationships outside of paid support workers. In a 2015 study that was completed, 12 people with intellectual disabilities were interviewed about their current job positions and work environment. Themes that emerged from this study related to social exclusion resulting from lack of transportation and the lack of opportunity to build interpersonal relationships (Van Asselt, Buchanan, & Peterson, 2015). All of the participants reported the problem of inconsistent transportation and the challenges of building their interpersonal relationships if they cannot get to where they need to go (Van Asselt, Buchanan, & Peterson, 2015). The whole idea of the research presented in this study was that people with intellectual disabilities cannot experience full community inclusion without the opportunity to create and build interpersonal and professional relationships within mainstream community (Van Asselt, Buchanan, & Peterson, 2015). In order to be accepting of the population, the community needs to learn to view people with intellectual disabilities as more than just their disability. To make this happen, supports in the form of transportation, policy, and community need to be executed in a way that promotes and builds community inclusion for people with intellectual disabilities within society. If people with disabilities cannot receive transportation supports such as funding for transportation to and from their job, or supports that assist them with getting them out into community environments, then that makes it harder for them to make it to job interviews, and it makes it more difficult for them to fulfill their committed work schedules. Also, if people with disabilities are segregated from the community and are not given the opportunities to build interpersonal connections, they lose out on networking opportunities for jobs as well as social

practice that can support them in preparing for job interviews or to be good candidates for jobs where there is communication with others.

Group Homes and Day Programs as Systematic Barriers

There is evidence that group homes also perpetuate stigma. Research indicates that like the institutions that came before them, the group homes segregate people with intellectual disabilities from mainstream community and operate in a way that is not person- first (Riley, 2011). The concept of person-first aims to avoid language, actions, and treatment that applies perceived or subconscious dehumanization of people who have disabilities (The Meaning of People First Language, 2008). The paid supports set the routine, and there are visiting hours for when family members and other guests can visit the residents in the group homes (Riley, 2011). This is a system that has been adopted in many countries across the world (Issac, Raja, and Ravannah, 2011). Denying the rights of individuals and keeping them in group homes where they are living with other people with intellectual disabilities diminishes the opportunity to get out and interact and make a place for themselves in the community. In some group homes, the population is segregated from the community, and lack of exposure does not help change the way that society perceives the population.

Research has also found that day program structures do little to benefit volunteer and employment integration for people with intellectual disabilities (Minnes et al., 2002). Day programs function as places of supervision and care for people with disabilities. They are often advertised as places of support for people with disabilities. However, they do not always do much to integrate people with disabilities into communities and to connect individuals with disabilities who are interested in employment with proper resources or networking opportunities.

This is because the structures of these programs have overall failed to progress since institutional living for people with disabilities was deemed inhumane with the passing of the Americans with Disabilities Act. It has been 50 years, and while the rest of society has continued to change and progress the structure of these day programs have not (personal correspondence, April 10, 2017). Many day programs have sheltered workshops for people with disabilities, where they are paid below minimum wage to do menial tasks, and they are segregated from the rest of the working community (National Disabilities Rights Network, 2012). These day programs may have been a good first initial step when the decision was made to close the institutions 50 years ago, but today, since the structure has not progressed, people with disabilities are still segregated from the community, and the rest of the community is unable to see the contributions that people with disabilities can make towards society (Personal correspondence, April 10, 2017).

The structure of leisure programs also fails to properly integrate people with disabilities into the community. This is largely due to the fact that many non-profits, government services, and school programs that integrate people with disabilities with other members of the community are for younger people, and they usually age out of these programs at the age of 21 (Advancing Futures for Adults with Autism). There are not many community integration programs for adults that are currently operating in a way that allows accessibility for adults with disabilities. There are suggestions for educating organizations like the YMCA on the positives of integrating adults with disabilities into their programs and from there getting other organizations to get involved (Advancing Futures for Adults with Autism).

Supporting adults with disabilities to use methods of public transportation could also be a small step towards community integration because they would be able to have more of a choice

with where they go during the day and where they work (Advancing Futures for Adults with Autism). Minnesota currently has a law in place in which the state will pay for transportation between home and the day program, but they do not offer that same kind of coverage for the individual if they have a job or if they have a certain group in the community that they would like to join (personal correspondence, 2017). Looking to structure programs with these initiatives could make a long-term change in community integration for people with disabilities. Implementation of these models of services, and follow up research on the success of these programs are important for the social justice and advocacy piece of social work and to overall create more societal opportunities for people with disabilities.

Types of Stigma on Micro, Mezzo, and Macro Levels

Reoccurring situations in which stigma and discrimination impact people with disabilities in the work force include the pre-entry job finding process, career advancement, job discharge, and job training. The different types of discrimination that occur within these situations tend to be attitudinal, institutional, and self-created. Attitudinal discrimination is discrimination on a mezzo level and focuses on the personal prejudices of employers and employees in the work place (Procknow & Rocco, 2016). Attitudinal discrimination is also present on the mezzo level in the community of group homes because there are many cases in which the staff, service team, and case managers have not had any training or contact with people with disabilities and so they come in with the same prejudices and biases on the capability of the population. Institutional discrimination is more on the macro level of how the state economy operates and how that influences whether or not somebody hires a person with a disability and how it influences the availability and opportunities for a person with a disability to

get a job (Procknow & Rocco, 2016). Self-created discrimination and barriers happen on the micro level and occur when people with disabilities start to believe the discrimination and the limitations that society puts on them for being who they are (Procknow & Rocco, 2016). These are all reoccurring factors in the literature related to this research topic of workplace discrimination towards people with disabilities. The following portion of this paper will assess each form of discrimination further.

Pre-Entry Job Discrimination and Job Training- Mezzo Level

Attitudinal discrimination plays a primary role in pre-entry job discrimination situations for people with disabilities. It has been reported that people who just have a record of having had a disability are less likely to be hired than somebody who has never had a record of having a disability (Draper et. Al., 2012). Somebody could have been misdiagnosed or could have had an injury growing up and by simply having the label from their past is enough to bar them from the same employment opportunities as people who have not been in these kinds of situations. Businesses and organizations who have never hired people with disabilities, along with employers who have not personally interacted much with the population, assess individuals with disabilities and their job potential based on their personal biases and judgments of what it means to live with a disability.

Research shows that continuous concerns these employers have about hiring individuals with disabilities include perceptions on the capability of the individual to complete the work in a productive and successful way (Rocco & Procknow, 2016). These assessments have nothing to do with the actual work ethics or skillsets of the individuals with disabilities; it has everything to

do with how society has constructed a social stigma related to ableism towards people with disabilities (Rocco & Procknow, 2016). That label of stigmatization and limitation encourages society to continue to see the potential of people disabilities as less. Another mezzo barrier for people with disabilities occurs when employers hire people with disabilities to take advantage of the economic benefits from tax incentives and government services and do not use these fundings to make the proper work place accommodations for the individual (Rocco & Procknow, 2016). Seeing people with disabilities as an opportunity for personal profit rather than as a potential successful employee when given the necessary accommodations needed also adds to the issue of discrimination in the hiring process.

Employers who have had more experience with hiring people with disabilities and having them as members of their business team go out of their way to hire people with disabilities. Employers who have never hired a person with a disability or have had experience working with them professionally reported that they would be very unlikely to hire somebody with a disability (Employer, 2005). The attitude of the employers and the understanding, or lack of, that they have towards people with disabilities impact the overall number of job opportunities for people with disabilities. This could explain why people with disabilities are so underrepresented in the work force.

Pre-Entry Job Discrimination and Job Training- Macro Level

Institutional discrimination takes place at the pre-entry stage in employment based on how the state's economy is set up and how the employer uses that information in the hiring process. Some employers tend to think the cost of hiring somebody with a disability and the accommodations they may need to be successful at their job will be more of a cost than a profit

for the organization (Rocco & Procknow, 2016). These perceptions and discriminatory situations on the macro level impact and encourage the attitudinal discrimination on the mezzo level in which employers, decide whether or not an individual is worth hiring based on the policies put into place on the macro level for employing people with disabilities.

Another example of institutional discrimination at a macro level is found in Medicaid waivers, SSDI, and SSI (Supplemental Security Income- Social Security) policies (Supplemental Security Income Eligibility, 1985). To receive SSI and SSDI benefits, people have to say and prove that they are unable to work. For people with disabilities, the SSI and SSDI policies already alludes to them being perceived as unable to work and because of the way this policy is set up, people with disabilities may be discouraged from seeking employment opportunities because they would lose their main source of financial support by taking a job. There are policies built into the system that are not only barriers towards obtaining employment for people with disabilities, but also sources that discourage people with disabilities from seeking employment at all. Another example of this are Medicaid waivers. In the state of Minnesota, Medicaid waivers will pay for transportation to and from sheltered workshops for people with disabilities. However, they will not provide transportation for people with disabilities who seek employment outside of sheltered workshops (MA-Waiver Programs, 2017). These are macro policies that reinforce workplace discrimination for people with disabilities and therefore provide less meaningful job opportunities for the population. They also impact people with disabilities on a micro level, because people with disabilities have to prove that they are incapable of working in order to be determined eligible for these forms of income. Having to prove incapability to work, makes the individual with disabilities perceive themselves as incapable and this is something that they internalize.

Pre-Entry Job Discrimination and Job Training- Micro Level

Because of societal stigma, the disability population doubts their own potential to succeed. The Department of Labor found that 79.5% of the disability population who had an education level of a bachelor's degree or higher but had been rejected by employers perceived their disability as a barrier, as something that got in the way of their opportunity (Persons with a disability..., 2012). Similarly, a study done related to stigma surrounding homeless people found that over time society's stigma towards homeless people made the self-esteem of the homeless people plummet because they began to perceive the stigma as truth (Mickelson and Williams, 2008). This same kind of stigma and the negative self-perception caused by the stigma affects the disability population. Multiple research studies completed after the passing of ADA show that women with disabilities have a lower perception of self-esteem and life satisfaction (Brown, 1997; Mullan & Cole, 1991; Nosek, 1995) as cited in Fairchild, 2002. After a history of people limiting their skills and talents, it is no wonder that educated people with disabilities often find themselves in a place of self-doubt.

The self-esteem discrimination in the pre-entry job stage for people with disabilities stems from the impact that attitudinal and institutional discrimination has on the inner selves of people with disabilities. Employers keep making assumptions about the capabilities and productivity of people with disabilities (Rocko & Procknow, 2015). They question whether or not the cost for accommodations is worth their time and they sometimes use the funding for personal profit rather than putting the individual in a position where he or she can give their most productive work (Rocco & Procknow, 2015). When everybody else is putting a limit on what an individual is or is not capable of doing, it is hard for that individual to remain confident in

personal skill sets and potential. They start to believe in the socially constructed stigma and that in turn also limits job opportunities because they feel like they can only apply for certain positions, and they do not always know how to stand up for themselves when others are at this consensus that they cannot be productive and successful members of the work force (Rocck & Procknow, 2016). The self-esteem barrier is created from the discrimination of the system and of other members of society and it influences the low representation of people with disabilities in the work force.

Career Advancement and Job Discharge Discrimination

Research also finds that attitudinal, institutional, and self-esteem influences of discrimination impact opportunities for people with disabilities to advance their career as well as to keep their jobs. They are more likely to be displaced. In 2010, one in every four people with disabilities were let go due to the work place accommodations that they needed (Bruyere, 2010). In this situation, the institutional discrimination takes place because employers assume that the accommodations are going to be too costly and therefore not worth keeping the person with the disability. This could also negatively influence the self-esteem of the person with the disability and therefore make it harder for them to flourish in a system already built against them. The fact that people with disabilities are significantly at a higher risk of being involuntarily let go from their jobs than people without disabilities leads to the inquiry of how much attitudinal and institutional discrimination influences these decisions of employers. The employer could have their personal biases related to what they believe is lack of capability from the disability population and they could also be wrapped up in the cost of accommodations.

Either way, these aspects of stigma keep people with disabilities from advancing in their careers and job positions. In cases when people hire people with disabilities to receive extra funding from the state that comes with hiring a person with a disability, research indicates that they care less about the individual having a job than about the perceived profit of doing it (Rocco & Procknow, 2015). In this case, the individual with the disability could be put in a less than meaningful job position that is below their job skills and aspirations and get stuck there because the goals of the employer do not include giving them the same kind of job tasks and career paths that they give other people. They could also hold an attitudinal prejudice related to capability and limitations and could influence the job tasks they have people with disabilities focus on. These attitudes and the lack of opportunity that can be given in these cases in the work force stalls the career advancement of somebody with a disability. With that being said, if people are told they can only do a certain simple task or that they cannot be successful with completing the tasks that other people do, then it is hard for them to be motivated to seek career advancement and look for other more meaningful job opportunities (Rocco & Procknow, 2015).

Research also displays a significant wage gap between the populations, with people with disabilities making 71% of the median wage that people without disabilities make because they are given subminimum wage jobs (Baldwin & Choe, 2014). The concept of subminimum wage employment conveys a certain stigma towards the disability population; that they are not as valuable as employees, or that they do not have as much to offer as an employee without disabilities. Also, being given these subminimum wage jobs in day programs provides no opportunities for that individual to get a raise or to advance to a position with more responsibility. These also take away mainstream employment opportunities for people with disabilities, because they are not given opportunities for job skills growth and they are hidden

away in sheltered workshops away from the opportunities of mainstream employment. In mainstream employment, attitudinal discrimination takes place and that negatively impacts the opportunities for career advancement for people with disabilities.

Summary

These results convey a message that employees with disabilities are not as valued by their employers as people without disabilities. A probable reason for this that emerges from the review of the literature is the fact that discrimination and lack of understanding about the disability population is still very prominent within dominant culture. Discrimination takes place on micro, mezzo, and macro levels through self-discrimination, attitudinal discrimination, and institutional discrimination. These forms of discrimination impact employment opportunities for people with disabilities as well as career advancement. Research indicates that educating the community and better introducing people with disabilities into the community is capable of changing the way that the disability community is perceived by the rest of society. The purpose of this study is to assess how people with disabilities who have been successful in their place of employment overcome these many barriers that have been set in place by a discriminatory system for a long time, and apply those themes to further practice, research, and policy.

Conceptual Framework

The data will be interpreted by means of the person in the environment theory. This theory focuses on an individual and how their lives are impacted based on the functioning of the micro, mezzo, and macro systems in their lives (Hutchinson, 2015). The researcher has chosen this theory as the conceptual framework for this project because of the environmental influences that uphold personal biases, judgments, and discrimination within the workforce towards people with disabilities. It also provides a wide lens with how these different systems interact and impact the environment and life of people with disabilities so it will effectively pick out these positive and negative transactions that impact the work place opportunities for people with disabilities. Within this theory, the micro system focuses on the connections and impacts that family members and close friends and other close personal connections have on their perception of themselves and their lives (Hutchinson, 2015). The mezzo system focuses on examples of local community environments that impact the lives of individuals (Hutchinson, 2015). Examples of mezzo systems include the functioning of the community in a specific work place, school, or neighborhood. The macro level of the person in the environment theory touches on environmental influence on the life of the individual from a broader scale. Macro level environments and interactions are influenced by state induced policies, funding, and societal cultural views. These macro level factors impact the lives of individuals (Hutchinson, 2015). The concept of the person in the environment theory is that all three of these environmental systems: micro, mezzo, and macro impact the life of the individual at the center of the environment and that the perceptions and norms set within each system also influence how the other environments positively and negatively impact the life of the individual (Hutchinson, 2015).

With the research question: How do people with disabilities overcome barriers due to discrimination in the workplace? assessing the impacts of each environment and how that influences stigma and discrimination is a sufficient method for assessing the data. In the literature review, the researcher mentioned three types of discrimination that negatively impact people with disabilities and their opportunities to gain employment and career advancement opportunities: Attitudinal, institutional, and self. Each of these concepts can be applied to the person in the environment theory.

Macro. Institutional discrimination is a macro level focus because it focuses more on how the laws and culture of the entire state policy is implemented. These macro level policy changes and laws are not always geared to provide people with disabilities the employment opportunities that they deserve and end up providing barriers and reinforcing attitudinal and self-discrimination. Attitudinal discrimination comes at both the macro and mezzo levels. Employers and other employees within a work place have preconceived judgments and ideas related to what they perceive as incapability from the disability population. State policies will promote institutional and attitudinal discrimination by making it law for people with disabilities to get paid sub-minimum wage, thus encouraging the idea that people with disabilities are lesser and so deserve to only have these certain job opportunities where they are paid less. The micro system focuses on the internal discrimination of the self. The transaction between these systems explains the impact that discrimination has on employment opportunities and career advancement for people with disabilities. It also explains how people with disabilities interact with their environments in order to overcome stigma. Other times when the state attempts to give money for reasonable accommodations, employers will hire people with disabilities and use that money for other things.

Mezzo. Even when the state tries to promote fair laws, it does not change the attitudinal discrimination that is already engrained into this culture and therefore into these workplace communities at the mezzo level. The system functions based on the transactions and interactions between the systems. The state instills a certain policy but employers who are not knowledgeable about people with disabilities still may interact with the system in a way that follows their personal biases, which provides a negative transaction.

Micro. This then impacts the individual's self-perception and capability on a micro level because the individual is made to believe by society that they are not capable of contributing meaningful production in the work place. Attitudinal and institutional discrimination impact the self-perception of the individual, because the individual is continuously told that their personal work ethic and efforts are lesser than the rest of the population because of a life condition that they were born into. The self-barrier impacts the individual with a disability on the micro level because the perceptions of self-change and the discrimination coming from the mezzo and macro levels of the environmental systems encourages the individual to give up on the same opportunities that are given to everybody else.

These types of discrimination and how they relate to the person in the environment theory will be the method of conceptual framework used to assess themes and data from the textual analysis standpoint. Personal stories of people with disabilities and newspaper articles will be assessed with these themes and the person in the environment theory in mind so that the data needed for the research question will be properly assessed. Once these themes are pulled, the researcher will type a Findings section that touches on the major themes coded and derived from the data as well as a Discussion section to complete specific explanations of the findings.

Methods

Research Design

Since this research is operating under the methodology of a contextual analysis, interviews with human subjects are not completed at the time of the study. This means that the steps of the signed consent form and the IRSB approval process is not applicable for this research study. Instead, contextual analyses pull themes from stories and narratives that already exist in newspapers. For this research, twelve different news articles that focus on the narratives of people with disabilities in the work place are assessed to study and code themes related to people with disabilities overcoming discrimination in the employment setting. The news articles were found in the online archives of the New York Times and the pioneer press. All articles have been published between the years 2007-2017. For purpose of validity, the researcher had a committee read over the methods and conceptual framework before using this process to proceed in data analysis.

Data Collection

The data collection was conducted through searches for narratives in the archives of the New York Times and the Pioneer Press. The researcher searched for these narratives in contents of the article using phrases like “People with disabilities combat discrimination,” “people with disabilities as employers,” “Employers perceptions of employees with disabilities,” “disabilities jobs,” and “personal work place experiences of people with disabilities.” The researcher read many different articles that appeared in the search results and slowly narrowed them down to the 10 articles that best represent the themes of attitudinal, institutional, and self-discrimination and how the individuals with disabilities overcome workplace discrimination. All of the narratives

that were assessed adhered to the “person in the environment” theory through the sharing of an individual and that individual’s interaction with the environment. Articles were also narrowed down based on the year that they were released. All articles that were published before 2007 were immediately disregarded and eliminated from the findings, and from there 12 articles published between 2009 and 2017 were found to use for the data analysis process of this project.

Data Analysis

The grounded coding theory was used to assess and analyze the data from the narratives found in news articles. Grounded coding is an open coding process in which texts are inductively analyzed through the text (Grinnel and Williams, 2016). The process of coding is reading and rereading the interview transcription and looking for themes and patterns within the participant’s words (Grinnel & Williams, 2016). The point of pulling themes is to find the words that properly express the experience of the participant and the experience’s relevance to the research question (Grinnel & Williams, 2016). So, in this case, the researcher is assessing the experiences of employees with disabilities who have overcome discrimination in employment and the themes and factors about themselves that helped them overcome this stigma. To complete this analysis, the researcher read through the selected articles a first time to gain an understanding of the full texts and to take notes on themes such as reliability, strong work ethic, good work ethic, value, inclusion, unique perspective, and satisfaction. The researcher then followed up with another reading, looking for themes related to what people with disabilities have to offer in the workplace, and how those factors helped them overcome discrimination. The researcher also used this second reading as an opportunity to double check the notes taken before, to further validate the reliability of the themes pulled from the first reading. After this, a

third reading was completed to finalize theme pulling and validation of the findings of the analysis. Through the grounded coding method, the researcher was able to find themes related to overcoming discrimination and combine that with the application of the person in the environment theory.

Findings

During the data analysis process, 5 main themes emerged relating back to the research question of the ways that people with disabilities overcome barriers of discrimination within employment settings. Within the *New York Times* and *Pioneer Press* articles, similar discussions regarding the discrimination that people with disabilities face when seeking employment and advancing in their career resonated with the themes discussed in the literature review. For this reason, defining society's perception of disability will be the first theme assessed. Following the definition of society's perception and how it impacts people with disabilities in professional settings, the themes that demonstrate how people with disabilities overcome society's definition will be explained. The four themes that emerged relating to how people with disabilities overcome these situations of discrimination were: pride in identity, motivation, advocacy, and benefits. Many subthemes emerged from these primary themes, and they will be discussed in this section.

Defining Society's Perception of Disability

Just 50 years ago, people with disabilities were living in institutions, separated from society and employment and education opportunities (Spencer, 2017). Despite the passing of The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), which closed these institutions with the intention of better integrating people with disabilities into society, many themes of discrimination were found within the narratives of the data collected. People with disabilities still feel isolated and rejected by the rest of society.

“Growing up with a disability, I often became isolated. Feeling devalued by my peers, with no confidence in my future, I experienced intermittent but profound depression.”

(Mattlin, 2016, *The New York Times*, pg. 3, prg.3).

This feeling of rejection from the rest of society and this feeling of isolation is not felt just by people who grew up with disabilities. Narratives from people who developed a disability later in life, also described how that life condition negatively changed the way people perceived them, whether they were perceived as successful professionals in their career prior to their life change or not.

“It surprised me how sitting down and using a mobility aid changed the way others viewed me. I’d gone from being a well regarded professional to a marginalized and oppressed member of a minority group...People looked at me differently, as though I was not one of them.” (The Editors, *What Disability Means*, pg. 1, prg. 2).

These themes resonate with the themes of discrimination described in the literature review. People with disabilities, although no longer living in institutions separate from the rest of society, they are still misunderstood and perceived as incapable by society. People with physical, developmental, and cognitive medical conditions are individuals that are not given as much of a chance in employment opportunities because of an inaccurate societal perspective. As a result, this misunderstanding of what it means to live with a disability also isolates members of this population from community integration and employment opportunities, because society assumes that they are not able to have a social place in the community or a meaningful place in an employment setting.

Even when people with disabilities are placed in an employment setting, the data expressed that people with disabilities are often put into job positions that are meaningless and make them feel degraded and devalued. Many of these job settings are in sheltered workshops where individuals with disabilities are given repetitive jobs with pay significantly below minimum wage and isolated from other members of competitive employment (Dan Barry, 2017).

“She and other clients would work at their own pace to fulfill various contracts: packaging heating pads; recycling television remotes; jarring Italian specialty foods. The pay averaged about \$1.57 per hour...also problematic was the general absence of encouragement to improve one’s skills; to see oneself moving up, and on...(Barry. NYT, 2014, pg. 4 paragraph 2).”

“I’d be like, ‘I want to go out,’ Ms. Sousa says. ‘I want to be trained for a job. Put me out there! I can do it!’” (Barry, 2014, pg 4, paragraph 2).

These feelings of being devalued and degraded as employees carry over into work place situations outside of the workshops for people with disabilities. Findings from the data convey that even though people with disabilities go through all the steps they need in order to qualify for applying for competitive employment (including earning a high school diploma, pursuing higher education, taking certain classes, and enrolling in specific job trainings), that these qualifications are not held to the same values and standards as individuals who do not have a disability. When their applications are not overlooked and they are given jobs, they often are not given the same meaningful job tasks as other employees, and they continue to feel devalued as workers.

“At first she liked unloading jars of applesauce and cans of tomato soup. But eventually, the work felt demeaning” (Spencer, 2017, NYT, pg 6, prg. 2).

Another aspect that goes into these feelings of being overall devalued and underappreciated as worker has to do with the perceived motivations of why employers choose to hire individuals with disabilities. Since people with disabilities often receive significantly less meaningful job tasks to complete in comparison to their other coworkers, some people believe that the motivation for hiring the individual with disabilities has little to do with their strengths and job qualifications and more to do with pity and wanting to “do a nice thing” or “do this individual a favor” by hiring them.

“Why, then, do rampant unemployment and educational disparities endure, and why does success remain the exception? I think that part of the reason is the insulation of our pro-disabled political consensus. Its logic is rooted not in any deep belief in the equal worth of citizens with disabilities but rather in a general aversion to disability. This is related to the charity impulse that has always surrounded a disability and has constrained liberation efforts by assuming that inequities are unfortunate but natural realities to be mitigated through compassion, rather than politically structured injustices” (Ruckelshaus, 2017, pg 2, paragraph 3).

Some people who do not understand what it is like to live with a disability only see limitations within that person, that this individual’s life is sadder than most people’s lives, and that by hiring them they are doing that person a favor and making their life better. In one of the narratives portrayed in the data, a middle school aged young woman with a wheel chair was tired of the sad narrative being placed onto people with disabilities (Shang, 2017). She decided to write a young adult novel based off of herself, just another young middle schooler who enjoys life as much as her peers (Shang, 2017). This was the response she got from the publisher:

“...Another [publisher] said that Mia Lee’s character didn’t seem suited for a lighthearted story...What she meant is that Mia Lee, my sassy, You-Tube loving heroine, differed too much from the convention of what a disabled kid is supposed to be like. There are very few stories about kids in wheelchairs, and there are even fewer with a disabled person who is cheerful and happy. Disability is always seen as a misfortune, and disabled characters are simply opportunities to demonstrate the kindness of the able-bodied protagonists” (Shang, 2017, pg. 3 paragraph, 2).

Because this is the narrative that currently exists for how society perceives people with disabilities, many people with disabilities who do become successful in competitive career opportunities have to rely on their strengths and their confidence in their strengths in order to advance and be just as successful as somebody who does not have a disability. They have to recognize that society’s perception narrative towards them is inaccurate and that they through their self-confidence and personal strengths have to be the ones to change that. They take pride in their full identity and use that pride to be confident and competitive in employment and to change the way that their employers perceive them based on societal discrimination.

Pride in Identity

One of the most important themes that emerged within the data was the concept of people with disabilities embracing their self-identity. For anyone to properly succeed in employment, the individual needs to have a fundamental level of self-confidence and trust in their own personal skills and work ethic to demonstrate their value to the job position and to their team of colleagues. This is easier said than it is done for people with disabilities because they grow up in a society that does not perceive them as individual potentials for success. When employers who

have never hired or worked with a colleague who has a disability, the lack of exposure tends to leave them with the societal perception that people with disabilities are incapable of being successful in team collaboration as an employee overall.

Because society has this perception of incapability employers are more likely to make the assumption that an individual with a disability would not be a substantial addition to the workplace team. Due to this belief that has been embedded in American society for centuries, people with disabilities are left in a position where they have to work twice as hard to get just as far as people who do not have disabilities when it comes to success in employment. In order to change the narrative of incapability associated with people with disabilities, the population needs to have self-confidence, self-awareness, recognition that society's perception of incapability is inaccurate, and pride in identity to fuel the determination and perseverance that goes with proving themselves as "worthy" in employment settings.

Pride in identity is made up of three subthemes: self-confidence, self-awareness, and embracing disability as a component of identity. The data reports that personal self-belief and confidence goes a long way in changing the narrative of how employers perceive people with disabilities and their potentials for success. Because of society's current misunderstanding regarding capability within people who have disabilities, people with disabilities not only have to work harder to be perceived as just as valuable for the workplace as people who do not have disabilities, they have to trust their strengths and believe in themselves to get there. They have to be proud of who they are and understand what they are capable of in a society that continues to underplay their worth and potential.

“I found communities online where there were heated and engaging conversations about what it means to have a disability in a world that isn’t built with us in mind. That’s when I proudly labeled myself disabled (The editors, 2016, pg. 3, paragraph 1).”

Self-Confidence. Because society is not currently actively working to empower individuals with disabilities, people with disabilities have to turn to personal self-confidence to keep putting themselves out there when attempting to find success opportunities in competitive employment. A major part of self-confidence comes from the ability to identify personal strengths and how those strengths set them apart from others and how those strengths support them in being successful. Society questions the capability of people with disabilities in employment settings. Questioning capability leads to discrimination by believing that the individual will not be a good addition to the team solely due to the individual’s disability. The individual needs to be able to live without limiting themselves in a world that continues to try to tell they are incapable. They overcome discrimination in employment opportunities through confidently expressing their strengths.

“Dyslexics like Virgin Airlines’ Sir Richard Branson, California Lt. Gov. Gavin Newsom, investment broker Charles Schwab, and attorney David Boies share qualities of persistence, creativity, thinking outside the box—their own sea of strengths...Schwab finds empowerment in his dyslexia saying it means he thinks through decisions more directly than his colleagues” (Wiegand, St. Paul Pioneer Press, 2012, page 1 and 2).

Another component of self-confidence that emerged from the data related to having the confidence and the bravery to assert the self into opportunities that are meaningful towards job interests. Getting involved with activities or classes that relate to personal dreams is important

for any individual because it helps the individual learn and gain confidence in the skills they need to be able to be successful in workplace opportunities related to that particular job interest.

The first woman with Down-syndrome to compete in the Miss Minnesota USA pageant is aware of her passion for performing, being in front of the crowd, and dancing (Divine, 2017, St. Paul Pioneer Press). She is passionate and is practicing for the pageant, and is very confident in her ability to give a great performance (Divine, 2017, St. Paul Pioneer Press).

“I’m really excited. I’m proud. I’m proud of all I’ve done. I’m having a great time being in this pageant. I’m not nervous. I really, really, really enjoy being on the stage. I’m like hey, people! Dancing is my passion. I’ve been dancing since I was 1 year old. I started taking lessons when I was seven. I practice all the time” (Divine, 2017, St. Paul Pioneer Press, page 1, prgh. 3).

Having the self-confidence to identify strengths that are applicable to the job position and the confidence in self-growth through practice of those strengths makes a more positive and educated impact on society’s flawed perception of capability from people with disabilities in the workforce. Self-confidence and self-awareness support individuals with disabilities in overcoming barriers of discrimination in employment settings.

Self-Awareness. Self-awareness as a sub-theme of pride in identity within the data focuses on being aware of how the self with the disability is perceived by society, and how it is the wrong perception, and being aware of what it actually means to live with a disability. Being aware of strengths and self-confidence is also vital towards understanding the self and using that understanding to change the inaccurate narrative of people with disabilities being incapable of finding a place in competitive employment.

“In sixth grade, Skye Lucas, who is dyslexic, was called ‘mentally retarded’ by another student. If she had been younger, she says in Redford’s film, she would have been upset, but wise beyond her years, she knew full well how much dyslexia is misunderstood (Wiegand, Pioneer Press, 2012).”

Having a full understanding of personal learning style and knowing what accommodations that will be needed in the workplace setting and giving an explanation of why these things are important for the success of individuals with disabilities is another component of self-awareness that supports people with disabilities in overcoming discrimination barriers in terms of employment. Every individual has a different learning style and identifying certain job trainings or accommodations that support that learning style helps the individual get the best orientation process possible for the job, and actively asserting it into conversation tells employers that these concepts have been personally successful for that individual in the past, and lets those employers know that there is certainty that these factors of learning will give the same results in this employment setting.

“They need very specific, structured situations that cater to their specific needs. No matter how severe needs of supports are for that child, they understand doing a good job and being appreciated.” (Dollinger, 2016, page 3 paragraph 2).

“I am capable of loving, laughing, crying, and learning. I have a full range of emotions and beliefs and am perfectly capable of thinking for myself. All I need are a few accommodations, and, as long as I get them, there’s no problem, or reason to discuss my condition” (The editors, 2016, pg. 5 paragraph 3).

Being aware of personal self-worth, strengths, and capabilities gives confidence to the individual and this confidence supports the individual in demonstrating these strengths towards others. This is helpful when seeking employment and the people with disabilities who are in the workforce have used methods of self-confidence to overcome barriers of discrimination in a society that is not educated on what it means to live with a disability.

Embracing Disability as Identity. The data also conveys that being able to embrace disability as a part of identity helps people with disabilities overcome discrimination when it comes to seeking employment opportunities. Being able to look at the life condition as a part of personal self without it being an identifier of limitation and short-comings is empowering to individuals with disabilities. This empowerment supports motivation and self-confidence when people with disabilities seek career opportunities, and it expresses to members of society who maybe only see limitation and sad situations when they notice disabilities, that there is a lot more positive qualities and meaningful characteristics to that human being than their medical life condition. People with disabilities credit pride in identities to helping them overcome barriers of discrimination within the workplace and within the community.

“Thanks to the annual M.D.A. [Muscular Distrophy Association] telethons, I thought disability was something to be ashamed of, or a weakness—that everyone with a disability wanted to be fixed, and that wasn’t me at all. I loved who I was, and had pride in my identity even if I didn’t recognize it that way... What I’ve experienced in life is a story worth telling, and a road worth following, despite how society tries to tell us otherwise.”

Pride in identity among people with disabilities fights the societal narrative of people with disabilities being nothing more than a sadder and more limiting version of life. When people bring in personal characteristics of themselves and combine it with their disability, people from outside of the narrative of incapability begin to get a more accurate perception of this population and what they have to contribute towards society. One narrative I read told of a former social worker who was run over when she was walking her dogs after work one day and as a result she lost mobility and memory and was no longer able to work as a social worker (Kingsley, 2016, pg. 3). Society would hear this story and think of it as a tragedy that ruined this individual's life and made her incapable of having another meaningful job. Society would inadvertently encourage her to also look at her situation from that perspective. Instead, she made this change in her life a part of her identity and worked with it.

“Always an active person, I didn't consider sitting home an option. So I reinvented myself as a volunteer in animal shelters, homeless shelters, and various non-profit organizations. (Kingsley, 2016, pg. 3, paragraph 3).”

Having pride in personal identity helps the individual with a disability have self-confidence and self-awareness regarding how to advocate for the self when seeking employment. It also reminds the individual that they deserve fairness and equal treatment to people who do not have a disability and that they deserve more than sheltered workshop opportunities and other jobs with menial tasks. These concepts give people with disabilities the motivation and perseverance that they need in order to overcome systematic and social barriers between themselves and competitive employment.

Motivation and Determination

Motivation and determination to work hard and succeed was another theme that was significant within the articles. As mentioned earlier in the findings section, because the label of incapability is still very prominent with how society views people with disabilities, people with disabilities have to believe in themselves and use their own self-confidence in their work ethic and ability to succeed in order to prove that they do have a place in competitive employment.

“Skye’s father, Tyler, a successful orthopedic surgeon, always found reading a tremendous challenge, but his determination got him into medical school and into a flourishing career (Wiegand, Pioneer Press, pg 1, paragraph 4).”

Think of the determination and hard work that the woman who suffered a brain injury and lost her career as a social worker after being hit by the car. She had the motivation and determination to create a life that would be as meaningful to her as the life she had prior to the accident. She knew what she wanted and who she was as a human being and she was determined to use that as motivation to get to where she wanted to be. She ended up volunteering at animal shelters and homeless shelters and was able to live the life that she wanted to live and was able to show the people around her that she was a reliable volunteer for these services (Kingsley, 2016).

Changing the narrative of how society perceives the employment potential of individuals with disabilities is not a belief that can be changed overnight. The individual with the disability has to prove to employers and colleagues that they are competent, capable, and hardworking when these employers have been brought up in a society that tells them the opposite about this group of people. Because these changes are gradual, the stories written about in the articles express the need of resiliency, determination, passion, and motivation in order to not give up on

personal potential and to not give up on the process of changing the narrative. The willingness to keep learning and practicing personal strengths related to the job along with the drive and passion towards the chosen work field supports the change of the discriminatory narrative of disability incapability in employment. Using frustration as motivation to create change also formulates success for people with disabilities in the workplace.

Resiliency. Resiliency is an important factor of motivation and determination that emerged during the data analysis process. This makes sense in light of the themes of discrimination discussed in the literature review, as well as earlier in the findings section. How does somebody with a disability become successful in employment in a system that has not been built to socially accept them as competent and capable workers? How do the people with disabilities who have had successful career advancements and accomplishments overcome discrimination? A lot of it has to do with the individual's willingness to persevere and continue to work hard and do everything that they can to demonstrate their value as employees. They have to be resilient in being a part of a gradual change of a societal narrative of incapability, and they have to remain resilient within the areas of their life where they do need more support. Thinking in a way that adheres to adjustment and adaptation to success rather than giving up on what they want because of their disability encourages resiliency and determination. It supports the individuals in overcoming the limitations that society has put onto them.

“I was raised to think with no limits. For many years I attended public schools with sighted students, getting in trouble for the usual things like running in the halls. On my own decision, I began attending the state school for the blind when I was 11, where I played sports and graduated as the school's valedictorian...The diagnosis [received

senior year of high school] was neurofibromatosis type 2, a disease caused by an inherited or spontaneous genetic mutation...the diagnosis was a shock, but it did not stop me from continuing my education. I went on to Middle Tennessee State University, where I served as both the sports and news editor of the school paper. I then became the first journalist student from my school to be admitted to the prestigious graduate program at Columbia and the first blind person to study in that program, according to institutional memories at both places. It was official: I was going to be a journalist. (Hubbard, 2017, NYT, pg 2 paragraphs 1, 3, and 4).”

Learning resiliency fuels motivation and determination to support an individual and give that individual the confidence that they need to work towards the desired career path. With a social narrative of incapability comes dependency. A bias underlying discrimination towards people with disabilities is that they have to depend on somebody who does not have a disability for all of their needs. In order to change this narrative, people with disabilities need to be brought into environments that empower them and help them understand that there are certain aspects that may make them different from others, or require them to have more support accommodations in certain situations, but it does not mean that they are incapable or that they have to be totally dependent on somebody else. They have the right to make choices and work towards a career of choice, just like every other member of society.

“Many of the parents said they were looking for something new for their sons or daughters: an environment where not everybody catered to their every whim, where they were allowed to stumble a bit and take some risks, which they hoped would allow them

to build the kind of resilience necessary for independent lives and fulfilling jobs (Spencer, NYT, 2017, pg 7 paragraph, 5).”

Another factor of resiliency is being able to turn frustration with the flaws of the current system and the narrative of incapability and dependency into motivation to change the narrative (Mattlin, 2016). Being able to hold onto the self-confidence and the will to make a place for the self in a society that tells them there is no place for them, is a major key to changing the narrative of incapability. There is a difference between needing more support in a certain situation and being completely helpless, and through resiliency and determination people with disabilities overcome barriers of discrimination by teaching their colleagues and employers this difference.

Advocacy

Another theme that emerged from the data analysis was the significance of advocacy in supporting positive systematic and social changes for people with disabilities. With overcoming discriminatory barriers to employment, people with disabilities use methods of advocacy to publicly educate the community about their experiences and about how the current policies in place impact their experiences as positive forces as well as barriers to equal opportunities. Perseverance, determination, resiliency, pride in identity, and the knowledge of knowing that people deserve more are the driving forces of advocacy towards contesting social injustices and in this case, addressing the discriminatory barriers that stand between people with disabilities and competitive employment. The belief that comes with these factors of passion in advocacy is important to hold onto because change resulting from advocacy takes a lot of time, repetition, and continuous effort to create large structural changes. People within the disability population have to be very involved in making themselves heard, and people from outside of the population

need to listen and acquire the belief for the need for change through the education provided by people with disabilities and the people who know them personally and professionally. It is not just about an individual, it is much bigger than that, and a lot of time, effort, and dedication go into advocacy for civil rights. In the data collected, people with disabilities gave credit to their success in career opportunities and advancement to methods of self-advocacy and advocacy on a broader level of community within the neighborhood and within the workplace including having allies from outside the disability community advocate with them and also with advocacy for general community inclusion of people with disabilities. The education of accommodations were also identified as significant topics regarding advocacy. They also talk about the need for further direct conversation at state policy levels in order to break discriminatory barriers for more individuals with disabilities.

Self-Advocacy. Self-advocacy in this data analysis is anything that an individual who has a disability says or does to educate employers to seek fairness in competitive employment opportunities. Self-awareness, self-confidence, and pride identity motivates individuals with disabilities to speak up. Recognition of rights, personal learning styles, and needed accommodations for the workplace were prevalent within the narratives of people with disabilities who used self-advocacy to overcome societal discrimination in competitive employment. The young woman who is going to be the first woman with Down syndrome to participate in the Miss Minnesota Pageant, spoke up from a young age about things she was passionate about and that helped her get into the dance lessons and coaching to support her in performing in the pageant (Pioneer Press, 2017). The man mentioned earlier who was born blind and developed NF2 continued to work in journalism even after he lost his voice. (Hubbard, 2017). He had advocated for himself throughout his entire career, and it got him to a place

where he and his employer were able to job carve and create a job in journalism that was still meaningful to him(Hubbard, 2017). People with disabilities work hard and advocate for themselves to overcome discriminatory barriers in employment opportunities.

“We Seek fair treatment, rightful access to everything in society—jobs, romantic prospects, and so on (Mattlin, 2016, pg. 2, paragraph 3).”

People with disabilities are entitled to the same rights as every other member of society. However, societal discrimination can at times fail these rights and eliminate meaningful employment opportunities for people with disabilities based on society’s lack of education and understanding regarding people with disabilities. The data collected focused on the importance of individuals with disabilities recognizing that they have the right to pursue a job choice that pertains to their career aspirations, and that it is a basic civil right for them to be given that chance to succeed in those career aspirations.

“A lot has changed over the past 40 years, both for me and for many of the 56 million Americans with disabilities. The passage of the Americans with Disabilities Act in 1990 was truly a milestone, and has led to great improvements in accessibility and opportunity for things that many non-disabled people take for granted: education, employment, housing, and transportation, just to name a few. But many people with disabilities still face rampant discrimination and misunderstanding. I will not stop working until ableism is eradicated (Muehe, 2016, pg. 5, paragraph 2).”

Changing the Narrative. According to the data, advocacy is the key to educating society and changing the narrative of incapability and dependency that is associated with people with disabilities. It starts with individuals speaking up for themselves, for their needs, and for their

rights. As more outreach occurs, the more opportunities that end up presenting themselves in terms of inclusion and competitive employment. However, this is a long process, because much of the population has never had a relationship with an individual with disability, due to segregation that can take place from the group home residential setting and the sheltered workshop settings because in these settings people with disabilities are only surrounded by like peers and staff members. It takes more for members of the community to listen and pay attention to discriminatory barriers when they do not know anybody with a disability, because they do not have any kind of emotional or personal connection to the problem. Getting individuals with disabilities integrated into the community and into competitive employment settings, along with educating employers on hiring individuals with disabilities, are forms of more mezzo and macro levels of advocacy that the data conveys will eventually help make competitive employment more accessible for people with disabilities.

“There is a difference between acknowledging that someone needs a little bit of help, and making them out as sad, sorry, pitiful creatures who need to be hidden from ‘normal’ people. And the sooner we stop doing that, the less nervous everyone will be (Liu, 2016, pg. 7, paragraph 1).”

Inclusion as Advocacy. Community inclusion is a form of macro advocacy that was conveyed as a factor of success for people with disabilities overcoming barriers of discrimination in competitive employment settings. Integration within the community provides more opportunities for people with disabilities to establish relationships with people who have never had a relationship or met somebody with a disability. Through these relationships, their perceptions of what they initially assumed it meant to have a disability will change, and they will

be supportive of advocacy for workplace equality because now the topic is meaningful to them because it represents somebody that they care about.

“The pathway to change is through relationships, and you can’t form a relationship if you’re not at eye level (Market, 2009, pg 2, prg. 4).”

Community inclusion also allows people with disabilities to become acclimated within the culture of society both socially and professionally. Imagine being in institutions for many years, being released with the purpose to be a part of society, only to continue to be isolated in sheltered workshops. People with disabilities are entitled to be put into the same learning experiences as people who do not live with a disability. This has to start with education. Providing an exclusive education and higher education system overall, would not only introduce society to people who have disabilities and help change society’s perceptions of what it means to have a disability. It would support people with disabilities in getting the learning experience that they need to be successful in the employment opportunities beyond the sheltered workshop setting.

“A 2015 survey by Think College of some 900 intellectually disabled students found that those who spent most of their time in traditional classes, soaking up campus culture and finetuning their social skills, had better job rates than those who spent most of their time in specialized classes (Spencer, 2017, pg. 3, prg. 5).”

The visibility of people with disabilities in the community supports advocacy. It educates community members and employers about the population and supports changing the narrative of incapability and dependency that has been embedded within American culture for centuries. Being able to see the injustice taking place and having personal connections with people with

disabilities offers an opportunity for open discussion and productive change for overcoming barriers of discrimination. There was an article written in the *New York Times* called “Living with a Disability,” (2016) which consisted of several people with disabilities sharing their stories and what it meant to live with a disability. The article received a lot of praise from other people who have disabilities and several editorials were written in regarding how the article empowered them. One woman wrote in response:

“I am so grateful for this [disability] being talked about. I think visibility is always productive. I think taking pride in ourselves, our abilities, and our resilience is impossible without it (Andrews, 2016, pg. 3, prg. 3).”

Politicizing Disability as Advocacy. If an issue is not talked about, it cannot be fixed. For there to be positive changes to issues of social injustice, action must be taken. For action to be taken, there needs to be in depth conversation surrounding the current issue. If people are not on the same page, changes cannot be made, and if people do not have conversation, action cannot be taken to fix the problem. Conversations regarding societal discrimination towards people with disabilities in workplace opportunities need to be productive. Too often “fake unison” arises in conversation about disability rights (Ruckelshaus, 2017). This means that often, people who are actively advocating for disability rights are doing it for the purposes of empowerment and to provide accessibility to opportunities that they are sometimes barred from due to social and structural discrimination, while the people who are looking to make the laws do not want to be anti-disability and see it as more of a charitable act to do something for the population rather than a situation with necessity for political reform (Ruckelshaus, 2017).

“In addition to greater participation in the public sphere, true progress for citizens with disabilities will require a willingness to confront the issues head on, especially when—especially when—citizens disagree on competing solutions. We must politicize disability—not in the cable-news, grandstanding kind of way, but in the term’s more formal sense... Until we publicly recognize real disagreements surrounding disability and accessibility, we are doomed to a vacuous, empty debate that is neither political nor productive (Ruckelshaus, 2017, pg. 3, prg. 4).”

To create changes, political conversations need to happen, no matter how uncomfortable the topic may be to discuss. Pretending to be on the same page when it comes to social justice issues related to disability discrimination in employment opportunities, does nothing but stall probable progress that could be made to change these social injustices. Advocacy and community inclusion raises awareness that these politicized conversations are important to have in order for productivity to occur. They can also help start the conversations through methods of self-advocacy and outreach that relates to the personal experiences of the population.

Benefits of Hiring People with Disabilities

Per data analysis, through exposure and advocacy to people with disabilities allows employers to realize their value as team members. Having this exposure and realizing that the narrative of incapability that is embedded into society is inaccurate changes perspective and makes employers more aware of discriminatory thoughts and biases regarding people with disabilities. Through understanding, the employer’s narrative of disability changes, and they become a part of the advocacy because they can verbally support the benefits and contributions

that hiring individuals with disabilities has brought to their workplace. People with disabilities fully overcome barriers to employment in their individual cases when their employer leaves the mindset of “are you sure you can do this?” and instead adopts the mindset of no limitations. The subthemes of benefits that emerged in the data resonated with the benefits described in the literature review. These subthemes included: Accommodations benefit the individual and everyone else, diversity in perception, unique strengths and serious work ethics.

Accommodations as Benefits to the Individual and to Employers. Every individual needs a certain style of support when it comes to starting a new job as well as when it comes to completing job tasks that the individual is used to working on. Trainings are provided for new employees, followed by on the job training by individuals who have been in the position for a long time. This all seems reasonable and unthreatening when it addresses people who do not live with disabilities. When people with disabilities apply for a job, some employers start to worry about them not being able to understand everything about the job right away. It is important for employers to give the same chances to employees with disabilities as they do with people who do not have disabilities. Some people require repetition in verbal instruction to learn, while others are more visual. Some people learn best through trial and error by their own efforts. Just like anybody else, people with disabilities have their unique learning styles and they have certain accommodations that support those learning styles. The sooner the employers recognize this and give these employees a chance, the more that that individual and the business profits from the effort.

“I nearly denied my first PLWD (person living with disability) hire, Andrew, a far shake. My company sells wine and donates all profits to nonprofits, so we host tastings at

grocery and liquor stores. Now one of my employees, Andrew, began his first tasting in 2015 like a pushy car salesman. Within minutes I was reconsidering my hire, anxiously coaching him between interactions. And something happened that in hindsight, I should have expected: Andrew listened to me, improving his approach with each customer.

After all, nobody gets a new job right on the first shot. By tasting's end, customers were lining up to speak with Andrew. We wound up selling twice our profit that day (Monette, 2016, pg. 2, prg. 1).”

Andrew needed verbal repetition in order to be properly trained to do his job well. Over time, he learned and as a result from adhering to his personal learning style and accommodating that, Andrew not only did his job well, he made a huge profit for the business. Some employers initially worry about the time and cost that will have to be put into making the accommodations necessary for the success of the employees. However, in many cases, such as this one, the benefits outweigh the cost and time put into making job success accessible for the individual. A lot of employers have the knowledge and the resources that they need to provide the accommodations needed for employees with disabilities, they just do not always realize that technology and working with different learning styles is most of what goes into making these accommodations. Examples of low cost accommodations are job carving and job sharing. A specific job sharing example is The Supported Worker program in Minnesota which allows up to three individuals with disabilities to share one full-time position (Magan, 2016). This allows people with disabilities who cannot always work 40 hours per week due to mental or physical health needs, to share a meaningful and competitive job. It costs employers nothing, and gives them multiple hard-working employees.

Job carving is an accommodation that also benefits people with disabilities and their employers with no cost. The definition of job carving is creating a meaningful job that is best fit for the employee with disability's strengths and their needs of support in combination with meeting the needs of the employer, allowing success for both the potential employee and for the business itself. Alex Hubbard, the man who grew up blind and later developed a NF2 diagnosis, used job carving as an accommodation with his employer as his NF2 got worse (Hubbard, 2016). Instead of holding what is considered to be the traditional job tasks for a journalist, Alex and his employers set up job duties that included extra editing tasks for articles that were written by his colleagues along with getting to write opinion pages (Hubbard, 2016). Even though he was put into a place where it was no longer easy for him to hold the reporter and interviewer role of journalism, he and his employers were able to collaborate to create a different job within the same field that still brought him feelings of Joy and accomplishment and also benefitted the employer.

Diverse Perspective. Having team members from different cultural backgrounds diversifies perspective and allows for enriching collaboration that helps the business succeed. Each individual can bring perspective regarding a client or vendor they are meeting with, based on common cultural ground as well as differences that are present. It helps the team know how to effectively and professionally communicate with many different types of people and personality styles. Adding employees with disabilities to the team allows for answers on how to understand and respectfully communicate with clients or customers who have similar experiences. It also provides helpful and unique perspective on ideas on how to better the company, advertise the business, or methods of communication and outreach with other businesses.

“In 2009, AMC Entertainment began hiring PLWD. To integrate its new talent, the theater chain collaborated with the Autism Society in Bethesda. The results from AMC’s chief people officer were stated as, ‘you end up being a healthier company from a lot of different perspectives: Innovation, engagement, morale, and productivity. So while your crew flourishes because of your inclusive program, rest assured knowing your company will benefit too. The i4cp study found that employing PLWD increased customer satisfaction by 44% and enhanced brands by 34% (Monsette, 2016, pg. 2, prg. 4 and 5).”

Strengths and Hard Work. In addition to contribution to overall success and productivity of businesses, the data indicates that businesses also receive employees who apply their unique strengths and talents and who put a ton of effort into their work. One of the narratives stated people with disabilities as first-class problem solvers (Mattlin, 2016). They grow up critically thinking in daily life situations because this society was not made with their accessibility in mind. Individuals with disabilities every day have thoughts like “Okay I can’t do this particular thing this certain way, so how can I create an alternative way to make it work?” This critical thinking and development of problem-solving skills support them in being successful in employment and it also adds to the success of the business, because people with disabilities are able to think in ways that productively solve problems, and develop alternatives to making those problems work.

“Let’s face it, people with disabilities are nothing if not first-class problem solvers. We find all manner of devices to enable us to raise a fork, drive a van, go to the beach. I now control my electric wheelchair with my lips, because my hands no longer function. These very words are being written with a voice-recognition computer. True, it is a hassle

having to devise alternative methods for living a normal life. But when it works, oh how good it feels! How triumphant and liberating! I'm proud of my persistence and creative coping skills (Mattlin, pg. 2, prg. 5).”

Persistence. The persistence that comes with problem-solving also influences work ethic. They work hard to come up with alternatives to living a normal life and so they also work hard with their support accommodations in order to turn in sufficient work. As mentioned in the literature review, many employers who hire people with disabilities are impressed with their work ethics. An example from the data is from the narrative of Mr. Maxeam, who up until 2014 was working in a sheltered workshop. When the state decided to close the sheltered workshop due to ethical violations and place the workshop employees into competitive employment, Mr. Maxeam got a job for \$15/hr working a custodial position at a psychiatric hospital (Barry, 2014). At the beginning of his job his boss stated that even though Mr. Maxeam was adjusting to the requirements for working a full-time position, she was very impressed by how hard and focused of a worker he is (Barry, 2014). People with disabilities have unique strengths and attributions that benefit their careers as well as the overall success of the businesses that they are working for.

Discussion

Through analyzing articles from the New York Times and The Pioneer Press, four major themes emerged relating to the research question of how people with disabilities overcome barriers of discrimination in employment settings. The four themes: pride in identity, motivation and determination, advocacy, and benefits emerged as methods used to overcome discrimination and to advance in competitive career settings.

The application of the “person in environment theory” demonstrates the impacts that these themes from the contextual analysis have on the micro, mezzo, and macro levels of changing the narrative for how people with disabilities are perceived as employees. In the same way that current narrative demonstrates forms of micro, mezzo, and macro discrimination through the concepts of self- discrimination, attitudinal discrimination, and institutional discrimination, the themes found within the contextual analysis uses self- empowerment, perseverance, and advocacy to change discrimination into empowerment.

Pride in Identity as a Change in the Micro and Mezzo Systems

The literature review mentioned how the impacts of attitudinal and institutional discrimination impact the micro level for persons living with a disability through negatively impacting self-perception of people with disabilities. Family members, educators, peers, employers, and case workers spend a lot of time focusing on the limitations of the individual and either assuming or telling them that they are incapable of doing certain things. In the case of this study, the focus of the certain things is narrowed down to competitive employment opportunities and career advancement. People with disabilities grow up in a society that has adopted this narrative that people with disabilities are incapable and codependent, and this narrative

influences the reasoning behind why so many people in society still think that people with disabilities cannot succeed in competitive career settings.

By recognizing that society's perception of people with disabilities is inaccurate and by developing a limitless attitude towards the self, people with disabilities change the narrative on a micro setting. Instead of listening to the narrative that puts perceived limitations on capabilities of people with disabilities, they use their self-awareness, perseverance, and passion for career to persist and create a place for them in competitive employment. In the process of self-belief and confidence and perseverance, people with disabilities change the perception of society's narrative for their supervisors and their colleagues.

Believing in the abilities of the self to learn and to be successful is evident in the completion of job tasks. Some people with disabilities who have had successful careers in competitive employment settings have had to use their confidence to change factors of attitudinal discrimination and to be perceived as competent and hard working. This point goes back to the article mentioned in the findings section about the young woman with Down syndrome who was the first woman with a disability to participate in the Miss Minnesota Pageant. She was not only excited about having the opportunity, but she was proud of herself, her talents, and was confident in her ability to be successful (Divine, 2017, St. Paul Pioneer Press). In the article, she spoke about how she had been dancing since she was one year old and taking dance lessons since the age of seven (Divine, 2017, St. Paul Pioneer Press). She identified dancing and being on stage as her passion, and she took every situation she could to practice whether it be walking in high heels, taking dance lessons, or working with her pageant coach. She is motivated to do well and to learn because she is aware of her passions and is confident in her abilities to be successful in it

(Divine, 2017, St. Paul Pioneer Press). In the process of learning and confidently pursuing her passion, this young woman is also changing the narrative of Down syndrome by being the first woman with down syndrome to participate in the Miss Minnesota Pageant. Through her confidence, performance skills, and passion to learn, other people have been able to see these aspects within her and these factors have made these people believe in her potential for success.

From the perspective of people who are already perceived as competent, believing in the self may seem like something that is easy because they have not experienced the same kind of discrimination as people with disabilities face. Some people struggle to realize that it is not as common for people with disabilities to grow up with family members and peers who encourage them and tell them that they are intelligent and capable. Some of these families believe the narrative that due to the different vulnerabilities of people with disabilities and due to their situation, they are unable to work safely and successfully in competitive employment. Certain teachers and peers at school are also at times influenced by society's narrative of incapability when it comes to discussing the futures of individuals living with disabilities. If these people within the micro and mezzo level systems continue to preach the narrative of limitations to individuals with disabilities it will be more difficult for those individuals to develop a strong sense of self and confidence in personal efforts to get ahead and learn.

Because of this, it is the responsibility of families, teachers, and peers to empower individuals with disabilities instead of holding them back by agreeing with the limitations that society tends to put onto them. This statement is reminiscent of two of the narratives demonstrated by the articles in the findings section. The first being the article about the man who was born legally blind and later contracted NF2 when he was in journalism school at

Cornell. He spoke about growing up blind and how his family taught him to think without limits and let him make his own choices (Hubbard, 2017). On his path to further his education and eventually become the first blind person to be accepted into Cornell's graduate program for journalism, he stated that nothing held him back because he was brought up to believe that nothing could hold him back from the career aspirations he wanted to pursue (Hubbard, 2017). He was brought up in an empowering environment and that contributed to his ability to think without limits. This type of environment is also conveyed by the teachers of the Syracuse education certification program. The article talks about how the parents of the students wanted an education environment that allowed their children to make their own choices and to take risks so that they could better explore their interests and use their learning experiences for empowerment (Spencer, NYT, 2017). It is a lot easier for young people to feel empowered and confident when they are raised in a home and a school setting that encourages these important factors of self-love and self-confidence. Encouraging self-confidence from the mezzo part of the system at a young age facilitates confidence and determination within people with disabilities. Having this self-confidence, in turn, allows people with disabilities to change the narrative on the mezzo level in the work place by demonstrating their self-confidence and fighting for their right to have opportunities to succeed in competitive employment settings.

Motivation and Determination as Changes in the Mezzo system

With the establishment of self-confidence, motivation and determination are what keeps an individual interested in learning and taking the steps and risks needed to support persistence in getting competitive job opportunities. When an individual is confident and is able to identify personal career interests and passions, that gives the individual the attitudes of motivation and

determination that they need to continue learning and, in the case of individuals living with disabilities, to persist and assertively put themselves out there when society does not believe in their potentials of hard working employees in the same way that society believes in people who do not live with disabilities.

People with disabilities use motivation and determination to explore their interests, discover their passions, and to persist as they look for a competitive job position that fit these passions. Motivation and determination, once perceived by colleagues and supervisors, supports change in perception for how these colleagues and supervisors see people with disabilities. The motivation and determination linked to the passion for dance of the young woman with Down syndrome competing in the Miss Minnesota Pageant is an example of this because her personal motivation and determination allowed people professionally engaged with pageant work to take notice (Divine, Pioneer Press, 2017). She had been in many pageants previous to this and had been taking dance lessons since she was 7, and the motivation and determination to compete along with her self-confidence is what earned her the opportunity to participate in the Miss Minnesota Pageant (Divine, Pioneer Press, 2017). When motivation and determination are conveyed, it gives the employers and colleagues the perception that these individuals are hard-working, reliable, and eager to work hard and learn. These observations support the change of the narrative from incapable to capable, reliable, and hard-working.

Advocacy as a Factor of Change

Self-advocacy is the result of the individuals with disabilities who are confident in themselves and who persist to make their value to employers known. The process of persistence and self-empowerment that is backed by self-confidence, motivation, and determination gives

people with disabilities the opportunity to use their voices to speak about and demonstrate that the discriminatory perception of incapability that has been put onto them is inaccurate. Self-advocacy, with persistence, creates changes on both mezzo and macro levels. In the context of the research question self-advocacy was described as a formula for success for individuals with disabilities who have overcome discrimination barriers to be successful in competitive careers and advancement. They persist and demonstrate their value to their employers and their colleagues and this is changed on the mezzo level.

Macro. There are also cases in which people with disabilities meet with legislators to discuss probable changes in policy that better support changing the narrative and getting rid of barriers between people with disabilities and competitive employment options. Specifically, in Minnesota, there is Disability Day at the capitol in which advocacy groups collaborate with self-advocates to have a rally inside the capital building, where flaws about current legislation and ideas on how to fix these flaws are addressed. Following the rally, self-advocates, their family members, and employees of advocacy organizations have the opportunities to meet with legislators to advocate for changes in policy. This example is linked to the point made in one of the articles in the findings that politicizing disability and direct conversations about social issues related to disability are important for productive advocacy (Ruckelshaus, 2017). The discrimination and the flaws in the system need to be talked about in order to change the narrative of incapability in the work place. When people with disabilities bring their stories of being underpaid when they work hard or when they are ignored as a potential employee altogether, they bring visibility to the issue. Visibility of the problem is the first step of advocacy and creating change.

Advocacy from family, peers, and employers is also important for making these overall larger changes. As mentioned earlier in the motivation and determination section, it is easier for people with disabilities to succeed and to feel empowered to advocate for themselves if they are raised in an environment that encourages them to feel empowered. Once employers and educators start to believe in them as well, they can use their experiences with working with someone living with a disability to continue advocating for the population on mezzo and macro levels by reaching out to other businesses and talking to them about the positive experiences of hiring an individual with a disability. They can also share these stories at the state level to continue to make the effort to change the narrative of incapability on micro, mezzo, and macro levels of systems.

Benefits

The benefits represent the factors and characteristics that motivate the perception changes of employers. Per the data from the articles, employers reported positive overall experiences for the business as a whole after hiring somebody with a disability. People with disabilities add a unique perspective and element of diversity that adds to collaboration and interesting discussions for how to better the business. They also have unique characteristics, skills, and ways of thinking that support them in being successful in job task completions. Businesses also report making more money when they hire people with disabilities. To go back to what was presented in the findings, Andrew, a Person living with a disability, worked hard doubled the usual profit of selling wine on his first day of work (Monsette, 2016). They also notice the value of these individuals through witnessing their hard work and reliability as employees. Employers who have employed people with disabilities are more likely to have positive attitudes towards the

work efforts of the population and are more likely to hire them (Vinzer & Roth, 2013). People who actually decide to hire people with disabilities and give them a chance to complete the work report being more than satisfied with their job performance (Employee, 2005). Once businesses witness the results that come with advocacy, pride in identity, and motivation and determination, they understand what it actually means to hire a person living with a disability versus the inaccurate label that society puts on persons living with disabilities. The benefits are the results of advocacy, pride in identity, and motivation that change the narrative for employers, and it gives the employers the information and opportunity for further advocacy related to the persons with disabilities population in employment.

Implications for Research

The primary implication for research is to further assess how people with disabilities overcome barriers of discrimination to achieve success in competitive employment. There is a lot of research present that relates to the discrimination on institutional and attitudinal levels and how that keeps people with disabilities from receiving meaningful employment opportunities. This topic needs to be further assessed for how people with disabilities overcome these forms of discrimination because those future findings could be used for future advocacy and policy changes. Studies that focus more on the success of individuals with disabilities and what they do to reach that success can give further suggestions for educating employers on what it means to have an employee with a disability and the difference between what society tells them to expect from an individual with a disability and what to actually expect from an individual living with a disability based on who they are as people and what they have to offer. So much research focuses on the discrimination resulting from society's definition of disability. Therefore, further

research assessing the stories of people who have overcome these barriers, and looking more into the themes assessed as productive methods of overcoming barriers, can bring more facts to the table and more consistency of these facts that can contribute to changing society's understanding of disability. The more studies that focus on this topic that are published, the more research that contributes to overall change.

Another important implication for research is the fact that there is a lot of research information related to people with disabilities experiencing discrimination, but there is a gap in research related to similarities and differences among what discrimination looks like towards various types of disabilities. There also needs to be more research done to assess the similarities and differences between discrimination in the work place towards people who were born with a disability and people who did not develop a disability until later in life. This focuses on how particular groups of disabilities are perceived and treated as well as their correlations between discrimination and low perceptions of self-worth. This focus of research would allow further understanding of how the narrative of incapability impacts each type of disability and the dynamics by which each group is impacted by it.

Implications for Social Workers

One of the main values in ethics for social workers is to appreciate the dignity and respect of other human beings. It is also the job of social workers to advocate against social injustices. This research has focused on the social injustice of people with disabilities being barred from employment due to discrimination, and how some people with disabilities overcome these barriers to hold successful careers in competitive employment opportunities. Social workers need to be aware of the methods of advocacy used to overcome these barriers, so that they can

provide this kind of information to the clients with disabilities that they are looking to empower and support. It is also the job of the social worker to advocate for persons with disabilities by sharing their success stories with people on the state and mezzo levels. Changing this narrative for more and more lives of persons with disabilities is a social justice issue. Social workers are responsible for fighting for civil rights and change.

Social workers can work with people with disabilities to empower them as self-advocates. They should encourage them to speak up for themselves, to be resilient, and encourage them to learn and practice their passions as well as to work towards those passions with a limitless attitude. Social workers should also encourage families to adopt this way of thinking. Families love their children but it can be difficult for them to know what the right answer is for how to support their children if society is giving them a negative representation of disabilities. The social worker can in collaboration with the individual with the disability, provide that change in narrative to the families so that they can encourage and empower their children. Social workers should also act as allies to disability advocacy by fighting for changes in policy and helping with setting up training seminars for employers to help them understand the different learning styles and small accommodations needed to support the success of an employee with a disability.

Implications for Employers

Employers need to have a substantial understanding and education on what it means to live with a disability. Being aware of personal learning styles and appropriate job trainings that are imperative for supporting a person with a disability as they start a new job, just as it is

imperative for any other employee starting that new job. It is the employer's responsibility to support them in feeling prepared and for giving them meaningful job tasks.

Employers also need to be mindful of necessary accommodations that some of their employees with disabilities may or may not need in order to do their jobs successfully. They need to understand that accommodations are typically not costly and that they usually end up receiving a larger profit by having the accommodation present, because it allows that person to bring in the profit for the company. They need to be able to reject inaccurate narratives that portray workers with disabilities as incapable or too expensive to hire.

Employers should also feel encouraged to advocate for people with disabilities by sharing their personal successes of hiring somebody with a disability. When people hear the positive narrative from employers, they are more likely to change their perception on people who live with disabilities. Trainings for employees about the benefits of hiring a person with a disability would also help.

Employers should also be aware of different learning styles and should advocate for their employees with disabilities by responding to the needs of each learning style. Providing the right type of orientation and training for individual learning styles along and recognizing the necessity of accommodations help set up a supportive work environment for success. Other ways that employers can get involved in advocacy is by networking with other businesses and letting them know the benefits of hiring somebody with a disability in terms of reliability, unique perspective, diversity, and productivity. Educating business colleagues on how cost-effective accommodations are would also dispute the myth that people with disabilities are not worth the cost.

Conclusion

The purpose of this research was to focus on how people with disabilities overcome barriers of discrimination in employment settings. The major gap in research that was noticed during the writing process was that there is a significant amount of research about discrimination towards people with disabilities in employment settings, but very little on what people with disabilities have to contribute to employment or how to overcome that systematic discrimination. In terms of workplace discrimination, library databases have everything from people with disabilities being underemployed, being less likely to be hired, being less likely to have meaningful employment tasks and positions, and being less likely to have the opportunity for career advancement. However in terms of how people with disabilities disprove the discrimination and demonstrate their worth and success to society there is very little research in the databases. Advocacy sites have statistics about how people with disabilities are more loyal and more reliable and less absent from work than people who do not have disabilities. This same information is not assessed in library databases. The key findings of this study are that even though the subject is overall ignored, there are people with disabilities who persist and succeed to make a place for themselves in competitive employment. These individuals also use their personal skills, confidence, advocacy, and identity to change a narrative of incapability. More needs to be done to recognize this so that society's narrative can be changed on a macro level. "Disability is natural. We must stop believing that disabilities keep a person from doing something. Because that's not true . . . Having a disability doesn't stop me from doing anything." — Benjamin Snow, Grade 8, in his essay "Attitudes About People with Disabilities"

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