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HEARING IMPAIRED AND LEADERSHIP: STRUGGLES OF
INDIVIDUALS WITH HEARING LOSS IN THE WORKPLACE

A Dissertation Presented
to
The Faculty of the School of Education
Department of Leadership Studies
Organization & Leadership Program

In Partial Fulfillment
Of the Requirements for the Degree
Doctor of Education

by
John C. Relihan
San Francisco
December 2022

“The future depends on what we do now and if we are pessimistic now, we are doomed in the future.”

Howard Zinn

“There is no greater disability in society, than the inability to see a person as more.”

Robert M. Hensel

“If we are to achieve a richer culture, we must weave one in which each diverse human gift will find a fitting place.”

Margaret Mead

THE UNIVERSITY OF SAN FRANCISCO

Dissertation Abstract

With the passing of federal legislations such as the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, Americans believe all issues relating to disability have been addressed. While Americans with disabilities gained civil rights under these two federal laws and educational opportunities have expanded, they are still struggling against the stigma of disability. They encounter many barriers as they enter the workplace and navigate toward leadership roles in their organizations.

This narrative phenomenological qualitative study seeks to understand the experiences of individuals with hearing loss as they enter and navigate through their careers. Its purpose is to gain knowledge on the barriers encountered in the workplace and to identify opportunities to implement new strategies to open leadership opportunities for individuals with hearing loss. This study provides stories from five professionals who have worked in different field such as academia, law, finance, and tech industry. Data for this study were collected through online interviews with five participants.

Key findings arose from the interviews with the participants, identifying three main themes. The first is a hearing-impaired self-image and personal experiences with their hearing loss. The second is their experiences in their organization (through the orientation process, the organization's policies toward employees, the hierarchy, and opportunities to become leaders). The third theme is their interactions with colleagues and leaders that impact their career opportunities. This study calls for the recognition of the social and economic barriers individuals with hearing loss face and the need for changes in organizational policies to open leadership opportunities for them.

This dissertation, written under the direction of the candidate's dissertation committee and approved by the members of the committee, has been presented to and accepted by the Faculty of the School of Education in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education. The content and research methodologies presented in this work represent the work of the candidate alone.

John Cleese Relihan
Candidate

November 29, 2022
Date

Dissertation Committee

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November 29, 2022

Dr. Kevin Oh

November 29, 2022

Dr. Michael Duffy

November 29, 2022

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This dissertation became a journey of discovery, connecting with individuals who are hearing-impaired or work in the field of disability rights. Along this journey, gifts of knowledge were shared among classmates, the participants of this study, and by the teachers at University of San Francisco; through the creation of this body of work, stronger bonds formed with my personal friends and family.

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To my friends and family who joined me on this journey, thank you for always listening and entering discussion about the topics of disability rights and research. Thank you to those who joined in my never-ending questioning of American culture and society and the heartbreaks of learning of the challenges I learned so many individuals with

disability face every day. This journey has been amazing, eye-opening, and given me a new sense of hope that the future can be better.

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CHAPTER ONE: THE RESEARCH PROBLEM

Statement of the Research Problem

In 1944 the G.I. Bill provided access to higher education for veterans with disabilities, but it did not provide civil rights protection (Kim & Williams, 2012) which would not arrive until the passing of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and later with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) of 1990. It was 46 years later the Americans with disabilities gained civil rights and protections under the law. These three laws had a significant impact in opening educational opportunities for Americans with disabilities yet there has been little improvement in opening employment opportunities for disabled Americans seeking careers or improvement their economic position in society. The employment opportunities in the United States are still set mostly by the private sector. Employers' opinions of how they can utilize the workforce and the needs of industry are crucial in developing hiring practices in the United States, leaving the effectiveness of ADA up to American employers to determine (Kim & Williams, 2012). We generally understand, in American society, that government is often more likely to hire an individual with disability than employers in the private or non-profit sector. These factors reveal the limited impact that ADA had on hiring practices and how essentially disabled individuals still have limited opportunities in the United States to improve their economic and financial goals.

With the passing of the Americans with Disability Act of 1990, there was a strong sense among the public that disabled individuals gained all the resources and services needed to be successful in life and that all discrimination against disabled individuals had been resolved. In the bay area, in everyday lexicon, rarely was ADA referred to in terms

of civil rights. Instead, ADA was spoken of as being a law that protected against discrimination of disabled individuals in the workplace. ADA does appear in the news when there are disability marches or protests. Sometimes it appears in city public meetings relating to the construction or modification of a building that might trigger ADA requirements such as needing to construct a ramp for individuals with mobility challenges.

As a personal aside, I grew up with hearing impairment and wore hearing aids that amplified sounds and speech for me. To American society, I would be considered a person with a disability. In the 1990s ADA was newly established and workplaces were adjusting to the new legal requirements set by the new law. Employers made sure they updated their policies to provide accommodations to employees with disabilities. Schools, if they had the funding, updated their technology and modified spaces to meet the ADA standards. Regarding students with hearing loss, schools and the workplace aimed to have closed captioning available or phones that were designed for individuals with hearing loss.

While ADA does attempt to address discrimination, it was designed on a civil rights model ensuring protection to disabled individuals, providing equal access to education, and establishing the liberty for disabled individuals to request for accommodations without fear of retaliation (Russell, 2019). ADA was seldom taught in K-12 school as a civil rights bill but rather as legislation that aided and protected disabled individuals in America. Unlike the civil rights legislation of the 1960s that was attempting to address racism and included an affirmative action feature, the ADA did not include any kind of affirmative action or requirement that private sector employers hire

individuals with disabilities. It was assumed that the ADA could automatically resolve economic issues on its own if the political and social issues were solved. In a sense, the ADA is also an economic law, aiming to assist individuals with disabilities to gain employment and to be protected from wrongful firing or mistreatment in the workplace. However, the employment practices of America are still based on capitalist methods, meaning the marketplace still dictates who is and isn't hired or what kinds of wages are agreed to for the disabled employee (Russell, 2019).

The passing of the ADA and other disabilities-related legislation, such as the Education for All Handicapped Children Act in 1975 (later renamed the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act [IDEA]), successfully increased the access to education for disabled students (Spring, 2020). There is still a great need to address employment opportunities and promotion into leadership positions for individuals with disabilities. According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics 2020 Economic News Release on unemployment, only 17.9 percent of individuals with disabilities were employed, down from 19.3 percent in 2019. In contrast, 61.8 percent without disabilities were employed in 2020, down from 66.3 percent in 2019 (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2021). It needs to be stated also that in 2020 the United States and the world were in the middle of a global pandemic so the decline in unemployment is mostly a result of nations and businesses shutting down temporarily as an attempt to reduce the spread of the Covid-19 virus.

Even with that in mind, it is important to note the employment gap that already existed in 2019 between those with disabilities (19.3 percent employed) compared to those without disabilities (66.3 percent employed). Among individuals with disabilities seeking work, only 19 percent were able to gain work. The unemployment rate for

individuals with disabilities was at 12.6 percent in 2020, an increase by 5.3 percentage points from the previous year while those without disabilities increased only by 4.4 percentage points to 7.9 percent the same year (USBLS, 2021). Individuals with disability seeking work, saw a greater increase in the percentage of unemployed compared to their abled peers.

In summary, the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics data from 2021 underscores that the percentage of disabled individuals is much higher than for those without disabilities. Yet even with this awareness, there has been very little political momentum to improve or expand the social programs, aiding those with disabilities. The Economic News Release also reports individuals with disabilities are less likely to receive a bachelor's degree or higher than individuals without disabilities (USBLS, 2021). This reality places disabled individuals at a great disadvantage in the competition for work that pays a livable wage or salary for them to be financially independent.

In the workplace, disabled employees are sometimes spoken of in terms of what they can and cannot do. This sets the tone for employers to seek to fill positions that fit with a person's disability. This is a form of discrimination that goes unnoticed. An example of this is when a person with hearing loss is asked to perform storage duties in a grocery store because the employer assumes that due to their hearing loss, the employee is unable to be a cashier and interact with customers. Consider the same context when race is applied in place of disability, where it becomes clearer the employer's act is a form of discrimination. These assumptions of what a disabled worker can perform greatly hinders opportunities for disabled individuals to obtain good paying jobs. It also limits their ability to build and establish professional networks that can assist them in expanding

their skills and experiences. Ultimately it can be a barrier toward becoming a leader in their organization.

Sharing my personal case may help to enlighten the challenges of hearing loss. Attending my K-12 classes with a hearing impairment, my parents had to always fight for my right to a good education and to be able to participate in the “regular classroom” with my peers of same age (despite the existence of ADA). I was fortunate to have a good case manager during my high school years who designed an effective IEP (Individualized Education Plan) with teachers who knew how to make a classroom inclusive. The case manager also fought for my right to be in the regular classroom. From my school experiences, I learned the importance of being a self-advocate to ensure that I continued to receive equal services and opportunities as my peers.

In some states such as California, disabled students are separated from the regular classroom and placed in “special ed” classes. The argument for doing so is that the school is ensuring a good education for the disabled student and protecting them. However, this is a form of segregation and disability isolation, depriving them of contact with their non-disabled peers and denying them access to equipment found in regular classrooms, such as scientific equipment, audiovisual aids, classroom libraries, and computers. (Spring, 2020). There are some schools that do their best to ensure that “special ed” classes have some of the necessary equipment and supplies such as computers. However, even when computers are provided, those computers may not have the necessary programs needed to complete the required assignments.

When attending college, I continued to develop self-advocacy skills to be effective and proactive in communicating with my teachers and the school administrators. I approached teachers when I needed assistance and took the initiative to build a supportive network that could provide me with the best education. In my career that meant working twice as hard to challenge the stigmas and stereotypes often applied to those with hearing impairment.

Some of those stereotypes include the idea that those with hearing impairment are stupid, dumb, or unable to function in a regular environment. Other stigmas include the idea that a hearing-impaired person is unable to perform complex tasks in the workplace such as having a conversation on the telephone or managing a team or being critical thinkers. When leaders or colleagues act differently around individuals with disabilities, their actions reinforce those stigmas and become a constant reminder that others are seen as “different” or not “normal.” The definition of “normal” is vague and ultimately a form of fiction. The reality is that all human beings have strengths and limits.

Individuals with hearing impairment are often portrayed in the media as having a disability. Having a disability does not mean that person is unable to participate in social activities or perform complex duties in the workplace. This might present additional challenges such as asking colleagues to speak more clearly or ensure that the phone is in good working condition. Everyone has personal limitations and must rely on others to provide supportive structures and encouragement. Many may believe they know what hearing impairment entails; a person cannot hear and needs to always see faces for lip reading or is unable to listen and keep up in a conversation. This representation is an inaccurate and incomplete picture.

Disability is more complex than just not being able to hear. There are several factors and obstacles. One is related to technology, meaning the assistive hearing device the person uses to improve their hearing. This can include, but is not limited to, hearing aids and cochlear implants. A second factor is having an audiologist that can program the hearing aids to permit the person with hearing loss to hear at their best. Thirdly, are the earmolds created to prevent feedback from the hearing aids and fit comfortably in the ear canal? Fourthly, what is the degree of a person's hearing loss, which can range from mild to moderate to severe? Fifthly, a person's age can impact how others perceive their hearing loss and how others treat them. For example, a person who is considered elderly by their society's standards may receive more patience and understanding than a teenager or young adult with hearing loss. It may be assumed by colleagues or strangers that a younger person doesn't have hearing loss. Finally, having the support of friends, families, colleagues, and mentors can have a positive impact that leads to opportunities to grow and build confidence. All these factors revolve around the notion of communication, understanding, and support. Hearing impairment can impact any person, no matter their age, gender, or race. Loss of hearing can develop at birth or develop later in life.

My own experience as a hearing-impaired person working in a professional environment helped guide this research and provided insight to understand the challenges and barriers faced by others. I also am aware of some opportunities that exist in organizations to lift those with hearing loss into leadership positions. There are individuals (some leaders and some in non-leadership positions) who are interested in seeing all people succeed and thrive in their careers. I have met a great number of

individuals during my school years and in the workplace who have provided so much support, assistance, and love.

This dissertation focuses on individuals with hearing impairment, ranging from mild to moderate to severe and profound hearing loss. What are their experiences as they entered their careers and how they progress toward their leadership positions in the organization? What skills and knowledge did they find helpful in advancing their careers and what obstacles and social barriers prohibited or limited their success in achieving their career goals.

Background and Need

The lack of public appearances of leaders with disabilities needs to be addressed in the United States of America. It can be viewed through the lens of disability rights or human rights, but it is also important to consider how capitalism and ideology of liberalism may not be sufficient to explain why disabled individuals are less often hired and promoted. Such disability right activists like Marta Russell (2019) argue that the nature of disability itself makes it more challenging for employers (or capitalists) to exploit their labor and the modern industrial capitalist society view disabled workers as cutting into profits due to the need to make accommodations (Russell & Rosenthal, 2019). Russell also points out that the term 'disability' is a socially constructed term to present disabled individuals in a political economic and productive terms that is disabled workers are less exploitable than non-disabled workers (Russell, 2001). The Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 was a recognition of the harsh economic and social realities that disabled individuals face as they graduate from school and enter society with the attempt to become productive members. Discrimination by employers and capitalist is

one barrier that reduces the chances of disabled individuals becoming independent economically.

Supervisors in organizations play a similar role as employers and capitalists through their power to promote employees, how they influence the organizational culture, and the opportunities they provide disabled workers to show to their capabilities and contributions. Russell (2001) reminds us that the ADA states clearly that employers and organizations have the luxury to determine if they provide accommodations or not, thus revealing ADA as a more business-friendly law than an attempt to assist disabled individuals (Russell, 2001). When a person with hearing impairment makes a request for accommodations, the employer may follow through by providing a more appropriate phone, a quiet space to work, and adjusting how meeting spaces are organized. If the accommodations prevent the disabled employee to pursue projects that could lead to promotions, then the ADA has backfired.

There is also the risk that the disabled person will face subtle acts of discrimination, such as negative facial expressions due to misunderstandings, being excluded from work social events, or not being given the space and time to grow as a professional. Then the accommodations are more of a facade than an actual attempt to assist the person with hearing impairment. If more opportunities were provided to disabled workers to enter leadership positions, the possibility exists to see improvement in organizational cultures, the policies approved, and better and safer working environment for all its employees. By advancing disabled employees into leadership roles in the organization, there is a greater chance to improve the performance of its employees

and the effectiveness of the organization itself, making it (in capitalist terms) more efficient and competitive in the market.

Again, I share my personal experience to better make the invisible problem visible. In my personal experience of working in city government and economic development, the position gave me a greater, more in-depth understanding of how political institutions operate and how they interact with and respond to the public. As a public administrator and public servant, I was in a position to hear the stories from colleagues and local community members about their lives and the local history. I learned about their challenges, their hopes, and their vision of how the community can improve. I discovered how crucial one's colleagues in an organization can be in adjusting to the workplace. Leaders in an organization create paths for their colleagues to develop their skills and knowledge to advance the organization's mission and goals.

I have also learned throughout my work experience that there are individuals who are unwilling to understand the challenges of hearing loss or are unable to adjust for those with hearing impairment. In some cases, I saw how some individuals feared those with disability and as a result could make it more difficult for those hearing-impaired individuals to continue working for their organization. This can make it difficult for a person with hearing loss to succeed and thrive in their desired careers as well as to build positive connections with their colleagues. It places unneeded stress on the person with disability and can reduce the quality of life in the workplace for them. ADA is designed to address discrimination that is on the surface, such as name-calling or harassment, but does not address indirect discrimination such as attitudes toward disability.

There is a prodigious need to build a more just and empathetic society where individuals with disabilities are included more in organizational operations and are accepted for who they are (not judged by their disability). Individuals with disabilities need to be provided the space and time to connect with others and be given opportunities to grow as individuals and professionals. Society should welcome and cherish diversity, to accept individuals with disabilities, and enable them to participate as equal members of a society so that they may achieve a good quality of life and independent living. Each person has a right to reach their maximum potential and to live fulfilled lives.

Unfortunately, the studies I identified indicated that not all individuals with hearing impairment were able to obtain work and those that did might find that their income fell behind others who had no disability, even when considering race and gender. “Analysis of data from the 2010 American Community Survey revealed that the percentage of DHH people with college degrees had increased almost four-fold since the 1970s, but that employment and earnings rates were considerably worse than for the general U.S. population and had declined over the same period” (Punch, 2016, pp. 384-385). This reveals that while more individuals with disability are attending higher education, their degrees are not always improving their chances to fully participate in the marketplace.

Much of the research points to how individuals with hearing loss suffer from isolation and depression or the inability to advance in their careers of their choice. Individuals with hearing impairment may be very susceptible to career barriers due to the effects hearing loss has on a person’s ability to interact with their colleagues and can bring up negative attitudes about disabilities which also creates career barriers (Punch,

Creed, & Hyde, 2006). These negative attitudes toward hearing-impaired individuals may even prevent opportunities for promotion or advancements in their careers. It is important to recognize both the challenges and the desires and hopes of those with hearing loss. The narrative around disability needs to be updated to include not just the challenges and heartache, but to include the desires and imagination of those with hearing impairment to provide a more holistic and complete perspective of the experience of individuals with hearing loss.

Statement of Purpose

This dissertation research provides an opportunity to explore the questions of how a person with hearing impairment can successfully progress through their careers, what their experience was like navigating toward becoming a leader in their organization, and what skills and knowledge they found helpful throughout their experience in the workforce. Through the sharing of the participants' stories, this study can serve all age groups who struggle with hearing impairment by providing an understanding that they are not alone in their struggles and may even find opportunities to connect with others with similar disabilities. The research may also offer valuable insight and recommendations for employers and colleagues (who have hearing), educators and educational institutions, and other organizations in assisting individuals with hearing impairment. The stories shared in this research could also lead to strategies on how to build better relationships between hearing and hearing-impaired individuals.

This research may be limited in that the information may not be applicable for those who are deaf or may be members of the Deaf culture. The knowledge and wisdom identified in this study will be valuable and can assist those with hearing impairment who

are struggling to progress in their careers. Through the participants' stories, we will discover some of the systemic and personal challenges hearing-impaired individuals face in the workplace. The stories may also reveal stigmas and stereotypes that the participants encounter each day.

Theoretical Framework

The literature review for the theoretical framework includes five theories that frame and guide the research approach, research questions, and search for the understanding of hearing impairment in the workplace and leadership opportunities. They are: Critical Disability Theory, Intersectionality, Social Justice, Grounded Theory, and Emancipatory Disability Research.

Critical Disability Theory

In this dissertation, Critical Disability Theory (CDT) “refers to a diverse, interdisciplinary set of theoretical approaches, task[ed] to analyze disability as a cultural, historical, relative, social, and political phenomenon” (Hall, 2019, introduction section, para. 1). Critical Disability Theory stems from Critical Theory which has its origins in Immanuel Kant’s and Karl Marx’s works. The theory “identifies, describes, and analyzes the subsumed or hidden origins of social and political culture, discourses, and institutions” (Hall, 2019, Critical Theory section, para. 1). This theory provides an important lens in understanding who the study’s participants are as members of a society and how the history of American institutions may have influenced how they have had to adapt to the modern workplace. Critical Disability Theory recognizes a long history of discrimination against disabled people and the misunderstanding of what it means to have

a disability. It also recognizes that disability discrimination comes with an added element of workplace accommodations that does not appear with other forms of discriminations such as racism, sexism, and agism.

Critical Disability Theory, like other critical theories, aims to understand the concealed history behind why disabled individuals are marginalized. It attempts to challenge the various models of disability such as the medical or social models (Hall, 2019) which portray disabled individuals as either needing to be fixed or downplay their suffering. Language used to describe individuals with disabilities as “other” or “not up to par” (meaning not able to do) can play a role in isolating people with disabilities from society or the workplace and creates a misunderstanding about disability. Words also can be used in a positive, humane manner that leads to seeing disabled individuals as valued members of society or an organization. To empower disabled individuals is to recognize their humanity.

The misunderstanding of disability is often through the perception of functionality or ability, particularly when looking at the modern workplace environment, where organizations and employers look for ways to “fit” disabled individuals into their organizational environment. That approach to understanding a person’s identity is a subtle discrimination, constricting a person’s career opportunities and chance for professional growth. Rosmarie Garland-Thomson (2019) stated that disability, like gender, is a notion that is portrayed in our culture in various ways such as social identities, cultural practices, political positions, shared experiences, and how our institutions are constructed (as cited in Hall, 2019). History also plays a role in how a society views itself and its heritage. With regard to marginalized groups such as

disabled individuals in a society, the history shared is sometimes a short summary, or in other cases a single person becomes an icon for a movement or event. It is a kind of denial or minimalization of a piece of history that can be rich with information and stories.

The Critical Disability Theory lens shines a light on the gaps in how organizations understand their employees with disabilities. The theory can help identify approaches organizations should use to assist their employees with disability so that they may be successful in the workplace. Through Critical Disability Theory, research can be conducted and presented in a way that leads to positive change and implementation of policies that can transform organizations in a way to make them more inclusive and understanding of those with hearing impairments. Critical Disability Theory recognizes the history of oppression and disregard for those with disabilities. Disabilities impact all ages, all races, all gender identities, and other social identities which the theory of intersectionality helps to point to that reality.

Intersectionality

Another aspect of the theoretical framework is Intersectionality. The term was coined by “Professor Kimberlé Crenshaw [in her] 1989 paper of the University of Chicago Legal Forum titled ‘Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politic’” (Encyclopædia Britannica, para. 2). In short, Crenshaw used this theory to help explain how prejudice and discrimination can have multiple layers. Legal and theoretical evidence was used to argue race and gender can have multiple burdens on a person’s

experiences yet American law and society did not view discrimination through multiple factors which might hide discrimination (Encyclopædia Britannica).

While this theory is “based on a concept developed over many decades of thinking and struggle by black and indigenous feminists and other women of color” (Runya, 2018, para. 2), it has been applied to many other forms of discrimination such as ageism, disability, class, etc. The theory focuses on how one of our social identities may not disadvantage us, but another social identity might have a negative impact on how we are perceived or limit the opportunities in our lives. An example is a white male in American society may be viewed in a positive light but then when identified as having a disability, may be perceived as less than human. This results in struggling more to obtain work or overlooked for promotion, or restricted from social activities of their choice, or lose opportunities to participate in political or economic activities. Crenshaw points out that intersectionality can be institutionalized into society through social networks and relationships making it a form of oppression based on race, gender identity, class, (Runya, 2018) or any other kind of social identity such as disability and ageism.

Intersectionality with Critical Disability Theory can help create a framework that sheds light onto how disability impacts a person’s social identity in the workplace. The framework can also help with explaining why employers or society have certain assumptions about what it means to be disabled. Organizations routinely question the capabilities of those with disabilities to lead or contribute toward the organization’s goals. While there is an emphasis on inclusion and “reasonable accommodation,” there is little to no emphasis on the education and understanding of the challenges that disabled employees face in their daily lives. In relation to hearing impairment, intersectionality

also recognizes that other social identities such as race, gender, and age can drastically impact how others perceive them. Intersectionality brings to light the multilayer prejudices that can exist in the workplace. By bringing that knowledge to light brings us one step closer to achieving a more just society for individuals with disabilities.

Social Justice Theory

Social Justice Theory is dedicated to bringing positive change or addressing social justice issues in a society (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The driving force of this research is to address social injustices against hearing impaired individuals who have been prohibited from entering the workplace or have been overlooked for promotion into leadership positions. This study focuses on individuals with hearing loss and recognizes disability as a dimension of human diversity (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Seeing disability as one of many aspects of humanity can lead to a call for action by organizations and leaders to make institutional changes for the purpose of achieving social justice (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Combined with Critical Disability Theory, Social Justice Theory structures the research to include the long history of disabled individuals being excluded from the market and employment. Social Justice Theory and Intersectionality ensure that the study recognizes that disability may not be the only trait where a person experiences prejudice. Disability associated with other characteristics such as race, gender, and age create greater changes of discrimination and mistreatment. Social justice seeks opportunities to improve the quality of life for those being marginalized and to find ways to open doors to new possibilities that didn't exist prior. The goal is to also empower disabled individuals and, in a sense, liberate them from the systemic and social barriers that are manifested in places such as the workplace.

In this research, Social Justice Theory serves to interpret how workplace structures, policies, and everyday practices can impact issues of equality, fairness, inclusion, and career opportunities. Achieving social justice in the workplace requires employers and institutions be aware of how to support their employees with disabilities. Employees with hearing loss are often discriminated against or overlooked in hiring processes because of misconceptions around the impacts of hearing loss. “According to the 2016 [American Community Survey] data, the rate of employment among individuals with a hearing disability was 51.7%” (Kalargyrou et al., 2021, p. 177) in the United States and as a researcher pursuing social justice, these percentages seem low and unjust.

The stories shared by the participants can help identify possible systematic barriers and obstacles faced by employees with hearing loss. Their stories can also provide hope and support for employees with hearing loss who struggle to enter the competitive work world or move up in their organizations. This research study strives to address the gap in the research literature of hearing-impaired individuals’ experiences in the workplace and to bring to light the challenges and desires of pursuing a leadership position within an organization. This study also addresses and dissipates the misunderstanding about hearing impairment in the workplace. This research study aims to find strategies and tactics that individuals with hearing loss can use to increase their chances of enter and navigating their career of choice.

Social Justice Theory partners well with grounded theory when pursuing qualitative research because both theories are interested in understanding a phenomenon and how individuals are shaped, limited, or oppressed by society in their experiences of the phenomenon. Social justice theory takes a “critical stance toward social structures and

processes that shape individual and collective life” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2017, p. 411). American culture often portrays individuals with physical or intellectual disabilities as being less capable in the workplace or taking on leadership positions compared to their abled counterparts. It was not until the passing of the ADA of 1990 that disabled individuals gained recognition as equals under the law. The ADA has had a positive impact in that it can encourage employers to consider hiring disabled individuals. However, there still appears to be a strong misconception of what it means to be disabled and stigma attached to the word disability either with the view that disabled individuals cost too much as employees or are unable to perform work that can benefit an organization.

This research study strives to address the gap in the research literature of hearing-impaired individuals’ experiences in the workplace and to bring to light the challenges and hopes of those seeking leadership opportunities.

Grounded Theory

A theory I will use in this dissertation that partners well with my theoretical framework of Disability Critical Theory, Intersectionality, and Social Justice is Grounded Theory. Grounded Theory is a “flexible, systematic, comparative method of constructing theory from data that supports studying social and social psychological processes” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2017, p. 411). Grounded Theory is a lens that helps to reveal the reality of how disabled individuals interact with oppressive social systems and the everyday practices by members of society contribute to the creation of barriers to disabled individual (Denzin & Lincoln, 2017). With my dissertation research, I aim to

empower individuals with hearing impairment to seek careers of their choice and if desired to have the confidence to pursue leadership opportunities. It is important for hearing-impaired employees to understand how their organizations operate and to understand what policies or practices may be unintentionally or indirectly creating barriers to their career advancements.

Grounded Theory provides the lens I need as a researcher to find the socio-economic and political origins of unspoken symbolism in society, actions performed by colleagues in a workplace, and society assumptions that people may not be easily identified without analysis (Denzin & Lincoln, 2017). Grounded Theory is a kind of comparative methods research which means as a researcher I look for multiple factors in my studies and interviews of hearing-impaired individuals that may provide an explanation why there are so few individuals with hearing impairment in leadership positions in organizations.

In a “grounded theory study...individuals may not be located at a single site and may be dispersed which can provide important contextual information useful in developing categories in the coding process...” (Creswell and Poth, 2018, p. 153). The participants in a grounded theory study will need to have participated in the phenomenon or activity being researched (Creswell and Poth, 2018) which ties nicely into my focus of narrative phenomenological research. In the case with my study, the participants will be individuals with hearing impairment who are in leadership positions or were once in a leadership position. Researchers using grounded theory method may find themselves at odds with the organization they work for or a group they associate with because the process of the research involves analyzing the organization, raising questions about the

organization and its employees that may lead to revealing of faults of the leaders or organization. This places the researcher, the participants, and the organizations in a vulnerable position and possible conflict (Creswell and Poth, 2018). Being cognizant of this reality, this dissertation focused not on any one organization or entity but rather on the shared stories of individuals through the common phenomenon of being a leader with hearing impairment in their current careers.

Emancipatory Disability Research

In Colin Barnes' (2003) journal article, he references emancipatory disability research as a type of research which aims to empower disabled individuals and to reduce systemic barriers or challenges misunderstandings about disabilities. (Barnes, 2003). Emancipatory disability research "...warrants the generation and production of meaningful and accessible knowledge about the economic, political, cultural, and environmental structures" (Barnes, 2003, p. 6). This research is valuable as disabled individuals navigate their careers toward leadership positions. Emancipatory disability research compliments Critical Disability Theory and Social Justice Theory because each is dedicated to aiding the positive integration and acceptance of disabled individuals into society and the workplace. These theories serve a practical purpose in pressing toward a more fair, equal, and just society for individuals with disabilities.

It is important to point out that disability research has received some criticism from the disability community. One of the more vocal critics places emphases on the influence of neoliberalism (or free market principles) on universities and research institutions (Barnes, 2003). This might negatively impact how the research is used by the

business community or research institutions. For example, the business community may use the research for the purpose of seeking greater profits or discovering approaches to manipulating disability policies to their favor. This study stresses to avoid this path and seeks to ensure that the research will lead to positive organizational and societal changes that improve the quality of life for individuals with hearing loss.

Another concern Barnes (2003) describes is the potential abuse of research data by leaders in organizations or political institutions, legislatures who are interested in maintaining the status quo rather than social justice, and the media who might portray data in a manner that harms rather than frees the participants of the study (Barnes, 2003). If research data is abused and manipulated, it could lead to negative impacts on the disability community or be used to weaken or dismantle social programs that support the disadvantaged. Money often plays a large role in research and depending on who is providing the funds could have a positive or detrimental impact on what is researched and how the research is used. Will the government, non-government organizations, or private enterprise cover the costs of further research. Will there be a need to protect the disabled community from certain funded research institutes?

Jan Walmsley's (2001) writings on emancipatory research on individuals with learning disability, points out "...emancipatory research is almost exclusively associated with the disability movement" (Walmsley, 2001, p. 195). It is often recognized as a strategy for disabled individuals to fight for their civil rights and the right to live independently. Emancipatory research builds on the social model of disability, arguing disability is a social construct where barriers are socially created, not a result of one's impairments (Walmsley, 2001). Even though Walmsley (2001) is referencing learning

disabilities, the points made are still valid in relation to how individuals with hearing impairment struggle to gain employment opportunities that could allow for career advancements.

Emancipatory research is greatly influenced by Paulo Freire, who advocated for critical pedagogy. Critical pedagogy is a reference to critical theory and the desire to free disadvantage and oppressed groups (Walmsley, 2001). Emancipatory research, like other methods of research, is dedicated to including participants in the creation and evolution of the research process. This study strives to discover the “essence” of the phenomenon of hearing impairment in the workplace to capture a more accurate picture of the experiences of individuals with hearing loss. This study also endeavors to be accountable to the disability community. It can be very difficult to be accountable to all members of the disability community as there is a wide variety of disabilities with different challenges and needs (Barnes, 2003).

As a person with a hearing loss who has lived and worked with a hearing impairment, I am confident that I can structure my research study in a manner that allows me to be respectful and accountable to the disability community. Most individuals with different impairments will understand that my research is focused solely on hearing loss, and I hope they will understand that my research should not be expected to apply to other forms of impairments or disabilities. Emancipatory research argues that the research needs to have a practical application for individuals in the disability community (Barnes, 2003).

This study intends to assist individuals with hearing impairment who are struggling to navigate through their careers and to achieve their career goals. Hopefully this research can assist individuals with disabilities seeking alternative perspectives on the challenges of navigating through one's career or strategies to develop themselves into potential leaders. This research will be available for organizations and leaders (with or without disabilities) who are interested to know how they can successfully include and integrate employees with hearing impairment into their workforce.

Research Questions

My research inquiry was guided by these research questions.

1. As an adult working professional (ages 30-64) in a leadership position who has a hearing impairment and communicates orally, what are the experiences of transitioning into a leadership position in an organization?
2. What organizational policies and practices make it more challenging for a person with hearing impairment to pursue leadership opportunities and promotion into leadership positions in an organization?
3. How are perspectives of hearing impairment as a disability viewed in the workplace and do they impact the onboarding experience?

I approached these questions through a narrative phenomenological approach that is further explained in Chapter Three, methodologies.

Limitations

Within the context of this study and throughout the research process, there are limitations. One limitation to recognize is that I pursued this dissertation research during a period of global pandemic which may have impacted the accessibility to information either through video conferences, phone conversations, and other forms of media instead of meeting with participants in person. It was my intention to still be able to collect relevant data relating to my research questions. While the world is in the process of returning to pre-pandemic activity levels and interactions, there may still have been limitations in the ability to reach out and connect with potential participants. In the hope to circumvent this limitation, I have been attending disability online meetings from various organizations such as the HLAA (Hearing Loss Association of America) and SMBC (Sumyomo Mytshu Banking Corporation) and in the future to identify other organizations that host online events.

A second limitation is that the research aims to focus on hearing impairment in the workplace which is only one aspect of a person's life. There may be social and relationship features that make up a person's experience in the workplace, but the research did not fully examine other aspects of the participants' life such as their family life, personal health, spiritual, recreation, and home. Also factors such as income, collegial friendships, and education may have come into play with the research.

A third limitation is that this research was established through my personal perspectives and biases. The research methods and theoretical framework were built on my own personal experiences and what appears to me to be important factors to be

considered when investigating hearing impairment in the workplace. Through my research and literature review, my perspectives may have changed, and my understanding of the topic may have expanded. Even with this recognition, I am aware that it may not have been sufficient in telling the story of desire and challenges by individuals with hearing impairment.

Educational Significance

This research strives to explore issues concerning individuals with hearing impairment who are navigating through their careers with the desire to pursue leadership roles. The first is to identify the challenges and barriers hearing impaired individuals face when pursuing promotions into leadership positions in an organization. Secondly, what abilities and knowledge are needed for those with hearing impairments to enter leadership positions? Third is to learn from those with hearing impairment in leadership positions what they believe organizations can do to support their employees with hearing impairments.

Definitions

Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA): Passed in 1990, the ADA is a federal law that provides American citizens with disability protection under the law against discrimination in the workplace or to have equal access to employment. ADA created standards for public physical space to be more accessible for disabled individuals (e.g., curb cuts and ramps for wheelchairs and brail writing on elevator buttons or room signs). ADA also guarantees the right to service animals and the right to the access to business

services among other programs the law provides. This law is considered the first civil rights bill for disabled Americans.

Assistive Hearing Device: The use of technology to amplify hearing capabilities or improve speech comprehension. Some examples include, but are not limited to, hearing aids, cochlear implants, and sound amplifier with headphone.

Degree of Hearing: There are seven degrees of hearing based on the dB HL (decibels hearing loss) units. Those seven degrees include: normal, slight/borderline normal, mild, moderate, moderately-severe, severe, and profound.

Disability: A social construct that portrays a person with limited physical or mental capability. Often it is viewed as a negative or something “other than normal” by the society.

Deaf: Deaf with a capital “D” is a cultural statement that the person with hearing loss who decides to not use technology to enhance their hearing and is also a member of the cultural group. Deaf with a lower case “d” is medical terminology to state that a person is unable to hear any noise.

G.I. Bill: Officially known as the Servicemen’s Readjustment Act of 1944, the G.I. Bill was passed to support World War II veterans to acclimate back into civilian life. The bill aided in covering education costs, low-cost home mortgages, and other financial assistance programs for veterans. While the official law no longer exists, many of its programs and services remain to this day in other federal laws.

Hearing Impairment: A medical terminology meaning a person who has a hearing range less than the average hearing person. In most cases it refers to a person who is unable to hear sounds under 25 decibels in volume. The range can consist of mild to moderate to severe to profound.

Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA): Formerly titled Education for All Handicapped Children Act, IDEA emphasizes equal access to education, focusing on including children with disabilities in regular classrooms and mandating that teachers provide assistance and accommodations for students with disabilities (Spring, 2020).

Individualized Education Plan (IEP): A federal mandate requiring local schools to develop and design joint educational plan with disabled students and their parents to ensure equal access to education for the disabled student. The IEP provides a space for negotiation between the parents/disabled students and the school regarding appropriate services for the student (Spring, 2020).

Leader: In this study, a leader is a person who is a manager, a supervisor, or a person in an organization who influences or motivates their colleagues. The person may also have influence on organizational policies or procedures.

Rehabilitation Act of 1973: Passed in 1973, it is a federal law that required affirmative action by Federal offices and is an anti-discrimination law for disabled individuals. It provided grants to states for employment and vocational assistance, provided some protections for people with disabilities, and authorized research relating to employment or living conditions for those with disabilities. National Association of the

Deaf. (2021). Rehabilitation Act of 1973. <https://www.nad.org/resources/civil-rights-laws/rehabilitation-act-of-1973/>

Working Adult: In the United States, a working adult is usually considered a person in the age range of 18-64. This study narrowed that range to ages 30-64 to focus on adults who have worked a few years after graduating from high school or completing their GED.

CHAPTER TWO: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Restatement of the Problem

An issue that needs to be addressed in the United States is how organizations can provide more opportunities for disabled individuals to grow as leaders and bring to the public more awareness of the stories of current leaders with disabilities in their organization. These stories can serve as inspiration and guidelines for individuals with disabilities who are struggling to navigate in the world. A wide range of laws have been passed such as ADA and the Rehabilitation Act, yet we see in the United States that a great number of disabled individuals are struggling to enter the workforce. The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics reported that in 2020, 17.9 percent of individuals with disabilities were employed, as compared to 61.8 percent of individuals without disabilities. This reveals a major difference in employment opportunities for those with disabilities (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2021, February 24).

These numbers are startling considering that the number of disabled students graduating from high school has risen from 61 percent in 1986 to 78 percent in 2001 and that these students are all potential candidates to enter higher education (Wolanin & Steele, 2004). The fact that just under 18 percent of disabled individuals are employed while roughly 78 percent are graduating from high school may reveal just how most employers and organizations have a negative view of hiring disabled workers. The Institute for Higher Education Policy reported that as of 2000, 73 percent of students with disabilities that graduated from high school had enrolled in some form of higher education (Wolanin & Steele, 2004), which is a positive sign of the rise in access to

education. This may also reveal the change in attitudes towards individuals with disabilities as capable of participating in higher education and achieving their educational goals.

When students with disabilities graduate from high school or a higher education institution, they are faced with the challenges of finding available jobs in the field of their interest. Graduates with disabilities may have additional hurdles to overcome such as discrimination or misconceptions of their capabilities due to having a disability that their non-disabled counterparts do not face. If they are fortunate enough to find a job that they like, the next challenge are the structural or cultural barriers they face in the workplace. In the case with individuals with hearing impairment, such barriers may include background noise, multiple speakers at a meeting, reluctance to reveal disability or request accommodations needed, fatigue from spending long periods of listening in work environment, and negative reactions or attitudes among colleagues (Punch et. al., 2007).

In this dissertation, I interviewed individuals with hearing impairment (ranging from mild to severe and profound), who are in leadership positions such as supervisor, manager, or in a position in the organization where one can influence policy or lead projects. In this narrative phenomenological research, the participants shared stories of their experiences with hearing loss in the workplace and how it has impacted their ability to navigate through their careers and to be hired or promoted into leadership positions. The knowledge and experiences shared in the research may reveal obstacles and barriers not often recognized or are unknown to researchers and the general public. The participants' stories provided wisdom for individuals with hearing loss who struggle in the competition for work or gain promotions in their organization.

Overview of the Literature

This review of the literature assists the reader in understanding why the focus of the dissertation research is on leadership opportunities for those with hearing impairment. Some topics the literature referenced encompasses the experiences of individuals with hearing impairment in their career pursuits, how they become leaders in their organizations, and how some organizations approach creating a more inclusive work environment. The main objective of this literature review is to provide context of previous research on the topic of hearing impairment and its impacts on a person's opportunity to be promoted into leadership roles in their organizations. The literature reveals the complexities involved with career advancements while also having a disability, particularly with respect to hearing impairment. The ability to communicate with others clearly and to keep up with the conversations in both formal and informal settings can play a role in the success or failures of a person striving to achieve career goals such as becoming a supervisor or manager of a department. Upward mobility in one's career usually leads to better pay and benefits that can have a positive impact on improving their quality of life. There have been great strides in opening educational opportunities for those with disabilities with the passing of several federal legislations such as the Americans with Disabilities Act (by opening economic opportunities and protecting those with disabilities from discrimination). Yet, despite the societal and legal advances made in the last few decades, very minimal research investigates the employment challenges of those with hearing impairment who struggle to navigate their careers and desire taking on leadership roles.

Education plays an important role in a person's ability to obtain work. In particular, higher education and professional education in the workplace often provide the opportunities for advancement in one's careers and possible promotions into leadership positions. The National Center on Secondary Education and Transition offers a "definition of success when students with special needs are transitioning from high school to adulthood...as the ability to demonstrate self-advocacy, make decisions, and express preferences" (Appelman et al., 2012, p. 265). Such success requires basic skills in reading, writing, mathematics, and social interaction (which ties into teamwork and professional networking). The ability to express oneself and to clearly communicate to their colleagues, supervisors, and clients or customers is built around the understanding of what is being said and building connections with others. Generally, this is done through speech and active listening. The "social/personal factors play a critical role in the success...in higher education, as well as subsequent success in the workforce" (Appelman et al., 2012, p. 266). The school environment and workplace are both structured around the ability to communicate and connect well with others. Regardless of the person's age, loss of hearing requires additional effort and energy to develop communication skills.

An organization that pays their employees a livable wage and establishes a safe and healthy work environment and supports their disabled employees can provide a person with a hearing loss the opportunity to be more independent and build those positive collegial relationships. To understand the benefits of establishing this kind of supportive work environment, the literature turns to some European nations that have been deemed successful in implementing disability supportive policies and strategies.

The Danish and Swedish, through their research on unemployment and disabilities, have made reforms and argued that “...exclusion from the labour market would cause general social exclusion, as well as worsening the already precarious social situation that ill and disabled persons face due to their health-related limitations” (Hultqvist & Nørup, 2017, p. 149). In the case with individuals who have hearing impairment, in “order to access missing information, individuals with hearing loss often have to depend on others” (Kumar, 2015, p. 344), especially as the competition for work shifts toward a global economy and communication becomes ever more important. In addition, “individuals with hearing loss get easily fatigued by communication because listening and communication consumes 50% of their energy, compared to a mere 5% of energy in hearing...” individuals (Kumar, 2015, p. 344). Kumar (2015) focused on teachers with hearing loss, but his statement equally applies to all workers with hearing impairment.

Individuals with hearing impairments must consider the challenges of how much time and energy they are able to apply to their jobs, in particular when they accept a leadership position in their organization. The organization has an obligation to educate employees about how they can support their supervisors and leaders who have hearing impairment. The leaders with hearing loss also play an important role in educating their colleagues on their needs and how best to communicate with them. Organizations have the opportunity to create supportive spaces that ensure all their employees are fully informed on the latest reports, policies, and organizational practices relating to disability in the workplace. According to Employers Forum on Disability (2007), most organizations do not build into their budget opportunities to support disabled employees or for promotion prospects (Roulstone & Williams, 2014). Organizations and their

leaders who are interested in creating a more inclusive and accepting work environment should consider including resources and initiatives that support employees with disabilities.

In recent decades, research has increased on disabled people entering the workplace through the context of equal access and diversity; however, almost no research addresses the question of disabled employees being promoted into leadership or management positions (Roulstone & Williams, 2014). Boucher (2017) points out that there is little to no mention of disability in the leadership literature (Martin, 2020). Having little research and information available on disability and leadership makes it more challenging for organizations to know what to do to support employees with hearing impairment interested in pursuing leadership positions. Despite the limited amount of information on disability in the workplace, great strides have been made in assisting disabled individuals to complete college education and pursue advanced degrees such as master's and doctoral studies.

To grasp the complex realities of being hearing impaired in the American workplace, a review of the social and economic history is important. Then, the literature review covers the topics of transformation leadership theory, communication theory of identity, career development and accommodations, socialization, influence of supervisors and colleagues, civil and disability rights, and disability self-identity in the workplace.

Social and Economic Barriers & Context of Disability History

Understanding that the workplace in the United States is greatly influenced by the ideologies and philosophies of capitalism, liberalism, individualism, the administrative

state, and medicalization can help set the stage for my research in how individuals with hearing impairment navigate their careers and pursue leadership opportunities or career advancements. These principles that have become the foundation of the United States in the modern age influence how Americans view themselves as individuals in a society. It also impacted the opportunities open for disabled and non-disabled individuals but can create social and economic barriers.

Russell (2001) references two economic historians, Karl Polanyi and E.P. Thompson, who point out that as societies shifted from agrarian feudalist model to industrial capitalist societies, the view of human labor changed into a wage worker where land-owning or material-owning individuals could control labor through economic mechanisms (Russell, 2001). Workers were now viewed as machines that needed to operate at a certain pace and method of work that only able-bodied individuals could perform. This brought rise to the idea that individuals with physical or mental impairments who could not meet the new industrialists' requirements of work were considered unemployable or disabled. Russell (2001) also references Karl Marx's Labor Theory of Value which in short refers to the capitalist accumulation of a laborer's surplus labor value, meaning that the laborer provides their skills in exchange for wages or salary when the amount the laborer produces higher value than is paid, the capitalist keep the surplus production in the form of profits. With industrialism and capitalism, society ends up

creating both a class of proletarians and a class of disabled who did not conform to the standard worker body...[and] a market-driven society meant that disabled persons perceived as less use to the competitive profit cycle were excluded from

work. As a result, disabled persons came to be regarded as a social problem and justified segregating individuals with impairments from mainstream life. (Russell, 2001, p. 89)

With cost being an important factor to businesses and capitalists, they see employees in terms of costs and benefits. They appear to believe that disabled individuals will be a major cost to their business or organization but rarely consider the benefits. In the struggle for rights, the ADA of 1990 was a step in the direction of recognizing the harsh historical reality of how capitalism and industrialism forced disabled individuals out of the labor force and society. The attempt to include disabled workers into the economic sphere of American life has met some resistance, most notably from businesses and capitalist. Also, some schools segregate disabled students from abled students with the support of state governments and school boards. Furthermore, the ADA plainly states that “employers are not required to provide an accommodation if it would impose undue hardship on the business” (Russell, 2001, p. 90). This fact reveals how the right to accommodations is not really a right but rather an option for the business and capitalists to determine if they are willing to invest in their employee or not. The business or organization uses their budget and business practice to justify if they will not hire or provide support to an employee with disabilities. This argument could also be used as a way to mask discrimination or prejudice.

Abberley (1987), in his journal article, “The Concept of Oppression and the Development of a Social Theory of Disability,” points out that the concept of disabled individuals being oppressed involved slightly different factors than when discussing oppression of individuals based on their gender or race. Disabled individuals then are

considered by society as inferior to abled individuals which is "...dialectically related to an ideology or group of ideologies which justify and perpetuate..." this belief (Abberley, 1987, p. 7). When determining who is considered disabled, we often look to the medical experts and to the government for definitions. However, are these legitimate sources in determining what is and is not a disability? Are there social or political or even financial factors that influence how these definitions are created? Were those with disabilities included in the discussion on how to define disability?

Abberley (1987) makes a distinction between oppression of those based on gender and race and those based on disability. For gender and racial oppression, their "...biological differences serve only as a qualifying difference to ideological oppression..." (Abberley, 1987, p. 8). In the case with disabled individuals, their impairment can serve as a layer of oppression itself or a barrier toward resisting oppression whether social or systemic. Therefore, disability rights activists are critical in society, whether they have a disability themselves or not. There is a need to support and teach individuals with disabilities how to build self-confidence in who they are and how to be self-advocates. Also, good education must be available to help expand their understanding of the world they live in and develop paths through life to achieve their personal and professional goals.

Capitalism is focused on how individuals can be productive and can be exploited in a way that allows capitalist to accrue profits which leads society to discuss disability in terms of how to make disabled individuals productive (or useful) in the making of profit (Abberley, 1987). We need to understand that when looking at individuals with impairments, most employers in the United States are trained to think in terms of finance

or capitalist modes of production perspectives. This is a predesigned notion of how to look at human beings.

Alternative approaches to viewing individuals with impairments do exist. Several authors have pointed out that the arrival of industrialism and capitalism led to a new emphasis on the speed of production and time that didn't exist in prior economic systems such as feudalism. For example, Anne Borsay (1998) in her journal article, "Returning Patients to the Community: Disability, Medicine and Economic Rationality Before the Industrial Revolution," references three scholars (Finkelstein, Stone, and Oliver) who provide history of the transition from feudalism to industrial capitalism. These authors point out that prior to the industrial revolution, individuals with impairments were more able to enter some form of employment. Yet with the arrival of modern capitalist societies came the rise of medical supervision and segregation of those with impairments into medical institutions (Borsay, 1998). Finkelstein (1980) and Stone (1984) questioned why disabled individuals were often excluded and ended up on the bottom of society:

With the arrival of large-scale industry with production-lines designed around abled bodies, impaired individuals were removed that had previously been integrated. A second factor was the rise in medical institutions that were operated by medical experts who segregated disabled individuals from society. Lastly, Stone points out that the industrial society was faced with the 'distributive dilemma' mean that society has two distributive systems, one based on work and the other on need. The predicament was how to reconcile both without undermining production. (Borsay, 1998, p. 647).

Disability was excluded from labor and the economy as a solution to address the capitalist approach to distributing resources and production of goods. In short, a person with an impairment was not considered part of the capitalist formula.

Oliver (1990) argues that capitalism naturally excludes individuals who are not productive or underproduce while in “agriculture or small-scale industry did not preclude the great majority of disabled people from participating in the production process” (Oliver as cited in Borsay, 1998, p. 647). This brings to light again how the term “disability” is interpreted today through the lens of capitalism and emphasis on being productive for industry. Borsay (1998) references Colin Barnes (1996) who points out that discrimination against disabled individuals does not arise just because of industrialism and capitalism. In fact, a wide range of works and writings from ancient Greek culture or Judaeo-Christian religions describes impaired individuals as outsiders of society (Borsay, 1998). Collin Barnes (1996) explains that such misconceptions and discriminations tie in with society’s mainstream beliefs and values as well as the economic, social, and political systems that bind the society together (Barnes as cited by Borsay, 1998). When looking at individuals with disabilities in the workplace, researchers need to be aware of the influence of many factors (economic, social, cultural, or political) at play.

Considering capitalism’s view of what is considered an abled-bodied worker creates a sense of what is “normal” or a kind of standard that is acceptable. Galvin (2006) points out:

The historical rupture that created the conditions for the emergence of disability as we now know it occurred during the 18th and 19th centuries in Western societies, during which time the administrative state, capitalism, positivist science and liberal philosophy came into being. It was during this time that disability became administrative, medicalised, institutionalised, calibrated, and ontologically vital for the definition of the modern subject. (p. 500)

This historical influence on the definition of disability points to why sometimes when organizations such as the workplace or schools segregate disabled individuals from the general inclusivity. At first glance it may appear the leaders are trying to assist the individual(s) with disabilities by arguing they are protecting them, but in actuality it is a violation of their right to participate. The push for more inclusion is in part an attempt to challenge this perspective on disability. However, it is not “forced-inclusion” American society needs; rather, it is the acceptance of others and the voluntary inclusion of others into the workforce.

The social model of disability argues that prior to appearances of factory-style (fast-paced production-line) work and industrialism, individuals with disabilities were more likely to participate in the productive activities because their skills and abilities could be applied or accommodated to the production process (Galvin, 2006). As a result of this, individuals who had impairments were active members of the community. They were not considered an independent group that needed to be excluded from the means of production. With machinery and factory-styled work, speed and timing grew to be more crucial, and the definition of an abled worker became stricter and more concise, leaving

not just disabled individuals out of the labor force but also individuals who did not fit the mold. This led to the creation of an early form of unemployment.

The National Organization on Disability released a report in 2004 asserting that Americans with disabilities continue to fall short compared to their non-disabled peers in gaining employment and achieving goals in other aspects of their lives (Kim & Williams, 2012). This organization is responsible to coordinate American companies and Americans with disabilities to find opportunities of employment for those with disabilities. According to statistics presented by the U.S. Department of Labor, Office of Disability Employment Policy (ODEP), the unemployment rate for people with disabilities and of working age (ages 16-64), as of September 2021, is 9.7% compared to 4.5% unemployment rate for persons without disability (US Department of Labor, 2021). According to the ODEP report, the labor force participation rate for people with disabilities is 36.4% compared to 76.5% for persons without disability (US Department of Labor, 2021). These percentages reveal how disabled individuals compare to non-disabled individuals in the United States. Those with disabilities have a greater struggle in obtaining employment compared to non-disabled individuals. Regarding the percentages for unemployment, it must be noted that this only considers individuals actively seeking employment. It leaves out the individuals with disabilities who have become discouraged and gave up looking for employment.

It was suggested in the 1960s during the civil rights and women's liberation movement that the disabled community should start their own movement and protest for the right to representation and to be considered full citizens (Oliver & Zarb, 1989). This sparked a debate among disability activists about how disability can be defined and if a

single movement could represent all individuals with disabilities for political purposes. The issue of concern was whether a single movement could be effective in presenting to the public the challenges of all individuals with disabilities or if multiple political movements should each represent a specific disability. Oliver and Zarb (1989) state that the irony of the disability movement's struggle to gain political and public recognition involved stating that disabled people are a minority group while still acknowledging the disabled-nondisabled distinction taught in society. In other words, the disability community would have to accept themselves as a minority while also fighting to be recognized as equals among their abled peers.

While this dissertation focuses on disabled individuals in the workplace, we must recognize other aspects of how disabled individuals are impacted, such as by social and political factors that tie in with their experiences in the workplace or may hinder their efforts to thrive in their careers. We have seen how the rise of modern medicine, the state, and industrial capitalism coordinated in creating what defined a disabled person. In short, a person who didn't fit the mold of the factory workplace and then later the professional workplace. The power of definitions and categorization can allow for a kind of division among a population. For example, the modern "...state does provide services to the disabled population as a way to foster division...[for example] it gives tax allowances to the blind..." (Oliver & Zarb, 1989, p. 222) but not to other members of the disabled community. Other tactics by the state are used as a way to treat one group of disabled individuals differently from another group of disabled individuals. This can create division and resentment among individuals with different disabilities and thus makes it less likely to allow disabled individuals to unite against the state and the status quo.

Transformational Leadership Theory

A wide range of leadership theories exist in the literature and different approaches may be relevant or appropriate under different circumstances. This research focuses on transformational leadership as it aligns with the concept of leaders creating a transformative work environment. It is a “process that changes and transforms people” (Northouse, 2019, p. 163). With this study revolving around the needs of disabled employees, transformation leadership is very appropriately “concerned with emotions, values, ethics, standards, and long-term goals. It includes assessing followers’ motives, satisfying their needs, and treating them as full human beings” (Northouse, 2019, p. 163). Transformational leadership evolved out of political sociologist James MacGregor Burns’ work entitled *Leadership* (1978) which attempted to link the roles of leadership and followership. It views each employee as an individual and attempts to understand the person as a whole, recognizing that each person has different needs, ways of being, and methods of working.

Transformational leadership is the “process whereby a person engages with others and creates a connection that raises the level of motivation and morality in both the leader and the follower” (Northouse, 2019, p. 164). Burns (1978) describes how in an organization, transformational leadership appears in the form of a person who attempts to redirect and change the organizational culture toward a more humane standard of operating, where employees are treated as human beings, with fairness, and engages work practices in a way that addresses social justice. Employees with disabilities who encounter transformative leadership are empowered and develop confidence in their own ability to contribute toward organizational goals.

Transformational leadership is dedicated to “improving the performance of followers and developing followers to their fullest potential” (Northouse, 2019, p. 169). While all employees benefit from a leader who is dedicated to lifting them up, individuals with disabilities may require additional focus and support to overcome the barriers in the workplace. Northouse lists four factors that reveal transformative leadership. The first is idealized influence, leaders acting as strong role models for their colleagues. Leaders who are good role models can show their colleagues what positive interaction with employees with disabilities looks like. The second is inspirational motivation, leaders who communicate high expectations and inspire followers to become committed to the shared vision of the organization. Leaders can create a diverse and inclusive workplace for all employees. This includes bringing in employees with disabilities onto the team and inspiring a more positive environment where employees feel safe and confident. The third factor is intellectual stimulation, stimulating followers to be creative and innovative as well as challenging their own beliefs and values of the leader and organization. A leader who is able to provide the opportunity for employees to encounter challenges and to coordinate with their colleagues to solve those challenges are opportunities to bring employees together. Individuals with disabilities may sometimes feel they are unable to provide assistance or creative ideas to the team. A leader can influence and encourage creative thinking by asking employees questions or including them in staff meetings where employees with disabilities can feel safe to speak their mind.

The fourth is individualized consideration, providing a climate in which they listen carefully to the individual needs. An employee with disabilities may be shy or embarrassed to speak about the challenges or barriers they face in the workplace. Leaders

need to listen carefully and observe from a distance to identify what those challenges or barriers may be. Sometimes a leader needs to address those challenges and barriers, even if the employee with a disability doesn't approach the leader. When the employee with a disability does approach the leader with their issues, the leader must take the opportunity to create the time and space to discuss what can be done to assist the employee so they can be productive and feel they are a part of the team.

The opposite of transformative leadership is "pseudotransformational leadership which describes leaders who are self-consumed, exploitative, and power oriented, with warped moral values" (Northouse, 2019, p. 165). An employee with disability may encounter this in the form of discrimination or being overlooked for opportunities to lead projects. A leader who is consumed with their own success may consider a colleague with a disability as a hindrance rather than a positive. The goal of any leader in an organization should be to pursue transformational leadership to create an environment that benefits all members of the organization.

As with any theory, there are criticisms of transformational leadership. One criticism is that it "lacks conceptual clarity, covering a wide range of activities and characteristics, it is difficult to define the parameters of transformational leadership" (Northouse, 2019, p. 180). Another criticism is the validity of how transformational leadership is tested and analyzed. The testing method known as multifactor leadership questionnaire (MLQ) is being challenged because many of the qualifications or factors that define transformational leadership can sometimes be found in other leadership styles and theories.

A third criticism is that “transformational leadership treats leadership as a personality trait or personal predisposition rather than a behavior that people can learn” (Northouse, 2019, p. 181). This becomes challenging as it would mean training individuals to be transformational leaders may not be possible but that then would make the theory not applicable for preparing for future leaders. The fourth criticism is having insufficient research and evidence to support the claim that transformational leadership “actually able to transform individuals and organizations” (Northouse, 2019, p. 181). The fifth criticism to come up is that transformational leadership can be viewed as “elitist and antidemocratic because this kind of leader often plays a direct role in creating changes, establishing a vision, and advocating new directions giving the sense they are acting independent” (Northouse, 2019, p. 181). A very important criticism to consider is that this theory can lead to the “potential to be abused because it is concerned with changing people’s values and moving them to a new vision” (Northouse, 2019, p. 182), yet who has the right to direct followers in a direction that they may contradict their own beliefs and values or way of being.

The last criticism that Northouse (2019) points out is that transformational leadership “may not be well received by millennials because millennials may be less willing to collaborate with others to achieve common goals” (Northouse, 2019, p. 182). This last criticism may be Northouse’s personal perspective and not based on evidence from research.

The author of this dissertation is a member of the millennial generation and worked in city government. The author of this dissertation served in the public sector, driven by the desire to coordinate with colleagues in city government, with community

members, and leaders from various organizations and movements. His personal experience contradicts Northouse's (2019) last critique in that many millennials worked with and encountered in his life are very dedicated to supporting others and desire to see strong and healthy communities that they can be active participants. It may be that millennials have not yet had the opportunity to show their desire and ability to be led and to lead projects. External factors such as economic, political, or systemic factors may have hindered millennials abilities to participate in a more social role in organizations and society. Transformative leadership can serve to empower individuals with and without disabilities, to open opportunities for advancement in their careers, and to create a diverse and inclusive work environment.

Communication Theory of Identity

Communication Theory of Identity helps to understand how those with hearing impairment may struggle more often than their hearing counterparts when it comes to building personal and professional relationships. Beckner and Helme (2018) were interested in understanding how individuals with hearing loss saw themselves and used "Communication Theory of Identity in their interactive interviews to gain insight into four layers of identity – personal, relational, enacted, and communal – in the hearing-impaired individual" (p. 394). A key factor to building positive relationships in the workplace (and in our personal lives) is often through verbal communication. Our ability to communicate clearly with others is a two-way street through both speaking and listening. "Communication Theory of Identity (CTI) was introduced as a way of explaining how individuals create, enact, and communicate identity through their interpersonal and intergroup interactions" (Beckner & Helme, 2018, p. 396). This theory

compliments impression management where individuals in the workplace dedicate time and energy to presenting themselves in a certain manner and style to their colleagues to influence how others view them (Johnson, 2019).

Some individuals with hearing impairments may not have learned how to communicate in the style and manner often taught to individuals with hearing. This can create confusion or tension between individuals with hearing loss and those who have hearing. Even among hearing peers, there are differences in communication styles and manners, but usually the pace and mannerism are similar in a way that allows for casual and smooth flowing conversations is expected from each other. Individuals with hearing loss may have to ask others to repeat a word or a sentence which can sometimes create friction or even frustration among some hearing individuals. Generally speaking, family members of individuals with hearing loss go through a transition in learning how to actively listen and clearly speak with their hearing-impaired family members. However, those who did not grow up with a family member with hearing loss may not know what to do or may not understand what communication challenges are arising.

From my own experiences, I have learned that for those with hearing impairment, it is very crucial they present themselves as capable of communicating clearly and in a manner acceptable by their hearing peers. If not, the person with hearing impairment could risk being viewed as unable to perform complex work, even if the person has the skills and knowhow. Like all individuals in the workplace, the organization and its leaders have an obligation to provide employees with the resources and support required to perform their job.

Career Development and Accommodations

As individuals with hearing impairment transition from the school environment to the workplace, they may experience the difficulty of entering and participating in the workplace. For individuals with hearing impairment newly hired may discover indirect or direct social barriers to upward mobility in their careers. According to Punch, Hyde, and Creed (2004), the “evidence indicates that deaf and hard of hearing people have been underrepresented in professional and managerial occupations, and overrepresented in blue-collar occupations especially manufacturing” (Punch & et al., 2004, p. 30). This begs the question, why is this the case? Also “vocational rehabilitation experts Edna Szymanski and David Hershenson assert, the “limitations of disabilities are not inherent within individuals, but rather in individuals’ interactions with their environments”” (Punch & et al., 2004, p. 32). For example, an employee with a mobility disability may face challenges entering a building if there are only stairs and no ramp. Another example can be a person with a hearing impairment may not be able to use a telephone that lacks closed captioning features. Organizations need to be aware of the design of a building or the arrangement of a physical space so that modifications can be made to reduce barriers to access and ability to independently operate within a physical space.

The most common challenge shared among hearing impaired employees involves “group situations such as departmental and staff meetings, in-service training sessions, and work-related social functions—all situations that are important to career maintenance and advance” (Punch & et al., 2004, p. 32). Organizations need to take into consideration the physical space being used for meetings, training, and social functions at work, recognizing what might impair a person with disability. In the case with a person with

hearing loss, organizations can take into consideration is the room quiet or does it seem to be noisy? Is there enough lighting that allows everyone to see each other's faces in case a person needs to lip read? The physical space can be either a barrier or supportive to an individual with a disability depending on whether an organization addresses the issues. The physical space can also increase or decrease the opportunities for individuals with hearing loss. If a person with hearing loss has to use a room that absorbs sound and keeps echoes at bay, they will have a greater opportunity to reveal their leadership and facilitating skills. If, however, the room doesn't keep outside noise away and speech echoes in the room, most likely the individual with hearing loss will struggle to hear their colleagues and thus struggle to lead. This reality can either hinder or enhance a person with disability to compete for leadership roles. A person with hearing impairment may be at a disadvantage in meetings where they unintentionally miss information without knowing. Organizations are aware of this reality, and this might influence their decisions on who they promote into leadership roles.

In the United States, the general population is aware of the employer's obligations to meet reasonable accommodations for their employees with disabilities. Scherich, Scherich and Mowry (1997) discovered in their research of individuals with hearing impairment in the workplace that the most provided accommodations were amplified telephones, text telephones, or colleagues assisted in making calls (Punch, et al., 2004). In one of their studies with hearing impaired workers, Scherich, Scherich, and Mowry (1997) learned that 62 percent of respondents felt their present accommodations did not meet their needs, and 31 percent reported that they had been denied a requested accommodation (Punch, et al., 2004). This data reveals the need for organizations to be

better aware of how they approach providing accommodations to their employees with disability. Another way to look at this data is perhaps the need for an improvement in how organizations communicate with their employees with disabilities so that all employees get the appropriate accommodations and resources for them to success in their jobs. This may not mean that employers do not want to provide accommodations, only that there may be a disconnect between what organizations believe they need to do and what course of actions is actually needed to support their employees with disabilities.

Some organizations and employers do their best to provide accommodations for their employees with disabilities but still fail to create an inclusive work environment. Part of this failure may be due to the lack of definition of what it means to be disabled. The ADA does not define such terms as “disability,” “substantial limitation,” or “major life activity” (Sager, 2003). The determination of the definition of these three terminologies falls under the “courts’ responsibility with guidance from the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC)” (Sager, 2003, p. iii). This gives courts and the EEOC great influence over how ADA laws are interpreted and applied to employees with disabilities.

Even with the existence of the Americans with Disabilities Act, companies in the United States are able to pay people with disabilities subminimum wage because of Section 14(c) of the Fair Labor Standards Act (Carli & Rizzolo, 2020), which would make it very difficult for any person, let alone those with hearing impairments, to build an independent and good quality life for themselves. There have been recent attempts to improve pay for those with disabilities such as with the Fair Wages to Workers with Disabilities Act (H.R. 3086), which was introduced to discontinue the issuing of special

wage certificates. The bill was widely supported by major national disability groups that advocate for people with different types of disabilities. Unfortunately, it died in the House in 2011 shortly after being introduced (Carli & Rizzolo, 2020). In 2021, the California State Legislature successfully passed SB 639 Minimum Wage: Persons with Disabilities that updated state labor laws, prohibiting the state government from issuing special licenses to employers requesting the ability to pay subminimum wages to employees with disabilities starting January 1, 2022. The law also plans to phase out the current special licenses by January 1, 2025 (Minimum wages: Persons with disabilities, 2021). Disability rights associations and some legislators continue to make the effort to push for legislation that updates minimum wage laws so that individuals with disabilities have equal pay as their non-disabled peers.

While these above-mentioned efforts in the United States have been made to improve pay conditions and working opportunities for those with disabilities, few efforts have been given to create a working environment that provides the space for upward mobility. While some supervisors and managers support colleagues with disabilities, organizations may not be able or willing to open career paths for disabled individuals, particularly if they are young or inexperienced. Due to this reality of the workplace, children and young adults with hearing loss will need to learn how to be self-advocates in the classroom and then later in the workplace. The classroom is a perfect environment for students with hearing loss to learn how best to communicate with their teachers and school administrators about their hearing loss and to learn how to request assistance and accommodations when needed. K-12 schools and higher education institutions should also play a role in normalizing disability by including students with disability into the

classroom with their non-disabled peers. Schools and the workplace both serve as strategic locations to assist hearing impaired individuals in developing skills and knowledge and to instill confidence and hope in their ability to be leaders.

Stigma and misinformed assumptions “interact[ing] with environmental [physical] barriers, [can] affect the career outcomes and advancement of workers with hearing loss” (Punch et al., 2004, p. 32). Perception of hard-of-hearing employees can limit how an organization can view the opportunities available to those with disabilities and that is a form of discrimination, even if unintended. According to Punch, Hyde, and Creed, (2004) “there is a dearth of studies—and, consequently, a dearth of empirical evidence—on the career development of adolescents and young adults with hearing loss, as the few researchers who have investigated this area have pointed out” (p. 34). It is this gap that this study hopes to fill. For disabled individuals, career development involves a combination of pursuing social justice, providing accommodations, and creating a supportive atmosphere for all (abled and disabled) to thrive in the workplace.

Socialization of New Employees into the Organization

As with any new employee, organizations should be dedicated to establishing a smooth transition or socialization of new employees with disability into the organization. Socialization is the process of “new employees being assimilated into the organization, developing an understanding of values, expected behaviors, and social knowledge...” (Kulkarni & Lengnick, 2001, p. 521). If the socialization process is well managed and new employees are provided the support and guidance they need to integrate into part of the organization, they will “achieve desired levels of job performance, are satisfied with

their jobs, and develop innovative ways to fulfill their organizational roles” (Kulkarni & Lengnick, 2001, p. 523). For individuals with disabilities, it may take longer for them to complete the socialization process since they are tackling both the adjustment to a new environment and relationships while also determining what challenges they may face due to their disability.

If the work environment is not suitable for the person with a disability and the organization is unable or unwilling to make the accommodations needed, then it becomes more likely that the person with the disability will not fully integrate into the organization and thus does not fully complete the socialization process. This could have a detrimental impact on the disabled person’s success in the organization and determine the possibility of future opportunities to advance in their careers.

In India, research has found that individuals with disabilities are often given more task-related duties and are less likely to casually or lightheartedly interact with their colleagues in the workplace (Kulkarni & Lengnick, 2001). These are barriers in themselves toward building positive collegial relationships. If the jobs available to those with disabilities are only task-oriented, they may not have the opportunity share their ideas or thoughts. Ultimately, the disabled person would have little opportunity to reveal their leadership or creative thinking capabilities, leading to career advancement opportunities.

Part of the integration process includes social gatherings, understanding one’s role(s) in the organization, how they can properly complete their assignments and tasks, and the informal interactions during meetings or events. For those with hearing

impairment, social activities can be challenging, in particular if the colleagues have not been properly trained and informed about the challenges of hearing loss and the limitations of assistive listening devices. The socialization process can be more effective and positive for new employees with disabilities with supervisors and colleagues who are invested in creating a more inclusive, supportive, and encouraging environment.

Supervisors and coworkers play a role in integrating new employees into organizations. Supervisors do so by “providing new employees with learning opportunities and by signaling new employee social acceptance” (Kulkarni & Lengnick, 2001, p. 525). Supervisors are also crucial in building relationships among members of their team, clarifying miscommunications or educating their team members about each other’s needs and challenges.

Coworkers are equally important in the socialization process and may even have a greater impact on how positive the integration experience is for those with disabilities. In an organization, coworkers play a crucial role directly or indirectly accepting new employees into the organization and have an immeasurable impact on how effectively new employees develop skills and knowledge needed for their jobs through informal feedback or direct instruction (Kulkarni & Lengnick, 2001). For employees with disabilities, it is never clear how others will react to them or will even provide support and assistance. A good manager or supervisor will dedicate time to ensuring that their team members respect and recognize each other’s contributions to the team and organization. The efforts by supervisors, colleagues, and the organization to support and provide opportunities for their employees with disabilities is one way of protecting each person’s human and disability rights.

Civil Rights, Equal Rights, and Disability Rights

In the history of the United States, there has been a continued effort to secure and expand civil rights for individuals with disabilities. Through the foundations of human rights and liberalism (the ideology), arguments are made that disabled individuals should have equal rights under the law and be allowed to participate in society on equal terms with their non-disabled counterparts. Part of this includes the need for accommodations and support by individuals, organizations, and institutions. Some disability rights activists such as Marta Russell (2019) argued that disability rights are not compatible with capitalism or liberalism (the ideology) because the nature of disability as an “exploitable workforce” (pp. 12-13) is viewed as too costly. Individuals with disability are often prevented from participating in the labor force and the concept of rights for disabled individuals is not just having political rights but also the right to participate in the economy as laborers with accommodations and as consumers, which is not part of the original argument of liberalism (Russell & Rosenthal, 2019).

The ideas of rights have evolved over the decades, and the definition of rights in the United States has expanded significantly during the 1900s. During the 20th century women gained the right to vote in the 1920s, the civil rights movements of the 1960s expanded rights for African Americans and other racial groups, and in the 1990s disabled Americans gained equality and rights under the law as well as the right to accommodations in the workplace and at home. “Oppression of disabled people in the modern (i.e., capitalist) world is no mere historical accident...rather capitalism and disability are structurally, necessary, and ontogenetically linked in a dialectical process of mutual reinforcement” (Russell & Rosenthal, 2019, p. viii). This points out an interesting

conundrum for modern society to address. It is time to reconsider how American society and government may improve conditions not just for disabled individuals but for all disadvantaged groups in the United States.

After the passing of the Americans with Disabilities Act in the United States, society overall felt it had addressed the issue of disability rights. However, today we still find individuals with disabilities are sometimes, if not often, segregated from the general population with the argument that they need to be cared for or need to be “protected.” An example is when a school segregates students with disabilities from the regular classroom and places them in “special ed” classes. This is a form of segregation. If one were to replace the term “disability” with a specific race or gender, it becomes clearer how this form of treatment violates their human rights and reverses the efforts toward more inclusion. Russell (2019) referenced an organization called Union of the Physically Impaired Against Segregation (UPIAS) in Britain that back in the 1970s “pointed out that ‘disability is something imposed on top of our impairments by the way we are unnecessarily isolated and excluded from full participation in society’” (Russell & Rosenthal, 2019, p. 1). Russell’s (2001) perspective on the term disability is that it is a socially constructed term to point out that an individual, in political, economic, and productive terms, is not exploitable in the capitalist’s perspective (Russell, 2001) and thus should be rejected by modern society and not allowed to participate in the labor market.

Legal History and Disability Rights Movement

Disability history is complex and, in many cases, silenced to hide from the general population’s knowledge of what it meant (and means) to be disabled in American

society. For much of human recorded history and in most parts of the world, people with disabilities were subjected to a broad range of oppression and discrimination and considered a burden in some societies (Ability, 2015).

In some cases, they were killed or exiled. In rare cases disabled individuals were “supported by their family, neighbors, employers, charitable institutions, or left to begging to survive” (Ability, 2015, para. 4). In the early American colonies, prior to the revolutionary war, “colonists tried to prevent the immigration of those who could not support themselves and would have to rely on state help” (Shapiro, 1994, p. 58) and in some cases forced individuals with disabilities to return to their original country. America since its early foundation has had an uneasy relationship with disability.

Treatment of Americans with Disability

During the American Revolutionary War, Civil War, and both World Wars, the American government did create funds and programs that would provide some relief for veterans who became disabled, though usually those funds were limited and the programs temporary. Under the Franklin D. Roosevelt administration (1933-1945), established the Social Security program in 1935. This was the first time in American history that a permanent welfare program for individuals with disabilities was established. President Roosevelt’s experience with losing his ability to walk due to Polio most likely made him more empathetic toward Americans struggling with disabilities and influenced his push for a permanent Social Security program.

The advances of medicine and knowledge of the human body during the 17th and 18th century led to the creation of the medical model of the early 19th century. In short, the medical model “defines disability as an individual defect lodged in the person, a

defect that must be cured or eliminated if the person is to achieve full capacity as a human being” (Siebers, 2011, p. 3). In the United States, the medical model became a key method to managing individuals with disabilities and influenced the American public’s view of needing to feeling pity toward those with disability. Later in the 1980s, another model appeared and challenged the medical model, known as the “social model [which] defined disability relative to the social and built environment, arguing that disabling environments produce disability in bodies and require interventions at the level of social justice” (Siebers, 2011, p. 25).

Disability Movements in the 20th Century

In the 1930s, when the Great Depression hit the United States, disabled people turned to civil disobedience for the first time (Shapiro, 1994). Negrón-Gonzales (2017) points out that “a lack of political power can be harnessed as strength...such as the use of civil disobedience” (p. 422). An organization known as the Physically Handicapped occupied the Works Progress Administration offices in Washington to protest that they were being routinely rejected for WPA jobs (Shapiro, 1994). They were very successful. Following the occupation and protests, some disabled individuals obtained work through the WPA. After World War II, many disabled soldiers returned from the war and were getting married or returning to wives they married prior to leaving to fight. As a result, there was a growing concern among the disabled community about what opportunities would exist for them and for their children with disabilities. This influenced the thinking of a new generation of disability activists in the 1960s that sparked the creation of the 20th century disability movements.

The disability rights movement of the 1960s and '70s arose in large part to challenge systemic oppression, prejudices, and misconceptions. Activists learned from the civil rights movements of the 1960s that peaceful demonstrations could lead to new legislation that could have a huge and positive impact on society. The disability rights movement is a unique type of social movement that is not focused on just one type of disability, but all types of disabilities. The movement is distinctive because “diversity is its central characteristic. No one leader or organization can claim to speak for all disabled people” (Shapiro, 1994, p. 11). Ironically, “without one highly visible leader, the disability movement has gone largely unnoticed by nondisabled people” (Shapiro, 1994, p. 11). One of the more memorable protests by the disability rights activists was the 504 Sit-In protest in San Francisco on April 5, 1977, organized by a wide number of disability activists and led by Judith Heumann, a disability rights activists, teacher, and has served in various government positions relating to disability services.

During this protest, approximately “150 disability rights activists occupied the fourth floor of a federal building, then later the whole building, in San Francisco for twenty-eight days” (Osorio, 2022, p. 243). Varda (2019) illustrates that “...sit-in has been an effective tactic for labor and social movements for more than a century...[that includes such protests as the] Industrial Workers of the World (IWW) protests in 1906” (p. 133)

Section 504 of Rehabilitation Act of 1973

Section 504 in the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 in short was an anti-discrimination law, prohibiting programs or agencies that were funded by federal dollars to discriminate against individuals with disabilities. The “Rehabilitation Act’s Section 504...was based

on previous laws that banned discrimination based on race, sex, or background by programs and businesses that received federal funding” (Hayes, 2017, p. 14). This was the first law to “recognize that there was discrimination and prejudice toward individuals with disabilities” (Hayes, 2017, p. 14). Prior to the law being passed, smaller advocacy groups existed for certain disabilities, but they were separate from one another (Hayes, 2017). After the passing of the Rehabilitation Act, there was recognition that all individuals with disabilities and impairments were going to be protected under U.S federal law.

When Jimmy Carter ran for president in 1976, he sought the support of the disability community and promised to improve enforcement of the Rehabilitation Act regulations. Yet after Carter’s successful run for president, disability rights didn’t seem to be on his agenda. “Joseph Califano, Carter’s new HEW Secretary, appointed a task force to review the [Section 504] regulations...but it lacked a representative from the disability community” (Grim, 2015, para. 4). This disturbed the disability community and advocates. The American Coalition of Citizens with Disabilities (ACCD) insisted that the regulations be signed unchanged. If they were not signed by April 5, 1977, the ACCD would organize a march and protest for the signing of Section 504 (Grim, 2015). The ACCD board members, particularly “Eunice Fiorito, president of the board, and Frank Bowe, the newly hired executive director, who was deaf, reported their concern about Califano’s lack of progress on signing Section 504” (Heumann & Joiner, 2020, p. 86). They feared that Section 504 would be changed or weakened.

When April 5, 1977, arrived, and nothing had been done, individuals with disabilities occupied federal buildings across the country in hopes to bring to media

attention the importance of Section 504. The ACCD “targeted ten HEW offices: Washington D.C., Atlanta, Boston, New York City, Los Angeles, Denver, Chicago, Dallas, Philadelphia, and San Francisco” (Heumann & Joiner, 2020, p. 86). When Heumann and other disability activists in San Francisco occupied the HEW office, it was clear they were going to have to stay more than a day. “For people with disabilities, a sleepover is not as simple as packing a sandwich and a toothbrush...in addition to personal assistance, a fairly high number of us required daily medications” (Heumann & Joiner, 2020, p. 98) and equipment to support them.

Many of the organized disability protesters did not last very long due to logistics and health issues, but the sit-in protest in San Francisco persevered and gained media attention. Heumann, one of the many activist leaders of the time spoke out that “through the sit-in, we turned ourselves from being oppressed individuals into being empowered people” (Heumann as cited in Grim, 2015, para. 6). The disability movement was mimicking Martin Luther King Jr.’s civil rights approach to peaceful protest through sit-ins.

The sit-in protest was a message to Califano that the disability community would fight for their rights as citizens and desired the signing of Section 504 regulation. The protest also brought to the public an awareness that “traditional definition of citizenship valued able-bodiedness, particularly as it relates to productivity...” (Osorio, 2022, p. 245). The 504 Sit-In protest of 1977 was the first time in the United States that the demands of the disability community was taken seriously and “the longest nonviolent occupation of a federal property in the United States history” (Osorio, 2022, p. 243). This experience taught individuals with disabilities that they would have to always fight to

protect laws that supported them and to continue fighting for new legislation that would help lift individuals with disabilities.

Americans with Disabilities Gain Civil Rights

Following the 504 Sit-in protest, individuals with disabilities in America were viewed as independent and “disability really was looked at as an issue of civil rights rather than an issue of charity” (Grim, 2015, para. 13). The sit-in protest was built on previous networking efforts of the Center for Independent Living (CIL) that had “been building a power base for years – recruiting alliances with other civil rights groups by supporting their rallies and causes, launching successful campaigns for personal assistance, advocating for accessible transportation” (Heumann & Joiner, 2020, p. 87). CIL was using transformative movement tactics, a “holistic and comprehensive approach to transforming the world that is guided by our deepest values, vision, and purpose” (Zimmerman & Quiroz, 2016, p. 10). CIL was dedicated to supporting all movements and protests, to fight for fairness and the rights of those who are faced with systemic barriers, and “love” was a driving force for CIL and the disability movement.

The 504 Sit-In protest in 1977 was a collective action driven by hope and determination. The disability rights activists understood that in “order to create a world that works for more people, for more life, [they had] to collaborate on the process of dreaming and visioning and implementing that world” (Brown, 2017, p. 158). Their vision of a better future and their actions inspired other activists to join in the fight for their rights. Such groups like the Black Panthers joined by providing blankets and food for the disability activists. The disability activists also called upon two allies – the Delancey Street Foundation, a rehabilitation program for drug addicts and ex-convicts,

and the Salvation Army who gladly helped (Heumann & Joiner, 2020). The disability rights activists understood that the “more people who co-create the future, the more people whose concerns will be addressed from the foundational level in this world” (Brown, 2017, p. 158). Solidarity was a crucial factor for the disability rights activists and the “very remedy to disabled people’s historical exclusion is a strong government that acts on behalf of social justice inclusion principles” (Russell, 1998, p. 215). As Negrón-Gonzales (2017) describes in her lessons learned, “solidarity is our protection” against those in power (p. 422).

Another disability activist involved in the fight for Section 504 was Frank Bowe, who was at the time, head of the American Coalition of Citizens with disabilities and was negotiating to save Section 504 from any reduction or changes from the original language in hopes that a protest would not be required (Shapiro, 1994). As Bowe was amid negotiations, a group of his “colleagues lead a group of demonstrators in wheelchairs, holding candles and praying, to Califano’s home short before midnight on April 3, 1977” (Shapiro, 1994, p. 66). On April 5, Bowe and many other disability activists occupied Califano’s offices in Washington, D.C. but were cleared out after two days of occupying the offices. Heumann’s occupation of Health, Education and Welfare offices in San Francisco continued the fight and managed to get media attention needed to gain public support.

What helped the disability activists involved in the 504 Sit-In was that the protestors “received official blessings from Ed Roberts, the State Director of Rehabilitation” (Shapiro, 1994, p. 67). Roberts and Heumann were friends and colleagues

in the fight for disability rights. Roberts is known for being the “father of independent living” who fought for reduction of social and legal barriers.

The 504 Sit-In protest paved the way for other disability rights laws such as the Education for All Handicapped Children Act passed in 1975 that provided all children with disabilities a right to equal education. Many students with disabilities were integrated into classrooms though not all states followed through (Hayes, 2017). Some states such as California have instead pursued special education programs that segregate disabled students from the classroom.

Later in 1990, this “legislation was renamed the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)...which gave parents more rights when deciding what type of education their children should receive” (Hayes, 2017, p. 20). When Ronald Reagan ran for the presidency in 1980, he campaigned that government needed to be reduced, that regulations were impeding on business opportunities and ability to compete nationally and globally, and that he would be dedicated to cutting programs that were deemed ineffective or unnecessary.

When he won the 1980 election, one of the earliest actions Reagan took was to create a “...task force on regulatory reform, to be headed by...vice president, George H.W. Bush...to hack away at anything that looked like an excrescence of governmental largess” (Davis, 2015, p. 30). After the task force reviewed several social welfare programs and laws, “three areas received particularly large jab were the Education for All Handicapped Children Act, the Architectural and Transportation Barriers Compliance Board, and Section 504 – all disability-related laws” (Davis, 2015, p. 30).

Backlash Against Section 504

When Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act was signed by Califano on April 28, 1977, “there was a backlash against Section 504 regulations” (Davis, 2015, p. 52) and in “particular, the transportation industry became a big opponent since its livelihood was being encroached on by the demand that all trains, local transport, and buses...had to be accessible” (Davis, 2015, p. 52). For the first few years, the Rehabilitation Act and Section 504 supported disabled individuals to sue states and transportation organizations that received federal funds to update their services and transportation vehicles.

However, in 1979, the Supreme Court case, *Southeastern Community College v. Davis* led to a “ruling that virtually negated or weakened that right” (Davis, 2015, p. 53). To summarize what led to the court case, Francis B. Davis was a nurse for ten years, had profound hearing loss, and relied on hearing aids and lip reading to communicate (Davis, 2015). She desired to become a registered nurse and advance in her career. Francis was denied entrance to Southeastern Community College because she had a disability. She sued them and went through several levels of the court system, where at first the lower court ruled against Davis, but a circuit court overturned that ruling, then it went to the Supreme Court (Davis, 2015). The Supreme Court stated that a “person might be ‘otherwise qualified,’ but particular disabilities would disqualify him or her from taking a job” (Davis, 2015, p. 53). The court felt that because nurses and other medical practitioners sometimes wear surgical masks that Davis would not be able to lip read and, therefore would put patients at risk or would place undue hardship on the schools and medical institutions.

Another Supreme Court case that further weakened Section 504 was the “decision in *APTA v. Lewis* which the basic tenets about making public transportation accessible were undone” (Davis, 2015, p. 54). The American Public Transportation Association (APTA) was the main lobbying group for the domestic transportation industry and was very much against the Rehabilitation Act that required them to reduce the barriers for accessing transportation services (Davis, 2015). The buses acquired prior to the Rehabilitation Act were now not up to legal standards, such as not have a boarding ramp or the doors not being wide enough for a wheelchair to pass through. Section 504 “required [transportation] providers to retrofit older buses with wheelchair lifts and to buy only new buses that had such accommodations” (Davis, 2015, p. 54). While the lower courts continued to support Section 504, when the case reached the US Court of Appeals, they ruled unanimously in favor of APTA, excusing them from their obligations to meet Section 504 requirements because it was due hardship (Davis, 2015).

A third case that essentially washed-out Section 504 was *Grove City College v. Bell* where a college took the dramatic step of refusing all federal funds so that it would not have to comply with [disability laws] (Davis, 2015). Ironically as a result their students no longer could apply or obtain federal student loans. In *Grove City College v. Bell*, the “Supreme Court ruled that the college was indeed subject to Title IX regulations, but that the entire college was not culpable - only the specific program, in this case the financial aid office, was subject to those regulations” (Davis, 2015, pp. 57-58). This resulted in a massive rejection of the rights of disabled Americans. This also brought into question rights relating to gender, race, and age and what would be considered discrimination under federal law.

Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990

When President George H.W. Bush signed the ADA in 1990, the “law was the culmination of a years-long battle against discrimination, some had been turned away from public schools, barred from public hearings, others warehoused in institutions isolated” (Gold, 2011, p. 7). Prior to the ADA, “government programs treated Americans with disabilities as dependent and damaged human beings incapable of caring for themselves” (Gold, 2011, pp. 7-8). This was an ableist view of that disabled individuals could not contribute toward society.

While the ADA is an amazing achievement for the disability movement, “a single event cannot, by itself, provide the healing and long-term sustenance required to maintain hope amid conditions of suffering” (Duncan-Andrade, 2009, p. 184). The ADA is designed to protect the rights of individuals with disabilities and can also be viewed as a bill to protect businesses from frivolous lawsuits and government regulations (Davis, 2015). While the ADA does encourage employers to diversify and hire individuals with disabilities, there are no legal requirement for employers to do so. As a result, one of the “biggest problems of discrimination are more every day and more entrenched, such as employment bias. Only one-third of disabled people hold jobs” (Shapiro, 1994, p. 27). Of those who work and have a disability, often “they earn far less than their coworkers and are far less likely to be promoted” (Shapiro, 1994, p. 28). Shapiro (1994) references “Sandra Swift Parrino of the National Council on Disability...saying a disability may limit the type of work a person can do, more often companies simply do not want to hire or accommodate physically disabled workers” (p. 27).

Another major concern disability activists face is how the World Trade Organization provides businesses opportunities to sue foreign governments if their national laws impede on business practices. Marta Russell (1998) points out that when the World Trade Organization was

ratified, any member country can challenge any law of another member country that it believes deprives [them] of benefits it expected to receive from the new trade rules, including any law that requires imported goods to meet local or national health, safety, labor, or environmental standards that exceed WTO standards. (p. 206)

Even with the great advances we've made, there is still a great deal of prejudice and misconception of what it means to have a disability. The general American population seem to have a strong sense that individuals with disabilities have achieved full citizenship due to the ADA, IDEA, and the Rehabilitation Act. Unfortunately, individuals with disabilities are still not fully included into society as equals.

To bring to light this misconception is to look at the Franklin Delano Roosevelt (FDR) Memorial that opened in 1997. It portrays FDR next to his dog, Fala, and is sitting in his wheelchair without it being hardly noticeable because it is covered by his cloak, hiding his disability. It is a kind of affirmation that having a disability lessens one's greatness or ability to be a leader. The disability rights activists felt betrayed and fought for a statue that accurately presented the 32nd president in his wheelchair. This reveals that there is still a great deal of work needed to undo the negative myths and misconceptions around disability.

Disability & Identity in the Workplace

The workplace is a kind of miniature version of what society considers normal and acceptable. As a result, the workplace can become a place for “...negative identity for disabled people because in the work settings disability is pitted against the norm” (Cunnah, 2015, p. 215). Wendy Cunnah (2015) in her article on disabled students and their identity reveals that many students with disabilities do find a positive classroom environment and experience which can lead to a strong sense of self and build confidence in their ability to thrive. Yet when disabled students graduate and enter the workforce, their experiences may be different, and they are likely to be faced with employees who have negative views of individuals with disabilities thus creating directly or indirectly a toxic work environment (Cunnah, 2015).

This fact can result in the disabled person being unable to progress through their careers or may leave their jobs to pursue other work that may not be as fulfilling or pay as well but society might deem more acceptable. Cunnah’s (2015) research did reveal that for some individuals with disability, gaining employment reinforces positive images of themselves and was a way to prove to themselves and others that the negative perceptions of disability were not accurate or did not apply to them (Cunnah, 2015). This point is crucial to recognize as it shows that, like with any individual, to be able to work and support themselves financially is a way to help build self-confidence and lead a more independent life.

In this research study, we looked at individuals with hearing impairment who are seeking to enter leadership positions or sought opportunities to advance their careers into

leadership positions. For those willing and interested in learning new skills and abilities to enter leadership positions, often organizations do not provide the space or opportunities for hearing impaired individuals to learn the necessary skills to develop into leaders. In a U.K. study, it was discovered that "...deaf and hard of hearing people typically leave school with fewer qualifications than hearing people...and are more likely to find themselves in positions where they are not promoted..." (Kim et al., 2018, p. 375). While this study is in the U.K., individuals with disabilities in the United States suffer similar outcomes. Individuals with hearing loss in the United States are more likely to be overlooked as potential leaders compared to their hearing peers due to misunderstanding, misconceptions, or discrimination.

Another challenge for employees with hearing loss is the feeling that they are isolated or harassed in the workplace, making it difficult to stay in their organization long enough to even be considered for promotion into a leadership position. In another U.K. study by Kim, Byrne, and Parish (2018), they discovered that 55% of those deaf and hard of hearing reported feeling socially isolated at work and one in four reported being harassed in their workplace (Kim et al., 2018). Seeing data from another country helps to reveal that the challenges of individuals with hearing loss is not a uniquely American issue but in fact is global. Positive ways to assist and orient individuals with hearing impairment to integrate into the workplace need to be discovered and effectively implemented.

Also, a substantial need to learn more about how individuals with hearing impairment are performing in the workplace in comparison to their hearing peers can lead to valuable data that can translate into new effective strategies. Their experiences in the

workplace can influence their self-esteem and influence their success in navigating through their careers. In many countries, including the United States of America, individuals with disabilities are at greater risk of living in poverty, not being able to obtain a sufficient wage or a job that provides opportunities, and in the case with hearing impairment may struggle to build a professional or social network that can provide support in one's careers. This is not to say that there is no support or no cases where hearing impaired individuals succeed in their careers. It is only to state that a wider range of systemic barriers must be overcome, and, in some cases, the society or government may create more problems deliberately to isolate disabled persons.

Summary

The literature in this chapter reveals the long history disabilities has in American society. Social and economic barriers such as lack of access to education or to well-paid work existed until 1973 when the Rehabilitation Act was signed into law. 1973 was a turning point for equal rights for Americans with disabilities. Since then, more laws have been passed to address equal access to education, to fight against discrimination, and to provide resources and services to individuals with disabilities. Despite all the effort to improve conditions for individuals with disabilities, there are still those in American society who believe that disabled individuals do not deserve the additional assistance they receive from government and instead want to see those services stopped. The literature also revealed the struggle individuals with hearing loss face with developing their identity in a world designed for those with hearing. The literature provides hopeful data as well such as the positive impact of transformational leadership to inspire and support

individuals with hearing loss, to ensure accommodations are provided to employees with hearing loss, and that career development opportunities are open to all employees.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this narrative phenomenology study is to explore the experiences of those with hearing impairment in the workplace as they navigate their careers into leadership positions. This qualitative study examined the participants' stories through an interview process and demographic survey to help understand the common and unique experiences of having a hearing impairment in the workplace. This chapter summarizes the methods, the narrative phenomenology plan. It also includes interview questions, participants in the research study, the context of the study, and my positionality and ethical considerations. This chapter describes how the data were collected and analyzed.

Phenomenology and Narrative

Each person with a disability has a different background, different experiences, and different circumstances. Even if the disability is the same, everyone does not experience the disability in the exact same manner. This is particularly true when looking at hearing impairment. Hearing limitations have a wide range, such as mild to moderate to severe and profound, and the cause of the hearing loss can range from genetic to ear infections to inner ear deformity among other possible causes. The kind of speech and listening training an individual has completed can also impact how they are able to interact with other individuals and institutions in the world.

Phenomenological research attempts to reveal the unique truths of each person's experience of a phenomenon while also identifying a common meaning among several individuals who experienced the same phenomenon (Creswell & Poth, 2018). I attempted in my study to discover both the unique truths spoken by the participants and to find the

interpretations that bond each participant's experience. The common experience, or phenomenon, is that each person has a hearing impairment and through the interview process I aimed to discover if other aspects of the experience might hold a common theme. From the data collected, I developed a detailed account of the essence of the participants' experience (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The essence is the core of what was experienced and how those individuals perceive their experiences.

Phenomenology is the study of a person's lived experience, how they perceive themselves in those experiences, and creating a description of how they consciously understand those experiences. The phenomenological researcher is not attempting to explain why a particular phenomenon took place, but instead to discover the "essence" (or the person's truth) of the experience. Stewart and Mickunas (1990) highlight four philosophical outlooks in phenomenology. The first viewpoint is the idea of returning to the original method of philosophy meaning the search for wisdom, rather than the excessive use of the scientific method. The search for wisdom about a phenomenon would be explored through the discussions of one's experience and interpretation of those experiences. The second viewpoint is that in the midst of searching for wisdom in the experience, to suspend all judgments about what is considered "real" by the world and instead to seek a truth unique to the participant. The third viewpoint is what is called the intentionality of consciousness. This concept points to the idea that when a person sees an object, they intentionally create a reality around that object. As a result, every act of the person is a conscious act or experience of a phenomenon. The fourth viewpoint is the refusal of the subject-object dichotomy, meaning that when the object and reality is perceived by the person, it is only perceived through the essence of the experience

(Creswell & Poth, 2018). These four philosophical outlooks explain the perspective of the researcher seeking the meaning in a phenomenon experienced by several individuals.

In my research, these four philosophical mindsets played a role in shaping the interview question research approach. Individuals with disabilities carry in them a unique knowledge that is rarely given the space and time to reveal itself. The goal of my research is in part to create that space for hearing impaired individuals to share their stories, to reveal their experience of having a disability in the workplace, and to explore how their experiences creates a unique understanding of the reality of the workplace that non-disabled individuals may not have awareness. As I pursued my narrative phenomenological research study, I was aware of my biases and judgements but also understood that my experiences as a disabled person served as a positive guide to enhance the stories shared by the participants. Through each participant's story, there was a glimmer of a common thread among hearing-impaired individuals of their perspective of serving an organization as a leader. The goal is to understand the full human experience of hearing loss in the workplace. Each participant's experience is unique, and these unique stories broaden collectively society's understanding of the joys, wisdom, and hardships that come with having a hearing impairment.

Phenomenological approach has faced some critique. It asks researchers to define a particular experience (or phenomenon) to be studied and then to find individuals who have experienced that phenomenon. Finding participants who fit the researcher's criteria and experienced the exact phenomenon can be difficult. When individuals are discovered that do meet the criteria, they have the opportunity to participate in an interview process with the researcher asking predesigned interview questions. During the interview process,

and later during the analysis of the stories collected, researchers must be sure to put aside their own personal assumptions and interpretations of the participant's stories. This ensures that the research data presents the most accurate version of the participant's perception of their experience of the phenomenon.

This can be difficult to achieve. The researchers are gathering the stories and in the process are at risk of automatically interpreting the participants' stories in way the research feels are important (Creswell & Poth, 2018). It helps for the researcher to ask the participant for clarification on certain aspects of their story or to even ask what meaning they find in their own stories. In other words, the researcher is not only describing how the participants view their own experience of the phenomenon but attempts to grasp how the participant makes sense of their experience of the phenomenon (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Regarding this criticism and how it applies to my research, I located participants who are hearing-impaired and serve as leaders in their organizations. As a person with hearing impairment, I connected with the participants on a personal level and with an understanding of what they may be trying to express in their answers to the interview questions. I understood that I needed to ensure my assumptions did not change the meaning of the participant's interpretation of their experiences. I drew upon my own experiences as a hearing-impaired individual to coordinate with the participants to clarify how they perceive the "essence" in their experiences.

Along with phenomenology, the narrative research method can be very helpful in providing the space for participants to share their stories. Through the sharing of stories,

narratives and themes appear, revealing the individual's relationships with and to others, how they were influenced by societal roles and their various identities (e.g., age, sexual identity, etc.), and their values and customs they hold dear (Creswell & Poth, 2018). I asked participants to share their experiences with hearing loss and how it impacted navigating through their careers. The narrative approach connects the researcher with the participants and builds trust between them. This is critical to ensure that the research is ethical and translates into positive action, steering away from the risk of harming the participants and the study group's community.

Narrative method comes in two different orders. The first-order narrative is the collecting of how the participants tell their stories and reveal about their personal experiences (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The second-order narrative involves me as the researcher assembling an overarching story about the participants' phenomenological experience (Creswell & Poth, 2018). In my research, I used both the first-order narratives and second-order narratives because I am interested in how the participants view their experiences of the phenomenon of having a hearing impairment as they navigate through their careers. I also formulated the narrative about the participants' experiences as I collected the stories and wrote those stories to address the research questions.

The narrative method presents certain challenges for a researcher. One of the biggest challenges is the "...extensive amount of information needed to be collected about their participants..." (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 73) which can be very time consuming. Another is the "issue of power relations in narrative inquiry" (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 73) and the importance of the researchers to understand that while they are presenting the participants' views and understanding of their own experiences,

researchers are interpreting those stories and can create a new meaning out of the participants' wording. To address the possible rise of issues of power relations in my research, I shared my own hearing impairment stories with the participants and presented myself as a student to their teachings.

It is very crucial that as a researcher, I present the stories shared by participants as accurately as possible. Narrative research is focused on the participant's interpretation of their own experiences and as a result can be difficult to measure each participant's stories. In the case with my narrative, qualitative research, there is no measuring of the data collected as one would see in a quantitative research study. Each participant's story was unique but also revealed overlapping themes, such as needing accommodations or the need to self-advocate, that assisted in answering the research questions.

Narrative phenomenology method "illustrate the complexities of narrative production by comparing 'life story' interviews to conventional assessments" (Josselson & Lieblich, 1995, p. 48) as those with hearing impairments navigate through their careers and in leadership positions. It can get complicated when assessing the interview data to point out to the reader how the participants each revealed their interpretation of their experiences with hearing impairment as they progress through their careers (Josselson & Lieblich, 1995). I used the same approach in my own research where I sought common links (or essence) in each participant's experience with hearing impairment in the workplace. I was aware that when doing a "phenomenological study, the participants must be individuals who have all experienced the phenomenon being explored and can articulate their lived experiences" (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 153).

Narrative Phenomenology Plan

The narrative phenomenology research study plan is an overview of the steps I took in collecting qualitative data. The first step involved reaching out to individuals participating in the research to discuss the objective of the research study and to answer any questions they had about the study. The second step involved reviewing the participants' rights as well as the description of the demographic survey and the interview process. Most interviews took no longer than one hour to one hour and half. No follow-up interview appointments were needed. The third step involved transcribing the interviews and sharing the transcripts with the participants for accuracy and checking. In the last step, participants had the opportunity to share their experience participating in the study and revised answers from the interview transcript. The following steps involved:

1. First step was to meet in-person or over Zoom video conference to discuss the dissertation work and themes of the research study. This space and time were for sharing what the interview process would include such as interview questions and a demographic survey. I asked the participants if they had any questions or concerns about the survey or interview process. It was significant that participants be active in the creation of the interview process, including them as co-creators of the research if they wanted.
2. Once the participants reviewed the elements of the interview process and survey, we read together their rights as participants/subjects of the research study. If the participants agreed, we then scheduled a time for the interview. An electronic copy of the survey was emailed to the participant or if they preferred; a hard copy of the survey was also available.

3. After completing the survey and the interview questions, I transcribed the interview and the participants afterwards had the opportunity to review their answers, excluding any knowledge or information they felt should not be included in the research study.
4. At the end of the interview process, I asked participants if they wanted to share verbally a summary of their experience going through the interview and demographic survey process. Each participant expressed their appreciation to be included in the study and was interested in how the study will conclude. I continued to stay in touch with each participant to let them the progress of the dissertation study and promised that each would have access to the finished product when successfully completing the dissertation defense.

Demographics Survey Questions

The following demographics survey questions were provided to each participant in the study prior to meeting for the interview section.

1. What gender do you identify as?
 - a. Female
 - b. Male
 - c. Fill in: _____
 - d. Prefer not to say
2. What is your age?
 - a. 30-35
 - b. 36-40

- c. 41-45
 - d. 46-50
 - e. 51-55
 - f. 56-60
 - g. 60+
3. What ethnicity are you?
- a. African American
 - b. Asian
 - c. Caucasian
 - d. Latinx or Hispanic
 - e. Native American
 - f. Native Hawaiian or Pacific islander
 - g. Mixed
 - h. Other
 - i. Prefer not to say
4. What is your educational level?
- a. High school degree or completed GED
 - b. Bachelor's Degree
 - c. Master's Degree
 - d. Doctoral Degree
 - e. Prefer not to say
5. What is your degree of hearing loss?
- a. Mild

- b. Moderate
- c. Severe
- d. Severe to Profound
- e. Profound
- f. Prefer not to say

6. Please write your current work title: _____

The demographic survey questions served as a warmup to the interview questions and a way to check for common or uncommon backgrounds among the participants.

Interview Questions

Interview questions were developed to help answer the themes of the research questions revolving around leadership, organizational policies and practices, communication with colleagues and supervisors, experience in the workplace, and socialization (orientation) process as a hearing-impaired employee. These questions were forwarded to the participants prior to the actual meeting for the interview. In all cases, due to the Covid pandemic, the interviews took place online via Zoom.

1. When did you learn you had a hearing impairment? What degree of hearing loss do you have (mild, moderate, severe, profound)?
2. Do you consider yourself to have a disability?
3. Are you currently in a leadership position in your organization? If yes, how long have you been in a leadership position?
4. Do you feel that your hearing impairment has made it more challenging to be a leader or does it enhance you as a leader or both? Please explain how and why?

5. Share with me what challenges you have experienced in performing your duty as a leader. Please explain if your colleagues offered to assist and support you or did you have to reach out to your colleagues and request for assistance? What kind of assistance did you need?
6. Tell me about organizational or departmental policies that have had a positive or negative impact on your ability to perform as a leader?
7. Share with me your experience of being oriented into a new organization.
8. What have your colleagues' attitudes been toward you and your hearing impairment? How has it impacted your sense of belonging in the organization?
9. How do your colleagues see your hearing impairment?
10. How has your colleagues' perspective on your hearing impairment impacted you as a leader?
11. How has having a hearing impairment impacted your interaction style with your supervisor, your subordinates, your colleagues, and your clients?
12. What experiences have you had with misunderstandings with your colleagues surrounding your hearing impairment?
13. What kinds of mentors or supervisors would be needed to create supportive environment for employees with hearing impairment in the workplace?
14. As a leader yourself, how would you suggest such an environment is created?
15. What support have you encountered in finding fulfilling work? What obstacles?
16. How would you characterize the ease or difficulty of finding fulfilling work?
17. Are there any other comments, thoughts, or ideas you would like to share regarding leadership, hearing impairment, and the workplace?

Participants, Data Collection, and Qualitative Questionnaire

Participants of the study consisted of working adult men and women (ages 30-64) who had been identified as having hearing loss and used assistive listening devices such as cochlear implants or hearing aids and have leadership experience. The focus was only on those individuals who used assistive listening devices and were able to speak verbally or had formal speech training (e.g., auditory-verbal therapy, speech therapy, etc.) allowing them to interact verbally with others. I did not include in this study those who choose not to use assistive listening devices or who are part of the Deaf Culture or who use sign language as part of their everyday use of language.

All participants currently were working or had worked in professional or administrative careers and were currently volunteering their time toward an organization. The focus of this study was to understand how the individual with hearing impairment navigated through their professional careers. As part of my theoretical framework, I used Intersectionality and welcomed participants from any racial background, gender, religious or secular background, and sexual orientation. Along with a wide range of demographics, I sought participants that lived and/or worked in the Bay Area in California.

Participants in this study worked in the public sector or private sector. Including participants with hearing impairment from different sectors of the workforce could reveal if individuals with hearing loss have more opportunities to serve in leadership positions in one sector over the other. In this study, the participants' answers revealed that the opportunities for hearing impaired individuals to serve as leaders was about the same in

the private and public sectors. Per the answers from the participants, a person's gender, racial background, and age may have played a part in opening or limiting opportunities to serve as leaders.

My aim was to interview four to five individuals, a common range for narrative phenomenological research. The five selected participants interviewed were associates or clients at similar audiologist offices, in other words a sample of convenience. I asked participants if they knew of other individuals who had hearing impairment and might be interested in participating in the study; this is known as a snowball sample as well.

My dissertation committee contributed to the creation of the interview questions and survey questionnaire. The University of San Francisco IRB (Institutional Review Board) reviewed and approved my dissertation proposal, thus ensuring that my research met ethical standards and did not violate any participants' human rights.

Context of the Study

In this phenomenological study, the participants were individuals who lived and/or worked in the San Francisco Bay Area of California. As I progressed through the doctoral program, the United States and the world faced a global pandemic. This had an impact on how and where the interviews took place. The interviews for this study were conducted through an online platform, Zoom. Due to the pandemic, the likelihood of being able to interview participants in their work environment was unlikely. I also had no opportunity to observe the participants in the workplace.

Ethical Considerations

The interview process created a space for sharing one's personal experiences, in this case with hearing impairment and career development. As with all of us, whether disabled or not, our self-image is important to us and how others perceive us is important to us. We all want to do well in life and in our careers and to build bonds with others to create a full life for ourselves. With participants sharing their personal experiences, whether positive or negative, the interview process was likely to bring up strong feelings about who they are, where they have been, and what they want to achieve for the future. Throughout the interview process, I ensured that the participants' identities were protected and options for them to request names to be changed or information they shared to be omitted from the final version of the dissertation. Consent forms for participants were written in English as I was focusing my research on English-speaking individuals with hearing impairment. A copy of the "consent to participation" form is found in Appendix A. It was my hope that participants would feel they were able to contribute knowledge and experience that can help others with hearing impairment to feel they are not alone in their struggles, that there is hope for them to achieve their dreams and desires, and that they are able to develop a positive, independent life for themselves.

Data Analysis and Procedure

All results from the surveys, interviews, and stories shared by participants were documented, stored, and kept anonymous. The survey and interview data were organized and analyzed by the researcher of this study. The research approach was coordinated between researcher, dissertation committee, and participants to ensure all ethical

procedures were followed and in hopes of creating a series of stories of experiences that provided a clearer picture of the experiences of individuals with hearing impairment.

Positionality

To understand my perspective and approach to the research on the impacts of hearing impairment on individuals striving to develop their desired careers and establish an independent life, I needed to share my positionality. “Suffla, Seedat, and Bawa (2015) define positionality as ‘the researcher’s social location, personal experience, and theoretical viewpoint, the relational and institutional contexts of the research, and the bearing of these elements on the research process itself’ (as cited in Strunk & Locke, 2019, p 17). Having a researcher come from a different background from the participants can create bias in the research process in an attempt to be in full disclosure. This section is dedicated to describing my own background and how it could influence the research process and results.

I grew up with hearing impairment for most of my life and used hearing aids to enhance my ability to hear my surroundings. As I attended my regular schooling with my same-age hearing peers, I also attended auditory-verbal therapy which taught me and my family how I could use my hearing aids and other listening devices effectively. I also developed communication and interaction skills and a strong sense of confidence in my own ability to achieve personal goals in my life. I was raised in a family where my hearing loss was considered an impairment and not a disability. An impairment is a recognition that my ears were not processing sounds at the usual levels as my hearing

peers did. Whereas the term disability is a social construct that is associated with stereotypes, stigma, or cultural biases and misconceptions.

Hearing impairment is a condition that is a unique experience for each person with the impairment. While the overall experience of struggling to listen and communicate is similar, the degree of the challenge can differ based upon the degree of the hearing loss. Such differences can be that the person has bilateral (meaning both ears) hearing loss or just in one ear. The person may have had hearing loss since a young age, or perhaps the person gradually lost it as they aged, or it was a result of a sudden drop in hearing due to an infection or injury. In my case, I was diagnosed with bilateral sensorineural hearing loss, meaning my hearing loss was in my inner ear at the age of three. My degree of hearing loss was categorized as severe-to-profound which is an extreme level of hearing loss and just before being identified as deaf. The degree of hearing loss ranges from mild, moderate, severe, profound, and deaf.

I am a white male who was raised in a middle-class family in the San Francisco Bay Area, California. My parents were the first in their family to obtain a college degree and my mother the first to attain a postgraduate degree. They instilled in me the value and appreciation of education. My grandparents on both sides of my family come from a mix of immigrants and long-time American citizens which gave me an understanding of the different worlds living in the United States of America. I learned about the different cultures they came from and how that impacted their experiences growing up in the United States.

One experience especially stands out for me and has influenced me greatly. My mother took me to a bakery where the employees didn't speak much English or didn't speak English at all. My parents wanted me to understand that there were immigrants and American citizens who didn't speak English and they still worked very hard and contributed to our community and country. My family had a great love for diverse cultures and different identities. They had a strong love of humanity in all its forms and ways of being. I learned from them to see other individuals as human beings and to recognize others for who they are with love and kindness.

My family instilled in me the importance of assisting others when we can and to do our part to make the world a better place for everyone. It was not until I was in my thirties, having entered a leadership position in the workplace, that I began to better understand that not all individuals I encountered saw the world in the same light in relation to those with disabilities. In some cases, there are individuals who do not want to support individuals with disabilities or may even wish harm upon them. This realization shocked me and saddened me deeply. This lesson gave me the encouragement to pursue research on the topic of hearing impairment in the workplace and how it might impact their success in navigating their desired careers. I desire to contribute new knowledge and data toward the understanding of the challenges and opportunities for those with hearing loss. I hope to dismantle the prejudices and misconceptions in the workplace about those with hearing loss so that the world can move toward a more accepting and positive work environment for those with disabilities.

My interest in the topic of how hearing impairment impacts a person's life and career development is both driven by my own personal experiences and from my

observation of how so few with hearing impairment are in leadership positions. I have met a few leaders in their 50s or older who had developed a certain degree of hearing loss later in their lives when they had already established their careers or were near retirement. While I knew some children with hearing loss during my auditory-verbal therapy years, I did not in my everyday interactions meet any who had hearing impairment from a young age (childhood up to their 20s) who later became leaders in their organizations. It makes me wonder if there is a glass ceiling, or glass cliff, for those with hearing loss. If the stigma and misconceptions around hearing loss are still very prevalent, despite the rising awareness about the impacts of hearing loss, there is still then a great deal of effort needed to address this societal issue. It is my hope that this research can challenge the misconceptions of hearing loss in the workplace and bring about a better understanding of how much hearing-impaired individuals can contribute to the organization.

CHAPTER 4: RESULTS OF THE STUDY

Introduction

In this chapter, five participants who with different degrees of hearing loss share their experiences in the workplace and offer insight into their perspectives on how their hearing loss has impacted them as leaders in their organizations and/or workplace. Each participant completed a demographic survey that provided background about themselves and followed with an interview about their personal and work experiences with hearing loss. The narrative presented in this chapter resulted from the one-on-one Zoom interviews, the demographic surveys, and reflection upon the interview response and of my own experiences with hearing loss.

The theoretical framework from Chapter Three provides the lens of how I evaluated the stories each participant shared as well as my reflection of my own experiences. It is my hope that these stories will be another step forward in gaining a better understanding of the experiences of individuals with hearing loss and how they see themselves in the world and in the workplace. The results presented in this chapter can be an opportunity to serve individuals with hearing loss. The data in this chapter might be helpful in discovering new ways to improve the work conditions for employees with hearing loss and to open more career paths for them.

Profile of the Participants

The privacy and confidentiality of each participant was respected and maintained throughout the study. Prior to conducting participant interviews, a demographic survey

was provided that details their gender, age, ethnicity, educational level, degree of hearing loss, and current work. A summary of the results is presented below in Table 1.

Pseudonyms were used for some of the participants while others stated that they were willing to use their names. In the efforts to protect each participants' identity, only first names are used and details about each participant's background are kept general as not to easily identify each participant. Table 2 and Image 1 are included to illuminate and visualize what the degree of hearing loss means.

Table 1

Participant Demographic Information

Participant	Gender	Age Range	Ethnicity	Educational Level	Degree of Hearing Loss	Professional Title
Cindy	Female	51-55	Caucasian	Bachelor's Degree	Severe	Vice President
Jason	Male	36-40	Latinx/Hispanic	Bachelor's Degree	Profound	Data Engineer
Lily	Female	60+	Caucasian	Bachelor's Degree	Moderate	Program Manager/Volunteer Sponsorship Chair
Nathanial	Male	51-55	Latinx/Hispanic	Master's Degree	Single-Sided Deafness in Left ear. Mild loss in right ear.	Senior Financial Planner & Adjunct Professor of Economics
Zina	Female	46-50	Caucasian	Doctoral Degree	Severe to Profound	Attorney

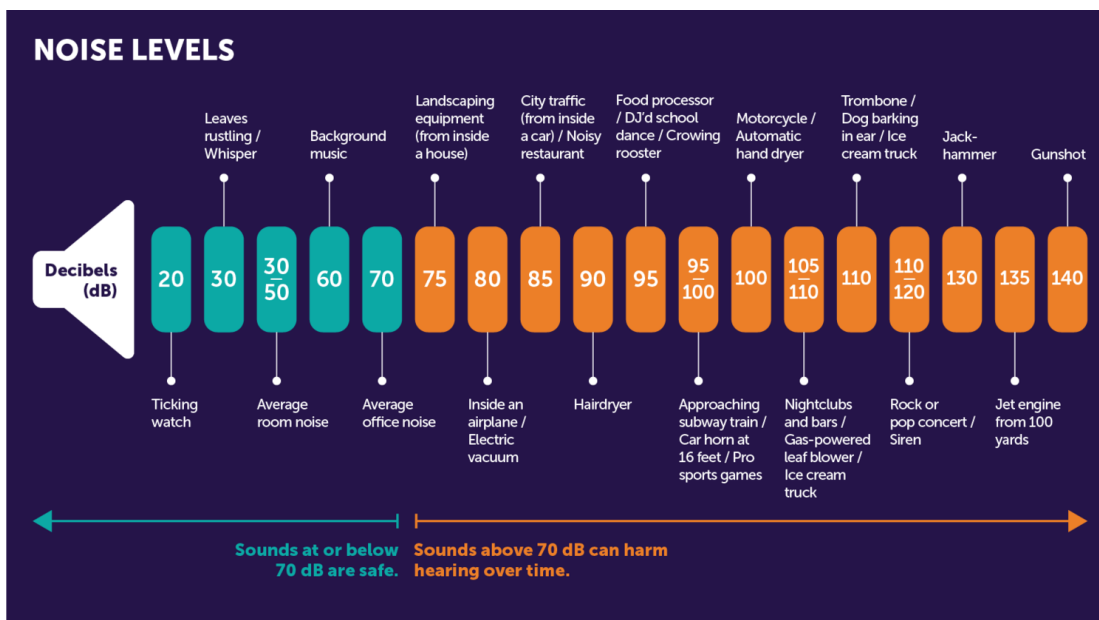
Table 2

Degree of hearing in units of dB HL (decibels hearing loss)

Adults	0-20	Normal
	21-25	Slight/Borderline Normal
	26-40	Mild
	41-55	Moderate
	56-70	Moderately-severe
	71-90	Severe
	≥91	Profound

Figure 1

Decibel (dB) Range



Introduction to the Study Group

The study group participants ranged in age from 36 to over 60 years old. All participants had some degree of hearing loss ranging from mild to profound in both ears or had single-sided hearing loss in one ear and mild in the other. The group as a whole is well educated with three of the participants with bachelor's degree, one a master's degree, and one a doctoral degree. Each participant works in a professional field. One participant works in finance, another as a data engineer, a third in program management, another participant works as a professor with a second job as a financial planner, and another participant works as an attorney. Below are descriptions of each of the participants:

Cindy. Cindy first realized that she had hearing loss after graduating from college and when first entering the workplace. She has severe hearing loss and considers herself to have a disability. She is a mother, is currently a vice president in her organization, and has served as a leader in previous organizations.

Jason. Jason was diagnosed with hearing impairment when he was in kindergarten. He wears a cochlear implant in one ear and a hearing aid in the other. Jason is considering getting a second cochlear implant to replace his hearing aid. He is married and with a child on the way and works as a data engineer.

Lily. Lily worked in the technology industry for 20 years. She is a musician and plays the bass in a band. While she was not diagnosed with hearing loss until much later in life, she was aware during her grade school years that she had some hearing loss. Overnight she developed a hearing loss and amusia (being unable to process music). She

visited her neurologist and had a brain surgery for normal pressure hydrocephalus which helps restore her ability to process music. She volunteers as Sponsorship Chairman for a non-profit corporation.

Nathanial. Nathanial has one sided hearing meaning that he is deaf in his left ear and has mild hearing loss in his right ear. Since his childhood, Nathanial has had some degree of hearing loss. Hearing aids have not always been the most effective in assisting him to hear others but continues to use it. A father and husband, he works as an adjunct professor in economics and is also a financial planner.

Zina. At six months of age, it was discovered Zina had hearing loss. The etiology of the illness is unknown. She has severe to profound hearing loss in both ears with no usable hearing in the left and wears a hearing aid in the right ear. Zina is an attorney in special education and works with students with disabilities to ensure they get the services they need and that their rights as students are protected.

Phenomenological Narrative Themes

The research for this study was through a phenomenological narrative approach where data were collected through a demographic survey and online interviews of participants through Zoom. After interviewing the participants, I transcribed the interviews and identified recurring themes that I saw in the transcription.

Phenomenological narrative is a qualitative research method and “narrative relies on criteria other than validity, reliability, and generalizability” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 7). The narrative research approach recognizes that “humans are storytelling organisms, who individually and socially, lead storied lives” (Clandinin & Connelly,

2000, p. 2). This study is interested in identifying themes in the stories of individuals with hearing loss who find ways to participate in the world and to share their gifts and talents. The “study of narrative is the study of the ways humans experience the world” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 2). In this chapter, we learn from the participants about their experiences and how these impact their personal views about disability, the challenges they face and the advantages they developed throughout their life, their experiences in the workplace, and their interactions with colleagues.

Three Main Themes Identified

In this study, three main themes have been identified through both my personal experiences with hearing loss and learning from the participants’ experiences with their hearing loss. The first theme is their self-image and personal experiences. The second theme is a hearing-impaired person’s experience with their organization through the orientation process, the organizational and departmental policies, and organizational structure. The third theme is the interaction experience with colleagues, mentors, and supervisors.

Each of these three themes assists in exploring the research questions around hearing loss and leadership, the organizational policies that exist that either enhance or create barriers for individuals with hearing loss, and how hearing loss is viewed in the workplace by colleagues and what are the socialization process involved for employees with hearing loss. All these elements point to the need for organizations to create leadership opportunities for individuals with hearing loss so that those interested in pursuing leadership roles can achieve their full potential in their careers and in life.

Self-Identification of Disability

The word ‘disability’ is a social construct and not a fact about a person. When a person identifies as disabled, it is to “recognize that it is not a biological or natural property but an elastic social category both subject to social control and capable of effecting social change” (Siebers, 2011, p. 4). How individuals view themselves can have a tremendous impact on how their lives develop. How society views a particular individual or group of individuals can influence how members of that society treat others and/or create or reduce barriers toward a good quality of life. How a person is treated by others can impact one’s self-image and confidence or how one addresses barriers they encounter or lack of barriers in their careers and toward a more independent life. In this study, some of the participants viewed themselves as having a disability while others did not. In a few cases, some participants changed their views as they went from childhood into adulthood.

Cindy stated that she saw herself as having a hearing loss, whereas Nathaniel said he did not see himself as having a disability because he can do what others can do in the workplace and in life. Jason found himself thinking hard about the question of disability and stating that he does not see himself as disabled, though sometimes sees himself as inconvenienced. During discussions with colleagues, he might use the word ‘disability’ to make a point or to speak about a topic in a manner that others might understand more clearly. The term ‘disability’ is used as a way to build a dialogue between him and others.

Lily had to take some time to contemplate the question about her identity as disabled or not before answering, saying:

that is a hard question. Yes and no. When I fill out job applications, they always ask you, do you have a disability. For a while I was saying, yes, and I wasn't getting interviews, so I stop saying yes. I would say, overall, no, but it does catch up with me, sometimes.

Zina does see herself as disabled, but her views changed throughout different stages in her life. Growing up during her childhood and teens years, she didn't want to be different or consider herself disabled. Even up to during her college and law school years. After school Zina started to view herself as disabled, but this did not mean that she was not able to build a life and career for herself. She learned the importance of asking for accommodations and using the technology available to her so that she could be at her best for her family, herself, and her career.

How a person views their capabilities or identity may also be influenced by using assistive listening technology such as hearing aids or cochlear implants. In the United States, the average American views the body as a machine and when something is considered incorrect or broken, there is a desire to use medicine and technology to address it. There can also be a stigma with this attitude if a person needs to use assistive technology, then it might be viewed as being less than human or unwanted or not worthy. It is important to recognize that assistive listening devices can be both an enhancement and a limitation. An enhancement in that it provides the person with hearing loss the ability to hear again, even if there are complications with the devices. A limitation sometimes because it may be viewed negatively by others or serve as a reason to isolate that person or restrict their opportunities, even when they are capable of performing the task or duties. A possible influencing factor for how one identifies as disabled or not may

be the result of the use of assistive listening technology. If a doctor or medical specialist suggests the use of technology to improve one's hearing, the person losing their hearing may begin to see their body as broken or disabled.

Assistance of Technology

Technology plays a valuable role in the everyday lives of Americans ranging from the use of computers to television to the Internet and cellphones. These all impact our ability to communicate with each other, to keep up in the ever-increasing pace of everyday life and to accumulation of information. In some cases, this can give an edge to individuals competing in the workplace, and sometimes can assist us with making life easier. Wearing hearing aids or cochlear implants are a form of assistive listening technologies used to amplify and enhance a person's ability to hear speech and their environment. It is a tool dedicated to opening the world to those with hearing loss and to provide opportunities to interact and connect with others.

The Americans with Disabilities Act encourages organizations and employers to provide any additional tools and resources available to aid employees with hearing loss to successfully complete their roles in the organization. Tools such as telephones with closed captioning or Zoom calls that allows a user to see the person they are speaking with, and lip read if needed. Headsets can sometimes provide clearer speech than a phone does. Cindy stated in a positive way that "what's great is technology keeps improving on this front, so that benefits us." With more research pursued in understanding the medical and social challenges of individuals with hearing loss, there can be an improvement in the technology available to those with hearing loss. There can also be further efforts by

organizations and audiologists to develop with individuals with hearing loss the techniques and strategies that can increased the participation of those with hearing loss in the world and the workplace.

When exploring the question of whether there are work phones that use Bluetooth, Cindy commented that “I don’t know, but I have to imagine everything’s trending in that direction because even if you don’t have hearing aids, you might have earbuds that you want to connect to your phone.” None of the participants that I’m aware of use their Bluetooth feature to connect to a work phone but do use it to connect with their personal cell phones in which they might use in the workplace.

During the interview, I made a comment about how it seemed to take more energy to listen with the newer models of hearing aids because they focus on one specific speech rather than a more inclusive sound system. Jason responded with “that is another kind of annoyance. It would be great if hearing aids didn’t have their own opinion.” This is a valuable information for managers and organizations to understand when working alongside colleagues with hearing loss. Hearing aids used to just enhance sound but now do so much more. There have been many “advances in hearing aid technology and the greatest have been the performance of directional microphones (DSP)” (Kerckhoff, et al., 2008, p. 102). Kerckhoff also stated that prior to “DSP, analog hearing aids had the capability to use fixed directionality only” (Kerckhoff, et al., 2008, p. 103). My personal experience changing from analog to digital hearing aids was that I lost the ability to hear from behind or distinguish any sound sources from behind. I speak from my own experience in the classroom, losing the ability to hear my classmates calling me from

behind. Fortunately, the technology of the digital hearings did improve, and the hearing aids were able to pick up sounds in a wider range up to almost 360 degrees.

Despite this improvement, the DSP continues to focus on just one sound source while suppressing other sound sources which can complicate how a person with hearing loss is able to hear their surroundings. The authors do point out that “analog hearings aids either contained a dedicated directional microphone or had a push button that was used to switch the hearing aid from omnidirectional to directional microphone mode” (Kerckhoff, et al., 2008, p. 103). This may have been challenging or frustrating for the user but at least the user had control over the features.

Today’s hearings aids are designed to operate automatically which can complicate listening to a person whom you want to hear when the hearing aids decide to focus on a radio or the ventilation system or another conversation that is located in a different part of the room. Kerckhoff et al. (2008) do recognize that the advances in digital hearing aids, while they have brought many new options such as “directionality, automatic adaptive, multiband automatic adaptive, and asymmetric directionality; each of these options has benefits but some also have limitations and may not prove to be as beneficial to the patient as touted by hearing aid manufacturers” (Kerckhoff, et al., 2008, p. 103). This is an important factor for managers and organizations to recognize and understand. A person who uses hearing aids, or other assistive listening devices, when hired may have no challenges when first working in the organization. Then when the person obtains new hearing aids, they have no certainty of what changes lie ahead or what new challenges might occur that can disrupt their work performance. This reality can sometimes confuse colleagues who may have become used to one way of interacting with their colleague

with hearing loss and struggle to make the adjustment when the new hearing aids come into play. This shift can make job security a serious concern for individuals with hearing loss.

From personal experience, I have learned that other colleagues sometimes are unable to grasp this reality of what it means to wear a hearing aid and how the “standard tricks” of making a room quieter does not always solve hearing challenges for the hearing-impaired person. Wearing a hearing aid is not the same as listening with a biological ear. The newer digital directional hearing aids are designed to continually focus on one primary sound source, that may or may not be the person they are speaking to, and the hearing aids are continually amplifying and diminishing what it thinks it needs to do. This automatic feature can either enhance or disrupt the listener’s ability to function consistently in their environment. In my experience, this feature of the hearing aids has caused more harm and disruption to my ability to function in the work environment than in enhancing my abilities. Another important factor in hearing aid technology is the need for the user to have the necessary time to test the different features of their hearing aids and how they operate in different environments, while still being able to continue working and meeting the organizational goals. Others also need to recognize that sometimes the person who has obtained new hearing aids may never achieve as good a setting as was previously attained with an older model hearing aid. This can be disruptive to both the employee and the organization. A great deal of patience and support is needed for those with hearing loss.

Jason shared that during his college years, “I tried all sorts of assistive listening devices, and I even had a closed caption or a transcriber. That was kind of a clunky

experience.” As mentioned earlier, the current hearing aid technology has a mind of its own, focusing on what it believes it needs to focus. The transcriber stated by Jason is not the same as a note taker. Jason considered a note taker but decided against it. Upon my introspection, when I was in college, I was very concerned that I would miss information needed to complete my assignments or the updates on assignment due dates that I asked the school for a note taker to assist me. Ironically, after a few weeks I learned that I was taking better notes than the note takers. I thanked the school for the opportunity and then decided to no longer use the service. This kind of experience can discourage individuals with hearing loss to seek out services as they may believe that the services, or assistive technology may end up making it more difficult than they are already experiencing.

When the Covid pandemic hit and many companies shifted to Zoom when everything shut down, Lily stated “I found Zoom easier than being in a large meeting room.” Lily also stated, “When the sudden hearing loss happened, they would have meetings in big rooms and I was just sitting in the back going ‘oh my God, this is terrible, I can't interact at all.’ So, we were more productive remote.” Lily stated as well:

...the previous job, when we were doing all these conferences, we had people in Australia and people in Poland and we would have meetings with these conference phones and no video so just audio coming from the phone. That was very difficult for me and again I think it didn't enhance people's perception of me.

Zoom for all the participants has improved the ability to communicate more with their colleagues, to better keep up with what is said, and to easily see everyone's face for cues of how a person is saying something or easier lip reading.

Lily shared her experience with the Roger Pen technology that she had hoped would assist her in meetings at work. The Roger Pen, or sometimes called the EasyPen, is a microphone that a person who wears hearing aids or cochlear implants can use as a way to hear others better at meetings. It requires either the speaker to wear it in their shirt pocket or clipped onto their shirt. It can also be held by the person with the hearing aids to point it at the person speaking like a handheld microphone. Like my own experiences trying the Roger Pen, Lily's experience was not positive, stating "Oh, what a ridiculous piece of gear, this was. A person was supposed to take this directional MIC and put in on... or I'm supposed to aim the microphone and take notes." For Lily, the challenges she faced included the need to be able to hear her colleagues, to be able to process what was said, and to be able to take down notes when needed.

There can be stigma around the use of additional assistive listening devices by one's colleagues. While it is against the law to discriminate based on disability, colleagues may still display disgust or disapproval with non-verbal cues. This can lead to tension between abled and disabled colleagues or may create a toxic work environment for a person with a disability. In some cases, employees with disabilities are forced to leave their jobs due to an unwelcoming or toxic work environment rather than attempt to address the discrimination or the misconceptions.

Zina shared that she "did have CART services as an accommodation in both college and law school." CART is an acronym for Communication Access Realtime Translation "where a trained captioner transcribes spoken words into readable text) which are used in public spaces, workplace, educational and medical situations" (Eberts & Hannan, 2022, p. 75).

Zina communicated that during the interview process,

[if] screen call was on the phone, I would try to find a way to have my caption phone. This is before Zoom. I was probably the first one on Zoom when it came out. I tried to use FaceTime as much as possible.

Zina brought up a point that I believe is common among individuals with hearing loss, when to disclose a hearing loss to others. Zina said, “When to make the disclosure, how to have that conversation and how to sort of reassure [employers] that they can hire me.” While it is true that ADA exists to discourage discriminating against individuals with disabilities, barriers still exist prior to being hired.

Zina brought up a piece of technology known as Otter.ai, which is a program that transcribes relatively accurately what others are saying. A person can download an app onto their phone and as a person is speaking, the app transcribes what the person is saying. This technology became very helpful during the pandemic for those who rely much on lipreading and were no longer able to lipread due to others wearing a mask.

Zina really liked the Otter.ai program and said it has been a real support for her, stating:

I would use Otter.ai because it was portable, and I could take it [anywhere] needed. When staff didn't have a clear mask, I was using my otter device which enhanced my ability to have access to emergency situation and it's including me in my work.

Zina added, “Automatic speech recognition (ASR), have gotten much better. It's not great, but it's better than nothing. I can put things into context so if it misspells a word, I know what it meant.” Zina concluded:

I think technology has been key in allowing me to have access and contribute.

Whether the CART services, I mean I still use CART services, I don't rely on the ASR. And then video conferencing, hopefully, I will never have to go back to an IEP meeting in person. It really is much easier to see everybody and certainly not wear a mask.

It is important to recognize that there is no perfect piece of assistive listening devices, but it is equally important to recognize that good technology can support individuals with hearing loss. The goal of developing and improving listening assistive technology is to ensure that individuals with hearing loss can participate in everyday activities such as conversations with others, to function at their best in the workplace, and to be able to enjoy life to the fullest.

Challenges with Hearing Loss

Even in cases where hearing aids and other assistive listening devices are able to improve one's conditions, individuals with hearing loss still face challenges on a daily basis. Challenges mentioned in this study include the volume and tones of speakers, misunderstanding of non-verbal cues of hearing-impaired person, the type of environment one is listening in, how others perceive those who wear hearing aids, clarity and communication styles, and the amount of energy and time needed to process what one hears. The participants also shared advantages they have experienced including

asking for instructions in writing instead of verbally becoming a better active listener and being able to use technology such as headsets or computer screens to improve communication overall.

In this vein, Cindy shared some challenges she faced in the workplace with hearing loss such as “when people call out to me across a room, because I have no distance hearing at all, and it can be embarrassing.” Cindy said she

also struggled with people who are soft speakers. In one of my jobs at a very small private equity firm, where I definitely wasn’t as comfortable disclosing my disability. I interact with the very senior management, some of whom were very soft speakers, and I didn’t always understand, or I probably misunderstood what they said.

Nathanial stated that “whenever there’s a mixer or there’s anything with ambient sound, I’m out of it, I can’t talk, I can’t really converse with people.” Nathanial pointed out that when he finds himself in social gatherings, he is “almost super focused on [people’s] face that people think that I am mad or super serious” which is a common misunderstanding by those with hearing. In any case, hearing impaired or not, when a person struggles to hear the words, they will often lean in, sometimes look intently at someone, or even squinch their eyebrows inward which can lead to misinterpretation.

The ability to keep up with a conversation in noisy or poor acoustic areas requires a great deal of effort and energy on the part of the person with hearing loss. Nathanial states that “I continuously try to figure out what the missing piece of the conversation is. It’s constant work at mixers and meetings.” In any work environment, one of the most

valuable skills is the ability to build positive relationships with your colleagues, and the most common approach to this is through conversations, especially if after work hours. Nathaniel, referencing his earlier comment about the challenges of hearing at mixers and social gatherings, stated that “this is when we are supposed to relax and schmooze your boss and set yourself up for a future promotion.” This scenario begs the question: Is the organization failing to create a safe and good social environment for all their employees to thrive and connect? Or is the organization ensuring that only a select targeted group will have a greater opportunity of gaining promotions over other individuals or groups?

For some individuals with hearing loss, their sense of direction or the source of a sound or the speaker can be confusing. It may even be that the person with hearing loss will need time to look around their surrounds to determine who is speaking which in itself can delay the processing of what is being said. For example, Nathaniel expressed this very challenge he faced as a teacher, stating:

I’m upfront with the students about my inability to hear whispers and soft voices. Sometimes when I’m turning and I’m writing something, I hear a voice, but I don’t know where it came from because I’m mono sided hearing, I can’t tell direction that well. The problem now is that I get big classes and they gave me an auditorium, it’s like staired seating, and it’s more seats than I have students, which I think for Covid reasons they wanted them to spread out. I’ll ask a question and I’ll hear an answer and I have no idea who or where it came. Even when I hear...soft voices and I just don’t get it. I must get out of the pedestal, and I climb up the stairs and I come up to their face. What did you say, and they have to do

that, a few times, so I kind of tell them, please speak up, please speak up and have to do that quite often.

Much like the other participants, the need to ask others to speak louder or clearer on a constant basis can be challenging and energy draining. It can sometimes be viewed as dehumanizing because the person who is not remembering to speak up is accommodating to the needs of the person with hearing loss. The act of not accommodating can be experienced as a form of rejection of the person.

A challenge many individuals with hearing loss face is the concern of how they are viewed in the eyes of others. Nathaniel expressed a concern about being viewed as competent and valuable when he stated “I don’t want [my hearing loss] defining me. I want to be known for being capable, not incapable.” For a participant to share this perspective points out the fear or concern about how their disability is portrayed and how others may view the disability as a “problem” or an “issue.” On the other side of the coin, people with hearing loss who have successfully navigated their careers and their life even with a disability, “passing for able-bodied are neither cowards, cheats, nor con artists, but skillful interpreters of the world from whom we all might learn” (Sieber, 2011, p. 24). Each person with a hearing loss experiences the world differently and encounters different challenges that can lead to different conclusions about how American culture views disability.

It can be challenging at times for some with hearing loss to keep up with conversations because they are so focused on making sure they are hearing the words that are being said. They then follow up with processing the meaning of what was said. This

delay can sometimes make it difficult for hearing impaired individuals to think of a quick reply or comment to the conversation. When Jason describes his experience as a project manager for translation companies, he stated that having a hearing loss was both a challenge and enhanced him as a leader. “My hearing impairment does make it difficult to receive the audio signal in a noisy environment or even on telephone or somebody with a bit challenging accent.”

Jason also described the challenges of hearing loss: “I have to think about what I’m hearing. My processing power is devoted to what I’m hearing and not on the content of the message of what the person is saying so that already kind of put me behind.” This is a good example of when a person with hearing loss meets with friends or colleagues at a restaurant. They may be on the quieter side as they are spending more time listening and determining what words are being said. They don’t have the time or perhaps the energy to contribute on the same level as a person who is has hearing. In my experience, when I find that I have heard all the words correctly and with less effort than usually is needed, I find that I am more sociable and enjoy those moments because the conversation is smoother and a connection is being formed.

Jason describes what he views as:

...an advantage, is I’ve learned different techniques to understand really where the person is coming from, how they’re expressing what they’re saying. So, their emotional response, the tone of their voice, you know some of those like subtle cues that maybe their subconsciously received but I’m actually focusing on that and that might help tailor a message a certain way.

Jason added the benefit of getting what was said in writing to reference it later. If you don't get it in writing, then it's just as good as if they didn't say in case they want to like back out or whatever.” Being able to see instructions via an email or read minutes from a previous meeting provides individuals with hearing loss more confidence that they are obtaining the full picture of what was said. As a result, an individual with hearing loss can be more confident. Jason also pointed out how others, hearing or hearing impaired, can benefit from having instructions in writing for reference later and about how to complete an assignment or project. Jason said, “somebody else down the line, might need to know how to do it so it's already documented right because you needed to know how to do it in the first place.”

When Jason was speaking earlier about having to dedicate time and energy to processing what he was hearing, I shared with him my similar experiences. I compared it to being similar to the difference between a manual and automatic vehicle where those with hearing loss are “driving a manual” while those with hearing are “driving an automatic” which requires less thinking, awareness, and energy.

Several participants pointed out that during the pandemic, they have had a positive experience using headsets and the computer screen more often. For example, Cindy stated “now that we all wear headsets where I work, it's great because I can hear better than ever and almost all of my interaction is remote, even when I'm in the office I sit in front of my computer on calls all day so that really helps me.” Jason also uses a headset to assist him when using Zoom calls so that he can more clearly hear the words and is blocking out the background noise. Jason shared that “most of the challenges have been around calls with customers. Internally, you can always go fact to face [to talk with

your colleagues].” Another point Jason made was that “sometimes I don't know what I need and it's a very variable situation, so I can't really tell them ‘I need this’ and then have the speaker throw a curveball.” This statement points out the unpredictability of the impact of hearing loss or the environment or even the type of assistive listening devices used. This makes the reality of requesting accommodations more challenging and points out the need for organizations and managers to be patient with their employees with hearing loss who are continually adjusting to the ever-changing work environment.

Along with changing work environments and modifications to assistive listening devices, individuals with hearing loss are faced with stigma and misconceptions about hearing loss and disability. As Lily stated, “in organizations, where people aren't jerks, I think it's kind of an asset.” Lily described that a previous employer she worked for offered “hearing aid benefit and they basically paid for my second set of hearing aids.” In Lily's case, she found an organization that was dedicated to providing financial support for their employees with hearing loss. This is one kind of support that is very helpful to employees struggling to keep up with the latest hearing aid technologies that could assist them in being at their best in the workplace. Lily's statement also implies the reality of stigma in some working environments where it can result in colleagues who are not kind or support their colleagues with hearing loss.

Lily shared her experience using conference phones where her colleagues were not understanding of her hearing loss:

We did a lot of meetings using our conference phone, which is like a Polycom Treo. It's like a Polycom Treo only way better and I had to sit at the end of the

table. It was a very long table and I guess this was my fault, I should have made it clear it wasn't working for me. In future meetings I sat in the middle of the table near the phone.

Lily is being hard on herself but also true about needing to speak up. However, Lily may not have spoken up as much in part of her fear of being faced with negative reactions from her colleagues or employer. That experience can make it challenging for an individual with a disability to speak up. In this case with the conference phone experiences, Lily stated “I think people concluded that I was stupid. That really upset me.” Lily choked up a bit when sharing this piece. She was struggling with hearing loss and her colleagues were not supporting her or even attempted to reduce the barriers in the workplace. I think many with hearing loss can relate and empathize with this experience. When others unaware of a person with hearing loss, there can be many misconceptions such as viewing a person as stupid, ignorant, or arrogant.

Reflecting on an experience from a previous organization, Lily stated “I would say the management was not supportive of me, which is ironic, given that [the company worked on audio technology].” This statement makes it clear that misunderstandings, misconceptions, or straight-out discrimination can be experienced in any organization, even in an organization that is developing and selling products that are designed to help those with hearing loss. Strong and positive leadership can play a huge role in reducing negative misconceptions of hearing loss in the workplace. If the leadership in an organization is not addressing the social and systemic barriers within the organization, there is a great risk of not promoting individuals with hearing loss into leadership roles and supervisory positions.

Onboarding, Organizational Factors, and Leadership

Orientation, Onboarding Process and Experience

When employees work their way through an organization's onboarding process, there are "three main goals the organization wants to achieve: 1. Affirming the employee's decision to accept the job, 2. Communicating expectations, and 3. Encouraging the new employee to think in terms of 'us'" (Wallace, 2009, p. 170). Most organizations have a standard orientation procedure for all their employees. Individuals with hearing loss experience these same orientation process, though may not experience the same interaction with or reactions from the orientation team.

For each of the participants, their orientation or onboarding process was overall a positive experience, either in their past organization and/or in their current organization. Most, if not all, organizations in the United States seem to have a standard orientation or onboarding process to ease the integration of a new employee into the organization and into teams. Orientation processes are about teaching the new employee the "fundamentals of the organization: what it is trying to do, why it is doing that, and how the particular employee will contribute to these efforts" (Wallace, 2009, p. 168). Starting a new position at a new organization can sometimes be exhilarating and filled with the sense of new opportunities on the horizon.

As Jason shared about his onboarding experience, he stated "I think it's always fun. You get to be the new person, you get to ask different questions, you see things with a fresh pair of eyes." Jason shares that he "loves onboarding materials since I get a good idea of the organization." Jason also pointed out that elements of the onboarding process

really reveal how the organization will be, stating “how you get introduced to the team? How do you get introduced to the organization at large? How you get introduced to your job? What are the tasks?” When employees start a new job, they are “often interested and eager to learn and prove” (Wallace, 2009, p. 169) themselves to the organization. Individuals with hearing loss may have a greater drive and desire to prove themselves as they are sometimes faced with stigma or stereotypes around disability.

Cindy’s experience of onboarding for her organization was, as she stated:

awkward because I didn’t know where I would be sitting and [the organization] gave me a desk at the end of a row, where it’s a little noisier. I do better in a quieter situation, and I had the headset issue where I didn’t have the optimal headset and people talking to me from across the aisles.

Initially Cindy did not speak up and instead purchased her own headset that had better quality sound. She did learn later to speak up for what she would need to perform her best at her job. Cindy did point out that “in my past experiences not all the companies are as good as my current one.” However, not all organizations have made the shift toward supporting their employees with hearing loss but as Cindy believes the trend is shifting in favor of individuals with disabilities.

Much like the other participants, Nathaniel believes his orientation experience is the same as their hearing peers. “I think it’s no different. Again, I try to make it a non-issue, so I don’t think you’d be any different than a person without hearing issue.” Despite believing his experience is the same as his hearing peers, he still decides it is

important to not share his hearing loss with his employer or colleagues. This might indicate a fear of being judged by his hearing loss.

Lily's experience of onboarding for the audio technology company was overall positive, stating "they had an onboarding process that were pretty good about it. I did make my boss aware of my hearing situation. I guess I should have been more open about it." Lily's response shows a hesitancy to reveal her disability to her colleagues. Her hesitancy is a response to her past experiences of colleagues not being as respectful and supportive as they could have been.

For Zina, her experience of onboarding with a new organization was very professional. She stated,

My onboarding with the law firms were small. The health care systems are large, so their orientations are more formalized. Maybe even a few days. I've always sat in the front. Depending on where it was, there was usually captioning for any videos. So, I had my need mostly met.

As Wallace (2009) pointed out, each organization should aim to "customize the orientation process to the individual employee's experiences and needs" (p. 170). In the case with individuals with hearing loss, the process needs to be done perhaps in quiet environments or in the case with Zina to ensure that there is a seat in the front of the room or having close captioning available if a film is being shown. Having an effective onboarding process policy can ensure organizations can retain talented employees and even attract new needed skilled workers to the organization. A good onboarding process

can also lift employees up, providing them opportunities to develop their careers and into more confident professionals.

Organizational or Departmental Policies

Organizational and departmental policies can have a substantial positive impact on how individuals with disabilities, such as hearing loss, can integrate into the organization and seek opportunities for promotions into leadership positions. The participants shared their experience encountering organizational and/or departmental policies making them feel either empowered or constricted.

Cindy stated that at her “current company, they have a program which really embraces employees with disabilities, including neurodiverse disabilities and it’s really encouraged employees to speak up about their own experiences, to share experiences, to educate one another. It’s a great resource.” Cindy said that it “really empowered me and made me feel much more comfortable about having a disability and hearing about other people’s experiences as well.” Cindy also stated, “I think that corporate America these days in general is trending in that direction, because I’ve seen other job applications say do you want to identify yourself as someone with a disability.” This can be a sign that organizations in general are looking to hire individuals with disabilities and also want to be more proactive in supporting new hires who have disabilities. Cindy also thought this trend toward more inclusion of disabled workers extended to other segments of society such as universities, which makes “me think that our culture in general is becoming more open and accepting of people with disabilities.”

Nathanial shared that he was not familiar with the policies and procedures at his organization because he didn't ask. He didn't want to ask. "I've seen who gets hired and promoted and it reaffirms the fact that I should not have an image of someone who needs extra help or accommodations." Nathanial is pointing out the fear that all employees, whether with a disability or not, want to appear competent and able to perform their duties at work. There is a stigma that those with disabilities require not just extra assistance but also cost more than the non-disabled employee.

Nathanial stated, "what I think is a more pervasive problem that HR departments are dealing with is probably, equality and open access based on gender and race." He felt disability issues didn't really make it up on the list. This may mean that organizations do not advertise enough the services and protections they offer or may be that organizations do not consider disability an issue. Cindy stated she felt certain trends have shifted and that organizations are now noticing disability as a topic needing more focus and integrating it into their business plan.

Jason spoke to how organizations, particularly startups, tend to change their operations quite often and can sometimes be frustrating.

In my current organization, it's a startup, they're different. We're pivoting all the time, trying to gauge where the wind is blowing and then 'Oh, you know the markets going this way, this is where we need to how we need to adapt' and there's organizational changes, which I get it, but it can be frustrating just because our day to day [operations] doesn't really change.

Jason also stated, “I think I prefer when organizations kind of have their act together and have well-established processes but aren't dogmatic about it.”

Zina stated, “I’m not sure there has been anything that could be discrimination.”

The participants who sought out accommodations from their organizations had responsive organizations though it often took a while for the organization to follow through. As Zina explained “I did try to get a caption phone through my organization which was free, but it took years. I think it was just incompetence of the system, maybe too many layers of bureaucracy.” In each participant’s case, they bought their own devices so not to burden the organization and ensure they had access to the technology best suited for their needs.

Policies are usually viewed as a way to maintain structure and order within an organization; however, with “a political view of these arrangements suggests that in many situations they are often best understood as products and reflections of a struggle for control” (Morgan, 1997, p. 175). Recognizing this reality as a leader in an organization can empower them to encourage positive change and amendments to policies. Policies are tools and mechanisms that could be at a leader’s or non-leader’s approach to creating a better working condition for employees with hearing loss.

Hearing Loss and Leadership

Leadership is a term holding different meaning for different individuals. In this study, participants held different views of leadership. From one perspective, leadership was seen as a specific job title or duty within the organization such as being a manger, supervisor, or president. The other perspective, a person is a leader in an organization

regardless of one's official position or title in an organization. Instead, it is about what a person does in the organization such as teaching others, inspiring others, or providing support to colleagues.

Cindy noted that "when I was less mature and less reluctant to admit that I had a disability, it did hold me back more. I would miss things and not speak up like I probably should have, and you know ask people to repeat themselves." With experience and maturity, Cindy stated that

being in an organization that really is open to hiring people with disabilities, I'm more comfortable admitting that I have a disability and I'm not as shy asking people to repeat themselves or to say, 'you know I'm going to sit at the middle of this conference table.'

Cindy felt her hearing loss made her a better leader "because having hearing loss, I try to really focus on things which probably helps me to be successful. I pay closer attention to all of my conversations." In some ways, individuals with no hearing loss take listening for granted and may miss something said without knowing, while a person with hearing loss wants to make sure they hear as much as they can and engage in active listening.

In thinking about his role as a teacher, Nathaniel stated, "The best we can do is help people along their path and you can tell when people are going to be on solid footing." While Nathaniel doesn't consider himself a leader, he is in fact a good leader because he has a desire to assist those struggling and/or need of guidance. A person with hearing loss is often going to focus more on the speaker and that leads to a kind of active listening which is a trait of a good leader.

Jason stated: “I wouldn’t say I’m in a leadership position per se, I’m not a manager. I used to be a manager in a different organization.” Like Nathaniel, Jason views leadership mostly through the concept of being a manager, supervisor, or a title that indicates that one is a leader. Jason did later state “I do lead different initiatives from time to time, but it’s not an explicit leadership position.” Jason and Nathaniel may be downplaying their own abilities and contributions of their work.

Lily has not only served as a leader in the workplace but also as a leader on her band where she plays the bass, stating, “I am the bass player, so I have to play the right notes, or it screws everybody up.” She describes the need to be alongside her fellow musicians to be able to hear and explained that there were times in the past where the design of the stage was not ideal for being able to listen to her own playing while also listening to her partners on stage. From Lily’s statement, we can see that sometimes individuals with hearing loss have to perform in an environment that will not be ideal for their hearing conditions. This reveals that there is still a great deal of work needed to transform physical space in a way that can be more inclusive of individuals with hearing loss. Lily’s experience points out the everyday uncertainties and stresses placed on individuals with hearing loss.

Lily also shared her own experience of misunderstanding when a person doesn’t reply to her only to find out later that person had a hearing loss too. “The mandolin player who is more deaf than I am, for years, I thought she was ignoring me. No, she’s just deaf.” Here is a case where two individuals with hearing loss, who at first didn’t communicate with each other about their hearing conditions led to misunderstandings. Once it became known that her fellow musician was deaf, the relationship and style of

communication improved. Being open with others can lead to better collegial relationships.

Lily shared a leadership experience when teaching music to students about the importance of listening to the music instead of watching the musician play the instrument.

I always tell students to rely on your ears, not your eyes, your ears are going to give you a lot more information...my ears work better than my eyes and I'm hearing impaired, and they don't believe me, so I take them out and show them my aids.

By introducing her students to hearing aids, she is bringing awareness to others about hearing loss and the technology that helps a hearing-impaired person to hear their environment, helps them participate in the world.

Lily is also dedicated to assisting others with hearing loss by encouraging them to get a hearing aid when they need it. Being a leader for those who are struggling means one listens to others' needs and provides encouragement in the correct direction. Lily stated

I try to be a hearing aid advocate, especially for musicians. I had one girlfriend who knew that her hearing was deteriorating...after talking to her, multiple times, I finally get this text that is the picture of the hearing aids.

Lily was so happy her friend was seeking the help she needed. Lily's friend, "said that the first time she used them to watch TV, she cried because she realized how much she had been missing." Lily's leadership and encouragement improved her friend's life on a deep,

emotional level. To be able to hear is a powerful act. When we are unable to hear others speak or process sounds in our surroundings, we suffer emotionally too.

Zina briefly described her current career as a lawyer and how she saw herself as a leader:

I am currently in a leadership position. I'm a solo practitioner, but because I'm a lawyer and I have my own clients. I am in a position of leadership in terms of influencing strategy and my clients trust me. It hasn't always been that way, I've only been in this leadership position, maybe for a few years because I transitioned to new career. A career change and then it takes time to get experience in that area of law and know what you're talking about, speak with authority for someone to look at you as a leader. So, I've been in special education law now maybe five years but really in a leadership role probably within the last three.

Zina shared her desire to pursue leadership opportunities and promotions and stated "I wanted to be in a leadership position, or at least more so than I was, so I constantly tried to prove myself, assert more independence, and take on additional responsibilities. I did get promoted, but just barely so." Zina's experience points out the struggle individuals with hearing loss face when pursuing their desire to be successful in their careers and to move up in the organization. This brings into question why organizations or followers are not always welcome to the idea of hiring or promoting an individual with disability into a leadership position. Zina shared about her work with students with disabilities:

It probably was more of a challenge to attaining leadership previously, as opposed to now. I represent students with disabilities. Having one sort of reinforces what I'm supporting and gives me some credibility that I know what I'm talking about,

having lived through it, or when I'm representing students with hearing loss. So maybe it enhances it now, but it was a challenge before.

Each participant's responses revealed their views of leadership. Some participants see a leader as a person who holds an official title or position within an organization. Some of the participants see leadership as a role within the organization or the ability to influence others or policies, which doesn't always require being in a managerial position. Having a disability should not determine if a person can pursue leadership opportunities or not; however, in most organizations, communication skills and style are considered crucial. Having the "acceptable" form of communication approach is viewed as a potential leader in an organization and ideal for promotion.

Communicating with Colleagues, Supervisors, and Mentors

Colleagues' Perspective of Individuals with Hearing Loss

A person with a disability may be concerned with how others perceive them as capable workers due to their disability. The participants shared that they neither had bad or good experiences, rather that most were not concerned with their hearing loss if the topic came up. In the case with Cindy, she stated "since I've disclosed my hearing loss to a handful of people, no one really seems too bothered by it."

An experience that most of the participants could relate to is the need to continually remind others to speak up when speaking softly or more clearly if they mumble. Cindy stated,

I have to say one thing about hearing loss is, if you say to someone ‘you know, I’m hard of hearing,’ especially to someone who is a soft speaker, ‘Could you please speak up?’ They’ll be like ‘Oh, hey yes of course,’ but then the next day, they forget.

Each of the participants are aware that hearing loss is considered an invisible disability, meaning that it is not easily noticeable until a person states it. Cindy stated that hearing loss “really is [an invisible disability] because people just don’t know and even my sister, she was visiting me and she knows, but she would try to talk to me from another room...I can’t hear her.”

A common concern among any individuals with an impairment is the question of whether their impairment negatively impacts how others perceive them. Nathaniel expressed this concern during the interview when he stated “I just wonder that seeing me in hearing aids sent a signal to my new manager that I was less than capable. I don’t know if I can ever figure it out.” Nathaniel also pointed out that he views himself as a person without a disability because he knows he “can do the job like anyone else.” When addressing the question about whether hearing loss negatively or positively impacts one’s ability to be a leader, Nathaniel responded “I think my view is that managers hire people to take problems away. To the degree that you present yourself as needy then you’re presenting them with a new problem...so it makes it more challenging.”

This can go hand in hand with the fear of being viewed as a hindrance to an organization or one’s teammates. As a result, some individuals with disabilities learn to stay silent or muddle their way through a project or assignment without asking for

assistance. Nathaniel believed that his colleagues “don’t mention it and they don’t talk about it” and followed that statement with “I’m not sure if they were aware. I think they are aware now.” He also commented:

I don’t know to what degree, especially when I lost the promotion to somebody with 11 years less experienced than me. I’ve been told I’m a star performer at work, but still don’t get a promotion to show for it, so it might be seen as more work for my manager. I don’t know.

If organizations do not promote their employees who have disabilities, it becomes uncertain what the reasons for those decisions. It places undue hardship on individuals with disabilities who are dedicated to an organization, have a desire to stay and expand their role or responsibilities in the organization, and want to achieve economic independence.

Nathaniel made another point when he said, “the hearing-impaired community is pretty much invisible. You can be shopping next to them in the supermarket, you wouldn’t know,” a great example of what it means to have an invisible disability. Since the disability is not easily identifiable, those with hearing loss have the challenge and stresses of continually telling others that they are hearing-impaired. It also means encountering misconceptions or misunderstandings by those who have hearing. A common issue facing those with hearing loss is that others believe the hearing-impaired person is ignoring them. There is a lack of understanding of how today’s hearing aids identify speech and sound, as well as how the hearing aids attempt to block certain

sounds out which can sometimes be speech. This lack of knowledge can lead to conflicts between individuals or tension that can damage collegial relationships.

Hearing loss is regarded as an invisible impairment and the “present study found that managers tend to forget about the conditions” (Svinndal et al., 2020, p. 1860) not because they are careless or inconsiderate, but mostly because they are not seeing it or experiencing it. Therefore, it doesn’t always come up in their thinking process. With this said, good managers or supervisors should remind themselves to interact and speak with each of their colleagues, with or without disabilities. It may require additional effort and energy on the manager’s part, but it is achievable and ultimately just a respectful approach to supervising.

Jason had the experience of needing to inform his colleagues or customers that he will be using a headset to help him hear as a way to prepare them. He stated,

I’m going into a meeting room for a call or telling them ‘Hey I’m going to be using headphones for this call,’ might look weird but you know, most of the time people are just, I mean it’s fine. Nobody really cares.

Individuals with hearing loss who use listening assistive devices are often sensitive or concerned about how others will perceive them using the devices. In most cases, colleagues and clients are comfortable or may not even be thinking about why a person is wearing hearing aids or a headset.

Jason shared his experience of his last job performance review where he stated that “a couple of my peers have mentioned that I don’t speak up much. That’s true. Most

of the time I'm listening again, processing what people are saying. I am doing double duty because I'm listening and processing. People talk quickly." Jason also reiterated "I don't speak up because in the moment I'm just kind of absorbing [what I'm hearing]." Jason pointed out that sometimes his colleagues will voice an opinion that he already has in mind before he gets a chance to speak to the group. He will either say he supports the idea or just not speak up. For Jason, his experience with his colleagues, "I think overall it's pretty positive...I think we're a pretty inclusive organization." Like Cindy, Jason reveals that some organizations want to be inclusive and follow through on those aspirations.

Jason stated, "I don't think people have ever really called [my hearing loss] out explicitly in my current organization. My past job when I brought it up, people are fine, it's never really an issue." This reveals situations where others are not disturbed by a colleague having a hearing loss. Jason did, however, experience a work situation where he felt that his hearing loss was disruptive to his ability to complete his role in the workplace and tension with his colleagues. He said,

where it was an issue was when I was a student-teacher. I was doing a combination of bilingual education and teaching credential program. That's where it was a liability because I needed to really know what was going on in the classroom.

Jason expressed his feeling that his hearing loss didn't allow him to keep up with the conversations and activities in the classroom. "The challenge was the kids would whisper or there's already some kind of discussion happening." Classrooms can be places

where there are many background noises such as chattering among the students, sounds from outside might make it more difficult to hear speech in the classroom, or sometimes with multiple activities taking place at once might make it difficult to manage where to focus our listening.

In Jason's experience with the teaching job, his colleagues' perspective on his hearing impairment impacted him as a leader in that "it caused me to quit teaching. It wasn't just my colleagues' perspective on hearing loss, it was a very stressful experience overall and it pushed me to my limit." He later pointed out that "I was not getting enough out of it to make it worth the effort." From this experience, Jason said that he learned "not to be ashamed or [that I needed] to be able to advocate for myself. I think that's kind of been how its impacted me."

Supervisors

In his overall experience in the workplace, Jason shared that "With his supervisor it's not an issue. I don't think it's really impacted how I interact with them. Subordinates or colleagues, I think the same thing." When reflecting on his experiences with clients and customers, Jason stated

clients, I don't always bring it up so sometimes it can get awkward... when I can't hear and somebody will just kind of step in and kind of drive the rest of the conversation and then I'll just participate where my part or role is needed.

Jason commented that not just hearing impaired but all individuals "want to be heard and understood, and you're somebody who may be not have the hardware to do it that

function properly, but they're still trying.” Building off what many of the participants have stated, a Norwegian study (2020) shared that “managers had an overall positive inclination toward hearing impairments and contribution to inclusive workplaces, where they recognized an extensive responsibility towards all employees and their needs” (Svinndal, et al., 2020, p. 1859).

While most of the participants expressed an overall positive experience with their supervisors, some pointed out that they had negative experiences with their colleagues and/or supervisors. Lily shared her negative experience with the company that focused on audio technology and said,

I found their attitude [about my hearing loss] bad. Instead of helping me, they saw me as incompetent, and I didn't like that very much. I think it was frankly because the general manager of the division knew that he wasn't making his quota.

Zina shared her experiences in the classroom, “I did hear that I was referred to as the deaf person and then I’ve also heard that some people thought I was just wealthy and [had] a note taker.”

Collegial Relationships

Zina said “My colleagues have typically been helpful, and they want to be supportive. Probably personality has something to do with that rather than my disability alone. I think people have generally wanted to be helpful and I happily take it.” Part of being successful in the work environment is having a positive working relationship with one’s colleagues. Zina explained “in a social situation if I don't hear what somebody says

or I've lost context, I'll ask whoever I'm familiar with or whoever's closest to me. So, the 'communication repair; strategy.' Trust plays a huge role with individuals with disability and knowing that others will not ridicule them for seeking out assistance.

When reflecting on her past and current collegial relationships, Zina said:

The attitude toward me as a person may have varied versus me as a person with a disability. I don't think the disability played in. I think there could be a sense some people felt threatened. Given my background, my experience, how I look, how tall I am. Maybe my hearing impairment made me more approachable.

Overall, the participants stated that their colleagues were not concerned or bothered by their hearing loss. Though one participant did share that they experienced tension with their colleagues because of their difficulty to hear in the classroom and was also faced with other stressful factors in the workplace that might have led to him quitting. A few of the participants noted they have had the experience of asking others to repeat what they said and expressed their need to continually remind others to speak up which can become frustrating for all parties. One participant spoke about not sharing their hearing loss because they didn't want to be viewed as "needy." This can be not only a sign of lack of trust of one's colleagues to treat them fairly but also a practical observation of how current organizations are often less willing to assist their employees. One participant pointed out that her colleagues saw her as "incompetent" because she couldn't hear them. All these statements point out the importance of leaders to create safe spaces for individuals with hearing loss to speak up freely about their challenges and needs.

Impacts of Hearing Loss on Leaders, Interaction, and Communication

The participants shared that their hearing loss did impact them as leaders or influenced how their colleagues viewed them as individuals. Cindy stated:

If anything, I did have a young man who worked for me for a while, who stuttered and somehow, we started talking about that, and then I shared my disability with him, he had no idea, and I mean that was like a really nice comfortable conversation to have. I felt like maybe he viewed me as a stronger leader for being empathetic. I have more empathy for people's personal situations, and you know disabilities or what have you and try to be conscious of individual needs.

Having a hearing loss or any kind of disability does help individuals understand that others struggle with barriers in the workplace and ultimately became more empathetic. A common point among the participants is that even those with hearing at times have trouble understanding others because they can't hear them, or the speaker is soft spoken or mumbles. As Cindy shared:

...with my supervisor, he is someone that is soft spoken and mumbles a bit so I often have to ask him to repeat himself, but then I notice, this has happened with other people as well...that there's other people who can hear perfectly fine that have trouble hearing him. Sometimes it just takes one person to speak up and then the other people say the same thing.

Cindy's work requires her to connect and speak with individuals from all over the world which can at times be a challenge to understand what is said through some accents. Cindy

stated, “I do work with a very internationally diverse group of people with accents, so that can make things more challenging as well.” After asking Cindy if she mentions she has hearing loss when speaking on the phone, Cindy replied with “No but if it’s particularly challenging, I will just say ‘I’m sorry, could you speak up or could you speak more slowly’ and they’ll be responsive.”

Hearing loss can sometimes lead to misunderstandings or miscommunication between colleagues. Cindy stated:

In my current job probably none, but I think back to that small company that I worked in and I think there were definitely times when I did not hear what someone said so I either just pretended not to hear them at all or I misinterpreted what they said.

This is a common experience and tactic among those with hearing loss. If in fact there was miscommunication, it could lead to complications in the workplace and damage working relationships, especially if the hearing-impaired person has not yet disclosed that they have a hearing loss.

Nathanial shared a beautiful story about his desire to support others and see them thrive. Nathanial was teaching at a community college at the time and met a student who was a single mother and dedicated to her education. Nathanial said:

Out of all those students, there was a shiny gem. I wrote the best recommendation letter for this woman who should have been in a four-year university but was at community college because she got derailed with a high school pregnancy. She was working her way through community college as a

single mother. She was brilliant. She belonged at a university. I tried to do everything I could to assist her. She applied to USC. I wrote her the best letter I could, and she, a few years ago, sent me an invitation to her graduation. She also started a career at KMPG for accounting. She has since married and her life for herself and her son are in a much better place.

Nathanial did not consider himself a leader because he didn't hold a specific management or supervisor title or rank in the organization. However, for some individuals, Nathanial's action of assisting a struggling student and opening opportunities for them to enter the UC system and graduate is a powerful act of a loving leader. Nathanial was humble when he said "she changed her own life. I just was the one who trumpeted her abilities and tried to let USC know that they needed to accept her... I'm real proud of her." Nathanial saw great potential in another person and provided guidance and encouragement that led to a blossoming of a more confident individual.

Nathanial spoke about his experience when the pandemic began and how the shift to teaching on Zoom brought new positive opportunities for him to interact with his students and colleagues better. Nathanial stated:

Being on Zoom helped a lot because when I have a headset on, it's almost a bespoke and now become my preferred way of communicating with people, but in-person, that's where the challenges are. The challenges are in the ambient, loud meeting, in a room where you don't get to choose where you sit because there's a pecking order and you must sit where you're assigned.

Zoom meetings seem to have had a positive impact on individuals with hearing loss to interact more with their colleagues because they are better able to hear their colleagues

and the background ambient noise is either reduced greatly or removed completely. Another advantage, and I can speak from my own experience too, is that being able to see everyone's face on the screen allows for better lip-reading opportunities and also no masks covering the face.

When thinking about misunderstandings that took place in his work experience, Jason stated "You know what it's funny, I can't say there are many that are related to hearing impairment... I would say communication styles lead more to misunderstandings than not being able to process a word or sentence." Communication style definitely has a huge impact on how others interact with each other or react to others. Jason also stated, "there might be details here and there, that I don't get that I'll be able to get after the fact, which reminds me it doesn't hurt to occasionally remind colleagues that I don't hear or can't hear." Part of communicating with others is also being honest, open, and sometimes vulnerable.

An experience and feeling I've heard several of the participants mention is the idea that they don't want to be a burden to others. Jason expressed this when speaking about working with start-up companies where it "is fast paced and everybody has a lot on their plate, sometimes I hesitate to say could you repeat what the customer said right after the call just because it feels like I'm creating more work for the other person."

Lily described how the attitude of her colleagues at the audio technology company toward her hearing loss "definitely impacted me negatively. I think that at the last company and the previous companies, it didn't do anything. They just accepted it." Lily followed up to share that often her colleague figured out on their own that she had a

hearing loss, when her colleagues “would walk up to my desk and I wouldn’t know they were there. They would say something, and I would jump...in surprise.”

Lily also experienced the struggle to hear soft speakers and the continual need to remind those individuals to speak up and more clearly. She stated, “when [my hearing] suddenly got worse, I was assigned to this project with this guy who was very soft spoken and that was awful. He didn’t get it. I kept saying, ‘please speak up’ and that was terrible.” Leaders in an organization need to be able to be aware of how your colleagues are doing. In most cases, employees should inform their supervisors of their challenges, but sometimes that is not always a comfortable or easy process for the person with hearing loss. If it is the leader who is continually being reminded to speak up, the leader is revealing that they are not being considerate to their colleague’s needs and thus is a poor leader.

Zina shared her experience in school when others made assumption about her such as wondering where she was from because of her accent. Zina stated, “There were times when I didn’t want to have to explain ‘where’s your accent from?’ Sometimes I even made up a place, I would tell people I was from Israel and then I was in trouble if they were too.”

Zina is the second participant in this study to speak about “coming out of the closet” to reveal their hearing loss to others. To me this implies that a great deal of prejudice and misconceptions still exist about what it means to have a hearing loss. Zina stated, “I probably came out, if you will, when I got my hearing dog.” The idea of stepping ‘out of the closet’ again implies the concern of how others will react to learning

about their hearing loss and whether others' behaviors will change around them knowing the knowledge of their hearing loss.

I personally have always been open about my hearing loss. I didn't feel shame around my hearing loss until an experience in the workplace where revealing my challenges of hearing loss led to others changing their behavior and style of communication with me. Some colleagues, some in leadership and management positions, changed their tone and style of communication and spoke to me as if I were a child. I was personally insulted and hurt by this change and yet found myself in a position where I could not speak against it, as I understood the change was a result of their perspective of pity toward individuals with disabilities. Other colleagues changed their style of speech toward a higher energy, extra 'happiness' style of speech that also made it frustrating for me to communicate with them as I could tell this was a kind of masking of a person's fear or discomfort around my disability. I found that the colleagues that did not change their style of communication were more satisfying for me as it meant that my hearing loss did not bother them.

While the participants revealed that their hearing loss did not change their leadership style, it did impact how they interacted with their colleagues. For some of the participants, the interaction with their colleagues was professional while some participants had negative experiences with interacting with their colleagues. Mentors and supervisors can play an impactful role in normalizing disability in the workplace through their actions and how they engage in conversations with employees with hearing loss. The best approach appears to be to treat each person, with or without a disability, as a human being.

The Supportive Role of Mentors, Supervisors, and Managers

Mentors, supervisors, and managers can and should play an important role in improving the quality of the workplace. Their role as a leader in an organization is in part to set the tone and atmosphere among their colleagues and to address needs of those under their supervision. While it is encouraging to hear in the media the importance of including individuals with disabilities, there seems to be a “frequent lack of knowledge about the impact of hearing loss on daily life found among employees with hearing impairment” (Svinndal et al., 2020, p. 1860). This is a barrier for employees with hearing loss who are striving to progress in their careers. As Svinndal points out, the acceptance of one’s hearing loss does not always translate into knowing what one needs to do to achieve optimal success in the workplace. “Accommodation measures in complex communication situations, such as meetings, would constitute a recurring situation and imposing action on others if a microphone system” is needed (Svinndal et al., 2020, p. 1860). When accommodations are needed, disability is brought up in the workplace through the idea that someone is imposing on them or increase costs to the organization. However, this can be viewed through a different perspective of assisting our colleagues. Since friends and family members with disabilities occasionally need assistance, so why not our colleagues with disabilities?

An employee with hearing loss may have experience requesting accommodations but still struggle with explaining to their colleagues what would best assist them. For some individuals with hearing loss, their hearing aids may not operate consistently in all the different work environments, which can make it difficult to determine what accommodations they may need. This is a challenging barrier to overcome and requires

an extremely patient teammate. If the colleagues are all hearing, it can be extremely difficult for them to understand the inconsistency of assistive listening devices and for those with variable hearing loss that have good and bad days.

When considering what a supervisor could do for a new employee who has hearing loss, Cindy stated:

...on day one, when they welcome you and try to acclimate you to the environment and introduces you to people, someone who would say, is there anything you'd like to share with me, you know personally or professionally, that I might not know or glean from you, at first glance, or two. Are there any accommodations that you need would be helpful.

Some managers and supervisors are advised by the human resources department not to ask an employee if they need accommodations and instead wait for the employee to request accommodations. This is a reactive, rather than a proactive, approach and does not create the space that encourages individuals with hearing loss to speak up about their needs. A proactive approach can reveal a manager's or supervisor's desire to assist the employee with hearing loss which also says that the workplace is safe for them.

When asking Cindy what she would do as a leader when onboarding new employees, she stated "I should take my own advice that I just mentioned and ask them. Not to put them on the spot, but just welcome them to our company" and to take the lead in "introducing them to people, giving the lay of the land, and if there's anything on a personal or professional level that you feel would be worth sharing." The goal is to help the new employee with hearing loss, or any new employee, to feel comfortable

integrating into the new work and feel as if they are a member of the team. During this discussion, the word “comfortable” came up, and Cindy shared that she and her colleagues had a “leadership training session recently and they used a term called ‘psychological safety’” which is related to “being comfortable speaking and sharing your opinions” which for individuals with hearing loss can be a great challenge to feel safe in the workplace.

Feeling safe is having a trusting relationship between manager and employee. “Trust between manager and employee was the most important tool to make sure the employees would inform her about their needs” (Svinndal, et al., 2020, p. 1857). What we have heard from some of our participants is the uncertainty of revealing or not revealing if they had a hearing loss. This implies a concern that how others view them will impact their career opportunities. It is a fear of how others may react and treat them learning that they have a disability.

Even when supervisors and managers do their best to assist their colleagues, employees with hearing loss still need to pursue certain strategies. For example, Cindy acknowledged that in preparation for meetings with an individual she knew was soft spoken, “I would make sure that my hearing aid batteries were fresh because the last thing you want is to be in a conference room with someone and suddenly, you’re hearing aid batteries did.”

None of the participants had a supervisor with hearing loss. Cindy commented that the comfort and confidence with one’s own hearing loss impacts the decisions and

career choices they make. This can also impact their decision to pursue a leadership position. Cindy stated:

if you grow up being really uncomfortable with your disability and feeling held back and not being told that, “hey, you can still do X, Y, & Z, there's resources out there, and organizations willing to help you,” they potentially might choose a simpler or safer career path where they're not as comfortable, especially if they haven't encountered someone in a leadership position with a disability, because that's really inspiring too.

When considering what mentors and organizations can provide to assist their employees with hearing loss, Nathaniel said:

That's challenging to know because, to borrow a phrase from the LGBT community, I'm in the closet with my hearing issue. Maybe people know about it, maybe it's an open secret, but I'm not out front with it so trying to seek out mentors or leaders in regards to my hearing. It's not happening because I'm not even asking the question. But if I did, the organization would have to, I would think, be very helpful. The employers would need to be explicitly offering help first.

Nathaniel also pointed out the important role that human resource offices can play in assisting employees with hearing loss. He asserted, “The HR department needs to say, ‘hey if any of you need help with hearing issues, we want to accommodate you,’ from the beginning.” Having support and knowing that you have the safe space to explore and determine what is needed to achieve their job duties is very important. “Having access to

support contributed to trajectories maintaining work participation, while limited access to information and unsupportive service providers contributed to trajectories towards disconnection” (Svinndal et al., 2020, p. 1861). An unsupportive environment or lack of resources provided to their employees with hearing loss may be one possible reason for why many organizations in the United States do not often see employees with hearing loss moving into supervisory and managerial positions.

Jason said, “In my ideal world, we would have call transcripts” emphasizing the need for more access to technology to assist employees to perform more independently in the workplace. Jason also pointed out the importance of socializing with colleagues when he said, “because of the hearing impairment issue, I might miss out on some of the fast-paced banter or some of I want to say non-essential work functions, but they're socially essential.” It is understandable when we hear about those with hearing impairment isolating themselves from social gatherings due to the struggles of hearing and how that can lead to depression. We rarely consider the impacts of socializing with colleagues that can pave the way toward job promotions and/or raises in pay. Again, along the lines of not wanting to be a burden to others or restrict them in anyway, Jason shared:

I don't want to say for people to not [discuss or banter] because that's being human, but I do think for the most part, most people I've worked with have been very open minded, kind, and forward thinking, knowing that not everybody's perfect, not everybody has the same you know hardware. So, I think I've been lucky in that regard.

I find it interesting the concept of being lucky to be with colleagues that are kind, open, and supportive. To me that implies that the participants have had more negative than positive experiences, or at least they have a fear that one might end up working for an organization that does not care for their disabled employees. In regard to traits in a mentor or supervisor, Jason said “just being open minded, mostly compassionate, empathetic knowing that we’re going to miss out on say the timing of a joke or the joke itself.”

Among several of the participants, empathy came up as a crucial element. They expressed some doubt as to whether colleagues and supervisor are empathetic or just sympathetic. Jason made a comment:

Sympathy sometimes can seem kind of condescending...when it's something you can't change, a quality of yourself. Sympathy seems misplaced like if for somebody who's in a wheelchair, who can't walk or has a very hard time walking... sympathy for me would not be the right word or emotion because it's not my place right, that's very ableist... Empathy for me is more like you know say this, you know proverbial person in a wheelchair, what is their experience like, how do they go about in the world, it's like those series of questions to really put be able to put myself in their shoes and understand their experience better.

Empathy is a vehicle, a way to understand the other person's point of view.

Jason considered how empathy can be encouraged in the workplace. “Education, workshops, knowing another who's in that same boat. If there's a presentation, make it as accessible as possible, having closed captions for a video or record the presentation so

colleagues can revisit later, though employers almost never do.” Jason made an interesting point here in that even when the technology is available and the organization might have good intentions to assist their employees with hearing loss, the organization does not always follow through on it.

Reflecting on her experience interacting with her colleagues, Lily stated “Not too badly, I would say. I don't think it was an issue, I think it was fine.” Lily felt that overall, her interaction with her colleagues in her current organization is overall positive. She also shared that in one of her previous jobs she connected with a colleague who became a mentor for her:

I knew there was a guy who was in a leadership position, and I knew he had some issues hearing. So, I went to see him, and he was really supportive. His own career was not affected by his hearing loss, and he had this habit of talking too much because when you talk, then you're controlling the conversation. And he also said he was very conscious of where he sat in the room, such as being close to the leader or maybe be in a corner, so that he can get reflected sounds off the wall. He was really helpful. It's almost like the mentor must be hearing impaired to understand.

When considering her work as a board member, Lily shared there was another board member who had severe hearing loss and wore hearing aids. Lily stated “he would get very frustrated, and he wasn't good at being frustrated. He would just get mad, and I don't think we were doing enough to help.” A good leader looks back at previous experiences to understand what might have gone wrong and where there could be improvements to ensure that future experiences can be more positive for all involved.

I followed up this discussion by sharing that it can sometimes be challenging to explain to others what assistance one needs. Both Lily and I have seen how hearing loss can make it so challenging and frustrating for others to communicate their needs but also that anger is not a positive or effective approach to express one's concerns. I believe that anger may come up when a person with hearing loss has had several bad experiences and reactions from others and this can leave an imprint on a person. Zina shared some words of advice that her mentor once gave her:

The feedback I got early on, from hearing mentors was to be open about [my hearing loss] and don't demand anything. Show [your employer] you can do it. So, I sort of put that approach. In my interview, I was open about it, but said I don't need any accommodations.

This statement reveals a reality that hearing-impaired individuals are in fact at risk of facing discrimination in the workplace. Zina reveals how ableist the majority of workplaces are as a result of being led by individuals who have no disability.

Mentors and supervisors have an important opportunity to bring the best out of their colleagues. One possible approach to assisting employees with any disability is to nurture a more positive imagery around disability and to provide the space for disabled employees to freely speak to others about how their disability impacts them. In most cases, organizations and supervisors do not want to spend the time and space to discuss disability in part because they may be afraid that they will be sued. American society has also taught the public not to speak openly about disability or that disability is somehow a sin or distasteful. Mentors and supervisors can create the space for disabled employees to

build positive self-identities and also feel that they belong to a loving and supportive team.

Self-Identities and Disability

Having a disability is only one aspect of a person's identity. They may also be a parent, someone's child, poor, rich, male, female, old, or young. Our identities are multifaceted and can include our gender, race, sexual orientation, political views and so much more. Individuals with disabilities struggle at times with how others view them. As soon as a person learns of their disability, that often becomes the primary identity marker others see them through. The participants in the study each shared how their identities have impacted their careers and personal lives.

Cindy is a mother, and when returning to the workplace after five years of raising her children, she had an overlapping identity that could lead to stigma or misconceptions. Cindy shared her experience of returning to work after focusing on raising her children:

It was more challenging for me, that was also my first job back in the workforce after I'd taken like five years off to raise my small kids. And there was a lot at stake because it was like "alright I'm back in financial services, thank God I've got a job, but it's also this small European boutique for a firm headquartered in Monaco with these executives flying in and out" and it did make me very nervous, at times, but I managed, I did well. I conquered that challenge.

For any parent deciding stop working to support their children can find it difficult to return to the workplace because employers tend to want to hire individuals already working. Sometimes employers are prejudiced against parents because the organization

may see them as unreliable workers or the organization may not want to pay for childcare services. Adding a disability to this equation complicates career opportunities. It is not to say that disabled parents returning to work never get hired, only that it may be more challenging compared to a parent who has been working and has no disability. Nathaniel stated “My approach is to not be seen as a person with hearing issues. Also, I am a minority.”

Lily said, “My hearing is conflated with the fact that I'm a woman and I'm 63 and you don't want to be that person in Silicon Valley.” Lily reiterated her experience as an elderly woman with hearing loss by sharing in the “last three jobs, the hearing issue has been conflated with the age issue, and Silicon Valley is pretty brutal to people with gray hair. There have been multiple lawsuits against Google and probably Facebook too.” Lily elaborated further by sharing a story about a company she applied to and learning about how male dominated the tech industry (evening hearing aid technology) is:

They have this hearing aid. They're trying to bring the cost down that's their niche. So, I think they're hearing aids are under two grand. It's not like infinitely programmable, there's three programs, and just one that's closest to your audiogram. I was very excited to try the product. I couldn't put them in my ears because they never tested on women... White guys making products for white guys, and I was so pissed that I almost left. I was so appalled.

Lily also shared her experience at Hewlett Packard, a reputable tech company: “I never thought about my gender. If anything, I thought it was an asset.”

After completing law school, Zina worked roughly five years in medical malpractice defense before having a child. Zina stated “I had my first kid. I decided not to

go back. You know, I was home for a while. I realized I needed to go back, and I tried to go back to work. Even though I wasn't sure that was the right fit for me anyway, and I didn't get rehired.”

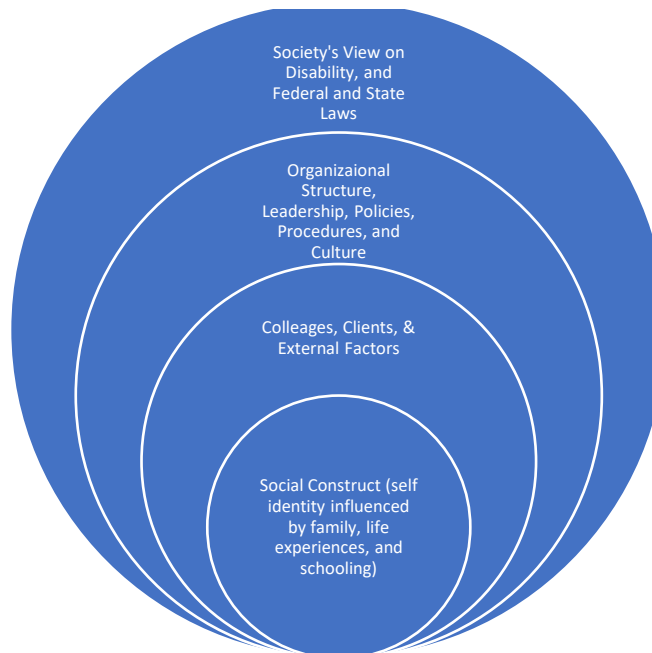
Zina changed her careers and went into compliance, saying it was not in healthcare. Not in a leadership position but felt that maybe that would be a launching point to maybe get promoted but it's hard. I thought, having my legal background and I learn quickly. I eventually got promoted, but it felt like a fight. Often those with disabilities have a sense of needing to fight for a promotion and seeing “abled” employees promoted more often than those with disabilities. “Employees with disabilities have rights, but they often have to fight for them” (Eberts & Hanna, 2022, p. 207).

Zina made an interesting point that I think applies to every person, with or without a disability, when seeking promotion opportunities, “if you don't assert yourself even kindly, you might not make any improvements.” An employee, with or without disability, needs to take the steps to present to their colleagues their competency and how they are achieving organizational goals. Individuals with hearing loss may not have been taught to be vocal or to find ways to stand out in the competitive environment of the American workplace. In many cases, individuals with hearing loss may desire to not stand out in part because they do not want their hearing loss to stand out.

Figure 2 portrays disability identity and how it relates to and is impacted by the workplace. Managers, supervisors, and leaders need to understand that how an employee views themselves may be impacted by how their colleagues and clients interact with them, how the employee with disabilities experiences organizational policies and

procedures that are usually created and approved by ableist leaders, and how society's culture and federal and state laws impact how organizations operate.

Figure 2: Disability Identity in relation to environment



As we see in this section, individuals with hearing loss need as much support as any other employee in the organization. The challenge may be that organizations and/or supervisors may not fully know how to support their employees with hearing loss. Organizations should be aware that employees with hearing loss might need time and space to explore how their hearing loss interacts with the workplace. Support and assistance from supervisors, managers, and colleagues can be a great asset for employees with hearing loss. At the end of the day, the objective is to ensure that individuals with hearing loss can pursue the careers of their choice, feel that they can contribute to the organization on equal grounds and find or build a fulfilling career.

Finding Fulfilling Work

A dream many Americans pursue is to be able to find fulfilling work that can lead to a positive, satisfying, independent life. Individuals with disability have just as much

right to this goal as any other person. Each participant shared their experience of pursuing their careers and how their hearing loss impacted them. Some struggled more than others, but they each expressed how important a supportive supervisor was to building their careers and finding that feeling of fulfillment in their work.

Nathanial pointed out about his experience seeking fulfilling work, “I think I’m lucky because through my education and career as a certified financial planner, I help people prepare for retirement. This fulfills me.” Nathanial points out a common desire among not just those with disabilities but among all people, the desire to help others and be a part of community. This creates a sense of belonging and fulfillment. If an employee with hearing impairment doesn’t feel they belong in an organization or on the team, then the sense of fulfillment may vanish, creating a harsh and possibly toxic work environment.

Jason immediately thought of his wife when he was considering what support he has had in his working life, claiming his wife has “been a big supporter. Just having somebody close to you, who believes in you and what you want to do and provides honest feedback.” Jason shared his thoughts on his own speech by saying, “How I enunciate different things so that's something I’m aware of, I'm trying to, I actually probably need to find a speech pathologist or something.” I had to follow his statement that I thought he was one of the clearest speakers I know, easy to hear and understand (I thought he had a wonderful radio voice).

Jason pointed out that searching for fulfilling work “is hard. So, I started in translation project management and I was in that business for six or seven years, not

because I liked it, but because I really didn't see anything else that I could be doing.” He then commented that as he pursued his career in translation project management “I was getting depressed too at the same time, I was not happy. I really didn't know what to do, I stopped caring really, felt like my work suffered a little bit.” Having support and a person who can provide feedback plays a significant role in career success. Sometimes that support comes from our colleagues and sometimes from our family. In the case with Jason, his wife approached him and “was the first one to say, ‘Why don't you do something that combined the two of your skills?’ I never thought of that. I was like, I know I need to be software engineer.”

Jason ended the interview with a few additional pointers. He said, “I think it really helps to surround yourself with people who understand or think like you little bit... you want people to see who you are, what you're capable of, and I think that applies all of life in general.” Jason pointed out also that “We all have weaknesses, character flaws, whatever you want to call them. Those things don't define us, those things are part of the human experience.” On a positive note about understanding our place in the world, Jason said:

Why put yourself in a position that makes you uncomfortable, you know if you don't need to be there. It sucks if you really love bars and noisy people and things like that where you can't really hear, but maybe take it as a lesson from the universe, or like a nudge that maybe you shouldn't be there, maybe you should be somewhere else. Nothing is static, nothing is like set in stone. Everything is dynamic so might as well roll with it.

Lily emphasized that

the last three jobs since the severe onset, I had a boss, who was incredibly supportive and that made me feel like part of the team and fulfilled. My boss at the audio technology company was initially supportive, however, then decided I was stupid.

Lily displayed a sense of disgust and feeling she lost being part of the team. “I worked with a really excellent job counselor who helped me find the last two positions that were fulfilling.”

Zina shared “I would say the most fulfilling is multi-faceted. Probably what I do now.” Zina also explained:

It only took me 40 years. I ruled out what I definitely didn't like. Some of its luck. Sometimes it takes time to find what might be interesting, you know. It's interesting because right out of law school, I was offered a job, working for a nonprofit in the name of it forgotten already, but it was focused on working with people with disabilities and, interestingly, I didn't want to take it. I think I was still in the identity crisis phase and wanted to prove to myself as somebody with a disability who could do something unrelated and still be successful. It depends on how you define success too.

All individuals, with or without hearing loss, desire to pursue a fulfilling career and life. Each person has multiple interests and could pursue their interests and passions with the correct environment and support.

Summary of Findings

The participants in this study shared their most inner thoughts, experiences, and hopes, and desires. Each participant expressed their challenges of learning how to speak up and educate others about their hearing loss along with their need to be effective employees in their organizations. They recognized that all individuals do their best to build a good life for themselves and their loved ones. All shared their experiences with hearing loss from their childhood into adulthood. Through their work experience, they each displayed their challenges and successes and how over time, they became more comfortable with hearing loss. Even with that comfort and acceptance of their hearing loss, they each expressed the annoyance and sometimes frustration of having hearing loss. For some of the participants, we learned there was uncertainty as to whether their hearing loss played a role in their being overlooked for promotions.

Still, they expressed a strong sense that others misunderstand what it means to have a hearing loss. Each of the participants experienced miscommunication with colleagues, though it was not always due to the hearing loss. It might have more to do with a person's style of communication or a person's misunderstanding of what having a disability means. Each participant had their moment when they stopped to think about an interview question or reflect on their experiences in the workplace. Some of the participants point out that having a hearing loss has made them better leaders because they really focus on listening and processing what others are saying. For some of the participants, having a hearing loss meant employees they supervised that had disabilities connected more quickly or comfortably with them because they had a shared experience of having a disability.

A common experience was that none of the participants' supervisors had hearing loss. Participants do occasionally meet with a colleague in a leadership position and would learn strategies to help them in the workplace, yet none of the participants had a supervisor with hearing loss. According to the participants in this study who sought advice from their supervisors regarding when and how to reveal they have hearing loss in the workplace (for example, during an interview), their supervisors suggested to only reveal they have a hearing loss and that it doesn't impact their work performance. This advice is displaying an underlying belief among the abled that those with hearing loss are unable to perform complex tasks and duties. This advice is also asking the participants to hide who they are because they may not get the job they want.

The experiences shared in this dissertation are only the beginning of revealing the stories of hearing-impaired individuals in the workplace. The workplace has significantly improved for employees with disabilities since the passing of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990. However, there is still a great deal of work needed to update federal and state laws, organizational policies, and challenging misconceptions around hearing loss in the workplace. Chapter Five explores the conclusions drawn from the data, practical strategies for organizations to use to make the workplace more inclusive for employees with hearing loss, and provides recommendations for future research.

Chapter Five: Conclusions, Implication and Recommendations for Future Research

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to learn about and share the experiences of individuals with hearing loss as they enter and operate in the workplace. Each participant in the study had a different range of hearing loss, used different assistive listening devices, and pursued different careers. All faced challenges they needed to overcome to operate in an ableist work environment.

This chapter provides a summary of the findings from the research and the conclusions drawn from the data presented in Chapter Four. The three main themes identified in Chapter Four (self-image and personal experiences, hearing impaired person's experience with their organization and orientation, and the interaction experience with their colleagues and mentors) and the literature review from Chapter Two guide the conclusions developed in this chapter. Chapter Five demonstrates how the findings can be valuable to organizations interested in being more inclusive of individuals with hearing loss and how to tap into their hidden talents and knowledge.

The conclusions developed from the research questions are built on the theoretical frameworks of Critical Disability Theory, Intersectionality, Social Justice, Emancipatory Disability Research, and Grounded Theory. The overall driving factor of this research was to understand if stigma around disability is still an influencing force in the workplace. Another factor in the quest to understanding the experience of employees with hearing loss was to identify if indirect barriers, such as attitudes and misconceptions, still influence the success or failure of employees with hearing loss. It was the

researcher's hope to identify barriers that may have been thought to be resolved, but in reality, still are not. It was also the objective of this study to suggest approaches that could support and open opportunities for employees with hearing loss who strive to become leaders. This study sought to identify or create practical solutions that organizations could use to create a more inclusive and disability-friendly work environment.

Conclusions for Research Questions

Research Question 1

As an adult working professional (ages 30-64) in a leadership position who has a hearing impairment and communicates orally, what are the experiences of transitioning into a leadership position in an organization?

When discussing leadership with the participants, they expressed two main thoughts regarding the meaning of leadership. The first view of leadership was of a person who held a specific management or supervisor position. The other view was of a person, regardless of their title, who influences colleagues, the department, and/or organizational policies. In reality, no definitive definition of leadership emerged from the participants. How a person views leadership can impact whether an employee feels empowered or not. For example, a person who believes leadership rests with a title in an organization may refrain from acting or providing suggestions to their colleagues that could show potential leadership capabilities. A person who sees leadership more as one participates in the organization, regardless of title or rank, may feel more empowered to

speak their mind or join a team to provide assistance and suggestions on how to complete a project.

Each participant did point out that they desired to be in a leadership position of some form, whether that be in a formal position as a manager or supervisor, a project leader, or in a position where they can have some positive influence on policies and practices within the organization. In the process of pursuing promotions, some of the participants felt they had to fight for a promotion while others without a disability might not need to fight to obtain the same promotion. In other cases, the participants shared that they changed careers since their hearing loss made it difficult for them to perform duties in the work environment. Fortunately, each participant found leadership roles they could fulfill and successfully influence projects in their current organizations. In one case, a participant established her own practice rather than work for an organization and took on a leadership role developing strategies for her clients.

Some of the participants expressed their anxiety and uncertainty around how their hearing loss might have impacted their ability to obtain promotions. Other participants proclaimed that their hearing loss was not an issue they had considered when progressing through their careers. One participant pointed out that due to his hearing loss, he often preferred to just listen to his colleagues during meetings and to take the time to process what was said. He often found himself not contributing as much at meetings as his colleagues because he wouldn't always know if his ideas had been expressed already, or perhaps he needed time to process the information, thus slowing down his response time. He did not believe that this impacted his ability to be a leader. Interestingly, during his

last work performance review, his supervisor did ask him to speak up more during meetings which surprised him.

Management often views employees who voice their opinions more as a crucial characteristic of being a leader. If individuals with hearing loss are struggling to keep up with meetings, they may miss the opportunity to share their opinions or solutions to the issue. Individuals who grow up with hearing loss may not develop the same style of communication or confidence to speak up in the manner than their hearing peers. The reasons for this can vary. It may be that as a child or student they were ridiculed by their peers for saying something already said or missed. Thus, they learned not to speak up. It may also be that hearing-impaired individuals were seldom encouraged to advocate for themselves or were embarrassed by their hearing loss and/or their speech.

Several participants pointed out that by having a hearing loss, they developed into more empathic leaders. To hear well, they must be active listeners and even good observers of body language and other non-verbal cues to understand full context of what is being said. The participants believed this made them good leaders because they were dedicated to ensuring they heard their colleagues. Having a disability can also be a positive way to connect with other colleagues who have disabilities of any kind. This is not to ignore the reality that some non-disabled individuals may not want to work with colleagues who have disabilities or may feel uncomfortable working with colleagues who have disabilities. The stigma and negative attitudes about disability can create friction with leaders with disabilities which may not be resolvable. Each of the participants expressed a desire to help others who are struggling, possibly a result of their own challenges with hearing loss.

A common statement among all the participants was that they felt their rise into leadership was mostly through the opportunity to develop the knowledge and skills needed for the field and having access to technology that assisted them in performing their work. This last point brings up an important issue: Are organizations providing the latest and most effective and affordable technology for their employees with disabilities? Several participants stated they bought their own technology such as headsets or better speakers for their computers instead of approaching their employer to provide those devices. In part, they did not want to be a bother to their employer, and they knew that the technology they bought would be effective in assisting them at their work. Another benefit of already owning devices such as a phone headset is that the person with the hearing loss can take it with them to their next job, ready and prepared to address challenges in the new workplace.

Research Question 2

What organizational policies and practices make it more challenging for a person with hearing impairment to pursue leadership opportunities and promotion into leadership positions in an organization?

Organizational policies and practices can have an impact on the success of their employees, with or without disabilities. Prior to the passing of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, policies and practices were structured more around ableist perspectives. In some organizations, the updating of their policies and practices have been effective and led to positive change in the workplace for employees with disabilities. For example, one of the participants shared that in their organization, employees with disabilities are encouraged to speak up about their own

experiences and even have support groups creating safe spaces to express their challenges and hopes. One of the participants emphasized seeing a trend toward more inclusion of employees with disabilities, understanding their positive contributions toward the success of the organization. Organizations today are looking for more diverse perspectives and approaches toward competing in the marketplace and gaining knowledge on the different target groups in society.

Some individuals with hearing impairment work for organizations that do not inform their employees of the organization's policies toward employees with disabilities or available accommodations and services. While the participants were not necessarily interested in knowing the policies, the fact that the organization didn't even consider providing any information to their employees in general about the services is a sign that the organization does not proactively support their employees with disabilities. One participant commented that they felt that the issues human resources departments focus on are related to gender and racial equality and access to jobs. Disability does not appear to even show up on their radar.

Startups are businesses that are in the early phases of developing their products and usually have venture capital or financial investment backing. However, one of the weaknesses startups face is not being able to "get their act together," referencing Jason's comment relating to his experience working with startups. Even if the startup has policies in place, leaders may not be able to implement those policies effectively for employees with disabilities. Organizations need to be aware of their legal obligations toward their employees and follow through on their policies.

Despite organizations putting in place policies that line up with the legal requirements to not discriminate against individuals with disabilities, disability issues are ignored or not brought up during discussions on equality and accessibility. Instead, organizations wait for employees with disabilities to speak up. Possibly disability is viewed as an individual issue rather than an organizational or rights issue.

Research Question 3

How are perspectives of hearing impairment as a disability viewed in the workplace and do they impact the onboarding experience?

According to the stories shared by the participants, it appears all participants had a positive experience working with their colleagues and that their hearing loss did not define them in the eyes of their colleagues. However, some mentioned experiences of moments where their colleagues viewed them as stupid or incompetent or that their hearing loss may have played a role in not getting a promotion. This is an experience that can be hurtful and a memory that can impact a person's confidence in their ability to participate in the workplace.

Organizations hire employees to solve problems for the organization, not to add new problems. Some organizations may view an employee with a disability as adding problems rather than recognizing the benefit that any new employee might bring to their organization. Having a disability provides an employee with a unique perspective on issues facing the organization. In fact, problem-solving and critical thinking are common skills among individuals with disability because on a daily basis, individuals with disabilities need to address the challenges and barriers in the world.

Employees with hearing loss may struggle with communication; however, conflicts between employees are more likely to arise due to differences in personalities or methods of working rather than anything related to hearing loss. All employees, with or without disabilities, have a great desire to be respected as a human being and to be viewed as competent and equal to their peers.

Organizations generally have a standard orientation or onboarding process that all new hires complete. The participants expressed that they generally enjoyed the process and viewed it as an opportunity to learn about their role in the organization. Being a new employee provides a sense of hope that the new organization and their colleagues will be accepting of them. Some of the participants did express that sometimes orientation can be confusing or awkward as they may not always know where they will be sitting during the orientation. The participants were at times concerned about whether they were going to be assigned to a room that was noisy or quiet.

Individuals with hearing impairments may need to learn to ask for better seating locations in a noisy room if it's important to hear a speaker or if there is a particularly good place at the table to hear everyone. During onboarding processes, organizations and leaders need to be aware that sometimes individuals with hearing impairments are embarrassed by their disability and may try to minimize the visibility of it. Usually, onboarding is completed by human resources staff, and they should be cognizant of the possibility that their new employee with hearing loss may not want to speak about it. Yet, onboarding can still be a positive experience by ensuring the room selected is quiet with the windows and doors closed to reduce background noise, that the room is nicely lit, and that everyone speaks clearly to the new employee with hearing loss. There is nothing

wrong with asking individuals with hearing loss if they need any accommodations or preferences. I use the term ‘preferences,’ because it sounds more casual and a word that is applied to everyone. The term “accommodations” are often associated with disability. In most cases, when an employee with hearing loss shares their disability, colleagues will accept it and be pleased to provide assistance. With this said, it is important for organizations to be aware that some individuals with hearing loss have faced situations where they felt their hearing loss complicated their work performance or confidence.

Having a hearing loss does create a unique opportunity to bond with other colleagues with disabilities (doesn’t have to be hearing loss) because they can have a sense that the other person will have some level of understanding of the everyday challenges and barriers. Leaders with disabilities can be emphatic and supportive in a way that empowers employees with hearing loss.

Implications of the Study: Possible Strategies for a More Inclusive Workplace

The participants in this study shared their experiences of having hearing loss in the workplace, how it has impacted their lives, and how they view themselves within American society. In general, the experiences of individuals with hearing loss in the workplace appear to be positive, but some struggle with how to share their disability with their colleagues or employers. In some cases, the person with hearing loss was profoundly hurt by how their colleagues treated them, leaving a lasting impression. In other cases, colleagues and leaders were there to support and encourage their employees with hearing loss. In this next section, I discuss four main topics: communication, career advancement, technology, and onboarding.

Communication

A common experience among the participants is the positive impact of Zoom as a method of communicating with their colleagues. They found they could more easily follow meetings and if needed had access to closed captioning to see words they may not be hearing. While the closed captioning feature is not 100 percent accurate, it is usually sufficient in getting the message across. Organizations may want to consider using Zoom, or programs similar to Zoom, for employees with hearing loss who would prefer to communicate via Zoom. An important factor to recognize is that not all individuals with hearing loss will want to use Zoom or similar form of technology. In that case, the organization needs to do their best to meet their accommodation needs in the office.

For individuals with hearing loss, there is great value in receiving work instructions via email or in writing that ensures they get the full information needed to complete their assignments. This approach can also benefit non-disabled individuals, making them more efficient employees. For example, perhaps an organization received a new computer procedure for filing documentation. An email can be submitted to the team or filed into a group folder, retrieved by any employee. Those emails or documents can be recalled helping employees remember the steps needed to complete the computer procedure. With this said, this does not mean that individuals with hearing loss should be excluded from department meetings or organizational events. The email can be a form of minutes shared among all colleagues. Managers and supervisors should also be available to meet with their employees with hearing-impairment one-on-one in case employees would like to confirm that they did not miss any crucial information. These one-on-one

meetings can also be a great way to provide support and guidance on projects if needed as well as an opportunity to learn more about the employees' needs for future meetings.

Workplace Environment and its Impacts on Career Advancement

Social events at work can be a wonderful opportunity for colleagues to get to know each other better and build positive working relationships. Work mixers are opportunities for employees to connect with their colleagues within and outside of their department, their bosses, and sometimes clients associated with the organization. These mixers can be the space that leads to potential promotions. Unfortunately, individuals with hearing loss tend not to attend mixers or social events at work because often times the environment is too noisy to hear others or in some cases, the hearing aids are not designed well enough to address the noisy background. If social events are places that lead to potential promotions and designed without considering the challenges hearing-impaired individuals face in noisy environments, then this becomes an unintended barrier toward career advancements.

The same can be said about the work environment. If a meeting room is not designed to buffer sound or the cubicles spaces are located in a way that does not diminish or block surround sounds, this can make it very challenging for the individual with hearing loss to hear well on the phone or to hear their colleagues who visit their cubicle either for discussion around a work project or to casually catch up. Individuals with hearing take for granted their ability to hear in a wider range of environments than their hearing-impaired colleagues. It can be difficult to fully grasp how background sounds impact speech comprehension. With the latest digital hearing aid models, another challenge that has arisen is that soft sounds like air ventilation systems or ticking of a

clock may be amplified and can sometimes disrupt speech comprehension. To the person with hearing, this can perhaps be the most confusing issue to fully grasp. A person with hearing, generally speaking, is able to block out the noises of the ventilation system or may not pick up soft sounds that the hearing aid detects and may amplify. This creates a scenario where the hearing person and the hearing-impaired person are hearing different sounds. A possible approach to remedy this is to share a video about what it sounds like to have hearing loss to those who with hearing. It doesn't guarantee that those with hearing will fully comprehend the experiences of a hearing-impaired person, but it can open dialogue.

Technology

Technology can play a crucial role for employees with hearing loss to participate more in the workplace and might increase their opportunities to interact with colleagues. Much like the use of email for distributing instructions mentioned earlier, phone headsets can assist employees with hearing loss to better communicate and follow conversations on the phone or on Zoom. While some telephones include closed captioning, individuals with hearing loss often considered them to be ineffective, too slow, and of poor quality. They do not provide enough assistance in the workplace. Zoom has a more efficient and accurate closed caption program and offers the advantage of employees to see the person they are speaking with, and lip read if needed.

Onboarding

When an organization considers their onboarding and orientation process for new employees with hearing loss, the organization can ensure that the room is quiet or at least

minimize the background noise. Doors and windows may also need to be closed, if possible, to avoid outside sounds interfering with listening. If a video is shown during the orientation process, the organization should make sure that closed captioning is available. Seating should be clearly marked, identifying where the speaker or host will be located so that those with hearing loss can choose to sit near the speaker if needed. One approach to consider is to have a one-on-one orientation process which allows the employee with hearing loss to focus on the speaker. It can be less stressful than having to focus on a wide number of speakers and would also give the hearing-impaired person opportunities to ask questions. This last approach may be more challenging for larger organizations that tend to pursue group orientations in which case it might be helpful to include on the application or acceptance packet a question for all employees if they prefer to do their orientation one-on-one or in group.

Summary of Strategies Organizations Can Apply to the Workplace

Creating an inclusive and accepting work environment is very important when hiring employees with disabilities and ultimately is very important for all employees, no matter their background. An inclusive and accepting work environment will often lead to a happier, healthier and more productive workforce. Strategies mentioned in this chapter might be helpful for organizations to consider:

- having a positive orientation and onboarding experience for employee with disabilities
- building a trusting relationship with your employees
- creating the space for employees to share their disability openly if they desire

- offering a safe space to request accommodations without fear of retaliation
- designing organizational policies around educating and training all employees
- providing promotion opportunities for employees with disabilities (particularly promotions into leadership positions)
- ensuring organizations set up budgets to include funds to support employees with disabilities
- using all the technology available to improve communication conduits such as providing instructions via email or minutes from department meetings
- lastly, always being proactive in providing accommodations (or at least always providing accommodations when employees with disabilities request it).

Another important factor to creating a more inclusive work environment for employees with hearing loss (and all employees with and without disabilities) is the emphasis on transformative leadership. If organizations have leadership training programs or seminars, they can teach managers, supervisors, and leaders in the organization how to serve employees in a way that is supportive, inspirational, kind, and humane. This can go a long way in bringing employees with hearing loss into the everyday operation of the organization.

A positive model is the Center for Independent Living (CIL) in Berkeley, California, which has dedicated itself to transformative building among their staff, members, and clients. In short, CIL is dedicated to transforming how the world views disability and to shifting the way organizations design their buildings, how collegial relationships are formed, and how teams are supported and encouraged. Leaders interested in creating a

more inclusive and accepting workplace should consider reviewing how CIL has approached transformative leadership.

These are the strategies uncovered in the research that seem to provide great support to employees with hearing loss. These recommendations do not address all factors that might impact an employee with hearing loss. Organizations need to be aware that different disabilities require different responses and support systems. Even among new hires with hearing loss, their experiences may be different, and their needs may be different. One of the best approaches is to just ask the individual what they need and to follow through with supporting their employees.

Recommendations for Future Research

This study focused on several factors of a hearing-impaired person's experience in the workplace, such as the impact of hearing loss on one's experiences in the workplace, their style of interaction and communication with colleagues and supervisors, their experiences using assistive listening devices, and how they navigated through their careers. This study has only begun to touch on the topic of hearing loss and its impact on hearing impaired individuals who strive to pursue careers of their desire and of their passion. So much more research is needed to gain a greater understanding of how hearing loss impacts a person's ability to achieve life goals and navigate through careers. The literature and the interviews of the participants attest that while there have been great advances in reducing the barriers to education and in the workplace, there are still many misconceptions around hearing loss and one's ability to be a leader in an organization.

A qualitative study that might be helpful would be around the question of how individuals with hearing loss internalize what others say about them. Do individuals with hearing loss associate all challenges with their hearing loss and do these become barriers to success in their careers? What types of relationships are formed between employees with hearing loss and their supervisors? Is there a misconception that individuals with hearing loss are not effective leaders? Do leaders in an organization do enough to build trust between their employees with disability and employees without disability? These questions revolve around personal relationships between employees with hearing loss and their colleagues. A study could be pursued through surveys and interviews. Another approach could be to create a study around observing employees with hearing loss in their everyday practices in the workplace.

With the existence of ADA and other laws designed to protect individuals with disabilities against discrimination and to increase access to higher education, there appears to be very little research conducted to determine the effectiveness of such laws. A good research opportunity would be to review the objectives of all disability-related laws and to see if they are in fact supporting the disability community, bringing real results that are improving their lives. A question to explore is whether there has been an increase in employed disabled individuals. If yes, which industries and job positions are seeking individuals with disabilities? Are they more in the public sector or private sector? This would be a quantitative research project and much of the data might be found with the U.S. Department of Labor, U.S. Department of Education, and possibly U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. Following the review of the available data, a researcher could then approach the public with surveys and questionnaires to determine if

the numbers found with the Federal government match the reality or if somehow the criteria used by the federal government is not capturing the complete picture.

While American universities are seeing an increase of students with disabilities, has there been an increase in including disability as an academic discourse? Many classes focus on diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI), human rights, leadership approaches, critical theory, and other fields that point out the inequities and injustices created by racism, sexism, and ageism. But do these classes include disability as part of the curriculum? This last question is a result of my own experience as a college, master's, and doctoral student, where disability rarely came up as part of the curriculum in classes on human rights, diversity, equality, and inclusion. In the doctoral program, I shared about my interest in how disability ties in with topics in class and teachers tried to find disability-related topics. Unfortunately, most of my teachers found it challenging to find or integrate the materials into the class discussions either because there were no materials to find, or the theme of disability did not come up as a topic among the students.

Questions surrounding disability in society could greatly benefit from quantitative and qualitative research through surveys, questionnaires, and interviews. The impact of families on individuals with hearing loss can play a crucial role on how they build confidence and self-esteem. This can later impact their success in the workplace and in the world in general. Did the parents fight for their children in the school system or did the parents teach their children how to be self-advocates? There are so many factors for further study ranging from the individual to familial influences on how society interacts with them and how laws are written that can shape a person's entire life.

Thought the literature review I found several studies pertaining to how European countries address disability access and economic opportunities. There is such a great opportunity to compare and contrast between how the United States federal and state governments address disability-related issues with how European governments address these issues. Culture might play a significant role in how legislators approach policymaking and the implementation of those policies. Are European nations more effective than the United States or vice versa? Research relating to this might be a comparison of the literature from American educational institutions with European educational institutions. A bolder approach could be reaching out to the disability community in several nations, interviewing them about their views of how their country addresses their needs and quality of life and learning about the services available in each country.

Research around disability rights and identity is another topic that can be very valuable to the disability community. Do women and individuals with disabilities, as identity groups, have shared experiences of oppression in society? Do women and individuals with disability faced with their struggle to retain their right to one's body and the acceptance of their bodies as natural and beautiful? Both women and individuals with disabilities face society's judgement of how their bodies should be and what their purposes are. In the case with women, they are often objectified and commodified into sexual objects for society to use.

For individuals with disabilities, they have been told their bodies are not acceptable and do not produce as much for the capitalist system as their abled peers. How are women and individuals with disabilities classified in a capitalist society? The

classification, I suspect, is different, but it seems the stigma revolving around the right to one's body, the right to be protected from abuse, and freedom to participate in the society fully are similar. A qualitative and quantitative research about the similarities and differences between the history of oppression of women and oppression of individuals with disabilities in the United States can lead to better approaches to resisting the dominant narratives. It could be the first step toward breaking down the systemic barriers into the economic and political life.

Conclusion

From the participants' stories, hearing loss has an impact on how their careers develop and the opportunities available to them. The research revealed how in most workplaces, there is a positive attitude toward individuals with hearing loss and a desire to make organizations more inclusive. With that said, the participants have also revealed that a great deal of work is still needed to reduce barriers to promotions and to ensure positive collegial relationships between employees with and without disabilities. Leaders in organizations must challenge the stigma and misconceptions among their staff, creating a supportive environment. Leaders and organizations as a whole also need to recognize that hearing loss has many components that can vary from day to day, such as variable hearing loss or the use of new hearing aids that may require weeks or months of modifications and testing in the work environment.

Leaders and organizations need to understand that hearing loss is not a limitation but rather a different way of experiencing the world and of navigating the workplace. Our society needs to have an understanding that individuals with hearing loss everyday face the uncertainty of how their hearing and assistive listening devices will perform in their

interactions with others. This can create distress and anxiety for individuals with hearing loss. It takes a greater amount of energy to participate in social settings, perseverance, and vigilance to match what their non-disabled peers perform. Organizations have the opportunity today to update their policies and procedures in addressing discrimination toward employees with disability, to ensure that the orientation process is disability-friendly, to create leadership training programs that include disability as part of its mission, and to ensure that accommodations are available for employees with disabilities. Supporting employees with hearing loss does not mean that these individuals can not contribute and serve as leaders in an organization. Quite the opposite. Employees with hearing loss can bring a wealth of knowledge and talent to an organization.

Looking toward the future, it is the hope that this research study contributes toward improving the working conditions for employees with hearing loss. A paradigm shift is needed toward how organizations design their work atmosphere through their policies and how leaders in the organization create those safe environments for employees with hearing loss. There is a need to open more promotion opportunities in leadership for individuals with hearing loss and a need to shatter the misconceptions that individuals with disabilities cannot lead or contribute. Promotions often lead to better pay and benefits as well as opportunities to grow as a professional. This can then result in being able to build a more independent and satisfying life, where individuals with hearing loss gain more economic opportunities and thus can participate more fully in society. Even with the existence of laws such as the Americans with Disabilities Act and the Rehabilitation Act, a great deal of inequity still exists in American society along with resistance against individuals with disabilities to participate in society economically. The

inequities and injustices individuals with disabilities face in the United States need to end and instead lead to creating opportunities for all individuals with disabilities.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A

Example of Consent of Participation Form

CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN A RESEARCH STUDY

Dear Co-Participant,

Below is a description of the research procedures and an explanation of your rights as a research participant. You should read this information carefully. If you agree to participate, you will sign in the space provided to indicate that you have read and understand the information on this consent form. You are entitled to and will receive a copy of this form.

You are invited to participate in a research study conducted by John “Cleese” Relihan, a graduate student in the Department of Leadership Studies, at University of San Francisco as part of a completion of the requirements for a doctoral degree in education. The faculty supervisor for this study is Walt Gmelch, a professor in the Department of Leadership Studies at the University of San Francisco.

WHAT THE STUDY IS ABOUT:

The purpose of this research study is to gain an understanding of the experiences of hearing-impaired individuals’ navigating through their careers, the sharing of their experiences in the workplace as leaders with hearing impairment, and to learn what barriers, if any, they may have encountered in the workplace.

WHAT WE WILL ASK YOU TO DO:

In this phenomenological narrative study, you will be asked to first complete a demographic survey and then secondly participate in an interview. Your participation is voluntary, you have the right to refuse to answer any questions and you may choose to end your participation at any point in time during the study and answers you have given will be deleted and will not be included as part of the study.

DURATION AND LOCATION OF THE STUDY:

Your participation in this study will involve one or two sessions of an hour and half interview sessions and a background survey that will take up to five minutes. Due to the Covid pandemic, to ensure your safety, the interview process will be completed online via Zoom. If you prefer to do the interview process in-person or in writing, that is also available. The researcher will do their best to meet any accommodations possible to make the interview process easier and more enjoyable. The interview process on Zoom will include video and audio recording for the purposes of being able to transcribe the interview and for being able to ensure accuracy to participants’ responses to the interview questions. If interview is completed in person, a tape recorder will be used for the same purposes and the Zoom video and audio recording.

POTENTIAL RISKS AND DISCOMFORTS:

Overall, we do not anticipate any risks to you from participating in this research. The interview process does ask participants to share their personal stories and experiences having hearing impairment in the workplace which may create some emotional discomfort to the participant. If you wish, you may choose to withdraw your consent and discontinue your participation at any time during the study without penalty.

BENEFITS:

The possible benefits to you, and to others, of participating in this study is the opportunity to share your personal story of having a hearing impairment and how that has impacted you in the workplace, you may discover new concepts and ideas not previously considered, and a space is created for you and others to explore those discoveries.

PRIVACY/CONFIDENTIALITY:

Any data you provide in this study will be kept confidential unless disclosure is required by law. In any report we publish, we will not include information that will make it possible to identify you or any individual participant. Specifically, we can alter names in the report and will exclude any specific information such as company name that employs you, names of family members or colleagues, or additional details that would tie you to your organization. For the interview responses and coding, I will have your personal information, and this will be separate from the published work and stored safely on a computer that requires passwords to access this information. The IRB requires that participants and researchers to keep consent forms for three years and data and responses collected in this study that can link to individuals will be destroyed after three years.

After the interview process, and after the researcher completes the transcription process, you will have the opportunity to review the questions and your responses from the interview. You will have the opportunity to make revisions, omit answers you provided, or can elaborate further on any answer you provided during the interview.

COMPENSATION/PAYMENT FOR PARTICIPATION:

There is no payment or other form of compensation for your participation in this study.

VOLUNTARY NATURE OF THE STUDY:

Your participation is voluntary and you may refuse to participate without penalty or loss of benefits. Furthermore, you may skip any questions or tasks that make you uncomfortable and may discontinue your participation at any time without penalty or loss of benefits. In addition, the researcher has the right to withdraw you from participation in the study at any time.

It is hoped that through this interview process, you will find the experience enjoyable, thought provoking, and a space to be open about your experiences with hearing impairment. New insights may emerge in the process of interviewing and upon reflection on your answers. This study has been designed with your safety and growth in mind. The

researcher will be attentive and respectful to your emotional safety and if at any time you need to stop for a break, the researcher will understand and respect.

OFFER TO ANSWER QUESTIONS:

Please ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, you should contact the principal investigator: John "Cleese" Relihan at 650.3871870 or jcrelihan@aol.com. If you have questions or concerns about your rights as a participant in this study, you may contact the University of San Francisco Institutional Review Board at IRBPHS@usfca.edu.

I wish to be identified by a pseudonym in the research study: Yes / No

I HAVE READ THE ABOVE INFORMATION. ANY QUESTIONS I HAVE ASKED HAVE BEEN ANSWERED. I AGREE TO PARTICIPATE IN THIS RESEARCH PROJECT AND I WILL RECEIVE A COPY OF THIS CONSENT FORM.

PARTICIPANT'S SIGNATURE

DATE

RESEARCHER'S SIGNATURE

DATE

Appendix B

Attachments:

- Expedited Review Approved by Chair - IRB ID: 1681.pdf



IRBPHS - Approval Notification

To: John Relihan
From: Richard Gregory Johnson III, IRB Chair
Subject: Protocol #1681
Date: 02/02/2022

The Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects (IRBPHS) at the University of San Francisco (USF) has reviewed your request for human subjects approval regarding your study.

Your research (IRB Protocol **#1681**) with the project title **Hearing Impaired and Leadership** has been approved by the IRB Chair under the rules for expedited review on **02/02/2022**.

Any modifications, adverse reactions or complications must be reported using a modification application to the IRBPHS within ten (10) working days.

If you have any questions, please contact the IRBPHS via email at IRBPHS@usfca.edu. Please include the Protocol number assigned to your application in your correspondence.

On behalf of the IRBPHS committee, I wish you much success in your research.

Sincerely,

Dr. Richard Gregory Johnson III

Professor & Chair, Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects

University of San Francisco

irbphs@usfca.edu

IRBPHS Website