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Disclosing an Invisible Disability During the Interview Process: A Qualitative Study

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Disclosing an Invisible Disability during the
Interview Process: A Qualitative Study

Disclosing an Invisible Disability during the
Interview Process: A Qualitative Study

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy in Rehabilitation Education

By

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December 2011
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ABSTRACT

Rehabilitation professionals, persons with disabilities and employers were asked to participate in a focus group interview exploring the phenomena of disclosing invisible disabilities during the interview process. This Qualitative study examined disclosure of disability from each stakeholder's perspective in an effort to understand its impact on the interview. After transcribing the focus group interview and analyzing the data; five themes emerged reflecting each stakeholder's views on disclosure. The themes revealed the persistence of attitudinal barriers that people with disabilities face in seeking employment; if and when a person should disclose; what are the positive and negative aspects of disclosure and what can be done by the stakeholders to mitigate the process. The research revealed that the decision to disclose is a complex phenomenon and should be seriously contemplated prior to making this decision. This research will guide the process to determine if disclosure of invisible disabilities is appropriate for the person during the interview and will impact how rehabilitation professionals prepare and counsel clients on disclosure.

This dissertation is approved for
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will remember Dr. Brent Williams tirelessly working to assist his students... and for that I hope to emulate his dedication and drive for my students into the future.

DEDICATION

To all the graduate professors and students at the University of Arkansas, I dedicate this body of work to the continuation of research in the field of rehabilitation studies. I also dedicate it to my wife Susan and my three children; Steven, Elias and Jessie. To my beautiful grandchildren Alana and Zariah I hope their future is as bright as the sun.

Disclosing an Invisible Disability during the Interview Process:

A Qualitative Study

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CHAPTER 1

Overview

Introduction

This chapter begins an epistemological journey into the phenomenon of disclosing disability during the interview process. This chapter will identify the experiences that shaped the initial formation of the study and the research questions. It will describe the research approach and how the methodology was selected as well as provide a rationale for the theoretical paradigm employed. Finally, this chapter will include a brief preview of the dissertation contents.

The Problems

Disclosure of one's disability during the interview process is a question that appears to be straightforward on the surface for the outsider looking in. Inherently, if one delves past the surface he or she will quickly uncover the complexities and the responsibilities of the decision to disclose or not to disclose a disability during the interview process. One example of the complexity of the decision could be that a person who has a disability may have fear that disclosure of disability may possibly lead to subtle discrimination in the employment process. This fear may compromise motivation to seek employment for the person with a disability.

As a rehabilitation professional that has worked in the field for over twenty years; providing guidance to people with disabilities and their counselors, I realize that there are

three primary groups of stakeholders that may hold divergent views of disclosure of disability. The person with the disability, the rehabilitation counselor and the employer may have little or no congruence in understanding how disclosure affects each party. There are no consistent standards that shape the counselor's approach to advising a person with a disability as to whether he or she should or should not disclose his or her disability during the interview. Disclosure is generally the individual choice of the person with the disability. The employer who provides opportunity for all parties may want to create diversity in the work place but has limited knowledge of how to promote it and may be unwittingly creating obstacles in the process. The choice to disclose or not can have serious ethical and legal ramifications for the stakeholders. Disclosure can foster a smooth transition by ensuring that the appropriate support is identified for each individual and that the job matches the individual's aptitudes and abilities. A clear understanding of disclosure is needed to ensure opportunities for all the stakeholders and those who have a genuine interest in creating diversity in the workforce.

I began this journey in part due to my own struggles with how to advise my clients and staff on the issue of disclosure. My years of experience could not assist in providing specific guidance on this controversial concept. Therefore, I wanted the dialog with my colleagues and clients to shape my research. In carrying out the literature review, I sought to discover what other studies have been conducted on the topic of disclosure to ensure that if guidance did exist it would be incorporated into my study. I quickly found out that disclosure is a complex issue and there is only a moderate amount of research on the topic. There is also a range of viewpoints from the individual stakeholder's perspective. I

began my research by investigating a person with a disability's view of "self". Self is at center point of the investigation into understanding why a person with a disability would or would not choose to disclose disability. It is in the attitudes about the disability itself by a person with a disability and his or her fellow stakeholders that forms the underpinning of how or if one should disclose. I also wanted to research the understanding and role the employer plays in the process, since it is the employer's creation of opportunities that shapes entry into the job market. I finally turned to the ethics and professional obligation from the rehabilitation professional's perspective, for the counselor's role is pivotal in shaping the interaction of the employer and the potential employee.

Understanding of Self

A person's understanding of the psychological concept of *self* and its role in the individual's development is essential to the growth of oneself in all therapeutic relationships. Self begins with an honest understanding of the view of how a person sees his or herself as an individual. Carl Rogers felt that in order to be an effective therapist, one must first find his or her self as a person first. The therapist should possess in themselves three specific qualities: *congruence, empathy and respect*. Congruency is genuineness and honesty with the client. This construct is extremely important to me as a therapist for I believe all healthy relationships begin with honesty. To teach anything else would be inappropriate. Thus in discussing whether an individual should disclose, congruency becomes the center in the discussion. However, some rehabilitation literature advises not to disclose invisible disabilities in the employment process, specifically in

cover letters (Pearson, Ip, Hui, Yip, Ho, & Lo, 2003), if the disability does not have an impact on the job, and many people are also advised not to disclose for any reason for fear of discrimination. This places the rehabilitation professional in a complex relationship with their obligation as an objective counsel to all stakeholders.

Discrimination should be a concern for all people and universally denounced; however, to deliberately counsel a person to mislead a potential employer for fear of discrimination can violate counselor ethics at two levels. The first is specifically addressed in Section K of the 2002 Commission on Rehabilitation Counselor Certification (CRCC) code of Ethics (Beauchamp & Childress, 1994), the promotion of doing good to others (beneficence), the ability to be fair (justice) and to be loyal, honest (veracity: added in 2010) and keep promises (fidelity). To honor the right to promote individual choice (autonomy) when making choices - such as if to disclose, and mitigating the above principles it can ultimately lead to advice from the rehabilitation professional that violates the standard of non-maleficence: to do no harm to others. When we deliberately counsel a person to falsely represent or conceal information about his or her self and their disability, a counselor can violate non-maleficence if it ultimately leads to difficulties or safety issues on the job for the client and employer. It is the interpretation of these principles as they relate to disclosure that drove my desire to research the subject from a collective perspective.

A secondary level may even be more general in nature than the following of the code of ethics. What type of messages are the rehabilitation professionals sending to the client if we ask them to conceal information in an effort to secure employment? The

rationalization of advising a client, in general, that non-disclosure is acceptable, the rehabilitation professional can be misconstrued as saying that they should generally conceal his or her disability in the interview. This misconception can lead to a variety of mixed messages, and it is because of these two dynamics and the dilemma they can create that I felt compelled to address this issue in my research.

In a Harris Poll conducted in 2004 only 35% of people with disabilities were employed full or part time as compared to 78% of those working without disabilities. The number of people with disabilities reporting discrimination relating to their disability has dropped from 36 to 22%. There still is a gap between the number of people with disability and those without disability who work, but the reasons for this gap involve a variety of reasons other than disclosure including: no appropriate jobs available-52%; family responsibilities-34%; lack of transportation-29%; no appropriate information about jobs-23%; inadequate training-21.6%; fear of losing health insurance-20.1%, and those whose families and friends discouraged them from working-14%. Even if discrimination played a role in the employment gap, as feared by professionals, it is clear from the above statistics that we are seeing a decline in this variable. Therefore, to perpetuate the fear that if one discloses his or her disability they would automatically be discriminated against is wrong.

Other Voices

In developing my initial research into disclosure, I wanted to get the opinions of the stakeholders who are currently helping people with disabilities find work, so I turned to

rehabilitation professionals and paraprofessional (job developers/coaches). The opportunity for this research began during a routine assignment in my introduction to statistics class. I would later describe the work as a pilot study for this research. I began my research with people with invisible disabilities that are not readily apparent to employers. Since I had the good fortune to work with professionals and paraprofessionals at programs in two states in the southwest I enlisted their help. The programs are similar in that they all provided employment services for people with disabilities and they employed both professional and paraprofessional staff. In 2004, I conducted a seminar on ethics in employment practices for all programs. The subject of disclosure was presented as a subtopic to the group in a large southwest city, in a group interview format. The results astonished me. The professionals who generally run the programs felt that it was acceptable not to disclose, and paraprofessionals, who actually help in job development and who work closest with employers, felt that disclosure is the best practice. The same topic was again addressed at the two other locations and the results were similar. Gender differentiation was also another variable; the professional male counselors advised against disclosure at the highest rate followed by their female counterparts. Paraprofessionals, whose interaction with current and potential employers was paramount to his or her success, advised that honesty and disclosure were the best practice. I thought, "If there is so much controversy within the professional groups, how can the person with a disability sort out how and when to disclose, if at all?" Finding such diversity in the responses of the professionals, I concluded that more qualitative research needed to be conducted in an effort to understand the phenomena. There is little in the

literature that investigates the complexity of disclosure from each of the stakeholder's perspective. Therefore, I found the problem of whether a person with a hidden disability should disclose during the interview process the focal point of my research in relationship to how each of the stakeholders view the issue.

Research Questions

Disclosure of disability is an issue that on the surface appears to be straightforward when dealing with people with disabilities as they seek assistance in finding employment. Inherently, if one delves past the surface of the topic he or she quickly uncovers the complexities and the responsibility of this decision. There are three primary stakeholders in this process: the person with the disability, the rehabilitation professional providing guidance and the employer creating opportunity. Research and experience indicate there is little or no congruence in the attitude towards disclosure from these stakeholders. There are no hard or fast rules to shape the counselor's approach to this topic, and it is left to the individual choice of the person with a disability to disclose or not. This can have serious and ethical ramifications for all the stakeholders. Due to the complexity of this phenomenon, I investigated the following questions with the stakeholders' point of view:

Question 1

Should a person disclose his or her disability? (Why or why not)

Question 2

What are the stakeholders' views of disclosure?

Question 3

Can there be consensus from the stakeholders' point of view on when, how and what to disclose? (Why or why not)

Question 4

Are there interconnections between the stakeholders on this issue?

Question 5

If the stakeholders interact and communicate their point of view, will their cohorts change their point of view?

Question 6

How can these findings and implications influence interaction and training of professionals and how they counsel people with disabilities on disclosure of invisible disability?

Significance of the Study

The core issue when discussing disclosure of disability is the need to create opportunities for people with disability in the workforce. Each stakeholder can have a personal or emotional interest in this topic. It is their perception of the consequences of disclosure that can have a paralyzing effect on its success. If a person with a disability has fear about a negative response from the employer and its potential impact on securing a job, he or she may not feel comfortable in disclosing. Conversely, an employer may be

able to develop an interview style that can facilitate trust, thus letting the potential employee feel confident in his or her ability to openly and proactively discuss their disability and specific accommodations. The rehabilitation counselor can work with all parties to ensure an appropriate job match. Since there continues to be an employment gap for people with disabilities (Daigan & Gilbride, 2003) it seems that “getting out of the gate” prior to and during the interview process wouldn’t be a focal point in researching the significance and dynamics of disclosure. The importance of this study lies in the premise of the appropriateness and the timing disclosure during the interview.

Communication and finding common ground between the stakeholders on this subject will help facilitate decisions that will create the opportunities for the people with disabilities. Stakeholders who have a clear and concise understanding of the ramifications of disclosure and its consequences could develop guidelines that eliminate the guesswork on whether or not to disclose a disability in the employment process. That information will ultimately benefit the field of vocational rehabilitation, the person with a disability and the employer.

Michael Marchello is a writer living in California who has Type 1 Diabetes and had worked as a professional roadie for many famous bands in the 1980’s. His nondisclosure of his disability almost cost him his life in a near-fatal auto accident in 1984. He initially did not disclose his disability, not wanting to let his diabetes hinder his lifestyle. However, his approach to diabetes has changed since the accident. Michael’s feelings about disclosure are reflected in the following statement (1999):

My entire approach to diabetes changed. I resolved to always let people around me know that I had diabetes and what to do in an emergency. *Always!* It became literally the first thing out of my mouth after an introduction (p.92).

Michael now works willingly with the disability instead of against it and his actions could be classified as self-efficacious. Michael's story reinforces the significance of addressing disclosure and the gravity for all stakeholders in understanding the consequences of the individual's choice on whether or not to disclose his or her disability.

The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) of 1990 and its amendments in 2008 protects people with disabilities from employment discrimination by providing guidelines on how to establish appropriate or reasonable accommodations for employees that seek them. Employers must make reasonable accommodations for qualified applicants with known disabilities. The job accommodations requested must be reasonable and not impose an undue hardship on the employer (EEOC/DOJ, 1993). Employees with invisible disabilities must be able to perform the essential functions of a job, and employers are required to provide reasonable accommodations that make it possible for an employee with a disability to satisfactorily meet the demands of the position (Granger, 2000). In order to request or arrange for accommodations, people with disabilities have to be willing to disclose and negotiate with the employer for any accommodations relevant to their disability.

The decision to disclose is a very complex one because the person needs to consider the possibility of confronting a variety of variables, including negative social stigma and

stereotyping (Daigan, & Gilbride, 2003). The dilemma is played out more in invisible disabilities where the individual is required to make a more conscious decision regarding disclosing his or her disability to the employer. Discrimination in the workplace is a universal problem that still exists for people with disabilities despite legislation in many countries (Semmens, 2006). Businesses rarely admit to the real reasons that keep them from hiring people with disabilities: fear could be a motivation for not hiring a person with a disability (Peck, & Kirkbride, 2001); fear of the cost associated with hiring; of additional supervision and loss of productivity; being stuck with a nonproductive employee; or that employee is somehow damaged are reasons cited by Peck and Kirkbride (2001) that employers shy away from providing people with disabilities opportunities to secure employment. The rehabilitation professional must understand the dynamics of employment, especially the feelings of the employer. A negative attitude regarding people with disabilities is often the result of lack of education of employers (Baker, 2005). Thus, partnerships with business by disability advocates can make a significant contribution for employment for people with disabilities that seek work.

There is a need to train all stakeholders on the work capacity and the potential of people with invisible disabilities because the lack of knowledge is a hindrance to long-term employment outcomes (Webman, Targett, West, & Kregel, 2005). The lack of education on employment capacity, whether a person has a cognitive or developmental disability, Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI), epilepsy, diabetes, psychiatric or other invisible disabilities may be reasons why employers have fear in hiring a person. A lack of proper training and education of stakeholders can lead to indecisiveness among individuals with

disabilities when they must make the decision of whether or not to disclose their disability. This in turn perpetuates the cycle unemployment among people with disabilities.

The interaction of employers with people with disabilities is not a novel approach. Disability management has been successful in preventing and accommodating physical disabilities in the workplace (Olsheski, Rosenthal, & Hamilton, 2002). Disability management is a combination of prevention and remediation strategies that reflect the commitment of the employer to the employees that have a disability and the creation of a diverse workplace. Disability management programs are widely used in a variety of businesses and industries. This partnership includes the rehabilitation professional facilitating transition back into work for injured employees and development of Employee Assistance Programs (EAP). This model is now being expanded to include psychosocial rehabilitation for psychological/mental health related disabilities. The disability management models can be utilized to make an inclusive interview process possible, increasing the comfort of the job applicants, and allowing easier integration of people with hidden disabilities into the workforce.

For an employer, the bottom line concerns cost and profit. They do not necessarily share the rehabilitation counselors' values regarding employment (Millington, Miller, Asner-Self, & Linkowski, 2003). The employee with a disability is expected to compete with others for the positions and remain a good employee first. Employers want the best workers at the least expense. Time for training and accommodations are factors that the employer would consider in the hiring process, therefore in preparing for the interview,

the onus is on the employee and the vocational counselor to ensure that there is a clear understanding of the requirements of the job. Millington et al. (2003), distinguish: “Strictly speaking, VR practitioners cannot point to a successful client placed in competitive employment and identify him or her as a worker with a disability.” Properly accommodated, successful workers are, by definition, “simply workers” (p.320).

Rehabilitation professionals must understand the dynamics and perspectives of employers if they are to truly advocate for opportunities for their clients. A clearer understanding of the dynamics of the inter-relational aspects and variables of the interview, specifically disclosure, is significant and worthy of research. This type of study can be replicated and modified in a variety of settings, thus increasing the opportunity for dialogue and discussion on the topic of disclosure, leading to more opportunities for further research. Daigan & Gilbride (2003) report the lack of empirical literature on disclosure for people with psychiatric disabilities. The significance of the lack of information available for rehabilitation professionals with invisible disabilities was universal in my research.

Intended Audience

The study was conducted with stakeholders in mind and academics who are training the future rehabilitation counselors and human resource managers. People with the disabilities could decide if this study has helped them decide if disclosing their disability will enhance the opportunities to discuss freely and competently how his or her condition may affect work and request appropriate accommodations. The employer could benefit from hearing the concerns of a person with a disability and work to make the interview

process more sensitive to the needs of those with disabilities. The study can help the rehabilitation professional (a) identify the feelings of his or her contemporaries on the subject of disclosure, (b) understand his or her responsibility to act as a consultant to all stakeholders in the process, and (c) to ensure the five ethical principles of the CRCC code of ethics are followed. The academics who are training the future leaders in the field of human resource management can benefit from the study having increased their understanding of people seeking work with hidden disability. Human resource educators and managers can also research and design user-friendly employment interview practices that facilitate diversity in the work environment. The rehabilitation academics can also benefit from the study by (a) ensuring that rehabilitation professionals have a thorough understanding of job matching, (b) have had the ability to discuss the nuances of disclosure and, (c) can apply the six ethical principles' from the CRCC code of Ethics (2010) when advising a client on disclosure.

Operational Definitions

Disclosure

According to Webster's College Dictionary (2003) disclosure is the act of exposing a view, to make known or to reveal. In the rehabilitation field, the definition put forth refers to the deliberate informing of someone in the workplace about one's disability (Ellison, Russinova, MacDonald-Wilson, & Lyass, 2003).

Concealment

According to Webster' College Dictionary (2003) concealment means the act of

hiding or keeping secret. Concealment as defined in the rehabilitation field is conscious behavior to decrease visibility of functional limitations (Allen & Carlson, 2003).

For purpose of this research, I compare and contrast the two definitions throughout the study as a dilemma of how to resolve the conflict of whether or not to disclose one's disability in the interview process, and the consequences of the choice to conceal his or her disabling condition from the employer. Allen and Carlson (2003) believe that vocational rehabilitation counselors must understand why clients may or may not want to conceal their disabilities to a potential employer and to be ready to provide the implications of disclosure as part of the advice they provide to the clients.

Another key term used throughout this research includes "*invisible disability*" which can include some physical, psychological, cognitive and social limitations. These conditions can include, and not be limited: to traumatic brain injury (TBI), low vision, learning disabilities (LD), invisible physical disabilities, multiple sclerosis (MS), mental health related disorders such as depression and various cognitive conditions. In contrast, a "*visible disability*" is one in which a person's condition is clearly visible to the employer, such as total blindness, spinal cord injury (SCI) with mobility issues, developmental disabilities such as Down's Syndrome, or Cerebral Palsy (CP) where language production may be impaired. All disabilities can be measured by the range in one's ability to perform Activities of Daily Living (ADL's). ADL's are the things we do normally in daily living, including activities for self-care and how we manage a household. The activities can include feeding, bathing, dressing and grooming. According to WebMed.com (Hitti, 2007) the ability or inability to perform ADL's can be used as a very practical measure of

ability/disability in many disorders. It should be noted that the generalization of ability and skills to all populations within a category has been considered in this study.

For the purpose of this study I focused on *invisible disabilities*. The complex circumstances associated with people that have *invisible disabilities* and the general reluctance to disclose this condition is what makes this study significant. When one has a *visible disability*, disclosure may not cause as much of a dilemma to the person with the disability. The counselor may also have a dilemma associated with disclosure to a potential employer due to the potential of pre-employment support, supported employment (SE) activities and communication with potential employers. It is when a person with an *invisible disability* seeks employment that the dilemma of whether or not to disclose can be brought to the forefront of the decision process.

Theoretical Orientation

Disclosure of disability is a complex and an intertwined phenomenon that incorporates the perception of each stakeholder and his or her understanding of its impact on the interview process. Each stakeholder has a perspective that guides his or her action in regards to how they approach the interview. The belief of each stakeholder is based on a perceived outcome of the interview. Thus, to theorize disclosure of disability during the interview one must understand that it is more fluid and complex than a “dry intellectual task” (Williams, 2001) and has larger sociological implications.

Since the 1990s the field of rehabilitation has moved away from the medical model and a positivist /post positivist perspective where the cure or remediation was the focus of

the intervention or study. We now are constructing the voices of those who were the focus of the studies themselves from a sociological paradigm. The growing field of disability studies has many facets and numerous styles, including Marxism, feminist postmodern and poststructuralist (Williams, 2001). The common thread is the rejection of a medical model and its replacement with the sociological and political theories of disability. The social reality is constructed with all stakeholders having a voice in the activities and discourses on the effects of disclosing disability in the interview. In sociological research the placement of the stakeholders in their environment is critical for a richer understanding of the phenomenon of how each person interacts. Theorizing disclosure of disability, therefore involves the analysis of dimensions of each stakeholder's experiences and the relationship between them.

People themselves can help shape the focus of a study in a holistic way versus the traditional approach of defining disability from the professional's perspective. Williams (2001, p.23) states that by, "using various forms of qualitative methods, researchers have attempted to reconstruct from people's own accounts of their experiences the reality of chronic illness and disability as something that comes out of the relationship between the person and the environment." To the person in the environment experience is then shaped on the perceived understanding of interactions between the stakeholders and whoever holds the power in these relationships. The complexity of the relationship between the stakeholders and the resulting social structure in correlation to employment makes the research into disclosure a significant phenomenon for the researcher to study. As a result the consequence of disclosure for a person with a disability is important because it shapes

his or her economics, accessibility to community integration and adequate housing (Oliver 1990: 94). Consequently, if the stakeholders do not have a clear understanding of each other's perspective they can lead to barriers in employment opportunities.

According to a social oppression model, disability is caused by society (Williams, 2001), and those barriers are erected by institutional discrimination. This study looked at the construction of such barriers in the context of disclosing disability during the interview and the interpretation of reality from all stakeholders' perspective in the process.

Disclosure is a powerful phenomenon supported by social theory that can be argued and justified at a variety of levels -- empirical, political, cultural and epistemological -- because traditional research in the medical model does not take into account the individual's perspective on the subject. Most theories look at disability from a feminist, postmodern or poststructuralist perspective. In this study, there are multiple perspectives and "mutually constituted realities" (Hatch, 2002) that are shared in the interview that provides guidance for each stakeholder. Therefore, the researcher constructed understanding from constructivist ontology where researcher and participants co-construct understanding of the dynamics of disclosure. This type of study can be classified as action research.

Action Research

Action Research can be formed from a variety of different intellectual traditions and can be also known as *participatory action research* (PAR). Kurt Lewin (1946) can be credited with the popularization of this approach (Berg, 2004). PAR has been described to be highly reflective, experimental and participatory. All participants are involved in the

study and the researcher is considered a co-participant and facilitator. Action research seeks to advance theoretical knowledge while solving practical problems (Schwandt, 2001). The selection of this type of model works well with the research methodology and questions. Disclosure is a social problem that affects people with disabilities in their search for employment. Through PAR, people can collectively build cooperation and increase understanding of each stakeholder's unique experience and point of view, thus shaping further action and understanding. This active feedback cycle known as "double looped learning" can increase opportunities to develop a better approach to employment practices involving people with disabilities. Improving conditions for employment is an important social praxis and it begins with dialogue and understanding of each stakeholder's perspective. The ultimate goal of action research is that each participant's unique perspective on the subject of disclosure is shared with the other stakeholders and as a whole the group develops higher understanding of the employment process from the perspective of the "other." This increase in understanding could lead to better guidance on the phenomenon of disclosure and how it affects employment for people with disability.

Researcher's Perspective

Researcher bias will have to be factored into the relationships between researcher and participant at each level of study. I have to be ready to release my "grip" on the interpretation and embrace alternatives (Krueger & Casey, 2000 p.140). Self-disclosure is not only the subject of this research; it is an important concept to be aware of in the design of the methods to limit bias in the interactions between participants and

researcher. Constructionists see their role as to co-construct data with the participants (Hatch, 2002, p.110) and thus have more control of the process. Therefore, I designed the questions to include open-ended formats and limited details about my opinions on disclosure of disability during the focus group and interviews.

My position on disclosure of disability is complex and, in general, I believe that honesty is the best policy. Disclosing a disability during the interview begins an honest and open relationship between the employer, and the job applicant. I wanted to come clean and lend credibility to the study by identifying that I believe disclosure is a positive relationship builder between the person with a disability and the potential employer who ultimately provides opportunity for the job seeker. I also believe that the rehabilitation counselor should ensure all relevant information about the position is provided to his or her client to make sure there is a good job match. Since I have chosen to disclose my bias I realized the onus will be on my actions during the research not to influence the participants with my predisposition but save it for my interpretation. Therefore as described above I will take precautions to ensure ethical protocols in my design.

Review and Organization of Study

The dissertation is divided into traditional chapters. Chapter Two is a literature review that has blended traditional peer reviewed journal articles with a selection of internet commentary on disclosure from an advocacy perspective. Chapter Three outlines the methodology of the study; including (a) research and design rationale, (b) participants and site, (c) data collection, (d) measures and (e) data analysis. Chapter Four is devoted

to the results and findings of the study and how the research answers the initial research questions. Chapter Five is a discussion section and specifically is used to discuss the findings of the studies and applications. Chapter Six discusses the conclusions and the limitations of the research and set the stage for further inquiry.

The study itself was conducted as a heterogeneous focus group with pre-structured group interview and post-semi-structured individual interviews. The focus group utilized video and audio tapes to record and developed an archive of the interaction. A tape-based-abridged transcript analysis identified specific themes as they evolved from the interaction. The triangulation of data generated from the focus group was subjected to rigorous analysis and thematic identification using a long table approach (Krueger & Casey, 2000, p.132). A final questionnaire was utilized to identify any changes in the perceptions of the stakeholders that may have evolved after the focus group. A peer review was conducted to ensure authenticity and trustworthiness.

Overview of Dissertation Content

The dissertation is divided into six sections. In the second chapter current literature is reviewed to provide a backdrop of attitudes and principles related to the stakeholder's perspective of disclosing disability. Chapter Three is a review of qualitative methodology and the significance to my study. Results of the focus group and individual extended interviews make up Chapter Four's research findings. Chapter Five discusses the results of the research and identifies a potential model for action from the participant's results. Chapter Six will outline the suggestions for future research, and the conclusion of the

research.

CHAPTER 2

Literature Review

Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to review the complexities of disclosure and how it affects the stakeholders. It is organized into four sections; (1) an introduction to disclosure and the stakeholders in this phenomenon; (2) the challenges people with disabilities face as they confront the attitudes of others and how it can impact employment; (3) ethics and guidance from the accreditation commission for rehabilitation counselors and (4) how the concepts related to disclosure can be synthesized into action. At the end of each section the relevance of the literature to the central research will be discussed.

It is difficult for the person with a disability to choose whether or not to disclose their disability during the job hunting process. Rehabilitation professionals providing guidance on when and how to disclose a person's disability should spend sufficient time analyzing the consequences of disclosure and the impact for each person's individual circumstance. With the passage of the Americans with Disability Act of 1990 (ADA) and the Rehabilitation Amendments of 1992 it became unlawful for an employer to discriminate against a qualified applicant or employee with a disability. Since this is now the law, one would think that discriminative practices in employment for people with disabilities would gradually fade away (Granger, 2000, Dalgin & Gilbride, 2003). While the conditions are improving, it is the consensus of many rehabilitation professionals and

people with disabilities that there still exists a level of bias in the hiring practices of employers (Pearson, Ip, Hui, Yip, Ho, & Lo, 2003). To tell or not to tell about one's disability becomes the question. This is a complex problem for not only the person with disability, but also for the people advising them and a phenomenon worthy of investigation.

Most research in the field of employment for people with disabilities has been quantitatively based (Freedman & Fesko, 1996) and has focused on quantitative variables such as dollars earned, number of people with disabilities employed and other measurable outcomes. However, there is a current trend in rehabilitation to give the voice back to the stakeholders through qualitative methods (Goode, 1989; Inge, Banks, Wehman, Hill, & Shafer, 1988; Schalock, Keith, Hoffman, & Karan, 1989). People who make up the stakeholders are essential sources of qualitative information in the employment experience (Freedman & Fesko, 1996). The complexities of disclosure and the perspectives of the stakeholders make this phenomenon meaningful for the researcher to investigate its effect on job seeking efforts, thus leading back to measurable outcomes. One of the basic elements of participatory action research, a concept promoted by the National Institute on Disability and Rehabilitation Research, is participation by the people most affected by the phenomenon under study (Bruyere, 1993; Freedman & Fesko, 1996; Walker, 1993). Therefore, having a "team" of stakeholders, addressing the issue of disclosure will provide perspective and essential themes that will help to guide the rehabilitation professionals when facing the question of "to tell or not to." The concept of giving stakeholders a voice will help guide the framework of this research.

The rehabilitation professional is expected to adhere to a specific code of ethics developed by their accreditation body, such as The Commission on Rehabilitation Counselor Certification. One such principle in the commission's guidelines (CRCC, 2009, p.2) is that all counselors should not engage in "any act or omission of a dishonest, deceitful or fraudulent nature in conduct of their professional activities." This becomes an ethical dilemma when knowledge that disclosure could lead to significant risks for their clients including stigma; differential treatment by interviewers; discrimination in the hiring process, on the job, in promotion and obtaining other benefits and opportunities while working (Ellison, Russinova, Macdonald-Wilson, & Lyass, 2003). Thus, a rehabilitation professional can potentially violate the principles of doing no harm (non-maleficence), and doing good (beneficence) in deciding how to counsel their clients on this issue. Disclosure elicits a variety of concerns and issues. Some professionals advocate for honesty in the relationships with potential employers (Buchanan, 2003) and others view disclosure as an individual choice (Center for Psychiatric Rehabilitation, Boston University, 1998) and still others see disclosure as a strategically placed timing issue (Pearson, Ip, Hui, Yip, Ho & Lo, 2003).

In the field of vocational rehabilitation the term "disclosure" generally means the deliberate informing of someone in the workplace about one's disability (Ellison, Russinova, Wilson & Lyass, 2003). Thus, the act of not disclosing becomes a deliberate action to not disclose one's disability. This form of concealment is seen as a conscious effort to decrease the visibility of the disability (Allen & Carlson, 2003). While it would be difficult to conceal a disability that is apparent to the employer, some disabilities are

not as easy to distinguish; these generally are referred to as invisible disabilities. For the purpose of this study invisible disabilities will be discussed.

Invisible disability is a broad term that in even its simplest definition encompasses a variety of disabling conditions. The online support group for people with learning disabilities, *LDOnline* (Young, 1996), defines invisible disabilities as hidden neurological conditions that present significant challenges to learning, interacting with others, regulating mood and thinking patterns that prevents one from living a full lifestyle. They can include: Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI), Learning Disability (LD), Attention Deficient Disorder (ADD), Mental Impairment (MI), Asperger's syndrome, Epilepsy and Tourette's syndrome. The *Invisible Disability Advocate*, another online support system, definition includes Chronic Pain as well as groups of disabling conditions that are the product of disease, disorders, chronic infections and birth defects, such as pain, fatigue, dizziness, chronic weakness and nausea (Invisible Disability Advocate Online, 2009).

Counseling a client in disclosure of invisible disabilities can become a complex problem for the rehabilitation professional as they try to understand all aspects of hidden disability and the unique accommodations that each diagnosis may require. Many accommodations for people with invisible disabilities can be as simple as note taking/written instructions (Briel, McManus, & Gretel, 2006), employer education programs (Hunt & Hunt, 2004), to supported employment models (Wehman & Targett, 2006), and self-employment approaches (Geary, Shelley, Griffin, & Hammis, 2006). If you add the specific job requirements for each unique employment site it quickly forms a difficult puzzle for the rehabilitation professional to solve (Gilbride, Stensrud,

Vandergoot, & Golden, 2003). It takes time to do the analysis of the variables that each job may present and when the pieces of this puzzle are put together as Gilbride, et al (2003) describes, it becomes a work environment that is open to hiring people with disabilities. If this analysis is completed correctly it can guide the rehabilitation professional in helping all the stakeholders make accurate decisions about the relationship of disability and the job, thus reducing the fear of disclosure.

For vocational rehabilitation professionals to best discuss the options with their clients they also need to fully understand why a client may or may not want to conceal his or her disability in the first place and the consequences of any advice that they give them on whether to disclose or not to (Allen & Carlson, 2003). This may become difficult if the client does not fully understand their condition, the disability's complications for accommodations and specific elements of the job.

Perils and Attributes of Disclosure

In understanding the implications of disclosure or concealing of information the rehabilitation professional should also have all the stakeholders' points of view. The implications can be obtaining full benefits of the ADA, and the opposite-not having the protection of the ADA (Hughes & Graham, 1994). The stakeholders would include employers, advocates, rehabilitation professionals and people with invisible disabilities. People with disability may feel that the "stigma" attached to their disability may be difficult to overcome, along with the preservation of one's self-concept, especially if a condition is perceived as socially less-acceptable (Freedman & Fesko, 1996). These

variables can play into one's motivation not to disclose (Allen & Carlson, 2003).

Advocates feel that timing is important in disclosure; the Epilepsy Foundation (2004) provides guidelines in helping a person with a disability decide whether to disclose, and the advantages and disadvantages to the timing of when to disclose in each phase of the employment process. Glenn Young, an advocate of people with learning disabilities, in a 1996 news brief stated for LDonline, "Perhaps the more important question a person with learning disabilities must ask, is not whether to tell or not to tell, but rather the consequences of not telling."

Clients and advocates have a variety of concerns and views about the subject of disclosure (Allan & Carlson, 2003). Misunderstanding the employer's disability management practices is still considered an employment barrier for people with disabilities and can affect the decision to disclose or not to; it is however unique to each employer and should be examined individually (Gilbride, Stensrud, Vandergoot, & Golden, 2003). Disclosure research indicates that companies that promote "good working environments" begin with the interviewing process (Parry & Rutherford, 1995), and direct disclosure of visible disabilities makes accommodations easier to arrange. A 1984 study conducted by Huvelle, Budoff, and Arnolz acknowledged that while disclosure is a complex subject; one which has profound personal and professional implications on the stakeholders, the authors still favored disclosing a disability over not. The interesting part of this study was that the participants of this study were 21 white collar managers that had disabilities themselves. The participants of the study favored increasing education on accessibility to accommodations for people with disabilities for employers. The study

also cited the educational value in increasing co-workers' knowledge of people with disabilities in the work force as examples of the positive effects of disclosure.

Education of employers can help mitigate the effects of discrimination in the workplace by creating a management system that understands diversity (Flynn, 1996). Effective management of people with learning disabilities pays off according to Traci Hagan, a regional recruiter for Chili's Grill and Bar, not only for the person with disability but in teaching valuable training skills for their managers (Flynn, 1996). The Flynn (1996) study is relevant to rehabilitation counselors advising people with disabilities in whether or not they should openly disclose their disabilities during the interview.

Due to the variety of responses from the various stakeholders above, one can see the difficulty of how to correctly address disclosure. The rehabilitation professional is the point person for all activity involving the discussion of disclosure. All activity is channeled through them. The client and his or her individual concerns are assessed. A person's unique vocational needs are identified and an individualized vocational profile is developed. This information becomes essential in helping a person seek out the appropriate career path. It is at this junction that the employer and the unique requirements of the specific job become important. Rehabilitation professionals are saddled with the responsibility in making judgment decisions in counseling people with disabilities as to whether or not they should disclose hidden disabilities.

Under the ADA an applicant with a disability, like all other applicants, must be able

to meet the employer's requirements for the job (Hughes & Graham, 1994). In addition to meeting the standard requirements of each job a person with a disability must be able to perform the "essential functions" of the job either on their own or with the help of "reasonable accommodations." The U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission's website on the ADA recommends it is best to let the employer know as soon as you realize that you need a reasonable accommodation. In a survey of 1,042 resource managers titled "*Implementation of the Employment Provisions of the ADA*," indicated that 82 percent of employers modified their workplace; 79 percent have engaged in flexible human resource practices; 79 percent restructured jobs or modified work hours; and 80 percent made the interviewing process more accessible (Sunoo, 2001). In the research Sunoo, (2002) indicates that 90 percent of the staff in the survey reported that they were knowledgeable of appropriate interviewing techniques for people with disability. One could think that if these activities are becoming the norm then rehabilitation professionals and individuals with disabilities would have a higher degree of success in attempting to enter the work force. Since there is the phenomenon of higher unemployment for people with disabilities someone is not getting the message about opportunities and rights for people seeking employment.

While there are many reasons for underemployment, such as transportation and workplace accessibility, there are also problems getting a person to participate in the interview from a variety of psychological variables, such as fear and anxiety (Schmidt & Smith, 2007). Fear of disclosure of disability is the phenomenon of interest to this study and its variables need to be identified and dealt with. Schmidt and Smith report that

31.7% of people with disabilities fear prejudice at work. Potential for discrimination during the interview is legitimate fear for people with disabilities even in structured selection interviews (Miceli, Harvey, & Buckley, 2002) that generally are used to promote fairness in hiring for general populations. The structure selection interview is defined by Gordon and Leighty, (1988, p. 73) as a “limited interpersonal interaction, designed to gather information and assess the degree of fit between the candidate, the job, and the organization,” and is in sense the gate keeping event for employment opportunities for a person with a disability as they seek employment (Miceli, Harvey, & Buckley, 2002). The fear of disclosure was the subject of another focus group (Pearson, Ip, Hui, Yip, Ho & Lo, 2003) where people with disabilities and people without disabilities were ranked by order of preference in hiring. The nondisabled received the highest rankings of hiring preference over their counterparts with disability. The need to break down the barriers for employment was evident in the Pearson, et al, 2003 study. Disclosure of disability can be perceived as one of the barriers.

Fear of Disclosure

The literature identifies three reasons people with disabilities have trepidation in disclosing; (a) fear of discrimination, (b) the avoidance of hurtful responses to disability and circumvention of negative attitudes from potential employers and, (c) self-esteem issues drive people with disability not to disclose (Allen & Carlson, 2003). Independently any of the above reasons not to disclose can be a daunting obstacle for a person with disability to overcome. One can imagine that when perceived in any collective combination a person would have difficulty deciding whether or not to risk putting

themselves “out there.” Giving up on seeking employment becomes one explanation for higher rates of unemployment among people with disability. It is also important to understand that the rehabilitation professional’s ultimate goal is to help a person with a disability develop a career path. Allen and Carlson, (2003) report that if their clients cannot find employment opportunities due to real or perceived barriers they can become reluctant even to try to find work. The psychological fallout due to these real or perceived barriers can impact a person overwhelmingly, impeding his or her own desired employment outcome. Within the Department of Rehabilitation Services employment outcomes are one measure that rehabilitation professionals are evaluated for his or her effectiveness (As per the researcher’s own experiences). If the rehabilitation professional cannot facilitate opportunities then the stakeholders lose. Finally, the employer loses if they are looking for qualified applicants that will help make their business prosper and in the case of progressive companies, create an environment that embraces diversity.

There is a sense that the stakeholders are not dialoging with each other in a conscious effort to address the concerns of each of the stakeholders perspectives; at least in the lack of empirical research and literature in this subject . One can also have the impression that these stakeholders are not aware of issues relating to disclosure from each other’s perspective and do not see the significance of divergent points of view. However, if one looks at the potential in having the stakeholders enter into a deliberate dialogue on disclosure then they could become keenly aware of how connected they ultimately are to the employment process (Madaus, Foley, McGuire, & Ruben, 2002; Unger & Kregel, 2003).The stakeholders are interdependent whether they understand that or not. The

literature (Rocco, 2003) gives us the impression that people with disabilities are genuinely aware of how disclosure affects their own perceptions of self. Until we bring the stakeholders together collectively (Unger & Kregel, 2003) they will continue to have difficulty with the logical link that is apparent from the outside looking in, on how the elimination of fear can impact the decision to disclose or not. This sentiment is echoed in a focus group study by Westmorland, Williams, Strong & Arnold (2002) where the perceptions on work (re)entry for persons with disability between stakeholders was examined. The conclusion was that values and attitudes still impact both positively and negatively the perception of individuals with disabilities who are seeking employment.

As the stakeholders begin to develop a relationship in their shared understanding of disclosure, fear will be replaced with reasons to disclose (Allan & Carlson, 2003). The client will benefit from this new relationship with their co-stakeholders and gain access of an extended social network (Parry & Rutherford, 1995). Allen and Carlson's 2003 study describes other benefits to disclosure that include access to accommodations and explanation of employment gaps in work history. If there is a public record of the disability, such as an insurance claim or workers compensation suit the issue of disability has already been "outed" (Allan & Carlson's, 2003). Perhaps the strongest outcome of the relationship between the stakeholders will be the honesty that will be established by the simple act of communication (Parry & Rutherford, 1995). Understanding the complexity of disclosure from each other's perspective (Rocco, 2001) can also help in the development of methods to address the issues. People can have a strong personal preference for honesty (Rocco, 2001). The difficult position that one can be placed in

when disclosing a disability, and the fear in making the right decision whether to disclose or not, could be eliminated by communication and understanding of all the stakeholders' perspectives. Just the benefits of hiring the right person with a person with a disability can lead to positive attributes for the company (Olson, Cioffi, Yovanoff, & Mank, 2001). These positive attributes included positive employer experiences with people with disability and the public image that is associated with a diverse workplace. These attributes can include in meeting productivity goals and without higher costs in insurance; a myth sometimes associated with hiring people with disabilities.

Concealing a disability may be a response to general attitudes towards disability (Allen & Carlson, 2003), but as those attitudes change in the general public through inclusion of people with disabilities into the community's everyday activities, including the workplace, the paradigm can change and society could eventually adopt favorable attitudes in their employment practices (Olson, Cioffi, Yovanoff, & Mank, 2001). The change in employment practices, where people are seen as qualified despite their disability leads to the mitigation of stigma. Change in the individual person with a disability's concept of self worth (Rocco, 2001; Allan & Carlson, 2003) can begin with a clearer understanding of how each stakeholder views disclosure from his or her unique perspective and then how it affects others. This can lead the person with disability to feel self-worth and acceptance.

Participation Action Research (McTaggart, 1997) is a natural starting point to bring these stakeholders together and in Chapter Three the rationale for this methodology will be described in more detail. The next section explores the challenges that people with

disabilities face in seeking employment and an exploration of the perception of the stakeholders, specifically the employer and the person with a disability.

Attitudes on Disability

People with disabilities are a heterogeneous group (Szymanski & Trueba, 1999, p.195) and attitudes towards people with disabilities represent a broad and complex concept. Attitudes are constructed differently and can include both negative and positive images and concepts of disability by various stakeholders (Goffman, 1963; Skrtic, 1991; Stubbins, 1991; Szymanski & Trueba, 1999, p.195). It is in the complexity of these attitudes that we see the incongruities of feelings and its effect on related behavior of the various stakeholders within the employment process. These can range from the ability to create an opening to diversity at work by the employer; or their fear of increased costs of accommodations. Since disability is known to be a social and cultural phenomenon (Szymanski & Trueba, 1999, p.197) many of the experiences have been shared with ethnic minorities in their quest for equal rights in employment. There apparently is a range of treatment and equality that employers, agencies, and other entities, may provide people with disabilities in accessibility issues (Brostrand, 2006). Discrimination can result when there is a negative attitude towards people with disabilities at work, whether overtly or covertly. Overt discrimination can include refusing to offer employment based on bias or stigma attached to disability or covert discrimination such as not promoting a person based solely on their disability (Woodward & Day, 2006). Some attitudes that can be experienced by people with disabilities are represented in the Table 2.1 below. These attitudes can come from a variety of perspectives and ultimately are a very difficult

barrier to employment. However, the over generalization of these perceived barriers can be equally restrictive. Therefore, understanding the realities of the phenomena is essential in counseling whether one should disclose his or her disability or not.

Table 2.1: Experiencing Prejudice and Discrimination

Attitudes Attached to Disability and the Effects
1. Stereotyping and Categorization: The exaggerated belief associated with a category or label of a person with disability.
2. Role entrapment: When people with control and power define the roles of people with disability or other minority status. This can be seen as “occupational stereotyping.”
3. Pity: The concept of pity can be used to decrease the value of the individual due to the nature of his or her disability.
4. Lowered Expectations: The concept of overprotection and sheltering individuals along with lowering expectations for work or independence.
5. Objectification: Viewing People with disabilities as a curiosity and also being viewed as less than human.
6. Marginality: When a member is restricted to a devalued membership group (Disability) they can be barred from full participation of the dominant group, thus being seen as inferior.
7. Unnecessary Dependence: When a person’s perceived as less capable they may loss their say in issues relating to the freedom of choice.

Adapted from “*Disability, Society and the Individual.*” J. Smart, 2009, 297-3.

Attitudes are “a combination of beliefs and the feelings that predispose a person to behave in a certain way” (Noe, 2002, p.108). These “beliefs” can lead a person to act or behave in way to provide opportunities for others, or beliefs can become attitudinal

barriers that block access to employment; depending on how one understands the specific disability. Noe (2002) explains that the make-up of attitudes can be broken into three elements: cognition (thought), affect (emotions) and behavioral responses (action). It is in negative attitudes that some researchers have found the foundation of discrimination (Bostrand; 2006, Scope, 2003; Shapiro, 1994). Brostrand (2006, p.2) cites the 1999 President's Committee on Employment for People with Disability reporting that; "often, the most difficult barriers to overcome are the attitudes other people carry regarding people with disability." Many of these negative attitudes can influence the hiring practices of employers and thus, lead to higher rates of unemployment for people with disability (Woodward & Day, 2006). Social-environmental discrimination can be a significant problem for people with disability, (Antonak & Liveh, 2000; Lebed, 1985) and is another dynamic that negative attitudes towards people with disability can produce. The combination of negative attitudes and the social-environmental barriers can be particularly noticed in the employment continuum; from the point of seeking an interview and or first contact with employer, to the actual job offer (Brostrand, 2006). These attitudinal dynamics and the fear of a negative reaction/behavior from others and employers (Dalgin & Gilbride, 2003) can also effect a person's decision to disclose his or her disability.

Attitudinal barriers to employment are not just phenomena that are limited to our country: France (Louvét, 2007), Italy (Negri & Briante, 2007), United Kingdom (Danieli & Wheeler, 2006), Canada (Westmorland, Williams, Strong & Arnold, 2001), and Australia (Driscoll, Rodger, & de Jonge, 2001) all identify attitudes as a barrier to

employment within their own countries. Attitudinal barriers appear to be universally tied to the lack of understanding or based on persistent myths about people with disability; such as inability to compete on the job, (Brostrand, 2006; Unger, 2002) and can foster the high unemployment rates that are pervasive for people with disabilities in many of the industrially based nations.

Universally, attitudinal barriers reflect a persistent explanation that drives behavior (Vash, 2001); stigma and labeling can also result in bias and discrimination (Garske & Stewart, 1999) in the employment continuum specifically in the moment of disclosure in the interview. Stigma appears to play a role in whether or not some employers offer employment to people with mental health issues. Stigma can also be unwittingly reinforced by the actual rehabilitation professional because of his or her own attitudes toward people with disabilities and the environment and type of employment they should seek. People with invisible disability can be affected by stigma and negative attitudes both internally and externally and can result in lowered self-concept and thus isolation (Garske & Stewart, 1999). Stigma and negative attitude towards people with disabilities can affect behavior in all stakeholders and their complex relationship drives this study. If rehabilitation professionals treat people with disability as less of a human based on their label, what could we expect society to do (Garske & Stewart, 1999)? It is in this lowered level of acceptance, combined with the disability itself, that we see disconnectedness, crisis in spirit and disempowerment (Deegan, 1990) and resulting fear of how to proceed with one's societal interactions. While there has been some progress in attitudes towards people with mental health issues (Garske, 1999), Anthony, Cohen, and Farkas, (1990)

commented: “We wonder how many more clients could be employed, return to school, live more independently-without the clients themselves ever changing-if only the attitudes change in the world” (p.227).

There is great diversity within diversity. While the attitudes play an important part of how people with disabilities can be viewed from both a negative or a positive perspective, an affirmative attitude can build a commitment to achieve long term diversity in the workplace (Brostrand, 2006). Top management’s commitment to creating diversity in the workplace can form an environment where barriers are reduced (Brostrand, 2006). A policy of nondiscrimination can help foster a culture of inclusion (Parry & Rutherford, 1995). Many employers expressed the desire to hire people with disabilities in the workforce (Gilbride, Coughlin, Mitus & Scott, 2007) but didn’t because they felt that applicants were unqualified and not a general negative or stereotypical attitude towards people with disability themselves. Louvet (2007) identified a variety of factors that can influence the hiring process; including personal; environmental; and organizational characteristics-such as a company’s understanding of the ADA. It is in this context that Colella, (1998) suggests that the discrimination of people with disabilities in the workplace varies in the complexity of the attributes attached to individual disability, and the attributes attached to each one by coworkers based on their personal knowledge and experience. Another aspect of discrimination can rise if there is not a good “fit” between the person with a disability and his or her respective job.

Negative attributes that generally have existed in the minds of people without disability about attributes of people with disability has reinforced negative outcomes in

employment. The expectation for a positive employment outcome is decreased when the “fit” of the job is beyond what functional attribute is attached to the person with a disability and the actual job. For example, a job that has higher visibility and a lot of customer contact may be perceived by the employer as beyond the attributes of person with a visible disability due in part to a “perceived” negative characteristic associated with the disability (Smart, 2009). While it may be clearer that employer attitudes can be part to blame in higher unemployment rates of people with disability there is an expressed desire to hire qualified people with disability (Gilbride, Coughlin, Mitus, & Scott, 2007, Gilbride & Stensrud, 1993). How a person’s decision to disclose his or her disability is influenced by negative attributes and the resulting attitudes that are developed by others towards people with disability, and their effects on a person’s “self” is lacking in empirical research. Also, the generalization that “most” employers have negative attitudes towards people with disability is significantly multifaceted not a singular universal perception (Gilbride & Stensrud, 1993).

The ADA and Employment

While the 1990 American with Disabilities Act (ADA) and the amendments in 2008 mitigated many of the concerns for people with disability there is a still serious problem for people with disabilities in regards to employer attitudes (Kennedy & Olney, 2001). However, there is empirical evidence that this paradigm can change (Parry & Rutherford, 1995) with individual and interpersonal contact (Negri & Briante, 2007), development of multiple supply side educational activities (Roessler, Neath, McMahon, & Rumrill, 2007), the employer’s own understanding of knowledge of disabilities (Louvet, 2007), in

class consciousness (Russell, 2002), and with education of stakeholders (Hunt & Hunt, 2004). Society benefits by addressing the problems of employment for people with disabilities. Hunt and Hunt (2004) cites the economist, Douglas Rouse (1998) reporting that if only one million more people with disabilities worked, there would be a \$21.2 billion annual increase in earned income, \$1.2 billion cash in means-tested payments, a \$286 million annual decrease in the use of food stamps, and a \$1.8 billion decrease in SSI income programs. Companies that hire people with disabilities benefit by having an expanded pool of employees in times where there is high employment, creating diversity in the workplace, receiving tax breaks and an increase in morale of co-workers (Hunt & Hunt, 2004; Brostrand, 2006).

Major trends in research indicate that society is still mixed in acceptance and attitudes towards people with disabilities when it comes to employment (Hernandez, Keys, & Balcazar, 2000). However, while the above study identifies mixed results, there is evidence of expressing a global acceptance from employers and that were likely to express positive attitudes towards disability in general. Traditionally, employers from larger companies reported a higher degree of acceptance and attitudes for people with disabilities than the smaller companies' surveyed (Greenwood & Johnson, 1987). The current trend is leveling out between large and small companies, as reported by, Hernandez, Keys, and Balcazar, (2000) where five studies identified no attitude difference based on company size, which is a positive phenomenon for people with disabilities (PWD) seeking work. Employers with higher levels of education expressed more favorable attitudes for people with disabilities; however this trend had leveled out

(Greenwood & Johnson, 1987) at the time of this study. These studies reflect the need to identify the variables in employment trends.

There are other intangible rewards that will increase positive attitudes toward work for people with disabilities. The most important context in which the rehabilitation professional can encourage people with disabilities to see in the benefits of work is the potential to be lifted out of the pervasive poverty that some people with disabilities are regulated to when living with government assistance only (Russell, 2002). While work rewards are variable with the type of work, it increases the quality of life through work as contribution to society as a whole (Kirsh, 2000). Work can reward the individual through his or her ability in giving back to a “system” and through increasing earning potential. A person with disabilities can also increase his or her self-worth, normalization and life satisfaction (Kirsh, 2000) through work. These positive benefits that people with disabilities derive from work need to be highlighted and as Kirsh’s study suggested and identifies other factors that future research can identify.

Individuals with disabilities face several barriers to employment such as negative attitudes, stigma and discrimination (Woodward & Day, 2006). These barriers for employment can lead to fear of disclosing disability and are real. The fear and anxiety over disclosure is complex (Kirsh, 2000). However, when looking at the ways to mitigate these issues and the potential benefits for all stakeholders adds to the importance of this study by sorting out the actual variables for each person as an individual and collectively as people that have disabilities.

It is when there is misperception of the actual phenomenon of whether or not a person should disclose his or her disability that contributes to the complexity; in this case our fears and bias lead to inaccurately advising a person whether or not they should disclose their hidden disability. If employers and rehabilitation professionals share a misperception of a person's ability, it can become a shared lack of understanding of the actual accommodations and potential barriers that could impede employment opportunities for people with disability (Michaels & Rusucci, 1992). When there is congruence and agreement in issues of employment between the rehabilitation professional and the employer including accommodations the person seeking work can, develop appropriate rehabilitation interventions, compensatory strategies and ultimately employment (Michaels & Rusucci, 1992). The value in knowledge of the individual with a disability as a person first whose disability is uniquely defined by his or her attributes and abilities help ensure an appropriate job match, thus increasing options for all stakeholders. It is in the lack of agreement that indicates more education and understanding is needed by both the rehabilitation professional and the employer. In their study Michaels and Rusucci, (1992) offered that employer and rehabilitation professionals have similarities and of course differences in their perception of how to accommodate individuals with disabilities. However, there is an interest to ensure inclusion of people with disability into the work by both groups (Perry & Rutherford, 1995).

Stakeholders working together to enhance potential employment are a definition for success (Westmorland, Williams, Strong & Arnold, 2002). That is why a change in the

paradigm of how the stakeholders view disability might be the difference. Success is as individual as the people engaged in it. While the numbers of people with disabilities employed is still low despite legislation (Parry & Rutherford, 1995), the importance of understanding each stakeholder's own knowledge of disability and their attitudes towards people with disabilities is both helpful and hopeful. Helpful, in that by creating the right job related accommodations through communication with all the stakeholders we can increase employment success. Hopeful in that with success on the job, negative attitudes and misperceptions from employers, co-workers and rehabilitation professionals of people that have hidden disability can be decreased and thus create a new paradigm of inclusion in work and community and a general acceptance of people with disability.

Ethical Considerations

Justice will only be achieved if people with disabilities are accorded the same worth as those who are not disabled (Shakespeare & Watson, 2001. p.559). The Preamble of the Code of Professional Ethics for Rehabilitation Counselors (2002, revised 2010), henceforth referred to as the Code, describes five principles of ethical behavior that professional rehabilitation counselor should include in their practice. These principles are the values that drive ethical behavior and are extended to the people that rehabilitation professionals interact with; and while the preamble focuses on the facilitation of these values for people with disabilities, there should be some consideration for the employer's position in the employment process. Productivity and profit need to be considered since it is the employers who provide the employment opportunities for individuals with disabilities (Rubin, Wilson, Fisher, & Vaughn, 1992). The employer is sometimes

perceived as creating barriers for employment however, that there is no consistent empirical evidence that would support that employers create barriers as a singular variable and such a generalization can minimize the complexity of the difficulties that people with disability face in obtaining work (Parry & Rutherford, 1995; Bricout & Bentley, 2000). Thus, the values of all stakeholders should be taken into consideration as equals and thus afforded similar treatment.

Rehabilitation professionals and counselors have a primary objective to facilitate and demonstrate a “fundamental spirit of caring and respect” as stated in their *Code of Professional Ethics for Rehabilitation Counselors* (Commission on Rehabilitation Certification, CRCC, 2010). This spirit is based on the above principles of ethical behavior as outlined below in Table 2.2, which include autonomy, beneficence, non-maleficence, justice, fidelity and veracity. These principles shape decision making for the interaction between rehabilitation professionals and their co-stakeholders. The principles occur regardless of whether the rehabilitation professional has direct or indirect contact with a client or employer. Ethical behavior should be expected and encouraged by the rehabilitation professional of his or her clients and in the relationship with the employer; and in turn of the employer towards the person with a disability.

Table 2.2: Six Principles of Ethical Behavior

<p>Principles of Ethical Behavior:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Autonomy: To honor the right to make individual decisions.2. Beneficence: To do good/well to others.3. Non-maleficence: To do no harm to others.
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4. Justice: To be fair and give equally to others.
5. Fidelity: To be loyal, honest, and keep promises.
6. Veracity: To be honest

Note: Adapted for the Code of Professional Ethics for Rehabilitation Counselors, 2010.

Fidelity

Fidelity, as defined in the *Code*, is the behavior of being loyal, honest and having the ability to keep promises as outlined in the preamble of the *Code*. Thus, when the subject of disclosure comes into play it creates a dynamic that can stretch ethical boundaries. Encouragement to be honest can cause many of the fears of disclosing disability to surface (MacDonald-Wilson & Whitman, 1995). Even though some human resource managers have advised that disclosure should occur (Parry & Rutherford, 1995) there is no conclusive empirical evidence that disclosure is without risk. It is in the balancing of the risks and benefits of disclosure that information and direction is needed to ensure that professionals can weigh which principles are more applicable (Mears, Schmidt, & Day, 1996). These principles if intended to be effective must be considered in every case where disclosure is called for.

Fidelity must be extended to all stakeholders, not just the client. The education of stakeholders is the key to creating diversity in the workplace. When creating diversity in the workplace the keys to employment become extended to people with disabilities. It is in the empowerment of individual stakeholders that these keys are actualized for all people (Pati & Bailey, 1995). When Karen Higginbottom, editor of *People Management* (2004 p.14), wrote about how employers could meet the challenges for deaf employees she stated that, "If employers were to provide deaf awareness training" conditions on the

job for deaf people could improve. If conditions on the job improved it would also have a secondary benefit of improving diversity in the workplace.

The above sentiment is helpful in understanding the idea of fidelity and how it works with beneficence (discussed below) to improve the employment opportunities of people with disabilities, as well as other stakeholders. In its basic level, beneficence is the general social obligation to provide mutual aid to those who need assistance (Cottone & Tarydas, 2007, p.27) and thus it naturally extends to the employers who are trying to balance their own responsibilities. Counselors must balance their knowledge of the vocational rehabilitation process with how to influence their client's best interests. Therefore, advising one to disclose or not becomes a direct component of ethical behavior for the professional and it has ramifications for all stakeholders (McDonald-Wilson & Whitman, 1995).

Autonomy

Autonomy honors the right for an individual to make their own decisions. The selection of a particular vocational goal would be an example how autonomy is played out in the field of rehabilitation (Rubin, Wilson, Fischer, & Vaughan, 1992). Thus if a person has a disability that might be considered a risk for his or herself and others, such as HIV (Fesko,2001), the rehabilitation professional would have to provide the individual with information on the risks involved in the specific job as it related to his or her disability. This would provide the person with a disability the opportunity and the ability to make an informed choice and/or decision if the job is an appropriate match (Rubin, et.

al, 1992). The fear of discrimination, harassment, loss of promotion may be the original rationale for a person not to disclose (Fesko, 2001). Just the stigma that society associates with HIV may make the decision to disclose a difficult one. However, as social stigma associated with the disease is reduced in the future (Fesko, 2001) the fear may be mitigated and a person can make a different decision to disclose or not.

Non-malfeasance

Non-malfeasance is to act without doing harm to clients and is perhaps one of the oldest ethical principles that have shaped the foundation of medical practices. It reflects refraining from taking action that could bring harm to others. If a person with a disability has a condition that could result in danger to themselves or others, much consideration would need to be taken into account by the professionals as to how not disclosing could put co-workers, the employer; even the person with disability at risk. A person with limitations in lifting can put his or her co-workers and their employer at risk by working in conditions that are outside his or her restrictions. In the “Code of Practice for Disabilities Managers” (2000) one of the principles is to provide a safe and healthy workplace. Their expertise helps in developing accommodation plans and appropriate job analysis. After all, it is the clinician’s expertise that could be considered an important factor in influencing change in the workplace (Westmorland, Williams, Strong & Arnold, 2002) which can include increasing safety and opportunities for people with disability. It is through change in the workplace that opportunities for all stakeholders can be achieved.

Beneficence

While non-maleficence is refraining from action that would do harm, beneficence contributes to the wellbeing of others, and when these two principles are taken into consideration by the rehabilitation professional it can be seen as a way of protecting the rights of all the stakeholders in the employment environment. Psychosocial disability management using the joint employee-management model includes aspects of creating a working environment that is inclusive as well as helpful (Olsheski, Rosenthal, & Hamilton, 2001) in promoting positive change in the workplace. Creating an open workplace where people with disabilities feel that they are valued and accepted helps change the overall working environment. This shift in the paradigm can solidify the principles of non-maleficence and beneficence by creating an open honest environment in which people with disabilities can feel safe and secure in the knowledge that they will have no psychological or physical harm. It is when the stakeholders pull together for a common cause that issues of fear can be addressed in a balanced approach to disability management. The strategies that Olsheski, et al. (2001), identified in their article help not only the employer by addressing costs and productivity but also the employee with a disability by protecting his or her employability.

Veracity

To be honest when there is so much at stake. There are many benefits from being honest when assessing the choice to disclose or not for the stakeholders. Being honest or practicing veracity can lead to accommodations and other entitlements such as leave time

or even modified working schedules for the client (Allen & Carlson, 2003). The rehabilitation professional also needs to identify the perils of being honest; such as discrimination and stigma. Honesty is really at the core of the disclosure debate. One can frame the disclosure debate in a very simple statement; should a person with an invisible disability be honest about his or her disability? Allen and Carlson (2003) stated that one of the reasons a person may disclose is that they have a strong “personal preference for honesty” and thus has a higher degree of understanding how his or her honesty can impact others. They also feel that the potential employer should have the right to know about how or if a person’s disability can impact the job. One can be honest about his or her self-much easier if they have a higher concept of self and the understanding of the job specific requirements.

If a person can honestly answer questions about his or her disability; the type of job accommodations needed for work; and explain gaps in employment history it can also help mitigate the stressors of keeping information inside about the disability (MacDonald-Wilson, 2005). Honesty can free a person to concentrate on the job and in developing his or her own concept of self instead of focusing on being “outed”. Veracity can lead a person to develop a positive disability identity (Daigin & Gilbride, 2003) and in doing so can lead a person not to view his or her specific disability as the defining factor in who they are. Honesty is a cornerstone to relationships and the stakeholders should consider and especially be prepared to discuss the benefits and risks of disclosure (Dalgin & Bellini, 2008) when making this choice. The rehabilitation professional’s knowledge of disability management and employment issues can help them prepare to

discuss the benefits and risks of disclosure. The decision to disclose becomes easier when the above variables are discussed honestly with the stakeholders.

Justice

Finally, the principle of justice as outlined in the *Code* involves fairness and equality and access to resources and treatment (Tarvydas & Cottone, 2000). People with disability are afforded, in principle, equality in distribution of resources. However, these basic Rawlsian rights of having equality in distribution of justice and opportunity for quality of life have somehow shown difficulty in being distributed, in theory and practice to people with disabilities (Nussbaum, 2006). The responsibility of advocates and professionals who believe that justice should be equally distributed to all citizens must determine the extent that opportunities are not afforded to all people equally and develop advocacy activities that can help remedy the inequalities. While decisions made by the rehabilitation counselor on issues of justice generally involve the fair distribution of case management dollars and his or her professional time (Rubin, Wilson, Fischer, & Vaughan, 1992), by adhering to principles such as keeping service related costs down, identifying alternative funding, and being equally available to all clients a professional can adhere to the principle of justice.

If counselors feel that an inequality still exists they must help bring together resources to address these issues. These resources include: knowledge of best practices such as job matching, work environmental analysis and interviewing techniques (MacDonald-Wilson & Whitman, 1995). Rehabilitation professionals must act in a way

that is fair to all parties and avoid making prejudicial decisions (Tarvydas & Cottone, 2000). Understanding complexities of how disclosure impacts each stakeholder and then keeping true to the principles of justice as are outlined by the Code action becomes justice in practice. These principles are constructed by the professionals that make up the practice and are distributed to all stakeholders equally. Those who want to benefit mutually from them, generally create ethical standards. According to Nussbaum (2006) these standards are not always equally distributed to those who can't contribute according to Rawlsian (p.110) expectations, but nevertheless, the needs of people with disabilities should be protected by those who are in positions to help distribute equally and ethically. Informing clients of the risks and benefits of disclosure and giving them the choice is beneficent and may do well for the client; but the rehabilitation professional would have to ensure it can extend to all parties when there is potential by omission to do harm to the client or others. After all, if the goal is to extend justice to all stakeholders equally, then those who have control of the opportunities should be prepared to extend all aspects of justice equally to all stakeholders (Nussbaum, 2006). The topic of disclosure is really a test to the principles outlined in The Code of Professional Ethics for Rehabilitation Counselors (Commission on Rehabilitation Counselor Certification, 1995) and the reason why more research is needed to ensure that when rehabilitation practitioners give guidance as they take into account all the stakeholders needs (Shaw & Tarvdas,2001).

Disclosing invisible disability can lead to many ethical consequences but what rehabilitation professionals need are clear guidelines from the perspective of all stakeholders to ensure that the guiding principles are adhered to. Each stakeholder has his

or her own perception of disabilities. Employers can have a general understanding of people with disability based on each person's perception that has been constructed by their own experience and understanding. The perceptions are as unique as the person they are interviewing (Roberts & Macan, 2006).

A general consensus has not yet been reached concerning whether individuals with disabilities should or should not disclose. Therefore, there is a need for the following three principles. First, people need to overcome the misperceptions of how disability affects interpersonal relationships on the job and ultimately in the community. Secondly, people need to interact with people with disabilities to overcome personal bias or reservations that are held (Parry & Rutherford, 1995). Finally, people with disabilities need to understand the consequences of disclosure-both pro and con, and the effects that it may have on a bigger picture-specifically for his or her self and the millions of other Americans who have disabilities that desire to work (Parry & Rutherford, 1995). The lack of empirical evidence supporting specific guidelines for disclosure should spur rehabilitation researchers to find new ways of initiating dialogue and put into action a new paradigm that sees people with disabilities as equals or peers awaiting the appropriate accommodation. But what has to be put into action is the rationale for the importance in the study of disclosure.

Synthesizing into Action

Diversity in the workplace can create a climate of counter culture acceptance of people with disability. It is known that negative attitudes about people with disability can

result in discrimination (Brostrand, 2006) but it is a construct that is not set in concrete. Employer education and training may be one way to shift the paradigm. Increased sensitivity and awareness training can lead to the creation of positive interactions. There is evidence that employers want to practice disability nondiscrimination (Buryere, Erickson, & Vanlooy, 2004). However, employers need a clearer understanding of the accommodation requirements and how to respond to these requests effectively. It is due to the desire to create diversity in the workplace that the stakeholders' intersection of understanding is critical in how disclosure and employment opportunities take on a more critical perspective for all the stakeholders. Many companies have explored and put into place disability management or return-to-work/retention programs (Hunt & Hunt, 2004). However, it can be the rehabilitation counselors' understanding of the process that needs adjustment (Michaels & Risucci, 1992). Many rehabilitation professionals rate accommodations more problematic than the actual employers (Bat-Chava, Deignan, & Martin, 2002; Gilbride, Stensrud, Ehlers, Evans, & Peterson, 2000; Michaels & Risucci, 1992). These same rehabilitation counselors tended to view functional limitations more problematic than the employer who in reality viewed actual job function as more important than one's limitation; after all, functional limitations can be accommodated for in most cases with variable costs. It becomes more apparent as one understands the purpose of PAR-focus group research that the rehabilitation professional and the employer interact with the person with a disability; this will increase a deeper understanding of the fears and perception of disclosure of all stakeholders equally. It is in this interaction where true change can take place.

Wells Fargo finds that a conscious effort made to increase diversity in the workplace includes developing strategies for hiring, advancing and retaining people with disabilities (Younes, 2001). This logic is also based on the vast consumer market of potential customers that happen to have a connection with people with disabilities, intimately or through personal contacts. If myths associated with disability accommodations, such as high dollar costs are dispelled by the reality that most costs are moderate and if a company can attract and retain qualified workers, the costs for accommodations will be marginalized. Perhaps the continuation of stereotypes remains the biggest barrier to employment. But through continuous education, effective hiring practices and communication, employers can be the leaders in synthesizing into action the dream of equality and diversity in the workplace (Brostrand, 2006). Increasingly employers are collaborating with rehabilitation specialists in creating these opportunities and accommodations (Unger, 1999). It is through these actions that there is an increase in employer satisfaction but it still is up to the individual with a disability to have a good outcome (job-performance) and the process of a job match is essential (Smith, Webber, Graffam & Wilson, 2004).

Summary

“My disability is part of me” (Rocco, 2001) ...and people seldom ask, why do they stand six foot tall or have brown hair, but people with disabilities are treated as if they are so much different than people without disabilities.” The paradigm needs to change from looking at a disability as a negative trait, and begin to look at the individual with a disability’s character first. The disability that a person has is just waiting for the right

accommodation. Why is it ok for a person to take an aspirin for a headache and not antidepressant for depression? Our world has made accommodations (the automobile a more efficient means of accommodation for people walking great distances) widespread but for some reason when it is used for an individual it becomes mystified. In trying to understand why there is fear in disclosure, ultimately the understanding of the complexity of the fears and attitudes about people with disabilities must be addressed. Understanding why some businesses don't employ people with disabilities can help eliminate barriers to employment such as: a) fear of accommodation costs, b) fear of being stuck forever, c) fear of additional supervision and loss of productivity, and d) fear of disability (Peck & Kirkbride, 2001); and by eliminating fear through education and understanding can decrease certain stereotypes about people with disability and employment. In evoking strategies to increase positive employment processes (job matching and interviewing) for people with disabilities it's possible to increase performances (outcomes), create opportunities for workplace diversity, decrease high rates of unemployment and help to eliminate the fears associated with disclosure. By including all the stakeholders in the development of these processes there can be recognition of the positive benefits of disclosure and costs of nondisclosure can be addressed (Smart, 2009, p. 259). Thus, individuals with disabilities should make informed choices in how to engage disclosure in the interview process.

Chapter Three examines the research methodology. It will also explore the development of bringing the stakeholders together to address the complexity of disclosure in extended interviews. I will discuss the focus group format, looking at new

ways of approaching the concept of disclosure through qualitative research.

CHAPTER 3

Methodology

Introduction

Chapter three describes the methodological approach of this research. It provides a rationale for the selection of action research as the design of this study. Action research blends the objective reality of discrimination and the subjective experiences of stakeholders into a deeper understanding of the disclosure phenomenon. As described by Crotty (1998), this understanding gives the research purpose and can facilitate the creation of change in communities. Commensurately, this chapter describes the sampling techniques and explains how the data gathered for the study was analyzed within an action research design. Chapter Three also explores the limitations of this specific type of methodological approach.

Personal Rationale for Study

Passion is a deep and stirring emotion. When I first was exposed to the depth of qualitative research I had an epiphany. This sudden intuitive leap of understanding rescued me from serious doubt and confusion. I suddenly realized that research can be both scientific and creative. It can pulse through your thoughts and give life to a magnitude of ideas. My energy has focused on helping others ever since I can remember. Bringing creativity in the field of rehabilitation will bring vitality to ideas that counselors employ when training interviewing skills to their clients: in turn it will help people with disabilities gain independence and employment. I also knew through my long term

relationships the realities of the field and how decisions are made daily by rehabilitation professionals. Many of these decisions are based solely on statistics; specifically employment closures. Therefore, I felt by adding a face to the statistics, and “richness and understanding” to the study (that qualitative research is designed to provide), I could advance understanding in the topic of disclosure. This could not be understood with statistics alone.

Action research aims to contribute both to the practical concerns of people in an immediate problematic situation and to the goals framework (Rapport, 1970, as cited in Masters, 1995 p.123). This methodology reflected my desire to create a research project that would benefit stakeholders and not sit on the shelf of academia. This methodology has its roots in anthropology where the researcher views himself/herself as the student of the people he or she studies, and that the real experts are the people being studied (Kiefer, 2007). Participatory Action Research (PAR) can bring change in the sentiments of the stakeholders facing the issues of disclosure. I would like to be in the center of things, not as a passive observer, but as a teacher, facilitator, and synthesizer. These roles will give way to the stakeholders when they get to the point where they take responsibility for the process. This method allows for the empowerment of participants (hopefully through self-insight). Also important are collaboration through participation, acquisition of knowledge, and social change (Masters, 1995). The stakeholders need to discover each other’s feelings through discourse concerning many of the difficulties and complexities they have encountered regarding disclosure. Through this discussion the participants could plan, act, observe and reflect; leading ultimately to social change for people with

disabilities within the micro-community of local business in their hiring practices.

Researcher as Instrument

In conducting this study I drew upon my thirty years of experience in the field of rehabilitation and special education. This experience gave me access to participants for the study from a wide sample of people that I have interacted with over the course of my professional career. It is through the researcher's agency that participants are known. The agency is a vocational rehabilitation placement agency that is contracted to provide vocational rehabilitation services to the state department of vocational rehabilitation.

My role as the primary researcher was to be as an active participant in the study; leading the focus group and interviewing the participants. The concept of being an active participant in the study is developed from the notion of "being there" (Schwandt, 2001) and is a professional scientific norm in cultural anthropology known as participant observation. I also ensured that my personal bias and feelings about disclosure was filtered out initially in the active portion (initial interview and in the opening of the focus group) of this study. I will reveal my bias, feelings and conditions of disclosure in chapter five.

Research Design

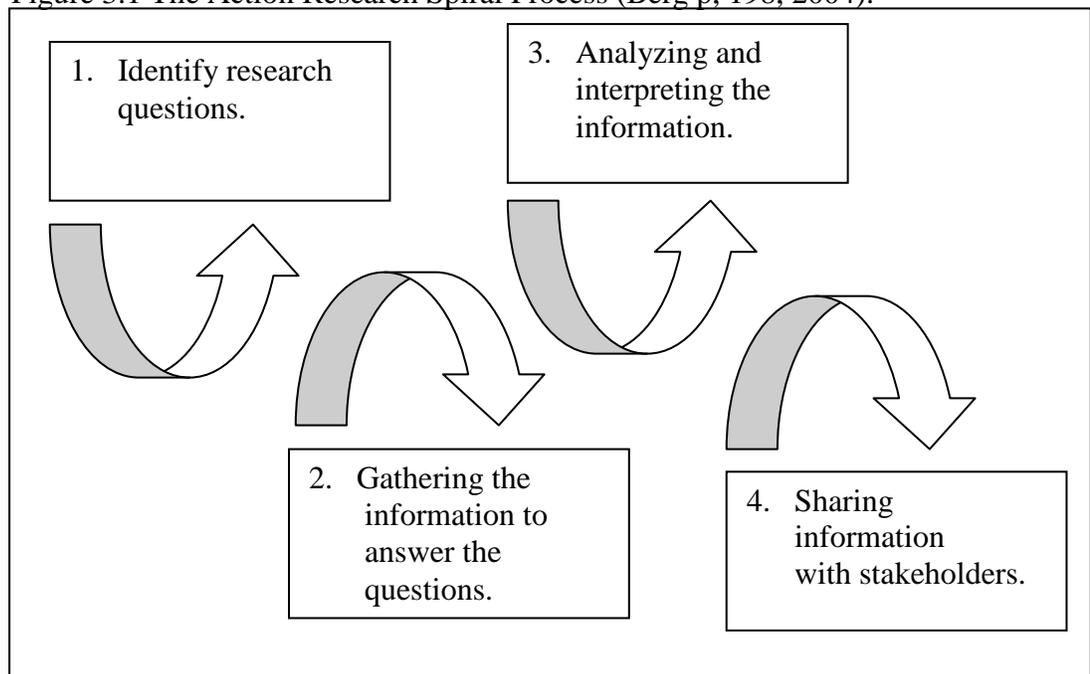
The method is qualitative research is embedded in action/critical research under the designation of Participatory Action Research (PAR). PAR, as a critical social science method, refers to the study of subjective human action as opposed to behavior. This form of research also interprets subjective meaning requiring understanding not simply

individual beliefs, attitudes, motives, values and intentions, but also inter-subjective or shared meanings, values and understandings, and so on that interpenetrate individual thought and action (Schwandt, 2001). It seeks to advance basic knowledge while solving practical problems such as the disclosure of disabilities in the employment process. By framing the problem, it links inquiry with feedback in a cycle called “double looped learning.” This is where action scientists work collaboratively to solve problems in practice, thus, helping the stakeholders understand the construct of disclosure and then proceed by designing appropriate interventions. This method has three characteristics that distinguish it from other forms of social inquiry: a) its participatory nature—cooperation and collaboration between researchers and participants in problem definition and use of findings; b) democratic principles of promoting change; and c) the objective of producing knowledge, action and the raising of consciousness of the subject studied (Schwandt, 2001).

The type of action research chosen for this study comes from McKernan, (1991, pp. 16-27 as cited in Berg, 2004, p. 202-203) collapsing of emancipating/enhancing/critical mode into one political emancipating praxis. Enlightenment of the reader and making change is research at its best. Berg’s model (2004) is fluid and creative and the process is spiraling versus linear, and therefore is more authoritative which in turn shapes methodology. The first stage is identifying the research questions presented by the researcher and people that are referred to as the stakeholders. They are brought together to identify their problems in relation to the topic of research. The second stage is gathering information to answer the questions that arise in the discussion. The third stage

is the analysis and interpreting of the information. This involves examination of data that has been collected. The fourth stage involves sharing the results with the participants. Stringer (1999, p.81) recommends focus groups as one method to maximize participation and follow through. These methods are presented in Figure 3.1 and demonstrate the spiraling progression of this method of research as an interactive and fluid process versus the traditional linear ones.

Figure 3.1 The Action Research Spiral Process (Berg p, 198, 2004).



The following methods of data collection were utilized; purposeful sampling, semi- standardized interviews, extended focus group interviewing, research notes, transcription of audio and video tapes, and peer debriefing/member checks. Triangulation of data to ensure credibility, transferability and inter-rater checks on the codes will ensure “confirmability” (Schwandt, 2002). Triangulation involves the use of multiple data

sources, multiple investigators and multiple methods to establish the criterion of validity (Schwandt, 2001). This has an advantage in research since it involves drawing conclusions from a variety of vantage points.

Purposeful Sampling

The study consisted of participants in three purposeful sample categories: people with invisible disabilities, rehabilitation counselors and rehabilitation counseling students, and employers who have a track history of working with people with disabilities. The participants of the study were known to the researcher and selected from his extended contact from the local professional rehabilitation field and community. The people with invisible disabilities were purposely recruited for the study from contacts in the researcher's rehabilitation agency and from friends and colleagues in the area. The sponsor agency is a rehabilitation program that provides employment for people with disability, located in the study city. People with invisible disabilities will be selected by the researcher to limit variability. Employers were selected from local employers who have had success or experience in hiring people with disabilities; employ over 25 people and may have current knowledge of ADA practices and guidelines. Rehabilitation professionals will be selected from the local Department of Vocational Rehabilitation Services and students from a Southern Midwestern university's Department of Vocational Rehabilitation Counseling. The rehabilitation counselors from the state agency will have at least five years of direct field experience in serving people with disabilities. The people selected with disabilities, were people with invisible disabilities. The participants that were selected with disabilities have maintained employment

consistently over the course of their careers.

Demographics

The specific breakdown of the demographics is: There are seven men and four women in the sample. The ages range from the mid-twenties to the fifties. Participants were selected from a diverse cultural background. The participants are reflective of lower middle-class to middle-class. The students were considered temporary lower-middle class. The participants resided in a town in the west south central (census classification) United States and will be selected to reflect the nature of the study. The researcher wanted to study results of a purposeful dialogue between the stakeholders on the subject of disclosure. The local Department of Vocational Rehabilitation was solicited for volunteers as well as students from a university in the South Central United States. The participants that have disabilities were also volunteers from the community and will be known by the researcher. The two employers were volunteers from the community that had limited contact with the researcher in regards to the study. None of the participants had in depth conversations with the research team prior to the study on the subject of disclosure; thereby maximizing the discovery nature of the study. The phenomenological nature of the experience in the focus group leads to a purer dialogue between stakeholders. In turn the analysis gave the research team less opportunity to have bias influence the participants prior to the study. Table 3.1 below is the demographics of the study.

Table 3.1 Demographics of Sample

Occupation	Gender/Race	Disability
Rehab Counselor (P1)	Male/White	None
Supervisor Rehab Counselor (P2)	Male/White	Visual Impairment
Rehab Counselor (P3)	Female/Native American/White	Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI)
Job Developer/Student (RC) (P4)	Female/White	None
Job Developer/Student (P5)	Female/African American	TBI
Job Developer-Police Officer Student (P6)	Male/White	Learning Disability (LD)
Hotel Manager/Instructor Business (P7)	Male/White	None
Business Technology Manager (P8)	Male/White	Diabetes and Orthopedic
Speech & Language Pathologist (P9)	Female/Native American/White	Multiple Sclerosis (MS)
Business Owner & Attorney (P10)	Male/White	None: Family Member has Disability
School Psychologist (P11)	Male/White	TBI

The participants all speak English as a first language and have transportation available to participate in the study. This heterogeneous group was selected for the purpose of future interaction. Participatory Action Research lends itself to the promotion of social change and in working collectively on this research; participants will have the ability to come together in the future to continue to promote employment opportunities for people with disabilities.

Data Collection Strategies and Techniques

Extended Interviews (Semi-standard)

Interviews have traditionally been used in research to gather information. Historically, interviews were defined simply as a conversation with a purpose (Berg, 2004). The interview has evolved to include a more dynamic relationship in the research process. In this study interviews were used to reflect the participants' understanding of his or her views on disclosure during the employment interview. A pre and post interview in a controlled setting with each participant was utilized to introduce the business participants to topics and vocabulary of the field as well as to get his or her opinions of employment practices for people with disabilities. The individual participant's home or office constituted the controlled setting and was chosen to reduce outside influences and decrease initial anxiety for participation in the study. A controlled setting was chosen to reduce the variability in the time constraints that individuals may have.

The utilization of a pre-interview set the stage for the focus group and introduced the activities; it provided the participants the ability to explore his or her understanding of disclosure, and presented the basic rules and guidelines for the group interview (focus group) (Krueger & Casey, 2000). The initial interview also helped give the participants' guidance for dealing with sensitive issues that can come up in the focus group. The use of a post-interview served a dual proposes; a) it is used to confirm the data gathered from the focus group and b) it explores how the individual participant's view on disclosure has been shaped by the encounter.

Out of the three types of interview structures that Berg (2004) reviewed, *Semi-standardized interviews* were selected for this study. This type of interview format uses a predetermined number of questions and special topics. They are generally asked in the same systematic and consistent order for each participant. The vitality of this method allows the researcher to probe beyond the answers to the standardized questions. The structure helps construct the information from the participant's perception of the topic and expands the understanding of his or her view of the world. A semi-standard interview also helps to define and clarify specific language related to disclosure. Information is analyzed by contextual analysis to gain an understanding of the participant's perspective on employment of people with disabilities. This method allows the researcher to explore how the focus group's interaction influenced or changed each member's point of view.

Interviews were outlined and I developed an *interview schedule*. There were four types of questions as outlined by Berg (2004, p.84); essential questions, extra questions, throw away questions, and probing questions. These questions are outlined in the appendix (see Appendix A). Essential questions concern themselves with the central themes of the study; an example would be "What is your understanding of disclosing disability during the interview?" These questions are essential in gathering information. *Extra questions* are generally the equivalent of the essential ones but worded differently to gain further reliability of the responses of the participants. The following is an example of the extra question: "What has been your perception of disclosing disability?" In an effort to keep the interview moving or to establish rapport with each participant *throw away questions* will be utilized. These questions can also re-direct to a less sensitive

subject if I found the participant struggling to find an answer. *Probing questions* were also utilized to get deeper into the participants' perceptions of disclosure. This technique will allow the participants to have the person elaborate on a theme or expand an explanation by utilizing probing questions such as "Could you tell me more about how disclosure made you feel during the interview?" The use of probing questions allow the development of a deeper understanding of how each participant views disclosure from his or her perspective and keep a relatively consistent interview schedule. This technique allows for the development of themes which enhance data analysis.

Interviewing the participants is a natural experience for me as a researcher since I will utilize my counseling training. I employed rapport building techniques to establish genuineness between myself and the participants. I utilized Berg's (p.110-111, 2004) "ten commandments" as a guide to conducting the interviews (see Appendix B). These basic rules helped to structure my interviews, increasing the consistency of the experience. The use of the interview gave my research fluidity and depth. By using the pre and post interviews wrapped around the focus group interview I was able to utilize the data in a quasi-experimental format, and be capable of examining the effects of the interaction of the focus group on the participants' views of disclosure.

Focus Group Interview

The purpose of the focus group interview was to promote self-disclosure of feelings and thoughts (Krueger & Casey, 2000). As a method in the study of disclosure, focus groups fit into both the combination of action research and phenomenological study's

methodology. The use of the focus group interview matches my epistemological understanding of constructionist philosophy and research (Hatch, 2002), although it can find a home in many paradigms. Theoretically, the fluidity of the focus group can flow in an interpretive direction and it is important that the research question be the driving factor in selection of methodology for research. The primary question in the research is, “Should people with a hidden disability disclose during the interview process?” The general purpose of focus groups is to determine the perceptions, feelings and thinking about the questions and issues posed. The goal of my research is to develop a deeper understanding of the feelings, and perceptions of the three stakeholders (group) on the subject and if anyone changed their mind after the interaction and communication with their fellow participants.

There is a tendency to self-disclose in non-threatening and interim situations (Krueger & Casey, 2000); a person can open up to a perfect stranger on a plane, get into a deep conversation and then get off the plane and return to their anonymity without commitment to furthering the relationship. In focus groups, people can experience these same phenomena. However, the goal of this research is to promote change and it is hoped that the relationships would continue after the initial contact; at least at a cognitive level. Each individual would retain the experience and help enact changes in their own thoughts and actions. Secondly, people disclose to others if they perceive there is some commonality, in employment a common identity that is shared by those who seek it and those providing opportunities. The inclusion of these specific stakeholders is the idea behind the utilization of a purposeful sample. This enhances the potential for the

development of a common understanding of how disclosure affects the individual stakeholders' perceptions and their behavioral response can help provide future opportunities for all stakeholders.

Krueger and Casey (2000), identify five characteristics of focus groups that warranted the interest in it as a method for the research. Focus groups are made up of, 1) people with specific characteristics, 2) a sharing of insight into a problem, 3) can provide qualitative data, 4) offer focused discussion and 5) help to understand the topic, in this case disclosure. The stakeholders have diverse opinions of how, if, or when to disclose a disability during the interview. It is through this insightful discussion that learning can take place. The researcher can collect data and compare themes that emerge across this discussion. In the end, the researcher returns to the individual stakeholder and through a structured interview and identifies any changes in personal perceptions of disclosure and considered member checks (Patton, 2002). The focus group and subsequent interviews increased understanding of stakeholders' concerns about disclosure and what may be the barrier from practicing it during the interview. Thus, by having information on when and how to disclose can ultimately lead to helping develop potential policies for employment practices for all stakeholders.

Planning and Implementing the Focus Group

The planning of the focus group actually began with the decision whether or not the focus group was the right method for this research. Krueger and Casey's (2000) guidelines were utilized to help determine if a focused group should be considered. It is important to

understand the feelings and perceptions that stakeholders have about disclosure. It is also important to uncover factors that may influence how stakeholders perceive each other's view of disclosure. Focus groups can provide insight into behavior shaping the decision of whether or not to disclose. This can come by seeing how ideas emerge from the focus group on disclosure and what conclusions the stakeholders would have after listening to each other's point of view. The focus group can serve as a pilot study and can be repeated in other locations. Seeing if there was any consensus derived from the interaction is central to the research.

Focus groups cannot make statistical projections; however in the development of planning, this method of research is one of the best ways to see the dynamics of how divergent thinking can create synergy, which in turn could generate new ideas, plans or policies in regards to disclosure. Focus groups can provide insight into complicated topics when opinions are conditional and the area of concern. In this case, disclosure relates to multifaceted behavior (Kruger & Casey, 2000); to disclose or not to disclose during the interview. This study could lead to a variety of future research projects including both qualitative and quantitative studies in the area of disclosure.

In the planning phase it was the research question that shaped the methods. I used the questions below in table 3.1 to shape my methods. A typical decision template was developed, with the following questions:

Table 3.2: Kruger and Casey's Decision Questions (Kruger & Casey, 2000)

<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. What is the problem that the study is going to address? 2. What is the purpose of this study? 3. What type of information answers the research question? 4. Why is it of particular importance? 5. How will this information be used?
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The above questions were adapted from Kruger and Casey’s (2000) text. The questions were selected because of the relevance to the research, and were designed by Kruger and Casey (2000) to promote flexibility and ease of design.

Multiple-Category Design

Focus group multiple-category design (Krueger & Casey, 2000), is a variation of traditional design whereby it allows the researcher to make comparisons in two ways from one group to another (employers) group within category, and the comments between the category (comparing what the three stakeholders expressed). Multiple-category design permits the researcher to observe the heterogeneous groups' (stakeholders) interactions and record their dialogue in regards to the structured questions posed to the group. Table 3.3 shows the structure of this design.

Table 3.3: Krueger & Casey's Multiple Category Design (Krueger & Casey, 2000).

Audience 1 (People w/Disability)	Number of Groups (0 = 1 group) 0
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Audience 2 (Employers)	O
Audience 3 (Rehabilitation Counselors)	O

Style of Focus Group

In this research three styles of focus groups were investigated and then combined as described in Krueger's and Casey's (2000) text to encompass the research design and questions. *Academic Research*, *Public Approach* and *Participatory Action*; were combined into a hybrid form of a focus group project that could be replicated in many settings and used to produce traditional participatory action projects. Academic approaches focus on the rich experiences with interviews and content analysis (Krueger & Casey, 2000). The public approach builds on the academic approach's goal to add to the body of knowledge on a specific subject by making the results of the focus group more immediate and practical (Krueger & Casey, 2000). The third style of focus group, participatory approach relies on getting non-researchers involved in the process. However, this can be difficult since agencies change and thus the participants can drop out of the study. The hybrid version of the above mentioned focus group styles allowed this study to focus on the research questions with actual stakeholders. Academically the rigor is in the guidelines employed in the design of the focus group, and the analysis of the results. Using multiple methods insures triangulation, and by utilizing triangulation of data sources and analytical perspectives the accuracy and creditability of findings are increased (Patton, 2002, p.93).

Triangulation of data assures the analysis of the content is an accurate reflection of

the focus group stakeholders' perception of the topic. Public health professionals were one of the early groups to embrace focus group interviewing. These groups were designed to be smaller and allow the participants to have more dialogue with one another. The results were open to the public and helped to serve as catalysis of change. The inclusion of Participatory Action Research (PAR) into the methodology was to ensure that the project wouldn't end up on the shelves of academia, but instead serves as a guide to programs that want to establish a working relationship between stakeholders. The model could be a useful tool in many settings grappling with how to advise stakeholders on the subject of disclosure. This combination of research and evaluation can be set up experimentally and utilized as a change agent. Since most employment grants administered by the Rehabilitation Service Administration (RSA) require some form of business and community involvement, the design of this focus group can actually make participation in business advisory committees meaningful and relevant.

The focus group hybrid can shape the involvement of the various stakeholders. First, the interaction and communication of how each stakeholder's view of disclosure shapes decision making before, during and after the interview needs to be explored. The second level of involvement is the transferability of ideas into each individual's practices. The stakeholders can bring the new knowledge into their own world and create change. Finally, the research can be opened to the community and subsequent action can take place. This teamwork can lead to future interactions and activities that will promote employment opportunities for people with disability.

The one common thread between the hybrid focus group and its components is the

need to create a safe, trusting, and sharing environment where each stakeholder is free to express his or her own feelings. The hybrid focus group will still retain the distinct quality of traditional focus group research and its goal to have a planned discussion using predetermined questions, guided by a skillful moderator, conducted in an open and non-threatening format for the purpose of providing insight (Krueger & Casey, 2000) into the phenomena of disclosure and taking action in the promotion of opportunities for employment for people with disability.

Data Maintenance and Confidentiality

Keeping records and analysis through audio and video recordings is an accurate way of data recording (Kiefer, 2007). A tape recorder for the stakeholder interviews was utilized as the least intrusive method to collect the data during the interview. Each interviewee was provided with an explanation of confidentially/informed consent and record keeping methods to decrease awkwardness of being recorded. When the interview gets started most people forget that they are being recorded (Kruger & Casey, 2000). The focus group was recorded with the aid of a graduate/research assistant via audio video recorder as well as a tape recorder. Extra batteries and tape were used to ensure back up recording if there was a breakdown of equipment. Each tape was coded and stored in a locked receptacle. The tape based method of analysis gives the researcher the ability to create accurate records with less time devoted to creating large transcripts. Instead, an abridged transcript format will be utilized and irrelevant conversation is removed from the transcript (Krueger & Casey, 2000) but not lost since the recorded tapes are stored. The abridged transcripts format focuses the analysis of the conversations around the

research questions and the discourse surrounding feelings on disclosure. Since it is important that abridged transcripts capture the true essence of the experience both the researcher and the assistant will review the tapes to ensure appropriate inclusion of topics into the transcripts. This method is a portion of triangulation (to be discussed in the section on trustworthiness). The researcher and the research assistant reviewed the final transcripts and participants received a copy of the transcript (as needed) in person to ensure that their perspective is accurately represented as a member check.

Analysis of Data

The researcher's ability to analyze the discourse between focus group members and the interpretation of data is directly related to the methodology of the research. The goal is to understand the phenomenon of disclosure from the stakeholders' unique perspectives; to analyze if the interaction during the focus group generates change in their views. The process is to make conscious the understanding of the stakeholder's perspective; this is achieved by explicitly and consciously asking and answering questions about the data. This method enriches the understanding of the research questions (Kiefer, 2007). The process can be achieved by examining the patterns in the notes and asking *how these facts fit into, or alter, or extend, the intuition of the research problem*. The analysis is used to see if the stakeholders share similar patterns in their perception of disclosure. If there are any inconsistencies in perceptions they can explained, changed or enhanced through the interaction during the focus group.

Data management is an important part of analysis; and by constantly asking questions

and intuitively expanding and refining the information gathered from the answers I was able to develop a “richer” understanding of the research questions. The more data that is accumulated the more basic memory problems develop for the researchers, specifically with the minor details (Kiefer, 2007). Coding the data as it is analyzed organizes it and provides reference points to return to it from time to time to develop an audit trail.

Hatch (2002, p.148) describes, “Data analysis is a systematic search for meaning” and it begins in the early stages of analysis. The fluidity of analysis during my interviews and focus group shaped the secondary level of questioning and was used to clarify meanings. In the post group, analysis was used to categorize responses and to ensure that data is complete. Hatch identifies four criteria as outlined in table 3.4 below that will be used to ensure that data analysis is complete; they include the following questions:

Table 3.4: Hatch's Criteria for Data Analysis (Hatch, 2002)

- | |
|--|
| <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Are all deviant cases and disconfirming data accounted for?2. Can the analysis be explained and justified?3. Can a complete story be told?4. Can the analysis be organized into coherent written findings? |
|--|

Knowledge is generated throughout the process. However, it is the participant’s interaction and knowledge generated from the interaction that makes this study come to life. All stakeholders having their own perception of disclosure bring new understanding of the phenomenon to their co-participants. This interaction was of primary interest and

the reason for the heterogeneous design in the focus group. It was also why the participants had intimacy in the analysis of the research.

Interpretive Analysis

Interpretation is a defining element of all qualitative research (Hatch, 2002) and is a natural fit for the constructionist paradigm. In action research, the participants have ownership in the research and generating explanations for the data. Interpretation places the researcher in the “thick of things.” Denzin (1994, p.504) expands this theme even farther stating that interpretation is a “productive process that sets forth multiple meanings of an event, object, experience, or text.” As the researcher co-constructs meaning of the research with stakeholders it will link the data with the stakeholder’s interpretation which in turn makes sense of the phenomena of disclosure. Denzin (1994) describes interpretation as the “artistic, creative side of qualitative work.”

Analysis of data using interpretive analysis is a process that helps frame the activity. The richness of the interaction and the possible outcome utilizes interpretive analysis as a catalyst for change and deeper understanding of how each participant views disclosure. Even though some view qualitative research as “sexy” the process is very complex empirically and Hatch (2002) provides steps to guide the new researcher in this process. Table 3.5 describes these steps in the interpretive analysis as described by Hatch (2002).

Table 3.5: Hatch's Steps in Interpretive Analysis (Hatch, 2002)

1. Read the data for a sense of the whole.
2. Review the impression previously recorded in the research journal and bracketed in the protocol and records these in memos.
3. Read the data; identify impressions, and record impressions in memos.
4. Study memos for salient interpretations.
5. Reread data, coding places where interpretations are supported or challenged.
6. Write a draft summary.
7. Review interpretations with participants.
8. Write a revised summary and identify excerpts that support interpretations.

Trustworthiness

Lincoln and Guba (1985) used trustworthiness to describe the quality of qualitative inquiry and can be defined by their noteworthiness to the audience. They developed four standards to parallel conventional means of ensuring epistemic criteria. First, *credibility* (parallel to internal validity) represents the views of participants' responses and the reconstruction of my study. Second, *transferability* (parallel to external validity) looks at the generalization of cases that could be transferred to other similar cases. Third, *dependability* (parallel to reliability) looking at the process to ensure that it was logical, traceable, and documented (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Schwandt, 2001). Finally, Schwandt's (2001) concept of "*confirmability*" (parallel to objectivity) links the

assertions, findings and interpretations so that the process representing my research is based on trustworthiness and a foundation of naturalistic inquiry as described in Lincoln and Guba's 1985 book *Naturalistic Inquiry*. Together these procedural guidelines shape the richness of the study.

How the above criterion is played out in the study is in the course of *triangulation* of information. Triangulation is a means of checking the integrity of the information drawn from the study (Schwandt, 2001). This method of corroborating information is achieved from reviewing conclusions from a variety of vantage points and involved *member checks* and *peer review*.

Member Checks and Peer Review

I utilized recordings of the participant's responses through audio and visual methods. At the focus group I provided each participant with a set of research questions and had the participant's record if they wanted to expand any response for clarification. I then included these questionnaires in the final analysis. Then after summarizing the findings in transcriptions, the interpretations were reviewed with some of the participants prior to the final write-up. I also reviewed the data with the research assistant and with another peer in the field. The soliciting of feedback from both colleagues (peer review) and participants (member check) is an important procedure for collaborating findings to address concerns about "confirmability" (Schwandt, 2001). While there are inherent difficulties in any transaction of information, the research moves closer to triangulation, using multiple methods of data confirmation.

Limitations and Boundaries

The distinction between qualitative and quantitative research lies at the level of methods and not the level of epistemology or theoretical perspective (Crotty, 1998. pg. 14). Since I placed myself as an active participant/facilitator in the focus group and conduct the extended interviews, I was able to ensure the participation of members and revisit interesting themes during the process. The research is centered on the richness of the interaction between the participants and how their feelings affected each other's point of view on disclosure. I chose to be an active participant because I work directly with rehabilitation professionals, employers and people with disabilities. The limits of my study would then have been obvious to the beginning researcher that generalization to larger applications would be difficult since the focus group format is utilized in one setting. Instead, I chose to construct meanings from the interplay and exchange of the participants. I hope that such an exchange would lead to a deeper understanding of the dynamics of disclosure for the individuals involved in the study. The interaction between the participants and the way the interchange affected their perspectives on disclosure will provide the richness of the study. Having an exchange between different stakeholders reveals divergent perspectives on the subject of disclosure. When stakeholders openly communicate their perspectives, a deeper understanding of the effects of disclosure's affects can be discussed and alternative solutions explored.

Limitations of PAR

The choice of PAR is not without methodological limitations. The primary purpose

of PAR is to bring about desirable change in the community that is being studied. In deciding what to change, researchers turn to the participants to be involved and have an active voice in this change (McTaggart, 1997). PAR is not research that is quantified and put to action at the discretion of the researcher; the participants decide what is important in understanding his or her living condition. The limitations of PAR also are not just problem solving, it instead is problem posing: participants work to improve their own communities. It is not a specific scientific method and to generalize the results may be misleading to those who are used to traditional methods of inquiry which quantify results. PAR does not have hypothesis to test, nor does it attempt to draw conclusions (McTaggart, 1997). The above limitations are mitigated by the rigors of the processes that systematically bring about change in people's lives.

In this study I have chosen not to try to identify the variables affecting disclosure from at a quantitative level. Instead I looked at the process as a unique and rich experience and consider whether it could be repeated again in a variety of settings with similar results. Each one of these exchanges could lead to a higher degree of understanding of how each participant viewed disclosure and in turn affect changes in his or her perspective. The changes would be specific to each group but like a ripple in a pond could ultimately facilitate change.

Qualitative Research

The choice of qualitative research was based on the desire to understand the interaction of stakeholders and their potential to create a shift in the paradigm in

relationship to disclosure of disability during the interview process. The researcher studies the interaction between the stakeholder in the context of an informal focus group, and looks for new trends in the ability to serve people with disability, while examining a “complex interactive social process” (Hagner & Helm, 1994) that can ultimately lead to a deeper understanding in disclosing disability. Denzin and Lincoln (2005a) urge researchers to use qualitative methods to advocate for change and social justice. By having a deeper understanding into the dynamics of disclosure, there can be an impact or change in employment practices. Action research advocates for the change in social paradigms. It therefore was a natural way of conducting research and a change from the researcher’s perspective. Since change is essential in the expansion and extension of civil rights in employment for people with disabilities-focus groups of this nature can be replicated in multiple locations thus helping to facilitate change with the very stakeholders intimately involved with the research. It is the carry over action and the relationships that can arise from this type of qualitative research that can transform stakeholders at a grassroots level (McTaggart, 1997) to have a deeper understanding of the dynamics of disclosure and change their behavior, attitudes and ultimately employment procedures and policies. Qualitative based rehabilitation studies can help to uncover “overt and covert bias,” especially in disclosure of disability. It is the design of qualitative research that attends to the complexity of the disability experience that leads to its power as a tool for inquiry (Woodring, Foley, Rado, Brown & Hamner, 2006). It is in the narratives of the participants that real understanding can add a face to research questions and methodology. The individual narratives describe the thoughts, fears,

concerns, and ideas while providing a voice to the stakeholder that guided the research into designing this project. Qualitative research is the voice of inquiry and adds individual meaning to each of the dynamics studied in the project.

Conclusion

Chapter Three summarized the procedures of the study. The chapter reviewed the choice of qualitative research and it explored the decisions in making focus groups and extended interviews the methodology of choice for the study of disclosure. The third chapter described the way participants are to be selected for the study and how the information gathered by the study will be analyzed and disseminated.

The next chapter will discuss the findings and analysis of the extended interviews and the focus group. It will give a voice to the stakeholders and his or her individual understanding and ideas on disclosure of disability in the interview process. It is in the understanding of these complex phenomena from an individual perspective that the stakeholders can begin to change dynamics of employment by creating an environment more accessible for people with disability and possibly increasing employment options.

CHAPTER 4

Results

The purpose of this study was to develop a deeper understanding of the phenomena of disclosing an invisible disability during the interview process from the stakeholder's perspective. The results of this research will be useful in advising people with disabilities (PWD's), rehabilitation counselors and employers when preparing for the interview and lead to higher rates of employment for PWD's. These research questions were addressed:

1. Should a person disclose their invisible disability? (Why/why not)
2. What are the stakeholder's views of disclosure?
3. Can there be consensus from the stakeholders' point of view on when, how and what to disclose? (Why/why not)
4. Are there interconnections between the stakeholders on this issue? In this question we seek to find an understanding if there is common ground between the stakeholders in their thoughts about disclosure.
5. Can the results of the participant's experience in the focus group open each other's minds about each other's feelings about disclosure?
6. How can these findings and implications influence interaction and training of professionals and how they counsel people with disabilities on disclosure of invisible disability?

After an initial interview with the employers in the study by the primary researcher to introduce them to the terminology involved in the study a focus group was conducted.

The results of the focus group were recorded by both an audio-visual camera and a tape recorder by the research assistant. A follow-up interview/questionnaire was provided to the participants to determine if their conclusions and attitudes towards disclosure had changed after participating in the focus group.

The methodological analysis of the data was conducted using Hatch's (2002) systematic analyses of data. Hatch's systematic approach utilizes the process of "asking questions of the data" (2002, p. 148). In the first stages of analysis raw data was collected, transcribed and organized by the primary researcher. The researcher typed results on a single document and color coded each of the participant answers. The researcher reviewed the audio a second time to see if the participants answered questions matched the transcripts. Reading the data again helped to determine if there is a sense of "whole" (Hatch, 2002, p.181). The researcher became immersed in the data in this manner to determine what should or shouldn't be included in the analysis. Using the Long-Table approach (Krueger & Casey, 2000) the researcher wrote the research questions on the top of flip chart paper. The focus group answers were categorized around the research questions. The researcher then used portions of Hatch's (2002) eight steps of interpretive analysis (see Figure 3.2) to determine what *themes* emerged or if any tangent or alternative themes evolved within the answers. Themes were then identified and summarized as a draft outline by the researcher to "tell the story" (Hatch, 2002), as a narrative, so that a member check could reveal any holes in the analysis. Since constructionists are interested in the co-construction of meaning with the participants in the research, the summaries were reviewed with available members of the focus group, as

a member check, to see if the themes identified in the researcher's analysis matched his or her understanding of the research questions.

Results of the study are reported in the following sections broken into the answers to the research questions by each participant; with each of the ten participants' demographic information, a brief description of their background information and responses to the questions.

Participant Summaries

Summaries of the eleven participants were developed and coded according to the research questions. The themes that emerged will be discussed in the next chapter. The post focus group questionnaire is also included in this section and it was used to confirm that the participants responses (member check), during the focus group were recorded accurately.

Participant number one (P1); background information, demographics and answers to focus group questions: P1 is a white male rehabilitation counselor with 15 years of experience. He is currently employed in a state vocational rehabilitation agency. He holds both a certification as a rehabilitation counselor and a license as a professional counselor.

What is the biggest challenge a person with a disability faces when trying to secure employment? P1 answered that the biggest challenge was "convincing the employer that they could do the job".

Should a person with an invisible disability disclose their disability during the

interview process? P1 answered; “no, unless it is obvious, will require special considerations or accommodations, or if they will need time off for the disability.”

If a person chooses to disclose their disability: at what point do you feel they should?

P1 answered, “If it [disability] was not obvious and the person feels the employer has a “need to know”, then after the offer of the job and before the person starts the job.

What then is the best way for a person to disclose an invisible disability during the interview? P1 stated that a person “should describe the condition and the current treatment, and who the treatment team that is following the person and job implementations...saying I will accept the job but I have these accommodation needs and I have to share with you before I actually start.”

What advantages do you think a person would have if they disclose their disability?

Disadvantages? P1 sees the advantages as a) speaking honestly; b) maturity, and c) professional. P1 also states that, “I would be impressed that a person has thought through the disability and process and come up with a solution, that he has chosen to share this and has thought about its impact (disability) on the job.” P1 stated the disadvantages of disclosure would be “in the creation of a red flag” and that it may lead to the employer “choosing not to hire the person as an attempt to reduce risk.”

What advice would you give to a person with an invisible disability if they were seeking employment? P1 reports that having a “person be aware of any restrictions; have knowledge of “safety plans” in place should an emergency arise and treat condition seriously,” would be helpful if the choice was to disclose. P1 also discussed:

I would explore how the disability affects a specific job and if a person's disability is not a factor in the job and there is no time off related it becomes a non issue. The employer is trying to make a good decision to hire and that they need all the formation to do so....so they should disclose.

How can we make it safe for a person with a disability to disclose their disability while seeking work? P1 answered that we should; a) educate the PWD on the best practice [in reference to placement models] of treating "it" (disability) and, b) assess "acceptance" of the disability (by the employer) and encourage this dynamic if needed. P1 also states that "role playing" to help learn to be comfortable sharing. This can be done "two or three times" until it is less uncomfortable.

What other thoughts do you have in regards to helping people with disabilities find employment? P1 answered "that overcoming a barrier takes hard work and time, and that most careers happen early in the first five years of seeking employment, so getting through this time successfully will be important." Also P1 states, "Sometimes I tell people with lots of employment gaps to be honest and some may hold that against you ...and you may have to do twice the interviews, applications and work. So let's get started and I know it will be tough but that is why we are here."

In summary P1 states that understanding of the difficulties and barriers; both personal and environmental, that a person with disabilities faces in the work environment is important in securing employment. P1 understands that the ramifications of the decision on whether to disclose an invisible disability or not can impact employment. He estimated that discrimination happens approximately "60%" of the time in the

employment process and we need to be realistic about how the process can work for others. P1 also states that a person should disclose if it will directly affect his or her job and only if they are seeking job accommodations. P1 felt that if one were to disclose they should do so after the employer has offered them the job and before they start work. Honesty is a theme that is repeated in P1's interview, but so is the timing of the disclosure. He felt timing is an important dynamic to consider when discussing disclosure with the client. With the right education and role playing a person with a disability could eventually secure employment with disclosure of disability.

Participant number two (P2): Background information, demographics and answers to focus group questions: P2 is a 55 year old white male with a visual impairment. He has been a rehabilitation counselor and unit supervisor for over twenty years. P2 holds a certification as a rehabilitation counselor and has been active in the community as a speaker and trainer for rehabilitation counselors.

What is the biggest challenge a person with a disability faces when trying to secure employment? P2 recognizes the barriers for people with disability and the dynamics that make it difficult to disclose personal information based on a variety of reasons. The following is his discussion of these barriers:

One of the things that needs to be included in the discussion is that there are internal barriers that a client sets themselves up with...because depending on where that person is with their adjustment with disability that they may be less willing to disclose. Or when they disclose they maybe almost apologetic or make the employer nervous...they may themselves may have reservations about their own abilities...

unresolved issues may have come across as anger; resentment(you know)...my disability when I was younger...I was hesitant in some situations to disclose my disability ...now that I am 56 years old I don't give a flip about who knows. I will tell them anything or answer anything that they want...but if have someone who is a is a new spinal cord injured person...or someone who is newly diagnosed with MS or they have a mental health illness type of thing...

P2 identified how these barriers changed as he grew more comfortable with his disability. He distinguishes between a person who has recently been diagnosed with a disability and recognized that it would be different for them at that point in the adjustment process. He identifies the role of the rehabilitation professional as the following:

...well one of the things we have to do as a VRC [rehabilitation counselor] is help a person to understand their disability. Help them be able to discuss the disability in a way that they are comfortable and don't put people off simply because of their own personal reaction.

P2 answers the question about if people with disabilities are still discriminated against in the hiring process he answered: "that it depends on the type of disability...some have more stigma than others." P2 stated that mental health related issues are not viewed in the same light as medical related complications, such as diabetes or high blood pressure.

When responding to a statement from a group member about the needs of the

employer and just how an appropriate job match factors into the equation P2 answered:

If a person needs accommodations...reasonable accommodations it comes into play. Certainly for me I would need a large monitor...this is something I can't hold from an employer and expect to be successful. If a person has a hidden [invisible] disability like diabetes or a pregnancy...or they have a disability that they are taking medications for that is not going to need any type of accommodations from the employer, there might not be a need to disclose, because once they disclose; even if they disclose to a co-worker, it can change a perception of that individual...myths and perceptions can come into play. So employees need to be careful what they disclose [disability] and who they disclose them to ... but unless so...it is really going to impact the job, they may do well not to share this type of information.

In the above statement P2 begins to lay the ground rules for if and when a person should disclose. P2 distinguished between the type of disability and the use of accommodations; this theme is carried throughout the next question.

Should a person with a disability disclose during the job interview? P2 answered; "I would only advise them (to disclose) that if they are going to need some type of reasonable accommodations that they should...then if they don't need it for the job then there is no need to disclose."

If a person chooses to disclose their disability: at what point do you feel they should? P2 recommended that a disclosure should be at the "time of the job offer." He also stated that due to the personal nature of each person's own disability; care has to be taken to ensure that his or her rights are protected. Disclosure is recommended when it is pertinent to the job, "issues; such as bladder functioning and sexual persuasion and functioning...are not pertinent to the job" and should not be considered in the discussion.

What advantages do you think a person would have if they disclose their disability?

Disadvantages? The advantages include being part of a program (Vocational Rehabilitation) that prepares a person to disclose. “Doing Mock interviews with them...and doing job readiness.” By “helping them to figure out how they are going to disclose their disability and request the appropriate accommodations.” P2 feels that people that go through programs (private and agency based) “have a better shot at getting hired than doing it on their own, going out there cold turkey and not know how to deal with it (disability and job accommodations)”. He states that some people just “don’t know how to deal with it (interview)”. The disadvantages of not disclosing is harder to define according to P2, he feels that this is hard to define since we (people) have a tendency to “blame the victim” and due to the nature of how a person may have received his or her disability; “if a person has sustained a TBI, we may say that their behavior is the cause of that injury...he was drunk and stupid... running his motorcycle a hundred miles per hour into the tree.” “The employer may not have the same appreciation of what the person with the injury may have gone through...” and it was for this reason that P2 felt that there are “some things an employer doesn’t have the right to know.” P2 also offered that if a person chooses to disclose there are certain tax incentives that would assist the placement specialists in developing opportunities with the employer, as well as on the job training. If the rehabilitation specialist does his or her job up front and helps ensure a good ‘job match’ it makes sense to disclose. So the advantages and disadvantages were varied depending on the need of the client and the range of the disability and the stigma attached to each condition.

What advice would you give to a person with an invisible disability if they were seeking employment? P2 saw the answer as a complex one, stating:

I think there are three truths here...one yes the employer has the right to know...but they have to avoid the slippery slope when they assume what the disability impact is or what they can or cannot do with the disability...most employers really don't have the background to really know what is the abilities or limitations...with or without accommodations...this is the job for VRC.. At the same time; the individual with a disability has an obligation to know type of accommodations that a person is going to need...and provide some kind of comfort zone in which to work. Obviously if a person has a job that requires lifting fifty pounds or more from ground to table and they have a back injury that is dangerous and you probably need to disclose that you have a back injury but there are accommodations that could probably be made to assist the person. A lift or have someone else lift or help. There are lots of accommodations that can be made that will cost the employer little if anything. If they don't discuss an employer may walk away with their own stereotypical understanding of the person/disability.

P2 identified the role of the rehabilitation professional as a facilitator of information on appropriate job accommodations and specific restrictions a PWD might have for the job. This will help the employer make an informed decision on if the job is going to need accommodations and would be suitable for the applicant. The role of the rehabilitation professional according to P2 is also to teach the PWD about how to negotiate specific accommodations for the job. This will help in mitigating P2's following fears of discrimination:

The client may walk away with the feeling that they have been discriminated against. But the fact is that they did not give the employer all the information that they needed. I think there is an equal set of responsibilities there between the employer and employee. Part of this comes with education. (The key is) Employer and employee education about disability and employment related issues.

P2 continues to explain the rationale for why it is important to discuss the issues of disclosure with people with disabilities after engaging in a conversation with one of the participants and his strong views [as a person with a disability] on why you should always disclose disabilities. P2 stated that it helps fill gaps in the resume;

Sometimes you have to disclose because of gaps in the resume...the employer is going to sit there and wonder what the reason for these gaps is. If they see a three year gap then they are going to want to know why? Sometimes employers can get to the truth by pointing out those kinds of discrepancies. So what are you going to say to the guy? Oh I just stayed home and raised the kids for two years. Women may be able to use that in society but most men can't. That is not going to be very sellable to the employer ...so you are going to have to be able to fill in the gap...with what you have been doing. I have been in prison, a missionary trip, or I had a TBI and had to go through a couple years of rehabilitation. Then follow up with, "Let me tell you about that"....use that as a lead in rather than focusing in on the negative and show the way to present to the employer the positive. It allows a person to show what they can do.

P2 stated above that filling the gaps in the job seekers resume is an important step in helping show potential employers what a person can do; and what they have been doing with their time.

How can we make it safe for a person with a disability to disclose their disability while seeking work? P2 believes that making society as whole safer for a person with disability is the first step. The following statement compares how the struggle for civil rights is similar for PWD and the ADA.

Making society safer... means going back to the ADA making more businesses accessible [to people with disabilities]...through communication and transportation, so that the person with a disability (PWD) doesn't have to fight that much [to secure

employment]. As PWD become more integrated in society it becomes more participation in jobs [competitive] not sheltered workshops. Thus, people without disabilities will become more comfortable also. We just have to look back into our lives with racial integration and how far we have come by just looking back into the sixties and where employers and colleges we uncomfortable at first but now it is different... It's not perfect for persons of color and it's still going on and hopefully it is better than in the 60's. If you look at how recently ADA was implemented that in twenty or thirty years we won't be seeing this...Where people are not hired because of disability.

P2 stated the need to find receptive employers that may or may not realize that there is a viable and potentially stable workforce out in the world that could help fill the jobs that have traditionally had higher turnover. P2 uses the integration struggle as an example of the hardships and barriers that PWD face today and how the civil rights movement still continues today; however inroads are being made and hopefully it will continue to get better for all people.

What other thoughts do you have in regards to helping people with disabilities find employment? P2 states that it is both the job seekers and rehabilitation professionals' responsibility to "understand the job" thus ensuring the right job match.

In summary P2 who has spent thirty years as a vocational rehabilitation counselor and as a person with an invisible disability was very active in the Focus Group discussion. He feels that one should disclose their invisible disability if it affects the job. Specifically "after the job offer" and before the person starts work which is consistent with P1's thoughts. The complexity of disclosing a disability makes it difficult to have specific answers for all occasions. P2 states that today he has no problems initiating disclosure of his disability, but that came with maturity and understanding. As a whole society can and

does contribute to this complexity, and it is the perceptions and “myths” that come into play in this decision. If there is no current or future impact on the ability to do a job then disclosure becomes highly individualized. P2 did state that employers can find “all kinds of reasons to not hire a PWD” and if a person becomes disabled after working it is more “difficult to push someone out the door” so the circumstances and the accommodation needs dictate the decision to disclose or not.

Participant number three (P3): background information: P3 is a 55 year old female Native American. She is currently working as a vocational rehabilitation counselor and has multiple disabilities. One of her disabilities is a Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI). She has been working as a VR counselor for 1.5 years. P3 also holds a CRC.

What is the biggest challenge a person with a disability faces when trying to secure employment? P3 stated that she felt “labeling” was the biggest challenge that a PWD may face as a result of their disability and “once labeled it is hard to take it (label) back”. P3 also reports that other challenges include; a) becoming accepted; b) decreasing employer anxiety (over disability); c) the liability of taking a person on (with disability); d) interviewer bias; and e) internal barriers.

Should a person with a disability disclose during the job interview? Initially, P3 stated that she wouldn’t disclose (her-self) during the interview but soon after. She later refined her answer to “only if it affects the job or causes harm to the client or employees that he or she works with.” P3 feels that discrimination in employment occurs 85% of the time.

If a person chooses to disclose their disability: at what point do you feel they should?

P3 feels that after the job has been offered then if they need to he or she can disclose.

This is if they need a specific job accommodation.

What advantages do you think a person would have if they disclose their disability?

Disadvantages? P3 feels that the advantages are in the way it opens up communication and understanding. Disclosure can lead to “protection from the ADA”. The disadvantages can be the labeling of a PWD and or the stereotyping that can accompany labels. P3 states that it also forfeits the “protection of the ADA.”

What advice would you give to a person with an invisible disability if they were seeking employment? P3 stated that an employee seeking work should research the company. She also stated a person should “believe in oneself.” As far as advice in general P3 stated the following as advice to the vocational rehabilitation counselor:

But, But...you can say that you have qualified candidate that will fill your employment needs...I have had a person who was an excellent qualified candidate. Tell your people ...some may think insurance is going up...but in reality this is based on experience over the last year...is what dictates your insurance...u can say we have a qualified person...and a good job match...we can do that with your futures employees...you have to do that...we can't just put someone in there...I tell my clients all the time we don't just put u into a job...it's your employment goal. We match the job to you and the job for you. We won't put you into a job you don't want.

P3 states that it is after the job offer that one should disclose, however as rehabilitation professionals we have education on the specifics of the disability and of course the job.

How can we make it safe for a person with a disability to disclose their disability while seeking work? P3 stated that through “education and role playing (interview skills)” the rehabilitation professional can teach self-advocacy.

What other thoughts do you have in regards to helping people with disabilities find employment? P3 sees “education of the employers” as a significant part in the creation of opportunities for PWD as they seek work. She also feels that the rehabilitation counselor should help a PWD “believe in their selves and that the client is important (valuable as a person).”

In summary P3 believes that one should only disclose after the job has been offered and if it has a direct impact on the safety of the job for the PWD and his or her fellow employees. The biggest challenges are getting past the “labels and stereotypes” that people have against PWD. P3 feels that while there is still discrimination there are still opportunities for PWD in securing employment if there is an appropriate job match. If one chooses to disclose his or her disability they can find protection in the ADA. However, a consistent theme was teaching self-efficacy and advocacy. Through education and role-playing a PWD can better position his or her self for the interview. This could include having knowledge of the job and making sure it is a good job match. P3 believes that education of the employer plays a critical role too; education is the key to the dilemma of disclosure.

Participant number four (P4): Background information, demographics and answers to focus group questions: P4 is a 46 year old white female job developer and a graduate student in a rehabilitation program.

What is the biggest challenge a person with a disability faces when trying to secure employment? P4 believes that PWD are still discriminated against “even though there are laws in place, there still exists bias” in how employers view them as potential employees. She felt that employers discriminate 75% of the time.

Should a person with a disability disclose during the job interview? This question was asked early in the focus group and repeated again in various forms throughout. P4 initially responded; “I don’t think they should unless it would impact their ability to do the job, or they need an accommodation.” P4 also stated “she thought you shouldn’t disclose during the interview...say if they get their evaluation, if there is a problem due to the disability then you can disclose then and try to fix whatever problem that may arise.” This was her theme throughout the initial focus group until the follow-up where she modified her responses. At the follow-up she reported that after participating in the focus group she changed her mind and now was in favor of promoting disclosure. She modified it to “at the time of the job offer and if they needed a specific accommodation.” P4 also felt it was also dependent on the type of disability. This answered the timing question.

What advantages do you think a person would have if they disclose their disability? Disadvantages? P4 felt the advantages of disclosing would be in the relationship with

the potential employer, stating that “their employer would like the fact that they are an honest person.” The disadvantage would be in “how the employer looked at them.”

What advice would you give to a person with an invisible disability if they were seeking employment? P4 would advise a client to disclose if they need a job related accommodation, but “keep it short and simple”. “If someone has depression they may not really have an accommodation need ... they may just need to stay on their medications (an accommodation)... so why go further than that?”

How can we make it safe for a person with a disability to disclose their disability while seeking work? P4 stated that “we (professionals) should make sure it (disability) will not make a difference (in the job) and they will be treated fair and still get the job even if they disclose.” P4 gave an account of an employer who had a history of hiring PWD and there was no fear in openly discussing the disability. This would not generalize to other employers but she thought “using it as an example and an educational opportunity would allow employers to increase opportunities.”

What other thoughts do you have in regards to helping people with disabilities find employment? P4 thought about the focus group and the dialog between the co-participants and stated:

Well after the discussion today maybe the advice I have been giving to my client is wrong. I am now thinking for my clients own safety as well as other employee’s safety, maybe I should advise them to disclose. I will have to rethink my thoughts on this subject.” I think morally if you can harm someone else...if you had someone with HIV and they got cut and someone else was exposed you may morally have the obligation to disclose.

In summary, P4 modified her opinions of disclosure as a result of the focus group from advising clients to not disclose disabilities to disclosing after the job offer has been made. She felt that PWD still face discrimination and if a disability has no direct impact on the job; and a person doesn't need accommodations, she would still advise a person not to disclose. The onus is on the professionals to "make sure" we know that a disability will not affect a person and the safety of others on the job. It is important that we have a correct job match. If a person then would chose to disclose he or she should make 'short and simple' statements relating it to the accommodation needs.

Participant number five (P5): Background information, demographics and answers to focus group questions: P5 is a 38 year old African American woman job developer with a hidden disability. She is currently a graduate student in a rehabilitation counseling program. She has been working as a job developer for approximately one year and has experience in both the private sector and at the state vocational rehabilitation agency.

What is the biggest challenge a person with a disability faces when trying to secure employment? P5 stated that her clients are facing discrimination 85% of the time they seek employment. She describes an experience that she faced at Wal-Mart; "I have several clients at the store...they have at one point no problem hiring a person with a disability...but they (Wal-Mart) had a person that had bias and she stated, "if I had known they needed a job coach I would never hired them," this is a challenge."

Should a person with a disability disclose during the job interview? P5 stated no to this question. She also stated that if the application doesn't ask if you are disabled, you shouldn't volunteer it. When another participant stated they are not allowed to ask on the application, P5 stated; "Right, Right, in the interview process they never ask you...so the question wouldn't arise...so if it doesn't come out I don't see how you are going to be dishonest in the interview process." P5 basically evoked the "don't ask don't tell"

position. She felt that if the question of disability doesn't come out then it isn't open for discussion. However, if they ask, "do you have a disability? Then you have the obligation to discuss the disability." The timing of the disability disclosure should be at the point of the job offer so the employer and PWD can discuss accommodation, according to P5. She also stated that if there is no offer then a person shouldn't disclose.

What advantages do you think a person would have if they disclose their disability?

Disadvantages? P5 believes that the one advantage to disclosure is that it gives the employer information that could help them down the road to ensure any help the person may need is provided. The disadvantage is that a person risks; "not getting the job."

What advice would you give to a person with an invisible disability if they were seeking employment? "Disclose only if you need accommodations." P5 explains that it "really boils down to your disability and if you and your doctors feel that accommodations are needed."

How can we make it safe for a person with a disability to disclose their disability while seeking work? P5 feels that it is about education and that rehabilitation professionals should teach about disabilities.

What other thoughts do you have in regards to helping people with disabilities find employment? The path to helping a person understand his or her own disability; this way they can "educate and remove employer bias."

In summary P5 feels that discrimination is a very real (85%) barrier and that a person should only disclose a disability if accommodations are needed. That if they chose to do

so it should be at the offer. P5 expressed that one should invoke the “don’t ask, don’t tell rule.” If the disability does not require accommodations; P5 would advise not to disclose anything about the disability to the employer. This is out for fear of discrimination and the loss of opportunity to get the job. She feels that disability education will help the client advocate for his or her self by having knowledge how the disability impacts the job. P5 also feels that education of employers can reduce bias in how they view disabilities.

Participant number six (P6): Background information, demographics and answers to focus group questions: P6 is a 32 year old white male police officer who has a learning disability. He is currently employed as a police officer while attending graduate school in rehabilitation counseling. P6 moonlights as a job developer for a small private rehabilitation company.

What is the biggest challenge a person with a disability faces when trying to secure employment? P6 discussed the “stigma” attached to disability as a challenge that the PWD has to overcome. He reports, “I know that in my line of work that basically when someone gets a disability or admits to a disability they are considered a liability. Their assets are erased and now they are a liability for the most part.” P6 concurred with the other participants that employers still discriminate during the hiring process. He acknowledged the following:

If you are looking at two candidates, where you have more than one person going for the same job...You would face an employer who looks at one where you have to accommodate or what are you going to have to do? Now you have to face that you

have to accommodate or expenses? One may have issues that arrive and the other may not. Why as an employer would you go that route?

It is the fear of the unknown that produces challenges for the PWD. The employer may feel costs associated with accommodation and the chance of increasing liability will create an undue hardship.

Should a person with a disability disclose during the job interview? P6 stated emphatically, “Unless they need an accommodation, absolutely not.” When asked if the person wanted the job but had a disability that could put others at risk, he replied, “That should not be a job you applied to begin with...”

What advantages do you think a person would have if they disclose their disability? Disadvantages? P6 states that the advantage is the protection that the ADA allows for a PWD. The disadvantages are the “stigma and discrimination” that a person would face from uninformed or biased employers. P6 expands the rationale for his feelings on the disadvantages:

I am not in the hiring process but as a field training officer...but after meeting a lot of colleagues, “they are not going to deal with that”. They won’t do it. It doesn’t matter if it is invisible or not. It is a meat locker; they can get rid of you for any reason at any time that first year. They will find a way to do it if they find out you have a disability. Anything that can slow down their process, since it is speed up to begin with,...if there is anything that slows up the process you are gone..., terminated...they are pretty open about that.

What advice would you give to a person with an invisible disability if they were seeking employment? P6 stated, “Do not disclose unless you have a specific accommodation need.”

How can we make it safe for a person with a disability to disclose their disability while seeking work? P6 expressed that until we change the general public's perception of disability it will not be safe for PWD. "In fact you will see more nondisclosure, until we see more education and accountability on the part of the clients." P6 has experienced people openly speaking about not hiring people with disabilities and "nothing happens to them." P6 expressed empathy for PWD but had the concern, "that until something changes we will have people with secret disabilities not disclosing because they don't have to. They will not because they realize that because of their disability they may have shot themselves in the foot." So they will not disclose their disability period. So safety really will come as the general public and employers changes their view of disability and accepts qualified PWD into the work place.

What other thoughts do you have in regards to helping people with disabilities find employment? P6 was concise in stating that employers are "not your friends, they aren't your family, these are the people who are going to sign your paycheck...and you're just doing a job for them." Therefore, the people working with PWD should be aware it's about being qualified and capable of doing the job versus hiring a person because you want to contribute to society.

In conclusion P6 expressed strong views in regards to the subject of disclosure and didn't waiver from his initial position. He feels that stigma and discrimination plays a large part in this analysis. P6 feels that unless you have a "specific need" you shouldn't disclose, "period." He also, stated that until society changes their perspective people will

not disclose especially as the job market becomes tighter. These feelings are reinforced by his contact with colleagues whose attitudes towards PWD are very robustly negative.

Participant number seven (P7): Background information, demographics and answers to focus group questions: P7 is a 51 year old white male who has been in the business world in management for over thirty years. He has hired people with disabilities and is currently working to finish his Masters Degree in Business. P7 teaches hospitality at a prison through a community college.

What is the biggest challenge a person with a disability faces when trying to secure employment? P7 answered this question from the perspective of an employer seeking qualified candidates. He stated as an employer, “I would like to know up front about the disability since I am trying to match up the job to the person. I am looking for the “best fit” for the individual and the business.” For P7 it is all about the “fit” and how a disability might impact the job. “I feel that I can do a better job (determining fit) of matching potentials,” if he had the information up front.

Should a person with a disability disclose during the job interview? P7 feels that a person should be upfront with employers and disclose as soon as there is rapport/review of specific job qualifications.

I am trying to match a job with a person so I need to know this while making my mind up to see if it is a good match. I need to know what the qualifications are ...what they can or can't do...there is no reason to offer a job to someone who is not qualified. It won't work. It's a no win for everybody. Why would you hire somebody then have to let them go. It's a legal minefield anyway. We live in a litigious society... Anyway, we have talked about someone getting cut with HIV...people can get hurt either accidentally or incidentally...because of someone's hidden (invisible)

disability we don't know when things will pop up. The seizure or diabetes can pop up...it is a very rough thing to hire people and it is even harder to let them go. I would like to do it right the first time.

P7 was asked directly by another participant during his response if he thought it was a timing issue, and he stated that he feels he should be an "informed employer." He then replied, "Don't you think it is the kind of job you are talking about...the type of disability and how it relates. These are a nebulous series of questions... I would prefer to know something up front."

When asked about when a person should disclose, P7 felt that it is incumbent on the PWD to initiate the discussion. He stated that; "the applicant must decide to disclose/stay quiet after reviewing the job description, objectives, analysis and the final "fit" between the applicant, organization and nature of the disability."

What advice would you give to a person with an invisible disability if they were seeking employment? P7 stated, "If a person gets hired and never discloses disability and cannot perform in the job, termination is an option, as the employee cannot perform the duties he/she was hired to perform and never asked for the "reasonable accommodations" necessary to perform the job." P7 felt that if the person wanted protection he or she should have asked at the point they reviewed the specific qualifications. He stated he would encourage the job applicant to be "honest" by disclosing his or her disabilities so the "employer" then could perform his or her duties as "required by the ADA."

How can we make it safe for a person with a disability to disclose their disability while seeking work? P7 felt that the discussion is helpful but it really should leave the

halls of academia and move into the board rooms and in management meetings. That by having the discussion about disclosure with insurers, investors and management teams we can then affect policies/procedures, employment manuals, etc... and in doing so make change meaningful. Then after making adjustments the changes should be reviewed by the legal department to minimize risk to the organizations.

What other thoughts do you have in regards to helping people with disabilities find employment? P7 perspective came from years of working with the hiring and firing of individuals. As a final thought, he stated, “even if a applicant has visible disabilities, the potential employer cannot make reference to the disability.” He placed the “responsibility” of speaking about disability in the applicant with a disability. “The potential employer cannot even ask what sort of accommodation might be necessary even if the disability is apparent, without the potential employee advising the potential employer about the disability.” P7 feels that honesty is not only the best policy it is a necessary policy if an applicant is seeking accommodations. This will help reduce costs associated with hiring/firing and decreasing the chance that an employer “will resist hiring PWD in the future.”

In summary, P7 represented the employer perspective in the focus group. He not only has experience as an employer, but also as a manager he has hired and managed people with disabilities. P7 also has intimate knowledge of disability since he lives with a person who has a disability. P7 believes that disclosure is an “honest” way to address accommodation needs. The advantage in having the applicant disclose is in the protection the ADA provides a candidate. He would advise that a PWD understands his or her

disability and the specific needs of the job they are seeking. P7 reports if the person with a disability is qualified and matched with the job it helps in the reduction of costs associated with the hiring/firing process and ultimately can help encourage the employer to hire people with disabilities in the future. P7 stated theme of “honesty” can help to create a positive atmosphere when discussing the applicant’s specific accommodation needs. Honesty in such communication is an important collaboration between the PWD and employer. One theme that was introduced by P7’s participation was the potential for training and opportunity to take this research into the “board rooms, management meetings and policy making groups.” The contribution that P7 made to the group from the employers perspective was an invaluable insight into phenomena of disclosure.

Participant number eight (P8): Background information, demographics and answers to focus group questions: P8 is a 62 year old white male with a disability (diabetes and Parkinson’s disease). He has over thirty-five years’ experience in the business world. P8 is currently retired. Until recently he volunteered at a vocational program for people with disabilities.

What is the biggest challenge a person with a disability faces when trying to secure employment? P8 believes that the biggest challenge that a person with a disability faces is employers not wanting to increase “costs” and the “lack of understanding about the disability.” He also agreed that discrimination takes place in the employment process.

Should a person with a disability disclose during the job interview? P8 had a personal experience that shaped his decision on the topic of disclosure. He related the following experience:

Like I said earlier; that before coming here that I never knew/considered that I have a disability...so I never talked about it... I never said anything about it. Then one year I had a diabetic incident in that I almost went into a coma...and the women who I was training with took me to the hospital...had she known up front she could have taken care of me and it wouldn't have gotten that serious. Subsequently she took me to the hospital and it saved me. She didn't know what she was doing...she just took me to the hospital thinking that that's what she had to do since I wasn't waking up. So I agree with knowing up front would be better.

As far as timing the disclosure, P8 felt that at the time of the offer is a good point. He felt that the "key time" is at that point. Because, if the employer had to chose between a applicant that had a disability and one that didn't, the employer would chose the nondisabled applicant.

What advantages do you think a person would have if they disclose their disability? Disadvantages? According to P8 the advantages could be a tax break and other related incentives. He also reported that it can be a matter of life and death based on his experience with diabetes. The disadvantages would be not getting hired.

What advice would you give to a person with an invisible disability if they were seeking employment? P8 stated that a disability is secondary to a qualified person seeking employment. "What difference does your speech (or other disability) have if you can do the job?" He stated that he feels if you can do the job then you should focus on that. P8

also stated that if the applicant qualified for a tax break then they should be honest and disclose that too.

How can we make it safe for a person with a disability to disclose their disability while seeking work? P8 he stated, "usually it is not the employer that would discriminate against a PWD instead; it is usually the Human Resource Department. Specifically P8 states, "It is the interviewer that relays the impression of the applicant to the employer."

The education about PWD needs to start at the employer level and then relayed to the Human Resource Officer.

What other thoughts do you have in regards to helping people with disabilities find employment? P8 focused on the perceived costs of health-care and increased pharmaceutical needs. P8's concern about healthcare costs associated with hiring a person with disabilities was addressed through the interaction with the co-participants; this helped to educate and eliminate the concern for P8. This truly became a teachable moment.

In summary, P8 also represented the perspective of a business leader. He expressed financial concerns as well as traditional themes of higher healthcare costs. P8 recognized that discrimination does exist in the employment/interview process and that most employers when given a choice will hire a nondisabled person. However, P8 stated that he felt that an applicant should disclose if there is any chance by concealing information a person can jeopardize his or her safety as well as others. In making it safer for PWD he believes that we have to educate not only the employers but the Human Resource

Officers. P8 feels that PWD who are eligible for tax breaks or other incentives to be hired should “speak up” and disclose which in turn will help the employer. He also felt the best time to disclose is at the job “offer.” P8 thought the focus group helped clarify some of the thoughts he has had through the years about disability and the workplace.

Participant number nine (P9): Background information, demographics and answers to focus group questions: P9 is a 50 year old white/Native American female with a disability (Multiple Sclerosis/MS). She is currently working as a Speech and Language Pathologist. She has lived with her disability for 25 years.

What is the biggest challenge a person with a disability faces when trying to secure employment? P9 replied that the biggest challenge a PWD faces is “labels” because “once you label a person it is hard to take it back.” She also felt that labels lead to “negative attitudes” toward PWD. Between the labels and the negative attitudes P9 felt these would be barriers to employment. She felt that there are a high percentage of people who discriminate against PWD. P9 stated that her sister-in-law works as a Human Resource Officer for a major company and she assured her (P9) that while “illegal” it does exist.

Should a person with a disability disclose during the job interview? P9 expanded her feelings above and stated that, “I feel information given to the employer will result in discrimination and in my case won’t disclose at all. I won’t disclose in the interview but I will shortly after.” As far as disclosing in general she felt that it “depends” on the circumstances. P9 stated, “She is fortunate to work in rehabilitation so there is a lot of understanding there, that might not be present in other work environments. People may

realize that PWD/MS is not necessarily a liability.” P9 feels that in her case there is no reason to openly discuss her disability at work. She then added, “Let’s assume I was going to disclose during the interview for whatever reason...you don’t do it right off the bat...you wait till rapport is built ...you have already presented yourself as someone who is obviously capable and able to do the job...you sold yourself...”sure.”

What advantages do you think a person would have if they disclose their disability?

Disadvantages? P9 stated that honesty and openness is the advantage of disclosing one’s disability. She still stated that the presence of “negative attitudes” would still be a disadvantage in most cases.

What advice would you give to a person with an invisible disability if they were seeking employment? P9 reflected on this and reported the following:

I think of it so job related like in my field ...it’s a compassionate audience they should be supportive...so the fear of being outed is less...that I have MS...usually I bring it to the table soon after I get the job...people don’t usually detect that anything is going on...they may ask if I hurt my leg...I don’t have any set protocol that I follow. I don’t have specific timeframes I go with my gut...at different times...my field has never used it against me...it is never really has come up...when it does it is like “oh”...then someone would say I have an aunt that has it (MS). Then it becomes a non-issue.

P9 feels that rapport building prior to disclose minimizes the “negative attitudes” that one may harbor with his or her own bias. This is a “timing” issue and one that has to be “intuitive” in nature. Having that “gut” feeling that rapport is built up is important in timing of disclosure.

How can we make it safe for a person with a disability to disclose their disability while seeking work? P9 felt exercises like the focus group can serve as a catalyst to “educate and promote change” She gained new insights into the subject of disclosure and feels now that “openly discussing disability” in open forums can lead to changes in the paradigm, especially in “heightening awareness and acceptance”.

What other thoughts do you have in regards to helping people with disabilities find employment? P9 felt that in the end she keeps writing and thinking “depends, just depends” on whether or not one should disclose. She feels that this (depends) is her best answer. P9 feels that it is all about education of the employer and having open discussions (like this: focus groups) is the best way to ‘move forward’.

In summary, P9 gave a voice of a professional with a disability to the focus group. She feels that discrimination through labeling and negative attitudes about PWD is still a major challenge. While P9 has grown to understand the needs of the employer she feels that if a job applicant chooses to disclose they should do so after “rapport” has been established. When asked about the advantages of disclosing P9 stated that ‘honesty and openness’ are the byproducts of disclosure. She however cautions that we should understand that disclosure is also an issue of timing and rapport building. P9 feels that through exercises like the focus group, we can discuss openly with employers the concepts related to disability and employment.

Participant number ten (P10): Background information, demographics and answers to focus group questions: P10 is a 58 year old white male. He is a professor in a business

department as well as an attorney. P10 consults with small businesses in law. He states that he has personal experiences with PWD...his father was born with one arm and his youngest brother was born with Down's syndrome. He comes from a family of ten.

What is the biggest challenge a person with a disability faces when trying to secure employment? P10 stated that, "convincing the decision makers that he/she (PWD) is the best fit for the job". He feels that employers only discriminate 25% of the time, therefore it really about understanding the 'different issues in turns of legality,' for all applicants who have disability and those advising them. P10 feels that discrimination occurs more in small businesses that lack information, experience and legal counsel.

Should a person with a disability disclose during the job interview? P10 is clear in his interpretation of when and how a person should disclose his or her disability. He states in pre-offer situations it is the "legal and moral choice of the applicant." In the post-offer, "since employer may ask (legally), I believe disclosure is beneficial." P10 expands his understanding in the following statements;

There are so many different issues in terms of legality...most of you are familiar with basic laws in hiring...especially in a pre-offer situation...before an offer for a job is made. Laws are different in the post-offer...you basically can say whatever you want to say...the perspective employer is not legally able to ask questions that are illegal or leading...related to disability...they can't make a person take a medical exam or tests or anything like that...it is a different situation after the offer has been made. Post-offer has been extended to you...that you are ready to accept before you actually go to employment...so in my mind morally there may be distinctions...that we may get into.

P10 states, “Before any serious negotiations begin, my ethical preference is for full disclosure as early as possible.” He feels that the request for reasonable accommodations can alter the cost-benefit analysis of the employer. This is related to the “material facts” that can affect the employer’s financial interests. So it is important to discuss this early on in the process.

What advantages do you think a person would have if they disclose their disability?

Disadvantages? P10 feels that disclosure “fosters trust, honesty and presents “self” as of good character.” Disclosure may benefit the employer as a potential tax break. He expands the advantages as follows:

My small business clients typically look at it as will the benefits they (PWD) bring me exceed the costs? If we are talking about disability in general ...statistically, if it is an employment thing there may be some tax incentives or breaks for hiring a person with disability. On the cost side you are worried about what is going to cost me for appropriate accommodations? I think statistically the costs are typically around five hundred dollars or less ...but is that unknown that may affect the benefit analysis. I was listening to you to guys about the disabled and versus other applicants...they (employer) may say am I going to get more out of this....am I going to have to pay more.

P10 states that there is still the potential to “scare off the employer”; this risk/disadvantage is reality. He responded now to the moral advantages and disadvantages:

If we are talking about disclosure; we are being too generic ...it needs to be clarified. Disclosure of what and disclosure when, the disability as the “what”...and the timing of “when”...Generically, I would answer that if it is a material fact...the other party would need to know, but if it is not of consequence...then you should provide it generically. So what’s material and what isn’t, from an employer’s perspective? *What would be a material fact?* The extent of the disability and associated costs

would be considered a material fact. They are not asking in effect what I would consider moral ones...which may or may not overlap with the law. If the employer to be/employee to be have some material fact that they possess that others don't have access to they should disclose.

P10 states that the discussion about advantages and disadvantages becomes centered on the material costs of accommodations and timing of disclosure.

What advice would you give to a person with an invisible disability if they were seeking employment? P10 stated the best advice would be to advise the PWD to sell their "benefits" and to be "upfront" with the employer about the material facts that could affect the costs to the employer. When asked a follow-up question; what the focus should be on for the PWD in preparing for the interview, P10 responded, "practice selling yourself and the benefits you bring the potential employer." He also states, "PWD should research and prepare for the interview; to know all you can about the potential employer and his or her business."

How can we make it safe for a person with a disability to disclose their disability while seeking work? P10 believes that working within the law is a "practical" vehicle to make it safer for PWD in securing employment. He stated that in personal terms, "one's mores and zeitgeist are formed by family, church, culture, etc." These values could be the catalyst for discussing the effect of disability in life and work.

What other thoughts do you have in regards to helping people with disabilities find employment? P10 states that while employers are not allowed to ask illegal questions regarding disabilities and so 'lying can't hurt you'. "We also know what is said on paper

is not always in reality what is done.” Expanding his thoughts P10 stated, “I sound like a broken record...in legal terms (before I talk about moral terms) pre-offer you don’t need to disclose...post-offer while there is not duty to disclose I would recommend that you do, especially if you need an accommodation. In terms of a moral duty, I would in my own moral code if I thought it was a material fact and that the other party doesn’t have information on- the sooner the better if you ask me. But that’s just me.”

In summary, P10 brought a legal perspective to the focus group. His experiences were valuable in the focus groups discussion and he provided insight into the moral, as well, as the legal implications of disclosure of disability in the interviewing process. P10 looks at finding the “fit” between the employer, job and applicant as one of the important themes in understanding disclosure and finding the right time to disclose as a combination of a moral and a legal decision. P10 was open to others perspectives in the discussion, but he felt morally that disclosure is the right thing to do and the question that needs consideration is when should a person disclose. He felt that being “up front” about a person’s disability is preferable; and this discussion could be initiated when discussion between employer and applicant centered on the “fit” of the job along with the material costs for accommodations. The job applicant should be “upfront and honest” and in doing so he is afforded the protection of the law. P10 also felt that the job applicant should also focus on his or her personal benefits and how these attributes will “fit” the job he or she is applying for. The onus is on the PWD to “research” the business and prepare his or her self for the interview. The moral aspect in discussion of disclosure is related to being “honest” (veracity) and developing a trusting environment between the

employer and the applicant. P10 discussed the moral and legal issues related to disclosure and gave the group a new compass from which to reflect on the issues surrounding disclosure.

Participant number eleven (P11): Background information, demographics and answers to focus group questions: P11 is a 59 year old white male with a disability who works as a school psychologist. He has Masters' degree in counseling and has been living with the effects of a TBI for approximately thirty years.

What is the biggest challenge a person with a disability faces when trying to secure employment? P11 brings a strong voice for people with disability from his years as an advocate and educator. He stated, "The biggest challenge for a PWD when seeking employment is to be honest about his or her disability issues without creating a barrier to getting quality employment." P11 also feels that the "employers need to know about the disability...so that down the road if issues do arise there will be protection (for the PWD) and to decrease anxiety that is produced by not telling."

Should a person with a disability disclose during the job interview? P11 feels that "once the job applicant has had the opportunity to establish rapport and describe both strengths as well as previous employment successes he or she should disclose the disability. Along with that disclosure, effective accommodations should be illustrated." He also, feels that "when describing his or her disability, the applicant should disclose possible issues that may be problematic to the job. In the same dialog, the applicant can describe what accommodations could be used to either minimize or eliminate these

issues. P11 has very strong feelings about disclosure and how it sets up the employer and employee relationship. He stated:

One of the things that if you hire someone with a disability if they haven't disclosed it in the interview...it will come out someday...and you might be manufacturing distrust...they (employer) may wonder what else the person not telling me is. However, if you discuss it up front and say, "Here are the issues" ...and these are the accommodations that will erase any concerns that's the way it can work with communication....that way you are not setting yourself up for dishonesty.

Honesty is the central theme in P11's thoughts about disclosure. The timing of disclosure is important according to P11 and it shouldn't happen before the interview and it shouldn't happen until rapport is established or during the offer/job review.

What advantages do you think a person would have if they disclose their disability?

Disadvantages? P11 see that biggest advantage is that the employer will see the applicant as "honest and forward thinking." He also stated that the applicant should have "accommodations in mind that will minimize or eliminate the disability issues." P11 stated, "Many times a TBI is so pervasive to a person's way of life that it has to be discussed...it is just a matter of time that my memory will cause concern. To bring the issue up and deal with it is a proactive approach, to deal with the issues that surround my disability." The disadvantage that P11 described could be that the employer might automatically disqualify the applicant based on what might happen (perceived problems).

What advice would you give to a person with an invisible disability if they were seeking employment? P11 has three pieces of advice for a job applicant with a disability. First, "I wouldn't advise you to walk up and say, hi I am P11 and I have a TBI." So timing is essential. Secondly, "the individual should be told to establish rapport and take

measures to build a positive perception of his or herself before disclosing the disability issue.” Finally, the person with a disability should focus on his or her strengths and the potential for success at the workplace as well as previous successes in his or her employment history.

How can we make it safe for a person with a disability to disclose their disability while seeking work? P11 stated, “If a PWD has the opportunity to go through vocational training in order to address both employment issues as well as techniques to address his or her individual issues, it will be safer for that person to disclose his or her disability. Unfortunately, it will probably never be totally safe in this society at this time.” The preparation that a PWD receives from vocational counseling can make the person feel safer and more secure in his or her self.

What other thoughts do you have in regards to helping people with disabilities find employment? P11 replied, “I think I would rather be a person with a TBI that fits the job than one that has a job and is failing. I think it is appropriate to disclose the disability and then discuss the accommodations. Then you can deal with the issues...then you can educate...the employer is going to have a hard time fixing it after you are struggling. It (the disability) will eventually come out, it always does. It’s not if it comes out but when. If you don’t talk about it up front you are setting yourself up for problems later in the future.” P11 feels disclosure helps eliminate the unexpected things that could come out...you have to have a plan. The plan is to have vocational counseling help in preparing the timing and how one discloses.

In summary, P11 had a clear and concise view of disclosure. His experience in the field of rehabilitation and the fact that he has experienced a disability first hand was a valuable voice in the focus group. P11 feels that a PWD should disclose after rapport has been established in the interview process. He feels that establishing an “honest and open” relationship will help mitigate future problems on the job if they arise. By being “forward thinking and honest” the expectations will be known by both the applicant and the employer, and any need for accommodations will be discussed at the time of offer. Timing of the disclosure was important for P11; he felt that disclosing too early in the interview process (pre-interview) would not serve the PWD well. P11 suggested that vocational counseling can help prepare a PWD for the interview by reviewing his or her strengths and the benefits he or she brings to the table. Perhaps the most salient thing P11 replied to the group is, “It’s not if the disability comes out, but when.” He told the researcher in subsequent conversations that it is always just a matter of time before an issue relating to the disability will come up and how one has established the relationship with the employer will determine the consequences of the issue. It’s not if but when, this bore repeating.

Research Questions

A summary of the results revealed that each participant had distinct and personal experiences that had shaped his or her responses. In Table 4.1 the results are summarized and presented with the salient ideas presented for each of the categorical questions from the focus group participants. The themes identified helped answer the research questions

and confirmed the complexities that the topic of disclosure presents. The research questions were answered by the participants in the following manner:

1. Should a person disclose their invisible disability? (Why or why not)

The answers varied with the participants. Within the stakeholders there was no general consensus between even the stakeholders with disabilities that disclosure of disabilities is recommended unless specific accommodations are required. The focus group participants did conclude that if a person were to disclose that they should do it after rapport has been established while discussing the specifics of the job, or at the point of the offer. The participants unanimously concluded that discrimination and stigma surrounding disability was the biggest barrier to hiring PWD, and the primary reason that disclosure was a difficult decision. According to the participants; perhaps the most salient point/ or advantage of why a PWD should disclose; was the open and honest relationship it fostered with the candidate and employer.

2. What are the stakeholder's views of disclosure?

The views of disclosure varied across each of the participants and reflected a concern that disclosure could lead to discrimination. The reluctance to disclose is based on the fear of discrimination and society's lack of disability education and awareness. This includes employer knowledge and training in how to ensure a good job fit for PWD. Disclosure is still complex and the variables reflected in the answers demonstrate that participants would like to have an employment climate

safe for disclosure since it promotes honesty. Until, society changes its perspective on disability it will be left up to the PWD to decide if he or she should disclose his or her disability.

3. Can there be consensus from the stakeholders' point of view on when, how and what to disclose? (Why or why not)

While there was no consensus that PWD should disclose in the interview, there was a general feeling with the participants that if a person needed accommodations he or she should be ready to discuss this at time of the job offer, or when the specific job is being discussed. If the person wanted to disclose his or her disability, and then do so at the time he or she felt a positive rapport is established. Rapport building and honesty were the two themes that were consistent with the rationale of why a person should disclose. Again, discrimination and stigma continued to be the theme of why there is fear of disclosure.

4. Are there interconnections between the stakeholders on this issue?

Yes. The interconnections are with the a) recognition that discrimination still is a problem for PWD; b) that if PWD need accommodations on the job they should disclose; c) disclosure should be at the time of offer or during the specific job review, d) and if a person wants to disclose his or her disability it should be after rapport has been developed. If society has a better understanding of disability then disclosure would be a technical aspect of the interview, since "honesty" is

still the best way to approach the development of the employer-employee relationship.

5. If the stakeholders interact and communicate their point of view, will their cohorts change their point of view?

The study didn't reveal change in the points of view of the participants; perhaps a better description would be a greater understanding of each other's perspectives. The study illuminated the stakeholder's perspectives and clarified the reasons why PWD are reluctant to disclose. The interaction did serve as a perspective building exercise that all participants felt was useful. In a follow-up survey/interview the participants felt that the focus group dialog would be useful in a variety of non-academic settings and would help to bring focus on how to change the paradigm in the hiring process. Specifically, the participants felt the focus group was a very good format in developing a dialog between stakeholders and as a catalyst for positive change in promoting change in the interview and employment process. There was consensus that disclosure is warranted in seeking accommodations...this was perhaps the softening of each other's perspectives.

6. How can these findings and implications influence interaction and training of professionals and how they counsel people with disabilities on disclosure of invisible disability?

The participants responded that employer education and job readiness training for PWD would help eliminate some of the barriers that job applicants with disability

face when seeking employment. Client role playing and other training activities could help in preparing for the job interview. Self-efficacy training and teaching how his or her disability relates to specific job fit could shift the focus on a person's abilities and move away from the older model that has traditionally relied on identifying what a person can't do and that disability is something inherently focused on negative attributes.

Summary

In the study, three of the participants identified as businessmen shared a pragmatic desire to create opportunities for "qualified" people with disabilities. While they acknowledge discrimination is a concern; if the person was a good "job fit" it would mitigate this concern as long as the accommodations were reasonable. All three agreed that honesty is important in the development of the relationship between the employer and employee. A strong acknowledgement of this position was vocalized by a participant whose disability could be considered invisible (TBI). His view on honesty in disclosing was very direct, "it is not a matter of if a person's disability will come out but when." He felt that while disclosure has its risks, the risks are greater if a person chooses not to disclose and is outed without an understanding of the disability.

All participants acknowledge discrimination and stigma is why most PWD chose not to disclose. It is in society's "attitudes" of disability and the resulting stigma that people discriminate against PWD. All participants expressed that it is not safe to disclose his or her disability for fear of not getting the job. However, if conditions that lead to discrimination were mitigated, and it was a good job fit, it wouldn't matter if a person

had a disability as long the costs of accommodations were reasonable and the potential employee would not put others at risk. All participants expressed that the education of employer and society about disability awareness would help in creating a safer climate for PWD. Three participants thought that teaching self-efficacy to PWD and the affects of disability would be a good starting point for rehabilitation professionals to make it safer for a PWD to choose to disclose while they are seeking employment. Two participants thought that in addition to self-awareness rehabilitation professionals should teach PWD how to research the company and specific jobs.

The results of this study demonstrated the complexity of the phenomena of disclosure. The interaction between the stakeholders in the focus group was enlightening and each saw the value of this type of dialog. Table 4.1 summarizes the participant’s expressed views in an in-depth summary of the results of the research. The next chapter will deal with the implications of the study and how we can make it “safer” for PWD to disclose his or her disabilities. Chapter five will also discuss and explore specific themes and ideas gleamed from the participants of the focus group.

Table 4.1 Summary of Results

<i>Participant</i>	<i>1. Challenges PWD Face w/Employment</i>	<i>2. Should a PWD Disclose Disability?</i>
P1	Convincing an employer they can do the job.	No, unless accommodations are required.
P2	Internal barriers & discrimination based on the stigma of certain disabilities.	No, unless certain accommodations are needed.
P3	a)Becoming Accepted; b) decreasing employer anxiety over person’s disability; c)the liability of taking on a PWD in the work force; d) interviewing bias: labeling, and e) internal barriers.	Only if job could potentially harm PWD or other employees.

P4	Discrimination	At the time of offer; specifically of accommodations are needed.
P5	Discrimination	No- "don't ask don't tell." If one must tell it should be after the offer and only if accommodations are needed.
P6	Stigma and feeling of PWD may be a liability.	Unless a PWD needs an accommodation, absolutely not.
P7	Is the job going to be a good fit for the PWD.	Yes I would like to know up front.
P8	Discrimination and cost associated w/accommodations.	Yes, after offer or when rapport is developed.
P9	Labeling and discrimination.	Not until after offer, if at all.
P10	Determining if job is a good fit.	Yes, prior to offer-it is a moral decision for PWD. After the offer, yes it is essential.
P11	To be honest about the disability w/out it becoming a barrier.	Yes after the rapport is established-honesty is important.
Participant	3. Advantages and Disadvantages for Disclosure.	4. What Advice would you give a PWD?
P1	Advantages: promotes honesty; professionalism; and maturity. Disadvantages: creation of a red flag.	PWD should have knowledge of safety plans and job fit.
P2	Advantages: being part of a (VR) program and interviewing training. Disadvantages: stigma and blame/bias: depending on the person's disability and how they got it.	It is complex: while employer has the right to know it can lead to a difficult situation if PWD isn't prepared to discuss the needs and accommodations.
P3	Advantages: protection of the ADA. Disadvantages: stigma attached to disability.	Research the company that you are seeking employment with; and if know the job and yourself.
P4	Advantages: developing a relationship with the employer. Disadvantages: how an employer looks at the PWD.	Keep it (disclosure) short and simple. Keep it related to the accommodation needs.
P5	Advantages: gives the employer information that will help a PWD. Disadvantages: PWD risks not getting job.	Disclose if you need accommodations.
P6	Advantages: protection of the ADA.	Do not disclose unless you

	Disadvantages: stigma	have a specific accommodation need.
P7	Advantages: honesty	Disclose when reviewing specific job requirements-if you don't disclose and you are not doing your job well you can be terminated and not have the ADA to protect you.
P8	Advantages: tax breaks and incentives. Disadvantages: not getting hired.	See one's disability as secondary to the person; not as a definition of his or her self.
P9	Advantages: honesty and openness. Disadvantages: negative attitudes about disability.	Develop a rapport with the employer prior to disclosing disability to minimize negative attitudes about disability.
P10	Advantages; presents self as a person of good character. Honesty and trust. Disadvantages: potential to scare off employer.	Sell employer on one's benefits and have knowledge of self (attributes).
P11	Advantages: PWD is honest and forward thinking: "Accommodations will minimize the disability issues." Disadvantages: disqualification due to disability.	Three issues; a) timing of disclosure; b) after rapport has been established and c) focus on his or her strengths.
Participant	5. How Can We Make it Safe for PWD to Disclose?	6. Any other Thoughts?
P1	Help PWD learn to mitigate disability. Help employer assess his or her understanding of disability. Have rehabilitation counselor role play the interview.	Employment is difficult during any of our first five years of employment. When there are gaps in employment fill them with the truth of why there are these gaps.
P2	Shifting social attitudes and barriers towards PWD can create opportunity. Eradicate physical and employment barriers through education.	All stakeholders have responsibilities towards job matching and should understand each job's specific requirements.
P3	Through therapeutic intervention and teaching self-efficacy. Role playing will help PWD prepare for interview.	Education of employers on PWD issues and teaching self-efficacy is the key.
P4	Professional should help educate the public and employers about disability. Professionals need to advocate for PWD.	Disclose when accommodations are needed. Make sure the PWD's job will not put themselves or others in

		danger.
P5	Rehabilitation professionals should educate employers and public on disabilities.	Professionals should help teach self-efficacy; this will help erase employer bias.
P6	Society has to make it safer for PWD or you will continue to have problem in hiring.	Employers are friends; they want “qualified” employees that can be productive. Our job is to provide the employer with qualified workers.
P7	This discussion is valuable and should be repeated everywhere decisions makers are presented: Boardrooms, Human Resources etc.	Honesty is the best policy and the responsibility lays with the PWD to explain how or her disability effects the job.
P8	Training and education for the employer and the Human Resource Director in hiring practices.	Knowledge on the related costs of hiring PWD.
P9	Focus groups help start communication to promote change.	Disclosure should be a situational decision.
P10	One’s morals and values can act as a catalyst to discuss how disability impacts society.	In the Pre-offer the onus is on the PWD to decide to disclose or not. After the offer honesty is a must.
P11	Going through a Vocational Rehabilitation Program helps prepare a PWD for the employment process.	I would rather be known as a PWD that is successful on the job than one that fails. “It is not a question of if a person is outed but when,” so honesty is critical.

CHAPTER 5

Discussion

The complexity of decision-making in regards to disclosure of invisible disability during the interview process is a phenomena that has not received vast amounts of attention in research literature (Dalgin & Bellini, 2008). Disclosure issues are complex, and the results of this study demonstrated that there continues to be lack of consensus in developing a definitive answer to the disclosure question. However, themes were identified in this research that can be useful in understanding each stakeholder's perception of why disclosure is a concern and how to utilize these themes in impacting change of attitudes. Five major themes were identified from the data analyses in the previous chapter and will be discussed in depth in this chapter along with a decision-making model that can help vocational rehabilitation counselors facilitate integration into the workplace.

The participants in the study had various backgrounds and experiences in their employment history. They represented people with disabilities, vocational rehabilitation professionals, rehabilitation counseling students/job developers and employers. This heterogeneous group added to the rich dynamics of the subject, and the interaction was designed to help the participants construct a higher degree of personal understanding of disclosure. In designing the research methodology the researcher wanted the participants to interact with each other and construct their own opinions about disclosure. The following represent the five major themes developed by the participants.

The results of this study showed participants' responses varied to the specific question of "should a PWD disclose his or her invisible disability;" however, other views expressed by participants had more universal responses to certain themes and ideas. These responses were categorized and recorded in Table 5.1 summary of themes. The dominant themes of discrimination and stigma of PWD; timing of disclosure; soliciting accommodations; and honesty (disclosure), played important roles in the discussion of whether or not a person with an invisible disability should disclose his or her disabilities. Along with the above themes, ideas were expressed in how to create a better environment for PWD in the interview, and how the rehabilitation professional plays a valuable role in the process.

Table 5.1 *Summary of Themes*

Themes	Explanation of Themes
Discrimination and stigma	Discrimination and stigma can be a reason why PWD are hesitant to disclose disabilities.
Disclose only when needing specific accommodation.	PWD should only disclose if they do need specific job accommodations.
Timing of disclosure important.	After a PWD establishes rapport. During the discussion of a specific job is optimal but optional. Definitely after the job offer if person needs accommodations.
Honesty (veracity)	Honesty is an important part in establishing an open and viable relationship with the employer.
Rehabilitation professionals' role in the employment process.	How can the rehabilitation professional through education facilitate a better outcome in employment? Teaching self-efficacy.

Five Themes Generated from the Focus Groups

The participants had the focus group leader's questions available to them during the focus group if they needed to write down additional thoughts and ideas or if they needed to clarify or express thoughts during the actual discussion. These answers were also included in the analysis as another method of triangulation of data. Through content analysis the researcher and peer reviewer were able to identify five themes that the focus group participants constructed. The themes will be discussed to increase understanding of the phenomena of disclosure. They are not rated or ranked in level of importance.

Themes of the Participants in the Focus Group

Theme One: Stigma and Discrimination

The focus group participants unanimously agreed that there is still a stigma and discrimination problem for people with invisible disabilities as they seek employment. Negative attitudes towards PWD continue to "prohibit" a person from fully seeking participation in employment (Hergenrather & Rhodes, 2007). Whereas stigma is a result of negative attitudes and can affect a person in adverse ways in all aspects of how he or she perceives self, stigma can also affect a PWD in negative ways when seeking employment (Phemister & Crewe, 2004). Self-awareness of how a person perceives his or her disability and its effect on self identity has a lasting impact on how a person tackles life's challenges. Since stigma is a social construct that can devalue a person, it is important to understand how stigma effects decision making in regards to disclosure of an invisible disability in relation to work. Understanding the complexity of the

psychological components of disclosure, such as the effect of stigma, can be an important tool in the arsenal of the rehabilitation professional. The CRC Code of Ethics (2009) identifies the practice of beneficence as the promotion of the well being of clients and it is critical that professionals work to increase the awareness of the positive qualities of PWD and decrease the effects of stigma.

Since there is an ambiguous picture of employer perceptions of disability (Briscout & Bentley, 2000) this study was important in bringing stakeholders together to discuss how disability impacts employment decision making. The participants were split on whether or not to disclose if they did not need an accommodation. Despite the fact that when it came to the question of should a PWD ultimately disclose his or her disability, most of the participants felt if a person did indeed need an accommodation then it is important to consider disclosing his or her disability. P6 stated; that a job seeker should call to mind a “Don’t ask (about relevance of disability on job) don’t tell” stance on disability disclosure if they did not need an accommodation. P6 expanded the explanation by stating that a person should disclose, “If and only if after the job has been offered and if an accommodation is required.” These conditions were understandable since the effects of stigma are a variable to be contended with for PWD. Negative attitudes persist in our society (Chan, McMahon, Cheing, Rosenthal, & Bezyak, 2005) and have devastating effects on PWDs as they seek employment and other life goals. However, as we increase awareness and explore marketing the positive qualities that PWD possess, we see that companies that employ qualified applicants with disabilities have favorable views of PWD (Siperstein, Romano, Mohler, & Parker, 2006). The reputation of being a good

corporate citizen is growing in importance to our communities and therefore we need to continue to dialog with all stakeholders. A society, who accepts that a PWD has so much to contribute to our communities, can mitigate the effects of stigma and prejudice.

The participants of the study identified stigma and prejudice as barriers to employment and literature supports a complex picture of how challenging it is for people with hidden disability to succeed in a competitive job market even with the protection of the ADA (Scheid, 1999). This study revealed the need to respect the autonomy of the client when advising the client if and when he or she should disclose. This decision comes with the client's and professional's responsibility to his or her social and community's framework in regards to appropriateness of the job match. It was agreed by the participants in this study that disclosure should be considered if there were specific job accommodations needed to successfully complete the job and for the safety not only for the PWD but also his or her co-workers. Just when and how one would disclose is explored in the following section.

Theme Two: Disclosing if Accommodations are Needed

The participants of the focus the group agreed that disclosure is a complex and an individual decision. This autonomous decision can impact employment in variety of ways (Hughes & Graham, 2004). Disclosing disability can have many ramifications ranging from rejection (Fesko, 2001) to the creation of diverse and protected workplace (Allan & Carlson, 2003). Therefore, the participants agreed unanimously that disclosure should be considered if a person needs a specific accommodation. The research theme of disclosing

a disability when a person needs a specific accommodation is also reflected in Allan and Carlson's 2003 study on the reasons to disclose. Some of the reasons identified by the participants in Allan and Carlson's work on whether or not to disclose identified these themes; a) needing the assistance of a social network; b) to access work entitlements or accommodations; c) or if public records exist on past workers compensation claims. In this study participant P10 stated, "I would only advise them (PWD) that if they are going to need some type of reasonable accommodations they should (disclose) and if they don't need it for the job then there is no need to disclose." P4 expanded the response to include people that have a disability who really don't need an accommodation "should stay on their medications and they would not need to go further than that." Even when a PWD has a need that may require interventions in specific cases such as "depression" if his or her disability does not require accommodations then they should think about disclosure and what the pro's and con's are in making this decision. This study's participants felt that it then becomes a matter of timing when a person should disclose if they need specific accommodations.

Theme Three: The Timing of Disclosure is Important

The participants agreed that disclosure was an individual and complex decision and that the timing of it when going through the interview process was important. The participants in this research expressed mixed feelings about the timing of the disclosure. In a 2003 focus group conducted by Pearson, Ip, Hui, Yip, Ho, and Lo a group of participants stated that disclosure in a cover or an introductory letter is not recommended and is in fact "self-defeating", and this study's participants supported this position. P10

stated that if it (accommodations) is needed as a “material fact,” or something an employer needs to know about in order to develop an accommodation, then during the discussion of the “specific” job is a good time. This should be done “generally” and only if the information shared is relevant to the specific job. P10 also stated, “If it (disclosure) is being decided as a moral issue, the sooner the better.” P7 one of the businessmen in the study suggested that the decision to disclose is about the “job fit” and his goal was to make the right decision about the appropriateness of the job for the applicant. Therefore, it is important to make this decision early in the process. P11 felt it is the role of the job applicants to “demystify” the disability before the employer creates their own understanding of the disability. To fill in the “blank” with the applicant’s positive qualities is important in the process and if “you wait till after the offer” the employer will have their own impression of disability, which could be negative or positive depending on the employers understanding or experiences. Negative attributes associated with PWD are still pervasive and is a persuasive reason not to disclose (Gordon, Lam, & Winter, 1997) causing a potential strain in the employer/employee relationship before it has a chance to develop.

The disability should not define the person and is not who the person is. It is a label, a classification system for those in the field of rehabilitation and others to understand the implications of the disability. Social Distance Studies (Hergenrather & Rhodes, 2007) demonstrate many people still see distance or proximity in specific relationships, such as dating or work, can be affected negatively due to stereotyping and labels. As social distance increases the attitudes toward PWD becomes more positive. Thus, it is crucial in

the interview process to have the applicant develop a rapport with the employer initially in order for the PWD to be an individual first: and his or her disability as an “accommodation waiting to happen.” P8 the other business person in the study stated that you can do this during the interview, explaining, “you are hiring a business person...the disability is secondary...your speech has nothing to do with your disability if it doesn’t affect your job.”

Disclosing during the development of rapport between the employer and applicant was the prominent secondary theme and agreed upon by a majority of the participants; it elicited a very strong concurrence that it was crucial. The issue of disclosing after the job offer split the participants. While disclosing after the offer is considered safest by the rehabilitation professionals, the business participants and P11 felt it was not being proactive and a little dishonest. P10 stated when not considering the moral issues “during the pre-offer you don’t need to disclose” if you don’t need an accommodation...post-offer while there is not a duty to disclose, I would recommend that you do.” In moral terms P10 stated that his personal moral code dictated “if you have material facts (disability and its affects) that you should disclose and the sooner the better.” P11 stated it the most concisely; “It is not if your disability will be disclosed but when it will come out.” His experience is it will always be just a matter of time until your disability will affect the job, so you should be honest and up front as soon as you develop a rapport. P11 also felt that it too was important to discuss this no later than when you and the employer are determining the specific job. P7 concurred with P11, and as an employer who has conducted multiple interviews, he stated that it truly was about the job fit in his mind.

Having hired many PWD he also felt that honesty will help in the communication and discussion of specific job accommodations. The participants agreed that honesty is important in developing a healthy working relationship between the employer and employee even with its potential pitfalls. The participants also agreed that if you need specific accommodations, have concerns about job performance or your disability can affect others safety that you should disclose ideally after rapport has been established and always after the offer. Disclosure and practicing the attribute of honesty is ideal during the process.

Theme Four: Honesty is Important

Allan and Carlson's 2003 research into disclosure suggested "if a person has a strong personal preference for honesty" they should consider disclosing their disability. Being honest is an attribute many people seek in their employees. Honesty (veracity) has been added to the five principles of ethical behavior and adopted in the 2010 CRC Code of Ethics, and emerged as an important theme in this study of disclosure. The participants of this study recognized that naivety in understanding of the effects of honesty, as it related to disclosure during the interview process can have devastating results (Wilson, 2005) for the applicant if it is not timed appropriately and coupled with knowledge of the specific job accommodations. However, Wilson's study recognizes that if a person is able to "honestly answer" questions about his or her disability they can eliminate the fear of being outed or remembering previous explanations. These positive effects of honesty can also help eliminate stress associated with holding back information or trying to remember these previous explanations, hoping that the "disability" doesn't come exposed; which

can then become a cycle of dodging being outed and dealing with the affects of stress associated with keeping information secret. Granger (2000) reported disclosing mental health conditions, when the right supports were available, resulted in fewer difficulties on the job.

Five participants in the study agreed that honesty is an important advantage in the discussion of disclosing disability. This researcher's personal bias is that honesty is an important condition in developing a relationship with the employer. Honesty does come with responsibility, and the onus is on the rehabilitation profession to make sure the PWD has knowledge of the risks and benefits associated with disclosure of his or her disability. The "informed consent" of the client in how to proceed is critical in the continuum. Wilson's (2005) steps to prepare for disclosure is one model that takes into consideration many of the concerns expressed by this study's participants when looking at the advantages and disadvantages to disclosure. It was incorporated into a model that will be presented later in this chapter. Honesty (veracity) is the anchor to the six principles of ethical behavior in the CRC code of ethics (2010); it directs rehabilitation professionals to refrain from using or participating in the use of any form of communication that contains false, fraudulent, deceptive, or unfair statements or claims (American Occupational Therapy Code of Ethics, 2005). Failure to disclose disability would violate this principle if the client/applicant needed appropriate supports or consequences of his or her disability put others at risk. It also would be an issue if the rehabilitation professional decided to unilaterally fail to review the risks and benefits of disclosure with the client. False or misleading tactics to conceal a disability from the employer can result in

violation of principles of beneficence, justice and nonmaleficence. The rehabilitation professional's failure to understand the stakeholders' concerns should be considered as not being prepared to help the client in making an informed choice. Therefore, it is the responsibility of the rehabilitation professional to prepare and have all the information available to discuss the options with the client/PWD.

Theme Five: The Rehabilitation Professional's Responsibilities in the Process

The participants of this study identified that rehabilitation professionals have an important part in helping make it safer for the PWD to disclose. The rehabilitation professional can play a significant role in providing other stakeholders education and information about the effects of the disability and even help in the development of a 'disclosure plan' (Allen & Carlson, 2003). The disclosure plan can include details of who will disclose, to whom, when, where and how. The disclosure plan should include Wilson's (2005) Model of the "Steps to prepare for disclosure of psychiatric disabilities to employers," as a guide to preparing stakeholders to share information in regards to the job as well as the PWD's accommodation needs and concerns. Dalgin & Bellini, (2008) identified that a client that has "good interview skills and perceived honesty in discussing job history, effects of disability, and need for accommodations are likely to enhance the probability of being hired." The above attributes should be considered as the PWD being prepared to make a better decision on whether or not to disclose.

Education was a subtheme in the category of the rehabilitation professional's responsibility to the process of preparing a PWD for employment. The participants all

identified the need to educate the public and employers on the positive attributes of PWD and how to look beyond the label and see the person first and if the job is an appropriate match. Included in education of the community of the positive qualities that PWD bring to the table they also recognized that it is important that knowledge of accommodations is critical. P7 and P8 both stated that the education process needs to take place in the board rooms of corporations and in the offices of the human resource directors. P4 stated that along with education, advocacy for PWD is important in changing society's view of disabilities. This research identified that stigma and discrimination still are barriers to full employment for PWD. It is through activities like the focus group that bring about discussion and ideas for creating a safer environment that change can take place. All the participants agreed that this type of action research was a good format to open minds and create a better community for all people. Ten of the eleven focus group participants specifically stated that it will be through education of the employer and the public in general that positive change can take place. Along with the need to educate the external stakeholders/employers and the public; rehabilitation professionals need to also include teaching PWD self-advocacy and self-efficacy.

The role of self-advocacy and efficacy is critical in developing the skills needed to seek employment (Strauser & Berven, 2006). Bandura's self-efficacy theory (1977), its evolution and the theory's explanation of persistence and coping, has been applied to rehabilitation, specifically job seeking behaviors. The job seeking efficacy expectancies are applied to the individual's confidence in developing job seeking skills that lead to employment. If a person possesses efficacy expectancies, it is a greater indicator that a

person will persist in job seeking behavior versus outcome expectancies which is related to securing employment. Self-efficacy increases the applicant's ability to continue to pursue job seeking behavior when outcomes are nebular or after numerous failures in securing employment. One such intervention worth mentioning is Markus and Nurius's (1986) work in the development of the theory and intervention of Possible Selves. The intervention of Possible Selves derives from helping a person see his or her future self as the consequences for his or her behavior in the past and now. The person is free to create a pool of alternatives for his or her self to draw upon. This pool of alternatives can be applied to employment options.

Possible Selves is one way to cognitively change a person's view of self. When rehabilitation professionals help their clients develop self-advocacy or self-advocating behaviors they are ultimately giving the PWD a tool to dispel negative attitudes of disabilities (Skelton & Moore, 1999). When rehabilitation professionals teach self-advocacy skills-such as focused communication (Dow, Verdi & Sacco, 1991), the PWD takes on a stronger role in the development of self-advocacy. A higher degree of self-advocacy and self-efficacy can lead to persistence in seeking employment and helping educate employers and the community in the value of PWD in the work force and in integrations of the community as a whole. Participants in this study overall agreed that the skills of self-advocacy and self-efficacy are critical in laying the frame work for employment seeking behaviors and can increase positive attitudes towards people with disability. This will help create a "safer environment" for PWD. When asked specifically how to create a safer environment for PWD to seek employment, ten of the participants

identified teaching self-advocacy and education as the key variables to accomplish a safer environment. Self-efficacy, self-advocacy and knowledge of self are the tools for rehabilitation professionals. When people are comfortable in advocating for themselves, they engage in self-efficacious behaviors and can see a better future for themselves. This positive attitude can spill over into how others view people with disabilities in general and create a safer environment.

In this research one of the goals was to create a project that would not sit on the shelves of academia but would help guide rehabilitation professionals in their everyday practices. Disclosure of disability is a subject that rehabilitation professionals have to struggle with when their clients with invisible disabilities begin to discuss employment. In the research I found that empirical literature is lacking in the development of a consensus if one should disclose or not. There is a lack of development of a universal approach in how to deal with the subject pragmatically. However, this study's research participants identified the above five themes and when analyzing the raw data it became evident that these themes could be developed into a model for decision making to guide professionals in helping clients in reaching a conclusion of whether or not disclosure is appropriate. The next section will discuss the application of a model that evolved as a result of this research and utilized Travydas's Integrative Decision-Making Model of Ethic Behavior (1998) as a guide in how to capture the themes and how to integrate them into ethical decision making while advising clients in disclosure. The Travydas Integrative Model emphasizes the reflective attitude in constructing ethical behavior within a specific context. This research on disclosure identified themes that would be

contextually relevant to Travydas's Integrative Model; Stigma and discrimination; asking for accommodations; timing of disclosure; honesty and roles and responsibilities of the rehabilitation professional. The themes can also be compared and contrasted to the CRC Code's six principles of ethic behavior, thus making this research a dynamic project that has relevance in the rehabilitation professional's daily practice.

Disclosure Decision-Making Model

Participants in the current study were a heterogeneous group made up of five rehabilitation professionals (counselors and job developers), three business professionals and four people with disabilities. The five themes when placed into a progressive order formed a decision making model that could be a useful for those involved in assisting people seeking employment with disabilities in making the difficult decision of whether or not to disclose a invisible disability. Figure 5.1 describes the model and how it can be used to guide the process.

Model Format

Stage 1: Interpretations of Clients' Self-Knowledge

In this stage the rehabilitation professional gathers relevant information about the client's understanding of how the disability affects the individual and his or her concept of self (Theme One: Stigma and Discrimination) and how the PWD's life has been impacted by the disability and how they navigated the environment to date. The rehabilitation professional also explores the client's understanding what physical, cognitive, emotional and spiritual needs that have to be addressed. In this stage the

rehabilitation professional would examine the client's view of self-motivation to seek employment; this is critical in understanding commitment to carry through with any "homework" assignments and to actual work to find employment. If the client has a firm understanding of the above attributes; the rehabilitation professional can evaluate the specific employment goal and the job match with his or her client. They can also begin to identify appropriate accommodations (Theme Two: Need of Accommodations). Stage one is where the rehabilitation professional needs to take on a very active role (Theme five: Professionals Responsibilities) utilizing his or her skills to work collectively with the client in the development of an employment plan. The rehabilitation professional using MacDonald-Wilson's (2005) Steps to Prepare for Disclosure of Psychiatric Disabilities to Employers can begin to develop the disclosure plan.

The MacDonald-Wilson Model has practical steps to assist the rehabilitation professional to prepare the client in making the decision to disclose or not. The themes in this current research match the steps in this model very adequately. Thus it has been incorporated into the Disclosure Decision Making Model's first stage as the foundational structure. Macdonald-Wilson's first step includes the feelings about being identified with an invisible disability. Step two discusses past reactions and experiences with disclosure both positive and negative. Step three reviews factors around disclosure that are relevant; including specific skills related to employment sought; accommodations; understanding of the ADA; resources and natural supports for employment and community reintegration; employment history and comfort in self. Step four looks specifically at accommodations needed for the search, interview and job transition. Step five researches

potential employers and analyzes possible reactions to the person and the support that may be needed. Step six weighs the benefits and risks of disclosure (Theme Four: Honesty). Step six begins discussing the development of a plan to disclose. Step seven is how the plan is developed. This stage looks at: the “Who” will disclose; “What” to say, “When” to say it (Theme Three: Timing of Disclosure) and “To Whom” to say it. These steps are designed to prepare a person in whether or not he or she should disclose a disability.

In the *Interpretations of Clients Self Knowledge* stage in the Disclosure Decision Making Model the rehabilitation professional can assess job readiness and determine together with the PWD if he or she is ready to continue in the decision making process. If the PWD is not ready to proceed, Stage One can continue into an extended counseling stage that has further individual or group counseling focus on job readiness training. When this extended stage is completed the PWD can then proceed to second stage.

Stage 2, Decision Making

During the second stage the client and the rehabilitation professional agree to disclose or not to disclose. A disclosure plan is finalized during this phase if all stakeholders (Rehabilitation professional, significant others and the PWD) agree that it is time to actively prepare for work related activities: including job seeking behaviors. Applicant (PWD) will engage in Mock Interviews and practice disclosing to rehabilitation professionals and as recommended in MacDonald-Wilson’s (2005) model to “trusted significant others.” The applicant will be provided with information and sign

off on an “informed consent” to disclose disability. This decision stage shapes the final phases of the model from deciding how to seek out employment with disclosure or not.

If the applicant does not wish to disclose at this point the rehabilitation professional should discuss what potential issues that may arise to lead the employer to suspect a disability (MacDonald-Wilson, 2005) such as gaps in employment, frequent job changes, poor references, medical records or performances issues that may come up after securing employment. If the person does not disclose it is imperative that they are aware of their rights within the ADA. Natural supports behind the scenes should be considered. The decision not to disclose should not be met with bias or the rehabilitation professional’s personal feelings toward the issue. If after discussion the PWD changes his or her mind then they can proceed into stage three. This stage is the action stage of disclosure.

Stage 3: Action-Job Placement

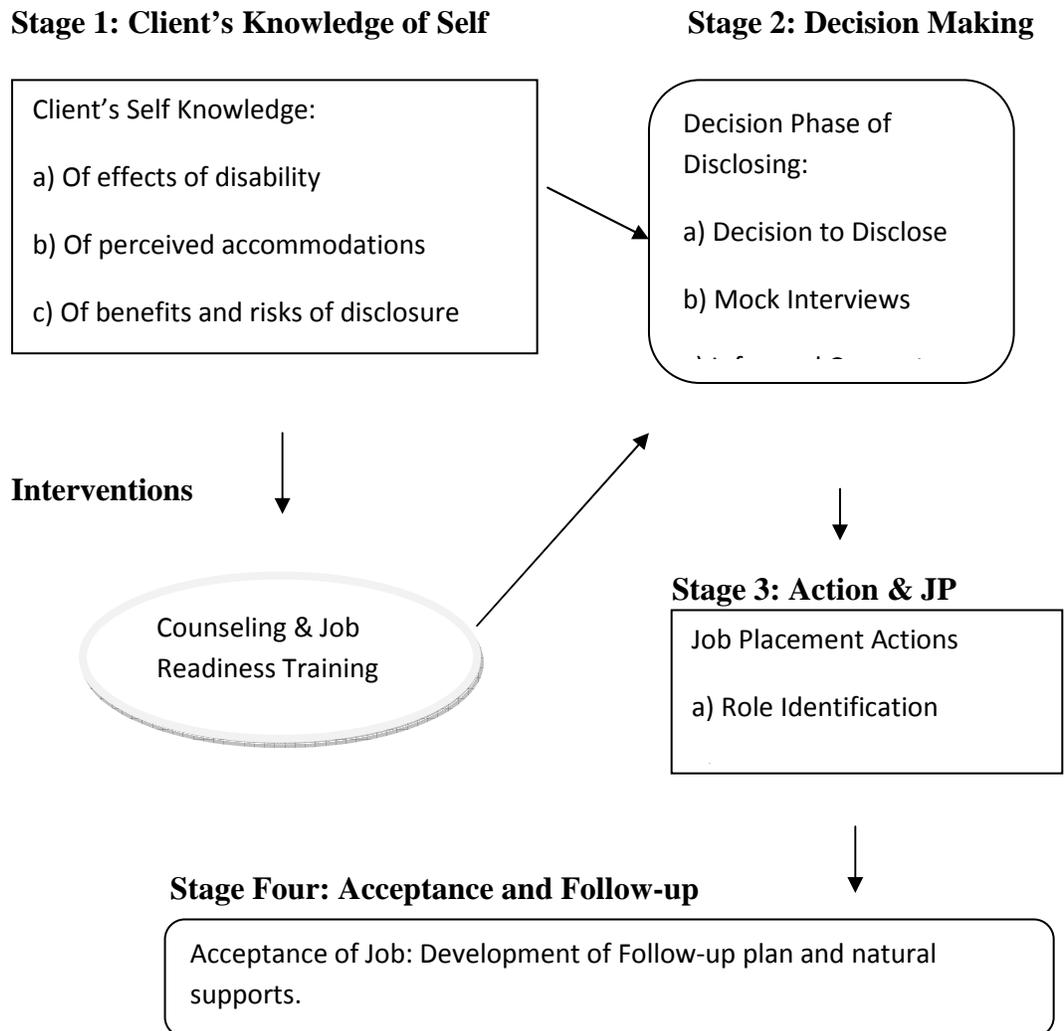
Traditional job placement activities are initiated with this phase. It is important that during stage three the rehabilitation professional and the applicant understand each other’s role in the placement process. If the rehabilitation professional is going to engage in direct placement or not; is the applicant going to take the lead; or if the process is shared. During this phase one of the indicators for a good job match is if the job seeker and employer are in line for employment compatibility. A second indicator of a good job match can be based on the knowledge of employer’s practices in hiring PWD and their willingness to create a diverse workplace. This action stage is based on traditional job placement models and can include Self-Directed Models (Sowers, McLean & Owens,

2002). During this stage the application is completed and the interview is scheduled. The final stage is after the application process and the interview and possible acceptance.

Stage 4: Acceptance and Follow-up

This stage is where the honesty and hard work of the stakeholders pays off with the acceptance of the offer. Disclosure leads the way to discussion of accommodations and other supports that will make the job successful. The stress of the unknown (disability impact on interview) is now put aside for a more open and working relationship (Dalgin & Gilbride, 2003; Dalgin & Bellini, 2008; Hughes & Graham, 1994). An open relationship between the stakeholders encourages the process and hopefully the favorable feelings associated with the honesty of the applicant. Work now focuses on assuring the appropriate supports are established; roles of the rehabilitation professionals are defined for the follow-up phase; and the transition to natural supports are discussed. This is a dynamic and rewarding phase and can act to solidify positive attributes associated with hiring PWD and having rehabilitation professionals completing their responsibility in the rehabilitation/employment process.

Figure 5.1: The Disclosure Decision-Making Model



The Disclosure Decision Making Model (DDMM) was developed from the responses of the participants of the focus group. The model incorporated two models from the research literature; MacDonald-Wilson, (2005) and Tarvydas, (1998). The incorporation of the literature and the participants responses/themes could help make the Disclosure Decision Making Model useful for the rehabilitation professionals in deciding with the

client if disclosure is right for them. This model can act to shape the interaction of the rehabilitation professional with the stakeholders. The concept of disclosing disabilities is a fluid process and has to be evaluated individually, and thus the need to develop a model to help shape this complex decision. The ethics of the disclosure process are as complex as any action involving client's rights and responsibilities. Tarvydas's Integrative Decision-Making Model of Ethical Behavior can provide a useful guidance and its four stages provide an ethical overlay to the Disclosure Decision Making Model. Tarvydas's first stage; interpreting the Situation through Awareness and Fact-Finding, blends nicely with DDMM's first stage of Understanding the client's awareness. Both gather information to make a better informed decision. This is reflected in both models stage two's formulation of ethical decisions and in Tarvydas's third stage; Selecting an Action by Weighing Competing Values. The fourth stage in Tarvydas's Model reflects planning and action which corresponds to the DDMM third stage; Placement and carried over into the fourth stage: Acceptance and Follow-up. The DDMM model that was developed out of the themes identified by the participants and through the research in this study demonstrates the power of action research. It was a study that had active participation and its results can help rehabilitation professionals.

Summary of Results

Results of a follow-up interview via a brief survey indicated that all participants agreed that the focus group format on the discussion of disclosure was a good format to educate on the subject. P7 felt that this research's format was "helpful and should be repeated with similar success." The research goal was to bring stakeholders together and

its unexpected result was the origin of a model that can be used by professionals. Participant 3 felt that through this format it can serve to “educate and education is power.” However, the interaction of the stakeholders was the core of the research and it served to help bring together divergent thinkers and the phenomena that resulted was best summed up by P7 a business person, “...these discussions should leave the halls of academia and enter the real world of business.” He stated that “management, insurers, investors and Boards of Directors should insist these issues be discussed and be made known in advance to the actual interview process.” Participant 10, also a business person, said that this type of research should be repeated elsewhere and it would be “efficacious.”

When having people (stakeholders) together to listen to each other’s perspectives can be helpful in building understanding and empathy towards each other’s point of view. Participant 9 reported gaining “new insights” and “would do her part in promoting change by openly discussing disability and positively heightening awareness and acceptance.” This is a positive reflection of how this type of research can influence change through personal action. Participant 11 felt empowered to bring about change through actively educating the community on the attributes of PWD. The rehabilitation professionals also agreed that this research should be taken to different communities and chambers of commerce.

In this chapter, the five themes that were developed through this research were discussed and a potential intervention model was discussed. The research participants came away with a positive experience and their candor during the focus group was refreshing. The follow-up interview/survey was instrumental in the triangulation of the

information and served as a member check. In chapter six, additional implications for research and practice will be discussed.

CHAPTER 6

Conclusions and Future Directions

The research into whether or not one should disclose an invisible disability during the interview process was explored through Qualitative measures in this study. Researchers working in social science need to be able to “critically appraise” research (Hek & Moule, 2006); and the richness of Qualitative research helps explore the phenomenon at a level that gives a reflective critical voice to the stakeholders. Disclosure of disability is a complex element of humanity and the feelings expressed by stakeholders on the subject makes the research real; “Understanding how individuals make sense of their everyday lives is the stuff of this type of inquiry” (Hatch, 2002 p. 202). Every day rehabilitation professionals are confronted with making decisions about helping people with disabilities find employment and are confronted with the “dilemma” on whether or not to advise their clients to disclose invisible disabilities (Allen & Carlson, 2003). This study provided insight into the dynamics of disclosure from a stakeholder’s perspective.

While the study never got the “definitive answer” on whether or not one should disclose his or her invisible disability; it did give the researcher a better perspective of; a) how to discuss the topic with clients; b) the reasons why to disclose; c) what to disclose; d) when to disclose; and e) how to develop better communication and relationship with employers surrounding the topic. The richness of this study’s information gathered from its participants helped the researcher re-affirm an understanding of the importance of

Qualitative methods in exploring complex and personal nature of this type of inquiry. In exploring the themes that developed in this study it opened the door for further research and action to be engaged in. There of course are limitations to this study which will be discussed in the next section.

Limitations to Study

Traditional limitations of Qualitative research apply to this research. The small sample size was purposefully selected and not randomized, and the results cannot be generalized but can be transferred to similar situations and groups of people that the reader deems representative of the study. Limitations of transferability in this study would lend itself to further duplication and expansion to a larger group of stakeholders and their experiences. The interaction between stakeholders of different backgrounds may have affected the responses and may be accurate only in this context. Since the researcher is also the voice of the participants (Krueger & Casey, 2000) care has to taken to take in the many voices of the stakeholders and accurately represent the range of views. Researcher bias is filtered into any study and care needs to be taken to distance self from their own pre-existing bias.

Traditional limitations of the study as described above were carefully taken into consideration when planning this study. Limitations specific for this study also included the high level of understanding of employment barriers by all participants and a history of advocating for people with disabilities. These factors could have helped the participants in shaping a stronger positive or negative attitude towards the job seeking environment.

The researcher would like to have included PWD seeking employment at the time of study to include their perspective instead of relying on PWD who are successfully employed. That was beyond the resources of the study and could be addressed in future research.

Research Implications

The current study was greeted with enthusiasm by the participants and evoked the suggestion that it be taken to the “board rooms” and decision makers in Human Resource offices. The participants thought the interactive format would also serve the business and community as a whole. While never getting a firm answer in whether or not one should disclose his or her invisible disability the general consensus was that it is an autonomous decision and should be made with informed consent and an understanding on the risks and benefits of disclosure. The positive answer of adopting an “honesty” policy is the ideal but that comes with inherent risks for PWD to face discrimination based on stigma and lack of education on the positive attributes of people with disabilities. Themes identified in this study would lend each to individual inquiry and would shape further research.

As a follow-up to this study there are many ways in which the researcher can expand on each of the individual themes in both qualitative and mixed methodology. Denzin and Lincoln’s (2003) definitive work in Qualitative research outlines various paradigms in which one can expand research to improve the transferability, dependability of the results and confirmability. One such way is to repeat this study until there is saturation of

responses (Krueger & Casey, 2003) within the themes derived from the participant's responses. In addition to repeating the focus group one can use mixed methodology in developing surveys that reflect the main research questions of this study; specifically "whether or not one should disclose invisible disabilities." This question and sub-questions could reflect the themes developed from this study. Selecting from a pool of responders can give the Qualitative information that makes this type of research so rich.

This study involved a heterogeneous focus group; generally these groups are homogeneous in nature however, this study can be conducted with rehabilitation professionals, employers/business-persons, and people with disabilities in independent groups to see if similar themes emerge. This method could be repeated until there is congruency in themes and/or a convergence of ideas. The current study's group format also included the interaction of participants from a variety of background and experiences, it could be expanded to a true Participatory Action Research project where the participants could have continued meeting and developed a definitive training manual for employers and rehabilitation professionals to use in creating a "safe" environment for applicants with disabilities. The current study format worked well in bringing divergent perspectives and people together to discuss a complex subject. The rich information derived from this study can have multiple implications both academically and in policy development.

Policy Implications

Unemployment for people with psychiatric disability ranges from 70% - 90% (Daigan & Gilbride, 2003). This invisible disability represents a portion of the 20% of the population with disabilities (Hunt & Hunt, 2004) that are underemployed or unemployed. The ADA has not seen a decrease in these figures since its passage in 1990. People with disabilities are still trying to find their voices. Negative attitudes towards people with disabilities are still one of the problematic barriers people face when trying to find employment. People with invisible disabilities face this barrier, and they must disclose their disability to gain protection through the ADA; this action can lead to discrimination and isolation (Fesko, 2001). Findings in this study identified the need to create a safer environment for people with disability in order to seek employment. With a safer environment the applicant can seek acceptance of accommodations from potential employers as a leveler to create equal opportunity for themselves. Accommodations can be reasonable expenses for employers (Peck & Kirkbride, 2001) and should not be considered barriers. While policy change is tedious and difficult, the interaction on a macro-level as in this study can go a long way to create a ripple in the business world.

Working groups of stakeholders similar to the study's participants can make changes in the local environments and in doing so start a ripple effect in hiring practices. The participants in this study identified education and communication techniques that can be taught by the rehabilitation professional, that can help change the attitudes and stigma towards people with invisible or visible disabilities. These activities may have little impact on future policy but can help achieve what the ADA was created to accomplish.

Working groups are the core of participatory action research (McTaggart, 1997) and can impact individuals at an individual level and in turn develop into hiring practices at a variety of levels. The Disclosure Decision Making Model (DDMM) can be incorporated into the practices of state department of vocational service units as a training tool. This practice model can help impact employment decisions thus increasing the opportunities for PWD to gain employment and dispelling the stigma and discrimination that they face in seeking employment.

Practice Implications

Stigma and discrimination for people with disability is a concern for the rehabilitation professional and job seekers that have invisible disabilities (Daigin & Gilbride, 2003). The decision to disclose an invisible disability presents a challenge (MacDonald-Wilson, 1997) even though disclosure is needed to secure accommodations (Fesko, 2001). The current study indentified the need for the rehabilitation professional to assume the role as the leader in bringing knowledge of disabilities, job matching and accommodations to the employer and PWD. It is the responsibility of the rehabilitation professional to take a proactive role in the interview process at a variety of negotiated levels and to represent not only the person with the disability but the employer. The leadership role may help mitigate fear in all stakeholders and help in creating an environment that is safe to disclose if accommodations are needed.

Job Matching is critical in the process; P7 stated that he was interested in making the “right” choice the first time in the interview and that an appropriate job match is the key

to this decision. P10 added that the applicant should disclose as rapport building is developed and possess a strong understanding of the job and the specific accommodations they will need to be successful. P8 stated that the disability then becomes less of a factor in the discussion if there is an appropriate job match. All three of the above respondents were businessmen; who saw the job match as the equalizer for employment opportunities. Participants felt that the role of the rehabilitation professional is to ensure that job matching was part of the process.

The Disclosure Decision Making Model (DDMM) is a direct result of the study's research and can help the rehabilitation professional in facilitating communication about the risks involved in seeking employment. The role of facilitator for the rehabilitation professional is important in the first stage of the DDMM (Self Knowledge) as well as throughout the interview process. The rehabilitation professional can help clients make their mind up in whether or not to disclose their invisible disability. If the role of the rehabilitation professional is a facilitator, this study placed emphasis on what roles they should assume and the DDMM helps in structuring this role, in short it is the rehabilitation professional's job description.

The results of this study provide the rehabilitation professional knowledge of the five themes that the participants identified as areas for further research and application. It is all of the community of helpers' responsibility to ensure that we teach understanding of disability and self-advocacy and efficacy. It is the responsibility of the client to understand his or her own disability and how it fits the job they seek, if the applicant does not understand how their disability and the job fits it will be imperative that the

rehabilitation professional facilitates this knowledge. The employer can provide specifics and accommodations only if they are aware of the need. Rehabilitation professionals need to understand the complexity and responsibility to advocate for change and through education this can be achieved. This study identified that timing of disclosure is important and that it should be considered if accommodations are needed. The responsibility to make this autonomous decision lies ultimately with the applicant, it is the rehabilitation professional's responsibility to lay out all the options and risks and rewards that are associated with the decision. Appropriate job development and placement increases the positive attitudes of PWD, by focusing on what they can do and not on limitations. Thus the ultimate form of self-advocacy for clients is success, in this case in securing employment.

The results of this study shows what can happen when you bring all stakeholders together to explore different contexts in the employment process. It was successful in opening up communication between stakeholders and helped each find common ground in their view of disclosure. The themes within the group helped shape practical practice guidelines. In a safe environment the study brought out each stakeholder's understanding of disclosure in the interview process and related fears and concerns. This study and its dynamic exchange can be repeated in variety of settings. It will open up participants to each other's viewpoints on disclosure; that in turn can be made into practical applications for the rehabilitation professional and employers. This study does not have to sit "on the shelves of academia" but can serve rehabilitation professionals in the field.

Conclusion

The complexity of disclosure was the cornerstone of this qualitative study. The unconventional use of a heterogeneous focus group provided a dynamic exchange between participants and increased their understanding of disclosure. Each participant brought unique experiences and perspective to the study. In the end five themes were identified and these led to practical applications for the rehabilitation professionals to employ in practice. While the definitive answer on disclosure was elusive, the study gave the researcher a clearer understanding of the complexity and the individuality of the decision whether or not to disclose an invisible disability. The study answered many questions on disclosure; though generalization was limited because of a small sample size it can be useful in expanding our understanding of the topic.

The results of this study indicated that disclosure is appropriate when disability may impact the safety of self or others and is critical when the applicant is seeking accommodations for a specific job. The study when viewed through a moral prism identified disclosure as a foundation for honesty and relationship building between the applicant and the employer. While the study did not give a universal and definitive answer on whether or not a person should disclose a hidden disability it did add to the understanding that if one needs to disclose the timing of disclosure can be critical; the participants agreed that it should be done after rapport is established between parties at the earliest, and definitely after the job is offered. The study did clarify the role of the rehabilitation professional as an educator and facilitator; expert on accommodations and job matching; and disability management. It is in this role that the rehabilitation

professional becomes a co-facilitator of change along with the other stakeholders. What was a nice by-product of the study was the development of a model (DDMM) that can help structure the decision to disclose. The DDMM is a product of the study's research and the themes indicated by the participants. While we can't eliminate stigma and prejudice we can mitigate their affects.

The phenomena of disclosure of invisible disabilities and its effect on people will continue to be studied empirically as long as there is prejudice and negative attitudes towards PWD in the interview process. The rehabilitation professionals can join the stakeholders in changing the environment through education and advocacy. As far as how disclosure affects individuals, it is clear from this study that it creates anxiety and fear in all parties seeking an honest and open work environment. If disclosure is not handled professionally and appropriately it creates a vicious cycle for the job applicant. This cycle of the fear and stress of being outed is real and can lead to poor performance on the job; and potentially termination. It then plants the seed in the employer's mind of negative attitudes towards PWD. I remember one time doing job development an employer told me. "I hired a PWD once and they didn't work out," I respectfully asked did you ever have to fire a tall person. His answer was "of course", I said I see many tall people working here. When society is safe from prejudice and stigma we will see change, but change takes courage and take means standing up to the challenges that people with disability face on a day to day basis in seeking employment. When the rehabilitation professional has all their information lined up and the job is a good match it is just another interview hurdle to overcome with proactive solutions. The key is to adopt the

understanding that was agreed to by all participants of the study; a disability does not define the person; just the accommodations needed.

As far as disclosure participant 11 stated so forcefully, “it is not if it (disability) is going to come out but when.” It is how we deal with disclosing at this personal level that will determine success in changing the paradigm or perpetuation of the current conditions that people with disability face when seeking employment. The participants recognized that people would rather be honest with each other in the interview process. It is up to the rehabilitation professionals and their clients to advocate for the creation of a “safe” work environment and thus creating positive change in our expanding and diverse community.

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Appendix A

Focus Group Interview: Primary and Secondary Questions

Primary Questions	Secondary questions
1. What is the biggest challenge a person with a disability (PWD) faces when trying to secure employment?	Do you feel that employers discriminate? What % of time?
2. Should a person with an invisible disability disclose their disability during the interview process?	
3. If a person chooses to disclose their disability; at what point do you feel they should?	What then is the best way to disclose? Pre-interview; during interview or after the job has been offered.
4. What advantages do you think a person would have if they disclose their disability? Disadvantages?	
5. What advice would you give to a person with an invisible disability if they were seeking employment?	If a person has a disability what should their focus be on when getting ready for an interview?
6. How can we make it safe for a person with an invisible disability to disclose their disability?	
7. What other thoughts do you have in regards to helping people with invisible disabilities find employment?	
<i>Questionnaire: for all participants.</i>	

Appendix B

Berg's Ten Commandments of Interviewing (2004, p. 110-111)

Ten Commandments	Descriptions
Never begin an interview cold.	Spend some time creating small talk w/participants.
Remember your purpose.	Keep subject on track and remember you are there for information-have your questions available.
Present a natural front	Even though your questions are memorized you should act naturally and act as if these questions just popped into your head.
Demonstrate aware hearing	Offer nonverbal responses.
Think about appearance	Dress appropriately.
Interview in a comfortable place	Make sure location is comfortable for the participants.
Don't be satisfied w/ monosyllabic answers	Ask probing questions; expand on yes-and no answers.
Be respectful	Make sure your participants understand their importance.
Practice, practice	Develop your own style of interviewing and practice.
Be cordial & appreciative	Reinforce answers and remember to thank your participants.

Appendix C

Follow-up Questions: For disclosure of disability during the interview.

Thanks again for your help in my research... Today I will be following up with you and if you can please answer the following questions.

1. Did participation in the focus group influence or change your mind in any way about disclosure of disability?
2. If you feel disclosure of disability is appropriate; at what point during the interview process would you feel a person should disclose?
3. Was the format of having people (stakeholders) together to listen to each other's perspective helpful? And would you recommend this type of action research in other locations to raise awareness for people with disability and employment issues...

