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Workplace Experiences of Blind College-Educated Women

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Walden University
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Abstract

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MPA, University of Alaska Anchorage, 2010

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Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

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Abstract

Because of the limited research on workplace experiences of blind college-educated women, policies have not been implemented that will lead to greater equity for this group. The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore the workplace experiences of blind college-educated women using the social construction theory. Data were collected from semi structured interviews with 11 blind college-educated women. Results indicated that accessibility in college or at work with websites and job applications presented the greatest obstacle to successful job seeking. State rehabilitative agencies were not considered to be effective in job development, placement, or promotion. Working from home was desirable due to transportation deficiencies, and work–life balance. Findings indicated that the constructed reality sets up barriers for blind women in employment. This study is important for positive social change because it revealed heretofore unrepresented voices of blind college-educated women regarding their experiences in the workplace.

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Dedication

I dedicate this dissertation to my father, Alfred Koral, who has assisted me in attaining this degree.

Acknowledgments

I acknowledge my fabulous committee who has really buoyed me up during this dissertation. They are a powerhouse committee according to my student success advisor and disability services. My committee consisted of Dr. Anne Hacker, Dr. Gary Kelsey and Dr. Lori Demeter. I also acknowledge Dr. Gredler who shepherded me through part of the literature review. Dr. Verrone was a similarly wonderful support during a class about writing and editing the proposal.

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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

The factors in the articles that I reviewed were both internal and external and included stigma, legal, rehabilitation, and stereotypes that have interfered in the full equality of blind people and those with disabilities, especially blind women. Marginalization was jarring regarding the access and obstacles to employment in the United States and around the world. Marginalization stigmatized blind women in multiple ways.

The theory that best explained the power imbalance between able-bodied and people with disabilities was the social construction of reality (Berger & Luckman, 1966) as exemplified in public administration and policy studies by Schneider and Ingram (1990, 1993, 2019). The model of the structure of power and how it is used toward target populations including blind women to diminish their effectiveness is described fully in Chapter 2. For blind people, their social construction provided an explanation as to the obstacles in the workplace.

I included an explanation of how research articles viewed people with disabilities, how employers viewed people with disabilities, and how rehabilitation agencies purported to prepare blind people for work in the introduction. The first chapter addresses the paradigm from which I was operating which was constructivist and assumed multiple realities. Next, I define terms and share the study’s significance. Finally, I explain any limitations of the study and the inclusion and exclusion criteria and validity and reliability techniques that added to the study’s credibility. I also discuss how the study may contribute to scholarly research. Lastly, I discuss positive social change implications of the study.

My study is expected to have an impact on different social and organizational settings and situations. Many articles addressed how the constructed reality cuts across all sectors of society (Lindsay & Thiyagarajah, 2022; Stangl et al., 2019). However, Creamer, (2019) indicated that many researchers did not set forth their philosophical or paradigmatic orientations. Creamer noted that a paradigm is a coherent body of understanding about the nature of reality and the agreement by other scholars about the paradigm. The fact that the constructed reality has been used to diminish the work and educational possibilities and opportunities of blind women portends that the current study might have an impact on scholarly and practical domains. The practical implications might include improving legislation and national and state policy. Policies might also be updated with human resource managers, medical providers, and rehabilitation professionals. The academic changes might include increasing the understanding of college-educated blind women's obstacles to employment. Definitions of disability might also be more uniformly applied, and consistent standards of identifying what constitutes a disability. Different sectors are not in agreement of what a disability is.

Stigma and stereotypes were the overarching focus of this study. Through this research, stigma and stereotypes may be reduced and financial stability may be improved if policies and programs are more integrated and uniformly applied for people with disabilities. Social construction was used to undergird the study (see Schneider & Ingram, 1990, 1993, 2019). This framework is further explored in Chapter 2.

Background

When I first looked at this study topic, I found that mentorship and job shadowing were techniques to aid with employment (Antonelli et al., 2018; Lund & Cmar, 2020; McDonnall and Cmar, 2019). Then I discovered articles where education and technology were discussed for job readiness (Chowdhury et al. 2021; Lund and Cmar, 2020; McDonnall & Tatch, 2021; Yeager et al., 2006). The research that was uncovered related to topics such as stigma from the individual to the societal. The research articles addressed isolation and helplessness that plagued many people with disabilities, especially those who are blind (Brunes et al., 2019; & Hadidi & Al Kateeb, 2013). Some articles addressed the rehabilitation agencies and other public agencies that used the medical model and reasons why blind people or those with other disabilities were not employed (Kim & Williams, 2012; McGrath and O'Sullivan, 2022; Thurman et al., 2019; & Wang et al., 2019). Laws hampered some of these attempts at employment, especially for those who were highly educated (Chowdhury et al., 2021).

The articles I found pointed out that there were few studies that separated disability groups or gender groups from their studies (Chowdhury et al., 2021). This is why women were chosen as a part of the current study, and why blind people were chosen. There were studies that indicated that higher education would assist in access to employment, but few studies addressed this aspect to determine whether employment outcomes were improved. I did not find one study that looked at blind women and their employment whether they attained a college education. This is why I chose this group for the study. Social construction fit with some of the barriers to college-educated blind women's employment potential.

Quite a few of the articles were meta-analyses that lacked primary sources of blind people in general. The meta-analyses were primarily quantitative. This is one reason why I chose to conduct this qualitative study. The lack of studies on women with disabilities in general and blind women in particular was demonstrated by my review of the research literature. The literature indicated that there were many barriers facing people with disabilities, such as stigma, stereotypes, and gatekeepers, which enveloped every level of society (Lindsay & Thiyagarajah, 2022; Stangl et al., 2019).

Problem Statement

The implications at the time of the current study were a lack of research studies that included data on blind college-educated women. I could not find articles that studied workplace experiences of blind college-educated women. In addition, I was not able to identify articles that included social construction as their framework for understanding the marginalization of blind college-educated women and their access to the workplace.

The social problem was the erroneous belief by institutions that blind people are not capable of working in a competitive working environment. Other stereotypes that were explored were blind people's alleged lack of competence, fear of the blind person, and the idea that blind people will be too dependent on others (Kim & Williams, 2012;Narraine & Lindsay, 2011). These attitudes and beliefs regarding blind people have permeated society.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to explore the workplace experiences and obstacles of blind college-educated women using the theory of social construction (see Schneider & Ingram, 1990, 1993, 2019). The theory was pioneered by P. L. Berger and Luckman (1966) and modernized by Schneider and Ingram (1990, 1993, 2019). This theory lent itself very well to my study.

Closely related to the theory of social construction (Schneider & Ingram, 1990, 1993, 2019) is the paradigmatic lens that I used in the current study. A research paradigm is a set of values that guides the study (Given, 2012). The research paradigm that I used was naturalistic and constructivist in which the nature of reality rests with each person who interprets it (Given, 2012).

Given (2012) and Salmani and Akbari (2008) indicated that Kuhn (1970) first introduced the concept of paradigm and explained it as a model or pattern. There were four research paradigms that Salmani and Akbari identified: positivism, constructivism, poststructuralism, and critical theory. A paradigm is defined as a systematic thought pattern in a social science framework (Salmani & Akbari, 2008).

Meerwald (2013) looked at autoethnography as a constructed narrative. The researcher and the researched are the same person, and reality is constructed in this context according to Meerwald. Meerwald also viewed autoethnography as a paradigm suitable for marginalized populations. The research paradigm establishes how findings will be interpreted and also exposes the mindset of the researcher (Salmani & Akbari, 2008). The research paradigm was closely related to the social construction theory that I used to frame the study, which was that all reality was constructed by the participants.

For the purpose of this study, I explored the obstacles of blind college-educated women and their work activity using the theory of social construction of reality as developed by Schneider and Ingram (1990, 1993, 2019). I used the framework that all society is institutionalized (Berger & Luckman, 1966; Scott, 1969). The paradigm was constructivist which was more suitable for groups who are marginalized and underrepresented in the literature.

Research Question

The following research question guided the study: What are the obstacles that female blind college-educated job applicants face in seeking employment?

Theoretical Framework

The theory that I used as a framework was social construction of reality, which was first set forth by Berger and Luckman (1966).   Berger and Luckman updated ideas about institutionalization and how ideas get inculcated into the public discourse. Social construction spans sociology, psychology, and philosophy (Berger & Luckmanm, 1966; Kuhn, 1970).

Howard and Aas (2021) said that philosophy has not represented disability well, and Hartblay (2020) indicated that anthropology has not represented disability well either. Social constructivist theory was developed as a contrast to positivism and objective thinking (Romaioli & McNamee, 2021; Schneider & Ingram 1990, 1993, 2019;.

& Spash, (2017) took these earlier concepts and used them to put forth their own theory related to target populations and policy.

In social construction, reality is based on contextual factors and is based on each relationship between an agency and a structural element. This is constituted through power relationships that are ascribed to different groups in society, such as people with disabilities. There is still a debate between positivists and constructivists (Romaioli & McNamee, 2021; Spash, 2017). The relevance of social construction for my study was that policies and laws are institutionalized. The issues are complex and were addressed in this study. There is an intersection between social construction and disability because people with disabilities interact with policymakers and programs and policies that have an impact on their work life. The fact that reality is constructed by institutions and society means that it is adaptable and flexible and not fixed or objective (Berger & Luckman, 1966). I conducted this study because there was a lack of research on blind college-educated women who face obstacles to employment.

Nature of the Study

This qualitative inquiry was constructivist and postpositivist. The constructivist paradigm is that reality is not fixed or outside of one's experience. The phenomenon being considered was blind college-educated women's obstacles to employment. The rationale for a qualitative approach was that it would provide rich, detailed information regarding the phenomenon (Creswell & Miller, 2000; Ravitch & Carl, 2016; Rubin & Rubin, 2012). Semi structured interviews provided the relevant data to answer the research question. Semi structured interviews were conducted, and the interview transcripts were analyzed to identify codes, categories, and themes.

A postpositivist paradigm was used because reality is socially constructed by individuals and institutions (Berger & Luckman, 1966; Schneider & Ingram 1990, 1993, 2019). The key concept I used was the social construction of reality that explained the barriers to employment for blind college-educated women. The qualitative interview was the best source of rich data (Ravitch & Carl, 2016; Rubin & Rubin, 2012). The interviews were conducted with 11 women between the ages of 31 and 66 who were blind or visually impaired and who had a college degree. The interviews were tape recorded and transcribed.

Definitions

Defining *disability* and *blindness* is difficult. Many articles provided information about the inconsistent and differing definitions in disability studies (Adhikari & Frye, 2020; Beatty et al., 2019; Fraser et al., 2009; Hansen et al., 2017; Mont, 2019; Odame, et al., 2021; Thurman et al. 2019). Beatty et al. (2019) suggested that the research literature had not defined what a disability is and who has a disability. A further complication existed with different definitions for people with disabilities and blindness, such as someone who has more than one disability as defined by the Administration for Community Living (ACL) (2019) and the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services [HHS], (1991). The Administration for Community Living is part of HHS. The definition that is most recognizable in the United States by the public and researchers for a disability definition is the Americans with Disabilities Act (1990), which was amended in 2008. Even this definition is somewhat fluid (Association of State and Territorial Health Officials [ASTHO], 2021; Cornell Study 2018, 2020).

The World Health Organization (WHO, 2021a, 2021b) gave a more nuanced definition of disability and blindness. The WHO (2021a) study defined blindness as the access to treatment and interventions to mitigate preventable blindness and ability to take advantage of rehabilitation and an ability to cope with the disability such as transportation and the built environment. The WHO (2021a) also classified visual impairment into mild, moderate, and severe visual impairment.

The Americans with Disabilities Act is designated as 42 USC Section 12101 et Seq (ASTHO, 2021). Their definition of disability denoted someone who has a “mental or physical impairment that substantially limits one or more life activities” (Adler, 1991, p. 19). Wang (2019) also concurred with this definition (see U.S. Department of Justice, 1990; Van Beukering et al., 2022).

Disability is also defined by knowing that someone has had a history of a disability or has been known to have a disability in some government agency records, which may be related to stigma (Americans with Disabilities Act, 1990; ASTHO, 2021). One of the tenets of disability for employment is if a person can perform essential functions of a job (Americans with Disabilities Act, 1990; ASTHO, 2021). This concept is embodied in Title I of the Americans with Disabilities Act. Disability is not easy to define, and there is no agreement about the definition of disability (HHS, 1991). Different programs have different definitions because policies change depending on different court proceedings and amendments to law or amendments to the state or federal Constitution

(HHS, 1991). Eligibility requirements for programs and benefits may change, and that means that funding mechanisms may change also (HHS, 1991).

This confusion about the definition of disability has had an impact on research (Adhikari & Frye, 2020; HHS, 1991). There are many psychosocial and cultural barriers that have made defining disability difficult (HHS, 1991). Research is used for many purposes including rehabilitative health research, epidemiological and medical research, and work-related and educational research (HHS, (1991). With all of these domains, research is complex, and it is not surprising that research findings are difficult to interpret or studies cannot be conducted because there has been no agreement on definitions of disability. Because researchers cannot agree on definitions of disability, legislators, educators, governments, rehabilitation professionals, and other officials are confused and cannot form policy out of mismatched definitions. There are additional difficulties if definitions are constantly changing according to the whim of policymakers (Adhikari & Frye, 2020). There are also differences among countries who use the WHO's International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health as a merger of the medical and social model of disability (Hastbacka, 2021; WHO, 2021b). Krahn et al. (2015) and Beatty et al. (2019) noted that there are 67 definitions of disability.

Blindness: Functional limitations that include activities such as transportation, mobility, cooking, and self-care (American Foundation for the Blind [AFB], 2020).

Legal blindness: A medical diagnosis of an acuity of 20/200 or less in the better eye or a visual field of 20 degrees or less (AFB, 2020). Legal blindness defines what benefits (such as Social Security) a blind person will receive (AFB, 2020; McDonnall et al., 2022).

Social exclusion: The community support necessary to meet inclusion into society by every person with disabilities (Howard & Aas, 2018; Ionescu, 2019).

Statutory blindness: The category of blindness defined for Supplemental Security Disability Income for legally blind people. Substantial gainful activity is significantly higher for blind people than for other people with disabilities (McDonnall et al., 2022).

Total blindness: No vision in either eye (AFB, 2020).

Assumptions

I assumed that reality is always changing because of the individuals who are setting policy for blind women. Reality is an interaction between the blind college-educated woman in her work life and the policies that promote or hinder her access to cultural, social, and political opportunities. I assumed that blind women have been subjected to institutionalized, socialized reality that is inculcated into them (Berger & Luckman, 1966; Goffman, 1963; Ryan, 1976). This assumption supported the use of the theory of social construction in my study because of the power imbalance between blind women and the hierarchies that have ensued (Maroto et al., 2019). I also assumed that qualitative methodology was the best approach to answer the research question. Through convenience sampling and semi structured interviewing, 11 women were interviewed for this study. I paid attention to when data saturation was reached for participants. The sample size was determined by data saturation.

I also assumed that participants would be willing to answer the interview questions honestly. I assumed that I would establish rapport with the participants. Finally, I assumed that I would be able to recruit a sufficient number of participants to conduct the study.

Scope and Delimitations

The literature that I reviewed informed the study parameters including women, college education, employment, and blindness. My experience as a blind woman also influenced the study, but the research articles determined the scope of the study. I included blind college-educated women between the ages of 31 and 66 to be interviewed using semi structured interviews. I excluded anyone under age 22. I also excluded men because they were not the focus of the study. I also excluded those who did not speak English and who lived outside of the United States. Finally, I exclude women with other disabilities.

There were many theories that I could have used to explain the employment barriers of blind college-educated women, such as Crenshaw's intersectionality theory (Chowdhury, 2021; Howard & Aas, 2018; Pena et al., 2021; Wang, 2019). The intersectionality theory was mentioned in several of these studies. However, even though intersectionality theory had some suitability for this study, it did not explain the power differences that blind people face as exemplified by Schneider and Ingram (1990, 1993, 2019). The only other theory that was mentioned more often was the social model of disability (Chhabra, 2020; Cregan et al., 2017; Kim & Williams 2012; Naraine & Lindsay, 2011). The reason why I rejected the social model is because though the theory does focus on how society and the environment arguably misrepresent disability and socially exclude disabled people (Chhabra, 2020; Kim & Williams, 2012; Narraine & Lindsay, 2011), the issue of power by dominant culture is not discussed. It is possible that the social model has aspects of the social construction of reality included in the model (Schneider & Ingram, 1990, 1993, 2019, but social construction is more broadly defined. Howard and Aaas (2020) explained that the social model excludes cognitively disabled people and focuses exclusively on those with physical disabilities.

Credibility is important for a qualitative study. Because I was studying a specific group, the findings may not be transferrable to other groups of people (Guest et al., 2006; Ravitch & Carl, 2016). However, because I included an audit trail, the study can be replicated with other groups.

Limitations

The first limitation of this study was that the interviews were conducted on Zoom, which allowed for people to use their mobile phones or computers to connect with the Zoom call. Considerations for methods of data collection were considered carefully to obtain a sufficient sample. I did not use in-person interviews. I chose updated documents for a triangulation method to supplement the semi structured interviews, such as the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (1998). I also made use of an audit trail, journals, and field notes.

Although qualitative studies can supply thick, rich data, there are usually fewer people who are chosen as participants for the study. This can mean that the findings cannot be generalized to other groups, but the current study was not meant to be generalizable. In terms of content validity, the interview questions were vetted with a couple of participants before the formal interviews began.

Because I had a paradigm and perspective from which I was operating, I used journals and field notes to track my biases, and I used member checks and peer reviewing for controlling bias. All research has a paradigm and theory that are used to answer the research questions. In the current study, I used the social construction of reality as the theoretical framework (Schneider & Ingram, 1990, 1993, 2019). Other theories were considered for this study, but social construction of reality addressed the issue of power and how groups such as people with disabilities experience the power of the state and other government agencies.

Transferability of findings may not be determined by readers of the study. However, dependability was bolstered through triangulation techniques including audit trail, reflexivity, positionality, member checks, and other documentation (Creswell & Miller, 2000; Ravitch & Carl, 2016; Shenton, 2004). Dependability referred to reliability of findings and whether I could justify the conclusions drawn from the data analysis.

Significance

The significance of the study includes the body of scholarly literature that may benefit from this study. No studies had been conducted by recruiting blind college-educated women and exploring their obstacles in their workplaces. Policymakers, legislators, rehabilitation professionals, universities, and blind women may benefit from the findings of this study. In the academic and policy arenas, this study addressed a group of participants who had not been studied separately from other blind people or those with other disabilities. Though many articles indicated that college education is important for employment (Chowdhury et al., 2021; McDonnall & Tatch, 2021), previous studies did not address blind women who had obtained a college education.

Disability has been seen as a reason for marginalization. Women have been seen as less integrated into society, so the findings may add to the literature on disability, blindness, and female empowerment, especially for those who have obtained a college degree and seek competitive employment. Another benefit of this study may be to policymakers and rehabilitation professionals who make decisions concerning the trajectory of a blind woman’s life and who provide funds for technology, accessibility software, and ongoing counseling and support. This study may demonstrate that these gatekeepers can improve their knowledge concerning federal programs and the increase of mental or emotional problems that may arise. Positive social change may be achieved through increased understanding among researchers, policymakers, and other professionals regarding how their policies and decisions impact blind women who are college educated and need to be competitively employed (Chowdhury et al. 2021; Stangl et al., 2019). One additional benefit of this study might be that more women who are blind and who have obtained a college education will be recruited for research studies (Rios et al., 2018; Sabatello, 2017; Shandra, 2018). Some articles pointed out that researchers have not recruited women for health-related and other studies that could improve the scholarly literature.

Summary

This chapter presented the research parameters I used to fill a gap in the literature. I explained that although there had been other theoretical constructs used in the research on disability, social construction was most appropriate to understand the power dynamics addressed in this study. I explained that barriers have existed, including stigma, stereotypes, ableism, policy, financial offsets, law, and rehabilitation and health agencies. These factors have contributed to the problems of blind college-educated women in the workplace. The lack of studies and the ways that studies have been conducted have also contributed to the devaluation of blind people in general. The literature revealed that the problem of barriers to employment for blind people, and blind women in particular, is due to a multitude of factors. In Chapter 2, I provide a comprehensive review of recent and seminal literature on the study topic.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

The literature review includes the themes that were uncovered during the literature search and how they relate to the theory of social construction of reality (Schneider & Ingram, 1990, 1993, 2019).

The purpose of this study was to explore the obstacles to employment of blind college-educated women using the theory of social construction of reality (Schneider & Ingram, 1990, 1993, 2019). Because of the sparse research on college-educated blind people, I interviewed blind women with a college education and use open-ended interview questions to answer the research question.

The literature review includes a description of the theoretical framework that I used to explain the power imbalance that exists for people with disabilities, especially blind women. Social construction explains that people with disabilities are deviants and deserving of benefits (Goffman, 1963; Schneider & Ingram, 1990, 1993, and 2019). This paradox sets up an interesting conundrum. Ryan (1976) discussed that people with disabilities were portrayed as deserving of poverty because of their disability. Schneider and Ingram (1993) viewed the disabled population as deserving and deviant at the same time. The idea of being unfit to work was explained by Ryan (1976) and Odame et al. (2021). Certain researchers chose a constructivist view of disability. Social construction was appropriate for the current study because it was the framework used by other researchers when naming people with disabilities as deviants and deserving (Goffman 1963; Jun, 2005; Kaminska, 2020; Ryan, 1976; Schneider & Ingram, 1990, 1993, 2019).

Literature Search Strategy

The following databases were used to search the existing literature: Springer, PsychInfo, MedLine, Business Source Complete, Academic Source Complete, Scholar Works, Google Scholar, Sage Journals, Ebsco, ERIC, Education Source, Wiley Online, and Ph.D. Dissertations, and the Thoreau database. Additional databases included Gale Academic OneFile, Gale OneFile LegalTrac, and Nexis UNI. The keywords used in searches included *employers*, *employment*, *blind*, *blindness*, *barriers*, *college-educated*, *disability*, *disabilities*, *women*, *employment outcomes*, *education*, *disaggregation*, *Thomas theorem*, *Thomas Kuhn*, *vision-impaired*, *visual impairment*, *employment rate*, *employment statistics*, *gender*, *social construction* and *disability*, *stigma* and *disability*, *paradigms*, *stigmatized identity*, *power* and *power differential*, and *social construction of disability*. Phrases that were used were *vocational rehabilitation* and *blind people*.

Theoretical Foundation

The theory that was used for this study was social construction as described by Schneider and Ingram (1990, 1993, 2019). This theory emanated from earlier theories including the Thomas (1932) theorem that set forth that the situation sets the behavior for individuals. The ideas that Thomas had were added to by Berger and Luckman (1966). Berger and Luckman expanded the theorem by including socialization, language, and institutionalization as forming people’s understanding of reality. Schneider and Ingram (1990, 1993, 2019) developed a typology to understand how reality is constructed for different target groups.

Many researchers in various disciplines have used social construction including philosophy, sociology, and psychology (Berger & Luckman, 1966; Goar, 2021; Kingdon, 2013; Romaioli & McNamee, 2021; Schneider & Ingram, 1990, 1993, 2019). Reality is interpretive according to the social constructionist theorists (Berger & Luckman, 1966; Schneider & Ingram, 1990, 1993, 2019). Social construction was theorized in opposition to positivist and objectivist thinking (Romaioli & McNamee, 2021; Spash, 2017). As Romaioli and McNamee (2021) and Spash (2017) explained, there are multiple realities because reality is relational and contextual. Spash (2017) pointed out that empiricism is about secondary verification outside of the individual's consciousness. Empiricism is scientific, objective, and measurable (Spash, 2017). Berger and Luckman (1966) posited that reality is formed from human consciousness and interaction with others through institutional policy. There is not one objectified reality because reality is mediated through historical and cultural contexts (Romaioli & McNamee, 2021; Spash, 2017).

Debate is still occurring between the positivist and the social constructionist theorists (Romaioli & McNamee, 2021; Spash, 2017). This debate mirrors the controversy concerning qualitative and quantitative research methodologists. Earlier theorists such as Thomas (1932, as cited in Goar, 2021) and later researchers such as Kingdon (2013) used politics and policies and problem solving by humans instead of generalizing thinking into simplistic terms into scientific certainty. Thomas (1932, as cited in Goar, 2021) thought that the world is socially defined and argued that humans come into the world with expectations and meaning already established for many different situations and problems in society. Thomas (1932, as cited in Goar, 2021) contended that people assess situations on the basis of interpretation of policies that forms their decisions. Kingdon (2013) indicated that policies, politics, and problems are the ingredients necessary for policy change or to solve a problem. The problems, policies, and politics converge so people can define problems and solve them through policy decisions and interaction (Goar, 2021; Kingdon, 2013; Schneider & Ingram, 1990, 1993, 2019).

Social construction was drawn from many antecedents. Its tenets have been used to understand the social world and its relation to decisions, solving problems, power relationships, and political imbalances (Berger & Luckman, 1966; Goar, 2021; Schneider & Ingram, 2019). Creswell and Miller (2000) assumed that qualitative research embodies the lens that reality is socially constructed and that participants will share in their perspective. Social construction can be applied to college -educated blind women's access to employment because anything that does not fit what society expects is considered deviant (see Schneider & Ingram, 1990, 2019). The theory's components were related to the stigma and stereotypes experienced by people with blindness and disability. Society sets up hierarchies, and the theory of social construction explains the intersection of power and what Schneider and Ingram (1990, 1993, 2019) referred to as target populations. Maroto et al. (2019) used intersectionality theory and feminist theory for their study that underscored that there are hierarchies of marginalization and inequality in terms of women and disabilities. Maroto et al. corresponded with the articles that mentioned marginalization and the deviant definition as argued by Schneider and Ingram (1990, 1993, 2019).

In the theory of social construction, there is a power dynamic that is institutionalized and typified (Berger & Luckman, 1966). There is a need to maintain power and divide power into who deserves benefits and who bears the burdens of their lowered status (Berger & Luckman, 1966; Schneider & Ingram, 1990, 2019). Berger and Luckman (1966) and Schneider and Ingram (1990, 2019) addressed how people in society are defined and how institutional views are reinforced, including stigma of blind people or those with other physical disabilities. The young individual tries to learn about the society around them through trusted sources. As they grow, the reality they were taught may seem different from their own view of it (Berger & Luckman, 1966; Schneider & Ingram, 1990). This is the process of stigmatization when society seems to reject the blind girl as being different and sinister. The child wants to be normal and to fit in, and the reality of stigma is purported as the real truth, but outside reality does not align with that person's self-concept (Goffman, 1963). Stigma is assigned to that blind woman by society (Goffman, 1963).

The theory of social construction explains how institutions are designed by humans (Berger & Luckman, 1966; Schneider & Ingram, 1990, 2019). This construction is reinforced through institutional rules of what is acceptable in society. Schneider and Ingram (1990, 2019) introduced four types of people whom they identified as target populations: contenders, deviants, advantaged, and dependents. Social construction is still being cited today to explain policy decisions and politics.

Social construction is somewhat simplistic and formulaic even though it is useful to understand how reality is constructed by society (Baird, 2010; Romaioli & McNamee, 2021). Putting people into defined categories makes the model oversimplified but easy to understand by researchers. Even though social construction has its limitations and its detractors, social construction is a viable theory to understand the way public society thinks about women with disabilities and how they are identified and categorized. Romaioli and McNamee (2021) described how the theory of social construction has been met with broad acceptance.

Other researchers exposed intersectionality and how marginalized groups are intertwined while not studying women with blindness who have been college educated and looking for work (Baird, 2010; Pena et al., 2016; Wang et al., 2019). Baird (2010) said that social construction did not encompass multiple intersections of gender or race, but both intersectionality and social construction use power as their understanding of oppression. However, there are many sources from which social constructions take place. Knafo (2008) stated that power is not inherent in agencies or agents, and power is subject to the agent’s proclivities or understandings. Knafo argued that marginalized participants can exercise power and posited that power is apolitical, which denied the structural inequality that Schneider and Ingram (1990, 1993, 2019) proposed. According to Knafo, social construction becomes blurred and is not one-sided from the powerful to the powerless because power is not inherent in agencies. Knafo wondered what is being constructed and explained that positivism is taken for granted; therefore, Knafo did not believe in social change as influencing actors and institutions. Social construction is closely related to the research paradigm and paradigmatic assumptions of the researcher.

Some researchers used social construction as part of their understanding of disability oppression and stigmatization. Pena et al. (2016) discussed structural, societal, and institutional inequities, which aligned with social construction. However, Pena et al. also used the theory of intersectionality and critical theory to understand disability oppression and found that disability was defined by the environment which fits with the social model of disability. Pena et al. claimed that disability is not impairment, and Howard and Aas (2018) agreed. Howard and Aas noted that Barnes, who developed the social model of disability, saw social construction as demeaning disability and making the person with a disability part of the oppressive society instead of defining themselves as having disability pride.

Several other researchers used the theory of social construction to analyze disability marginalization (Devar et al., 2020; Naraine & Lindsay, 2011; McManus et al., 2021). McManus et al. (2021) used social construction theory and the social model of disability in their study concerning service animals. McManus et al. viewed reality and knowledge as socially constructed. McManus et al. described how reality is constructed of social, policy, faith, and cultural views of society. McManus et al. also theorized that disability is a construction of society. In contrast to McManus et al., Naraine and Lindsay (2011) studied social situations in the work environment and discovered that stereotypical ideas about dog handlers at work created erroneous socially constructed beliefs by coworkers. Devar et al. (2020) also used social constructionism in a qualitative study of 12 students with disabilities in South Africa. Devar et al. found that societal conditions create disability and are socially constructed. I was not able to determine whether Devar et al., McManus et al., and Naraine and Lindsay used the same conception of social construction as Schneider and Ingram (1990, 1993, 2019).

Stigma Introduction

Although several researchers examined various forms of stigma (American Psychological Association, 2020; Babic, 2010; Clair & Lamont, 2016; Goffman, 1963; Kuhl et al., 2011; Matulessy, 2020; Ryan, 1976; Smith, 2007; Tyler & Slater, 2018), other researchers looked at stigma concerning people with disabilities (Beatty et al., 2019; McDonnall & Tatch, 2021; Shandra, 2018; Silverman et al., 2020; Van Beukering et al., 2021; Wang et al., 2019). The articles about general forms of stigma presented stigma from a psychological or sociological standpoint. The researchers viewed stigma as damaging, but they did not approach it from a disability policy standpoint except that Goffman (1963) mentioned disability as one of the many stigmatized groups, as did Ryan (1976) who mentioned disabled people as being distinguished in society as the worthy poor. Wang et al. (2019) updated the literature with the claim that there were few studies that addressed stigma and disability as well as the concept of ableism.

Literature Review

I sought to identify the various social structures that cause obstacles for blind college-educated women, including dimensions of stigma, gatekeepers, legal structures, education, financial instability, and the models of disability that have hampered employment. Social construction was used to explain these themes. The disputes about social construction were explored. The articles that related social construction to disability were explained in terms of confirming or disconfirming evidence.

Legal problems were identified in several court cases (Hoge, 2015; Pfeiffer, 1994; Waterstone, 2014). Laws such as the Americans with Disabilities Act (1990) and the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 (Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act, 1998). and the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (PL94-142) (1975) were also instrumental in policy making. These laws added to the stigmatization and marginalization of blind people. The articles that defined stigma in general and explained it as damaging for people were from the American Psychological Association (2020) or Babic (2010) or Albrecht (2007).

The process of marginalization in modern times started with the concept of stigma. Stigma was referred to most often in the articles in this literature review. Goffman (1963) was the sociologist that first named the concept, and other researchers saw stigma as a useful concept as well (Clair & Lamont, 2016; Stangl, et al., 2019). The articles that mentioned stigma in general described its forms and its derivation such as Babic (2010) which discussed those with mental illness. Chowdhury (2021), Clair and Lamont (2016) and Stangl et al., (2019) discussed stigma but with other groups such as those targeting race, people who tended to be overweight or those who have AIDS or other health conditions.

The conceptualization of stigma in the Clair and Lamont (2016) and Stangl (2019) articles found that people could alter their stigmatization which counters many of the other conceptualizations of stigma. Instead of focusing on stigma as a negative concept, Clair and Lamont (2016) focused on what they characterized as destigmatization. Stangl et al., (2019) proposed that stigma has been siloed across different health conditions, and that policy has to meet the needs of the public to limit stigmatization, although Stangl et al., (2019) viewed stigma as a positive aspect that could foster resilience and agreed with Clair and Lamont (2016) about ameliorating stigma.

Women who were disabled were also an under-studied group although three articles conducted qualitative studies about disabled women and their relationship to employment (Chowdhury, et al., 2021; Moloney, et al., 2018; Taub et al., 2004). Other studies mentioned that women were not utilized as a separate research cohort in other research that studied all disabilities (Chowdhury, et al., 2021; Wang et al., 2019;

The obstacles to employment for blind college-educated women was under-studied and under-developed. Specifically, studies collected data concerning blind people in general or disabilities in general concerning the topic of stigma (Scott, (1969; Van Beukering, et al., 2021; Wang, et al., (2019). Wang et al.'s study compared treatment by the public towards blind people and compared their rebuffed reactions to the reactions of unsolicited assistance of wheelchair users, while in contrast Van Beukering et al., (2021) used multiple sources to explain self-stigma among people with varying disabilities. Scott (1969) studied the socialization of blind men and mentioned blindness as a stigmatizing factor.

The purpose of this proposed study is focused on the obstacles to employment experienced by blind college-educated women. The research literature uncovered several problems in terms of the fact that there is no standardization of the definition of disability and quite a few studies analyzed secondary datasets instead of original research such as the U. S. Census Bureau's American Community Survey and the Cornell Study, (2020).

The various definitions of disability were discussed in the previous chapter. The issue of studies that used secondary data was also discussed previously.

As I mentioned earlier, several studies aggregated data so that it was difficult to collect data on individual disability groups or to separate gender (Beatty, et al., 2021). Most of the research that was uncovered was either meta-analyses, literature reviews or systematic reviews where participants with disabilities and gender were simplified and objectified (Hartblay, 2020). When groups are aggregated, either by disability type or gender, it blurs the differences between groups of people and gender differences. This blurring of gender and disability was also mentioned in the article by Adhikari and Frye (2020). Hartblay (2020) proposed that disabled people were objectified as well (Abualghaib, et al., 2019; Adhikari & Frye, 2020; Beatty, et al., 2019; Blaser & Ladner, 2020; Grills, et al., 2017; Rios et al., 2016; Sabatello, 2017). Beatty (2021) and Mont (2019) expressed concern about combining data in administrative sources from a global perspective.

The perspective of disability stigma has been demonstrated mostly from a western perspective concerning programs which explained why data was difficult to categorize and analyze for people with disabilities in other contexts (Blaser & Ladner, 2019). Abualghaib et al (2019) discussed why it is important to separate groups in research studies to generate better data analysis. Beatty et al., (2019) added that the literature stated that women are not separated from men and university education was not studied either in multiple studies they reviewed. McDonnall and Tatch (2021) did not separate blind women in their study either regarding the rate of college education for blind people in general as compared for non-disabled college education. McDonnall and Tatch noted that there was still a wide gap between the numbers of blind people and non-disabled people who have attained a college education. However, in the educational context Pena et al. (2016) mentioned that studies skewed results since disabilities were mixed together to study the issues in university education.

While the article by Rios et al., (2016) and Sabatello (2017) focused on studies concerning healthcare for which disabled people were excluded, such as precision health studies, the Grills et al., (2020) article focused on how studies around the world have excluded research questions about disabilities from the research that has been conducted. Beatty, et al., (2019) specifically suggested that studies aggregated gender and didn't study those individuals who have a college education. Beatty et al., indicated that 67% of research studies have been conducted in the United States. Because of the aggregation of studies, disability is one unitary construct and not studied in a manner that could highlight differences between men and women or disability type (Beatty, et al., 2019). Beatty et al. discussed that those with sensory disabilities have not generally been considered as topics for research study. The aggregation of studies and the lack of studies especially conducted on disabled women in general supports the contention that the purpose of the study necessitates separation of blind women from the majority of articles about disability or blind people.

There is another problem with data interpretation and collection. Adhikari and Frye (2020) mentioned problems with aggregating data and the reporting of findings is not always consistent. This seems to depend on who holds power in the United States as well as who holds power in Finland (Hastbacka, 2020) and what their priorities are. Adhikari and Frye (2020) mentioned measurement for people with disabilities. This particular study indicated that disability status is not compared for gender or race. The way that data is interpreted and who data is collected from can be problematic for people with disabilities. Adhikari and Frye (2020) indicated that their data demonstrated that it was difficult to get specific data that is pertinent on different racial groups or specific information on women. Schneider and Ingram (1990, 1993, 2019) mentioned political considerations. Tyler and Slater (2018) and Lawson and Beckett (2021 also discussed political implications of policy.

The many research articles that I found demonstrated that blind women are subject to individual, systemic and societal diminution of their talents and worth(Naraine & Lindsay, 2011; Lawson & Beckett, 2021; Maroto et al., 2020; Silverman et al., 2019; Wang et al., 2019). There are many causes for this negative self-concept. For the congenitally blind person, the assessment of the low-incidence disability in school is problematic because of a shortage of teachers of the visually impaired because training is highly specialized (Bowen & Ferrell, 2003). The state rehabilitation agency is one outside source of this negative feeling among blind people who are constantly monitored for their fitness for education and employment by rehabilitation agencies. The rehabilitation agency has a great deal of decision-making power regarding the quality of life of blind people (Crudden & Steverson, 2018). The service agencies for blind people can also have a tremendous impact concerning what work is realistic for their clients. Each state rehabilitation agency has decided what is realistic for each client (Crudden & Steverson, 2018).

There are many economic consequences to the policies and programs that exist for people who are blind. The fixed benefits lull blind people into a state of security and disabled people would rather get benefits than work (McDonnall & Tatch, 2021; Yeager, et al., 2006). There are also many legal structures and constraints that impinge on the lives of disabled people including not having equal protection under the law or problems with adopting or having children (Pfeiffer, 1994; Waterstone, 2014).

Power imbalance is especially true regarding various stigmas, stereotypes, gatekeepers, and economic opportunities (Lund & Cmar, 2019; Yeager, et al., 2006). Ravitch and Carl (2016) also defined power as a constant problem especially in qualitative research. This power dynamic is part of how Schneider and Ingram (1990, 1993, 2019) explained target populations. This problem of power over disadvantaged and deviant populations manifests in many challenges for blind women who are college educated (Schneider & Ingram 1990, 1993, 2019).

Stigma is the most over-arching theme that the research literature identified (Goffman 1963; McDonnall & Tatch, 2021; Van Beukering et al., 2021). Stigma is used for many groups and situations and may seem to be over-used in our society today. Stigma has individual, systemic, and societal ramifications. Several types of stigma were identified including self-stigma (Van Beukering, et al., 2021) (Cite the central author), social stigma (Albrecht, 2007; American Psychological Association, 2020; Kuhl, et al., 2011) (cite this author), public stigma (Goffman, 1963; Shandra, 2018) and structural stigma (Shandra, 2018). Research articles demonstrated many other facts about the various forms of stigma (American Psychological Association, 2020; Gofman 1963; Kuhl, et al., 2011); Ryan 1976; Van Beukering, et al., 2021). The various articles demonstrated that stigma had consequences for people with disabilities in every aspect of their lives. Stigma has not been augmented to include blind women with a college education. The definition of stigma will be defined, and the various forms of stigma will be explained further in this literature review.

Some articles discussed the lowered status and income of people with disabilities, especially disabled women (Lund & Cmar, 2019; Wang, et al., 2019; Yeager, et al., 2006). [3]. For many people with disabilities, articles found that poverty was identified as a barrier to full participation in society including employment and especially was precarious for women (Lund & Cmar, 2019; Yeager, et al., 2006). Researchers found that a problem identified by participants with disabilities was that they might lose state and federal benefits if they searched for employment (McDonnall & Tach, 2021; Yeager, 2006). Benefits that were identified included Supplemental Security Income and medical benefits (McDonnall & Tatch, 2021; Yeager, 2006). The lack of financial stability made it difficult for blind people to look for employment, which was perhaps related to the lower employment of blind women.

The Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (1990) and the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 (Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act, 1998) have had the most impact on the lives of people with disabilities (Hoge, 2015; Mayerson, 1992; Pfeiffer 1994; Waterstone 2014). In the section on the law and legal constraints, I will compare and contrast various viewpoints on legal constructs and legislation. That section on the legal constraints and the law will explain how legislation and laws have had an impact on disabled people's lives and impact on employment.

The rehabilitation system in each state is one of the most important stakeholders with decision-making capacity over blind people's future education and employment possibilities (Chowdhury, et al., 2021; Fraser, et al., 2009; Kim & Williams, 2012; McDonnall & Tatch, 2021; Silverman, et al., 2020; Yeager, et al., 2006). Many articles mentioned that agencies failed to provide equipment for blind people, and this can hamper their access to employment (Fraser, et al., 2009; Lund & Cmar, 2019; McDonnall & Tatch, 2021). Crudden and Steverson (2018) explained that rehabilitation professionals fail to recognize the difference between work retention and advancement of employment (Crudden & Steverson, 2018; Kim & Williams, 2012; Lund & Cmar, 2019, 2020; Silverman, et al., 2020).

Statistics About Blindness and Disability

There were three articles that presented data about blind and disabled people in population data and employment statistics. One source was a Cornell Study from 2018 (2020) and another source was the Centers for Disease Control (2020) and the third source was the Bureau of Labor Statistics (2020). The Center for Disease Control (2020) estimated that in 2015 1.2 million people were blind and 3.22 million were visually impaired. By 2050, the population of those with visual impairments will dramatically increase to double these numbers. Visual impairment is best defined by what can be the better correction for visual acuity in both eyes (CDC, 2020). The Census Bureau collects the information in the American Community Survey (Cornell study, 2018, 2020). The Cornell Study (2020) indicated that there are six questions identifying the disabled population. In another study by the Bureau of Labor Statistics (2020) the data demonstrated that more people who were employed were older than the general population if they were disabled. Bureau of Labor Statistics (2020) indicated that half of all disabled folks were under 65. Fewer disabled people were employed in every age group (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2020). In 2020, 29% of people with disabilities were employed part-time compared with 16% without a disability. For disabled people from ages 16-64 the employment rate was 29% employed as opposed to 70% for those without a disability (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2020). Unemployment increased by 5% in 2020 from the previous year (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2020). These statistics give a sense of what many other articles use such as the American Community Survey from the Census Bureau actually demonstrated for their data (Cornell University, 2020). In one study, It took an average of 17 months for a blind person to find a job (Silverman et al., 2019).

One more website from the United Nation's World Health Organization (2021) gave global statistics about blindness. Globally, 2.2 billion people have close or far impairment as WHO (2021) defined it.

The Nature of Work for People With Disabilities

Preparation for work for people with disabilities has been extensively researched previously (Cregan, et al., 2017; Cmar and McDonnall, 2019; Kendall & Karnes, 2018; Kocman, et al., (2018; Lund & Cmar, 2020; McDonnall & Cmar, 2019; McDonnall & Lund, 2020; McDonnal et al., 2021; McDonnall & Sui, (2019); Sevak & Khan, (2017).

Several of these articles studied employers' attitudes regarding disabled people, and some compared groups of disabled workers. Some of these studies, especially those quantitative studies concerning the analysis of secondary data of blind people was problematic because the data collected was not from a primary or original source (Lund & Cmar, 2020; McDonnall & Cmar, 2019; McDonnall & Sui, (2019). Several articles researched blind people in terms of preparation for work especially with rehabilitation agencies (Antonelli, et al., (2018; Chowdhury et al., 2021; Crudden &Steverson, 2018; McDonnall et al., 2021; Silverman, et al., 2019).

Some articles discussed blind people and rehabilitation professionals' understanding of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (1998) (Chowdhury et al., 2021; Crudden & Steverson, 2018; Kendall & McLennan, 2021; McDonnall et al. 2021; Silverman, et al., 2019). The preceding articles are all quantitative and the article by Kendall and McLennan (2021) gives the Australian context. The McDonnall et al., (2021) and the Chowdhury et al (2021) articles analyzed secondary data. Even though there have been numerous articles concerning employment in general, including some articles on blind people, no original or seminal studies sought to collect data on blind women who are college educated and what that might mean for their workplace.

The positive social change implications that are possible were revealed in the literature. The issues such as isolation, lowered economic status, lack of agency in decision-making regarding education and work capabilities were all researched for employers, people with disabilities, rehabilitation professionals and the public (Chowdhury et al., 2021; Lund et al., 2020; McDonnall & Antonelli, 2022; Wang et al., 2019; Yaeger et al., 2006). However, studies did not capture the experiences of blind women's college education in relation to employment. In order to accentuate positive social change, policies and programs need to change for blind women to attain equitable and meaningful employment as Chowdhury et al., (2021) described. Studies need to be conducted which recruit blind women who have a college education with an emphasis on their work places but studies on disabled people in general have rarely been conducted (Krahn, et al., 2015; Rios, et al., 2018; Sabatello, 2017; Shandra, 2018).

Studies need to add to the body of literature on people who are blind or disabled and who seek to work in a competitive work setting. Similarly, studies have demonstrated that disabled women need to be recruited for studies to increase the data on blind college-educated women who experience obstacles to employment (Krahn, et al., 2015; Rios, et al., 2018; Sabatello, 2017; Shandra, 2018). These studies mentioned specifically that women have not been studied or recruited in a wide variety of domains or disciplines (Rios et al., 2018; Sabatello, 2017). The fact that so many studies did not study women in many disciplines such as healthcare and other domains or try to recruit women with disabilities as study participants is one reason this study is being conducted. It is likely that positive social change may be achieved because of bringing attention to these gaps and problems that were revealed by the literature.

Another problem with studies that recruited and collected data on people with disabilities which I defined before is that disability is identified and defined in so many different ways that it is difficult to codify a universal body of knowledge that all researchers can refer to when conducting studies using primary or secondary data on people with disabilities. This is not just a problem in the United States, but it has been represented in other studies from various countries (Goertz et al., 2010; Hadidi & al Kateeb, 2013; Grills, et al., 2017; Odame et al., 2020). This makes it difficult to interpret findings of government and other studies concerning who is disabled, and how to gauge the number of disabled people for eligibility purposes for programs and services (Adhikari & Frye, 2018; Beatty et al., 2019; Mont, 2019).

A further reason why this study is being conducted is that disability is a social construct which society and environment reinforces through attitudes and beliefs about the capabilities of people with disabilities (Iezzoni, 2011; McDonnall et al., 2021). Institutions reinforce these beliefs and characterizations as well. Grills et al., (2017) reinforced that there was no standardization in data in the Indian context which can estimate prevalence of disability. Though many studies for this dissertation were qualitative, many research articles used large datasets or existing datasets which does not give researchers enough primary data from the experience of blind college-educated women (McDonnall et al., 2019; Silverman et al., 2019). Because U.S. society seems to portray disability as an individual tragedy, and not a systemic one, the policies did not reflect the injustice of how disability was portrayed and marginalized, stigmatized and structurally segregated (Howard & Aas, 2018; Van Beukering, et al., 2021; Thurman, et al., 2019). Wang et al., (2019) also indicated that disability is a multifaceted construct. Say more here Lynne. This is a place where your passion and outrage can be shown, albeit tempered Employers' attitudes Towards Employees with Disabilities is problematic and these issues were mentioned by Kendall and Karnes (2018) and Sevak and Khan (2017).

Many articles discussed barriers to employment that were imposed by employers. Articles compared groups of disabilities with each other for their ability to be employed and employers' perceptions of these groups (Fraser et al., 2009; Kim & Williams, 2012; Kendall & Karns, 2018; Kocman et al., 2018; Sevak & Khan, 2017). While the Sevak and Khan (2017) article disclosed that job restructuring could be one method for mitigating employment barriers for people with disabilities, Kocman, et al., (2018) found that overall, employees with physical disabilities were considered more favorably than those with intellectual disabilities by employers. Other articles discussed how employers had stereotypes about blind people (Fraser et al., 2009; Kim & Williams, 2012). Kendall and Karnes (2018) confirmed what Fraser et al., (2009) and Kim & Williams (2012) found in that concern about costs to the employer for health care or accommodations such as health insurance claims and work productivity could be associated for people with disabilities. These articles demonstrated that the attitudes of employers still need to be updated to mitigate stereotypes about blind people's capabilities and burden on employers. Most employers were not familiar with tax offsets for employing people with disabilities (Fraser et al., 2009). The study by Sevak and Khan (2017) demonstrated findings from a quantitative study which showed that many people with psychiatric disabilities or physical disabilities or both were not aware or vocational rehabilitation.

Stigma

The preponderance of articles for this literature review focused on stigma. There are different kinds of stigma that were proposed in articles. There is self-stigma (Van Beukering et al., 2021) social stigma (Albrecht, 2007) Public stigma (Clair & Lamont, 2016; Stangl, et al., 2019; Shandra, 2018) health-related stigma (Stangl et al., 2019) and structural stigma (Clair & Lamont, 2016; Stangl et al., 2019). Both Clair and Lamont (2016) and Stangl et al., (2019) studied different health conditions but not people with physical disabilities in relation to stigma.

Most of the stigma that was discussed in general articles about stigma emphasized sociology and psychology and mental health (American Psychological Association, 2020; Goffman, 1963; Kuhl, et al., 2011; Ryan, 1976; Smith, 2007). Other articles upon which this literature review is based were concerned with physical disabilities or blindness (McDonnall & Tatch, 2021; Van Beukering, et al., 2021; Wang, et al., 2019; Yeager, et al., 2006). The British study by Stangl et al., (2019) represented stigma as a multidimensional construct. The articles which the literature review focused on were concerned with physical disabilities or blindness (McDonnall & Tatch, 2021; Van Beukering, et al., 2021; Wang, et al., 2019; & Yeager, et al., 2006). The majority of the literature on stigma was prioritized toward the study of those with mental illness and stigma. Very few articles prioritized the policy and political implications of stigma,, but one article did (Tyler & Slater, 2018). Other articles discussed societal implications tangentially (Goffman, 1963; Ryan, 1976; Smith, 2007).

Stigma causes many reactions from the individual to the societal. However, as Tyler and Slater (2018) concluded, little research has been conducted to understand the reasons for stigmatizing people, but some explanations were given by Smith (2007). In ancient times, stigma was used to exclude people like slaves and criminals by branding them (Smith, 2007). It might be said that blind people were branded when they used a cane or dog guide or glasses. But while the physical manifestations of stigma may be evident, the political and cultural dislocation is much more insidious. Smith (2007) further stated that the mark in ancient times was made with a blunt object. Though in ancient times stigma was used as a physical brand, it has a more figurative meaning in today's use of the word. Today, it is used as part of the institutionalization of certain groups of people like blind women (Berger & Luckman, 1966; Schneider and Ingram, 1990; 1993; 2019).

Though Smith (2007) focused on stigma in communication, Tyler and Slater (2018) understand the concept as generated from political and economic power. Schneider and Ingram (1990; 1993; 2019) explained power relationships with certain target groups in a later theory about target populations. This will be further developed in the theory section.

There were many different cultural perspectives and policies that were explained in some articles. Many articles were slanted towards western and Euro-centric cultural norms (Beatty et al., 2019). An article from Indonesia demonstrated how their country stigmatized those with Covid (Matulessy, 2020). Matulessy used a social/psychological perspective to understand social stigma which was the most prevalent presentation of stigma that I found in the literature.

As Tyler and Slater (2018) conceptualized, little research energy has been used to discuss the reasons for producing stigma, and why it is necessary to classify people in this manner. Though in ancient times, stigma was used to separate people like slaves and criminals by marking them physically (Smith, 2007). In the present context, Howard and Aas (2018) defined a marked body of disability which hearkens back to stigma being thought of as a mark on the disabled person in ancient times.

While the preceding discussion focused on a general comparison of stigma in terms of different disciplines and even different countries, the emphasis this dissertation is focusing on blind female college education and its impact on employment. Researchers have identified many kinds of stigma in regard to people with disabilities and blind women upon which this study is based. The term stigma has been used to explain the negative treatment of people with disabilities by scholars and by society as the main factor described in the literature to explain the lower status of people with disabilities, (Goffman, 1963; McDonnall & Tatch, 2021; Ryan, 1976; Van Beukering, et al., 2021; Yeager, 2006). The foregoing discussion demonstrates that this study is significant, and has social change implications, since blind women have been under-studied in the literature relating to college education and employment, and in relation to stigma as well.

Self-Stigma

Self-stigma is the internalization of the stigmatized identity that has labelled people with disabilities as a devalued population (Chowdhury, 2021; Goffman 1963;

Hastbacka, 2021; McDonnall & Tatch, 2021; Moloney, et al., 2018; Taub et al., 2004; Van Beukering, et al., 2021; Ryan, 1976). Self-stigma is the belief by marginalized people that they can work or be promoted. Van Beukering, et al., (2021) indicated that people also quit their jobs as a result of self-stigma or tried to emphasize other assets to minimize disability on the job (Taub et al., 2004). Though Van Beukering et al., (2021) found women and disenfranchised groups tended to be more victimized, isolated, and more impoverished, that study did not disaggregate women because it was a secondary analysis (Wang, et al., 2019, Yeager, et al., 2006). The researchers gave scant evidence concerning the specifics of the stigma on multiple stigmatized populations including blind women who have attained a college education. Many articles use existing datasets, and this adds to the confusion about how stigma affects blind college-educated females. The article by Van Beukering et al., (2021) was a compendium of different sources which makes self-stigma difficult to analyze, since there are no definitive findings based on a single disability such as blindness. Wang, et al., (2019) discussed the interaction towards people with disabilities as adding to the lack of a positive self-concept as does Chowdhury et al., (2021) Moloney et al., (2018) and Taub et al., (2004). Even though the article by Wang et al. (2019) did not mention self-stigma, Albrecht (2006) did mention a negative internalization of society's branding of the disabled person.

Self-stigma is the internalization of one's status as being devalued and unworthy and being discriminated against (McDonnall & Tatch, 2021; Stangl, 2019; Van Beukering et al., 2021; Wang, et al., 2019). More articles need to focus on this, but stigma is not necessarily an individual pathology because it has social and societal implications (Howard & Aas, 2018; McDonnall & Tatch, 2021; Thurman et al., 2021; Wang et al., 2019; Yeager et al., 2006). Self-stigma can lead to feelings of malaise and unwillingness to seek employment (McDonnall & Tatch, 2021; Yeager et al., 2006). As Goffman (1963) disclosed in his findings, being segregated into a group such as disability can cause consequences for employment and also lead to self-stigma. Some of these consequences that were identified by Van Beukering (2021) were the reticence to dislodge themselves from federal or state fixed income programs or entitlements. The decision to forego employment is linked to poverty and lower income and can add to their lowered lifetime earnings.

Self-stigma is closely related to the medicalization of disability. Kim & Williams (2012) compared different models of disability including the medical model of disability, and McGrath and O'Sullivan (2022) concurred. McDonnall et al., (2020) discussed that blindness is the most feared condition by medical professionals. Thurman et al., (2021) felt that society saw disability as an individual malady which could perpetuate self-stigma and a medical model of disability. The medical model of disability was discussed in many articles (Chowdhury, 2021; Devar et al., 2020; Hastbacka, 2021; Kendall & McLennan, 2021; Kim & Williams, 2012; Krahn, 2015; McGrath & O'Sullivan, 2021; Naraine & Lindsay, 2011; Shandra, 2018; Thurman et al., 2021). Rehabilitation agencies also reinforced a medical model orientation but since the 1950's has changed their orientation according to Kendall and McLennan (2021).

Social Stigma

Social stigma is defined by the American Psychological Association (2020) and by the early theorist Goffman (1963). Though stigma is seen as the individual defect that denotes a physical, mental or social deformity by Goffman (1963), social stigma leads to societal disapproval and isolation and discrimination of that individual (American Psychological Association, 2020; Kuhl, et al., 2011; Matulesssy, 2021). Chowdhury (2021) and Moloney et al., (2018) conducted a study that demonstrated that women with disabilities employ more stigma management strategies than men to be included at work, and social stigma involved social responses that excluded people with disabilities from social interactions (Albrecht, 2006; Naraine & Lindsay, 2011). Chowdhury et al. (2021) used their qualitative study to analyze disabled women with advanced degrees. The Chowdhury (2021) study will be discussed later. Other articles discussed social stigma in social situations such as Kim & Williams (2012) and Naraine and Lindsay (2011). Naraine and Lindsay (2011) used a Canadian perspective to study social stigma.

Public Stigma

While Chowdhury (2021) and Moloney (2018) discussed strategies to fit in to the workplace for women with disabilities, an earlier study by Tau et al., (2004) covered much of the same material. Women with disabilities minimized their disability in an effort to fit in to the workplace (Moloney, et al., 2018; Taub et al., 2004). Chowdhury (2021) described how there is a double bind for women with disabilities with degrees since they don’t receive enough help from their rehabilitation agency. Chowdhury (2021) augmented the study by Moloney et al., (2018). However, Maroto et al., (2019) was a contrast with those articles which mentioned that employment was not the only factor that caused lower income and dependence among women with disabilities. Public stigma means that the stigmatized person deviates from the ordinary or what is expected by society (Goffman 1963). Goffman (1963) is an excellent source for understanding stigma of various types and people, but he does not explain the particular stigma of blind people or blind women. Though the two articles by Taub et al., (2007) and Moloney et al., (2018) discussed the effort to fit in to work place as women with disabilities, these articles did not give a clear perspective on blind college-educated women in particular. However, Chowdhury et al (2021) gave a very detailed report about their findings of the women they studied who were college educated and employed, but still felt isolated at work. Chowdhury's et al. (2021) study also found that women used adaptation strategies to fit in at work.

Structural Stigma

Stigma has many dimensions including structural stigma. Stangl (2019) discussed how constructions that embody culture seems similar to social construction of reality (See Schneider & Ingram, 1990; 1993; 2019). Stangl et al., (2019) discovered in their research that different stigmas have different consequences, and this article studied those with HIV and other groupings just like Clair and Lamont (2016) in discussing destigmatization. Both these articles argued about different groups other than disabled people, but they also discuss how stigma can be rectified.

Stereotyping

Stereotyping is an outgrowth of stigma (Stangl et al., 2019; Wang, et al., 2019). In fact, Stangl et al., (2019) explained that stereotyping is a type of stigma. One such study concerned how blind people were perceived generally as ruder and more unlikable as they rebuffed unsolicited forms of help (Wang, et al., 2019). Blind people were perceived as ruder than those who use wheelchairs. Other articles focused on social stigma in social situations at work (Kim & Williams, 2012; Naraine & Lindsay, 2011; & Wang, et al., 2019). Social stigma is part of the stereotyping by these particular authors (Kim & Williams, 2012, Naraine & Lindsay, 2011, & Wang, et al., 2019). Van Beukering et al., (2021) and Stangl et al., (2019) indicated that disabled people internalized society's stereotypes. Wang et al., (2019) spoke about stereotypes as a structural problem that contributed to lack of access to the physical environment, or lack of accessing pertinent information about employment, housing, and higher education (Stangl et al., 2019; Wang et al., 2021).

There are numerous stereotypes that the nondisabled public believe. Kim and Williams (2012) discussed that stereotypes include fear, pity, incompetence, dependence, and helplessness of disabled people (Beatty, et al., 2021; Chhabra, 2020; Hartblay, 2020; Naraine and Lindsay, 2011). Chhabra (2020) discussed how people who were blind were stereotyped as stupid. Stereotypes are used to deny people integration into society, and this view was borne out in the article by Cregan et al., ((2017). Cregan et al., (2017) used the Australian lens to discuss stigma and stereotyping which led to lack of employment.

Ableism

Ableism is a part of the medical model of disability according to several authors (Hansen, et al., 2017; Hartblay, 2020; Kim & Williams, 2012; Pena, 2016; Wang, et al., 2019). Beatty, et al., (2019) discussed how many sighted people or able-bodied people see blind people as needy and also are condescending towards blind people and believe that they lack autonomy and decision-making ability. Hartblay (2020) described that one aspect of ableism is a view that disabled people are suffering and should be pitied.

Ableism is closely associated with what Shandra (2018) and Chhabra (2020) discussed as disablement. Chhabra (2020) conducted a longitudinal study comparing blind people from Norway and Delhi. Disabling attitudes were promulgated by the qualitative study of six trainers and six assistance dog handlers in New Zealand (McManus et al., 2021). These attitudes were studied by the public in the study, and the public had some mistaken ideas about assistance dogs (McManus et al., 2021). Dog guides were denied in shops and restaurants and public transportation (McManus et al., 2021). This caused discrimination and inequality (McManus et al., 2021).

Wang et al., (2019) also used ableism to explain their study of patronizing assistance towards blind people and people who use wheelchairs. Wang et al., (2019) defined ableism as oppression, and included stereotyping in the concept of ableism. Ableism is multifaceted and cuts across many life activities. It includes barriers that are structural, hence social construction will be used as the theory I will choose to inform this dissertation (Hansen et al., 2017; Wang et al., 2019). Ableism also includes policies that limit education housing, and healthcare (Wang et al., 2019). Ableism is seen as patronizing in the interpersonal domain (Wang et al., 2019). Finally, Chowdhury et al. (2021) found in their analysis that internalized ableism was revealed in their interviews. Internalized ableism seems to be the same as self-stigma (Van Beukering et al., 2021).

Educational Deficits

While stigma, stereotyping, and ableism are the outgrowth of policies, certain consequences accrue from those policies. Foremost among these is the area of educational opportunities, especially advanced postsecondary education. One article by McDonnall and Tatch (2021) does study the attainment of blind college-educated people compared with non-disabled participants. They found that college education was greatly reduced for blind college education students even though things had improved for blind college-educated enrollees.

Some articles do validate college education as leading to better work outcomes including Antonelli et al., 2018 and Lund & Cmar, (2020) as well as a Ghana study Odame et al., (2021). Odame et al., (2021) article was a study from Ghana that mentioned that in transition from school to work students with disabilities did not have enough supports. The study by Lund and Cmar (2020) validated that for the United States in terms of the transition from school to work. One article studied blind students in transition and indicated that college education would improve chances of employment (Lund & Cmar, 2019; Lund & Cmar, 2020). While the Lund and Cmar (2020) article was a systematic review of ten sources, the other article used mentorship as a strategy to increase employment of those who already had a college degree (Antonelli et al., 2018; Lund & Cmar, 2020). Similarly, Lund & Cmar (2019) mentioned that college education was a predictor of employment in the studies they reviewed. Kim and Williams (2012) also mentioned that some college seniors prolong efforts for job searching as they were concerned about problems with employment.

Other articles such as Beatty, et al. (2019) discussed very briefly how fewer accommodations are accorded to people with disabilities if they are less educated. Similarly, articles were not identified that studied blind people's access to college education that led to employment except for mentorship (Antonelli al., 2018). Pena et al., (2016) indicated that because of the Americans with Disabilities Act (1990) and the Rehabilitation Act (1973) (Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act 1998) college education has increased for people with disabilities. They concluded that community colleges had more students with disabilities than four-year matriculations. Another article which concurred with the Pena et al. (2016) article was one by Tedla et al. (2022) said that things had improved in Ethiopia but there was no instrument that measured inclusion in their country. This study was quantitative and the irony of this study was that blind people and women were more included in education. The Tedla et al., (2022) study did not link education to employment, or this was not a variable in their study even though they studied college education in Ethiopia. Chowdhury et al (2021) also studied higher education and the workplace for people with disabilities and found that vocational rehabilitation agencies did not respect employees' advanced education. In fact, the participants in the Chowdhury et al., (2021) study felt that they had to prove themselves at work. The vocational rehabilitation agencies wanted to place them at lower levels of employment that included entry level positions even though they had advanced degrees.

Rehabilitation and Employment of Blind People

Kendall and McLennan (2021) defined rehabilitation as an intervention that assists the disabled individual in retaining their current employment after a disability onset, return to work after an illness or disability or find employment for the first time. The rehabilitation system is a governmental system in many countries designed for the purpose of equipping blind people and disabled people for competitive work. Wong et al., (2020) indicated in their study of secondary data that rehabilitation counselors can contribute to people with disabilities who are returning to work in their accommodations.

There are two funding mechanisms in which rehabilitation agencies work in federal law in the United States. Some states have a separate funding source and agency for blind or low vision individuals (McDonnall et al., 2021). A general rehabilitation agency provides services for people with other disabilities in that same state (McDonnall et al., 2021). A separate state plan is developed for the separate agency (McDonnall et al., 2021). The other model is a combined agency that serves all disabilities (McDonnall et al., 2021).

There are two different onsets of blindness generally for blind people. Brunes et al., (2019) conducted a cross-sectional quantitative study about loneliness but mentioned the congenital and acquired blindness and cannot be mitigated or ameliorated. Lund and Cmar (2019), however, conducted a review of other studies that mentioned that rehabilitation programs serve two types of blind people with different onsets for blindness as measured in the studies they reviewed. Some studies worked with congenitally blind people who became blind before the age of 6 (Lund & Cmar, 2019).

Other studies that Lund and Cmar (2019) reviewed were those who are adventitiously blinded which means they were blinded as adults over 18 years of age (Lund & Cmar, 2019). The Kendall and McLennan (2021) study from Australia was not specifically geared towards rehabilitation of blind people, but did define how rehabilitation assists people with disabilities across the world. McDonnall et al., (2021) indicated that vocational rehabilitation does not increase job quality according to their analysis of the RSA-911 case closure reports. Chowdhury et al., (2021) also spoke about job quality since they found that vocational rehabilitation agencies tried to put clients at the lowest level for job placement. However, Beatty et al., (2019) mentioned that job quality and promotion are areas where more study is warranted for people with disabilities in general.

In an earlier article from the Netherlands Goertz et al., (2010) mentioned that for blind and visually impaired persons around the world the employment level is low. Several articles described the rehabilitation system and how inconsistent the various governmental systems are (Crudden & Steverson, 2018; Goertz et al., 2010; Kendall & McLennan, 2021; Lund & Cmar, 2019; McDonnall et al., 2021; Silverman et al., 2019). The rehabilitation system has been an integral part of blind people's lives and employment opportunities. Many blind people used other forms of seeking employment than vocational rehabilitation agencies (Silverman et al., 2019). The success of rehabilitation for finding employment was found to be mixed amongst blind jobseekers (Silverman, et al., 2019). This could be related to the confusion over regulations of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (1998) amended in 2014 by rehabilitation professionals (Crudden & Steverson, 2018; McDonnall et al., 2021). Job recruiters and job fairs were not helpful to blind jobseekers (Silverman et al., 2019). Other articles aside from Crudden and Steverson (2018), and McDonnall et al., (2022) were literature compendiums of other literature or governmental documents.

The rehabilitation system in the United States is geared to improving employment outcomes to increase independence and inclusion in their home community (Crudden & Steverson, 2018; McDonnall et al., 2021).

Cmar and McDonnall (2019) conducted a study where blind youth were given summer work experience and also mentioned the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (1998). Cmar and McDonnall predicted that high school work experience improved chances of competitive employment. Vocational rehabilitation paid for six weeks of their summer work experience. However, only three of the 42 participants had paid work experience in that program. Some participants received job training and some did not in that particular study.

While Crudden and Steverson (2018) found that agencies had trouble interpreting the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (1998) for work retention as opposed to work advancement, McDonnall et al., (2021) focused on the quality of employment positions that are found for blind people. The article by Mcdonnall et al., analyzed government documents known as RSA-911 forms about what is called case closure of blind people, and analyzed the factors that might improve the quality of employment. The Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (1998) was amended in 2014 and was a modernization of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 which was a landmark legislation for people with disabilities (Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act 1998). The

Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (1998) amended the regulations for vocational rehabilitation agencies. Kendall and McLennan (2021) described how there is little evidence that supports vocational rehabilitation services in improving employment outcomes. Kendall and McLennan (2021) discussed how the role of rehabilitation agencies are ill-defined. Even though this applied to Australia, this is just as true in the United States. Failure to adapt to changing work patterns and environments will doom the rehabilitation system, Kendall and McLennan (2021) asserted.

Silverman et al., (2019) and Chowdhury et al., (2021) discussed how rehabilitation systems did not always result in competitive occupational positions. The issue of job quality was discussed by McDonnall et al., (2021) and Chowdhury et al., (2021). These articles suggest that it is not just finding any job, but a job that matches the skills and experience of blind jobseekers with the employment position. Chowdhury et al., (2021) focused on women with disabilities, and stated that women are started at lower salaries and stereotypical female job positions such as childcare.

Another aspect of rehabilitation is the employers and their access and availability of rehabilitation professionals. Earlier articles by Kim and Williams (2012) and Fraser (2009) discussed the frustration of employers because communication was scarce between employers and rehabilitation professionals. This meant that the employee was not getting the support that was promised for their work position.

Two other articles sought to collect data on implicit biases of blindness professionals and compare those results to employers' biases (McDonnall, et al., 2019; & McDonnall et al., 2022). The employers had more negative perception of blind people's capabilities in the McDonnall et al., 2019) article. However, a later article by McDonnall et al., 2022) had employers meet with VR counselors. Both articles studied the attitudes of employers. The McDonnall et al., (2019) article interviewed the blindness professionals as well as the employers.

Finally, one article mentioned that rehabilitation professionals were not equipped or trained to assess suicidal ideation or other mental health problems that might have an influence on employment (Lund et al., 2020). The holistic view of the blind person should be undertaken in rehabilitation agencies so that employment can be successful. Articles such as Silverman et al., (2019) and Chowdhury et al., (2021) provided a view of how blind and disabled view rehabilitation agencies and their decisions. Cregan et al., (2019) focused on how work can decrease stereotypes and increase a person's sense of self-efficacy. Cregan et al., (2019) further pointed out that paid employment can decrease stigma.

Financial Considerations in the Decision to Work

There are sometimes financial reasons why people with disabilities and especially blind people are hesitant to work as noted in some articles. This section will explain the benefits that blind people do not want to lose, and other financial considerations especially for women with disabilities and who happen to be blind. Some people prefer to stay on a fixed income rather than apply for positions for work. First, Ryan (1976) assumed that people with disabilities could not work and Yeager et al., (2006) assumed in their study they would review data from impoverished blind women which assumed that most people who are disabled are impoverished. Even Ionescu (2019) discussed poverty of disabled people in Romania. Ionescu (2019) even mentioned the American psychologist Abraham Maslow who originated the hierarchy of needs (See Maslow, 1943). These needs are linked to integration and social inclusion in the work place for people who are blind or disabled (Ionescu, 2019). People with disabilities have the same aspirations as everyone else in society, but social exclusion keeps many disabled people from exercising their full potential whether economic or social (Howard & Aas, 2018; Ionescu, 2019).

Maroto et al., (2019) also focused on persistent barriers to employment which caused people with disabilities to use government sources such as Supplemental Security Income (SSI) or utilized family income or savings when they experienced economic hardship (Beatty et al. 2019; McDonnall & Tatch, 2021). This is one confirmation that society has viewed people with disabilities to solve their own problems with government sources or family support. This conception of disability also feeds into the fact that people with disabilities are just going to be poor and are not able to work (Odame, et al., 2020; Ryan, 1976). This also encouraged disabled people to be dependent on others without making their own decisions.

People with disabilities would rather forego work than give up their benefits which makes it incumbent upon them to declare that they cannot work. Wang et al., (2019) discussed specifically that women have higher levels of poverty and social isolation and victimization than disabled men. Lund and Cmar (2019) suggested that poverty and lower earnings accrue to blind people who seek employment. McDonnall et al., (2022) proposed that Social Security benefits set up a barrier to employment of blind people. Ironically, Social Security has designated statutory blindness in their regulations which automatically makes the blind recipient eligible for Social Security Disability Insurance benefits (McDonnall et al., 2022). This also signified that higher benefits accrue to blind recipients because blind recipients have a higher substantial gainful activity amount (McDonnall et al., 2022). Other benefits also accrue such as higher earnings capacity if one is receiving Social Security Disability Insurance (McDonnall et al., 2022). This study by McDonnall et al., (2022) used secondary data from the American Community Survey and the Survey of Income and Program Participation. Both of these surveys are administered by the Census Bureau (McDonnall et al., 2022). Even Waterstone (2014) discussed means testing for people with disabilities who receive Supplemental Security Income . To receive Supplemental Security Income, a disabled individual cannot be performing any gainful activity (Waterstone, 2014).

Legal Structures and Laws

In the 1920s, the eugenics movement was popular in the United States. This led to a 1927 Supreme Court decision Buck V. Bell (274 US 200, 1927). This case held that people who were thought to be “mentally defective” were to be sterilized so as not to pass their supposed disability on to the next generation (Iezzoni, 2011; Pfeiffer, 1994). Hartblay (2020) took this further to indicate that not only were disabled people feeble in their minds but also in their bodies. The Buck V. Bell (1927) case caused many unnecessary sterilizations in the United States. Over 30 states had and still have laws on the books where disabled people can be sterilized (Antonius & Raup, 2020). Goffman (1963) and Ryan (1976) proposed that institutions have caused the public to believe that blind people are burdens on society. The erroneous belief about blind people's capabilities is part of the social construction of reality (See Schneider & Ingram, 1990, 1993, 2019). Scott (1969) reiterated this view of blind men as socialized and helpless societal participants. Scott (1969) suggested that previous research had looked at blind men as having psychological defects. There were and are some misguided assumptions about blind people being dependent which have been cited in articles (Kim & Williams, 2012; Naraine and Lindsay, 2011). Naraine and Lindsay (2011) discussed that incompetence and helplessness are associated with blindness by the public, and these stereotypes are socially constructed. No studies that I reviewed collected data on blind women who were college educated and their obstacles to employment. These articles did not use social construction to analyze their findings (See Schneider & Ingram, 1990, 1993, 2019). In fact, there was no literature that studied blind women and work in a disaggregated manner as many articles explained. One of the most interesting findings was that many articles mentioned power dynamics and stigma, though the focus of those articles was not on blindness or disability (Albrecht, 2006; American Psychological Association, 2020; Babic, 2010; Goffman, 1963; Kul et al 2021; Smith, 2007; Tyler & Slater, 2018). It was not until 1993, when Schneider and Ingram explained how social construction represented power dynamics and group hierarchies and how power dynamics had an impact on target populations. Schneider and Ingram (1990, 1993, 2019) drew upon earlier theorists to initiate their theory of social construction of reality.

One treaty that Hastbacka (2021), Lawson and Beckett (2021), Mont (2019), and Odame, et al., (2021), discussed was the United Nations Convention on the Rights of

People with Disabilities. The United States has not ratified this treaty. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities emphasized the full inclusion of people with disabilities in society. (Hastbacka, 2021; Mont, 2019; Odame et al., 2021). This treaty was ratified in 2006 in Finland and Lawson and Beckett (2021) also cite 2006 as the ratification of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities in England. But it was ratified in Ghana in 2007 (Hastbacka, 2021; Lawson & Beckett, 2021; Odame, et al., 2021). Lawson and Beckett (2021) reported that the United Nations Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities was the advent of the human rights model of disability (Lawson & Beckett, 2021).

The laws that have had a significant role in the United States started out with the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, which was updated as the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (1998) in 2014. Mayerson (1992) wrote that the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 Section 504 was the first time that discrimination was acknowledged for people with disabilities (Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act 1998). The law banned discrimination on the basis of disability for those who were recipients of federal funds (Karger & Rose, 1992; Mayerson, 1992). However, it did not protect people with disabilities in private employment, public programs, or benefit programs (Karger & Rose, 2010; Mayerson, 1992). Not until the ADA did those protections become enshrined in law in the United States (Karger & Rose, 2010; Mayerson, 1992). The Americans with Disabilities has five titles and the first title concerns employment provisions (Karger & Rose 2010). Mayerson (1992) discussed how the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 (Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (1998) finally recognized disabled people as a minority.

In terms of employment, McGrath and O’Sullivan (2022) and Wong et al., (2020) discussed employment in a section in Title I of the Americans with Disabilities Act (1990). Their emphasis is on the concept of reasonable accommodation which is a concept in Title I of the Americans with Disabilities act (1990). Reasonable accommodations are workplace specific changes to the disabled employee’s workplace. Even though the article by McGrath and O’Sullivan (2022) studied the Irish context, this may have application to the United States legal framework of the Americans with Disabilities Act (1990) (McGrath & O’Sullivan, 2022; Wong et al., 2020). Wong et al., (2020) discussed that workplace policies might change to accommodate workers with disabilities. People are afraid to ask for workplace accommodations as reasonable accommodations (Wong et al., 2020). Wong et al., (2020) explained that unless there is an undue hardship by the employer (ADA, 1990) reasonable accommodations should be granted (Wong et al., 2020). Even Hartblay (2020) mentioned that disabled people lacked legal authority.

The Supreme Court has been the single greatest barrier to people with disabilities and poor people. This chapter has already discussed Buck V. Bell (1927) which has never been repealed. However, another Supreme Court decision has disenfranchised disabled people in terms of equal protection under the law (Hoge, 2015; Waterstone, 2014). The case that is being referred to here is City of Cleburne Texas v. Cleburne Independent Living Center, Inc. 1985, (Hoge, 2014). According to the case brief of the case (473 U. S. 432) there was no rational basis and there was no legitimate state interest and the Supreme Court decided that there was no equal protection for the plaintiffs in the case who were developmentally disabled (Hoge, 2015; Waterstone, 2014). This case had long-term ramifications for all people with disabilities (Hoge, 2015; Waterstone, 2014). Other disenfranchised groups have heightened scrutiny or intermediate scrutiny, but people with disabilities are not given the same kind of protections as other groups (Waterstone, 2014). This is perhaps one reason why Waterstone (2014) indicated that the Americans with Disabilities Act (1990) is a better tool for bringing employment cases than the Supreme Court. The legal framework is one reason why disabled people are marginalized and stigmatized.

Impairment and Disability

Studies have been conducted in various countries concerning blind people and how they were treated that replicated unequal treatment in the United States (Chhabra 2020; Hansen et al., 2017; Hartblay, 2020; Hastbacka, 2020; Kaminska, 2020; Odame et al., 2021). Iezonnie (2011) discussed how disabled people feigned disability so that they did not have to fulfill responsibilities of working in the 1880s. Kaminska (2020) concurred with that where it concerned disabilities and the Middle Ages and what work could be performed. In terms of disability being sinful or a curse from God, two articles had similar findings about this (Kaminska, 2020; and Odame et al., 2021). Hastbacka (2020) also portrayed the Middle Ages as a time when disabled people were institutionalized. Just like Ryan (1976) categorized disabled people, Hastbacka said that people with disabilities were thought of as the deserving poor, and they were separated out from society and subjected to the medical model of disability. People with disabilities were seen to be in need of cure (Hastbacka, 2020; Kaminska, 2020; Odame, 2020; and

Thurman et al., 2020). Hartblay (2020) found that in postSoviet Russia, disabled people were morally inferior and could not work, relegating disabled people to poverty. The medical model viewed disability as an individual consequence of sin or tragedy or some other catastrophe that is relegated to the family or to the medical professional. Next, we will consider how disability became more of a societal designation.

Some studies mention impairment of the body instead of disability (Devar et al., 2020; Howard & Aas, 2018; Pena, 2021; Shandra, 2018). Shandra (2018) found that the social model of disability ignores impairment of the body. Howard and Aas (2020) posited that if one becomes disabled later, the individual body is not to blame but it's society's negative response to the body. Lawson and Beckett (2021) also differentiate impairment from disability. They Maintain that the social model and human rights model ascribe disability as a societal function, and that previous models viewed disability as an individual problem of the individual human being to solve (Lawson & Beckett, 2021).

Summary of Literature Related to Key Concepts

In looking for the various constructs and phenomena of study, I chose articles that explained the lack of consequential studies on blind women or even disabled women in the literature. I chose employment as it is so often written about concerning blind people, and I chose college education since there were very few articles studying whether that would make a difference in employability. The articles that I reviewed from Journal of Visual Impairment and Blindness were quantitative and some were also using secondary data from the American Community Survey (Antonelli et al., 2018; Maroto, et al., 2018; McDonnal et al., 2022; McDonnall & Sui, 2019; and McDonnall, & Tatch, 2021).

Antonelli et al., (2018) conducted a longitudinal study, and the authors described how barriers to employment of blind people have been established in previous literature. Antonelli et al., (2018) have indicated that blind people have employment issues despite attaining a college education. Mentorship by a fellow blind person was one method of assisting with job search (Antonelli et al., 2018). Antonelli et al., (2018) indicated that studies on job search strategies are nonexistent. McDonnall and Cmar (2019) indicated that there were reasons why blind people may still have lowered employment despite more college education and greater technology use. McDonnall and Cmar (2019) drew their conclusions from the American Community Survey. They stated that many websites are inaccessible to blind people. McDonnall & Sui (2019) drew their conclusions from four national surveys including the American Community Survey from different years concerning employment of blind people.

Because of the very limited research on blind women, and the scant research on job search strategies, I chose my constructs from what I saw was a gap in the literature. I chose the topic of women in the work place because women were routinely left out of studies that I reviewed, and authors mentioned that women had lower earnings and more difficulty in their desire to work (McDonnall & Tatch, 2021; Yeager et al., 2006; Wang et al., 2019). There were no specific data on any of these categories of employed people who had graduated from college.

A qualitative study will give a broader description and explanation about women who are college educated and their obstacles to work. As Antonelli et al., (2018) and McDonnall and Cmar (2019) exposed in their articles, the gap in employment of blind people and their problems with actually gaining employment is still a problem today. I chose the construct of employment because the literature is replete with data demonstrating that work is harder to acquire for blind people than it is for sighted people. College education is the best way to be employable but it has not brought down the unemployment and under-employment rate as much as researchers would have hoped.

Social construction is related to the medicalization and stigma that has isolated and categorized blind women who have a college education (See Schneider & Ingram, 1990, 1993, 2019). Social construction is an updated theory of why actors act as they do in relation to deviant groups, and they categorize disabled people as deserving (Schneider & Ingram, 1990; 1993; 2019). The theory of social construction explained the power imbalances that shaped the lives of blind women and their access to employment. The best example of this is the Chowdhury et al., (2021) article which explained that even though the disabled people had attained advanced degrees, the power brokers such as the rehabilitation agencies made decisions about their fitness for professional work settings. I have discussed how Baird (2010) and Knafo (2008) defined problems with the theory of social construction.

More studies need to be conducted on college education and blind women in general, and earnings disparities between blind men and women and the types of employment that are available for blind women who are college educated. Because Chhabra (2021) and the Antonelli et al., (2018) articles were two of the only longitudinal articles identified, more longitudinal studies need to be conducted. Another problem that I identified is that many articles used secondary data that analyzed such issues such as

Social Security payments to blind people McDonnall et al., (2022) self-stigma (Van Beukering et al., 2021) and other research that analyzed the treatment of disabilities (Beatty et al., 2019). These articles are just a sample of the issues that were covered, but they are important and indicative in understanding the factors that lead to the marginalization and the obstacles to the workplace for blind or disabled people.

Summary and Conclusions

The themes that have been elucidated in this literature review were drawn from conclusions and findings found in the literature. The most frequent theme was that of stigma either in the individual or by society (Goffman, 1963; Van Beukering, et al., 2019; Wang et al., 2019). Stigmas were towards the self (Van Beukering et al., 2019) or by social institutions (Albrecht, 2007; American Psychological Association, 2020; Kuhl, et al., 2011), public stigma (Goffman, 1963; Shandra, 2018) and structural stigma (Shandra 2018).

Stereotyping and ableism are closely related to stigma, as the stigma was thought to cause ableism and stereotyping (Kim & Williams, 2012; Naraine & Lindsay, 2011; Wang et al., 2019). Financial considerations were also considered and the rehabilitation agencies also factored into employment decisions (McDonnall et al., 2021; Silverman et al., 2019; Wang et al., 2019).

In analyzing what is not known about this topic, the topic of how family members react to blind women and their workplace barriers have not been a subject of studies (Van Beukering, 2021). Another topic is that studies should be conducted on how Social Security and medical benefits are actually a barrier to employment as Yeager et al.,

(2006) and McDonnall and Tatch, (2021) discussed. McDonnall et al., (2022) used secondary data, but that even pinpoints further that Social Security should be studied as an impediment to employment.

Now that the themes have been explained, the methodology will be explained in the next chapter. The methodology will explain how this study will be conducted and the data points that will be tapped in this qualitative dissertation. The methodology will be using the themes identified in this chapter to forge a data collection and analysis plan in light of the gap that is demonstrated by the lack of articles on blind women who have attained a college education and their barriers to the workplace.

Chapter 3: Research Method

The purpose of the study was to explore the obstacles to employment experienced by blind college-educated women using the theory of social construction. No researchers had chosen blind college-educated women for their study parameters. I hoped to add to the scholarly literature on employment barriers and also build on the scholarship concerning people with disabilities who happen to be blind and female. This chapter provides a description of the methodology used in this study.

Research Design and Rationale

The primary focus of the study was the obstacles that blind female college-educated applicants for employment face through societal and self-stigma, governmental policies and restrictions, human resource policies, legal structures, and public stereotypes. I collected data from semi structured interviews (see Guest et al., 2006; Rubin & Rubin, 2012; Seidman, 2006; Turner, 2010).

I conducted a qualitative study. Ravitch and Carl (2016) and Turner (2010) suggested that the qualitative research that I conducted provides a rich, thick description of my participants. I used semi structured interviews to explore the phenomenon of obstacles to employment faced by blind college-educated women.

Qualitative methodology allows researchers like me to elicit participants' perceptions and perspectives through open-ended questions. Researchers have demonstrated that qualitative research is a valid form of inquiry (Cooper & Endicott, 2007; Kahlke, 2014). The qualitative method of inquiry is adaptable, flexible, and pragmatic, and qualitative inquiry can include many sources to collect data (Kahlke, 2014). My research paradigm was constructivist because other researchers described the benefits of qualitative research (see Cooper & Endicott, 2007).

The interview technique is a preferred method of data collection for qualitative research (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). This is especially true for homogeneous and marginalized groups (Guest et al., 2006). Morrow (2005) noted that there is no set number of participants if the interviews are sourced with high-quality information.

Role of the Researcher

It is important to identify the role of the researcher to understand the standpoint from which the researcher is situated (Creswell & Miller, 2000; Dodgson, 2019; Holmes, 2020; Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Saldaña (2022) identified many roles than a researcher can inhabit. For example, the researcher may be an insider or an outsider relative to the group they are studying (Dodgson, 2019; Holmes, 2020; Ravitch & Carl, 2016).

Bias is inherent in all research (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Researchers have biases because they have values and beliefs that follow them into the research process. No one who conducts research is objective, and researchers have a particular way of viewing their relationship to the research, participants, and interpretation of the data. Although the current study was informed by my identity and positionality as a blind college-educated woman, I relied on the literature to develop the research question. I was both an insider and an outsider in the study (see Ravitch & Carl, 2016; Rubin & Rubin, 2012).

My role was an insider as a blind college-educated woman, and my role was an outsider because I was not the same age as the participants. I was also an outsider because the participants were not exactly like me. I was an insider because I am a person who is blind and shares that experience with participants. I controlled for bias by keeping a journal and by being reflexive about my participation. By writing about my reactions to the interviews and how I was positioned in the research process, I identified my biases and mitigated them as much as possible. I am not sure I was always neutral, but I asked open-ended questions.

Methodology

Participant Selection Logic

The sampling frame for this study was a convenience sample. This nonprobability sampling method is commonly used for qualitative research. I drew a sample from emails sent to consumer organizations or people unknown to me with the criteria that I specified for sample participants (see Appendix A). The organizations I sent letters to were the American Foundation for the Blind, American Council of the Blind, LinkedIn, a disability wisdom Facebook page, and a Zoom group.

The logic I employed when recruiting participants was that because my study was addressing the employment obstacles of blind college-educated women, I looked for participants who were similarly situated. That meant that I recruited blind college-educated women over the age of 22. I used the internet or networking to identify participants. The anticipated number of participants in the sampling frame was 18.

Though it was not possible for me to gauge when saturation would be reached, studies suggested that 12–15 participants would produce the necessary data to answer the research question. Saturation referred to the number of participants at which the same information was being reported and no new information was being produced by the interviews.

Informed consent documents were provided to participants explaining the purpose of the study and explaining how the participants would be protected from harm. Dependability was bolstered by triangulation which included member checks from participants. An audit trail was also employed for dependability. Reflexivity was used for confirmability. Credibility was ensured as a trustworthiness category by member checks and triangulation. Transferability was promoted by thick, rich description of participants' experiences (see Creswell & Miller, 2000; Ravitch & Carl, 2016; Rubin & Rubin, 2012).

As Creswell and Miller (2000) noted, thick, rich description is detailed and meaningful when reporting participants' stories about their experience. Rubin and Rubin (2012) explained how thick description encompasses complex issues. Morrow (2005) explained that contexts of the shared experiences can also add to thick description. The qualitative method of interviewing is especially beneficial for marginalized groups or groups who have been understudied to explore their experiences (Guest et al., 2006).

Instrumentation

Semi structured interviews were the primary method of data collection. Seidman (2006) explained that interviews are the best way to elicit people's lived experiences. Researchers can understand the meaning of those experiences by interviewing people who have had the experiences. Even though the interview is subjective, it addresses the primary experience (Seidman, 2006). The interview is more formal than an ordinary conversation (Rubin & Rubin, 2012; Turner, 2010). It is best if the questions are open-ended (Creswell & Miller, 2000; Rubin & Rubin, 2012; Turner, 2010). Even though Seidman touted the benefits of interviews, Turner (2010) and Rubin and Rubin (2012) detailed the types of questions to ask and how questions should be phrased for neutral and nonjudgmental data collection. Another benefit of interviewing is that it should be synchronous and not conducted by email or mail surveys (Opdenaker, 2006). Guest et al. (2006) suggested that for stigmatized groups, researchers should employ nonprobabilistic sampling. For a homogeneous sample, which was sought in the current study, Guest et al. suggested a sample of six to eight participants. I practiced my interview questions with family and friends (see Appendix C). The interview protocol was developed from themes and categories related to the literature reviewed. Interview questions were vetted in a road test to determine whether the questions were open-ended and would elicit thick, rich responses from participants.

Recruitment, Participation, and Data Collection

I conducted semi structured interviews from my home over the internet. Participants were in their homes to make it more comfortable for them to participate in the interview. As the primary researcher, I conducted the interviews solely by myself. Transcript reviews were undertaken for rigor of the study by my dissertation committee. I shared the written transcript with a couple of participants who requested them. I tape recorded and transcribed the interviews, and I invited the participants to review the transcripts for accuracy and fidelity with their spoken word. I shared my codes and thematic structures with my chair. I made sure that all participants who were recruited met the study criteria and verbally signed the informed consent forms. I made sure that the participants understood the purpose of the study.

The debriefing strategy was undertaken with an inquiry about the participants' comfort level. I asked if they had any questions for me as the interviewer. I also asked if they had any other questions about the study. I thanked them for their time and honesty. I used pseudonyms for the participants to mask their identity.

Data Analysis Plan

The data analysis involved manual coding of individual codes. Then I put first-cycle codes into categories and then into themes. I then compared and contrast the themes and looked for discrepant data. While conducted first-cycle coding, I detected individual codes from interview transcripts and then broadened them into categories and themes that cut across interview participants (see Saldaña, 2022). The thematic elements were summarized to form the basis of the results and discussion for the study. The results were based on the quotations and thematic elements that were derived from the interviews. Transcript data were coded and added to the thematic structure to form results. I made sure the data related to the research question and to the interview questions, and I looked for similarities and differences among the participants.

Preliminary Coding Framework

The preliminary codes that were used for data analysis emerged from the literature related to concepts of stigma (Goffman, 1963), including stereotypes and ableism. Codes related to the theory of social construction of target populations (Schneider & Ingram, 1990, 1993, 2019) included power, values, burdens, benefits, and values. As data were analyzed, I used an iterative process and was attentive to emerging codes.

Issues of Trustworthiness

Credibility

There are many techniques for establishing credibility in qualitative research. Berger (2015) and Dodgson (2019) noted that reflexivity is one of the most important techniques for establishing trustworthiness in qualitative research. Reflexivity establishes the ways in which the researcher and participants might differ in terms of race, class, and life experience (Dodgson, 2019). Reflexivity also involves self-reflection. to check for bias and positionality (Berger, 2015). Saldaña (2022) also indicated that it is essential for researchers to understand their roles to have credible qualitative research. Ongoing self-reflection is necessary so that researchers' biases do not limit the results of data analysis. Researchers questioning their values and beliefs as well as their assumptions is part of the research process (Berger, 2015; Dodgson, 2019).

Transcript reviews, reflexivity, and attention to data saturation were used to establish credibility in the current study. These methods for internal validity were supported by Creswell and Miller (2000), Morrow (2005), and Ravitch and Carl (2016). I also used a journal and audit trail as well as field notes to bolster the study's credibility. I gave participants an opportunity to provide comments about the transcript of their interviews.

Transferability

For transferability, the intentional selection of participants and information-rich descriptions promoted external validity. However, qualitative studies are often not designed for transferability to other situations and circumstances (Morrow, 2005). Because blind and college-educated women were being considered for the current study, , they were a subset of the blind population. Also, not all ages of blind women who were college educated were considered. Participants needed to 22 years or older because I was considering blind women at the beginning or near the end of their careers. I was able to find participants who had had diverse experiences. I used a convenience sample, and I hoped that the sampling frame that I devised would allow for data saturation to be achieved.

Dependability

Dependability was achieved through audit trails and triangulation. An audit trail was used to track all the parts of the study with data collection and analysis (Carcary, 2020; Morrow, 2005). Triangulation is a technique to increase data sources in the study. I chose participants for semi structured interviews that were recorded and transcribed.

My committee chair reviewed each stage of the data collection and analysis process. Shenton (2004) also explained that dependability involved replication of the study. It is important to be as detailed as possible about how the study was conducted so that it can be replicated. That is part of the reason for the audit trail (Carcary, 2020).

Confirmability

The last step for credibility of the study will be confirmability. Confirmability is analogous to objectivity such as the findings of what the data collection found (Shenton, 2004). Bias is inherent in any study, and I tried to build rapport with each participant and honor their experiences. I asked follow-up questions and clarifying questions and probes when necessary (Rubin & Rubin, 2012).

Ethical Procedures

Ethical procedures are necessary in any research conducted on human subjects. Ethical considerations should be taken seriously to protect the participants. Ravitch and Carl (2016) indicated that the relationship between researcher and participants should be carefully managed. Ngozwana (2018) also felt that context is important in the relationship. Ethics is not just a legal requirement, but it is a moral imperative as well. Confidentiality must be respected so that the data that is collected is forthright and there is an assurance that the researcher who is me can be trusted. Ngozwana (2018) and Rubin and Rubin (2012) maintained that reducing harm to the participants is paramount.

Power relationships are also inherent in the researcher/participant relationship. Anything that builds trust and helps the participant feel empowered will help with data collection (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). That means that no identifiable information is given about any participant. This includes their name, place of residency, information about the interview, or any other information that could identify the participant. Trust is important for collecting the data that is necessary for the research study.

One method for ensuring ethical standards is the review of the proposed study by the Walden University Institutional Review Board (IRB) for approval of the study (approval number 01-13-23-0998574). The IRB ensured that the research study is conducted with rigorous standards of confidentiality and anonymity of research participants. Anonymity is also important for an ethical study. This is why masking the names and geographic or age of the participants is so vital for a research study.

Informed consent is also important. It is inherent in an ethical study that the participants understand the purpose of the study, and how the information will be used in the future (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). It gives respect to the participants. Transparency and honesty about the study and who has access to it is important to give confidence to the participants that their information will not be shared.

Summary

The descriptions in this chapter specified techniques that were used to collect data for this study. I mentioned the specific methods that will be used, the preliminary codes and credibility techniques. Specifically, I used semi-structured interviews and I described why this is the viable method in qualitative research studies. I also described the sampling method, saturation and how ethical procedures will be followed. I was specific about how I will control for credibility and the methods I will use for that. The Trustworthiness is met with credibility standards. Credibility techniques was triangulation techniques and audit trail. I used reflexivity to mitigate for bias which is always present in qualitative research. Credibility is concerned with dependability, confirmability, and transferability.

Chapter 4: Results

The purpose of this study was to conduct semi structured interviews with blind college-educated women who were working full-time or part-time and were over 22 years old. The research question was the following: What are the policy and social obstacles that female blind college-educated job applicants face in seeking employment? This chapter includes the codes, categories, and themes that were identified in the analysis of the 11 participants' interview transcripts. I also explain how the codes, categories, and themes were used to answer the research question. Quotes from the interview participants demonstrate why the codes and themes and categories were chosen. I also explain how I conducted the study and the procedures for finding the participants. I describe the method by which I scheduled interviews. I also identify challenges that I encountered with the technology and explain the test that I used to verify the questions. I debriefed each participant after the interview and explained whether she was in the test or not.

Next, I explain the characteristics of the study and the participant demographics. I explain the length of interviewing and the setting of the interview. During the research process, I kept a research journal and an audit trail to keep track of my concerns or feelings regarding the research process. I also wrote some field notes after working on the codes and categories and the quotations from each participant.

Setting

The 11 women participants answered the interview questions in detail, and data were generated by their experiences and explanations of obstacles to employment. Even though each participant's story was different and there were some discrepant data, which will be explained. The 11 interviews took place over the Zoom platform and were recorded using the Zoom program. I set the program to record the interview the minute the meeting was scheduled. Most of the interviews were recorded locally, and two were recorded to the cloud. One interview had to be recovered from the Otter.ai program that generates transcriptions and can record calls. I did not find the software to be as accurate as my manual transcriptions. Manual coding kept me close to the data. I never found any software transcription or analysis program that was accessible and took less time. Also, most of them cost money. Even though using software might have sped up the data analysis, I took the time to listen and transcribe the interesting and in-depth interviews.

The setting was at each person's home. All participants used the Zoom platform and were sent meeting requests. Participants were also sent the informed consent form that I was required to read verbally at the interview. I sent the informed consent form to each participant before the interview to peruse before they would have to consent verbally during the interview.

Demographics

The participants were 11 adult women who worked part-time or full-time. Participants were between the ages of 31 and 66. The were geographically dispersed across the United States. Most participants were White except for one Native American and one person whose roots were from India. I used convenience sampling to find participants. Convenience sampling is a nonprobablistic sampling that uses known organizations from which to recruit participants. These were organizations that I was a member of and from whom I could choose qualified participants quickly. I found that this was the quickest way to recruit participants for the study. The sample was not representative or random, but the thick, rich descriptions of interviews outweighed the benefits of randomized representative sampling because this group of participants had not been studied.

Data Collection

On January 13, I received final approval from the IRB. As soon as I received the approval from the IRB, I called my contact at the American Council of the Blind and was instructed to send the announcement of my study and an invitation to participate to her and it would be posted to the general discussion list on their website. Within an hour or so of posting the announcement, I received three messages from people I knew from the American Council of the Blind. However, they were all older and retired and therefore not eligible for the study. I also sent messages to my Facebook page and to the American Council of the Blind Facebook page at least twice, and I called American Foundation for the Blind to recruit participants.

I sent a message to LinkedIn but did not receive any participant inquiries through that social media site. I also sent a message to Washington Council of the Blind and mentioned it in a Washington Council of the Blind Zoom call that took place on Saturday morning. I sent a message to a Facebook page called Disability Wisdom, which was mentioned to me by the American Foundation for the Blind, where I found two participants.

On January 14, a person contacted me who qualified. I always asked by email if the women were working for pay and if they were over 22 years old. According to the audit trail, I was worried that I was not getting enough participants on the second day. I did get one message from someone I did not know. When I asked them about working, I asked if they were working for pay, how they found out about the study, and whether they were 22 or older. I wrote back to the first two eligible people to see if they would be part of the test for me to practice my interview protocol. I heard from one person who eventually realized she did not have time to be interviewed. She would have qualified. She had found the announcement on the American Council of the Blind Facebook page. I continued answering emails and reaching out to request participation. I found another person who qualified. I then received messages from one who qualified and one who did not. Recruitment was slow but steady.

I also made sure that everyone had Zoom and could attend by the Zoom platform. I sent each participant the meeting request by phone, which was easier, or computer. The meeting request gave the date and time on the mobile phone if I selected those who would be attending the meeting, but it did not work as well on the computer.

One person who was not working emailed me on my personal email wanting to participate, but I said I could not use her for the study because she was retired. I also received a request to participate from a man, and I said this study was focused on women but I thanked him for getting in touch with me. I wrote back to five people, but only one qualified. I completed two practice interviews by the end of January 2023. These were with two blind women who were not working. The third person who had written me on the first day did not show up for the practice interview. I tried to schedule two more times and then decided that it was not going to work. Luckily, I had another person I could interview for practice.

I created an audit trail for each step of the research process (see Carcary, 2020). In my audit trail, I noted that I was nervous about the transcriptions and the data analysis. With one of the practice interviews, I arrived on the Zoom call about 20 minutes beforehand. Practicing before the formal interviews was useful in that I was able to better understand what lay ahead.

All the names herein are pseudonyms. My participant interviews began with Hannah. I had a problem with Robyn's interview because she was using her phone and she was not intelligible due to her being distorted many times and not using a microphone and putting her face into the phone. I scheduled with Esther for the next week with the Walden email. I received two other emails from Wendy and Gayle, and that made five people. I checked about Gayle being a participant because she had been sighted until 6 years ago, and I was not sure that I could use her for a participant. Gayle complained that she did not get a time for the meeting. Wendy was 5 minutes late, but she really appreciated the interview. I was worried that she did not have the right link. On the 31 of January, I had to change the meeting time for Gayle because she had another meeting at the time I scheduled. I sent consent forms to Gayle and Esther by the Walden email. There were three more people I had received requests from who were Opal, Ursula, and Claire. I was beginning to notice similarities and that Robyn and Nancy both mentioned creativity. Twice with Nancy and Penny my braille display did not work, which meant I had to listen to the screen reading software to read the consent form and read the questions.

In my research journal, I put information about what participants focused on, such as Hannah focusing on finding jobs by herself and being a woman. As I stated in the research journal, all participants focused on the difficulty finding jobs, and the first two interview participants reported having had quite a few jobs. Several participants had assistance from family members, including financial assistance.

The cloud meetings were hard to find, but Zoom sent me the link to the meetings by email. I had two meetings right after the other on February 9, 2023. The second meeting was frustrating because she was 20 minutes late and her wireless signal kept bumping her off. Malinda indicated at the beginning that she had only 25 minutes. I always honored the time constraints of the participants. Malinda and I got through all of the questions. Nancy was 10 minutes late on February 6, 2023. I texted her, as I had texted Malinda, because I did not know what the problem was with them joining the meeting.

At every interview except Wendy's, I asked if the person wanted to receive the transcript. Several participants wanted the full study. I thanked them verbally and thanked them by email as well. I asked them if they had anything to add or if they had any questions for me. With one person, I forgot to ask one question. That was in Robyn's interview because it was so long. I did not ask "What resources did you use during your education to prepare you for work?"

The interviews lasted between 22 minutes and 76 minutes. Only Malinda had time constraints. There were problems with internet connectivity with Malinda's interview. One other participant, Robyn, was not using an external microphone as she stated in her interview after my not being able to understand her multiple times. That was frustrating. Each interview is explained with the categories and themes in the next section.

Data Analysis

Before the transcriptions were completed, I noticed some repeating codes and categories emerging from the data. I thought that I might have been drawing conclusions too quickly. I knew that some of the codes were about volunteering because they figured prominently in Malinda's transcript. Codes related to accessibility, transportation, and working from home eventually were categories that emerged from the data. I had thought that stigma and stereotypes were not prominent, but they seemed to be when I looked more closely at the codes and transcripts. A couple of participants indicated that they did not consider themselves to be stigmatized, but these were the minority because most of the participants felt stigmatized. The participants who did not feel stigmatized felt that was their own deficit or that they had mitigated their circumstances so that stigma did not figure into their feelings about their employment experience. This could also be a manifestation of a stigma management strategy. This was different from the other participants who said they were stigmatized.

After I transcribed the interviews, I started looking for the most prominent codes in each interview. The aggregate frequencies for the coded data are included in Appendix C. The codes were then aggregated into themes with quotes from the participants to support them. These themes were accessibility, transportation and commuting, work arrangements, rehabilitation services, and other job searching strategies.

Accessibility

Because inaccessibility of websites as well as proprietary websites posed a problem for most of the participants, most mentioned that they had trouble with company website applications for occupations or had to deal with proprietary software. Related to this was the fact that many of the participants did not have or were not given the training or equipment they needed to do their work when they started their employment.

Robyn stated

> I had a complete melt-down when we started using Google sheets and I couldn't it was not it was not it was it was far more of a reaction than was reasonable this is the first job in my entire working life where every single aspect of this job every single one we were using Word and Excel and a telephone. And there wasn't one thing that I couldn't 100% do on my own. Now they've entered into Google Sheets and I can't do it. And I was just It was so it just it just kind of knocked the steam out of me because I was feeling so awesome about the fact that I didn't need help with anything…. we had to use specialized software .

This quote was most heartfelt, but there were others that addressed accessibility issues. This was Gayle's take on inaccessibility after she became blind:

> I had … a hard time reaching anyone in Human Resources to help me with anything including any of the forms that needed to be filled out that I could no longer read. … They kept sending me forms by e-mail attachment only that I

> could not read. … Were Not sending me anything in an accessible format and I was just beginning to understand how to use my phone and I did get myself an IPad … because I figured if I could make things bigger I figured out I might be able to read them.

Esther expressed her feelings this way: Losing my vision completely there was a lot of accessible issues with applying online for jobs with them not being accessible. E

Opal expressed her frustration with the computer this way:

> Most of that job-hunting is online. Um so it's been interesting to get on these different websites and fill out these different job applications and have to go through their assessment process. A lot of times that stuff really isn't very accessible.

She also noted, You almost never get hired.

Transportation and Commuting

Close to the inaccessibility of computer software or applications and proprietary software was transportation and commuting time. Transportation is one of the biggest factors in job access. The issue of transportation sometimes came in the first question I asked and sometimes I asked about it later. Commuting times were mentioned and the lack of work and family balance. It was not only the long commutes on paratransit, but having to change buses or the amount of walking it took to get to a conveyance. This is one of the main factors in people working from home. At least three participants mentioned secondary disabilities that caused them to prefer working from home. But that is in the next section. I knew this was a factor although in this dissertation it is an emerging code.

The first quote I knew I was going to use was Opal's story about commuting:

> You know I think one of the biggest challenges that I've had so far even just working is the commute; how long it takes to get to and from work and of course you know if you live you know forty-five or an hour away from your job site or if you just you know if that's where you're supposed to you know that's where you you put down roots, that can be really hellacious because you know you're often times you're taking you know one of those paratransit buses or you're or even if you're taking the regular buses or I mean Uber is like super expensive so like for me that was the only option was the paratransit bus, and so you know you get up at you know at you know 5:30 or you know get picked up at 5:30 or 6:00 in the morning and sometimes you know you don't get home until 8 or 9:00 o'clock at night. And um that really wasn't working for me. I really cause that doesn't really give me a good work life balance.

Gayle's take on this aspect of employment added another dimension.

> I started taking Uber and Lyft back and forth to work cause I couldn't trust Access. I tried them a couple times they were not timely at all I'm like I can't show up any time that you want me to work and then wait as much as an hour and a half afterward for you guys to bother to show up to pick me up.

Malinda had paid for transportation out of her paycheck with carpooling or drivers and Uber when she was looking for work. She said: I had to pay a lot of jobs yeah

I had to pay for transportation to and from. … “I mean like when I used paratransit. But I found that paratransit likes to get care think that disabled people have nowhere to be and don’t get people there on time.” She also said the buses were “subpar.” Nancy indicated that it’s a two hour commute.

Work Arrangements

Working from home was mentioned by the majority of participants (7). This category was the most often discussed code or category and was as prominent as accessibility barriers. There were multiple reasons for this, but some decided to have that work arrangement due to secondary disabilities and some chose that option due to accessibility concerns at work. A few women chose to work from home because of transportation and commuting issues. This category is closely related to transportation and accessibility. All of these categories work together and intersect with each other to form a framework that explains some of the barriers that blind college-educated women face. It also relates to the constructed reality that blind women face.

Opal was really enthusiastic about working from home. Oh yeah, it’s a work from home job. It’s super sweet. Esther noted: Yeah, I guess I gave a presentation And now I work remotely one hundred per cent of the time. Gayle discussed how lack of reasonable accommodation forced her hand with her employer. They (her employer) decided I’d be safer working from home. Penny indicated that we’ve been working from home for the past three years because of the pandemic. She has secondary disabilities. This might be considered a discrepant case because she was the only one who mentioned Covid.

Nancy also advocated for herself to work from home due to a secondary disability from the time she had been an intern. Specifically, she said: I needed to advocate for myself and I needed to explain that in order for me to continue doing my work well, I needed to be able to work remotely. Ursula had started to work from home for a part-time position last year. Robyn worked part-time also due to a secondary disability.

Work and Family Balance

Work and family balance was mentioned directly by Opal. However, Gayle also mentioned it as did Robyn. Even though it was not a main category, it created a barrier for many of the participants because of commuting and transportation. Gayle said as I discussed earlier: I can't show up any time that you want me to work and then wait as much as an hour and a half afterward for you guys to bother to show up to pick me up.

I will reiterate Opal's comments: you know if you live you know forty-five or an hour away from your job site or if you just you know if that's where you're supposed to you know that's where you you put down roots, that can be really hellacious because you know you're often times you're taking you know one of those paratransit buses or you're or even if you're taking the regular buses or I mean Uber is like super expensive so like for me that was the only option was the paratransit bus, and so you know you get up at you know at you know 5:30 or you know get picked up at 5:30 or 6:00 in the morning and sometimes you know you don't get home until 8 or 9:00 o'clock at night. And um that really wasn't working for me. I really cause that doesn't really give me a good work life balance.

Malinda lamented: I found that paratransit likes to get care think that disabled people have nowhere to be and don't get people there on time. Nancy discussed that her commute could be as much as two hours. Robyn said And I said you're going to have me ride you think it's reasonable for me to ride the bus four hours a day for four hours of work?

Rehabilitation Services: Pros and Cons

Most participants did not feel as if they received quality or fulfilling rehabilitative services from their state. Sometimes, services were not timely, and sometimes services did not fit the education that the participants had attained. This was in contrast to the fact that many participants received assistance with paying their tuition during undergraduate education with drivers if necessary or with reader services even in graduate school. However, many participants felt that services were lacking in terms of understanding their goals and the jobs they could attain and not just working at sheltered workshops or stopgap employment.

Another problem was that rehabilitation services had changed and they were contracted out with different non-profit agencies which had negative results for blind clients in terms of barriers that they posed. These contractors were part of the federally mandated Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (as amended 2014).

Penny complained that I had to fight for everything because you know they didn't they don't make it easy to go through the system. Malinda brought up another point. I found they their goal was to get someone a job and not necessarily a job that's fulfilling so I found that not to be very helpful. Ursula pointed out I have to say the Commission for the Blind um really was not of assistance and um to me as an individual yes they probably helped me get some what we would now call Preat skills. Moreover, Wendy said: I think uh I've always had a mixed view of (rehabilitation agency). But Hannah argued: I had I really did not have good experiences with (state rehabilitation agency)….It stinks. She felt that her state had more money than other states but the agency was not good at helping people find jobs or were training clients on computers.

Other Job-Searching Strategies

Nearly all the participants mentioned that they networked to find jobs. These strategies included making use of friends or other people they met in various situations. This was related to taking initiative in finding jobs. Nancy and Hannah were trail-blazers in a sense in finding ways to earn money by either speaking at conferences which helped them get noticed or Hannah was writing letters for self-advocacy for a particular position. Wendy found mentors or other people who had been employed and who were blind. Penny had a blind supervisor who had mentored her as did Claire in helping to be re-employed after losing her sight. Whether it was mentors or friends, these blind women took advantage of resources to improve their employment circumstances. They took initiative to find jobs.

Some women furthered their education for better job prospects. These efforts did not always prove to further their career aspirations, but many of the participants had more degrees or certificates after four-year matriculation. Below are quotes about this aspect of employment for participants and their ideas about using different methods to find and create employment.

Robyn said they say when you’re looking for a job it’s not what you know it’s who you know. She talked to people who she knew to find employment and sought assistance with applications. Wendy gave a slightly different take on this. I I I um talked to people who were in the workforce. Opal indicated that most of the leg work was on my own because I already knew um because I had been employed. Ursula felt that I stay very well connected in different areas and you know my theory is like never burn bridges. Penny also reiterated networking with people. I obtained both of the positions that I had since my degree because of the people I knew.

Evidence of Trustworthiness

Though I could not prove transferability, some of the findings and results were similar to what I found in the literature. I did use an audit trail for confirmability and I also conducted two “road tests” from the first three people who had contacted me through my Walden e-mail. I am a blind woman and so were my participants, and I felt that that built rapport with them. They felt comfortable talking to me, and there was only one participant who asked about the name of her schools and whether they would be mentioned. This was somewhat surprising since I made clear that everything was aggregated and confidential during the informed consent document. For the other parts of trustworthiness, I kept a journal and audit trail and wrote some field notes as I was working on coding the interviews.

Results

The results (see Appendix C) pointed out that the majority of participants had problems with accessibility at work with proprietary software or assessments or applications or document formatting. This created a feeling of being dependent on others, or a feeling of inferiority or insecurity or frustration and anger. Almost everyone worked in the non-profit or disability world or had jobs that had implications for people with disabilities. Otherwise, many participants worked for state or governmental agencies. Quite a few of the participants received degrees in social work or counseling, even if they ended up teaching technology which seemed to be a bigger need for their agencies.

Two people worked for for-profit companies and not non-profits. They were the outliers. One person worked for a company that offered competitive employment, and one person worked for a for-profit company that produced blindness products.

One discrepant emerging category was working from home. The majority of participants worked from home for various reasons. I had not thought that would be an issue for people. But their stories explained why it was preferable to going to a worksite. At least 7 people worked from home when I interviewed them.

Even though transportation was problematic for some, some had good experiences with transportation. It was still a major barrier to employment but those who had lived in big metropolitan areas did not have problems that they mentioned with transportation. Only one person had access to multiple modes of travel, and one other participant thought their paratransit was quite good. One person did not even mention transportation to get to work. But Hannah mentioned that she took a job that was not easy to get to with transportation but she took the job anyway because she thought that was the only one she could get.

In terms of rehabilitation, there were somewhat mixed results although the majority of participants were not happy with their services even though they did receive help with funding their education or help with funding for reader services or even getting drivers if transportation was a problem. One problem is that if someone is already employed, they cannot get help with finding another job unless they are not working as Opal described. At least three of the people were told to go to a sheltered workshop and their education was not considered. This is problematic.

To mitigate problems with rehabilitation, finding jobs on one's own or networking were tactics that participants used. Three participants mentioned they found mentors either before finding a job or on the job. One woman used mentors to find jobs, and two women had a mentor on the job.

One of the preliminary codes was stigma and power imbalances. At first I thought that stigma was not a big code which was used as a preliminary code, but seven participants felt stigmatized when I asked them. A couple of people said they were not even though they spoke about barriers to employment, but they did not attribute those barriers to stigma but to their own deficits or own ability to get around the barriers they mentioned. Stigma stood up as a preliminary code.

Ableism was also a preliminary code although it was not mentioned by Schneider and Ingram (1990, 1993, 2019). However, ableism is still being described in articles as is stigma which will be described in Chapter 5.

The other preliminary codes were power and burdens and in the interviews power was wielded over participants in terms of being able to find jobs and what kinds of jobs they could find. Power imbalances were described in the updated articles I found. One article I found even mentioned the socially constructed reality.

Values and benefits were other preliminary codes from Schneider and Ingram (1990, 1993, 2019). Since everyone has values, values about women with blindness might have played a part in the barriers they experienced. Values were especially salient for blind women in the workplace as there were stereotypes about them.

Other values that coalesce many of the categories are autonomy and self-determination. All the participants tried to find a way to be independent and self-sufficient which were some of the reasons that they did not want to rely on transportation or lack of accessibility or rehabilitation that did not have a holistic view of their employment options.

Benefits might have accrued due to the creative and stigma management strategies that were employed by some of the participants. Moloney et al., (2018) mentioned how disabled women used stigma management strategies in the workplace.

Autonomy

Autonomy was a theme that stood out when participants needed to be creative. They used their own self-determination to get noticed.

Malinda said: “I was pretty persistent. So it certainly didn’t work to wait for people to contact me.”

Hannah said: “I finally had to tell them that if I didn’t get paid I would get in touch with the legal department of the school system… I got a two-year grant … to help people in nursing homes um with who had disabilities um find mentors. “

Gayle used autonomy which hastened her employer to tell her she’d be safer working from home.

> I put in three different e-mails and this is why I work from home now three different e-mails that said out of reasonable accommodation to my visual impairment and to my personal safety and to the safety of others that that evacuate down this back hallway I request the following: 1. Yellow striping on each step 2. Emergency lighting to be placed in that back in that back evacuation hallway because if we fully lose electricity that’s a completely blacked-out stairway and no one’s going to be able to see what’s going on 3. In big, bold, high contrast letters the word exit on the door we need to open and exit so we can safely leave the building and then 4. Within my office is an audible alarm. So yeah after about the third one of those that I sent to everyone I could possibly find um they decided I’d be safer working from home.

Self-sufficiency

The participants wanted to make their own decisions and to determine their own course of action in employment. They wanted to feel self-sufficient.

Malinda said: So yeah and then some phone calls I literally I remember once out looking for a job I literally just found places that would work with my degree and called them and asked them, “Hey, are you hiring?” And I would just do like a lot of cold calling like that.

Wendy said: "I think you know nobody wants to be told they can't do something or feel like they're being put you know in some kind of a pigeon hole."

Esther said about a supervisor: "I think I'm really I know I'm at least the first person with a disability who spoke up. And she ended up keeping her job. And who knows what happened behind the scenes?"

Hannah said: "I really found everything on my own. I had I really did not have good experiences with (rehabilitation)."

Opal said: "No my state isn't very good at finding jobs for me. So I've had to be pretty resourceful for that."

Meaningful Employment and Satisfaction

Malinda said:

> I found that (rehabilitation) I was only open with them for a small amount of time. And I found they their goal was to get someone a job And not necessarily a job that's fulfilling so I found that not to be very helpful.

Opal said:

> I the only thing I could find was a place … which is a sheltered workshop. um you know that offers certain jobs to blind and visually impaired people um and you know to be quite honest with my education I my own opinion was I didn't want to settle for that. And I wanted something different. I wanted something more challenging or I wanted I just wanted something that would match my skill set you know?

Wendy really feels satisfied and that she is doing meaningful work. “Um I love my job. The only problem I have with the job I have right now is that I don’t work enough. It’s not anybody’s fault. It’s just that things are slow. But I really like my job. “

Wendy also said: “the hardest one the the most negative pol uh experience I had was at the community college because I felt very unsupported *there.”*

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Summary

In this chapter, I described the codes and themes derived from the in-depth interviews. I chose first cycle coding and then realized which aspects fit together for broader application in categories. Moreover, I chose quotes that would support the themes that I recognized. These themes came from the 11 female participants. In the next chapter, I will prescribe what future research should focus on. I will update some of the resources and tie them to the results and relate the resources to the theory which is the social construction of reality. In my reflection, I realized as I mentioned earlier, that several participants used stigma management strategies to cope with barriers to employment. I will flesh that out in the next chapter. I will also expand on the need for autonomy and self-determination of blind participants that I interviewed.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

The purpose of this study was to explore the obstacles that blind college-educated women face in employment. The study comprised 11 women ages 31 to 66 who were dispersed across the United States. The participants were working part-time or full-time.

The nature of the study was to use a postpositivist constructivist model to interpret the findings of the study. This meant that I relied on the evidence that was gathered from participant interviews as the source of rich, thick data. My positionality was that everyone's experience was her own and was drawn from her own internal construct that interacted with society and social forces. The data were dense and intense at times. Not only did the data reveal participants' individual experiences, but the data also revealed deep emotional findings that could be the result of the barriers faced. Experiences were a combination of each participant's thoughts, opinions, and ideas as well as their emotional reactions to events in terms of gaining and maintaining employment. Each woman's experience was based on their decision-making and coping capacity and their internal and external resources to find ways to work through the barriers that impeded them.

Though this study was based on public policy decisions and structures by state governments, the findings demonstrated that there are multiple policies and external factors that have an impact on employment of blind college-educated women. These included family resources, rehabilitation agencies, computer training and skills, and transportation access. Though the public has stereotypes about blind people and their dependence, family structure and support were associated with good job outcomes.

The interview responses revealed deep fissures in governmental and nonprofit structures as well as state rehabilitation resources. There are policies that participants mentioned that were different across state lines due to funding and other considerations such as legislation. The capacity to break through the barriers consisted of personnel who would understand how to meet the needs of the blind women, which usually included rehabilitative agencies. Because rehabilitative agencies have been partnering with other nonprofit agencies to provide services that state rehabilitative agencies pay for, the results have not been positive for blind women because they are varied and not based on an understanding of blindness by these agencies. This is definitely a gap in service delivery. This is an area in which policy must be developed and improved for better outcomes for blind women. To underscore this point, many participants mentioned that state rehabilitation agencies were now served by a network of participating job developers or job coaches who may not know anything about blind people's barriers to employment or access to transportation, or mental health needs. Many participants were frustrated by the rehabilitation process.

Interpretation of Findings

Social construction helped me interpret the major themes of this study, which addressed blind college-educated women's barriers to employment. Social construction is a wide-ranging conception of reality as interpreted by the people who live their experience, as did the 11 women participants. The themes were derived from the thick, rich interviews I conducted (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). The categories were an outgrowth of the social construction of reality as interpreted by the employers, rehabilitation specialists, legislators, and blind women. The theory was developed by Schneider and Ingram (1990, 1993, 2019). The quotations by the participants explain how the social construction works in real life and in the decisions of the participants. According to the participants, meaningful employment, satisfaction, self-sufficiency, and autonomy were not always the outcomes of employment.

The category of accessibility covers the websites, application process, word processing, and transportation barriers that many participants shared and was the top category for the participants. Even though this was the top barrier for the participants, several researchers admitted that there had been very little data about this prominent barrier to the workplace, including McDonnall et al. (2023) and Steverson and Crudden (2023). Instead of looking at social construction as a policy or legislative barrier, these researchers looked at the impact of social construction on blind employees, including underemployment and job satisfaction, which are hampered by isolation from coworkers and lack of communication with supervisors. These studies are good examples of why frustration and feelings of low self-concept were voiced by participants in the current study.

Some researchers approached this from a human rights or equality lens, especially in the European context (Ferri & Favalli, 2018; Shaw et al., 2022). Although Shaw et al. (2022) discussed having meaningful employment, which is problematic across the world, Ferri and Favalli (2018) described lack of accessibility of complex websites and hardware but agreed with the human rights lens of Shaw et al. Lack of accessibility adds to the segregation from society experienced by people with disabilities (Ferri & Favalli, 2018).

Ferri and Favalli and Shaw et al. addressed the construction and updating and maintaining of websites in a human rights context, but Shaw et al. also addressed the human resource and diversity issue in an organizational context as exemplified in a organizational cultural shift, not merely a siloed shift in human resource management.

Shaw et al. (2022) mentioned that interventions for increasing inclusive employment do not address employment procedures and recruitment practices that level the playing field for disabled employees. The equipment and workplace do not provide access that leads to parity and equity with their able-bodied coworkers. Shaw et al. and Ferri and Favalli (2018) also acknowledged that disability is a subjective, socially constructed concept. Ferri and Favalli carried this further by identifying the socially constructed reality as the outside environment that interacts with the individual's disability. Ferri and Favalli and Shaw et al. approached social construction through the lens of the social model of disability and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities that was alluded to in the literature review. However, neither of these articles included information on employees or employers with disabilities in the United States.

One intriguing point that Shaw et al. (2022) described was seeing employees with disabilities as contributing to the workplace, not as being employed as charity cases. However, Steverson and Crudden (2023) discovered that underemployment had implications for job satisfaction of blind and visually impaired employees. A few current participants discussed how they were not being promoted, had not achieved management posts, or were overqualified for their positions. Job satisfaction is discussed in the working from home section because working from home increases satisfaction at work (Kanter, 2022).

In the web accessibility space for blind people in the United States, McDonnall et al. (2023) mentioned that proprietary software, PDF formats, and other document formats were problematic, as many current participants mentioned. McDonnall et al. provided evidence that both hardware and software were problems with blind employees, which Ferri and Favalli (2018) confirmed. McDonnall et al. also mentioned that only two other articles mentioned web accessibility, so there is a need for more studies on the accessibility of websites, applications, and proprietary software in workplaces. Both studies that McDonnall et al. referenced only had five study participants each. Steverson and Crudden (2023) stated another point that was mentioned by the 11 participants in the current study, which was that jobs must be economically sustainable and commensurate with employees' education and skills. McDonnall et al. would concur and so would the other articles that were policy based because they focused on equality for people with disabilities (Ferri & Favalli, 2018; Shaw et al., 2022).

This last point can be supported by more targeted rehabilitation and counseling support. I discussed in previous chapters that blind women tend to be more isolated at work. Coworker and supervision communication and validation are important (Steverson & Crudden, 2023). Blind women need to be acknowledged and supported and have autonomy, empowerment, and self-sufficiency. Good working condition will also increase confidence.

Ferri and Favalli (2018) and Shaw et al. (2022) approached accessibility as a policy and legislative mandate for equality, whereas McDonnall et al. (2023) and Steverson and Crudden (2023) approached this from the standpoint of the blind person's barriers to accessibility. Shaw et al. (2022) also framed their article in the context of sustainable development goals and disability equality. These studies demonstrate the differences in a micro and macro method of analysis in regard to accessibility.

Moreno (2022) indicated that 13% of people with disabilities are less likely to have internet access at home. They are 11% less likely to own a computing device at home, which narrows their access to employment and complicates the web accessibility issue and working from home. All these categories gave rise to the autonomy and self-determination that current participants craved.

Finally, these articles show that web accessibility is still a low priority despite web accessibility standardization internationally, and this is a prominent reason for discrimination in employment (Ferri & Favalli, 2018). When I started this study, there were very few articles that addressed this need for web accessibility and training for blind women and employment. Ferri and Favalli (2018) augmented their definition of accessibility to include the environmental factors such as transportation, which is one reason why many participants work from home. Ferri and Favalli also pointed out the digital divide of people with disabilities. Ferri and Favalli mentioned that standardization of policies such as the World Wide Web Consortium and the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines are important.

Working From Home

Working from home was a frequent method for the participants to mitigate transportation and secondary disabilities. Some articles mirrored what participants said. Hoque and Bacon (2021) mentioned transportation problems, which Gayle mentioned and so did Opal, as well as work and family balance, which was mentioned by Kanter (2022). Hoque and Bacon were not sure if there were benefits to working from home because some of the assistive technology might not work for the employee with disabilities who worked from home. More interruptions might ensue at home, so working from home may not have been as positive as what Kanter found. Kanter thought that working from home should be treated as a reasonable accommodation. Headrick (2022) also thought that telework might be viewed as a reasonable accommodation, but Hoque and Bacon thought that working from home might increase isolation even though it might be something to explore.

One of the barriers that Hoque and Bacon (2021) and Headrick (2022) identified was that because people with disabilities do not hold leadership and high positions, it is less likely that they will be permitted to work from home. Headrick also approached the issue of people with disabilities working from home. The 2019 statistics about work for people with disabilities were 79.2% compared to 31.1% of nondisabled people (Headrick, 2022). Headrick studied people who worked from home who were in high status positions. Hoque and Bacon noted that working from home might help with lighting and assistive technology issues. Gayle brought up lighting issues in her interview. Hoque and Bacon indicated that more studies should be conducted on working from home. There is no definition of working from home according to Hoque and Bacon. Hoque and Bacon also compared disabled with nondisabled employees and found that nondisabled people work from home more than people with disabilities do. Over 50% of people with disabilities worked from home after the COVID-19 pandemic, so working from home does not constitute a disadvantage for employees with disabilities (Hoque & Bacon, 2021).

Mamaysky and Lister (2022) explained that there are legal and tax implications with working from home in employment law. Regulations change in each state also (Mamaysky & Lister, 2022). Mamaysky and Lister indicated that working from home increases happiness and employees are more productive. Although Mamaysky and Lister did not study people with disabilities, they noted that after the COVID-19 pandemic started, 56% of all workers worked from home in the United States.

Working from home fit into this schema because it is tied to the transportation barriers that were conveyed by participants. Studies that also fit the schema focused on stigma management strategies (Moloney et al., 2018), which many of the current participants leaned on for success. Working from home was a strategy that was surprising in the data from current participants. By not sharing their accommodation needs and only working with disability organizations to mitigate their rejection, the participants employed multiple stigma management strategies, which is why three of them said they were not stigmatized (Moloney et al., 2018). However, stigma strategies went along with the need for autonomy and self-determination.

Volunteering

Volunteering was another strategy that was employed to gain employment for a couple of the participants. Malinda said she could not stress that tactic often enough, but she was also creative and innovative in how she found jobs. Networking and creativity were ways of finding jobs on her own, which were effective strategies to find and maintain employment.

Another outcome of the current study is that blind women should not be forced to work only for disability organizations if they could work for other employers. However, this would take a concerted effort at working with human resource managers to understand that blind women have abilities separate from working for disability organizations or working in a sheltered workshop. Rehabilitation agencies should work to understand what jobs the person can do given their education and experience instead of pigeonholing people, as participants Wendy and Penny described. This presupposes that blind women are getting good computer skills in the latest software or hardware available and how accessibility can be managed on the job. It also means that women must advocate for accessible options for assessments, job applications, and nonproprietary software at work or training on those options or work-arounds that will work for them. Accessibility was the top barrier for current participants, and Ferri and Favalli (2018), McDonnall et al. (2023), Shaw et al. (2022), and Steverson and Crudden (2023) provided the blind person’s view and the human rights implications of lack of accessibility.

Working from home was the next most frequent category reported by participants. This was surprising, but the majority of participants mentioned this aspect of work.

Commuting to work was part of the reason participants wanted to work from home. Two participants mentioned that it took too much time out of their day to commute to work. Four people work from home because of secondary disabilities. Stigma management strategies was the way that women had to prove themselves for the job market. The participants wanted to be self-sufficient and empowered. This was a constant issue for the participants.

Limitations of the Study

Because this study utilized a convenience sample, which is a nonprobablistic sample, I captured a certain subset of blind women who were college-educated. I chose the organizations from which I thought I would attract the right people for the study, but there are people who self-selected. They chose to be part of the study because of their interest or experience so it is impossible to say whether this actually represents the views of others or those who could be attracted to a quantitative study rather than a qualitative study. Another limitation is a time limitation since this is a student dissertation. I did not do an exhaustive search for blind women who are college-educated. I also did not study men, although one man did contact me and he was a blind person who had been college educated. Some of the participants thought I should carry this study further. There might be a study that could be conducted of those coping strategies or other contexts for people who were not college educated but may have just had high school or technical school training.

Another avenue of study could be a study of deaf-blind women with a college education or people with other physical disabilities who are also blind and are women who are college educated. Even though a few participants had secondary disabilities, their primary disability was blindness. There could be some interaction between various disabilities that people possess.

Another area that could be explored for study is of women of color and their obstacles to employment. Very little research on blind people has been conducted, so there is more research that is needed on blind women of color and this is an area for scholarly research. Similarly, people who speak different languages need to be studied in terms of access to employment. This study was also conducted in the United States so that was a limitation of this study.

Recommendations

There are several recommendations that would merit attention. Rehabilitative agencies have to have similar policies across states. It is clear that states are not necessarily using their state dollars to their best practical use for blind people. Legislators do not understand the kinds of services that blind people need. It is not entirely their fault. Most people have not met another blind person. However, different states have different funding mechanisms for rehabilitative services and some states have separate agencies rather than combined agencies. I discussed this in Chapter 2 and because the states apply laws in such a disparate manner, blind people are not getting the same kinds of services in each state or the same quality of service from each counselor or each agency that services are contracted with for services for blind people. Several participants spoke about these issues with rehabilitation agencies.

Another issue is that the definition of disability is not uniform. This is another problem that I mentioned in chapter 2. These definitions must be more uniform across governmental agencies in terms of eligibility to services. Eligibility for services depends on different state and governmental agencies and access to services.

Rehabilitation agencies do not provide a mechanism for promotion or advancement in employment once a job is offered. Several people were referred to sheltered workshops that were clearly below their educational attainment. Similarly, many clients do not know what they want to do for employment, because they do not know their options, and there needs to be much better communication so that blind women can make informed decisions on their goals. One of the issues is that women are supposed to be informed about their choices. Again, legislative bodies must understand about blind people and employment, and rehabilitation agencies must be able to help clients make informed choices but what agencies say is that we should have realistic goals. What does that mean? Realistic to whom? So it seems as if rehabilitation agencies do not want blind women to have fulfilling jobs as Malinda said and don't try to find jobs that promote blind women to higher levels of responsibility.

An important consideration is that stakeholders should be involved in legislative decisions. They should also play a part in their rehabilitation process as that has implications for their whole working life. Hannah expressed this view in the participant pool.

The three improvements for rehabilitation are training the contractors about blind people's barriers in transportation and job capabilities, really seeing if the WIOA is assisting blind women or blind people, applying disability more uniformly, and providing more computer training to blind clients.

Another other problem that was identified is not allowing blind people to seek rehabilitative services during a dead-end job or if they are working at any job at all. They must be fired or quit their job before they can ask for rehabilitative services. This problem was expressed by Opal. This does not allow for people's autonomy in helping them find the best job for their educational attainment.

Implications

When I embarked on this dissertation, I knew that stigma might be a part of the study, since I had studied stigma in the past. However, I did not know that work from home or other factors would be factors in this study until I conducted rich, thick interviews (Ravitch & Carl, 2016; Rubin & Rubin, 2012). The interviews brought out the categories and themes that I chose in my results and were brought out by the participants. I knew some things from my own experience, and the literature review confirmed many of my anecdotal information. I did not know the extent or particularity or nuances of the specifics of the various barriers to employment. The qualitative study gave me some good data from which to draw conclusions and to draw these implications of the dissertation research.

Since this is the first known study of blind women who have a college degree and their specific obstacles or barriers to employment, this will have implications for the scholarly literature. I decided to disaggregate blind women from other populations since women are not always disaggregated in quantitative or qualitative scholarly studies.

There was no way from previous studies to explore or describe the specific experiences of blind women with a college education and the obstacles to employment. Scholars and students will learn from the participants I interviewed and this will assist others to embark on more studies of this type or augment this study with either a quantitative study or a different subset of the population. A mixed methods study could even be conducted.

Another implication for this study is for those who are employees in the rehabilitation agencies which have a great impact on job development, job retention, and funding university education and reader services as discussed by participants. This qualitative dissertation might influence policies in these agencies that serve blind people or combined disabled population.

Next, policymakers might gain some information about how to create policies that work for blind women and employment. Since most legislators are unfamiliar with rehabilitative services, the findings in this dissertation will give them some ideas of real-world application of policies regarding blind people. People will get information about how to tailor training for blind employees and understand that websites are not designed to work with many job applications, assessments or job-related software.

Employers who need to make hiring decisions about blind women will be interested in this study possibly. This will give human resource managers or personnel managers information about how to include blind people and make employment more equitable. Several studies discussed diversity issues and corporate social responsibility that span more than just a siloed policy in their human resource management but across the whole corporation to create a more diverse culture for blind women in their workplace, but these articles studied people with disabilities in general and their access to employment and how human resource management dealt with diversity policy (ferri & Favalli, 2018; Shaw, 2021).

The last group for whom this study might have an impact is blind people themselves. More than half the participants want to se the full dissertation to distribute and share with their employers or others who may benefit from this study. Many participants felt that they could have had better employment if they were not blind. They felt that they were overqualified, and that there were no promotional opportunities, or that they could not perform their work independently.

Another benefit of this study which might emerge from this study is that parents of blind children might learn about how they can advocate for their blind children. There are benefits that will accrue from better policies and more equitable blindness services. Since social construction was used to understand these obstacles and barriers, the social fabric of our society may learn from scholarly studies if they are popularized in journals or consultants or lectures on the topic.

Conclusion

This study was a labor of love because no studies appeared in the literature that suffice it to say had anything to do with blind women or their employment or educational attainment. This study demonstrated that the participants that contacted me really wanted to talk about their experiences in great detail and did they ever! It is evident that more studies of blind women need to be conducted about many other topics besides their obstacles and experiences in the workplace. For instance, social supports could be discussed. The biggest problem is the dearth of studies that have been conducted on this specific population. Even though I suspected that the study would be important, I did not understand how important those 11 voices would be in sharing their experiences. I concluded that there are certain rehabilitation structures that need to be changed or modified based on the data, and that accessibility was the biggest barrier to locating positions and filling out applications online. Many modern jobs have online applications and employers look for certain algorithmic answers to screen people out of competition. This makes it difficult as the participants discussed. As Opal put it "you almost never get hired." Even in disability oriented organizations, they are not necessarily set up for blind employees as Robyn described.

This study has used the theory of social construction, and this theory lent itself very well to the data that I collected from participants. It is the social construction of reality that sets up the barriers that were foremost in the analysis and results of the participant interviews. Those barriers to websites and transportation, and need to work from home and the lack of understanding by rehabilitation agencies was a direct result of the socially constructed reality. Society around the blind woman set up those barriers in every part of life that made stigma management strategies necessary to survive and thrive in the competitive job market. It also sets up the need for self-determination and autonomy that the participants felt was important. I explained what studies could be done to augment the findings of this study. I also mentioned what the implications might be for this study for all sorts of governmental and human resource practitioners.

The research gave me insights for which I was not totally surprised. I did not have expectations, but because of the amount of time women gave in answering questions, the questions were well suited for the study. I hope that more studies will be conducted about blind women and other topics as I indicated because no one had even bothered to study blind women as a participant group. If this research study sparks interest from other researchers, I hope they will extend it and look at other aspects of employment and blind women. Articles had indicated that people with disabilities especially women were not recruited for studies, so this was an attempt to include those people with their lived experiences in a scholarly study. It was also significant that I was a blind person who conducted the study so I could probe and follow-up questions on things that I knew from my own experience and life. It was easier to build rapport with my 11 female participants because I was also a blind person who understood some of the things I was asking, and they did not have to explain them to the uninitiated. I admit that I had my biases and reflexivity, and I did listen to my participants and took what each participant said as their particular experience. I also understand my positionality as not totally similar but not too dissimilar from the participants.

In the end, this study is meant to give many stakeholders and scholars something they can use to study other aspects of blindness. Because blindness is a low-incidence disability and is poorly understood by societal actors, perhaps people will gain more knowledge about blind people in general and their employment specifically. This study is the first time that blind women who are college educated have been studied to probe their employment experiences. The experiences that were elucidated will give more data to scholars and practitioners alike and more flexible and creative options can be found for employment of blind women. I am hopeful that this research study will spark more research studies about blind women and education and other external factors that might interfere with employment.

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Appendix A: Letter to Organizations

To Whom it May Concern:

I am enrolled at Walden University in a doctoral program. Walden University is an online university. I am conducting a study of blind college-educated females and their obstacles to employment for my dissertation study. This study is being conducted as part of my fulfillment of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy (Ph.D.) at Walden University. This study will be conducted through semi-structured interviews to elicit the data that will be necessary for analysis and findings of this study.

I am seeking blind women between the ages of 22 to 40 who have received a four-year college education and who have had obstacles to employment. The interviews will be anonymous and confidentiality protocol will be followed. The interviews will be stored on a computer and will not be accessed by anyone else except the researcher.

The study should not pose harm to the participants, and the participants can opt out any time they feel uncomfortable. They can also opt out of answering any questions.

Please circulate this letter to anyone who might meet the criteria for this study.

Appendix B: Interview Protocol

1. Tell me about your experiences in relation to your searching for employment.
    a. Share a positive experience.
    b. Share a not so positive experience.
    c. How did you feel the recruiter interacted with you?
    d. Did you feel stereotyped or stigmatized in any way?
2. What would you have liked your employer to know about your abilities in relation to competitive employment?
3. What were the resources you used during education to prepare for work?
4. What advocacy strategies did you use in terms of job search strategies?
5. Was there anyone you turned to assist in the search for work?
6. How did you finance your education?
7. What support did you get from your family members?
8. What steps did you use when searching for a job?
9. How did you make use of technology in your job search?

Appendix C: Aggregate Code Frequencies in Ascending Order

Code	Frequency
Accessibility; accommodation	27
Ableism; work limitations	24
SC family+ & Friends+	14
Self-reliance	14
Training & education	11
Transportation	11
Stigma	10
SC rehab - resources -	9
SC rehab + resources +	7
SC Financial-	6
Networking	6
SC burden family & friends-	5
Self-worth	5
frustration	5
SC - benefits	3
Volunteer	2
Gender bias	2
Stereotypes	1
Social construction -power	1
SC Financial +	1
SC -Values	1