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The Use of Social Learning Theory and Communities of Practice in the Exploration of Social Interaction Between Hearing and Deaf Employees in the Workplace

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THE USE OF SOCIAL LEARNING THEORY AND COMMUNITIES OF PRACTICE IN THE

EXPLORATION OF SOCIAL INTERACTION BETWEEN HEARING AND DEAF

EMPLOYEES IN THE WORKPLACE

by

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Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to all those who have encountered many life changes and seemingly insurmountable obstacles while pursuing their doctoral education. During this entire dissertation process, I lost my mother, became a mother to a sweet little baby boy who I found out later had developmental delays, had several surgeries, went through a very painful breakup with my fiancée, found love again, and got married. These things also happened during a time of great change in my professional career, when I was being considered for promotion and tenure at the University of Tennessee Health Science Center. I had to juggle being a single mother, later a wife, and being a full-time professor with a heavy teaching load – all while trying to prioritize and finish my dissertation. Many times, I thought about giving up – but there were some people in my life that I had to push forward for, and people who told me giving up was not an option.

God brought these people into my life, and I am so grateful and humbled by that. To my husband, Price, thank you for being a supportive husband. I could not have done this without you. We can now spend our date nights focused on us, and not on me stressing out over my dissertation (smile). To Gabriel, my sweet little angel, you are the reason why I couldn't give up! I love you more than words can say. Now that I'm finished, we will spend more days at the park.

I thank my parents – (Darrell and Belinda) and my siblings for their support when I needed a listening ear, motivation, and a free babysitter for Gabriel. I am also blessed to have great friends and acquaintances who I don't know how I would have made it without them. There are so many that I'm afraid I may leave someone out, so I thank you all!

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Abstract

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Although the American with Disabilities Act has brought attention on disparities that focus on physical aspects of discrimination, there is a scarcity of research on the deaf employee's day to day experiences in a hearing work environment. Due to differences in communication styles between deaf and hearing individuals, deaf employees face obstacles in social interaction and participation in the workplace. The purpose of this study was to explore how the deaf employee's social interaction and participation is impacted by their experiences with hearing and deaf employees in the workplace.

A narrative inquiry qualitative design was used to gain understanding of the experiences of six deaf employees. The data was collected using semi-structured interviews. Three themes resonated through the data. The first theme is "Incompatible Forms of Communication: Isolation and Alienation". The deaf employees all described how differences in communication between them and hearing employees made them feel as if they were not a part of the workplace team.

The second theme is, "I'm Deaf, but I'm Still Capable". The deaf employees described workplace experiences that left them feeling less than capable of performing job-related tasks. The third theme is, "Suppression: Reluctance to Speak Out." Many of the participants recalled instances in which they were denied sign language interpreters for important meetings, but were afraid to express their anger or disappointment of being left out. This reluctance to speak out perpetuates feelings of isolation from other employees.

Drawing upon the narratives of the participant's experiences with hearing coworkers and hearing supervisors, Wenger's model of Communities of Practice was used in evaluating the

workplace dynamics of the participants' workplace environments. Based on the 14

characteristics of the Community of Practice Model, the findings of this research show there is a

need for improved communication between deaf and hearing employees to achieve a work

environment conducive to learning and sharing of ideas.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

Overview

The difficulties associated with being a deaf employee in the workplace are often underestimated. The inability to hear impacts effective communication and frequently isolates and segregates deaf employees from hearing employees (Blount, 2002; Wells, 2008). Consequently, isolation and segregation of deaf employees affect the potential to actively participate in workplace learning, networking, and developing positive and productive relationships with hearing colleagues. The quality of learning, networking, and productive relationships developed in the workplace has implications for low morale and motivation, low productivity, and unemployment (Foster, 1992; Harris & Thornton, 2005; Wells, 2008; Welsh & Foster, 1991).

Several studies have been identified that focus on communication between deaf employees and their supervisors and co-workers (Foster & MacLeod, 2003; Johnson, 1993; Rosengreen & Saladin, 2010; Wells, 2008). However, there is limited research that focuses on how the workplace impacts deaf individuals' social interaction and participation in the workplace (Garcia, Laroche, & Barrette, 2002; Jennings & Shaw, 2008; Shaw, 2013; Wells, 2008). Likewise, fewer studies exist that capture the lived experiences of deaf employees in the workplace (Wells, 2008). The deaf employee is the expert on the language, values, and norms of deaf culture, and is a valuable source for knowledge of the complicated dynamics that exist in a hearing work environment. Therefore, is it appropriate that the deaf employee should be included as an active voice in research on this topic.

Findings in the research reveal two common perceptions of deaf individuals that exist in a culturally hearing society. The first perception of deaf individuals is characterized by negative thoughts and stereotypes, such as being labeled uncivilized or having a lack of ambition (Nikolaraizi & Makri, 2004; Tellings & Tijsseling, 2005). The second perception is more complimentary, in which deaf individuals are viewed as having personal educational and career goals, and are considered valuable employees (Gallaudet, 1983; Padden & Humphries, 1990; Tyler, 2004; Vernon & Andrews, 1990).

In modern times, most people understand that being deaf is not a measure of intelligence or an indication of mental deficiency (Nikolaraizi & Makri, 2004). However, the perception of deafness as a disability or handicap is a view shared by many. Deaf individuals will encounter this perception throughout their lives, but it becomes more apparent when the deaf individual enters the workforce (Fritz & Smith, 1985). Lichtig, Woll, Carnio, Akiyama, and Gomes (2004) state, "In situations where there is little or no understanding of Deaf culture and no one to mediate or accommodate communication differences, the potential for conflict and misunderstanding is immense" (p.282). The literature identifies differences in communication between hearing and non-hearing employees in the workplace as being a key barrier to maintaining a job and career advancement (Foster, 1992; Haynes, 2014; Rosengreen & Saladin, 2010).

Many higher education institutions and vocational rehabilitation centers provide deaf individuals assistance with job search skills and services aimed to make a smooth transition into the workforce, which in most cases is in a predominantly hearing environment (Bat-Chava, Deignan, & Martin, 2002; Luft, 2012;). Despite these efforts, deaf individuals still face occupational barriers in the workplace that subsequently affect formal and informal social

interaction and opportunities for promotion and advancement (Wells, 2008). The three principle barriers are academic preparation, access to reasonable accommodations, and communication difficulties. The following sections of this introduction will address these barriers.

Academic Preparation

Because formal education is the foundation for future employment, it is appropriate to provide a brief overview of the educational preparation of deaf individuals. Marschark (2007) identified the educational options of deaf students: 1) residential schools for the deaf, 2) oral day schools for the deaf, 3) mainstream/inclusion programs, 4) self-contained classrooms, and 5) home school.

The curriculum in residential schools for the deaf encompasses the use of sign language in the learning environment. Students in this environment become immersed in deaf culture, which embodies the full communication and mannerisms of sign language, sharing of deaf cultural stories and ideas, and participating in deaf social activities (Ramsey & Padden, 1998). Spradbrow and Power (2000) identified the teachers' understanding of what it is like to be deaf and their communicating in sign language to be two valued characteristics held by students in residential schools for the deaf.

Oral day schools for the deaf focus on auditory and oral skills rather than sign language as primary means of communication. The communication model, along with the deaf student being able to attend school in the day and return to their families after school, are two characteristics that make this environment different from residential schools. The educators employed at oral day schools are properly trained in working with deaf students (Marschark, 2007).

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act were instrumental in enhancing the educational opportunities of students with disabilities in public schools with the subsequent creation of mainstream programs. The goal of these programs is to optimize the inclusion of students with disabilities in regular classrooms with the help of special accommodations. The creation of Individualized Education Plans (IEP) aims to help students with disabilities reach their fullest potential by devising an educational plan that is specific and unique to the student's needs. Deaf students may have some or all their classes with hearing students depending on the student's IEP.

The homeschool environment is an option parents may choose if they feel their child's needs are not being met in a traditional classroom setting. Although many school systems do not offer home schooling as an option, the trend in homeschooling is growing because of the flexibility in creating a curriculum that is specific to the child's needs (Kochenderfer, Kanna, & Kiyosaki, 2009).

In any of the educational options, the time of recognition that a child is deaf can have a significant impact on educational outcomes. Luft (2000) states deaf infants progress through normal stages of language until one year of age. Consequently, most children are diagnosed with a hearing loss between one and three years of age (Moores, 1996). By the time the hearing loss is addressed, the deaf child is already approximately three years behind hearing children in vocabulary and verbal skills. Some parents choose to learn ASL to better communicate with their child; however, ASL is a very complex language that can take many years to master (Kemp, 1998; Luft, 2000). Although most deaf students become proficient in sign language, structural differences between ASL and the English language cause many deaf individuals to experience difficulties with reading and writing skills (Appelman et al. 2012; Houston, Lammers, & Svorny,

2010; Wells, 2008). Thus, many deaf individuals graduate from high school on a fourth-grade level (Bowe, 2003; Moores, 1996).

Despite significant improvements to guidelines and plans for students with disabilities, the reported statistics for deaf high school students who are not successful in receiving a high school diploma are overwhelming. A 2001 report by Blanchfield, Feldman, Dunbar, and Gardner showed that of the U.S. population, approximately 18.7% of high school students did not graduate from high school, compared to 44.4% of individuals with a severe or profound hearing loss.

Although the literature reports a low grade level upon graduation from high school, many deaf individuals attend and complete college. However, one research study identified in the literature found that when compared to hearing students, deaf students' knowledge level and test scores were lower even with the use of a sign language interpreter and assistive technology (Marschark, Sapere, Convertino, & Seewagen, 2005). Blanchfield et al. (2001) reported approximately 5.1% of the deaf population graduated from college.

Statistics have consistently shown that there is a positive correlation between post-secondary education, employment, and socioeconomic status (Haskins, Holzer, & Lerman, 2009; U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2012a, 2012b; Williams & Swail, 2005). Research has also shown that deaf individuals who pursue post-secondary education opportunities have a higher level of workforce participation and higher salaries (Walter, Clarcq, & Thompson, 2002; Walter & Dirmyer, 2013).

Reasonable Accommodations

Reasonable accommodations for deaf employees are critical to securing and retaining employment (Cawthon, 2016; Geyer & Schroedel, 1999; Haynes & Linden, 2012). The

American with Disabilities Act (ADA, 1990) makes certain accommodations legal requirements

for deaf individuals in the workplace that aim to close the gap that exists between hearing and

deaf forms of communication, as well as improve the overall work environment of the deaf

employee. Under the ADA, institutions that employ at least fifteen or more people are required

by law to provide reasonable accommodations for workers with a documented disability. The

ADA defines a reasonable accommodation as any modification made in the workplace that

enables an individual with a qualified disability to have an opportunity for equal employment.

The following accommodations were identified from various sources as reasonable

accommodations for deaf employees (Job Accommodation Network, 2013):

- Deaf interpreters or transcribers for meetings

- Telecommunication devices for the deaf, amplified telephones, or flashing
   ringers

- Texting

- Bluetooth technology

- Installation of flashing lights on smoke alarms and equipment

- Installation of barriers to control noise levels

- Televisions with closed caption options

- Modification of entry systems that allow deaf individuals to enter secured building
   entrances

Section 1630.2(o)(2)(ii) of the ADA (1990) also recommends that employers should seek

feedback from deaf employees in the types of accommodations needed for a successful work

environment. However, studies have shown that despite the ADA recommendation, many

accommodations are still difficult to attain for deaf individuals (Geyer & Schroedel, 1999; Harris

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& Bamford, 2001; Scherich, 1996). A study by Arnold and Kleiner (2001) provided examples in which several organizations faced financial hardships in providing accommodations for deaf individuals. Bowe, McMahon, Chang, and Louvi (2005) suggested that deaf adults may experience possible resistance from employers in hiring, promoting, and providing reasonable accommodations due to the employers' perception of financial ability to provide opportunity and access. Several studies have shown that accommodation practices are the most significant factor in attaining and maintaining employment (Cawthon et al., 2016; Geyer & Shroedel, 1999; Haynes & Linden 2012; Scherich,1996).

The findings of several studies also suggest that deaf employees with a higher educational status in supervisory positions were more likely to receive accommodations than lower status employees (Foster & Macleod, 2003; Geyer & Schroedel, 1999). These studies show that despite federal efforts to provide reasonable accommodations for deaf employees, disparities in providing reasonable accommodations still exist in many workplace environments.

Communication Difficulties

Although many deaf employees receive reasonable accommodations under ADA guidelines, communication difficulties with hearing individuals are a common occurrence in the workplace. Communication difficulties have been cited as a significant factor in poor employment statistics and a low rate of promotion (Frasier, Hansmann, & Saladin, 2009; Hauser, O'Hearn, McKee, Steider, & Thew, 2010; Haynes, 2014; Rosengreen & Saladin, 2010; Schuler, Mistler, Torrey, & Depukat, 2014). Wells (2008) states, "While buildings, sidewalks, and public transportation can be modified to meet the needs of many disabled individuals, a method to decrease the communication barriers between hearing and non-hearing workers is less obvious" (p. 6). Technical accommodations such as texting and e-mail may handle basic communication,

but communicating in informal settings such as at the company picnic or the break room can prove to be more challenging. Hauser et al. (2010) describe what is referred to as the "dinner table" syndrome, which is described as deaf individuals watching family and friends communicating with each other, but are unable to actively participate in the conversation. Foster and MacLeod (2003) also highlight this issue in their research of communication issues that exist for deaf employees in the workplace. In many instances, deaf individuals may be aware of pertinent information to perform their assigned job; but without the support of hearing co-workers, they may miss out on "office gossip" or other informal information.

Numerous deaf individuals rely on visual sensory skills to compensate for their inability to hear information. These sensory skills include the use of sign language, lip reading, and writing using manual and/or assistive technology to communicate with others (Bat-Chava et al., 2002; Halgin & McEntee, 1986; Haynes, 2014). Johnson's (1993) review of surveys collected from employers of deaf individuals before and after the passage of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) found that deaf employees were noted as exhibiting a higher level of task performance when compared to their hearing counterparts. However, research has shown many deaf employees have poor reading and writing skills that may impede the process of receiving and comprehending important information (Marschark et al., 2005; Munoz-Baell & Ruiz, 2000;). Reading and writing skills are frequently common and necessary components needed for successful workplace outcomes (Foster & MacLeod, 2003). Consequently, the low rate of literacy among deaf individuals has been shown to impact wage earnings and opportunities for promotion (Cawthon et al., 2016). Several earlier studies have been identified that substantiate Cawthon's finding, which implicate literacy as a factor in the tendency of deaf employees to

remain in the same positions at work much longer than their hearing counterparts (Foster, 1992; Harris & Thornton, 2005; Welsh & Foster, 1991).

There are several aspects of deaf culture that impact a workplace environment consisting of mostly hearing employees. For the deaf employee, the ability to maintain eye contact with peers is a very important aspect of communication (Williams & Abeles, 2004). Deaf individuals rely heavily on the visual senses to process spoken and unspoken information. The need for constant eye contact can be a source of conflict in the workplace. Wells (2008) says, "Hearing people often feel uncomfortable from the constant gaze that is required by ASL" (p.62). As a result, deaf individuals may misinterpret the lack of eye contact as a lack of interest in conversation.

Deaf individuals may also suppress feelings of inadequacy when remarks about the differences in communication and behaviors are expressed by hearing employees (Williams & Abeles, 2004). These feelings may perpetuate low morale and motivation of the deaf individual. The cultural differences that exist between deaf and hearing individuals can significantly impact the ability of deaf individuals to secure and maintain employment.

A study conducted by Jeanes, Nienhuys, and Rickards (2000) found that profoundly deaf employees are often reluctant in asking for clarification from hearing individuals, and in turn have difficulty in requests from hearing employees for clarification. Many deaf individuals who do ask for clarification may do so by tapping the shoulder of their co-workers to get their attention. Foster and MacLeod (2003) found that many deaf employees received negative feedback from hearing co-workers, in that touching was perceived to be an invasion of the hearing co-worker's personal space.

Academic preparation, the access to reasonable accommodations, and communication difficulties are barriers to a high quality of interaction and participation in the workplace and opportunity for promotion. Because of issues in communication, deaf employees are also frequent targets of misunderstandings and unemployment (Frasier, Hansmann, & Saladin, 2009; Haynes, 2014; Rosengreen & Saladin, 2010; Shuler et al., 2014). Limitations in communication also reinforces negative stereotypes of deaf individuals that hearing individuals may possess. Faulkner et al. (2004) state, "This limited communication also prevents hearing colleagues from recognizing the abilities of deaf employees; instead it places the focus on what they perceive to be disabilities and reinforces any unfounded stereotypes they hold about deaf people" (p.1).

Statement of the Problem

A thorough literature review of deaf employees in the workplace show that there is a scarcity of research on the topic. Several current research studies have also observed this problem, noting that their research was conducted with the use of outdated empirical research (Balsamo, 2006; Butler, 2012; Johnson, 2010; Wells, 2008). Consequently, the presented literature review for this study includes several research studies that were conducted years ago as well.

Dickinson (2010) states, "The workplace environment is one where the social, cultural, and linguistic conventions of hearing people are deeply embedded and are accepted as the norm" (p. 111). Deaf individuals are affected in almost every facet of their work experiences due to striking differences in communication that exist between deaf and hearing individuals (Turner et al, 2002). Research by Foster (1992) revealed that due to communication differences, the deaf employee's professional and technical skills and abilities are often overlooked. Thus, the deaf employee may not be considered for promotion or advancement.

Dickinson and Turner (2008) state, "Deaf people's experiences in the workplace reveal gaps between inclusive and lived realities" (p.233). Harris and Banford (2001) identify several key issues in mismatched ideals and reality as it relates to the deaf employee in the workplace: 1) lack of awareness and flexibility by the employer in terms of expectations, 2) inability of the deaf employee to request support, 3) problems with knowledge about work-related equipment, and 4) the perception that support is service-led and not based on need. As a result, deaf workers may find themselves controlled by hearing workplace norms and values (Dickinson & Graham, 2008). Kendall (1999) identifies four disadvantages deaf individuals face in the workplace:

1) Communication issues: There is poor communication between deaf and hearing co-workers, especially when deaf workers use sign language.

2) Identity issues: The constructed identity of the deaf worker is affected by the mixed environment of the deaf and hearing work groups. Thus, deaf people tend to hide, or suppress important aspects of their identity.

3) Educational disadvantages: The perception of the hearing society that deaf individuals are less educated than hearing individuals.

4) Perceptual disadvantages: The perception of the hearing society that deaf individuals are less functional than hearing individuals.

Dickinson and Turner (2008) state, "Given the stress, competing demands, and workloads of many modern-day organizations it is easy to see how the communication needs of deaf employees can be seen as a low priority, if not ignored altogether" (p. 234). From the deaf worker's perspective, their needs are looked as being dismissed or of little value (Dickinson & Turner, 2008; Fritz & Smith, 1985). Alternatively, research has also shown that the needs of hearing employees are often misunderstood by deaf employees. Findings from Foster and

Macleod's qualitative study (2003) revealed misunderstandings that originated from the need for hearing employees to maintain a level of personal space and a reduction in staring when deaf employees communicate with them. Several participants expressed embarrassment that their touching of hearing employees to get their attention, or staring intently while their hearing coworkers are speaking evoked a feeling of awkwardness in social situations. Findings by Dye and Kyle (2001) also imply the deaf employee's lack of awareness of hearing culture and behavioral norms. The research shows there is a lack of mutual knowledge about individual needs of each group.

The findings of several research studies on this topic have consistently revealed the disparity in how deaf employees and hearing employees are treated in the workplace (Foster, 1992; Johnson, 2010; Wells, 2008; Welsh & Foster, 1991). Likewise, the unbalanced quality of communication between deaf and hearing employees have also been noted (Blount, 2002; Johnson, 2010). By reviewing both qualitative and quantitative studies aimed at exploring the many aspects of deaf individuals in the workplace, we know that effective communication is a critical component in career advancement, efficiency, and a harmonious workplace environment. However, few studies exist that focus on the experiences of the deaf employee in understanding how these communication differences can be negotiated in the workplace.

In summary, the research shows that the inability to hear affects the access and understanding of communication, and this lack of access separates deaf employees from hearing co-workers. As a result, the deaf employee is at a deficit in the learning, networking and commonality that occur among hearing individuals (Faulkner et al, 2004). The lack of these three elements consequently affects the motivation and productivity of employees (Brown, Duncan, & MacDonald, 2003). The research problem addressed in this study aimed to describe the deaf

employee's perception of social interaction and participation in the workplace, and recommendations on how social interaction and participation can be improved.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to explore how the deaf employee's social interaction and participation in a hearing environment is impacted in the workplace setting. This study addressed the following questions:

1) How do deaf employees describe their experiences with other deaf employees?

2) How do deaf employees describe their experiences with hearing employees?

3) How do deaf employees describe their experiences with hearing supervisors?

4) How do these experiences impact deaf individuals' social interaction and participation in the workplace?

One important point of interest in this research was to seek meaning in how the deaf employee perceives his or her quality of social interactions and participation in the workplace. These perceptions may provide awareness and insight into how the deaf employee views the overall dynamic of the workplace environment and its impact on the well-being of the deaf employee. These perceptions may also add to the body of knowledge that further dispels the negative stereotypes held by many hearing employees about what is means to be deaf in a hearing work environment. Finally, it is anticipated that this study will add to the research findings that already exist to establish a foundation in which to create stronger communities of practice between deaf and hearing employees in the workplace.

Significance of the Study

Business and industry are increasingly progressing in the current age of globalization and technological advancements. Al-Rodhan and Stoudmann (2006) define globalization as an

exchange of ideologies, products, and culture. As a result, the workplace is becoming a stronger source of cross-cultural integration. Possessing the ability to understand cross-cultural communication is a vital skill for the success of business leaders. Gaining practical knowledge of the factors that impact cross-cultural communication creates an environment in which to acquire this skill.

The study of how the workplace impacts the deaf employee can be of great importance to employers that hire deaf individuals. The increased awareness of the differences that exist between hearing and deaf employees and how a hearing environment impacts the deaf employee can serve as a foundation for both cultural competency and workplace diversity. In turn, workforce diversity can result in diverse markets. Employing deaf individuals has the potential to increase the marketability to deaf consumers. Because of the strong solidarity of the deaf community, deaf individuals are more likely to prefer to support and patronize businesses whose workplace is represented by deaf employees (Moss, 2012). Moss (2012) also lists several benefits of employing deaf individuals: 1) employing deaf people extends the talent pool, 2) the retention of skilled employees who become deaf later in life, 3) deaf individuals bring skills, aptitudes, and approaches to workplace issues that can result in valuable contributions to the organization, 4) employing deaf people results in a positive impact on the organization of a more diverse workforce, and 5) employing deaf people can improve public relations and widen industrial markets (p.217). Finally, being a participant in the workforce is important to the physical and mental well-being of both hearing and deaf individuals (Dooley, Catalano, & Wilson, 1994; Dooley, Fielding, & Levi, 1996; Kasl, Rodriguez, & Lasch 1998). Work related issues that deaf individuals face can lead to high rates of unemployment (Dooley et al.1994; Dooley et al. 1996). Unemployment can subsequently lead to increased crime, depression, and

in some cases, the development of mental illness (Dooley et al. 1994; Dooley et al. 1996; Kasl et al. 1998; Lennon & Limonic, 1999).

High unemployment rates also have a negative effect on consumerism and the economy. A recent report by the United States Department of Labor Bureau of Labor Statistics (2016) show that the unemployment rate for individuals with a disability is 10.5%, compared to a 4.9% unemployment rate among those without a disability.

Blanchfield et al. (2001) reported that only 58% of individuals with a severe or profound hearing loss between the ages of 18 and 44 were in the workforce, compared to 82% of hearing individuals. In the 45 to 65-year age group, 46% percent of deaf individuals were in the workforce, compared to 73% of the hearing population in this age group. Family income comparisons were also reported between hearing families and families where a deaf individual is the head of household. The findings revealed that 26% of hearing families earned between $10,000 and $25,000 annually, with 28% of deaf families earning incomes in the same range. Hearing families who had an annual earned income of $50,000 or more comprised 29.4%, compared to 14% of deaf families with the same income.

These statistics show a need for further investigation by higher education researchers to explain the gaps between the salaries of hearing and non-hearing employees, and how these gaps can be narrowed by improvements in vocational rehabilitation services. In a study conducted by Dutta, Gervey, Chan, Chou, and Ditchman (2008), positive employment outcomes are associated with vocational rehabilitation services for individuals with disabilities.

From an adult education perspective, a qualitative study which focuses on the communication differences and issues that exist between hearing and deaf employee can aid in improving camaraderie and interpersonal relationships between the two groups, as well as

improve the workplace environment for the deaf employee (Foster, 1992). Although the ADA addresses many issues deaf employee face in terms of access to basic accommodations needed to be successful from a technical standpoint, it does not address the holistic elements needed for a successful workplace environment that encompasses quality social interaction and participation.

The findings of this study can be useful to colleges of health professions that provide curriculum and instruction to students entering professions that typically offer services to deaf individuals. These professions include psychological counselors, occupational therapists, and audiology and speech pathologists. Practitioners in these professions not only focus on the medical aspects of the individual, but the psychosocial aspects as well. Vocational rehabilitation counselors can also benefit from qualitative studies such as the one currently presented in offering technical support and skill training that are needed for deaf employees to cope and adapt to a hearing work environment.

The findings of this research can also be important to the field of organizational behavior, and beneficial to educators in the discipline. One of the aims of the discipline of organizational behavior is to analyze different forms of communication, and how these forms of communication can be better negotiated in the workplace to improve efficiency and productivity in the workplace. Improving communication between deaf and hearing employees has the potential to strengthen the employees' sense of purpose and abilities.

In turn, experts in organizational behavior are often individuals who either work or provide training and continuing education to human resource professionals. Human resource development is now considered a behaviorist business sector that faces challenges in meeting the needs of the modern workforce that is experiencing growing levels of diversity. Improved

training of human resource professionals trickles down to improved training of managers and supervisors of deaf employees.

Theoretical Framework: Communities of Practices

Wenger's (1998) social learning theory model of communities of practice (CoP) was chosen as the theoretical framework to explain the findings collected in this research study. The communities of practice model, along with workplace studies that have been identified in the literature using this model, will be discussed.

The foundation for the communities of practice model has it foundation in social learning theory. Lave and Wenger's book, *Situated Learning Legitimate Peripheral Participat*ion (1991) introduces one of the most common theories that explains the meaning of workplace learning in the context of social learning. Lave and Wenger's contribution to adult learning theories was built upon the intellectual ideas of theorists interested in exploring how learning is related to social activities (Brown et al., 1989; Dewey, 1916; Goody, 1989; Lindeman, 1926; Scribner & Cole, 1973;). In his book, *Democracy and Education,* Dewey (1944) said, "The social environment is truly educative in the effects in the degree in which an individual shares or participates in some conjoint activity" (p. 26). Lindeman (1926) expounded on Dewey's ideas, stating, "The approach to adult education will be via the route of situations, not subjects" (p. 16).

Social learning theory posits that learning occurs in formal and informal settings, but it most often occurs in informal settings and is largely unintentional. These informal settings are social in nature, and does not occur with the confines of a programmed plan of study or training. Lave and Wenger (1991) state, "In our view, learning is not merely situated in practice – as if it were some independently reliable process that happened to be located somewhere; learning is an integral part of generative social practice in the lived-in world" (p. 35). This theory is unique in

that unlike other adult learning theories which focuses on behavioral and psychological explanations of how adults learn, the social learning theory presents a sociocultural perspective that learning is ultimately shaped by the context and culture that exist within the learning environment (Hansman, 2006).

Wenger (1998) further expanded the social learning theory to include the communities of practice model. Communities of practice is a concept that develops because of the connections made between coworkers (Wenger, 1998). It focuses on participating in social practices that allows individuals to learn from one another, enhance skills, and improve job performance. The community of practice model theorizes that participating in social practices will result in a sense of belonging to a group, or community. In the context of this research, the workplace is viewed as a community.

Cacciattolo (2015) state that approximately 80% of learning that occurs in the workplace is informal in nature. Informal learning at work usually takes place during social interactions and every day work practices. These informal means of learning include self-directed learning, networking, coaching, and mentoring. Several research studies have found that individuals tend to learn more from their peers and by coming up with solutions to frequently occurring problems in the workplace (Felstead et al., 2005; Hager & Johnsson, 2009; Silverman, 2003).

Numerous studies have been identified in the literature that uses social learning theory and communities of practice to investigate informal interactions and how individuals learn from others at work because of these interactions (Boud et al., 1999; Fuller et al. 2005; Garrick, 1998). Only one study has been identified in the literature that specifically studies whether communities of practice exist between hearing and deaf individuals in the workplace (Wells, 2008). Wells (2008) provided several recommendations for future research on deaf individuals in the

workplace that were added to the current study. In contrast to Wells' study, the current study included several participants in the 25-30-year-old range, a participant who worked in multiple workplaces for short periods of time, as well as a participant who has extensive limited verbal skills.

The social learning theory that is the foundation of the communities of practice model can be applied to the study of deaf individuals and their interactions in a hearing work environment. It can also be applied to examining how social participation within and outside of the deaf community is a process of learning and making meaning from life experiences. Wenger's (1998) concept of participation, called community of practice, identifies four components of social learning theory

1)   Meaning: a way to talk about the ability to experience life and the world as meaningful

2)   Practice: talking about shared historical and social resources and viewpoints that can support mutual engagement

3)   Community: talking about social structures, whether participation in these social structures as recognized as competent

4)   Identity: a way of talking about the impact learning has on an individual and in turn create a personal history in the context of community (p.5)

A community of practice develops when employees connect with other employees and share experiences. The shared experiences of deaf and hearing co-workers help to form a community of practice in which behaviors and ideas are shared to benefit better relations within the deaf community as well as the hearing world. In this community of practice, deaf and hearing coworkers constantly undergo the process of negotiating ways in which to share knowledge.

Wenger (1998) provides indicators that indicate a community of practice is in place:

1) Sustained mutual relationships

2) Shared ways of engaging or doing things together

3) Rapid flow of information

4) Absence of introductory preambles, as if conversations and interactions were merely the continuation of an ongoing process

5) Very quick set up of a problem to be discussed

6) Substantial overlap in participants' descriptions of who belongs

7) Knowing what others know, what they can do, and how they can contribute to an enterprise

8) Mutually defined identities

9) The ability to assess the appropriateness of actions and products

10) Specific tools, representations, and other artifacts

11) Local lore, shared stories, inside jokes, knowing laughter

12) Jargon and shortcuts to communication as well as the case of producing new ones

13) Certain styles recognized as displaying membership

14) A shared discourse reflecting a certain perspective of the world. (pp. 125-126)

Wenger (1998) did emphasize that it was not necessary for participants in a community of practice to "interact intensely with everyone else or know each other very well, but the less they do, the more their configuration look like a personal network or a set of interrelated practices rather than a single community of practice" (p.126). Participants are also not necessarily responsible for evaluating their colleague's actions or behavior.

Deaf and hearing employees have a wealth of knowledge based on personal and professional experience that can be the components of a fruitful work environment. The creation of a community based work environment strengthens the relationships between deaf and hearing employees and consequently strengthens businesses. A strong community of practice also strengthens diversity in the workplace as well as creates an environment in which new strategies and solutions are developed for a more successful day to day workplace environment.

Wenger's (1998) indicators of a community of practice will be used in analyzing whether a community of practice exists within the workplace environments of the participants in this study. Effective communication is critical to informal learning. Due to the importance of social interaction and participation that is needed in informal learning, this research aims to determine whether an effective community of practice exists in work environments where there are obvious differences in communication styles between deaf and hearing individuals. The analysis of these indicators was conducted in a previous study by Wells (2008). Because this is the single study identified in the review of literature that applies communities of practice in workplace settings that comprise both hearing and deaf co-workers, it is anticipated that this research will add to the body of knowledge presented by Wells (2008), as well as offer more insight, analysis, and recommendations for future study of this specific work group.

Assumptions

Several assumptions were made in this study. Based on personal experiences with a deaf family member, along with existing research on the topic, it was assumed that deaf employees face several challenges in a predominantly hearing workforce. It was also assumed that these challenges are magnified when the deaf individual has profound hearing loss and has little to no

verbal skills. It was also assumed that the participants in this study gave truthful accounts of their work experiences.

Limitations

Several limitations were identified in this study. One recurring limitation that typically occurs qualitative research is a small sample size. This prevents the ability to generalize findings to the population. Another limitation is that this study only presents the perspectives of deaf employees, and does not include the perspectives of hearing employees and hearing supervisors. Without these perspectives, it is difficult to provide a complete portrayal of workplace dynamics. The last limitation is the use of one sign language interpreter during the interview process. In retrospect, the use of an additional sign language interpreter would have been beneficial in further validating the accuracy of participant responses.

Definition of Terms

The following list of terms and descriptions have been compiled for readers not familiar with the research topic:

- **D/deaf Culture** – two primary cultural groups used to describe individuals in the deaf population. Individuals who identify as being Deaf uses American Sign Language (ASL) as their first language and reject the view of hearing loss as a disability. Little "d" individuals tend to view their hearing loss as a disability.
- **Deaf Employee –** for this study, as deaf employee is defined as an individual who has moderate severe to profound hearing loss, uses ASL as their primary language, identifies with Deaf culture, and was either born with the hearing loss, or acquired the hearing loss before language development.

Chapter Summary

  This introductory chapter covered the background of the problem, purpose, and significance of the research. Chapter 2 will begin with an overview of deaf culture before the literature review is presented. The literature review of literature that is relevant to the research topic will be presented in chronological order, followed by a summary of review. Chapter 3 will cover the methods that were used to carry out the research. A presentation of the findings and analysis of these findings will be presented in Chapter 4. Finally, a discussion of the findings as well as recommendations for further study will be presented in Chapter 5.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

Introduction

The principles of social learning theory are the foundation for this research study. Social learning theory suggests that learning can occur in both formal and informal settings, but it is largely informal and unintentional in nature. Effective communication is essential to the quality of learning in social settings. Many workplace environments are conducive to informal social learning. The sharing of knowledge and information between employees could possibly lead to career advancement and promotion, as well as a happy and productive work environment. The quality of social learning in the workplace is subsequently the foundation of a positive community of practice. Because there are notable differences in the communication styles of deaf and hearing individuals, the quality of social learning and a positive community of practice in the workplace was identified as an area for research.

The purpose of this study was to explore how the workplace impacts deaf employees. The study addressed the following questions:

1) How do deaf employees describe their experiences with other deaf employees?
2) How do deaf employees describe their experiences with hearing employees?
3) How do deaf employees describe their experiences with hearing supervisors?
4) How do these experiences impact deaf individuals' social interaction and participation in the workplace?

This chapter will cover the following topics as a backdrop for the review of literature: 1) deaf culture, 2) distinctions of deaf culture, and 3) language and deaf culture. A review of literature on deaf employees in the workplace will then be presented, which will provide the foundation for

the problem explored in this study. Next, a transition into the review of the literature that is specific to the studies related to exploring the lived experiences of deaf employees in the workplace will be presented in chronological order. Finally, a summary and critique of the review of literature will conclude this chapter.

Deaf Culture

According to statistics compiled by the National Institute on Deafness and Other Communicative Disorders (NIDCD, 2013), approximately 15% (37.5 million) people in the United States have reported some degree of hearing loss. Statistics also show that difficulty hearing is one of the most prevalent disabilities of adult Americans (Erickson, Lee, & von Schrader, 2014; National Institute on Deafness and Other Communication Disorders [NIDCD], 2013; Schiller et al. 2012; US Census Bureau, 2012). In addition, three out of every one thousand children in the United States are born deaf or hard of hearing, and ninety percent of these children are born to parents who can hear (Luft, 2000; NIDCD, 2013). The NIDCD (2013) also reports that approximately 4000 new cases of sudden deafness know the origin of their hearing loss. There is a wide range of hearing loss within the deaf population in the United States. The level of hearing loss is measured in decibels (dB). The measurements are listed below (Sheetz, 1993, p.49):

1) Moderate hearing loss: 41-55 decibels (dB); may need a hearing aid but can understand conventional speech at 3 to 5 feet.

2) Moderately severe hearing loss: 56-70 dB; language and speech therapy in necessary; conversation must be loud to be understood; great difficulty in group and classroom discussions. May adapt to the hearing loss with lip reading and visual signs.

3) Severe hearing loss: 70-90 dB; need special education for deaf children; may identify environmental noises, may distinguish vowels but unable to distinguish consonants.

4) Profound hearing loss: 91+ dB; needs special class or school for the deaf; may hear some loud sounds; does not rely on hearing as the primary channel for communication.

The quantifiable measure of hearing loss is a medical model used to understand hearing impairment, or deafness, as a disability. Disability and deafness have been traditionally understood by many as a medical condition or illness (Foster, 2001; Gregory, 1998). Over the past three decades, significant efforts have been made to dispel this perception by referring to the deaf community using a cultural model rather than a medical model (Swain, Griffiths, & Heyman, 2003).

Distinctions of Deaf Culture

Phillips (1996) identifies two primary groups that exist in deaf culture. The first group of individuals prefers using American Sign Language (ASL) and lip reading instead of hearing aids and consider themselves "Deaf", with an emphasis on the capitalization of the word. The capitalization of "Deaf" is symbolic in that these individuals have identified themselves as a minority within the deaf population. They do not perceive their hearing loss as a disability (Lane, Hoffmeister, & Bahan, 1996). The second group, the little "d" deaf individuals, view their hearing loss as a disability and are more likely to be receptive to social services and special accommodations as outlined in the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA, 1990). Although identified as two distinct groups, both are included in this Act to protect individuals with any documented hearing loss.

The medical model of hearing loss implicates seeking a cure and rehabilitation of individuals into the dominant society (Gregory, 1998). Barnes and Mercer (1996) view the medical model as one which focuses on the personal limitations of the individual, and these limitations can only be resolved by curing or treating the hearing loss.

Of the estimated 37.5 million people in the United States with a documented hearing loss, members of the Deaf community are a distinct group with a unique culture. The use of sign language as a form of communication is described by McEntee-Ataliantis (2006) as a "core value and defining marker of identity and group solidarity (p. 25). Hersh (2012) says, "Deaf people share the diversity of the rest of the population with regards to gender, ethnic origin, (other) impairments, age and interests, although those who identify as Deaf are more likely engaged with other Deaf people" (p.214).

The common language that members of the Deaf community share is unique in that unlike other languages, sign language is connected to a physical characteristic that is not shared by mainstream society. Foster and Kinuthia (2003) observed that for members in the Deaf community, deafness is the primary identity for many, whereas for others in another identity, such as being black, is more important. Hersh (2012) states, "There are a number of different sign languages, just as there are different spoken languages. However, Deaf people using different sign languages generally find it much easier to communicate with each other than do hearing people using different spoken languages" (p. 214).

In following the chronicled history of deafness in America, one can observe the evolution of an extremely misunderstood phenomenon to one that is now referred to as deaf culture. Before initiating a discussion of the phenomenon known as deaf culture, it is appropriate to first provide

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a general definition of culture. Several definitions have been identified ("Culture", 2012, paragraph 1):

1) A culture is a way of life of a group of people –the behaviors, beliefs, values, and symbols that they accept, generally without thinking about them, and that are passed along by communication and imitation from one generation to the next.

2) Culture is communication. Some of its symbols include a group's skills, knowledge, attitudes, and motives. The meanings of the symbols are learned and deliberately perpetuated in a society through its institutions.

3) Culture consists of patterns, explicit and implicit, of and for behavior acquired and transmitted by symbols, constituting the distinctive achievement of human groups, including their embodiments in artifacts; the essential core of culture consists of traditional ideas and especially their attached values; culture systems, may on the one hand, be considered as products of action, on the other hand, as conditioning influences upon further action.

In reference to deaf individuals, Padden and Humphries (2005) assert before the 1980s, the ideology of culture had "long been used to describe the practices of hearing communities around the world, but it had never been widely used to describe deaf people" (p.2). Ladd (2003) says the term *Deaf culture* was "developed to give utterance to the belief that Deaf communities contained their own ways of life mediated through their sign language" (p. xvii).

Today deaf culture is recognized by social science scholars as a phenomenon that is unique in life experience, history, language, values, and beliefs (Padden & Humphries, 1989, 2005). The lowercase designation of "deaf" refers to individuals who view their hearing loss as an auditory experience. Little d-deaf individuals have very little contact with Deaf communities,

and as Ladd (2003) says, "prefer to try and retain their membership of the majority society in which they were socialized" (p.xvii). Ladd (2003) also says big D-deaf individuals are either born deaf or became deaf at an early age, and "for whom the sign languages, communities, and cultures of the Deaf collective represents their primary experience as essentially kin to other language minorities" (p. xvii). These two subcultures are distinguished by a cultural and physical view of deafness.

When defining deafness, it is important to keep in mind that deaf people are not a homogenous group, but rather a group that ranges from individuals who were either born deaf or who became deaf later in life. In many instances, the acceptance of deaf culture as an identity is dependent on the stage in life that the hearing loss was acquired. For example, an individual who has spent most of his or her life being able to hear and suddenly loses the ability to hear may still identify with the hearing culture because their lives were initially shaped around hearing norms and values. Senghas and Monaghan (2002) best summarizes the complexities of deaf culture in the following statement, "Separating audiological issues from those of a socialization, acculturation, and identity (that is, Deaf as a sociological or cultural reference) makes otherwise confusing issues far more understandable. Those who lose their hearing late in life, for example, might be considered deaf but not Deaf" (p.71). Dickinson (2010) found that the degree of hearing loss, family influences and perceptions, medical intervention, educational opportunities, and language preferences also influence whether a deaf individual embrace deaf or hearing culture.

It is a common misconception that to refer to an individual as "deaf" is inappropriate, and that the common classification of "hard of hearing" is a more acceptable term to use in society. On the contrary, to classify an individual who is profoundly deaf as hard of hearing is

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inappropriate due to the considerable differences between individuals who have profound

hearing loss and those whose hearing loss is minimal. It also minimizes the experiences of

severely or profoundly deaf individuals (Harris & Thornton, 2005). Likewise, many individuals

who may acquire hearing loss later in their adult lives identify with hearing culture and norms

rather than non-hearing culture and norms. Because these complexities exist, research on this

topic may potentially result in ambiguous findings. For this reason, a deaf employee is defined as

an individual who have moderately severe to profound hearing loss and was either born with the

hearing loss, or acquired the hearing loss before language development. It is important to note

however, that the individuals in this study used a variety of communication strategies, such as

American Sign Language (ASL), lip reading, spoken English, written English, etc. These

communication styles are representative of the diversity that exists among the deaf population,

and is appropriate for inclusion in this study.

Language and Deaf Culture

Language, whether it is written, spoken or physically communicated, is a critical

component of culture. Language in all forms is the way in which humans communicate with each

other. Anthropological studies of deaf communities and it definition of culture reveal the

appropriateness in referring to the unique experiences of deaf individuals as Deaf culture because

of the unique qualities of the language that sets it apart from other languages of the world.

Language is considered a culture. Senghas and Monaghan (2002) state, "Understanding the

complex nature of communities with deaf members requires attending to how people use and

think about language. In other words, we need to understand more about the culture of language"

(p. 70).

In the Deaf community, sign language is a central area of interest in cultural studies of d/Deaf people. The study of sign language and its significance in the development of a unique culture for deaf individuals was first accepted by anthropologists in the early 1980s (Baker, Battison, & Stokoe, 1980; Washabaugh, 1981). There are several distinct types of sign language, as outlined by Senghas and Monaghan (2002):

1) Natural Sign Language: contains all the core components that are common to other human languages. The distinction between this sign language and spoken language is evident in the different ways in which words are articulated. Spoken language requires sound, and natural sign language involves the use of hands and body to convert both verbal and grammatical associations. As with spoken languages, distinct geographical regions have their own distinct form of sign language.

2) Artificial Sign Language: manually coded variations of the corresponding language of a country or region. It is "pictorial" in nature and used in many countries to teach spoken language to deaf individuals. Many parts of speech in spoken language to not have a corresponding sign in artificial sign language, an example of this would be the verb, *is,* which has a signed code in natural sign language, but does not in artificial sign language.

3) Fingerspelling: written alphabets represented by sign representations. May be characterized using one hand, as in American Sign Language (ASL), or with two hands in British Sign Language (BSL). Fingerspelling varies across nationalities due to variations in alphabet systems.

4) Home Signing: a quick system designed to meet the needs of small groups. For example, new signs or new meanings of signs may be created to better communicate

in families in which sign language is not the primary language in the home. This form

of communication is used most often in family settings in which a child is born to

hearing parents.

5) Contact signing: a form of sign language in which the communication is modified

depending on whether hearing individuals are present (pp. 74-75)

American Sign Language (ASL) is the preferred form of communication in the United States for

individuals in Deaf culture (Singleton & Tittle, 2000; William & Abeles, 2004). It is a visual

language, consisting of a coinciding grammatical structure and auditory spoken form of English

(Valli & Lucas, 2000). ASL has a different grammar system from English. Certain words are

unnecessary in ASL; for instance, the articles "A" and "The" do not exist in ASL. The syntax

structure of ASL is different from English in that the verb follows the noun. In addition, the

object of the sentence is commonly used as the topic of discussion. For example, the English

sentence, "I am a professor" is translated into ASL as "Professor Me", or "Me Professor" while

using a nod as an affirmative gesture (Humphries & Padden, 1992).

Communicating through American Sign Language is the fundamental nature of how deaf

people interact, how the make meaning of their lives, and how they understand their lives (Ladd,

2003; Padden & Humphries, 1990). It is an important symbol of deaf culture. Consequently, this

symbol of deaf culture is also connected to communication as an important element in the

creation of a successful work environment.

Chronological Review of the Literature

One of the earliest studies identified in the review of literature related to deaf individuals

in the workplace was Fritz's (1986) doctoral dissertation titled, "Career mobility and the hearing-

impaired employee". The purpose of the study was to explore supervisors' perceptions of

potential career paths of both hearing and deaf employees, and the types of skills sets they perceived to be necessary for career advancement for both sets of employees. The two research questions examined in this study were,

> 1) "What career paths, as judged by supervisors, are believed to be appropriate for deaf as compared with hearing technical/professional employees?"
>
> 2) "Is there a difference in the attitudes of supervisors regarding employee skills and characteristics needed by deaf as compared with hearing technical/professional employees to be considered for promotion?" (pp.12-13)

Fritz (1986) developed a survey instrument that was divided into two sections; the first section were questions pertaining to hearing employees, and the second section pertained to deaf employees. The following skills and characteristics were measured: 1) pronunciation and speech reception skills, 2) interaction and leadership skills, 3) individual and informal communication skills, 4) personality and appearance, 5) technical and career related skills, and 6) formal written communication skills, and managerial skills (pp. 65-67). Each of the skills were clearly defined so participants could provide accurate feedback.

A total of 107 supervisors from 43 companies in Rochester, New York participated in the study. The findings of the study showed that supervisors gave a higher rating to hearing employees having a greater chance for promotion and advancement in managerial positions than deaf employees. The supervisors also gave an equal rating to the probability of hearing and deaf employees acquiring non-managerial positions. Of the skills and characteristics being measured in this study, supervisors rated formal communication and pronunciation and speech skills as being less important a skill for deaf employees that hearing employees (p.107). Fritz makes a

comment on this outcome of the research, noting, "This was to be expected, as society as a whole is aware that deaf individuals may have speech production and reception difficulties" (p.107). Another finding of the research revealed that supervisors rated interaction and leadership skills as being more important for deaf employees than hearing employees. Fritz concluded that the supervisors' attitudes and perceptions of deaf individuals' skills and abilities "do not look upon the deaf individual as needing managerial skills because they do not perceive deaf persons as moving into managerial positions" (p.110). These perceptions consequently perpetuate a work environment in which deaf individuals are subjected to being passed on for advancement, as well as a stigmatized view of deaf employees.

In a similar study, Foster (1992) explored supervisor's perceptions of deaf employees as well as the perspective of deaf employees. This qualitative study consisted of open-ended interviews with supervisors of deaf employees, and a focus group session with the deaf employees of these supervisors to respond and reflect on the supervisors' comments. The study highlighted issues in communication between deaf and hearing employees, and how these issues serve as barriers to a harmonious work environment. Foster's study (1992) provided insight into the challenges faced by both supervisors and deaf employees in the workplace.

Because of the findings in this study, Foster (1992) noted the need for supervisors to receive better training and education on the communicative needs and issues of deaf employees. One example is the awareness of the supervisor that deaf employees may be unable to use the phone and thus should not be considered a realistic expectation of the deaf employee, unless reasonable accommodations have been put in place for the deaf employee to communicate in this manner. Fritz also noted that efforts should be made to create strategies that encourage equal opportunity. These strategies could be created by inclusion of the deaf employee's input in this

process. Foster's (1992) recommendation for further study included more research to be conducted in workplace social interaction of deaf employees, specifically to explore the experiences of social interaction of deaf employees in the workplace.

Johnson's study (1993) on deaf employees involved focus group activities of 490 deaf individuals between 31-60 years of age. The deaf individuals in this study completed a questionnaire that focused on job retention and career advancement issues in the workplace. The findings of this study revealed that the degree of participation in the workplace was a predictor of promotion. These levels of participation included socialization in the workplace, supervisory ability, teamwork skills, and task performance.

The deaf participants in this study rated their quality of work performance higher than that of their hearing co-workers. This finding was shown to be a major factor in the retention of deaf employees. However, supervisors rated socialization, supervisory ability, and teamwork as reliable indicators of a higher level of participation in the workplace. The study concluded that employees demonstrating a high level of socialization, supervisory ability, and teamwork are likely to be promoted than those who don't demonstrate these skills. In this study, task performance was the only level of participation that was given a high rating by both deaf employees and supervisors. It is implied that a high level of task performance is not a good indicator of promotion or advancement. The key component of socialization, supervisory ability, and teamwork is good verbal and written communication skills, which are skills that have been identified by the research as being poor among deaf individuals.

Larisgoitia's (1996) quantitative doctoral dissertation, "Factors that affect the employment status of young adults who are deaf" explored the employment status of adults who

were deaf in the state of Pennsylvania, and whether a relationship existed between social support and employment status. The sample size consisted of 175 deaf individuals and 109 parents.

The results of the study showed that 75% of the adults polled reported working approximately 40 hrs. a week, and that 11% gained employment through vocational rehabilitation offices in the state. There was a strong correlation between social support from family and friends and employment status. In fact, the findings of this study revealed that those individuals were more likely to be employed full time and earn higher wages than those individuals lacking social support. Deaf individuals who earned $12 or more per hour (28%) were found to request vocational rehabilitation services less frequently than those who earned $6-8 per hour (37%).

Larisgoitia (1996) concluded the study by implying that due to fear of stereotypical beliefs, deaf individuals may be hesitant in seeking out social services such as vocational rehabilitation centers to assist in securing employment. The study also recommended that more qualitative studies should be done to further explore the social interaction between deaf employees and their supervisors and coworkers, and the quality of these social structures.

A study by Young, Ackerman, and Kyle (2000) studied the experiences of deaf and hearing co-workers at two psychiatric facilities and one school for deaf children in the U.K. The study focused on the reflections and outcomes of the creation of a work environment that used ASL for communication in the workplace. This qualitative study consisted of forty-one individuals, of which 20 of these individuals were deaf.

The hearing participants reflected on their efforts to use ASL in the workplace to create a strengthened sense of acceptance and belonging of deaf colleagues, and deaf participants in turn

felt respected by their hearing colleagues' efforts. The study provided insight into setting realistic expectations for professional relationships.

Balsamo's (2006) doctoral dissertation titled, "Accommodating employees who are deaf in the workplace" focused on the note-taking skills of hearing co-workers for their deaf colleagues. He stated, "One question that arises is if the deaf or hard-of hearing employee does not receive all the requisite information to perform competently, and a lack of information affects his or her job performance, does the responsibility fall on the deaf employee, the note-taker, or the manager who chose not to hire a certified interpreter or provide the information in a meaningful way" (p.3). Balsamo addressed the following research questions:

1) What type of information is transcribed by a hearing participant during a verbal English staged video presentation in a workplace setting?

2) How accurate is the transcription by a hearing participant from a verbal English staged video presentation to written English in a workplace setting?

3) What biographical information or variables impact the quality of the transcription by the participants as measured by two scoring methods? (p.22)

This quantitative study consisted of 65 hearing supervisors who worked with deaf employees. The participants were noted to have varying degrees of experience in working with deaf individuals. Participants were asked to view a training video and transcribe the video for deaf employees from their note-taking. The quality of the note-taking was then measured by a validated scoring instrument.

The results showed participants were paid more attention to the verbal messages in the video rather than visual and textual messages, and experienced difficulties in taking notes and viewing the video at the same time. Balsamo stated, "In some instances, the words used in the

verbal messages were not exactly the same as the words used in the textual message" (p.70). The study concluded that as in the examples of miscommunication demonstrated in the transcription of the video by the participants, Balsamo (2006) stated, "When note –taking is used, the deaf recipient not only has to contend with whether a good, concise message has been sent, the intermediary's understanding of the message must also be considered" (p.107). This study successfully highlighted an aspect of communication break-down in the workplace that could potentially affect the work performance of deaf employees in the workplace. The study also suggests the challenges deaf employees may have in the workplace in attempting to take notes while a co-worker or supervisor is speaking.

Wells (2008) dissertation titled, "Deaf world, what's where I'm at: A phenomenological study exploring the experience of being a deaf employee in the workplace", captured the lived experiences of four deaf employees. This qualitative study consisted of in-depth semi-structured interviews with the assistance of an ASL interpreter. The interviews were both audio and video recorded and subsequently transcribed.

The purpose of the study was to explore the deaf employee's perception of participation or non-participation in daily tasks and social interaction at work. The study used Wenger's Community of Practice Model and Bandura's reciprocal interaction model to analyze the findings.

The findings revealed an overall poor community of practice structure for each of the participants based on Wenger's 14 indicators for the existence of a community of practice in the workplace. Participants revealed a low level of participation and social interaction in their respective workplace settings. This low level of participation and interaction had the greatest presence during business meetings. Several of the participants expressed frustration in not having

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an ASL interpreter during meetings, and felt a sense of exclusion in the workplace as a result. Wells (2008) concluded that in many workplace settings there is still a lack of awareness of the importance of reasonable accommodations for deaf employees, and efforts should be made to increase this awareness. In terms of social interaction, it was recommended that supervisors and employees be more aware of the quality of interaction during business meetings and informal gatherings.

The purpose of Johnson's (2010) dissertation, "A phenomenological analysis of the perception of employability of deaf and hard-of-hearing individuals following high school graduation" was to explore issues related to perceptions of employability of deaf individuals. In this qualitative study, ten participants were video recorded during interview sessions to gain their perspectives. The participants were all over the age of 18 and were employed full time.

Johnson's (2010) research question was, "How do deaf and hard-of-hearing individuals describe their experience of the phenomenon of employability after graduating high school?" The findings of the research showed that deaf individuals who attended residential schools and oral schools for the deaf had a strong identity with deaf culture. However, when compared to deaf students educated in mainstream programs in public schools, these individuals appeared to have more difficulties in finding employment and in the workplace due to the lack of assimilation into a hearing environment while in school. All participants expressed issues in employment difficulties, the importance of good communication to ensure good job performance, and the need for proper training of employers on the treatment of people with disabilities in the workplace.

In a study similar to Wells (2008), Butler's (2012) dissertation, titled, "An ethnographic case study of a deaf collective workforce", highlighted the individual and collective lived

experiences of four deaf United States Postal Service (USPS) employees in Houston, TX. The data collected for this qualitative study consisted of in-depth semi structured interviews. Butler stated that the purpose of the study was to "develop understandings of how grassroots Deaf workers successfully navigate the world of work, and how the collective aspect of Deaf culture influences the process" (p. 1).

The study revealed that the four employees' strong sense of identity in Deaf culture provided the foundation for solidarity to navigate the numerous legal issues arising from exclusion and accommodations. Butler (2012) provided recommendations for rehabilitation professionals working with the deaf individuals to facilitate lowering the high unemployment rate among in the deaf community.

Chapter Summary

The literature review of deaf employees in the workplace revealed both quantitative and qualitative methods of data collection. In this review of literature, several recurring themes were identified in the literature. Communication was identified in the majority of the studies as being the one key factor in whether a deaf employee with be successful in the workplace. Because of a breakdown or lack of proper communication, deaf employees face exclusion in both formal and informal daily work practices. The perceptions of both hearing and deaf employees perpetuate an environment of stigmatization of the deaf employee's skills and abilities, which can result in limited opportunities for promotion and career advancement. Findings in the literature also reveal a pattern in the workplace organization's lack of commitment in facilitating an environment in which the deaf employee is valued for their contributions.

There is a limited number of research studies on the topic of deaf employees in the workplace, and specifically on the deaf employee's lived experiences. Several qualitative studies

were identified in the literature that explore the phenomenon (Butler, 2012; Johnson, 2010; Wells, 2008). Although Butler's (2012) and Johnson's (2010) studies reveal the lived experiences of deaf employees in the workplace, these studies do not specifically focus on the perception and quality of interaction and participation, as in Wells' study (2008). The current study is a qualitative study designed to obtain data from six participants through in-depth semi-structured interviews using narrative inquiry. The sample size of six participants in this study is consistent with the range of participants in previous studies.

The research has consistently charged future researchers to conduct studies that raise awareness and understanding of the barriers that exist between hearing and deaf employees, and strategies to overcome these barriers. Previous studies have established the importance and relevance of this topic, and has laid the groundwork for future studies. Due to the scarcity of the available literature, this study aims to add to the body of knowledge on research relating to the deaf community.

Chapter 3

Methodology

Previous research identified in the study of social learning theory, communities of practice, and similar studies with the deaf population as outlined in Chapter 2 were used as the foundation in the creation of this research study. Similar research studies were used in designing the methodological foundation for the present study.

The purpose of this study was to explore the experiences of deaf individuals in the workplace. This study addressed the following questions:

1) How do deaf employees describe their experiences with other deaf employees?

2) How do deaf employees describe their experiences with hearing employees?

3) How do deaf employees describe their experiences with hearing supervisors?

4) How do these experiences impact deaf individuals' social interaction and participation in the workplace?

This chapter describes the methodological approach that was used to answer the research questions.

Research Design

The research focuses on a minority group in society, the deaf community. Although statistical research can be used to benefit non-dominant groups, qualitative research possesses characteristics that make it appropriate for addressing social issues that affect, or are endemic to non-dominant groups. Qualitative research is defined as a research method used to gain an in-depth understanding of human behavior and the reasons for behavioral patterns. Unlike quantitative research, which answers the questions what, where, and when, qualitative research answers how and why things happen. Consequently, qualitative research often involves smaller

samples rather than large samples that are used in quantitative research. The primary tool used in qualitative research is interviewing participants. Merriam (1998) identifies four characteristics that make qualitative research an appropriate method of choice: 1) the issue or topic has not generated enough information to make quantitative studies possible, 2) the purpose of the research is to gain a better understanding of how individuals perceive human interaction, 3) the research does not involve the analysis of cause and effect relationships, and 4) the research does not involve the testing of theories.

Because the research purpose and questions for this study were focused on exploring and understanding rather than hypothesizing, the research is qualitative in nature (Glesne, 2011). Conducting research with a qualitative approach allows for a deeper examination of the lived experiences of deaf individuals that illustrate multiple realities. As a qualitative study, the methodological design centers on understanding the perspective of the participants. This understanding is defined by Mertens (1998) as social constructivism, in which the goal of the research is to seek complexity in multiple realities rather than reducing the meaning into a few generalizations or ideas. Two key principles emerge from this understanding: 1) there are variations in the experiences of individuals, and 2) the researcher may not know enough about the issue or topic under investigation to generate a legitimate hypothesis (Auerback & Silverstein, 2003).

Qualitative research also allows for the researcher to communicate his or her subjectivities that have been formed from experiences with the topic, and gives recognition to the researcher's understandings and interpretations (Peshkin, 1988). In qualitative research, participants are collaborative partners. In the context of this research, all deaf individuals come in with unique backgrounds that cause their interpretation of experiences in the workplace to

vary. The qualitative paradigm gives the researcher an opportunity to examine these experiences that lead to meaningful discoveries. By better understanding how deaf individuals inform their cultural identities in the workplace, it may be possible to adapt more effective approaches to better understand and meet the needs of deaf employees in the workplace.

Narrative Inquiry

Qualitative research provides a variety of methodological options as the foundation for collecting and analyzing data. There are five approaches to qualitative inquiry: phenomenology, case study, grounded theory, ethnography, and narrative inquiry (Creswell, 2007). Creswell (2007) states, "Narrative research is the best for capturing the detailed stories or life experiences of a single life or the lives of a small number of individuals" (p. 55). Because this research involved the investigation of experiences of deaf individuals in the workplace, narrative inquiry was chosen as the most appropriate methodological approach (Creswell 2007; Crotty, 1998).

The use of storytelling is a widely accepted practice of gathering data in qualitative research (Goodall, 2010; Polkinghorne, 1995). It is recognized historically as an important form of communication in both pre-literate and literate societies (Pfahl & Wiessner, 2007). The collection of stories from significant populations documents the essence of human experiences. These experiences can then be documented and analyzed for recurring themes and issues that can be subjected to interpretation. The use of narrative in the deaf community has been a popular technique in providing a voice to a silent and vulnerable population. Perhaps one of the most noteworthy narratives of the deaf community is the work of Jack Gannon's (2011) *Deaf Heritage: A Narrative History of Deaf America.* The seventeen-chapter narrative provides descriptive stories and experiences of deaf individuals dating back to the early nineteenth century. Because this study involved the study of deaf individuals' experiences with identity in

the workplace, several qualitative studies were identified that use narrative inquiry to explore

deaf identities. Hole's (2007) research on deafness and identity analyzed the life stories of three

deaf women. The purpose of this narrative inquiry was to explore how three deaf women

constructed their identities in a hearing society. An analysis of how they accepted or rejected

various norms of deaf culture and hearing culture was also explored. Ohna's (2004) narrative

inquiry of 22 deaf individuals examined identity development and how the hearing world

positively and negatively influences identity development. Finally, McIlroy and Storbeck (2011)

explored the identity development of nine deaf participants through narratives highlighting their

educational experiences. The findings in the literature demonstrate narrative inquiry as a

qualitative approach used to understand and make meaning of the lives of deaf individuals.

Douglas Ezzy's text, *Qualitative Analysis (2013)* offers a step by step approach to

narrative inquiry that was used in this study:

1) Collect the stories

2) Analyze the stories' content by focusing on insights and understandings

3) Compare stories for similarities and differences

4) Consider the effects of demographic variables (age, gender)

5) Identify the stories that illustrate themes, insights, and understanding

Selection of Participants

The University of Memphis Institutional Review Board (IRB) approved this study before

the recruitment of participants took place (Appendix A). In qualitative research, only a subset of

the population is chosen for a given study. The purpose of the research and the characteristics of

the population to be studied are the factors that influence the number of individuals in qualitative

research (Mack, Woodsong, MacQueen, Guest, & Namey, 2005). Heppner and Heppner (2004)

suggest that reviewing past studies on similar areas of research is a good measure of the number of participants needed for a study. Siedman (2006) states, "The measure of in-depth interviewing applied to a sample of participants who all experience similar structural and social conditions gives enormous power to the stories of a relatively few participants" (p. 55). Creswell (2007) states, "In narrative research, I have found many examples with one or two individuals, unless a larger pool of participants is used to develop a collective story" (p. 126). Wells' (2008) study on the experiences of middle aged deaf employees in the workplace included four participants. Wells states that using a small number of participants "allowed me to gather sufficient information from deaf employees about their work experience" (p. 35). To give power to the voices of deaf individuals, my qualitative study involved six participants.

Sampling Method

Six deaf individuals were identified with personal workplace experiences. Porter (1999) describes the importance of locating eligible and accessible participants for qualitative research: "One important concern is whether it is feasible to find and adequate number of suitable participants to achieve the study's purpose" (p. 797). Criteria sampling was used to assure that participants met certain criteria to be eligible for participation. In the current study, deaf is defined as an individual with moderately severe to profound hearing loss acquired in infancy or early childhood. The deaf participants were required to be 18 years or older and have self-reported moderately severe to profound hearing loss. Participants were also required to have at least a high school diploma or GED and could either be currently employed or unemployed but previously held a work position. All the individuals had experienced issues associated with being deaf in the workplace and they all identified with deaf culture.

I began the process of recruiting eligible participants by contacting the director of a locally well-known social service organization for the deaf in Memphis. I discussed with the director in detail the purpose of the research. A copy of the flyer was created for distribution and was emailed to the director (Appendix D). Six participants were chosen that met the study criteria. An ASL interpreter also volunteered to provide interpreter services wuring the course of the study.

Andrew is an ASL interpreter and is the child of hearing adults. Andrew was born profoundly deaf and learned ASL at a very young age. ASL is his first language. He underwent a life change in 2005 when he chose elective surgery for a cochlear implant. A cochlear implant is defined as "a surgically implanted electronic device that provides a sense of sound to a person who is profoundly deaf or severely hard of hearing (NIH, 2013). A cochlear implant provides hearing to individuals who are deaf due to damage to sensory cells in the cochlea. Individuals who have mild hearing loss are usually not good candidates for cochlear implants. Because the implant enables sufficient hearing and speech recognition, I could communicate very well with Andrew. When asked about his cultural identity about D/deaf constructs, Andrew considered himself to be bilingual and bicultural (Singleton & Tittle, 2000, p. 255). Andrew's skills in ASL translating helped to ensure that the participants' description of experience was properly represented. Additionally, because of Andrew's extensive involvement in the deaf community, four out of the six participants knew him personally, and the camaraderie between him and the participants resulted in a comfortable and non-threatening environment in which to conduct interviews. In my research, Andrew is considered a gatekeeper, or the person who influences access to research data. Creswell (2007) defines gatekeeper as "an individual who has insider status with a cultural group" (p. 125). Hammersley and Atkinson (1995) further add to this

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definition by identifying the gatekeeper as the initial contact for the researcher. Although I attended two deaf social events and met several people, I am considered a "stranger" to individuals who are a part of deaf culture, and having Andrew as a gatekeeper before and during the research process was a valuable resource for me. Saunders (2006), says:

> Gaining access to undertake social research is often problematic. Friends, contacts and colleagues and others may be willing to vouch for a researcher and the value of the research and act as research sponsors. However, unless permission has been granted by a gatekeeper from within the group, community or organization in which it is planned to undertake the research, it is unlikely that access will be allowed in practice. (p. 126)

The camaraderie between Andrew and the participants along with his skills in ASL translation helped to ensure that the participants' experiences were accurately represented. Andrew's assistance also gave me the opportunity to focus on the interview protocol and the methods used to gather data (audio recorder and video recorder). Andrew was financially compensated for his services.

Research Site

The site selected for this study was the main public library in Memphis, TN. The public library provided a private room positioned away from the public patrons that was properly equipped to accommodate video recording. The interviews took place on Saturday mornings for the duration of 10 months. All the participants were informed of the location well in advance of the interviews and were comfortable with the location. On two occasions, the main public library was not available and a study room at the researcher's place of employment was used for interviews.

Informed Consent and Confidentiality

Participants were asked to read an informed consent before the first interview (see Appendix B). The consent form provided the participants information about the purpose of the study and potential risks associated with the study. The consent form also assured the participants that the results of the study would be confidential, and participation was voluntary. Participants were also told that they had the option of withdrawing from the study at any time. To ensure anonymity, pseudonyms were given to each participant. The sign language interpreter also reviewed and signed a confidentiality form (Appendix C).

Data Collection Methods

A variety of methods can be used to collect data in qualitative research. Each of the five approaches to qualitative inquiry has characteristic methods in which to collect this data. Czarinawska (2000) provides three ways to collect data for narrative analysis: 1) recording unplanned instances of storytelling, 2) gathering stories through interviews, and 3) eliciting stories from social media. Patton (2002) states interviewing is a common method of data collection for narrative studies. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) further expand the range of collection methods in narrative studies to include participant journals, researcher field notes, stories from participants' family members, letters, researcher observations, and social artifacts. Seidman (2006) establishes the purpose of interviewing in qualitative research:

> The purpose of in-depth interviewing is not go get answers to questions, nor test hypothesis, and not to 'evaluate' as the term is normally used. At the root of in-depth interviewing is an interest in understanding the lived experiences of other people and the meaning they make of that experience. (p. 9)

Based on the findings in the literature, I chose interviewing as the primary method for data collection. Other methods I found helpful in gathering information from my participants were researcher observations and field notes.

Interviews

There are several forms of interview designs that can be used in qualitative research. The three interview designs that are used the most by researchers are structured, semi-structured, and unstructured (Seidman, 2006). Commonly used in corporate institutions for recruiting employees, structured interviews are "verbally administered questionnaires, in which a list of predetermined questions are asked, with little or no variation and with no scope or follow up or warrant further elaboration" (Gill, Stewat, Treasure, & Chadwick, 2008). Structured interviews are generally easy to administer; however, a researcher using this format cannot expect rich data due to limited participant responses. On the far end of the spectrum is the unstructured interview, in which interviews are conducted with very little organization. Unlike structured interviews, where the researcher controls the interview experience, unstructured interviews allow the participants to have more control over the direction of the interview (McNamara, 2009). An unstructured interview may start, for instance, by saying, "Tell me about your experiences in the workplace as a deaf individual" and would continue based on the participant's initial response. Turner (2010) says unstructured interviews are beneficial in that it provides flexibility. However, Creswell (2007) views unstructured interviews as unreliable due to the difficulty in coding data due to an inconsistency in the interview questions.

The third and most common type of interview used in qualitative research is the semi-structured interview (Patton, 2002). Semi-structured interviews are comprised of specific questions that help to explain the topic being explored. Referred to as "open-ended", the

questions in semi-structured interviews are created in a way that discourages participants from providing yes or no answers (DeMarrias, 2004; Patton, 2002; Seidman, 2006;). The design of semi-structured interviews allows both the researcher and participant to have partial control during the interview process. Structure is provided in that open-ended interview questions are generated prior to, instead of during the interview. Participants are given an opportunity to talk freely while being provided guidance during the interview process. An example of an open-ended question in a semi-structured interview would be, *"Tell me about your experiences with hearing co-workers during break time."* The flexibility of semi-structured interviews, in contrast to structured interviews, allows for the presenting of information that is of value to the participant, and may be of significance to the researcher. Because the goal of my research was to gather data rich in descriptions that answered specific questions, the data collected from this study was gathered through in-depth open-ended, semi-structured interviews. By conducting semi-structured interviews, I was able to follow the intended topics of discussion and ask secondary questions that may arise during the dialogue.

Data was collected over a 10- month period. The dates and times for interviews were coordinated between the participants, the deaf interpreter, and the researcher through e-mail correspondence or text message. The first meeting consisted of an interview with each of the six deaf participants. Each interview lasted approximately 1 hr and involved the deaf participant, interpreter, and researcher.

An example of a question used in the first interview was *Tell me about the nature of your hearing loss.* This question served as an "icebreaker" and to encourage the participant to tell stories about their early lives. These stories often led to probing questions about their educational experiences and finally questions about their work experiences. Planned open-ended questions

gave me the opportunity to ask more probing questions that consequently allowed for a better understanding of the lives and experiences of the deaf participants in the workplace.

At the end of the first interview the researcher asked each participant if he or she would like to continue their participation in the research by scheduling another interview. For a few exceptions, the researcher could schedule second interviews with the participant on that day. This was convenient in that the participant, researcher, and deaf interpreter were all there face to face to coordinate days and times. Participants were also told if they had to cancel or re-schedule an interview to do so via e-mail or text message.

The second interview began with a summary of the previous interview. Participants were given the opportunity to correct or clarify anything in the first interview that they believed was a misrepresentation of their experiences. They also had the opportunity to add information to the previous stories. One participant stated that she was shy and felt that she did not provide the information that was needed for the study, and wanted to talk more about her experiences. The second interview was also an opportunity to ask questions that the researcher generated after reviewing the first interview transcripts and notes.

The final interview consisted of a summary of the previous interview, and an opportunity to make corrections to their stories. The participants were asked if they had any final comments about their experiences in the workplace as a deaf individual, or if they had any other information they would like to share. The final interview was an opportunity to add to the richness of data gathered from previous interviews. The interview guide for this study was adapted from Wells' (2008) dissertation, along with additional questions that targeted richer responses (Appendix E).

Although not a requirement in qualitative research, financial compensation of $20 per interview was offered as a token of appreciation for participation in the study after each interview. It is also important to note that participants were informed they would be financially compensated if they were not able to complete the interview sessions for any reason. Seidman (2006) suggests exercising caution in using financial rewards in qualitative research. He states:

> If paying per interview, setting the level of compensation can be tricky. Anything more than a token payment could bias potential participants' motivation for taking part in the study. On the other hand, some see the use of peoples' words without paying them as exploitative. (p. 73)

In addition to audio recording, video recording was also used in the interview process. Video recording has become an accepted practice particularly in qualitative research (Dufon, 2002). There are two advantages of video recording in qualitative research. The first advantage is that video recording gives deeper semantic information than taking field notes in that it records every word of the participant (Beebe & Takahashi, 1989). When taking notes during interviews, the researcher is faced with the challenge of trying to maintain a level of speed in writing down the thoughts of the participants while simultaneously attempting to capture the essence of the participants' responses.

The second advantage of video recording is that it gives the researcher the opportunity to capture the essence of events by replaying them (Grimshaw, 1982). Erickson (1982) and Fetterman (1998) state the benefit of video recording is that the researcher can gain a different perspective of social interaction each time the recording is viewed. Dufon (2002) states:

> Replaying the event also allows us more time to contemplate, deliberate, and ponder the data before drawing conclusions, and hence serves to ward off premature interpretation of

the data. Even a rare event, when captured on tape, can be played repeatedly for a

thorough analysis so that it can still be studied intensively. (p. 44)

Last, video recording allowed me to focus on the interview as well as have a record of the

interview if I did not understand something that the interpreter translated in ASL.

Despite the positive benefits of video recording, it also has its disadvantages. When

conducting qualitative research that focuses on behavioral observation, Dufon (2002) states that

video recording "tells us nothing about statistics, that is, how typical the event is. Is it a frequent

event or a unique event?" (p.44). The second disadvantage of video recording is its limitation in

capturing only the observed moment. Dufon (2002) says, "The unspoken thoughts and feelings

of a participant cannot be seen or heard on tape" (p.44). However, it is suggested by several

qualitative researchers that this limitation can be overcome by playing the video back to the

participants to evoke memories and asking them to describe their thoughts and feelings about an

event (Corsaro, 1982). Penn-Edwards (2004) lists the categories of video recording in qualitative

research:

1) Observational recording: observes a participant engaging in an activity or behavior.
   The recording is used as a resource for coding and interpreting data and evaluation

2) Subject viewing: participants are viewing the video recording of themselves; the
   researcher concentrated on the participant's reactions to seeing themselves on video.

3) Subject response: the researcher is focused on participant's responses to interview
   questions. Encourages reflecting and discussion of the recorded material.

4) Subject self-reflection: the researcher uses the video recording for the critique of a
   participant's performance or act; examples are scripted, or planned dramatic
   performances.

5) Subject recording: the researcher observes the participant designing and creating a

video recording. Allows the researcher to observe the participant's creative process

6) Researcher presentation: used to promote the work of the researcher; presentations

Subject response was the goal of video recording in the current study. The goal of video

recording was not used to analyze the behavior of the participants, but to aid in the translation of

the interviews. Several of the participants inquired whether individuals outside of the research

(the deaf interpreter and the researcher) would have access to the video recordings due to the

sensitive nature of some of the workplace experiences described in the narrative analysis.

Participants were told that the videos were for the viewing of the deaf interpreter and the

researcher only.

Data Analysis

The goal of data analysis in qualitative research is to extract meaning from life

experiences (Creswell, 2007; Patton, 2002). This is accomplished by "preparing and organizing

sources of data, coding the data and generating recurring themes in the findings, and presenting

the data through tables, figures, or discussion" (Creswell, 2007, p. 148). Each of the five

qualitative approaches has suggested guidelines for the analysis of data based on the nature of

the research method. Narrative analysis is defined as "a form of qualitative analysis in which the

analyst focuses on how respondents impose order on the flow of experience in their lives and

thus make sense of events and actions in which they have participated" (Adams, Khan, Reside, &

White et al., 2007, p.339). Adams et al. (2007) also state that the focus of narrative analysis is on

the stories of participants and "seeks to preserve the integrity of personal biographies or a series

of events that cannot be understood in terms of their discrete elements" (p. 339).

To preserve the integrity of the told stories, the process of analyzing the data began by first transcribing the audio or video interviews into text. Riessman (1993) identify recording and transcribing as necessary elements in narrative analysis. All the interviews in this research were first transcribed by reviewing the audio recordings. Video recordings were also reviewed in the transcription process in cases of ambiguity of the dialogue. The deaf interpreter was present to assist in the clarification of ambiguity by reviewing the sign language dialogue and translating what was said.

The use of both audio and video recording in the research process allowed me to have greater freedom to take notes and make interpretations because more than one method of recording data was used. The participants were given the opportunity to review a written summary of the findings from each interview to ensure proper interpretation of the findings.

Models of Narrative Analysis

After recording and transcribing the interviews, narratives were then developed from the interview data. There are several models used to construct narratives. Riessman (1993), identifies four models:

1) Thematic analysis: emphasis is placed on "what" is said in the interview rather than "how" it is said. Researchers collect stories from participants and organize these stories by themes

2) Structural analysis: emphasis is placed on the way a story is told. Different from thematic analysis in that language is analyzed over and beyond the spoken content

3) Interactional analysis: emphasis is placed on the dialogue between the researcher and the listener.

4) Performative analysis: storytelling is considered a performance (p.3)

Thematic analysis was used to construct narratives from participant responses. Emphasis was placed on what the deaf participants said about their various experiences in the workplace. This approach was chosen for the study because it was the best approach to explain the experienced phenomenon.

After constructing the narratives, the data was analyzed by identifying common themes in the participants' responses. The identification of themes in qualitative research is called coding. A more refined definition of coding is given by Merriam (1998):

> Coding is nothing more than assigning some sort of shorthand designation to aspects of the data so that the researcher can easily retrieve specific pieces of the data. The designations can be single words, letters, numbers, phrases, or combinations of these. (p.164)

The coding analysis of the data followed the approach outlined by Charmaz (2006). The process involved several phases of analysis, including 1) Initial Coding, 2) Focused Coding, 3) Axial Coding, 4) Thematic Coding, and 5) Analytic Notes.

Coding of Data

The first step in the coding process is initial coding. Saldana (2009) defines initial coding as the process of breaking qualitative data into distinct parts, examining the parts, and compare them in terms of similarities and differences. The first step in the coding method is to investigate each event individually to extract ideas from the actual data and not from predetermined perceptions of the researcher. Charmaz (2006) states that initial coding should consist of short, simple action words, and that initial coding should be carried out before any other analytic approaches are executed.

Focused coding is the most important initial codes in the coding method (Saldana, 2009). The most significant codes generated from initial coding are used to code larger pieces of data. Charmaz (2006) states these codes may be longer in length than initial codes and may take more time to analyze. Although focused coding may take more time to execute, it allows for easier comparisons of pieces of data and consequently make the process of consolidating codes into descriptive categories easier (Charmaz, 2006).

Saldana (2009) recognizes axial coding as the next step in the coding process. Axial coding consists of creating categories from the initial and focused codes. Axial coding is considered a method in which to develop ideas from the transcript texts and examine the relationship between ideas.

The final step in the coding process is thematic coding. In thematic coding, a central theme is constructed that captures the essence of the analysis into a short statement. This stage of the coding process is described by Charmaz (2006) as bringing all the data pieces back together (p.96).

Analytic Notes

Analytic notes were written throughout the data collection process. Charmaz (2006) says analytic notes are the vessels that connect data collection and formal written research findings together. These notes can be used for initial analysis and coding, focused coding, and the development of categories. Saldana (2009) gives several purposes for writing analytic notes: pondering on the research questions, examining emerging patterns, concepts and themes and how they are connected, exploring problems that arose in the research, and recommendations for future study. In this study, analytic notes were used throughout the research process to record observations and make connections to the data and literature findings.

Coding Process Summary

The coding steps presented by Charmaz (2006) and Saldana (2009) were used in the coding process for this research. The interviews were manually coded without the use of qualitative coding software. Each interview transcript was broken down into question and response categories for each participant. The initial coding process focused on one question and the participant responses for that question. Short action words and phrases were extrapolated from the participant responses. Differences and similarities in the action words and phrases were noted among participant responses.

The short action words and phrases generated from the initial coding process were used in the focused coding step. Similar codes identified in the initial coding step were then used to code larger pieces of data from the interview responses. In the axial step of the process, the focused codes were then placed into categorical descriptions. The descriptions given to describe each category were used to signify the relationships and connections that exist among the codes. Thematic codes were then generated, which captured the essence of the descriptive categories. A sample data sheet summarizing the themes identified in the study, and examples of responses that correspond to the themes can be found in Appendix F.

Academic Rigor and Trustworthiness

Interviews and peer debriefing were used to record the researcher's subjectivities throughout the research process. In addition to these strategies, other methods were used to ensure academic rigor and trustworthiness of the data, including member checks, and triangulation. Patton (2002) defines triangulation as the use of multiple sources of data to give trustworthiness to the study. My multiple data sources included transcripts, field notes, and

observations. Analytic notes were used to make observations as well as to help identify any subjectivities I had during the data collection process.

Throughout the course of data analysis of interviews and analytic notes, written summaries of the findings and interpretations were provided to the participants for them to review and comment. Written summaries were available for participant review after each interview session. Participants were given the opportunity to clarify statements and interpretations during interviews. This process, called member checking, aids in the trustworthiness of the findings as well as to ensure that the participants were accurately portrayed in the research (Creswell, 2007; Merriam, 1998,).

Peer debriefing was conducted with Andrew, the deaf interpreter. Andrew was chosen as a peer to review the findings of my research for several reasons. Andrew was significant to the conducting of this research because without him as an interpreter, the researcher would not have had access to the rich, thick descriptions that were extracted from the participants. Andrew is a Deaf individual who identifies with the Deaf culture, and was considered a gatekeeper in this research study. Most the participants were familiar with him in social settings and were comfortable with having him as the interpreter. Because he is a member of deaf culture and understands deaf culture, he was a valuable source of knowledge about deaf culture and the researched phenomenon. After each interview, the researcher and Andrew stayed at the library for approximately one hour reflecting on the shared stories. There was an opportunity to review the notes generated during the interviews and to express thoughts on the dialogue that had taken place. Andrew could provide rich feedback from the Deaf perspective.

Subjectivity Statement

My interest in the deaf population and the workplace was sparked by the experiences of a younger sibling who was born profoundly deaf. This family member has had difficulties in securing and retaining employment due to dramatic differences in communication and cultural attitudes of deaf and hearing employees. Several issues were highlighted in these experiences, including the perception of how this sibling sees himself in the workplace (positionality), the assumed perception of hearing employees about deaf employees, and legal issues involving the lack of access to services needed for deaf employees to successfully carry out job related tasks.

In terms of positionality, my position in the research is that of an outsider who is seeking to understand these issues of deaf employees trying to negotiate differences in communication as a deaf individual to remain competitive and successful in the workplace. Because I possess hearing values and norms, I was constantly challenged with abandoning certain personal epistemologies to see through the lenses of the deaf individual.

Another aspect of positionality puts me as an insider, because I am raising a son with cerebral palsy. My son has several developmental delays that has affected his speech, fine motor skills, and gross motor skills. Although my son is not deaf, I had to learn basic sign language to communicate with him due to a delay in speech. My experiences with a child with disabilities has given me an increased awareness of the differences between verbal and non-verbal communication, the quality of social interaction and inclusion, and the effects of negative stereotypes and labeling that often occur when raising a child with disabilities defined by the ADA. My position is like that of the deaf individual, who does not view deficits as disabilities, but merely things that make the individual unique.

Last, I have an undergraduate degree in a clinical laboratory science discipline, a graduate degree in health care administration, and I have been a professor in the Department of Clinical Laboratory Sciences at the University of Tennessee Health Science Center for 11 years. During my time at the University, many of my experiences in the workplace involve informal learning in the development of myself as a teaching professional in higher education. I began teaching at the University with no prior teaching experience, as is the case with many my colleagues in the clinical lab sciences department. I have experiences that reflect the principles of Wenger's community of practice theory, as well as situated learning theory. Although I have been fortunate to attend numerous educator's conferences and seminars that focus on creating and nurturing teaching strategies and improving classroom management, the most valuable knowledge I've acquired that has made me successful in academia came from informal interactions with my colleagues, program director, and department chair.

My colleagues have served as both mentors and friends to me both at work and outside of work. The learning that has resulted from these interactions with my colleagues is invaluable. I have could make meaning of my colleagues' classroom and professional experiences and apply those experiences to my professional development. The community of practice of my department is one in which communication, active participation, and a sense of belonging all work together to create a positive workplace culture. This positive workplace culture is the foundation for effective teaching, promotion and advancement, and subsequent positive student outcomes.

Chapter Summary

This chapter summarizes the qualitative methods that were used to recruit participants, collect data, and analyze data. The following chapter will present the findings and analysis of data.

Chapter 4

Finding and Analysis of Data

The purpose of this study was to explore how the workplace impacts deaf employees. The study addressed the following questions:

1) How do deaf employees describe their experiences with other deaf employees?

2) How do deaf employees describe their experiences with hearing employees?

3) How do deaf employees describe their experiences with hearing supervisors?

4) How do these experiences impact deaf individuals' social interaction and participation in the workplace?

Profiles of the Participants

This section of chapter 4 will provide a brief profile of each participant in the study. Each participant was given a pseudonym as an identifier that was used through the research process.

Hank is a 33-year-old Caucasian vocational rehabilitation counselor. Hank has been a rehabilitation counselor for 4 years. He provides rehabilitation counseling and job search assistance to the deaf population. Hank was born deaf. His father can hear, and his mother is profoundly deaf in one ear. Hank is profoundly deaf and non-verbal, and relies on ASL and writing things down to communicate. ASL interpreter services are provided to him at work on an inconsistent basis. Most his co-workers can hear; however, he does have one deaf co-worker who Hank describes as mildly to moderately deaf. They both communicate through ASL, and his deaf co-worker has functional verbal skills and can lip read.

Beverly is an African American preschool teacher assistant in the public school system, and has held this position at the same elementary school for 26 years. She requested that her age not be documented in this research. Beverly is a graduate of Gallaudet University in Washington,

D.C. Gallaudet University is a 4-year institution dedicated to the education of the deaf population. She has a bachelor's degree in home economics. Beverly assists with the deaf children in the preschool class at her school. A lead teacher and another teacher's aide works with her. Beverly preferred not to disclose her age. Beverly has profound hearing loss. She was not born deaf, but lost her hearing at 19 months old due to scarlet fever. Both of her parents can hear. She uses ASL and an interpreter in the workplace during important meetings. She does not use an amplification device, and has low-functioning verbal skills. Beverly is the only deaf employee at her school.

William is a 52- year- old Caucasian graphic design artist for a local designing company. William's job as a graphics designer required him to create designs for commercial advertising. His job duties included taking orders for services and creating graphic designs on T-shirts. He is currently retired. William has moderately severe hearing loss. He was born deaf, and both of his parents can hear. William has high functioning verbal skills. When he was employed, William did not use ASL in the workplace, and used an interpreter during meetings. William was the only deaf employee at his job at the local designing company.

Sally is a 52-year-old Caucasian mailroom clerk for a local distribution company. Sally has been employed at the distribution company for 30 years. Sally has profound hearing loss, and has low functioning verbal skills. She lost her hearing at 4 months old due to spinal meningitis. Both of her parents can hear. Sally does not use ASL in the workplace, she uses an interpreter for meetings, and does not use an amplification device. She is the only deaf employee in her department, and works alone.

Christopher is a 22-year-old African American sorter at a package handling business. He has been employed for 4 years. This is Christopher's first job since graduating from high school.

Christopher has moderately severe hearing loss. He acquired his hearing loss at birth due to a lack of oxygen to the brain. Both of Christopher's parents can hear. Christopher uses ASL in the workplace, and he uses an amplification device. He generally does not need an interpreter at work because his amplification device allows for him to distinguish language, and he also lip reads. An interpreter is available for all formal business meetings. Although he uses an amplification device, Christopher stated that the device has the tendency to amplify unwanted sounds while at times dulling sounds that he needs to hear. Christopher has difficulty when employees speak softly, or does not provide direct eye contact when speaking. He has two deaf coworkers. Christopher commented that his two deaf co-workers' hearing loss is more profound than his, and that they rely on him to interpret things that are difficult for them to understand.

Randy is a 39-year-old Caucasian order filler and material handler for a local distribution company. He is currently unemployed, and is enrolled at a local community college pursuing a degree in early childhood education. His plan is to transfer to a 4-year college and major in early childhood education with an emphasis on educating deaf children. Randy has moderately severe hearing loss. Randy was born deaf, and the cause is unknown. Randy has high functioning verbal skills. He used ASL in the workplace, and used an interpreter at work at least once or twice a month. He also used an amplification device at work. Five of Randy's co-workers at his last job were deaf. He communicated using a combination of ASL and writing to communicate with deaf and hearing coworkers.

Table 1 shows a summary of each participant's demographic information. As you can see from the table, the participants represent variety in regards to occupation, years of employment, age of hearing loss, and level of education. The study consists of four males and two females. Four of the participants were Caucasian, while two of them were African American. All

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participants reported having a level of education beyond high school, with Hank and Beverly holding Bachelor's degrees. William holds an associate's degree in graphic arts and design from a two-year technical school. Christopher, Randy, and Sally attended at least 1 year of studies at the community college level, but did not complete a certificate or degree program. The years of employment of the participants ranged from 2 years to 30 years. All the participants were born deaf, with the exceptions of Beverly and Sally, who lost their hearing during infancy before the acquirement of language skills. William and Randy were the only participants who were unemployed during the time of this study.

Table 1
Participant Demographics

Name	Job	Yrs. Employed	Age of Hearing Loss	Level of Education
Hank	Rehabilitation counselor	4 years	Birth	B.S. Degree
William	Retired graphic arts designer	2 years	Birth	Associate's Degree
Beverly	Teacher's assistant	26 years	19 months	B.S. Degree
Christopher	Package sorter	4 years	Birth	1 yr. college
Randy	Order filler/material handler	2 years (job 1) 2 years (job 2) 1 year (job 3)	Birth	1 yr. college
Sally	Mailroom clerk	30 years	4 months	1 yr. college

Interview Question Topics

The interview questions were narrowed down to three major topics: 1) experiences with hearing supervisors, 2) experiences with hearing coworkers, and 3) experiences with deaf coworkers. The semi-structured approach to the interviews allowed both structure and flexibility to the study, in that the questions were broad enough to get rich descriptions to construct meaningful narratives, while maintaining focus to the topics and purpose of the research.

The approach taken in the analysis of the data began with a close inspection of the demographic characteristics of each participant, and what similarities or differences existed between them. The participant responses to the interview questions further expanded the similarities and differences of the demographic characteristics.

Because of coding and categorizing of the collected data, three themes emerged from this study. The themes were identified based on the similar frequencies of participant responses to the interview questions. In analyzing the data, I made notes describing under what situation, context, or condition the theme arose based on the participant's description of their experiences. Although the frequency of the themes was important to the data analysis, the lack of frequency of certain themes was also recorded. This process was repeated for each theme presented in the study. The findings of this study were then compared to the findings of similar previous studies.

The three emergent themes essentially answered research question number 5, which was how social interaction and participation is impacted because of the participants' experiences with hearing supervisors, and hearing and deaf coworkers. None of the participants in this study had a deaf supervisor; therefore, research question number 2 could not be answered. The three emerging themes are listed below:

1) Incompatible forms of Communication: Isolation and Alienation

2) I'm Deaf, But I'm Still Capable

3) Suppression: Reluctance to Speak Out

The three themes are illustrated through narrating the participants' experiences, and how these themes support Wenger's social learning theory model of communities of practice (CoP).

Incompatible Forms of Communication: Isolation and Alienation

Communication is the foundation for the development of social interaction and relationships. The level at which deaf and hearing employees communicate can provide insight into the kind of socialization that takes place at work between the two groups. The participants in this study all provided examples of how incompatible forms of communication between deaf and hearing employees resulted in feelings of isolation and alienation in the workplace. Each of the participants in this study provided responses that highlight the existence of incompatible forms of communication that exist between deaf and hearing individuals in the workplace.

Hank is non-verbal and does not lip read. He relies on pen and paper or a sign language interpreter to communicate in his position as a vocational rehabilitation counselor. Hank feels that using pen paper to communicate at work has caused difficulty in being an active participant in formal and informal work situations. He said that he is frequently unaware of what his co-workers do during the day due to different communication styles.

Hank stated:

> If it is one on one communication, writing is fine. But if it's an event, it's hard
> to communicate with others when there are a lot of people around. My preference is pen
> and paper…they are my best friends and I have them in my pocket and I carry it…I just
> can't communicate…I just don't have anything.

When asked to describe the interaction with his hearing co-workers during break time, Hank describes the difficulties he faces in social interaction:

> It's not very easy for me during lunch. Everyone's talking, and they're all having their conversations…and then there's me.

Hank believes his hearing co-workers are reluctant to communicate with him because he needs pen and paper. He stated:

> I can tell when they're not patient…can see it in their face, their body
>
> language when I pull out my paper and pen. That is all I have. They don't
>
> get ASL. Paper and pen is all I have.

As stated earlier, Hank has one deaf coworker, Marge. Marge has functional verbal skills and can read lips. Because of these skills, Hank's perception is that her work experience is very different from his. He discussed his disappointment in how his supervisor uses Marge to communicate information to him:

> Marge has an easier time, because she can communicate by lip reading. It's easier for her
>
> to talk, so it's different for her. I can't lip read. I wonder about what is going on
>
> sometimes; but Marge can look, understand, then talk, and read, but I can't. It's different.
>
> I can't. They use her like an interpreter. It's crazy. If the hearing people come to me,
>
> they're lost, and look for an interpreter…they find her. I wonder why do they need an
>
> interpreter to talk to me…just write it down, talk to me.

Hank was then asked to describe how often he socializes with his hearing co-workers, and he responded, "Only when it is necessary, because they just don't understand."

Hank was asked to describe his experience with his supervisor, and how he received feedback on his job performance:

He talks with me with an interpreter if we need to meet, and I have a written evaluation.

He is ok, he is fair. But he does not always have an interpreter.

I asked Hank to talk about a time when he needed an interpreter, but was not provided one:

I remember one time we had a very important meeting. My supervisor was supposed to

make sure the deaf interpreter would be there for the meeting. He knew ahead of time

that I needed an interpreter but he didn't get one. I missed the meeting because I did not

have the interpreter. I was really mad about that. I had to wait for the meeting to be over.

Kay filled me in on what happened in the meeting. But I wanted to be there myself.

When asked to describe how he approached the incident with his supervisor, Hank responded:

He said he was sorry, but that was all…I need more professionalism. I feel I am not

respected. They respect my other deaf coworker because she can speak and use ASL. I

only use ASL, I don't speak…I wish they would understand.

Sally shared a similar experience at work when she was not provided an interpreter:

One time there was a conflict because the interpreter did not show up, so I got the

information later. I just went back to my desk. I'm not worried, it's the manager's

responsibility. It's not my fault that the interpreter is not there, so I went back to my desk

to work.

When she is provided an interpreter for meetings, she says she has an opportunity to express any
concerns or ask questions.

When asked how she feels when her supervisor neglects to get an interpreter, Sally said, "I feel
bad if there is no interpreter for important meetings. I feel left out. It hurts my feelings."

William was consistently denied an interpreter at his job. He said, "One time I told them I needed an interpreter and they said no. They said they had no money for an interpreter. They had a paper with big words that I didn't know."

When asked how his ideas were received during business meetings when he did have an interpreter, he said, "I ask questions about what is going on. I try to give my opinion on how things should go, but no one ever listened to me."

Because William was frequently denied an interpreter, he received his information from his supervisor. He also relied on paper and pen to communicate with his hearing co-workers and supervisor. I asked William to share his feelings on his experiences:

> Communication with hearing co-workers is frustrating for me. Like, I speak, and sometimes they don't understand; then I write it down…all of the jobs I've worked, I'm sick of writing.

William further elaborated on the communication between him and his hearing co-workers:

> Well there have been problems with communication and people leave me alone. I enjoy talking but never there (at work). Why? Because I'm the only one deaf. The communication breaks down, and there's no patience with me because I am deaf.

William was asked to elaborate on how writing to communicate has caused conflict with his supervisor:

> That boss…wow…there was no patience. He hated to write back and forth. But I can speak, and converse, but sometimes the conversation would end abruptly. Most of them would write and then get frustrated.

The incompatible form of communication ultimately caused William to be terminated from his job. William believes he was terminated from his job because he needed to write to communicate:

> Because of customers, other people. Other businesses come to us, and want us to make t-shirts. Then I tell them we have to write to communicate. They would be a little flustered because of the writing. Sometimes they would leave. My boss never told me they complained. He never told me. One day when I arrived to work, my assistant manager was there. The boss was hiding somewhere. Then the assistant manager told me, 'You're fired'. I asked, 'why?'. He said, 'I can't tell you. Go home.' So I went home. What I suspect was it was because of writing, and no patience with me, I think. I have no problem with communicating with others, but when outside people arrived and tried to talk to me, it was hard to work.

Beverly recalled an incident that reflected incompatible form of communication between her and a hearing co-worker. Beverly is profoundly deaf, and must rely on visual ques to understand and interact with her colleagues. She recalled an incident when a co-worker inappropriately tried to get her attention:

> For example, I was doing something, a craft activity for the kids. All of a sudden she threw this small thing to me. It hit the table, and I looked up with surprise. She said, 'I've been trying to get your attention. I just looked and said 'next time, you need me, come over and tap me, don't throw things at me to get my attention. She said, 'Well I've been trying to call you, but you were too focused, you need to pay attention, you were looking away when I try to call you.' So I said to the teacher, 'I don't really like that she threw that at me.' The teacher said 'Ok', then very weakly, meekly, said, 'I will say something'.

So the next day… I remembered that [what happened]. I was looking [at her] with an attitude and watching the room, and the teacher saw me and talked to me. And I looked at her with directness, giving her everything… quite the look and glance over. I have to look, so I'm watching to see if she wants me; so I look, and see her. That's the way to pay attention.

Beverly stated that her relationship she has with the principal is progressive and encouraging. However, the camaraderie that Beverly shares with her colleagues is less than positive. She described another incident in which several of the teachers were making unpleasant remarks about her, but they were under the assumption that Beverly was not privy to their conversation in the break room:

I get along very well with my principal, and the other teachers and assistants don't like it. One day, my niece came to see me at the school. She can hear, and she knows sign language to talk with me. Well, we were in the break room for lunch, and a few of the teachers were sitting at another table, and I could see them talking. When they saw me, they tried to turn the other way so I couldn't see them. My niece – they didn't know my niece could hear, because she was signing to me. She told me that the women at the other table were talking about me. They said they don't like me because the teacher gives me preferential treatment. I don't get preferential treatment! But I don't really care what they say about me. I just want to do my job. It was so funny that they turned around thinking if they did that, I wouldn't be able to hear what they were saying. But my niece told me everything!

Christopher works with two co-workers who are profoundly deaf, and whose hearing loss is more severe than his own. His deaf coworkers have limited verbal skills and do not lip read.

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In the interview, he stated that his supervisor relied on him to disseminate important information to his co-workers because of his proficiency in sign language. Chris provided an example of incompatible communication involving the supervisor and team leaders that consequently isolated him and his two deaf co-workers during a standard operating procedure:

Yeah, like with my part-time supervisor… and then the leaders. They were talking about how to better our job performance and things like that. We have one part time supervisor that knows there are deaf people on the team. And for example, we have one part time supervisor who knows to shout out the labels - the changes that we're going to have, about the boxes and the belts. He knows to shout that out to me, so that I can translate that to my other two coworkers. They're supposed to shout that out for me. But when we switch to another part time supervisor that doesn't know that, that's when we feel left out. Because say for example, if they tell us to put all the small boxes on a certain belt and it changes, and we're still throwing them on a certain belt, they get mad at us. And it's like, you never told us. You know you have three deaf people on your team, why didn't you just come to us and be like, ok, we're working on this belt. If you know that, why didn't you just come and say that? You can't dock us for that. You gotta shout it out for me to hear.

Christopher was then asked to describe how he expressed his disappointment in the breakdown in communication, and how it was received by his supervisor and team leaders:

Some of them responded like…they felt like I'm telling them what to do. Some of them took it like that. But I'm not telling them what to do. I'm just saying that in order for me and my two fellow co-workers to perform the job that they want from us, they're gonna have to communicate with us. You know, we have to

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make sure we get an understanding. I was just telling them what they needed to do

so that we could do what we needed to do.

He then gave another example which illustrates how incompatible forms of communication has affected his ability to be productive:

For example, Virginia goes on the purple belt. When the night is coming to an end, they

shout out, 'Virginia to the pink belt.' And once they shout loud enough, I can hear it. But

the other two can't. So I have to communicate with them to make sure they're up to par

so they won't miss anything. So my work is slow because I have to communicate with

them. And where we work, we can't have an interpreter in the middle with what we're

doing. But we work at a fast pace, and for an interpreter to stand there and interpret, we

would have a lot of work for days.

I asked Christopher if he made himself responsible for making sure his deaf coworkers were informed of workplace changes. He responded, "I made myself responsible for that. I didn't want them to miss out on not knowing something."

Overall, Christopher feels that the camaraderie between him and his hearing co-workers allows for him to properly carry out job tasks. However, he lacks social interaction with them. He stated:

I am very vocal with my hearing co-workers. I am very vocal. If I don't understand them

I ask them to repeat themselves. Or if they want to learn sign language, I show them a

little sign language. Sometimes, I request help from hearing co-workers, if I come across

a box that's an oversize. I'll tap their shoulder and point at the box, then they realize that

I need help. I don't really interact with them unless it's work related.

Christopher stated that he does not communicate with his hearing co-workers during break time. He said, "Break room time…ok, to be honest, it's just me and the other two people (deaf coworkers). I don't really know my deaf coworkers very well."

Christopher was then asked to explain why he chose to only spend his break time with his deaf coworkers:

Ok, it's almost like an everyday life. Say for example, it's like a certain quote…birds of a feather flock together. I guess it's kind of like that. Say for example, you work here at UT. And …ok…let me say it another way. I think this is the best way to put it…ok, mothers. You have people that are not mothers, and you have people that are mothers. And so the people that are mothers are the ones that are going to exchange ideas, and stuff like that. I guess it's the same way that we are. I grew up with them (deaf co-workers). I've been knowing one since elementary, and one since middle school. That's probably why I associate with them.

Randy shared experiences from three jobs in the interview process. All three jobs involved the same job description of order filler. The first job he held was at a distribution company in a northeastern city. He then moved to Memphis and was able to receive a transfer to work at the Memphis location with the same company. His last place of employment before deciding to quit and enroll in college was at a medical supply and device company. Randy compared his experiences from all three jobs for this study.

Randy recalled feelings of isolation at his second job in Memphis. He said:

I don't think they really understood deaf people, and I know what was different was how they approached deaf people. And I think the north was more open than in the south. I don't think most employers are exposed or aware about the deaf people, how we interact,

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sometimes they were like, 'ok'. The guy that I talked to, sometimes they would tell him to tell me what they're trying to say, or what I needed to do. I hated it. I mean I hated it because they were not willing to work with me. So I didn't feel like a team player when I worked in Memphis.

Randy was then asked to talk about his experiences with his supervisor:

She… we didn't talk much. She just told me what I needed to do. The evaluation was the same as Rochester – paper, write it down, and when I don't understand she would repeat. Sometimes she would write it down. I think overall, the leaders, managers, and supervisors were more open than the co-workers. I was more comfortable with the supervisor and manager because of their willingness to communicate, but not my co-workers. I didn't interact with the co-workers the same way I did in [the northern city]. The co-workers across from me, we talk but not as much as in [the northern city] I mean, they know I'm deaf, but I don't think they put the effort to communicate. They just point out basically what I'm supposed to do. But there's another guy, we talk a lot. But the rest of them, not many.

Randy was asked if her perceived any negative experiences with his hearing co-workers in Memphis were due to differences in communication. He responded:

I'm not sure how to explain. I think if I were still at the location in Memphis, I would be frustrated because of communication and understanding my job. But I think [northern city] helped me a lot to know what I'm doing. When I'm in Memphis, I just don't need somebody telling me what to do, because I already know. So like I say, without Rochester I'd be lost.

Randy then gave an example of incompatible forms of communication between hearing and deaf workers that impacted the overall productivity of the employees:

> If you put deaf people in one area they can work faster because of communication. One thing I hate about working down there…ok when you're working, most of us walk around, my deaf co-workers can talk because we use a lot of hands. But one thing I hate about it is they talk the same time doing the work. And they use their hands to work. Well, we can't. Because we have to work we can't communicate through sign language. But they use hands and they're talking at the same time. And they allow employees to listen to music. And I personally disagree because it's not fair that they have something to keep them entertained, while we can't…the deaf employee can't. I never brought it up about the music, but we did complain about the talking. Sometimes it didn't bother me, but we noticed that with our co-workers, when they listen to music, it slows them down. Sometimes I feel we're missing out on something important because we're not privy to their conversations.

In contrast, Randy had positive things to say about his first job at the distribution company in the northern city and his job at the medical device company in Memphis. Judging by his enthusiasm, it appears he holds both companies in high esteem in regards to how they treat deaf employees. Randy was asked to describe his experiences with his co-workers:

> Sometimes if it's not heavy, I communicate with the hearing guys across from me, or the other side, just you know, my neighbors, yeah. I don't think I had a problem communicating with them, I think they really put the effort to understand what I was trying to say. In the past we never had problems.

Randy was asked to provide examples of how his co-workers made the effort to communicate with him:

> Sometimes when I try to tell them something I want to say, and if my co-workers still don't understand it, sometimes I just bail out, or sometimes I just get a little piece of paper and write it down. Whenever they don't understand they ask me to repeat. That's one thing I liked about it.

Randy was asked if there were times when he sensed a tone of frustration by his co-workers because of communication:

> I'm not sure. My other co-worker knows me well. Sometimes they like to explain to the other co-workers who I am, how we communicate, all that stuff. I appreciate, sometimes I like to tell them myself, but I don't have a problem with that. I think we were more like a family. But in Memphis we had problems with that (communication).

Randy was then asked if he could describe how his hearing co-workers interacted with him compared to how his deaf co-workers interact with each other:

> I think it depends on the individual because if they talk about details, they probably don't share the joke. I think they [hearing coworkers] liked sharing with us in a positive way. I liked one of my coworkers that worked across from me. Sometimes he would share his personal business with me. I liked that, it's showing me that that it doesn't matter who I am, he wanted to share with me, that's what I like. But for some people if I'm deaf there are some people that don't understand.

> Randy also stated that he liked working for his supervisor at his first job. He was asked to describe his experiences with that supervisor:

Sometimes, it was difficult for me to hear him, but when the truck is driving around we would go to his office; it was easy one on one. I transferred to [one city], about 1 hour, 1 ½ hours east of [northern city], they have a staff with fourteen employees. And one deaf supervisor was down there. I liked the idea of their work team. I think most of the time hearing people don't realize that deaf people like to work to together, because of communication, yeah.

Randy stated his supervisor also learned sign language to better communicate with him. He concluded his thoughts on his experiences at his first job by saying:

I think the most important thing is that they think of me as a person and not just because I'm deaf. That's what I most valued. I don't want them to treat me differently just because I'm deaf. They treat me just like everyone else and I don't want to be the person like… I don't want to make myself different from everyone else. I just want to be…it's like no matter who you are, as long as you work as a team that's how they treated me as a team player, not just because I'm deaf.

Randy began talking about his experiences at his last job at a medical supply company:

I heard about the job at [medical supply company], and they had about 5 deaf employees. And then I thought about giving it a try to work for them. And I heard a lot of positive things about them. [Medical supply company] is a more deaf friendly environment. It took me about 5 months to get the job, because it is very competitive. And my other co-workers, they're deaf too. My recruiter, it was her first time working with deaf people, she was new. So I just had to write it down. We took some kind of test. And later she emailed me, go to first round interview, and provide an interpreter.

Randy then described how efforts were made to accommodate different communication styles of hearing and deaf employees:

>At [medical supply company], we have many sections in the warehouse and each section must have at least 2 employers. Sometimes my co-worker and I have a simple communication through hand gestures, but if anything is important, either my co-worker or lead team will write it down on what I need to know. That's why I always have a pen with me for communication. I'm not sure what ways that could be improved, but this is the reality I face every day in my life. However, the most important about interacting with co-workers is their attitude and patience. When I started working with my team, one of us have to start the order or pick the orders (from the previous sections). We always communicate in the beginning of our performance by using our hand gestures. For example, a finger point at empty totes means start the order or points at the manual assembly line means pick up the orders. Fortunately, most hearing co-worker can understand the hand gestures according what I'm trying to communicate with them. If I get new hearing co-workers, I will teach simple gestures a few minutes before we start our performance. Sometime my hearing co-workers know me well will teach new hearing co-worker how to work with me. One thing I loved about working at [medical supply company], they have support system for the deaf employees.

Randy concluded the interview by expressing an appreciation of how his last place of employment made efforts to engage their deaf employees:

>[Medical supply company] offered sign language classes and touch or tap switch lights. The company is aware about deaf people, and they make sure the environment and access for the deaf and out of all the companies, I admire the most.

Although Beverly's description of the camaraderie between her and her coworkers was less than positive, she spoke of her principal in high regard. She stated that her principal was very supportive of her and her communicative needs, and she also learned basic sign language skills to facilitate stronger communication between the two. The principal makes sure a sign language interpreter is present in all formal business meetings. I asked her to describe her experiences with the principal:

I get along very well with my principal, and the other teachers and assistants don't like it. My principal took the time to learn some sign language to talk with me, and she always asks if I need anything… I feel impressed. The principal knows me, and I feel I'm on good terms with her, and she said I am doing a wonderful job with the children. And she sends emails to me, to say good morning, how are you. Just let me know I am doing a good job. It feels good.

In further describing improved teamwork in the workplace, Beverly talked about other responsibilities she may has outside of the classroom. She stated that she has to help with morning and afternoon bus duty twice a week. Her discussion of her bus duty responsibility demonstrated the principal's efforts in creating a process that worked for both Beverly and her hearing coworkers:

I have bus duty twice a week, on Wednesdays and Fridays. I have to make sure that all of the children assigned to that bus make it to class, and to report the children who are not on the bus. It used to be really hard to communicate with the bus driver though. He didn't understand me and my sign language, and I did not understand him. It would be very frustrating because I felt like I couldn't do my job right because the communication was bad. I told my principal that the bus driver and I were having trouble understanding each

other. She met with the bus driver and talked to him about the problem. She made a little sign language handbook with basic signs for the bus driver to make it easier.

I asked Beverly to talk about her experiences after the implementation of the sign language book, and she responded:

> It was much better after that! The bus driver really made an effort to learn my language. The mornings were not as bad anymore because the bus driver met me halfway. We communicate a lot better now. Now he says hello and goodbye to me in sign language, and I sign back. That makes me feel good. I feel good that the principal helped to make things better.

Sally works with a small group of four hearing coworkers. She said she worked well with her hearing co-workers and had good experiences with them. I then asked her to describe the camaraderie with her hearing co-workers:

> Very different. Luckily I can read lips because of the oral education. But I talk sort of ok, but mostly I write back and forth. Luckily also I can write, because before I couldn't write. Sometimes the interpreter does not come, so we communicate with paper and pen…no problems.

Sally was asked if she and her coworkers share stories or socialize during the day. She said:

> I can't share stories unless the person tells me about their story. I don't know their stories because they don't share them. Yes, they care about me as friends but we don't chat much because of communication and not understanding about deaf culture too.

Sally also stated that her hearing coworkers' job tasks require them to use the phone; because she can't use the phone due to auditory and verbal limitations, she is not privy to what her hearing coworkers do during the day.

Sally was asked to describe how she feels when it takes more effort for her hearing co-workers to communicate with her:

> I can see in their expression whether they are patient with me. I have to be patient with hearing people too – that's only fair, you know. If they want to talk, that's fine with me…paper and pen, nice.

When asked to describe her interactions with co-workers during break time, she responded, "Nothing…bathroom and eating, and I keep busy to myself."

The participant responses are consistent with the literature findings that incompatible forms of communication frequently isolates and segregates deaf employees from hearing employees. This finding is reflected in what Hauser, et al (2010) terms the "dinner table syndrome", where deaf employees appear to be standing on the sidelines, watching hearing employees communicate, but are unable to actively participate in conversations. Wells (2008) qualitative study revealed a low level of participation and social interaction during meetings, feelings of frustration for having no interpreter, and feelings of exclusion among the four deaf participants interviewed.

The literature also shows that differences in communication can result in poor employment poor chances for promotion (Frasier et al. 2009; Hauser et al., 2010; Haynes, 2014; Rosengreen & Saladin, 2010; Shuler et al. 2014); During the interview process, the participants were asked to express their thoughts on being promoted at their place of employment. William believed his preferred communication style of using pen and paper with customers was the key factor in him being terminated from his job. It is important to note however, that an observation made during the interview process with William may possibly reveal another reason for termination related to reading and writing skills. William asked for assistance in completing the

demographic questionnaire, stating that, "Sometimes I have problems with big words." It is highly possible that William's poor reading and comprehension skills may have contributed to his termination. Poor reading and writing skills can disrupt the process of receiving and comprehending information (Marschark et al. 2015; Munos-Baell & Ruiz, 2000). Cawthon et al. (2014) found that this can significantly impact earnings and promotion.

In one of Christopher's responses reflecting on communication differences, he revealed a problem in note-taking while trying to listen and receive information during his job training. Because of his hearing difficulty, he had difficulty in taking notes and listening to the trainer, who often looked away or spoke in a low tone that prevented him from reading his lips or hear what he was saying. This finding is consistent with Balsamo's study (2006), which implicated the difficulties deaf employees may have in trying to take notes while someone is speaking.

Christopher also stated that his goal was to become a driver for the company he is currently employed at, but he feels he may not be able to advance into this position. Although he feels he has a high level of verbal skills, he feels that he may not be considered for the position because of his hearing. Despite his feelings, Christopher expressed plans to apply for the position. He stated that although his place of employment has not hired deaf individuals for driving positions in the past, "you never know until you try."

Hank and Randy stated they felt they would not be considered for a supervisory position because of communication differences. Johnson's study (1993) found that the degree of participation in the workplace is a predictor of promotion. Participation was defined as socialization in the workplace, supervisory ability, and teamwork. The study found that task performance was rated higher for deaf employees, but that task performance was not a good indicator for promotion. Because of the deaf employee experiences high levels of isolation, this

prevents them from a high level of socialization and interaction that is needed to for promotion in many positions.

Sally had no interest in being promoted. She stated that she was content being in her current position, and believed extra responsibilities at work would interfere with her spending time with her family. Beverly stated that she would have to go back to school for a teaching degree to advance, and had little motivation to do so because of her age.

The employer's lack of consideration in providing an interpreter for important meetings isolates and alienates deaf employees. Bowe, McMahon, Chang, and Louvi (2005) found that many deaf employees face employer resistance in providing an interpreter. Several of the participants were repeatedly denied an interpreter, and this finding is consistent with the literature. Not providing reasonable accommodations has been found to be a significant factor in attaining and maintaining employment (Cawthon, et al., 2014; Geyer & Schroedel, 1999; Haynes & Linden, 2012; Scherich, 1996).

Several studies found that communication differences between deaf and hearing employees can be the source of misunderstandings that leave the deaf employee at a disadvantage (Frasier et al., 2009; Haynes, 2014; Rosengreen & Saladin, 2010; Shuler et al., 2014). This finding is consistent with the participants' responses in this study. Many of the participants described workplace experiences in which they were the targets for misunderstandings. Beverly and Christopher shared stories of how communication differences resulted in them being targets for misunderstandings at work. Beverly recalled an incident in which her colleague threw something at her to get her attention. It was the colleague's perception that Beverly was not paying attention to her, when in actuality Beverly did not get the proper cues that her attention was needed.

Beverly and Randy expressed experiences in which the felt a sense of belonging because of efforts made by hearing coworkers to lessen the gap that exists due to differences in communication. Randy stated that he felt respected and a part of the team at one of his jobs, because his supervisor and hearing coworkers worked out a system for communicating with him. Beverly also expressed a sense of respect and belonging when her principal created a basic sign language book and encouraged the bus driver to learn to improve communication. These findings are consistent with a study by Young et al. (2001), which found that learning and using ASL in the workplace strengthened a sense of belonging and respect among the deaf employees.

I'm Deaf, But I'm Still Capable!

Several of the participants expressed frustration in how they feel they are viewed by their hearing co-workers and supervisors. This frustration left them feeling less capable than their hearing co-workers in performing job tasks.

Beverly talked about her frustration in being the only teacher assigned the duty of changing diapers of the children in her class with special needs:

> Sometimes I feel…taken advantage of. For example, I work with kindergarten deaf children, including typical children, which are hearing, joined with the class. I have three [hearing children] and eight deaf children. Two kids are not toilet trained, and sometimes I have to change their diapers most of the time even though there is another teacher's assistant. All the time I am changing diapers…why me, I'm the 'diaper changer' instead of being the teacher assistant, you know what I mean. I feel that way. I told the principal, and she had a talk with the teacher about it. I could tell the teacher did not like it. But I want what is fair. I wanted to do more with the children than change diapers. I wanted to interact with the children more, teach them more.

I asked Beverly if she ever expressed her dissatisfaction in being the diaper changer. She stated:

> I talked to the teacher, not to the teacher's aide. I talked privately with the teacher and
> explained 'I am changing diapers all the time. I want to share duties.' The teacher says
> 'Well, well…' and puts off what I am saying. You understand, since the teacher and the
> teacher's aide are good friends, how can I criticize her [the teacher's aide] if they're
> buddies, you know what I mean? You know, in other words, she's doing her a big favor.
> For example, during nap time, I'm watching the teacher and she comes in the room with a
> coke, hands it to the other teacher's aide…why not me, I wonder. I see that they're good
> friends. The teacher allows her to use the credit card to go out to get something to eat for
> lunch, bring it back… she never asks me what I want or anything, nothing. I see that,
> interesting (shrugs shoulders). So I'm not talking to the teacher's aide, I talk with other
> teacher…hands off, nothing. I'm being humble, hands off, not worth me to complain,
> they will fight and fuss with me, and I want to avoid that confrontation.

Beverly assists with bus duties in the mornings at her school. She provided another example of
her frustration of not feeling capable:

> One day she (teacher assistant) came in late right after the kids got off the bus. I told
> myself I didn't have to wait on her to get the kids off the bus if she is late. I just decided
> to myself - I see all of the children are here, so why should I have to wait on her? I can
> get all the kids lined up and follow me to the classroom. The TA (teacher assistant) came
> in late. I ignored her and kept working with the children. I showed her that I can do this
> without her. You know like, that was an example to her that I can do it.

When asked to share her perception of why she was consistently chosen to change diapers
instead of teach and not equally share in daily responsibilities, Beverly stated,

I think it's because I'm deaf. I have a degree, just like them. I learned the same things in college as they did. Just because I can't hear doesn't mean I can't do my job. I think it's because of communication.

Although Beverly has a B.S. degree and was properly trained as a teacher's assistant, she stated that she has had moments of inferiority due to the less than positive camaraderie between her and her teacher assistant in her classroom. She began by describing her relationship with the teacher's aide by saying, "This person…she knows everything. Me? I'm just trying to do my job. It's like I don't know anything. That's why I feel inferior with her."

Beverly was asked to describe her feelings of inferiority, and to provide examples describing the dynamic between her and her hearing co-worker:

Because she thinks I'm deaf that I don't know anything, and because she's hearing she knows. What? I know!!! Like for instance, there was a rug in the classroom with ABC's all around. She pointed to 'N' and got confused between 'N' and 'U', and the kid was pointing at the letter, said 'U', and the teacher said, 'No, that's wrong.' I caught the mistake and I said, 'No, the kid is right. It's not an N, it's a U. The teacher came over and said yes, that I was right. She sort of did this body (language) thing. I just…I showed her that I know what I'm talking about.

Wally and Hank also expressed how the work environment has created feelings of being incapable of reaching their full potential. Hank expressed this feeling when describing how he feels he knows how to do his job; but because of his reliance on pen and paper for communication, he doesn't feel as successful. Wally stated that he was the art department manager at his job, but feels he was terminated because he was deaf. He stated:

I know I am talented. I am a great artist. Being deaf does not stop me. I am proud of who I am. Jobs have been frustrating because I know I can work but sometimes hearing people don't understand. Sometimes I tell hearing people that with deaf people there is no voice because deaf culture signs, and there is no voice.

Although several studies were identified showing that the overall current perception of deaf individuals is positive (Gallaudet, 1983; Padden & Humphries, 1998; Tyler, 2004; Vernon and Andrews, 1990), the findings in this research reveal participant responses that reflect negative thoughts and stereotypes about deaf individuals still exist (Nikolarazi & Makri, 2004; Tellings & Tijsseling, 2005). Beverly, Wally and Hank all expressed their thoughts of how they believed hearing employees perceived them of being incapable of doing their jobs. Because the study focuses on the thoughts, feelings, and perceptions of the deaf participants, it is important to note the difficultly in determining if other contributing factors were involved in their experiences.

These feelings of incapability can result in low morale and motivation (Williams & Ables, 2004). Hank stated that because of communication differences, he felt less successful as his hearing coworkers. William stated that he felt "deflated, like garbage" due to his experiences with hearing employees.

Suppression: Reluctance to Speak Out

Some of the participants experienced workplace incidents that many would consider ones that warrant the attention of supervisors or upper management. These incidents include 1) neglecting to request the services of an interpreter for an individual who needs one as mandated by ADA guidelines, 2) violation of personal space, and 3) being held back by another coworker from effectively performing job related tasks.

When I asked Hank if he had ever complained about his need for an interpreter during meeting to be overlooked, he said,

> I didn't push back. Didn't tell him how I felt about it. I felt unimportant, that he didn't get it. I don't speak, I use ASL. I can't lip read. That is who I am. It is frustrating for me…I hold it in. I don't do anything. I can't do anything. I learned a long time ago, when I was a child to hold it in. I get angry, but I can't do anything. Sometimes I feel that I can't be who I am at work.

I then asked Hank to talk about why he does not "push back" during situations in which he is not given consideration of his communicative needs, he responded:

> It's useless. Because hearing co-workers don't feel comfortable with the deaf. They're never sure what to do with communication. If hearing coworkers see a deaf person signing for the first time in their life…hearing people do not understand deaf culture, differences.

Beverly described an incident at work that could have potentially been solved by talking with her teacher assistant:

> I was standing with the children to go potty. The boys were in the bathroom and I was outside. The TA (teacher assistant) comes outside, and says, 'You need to know the boys are making a lot of noise' and she went in there to handle it. So, why didn't the TA tell me, 'The boys are yelling' and let me handle that instead of cutting in front of me and doing it for me?

I asked Beverly if she ever expressed her feelings to the teacher assistant about allowing her to handle discipline problems with the students, and she replied: "I didn't tell her. It happened so

quickly, and after that she went back into the classroom. I carried the boys back into the room. It happened so quickly. After that, nothing."

When asked to describe how he feels when encountering situations in which he can't talk and interact at work, William gave a simple response:

"I feel left out...deflated, like garbage."

I asked William to describe ways in which he coped and adapted to his work environment:

I just take it, hold it in…always. I'm afraid they will yell at me and I decide it's not worth it. It's a part of my father…I would always go up to him, then he would yell at me, so I grew up in childhood holding it in. I work in fear, but it's not the same for other people. My growing up in an abusive situation…it's different. I grew up in fear…I still have fear."

During the interview, William stated that he wanted to file a lawsuit against his employer for unfair employee practices, but decided not to because he did not feel confident he had a legitimate case. When asked why he felt this way, he stated he thought he was too old, and was afraid of putting his family in a poor financial situation.

When Sally was asked why she did not express her disappointment to her supervisor when she was excluded from an important meeting, she replied that it was her manager's responsibility to make the accommodation, and she chose not to worry about it.

Christopher's reluctance to speak out on an important matter at his job derived from his fear that he would not retain employment if his supervisor knew that he could not hear. Christopher needed an interpreter to be properly trained, but he did not disclose this need. He began to talk about a time when the training was difficult:

Ok, the trainer was telling us the rules and stuff like that… about flipping boxes, sorting boxes, about how to read the labels… know your states and zip codes, and we had to write it down. There were notes that we had to take down. And I'm writing them down, I have to pay attention too, so that I can know what all I need to write down. My head is down and the trainer was still talking, and mentioning nine or eight different states and zip codes…and I was like, 'This is where I draw the line. Ok, I have to be honest with you, I'm deaf'.

Because Christopher is moderately to severely deaf in both ears, he had to rely on his visual senses to fully understand what his trainer was verbally communicating. Unfortunately, Christopher could not concentrate on writing and trying to look at the trainer for visual cues. I asked Christopher to explain how the dilemma was resolved:

He didn't know that I was deaf. Because of that fact, it was like Thursday, and training started on Tuesday… and he was like, 'Why are just now telling me this?' I told him, 'that's because I was pretty much doing well, but you popped up with this'. So he was like, 'Ok, are you having any difficulties', so he was working with me. I said, 'Right now you're telling me the states and the zip codes', and he was like, 'don't worry about it, I will write it down for you so you can study.' So I was like, ok, cool. So he made an arrangement with me where he would write down the states and zip codes for me to study. So I asked him did the job require me to hear, and he was like, 'No, you don't have to hear to be employed or anything like that. You know, truck sorting is just reading the labels and putting it on the right belt. That's it.' He was very…he really worked with me on that.

Christopher's trainer exhibited a willingness to assist him in gathering and understanding the knowledge he needed in order to be successfully trained for his job.

Hank, Beverly, Sally, and William shared stories that describe experiences of suppressed feelings during stressful and conflictual situations at work. These stories reflect a consistency in the literature of how deaf individuals may suppress their feelings when faced with differences in communication and negative expressed behaviors by hearing employees (Williams and Ables, 2004). William and Ables study (2004) also sited fear of losing employment and fear of creating conflict as major factors in suppressing feelings. In Christopher's case, his suppression originated from a fear of losing his job if he revealed his physical identity as a deaf person. Although Sally felt isolated from other employees during meeting time due to a lack of interpreter, she chose not to express her disappointment because she did not want to cause conflict with her supervisor. Both William and Hank stated they chose to suppress their feelings because of past learned behaviors related to coping skills. Hank also expressed a feeling of futility at trying to communicate his frustration due to the differences in deaf and hearing culture. Beverly cited the incident occurring so fast that she did not have the time to process and react as a reason why she chose not to speak out.

Summary of Data Analysis

The participant responses communicated their experiences with hearing coworkers, hearing supervisors, and deaf coworkers, and how these experiences impact the quality of social interaction in the workplace. These collected experiences culminate in the themes that emerged from the sharing of stories.

All the participants expressed feelings of alienation and isolation because of incompatible forms of communication between hearing and deaf individuals in the workplace. Writing things

down is how many deaf individuals "talk" to those who are not trained in using sign language. Sally, Christopher, and Randy's coworkers were understanding and patient in using paper and pen. For Hank and William, the need to use paper and pen was considered an inconvenience by their hearing co-workers, and there was no evidence of efforts made to compensate for this difference in communication. It was Williams' perception that he was terminated from his job because he relied on using paper and pen to communicate with customers. Hank stated that he felt isolated from his coworkers, because paper and pen are "all I have". Barbara's principal is supportive of her communicative needs for paper and pen. However, her coworkers are not as supportive, and one of her coworkers used inappropriate tactics to communicate with her (i.e., throwing objects).

The use of a deaf interpreter was a need for several of the participants, but they were denied this service. The lack of an interpreter resulted in the participants missing out on important information. It also caused isolation in that they lost the opportunity to socialize and share ideas with their coworkers. The denial or refusal to provide an interpreter when necessary has both legal and discriminatory implications. Nonetheless, the supervisors' attitudes towards not providing an interpreter resonated tones of indifference; and in many cases, several of the participants were consistently denied an interpreter. Hank, Sally, and William shared their stories of exclusion from important business meetings. Hank expressed feelings of alienation and isolation from his hearing coworkers because of his supervisor's habit of forgetting to request an interpreter in advance for meetings. He stated that he needed more professionalism from his supervisor, and the lack of professionalism made him feel less respected when compared to his hearing coworkers, and to his fellow deaf coworker. William's employer told him that there was no money to provide an interpreter, even though his supervisor was aware that he needed one

when first hired and the use of one during important business meetings was critical to him being successful in his position. Christopher shared a story in which he chose not to request an interpreter during his training out of fear that he would lose his job. In fact, he did not disclose that he could not hear until he was faced with a workplace dilemma that forced him to do so. He also provided an example of how an interpreter is sometimes needed to disseminate information, but due to the logistical challenges presented by a noisy and busy work area, an interpreter is frequently not practical. Christopher also commented that even if an interpreter is available, that person may not be knowledgeable to the business jargon needed to properly communicate information. Christopher who has moderately severe hearing loss, also expressed his concern for his fellow deaf coworkers, who are profoundly deaf and who have considerably less verbal skills than he does. He is frequently asked by his supervisor to act as an interpreter for his deaf coworkers when circumstances are less than optimal to communicate with them himself. Christopher says he worries about his coworkers when he takes vacation time or days off, because he feels that his deaf coworkers will be at a disadvantage without someone to interpret important information for them.

The participants' stories illustrate how the voice of the deaf employee is often not heard or is ignored in a hearing work environment. In some instances, that voice is suppressed by the deaf employee, as illustrated in several stories. Both Hank and William chose to "hold in" their feelings of anger and frustration due to being denied an interpreter for important business meetings. Although Sally stated that she felt left out of business meetings because she didn't have an interpreter, she chose not to express her disappointment. Beverly shared several conflictual stories that occurred between her and the other teacher's aide in the classroom. To avoid further conflict, she chose to suppress her thoughts on important matters.

A key component of Wenger's (1998) theory of community of practice lists three components of mutual engagement: 1) Enabling engagement, 2) Diversity, and 3) Mutual relationships. These components will be discussed in relation to the participants.

For an environment of mutual engagement to develop, inclusion in daily processes is a requirement in a community of practice. It is not enough to simply show up for work. Wenger (1998) stated, "Membership in a community of practice is therefore a matter of mutual engagement. That is what defines the community. A community of practice is not just an aggregate of people defined by some characteristic. The term is not a synonym for group, team, or network" (p.74). Several of the participants in this study were not included in the daily operations at their jobs due to incompatible forms of communication, and being denied an interpreter for important meetings. All the participants shared stories in which hearing coworkers were either reluctant or refused to communicate with them if it involved making the effort to write with pen and paper, or other form of communication in formal and informal work situations. This may seem to be an unrecognized issue to the hearing coworker; however, the "office gossip" may be as important as the formal business meeting. Without proper communication, the deaf employee may be at a disadvantage in performing their job, and may potentially be passed up for advancement.

In his discussion of recognizing diversity as a part of mutual engagement, Wenger (1998) stated, "If what makes a community of practice is mutual engagement, then it is a kind of community that does not entail homogeneity" (p.75). Mutual engagement can be enriched and subsequently boost productivity and morale if diversity is welcomed and encouraged in the workplace. Moss (2012) stated that deaf employees have been recognized for having a strong work ethic as well as being highly productive. The deaf employee has the ability to concentrate

on carrying out job related tasks because they are not distracted by typical distractions hearing employees face due to noise. To corroborate this finding, Randy alluded to this fact in one of his responses, when he discussed how his hearing coworkers were not as productive in the same job tasks as the deaf employees, because they talked throughout the day. In contrast, because deaf employees "talk" to one another with their hands, they can't communicate with each other if they are constantly using their hands to complete repetitive job tasks. Therefore, the deaf employee take on significance in the workplace. The competence of the deaf employees and the diversity that they bring to the work place could be studied and observed by hearing supervisors and coworkers to improve productivity. Johnson's study (1993) which revealed deaf employees rated higher in task performance than hearing employees substantiates Randy's responses.

Mutual relationships form because of mutual engagement, however Wenger (1998) says mutual engagement is not always peaceful and without conflict in the workplace. He stated, "Because the term "community" is usually a very positive one, I cannot emphasize enough that these interrelations arise out of engagement in practice and not out of an idealized view of what a community of practice should be like" (p.77). Many of the participants' stories reveal workplace tension and conflicts. While comparing the overall work environments of the participants, Hank, William, and Beverly were found to have experienced more workplace conflicts and tension. It appears that these workplace conflicts may in fact be the foundation of a dysfunctional community of practice rather than a positive one. A community of practice can have both positive and negative elements of engagement (Wenger, 1998). However, deaf employees in many instances have no voice to express their anger, frustration, and their point of view during disagreements or when they feel they have been treated unfairly. Because these differing

viewpoints are not brought to the surface, deaf employees may have ongoing feelings of dissatisfaction in the workplace.

Chapter Summary

Three themes emerged from the participant's interviews. All the participants shared stories that reflected how incompatible forms of communication with hearing coworkers resulted in feelings of isolation and alienation in the workplace. William, Beverly, and Hank shared stories of how they felt they were qualified to perform well at their jobs; but because of differences in communication, they had feelings of incapability. Hank, William, Beverly, Christopher, and Sally all shared stories of how they chose not to speak out during workplace conflicts. In these stories, differences in communication is the central element in explaining how social interaction and participation are impacted in the workplace. Social learning theory and Wenger's community of practice model focuses on how adults learn from one another through workplace interactions. The things learned at work aren't always specifically related to workplace tasks, but rather learning things from each other that strengthens the camaraderie between employees. This learning takes place in the breakroom, during office meetings, and social functions at work. Without enabling engagement, encouraging and recognizing diversity, and creating positive mutual engagements, deaf employees miss out on becoming a full participant in the work community.

In the following chapter, Wenger's (1998) 14 criteria for a positive community of practice will be used in assessing the workplaces of the six participants. A discussion of how the findings in previous studies highlighted in the review of literature compare to the findings in this study with be presented. Last, suggestions for future research on deaf employees in the workplace will be provided.

Chapter 5

Conclusions

Overview

Little research exists that focuses on the day to day experiences of deaf people in the workplace. A narrative inquiry was used to explore these experiences. The researcher could develop an understanding of how deaf employees' social interaction and participation are impacted in a predominantly hearing work environment. This study added to the body of knowledge by highlighting the experiences of six deaf participants.

The purpose of this study was to explore the experiences of deaf individuals in the workplace. This study addressed the following questions:

1) How do deaf employees describe their experiences with other deaf employees?

2) How do deaf employees describe their experiences with hearing employees?

3) How do deaf employees describe their experiences with hearing supervisors?

4) How do these experiences impact deaf individuals' social interaction and participation in the workplace?

The findings of this study suggest that deaf employees have the adequate knowledge and skills to be successful and productive in the workplace. However, in many instances deaf employees are not asked to contribute their suggestions, or their suggestions may be ignored. Several of the participants in this study expressed frustration with the often-overlooked need for a sign language interpreter during important business meetings. This formal mode of communication is necessary for deaf employees who are severely to profoundly deaf to remain aware of the pertinent changes that may be taking place at work.

Several of the participants in this study are employed by top industrial leaders in the areas of the transporting and distribution of goods. Because of the large number of individuals who are employed by these top companies, the ADA requires these companies to provide reasonable accommodations for deaf employees. Based on the responses of several of the participants, the employers' commitment to providing these accommodations appear to be superficial at times.

The findings also suggest that employers of deaf participants should improve their efforts to actively include deaf employees in day to day activities and camaraderie. Many of the participants expressed frustration in not being included in the "office gossip", or other informal social activities that would enhance their workplace experiences. Upper management can facilitate and encourage social activities between deaf and hearing coworkers by offering opportunities for hearing employees to learn basic sign language, and to offer cultural competency training that focuses on the cultural differences that may exist between hearing and deaf individuals. These activities give employees the tools in which to reflect and generate ways to lessen the communication gap between the two groups in an informal setting.

Wenger's Criteria for Communities of Practice

One of the goals of this research is to encourage organizations that employ deaf individuals to create work environments that reflect signs of an effective community of practice. Wenger's criteria were used in assessing whether a community of practice existed in each of the participants work environments. The fourteen indicators of a community of practice are:

1) Sustained mutual relationships

2) Shared ways of engaging or doing things together

3) Rapid flow of information

4) Absence of introductory preambles, as if conversations and interactions were merely the continuation of an ongoing process

5) Very quick set up of a problem to be discussed

6) Substantial overlap in participants' descriptions of who belongs

7) Knowing what others know, what they can do, and how they can contribute to an enterprise

8) Mutually defined identities

9) The ability to assess the appropriateness of actions and products

10) Specific tools, representations, and other artifacts

11) Local lore, shared stories, inside jokes, knowing laughter

12) Jargon and shortcuts to communication as well as the case of producing new ones

13) Certain styles recognized as displaying membership

14) A shared discourse reflecting a certain perspective on the world

Of the six participants interviewed for this study, Randy appeared to have had more positive workplace experiences at his first and third places of employment, and his comments about his employer resonated a positive community of practice in action. These places of employment consisted of both supervisors and coworkers who made considerable efforts to communicate with him through a sign language interpreter, pen and paper, as well as the development of a physical system to communicate when those forms of communication are not feasible. These efforts allowed him to communicate his workplace ideas, interact in informal situations, and subsequently made him feel like a true part of the work community. At his second job, Randy reported feelings of isolation from his hearing coworkers due to communication.

Because of these feelings, Randy chose to stay close to his deaf coworkers, and not attempt to create relationships with his hearing coworkers.

Beverly's experiences at the elementary school revealed the potential for a stronger community of practice. The school principal demonstrated leadership and value of Beverly's contributions to the school by consistently providing an interpreter at each meeting, valuing her suggestions, and creating opportunities for school faculty and transportation managers to learn sign language to better communicate with her. This resulted in not only a smoother bus duty process, but it also motivated the bus employees to explore different ways to communicate with her. However, Beverly's experiences with her coworkers are at times very confrontational and conflictual. Although the teacher she works with in the classroom communicates with her in sign language, Beverly still feels that she is excluded from doing more in the classroom because she is deaf. Beverly also feels that she cannot discuss problems that she may have with the teacher's aide, because the teacher's aide and the lead teacher in the classroom are friends. Because she has an engaging relationship with her principal, she occasionally discusses her conflicts with her. Consequently, Beverly feels that her actions only serve to alienate herself from her immediate work group. This work environment not only intimidates Beverly, it may also hinder her from communicating any ideas she may have for improved classroom instruction and activities.

Sally has contact with her hearing coworkers in the mailroom carrying out daily job tasks. However, she says they do not participate in social talks due to incompatible forms of communication. During break time, she says she stays to herself and eat lunch. Although Sally receives her job duties directly from her supervisor, she shared inconsistencies in being provided a sign language interpreter for important meetings. The disregard for her communicative needs makes her feel left out and not a part of the work team.

From an operational perspective, Christopher's description of his workplace environment is mostly cooperative. Cooperation is necessary in making sure thousands of packages are loaded to the right trucks daily, and clear communication is paramount in this task. He is included in meetings and has an interpreter during those meetings to communicate important information. However, Christopher did report instances in which there was a breakdown in work processes due to a lack of awareness of communication differences. This breakdown is a result of a lack of awareness that although Christopher can make out many verbal sounds, this ability is stifled in a loud work environment. He must rely on lip reading and other visual cues to communicate and process what is going on. In meetings, he sometimes feels that his ideas are accepted, but reluctantly. Christopher also expressed frustration in having to consistently act as an interpreter for his profoundly deaf coworkers because it affects his productivity. He does not socialize with his hearing coworkers outside of job related tasks.

William and Hank show the lowest level of social interaction and participation in the workplace. William spends most of his time in the workplace alone due to communication. He does not always have access to a sign language interpreter during important meetings. When he is able to have an interpreter, he feels that his ideas are not embraced. William is not included in day-to-day chatter with his coworkers. Overall, William's workplace is not successful in embracing him as a part of the work team, and he was later terminated. Hank feels that his work environment is unprofessional, and he does not feel included or respected at his job. Hank is frequently excluded from meetings due to a lack of an interpreter. He relies on his fellow deaf coworker, Marge, in disseminating important information and any office gossip she may be privy to. He often does not know what his hearing coworkers are doing during the day. Hank stated that before Marge was hired, he was completely alone at work and was privy to less information.

In the analysis of the data, it is important to note that the creation of a community of practice in each of the participants' places of work possibly depends on the work environment structure. For Christopher and Randy, who work in loud warehouse settings, the community of practice model may present some logistical challenges in regards to promoting participation and social interaction outside of completing work related tasks. Randy, however, stated that his coworkers worked out a system of nonverbal communication to improve work processes. Beverly, William, Sally, and Hank work in what is considered more intimate workplace settings that do not pose the structural challenges Randy and Christopher face. It would be an assumption that the four participants would have opportunities for a better community of practice in their workplace; however, they all shared stories of isolation from their hearing coworkers. It is the conclusion of the researcher that organizational culture is just as important as physical workplace structure in assessing socialization and participation.

Discussion of Findings and Correlation with the Literature

The findings of this research correlates with many of the studies highlighted in the review of literature. Foster's (1992) study exploring supervisor's perceptions of deaf employees and the perspective of deaf employees found that supervisors should receive better training and education on adjusting to the communicative needs of deaf employees. Many of the participants' responses in this study reflected a need for supervisors to be more aware of the need for interpretive services during meetings. Foster also recommended that deaf employees be included in the discussion of how to narrow the gap in communication with hearing employees.

Johnson's study (1993) involving focus group activities of 490 deaf individuals revealed that deaf employees rated their quality of work performance higher than that of their hearing co-workers. This study reported productivity to be a major factor retaining deaf employees, but not

promotion. In the current study, Randy's view of deaf employees substantiates findings in Johnson's study when he stated that deaf employees are more productive because they do not have auditory distractions. William's experience also resonated another finding in Johnson's study, in which supervisors rated socialization, supervisory ability, and teamwork as higher indicators of participation in the workplace, and therefore were better indicators for promotion. William believed in his occupational abilities; but it was his perception that he was terminated from his job due to incompatible forms of communication not only with his coworkers, but potential customers as well. One observation that was made, however, during Wally's interview, was when he stated that at times he was not a good speller and sometimes did not understand "big words". It is the researcher's observation that perhaps his termination was due to the perception that he was not as capable of performing his job-related tasks due to poor reading and spelling. Several studies were identified that show a low rate of retention and promotion because of poor reading and spelling skills (Frasier et al., 2009; Hauser et al., 2010; Haynes, 2014; Rosengreen & Saladin, 2010; Shuler et al., 2014).

Young et al. (2000) study of the experiences of deaf and hearing co-workers at two psychiatric facilities and one school for deaf children in the U.K. The study found that efforts made by hearing employees to learn and use sign language created a sense of belonging and community with deaf colleagues, and that deaf colleagues felt a high level of respect. In the current study, Beverly felt a sense of pride and respect when her principal facilitated efforts to improve communication between her and the bus driver. The bus driver embraced the principal's basic sign language manual, and learned signs that helped the bus duty process to flow smoother for him and Beverly. The principal's initiative transformed Beverly's perception of herself as a capable employee, and a true member of the team at her school.

Balsamo's (2006) doctoral dissertation titled, "Accommodating employees who are deaf in the workplace" focused on the note-taking skills of hearing co-workers for their deaf colleagues. Although this study primarily focused on the difficulties hearing individuals faced when writing concise notes for their deaf coworkers, it also suggested that deaf employees may have problems in taking notes while a coworker or supervisor is speaking. In this study, Christopher illuminated the difficulty he faced when trying to take notes during training for his job. Because he had to focus on writing, he could not take time to look at the trainer to see what he was saying.

Wells (2008) dissertation titled, "Deaf world, what's where I'm at: A phenomenological study exploring the experience of being a deaf employee in the workplace", focused on the experiences of four deaf employees. The study used Wenger's Community of Practice Model and Bandura's reciprocal interaction model to analyze the findings. This study, like the current one, used Wenger's 14 indicators for the existence of a community of practice in their respective workplaces. The findings revealed an overall poor community of practice structure for each of the participants. Participants revealed a low level of participation and social interaction in their respective workplace settings which was noted most often during business meetings. As with the current study, several of the participants in Well's study also expressed frustration in not having an ASL interpreter during meetings, and felt a sense of isolation and alienation in the workplace. Wells (2008) concluded that in many workplace settings there is still a lack of awareness of the importance of reasonable accommodations for deaf employees. In regards to social interaction, it was recommended that supervisors and employees become more aware of the quality of interaction during business meetings and informal gatherings.

Implications and Recommendations for Practice

The analysis of the data show that without socialization and participation, deaf employees are at a disadvantage of the active learning and networking that occur at work. Without these elements, it is difficult to create a positive community of practice that encourages an inclusive environment. It is important to note that the participants represented a variation in workplace logistics and organizational structure that may have presented challenges in a positive work environment. Because this study focused on deaf employees in the workplace, the primary target for implications and recommendations for practice are employers and supervisors. The findings of this study suggest that there is a need for more training of employers on how to facilitate inclusion of deaf employees in the workplace. This training should be tailored in a way that supports the logistics and structure of each organization.

Previous research has shown that deaf employees are often overlooked for their impressive work ethic and skills because they cannot hear. Based on many of the participants' responses, there was evidence that support discriminatory practices within the workplace, including the lack of an interpreter during important meetings and being treated unfavorably by both hearing coworkers and supervisors. It is recommended that employers offer education and training to supervisors to promote a more positive work environment. It is important to note however, that the training should not stop at the supervisory level, but rather passed on to hearing employees to lessen the gap that exist in the communication differences of hearing and deaf individuals. Several of the participants in this study indicated that the support they received stopped at the supervisor level. If employees can see the enthusiasm and efforts of supervisors, this may motivate them in embracing the value of deaf employees, and in turn create both a positive community of practice and a more productive work environment.

DeafConnect of the Mid-South (DeafConnect, 2017) is an organization located in Memphis, TN whose mission is to empower deaf individuals and their families. In addition to offering services for the deaf population, DeafConnect provides education and training to both small and large business on the differences between deaf culture and hearing culture, strategies that can be used in various work environments to lessen the gap in communicative differences, and basic sign language classes. Because many small businesses may struggle financially to provide consistent interpreter services for their deaf employees, DeafConnect also provides low cost interpreter services. Organizations like DeafConnect exist across the country in educating the hearing population on the lived experiences of deaf individuals.

The findings of this research can also benefit educators and administrators whose main focuses are in the areas of student disabilities and career services on college and university campuses. Student disability centers and career centers on college campuses can provide adult education to interest groups in the form of short webinars and workshops focusing on deaf employees and their needs in the workplace. Alternatively, this information can be useful for educating the deaf individual on the possible issues that may arise in the workplace and strategies on how to effectively address those issues to create an environment for workplace success.

There are also possibilities for interdisciplinary studies involving adult education and disability studies. Previous studies have shown that adult educators have conducted research on workplace accommodations for individuals with disabilities. However, Rocco and Delgado (2011) stated that most of this research is based on either medical or functional models of disabilities rather than an examination of disability using critical theory models. Rocco (2010) states, "We know race, gender, and class are socially constructed, but adult educators in the field

do not see disability as a constructed state; rather, disability is seen as an unfortunate condition, and the person with a disability is viewed as a poor unfortunate victim" (p. 4). Rocco (2010) proposes an application of Critical Race Theory in examining disability as a social construct based on four concepts of disability oppression:

1) Political economy

2) Cultures and belief systems

3) False consciousness and alienation

4) Power and ideology (p. 6)

The findings of this research implicate that there are issues relating to cultural differences, alienation, and power struggles that can be further examined in workplace settings employing hearing and deaf individuals.

Suggestions for Further Research

Based on the outcomes of this research, several recommendations for further research are indicated. Most the individuals in this study held blue collar occupations. It is recommended that this study be replicated to include deaf individuals in white collar positions to examine if similar workplace issues exist, and to the degree that they exist. The study could also be expanded to include both white and blue collar employees to make comparisons of the participants' experiences in each occupational group.

The small number of participants in this research can be viewed as both a strength and weakness. It would be helpful to increase the number of participants in future studies with focus group interviews that includes deaf and hearing employees and supervisors. These focus group sessions can not only serve to capture lived experiences, but it facilitates adult learning.

Including hearing employees and supervisors can offer a broader lens in which to analyze the work dynamics between the two groups.

It was observed during the interview process that several of the participants had a little difficulty in recalling workplace experiences during the timed interview, and asked if they could provide more information after taking a moment to think and reflect on their experiences. It is recommended that future researchers provide participants either a written or electronic journal option for recording their experiences before, during, and after the interview. This data collection method can maximize the participants' descriptions of workplace experiences.

Based on the findings of Rocco (2010), it is suggested that this study be replicated, using Critical Race Theory as a theoretical framework in which to examine issues of power and discrimination in the workplace setting of deaf individuals. In this study, many of the participant responses reflected an "Us" (deaf employees) versus "Them" (hearing employees) when describing their workplace experiences. The "us" versus "them" ideology is a central theme in critical race theory studies that focus on the disenfranchisement of minority and vulnerable populations in the dominant culture.

Final Remarks from the Participants

The participants in this study were asked to give a final statement on what they would like hearing individuals to know about Deaf culture. Their comments reflect the need for understanding and patience in the workplace.

Hank:

Culturally deaf people tend to socialize a lot. When deaf culture and hearing culture are together, it is hard to communicate.

Beverly:

Deaf co-workers, oh my goodness! We really throw down and sign, there's lot of interaction with each other. There is a really big difference between hearing and deaf co-workers. Big difference…big difference. In deaf culture we really make a lot of noise, sign gestures, a lot of body language gestures. But if you go into a hearing room, it's quiet writing, very limited, limited socialization, limited body language just…I feel like I don't trust hearing people. I trust deaf people and can share and exchange and make a lot of noise, stomp your foot, things like that. When the deaf have company we tend to talk in the kitchen…sit around the table, not in the living room. Compare to hearing people, they tend to sit in the living room. That's funny.

William:

Sometimes I tell hearing people that with deaf people there is no voice because with deaf culture we have signs, there is no voice. Another thing…some deaf voices (deaf speech) are awful. That's because they grew up with no hearing aid, so they can't control their voice. Oh, and that's why you notice that being deaf is varied, it is not the same. Yes, they are not the same…some are intelligent, some smart, some low functioning. It is different…their parents may not have taught them right, or it really depends on their life. It depends on their school, it they were mainstreamed, home schooled…these are different all around. It is little hard to explain that deaf people are not all the same.

Christopher:

There's certain places we (deaf people) go to. There's certain people's houses we go to. I mean, we're set in our ways, like…say for example, if my house is the deaf house then that's where we hang out. It's a culture. We'll have cookouts, fish fries...that's pretty

much like hearing people. We're no different.

Randy:

In deaf world, they prefer to work individually because it's easy for us, so we don't have to worry about the communication and get the job done. Some of us can work with hearing employees and some of us just can't work with them.

Sally:

It's easier working with deaf people. We have communication in common. We depend on each other. We sign and laugh, and the day goes by quickly. Hearing people don't understand us, and we don't understand them. We both need patience with each other.

Concluding Remarks from the Researcher

Without question, deaf employees face obstacles; many of which are related to differences in communication. These differences in communication should be embraced rather than rejected by the dominant hearing culture. It is unrealistic to expect this research or any other related study will completely close the communication gap between deaf and hearing employees in the workplace; however, bringing awareness to the issues can facilitate positive change. This change can ultimately empower deaf individuals and give them a sense of belonging and promote a healthier state of emotional well-being. It also empowers the employer, in that they may gain a well-respected reputation for creating a positive community of practice in their workplace.

This research process was very cathartic for me, in that it allowed me to be the voice for a section of the population that are often invisible. During the research process, I felt more connected to the needs and issues of the deaf population. Although the deaf participants were moderately severe to profoundly deaf, I discovered that each person

still had certain struggles that were unique to them and no one else. These findings cannot be generalizable to the entire deaf population, because differences in workplace structure, personality, and physical characteristics of the participants (whether they could lip read, speak clearly, etc.) can all influence the quality of social interaction in the workplace. I now have a deeper respect for qualitative research, in that these differences can be illuminated.

I enjoyed listening to the participants' stories, and they appeared eager to share them with me. I must admit, however, that at times the story telling was easier with some participants than others. For some, I had to conclude the interview a little earlier than expected, gather my thoughts, and prepare more probing questions for the next interview. It quickly became apparent to me that to get the responses that I needed, I had to better phrase my questions in a way that was understandable for the interpreter to convey to the participants.

The findings of the study were consistent with my assumption that deaf employees face several challenges in a predominantly hearing workplace. It was also assumed that these challenges are magnified when the deaf individual has profound hearing loss and has little to no verbal skills. I must note however, that these challenges can be either minimized or magnified by the workplace structure, and preconceived notions of the key players involved.

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Appendix A

IRB Approval Letter

THE UNIVERSITY OF MEMPHIS

Institutional Review Board

To: Keisha Brooks
                             Leadership

From: Chair, Institutional Review Board
                             For the Protection of Human Subjects
                             irb@memphis.edu

Subject: Deaf Employees in the Workplace: A Phenomenological Study of
                             How Identity Influences Workplace Experiences (#2126)

Approval Date: April 4, 2012

This is to notify you of the board approval of the above referenced protocol. This project
was reviewed in accordance with all applicable statuses and regulations as well as
ethical principles.

Approval of this project is given with the following obligations:
1. At the end of one year from the approval date, an approved renewal must be in
   effect to continue the project. If approval is not obtained, the human consent form
   is no longer valid and accrual of new subjects must stop.
2. When the project is finished or terminated, the attached form must be
   completed and sent to the board.
3. No change may be made in the approved protocol without board approval,
   except where necessary to eliminate apparent immediate hazards or threats to
   subjects. Such changes must be reported promptly to the board to obtain
   approval.
4. The stamped, approved human subjects consent form must be used unless
   your consent is electronic. Electronic consents may not be used after the
   approval expires. Photocopies of the form may be made.

This approval expires one year from the date above, and must be renewed prior to that
date if the study is ongoing.

Chair, Institutional Review Board
The University of Memphis
Cc: Dr. Barbara Mullins Nelson

Appendix B

Informed Consent

The purpose of this study is to explore the experiences of deaf employees in the hearing workplace, and how identity influences these experiences. Through interviews, you may be selected to describe your experiences in as much detail as possible. Your participation in this research will be beneficial to career counselors, and business and industries that employ deaf employees.

An American Sign Language (ASL) interpreter will be present during the interview to mediate in the interview process. Keisha N. Brooks, (901) 827-2273 or knbrooks@memphis.edu, is conducting this study to complete the dissertation requirement for a Doctor of Education degree. Keisha is working under the supervision of Barbara Mullins Nelson, Ph.D. of the Department of Leadership at the University of Memphis, (901) 678-3531 or bmullins@memphis.edu. The committee for the Protection of Human Research Participants at the University of Memphis, (901) 678-2533, approved this study, protocol number: _____2126_____.

The University of Memphis does not have funds to compensate for any injury or damages incurred as a result of participation in this study.

You will be asked to share your experiences through three personal interviews. Each interview will take approximately 60 minutes to complete, will be audio and video recorded, and transcribed for later analysis. Video recording is optional. If you choose not to be video recorded, it will not affect your ability to participate in the study. and transcribed for later analysis. If necessary, additional interviews of approximately 30 to 60 minutes would involve discussing unanswered questions the researcher may have to better understand your experience. After each interview you will receive a small compensation of $20 as a thank you for participating in this research.

There are minimal risks associated with participation in this study. Risks may be mental stress and fatigue during the interview process. If you feel you may need emotional counseling after this research, please contact Tennessee Vocational Rehabilitation at (901) 528-5284. The Tennessee Vocational Rehabilitation center provides vocational and emotional counseling and guidance.

 Participation in this study is entirely voluntary. You are free to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty. Only Keisha N. Brooks and the ASL interpreter will know your identity and that of any individual discussed during the interview. Pseudonyms (i.e., false names) will be used for any name mentioned during the interviews as well as in possible publications or presentations.

All efforts, within the limits allowed by law, will be made to keep the personal information in your research record private but total privacy cannot be promised. Your information may be shared with U of M or the government, such as the University of Memphis University Institutional Review Board, Federal Government Office for Human Research Protections, if you or someone else is in danger or if we are required to do so by law.

STATEMENT BY PERSON AGREEING TO PARTICIPATE IN THIS STUDY
By signing below, I attest that I am above 18 years of age or older. I have read this informed consent document and the material contained in it has been explained to me verbally. I understand each part of the document, all my questions have been answered, and I freely and voluntarily choose to participate in this study.

Name: _____

Date _____

Appendix C

Interpreter Confidentiality Agreement

The purpose of this study is to study social interaction of deaf and hearing employees in the workplace.

Your service as an interpreter us being used to interpret the study's deaf participants' experience.

Keisha Brooks, (901) 827-2273, or knbrooks@memphis.edu, is conducting this study to

complete the dissertation requirement for a Doctor of Education degree. Keisha is

working under the supervision of Barbara Mullins Nelson, Ph.D. of Leadership at The University of

Memphis, (901) 678-2533, or bmullins@memphis.edu. The Committee for the Protection of Human

Research Participants at The University of Memphis, (901) 678-2533, approved this

study, protocol number: 2126. The University of Memphis does not have

funds to compensate for any injury or damages incurred as a result of participating in this

study. The researcher will provide compensation in the amount of $20 per hour for the use of your

services.

The interviews will take approximately 60 minutes to complete, will be audio and video

recorded, and transcribed for later analysis. If necessary, additional interviews of

approximately 30 to 60 minutes would involve discussing unanswered questions the

researcher may have to better understand the deaf participants' work experience.

Only Keisha Brooks and you as an American Sign Language (ASL) interpreter

will know the identity of any individual discussed during the interview. The information

collected during this study will be kept confidential within the limits allowed by law.

Pseudonyms (i.e., false names) will be used for any name mentioned during the interview

as well as in possible publications or presentations.

I understand the nature of this research study and will keep information from the

interview process confidential.

ASL Interpreter Signature _____

Date _____

Research Study: Deaf Employees in the Workplace

- **Purpose**: To study the experiences of deaf employees in the hearing workplace

- **Requirements:**

  - At least 18 years of age

  - Reported moderate, severe, or profound hearing loss

  - At least a high school graduate or GED

  - Currently employed or unemployed

  - What the research involves:

    - Two interviews, 60 minutes per interview; and follow-up

      interview

    - A small compensation will be provided for participation

FOR MORE INFORMATION: Contact Keisha Brooks: knbrooks@memphis.edu

(901) 827-2273

Appendix E

Interview Guide

1. Prior to interviewing participants, the researcher will meet with the ASL interpreter to provide information about the interview process. The interpreter will have access to the interview questions and definitions that are specific to the study.

2. Building a rapport with the deaf participants

   a. Express appreciation for participation

   b. Recognize the participant as the expert of the lived experience

   c. Provide the participants a written and verbal description of the study and methods of data collection

   d. Provide information about confidentiality of responses and the use of pseudonyms. This information will be provided in written and verbal communication.

   e. Provide information about the legal/ethical limits of confidentiality. This information will be provided in written and verbal communication.

3. Interview Questions (probes can be used to gain additional information):

   a. Tell me about the nature of your hearing loss.

   b. Tell me about your training for your work experience.

   c. Tell me about your experience of receiving feedback at work. How do you get feedback at work?

   d. Tell me about your experience of receiving performance evaluations at work

   e. Tell me about your interactions with colleagues during business meetings.

   f. Tell me about your interactions with colleagues during break time.

   g. Tell me about your interactions with colleagues during social events at work.

   h. Tell me how your hearing colleagues interact with other hearing colleagues compared to how they interact with deaf employees at work.

i.   Tell me of a time when you felt valued by your employer.

j.   Tell me of a time when you did not think you were valued by your employer.

k.   Tell me some things that you need from your employer that you are not getting.

l.   What makes a good workplace dynamic?

m.   What kind of technological accommodations have been made for you at your job?

Appendix F

Sample Data Sheet

Theme	Transcription Info
Isolation/Alienation	"It's not very easy for me during lunch. Everyone's talking, and they're all having their conversations…and then there's me." (Hank)
	"My preference is pen and paper…they are my best friends and I have them in my pocket and I carry it…I just can't communicate…I just don't have anything." (Hank)
Deaf but Capable	"Just because I can't hear doesn't mean I can't do my job". (Beverly)
	"I know I am talented. I am a great artist. Being deaf does not stop me." (William)
Suppression	"I didn't push back. Didn't tell him how I felt about it." (Hank)
	"I just take it, hold it in…always. I'm afraid they will yell at me and I decide it's not worth it." (William)