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# An Analysis of Employment Barriers Facing Blind People

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I would like to thank everyone in the McCormack Graduate School for all their continued support throughout my time as a student in the MSPA program. The constant positive influence and can-do attitude everyone displayed made my experience positive. Everyone in his or her own way throughout my time at the university has left me filled with special memories and pride for this program and the greater University. It was here where I learned that educators and researchers exist who believe in defying the status quo when educating all individuals, regardless of their needs. I remember one instance of many that gave me confidence to pursue any goal I had in mind. For example, during a meeting, someone with strong conviction told me that I could pursue any goal I had. Yet, this individual later stated their general inexperience with disabled people. I was seen as an individual with skills and potential, not as another disabled person. In closing, both the McCormack school and the greater University will continue to excel teaching a diverse population. My gratitude cannot be expressed solely in this paragraph because a paragraph is simply too short. My general beliefs about what is possible grew here and I attribute this to the seamlessness taken by this organization as it continues to serve as a successful model on all levels.

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Abstract:

Blind people, the target population being analyzed, possibly face higher rates of unemployment or underemployment compared to others with disabilities.  They face higher poverty rates than any other minority group or group of people with disabilities. Typically, various statistics cite that 70% of working-aged blind people are not in the workforce.  Federal acts have been implemented to increase employment outcomes in an attempt to improve employment outcomes for all with disabilities.  The ADA and ADAAA been implemented to mitigate and/or eliminate barriers.  This study used qualitative research to analyze data from participants to investigate whether or not they were employed and the types of barriers they faced while they looked for employment.  The interviews resulted in the following findings.

The literature and findings reveal continued negative trends in employment rates amongst blind people. This is happening regardless of the two federal acts for the disabled and the Department of Vocational Rehabilitation's direct involvement with the blind.  Findings show that the Massachusetts Commission for the Blind is taking steps to work closely with individuals by having programs not found in other rehabilitation agencies across the nation.  Finally, blanket rules cannot fit everyone's needs.  Unfortunately, any piece of legislation or department cannot satisfy everyone's diverse needs.  Recommendations were made for other departments of vocational rehabilitation across the nation to look towards the Massachusetts Commission to model their successful programs.

Introduction:

On July 26, 1990, President George H. W. Bush signed the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) (U.S. Dept. of Justice, 2008).  The origin of this act dates back to the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 (Rehabilitation, 2014). The Rehabilitation Act allowed for deinstitutionalizing of disabled individuals. The goal was to integrate disabled individuals from hospitals and government facilities to community-based facilities such as specialized housing programs. Broader than any disability act, Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act made it illegal for the federal government, federal contractors, and any entity receiving federal financial assistance to discriminate on the basis of disability (U.S. Dept. of Justice, 2008).  So, what is the purpose of the ADA if the rehabilitation act had a clause to remove discrimination?

The ADA was designed to remove barriers set forth in the workplace (U.S. Dept. of Justice, 2008).  An example of a workplace barrier can include physical conditions in the work environment.  As a result, the ADA allowed for more open dialogue between employees and employers.  This is known as reasonable accommodation.  Reasonable accommodation will be revisited after discussing the creators of this act. Many of the ADA's creators were disabled people themselves (U.S. Dept. of Justice, 2008).

A diverse population of disabled people assisted with the creation of the act.  Its intended goal(s) of integrated accessibility allowed for new regulations to take effect. Many of these regulations involved the constructing of structures.  Although the act was passed in 1990, regulations on construction took place two years later in 1992 (U.S. Dept. of Justice, 2008). Access to programs and services are not restricted for physical attributes (U.S. Dept. of Justice, 2008).  Focusing on service delivery is crucial since accessibility is sometimes overlooked to the aesthetics of ramps, curb-cuts, etc.  This discussion cannot continue without a concise explanation about the clear definition of disability.

In general, a disability is defined as an impairment, both physical and mental in nature. Additionally, that impairment must inhibit and limit one or more major life functions or activities (U.S. Dept. of Justice, 2008). Three examples of limiting functions are, seeing, hearing, and thinking. This is important since everyone assumed to be disabled is not automatically covered under the ADA. There is a distinct difference between impairment and a disability (U.S. Dept. of Justice, 2008).

Stated above, the ADA covers people who are disabled or who are perceived disabled with a condition determined to limit one or more life activities. Additionally, the impairment cannot be considered a disability unless the impairment is limiting a major life activity (U.S. Dept. of Justice, 2008). A good example can consist of someone who is recovering from an addiction disorder. If the impairment(s) from treatment is not disrupting life activities such as seeing, hearing, and/or thinking, the impairment cannot be considered disabling. One important caveat exists regarding disability and major functioning. Impairment can be substantial when a person is determined to be unable to perform major life activities as a traditional person. The ADA's protection, a theme of this research, is extended to people with long-term conditions. Conditions must be considered serious. Short-term conditions are not covered. Mitigating measures for short-term conditions can disrupt major life activities, qualifying someone to be considered disabled. So, what does this mean for persons with disabilities in the workforce?

It means that they are entitled to reasonable accommodation(s) on the job. Note, when the word "entitlement" is used personal opinion(s) is not being interjected. A reasonable accommodation consists of a working relationship between employers and employees. The U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) publishes an in-depth detailed analysis about reasonable accommodations. This analysis draws on everything from the most basic

definitions to in-depth examples of appropriate and inappropriate situations where individuals can request accommodations in the workplace.  The definition of a reasonable accommodation is as follows.

According to the EEOC, a reasonable accommodation is "any change in the work environment or in the way things are customarily done that enables an individual with a disability to enjoy equal employment opportunities"(3). There are three categories of "reasonable accommodations":

"(i) modifications or adjustments to a job application process that enable a qualified applicant with a disability to be considered for the position such qualified applicant desires; or (ii) modifications or adjustments to the work environment, or to the manner or circumstances under which the position held or desired is customarily performed, that enable a qualified individual with a disability to perform the essential functions of that position; or (iii) Modifications or adjustments that enable a covered entity's employee with a disability to enjoy equal benefits and privileges of employment as are enjoyed by its other similarly situated employees without disabilities"(4) (EEOC).  These previsions are implemented assuming that the accommodation(s) do not incur a burden on the company. This burden is known as an undue hardship.  The topic of an undue hardship will be revisited in order to discuss the purpose for reasonable accommodation(s).  Reasonable accommodations are put in place to remove workplace barriers. Some examples follow below.

Workplace barriers can be physical or structural in nature. Physical ones can consist of complex office floor plans or an inaccessible entrance with steps to an office building, factory, etc (EEOC).  Requesting accommodations to these and other accessibility problems, often brings

up opportunities for companies to allow or deny such requests based on undue hardship concerns.

Undue hardship is measured with several parameters. Generally, "[a]n employer does not have to provide a reasonable accommodation that would cause an 'undue hardship' to the employer. Generalized conclusions will not suffice to support a claim of undue hardship" (EEOC). Additionally, undue hardship can be considered an open-ended issue. This is because individualized reasonable accommodations vary from person to person. For example, "[c]ertain individuals require only one reasonable accommodation, while others may need more than one. Still others may need one reasonable accommodation for a period of time, and then at a later date, require another type of reasonable accommodation" (EEOC),. Two pungent examples are below.

Two computer users on the job are legally blind. As a result, they need special adaptations to use the computer. One person can use the standardized accessibility programs found in the computer's operating system. In this case, the employee may or may not need to inform their supervisor of this. Assuming they inform the supervisor, the accommodation does not require anything additional to be purchased. This accommodation can be more streamlined to have someone check the settings on the machine after system-wide changes or software imaging takes place. The second individual is in a different situation.

This individual cannot use the default programs offered on the system. They need software with technology to use the computer effectively. For a small company, the cost of the accessible software can appear as an undue hardship. Before dismissing the accommodation request as an undue hardship, it is advised that the employee and employer discuss viable options for obtaining the software.

In some instances, state vocational rehabilitation programs for the blind will assist the employer to accommodate the workplace.  This includes the purchasing of assistive technology. Additionally, the request for a reasonable accommodation is something that can be asked prior to the start of work, or later, if changes with the person's disability occur (EEOC).

History of the Department of Vocational Rehabilitation:

Featherston discusses in detail the history of the Department of Vocational Rehabilitation. The author's analysis will also be discussed later in the literature review. The department has an extensive history, spanning the era of the First World War. Its original design/implementation was put in practice to assist newly disabled veterans who were losing their vision. Its original mission was to be a department that offered human services while these individuals adapted and became acquainted back in the community with their new disability.

History of Work Issues Facing the Blind, Including the Purpose for this Research:

For decades, people with various visual disabilities, including blindness, faced barriers when obtaining and securing employment. As a result, they often ended up living off the social security rolls from the government. The purpose of this research is to explore and analyze the stagnant change in the employment statistics. Additionally, the correlation of these results with the passage of legislation such as the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and, the Americans with Disabilities Act Amendments Act (ADAAA) will be analyzed.

The Department of Vocational Rehabilitation was designed to assist blind people to find employment. This is the Federal agency responsible for assisting and rehabilitating the disabled including the blind to reenter the workforce. Currently and since its inception, it has been funded under the U.S. Department of Education. This knowledge provides a basis to analyze the outcomes from vocational rehabilitation staff to find gainful employment for blind individuals.

Goals/Outcomes of this Research, Including Research Question:

Once an analysis between these organizations and stakeholders is discussed, with added vignettes from research participants, suitable recommendations will be analyzed. The goal is to tease out alternatives to change the employment statistics while reducing employment barriers. This will be in the form of recommendations from findings by an expert on successful programs from the Massachusetts Commission for the Blind (MCB).

Primary Research Question Pertaining to this Study:

The primary research question for this study was: Have employment barriers been affected by the policies and agencies designed to reduce barriers and improve employment outcomes for people who are blind?  Five key themes related to this were:

1.      The Department of Vocational Rehabilitation(s) roll in assisting this population.

2.      The various types of employment obtained and secured with and without assistance from the Department of Vocational Rehabilitation.

3.      The possible influence(s) of the ADA or ADAAA on the Department of Vocational Rehabilitation.

4.      The reasonable Accommodation process, its effects on employers and employees.

5.      The influence (both positive and negative) of the ADA and ADAAA on employers and potential employees.

Review of literature

Bowman and others open the discussion with an analysis on what is regarded to be considered a disability. A disability is categorized to be "a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities, a record of such an impairment, or being regarded as having such an impairment" (Bowman, L. 2011 NP). As a result, the ADA is broken up in to various sections. These sections are referenced as titles. For example, Titles 1 and 2 coincide with policies concerning employment and education (Bowman, 2011). The titles are guidelines for service providers and people with disabilities. Bowman and other scholars show that much of the information found in the literature is subjective and vague.

For example, Bowman discusses how other sections such as Title 3 protect against discrimination in other public sectors. However, the discrimination protection is limited. For example, medical conditions such as diabetes and cancer are not counted as disabilities under the ADA. Some people may not be entitled to certain disability accommodations that would fall under the general guidelines of the ADA (Bowman, 2011). As a result, some people are placed in a conundrum.

More people have conditions requiring them to receive extra assistance. In other words, Bowman refers to this as a larger pool of individuals: "The pool of individuals considered disabled is now larger" (Bowman, L. 2011). This causes a burden on the states and federal government. As a result, Bowman discusses new legislation called the Americans for Disability Amendments Act (ADAAA) which was passed in 2008. This act had several goals.

First, the ADAAA wanted to provide opportunities to those shut out from the ADA's rules. As Bowman and others discussed, entities had jurisdiction over key decisions. The ADAAA prevented these gate-keepers from making preemptive decisions. Many of these prior

decisions were decided on by courts like the Supreme Court. As a result, many decisions were based on mitigating and corrective treatments. Prior to the ADAAA, places like schools used to have jurisdiction when students were taking medication as a way to control disabilities. Once the ADAAA was implemented, schools were no longer able to consider effects from medical treatment for conditions such as ADD/ADHD when determining student's qualifications as a disabled person needing accommodations (Bowman 2011). This is one example of newer problems resulting from the ADAAA.

The ADAAA changed the interpretation surrounding the definition behind a major life activity. "Prior to the revision, the ADA was silent on what constituted a 'major life activity'" (Bowman, L. 2011 NP). Generally, the courts kept itemized lists of the activities that constituted major life activities. Some basic examples of major life activities prior to the ADAAA were walking, seeing, hearing, and breathing (Bowman 2011). So, these new changes under the ADAAA were welcomed. As Bowman writes,

> For disability advocates, the change that the ADAAA has brought to the employment and educational environment was long overdue. The original Act was passed with an eye toward granting access to employment opportunities for those with disabilities. It was rooted in equity, fairness, and social justice. However, somehow the judiciary turned away from the original intent of the Act and allowed it to be narrowly construed. Effectively, the Act became oppressive, not liberating. The ADAAA clarifies the intent of Congress and makes it clear that the Act is now to be broadly read. (Bowman, L. 2011 NP).

Bowman's article allows for the following theory to be analyzed.

Individuals such as Bowman stated that the original act was oppressive. Conversely the ADA's strict vague language may have brought out the clustering effect. The clustering effect in this case, would argue that everyone who is disabled is the same under the ADA. However, the ADAAA allows for wide-spread abuse of the amended act. As a result, the ADAAA may have caused problems for everyone. Stephen L. Percy discusses important concerns throughout his research on this topic.

In "Challenges and Dilemmas in Implementing the ADA," Percy discusses the positive and negative aspects behind the act. As a result, prior to the ADAAA, little to no progress behind the acts policies occurred. The progress being referenced involves hearings or progress briefings (Percy, 2001).

Employment outcomes for people with disabilities, including the blind, vary in nature. Various scholarly analyses surrounding the Department of Vocational Rehabilitation, the ADA, the ADAAA, show a correlation between policies and employment outcomes for the blind. Capella-McDonnall discusses how further issues arise especially when employment outcomes with the RSA911 database is used to document employment outcomes.

The Department of Vocational Rehabilitation uses a database to track client's progress. It is the RSA 911 database. The department has a primary goal. The goal of the department is to assist those with disabilities, including the blind to obtain and secure gainful employment (Capella-McDonnall, 2005). Gainful employment is achieved when someone who is blind is competitively working in the workforce. Various scholars including Capella-McDonnall argue that the department has equal strengths and flaws while achieving its goals for the population it serves (Capella-McDonnall, 2005). Some limitations of this study existed since its primary focus was to analyze employer attitudes of people participating and working with the

Department of Vocational Rehabilitation. The authors recognize the high importance in employment as both a cultural norm and boost to a person's moral. Other analysis from the study included the following information.

Both negative attitudes from employers about people with disabilities and/or rehab staff and other convoluted systems contribute to the systemic high levels of unemployment. An important reference is cited in the literature. This is the National Research Training Center on Blindness (NRTC) at Mississippi State University. Many studies are undergoing at this facility including a current one on mentoring of blind individuals who are working and those seeking employment. Finally, the authors discuss how this concept of employment barriers is nothing new. In fact, Gilbride & Sensrud, 1999), is referenced from their literature on Demand Side Employment. Note, Capella-McDonnall will be revisited later when predictors of competitive employment for blind and visually impaired consumers of vocational rehabilitation services is discussed.

Demand-side job development or Employment is simply a model. The model is designed for improving services and relationships between rehabilitation staff and consumers (Gilbride, 2000). The benefit of the analysis is that it offers services to employers to enhance opportunities and accessibility to blind employees. Additionally, incentives are offered for employers to sustain and create employment opportunities for people with disabilities. The approach referenced is to minimize attitudes away from a sales approach, to a consulting approach. The idea is to have professionals providing counseling and consulting assistance to both groups. This would allow for an intermediary in the process. Labor market information is shared between employers and rehab staff (Gilbride, 2000). Here is how the authors assert that this approach is different.

This approach is different from traditional placement strategies. It increases diversity to employers, as a systems approach to the labor market area (Gilbride, 2000). One of the other facets of the model is to help implement better training for employers. The training encourages more diversity training and awareness of worker's needs. Some tables provided the following.

The demand-side model, when used correctly showed an increase in productivity amongst disabled members of the workforce. Additionally, the model allowed for more open-lines of communication between stakeholders (Gilbride, 2000). Human sections training allows for better retaining and an open atmosphere. Returning to Capella-McDonnall, the review will shift towards the discussion of predictors of competitive employment for blind and visually impaired consumers of vocational rehabilitation services.

Capella-McDonnall reference a study by Knowles from 1969. The study being referenced discussed a sampling of over 400 people in California. The goal was to understand the correlation between employment goals and outcomes amongst a range of blind consumers of vocational rehabilitation. The individual's sampled had varying degrees of vision-loss. Some were congenitally blind, and others were adventitiously blind. A major aspect of the study was to analyze results based on people's time with the Department of Vocational Rehabilitation. Different conditions caused people's entrance times in the study to differ from when they started receiving services. This was not the only study being discussed.

Kirchner, Peterson, and others referenced in the literature discussed the importance of several studies from the 1980's. The studies stressed that both outcomes of employment and successful cases with vocational rehabilitation varied depending on the client's occupation, industry, and previous work experience. Additionally, results varied in situations when a person

may have chosen to become or remain a homemaker. This is because a homemaker is considered a profession even in the RSA 911 tracking system.

Using the multi-variety data gathered, Knowles (1969) determined that "the five variables that had the most important relationship to the success of vocational rehabilitation services were good orientation and mobility skills, a high level of vocational classification prior to rehabilitation, a younger age at the onset of visual impairment, a greater number of years of visual impairment, and a younger age at the start of rehabilitation" (Knowles quoted in Capella-McDonnall, 2005, pg. 307). This assertion leads scholars to attribute higher employment rates to be perceived as possible when all other skills are properly attained by the blind student. The Journal of Visual Impairment discusses some pertinent information on these issues in an 2013 article called "Predictors of Competitive Employment for VR Consumers with Blindness or Visual impairments" by Darensbourg, 2013.

The Bureau of Labor Statistics is cited, discussing how four-million blind or visually impaired people are classified as working-aged. A staggering 1.9-million estimated population is not working or not looking for work on average. An estimated two-million of the four-million discussed above fall in the age range of 16-69 (Darensbourg, 2013). Other than age, sex, and racial factors, degrees of disability and vision-loss played a role in outcomes of employment or unemployment concerns facing blind people.

The authors also discuss barriers to employment and how they have been mitigated over time. Various barriers to employment include transportation concerns and employer attitudes (Darensbourg, 2013). Although these barriers were referenced, solutions to these problems were also referenced in the literature. Regardless of the barriers discussed, the following analysis was completed to analyze the roll of The Department of Vocational Rehabilitation.

Data logistic regression analysis was used, to see how the outcomes of provided services were affected (Darensbourg, 2013). The goal was to counteract a dichotomous outcome. It was later discovered in the research that the barriers and trends analyzed, were statistically significant to the hypothesis of the research (Darensbourg, 2013). The hypothesis of the research was that barriers ranged for those seeking employment that were blind on various levels (Darensbourg, 2013). Regardless of disability accommodations and workplace concerns, the notion of social and human capital in the workforce as it pertains to blind people was discussed by Dulude as another contrabuting factor to successful employment outcomes.

It is understood that blindness in the workforce can be reduced to a mere characteristic. However, this can only be achieved when a blind person is given proper training and tools to work affectively. Human capital is developed for individual(s), through training, education, etc. Social capital is something that develops over time. It develops through human interactions and interrelationships (Dulude, 2012). It would appear that both of these aspects need to work together to form consistent cohesive partnerships. Receiving a degree was considered to be a human capital variable, whereas a cohesive relationship between councilors with the Department of Vocational Rehabilitation and consumers are social capital variables (Dulude, 2012). The author's reference the following:

Healthy social and human capital work together. They assist in the reduction of unemployment. Additionally, they promote healthy relationships, providing people with a better self-image. These combined attributes reduce numbers on welfare rolls and self-induced behaviors (Dulude, 2012). Social and human capital, discussed in the literature, is a theory-based approach. Generally, these aspects result in healthy relationships with better outcomes for

individual clients in the RSA911 database.   The conversation on social capital continues with a discussion from a 2005 article by Pots.

In this article, the discussion reverts to a survey on the high unemployment rates amongst people with disabilities.  In general, many of the high rates are attributed to numerous barriers facing people with all types of disabilities.

One important factor is the weakening social capital and use of social networks. The decay of these is due to ignorance of programs and the rights and responsibilities of clients and vocational rehabilitation staff (Potts, 2005).  Scholars place high importance for vocational rehabilitation counselors to consider social capital as part of their planning for clients. This is known as a social capital strategy (Potts, 2005).  The authors also discuss a topic called Social Capital strategies.

The authors cite a study by Harris from 2004. The study references the high unemployment and underemployment rates facing the blind compared to others with disabilities. The study referenced how the disproportion(s) in the employment gaps is a corollary of an improper matching system for employers and employees. The authors write that, when done correctly, employers and employees are matched together via several methods to ensure that the job(s) sought after are a good fit (Potts, 2005).  The authors both state that the lack of social capital, and other variables already discussed, directly attribute to the various problems facing blind people in the workforce.  It appears that the social capital problem caused the continuous communication breakdowns between stakeholders (Potts, 2005).

The reference behind the term stakeholder(s) refers to the blind population, and to the staff of the Department of Vocational Rehabilitation (VR).  The social capital problem discussed both earlier and now, references the problems of the blind not having proper social networks

(Potts, 2005). The improper social networks may appear as minor attributes. However, improper social capital in this case involves the disconnection that occurs between blind clients and staff working in the Department of Vocational Rehabilitation. Additionally, the disconnect became further apparent when some clients were not obtaining the full benefits of the rehab program. Thus far, it is not known whether this has to do with rehab staff being unclear of their client's potential. The authors touch on an important aspect that probably plays an important role in this situation. This is known as cultural capital (Potts, 2005).

Cultural capital refers to one's ability to properly carry oneself in the workplace. This happens regardless, to individual beliefs, background, etc. Individuals with sound cultural capital are adaptable in many situations (Potts, 2005). They are able to dress the part of a perfect employer and talk the proper company jargon (Potts, 2005). Conversely, the blind population is believed to be lacking severely the opportunity to possess strong social, human, and cultural capital. Finally, one important aspect behind the term 'disability' is referenced here in this article.

The term 'disability' references someone having less than a perfect ability, or lacking other skills. Yet, the job of someone in the workforce is to have adequate human capital (Potts, 2005). The adequate human capital allows for strong social relationships. Most importantly, it provides the employee the ability to have and use skills perfectly to complete tasks on the job. The idea is that, with scientific research, our culture validates the assertion that strong capital on all levels assists people to work affectively in the community, since skill determines who is best qualified for a position (Potts, 2005).

People with disabilities are often assumed to have low capital on all levels including human and social. As a result, they are assumed to not have proper skills to satisfactorily hold a

steady job (Potts, 2005). This direct assumption sets the bar for the blind to automatically be disqualified for employment. An added belief is that the blind simply possess poor skills equally in all areas. Earlier, the broader disability community was discussed. This discussion continues integrating another author's research concerning people with blindness and additional disabilities.

The literature discusses how the VR community is overlooking and ignoring those with multiple disabilities. Additionally, those with psychiatric and other forms of mental illness are severely overlooked in comparison to those with other physical or cognitive disabilities (Paugh, 2003). The literature also states that those with D2 and/or Comorbid disabilities are also overlooked. Additionally, the research asserts that large unemployment numbers are also attributed to the following. There are high numbers of individuals draining resources. This has happened in communities where the disabilities originate from life-style choices inducing the disability (Paugh, 2003). Lifestyle choices are usually considered to consist of ailments from addiction problems. Until recently, the Department of Vocational Rehabilitation was not familiar with those who had other disabilities unless they were deaf or blind (Paugh, 2003).

This new information sheds light on a bigger problem. The bigger problem is that, although the blind and others have been getting services previously, looming questions exist concerning the methods used for educating rehab staff and employers (Paugh, 2003). The authors assert that educational opportunities for employers about contributions of the disabled population in the workforce have been minimal. These authors and others agree that this problem of high unemployment and a lackluster approach to educate employers is not isolated (Paugh, 2003). The fundamental problem of being ill-equipped to handle this issue results in

many suffering quietly while retreating to live off the system.  An additional article from Hanley-Maxwell discusses the following.

Employment services are important especially when they assist those in overlooked areas. An overlooked area is the transitional phase (Hanley-Maxwell, 1990).  The term 'supported' or 'supportive employment' can be confusing or misleading.  This is because people with disabilities are either looking for employment or trying to obtain workplace accommodations. An assessment exists, but it is limited.  The assessment has three parts.

The first part attempts to investigate an individual's needs. The second part is an analysis of job readiness skills.  The third section tests supports, which could be tools used on the job (Hanley-Maxwell, 1990).  The test does not fully analyze the success of individuals utilizing support services.

Support services are broadly issued.  As a result, people who utilize services are frequently given tools they do not know how to use (Hanley-Maxwell, 1990).  Support services are limited to populations needing basic skills. For example, an individual who is blind may receive support for obtaining a factory job.  Whereas someone with some education may receive support to go to school. That individual who went to school may not obtain assistance finding employment that fits their education and/or expertise (Hanley-Maxwell, 1990).  Supported Employment is considered to be a barrier since it is not a solution for everyone who receives it.

Services are time-sensitive.  They last for weeks or months at a time (Hanley-Maxwell, 1990). Additionally, services are provided with little follow-up or intervention.  As a result, extra employment barriers plague individuals with visual impairments.   The authors from Mississippi State University cite several studies discussing barriers with the requesting of accommodations.

To start, accommodation requests are pragmatic. The fulfillment of accommodations are skirted legally since companies often find crafty ways around fulfilling the employee's needs (Frank, 2005). Since crafty methods are used to skirt the needs of fulfilling accommodations, disabled individuals including the blind face barriers when filing disability discrimination claims. Most claims end up being lost in the courts if they even make it there.

Many who file disability discrimination cases later find that their cases are deemed invalid. This is done when they are often automatically thrown-out of the court system (Frank, 2005). Many who file simply have their voices/case listened to with little progress. In fact, companies face little recourse for being noncompliant. Most complainants usually receive a letter regarding their complaint, with little to no compensatory damages. Additionally, Hearings or progress briefings would not help local municipalities. Percy discusses below how this would affect costs.

Percy discusses how accommodations generally incur extra costs. As a result, municipalities claim to be unable to handle sudden cost shifts. The costs of making and meeting accommodations do not have an effect on federal organizations like the EEOC. For example, between fiscal years 1992-1998, 108,939 charges of discrimination were filed with the EEOC (Percy, 2001). Often, these costs are not inflicted on the potential plaintiff, rather on the the EEOC and company being complained about. During this period, less than 3% of complaints filed favored the disabled person (Percy, 2001). Finally, complaints filed rose to an all-time high of 19,1798 between fiscal years, 1995-1999/2000. (Percy, 2001). In an article titled "Implications of the ADA", the author(s) discuss the following which will lead the discussion to analyze both the ADA and ADAAA.

Research has shown flaws by the widening of the classification of disability. Individuals are able to litigate when they are in precarious situations concerning employment. The burden(s) imposed on small and large companies are not felt by the plaintive. In this article, the author(s), begin the discussion on a legal case concerning a medical resident. This resident was not able to articulate information properly. As a result, they were dispersing advice and medication incorrectly (Regenbogen, 2012). The resident was blaming poor accommodations concerning a neurological disability. In this case, the resident lost their claim. Later evidence revealed the resident only asked for accommodations once they were disciplined. There is some literature that answers the question(s) surrounding new protection resulting from the ADAAA.

Coverage under the ADA has been narrowed since its passing in 1990 (Bradbury, 2013). Additionally, the ADAAA of 2008 was applauded for restoring its original intent. This allowed for a broadening of coverage for people with disabilities. The argument here is over an adjustment to the original ADA. A key problem in the literature is that many of the amendments may promise new progressive changes. Yet those changes are restoring the delivery of the same standards and services (Bradbury, 2013). An opposing view, of a narrowing affect from the ADAAA, can be seen in an article from the National Council on Disability.

The National council on Disability published an article in 2003 furthering the discussion of the Americans with Disabilities Amendments Act (ADAAA). The Roll of Mitigating Measures in the Narrowing of the ADAAA's Coverage discusses how, the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC), specifies exactly, the protocol(s), between a reasonable accommodation in the workplace and, the mandated guide lines for employers. These previsions occur regardless of any arrangement between the employer and employee (Burgdorf, 2003). The guidelines strictly state that they are in place to differentiate between reasonable

accommodations in the workplace, from accommodations for personal use. The EEOC, for example, has distinguished between an adjustment or modification that "specifically assists the individual in performing the duties of a particular job"—which an employer may be required to provide as a reasonable accommodation—and one that "assists the individual throughout his or her daily activities, on and off the job"—which would be considered a "personal item" that an employer would generally not be required to provide" (Burgdorf, 2003). It is plausible to conclude that the above was a major contribution to the ADAAA. These facts show two distinctions.

The first of these distinctions is that disabled people may be relying on public legal representation. These acts have confusing language with lengthy explanations. The authors cite that a bigger problem in communication may allow for causal links to be drawn-up between discrimination in the workforce and associated barriers facing the blind. The authors cite research discussing how, breakdown(s) in communication occur. They occur during the initial interviewing/hiring process. Often, the accommodation process and/or on-the-job accommodations are teased out inadequately. This frequently occurs during the initial negotiation process (Frank, 2005). Other problems face people who need accommodations.

The authors discuss that many do not request accommodations or speak up about receiving inadequate accommodations. Fear of reprisal and retaliation were the main reasons for these findings (Frank, 2005). Additionally, people discussed in the research feared termination for requesting accommodations (Frank, 2005). Often, employers use reprisal or intimidation techniques to skirt the act of providing accommodations (Frank, 2005). Other aspects regarding on-the-job accommodations were prevalent in the research.

Accommodations varied depending on the position someone applied to. Managers and others in those fields received accommodations since they were understood to be tools for on-the-job success. High-level employees also received accommodations, since they were more respected and probably had received them while in a previous lower-level position. The situation changed when mid or lower-level workers were on-the-job.

The authors discuss how lower-level workers were quickly refused accommodations. Often, an automatic refusal to hire occurred, either prior to or after the discussion of receiving accommodations occurred. Lower-level working individuals in companies ranged from entry-level prospective employees to individuals like PhD psychologists. The authors discuss how various PhD psychologists were automatically refused employment in entry-level internships or other career opportunities while obtaining their degree (Frank, 2005). Many of the problems focus on providing accommodations because individuals are focusing narrowly on the limitations of the individual, not the performance they can have with the proper accommodations (Frank, 2005). Reviciting the topic of social networking by discussing Roy's literature below is paramount since a relationship could exist between improper social networks and workplace barriers.

Earlier, social networking was discussed. It was understood that social capital briefly influenced workplace outcomes stemming from an individual's proper possession of available social and human capital. A different study from Great Britain discusses relationships between employment and social networks (Roy, 1998). The study investigated differences between stable work outcomes amongst recent college graduates. Additionally, formal and informal social networks were analyzed.

Vast differences existed in networks held by college graduates and under- or post-graduate students.  Disparities existed between those who graduated from college, and those who did not.  Those who were unemployed used social networks more formally than those who were already successful in the workplace (Roy, 1998).  One of the most important depictions of the research consisted of the following.

The social relationships and networking had more than one influence (Roy, 1998).  The influence was not just on employment outcomes. Rather, it focused on long-term relationships (Roy, 1998).  Social networks (both good or poor) indirectly effect individual's outcomes in finding and securing employment (Roy, 1998).

Simple Chi-square tests revealed responses to the posing questions about surveyed individuals.   Surveyed individuals were asked about their current employment status.  Additionally, they were asked about methods and networks used in obtaining or securing employment (Roy, 1998).   Rumrill analyzed profiles of on-the-job accommodations.  Additionally, the analysis provides a basis for choices individuals made resulting from barriers they faced before and after seeking employment.

Many barriers exist for those seeking employment with additional barriers continuing for applicants when they become employed (Rumrill, 1997).  In essence, the article discusses how the Department of Vocational Rehabilitation is failing.  The program has become an independent living skills assistantship.  The authors discuss how those in the Department of Vocational Rehabilitation often do better with training in life-skills, rather than receiving assistance in becoming gainfully employed, a founding fundamental principal of the department (Rumrill, 1997).  The blind continue to face social barriers while working, forcing them to remain in a lower socioeconomic class.

For those fortunate to become employed, those with blindness or visual impairment usually sustain a weekly income of $130.00 (Rumrill, 1997). As a result, they still require assistance from government programs. This includes the receiving of Social Security Assistance, or TANIF benefits further perpetuating high systemic poverty rates. Finally, many barriers exist when those fortunate enough to work decide to be promoted or advance in their career (Rumrill, 1997). The authors discuss pragmatic issues that arise from ill-trained vocational rehabilitation staff, to a potential workforce that is forced into voluntarily giving-up on their goals to become employed. Many reasons exist for this.

An additional barrier is the Social Security System (Rumrill, 1997). In essence, systematic factors exist causing people to be penalized for working from the SSA. Post surveys are not complete once individuals' cases are closed in the Department of Vocational Rehabilitation. Therefore, this extra piece of data is usually unknown to the Department of Vocational Rehabilitation. The job placement(s) of blind and visually impaired people is analyzed by Malakpa.

The authors discuss various studies showing that problems arose for many blind people. This included many of the broad areas like personal ability and other characteristics. The problems were attributed to people's sustainability of adequate skills. Additionally, those surveyed reported that red tape in the current acts, and policies concerning employment acted as barriers to obtaining and sustaining employment (Malakpa, 1994). These barriers extend in the job market since accommodations are perceived costly, perpetuating attitudinal barriers on all levels. Various barrier removal options were explored.

First, many surveyed in the literature, offered suggestions such as better transportation, adequate staff training in departments, and funding with better retention for programs and

program staff (Malakpa, 1994). Additionally, the authors appear to simply criticize rather than discuss the systematic facts inside and outside the Department of Vocational Rehabilitation. The authors discuss the high amounts of allocated funds for the department to teach and rehabilitate blind people into the workforce. This article does not touch upon the outcomes of the rehabilitation acts (Malakpa, 1994). Additionally, this article does a good job discussing the pragmatic facts with the Department of Vocational Rehabilitation in general. However, it does not reference any causal link between external and internal dysfunction. Additionally, this article mainly references issues facing people who are visually impaired or who have multiple disabilities (Malakpa, 1994).

The argument is that additional disabilities result in greater stigmatizations and a greater marginalizing of the population. This is because disparities exist between those in-training for employment or other skills.

The authors discuss how at random, 15% of people are either gainfully employed or seeking employment utilizing programs or setting goals in the workplace. Additionally, another 15% of people were not employed but working on employment goals. Finally, 70% of people were not working on any related employment goals. Their disabilities required them to be seeking out training for life skills (Malakpa, 1994). The literature referenced that the goals for employment or other needs for additional training varied depending on the extent of the individual's disability. An analysis of the decline in employment amongst people with disabilities by Stapleton is discussed below.

While reading the decline of people with disabilities by Stapleton, a policy puzzle, the following themes were noticed. First, various declines over a period of years from the late 1980's to the early 2000's occurred. Declines were noticed in all sectors, including the popular

booming ones of the late 1990s. As a result, various theories support these findings. Yet, underpinnings of the ADA need to be understood.

Stapleton offers the following theory for analysis. Work in the marketplace opens pathways to independence. Additionally, the social environment determines employment outcomes (Stapleton, 2003). The statistics behind employment outcomes really matter because the ADA simply designed a platform for employers to provide reasonable accommodations, while discouraging discrimination from employers. Before drawing conclusions on affective employment programs, one must analyze self-reported working limitations amongst the population (Stapleton, 2003). The text provides the following analysis on this complex issue.

In general, if one analyzed the disabled in a single snap-shot, the following would be clear. Employment numbers in general rose just after the passing of the ADA for all (Stapleton, 2003). Thus, the employment of working-aged people with disabilities drastically fell after the passing of the ADA. While a decline existed, it was relative in comparison to the general working-age population of everyone. The concept of the data's interpretation comes from the ideology that individuals surveyed had reasonable disabilities (Stapleton, 2003). Datasets show valid trends of both groups concerning findings in the employment statistics. Alternative measures such as sampling were used from various groups to determine employment success. One of the main problems is finding an accurate and succinct gauge measurement to define disability (Stapleton, 2003). This is also not discrediting work limitations placed in most studies.

Stapleton and others discuss how new policy legislation allows for policy detractors to occur. These occur from newly created problems between employees and employers. Autonomy is threatened and employers are forced to uphold policies regardless of any disagreeing opinions. It was believed that all individuals, including employees and managers,

must oblige.  Regulations are known to be complicated and costly.  As a result, these moving parts affect employability outcomes for people with disabilities in general.  Additionally, employers are forced to fear the legal system for taking any action (Stapleton, 2003).  Other problems relating to effects of the policies exist.  Program and contract interaction are also a problem mentioned in the ability to analyze program outcomes (Stapleton, 2003).  Finally, it is the target population that Stapleton and others assert is difficult to detect and analyze.  Other tracking mechanisms occur resulting in flawed findings.

Barriers in the Social Security Administration's practices, as well as the higher increases of disability allotment in the 1990s, alter general statistics (Stapleton, 2003).  Additionally, in both thriving and recession economies, people with disabilities are the first fired and last to be rehired.  As a result, unemployment rates need to be tracked a bit differently in order to account for this particular finding.  Stapleton references that the ADA was passed prior to a recession (Stapleton, 2003).  Since people with disabilities take longer to be rehired, it is difficult to show accurate trends and statistics once the recessions are long over (Stapleton, 2003).  Another paradox appears to occur.

According to Stapleton, Other than the hiring trends and recession problems, some with disabilities are hired out of fears by the employer.  Fears include litigation, for failing to hire, or litigation for firing prior or after a recession (Stapleton, 2003).  One of the major studies that was referenced was the work limitation measure.  Low study employment trends allow for problems to occur while surveying and studying employment outcomes.  Measuring success has its facts, resulting in people showing obtainment in work due to the ADA in the 1990s. The idea is that the ADA made accessibility occur, allowing for work limitations to be minimized (Stapleton, 2003).  Workplace limitations are minimized or removed, allowing for disabilities to be

considered moderate (Stapleton, 2003). Conversely, this may allow for statistics amongst unemployment rates for people with disabilities to show a either a decline or stagnant rate during the 1990s. Finally, stigmatization is a way for people to deny disability, or to not be included in the general statistics (Stapleton, 2003). There are some final thoughts regarding Stapleton's literature.

In essence, wage differences were shown comparatively between the 1980s and 1990s since many left the labor force (Stapleton, 2003). Many left the labor force for the following reasons. First, employment opportunities shifted for low-wage workers. As a result, lower-waged workers decided to drop-out of the labor force completely (Stapleton, 2003). Stapleton appears to assert that employers are simply discouraged from hiring low-waged workers as a correlation of the ADA. The literature trumps the ideal that rejected applications from those with marginalized disabilities may have leveled since awards of benefits occurred on a higher level in the 1990s (Stapleton, 2003). This is on a continuum, resulting from the theory that the ADA pushed people out of the labor market and on the SSDI roll (Stapleton, 2003). Furthering the discussion of employment, analyzing the writings of Steinman and others from 2013 is important since this is literature that is most current and available.

Steinman analyzed how agency decisions are made regarding employment outcomes in the Department of Vocational Rehabilitation. The goal was to discuss the outcomes of employment programs for consumers. Various tests were completed to show trends that impacted agency decisions. Here are some examples from the findings of the research.

Separate agencies serving the population reported better outcomes for consumers than those others such as Vocational Rehabilitation (Steinman, 2013). The analysis was completed using multi-level modeling studies. The idea behind this was to employ special selection criteria.

Additionally, six key functions were analyzed. Positive results were shown between the agencies reputation with clients. Results vary towards more successful employment outcomes when a positive association exists between those seeking and securing employment when agency staff is actively involved. Negative associations existed with the understanding that employment would be much harder to find, without rehab staff's assistance (Steinman, 2013). An additional aspect to analyze is the Barden-LaFollette Act.

The purpose for the act was to allow more funding and flexibility to states with commissions for the blind. Some states, depending on size, operate offices for the blind through the state's Department of Vocational Rehabilitation. The commissions for the blind had to be legalized and constituted in the state (Steinman, 2013). Since commissions are operating solely for the blind, they are able to act and work independent of other rehabilitation agencies. Furthering the discussion of employment and wages, analyzing Featherston's literature helps understand the wage differences that occur amongst blind people. It is another key factor to consider when analyzing employment outcomes.

Wage differences vary between groups of men and women. Disparities in these findings of successful case-closures with the Department of Vocational Rehabilitation occur for various reasons. Featherston and others argue that men tend to advocate better for them-selves, and are more assertive when they need to negotiate an offer. Additionally, people with disabilities are so glad to be employed that they often improperly negotiate pay or accept a lower wage to obtain the job (Featherston, 2009).

Employers do not realize that accommodations, in general, have a marginal cost of less than $5.00. The authors argue that people tend to put blame first on the employers. Yet, much of this needs to be attributed from society's upbringings on individuals like women. Traditionally,

people of both genders who are disabled fall into the same category of people who do not speak up. Many disabled people are so humble to be working that they rarely speak up to be properly accommodated. Additionally, they take a lackluster approach in being forceful to educate employers that they are not the cost burdens they are assumed to be. Furthermore, Featherston's literature trumps the stereotypical concerns of personal and financial liability. Featherston discusses how an understanding of the ADA's history helps scholars understand wage differences amongst people with disabilities.

Featherston and others do quite well detailing the history of the ADA as it relates to wage disparities. Additionally, information is offered to illustrate how the mechanics of the ADA only allow for the EEOC to be involved in work-related discrimination concerns. Yet, those disparities exist since the EEOC can only intervene in the hiring and/or phases of the application process. Also, the wage differences are not part of the ADA or EEOC. In fact, other discrimination practices are not followed by one agency like the EEOC, but a whole host of agencies. This leaves the person with a disability to become lost when advocating. Usually, a situation involves more than one governmental agency, so the disabled person often gives up advocating since too much time is wasted. This relates to employment since many of the systemic barriers towards employment are covered by multiple agencies (Featherston, 2009). Featherston asserts a fundamental problematic theme with the ADA as it relates to all facets of life, including employment. This information is vague in nature, but a recurring theme in the literature thus far. From all of this, one company has been documented to stand-out.

Henderson discusses how one company had better results having a disabled workforce where one out of every three people had a disability (Henderson, 2008). The text discusses the loyal workforce, and how productivity increased for the small store. The text is to be used as a

tool for innovation and marketing the disabled as a positive loyal workforce. The author shows how disabled people work collaboratively for equal wages regardless of differences in personal skills. Scholars and others alike should consider the ADA as both an act and a foundation. "The ADA is only the beginning. It is not a solution. Rather. It is an essential foundation on which solutions will be constructed" (West, 1994). These various themes result in the analysis being shifted towards research methods, findings, and themes from various interviews.

Research Methods:

One-on-one interviews and/or small group interviews with no more than three individuals were conducted. To capture a diverse audience, individuals ranged in age from 20 to 65 years old with varying experience and expertise. Each interview lasted for 30 minutes. The goal was to have the interview to be informal to allow for open-ended discussion(s). The following questions (see appendix) were asked of each interviewee.

Hypothesis Behind this Research:

This research was based on an independent theory. The blind populations face high unemployment and/or underemployment rates regardless of advances in education and technology. The ADA and ADAAA may have been both a help and hindrance. The ADA is over 20 years old. Still, the general statistics has remained in the range of 70% for the unemployment rate. In general, the blind are afforded (according to the law), the same opportunities as anyone else, regardless of the continued access barriers to information, material, and opportunity afforded to those without disabilities (U.S. Dept. of Justice, 2008).

Explored Themes in this Research:

Various individuals feelings about the assistance they been given from The Department of Vocational Rehabilitation were assessed. The term 'assistance' refers to the ways staff from VR assisted blind people to find employment. Additionally, barriers frequently facing vocational rehabilitation consumers when they attempted to find employment were analyzed. Additionally, on-the-job barriers were analyzed with an emphasis towards an awareness and ability to problem-solve. The focal-point behind this research was to investigate whether or not the Department of Vocational Rehabilitation was aware and/or intervened when problems came up.

Finally, the implications on the employment statistics resulting from two recent disability civil rights acts were analyzed.

## Study Limitations:

This study had several limitations. Unfortunately, one of the biggest limitations was finding available time to interview all the interested people. This is because the topic of employment outcomes for the blind is important to many individuals. Limited valid research material is also available in circulation. Research on these outcomes varies on a continuum. Bias amongst clinicians and researchers frequently occurs. This could happen for two reasons.

First, extensive research on this topic has not been done due to various limitations. Some limitations include there not being enough young employed people with blindness or low vision. Second, many who are adventitiously blind may not be seeking employment. Additionally, many with congenital blindness are also not actively seeking employment. Other limitations including work placement barriers are as follows.

Much of the literature and information obtained in conducted interviews references the various intergovernmental bureaucracies. One of the biggest ones is, the Social Security Administration. Financial barriers put in place offer many disincentives for people who are trying to work. Additionally, many of these rules are in place by blanket policies, rather than policies geared towards situational-based issues. Additionally, general widespread discrimination and systemic societal attitudes have been known to hinder the positive growth of employment outcomes for people with disabilities, including the blind.

## Themes of Data Collection:

Several themes existed throughout the data collection. Various individuals were employed in positions not matching their credentials. Additionally, they were working in positions either related to the field of blindness or other unrelated fields. For example, someone interviewed worked as a social worker for a small nonprofit. Yet, they had a master's in teaching. Conversely, another individual with a Human Services degree worked as a substance abuse counselor. Other general commonalities existed. Either they worked in fields related to disabilities, or they felt their chosen career was a good fit because they were blind. For example, the individual with the teaching degree settled for the nonprofit work simply because no one would hire them with their credentials and experience. Here is some more information on the participants.

All participants were selected from either snowball sampling, or other forms of networking. All participants ranged in age from 18 years old to 65 years old. The goal was to capture a wide range of individuals in terms of both age and work or other skill-related experience. Out of the group surveyed, the following trends were apparent.

Most worked in healthcare or government positions. Some were unemployed, often citing how they fell through the cracks. Additionally, some simply gave up since finding employment became time-consuming or impractical for medical, health, or transportation issues. Barriers equally occurred prior to finding employment. Additionally, extra barriers existed once interviews were secured and/or the individual began work.

Finding employment was difficult. For example, attitude problems arose early on in the interview process causing people to be denied prior to an interview, or immediately after meeting an employer, receptionist, or an employee's assistant if they met in an elevator over to an interview. It was reported that rejections came in with simple words or phrases indicating

sudden last-minute position changes such as requiring the use of a driver's license.  In other situations, individuals were told that the position they were interviewing for was recently filled, and the interviewer was not aware of the last-minute upper-management decision.  One theme in these cases existed. These conversations always happened immediately prior to any substantial interview taking place. Other attitudinal barriers occurred afterwards when it was time to discuss next steps. Many received a simple "we will call you" response.  In some cases, it would be later detected that the jobs they inquired about were not filled or a follow-up call would reveal that the position was closed and filled prior to the interview.  These and other barriers only scratch the surface regarding problems facing employees who are blind.

Findings/Discussion:

Sixteen interviews were completed. One of the interviews was completed with information provided by a policy expert from the Commission for the Blind of Massachusetts. One of the other fifteen participants had several professional degrees. However, they were not considered to be a policy expert. They had a doctorate in Biomedical Sciences, with a dual master's in Spirituality. The questions in Appendix A were used as a baseline for discussion to gage responses. However, based on the conversation additional questions were asked to gather more information from participants. For example, when asking people whether or not they were employed, once a response was given, a related follow-up inquiry about the type of work they were doing was discussed. Additionally, if someone provided an open-ended response or something leading to another part of the discussion, they would be asked to clarify and/or corroborate. For example, if someone discussed their employment, proceeding to discuss the Department of Vocational Rehabilitation, the discussion would shift to begin to inquire about their employment history. The discussion turned to investigate whether or not they approached the local Department of Vocational Rehabilitation with their employment goals. This group of interviewees had a wide array of perspectives on finding employment.

For example, recent college graduates or others who were younger with less experience appeared optimistic about the future and their abilities to achieve employment goals. Older individuals or those with different experiences had a shift in individual opinions related to the outlook for future blind job-seekers. One exception especially applied to an older individual. This individual felt both angry and completely pessimistic about the future for the blind regarding employment. "I am going to be 62 in May," he said, "I was forced out at age 46 because no one wanted to follow protocol. I was run out. No one wanted to help by putting their

name on anything. Politics and money always win, causing us to be left to our own devices"
(Participant). Others like one individual in his forties felt that the only way to gain employment
was to put in extra work while making extra personal and financial sacrifices.

For example, it is your job as a blind person to become employed. Additionally, they felt
that, as the future employee, you need to present yourself to the employer in a way that leaves no
doubt about you as an individual. If you need or want on-the-job accommodations, then it is your
job to provide them, eliminating any responsibility from the employer despite any legislation.
For example, "If you need Jaws or Zoom-text, then provide them even if it means you need to
live like a poor college student for a little longer. Show the potential employer that they can
employ you as they would anyone else. The hiring manager needs to know that you are as
qualified as anyone else. They should not even find out that you are blind. They do not buy
these things for sighted people. Sighted people do not have a Department of Rehabilitation to get
them accommodations/equipment. Finally, the sighted do not have ADA or ADAAA. That will
probably be the most important thing in the employers mind when they need to make a decision"
(Participant). Other results were as follows.

Out of the 16 respondents who were interviewed, six, or roughly one third, were
unemployed. Almost all who were employed worked in a field related to disabilities or blindness.
Everyone felt that their current employment status, whether or not they were employed, was
directly connected to their disability. The bulk of the industries people worked in was advocacy,
customer service, or other human service professions. For those who were unemployed, the
following information regarding their credentials was provided.

The research question being discussed was: "Are you employed?" Here are the various
responses for those who said that they were not employed. "No, I am not employed; I am

looking with the Mass Commission for the Blind to find a job developer to find employment. I had a volunteer job but it was through my college"; "No, I am not employed, once I am done with my master's degree, I will work in Public Health"; "No, I have a Criminal Justice degree, and I am homeland security certified. I have associate degrees in Computer Networking, Support and Criminal Justice"; "No, I am not"; "There are a lot of things I could do if I could see"; "No, I have a doctoral degree and a master's. All attempts to get hired at least part-time have failed. When on an interview, we talk about my white cane, hearing devices instead of job-related skills. I am a huge liability for them." What are your degrees in? "I have a PhD in Biomedical Sciences, and Spirituality. I have a master's degree in Biomedical Sciences, Genetics and Pathology, and actual end of life spiritual care. I have a certification in end of life care. Since 2008, I been working with administrators, and used to teach Pharmacy students. University did not want to accommodate me. Then, I was on disability. I have three impairments: Vision, hearing, ushers"; "My last employment was in 1998. No, I am not employed"; "I did not go for another job. I applied for Social Security since I was driven out. I was so sick from high blood pressure, cholesterol since they made me sick." Here are results from those who held positions in various careers:

"I am employed but it is a subcontracting position with assistive technology for education which is also subcontracted with the Department of Education of New Hampshire. I am a trainer also with assistive technology" (Participant); "I am employed through Mass Advocates Standing Strong as a peer trainer" (Participant); "I have four jobs between Mass Advocates Standing Strong, and Perkins. They are all part-time employment" (Participant); "I am employed, I teach communications in Mississippi. Those I teach are learning Braille, telephone skills/etiquette, and assistive technology. I work through State rehab services" (Participant); "I am an administrative and research assistant. This opportunity was a creation between the Oregon Commission for the

Blind, where services are provided to consumers" (Participant); "I am employed, and I did not get any assistance getting this job from the Bureau of Blindness and Visual Services. I work as a soloist, and I train people in development. I also work with two churches as an organist and music director. I am in the guild of organists and I apply when positions are available. I actually never got any jobs from the blind services. I think that is why I have been employed most of the time, because I got them all myself" (Participant); "Right now, I am an activities coordinator. I was a marketing director, now I am doing this. My title is Science Activities Coordinator" (Participant); "I am employed, I have two jobs. I work as a psychiatric clinician, I do authorizing for emergency admission, suicide prevention, and I work as a tech support specialist for Baum USA. They make braille displays, and CCTV's. Translation: I work a lot. I am also a call center operator" (Participant).

The discussion on obtaining employment varied since one common theme existed amongst all respondents during the initial application phase and the interview phase. While differences in the application process existed, in terms of its accessibility, barriers fundamentally came up once the disclosure of a visual disability was made. Sometimes the disclosure occurred during the application process. This occurred only when applicants faced barriers with technology while filling out applications. This resulted in the applicant not having any follow-up. Additional barriers occurred once an interview was secured or with an offer of employment.

Barriers occurred often in the interview process. This, of course, is unless the job was with an agency familiar with people with disabilities. Barriers, such as fear of the disability and unwillingness to accommodate through means of casual interactions often occurred in the interview process; that is, unless the job was with an agency adept at servicing people with disabilities. For example, one of the interviewees reported that they went to an interview for an assistant in an after-school program. The interviewee planned ahead regarding on-site low/no

cost accommodations they were going to personally provide them, assuming they were hired. The accommodation was to label special bins with bright discriminating colors. Additionally, large print would be used to identify the correct number of the bin. Instead of negotiating with the interviewee the interviewee was never called in for a follow-up. Therefore, any offer of employment never occurred.

Attitudinal barriers prevent blind individuals from succeeding in the workforce. As a result, they are often held back in lower-level jobs or forced to leave a current job. For example, one person interviewed worked in an insurance company. In 1998, the company under new management decided to make the job requirements more stringent. This was done by requiring all staff working to drive and have a valid driver's license. The interviewee reported that on many instances they often used public transit or walked to job assignments. Additionally, the company would not offer the accommodation of a driver. While the interviewee did not mind proving themselves, they often suffered with bad reviews or lower performance rating. This caused the individual to not be eligible for any upward mobility in the company. Once the interviewee started advocating for the situation, more barriers came up.

For example, the interviewee reported that current work responsibilities would shift, causing the caseload to change. Later, it would be revealed that others with demanding caseloads were assigned to complete tasks that they were capable of doing. This caused friction between coworkers. Coworkers began showing signs of resentment, feeling that this worker needed to be let go. They would often report that this individual was not willing to work since they were told to do so by upper management: "I was ousted for my disability; I got the American scheme, not the American dream" (Participant). As a social worker, this individual felt like someone needing

help while attempting to live the American Dream. This individual equates many of the issues they faced to the following problems.

While barriers exist, that are attitudinal and technological, many problems exist in the lack of the protection for the disabled, including the blind. This individual felt that we have laws that have no real backing. "For example," the participant said, "I never had an advocate. Blacks and other minorities in this country have the NAACP, we do not get the same protection. No one helps us, they just help themselves get promoted, elected, or reelected. Blind people in particular have nobody to go to when all efforts fail them. They can advocate. However, advocacy efforts only go so far when agencies blame each other or no legal council wants to represent due to the risk posed on someone's career" (Participant).

Bigger problems occur when, individuals use media outlets to try to convey a message or report their problems to local elected officials. Typically, elected officials also do not want to risk their career on a single case involving one person. This is one of those paradoxes where morals and legalities are mixed together. This is due in part, to the connections between elected officials, union representatives, and the media. This interviewee hypothesized that these outcomes probably also occurred since the union and company are in a small town in a small state. Also, there is an unspoken belief that unions do not speak to media and that those in the legal system do not assist when unions are involved, even if they think they have a case they can win. Finally, this interviewee portrays this problem with the general notion that blind people are considered to be less capable. Barriers and workplace discrimination against people with disabilities, including blindness, have devastating results.

For some, the constant advocating and fight for equality causes health problems. Internally, the health problems can cause exacerbated conditions. One interviewee commented,

"I quit since advocating for myself gave me nothing but high blood pressure and other health problems" (Participant). Those conditions cannot be treated properly because individuals needing care are subjected to a life of poverty resulting from them having to be forced to live on meager incomes from the government. The easy way out, as seen in this interviewees discussion, is to simply give up. Additionally other barriers occur on the governmental level. In turn, people with disabilities, including the blind, are discouraged from working due to limits and penalties placed on them from the Social Security Administration (SSA).

Other problems concerning health insurance coverage exist, once you begin depleting your benefits. As one interviewee put it, it is better financially to stay at home collecting, rather than working every day: "When you work, you are penalized either with sudden shifts in benefit coverage. While it is logical for coverage from the benefits to decrease when working, the uncertainty of income, for working meager jobs is not worth it" (Participant). In order to restore benefits, you need to go through a whole process that is filled with barriers and problems.

Many of the barriers rely on the extensive documentation to prove need based on disability. The system does not take into consideration that conditions change, and that one's ability to work or not is conditional on the person. For example, someone lost full benefits when they were working over a period of time. After the employment was unexpectedly terminated, they reapplied for benefits. Problems came up questioning the sudden need, and general history as a disabled person. The government considered this particular individual rehabilitated and able to work regardless of the new situation. Other additional barriers include the inaccessibility of information to people with disabilities, including the blind. At the time of this writing, various individuals who were interviewed said, "unless someone read everything in detail, without omitting information, we are unaware of processes and stipulations for working" (Participant).

Many workers at the SSA were unaware of the information and rules available to them. Finally, the everyday discrimination tactics occurred as another major barrier.

Discrimination occurred most often. "As a person with a disability," one interviewee noted, "not driving hurt me. Being legally blind and not quite like a normal person. They are supposed to treat you the same but don't. We are outcasts, traveling down the road of dreams usually ending up at a dead-end" (Participant). Everyone interviewed said that they faced some form of it, even in ways they did not know or feel as problematic until later. This was something as simple as a nice gesture indicating that all jobs were filled suddenly once a disability was revealed. One individual stated that they remember a security guard telling them this after they called on an inter-office phone and told the interviewee that a blind person was there to see them. Other forms of discrimination took place once someone was on the job.

Other than the discrimination discussed above, participants said that they either faced situations where, people tried to do their work for them. One said, "I learned quickly that, when someone said that they took care of something, appearing as a favor or gesture, I knew to wait for the real repercussions" (Participant). Additionally, they would complain about their performance or indicate that they were not able to complete tasks on the job. Additionally, supervisors would sometimes be the people complaining or changing work standards. Other denials of accommodations occurred. Some of the interviewed individuals discussed how, frequently, long periods would lapse between the offer and available accommodations on the job. This would slow performance, and cause work goals to suffer. "For almost two years," one noted, "I waited for an accessible larger computer monitor that never came" (Participant). Sometimes, accommodations would be denied. A great example of this was discussed when an individual interviewed was hired to work in a social work firm.

The individual wanted to provide their own accommodations. This ranged from an example of software, and other tools for them to complete their work. They sold the proposal as an idea to lift any associated costs off the company. The idea was that they would be able to perform all essential functions of the job with or without reasonable accommodations. No one would insinuate that an undue hardship was going to occur: "I offered to bring in my own equipment to act as my personal tools" (Participant). The employer refused, wanting to follow protocol although the immediate supervisor supported this. This is a good example of top-down decisions being made either as a direct result from or by acts such as the ADA.

Regarding the ADA, everyone felt that these acts did little justice for the people they serve. "The acts are not helpful; they do nothing for those with legitimate physical or hidden disabilities. I would still be working if the acts were really followed," one participant said. More specifically, the blind are at odds since protection for them in cases of discrimination is rare and limited. "They might as well not have the act," one interviewee said, "because it does not work for the blind. If anyone ever noticed, the Social Security Administration awards the blind for not working in some states" (Participant). This allows employers to use more methods of implied discrimination, or to implementing discriminating language and policies in job descriptions. One of the individuals interviewed discussed how their social work job had to be changed drastically since the job required the use of a driver's license. Yet, the individual did not need to drive since they had other methods for doing the work. They used public transit or walked. As a result, this was a functional requirement later put in the description, disqualifying the applicant from proceeding. "No transfers happened," the interviewee noted, "since I could not do the job without a driver's license, while this was not a requirement of the job" (Participant). This example of an implied discriminatory act ensures that the blind person cannot perform all essential functions, further disqualifying them for any ADA protection.

Regarding the ADAAA, the following responses were discussed and concurred. First, everyone surveyed agreed that, in our complex society, when you are fighting for civil rights, you need to break ground somewhere. While the ADA comes after the Rehabilitation Act and the Civil Rights Acts, it is the starting point for people to be able to access services independently. The discussion shifted when people would discuss goals or outcomes of it. A strong majority suggested that the original act allowed for more freedom, yet the blind were and are the last group to be able to reap any benefits. Furthermore, the act creates additional barriers that create more discrimination.

One individual interviewed suggested that the act should be more enforceable. It does not have any teeth politically or socially. "People and companies can violate it," the individual noted, "while finding ways to skirt it. However, depending on the severity of the violation or the group being discriminated, the violations are ignored" (Participant). However, this means that obvious physical barriers like stairs to a building would not be tolerated" (Participant). So, it works well for people with physical disabilities. It has done an adequate job serving them while others lag behind. Regarding the ADAAA, individuals surveyed discussed the following.

Many participants were not aware of, nor did they understand, the ADAAA. Once it was explained, they felt that it could help in theory. Many of the respondents discussed how our government is already burdened. "They are making too many blanket policies without being able to take in to consideration people's diverse needs," one said (Participant). Alternatively, some who were interviewed felt strongly that those with congenital disabilities or other ones from accidents may suffer for those who have newly acquired conditions from prolonged lifestyle choices. Many did not know that lifestyle choices contributing to a permanent condition resulted in a newly formed disability. One interviewee put it best when they said that, "we with

disabilities are paying more for those who made poor lifestyle choices. They are now using services afforded to us when originally they did not need them prior to being disabled" (Participant). Additionally, others interviewed felt the following about both acts.

One said "both acts were created with good intentions and little oversight" (Participant). Unfortunately, no one wants to put their political career at risk supporting or defending any cases of discrimination. This leaves disabled people trapped. They are trapped to accept what they have, or to fight on their own. One of the individuals interviewed suggested that we are living in a "live never-ending performance of bowling alone" (Participant) "We are advocating, facing backlash from people and companies alike. However, the political and other systems do not work, causing us to be stranded waiting for support that usually comes when it is too late" (Participant). Advocacy groups like the political system have their own flaws.

First, various participants felt that personal agendas and organizations' missions crowded up people's judgment of what was important: "You go to an organization, to get help, and then they want you to join. You join, yet you get lost in someone's mission. In the end, you either fall for the mission/agenda, or you receive nothing for your hard work" (Participant). Whether it is an advocacy organization or a federal/state organization like The Department of Vocational Rehabilitation, people are people with their own independent outside biases. As a result, they often need to be reminded that they have a job to do regardless of any personal opinions they may have. Continuing the discussion of the Department of Vocational Rehabilitation, here is what the interviewees had to say: "the department is saddled with good intentions, mixed results, which are often simple quick fixes that fail" (Participant). Enquiring about the inner reportings in the department, like the RSA911 database for tracking clients' progress, everyone interviewed was unaware of its purpose. Additionally, most interviewed felt that those working for the

department helped only if you, the client, were doing something that your individual counselor and/or supervisor agreed with. "I applied for a job with an independent living center" said one interviewee, "My counselor and their supervisor wanted me to go to a day program. Since I was applying for work, services began to change. They started to avoid me" (Participant). Additionally, the department takes a lackluster approach advocating for its clients when things go wrong either finding employment, or when clients face other barriers. One interviewee noted "I was going homeless quite some time ago. When this occurred, and it was affecting my school work, the commission left me on my own. They penalized me for finishing a semester late and requesting new equipment after mine was stolen" (Participant).

Another individual came to them with discrimination questions/concerns while they were seeking employment. Here is what they discussed. Going to the department allowed the situation to be heard, nothing was really done otherwise: "I told them that I was turned away from an agreed employment opportunity. I wanted to accommodate a solution to a problem that could arise on the job regarding assistive technology. I told them that the interview went well and, on the first day of work, I found out that higher-ups felt the job would not be a good fit. When I informed them, their simple answer was for me to keep looking" (Participant). Approaching the rehab department to discuss reasonable accommodations when the employer did not understand their need for specialized software as a tool had its problems as well. "They assumed it to be an undue hardship" said one participant. Department staff could not intervene since the client's case was successfully closed. Something else was understood to be true by all interviewed regarding the Department of Vocational Rehabilitation.

Much of their staff is untrained and not able to handle the many complex issues facing blind people. Also, they are unable to understand that blind people, like everyone else come from

different backgrounds. In turn, their self-beliefs are automatically shaped, and it can take a long time to change them.  Finally, most rehab staff is not familiar since many of them are not disabled or blind themselves.  General politics is often blamed for shortfalls in the department.  As one interviewee reported, "I was told often that budgetary restrictions from federal and state sources cause problems in availability of funding and other resources.  I was often told that I am on my own after a certain point" (Participant).  Additionally, the locations of each office vary determining, the availability of services they can provide.  "Living in the city, I have much better services unlike those others I know," said one interviewee  (Participant).

All who were interviewed stated that at one time or other budgetary plights occurred even during thriving economies.  Routinely, clients are offered services that are later cut by office staff as a result of shrinking federal budgets.  Various individuals referenced much of what was read in literature regarding the following problem(s).

Too many blind people are inadequately prepared to enter the world of work, or higher education.  "You can't send someone in to the workforce when they are unsure of themselves.  Many of those reputable schools for the blind don't really prepare us for the real world.  They may teach cooking and other life skills which are good. However, they rarely scratch the surface on the time-consuming, convoluted, tiring advocacy process, government programs, and the reality that we live under problematic broken programs and systems" (Participant).  They have many social and emotional flaws resulting from family and other upbringings.  "I did not know that I could work or go to college. I was set to leave high school with a GED and go to a day program or workshop.  After attending a summer rehab program, I realized that I had other options. I have since been disassociated from members in my immediate and extended family.  They wanted me to stay at home because they wanted to continue to receive my SSI check and

not go to work. I told them that I wanted to work and they found a job at a workshop where I put brooms together" (Participant). As a result, staff in the Department of Rehabilitation often find themselves advocating and assisting with other social barriers such as former training for blind clients, housing problems in urban or rural areas of the country, if services are even available. "I was working for a few years. I stopped working since the job went away. I wanted more training from Voke Rehab. They wait-listed me, I have not moved up in the past five years. This means that, once they are ready for me, I can have my initial meeting with them. Who knows when that will be, and what they will be able to do. The job I was doing no longer exists" (Participant). The wait list in some states like Georgia can be up to five years long. This is due to staff being over-worked. For example, one staff member or a small team of staff is responsible for covering clients living in a 60 mile radius. The following information references another problem discussed above.

"Blind people are inadequately prepared to face the real social problems of the world" (Participant). It is believed that this is a large contribution towards the employment problem. The real problem is that both rehabilitation staff and the consumer base are uneducated on the Social Security Administration's rules for working. "I never knew that when you are on SSI, they reduce your monthly payments based on the dollar amount you earn" (Participant); "The specialized expensive school for the blind I attended rarely discussed how one would go about handling issues of employment discrimination, and socialized discrimination" (Participant). While it is not the government's or rehab staff's responsibility to take care of the blind, the blind have as much right as the sighted to have information about programs, tools, and resources available to them. As one interviewee said, "you are taking someone with skills, and training, if at all, and expecting them to research and learn along the way. However, you cannot learn and research something you know little to nothing about. Additionally, you cannot research

something if the information you need is inaccessible, unclear, or unavailable" (Participant). This particular problem is strengthened when services like readers are cut, and the blind person has to rely on staff at agencies to read and interpret the information for them.  Often, the blind individual is told that the material they are questioning has a lot of information, allowing the person reading to take control. That control later allows for the person reading the information to assume what is important or not when reading to the blind person.  The following analogy from this individual with a PhD sums up the whole problem.

> A young adult entering the world usually has a good idea on what they want and what they need.  Maybe they have gained employment to purchase tools like a vehicle.  Additionally, they have free choice both in the market and socially in our society.  If they make bad choices, it is because they did not use available tools and information while they made their decision(s).  In many cases, unless people are honest and the blind person knows what they want/need, they are often left in the dark, not knowing what to do. Even worse, they end up making decisions based on verbal recommendations.  When they are able to research recommended decisions, they usually end up advocating for something better. In turn, this creates push-back from organizations and individuals.  It is as if the ability to access information and make free choices are reserved, or withheld.  They are reserved and/or withheld due to people's desire to simply control this group of individuals.  Over time, on a continuum this has created a platform for blind people to rely on groups like the Department of Rehabilitation, Social Security, to name a few. (Participant)

This perspective echoes much of what the literature and others have said. However an individual from the Massachusetts Commission for the Blind discussed how that office is leading in a positive direction.

The Director for Policy Research stated that this office does various things unlike others across the nation. First, they have a rigorous internship program. It stands out since it offers qualified applicants a series of trainings prior, during, and after the internship. As a precursor to participating in the program, one must complete a set of tasks. They must train with the soft skills training event, requiring participation in some in-person mock interviews and other discussions. Additional phone interviews for extra practice are also offered. To this individual's knowledge, this program is not available in other states. "We are a first of its kind" (Participant).

They are considered a model program, with other states beginning to implement its practices for their clients in the Department of Vocational Rehabilitation. "We are leading, others are following" (Participant). MCB strives to successfully have a 90% success rate, with the goal of an offer of full-time employment from the employer after a client successfully completes the program. "We have had many successful placements where people have gone on to obtaining full- or part-time employment after completing our program" (Participant). Unfortunately, no statistically significant data was offered or provided to correctly analyze the above claim. An additional source of information for gathering data and improving services is the bi-yearly needs assessment. "I think we are the only agency that does this despite its limitations" (Participant).

The goal of the needs assessment is to measure and investigate clients' needs both accessing services in and outside the community. The needs assessment provides data on the amounts of visually impaired people in the commonwealth, as well as suggestions for providing

expanded services in communities across the state.  It appears that the goals of the assessment are to analyze areas where advocacy efforts need to be strengthened in the community.  "We take an interest in finding out how people access services.  Our data collection is limited, mainly because we are short-staffed in this area" (Participant).  The assessment inquires about the following.

They inquire about an individual's ability to access local services in neighborhoods such as shops, and municipal programs.  Additionally, they inquire about people's access to transportation, and whether or not the available services are conducive to the client's needs.  "We need to know not only whether or not someone can access services; we need to know how and why they choose one option over another" (Participant); "This needs assessment is on-going with categories being added.  Moreover, suggestions are always welcome since this bi-year project is fairly new" (Participant).  Various long-term goals are apparent as a result of this assessment.

First, this office wants to provide more services based on clients' needs.  The idea is to take a needs-based approach, fostering the clientele as the focal point for providing services. Services can be targeted while implementing more community involvement. The idea is to help bring about universal design since universal design benefits all.  The needs-based assessment was started by the former commissioner who now directs the U.S. Department of Education.

Unlike many offices across the nation, The Massachusetts Commission for the Blind separates itself from others by having many of the leadership positions held by experienced individuals who are blind.  At MCB, unlike other organizations, both counseling and administrative staff have both visual impairments and total blindness.  This includes the individuals who run the employment program(s) such as the internship one discussed above.

Others I interviewed discussed how a major disconnect existed since the clients were often disconnected from the staff since the staff did not have disabilities. This is another great example about how the Mass Commission separates themselves from other offices. As a result, I recommend the following.

First, blind people have a long way to go even with the progress that has taken place so far. Additionally, more collaboration needs to occur between rehab staff, clients, and places of higher education and employers. Additionally, the other rehabilitation departments nationally should look to the Massachusetts Commission for the Blind as a positive model in the following areas. First, they offer great opportunities to act as mentors and professional trainers to the clients they serve. They can also use their policy division to connect with legislators on many of the issues they notice in the results of their needs-based annual assessment. Regarding the assessment, the following should occur.

It would be to the MCB's benefit to use various methods for dispersing the data in a clear, concise manner for all their clients. It is possible that some may have issues interpreting the data, since MCB serves many including the elderly and those with other disabilities than just blindness. Additionally, MCB should possibly consider offering light informational seminars on the findings for additional input and feedback from the clients. This can help better educate the client base on the work they are doing. Additionally, this can help evoke ideas for future advocacy efforts with those who are involved in the community or in the blindness consumer-based organizations. Additional recommendations to mitigate the meager employment outcomes are as follows.

More collaboration needs to occur between consumer groups serving the blind. Additionally, rehabilitation staff could assist in the process by using media technology to market

the blind and their valuable skills. A good start would be to show how marketable and loyal the blind are compared to others with disabilities in the workforce. The importance is to keep focus on the untouched pool of prospective applicants. A good marketing tool would be to reference the reasonable accommodations process and the meager cost they incur. Another plausible solution would be to have successful companies who hired the blind openly discuss the positive experiences they had. Using social media will break down various barriers in this process.

Many, including the federal government have used webinars and group conference calls to provide information to people on these topics. Additionally, interactive communications such as Skype video calls can illustrate the seamlessness in creating a workforce who can handle the blind population. For example, many employers may not realize how easy a blind person can navigate an office. Having an interactive Skype call or video-chat session can help illustrate how a blind person can safely navigate an office, or do a job with specialized software, etc. Also, allowing for detailed interaction(s) can help any individual to ask those questions they are not able or willing to ask in an actual interview setting. Additionally, allowing the blind people in on the informational sessions can open the discussion for the following.

The blind people can assist in educating employers and HR departments of accessibility barriers people face on the job. This includes inaccessibility of documents, websites for applying, and sudden shifts in software programs on the job. Additionally, this can allow for employers and companies to see how software can easily work the first time when previsions are made. The extra efforts can help initiate sensitivity training.

Sensitivity training can help companies work with the diversity training they are already doing to accommodate the ever-changing diverse workforce. Again, over time, these changes will allow for a more inclusive workforce for all. Also, these measures will help ensure that

those interested in universal design can take full advantage of its practices. Once again, more and more model companies, individuals, and agencies can help reverse these trends of high unemployment.

Moreover, when these practices occur on a continuum, many of the social barriers facing the blind will change. More will be able to accept the blind as respectable individuals in society. Most importantly, the market will benefit. The market will benefit since more purchasing power stimulates economies and more individuals can come to the table with product manufacturers, software developers, etc. The extra influence would assist in the collaboration between the blind and legislators. Working on a continuum, the shift can change from general civil rights issues to more focused initiatives with personal influence rather than just nonprofits or the legal system as seen in many of the disability discrimination cases that occur. Regarding the RSA 911 database, the following should occur.

First, unless the individual states that they don't want to work or go to school, the homemaker category should not be an applicable solution for a successful case closure; this is, unless it is a mutual decision between the client and Department of Vocational Rehabilitation. While people are seeking employment with supported services, frequent communication should be occurring to understand potential barriers that are being faced by the clients. While this solution would never fully remove barriers, it could help the sharing of ideas between clients and rehabilitation staff. Another solution, used to educate others including teachers can consist of the following.

Offering informal educational sessions to clients coming up through schools, including specialized ones, will allow them to understand the rehab process. Additionally, they can learn more about what they will expect to encounter when they attend work or pursue higher

education. Assuming that the goal of vocational rehabilitation is to have clients sustain gainful employment, the recommendations above can assist them in achieving this fundamental goal. Following the successful programs from the Massachusetts Commission for the Blind will also assist with the newly cohesive formed relationships. Finally, all departments should have a national mentoring program to instill confidence in newly blinded individuals and, those needing extra guidance.

Conclusion:

In essence, the following has contributed to the employment outcomes for blind people. The complex Social Security System has discouraged people from working. Additionally, blind people face extra barriers than others with disabilities. Barriers consist of the inability to read and access information in a timely manner to make proper decisions. Additionally, prior lifelong experiences keep stigmas alive.

Stated above, the blind face many social and emotional barriers to achieving their full potential. Many of these problems are exacerbated by the individual's upbringing, and low expectations placed before them from well-meaning individuals such as educators, families, etc. Finally, there is a certain level of persistence that needs to occur, keeping a set number of individuals needing services. Many of these barriers will never be completely eliminated. However,, a long-term goal can be to see employment statistics showing a lower unemployment rate with, more active job seekers. Allowing mentors to work with those upcoming in the system can help mitigate many of the problems discussed above.

Offering mentoring programs will allow for others outside the states or nonprofits from having to spend additional funds from budgets. Having a national program can assist in the reversal of the employment numbers. Finally, an additional needs assessment on a short-term basis over a designated period of time should be done while states adopt a similar assessment like the one used with the Massachusetts Commission for the Blind. Regarding the ADA, and ADAAA, they have had their influence in these statistics.

Both acts were designed to allow for a more cohesive workforce open to people with disabilities. While these acts are fairly new they could have been more streamlined. This could have allowed for more research and data collection as a mandate to ensure that they are effective.

Moving forward, some revisions to both acts can open the discussion of needs assessments for people with disabilities on a cross-disability basis. The difference is that the emphasis for this would be based on the prior needs assessments for people who are blind. The goals would be to educate and offer an opportunity towards a shift in attitudes. The shift would be from governmental entitlement and solutions to sensitivity training with the end-goal for implementing universal design. Universal design would, in theory, seamlessly remove many of the employment barriers discussed above. The following has occurred.

The blind, like many with disabilities, face various barriers while obtaining and securing employment. Legislation such as the ADA and ADAAA has had an impact on the employment outcome(s) systemically facing this population. Additionally, the Department of Rehabilitation has to assist the blind with more concerns facing them unrelated to employment goals and outcomes. The blind have a long way to go as a whole to successfully integrate in a society that generally forces them to lag behind. Social and attitudinal barriers affect programs on all levels. Continued efforts and open discussions for improved support services will empower the blind on a continuum to need social programs for a shorter period of time.

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http://www.ada.gov/


ADAAA – Americans with Disabilities Act Amendments Act of 2008

http://www.eeoc.gov/laws/statutes/adaaa_info.cfm

ED.gov – Rehabilitation Act of 1973

http://www2.ed.gov/policy/speced/reg/narrative.html

Description of reasonable accommodation:

http://www.eeoc.gov/policy/docs/accommodation.html#reasonable

*(U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission)*

Guide to disability rights laws

http://www.ada.gov/cguide.htm

New England ADA Center – reasonable accommodation

http://www.newenglandada.org/sites/ADATitle1_HTML/3ReasAccom.html

Appendix A, General Research Questions.

Are you employed? If so, how was it for you to become employed? If you are not employed, do you plan on becoming employed in the next 12 months?  Do you think that the ADA and ADAAA has helped or hindered your employment outcome(s)?  Are you aware and/or a client of the Department of Vocational Rehabilitation?  If so, how have they assisted you in finding employment? What barriers did you face, either finding employment or when you started working? What is your opinion on acts such as the ADA and ADAAA?  Is more or less pressure placed on entities such as the Department of Rehabilitation?  Are employer and employee attitudes stagnant, or have they been influenced by both the Department of Vocational Rehabilitation or the ADA and ADAAA? Assuming that outcomes have been hampered in some ways what creative possibilities do you foresee to minimize potential barriers for employers, agencies, and employees? This last question is to investigate creative ideas by others to focus on a set of plausible solutions.

The following was asked of the specialist who participated in this study.

Appendix B, Research Questions for an Expert Specialist.

What is your title?  What is the history of the agency?  What makes the programs at MCB so successful amongst others? When you refer to resources, such as money, did stakeholders of the agency invest their own personal money towards the projects in initial phase?  On the individual state level, who makes decisions regarding spending regarding programs and services?  Are you aware that some rehab programs for the blind in other states wait-list clients?  Do you consider your office to be a model as a service provider?  In general, what goals (if it were up to you) would you want to achieve in the next five or 10 years?  Has the Mass Commission ever thought of starting a think-tank with one of the leading research institutions like UMass Boston?

Appendix C, Consent Form for Research Participants.

To whom it may concern:

My name is William O'Donnell. I am a Graduate Student at the University of Massachusetts Boston in the Department of Public Policy and Public Affairs. I am conducting a research project examining employment outcomes amongst people who are blind and who may have had experience with the Department of Vocational Rehabilitation.  As a scholar in the field of public administration, I would like to interview you over the phone for about 30 minutes.  Some of the questions we would discuss are below.

- Are you employed? If so, how was your experience when you looked for employment?

- Did you face any barriers when working with agencies such as the Department of Vocational Rehabilitation? Note: a barrier can be something as a misunderstanding of reasonable accommodation(s).

- In your opinion, how have civil rights acts like the ADA and/or the ADAAA play a role in the employment rate amongst this population?

- How could these challenges be addressed?  Note: This allows for open dialog to be creative.

- Please let me know of any other individuals who may provide any useful perspectives on this research topic.

After all interviews are completed, I plan to write up the results of the study. Any information collected from the interviews would be presented in such a way as to ensure confidentiality. I would like to record the phone interviews using an audio recorder.

You could end the interview or not answer questions at any point for any reason. While we cannot promise any direct benefit from your participation in this study, I hope that it will provide systematically collected data to understand people's experiences with the civil rights acts: ADA and/or the ADAAA. I would be pleased to provide you with a copy of what I write if you are interested.

University research procedures govern this project. Me and/or my faculty advisors would be pleased to answer questions about these procedures at any time. This project has been reviewed by the Institutional Review Board at the University of Massachusetts Boston. Approval of this project only signifies that the procedures adequately protect the rights and welfare of participants. Should you have any questions or concerns for the Institutional Review Board (IRB), you may contact IRB directly at the Office of Research Compliance at (617) 287-5374 or at human.subjects@umb.edu. I hope to speak with you further to obtain your valuable feedback. If you are willing to talk with me, just let me know and I will contact you to set up a time.

Thank you, William O'Donnell

Contact information for my advisors overseeing this study is below:

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Appendix 4, Tables and Supplements

Notes:

Any number listed below the categories in bold on the left corresponds to the respondent's responses from the data collection. Any number to the right of a category in parenthesis denotes the quantitative result from the sample.

| Status of employment: | Not Employed,(4 or 1/3) | Employed, (8 or 2-3) Employed | Employed full-time, (3) | Employed Part-Time(5) | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Industry(s): | Assistive Technology( 2) | Human Services(2 ) | Advocacy( 3) | State /local Governme nt (1) | Self Employed/ot her employment (0) | |
| Length of current employment: | Less than 6 Months (1) | 1 year (3) | 2 or more years(4) | | | |
| Skill level: | Professional (1) | entry-level (6) | attempting to obtain upward mobility (3) | retired (2) | homemaker and/or seeking employment (3) | Gave-up finding employme nt (1) |
| Education attained: | GED (2) | High School Grad (4) | Some College Education (4) | Post Graduate (5) | Advanced Degree (1) | |