Overcoming Negative Employer Attitudes: Exploring the Lived Experiences of Employees with Visual Impairments

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OVERCOMING NEGATIVE EMPLOYER ATTITUDES: EXPLORING THE LIVED
EXPERIENCES OF EMPLOYEES WITH VISUAL IMPAIRMENTS

A Dissertation
Submitted to School of Education

Duquesne University

In partial fulfillment of the requirements for
the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

By
James Frank McNeil III

December 2019
DUQUESNE UNIVERSITY
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Dissertation

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Executive Counselor Education and Supervision Program

Presented by:

James Frank McNeil III, MS, Rehabilitation Counseling
(University at Buffalo, State University of New York)
BS, Child and Youth Services (Medaille College)

September 27, 2019

OVERCOMING NEGATIVE EMPLOYER ATTITUDES:
EXPLORING THE LIVED EXPERIENCES OF EMPLOYEES
WITH VISUAL IMPAIRMENTS

Approved by:

___________________________________________, Chair
Lisa Lopez Levers, Ph.D.
Professor of Counselor Education & Human Development
Department of Educational Foundations and Leadership
Duquesne University

____________________________________________, Member
Matthew Joseph, Ph.D.
Associate Professor of Counselor Education
Department of Counseling, Psychology, and Special Education
Duquesne University

___________________________________________, Member
Waganesh Zeleke, Ph.D.
Associate Professor of Foundations and Leadership
Department of Educational Foundations and Leadership
Duquesne University
ABSTRACT

OVERCOMING NEGATIVE EMPLOYER ATTITUDES: EXPLORING THE LIVED EXPERIENCES OF EMPLOYEES WITH VISUAL IMPAIRMENTS

By

James Frank McNeil III

December 2019

Dissertation supervised by Lisa Lopez Levers, PhD

Negative employer attitudes toward people with visual impairments who are already employed is a topic that rarely has been discussed in the literature. The purpose of this hermeneutic phenomenological study was to explore, understand, and describe how employees with visual impairments process and overcome perceived negative employer attitudes. Seventeen themes emerged as a result of this study. Some of the themes emphasize the lived existentials (lived time, lived space, lived body, and lived other) connected with being the object of an employer’s negative attitude. Other themes emphasize the risk factors that exist in the environment(s) of employees with visual impairments who experience negative employer attitudes. The most commonly mentioned risk factor was being the only employee with a visual impairment, and the second most commonly mentioned risk factor was employees’ being on their own or left by themselves. Finally, having no support from others was the third most
commonly mentioned risk factor. Some of the themes emphasized protective factors that appear or need to be constructed in the environment(s) of employees with visual impairments to mitigate experiences of negative employer attitudes. Having a support system was the most commonly mentioned protective factor, and knowing disability laws and having a positive sense of self were tied as the second most commonly mentioned protective factors.
DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my beautiful wife, Natasha Sade McNeil. I am so blessed to be married to my best friend. You encouraged me to pursue a PhD and supported me throughout the entire process. I love you!
ACKNOWLEDGMENT

Before I acknowledge some of the people who have played a major role in my life, I would like to acknowledge God. In Ecclesiastes 9:11 (New Living Translation), it says:

The fastest runner doesn’t always win the race, and the strongest warrior doesn’t always win the battle. The wise sometimes go hungry, and the skillful are not necessarily wealthy. And those who are educated don’t always lead successful lives. It is all decided by chance, by being in the right place at the right time.

Thank you, God, for giving me the chance to work toward a PhD; even though I was not the fastest runner, I still won the race; even though I was not the strongest warrior, I still won the battle; and even though I was not the wisest or the most skillful, I still had more than enough. My life has been good, but I know that the best is yet to come.

I would like to acknowledge my beautiful wife and two handsome boys. Natasha Sade McNeil, not only are you my partner but also you are the mother of my children. I could not have asked for a better wife or a better gift from you and the Lord. Psalm 127:3 (New Living Translation) says that “children are a gift from the Lord; they are a reward from him.” James Frank McNeil IV and Elijah Alexander McNeil are our reward and our sweet baby boys. James and Elijah, I want you to know that you came into my life at the perfect time. Whenever I thought about settling for less than what the Lord had in store for me, I thought about you and your future. You are handsome, loving, kind, smart, funny, athletic, and extremely talented kids. Your mother and I always talk about your future. We believe your opportunities are endless because the Lord is endless.

I would like to acknowledge my late grandmother, Clarice Clarett Davidson. Not a day goes by where I do not think about you. You continue to be an inspiration in my life, and
because of this, I want you to know that this dissertation is for you, too. I would also like to acknowledge my parents, James Frank McNeill, Jr. and Renee McNeill; my older sister, Alexis Renee Jones (McNeill); my younger sister, Michal Lyn McNeil; and my three younger brothers, Jonathan Blair McNeil, Sheldon Mac McNeill, and Ian McNeil. Thank you for giving me your attention, time, and energy. I want you to know that every text, call, and visit meant a lot to me. Whenever I needed you, you were there for me. For instance, one of the best times I had was when everyone came to see me at the Home2Suites by Hilton in Erie, PA. You brought food and drinks, and we grilled outback. It was perfect! Times like that made me work harder. Next, I would like to acknowledge my in-laws, Vincent Long, Michelle Long, and Vinsetta Long. Thank you for your words of encouragement.

I wish to acknowledge my chairperson, Dr. Lisa Lopez Levers. You were one of the gatekeepers to my success. If not for your patience, I probably would not have made it this far. Ecclesiastes 7:8 (English Standard Version) says, “Better is the end of a thing than its beginning, and the patient in spirit is better than the proud in spirit.” Every time I changed my research topic or stopped working on my dissertation, you were patient in spirit. Even when I thought I had less than a year to finish my dissertation, you continued to be patient in spirit. I thank God for you, and I cannot wait to work with you again. Finally, I would like to acknowledge Dr. Matthew Joseph and Dr. Waganesh Zeleke. Thank you both for your guidance during my dissertation journey.
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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Negative employer attitudes toward hiring people with visual impairments have been discussed widely in the literature (Benoit, Jansson, Jansenberger, & Phillips, 2013; Butler, Crudden, & Sansing, 2005; Candela & Wolfe, 2002; Coffey, Coufopoulos, & Kinghorn, 2014; La Grow and Daye, 2005; Lynch, 2013; McDonall, 2008; McDonall, 2017; McDonall, Zhou, & Crudden, 2013; O’Day, 1999; Papakonstantinou & Papadopoulos, 2017). However, negative employer attitudes toward people with visual impairments who are already employed has rarely been discussed in the literature (Bengisu, Izbirak, & Mackieh, 2008; Crudden, McBroom, Skinner, & Moore, 1998; Frank & Bellini, 2005; Golub, 2006; McDonall, 2014; McDonall, O’Mally, & Crudden, 2014; Papakonstantinou & Papadopoulos, 2009; Papakonstantinou & Papadopoulos, 2010; Shaw, Gold, & Wolfe, 2007; Shengli, Warner, Mamboleo, Guerette, & Zalles, 2017; Smith, 2002). McDonall et al. (2014) stated explicitly that research on this specific population is quite limited.

To date, I have found one qualitative study (Golub, 2006) and two quantitative studies (McDonall, 2014; McDonall et al., 2014) that explored this phenomenon using the perspectives of employers as their primary research data. I also found two qualitative studies (Frank & Bellini, 2005; Smith, 2002), three quantitative studies (Bengisu et al., 2008; Crudden et al., 1998; Shaw et al., 2007), and three mixed-method studies (Papakonstantinou & Papadopoulos, 2009; Papakonstantinou & Papadopoulos, 2010; Shengli et al., 2017) that explored this phenomenon using the perspectives of employees with visual impairments as their primary research data. While this information is valuable, it is not sufficient; thus, there is a gap in the research literature.
Through this hermeneutic phenomenological study, I sought to explore, understand, and describe how employees with visual impairments process and overcome perceived negative employer attitudes. I proposed selecting and interviewing eight to 12 individuals who meet the following criteria: (1) have a visual impairment, (2) are currently employed, (3) have experienced negative employer attitudes, (4) are between the ages of 18 and 79, and (5) can communicate in English. The guiding question of this study was: What are the lived experiences of employees with visual impairments who are processing and overcoming perceived negative employer attitudes? Three subsidiary questions helped answer the guiding question: (1) What are the lived existentials (lived time, lived space, lived body, and lived other) of being the object of an employer’s negative attitude? (2) What risk factors exist in the environment(s) of employees with visual impairments who experience negative employer attitudes? (3) What protective factors appear or need to be constructed in the environment(s) of such employees to mitigate experiencing negative employer attitudes?

The remainder of this chapter offers context and background for understanding the prevalence of visual impairments in the United States in general as well as those in the workplace specifically. The problem statement, purpose of the study, research questions, significance of the study, and definition of terms are presented here, and the chapter concludes with the theoretical framework of the study and organization of the dissertation.

**Context and Background**

In 2017, the *New York Times* published an article with the following headline: “The Worst That Could Happen? Going Blind, People Say.” The article was written to inform readers about the effects of blindness and low vision. The author presented a study that was conducted by several researchers from the Wilmer Eye Institute at the Johns Hopkins University School of
The study’s researchers aimed to understand the importance of eye health in the United States (Scott, Bressler, Ffolkes, Wittenborn, & Jorkasky, 2016). The researchers collected and analyzed data from 2,044 participants. The results showed that most people believe that visual impairments are equal to or worse than hearing impairments, learning impairments, speech impairments, and amputation. The term “visual impairment” refers to people with a visual acuity measurement of 20/40 or worse in the better eye and with the best correction available (e.g., eyeglasses) or a visual field measurement of 20 degrees or less. Visual impairments can be congenital (occur from birth) or adventitious (acquired through infections, accidents, or over time).

**Prevalence of Visual Impairments**

Visual impairments are increasingly prevalent in the United States. Data collected by the National Eye Institute (NEI) shows that 4,000,000 people had a visual impairment in 2010. Almost a decade later, that number is considerably higher and expected to double by 2030 and triple by 2050 (Figure 1). Research also shows that the rise of visual impairments is associated with an increase in life expectancy (Congdon et al., 2004; Klein & Klein, 2013; Munoz et al., 2000). The life expectancy of people in the United States is increasing, with current life expectancy at 79 years. Because people are living longer, the risk for developing visual impairments—such as cataracts, glaucoma, diabetic retinopathy, and macular degeneration—is growing (Congdon et al., 2004).
Figure 1. Prevalence of Visual Impairments (2010, 2030, 2050). (National Eye Institute, 2019).

Cataracts, glaucoma, diabetic retinopathy, and macular degeneration are the leading causes of visual impairments in the United States (Rein et al., 2006). These four visual impairments are more prevalent among people 40 years or older (Congdon et al., 2004). Researchers from the NEI reported that Caucasians 70 years or older have the highest risk of developing cataracts and macular degeneration; African Americans 40 years or older have the highest risk of developing glaucoma; and Hispanics 50 years or older have the highest risk of developing diabetic retinopathy. Drawing attention to these four eye conditions is important to this study because they affect more Americans than any other type of eye condition and can have a substantial impact on their well-being.

**Cataracts.** A cataract is a medical condition in which the lens of the eye becomes cloudy or blurry (Andley, 2009). People who have cataracts generally report blurriness, haziness, and faded color in their vision (Figure 2). Cataracts can be congenital or adventitious and can affect a person’s well-being at any point in life. For example, an adult with cataracts may find it difficult to perform certain household activities, such as preparing meals, sorting clothes, or getting
dressed. In the same vein, an employee with cataracts may find it difficult to perform certain job
duties, such as typing documents, operating a cash register, or inspecting equipment. Fortunately,
there is a cure for cataracts. Cataract surgery is performed regularly to remove the natural lens of
the eye and replace it with an intraocular lens (Ianchulev, Litoff, Ellinger, Stiverson, & Packer,
2016).

Glaucoma. Glaucoma is a medical condition that occurs when pressure builds up inside
the eye (Chen, Bhatia, Halpern, & Walton, 2006). This kind of pressure can cause damage to the
optic nerve, which in turn damages peripheral vision (Quigley, Addicks, Green, & Maumenee,
1981). People who have glaucoma generally report the following symptoms: blind spots, eye
pain, headaches, blurriness, and tunnel vision (Figure 3). There are two types of glaucoma:
angle-closure (acute) and open-angle (chronic). Angle-closure glaucoma is the only type that can
be treated through surgery (Khaw, Shah, & Elkington, 2004). Glaucoma can be congenital or
adventitious and can affect a person’s well-being at any point during that person’s lifetime. An
adult with glaucoma may struggle to read traffic signs that are located on the sides of the road
while driving, and an employee with glaucoma may struggle to navigate through small, dark, or

Figure 2. Normal vision versus cataracts. (National Eye Institute, 2019).
congested spaces while operating an industrial truck or forklift. There is no cure for glaucoma, but doctors may prescribe eye drops to relieve eye pressure.

![Image](image1.png)

**Normal Vision**  
**Glaucoma**

*Figure 3. Normal vision versus glaucoma. (National Eye Institute, 2019)*

**Diabetic retinopathy.** Diabetic retinopathy damages the blood vessels in the retina (Gündüz & Bakri, 2007). People who have diabetic retinopathy also have diabetes (Nentwich & Ulbig, 2015) and generally report the following symptoms: floating spots, blurriness, fluctuating vision, and dark or empty spots (Figure 4). Diabetic retinopathy can be congenital or adventitious and can affect a person’s well-being at any point. For example, adults with diabetic retinopathy may find it difficult to navigate their house or neighborhood. Similarly, an employee with diabetic retinopathy may struggle with navigating the office or getting to and from work each day. There is no cure for diabetic retinopathy, but doctors may prescribe eye drops or perform surgery to stop leaking blood vessels in the retina.
Normal Vision                  Diabetic Retinopathy

*Figure 4. Normal vision versus diabetic retinopathy. (National Eye Institute, 2019).*

**Macular degeneration.** Macular degeneration or age-related macular degeneration (AMD) occurs when the center of the retina (macula) deteriorates (Haines et al., 2005). People who have AMD generally report the following symptoms: central vision loss, blurriness, and changes in color perception (Figure 5). There are two types of AMD: exudative (wet) and nonexudative (dry). AMD is classified as wet when abnormal blood vessels grow in the retina and bleed or leak fluid. AMD can be congenital or adventitious and can affect a person’s well-being at any point during that person’s lifetime. For example, an adult with AMD may struggle to recognize relatives’ faces or watch television. In the same vein, an employee with AMD may struggle to identify customers or clients. There is no cure for AMD, but doctors may prescribe medication or recommend surgery to slow the disease’s progression.
Visual Impairments in the Workplace

Researchers have shown that people with visual impairments can perform a wide range of jobs (Candela & Wolffe, 2002; Crudden et al., 1998; La Grow and Daye, 2005; McDonnall et al., 2014; Papakonstantinou and Papadopoulos, 2017; Smith, 2002). Yet employment for the visually impaired still has a number of problems that involve the employment rate and various employment issues, as well as forms of discrimination.

Employment rate. A gradual increase in the employment rate of people with visual impairments has occurred over the last few years. Data from the American Community Survey shows that 36.5% of people with visual impairments, ages 18–64, were employed in 2011; in 2012, 37.4%; in 2013, 39.9 %; in 2014, 40.3%; in 2015, 41.8%; in 2016, 43.6%; and in 2017, 44%. However, when the employment rate of people with visual impairments is compared to that of others, their presence in the labor force is very low (McDonnall, 2014). Data from the American Community Survey (2017) show that 44% of people with visual impairments, ages 18–64, were employed, compared to 77.3% of people without any impairment.

The number of people with visual impairments working full time is also low (Kirchner & Smith, 2005; Lee & Park, 2008). Data from the American Community Survey (2017) show that
30.5% of people with visual impairments, ages 21–64, were employed full-time compared to 60.3% of people without any impairment. The state with the highest percentage of people with visual impairments working full time was North Dakota at 57.6%, and the state with the lowest percentage of people with visual impairment working full time was Wyoming at 14.8%. Based on these data, it is clear that employees with visual impairments not only have a low presence in the labor force but also work fewer hours (McDonnell, 2014).

**Employment issues.** Employees with visual impairments form a subgroup of the overall group of people with visual impairments, and they are rarely discussed in the research literature (Golub, 2006; McDonnell, 2014; McDonnell et al., 2014). The information published on this subgroup has been embedded in larger studies that explore people with disabilities in general (Dutta, Gervey, Chan, Chou, & Ditchman, 2008; Kruse & Schur, 2003; Livneh, 1982). Because of this, the proposed study can shed light on challenges that frequently occur between employers and employees with visual impairments; most people are not aware of such challenges, but rehabilitation professionals are familiar with the inequities people with visual impairments face. To illuminate the critical nature of some employer–employee interactions, I offer an example from my own professional experience, specifically from when I worked as a vocational rehabilitation counselor. I met a young woman with a visual impairment, Mary (pseudonym), who had been hired to work as a data entry specialist at a large international company. After a few weeks on the job, Mary stated that her employer was going to terminate her at the end of her probationary period, owing to poor job performance. Mary explained that she was having a difficult time reading the small print and locating the mouse cursor on her computer screen.

Mary asked me to contact her employer on her behalf to explain how our agency would be able to assist with the problem. After I spoke to Mary’s manager about our agency and one of
our services in particular—assistive technology—he agreed to a meeting. On the day that we met, Mary sat down at her workstation while the assistive technology specialist made changes to her computer settings and installed adaptive software and hardware. Mary’s manager, direct supervisor, and IT support analyst watched as Mary demonstrated how she could increase her typing speed and locate the mouse cursor much faster. Mary’s manager responded with amazement and told Mary and me that he was going to extend her probationary period to give her a fair chance. However, a few days later, Mary’s manager contacted me and said that he was going to terminate her because he was not sure how to work with her going forward. This example demonstrates a perceived negative employer attitude and shows how it is manifest toward employees with visual impairments.

**Forms of discrimination.** Discrimination against employees with visual impairments can take on many forms. Several studies have dealt with challenges that employees with visual impairments typically face in the workplace (Bengisu et al., 2008; Crudden et al., 1998; Papakonstantinou and Papadopoulos, 2010).

Papakonstantinou and Papadopoulos’s (2010) study presented the following list with details of the experiences and struggles people with visual impairments face in the workplace:

- No provision of suitable support equipment
- No provision of information on various matters of concern to me
- Overprotection in various practical areas
- Overestimation and underestimation of my visual capacity—no appreciation of the limits of what I can do
- No realization of at what point I start needing help
- Assignment of tasks that I am incapable of concluding
• Not being interested in finding out my visual capacity (what I can see)
• Not helping me adjust to the workplace . . . (p. 185)

In terms of “negative emotional support,” participants mentioned the following factors:

• Being indifferent to how I feel or what I need
• Being distant, avoiding me,
• Having formal or cold relationships
• Underestimating my abilities—thinking I am capable of only specific tasks,
• Being full of praise, too polite, and too anxious to help me, even when I can do something on my own,
• Showing disrespect to me—insulting me, not being treated as an equal but something different. (p. 186)

Title I of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) was created to prohibit employers from discriminating against qualified individuals during the hiring process and on the job. The ADA is administered and enforced by the US Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC), a federal agency that investigates charges of discrimination against employers. To illuminate the critical nature of some of these charges, I offer an example from a case filed with the EEOC.

In 2005, the EEOC reported that a “qualified blind employee” won an $8,000,000 lawsuit against a large employer in Denver, Colorado, because the company failed to provide a reasonable accommodation. At the time of the interview, the employee requested adaptive software as an accommodation. He explained that he could perform the essential functions of the job if the employer had someone install text-to-speech software (e.g., JAWS) on his computer. Instead of providing text-to-speech software, the employer asked another employee to act as a
reader. Shortly after, the employer stopped the interview and told the employee with the visual impairment that he did not have the ability to perform the job. In court, the employer argued that text-to-speech software was not compatible with their system. However, evidence provided by the employee showed that another large employer with the same computer system was able to install text-to-speech software. The jury determined that the employer violated the employment provisions of the ADA by discriminating against the employee because of his disability.

**Problem Statement**

Research has consistently indicated that the greatest barrier in the workplace for people with disabilities is a negative employer attitude (Bengisu et al., 2008; Crudden et al., 1998; Frank & Bellini, 2005; Golub, 2006; McDonall, 2014; McDonall et al., 2014; Papakonstantinou & Papadopoulos, 2009; Papakonstantinou & Papadopoulos, 2010; Shaw et al., 2007; Shengli et al., 2017; Smith, 2002). The reasons behind negative employer attitudes have been debated by researchers for decades (Livneh, 1982). For example, some researchers stated that negative employer attitudes toward this population are associated with widely held beliefs about disabilities in general (Crudden et al., 1998; Golub, 2006; Livneh, 1982; Lynch, 2013). Other researchers stated that negative employer attitudes toward this population are associated with a lack of knowledge or understanding about their abilities and limitations (Candela & Wolffe, 2002; McDonall, 2014; Wolffe, 2002). Regardless of the reason, the fact remains that people with disabilities who want to work or who are already employed have experienced and will continue to experience negative employer attitudes.

Employees with visual impairments constitute a subgroup of people with disabilities who frequently experience negative employer attitudes in the workplace (Papakonstantinou & Papadopoulos, 2010). However, there is a shortage of information on this topic in the research
literature (McDonnell et al., 2014). To date, I have found one qualitative study (Golub, 2006) and two quantitative studies (McDonnell, 2014; McDonnell et al., 2014) that explored this phenomenon using employers’ perspectives as their primary research data source. I also found two qualitative studies (Frank & Bellini, 2005; Smith, 2002), three quantitative studies (Bengisu et al., 2008; Crudden et al., 1998; Shaw et al., 2007), and three mixed methods studies (Papakonstantinou & Papadopoulos, 2009; Papakonstantinou & Papadopoulos, 2010; Shengli et al., 2017) that explored this phenomenon using the perspectives of employees with visual impairments as their primary research data source.

Only five studies have used a qualitative approach to explore negative employer attitudes toward employees with visual impairments. Frank and Bellini’s (2005) qualitative study investigated barriers to the accommodation request process, and Smith’s (2002) qualitative study investigated barriers when practicing law or working in the IT field. Papakonstantinou and Papadopoulos’s (2009, 2010) mixed-methods studies investigated social support in the workplace for employees with visual impairments, and Shengli et al.’s (2017) mixed-methods study investigated barriers in the accommodation process. Although this information is valuable, it is not sufficient, meaning there is a gap in the research literature.

**Purpose of the Study**

When people with visual impairments face negative employer attitudes, to whom can they turn for help? Research shows that most employees with visual impairments will turn to rehabilitation professionals for help (Butler et al., 2005). Rehabilitation professionals are experts who help people with disabilities manage personal, societal, and professional challenges. Frank and Bellini (2005) stated that professional challenges “may leave the requesters feeling even more disempowered than they might have otherwise felt as a result of having a severe
impairment while living in a disabling environment” (p. 38). To illuminate the critical nature of some of these professional issues, I offer another example from my own professional experience, specifically from when I worked as an accommodation specialist. I met a middle-aged man with low vision, David (pseudonym), who was working as an assistant store manager at a home improvement store. One day, David contacted me and stated that he was having trouble seeing. David also explained that his human resources manager and regional manager had given him a leave of absence and told him that he was not allowed to return to work until his eyesight improved.

David asked me to contact his regional manager on his behalf and explain how a job accommodation would allow him to perform his duties. After speaking to David’s regional manager about several low-vision aids (e.g., portable video magnifiers) and how they are used to enhance vision, she agreed to take him off his leave of absence. David’s regional manager told me that she was still skeptical about his ability to perform his duties but was willing to give him a chance. However, a few days later, David contacted me and said, “I was let go.” David explained that his regional manager had called him and said, “The company is downsizing and, unfortunately, you are a part of the layoff.” David told me that he felt angry and betrayed. This example again illustrates employers’ negative attitudes and perceptions toward employees with visual impairments.

My goal for this hermeneutic phenomenological study is to explore, understand, and describe how employees with visual impairments process and overcome perceived negative employer attitudes. The proposed study seeks to gather information from employees with visual impairments so that we might (1) understand what it is like to experience a perceived negative
employer attitude and (2) provide professionals in counseling and counselor educators with access to information that advances knowledge and skills.

**Research Questions**

The guiding question of this study was as follows: What are the lived experiences of employees with visual impairments who are processing and overcoming perceived negative employer attitudes? Three subsidiary questions helped answer the guiding question:

1. What are the lived existentials (lived space, lived body, lived time, and lived other) of being the object of an employer’s negative attitude?
2. What risk factors exist in the environment(s) of employees with visual impairments who experience negative employer attitudes?
3. What protective factors appear or need to be constructed in the environment(s) of employees with visual impairments to mitigate the experiences of negative employer attitudes?

**Significance of the Study**

Research shows that one in 28 Americans has a visual impairment (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2017; Congdon et al., 2004). The proposed study is significant because it gives a voice to eight individuals who have a visual impairment. The participants shared their experiences and perceptions (van Manen, 1997). They also identified the risk factors related to negative employer attitudes that exist in the employees’ environments, as well as any existing or required protective factors that may mitigate the effects of the negative attitudes. In addition, rehabilitation professionals and counselors from other specialty areas will have access to information that will help these individuals process and overcome perceived negative attitudes during the hiring process and when on the job (Crudden et al., 1998).
Theoretical Framework of the Study

This study incorporated the theoretical framework of Bronfenbrenner’s (2005) bioecological model for human development and van Manen’s (1990) hermeneutic phenomenology. The theoretical framework of the study is important because it facilitates understanding through relevant models and concepts.

Bioecological Model for Human Development

The bioecological model for human development was created by Urie Bronfenbrenner. Bronfenbrenner’s (2005) model is important to this study because it explains how a developing person is influenced by his or her environment. Smith, Webber, and DeFrain (2013) stated that the bioecological model for human development focuses “on the importance of the individual–context relations and how these relations influence the individual’s quest for development” (p. 1). As a person develops, that person interacts with other people and changes from a simple form to a more complex form. Bronfenbrenner and Morris (2007) stated that this “phenomenon extends over the life course, across successive generations, and through historical time, both past and future” (p. 793).

The bioecological model for human development has five environmental systems: microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, macrosystem, and chronosystem. The microsystem, the first environmental system, is defined as “the complex of relations between the developing person and environment in an immediate setting containing the person” (Bronfenbrenner, 1977, p. 514). The microsystem contains the components that have an immediate and direct influence on the developing person, such as family, school, peers, religious affiliations, workplaces, and neighborhoods. As applicable to this study, the workplace of employees with visual impairments is a part of their microsystem.
Hermeneutic Phenomenology

Created by van Manen, hermeneutic phenomenology is a qualitative research method that researchers commonly use to interpret and describe lived human experience. Van Manen (1990) observed that “lived human experience is always more complex than the result of any singular description, and that there is always an element of the ineffable to life” (p. 16). Because of this, van Manen (1990) recommended that researchers should use lifeworld existentials as guides to reflection, of which there are four: (1) lived space (spatiality), (2) lived body (corporeality), (3) lived time (temporality), and (4) lived other (relationality). Additionally, van Manen (1997) defined each lifeworld existential as follows:

Lived space (spatiality) is felt space . . . . Lived body (corporeality) refers to the phenomenological fact that we are always bodily in the world . . . . Lived time (temporality) is subjective time as opposed to clock time or objective time . . . . Lived other (relationality) is the lived relation we maintain with others in the interpersonal space that we share with them. (pp. 102–104)

For this dissertation, the lifeworld existentials provided a way to gain insight into the lived experiences of eight employees with visual impairments.

Definition of Terms

Accommodation—refers to an adjustment to a job or work environment that makes it possible for individuals with a disability to perform their job duties.

Employees with visual impairments—refers to people who are totally blind or who have low vision and who are currently working.

An employer is a person who is engaged in industry-affecting commerce and who has employees for each working day.
Low vision is having a measurable amount of vision but having difficulty accomplishing a visual task, even with prescribed corrective lenses (Corn & Lusk, 2010).

Perceived negative employer attitude is used to refer to a person’s perception of his or her employers’ negative actions or interactions.

Totally blind means that the person has an inability to see with either eye.

Vision loss—refers to people who have trouble seeing, even when wearing glasses or contact lenses, and refers to people who are blind or unable to see at all (Cassin, 2006).

Visual impairment in the technical sense refers to people with a visual acuity measurement of 20/40 or worse in the better eye and with best correction (e.g., eyeglasses) or a visual field measurement of 20 degrees or less.

**Organization of the Dissertation**

Chapter 1 offered the context and background for understanding the prevalence of visual impairments in the United States in general and visual impairments in the workplace specifically. I also give multiple examples of workplace challenges that occur between employers and employee with visual impairments. Chapter 2 presents quantitative and qualitative research on negative employer attitudes toward people with visual impairments. This chapter also explains the relationship between this study and Bronfenbrenner’s (2005) bioecological model for human development and van Manen’s (1990) hermeneutic phenomenology. Chapter 3 gives an overview of the methodology that guides this study, which is hermeneutic phenomenology. In Chapter 4, I offer information on the recruitment of participants; the demographic details; an analysis of interviews; a cross-case analysis of similarities, differences, and themes; and a chapter summary. Finally, Chapter 5 contains an overview of the study and a discussion on the findings as they pertain to the research questions. This chapter concludes with the implications
for counseling, considerations for future research, questions generated by this study, the conclusion, and a chapter summary.
CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

In this chapter, I present a comprehensive review of the literature on negative employer attitudes toward people with visual impairments. Whittemore and Knafl (2005) stated that a comprehensive review of the literature covers a wider scope and offers readers a broader understanding of the phenomenon being studied. To demonstrate the importance of this research topic and to help readers make sense of the information that I present, I have divided the literature into sections. In addition, I discuss the theoretical framework of the study, which is Bronfenbrenner’s (2005) bioecological model for human development and van Manen’s (1990) hermeneutic phenomenology.

Employer Attitudes Toward People with Disabilities

The attitudes of employers toward people with disabilities have been discussed in the research literature for decades (Copeland, Chan, Bezyak, & Fraser, 2010; Breen, 2018; Kregel & Unger, 1993; Livneh, 1982; Unger, 2002). Several researchers have found that some employers express a positive attitude toward people with disabilities (Graffam, Shinkfield, Smith & Polzin, 2002; Hernandez et al., 2000; McDonnall et al., 2015). For example, Hernandez et al.’s (2000) study found that employers who have higher levels of education are more likely to show favorable attitudes toward people with disabilities. Crudden et al.’s (2005) study found that employers who have prior knowledge of or contact with people with disabilities are more likely to show a willingness to hire members of this population.

Although some employers express a positive attitude toward people with disabilities, the vast majority of research focuses on employers who do not. Some authors show that more employers have negative attitudes toward people with disabilities than do not (e.g., Benoit et al., 2013; Burke et al., 2013; Butler et al., 2005; Candela & Wolffe, 2002; Coffey et al., 2014;
Combs & Omvig, 1986; Krahé & Altvasser, 2006; La Grow & Daye, 2005; Livneh, 1982; Lynch, 2013; McDonnall, 2008; McDonnall, 2017; McDonnall et al., 2013; Nota, Santilli, Ginevra & Soresi, 2014; O’Day, 1999; Papakonstantinou & Papadopoulos, 2017). Employers’ negative attitudes toward people with disabilities stem from various reasons (Livneh, 1982). Livneh’s (1982) study found that most of these reasons are associated with one of the following categories:

(a) conditioning by sociocultural norms that emphasize certain qualities not met by the disabled population; (b) childhood influences where early life experiences foster the formation of stereotypic adult beliefs and values; (c) psychodynamic mechanisms that may play a role in creating unrealistic expectations and unresolved conflicts when interacting with disabled persons; (d) perception of disability as a punishment for a committed sin or as a justification for committing a future evil act, which triggers unconscious fears in the non-disabled person; (e) the inherent capacity of unstructured social, emotional, and intellectual situations to provoke confusion and anxiety; (f) the impact of a basic aesthetic-sexual aversion, created by the sight of the visibly disfigured, on the development of negative attitudes; (g) the threat to the conscious body and unconscious body image triggered by the mere presence of physically disabled individuals; (h) the devaluative and stereotypical reactions fostered by the marginality associated with being a member of a minority group; (i) the unconscious and symbolic’ parallelism between disability and death as a reminder of man’s transient existence; (j) prejudicial-provoking behaviors, by persons with disabilities that result in discriminatory practices toward them; (k) disability-related factors (e.g., levels of functionality, visibility, severity) which may contribute to specific negative attitudes; and (l) observer-
related factors, both demographic (sex, age) and personality-connected (ethnocentrism, authoritarianism), which may foster the development of negative attitudes. (p. 344)

Based on this finding, it appears that negative employer attitudes are firmly embedded in thought, behavior, and culture.

**Negative Employer Attitudes Toward Hiring People with Visual Impairments**

People with visual impairments have dealt with negative employer attitudes for decades (Crudden et al., 1998). Researchers have shown that people with visual impairments frequently experience negative employer attitudes during the hiring process (Benoit et al., 2013; Butler et al., 2005; Coffey et al., 2014; Crudden et al., 1998; Crudden et al., 2005; La Grow & Daye, 2005). For example, Crudden et al. (1998) stated that most of the participants in their study experienced negative employer attitudes more than any other barrier during the hiring process (e.g., transportation and mobility, print access, adaptive equipment and accommodations, job opportunities, personal fears and uncertainties, and ability to recognize faces). In another study, Crudden et al. (2005) stated that all of the participants experienced at least one instance of a negative employer attitude during the hiring process.

In the following paragraphs, I discuss several studies that show how negative employer attitudes can affect people with visual impairments during the hiring process. I organize this discussion according to the perceptions of rehabilitation professionals, perceptions of employers, and perceptions of people with visual impairments.

**Perceptions of Rehabilitation Professionals**

At least two studies on negative employer attitudes toward hiring people with visual impairments have used the perceptions of rehabilitation professionals as their primary research data. Butler et al.’s (2005) study recruited 43 rehabilitation professionals (30 women and 13
men) to explore employment barriers for people with visual impairments. Eighteen participants were selected from a national conference, and 25 participants were selected from the Mississippi Department of Rehabilitation Services, Office of Vocational Rehabilitation for the Blind.

During the interview, the researchers asked the participants to respond to four open-ended questions. The first question was about identifying barriers to employment for people with visual impairments. Almost all of the participants described negative employer attitudes as an employment barrier. For example, one participant said that “attitudinal barriers are fundamental . . . people are scared to death of going blind, employers are fearful and ignorant about what a person with a visual impairment can do, and … it comes more from their lack of understanding and their fear” (Butler et al., 2005, p. 6). The second question was about identifying ways to overcome negative employer attitudes. The participants noted that they used nonthreatening methods. For example, some of the participants said that they usually meet with employers to share success stories or discuss disability laws, such as the Americans with Disabilities Act. Other participants said that they usually meet with employers to encourage them to increase their contact with people with visual impairments. The final two questions were about identifying ways to overcome transportation and print access issues.

Influencing employers to hire people with visual impairments can be a challenge for many rehabilitation professionals. McDonnell et al. (2013) examined ways that rehabilitation professionals could influence employers to hire people with visual impairments. The researchers used a 3-item questionnaire to collect data from 210 rehabilitation professionals. The first item on the questionnaire asked the participants if they thought employers had more negative attitudes toward hiring people with visual impairments than they did about members of any other disability group. Almost all of the participants believed that they did. The second item on the
questionnaire asked the participants to indicate the number of employers they had worked for in the past who had negative attitudes toward hiring people with visual impairments. The participants stated that 75% of the employers they had worked with manifested negative attitudes toward hiring people with visual impairments.

The last item on the questionnaire asked the participants to share techniques that they used to influence employers to hire people with visual impairments. From the exhaustive list of techniques provided by participants, the researchers created themes and listed them under two categories. Under the first category, which is called providing information, McDonnall et al. (2013) listed the following:

(a) providing information about accommodations and AT (assistive technology)[;] … (b) demonstration of how people with visual impairments perform a job, use AT, or function in general[;] … (c) demonstration of potential accommodations or AT[;] … (d) educating employers about disability and issues specific to visual impairments, including social/interpersonal issues concerned with working with someone with a visual disability[;] … (e) sharing information about tax incentives for hiring persons with disabilities[;] … (f) providing potential employers with success stories of persons who are visually impaired performing similar jobs[;] … (g) direct communication among employers about working with someone who is blind or visually impaired[; and] … (h) open discussions with employers. (pp. 11–12)

Under the second category, which is called service delivery strategies, McDonnall et al. (2013) listed the following:

(a) establishing ongoing relationships with employers[;] … (b) addressing employer needs[;] … (c) ensuring that the job applicant meets the employers’ needs[;] … (d) using
a job analysis to better understand the position[;] … (e) focusing on the position description and job duties[;] … (f) focusing on abilities rather than disabilities when working with employers[;] … (g) assuring employers that support from the [vocational rehabilitation] agency, such as assistance with technology or job coaching, would continue to be available[; and] … (h) using on-the-job training or other types of work experience, both paid and unpaid. (pp. 12–13)

The abovementioned studies show that negative employer attitudes are common barriers to employment faced not only by people with visual impairments but also by rehabilitation professionals. Because of this, rehabilitation professionals have developed a number of strategies in an attempt to influence employers to hire people with visual impairments. The strategies that were discussed the most and that seem to be the most effective are (1) meeting with employers to share success stories and (2) informing employers about disability-related issues.

**Perceptions of Employers**

At least three studies used the perceptions of employers as the primary research data. Candela and Wolffé (2002) met with nine employers to explore the hiring process and to develop a strategy that would influence employers to hire people with visual impairments. The researchers conducted several in-depth interviews with participants over the phone. They asked a number of questions about specific job roles, tasks, and accommodations, as well as questions about the hiring process, employee performance, job satisfaction, and the advantages of hiring people with visual impairments. After analyzing the data, Candela and Wolffé (2002) found that negative employer attitudes were associated with widely held beliefs about disabilities in general. They also found that negative employer attitudes were associated with a lack of knowledge about job accommodations.
In a similar study, Lynch (2013) created a questionnaire and sent it to 401 employers. Most of the items on the questionnaire were about myths and misconceptions regarding people with visual impairments. For example, one of the items on the questionnaire asked if people with visual impairments could perform only a limited number of jobs; another item asked if employers felt like they had to spend a lot of money on job accommodations; and the last item on the questionnaire asked if people with visual impairments needed more assistance than people without impairments. After analyzing the data, Lynch (2013) found that more than half of the participants believed there were only a few jobs in their company that people with visual impairments could perform. Lynch (2013) also found that nearly half of the participants believed they had to spend a lot of money on job accommodations, and more than half of the participants believed people with visual impairments needed more assistance than people without any impairment.

Lynch’s (2013) and Candela and Wolffè’s (2002) studies demonstrated that employers have negative attitudes toward people with visual impairments for various reasons. Some of the reasons identified in their studies were consistent with those found in a previous study by Livneh (1982). For example, Livneh (1982) stated that childhood influences can lead to stereotypical beliefs as an adult. Candela and Wolffè (2002) explained that the participants in their study had negative beliefs about people with disabilities in general. Livneh (1982) said that visible disabilities may contribute to specific negative attitudes. Furthermore, Lynch (2013) stated that the participants in his study believed there were only a few jobs that people with visual impairments could perform. Based on this information, it is evident that the participants in both studies lacked knowledge about the capabilities of people with visual impairments.
In Papakonstantinou and Papadopoulos’s (2017) study, 40 human resources managers (27 men and 13 women) were invited to learn about the capabilities of people with visual impairments. Papakonstantinou and Papadopoulos (2017) held a training session that was divided into three parts. In the first part, the researchers asked the participants about their willingness to hire people with visual impairments. Next, the researchers handed the participants some information about various jobs that people with visual impairments were performing. In the third part, the researchers asked the participants if they had changed their minds about hiring people with visual impairments.

The results of the data analysis showed that 45% of the participants at first stated that they would never hire a person with a visual impairment. However, after learning about various jobs in which people with visual impairments were employed, 22.5% of the participants said that they had changed their minds about hiring people with visual impairments. Not only was this strategy effective but it was also consistent with some of the strategies mentioned in two previous studies (Butler et al., 2005; McDonnall et al., 2013). In Butler et al.’s (2005) study, the participants said that they usually share success stories and discuss disability laws, such as the Americans with Disabilities Act, with employers. In McDonnall et al.’s (2013) study, the participants said that they also share success stories and discuss disability issues that are specific to visual impairments to influence employers’ hiring behavior.

**Perceptions of People with Visual Impairments**

At least four studies used the perceptions of people with visual impairments who do not work but who want to work as their primary research data. O’Day (1999) used a purposive sampling technique to recruit, select, and interview 20 people who were legally blind, unemployed, receiving social security benefits, and between the ages of 25 and 45. Some
interviews took place inside the participants’ homes and some at a local disability organization. During the interviews, O’Day asked the participants to describe their past work experiences. The researchers found that almost all participants had experienced negative employer attitudes during the hiring process. For example, some participants stated that employers had limited expectations of them, whereas other participants stated that they felt that employers made hiring decisions based on what they believed about the participants instead of what was true.

Likewise, the participants in Coffey et al.’s (2014) study stated that they had experienced negative employer attitudes during the hiring process. The researchers interviewed a large number of people with visual impairments to gain a deeper understanding of their experiences with negative employer attitudes. The researchers created a questionnaire, which dealt with negative employer attitudes, transportation issues, and technology issues, and sent it to 96 participants. They found that the vast majority of participants believed their experiences with negative employer attitudes affected their confidence. For example, some participants stated that they no longer believed that they could secure employment. One participant said that she wanted to work but felt she was no longer qualified after an employer told her that she could not perform certain job duties because of her visual impairment.

La Grow and Daye (2005) argued that people with visual impairments can perform a variety of jobs and examined ways people with visual impairments can overcome perceived negative employer attitudes during the hiring process. The researchers interviewed 95 people with visual impairments over the phone. All participants were between the ages of 18 and 65, and were members of a disability organization called the Royal New Zealand Foundation of the Blind. During the interview, La Grow and Daye (2005) asked the participants to share how people with visual impairments can overcome barriers to employment. The researchers found
that 75% of participants experienced negative employer attitudes during the hiring process. Many participants noted that the best way to overcome negative employer attitudes during the hiring process is to teach employers about the capabilities of people with visual impairments. This response is consistent with McDonnell et al.’s (2013) findings. In this study, the researchers focused “on abilities rather than disabilities when working with employers” (p. 13).

Benoit et al. (2013) explored the stigma associated with people with visual impairments, using a snowball sampling technique to recruit, select, and interview 18 people with visual impairments. All participants were legally blind and between the ages of 15 and 64. Benoit et al. (2013) used a mixed-method data collection approach. The researchers met with each participant and asked each of them to complete a modified version of the Devaluation/Discrimination Scale. This scale was originally created to measure the stigma associated with people with intellectual disabilities; however, the researchers modified it to measure the opinions of people with visual impairments. After the participants completed the questionnaire, the researchers asked them to respond to 12 questions about their work experiences.

The researchers found that the vast majority of participants believed that employers do not want to hire people with visual impairments. For example, one participant said that he believes most employers deliberately ignore applications completed by people with visual impairments. Another participant stated that “the biggest barrier really is around ignorance; if people meet a visually impaired person, the visual impairment is going to be what they are the most conscious of until the person has a chance to show abilities” (Benoit et al., 2013, p. 979).

**Summary of Perceptions**

People with visual impairments have been the recipients of negative employer attitudes for decades (Crudden et al., 1998), and these attitudes can be attributed to various reasons...
Such reasons include widely held beliefs about disabilities in general, a lack of knowledge about job accommodations, a belief that people with visual impairments can perform only a few jobs, believing that employers must spend a lot of money on job accommodations, and thinking that people with visual impairments need more assistance than people without impairments (Candela & Wolffe, 2002; Livneh, 1982; Lynch, 2013).

Several studies included the following strategies to overcome negative employer attitudes: (a) meeting with employers to share success stories, (b) informing employers about disability related issues, and (c) teaching employers about the capabilities of people with visual impairments (Benoit et al., 2013; Butler et al., 2005; La Grow & Daye, 2005; McDonnall et al., 2013; Papakonstantinou & Papadopoulos, 2017). These strategies demonstrate that people with visual impairments can overcome negative employer attitudes during the hiring process. This knowledge can increase the confidence of people with visual impairments who want to work and provide rehabilitation professionals with the tools they need to influence employers to hire people with visual impairments.

**Research on Employees with Visual Impairments**

Employees with visual impairments constitute a subgroup of people with visual impairments rarely discussed in the research literature (Golub, 2006; McDonnall, 2014; McDonnall et al., 2014). Published information about this subgroup is embedded in larger studies that investigate people with disabilities in general (Dutta et al., 2008; Kruse & Schur, 2003; Livneh, 1982). For example, Dutta et al. (2008) investigated the effectiveness of vocational rehabilitation services for people with disabilities. The researchers wanted to know whether people with physical and mental disabilities benefited from receiving such services. The researchers selected participants from the Department of Education, Rehabilitation Service
Administration (RSA) Case Service Report (Form 911). In the report, the participants were grouped together and arranged in the following categories: sensory or communicative disabilities, physical disabilities, and mental disabilities. The sensory or communicative category included employees with visual impairments and employees with hearing impairments.

The researchers reported that people with sensory or communicative disabilities experienced more successful employment outcomes than people with physical or mental disabilities. In addition, people with sensory or communicative disabilities were four times more likely to secure employment after receiving vocational rehabilitation services. Dutta et al.’s (2008) study is important because it sheds light on a workplace issue that involves employees with visual impairments; however, it does not describe the factors that contribute to the success of employees with visual impairments. Researchers who take employees with visual impairments lightly learn little about them or the challenges that they face and must overcome in the work environment (McDonnell et al., 2014).

**Negative Employer Attitudes Toward Employees with Visual Impairments**

Researchers have consistently found that negative employer attitudes present the greatest workplace challenge for employees with visual impairments (Bengisu et al., 2008; Crudden et al., 1998; Frank & Bellini, 2005; Golub, 2006; McDonnell, 2014; McDonnell et al., 2014; Papakonstantinou & Papadopoulos, 2009, 2010; Shaw et al., 2007; Shengli et al., 2017; Smith, 2002). Employees with visual impairments often perceive negative employer attitudes as negative actions or interactions. However, negative employer attitudes can also become legal matters (Hernandez et al., 2000). For example, a negative employer attitude may become a legal matter when an employer covered under the Americans with Disabilities Act treats an employee
with a disability unfavorably because the employee has a disability, has a record of a disability, or is regarded as having a disability.

Employers often treat employees with disabilities unfavorably (Chan, McMahon, Cheing, Rosenthal, & Bezyak, 2005). In 2018, the EEOC reported that 24,605 charges were filed against employers. Many such charges were filed by employees with visual impairments. As one example, on Monday, July 8, 2019, the EEOC reported that a large employer in Atlanta, Georgia, had refused to accommodate an employee with a visual impairment. According to the lawsuit, an employee who had a visual impairment had requested a job accommodation so he could complete a required computer based training. Instead of providing a reasonable accommodation, the employer denied the request and terminated the employee.

Below, I discuss several studies that shed light on challenges that employees with visual impairments face in the work environment. This discussion is organized into two parts: (a) the perceptions of employers and (b) the perceptions of employees with visual impairments.

**Perceptions of Employers**

At least two studies on negative employer attitudes toward employees with visual impairments have used employers’ perceptions as primary research data. McDonnall (2014) created the first questionnaire that was specific to employees with visual impairments and sent it to 197 employers from Alabama, Montana, New Jersey, and Texas. The participants completed the questionnaire online and over the phone. It measured employer attitudes toward employees with visual impairments, containing 15 items that dealt with the participants’ experiences with employees with visual impairments. Two items compared the quality and quantity of the work of employees with visual impairment to that of other employees. McDonnall found that many participants believed that job accommodations were too costly, that employees with visual
impairments required more assistance than other employees, and that employers’ lack of knowledge about visual impairments made it difficult to work with employees with such impairments. Although some participants expressed positive attitudes, many expressed negative attitudes toward employees with visual impairments.

Golub (2006) met with 22 hiring managers to identify factors that contribute to the success of employees with visual impairments. The study’s participants were selected because they had knowledge of or contact with employees with visual impairments. Golub asked the participants to respond to several open-ended questions. The first question required participants to identify factors that encouraged employees with visual impairments to succeed. For the second question, participants identified specific social skills that contributed to the success of employees with visual impairments. The third question addressed the employer’s level of comfort. The fourth question required participants to identify factors that contribute to overall work success, and the final question was about identifying specific steps that enable employees with visual impairments to succeed.

Golub (2006) assigned the participants’ responses to groups, converted them into themes, and listed the themes on a model that he created. On the model’s left side, Golub listed six steps or themes for employees with visual impairments: (a) your comfort is contagious, (b) blindness competencies, (c) be an ambassador, (d) positive attitude, (e) work etiquette, and (f) insist on being held to the same standard. On the model’s right side, he listed six steps or themes for employers: (a) core values flow from the top down, (b) fill the toolbox, (c) accessibility and accommodations, (d) attitude counts, (e) words speak as loud as actions, (f) expect the same performance (see Figure 7). Golub stated that mutual accommodation is possible only if employers and employees are willing work together.
Perceptions of Employees with Visual Impairments

At least eight studies on negative employer attitudes toward employees with visual impairments used the perceptions of employees with visual impairments as the primary research data. Smith (2002) identified challenges in the work environment for employees with visual impairments. The researcher selected 26 participants who worked actively as attorneys or IT specialists, met with each participant, and asked them to respond to several open-ended questions about challenges they faced on the job. Smith found that the most commonly reported challenge was a negative employer attitude. For example, one participant stated that her employers’ negative attitude prevented her from advancing in her profession.

Crudden et al. (1998) identified challenges in the work environment for employees with visual impairments and the factors that helped such employees overcome those challenges. The researchers selected 166 participants who were employed and resided in large labor markets. The researchers then created a questionnaire containing four items and mailed it to the participants.
The first item addressed challenges the participants faced during the hiring process, with the second asking how participants overcame those challenges. The third item required participants to identify people who played a part in their success, and the fourth asked participants to compare their strategies to others’ strategies. The researchers found that most participants had experienced negative employer attitudes, transportation issues, and no advancement opportunities. Many participants stated that they were able to overcome certain challenges through personal motivation and a strong work ethic. For example, one participant said that “people would tell me what I could and could not do. I had to constantly struggle to overcome their perceptions and show them what I could do” (Cruden et al., 1998, p. 29). Other participants noted that a support system (e.g., relatives, teachers) and networking opportunities contributed to their success.

Shengli et al. (2017) identified challenges in the accommodation process. The researchers selected 116 employees with visual impairments from several disability organizations (i.e., the Alliance on Aging and Vision Loss, the American Foundation for the Blind, and the American Council of the Blind). All participants identified as female and had a high level of education (e.g., diploma or degree). The researchers used a mixed-method approach to collect data. First, they asked the participants to complete a questionnaire about how they requested accommodations from their employers. Then, they asked the participants to respond to two open-ended questions about the challenges they faced when they requested accommodations from their employers. The researchers found that the vast majority of participants experienced a negative employer attitude when they requested assistive technology, assistance, and a modified work schedule.
In a similar study, Frank and Bellini (2005) sought to gain a deeper understanding of the challenges employees with visual impairments faced during the accommodation process. The researchers recruited individuals by placing an advertisement in a national magazine. They used a purposive sampling technique to select 20 participants who met the following criteria: (a) presence of a severe visual impairment, (b) had personal experience with requesting an employment-related accommodation for print access, (c) between the ages of 18 and 65, and (d) employed or seeking employment at the time the request occurred. The researchers asked the participants to describe their experience with requesting accommodations. One participant said,

The manager made a hypothetical statement, “if it isn’t achievable or reasonable, it is not required by ADA and it would be judged by our agency to be too costly to put it into an accessible format.” He never said it was an undue hardship. He never put anything in writing. I never pushed the request and I never received a wage statement in an accessible format. (p. 32)

After collecting the participants’ responses, the researchers converted them into themes: (a) betrayal and broken trust, (b) multiplicity of barriers, (c) fear of retaliation, (d) problems with technology, (e) concept of print, (f) habit, and (g) successful means of acquiring accommodation. Frank and Bellini (2005) noted that betrayal and broken trust, and fear of retaliation were the participants’ greatest challenges. As a result, Frank and Bellini said that “negative or inadequate responses to accommodation requests may leave the requesters feeling even more disempowered than they might have otherwise felt as a result of having a severe impairment while living in a disabling environment” (p. 38).

Shaw et al. (2007) investigated challenges in the workplace among youths with blindness and youths with low vision. The researchers sent a modified version of the Youth Lifestyles
Questionnaire to 328 participants (131 with blindness and 197 with low vision) who were between the ages of 15 and 30. The original questionnaire, which was created to investigate the lifestyles of youth, was modified to investigate the lifestyles of youth with visual impairments. One lifestyle domain was employment. Among the participants, 94 were in the workforce. The researchers found that employees with low vision perceived more challenges in the workplace than employees with blindness. Some challenges involved technology, transportation, job duties, and negative employer attitudes.

Bengisu et al. (2008) recruited 198 participants from two disability organizations, the Six Dots Society for the Blind and the Society for Modern Visually Impaired. All participants had high education levels (e.g., diploma or degree) and were between the ages of 20 and 62. The researchers used a questionnaire to collect data from the participants over the phone about challenges that people with visual impairments generally face during the hiring process and on the job. One such challenge was working conditions. The researchers found that most participants worked at lower-level jobs. Bengisu et al. stated that 38% of participants were employed as switchboard operators even though 29% held bachelor’s degrees and/or graduate degrees. The researchers stated that this was probably because of negative employer attitudes.

In addition, 17% of participants observed that they were treated unfavorably by employers during the hiring process, and 15% of participants stated that they had no advancement opportunities. Moreover, 12% of participants said that they were underestimated and disrespected, and 5% stated that they received lower wages and no overtime pay; 3% stated that they held jobs lower than their level of education, and 4% mentioned other challenges.

Papakonstantinou and Papadopoulos (2009) investigated the support employees with visual impairments received in the workplace. The researchers selected 15 participants (five men
and 10 women) from a nonprofit organization’s member directory. All participants worked for a law firm. Papakonstantinou and Papadopoulos used a mixed-methods approach to collect data. First, they asked the participants to complete a questionnaire that contained items about the type of support they received from their supervisor and other employees. Then, the researchers met with each participant and conducted in-depth interviews. They found that, despite signs of negative support, most participants described an overwhelming amount of positive support from their supervisors and other employees. For example, some participants stated that their supervisor was willing to provide them with job accommodations.

Papakonstantinou and Papadopoulos (2010) conducted another study relating to the support employees with visual impairments received in the workplace. However, in this study, the researchers intentionally looked for signs of negative support. They met with 25 participants (11 men and 14 women) who worked as telephone operators and teachers. Using a mixed-methods approach to collect the data, they first asked the participants to complete a questionnaire that contained items about negative support from their supervisors and other employees. Then, the researchers met with each participant and conducted in-depth interviews.

Papakonstantinou and Papadopoulos (2010) found that the participants received a great deal of negative support from their supervisors and other employees. The researchers assigned the participants’ responses to groups and listed them under four categories: positive practical, positive emotional, negative practical, and negative emotional. The negative practical and negative emotional categories included a combined total of 30 responses, 14 of which appeared very frequently.

Papakonstantinou and Papadopoulos (2010) listed the following most frequent responses. In terms of negative practical support, participants responded as follows:
No provision of suitable support equipment

No provision of information on various matters of concern to me

Overprotection in various practical areas

Overestimation and underestimation of my visual capacity—no appreciation of the limits of what I can do

No realization of at what point I start needing help

Assignment of tasks that I am capable of concluding

Not being interested in finding out my visual capacity (what I can see)

Not helping me adjust to the workplace….

For negative emotional support, the following items were most frequently mentioned:

Being indifferent to how I feel or what I need

Being distant, avoiding me

Having formal or cold relationships

Underestimating my abilities—thinking I am capable of only specific tasks

Being full of praise, too polite, and too anxious to help me, even when I can do something on my own

Showing disrespect to me—insulting me

Not being treated as an equal but something different. (pp. 185–186)

This study’s results indicated that negative employer attitudes toward employees with visual impairments appear in various forms and occur frequently.
Summary of Perceptions

Negative employer attitudes present the greatest workplace challenge for employees with visual impairments (McDonnall et al., 2014). These attitudes can be perceived by the employees as negative actions or interactions, which can also become legal matters (Hernandez et al., 2000). Negative employer attitudes can also take various forms (Papakonstantinou & Papadopoulos, 2010). Some participants experienced negative employer attitudes when they requested job accommodations or asked for promotions. Other participants experienced negative employer attitudes when they were offered a job lower than their level of education or were disrespected.

Theoretical Framework of the Study

The study’s theoretical framework consists of Bronfenbrenner’s (2005) bioecological model for human development and van Manen’s (1990) hermeneutic phenomenology. I discuss these theories in greater detail below. I also discuss Bandura’s (2001) social cognitive theory (SCT) in this section because it provides readers with an agentic perspective.

Bioecological Model for Human Development

Bronfenbrenner’s (1977) bioecological model for human development focuses on human development and explains how individuals develop within their environments. Bronfenbrenner observed that humans develop through bidirectional influences, which are interactions that take place in a developing person’s environment (Rosa & Tudge, 2013). According to Bronfenbrenner (1977), bidirectional influences can be direct or indirect. For example, in a parent-to-child relationship, mothers directly affect their children, and children directly affect their mothers. By contrast, a mother’s work schedule indirectly affects her relationship with her children.
Bidirectional influences occur during every stage of life (Bronfenbrenner, 1977). Erikson (1998) described the eight stages of life as infancy (0–18 months), early childhood (2–4 years), preschool age (4–5 years), school age (5–12 years), adolescence (13–19 years), early adulthood (20–39 years), adulthood (40–64 years), and maturity (65 years–death). As individuals pass through these stages, bidirectional influences become stronger and more complex (Bronfenbrenner, 1977). The bioecological model of human development demonstrates how bidirectional influences become stronger and more complex in terms of five environmental systems: the microsystem, the mesosystem, the exosystem, the macrosystem, and the chronosystem. Bronfenbrenner (1977) defined each system as follows:

A microsystem is the complex of relations between the developing person and environment in an immediate setting containing the person (e.g., home, school, workplace, etc.). A mesosystem comprises the interrelations among major settings containing the developing person at a particular point in his or her life. . . . An exosystem is an extension of the mesosystem embracing other specific social structures, both formal and informal, that do not themselves contain the developing person but impinge upon or encompass the immediate settings in which that person is found, and thereby influence, delimit, or even determine what goes on there. . . . A macrosystem refers to the overarching institutional patterns of the culture or subculture, such as the economic, social, educational, legal, and political systems, of which micro-, meso-, and exosystems are the concrete manifestations. (pp. 514–515)

The fifth and final system is the chronosystem, which “changes over time not only within the person but also in the environment” (Bronfenbrenner, 1977, p. 724).
Social Cognitive Theory

A core element of Bandura (1986) SCT is human agency, or the capacity to exercise control over one’s own life and circumstances. Human agency takes three forms: personal, proxy, and collective. People exercise personal agency when they exert control over their own lives. Bandura (2009) stated that “people are self-organizing, proactive, self-reflecting, and self-regulating, not just reactive organisms shaped and shepherded by environmental events or inner forces” (p. 266). Proxy agency is people’s control over other people’s lives. Bandura (2000) defined proxy agency as follows:

People try to get other people who have expertise or wield influence and power to act on their behalf to get the outcomes they desire. People also turn to proxy control because they do not want to saddle themselves with the arduous work needed to develop requisite competencies, and to shoulder the responsibilities and stressors that the exercise of control entails. (p. 75)

When people unite and exercise control together, they exercise collective agency. According to Bandura (2001), “people’s shared beliefs in their collective power to produce desired results are a key ingredient of collective agency” (p. 75).

Human agency includes four core elements: intentionality, forethought, self-reactiveness, and self-reflectiveness. Intentionality refers to committing an act on purpose. Bandura (2001) stated that a person’s intention “is not simply an expectation or prediction of future actions but a proactive commitment to bringing them about” (p. 6). Forethought involves setting a goal and planning necessary actions. According to Bandura (2001), “people motivate themselves and guide their actions in anticipation of future events” (p. 7). Self-reactiveness entails putting a plan into action. This “involves not only the deliberative ability to make choices and action plans, but
the ability to give shape to appropriate courses of action and to motivate and regulate their execution” (Bandura, 2001, p. 8). Self-reflectiveness refers to reflecting on a goal, plan, and motivation; it is a person’s metacognitive ability to reflect on the self and determine the effectiveness of one’s thoughts and actions (Bandura, 1977, 2001).

A major component of self-reflectiveness is self-efficacy, or the belief in one’s ability to overcome a difficult situation (Bandura, 2001). Bandura (2001) observed that self-efficacy plays a major role in how people think, feel, and act, as they can have a high or low sense of self-efficacy. A low sense influences people to think pessimistically; for example, people with low self-efficacy may believe that the worst will happen if they take on challenging tasks. High self-efficacy influences people to think optimistically; thus, they may believe that something good will happen if they take on challenging tasks. Bandura (2001) stated that self-efficacy determines “what challenges to undertake, how much effort to expend in the endeavor, how long to persevere in the face of obstacles and failures, and whether failures are motivating or demoralizing” (p. 10).

**Hermeneutic Phenomenology**

Hermeneutic phenomenology is a qualitative research method used to study an individual’s lifeworld (van Manen, 1990). Qualitative researchers use hermeneutic phenomenology to interpret text and describe lived human experiences. Because hermeneutic phenomenological research can be complex, van Manen (1990) stated that researchers should use lifeworld existentials as guides for reflection: (a) lived space (spatiality), (b) lived body (corporeality), (c) lived time (temporality), and (d) lived other (relationality).

**Lived space (spatiality).** Lived space is defined as the space that people feel. Whether at home or at work, the space that people occupy influences how they feel. For example, van
Manen (1990) stated that a person “walking alone in a foreign and busy city may render a sense of lostness, strangeness, vulnerability, and possibly excitement or stimulation” (p. 102). In the same way, a person at home may experience a sense of closeness, comfortableness, predictability, and security. According to van Manen (1990), “lived space is a category for inquiring into the ways we experience the affairs of our day to day existence” (p. 103), and articulating lived space is difficult because “the experience of lived space (as lived time, body) is largely preverbal; we do not ordinarily reflect on it” (p. 102).

**Lived body (corporeality).** The lived body refers to people’s physical presence in the world: “in our physical or bodily presence we both reveal something about ourselves and we conceal something at the same time—not necessarily consciously or deliberately, but rather in spite of ourselves” (van Manen, 1990, p. 103). For example, if a person with a visual impairment interviews for a job and believes the hiring manager is gazing at him, his body may wiggle or twist from side to side. People experience one another through touch via the lived body. According to van Manen (1990), “when we meet another person in his or her landscape or world we meet that person first of all through his or her body” (p. 103). For example, shaking hands is a natural, physical way to show appreciation or end an encounter.

**Lived time (temporality).** Lived time is a subjective sense of time based on a person’s feelings rather than an objective sense of time based on a clock. According to van Manen (1990), “lived time is the time that appears to speed up when we enjoy ourselves, or slow down when we feel bored during an uninteresting lecture or when we are anxious, as in the dentist’s chair” (p. 104). Lived time also refers to a person’s past, present, and future: “the temporal dimensions of past, present, and future constitute the horizons of a person’s temporal landscape” (p. 104). Past experiences remind people of what they have experienced and felt. Present experiences may alter
some past experiences because of pressure or environmental influences. Future experiences follow a similar pattern, but they predict future outcomes. For example, if a person has negative work experience, this may affect how that person feels about present and future work situations.

**Lived other (relationality).** The lived other, or relationality, is how people feel about and behave toward others in shared spaces. According to van Manen (1990), individuals meet in a corporeal way or even by phone or letter and “form a physical impression of the person which later may get confirmed or negated” (p. 104). For example, an employer may conduct a phone interview with a candidate and think the person is young and athletic based on the person’s voice. Then, the employer meets the candidate in person and sees that the candidate is actually older and has a visual impairment. The employer is surprised but proceeds with the interview. During the interview, the employer asks the candidate to respond to a few basic questions and several job-specific questions. The employer forgets about the candidate’s appearance and focuses on the person’s knowledge, skills, and ability. After the interview, the employer offers the candidate the job. Van Manen (1990) stated that “as we meet the other we are able to develop a conversational relation which allows us to transcend ourselves” (p. 105).

**Chapter Summary**

Chapter 2 presented a comprehensive review of the literature on negative employer attitudes toward people with visual impairments. Several studies have offered insights into how negative employer attitudes affect people with visual impairments during the hiring process. The remaining studies offered insights into challenges that employees with visual impairments face in the work environment. This chapter was organized according to the perceptions of rehabilitation professionals, employers, and people with visual impairments, and the theoretical framework
was introduced: Bronfenbrenner’s (2005) bioecological model for human development, van Manen’s (1990) hermeneutic phenomenology, and Bandura’s (2001) SCT.
CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

Chapter 3 contains an overview of this study’s methodology and research design. My research methodology was guided by van Manen’s (1990) hermeneutic phenomenology, a qualitative research method used to interpret and describe lived human experiences. According to van Manen (1990), “lived human experience is always more complex than the result of any singular description, and … there is always an element of the ineffable to life” (p. 16). Because of this, van Manen (1990) recommended that researchers use the four lifeworld existentials to guide reflection: (a) lived space (spatiality), (b) lived body (corporeality), (c) lived time (temporality), and (d) lived other (relationality).

Lived space is defined as the space that people feel. Whether at home or at work, the space people occupy influences how they feel. The lived body refers to a person’s physical presence in the world: “in our physical or bodily presence we both reveal something about ourselves and we conceal something at the same time—not necessarily consciously or deliberately, but rather in spite of ourselves” (van Manen, 1990, p. 103). Lived time is a subjective sense of time based on feelings rather than on an objective sense of time that goes by a clock: “lived time is the time that appears to speed up when we enjoy ourselves, or slow down when we feel bored during an uninteresting lecture or when we are anxious, as in the dentist’s chair” (van Manen, 1990, p. 104). Lived time also refers to a person’s past, present, and future: “the temporal dimensions of past, present, and future constitute the horizons of a person’s temporal landscape” (van Manen, 1990, p. 104). The lived other, or relationality, is how people feel about and behave toward others in shared spaces. According to van Manen (1990), individuals meet in a corporeal way or even by phone or letter and “form a physical impression of the person which later may get confirmed or negated” (p. 104).
Lifeworld existentials can be differentiated from one another, but they are all interconnected (van Manen, 1990). For example, an employee with a visual impairment who works for a large employer in a huge building may feel exposed or vulnerable at work (lived space). If this person works with many other employees who do not speak to the person, the employee may feel lonely or shunned (lived other). Feeling exposed in a huge building and lonely in the midst of many employees may cause the person to panic and, as a result, begin to sweat profusely or experience tightness in the chest (lived body). Whenever this happens, the employee may feel that time passes slowly or that the days are getting longer (lived time). This shows how lifeworld existentials are connected even though they cover different aspects of employees’ lived experiences (van Manen, 1990).

Bronfenbrenner’s (2005) bioecological model for human development in this study also gives insight into the lived experiences of employees with visual impairments. This model has five environmental systems: the microsystem, the mesosystem, the exosystem, the macrosystem, and the chronosystem. The microsystem is defined as “the complex of relations between the developing person and environment in an immediate setting containing the person” (Bronfenbrenner, 1977, p. 514). The microsystem is important to this study because it contains the workplace and demonstrates that the work environment can have an immediate and direct influence on an employee with a visual impairment. In other words, employees’ workplaces may contain certain risks and protective factors that can affect their development. For example, an employee with a visual impairment who has a support system in place or a positive sense of self may find that these ameliorate experiences related to a negative employer attitude. However, if an employee with a visual impairment does not have a support system in place or a positive
sense of self, the likelihood of experiencing the consequences of a negative employer attitude is increased.

**Research Design**

This study’s research design contained a rigorous data collection process aimed at gathering good information that would enable me to answer the research questions. The guiding question of this study was as follows: What are the lived experiences of employees with visual impairments who process and overcome perceived negative employer attitudes? I asked three subsidiary questions that helped answer the guiding question:

1. What are the lived existentials (lived time, lived space, lived body, and lived other) of being the object of an employer’s negative attitude?
2. What risk factors exist in the environment(s) of employees with visual impairments who experience negative employer attitudes?
3. What protective factors appear or must be constructed in the environment(s) of an employee with a visual impairment to mitigate the experience of negative employer attitudes?

Creswell (2013) stated that the data collection process can be visualized as a “circle of interrelated activities” (p. 145). Figure 8 illustrates the data collection activities, which comprised seven activities: (a) locating sites and individuals, (b) gaining access and building rapport, (c) purposefully sampling, (d) data collection, (e) information recording, (f) field issue resolution, and (g) data storage. These data collection activities did not happen in a particular order or sequence. In fact, some activities were repeated. For example, the first time I contacted an agency (site location), an administrator told me that they would be happy to assist me (gaining access). One of their employees acted as my point of contact, and we communicated through e-
mail and over the phone (building rapport). When I was ready to send out my recruitment e-mail, my point of contact informed me that the agency had decided not to move forward with my research project and ended our partnership. Therefore, I was forced to start the data collection process over again.

![Figure 8. Data collection activities. (Creswell, 2013, p. 146).](image)

**Role of the Researcher**

Researchers play an important role in the data collection process (Hannes, Lockwood, & Pearson, 2010). The researcher’s role can include meeting with participants, conducting in-depth interviews, making observations, and taking field notes. To fulfill this role effectively, researchers must have knowledge of and experience with the phenomenon under study (Hannes et al., 2010). My role in this study involved recruiting and selecting participants, meeting with the participants to conduct in-depth interviews, making observations, and taking field notes. My experience with this population ranges from preparing students with visual impairments for college to providing vocational rehabilitation services to adults with visual impairments.
In 2011, I graduated with a master’s degree in rehabilitation counseling and became a certified rehabilitation counselor (CRC). CRCs are the only professionals who are nationally and independently certified to serve people with disabilities. CRC certification is the highest level of credentialing in rehabilitation counseling. My first job was with the Lighthouse Guild in New York City, where I supervised a youth transition program that served students with visual impairments. The program helped students with visual impairments transition from high school to college or university. For example, I showed students with visual impairments the difference between living at home and living in a dormitory, and taught them how to interact with their professors in various ways (e.g., in person during office hours, via e-mail, or over the phone). Next, I worked for the Pennsylvania Bureau of Blindness & Visual Services, the South Carolina Vocational Rehabilitation Department, and Lowe’s Companies, Inc., where I provided vocational rehabilitation services to people with disabilities who were working or who wanted to work. In my current role as a vocational rehabilitation specialist for Prudential Financial, Inc., I provide return-to-work services to employees who are receiving long-term disability insurance. For example, if I work with an employee with a visual impairment, I may partner with the employee’s treatment provider to determine work restrictions or partner with the employer to identify appropriate job accommodations.

For the last 10 years, I have provided vocational rehabilitation services to people with visual impairments in various settings. These years of experience have taught me that employees with visual impairments face numerous workplace challenges. However, my clients’ greatest struggles have been related to overcoming negative employer attitudes. In Chapter 1, I provided two examples from my professional experience. In the chapters that follow, I provide more examples reported directly by employees with visual impairments.
Population and Sample Size

This study’s target population included employees between the ages of 18 and 79 who have visual impairments. As explained in “Definitions of Terms” in Chapter 1, *employees with visual impairments* refers to people who are currently employed and who are totally blind or have low vision. *Totally blind* refers to people who are unable to see with either eye, whereas *low vision* refers to people who have a measurable amount of vision but have difficulty accomplishing a visual task even with prescribed corrective lenses (Corn & Lusk, 2010). The individuals I selected to represent the target population were either totally blind or had low vision. I collected data from a small sample of individuals who had experienced the phenomenon under study. For phenomenological investigations, Starks and Brown Trinidad (2007) suggested a sample of 1–10 individuals if multiple forms of data collection are used; Creswell (2013) recommended at least five. Starks and Brown Trinidad highlighted the following:

> Phenomenologists are interested in common features of the lived experience. Although diverse samples might provide a broader range from which to distill the essence of the phenomenon, data from only a few individuals who have experienced the phenomenon—and who can provide a detailed account of their experience—might suffice to uncover its core elements. Typical sample sizes for phenomenological studies range from 1 to 10 persons. (p. 1375)

I originally planned to meet with at least eight individuals and no more than 12, or when I reached saturation. Mason (2010) has noted that saturation should be the guiding principle in all qualitative studies.
Sampling Method

“Sampling method” refers to the research technique used to select individuals from a target population (Etikan, Musa, & Alkassim, 2016). A purposive sampling method allows researchers to use their own judgment when selecting individuals from a target population (Tongco, 2007). Etikan et al. (2016) defined “the purposive sampling technique, also called judgment sampling, [as]… the deliberate choice of a participant due to the qualities the participant possesses” (p. 2). After discussing my study with 20 individuals, I used the purposive sampling method to select eight who possessed the following qualities: (a) has a visual impairment, (b) is currently employed, (c) has experience with negative employer attitudes, (d) is between the ages of 18 and 79, and (e) communicates in English.

Site Location

Ritchie, Lewis, Nicholls, and Ormston (2013) observed that the site “needs to be conducive to concentration: private, quiet and physically comfortable” (p. 166). I had originally planned to partner with the South Carolina Commission for the Blind, a state rehabilitation agency that provides employment services to people with visual impairments, because it is accessible to this population. The commission has multiple district offices throughout the state, so I believed that this would be a possible venue for putting up fliers, sending out my recruitment e-mail, and meeting with the participants, but I was turned down. Therefore, I contacted the North Carolina Division of Services for the Blind, the Metrolina Association for the Blind, the American Council of the Blind, the American Federation of the Blind, and the National Federation of the Blind regarding my research project. The North Carolina Division of Services for the Blind, the Metrolina Association for the Blind, and the National Federation of the Blind
agreed to partner with me, so I worked with their administrators to send out my recruitment e-mail and to schedule interviews (see Appendix A).

**Informed Consent**

Informed consent is a voluntary agreement between an individual and a researcher (Creswell, 2013). Miller and Boulton (2007) described informed consent as “ethical principles of respect for the dignity and worth of every human being and their right to self-determination” (p. 2202). Griffiths and Harmon (2011) noted that “the value of informed consent [is that it] is used as a tool to educate consumers by providing information considered to be important for each individual to know before agreeing to be administered service” (p. 449). I created a participation consent form in Microsoft Word and sent it to each participant the day before the interview. When we met, I read the form aloud (see Appendix D). During this time, the participants learned about the study’s risks and benefits, compensation, the right to withdraw, and other participation conditions. In addition, I provided the participants the opportunity to ask questions, share their concerns, and make suggestions.

**Data Collection Method**

Several qualitative data collection methods exist, including surveys, interviews, focus groups, and observations (Creswell, 2013). Gill, Stewart, Treasure, and Chadwick (2008) noted that “interviews and focus groups remain the most common methods of data collection in qualitative research” (p. 295). I conducted individual interviews over the phone because the participants lived in various cities and states. I began each interview by asking the participants to respond to my demographic questions and recorded their answers on an electronic version of my demographic survey. This enabled me to understand certain characteristics of employees with visual impairments (see Appendix B). Next, I used an interview protocol to gather information
about the participants’ lived experiences. The semi-structured interview format facilitated discussions with participants. I presented several open-ended questions and a few follow-up questions and probes “to achieve both breadth of coverage across key issues, and depth of coverage within each” (Ritchie et al., 2013, p. 148; see Appendix C). I also observed the participants’ behaviors carefully to help guide me through their responses (Creswell, 2013; Ritchie et al., 2013; van Manen, 1990). For example, I checked for nonverbal cues, such as humor, silence, pitch, and tone of voice. Each interview lasted between 45 and 60 minutes.

**Data Recording and Storage**

I recorded all interviews using a free call recorder. Then, I transferred and saved all the audio files to my computer, created a folder for each participant, and moved the saved audio files into the folders. Thereafter, I played the audio files on my computer to transcribe them using a free transcription service. I typed my field notes in a Microsoft Word document and moved them into the appropriate participant folders on my computer. According to Ritchie et al. (2013),

> It is highly desirable to audio-record the interview and for the researcher to take few if any notes during the interview. This allows the researcher to devote his or her full attention to listening to the interviewee and probing in-depth. (p. 166)

I stored all data (e.g., audio files, forms, and field notes) securely on a private, password protected computer. I will delete or destroy them three years after the research project ends. I assigned the participants aliases (e.g., Participant 1, Participant 2, Participant 3) and removed all other identifying information. I also assigned aliases to participants’ companies and employers, and removed all other identifying information.
Data Analysis Method

Several data analysis methods exist in qualitative research (Creswell, 2013). I used van Manen’s (1990) thematic data analysis, which comprises three approaches to uncovering patterns or thematic elements from the text. The holistic or sententious approach involves reading through the entire text to capture its overall meaning (van Manen, 1990). In this step, I read the transcripts multiple times to establish a basic understanding of the participants’ experiences. The selective or highlighting approach involves selecting statements or phrases that reveal information about the phenomenon (van Manen, 1990). In this step, I returned to the original text and highlighted significant statements and phrases that revealed information about the participants’ experiences. The detailed or line-by-line approach involves reading through every sentence or sentence cluster (van Manen, 1990). In this step, I returned to the original text and highlighted significant words, sentences, and sentence clusters that revealed information about the participants’ experiences. I put significant words and statements, risk and protective factors, and themes into a table, which is presented in Chapter 4.

Data Validation

One data validation method involves the researcher. Hannes, Lockwood, and Pearson (2010) indicated that researchers are instruments in qualitative research. As this study’s researcher, I am qualified to validate this study because of my extensive academic and employment background. As a master’s student, I participated in a rehabilitation counseling program that prepared me to become a competent and skillful rehabilitation counselor. I learned how to provide psychological, social, and vocational rehabilitation services to people with physical, mental or psychiatric, cognitive, and sensory disabilities at various stages in their lives. As a doctoral student, I participated in a counselor education and supervision program that
prepared me for leadership positions in mental health and school settings. I received intense training in counseling, teaching, supervision, research, and advocacy.

In addition, I have gained real-world experience by working in the field as a rehabilitation professional for over 10 years. As a vocational rehabilitation counselor for two state rehabilitation agencies, I have helped hundreds of people with disabilities prepare for and retain employment. Thus, the tasks I had performed as a vocational rehabilitation counselor helped me accomplish the tasks I performed as a researcher. For example, conducting interviews with clients in person and over the phone as a vocational rehabilitation counselor prepared me to conduct interviews with this study’s participants. As an accommodation specialist for a large private employer, I helped hundreds of employees with disabilities stay at work with or without reasonable accommodations. My strong understanding of accommodations prepared me to understand the accommodations that the participants used at work.

Member checking is a data validation method used in research to check for accuracy, credibility, validity, and transferability (Harper & Cole, 2012). Member checking occurs when researchers collect data from participants and check with participants to ensure that their interpretation was accurate. Harper and Cole stated that

> [m]ember checking continues to be an important quality control process in qualitative research as during the course of conducting a study, participants receive the opportunity to review their statements for accuracy and, in so doing, they may acquire a therapeutic benefit. (p. 1)

Member checking can occur either while the study is being conducted or when it is coming to an end. I used member checking throughout this study. As the participants shared their stories, I restated and summarized some of what they said to ensure I had heard and recorded it correctly.
Member checking is also important because it establishes trust between the researcher and the participants.

To enhance the study’s trustworthiness, I used triangulation. Mays and Pope (1995) defined triangulation as “an approach to data collection in which evidence is deliberately sought from a wide range of different, independent sources and often by different means (for instance, comparing oral testimony with written records)” (p. 110). There are four types of triangulation: data, investigator, methodological, and theory triangulation. I used two of these—data and theory triangulation—in this study, and I viewed the phenomenon through the lens of van Manen’s (1990) lifeworld existentials and Bronfenbrenner’s (2005) bioecological model for human development. I also collected data from multiple sources, such as individual interviews, field notes, and member checking. Thurmond (2001) noted that the goal of triangulation is “to conduct the study with multiple lenses and questions in mind, to lend support to or refute findings” (p. 254).

**Procedures**

I contacted the South Carolina Commission for the Blind and spoke to an administrator about partnering with their agency to recruit participants. However, the administrator stated they would not be able to assist because of limited resources and the impact on service delivery. So, I contacted administrators at the North Carolina Division of Services for the Blind, the Metrolina Association for the Blind, the American Council of the Blind, the American Federation of the Blind, and the National Federation of the Blind to discuss partnering with their agency to recruit participants. The American Council of the Blind and American Federation of the Blind did not respond, but the North Carolina Division of Services for the Blind, the Metrolina Association for
the Blind, and the National Federation of the Blind agreed to partner with me and send out my recruitment e-mail.

I attached a flyer to the recruitment e-mail asking members of those organizations to be part of this study (see Appendix A). The three questions I listed on the flyer to prescreen people for participation in the study were as follows:

1. Do you have a visual impairment?
2. Are you actively working?
3. Have you experienced a negative attitude from your employer?

If people interested in participating in this study answered “yes” to those questions, they were asked to contact me via phone or e-mail. The flyer also included a confidentiality statement and a brief overview describing the study’s purpose and defining the term negative employer attitude. I created three different flyers because I partnered with three disability organizations.

Within minutes of receiving my recruitment e-mail, many people reached out to me via e-mail and phone. About 20 people told me they were interested in participating in this study. Of that number, five people did not meet the criteria, four people did not state their availability, and three people did not show up to the interview. I used the purposive sampling method to select and interview eight participants who met the inclusion criteria. All the participants had a visual impairment, had an experience of a negative employer attitude, were currently employed, were between the ages of 18 and 79, and communicated in English. When scheduling the interviews, I also e-mailed the participants a copy of the participation consent form so they would have time to review it.

I conducted all the interviews over the phone because the participants lived in various cities and states. Over the phone, I asked the participants if I could activate a call recorder. All
the participants agreed, and I then reviewed the consent-to-participate form and asked for verbal consent. Next, I presented my demographic survey, explained its purpose (to understand certain characteristics of employees with visual impairments), and asked each participant to respond to seven demographic questions (see Appendix B). After collecting the demographic information, I provided participants with a brief overview of the study and asked them to respond to several interview protocol questions and a few follow-up questions “to achieve both breadth of coverage across key issues, and depth of coverage within each” (Ritchie et al., 2013, p. 148). I followed the interview protocol questions closely (see Appendix C).

After conducting all the interviews, I transcribed the audio files using a free transcription service. Then, I went through each transcription to correct misspellings and incomplete sentences. Reviewing the transcriptions to make corrections helped me to become immersed in the data. For example, while looking for misspellings, I noticed that most participants used the same words to describe their feelings. In addition, some of the feelings recorded in the text were similar to the feelings I had captured in my field notes. This style of data collection helped me gather good information and maintain consistency.

**Ethical Considerations**

Ethical issues can occur in all phases of the research process (Creswell, 2013). Thus, researchers should be aware of them and know how to address them properly. Prior to conducting this study, I had to identify sites that either had or could have had a vested interest in this study’s outcome. To address this issue, I selected sites that did not force me to do something that I did not want to do or to act in a particular way. While conducting this study, I ensured that I did not pressure the participants into signing the consent-to-participate form. To do so, I e-mailed them a copy of the form a day before we were scheduled to meet. This method gave them
reasonable time to review the form and sign it. I also had to understand that I was working with a population that differed from me because I do not have a visual impairment. Thus, I asked the participants questions that would help me create a safe and warm environment.

When it was time to collect data from the participants, I made sure the participants understood the study’s purpose and how their responses would be used. I explained to the participants that their responses would be used only for this study—not for future studies or by other researchers. I also ensured that I did not ask leading questions and that I revealed my personal impressions. For example, if the participants shared something shocking or important, I let them know by making a gesture or by telling them how it made me feel. While analyzing the data, I reported both positive and negative results; however, I did not report any information that would harm the participants to respect their integrity and privacy. To address this issue, I assigned the participants aliases and removed other information that could identify them, such as the names of their companies and the names of other employees. I also made sure to explain the risks, benefits, compensation, confidentiality, and the right to withdraw at the beginning and end of the interviews. For example, I told participants that minimal risks were associated with participating in this study but that they were no greater than the risks that exist in everyday life. All the participants provided a signed copy of the participation consent form and told me they understood what was requested of them.

**Chapter Summary**

Chapter 3 provided an overview of the methodology and the research design. The methodology of my research is hermeneutic phenomenology. As another methodology, I also used Bronfenbrenner’s (2005) bioecological model for human development to understand the lived experiences of employees with visual impairments. This study’s research design contained
a rigorous data collection process. The data collection process encompassed seven activities: (a) locating a site and an individual, (b) gaining access and building a rapport, (c) purposive sampling, (d) collecting data, (e) recording information, (f) resolving field issues, and (g) storing data. This study validated data in three ways: via the researcher, member checking, and triangulation. The rest of the chapter outlined the procedure and discussed several ethical considerations.
CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS

In Chapter 4, I discuss participant recruitment, demographic details, data collection, and interview analyses, concluding with a summary of the chapter. This study’s guiding question was as follows: What are the lived experiences of employees with visual impairments who are processing and overcoming perceived negative employer attitudes? Three subsidiary questions helped me answer the guiding question:

1. What are the lived existentials (lived time, lived space, lived body, and lived other) of being the object of an employer’s negative attitude?
2. What risk factors exist in the environment(s) of employees with visual impairments who experience negative employer attitudes?
3. What protective factors appear or need to be constructed in the environment(s) of employees with visual impairments to mitigate the experiences of negative employer attitudes?

Recruitment of Participants

After receiving approval from Duquesne University’s IRB, I contacted several disability organizations. The North Carolina Division of Services for the Blind, the Metrolina Association for the Blind, and the National Federation of the Blind agreed to partner with me, allowing me to send out my recruitment e-mail. Within minutes after I sent my recruitment e-mail, many people reached out to me via e-mail and phone. I used the purposive sampling method to select and interview eight individuals who (a) had a visual impairment, (b) were currently employed, (c) had experienced negative employer attitudes, (d) were between the ages of 18 and 79, and (e) communicate in English. I attempted to meet with some participants in person but could not.
Thus, all the interviews were conducted over the phone. Each interview lasted between 45 and 60 minutes.

**Demographic Details**

The participants varied in age, gender, ethnicity, education, diagnosis, and occupation (see Table 1, below). The participants who were between 28 and 37 years old represented 12.5% of the sample; between 38 and 49 years, 12.5%; between 50 and 59 years, 12.5%; between 60 and 69 years, 50%; and between 70 and 79 years, 12.5%. The gender of participants was divided equally. Four participants identified as male, and the other four participants identified as female. Seven participants described their ethnicity as Caucasian, one described her ethnicity as African American, and one described his ethnicity as Other. All the participants stated that they had attended a college or university. Four participants stated that their highest level of education was a graduate degree (a master’s or doctoral degree), three stated that their highest level of education was a bachelor’s degree, and one stated that his highest education level was some college experience but no degree.

Participants who described their diagnosis as diabetic retinopathy represented 25% of the sample; retinopathy of prematurity, 12.5%; macular degeneration, 12.5%; myopic choroidal neovascularization, 12.5%; retrolental fibroplasia, 12.5%; Stargardt’s disease, 12.5%; and blindness from lead poisoning, 12.5%. The participants’ occupations also varied. The occupation titles were rehabilitation specialist, editor, online accessibility specialist, IT architect, professor, braille transcriber, dispatcher, and coordinator.
### Table 1

**Demographic Details**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Alias</th>
<th>Age Range</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Ethnicity</th>
<th>Highest Education Level</th>
<th>Diagnosis</th>
<th>Occupation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Participant 1</td>
<td>30s</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>Graduate</td>
<td>Diabetic retinopathy</td>
<td>Rehab specialist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 2</td>
<td>40s</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>Bachelor’s</td>
<td>Retinopathy of prematurity</td>
<td>Online accessibility specialist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 3</td>
<td>60s</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>Graduate</td>
<td>Macular degeneration</td>
<td>IT architect</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 4</td>
<td>60s</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Other</td>
<td>Some College</td>
<td>Diabetic retinopathy</td>
<td>Dispatcher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 5</td>
<td>50s</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>Graduate</td>
<td>Myopic choroidal neovascularization</td>
<td>Coordinator</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 6</td>
<td>60s</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>Bachelor’s</td>
<td>Retrolental fibroplasia</td>
<td>Editor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 7</td>
<td>70s</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>Graduate</td>
<td>Stargardt’s disease</td>
<td>Professor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 8</td>
<td>60s</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>African American</td>
<td>Bachelor’s</td>
<td>Blindness from lead poisoning</td>
<td>Braille transcriber</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Data Collection

The participants provided rich information during the interviews. When I met with participants, I reviewed the consent form (see Appendix D) and explained that our conversation would be recorded. Then, I asked each participant to respond to seven demographic questions (see Appendix B). The demographic survey served as supporting research data for understanding certain characteristics of employees with visual impairments. Following that, I gave each participant a brief overview of the study and asked them to respond to several open-ended questions and a few follow-up questions and probes “to achieve both breadth of coverage across key issues, and depth of coverage within each” (Ritchie et al., 2013, p. 148). The original interview protocol questions are in Appendix C, and the revised interview protocol questions are in Appendix E. I also listened for changes in the participants’ pitch and tone of voice because all the interviews were conducted via phone. For example, a sharp rise in the voice could show anger or frustration, speaking quickly could convey a sense of urgency, and a long pause could mean someone was overwhelmed or speechless.

I originally planned to collect data from eight to 12 participants, but I reached saturation on the eighth participant. During the interviews, I began hearing the same comments repeated. In addition, some comments resembled comments my former clients had made when I worked as a vocational rehabilitation counselor. After the sixth interview, I felt like all the themes had emerged. Even though I thought I had reached saturation at that point, I continued collecting data for two more interviews to ensure that no new themes emerged. After the eighth interview, I stopped collecting data and started analyzing the interviews.
Analysis of Interviews

In this section, key texts are presented from participants’ answers rather than full transcripts. This information is presented as questions and answers for readability and for a simple structure. This section also includes tables with significant statements, lifeworld existential themes, risk factors, and protective factors. I created a table to help readers follow and understand the interviews, and wrote a summary at the end of each interview to highlight the main points.

Interview with Participant 1

My first interview was with Participant 1, who e-mailed me stating that she met the inclusion criteria. When we spoke over the phone, I reviewed the participation consent form and asked for verbal consent. After that, I asked her seven demographic questions. Participant 1 described herself as a Caucasian female between 28 and 37 years old, who works as a rehabilitation specialist in the Charlotte, North Carolina, metropolitan area. Participant 1 also stated that she was diagnosed with diabetic retinopathy, which is an eye disease that damages the blood vessels in the retina. After collecting demographic information, I gave Participant 1 a brief overview of the study and then asked her to respond to several interview protocol questions and follow-up questions.

1. **What experiences have you had with negative employer attitudes? How did you respond?**

One of the things I encounter frequently is maybe I’ll have an idea for my team, and it is somewhat discounted. So maybe if somebody with vision has the same idea then it would be more valuable. It happens frequently. I am the only person on my team. So it’s just me. I don’t have anybody else. So frequently in these meeting I’ll offer something up,
and then it’s kind of pushed to the side. So the way I have dealt with it over the last five years is to stay silent, which isn’t always the best thing, but I have to. I can get a temper, but I don’t want to lose my job!

2. **What is the worst part about your experience? How did it make you feel?**

You know, a lot of times I’ll feel unvalued or less than. Walking out of there, I’ll feel kind of head down. I’ll just keep going and smile and act like nothing happened, even though it does—deep down—wear on me. It really does! Yeah, sometimes you almost wonder if it’s worth it . . . like all of it. It’s a lot, mentally.

3. **What related obstacles or risks have you experienced? How does it affect you in other areas?**

So I haven’t had a whole lot of time to cope with this vision loss. It’s like I lost my vision overnight. I mean, I woke up, and I couldn’t see. My family still sees me as sighted. I definitely wouldn’t use the word “defeated,” but, in my head, sometimes you just throw your hands up and you’re like, “Wow, I feel so defeated today.” But then again, I always go back to gratitude and meditation and just to try to balance my thoughts because it wears on me a lot. I mean, I could just go back on disability and make a living and sit at home but there’s just something in me. I hope this doesn't change, but I want to contribute. I like going to work because it gives me a sense of self and stuff like that. I'm not ready to give up yet!

4. **Can you identify any protective factors in the environment? Is there anything or anyone that helped you to deal with your employer’s negative attitude?**

God, first and foremost. That might sound whatever, but I know he’s got my back. I have to say prayers to stay calm. My husband is a very strong supporter. My family has been a
huge support since I’ve moved here. I’ve made a lot of friends that are also visually impaired. Every place I’ve worked, you kind of just gravitate toward people that you know have empathy. I mean, you can kind of see that right off the bat. On the flip side, there are people I would never ask for help because they will be the martyr. They will spread it. They will act like I am totally incompetent.

5. **What are some of the strategies that you used to cope with the situation and to deal with the employer’s negative attitudes?**

Well, I have my own office, which is nice. So, you know, if I need to kind of close the door I can do that. I can play some music. You know, I can text or call my husband. I do have a coworker that is also blind, and we’re very close. She doesn’t work on the same team, but she will kind of come in and say, “How was the meeting?” So again, I do have those people here. And then, just kind of taking a break before I lash out or say things. You have to be really careful about it because I don’t want to lose my job.

6. **How did your experience change you? How did it help or harm you?**

So that’s a really good question. It’s kind of the same for me. You have to bite your tongue. So in a way, that’s a good thing because I’ve learned to control myself and not just say the first thing that pops into my head.

7. **How did you or how are you improving your relationship with your employer?**

You know, it’s a little bit up and down sometimes. I just try to keep my mouth shut, I think, more than others because I am, like, a minority. I think that helps until things will cool off. After a while, you know, if something was said and I’m really upset, it’ll usually pass if I don’t keep bringing it up. So, I just kind of have to sit down and take it.
8. What can other employees with visual impairments do to deal with a similar experience?

So in a perfect . . . I’ll just go that route. In a perfect place of employment, everybody would be trained, maybe on the blindfold or whatever. I think it’s important to do those type of trainings. I think flexibility is key when you’re working with people with disabilities because when you’re riding in on a paratransit, it may not always be right on time. I personally have to get here an hour before the place even opens to make sure I’m on time. So, we have to go the extra step—just like any minority, I believe, has to work harder. And so, I just think it’s important that people are flexible. I think it’s important that those things are recognized—that maybe we’ll spend 2 hours one way to get in versus just hopping in the car. I think open communication is really important. I think that having people around you with similar disabilities is important, to network and kind of share those commonalities. So employers hiring people specific to blindness and just taking a chance with hiring qualified people, so that we have people around us that experience similar things.
Table 2

Analysis of Interview with Participant 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Significant Statements</th>
<th>Lifeworld Existentials</th>
<th>Risk Factors</th>
<th>Protective Factors</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“I would much rather do that as I feel no privacy at my place of employment.”</td>
<td>Lived space: Feeling</td>
<td>Staying silent</td>
<td>Mindfulness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>vulnerable.</td>
<td>Being the only employee with a visual impairment</td>
<td>Having a private office</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Being on your own or left by yourself</td>
<td>Belief in God</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“I am the only person on my team. So, it’s just me. I don’t have anybody else.”</td>
<td>Lived space: Feeling</td>
<td></td>
<td>Praying</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>lonely.</td>
<td></td>
<td>Family</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“It’s like walking out of there, I’ll feel kind of head down.”</td>
<td>Lived other: Not</td>
<td></td>
<td>Friends</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>feeling appreciated</td>
<td></td>
<td>Coworkers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>by others.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“I’ll just keep going and smile and act like nothing happened even though it does, deep</td>
<td>Lived body: Having a</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>down, wear on me. It really does!”</td>
<td>increased physical</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>reaction.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“But in my head, sometimes you just throw your hands up—you’re like wow, I feel so</td>
<td>Lived body: Having a</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>defeated today.”</td>
<td>lack of physical</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
<td>energy.</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>“There are people I would never ask for help because they will be the martyr. They</td>
<td>Lived other: Not</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>will spread it. They will act like I am totally incompetent.”</td>
<td>feeling appreciated</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>by others.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Summary of the Interview with Participant 1

Participant 1 started the interview by sharing her frustrations with her employer, especially her frustration during staff meetings. Participant 1 believes she is treated unfavorably during staff meetings because she has a visual impairment. She took a deep breath and stated that her employer ignores all her ideas and welcomes everyone else’s ideas. Participant 1’s voice rose sharply when she described how it made her feel. She said, “It’s very annoying and frustrating because it happens all the time.” Participant 1 also said that she must always catch herself because she will probably lose her job if she gets angry. Instead, Participant 1 stated that she keeps quiet. Toward the end of the interview, Participant 1 shared her different strategies for coping with her situation. For example, she explained how a belief in God, meditating, listening to music, and praying helped her “stay calm.” She also explained how her spouse, family, friends, and coworkers help her stop thinking about what happened during her staff meeting.

Interview with Participant 2

Participant 2 contacted me via e-mail and stated that he met the inclusion criteria. When we spoke over the phone, I reviewed the consent-to-participate form and asked for verbal consent. Next, I asked him to respond to seven demographic questions. Participant 2 identified himself as a Caucasian male between 38 and 49 years old and said that he works as an online accessibility specialist in the Charlotte, North Carolina, metropolitan area. Participant 2 also stated that he had been diagnosed with retinopathy of prematurity, an eye disease that causes blood vessels to grow abnormally in the retina. After collecting demographic information, I gave Participant 2 a brief overview of the study and then asked him to respond to several interview protocol questions and to a few follow-up questions.
1. **What experiences have you had with negative employer attitudes? How did you respond?**

   A lot of times when I disclose to a business partner or vendor that I have a disability, the questions they ask me or the credence that they give to my input appears to change. Their tone of voice or the words they use will often change, almost like talking to a child or talking to somebody who is viewed to know less than they did before. The moment I notice that change, I don’t do anything about it. I just get frustrated. I might cringe or, you know, feel a physical reaction like tightness in my chest or something like that.

2. **What is the worst part about your experience? How did it make you feel?**

   The worst part of it is that I personally get really frustrated. I feel like it slows the entire interaction down, and my personality is that when things go more slowly than they could then I feel immensely frustrated. I want to hurry, hurry, hurry! And so, when it slows it down, I think, gosh, I wonder if there’s something I’ve done to cause this or if there’s any way I could have avoided it, but mostly I just feel like, ah man, it’s slowing us down, and I get frustrated that it’s slowing us down.

3. **What related obstacles or risks have you experienced? How does it affect you in other areas?**

   I think what it has done over time—and I don’t know that I’ve ever chosen this purposefully; if I have, I’m not aware of it—but I think what it does is it makes me look for opportunities to avoid disclosing. Now, I just talked about not wanting to slow things down, so I won’t. I’m not willing to slow down too much to try to spot those opportunities, but I suspect that subconsciously I try pretty hard to avoid disclosing until I must. When I must, I go full-steam ahead, but I think it probably keeps me from
disclosing a little bit. And then, on those occasions when I disclose, and it doesn’t slow things down, it sort of catches me off guard a little bit, and I think I like those people. Maybe I even invest a little more heavily up front once I disclose and people don’t respond negatively. Then I’ll probably dive in a little bit and maybe feel like I’m on a little more of an even playing field or I’ve stayed on that same playing field that I was on from before. So, I feel positively about it, but it’s a surprise.

4. Can you identify any protective factors in the environment? Is there anything or anyone that helped you to deal with negative employer attitudes?

I guess I just try to push through it. I don’t ignore it. I mean, I don’t . . . . I’m very aware of it, but I don’t try to confront it, I guess. I don’t try to confront it because I don’t think there’s any way to win. No matter what one would say to address the situation, I think it would make any or all of the other people involved feel as though their intent was questioned or that their integrity was questioned. And so, I feel like I would do more damage to people’s perceptions of me or to their feelings in that business interaction. If I were to try to confront it and say, “Hey, I noticed this. I noticed the change in your approach to me, and you don’t have to do that.” I think if I did that, then it would actually cause more damage to both sides of the business relationship. Whereas if I perceive their attitude to have changed toward me, they don’t know that I perceived that, so I just keep on going, and if I earn their respect later, so be it. If I don’t, I didn’t have it to start with, so it’s okay. So, I feel like ignoring it and just working around it is the least expensive way to deal with it from an emotional or relationship capital standpoint.
5. **What are some of the strategies that you used to cope with the situation and to deal with the employer’s negative attitudes?**

I guess I look at it and say, man, the best thing I can do is—quote unquote—prove myself or just push my way through it, and, you know, this will most likely to go away in the long run. I would say that, you know, at the end of the day I don’t feel like I get to dictate what my contribution to a situation is worth. So, I don’t feel any value if I try to proclaim that it’s worth more than somebody else appears to believe it’s worth.

6. **How did your experience change you? How did it help or harm you?**

I think that over time, what it has done is, at some level, it’s made me a little more hesitant to jump headlong into relations, peer-to-peer friendships, or outside of work. I guess I fear engaging in those relationships and feeling that sort of distrusting feeling or uncertain feeling from other people. So it makes me a little bit more hesitant than I probably should be to engage in, you know, new friendships with neighbors or new friendships with people that I would sit on a board with or people that I would be teammates with outside of work.

7. **How did you or are you improving your relationship with your employer?**

So I think the best answer to that is, if you were to have had this interview with me 3 or 4 or 5 years ago, I don’t think I would have been aware of the perceptions that other people had or would have been aware of my subconscious or sort of repressed reaction to those interactions. I don’t know that I would have been aware of this thing over the last few years. I’ve grown very close to a friend, and we have explored all of the things that I feel and the things that I think I feel and the things that, you know, the reactions that I think I’m getting versus the actual reactions that I’m getting from people.
And so, through the course of that exploration, I’ve become much more aware of my own contributions or my own responsibility for being more positive during such interactions. So I think prior to a few years ago, I would have pushed my way through one of those valleys, so to speak, but I don’t think I would have ever given grace or forgiven the person or persons involved in them. I would have always kept them at arm’s distance because I didn’t want to trust them again. I didn’t want to believe that we were equals again.

For the over the last year or so, I’ve come to realize, okay, I have an opportunity and a responsibility to make certain that that I don’t make it impossible for those people to come out the other side of that valley and not become collaborative trusting partners of each other. So, I think that, ultimately, as for how I respond, I try to just look past it and understand that these people are human. And, just like there are things that I don’t know, there are things that they don’t know. And so, once they warm up to me or once they reach back out to me, then I’m a whole lot more willing to provide them the benefit of the doubt than I was just a few years ago.

8. **What can other employees with visual impairments do to deal with a similar experience?**

If I were to stand in a room with 10 other employees that have visual impairments, I think one of the things I would say to them is, “Look, you know we have to understand that our way of living with our disability is just that it’s our way. It has its advantages, it has its shortcomings, and sometimes those advantages or shortcomings are not apparent to us.” You know, the way that people encounter us and the attitude that they encounter when they encounter us. They have reactions that we may or may not see or that we may or
may not fully experience before they go away. So, I think that we have to give people a whole lot of the benefit of the doubt, and we have to realize that, as smart and intuitive as we are, there's information that we don't have that we may not even know we don't have. So, I think that's the biggest key. A lot of the time, we think we have more information or a higher percentage of the information available than we actually do.

Table 3

*Analysis of Interview with Participant 2*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Significant Statements</th>
<th>Lifeworld Existential Themes</th>
<th>Risk Factors</th>
<th>Protective Factors</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“I would say that, you know, at the end of the day I don’t feel like I get to dictate what my contribution to a situation is worth.”</td>
<td>Lived space: Feeling restricted.</td>
<td>Staying silent</td>
<td>Friends</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“The moment I notice that change, I don’t do anything about it. I just get frustrated. I might cringe or, you know, feel a physical reaction like tightness in my chest or something like that.”</td>
<td>Lived body: Having an increased physical reaction.</td>
<td>Being on your own or left by yourself</td>
<td>Having a positive sense of self: self-awareness</td>
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<tr>
<td>“The worst part of it is that I personally get really frustrated, and I feel like it slows the entire set of interaction down, and my personality is that when things go more slowly, I feel immensely”</td>
<td>Lived time: Feeling like time is slowing down.</td>
<td>Being the only employee with a visual impairment</td>
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</table>

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frustrated. I want to hurry, hurry, hurry.”

“And so, once they warm up to me or once they reach back out to me, then I’m a whole lot more willing to provide them with the benefit of the doubt than I was just a few years ago.”

“Theyir tone of voice or their words they use often will change, almost like talking to a child or talking to somebody who is viewed to know less than they did before.”

| Lived time: Feeling like you have to change who you are over time. |
| Lived other: Not feeling appreciated by others. |

Summary of the Interview with Participant 2

Participant 2 started the interview by sharing how various employers (e.g., business partners and vendors) treat him unfavorably after he discloses his visual impairment. He said, “A lot of times, when I disclose to a business partner or vendor that I have a disability, the questions they ask me or the credence that they give to my input appears to change.” When that happens, Participant 2 gets frustrated because it slows down the process. To deal with it, Participant 2 will either ignore it or try to avoid disclosing his visual impairment. To cope, Participant 2 discusses the situation and his feelings about the situation with a close friend.

Interview with Participant 3

Participant 3 contacted me via e-mail and stated that she met the inclusion criteria. When we spoke over the phone, I reviewed the participation consent form, asked for verbal consent,
and asked her to respond to seven demographic questions. Participant 3 said that she is a Caucasian female between 60 and 69 years old who works as an IT architect in the Charlotte, North Carolina, metropolitan area. Participant 3 also stated that she was diagnosed with macular degeneration, an eye disease that causes the central part of the retina (the macula) to deteriorate. After collecting demographic information, I provided Participant 3 with a brief overview of the study and asked her to respond to several interview protocol questions and a few follow-up questions.

1. **What experiences have you had with negative employer attitudes? How did you respond?**

   Well, you know, my manager came up to me and pointed out that the quality is not what it should be. So, he said, “From now on, you need to send me whatever you’re going to send out. You need to send it through me first.” Okay, so another step was added in the process, whereas other people, other coworkers, other people on the team didn’t have an extra step. Well, you know, my heart fell to my stomach. First of all, I think this was the first time that I realized that I was going to have to do something differently if I wanted to remain employed and that I was going to have to figure out a way to get around that. I didn’t tell my employer that I had a visual impairment because I just didn’t realize the impact it was making.

2. **What is the worst part about your experience? How did it make you feel?**

   It slowed me down. Trust me. A lot of extra time because at that point you’re a little bit paranoid about any kind of work that you do. I had a lot of migraines and, you know, a lot of it was just stressing the fact that I had to do something differently.
3. **What related obstacles or risks have you experienced? How does it affect you in other areas?**

I would say that it slowed down my productivity, increased my stress level, and it increased my level of migraines. It made me less confident and it certainly inhibited my growth in terms of, you know, getting different projects, getting new projects, and having more special projects. You know, just the view of you in your manager’s eyes is not as high as it was.

4. **Can you identify any protective factors in the environment? Is there anything or anyone that helped you to deal with your employer’s negative attitude?**

A coworker was, I would say, gracious and kind. I never did say anything about my eyes to him, but he was just more of a friend. Sometimes I would ask him to just look over something. My husband was definitely a lifesaver. He was a cheerleader. He was a believer. He was an optimist.

5. **What are some of the strategies that you used to cope with the situation and to deal with the employer’s negative attitudes?**

Okay, one is that, through a disability organization, I learned how to magnify my whole computer screen using the windows tab, the plus arrow, and the plus sign. Prior to that, I could only just magnify certain parts of the other screen, and that was like the biggest lifesaver I ever had. Another strategy is that I have dual monitors. I asked for a monitor and nobody blinked twice about having it at my new job, which is where I am currently. Another thing is that I use WebEx or Skype. Those are two tools where you can see each other’s screens. Even though people project things up on a big screen in a meeting, I still can’t see them. So now, I will just ask them, “Hey, can you screen share your screen with
me so I can see it on my own computer or send me the document so I can see the
document myself?” I notice that people are quite willing to do that because almost
everybody, and I’m sort of the grandmother or mother of positivity of the people that I
work with, a lot of other people have a relative or a parent that has macular degeneration.
So, they seem to get it. It’s not such a big stigma anymore. I wouldn’t say that I lead with
my visual impairment at all, but when they put something up on the screen, I’ll say, yeah,
you’re right, it is up on the screen, but it’s much easier for me to see it if I could have you
share your screen or if I can have a copy of your documents. The reaction ranges from
“oh, of course” to “well, okay,” but it is my approach and has not had any negative
effects in this particular job at all.

6. How did your experience change you? How did it help or harm you?

Well, it made me less afraid to be forthright. You know, when I was giving my grief and
going through that negative experience, I was so petrified of letting people know that I
couldn’t see twenty-twenty. That pretty much was like being paralyzed. And so, by
saying, “look, I am smart. I know what I’m doing. I just can’t see without a little bit of
help,” I was able to ask for the appropriate kinds of help that I needed. Once I was able to
admit that to myself and once I was able to ask for the appropriate kind of help that I
needed, I didn’t even tell my current employer. I don’t usually tell people that I have
macular degeneration. I just say that this would make see and do my work better. I’d like
to have these kinds of tools and they are nothing out of the ordinary, and they aren’t
easily provided. So it has changed me in the way that I’m much more comfortable with
my own scenario. I realize that there are a lot of technology or ways that I can
accommodate. I even had a coworker just say to me, “I see what you have to do in order
to have things work for you, but you have not skipped a beat.” She said, “nothing gets past you.” That was just really wonderful because I realized that I can work just as fast as anybody else. I just need to have a little bit . . . . I just need to have a few different tools in order to do that.

7. **How did you or are you improving your relationship with your employer?**

Well, I have a new employer, but just asking for the kind of tools that I need, which for me is two large screen monitors. I also have that Americans with Disabilities Act card to kind of lean on. I never had to use that, but it gives me a bit of comfort to know that the kinds of things I am asking for are not out of the ordinary, and they do not put undue pressure or expectations on an employer. They are reasonable. So, there is some comfort in knowing the laws, like the ADA. That brings a sense of comfort.

8. **What can other employees with visual impairments do to deal with a similar experience?**

I don’t know how the distribution of this information would work, but I think technology is a double-edged sword. I received information and education from a disability organization. They are the ones that told me about being able to magnify my entire screen and not just portions of the program. That was such a lifesaver. I’ve shared that with many of my perfect sighted friends here at work, and they didn’t even know about it. But as far as to help other people, I would say to educate yourself on the technology that’s available. I’m able to function and be a fully functioning member of society because of technology, and if it weren’t for technology, I wouldn’t be able to work. So, learn it and have a desire to learn about it. I just want to throw out there that you play a big part in your success.
9. Is there anything that you would like to add or share?

I can’t think of anything that I haven’t shared. I think that the main thing for me is that I had to learn to be a little bit more transparent and the people, by and large, have been very gracious. Once they know, they don’t have to guess about why you can’t see.

Table 4

*Analysis of Interview with Participant 3*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Significant Statements</th>
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<th>Risk Factors</th>
<th>Protective Factors</th>
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<td>Staying silent</td>
<td>Family</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Not asking for assistance</td>
<td>Coworkers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Well, you know, my heart fell into my stomach. I think it was the first time that I realized that I was going to have to do something differently if I wanted to remain employed.”</td>
<td>Lived body: Having a lack of physical energy.</td>
<td>Having a lack of knowledge about technology</td>
<td>Partnering with disability organizations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“I was so petrified of letting anybody know what I couldn’t see twenty-twenty. That pretty much was like being paralyzed.”</td>
<td>Lived body: Having a lack of physical energy.</td>
<td>Being the only employee with a visual impairment</td>
<td>Knowing disability laws (e.g., Americans with Disabilities Act)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“It slowed me down. Trust me. A lot of extra time because at that”</td>
<td>Lived time: Feeling like time is slowing down</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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“Point you’re a little bit paranoid about any kind of work that you do.”

“I would say that it slowed down my productivity, increased my stress level, and it increased my level of migraines.”

“So, another step was added in the process, whereas other people, my coworkers and other people on the team, they didn’t have an extra step.”

Summary of the Interview with Participant 3

Participant 3 started the interview by sharing how her employer added an extra step to her job duties. She stated, “Another step was added in the process, whereas other people, other coworkers, other people on the team didn’t have an extra step.” Participant 3 believes her employer treated her unfavorably because she has a visual impairment. Thus, Participant 3 stated that she became paranoid and, as a result, began looking for a different job. Like the other participants, she sounded upset when she spoke about her treatment by her employer. To cope with her situation, Participant 3 said that she had contacted a disability organization and learned about different technologies that could help her on the job, as well the Americans with Disabilities Act. Participant 3 credited the disability organization, her spouse, and one of her coworkers with helping her to get through her situation.
Interview with Participant 4

Participant 4 contacted me via e-mail to say that he met the inclusion criteria. When we spoke over the phone, I reviewed the participation consent form and asked for verbal consent. After that, I asked him to respond to seven demographic questions. Participant 4 stated that he is a male between 60 and 69 years old. He described his ethnicity as Other. Participant 4 stated that he is currently employed as a dispatcher in the Boston, Massachusetts, metropolitan area. Participant 4 also stated that he was diagnosed with diabetic retinopathy, an eye disease that damages the blood vessels in the retina. After collecting demographic information, I gave Participant 4 a brief overview of the study and asked him to respond to several interview protocol questions and follow-up questions.

1. **What experiences have you had with negative employer attitudes? How did you respond?**

   They don’t offer any programs that would advance my career. They are not accessible for people with vision loss. They don’t have the necessary equipment or tools that we need to use. I wanted to become a supervisor because in my sighted world I was a manager. When I got the job where I work now, I didn’t have a title. Well, just dispatcher but I didn’t have any supervisor or manager title or anything like that. I knew I wanted to go there. So, my manager sent me to a person in human resources and I expressed how I wanted to advance in the company. I had a meeting and then I got the run around for a little while, you know, like they were trying to see what they needed to do, but they really weren’t interested in, you know, fulfilling my needs. So, I let it go. It went on for too long of a time. I guess the writing was on the wall. They weren’t going to do anything for me.
2. **What is the worst part about your experience? How did it make you feel?**

Well, I felt like I really didn’t matter to them at all. I was very good employee. I was dependable. I was kind of like a positive influence in the department, because it was a lot of negativity in the department. I was the voice of reason, but I don’t think they recognized that, you know, mainly because I was totally blind. I felt really bad about working for a company that I was giving my all to and they didn’t want to do enough for me.

3. **What related obstacles or risks have you experienced? How does it affect you in other areas?**

Well, definitely emotionally. You know, my self-esteem was definitely damaged because I went in on a high note. My motivation after I turned blind was employment, but that’s all they gave me. They gave me the opportunity to just have a job. They felt like they did enough.

4. **Can you identify any protective factors in the environment? Is there anything or anyone that helped you to deal with your employer’s negative attitude?**

You know, I was all alone. I really didn’t think I had any options of getting other employment. I felt that I was very lucky to be in the situation that I was in. I mean, I lost my vision in 1998, and I had a job in 2002, which is pretty fast. So, I felt that I was lucky to have a job and be able to support my family. That was very important. Well, actually, me and my wife.
5. **What are some of the strategies that you used to cope with the situation and to deal with the employer’s negative attitudes?**

It’s probably worse today than it was, so I’ve been going to therapy for the last 4 years. Because I go there, I get a lot of things off my chest. I don’t have to keep holding it in, and I don’t really have to share it with my wife anymore because it’s been years and years. I know she will listen, you know, and she always will listen to me, but I think about it all of the time, you know, I mean over and over again. Like I said, I think about it all of the time, so that was one of the reasons that I kind of thought of a therapist.

6. **How did your experience change you? How did it help or harm you?**

Well, it was a dip for me, really, because I always took pride in working and being a part of a department or team. That was kind of taken away from me. You know, I love going to work. I love being with people. I like being a part of a team and getting things done. Then, I just went through the motions of going to work, you know. It wasn’t like I really wanted to go every day. Before that, I was always like how I am today. I’m dependable. I’m responsible. I always felt like that was important to have, you know, being at work, going to work, being there when you’re supposed to be there, participating in the workflow of the department. You know, like I said, being a positive voice in the department—and I’m still that way, but I still have feelings, and they really weren’t there for me when I really need them.

7. **What can other employees with visual impairments do to deal with a similar experience?**

Well, I think you need to be really assertive, you know, and you have to have that kind of personality—like you really don’t want to take no for an answer. I mean, I think if I had
to do it all over again, I think I would have put a lot more pressure on my employer with getting me the things that were going to improve my situation. I never really did that, except in the last 4 years because I’ve learned a little bit from the past.

8. **Is there anything else that you would like to add or share?**

I think what you’ve got to do, which I didn’t do, is go over somebody’s head. You’ve got to be able to do that. In my experience of working as a manager, I never really wanted anybody to go over my head. I wanted to have the chance to correct the issue. However, if I couldn’t correct the issue, then by all means do what you have to do. I didn’t do that, you know. I always stayed with the manager of the department when I probably should have gone further. So I think you need to go above your department manager. If you don’t get the help from the human resources department, then you have to go further than that, whether it be legal help or some other resource company, like a disability organization. I probably should have gone to them.

Table 5

*Analysis of Interview with Participant 4*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Significant Statements</th>
<th>Lifeworld Existentials</th>
<th>Risk Factors</th>
<th>Protective Factors</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“You know, I was all alone.”</td>
<td>Lived space: Feeling lonely.</td>
<td>Having no support from others</td>
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<tr>
<td>“I felt really bad about working for a company that I was giving my all to, and they didn’t want to do enough for me.”</td>
<td>Lived other: Not feeling appreciated by others.</td>
<td>Being on your own or left by yourself</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>Family Therapy</td>
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</table>
“They don’t offer any programs that would advance my career.”

“They are not accessible for people with vision loss. They don’t have the necessary equipment or tools that we need to use.”

“I let it go. It went on for too long of a time. I guess the writing was on the wall. They weren’t going to do anything for me.”

“It’s probably worse today than it was, but I’ve been going to therapy for the last four years.”

“I had a meeting, and then I got the run around for a little while, you know, like they were trying to see what they needed to do, but they really weren’t interested in, you know, fulfilling my needs.”

“Well, I felt like I really didn’t matter to them at all.”

| Lived space: Feeling restricted. | Lived time: Feeling like you have to change who you are over time. | Lived time: Thinking about your past, present, and future. | Lived other: Not feeling appreciated by others. | Lived other: Not feeling appreciated by others. | Being the only employee with a visual impairment |

**Summary of Interview with Participant 4**

Participant 4 began the interview by sharing how his employer ignored his inquiries about advancement opportunities. He stated, “I wanted to become a supervisor because, in my
sighted world, I was a manager.” After informing his employer that the promotion process was not accessible for people with visual impairments, his manager referred him to personnel in the human resources department. Participant 4 stated that the people in the human resources department gave him the runaround, and he believes his employer treated him unfavorably because he has a visual impairment. As he talked, I could easily tell that he was upset. Participant 4 told me that he has gone to therapy for the last four years to help him cope with his situation. Toward the end of the interview, Participant 4 began to reflect on what he could have done differently. He noted that he could have been more assertive, sought legal advice, and contacted a disability organization for assistance.

**Interview with Participant 5**

Participant 5 contacted me via e-mail to say that she met the inclusion criteria. When we spoke over the phone, I reviewed the participation consent form and asked for a verbal consent. After that, I asked her to respond to seven demographic questions. Participant 5 said that she is a Caucasian female between 50 and 59 years old who works as a coordinator in the Newark, New Jersey, metropolitan area. Participant 5 also stated that she had been diagnosed with myopic choroidal neovascularization, a disease that damages blood vessels in the choroid layer of the eye. After collecting demographic information, I provided Participant 5 with a brief overview of the study and asked her to respond to several interview protocol questions and a few follow-up questions.

1. **What experiences have you had with negative employer attitudes? How did you respond?**

   My employer let me go once he found out that I had a visual impairment. I needed to take off that Monday to go for my first injection, but on Friday, he called me and let me go.
I’m like, “Okay, fine.” I didn’t get upset because, at that point, I was just diagnosed. I was trying to comprehend what the heck was happening to me and the impact that it had on my life. I thought I would be fine and go back to work and everything, but, you know, that didn’t happen.

2. What is the worst part about your experience? How did it make you feel?

I was angry. I was angry because I didn’t have any income. I’m single, and it’s my income or no income. What made it worse was when I applied for disability and he sat on the forms for four months. So, it’s like, okay, you let me go, but at least push my disability forms through for me. Looking back on it now, yes, there would have been a little interruption. Maybe I would have needed a day off for my shots or two days off depending on how I tolerated the shots, but I still could have worked.

3. What related obstacles or risks have you experienced? How does it affect you in other areas?

It affects your confidence because I was good at my job. I was able to do what I needed to do. Yes, I would have—you know, maybe it would have taken me longer to do certain things, but I could still have done my job. You know, I worked there, I proved myself, and now I have to go and try to find another job.

4. Can you identify any protective factors in the environment? Is there anything or anyone that helped you to deal with your employer’s negative attitude?

My new employer called me and said, “Hey, we could use help with this.” That’s how I was able to get, like, a little bit of my confidence back because I know that I’m good in that area, and I know I’m good at what I do. They reached out to me and said, “Hey, do you want to work remotely for us?” So that helped out a lot: having somebody recognize
that you have an impairment, but your head still works, and you can still do what we need you to do.

5. **What are some of the strategies that you used to cope with the situation and to deal with the employer’s negative attitudes?**

I’ve learned that you can’t . . . you can’t change people’s attitudes unless they’re willing to give you a chance, so you have to just put those people aside and say, “Okay,” and you have to try to search for people that are willing to give you the opportunity. Then, when you get the opportunity, you can say, “Okay, it is what it is. This is the best I can do.” I think when you do that, and you meet your benchmarks, you know, then they are like, “Okay, well, it may take her longer, but she’s still meeting her benchmarks, so we’re getting our money’s worth from her.”

6. **How did your experience change you? How did it help or harm you?**

You know, I just got slammed with so many things. I mean, this guy knew I had a mortgage, knew that I had responsibilities, and he just sat there and took away my income source. You know, that was pretty shitty. So I’m sitting here and I’m like, “Okay, I can’t spend the next 15 years dissecting every inch of the walls in my house. I just can’t. I like having money. I like getting the things I want. I want to be able to go to the dollar store and not have to worry about spending money.” I know that sounds stupid, but, like, you know, I don’t want to be living from paycheck to paycheck. I’ve always worked hard. I’ve always had a good work ethic, so I decided that I would start up my little search again to see what kind of jobs are out there and what I can do.
7. **How did you or are you improving your relationship with your new employer?**

By producing, by meeting whatever my goals and benchmarks are. That’s what I am doing with my current employer. That’s what I focus on: being able to show that this is the goal, this is the objective, this is what you sent me, this is what you’ve asked me to do, this is what has been successfully completed, or this is what hasn’t, and here are the reasons why, and that those reasons are certainly third-party issues. It has nothing to do with my eyesight. It has to do with the utility company, or a failed inspection, and I make sure that I’m probably now more even more detail-oriented. I say, “Okay, you know, they didn’t receive approvals because it failed, and it failed because of this.” That way, they know exactly why it failed. I mean, it has something to do with me, but they know that I actually followed up and got all the information that they need to correct this so they can get it passed. So I think showing that I can be productive and I’m getting things done.

8. **What can other employees with visual impairments do to deal with a similar experience?**

They know what their job is, and they just have to be able to reassure the employer that, yes, unfortunately, this is what’s needed, and say, “Look, I will schedule these injections on a Friday afternoon. That way, if I have something adverse, I have Saturday and Sunday to recoup rather than doing it on a Monday morning.” I took Monday morning because that was the first available appointment with the doctor, but I think that’s something I would definitely do differently. With the company I work for now, I make sure that my appointments are on a Friday afternoon. That way, depending on the job, I have the whole weekend to recover. You have to reassure the employer that this is not something that is going to happen on a weekly basis, every month, or every three months,
and it’s not going to interfere with your job. If you need to work extra time leading up to your injection, make sure everything’s in place and that there’s another employee who has an idea of what might hit the fan when you’re out. Also reassure them that, although your eyes may not be 100% the next day, your mind is still sharp, and any questions they have, they can just call you and ask the question. That’s why it’s frustrating because, when he let me go, I would have done all these things. I had done all the things. Everything was done. One of the other employees that was there laughed because, when they went through my desk after I was let go, they were surprised that there was notes on everything. Okay, this document is waiting for this. This document is waiting for this. This one needs this. So, like, whoever went through it, there was nothing that they had to pick up and say, “Okay, what’s going on with it?” You know, it’s possible to do it. You just have to have an employer and coworker. I don’t even think it’s just your employer. I think it’s also your coworkers. If you have coworkers who have an attitude or aren’t willing to step up and help you out, then that’s probably worse than an employer with a bad attitude.
### Table 6

**Analysis of Interview with Participant 5**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<td>Having a positive sense of self: Self-determination</td>
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<tr>
<td>“Looking back on it now, yes, there would have been a little interruption. Maybe I would have needed a day off for my shots or two days off, depending on how I tolerated the shots, but I still could have worked.”</td>
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<td>Knowing disability laws (e.g., Americans with Disabilities Act)</td>
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<tr>
<td>“My employer let me go once he found out that I had a visual impairment.”</td>
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<tr>
<td>“You know, I worked there, I proved myself, and now I have to go and try to find another job.”</td>
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| Lived time: Feeling like time is slowing down. | Lived time: Thinking about your past, present, and future. | Having no support from others | Not asking for assistance | Being the only employee with a visual impairment | Having a positive sense of self: Self-determination | Knowing disability laws (e.g., Americans with Disabilities Act) |
and say, “Okay,” and you have to try to search for people that are willing to give you the opportunity. Then, when you get the opportunity, you can say, “Okay, it is what it is.”

“I took Monday morning because that was the first available appointment with the doctor, but I think that’s something I would definitely do differently. With the company I work for now, I make sure that my appointments are on a Friday afternoon.”

Lived time: Thinking about your past, present, and future.

Summary of Interview with Participant 5

Participant 5 began the interview by sharing how she was terminated by employer after he found out about her visual impairment. She said, “I needed to take off that Monday to go for my first injection, but on Friday, he called me and let me go.” Participant 5 believed that her employer treated her unfavorably because of her visual impairment. She sounded upset and expressed her frustration throughout the interview. She stated that it had affected her confidence, especially when she searched for a new job. Participant 5 told me she was able to get a little bit of her confidence back when her new employer called and asked her to work remotely. She explained that it helped to have an employer recognize her capabilities even though she has a visual impairment. Although Participant 5 was able to secure new employment, she still had
questions about certain disability laws, and how knowledge of them during her situation could have worked to her benefit.

**Interview with Participant 6**

Participant 6 contacted me via e-mail and said that he met the inclusion criteria. When we spoke over the phone, I reviewed the participation consent form and asked for a verbal consent. After that, I asked him to respond to seven demographic questions. Participant 6 stated that he is a Caucasian male between 60 and 69 years old who works as an editor in the Columbia, Missouri, metropolitan area. Participant 6 also revealed that he was diagnosed with retrolental fibroplasia, a disease that causes an abnormal blood vessel growth behind the lens of the eye. After collecting demographic information, I provided Participant 6 with a brief overview of the study and asked him to respond to several interview protocol questions and a few follow-up questions.

1. **What experiences have you had with negative employer attitudes? How did you respond?**

I worked as a computer programmer for 30 years, and one of the difficulties in working with computers is that some things are accessible, and some things are not accessible. If they were not accessible, they were blamed on my screen reader. Pretty much, people would say, “We’ll buy anything that we can to make you function well in your job, but we’re not going to let you get involved in the procurement process about what we buy and whether or not it is accessible.” I was left out of the equation—not intentionally left out, probably, but at least systematically let down. I tried to respond by dealing with it externally. I tried to be an advocate, and I tried to go to the software provider.
2. **What is the worst part about your experience? How did it make you feel?**

When you come right down to it, a blind person who faces significant accessibility problems has to decide if they will sue their employer, but how do you decide to sue your employer and still be a part of the team? It was frustrating, but I understood it. Maybe that’s the difficult part, you know: when you want to win, but you understand what somebody is telling you, and you can’t villainize them. It makes it tough because we like to fight villains, you know. We like to fight oppressors.

3. **What related obstacles or risks have you experienced? How does it affect you in other areas?**

Well, I think it affects how high you go in the organization because there are some things that you cannot do, or there are some things that take you a lot longer to do. Then, your upward path, career wise, is affected, and your ability to be a part of the team is affected. So, for instance, one time near the end of my work career as a programmer, I was assigned to go and do interviews. I got lots of kudos from higher-ups in the organization for being articulate, being a good listener, asking good questions, getting answers, and putting them into summaries that people understood. So it comes time for my evaluation, and, of course, your immediate boss does your evaluation, and this guy sits down with me and says, “When I look at the past year, I think to myself, ‘What have you done for me?’ When I look at what you’ve done for me, I can’t think of very much. Therefore, your evaluation is not too good this year.” I’ve always had good evaluations, and I have to tell you that I’m listening to this, and the world starts to fade out for me. I don’t know what it’s like for a sighted person, but I know what it’s like for me. It’s like the person is
getting further away, and I break into this sweat, and I think, “How can I have disappointed this guy so much?” Because I kind of liked the guy.

4. Can you identify any protective factors in the environment? Is there anything or anyone that helped you to deal with your employer’s negative attitude?

I think lots of people helped. I think I shared this problem, and I don’t mean shared it as in talked about it, but I mean shared it with a lot of other blind people who were advocates in a disability organization. They understood what I was talking about. They understood the limitations of the software. They were involved in the advocacy efforts, and we could share our screens and talk about our frustration. We could talk about how to do something positive about it. I also think there were people in the management structure where I worked who said, “I don’t know how to solve this specific problem that he has, but he has talent and he has energy, and we’re going to figure out a way to use that talent and energy.” So I think they get credit, too. I can only do so much. I’m only one person. I am a cog in the wheel.

5. What are some of the strategies that you used to cope with the situation and to deal with the employer’s negative attitudes?

I realized that my accessibility problems affected me mostly, but they were not separate and distinct from whether or not I brought intelligence, a good attitude, and a desire to make things work. I wanted to pull my own weight in the world, and I think that people saw that and understood it. I think that’s how it was. I still got a great deal of benefit out of my job. I was respected where I worked. People thought that I had institutional knowledge, and people thought that I had good ideas. I think people mostly thought that I was a team player.
6. **How did your experience change you? How did it help or harm you?**

Well, I think I realized that, as complex things are, people can only do what they can do, and I can only do what I can do. If I’m working with people at the highest levels of my organization, and if I’m working with people at a software company, and if I’m working with the developer of my screen reader trying to get new things incorporated into the system that would help me survive, then I’m doing all that I can do. I’m not going to let the frustration of that get in the way of me enjoying life. As far as I know, I only get one life, and I got to make it good. When I look at myself, I realize that I could have been a far different blind person and, in fact, I was not the blind person that I feared that I would be. I feared that nobody would hire me, and I would go through life without a job and make excuses about why I wasn’t employed and what I was going to do in lieu of employment. I knew a number of blind people who did that.

7. **How did you or are you improving your relationship with your employer?**

The situation ended up resolving itself by my leaving. I don’t think that there was anything about the situation that was going to get better, so I don’t know that it resolved. I mean, the place that I work now understands blind people and blind issues, but there are still parts of systems that we use that are known to be difficult for blind people.

8. **What can other employees with visual impairments do to deal with a similar experience?**

Well, I think you have to try to have a good attitude first of all and realize that if you don’t believe that there’s a way to overcome it, you’ll be right. You won’t find that way because you won’t look for it. If you don’t have the idea that there is a solution, then you just might as well give it up. If you think that the system is going to get you or that
people don’t care, if that is what you experience, and that is what you perceive, then you’ll quit. I think if you don’t find other people who share your problem and have a vested interest in helping you come up with a solution, then you can feel terribly lonely. The last thing you want to do is go through life feeling isolated and lonely, so, you look for other folks. I think you keep functioning with this naive belief that if you can first define a problem, there will be a solution. I say naive because I think that there are problems that we can easily say there are no solutions for, but at least in the beginning, a solution has to define the problem. Working to solve it, figuring out what your resources are, taking advantage of the goodwill of people to help you when they can, and taking advantage of the fact that you have the mind that you have . . . I guess today they call it thinking out of the box. I also think the Americans with Disabilities Act is there and that there is an obligation to provide reasonable accommodations. I think that was helpful to me.

Table 7

Analysis of Interview with Participant 6

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Significant Statements</th>
<th>Lifeworld Existentials Themes</th>
<th>Risk Factors</th>
<th>Protective Factors</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“Well, I think it affects how high you go in the organization because there are some things that you cannot do, or there are some things that take you a lot longer to do.”</td>
<td>Lived space: Feeling restricted.</td>
<td>Being on your own or left by yourself</td>
<td>Partnering with disability organizations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Having no support from others</td>
<td>Knowing disability laws (e.g., Americans with Disabilities Act)</td>
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“Pretty much people would say, “We’ll buy anything that we can to make you function well in your job, but we’re not going to let you get involved in the procurement process about what we buy and whether or not it is accessible.”

“I was left out of the equation—not intentionally left out, probably, but at least systematically let down.”

“A blind person who faces significant accessibility problems has to decide if they will sue their employer, but how do you decide to sue your employer and still be a part of the team?”

“I’ve always had good evaluations, and I have to tell you that I’m listening to this, and the world starts to fade out for me. I don’t know what it’s like for a sighted person, but I know what it’s like for me. It’s like the person is getting further away, and I break into this sweat and I think, ‘How can I have

| Lived other: Not feeling appreciated by others. | Having a lack of knowledge about technology | Partnering with people in the upper management structure |
| Lived space: Feeling lonely. | Being the only employee with a visual impairment | Having a positive sense of self: Self-awareness, self-determination |
| Lived space: Feeling vulnerable. | | |
| Lived body: Having an increased physical reaction. | | |

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disappointed this guy so much?’ because I kind of liked the guy.”

“I can only do so much. I’m only one person. I am a cog in the wheel.”

Lived space: Feeling lonely.

Summary of Interview with Participant 6

Participant 6 began the interview by sharing how his employer refused to let him participate in the accommodation process. He noted that his employer did not let him get involved in the procurement process or have a voice in saying if the technology the company purchased would be accessible. Participant 6 felt that he was treated unfavorably by his employer because of his visual impairment. Unlike Participant 5, Participant 6 affirmed that he had knowledge of certain disability laws, such as the Americans with Disabilities Act. He said, “The law would have said that accessibility is a make or break.” Participant 6 stated that he did not contact anyone to enforce the law because he had mixed feelings. He said, “How do you decide to sue your employer and still be a part of the team?” Therefore, Participant 6 solicited help from a manufacturer and members of a large disability organization. Participant 6 stated that he never received the equipment he needed, but he seemed content with his efforts. He stated, “People can only do what they can do, and I can only do what I can do.”

Interview with Participant 7

Participant 7 contacted me via e-mail to say that he met the inclusion criteria. When we spoke over the phone, I reviewed the participation consent form and asked for a verbal consent. After that, I asked him to respond to seven demographic questions. Participant 7 stated that he is a Caucasian male between 70 and 79 years old who works as a professor in the Chicago, Illinois,
Participant 7 also said that he was diagnosed with Stargardt’s disease, an eye disease that causes progressive damage to the central part of the retina. After collecting demographic information, I provided Participant 7 with a brief overview of the study. I then asked him to respond to several interview protocol questions and a few follow-up questions.

1. **What experiences have you had with negative employer attitudes? How did you respond?**

I decided I would retire and come back as a professor emeritus. My employer insisted that I have a going away retirement party, but I told her that I’m not going away. I said, “This is just for paperwork.” So she comes to my door, knocks on the door, and comes in. I have chairs in my office, and she pulls up one and says, “People here don’t like you.” She thought that if I was disliked by so many people, I would just quit, but that didn’t work. Then, she moved my secretary and grad assistants away. So, I was like, “Fuck these people.” I went online, read all about the ADA, and got myself all squared away. Then, I went to our HR department and filled out a form. If you feel like the university is treating you unfavorably in regard to the ADA, you can fill out a form and submit it to the HR people. There was a big investigation, and they questioned for a long time. I think I may have been their first ADA complaint. It took a very long time. I mean, it just went on and on and on and on, and I was struggling without my secretary. Then, what happened is the HR gal called me and said that they wanted to make a deal with me. She said that if I would back off of the ADA complaint, they would restore my secretary back to her previous position. I said, “Yeah, that’s fine.” You know, I didn’t actually want to do it, but I figured that would be a quick way rather than fighting it out with lawyers.
2. **What is the worst part about your experience? How did it make you feel?**

I’m a pretty aggressive, pushy guy, and I wasn’t going to back off. I wasn’t going to shrink away, whipped and swamped, with my tail between my legs. This is what I thought she thought she could do to me because I’m blind and I’m weak, and I’m kind of easy prey. To my knowledge, she never did that to any of the other faculty members.

3. **What related obstacles or risks have you experienced? How does it affect you in other areas?**

During that time, my wife would say I would come home bitching and calling women “bitches,” but I just kept going. As a blind person, you just have to—you have to stick up for yourself, and that’s all there is. I had to look out for myself down through the decades in different situations as a kid. I just don’t let people run all over me. I just don’t know how to. Well, that’s how it affected me. I was pissed. Yeah, you could tell that it was very messed up, but I didn’t let it affect my work. I just kept chugging away, writing grants, working away, publishing, and that kind of thing.

4. **Can you identify any protective factors in the environment? Is there anything or anyone that helped you to deal with your employer’s negative attitude?**

Nobody. They didn’t want to hear about it. Nobody wants to get involved. Nobody wants to come to my aid, and that’s common. It’s very common. They want to keep their distance, even to this very day. The current chairman doesn’t really want to hear about the problems we had several years ago, and nobody outside of work does, either.
5. **What are some of the strategies that you used to cope with the situation and to deal with the employer’s negative attitudes?**

   I’m just determined to win. That’s all there is to it. Again, whatever it took. If I would have gotten a lawyer to come in if my ADA complaint had been turned down, if the problem wasn’t solved to my satisfaction, I was going to call a lawyer and tell her that I needed help and then threaten them with a lawsuit. That’s what I was going to do.

6. **How did your experience change you? How did it help or harm you?**

   This is, this is a very good question. It reinforced my attitude of sticking up for yourself and fighting back. You can’t let people run all over you. Nobody! This was a good example of nobody coming to help. Nobody! You are just on your own. You have to do what it takes to solve your own problems. Don’t be afraid to fight back. Don’t ever count on anybody—nobody!—even your best friends. Nobody will come to your aid. Nobody, and I really mean that. Nobody will. You just have to do it yourself, and that’s all there is to it.

7. **How did you or are you improving your relationship with your employer?**

   Oh, no, I would never improve my relationship with her after what she did. She wouldn’t want to talk to me anyway. So yeah, there’s no way in hell that I would go to her and try to be friends. I have no respect for her. I actually didn’t have any respect for her after she got hired, and I was on the committee that interviewed the candidates.

8. **What can other employees with visual impairments do to deal with a similar experience?**

   Well, the ADA is a wonderful thing, and it is taken seriously here. I think they should get online and do what I did at least. I went online and read about the ADA, and I followed it.
I knew it pretty well. I didn’t know all the details, but I did some investigation. So read it or find a consulting company. One of the universities, I think, provides a free lawyer. So I think they should get their ducks in a row and make sure they know what their rights are and then go after it, following the rules that have been set up, and then go from there. If things don’t work out the way they think it should, they should be ready to fight back and give it their best and just not walk away and let it happen to them. Don’t depend on anybody else. Don’t think anybody else is going to come and help them because nobody’s going to do it. Very seldom do people jump in and help another person. Very seldom! I’m actually one of the few people that I know who will actually jump in and help other people who are in distress and do something. That’s what I would do. That’s my attitude.

Table 8

*Analysis of Interview with Participant 7*

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<td>Lived other: Not feeling appreciated by others.</td>
<td>Having no support from others</td>
<td>Family</td>
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said that they wanted to make a deal with me. She said that if I would back off of the ADA complaint, they would restore my secretary back to her previous position. I said, “Yeah, that’s fine.”

“I’m a pretty aggressive, pushy guy, and I wasn’t going to back off. I wasn’t going to shrink away, whipped and swamped, with my tail between my legs. This is what I thought she thought she could do to me because I’m blind and I’m weak, and I’m kind of easy prey.”

“As a blind person, you just have to you have to stick up for yourself, and that’s all there is. I had to look out for myself down through the decades in different situations as a kid.”

“Nobody wants to get involved. Nobody wants to come to my aid, and that’s common.”

Lived body: Having an increased physical reaction.

Lived time: Thinking about your past, present, and future.

Lived space: Feeling lonely.
Summary of Interview with Participant 7

Participant 7 began the interview by sharing how his employer tried to force him to resign through intimidation and isolation. Participant 7 stated that he started to struggle with his work after his employer removed his secretary and graduate assistants. Participant 7 sounded very upset throughout the interview. He spoke loudly and angrily. Participant 7 believed that he was treated unfavorably because of his visual impairment. Because of this, he filed an ADA complaint with his human resources department. He dropped the ADA complaint after his employer offered to bring back his secretary. Participant 7 said that when he was going through his situation, nobody wanted to help.

Interview with Participant 8

Participant 8 contacted me via e-mail and stated that she met the inclusion criteria. When we spoke over the phone, I reviewed the participation consent form and asked for a verbal consent. After that, I asked her to respond to seven demographic questions. Participant 8 stated that she is an African American female between 60 and 69 years old who works as a braille transcriber in the Sacramento, California, metropolitan area. Participant 8 also stated that she was diagnosed with blindness from lead poisoning. After collecting demographic information, I provided Participant 8 with a brief overview of the study. I then asked her to respond to several interview protocol questions and a few follow-up questions.

1. **What experiences have you had with negative employer attitudes? How did you respond?**

   I experienced a great deal of ableism as a blind counselor: no opportunity for advancement, and work was inaccessible. When I say inaccessible, I mean geographically inaccessible locations and punitive responses when I protested it. I was continually forced
to work in places that were just not accessible for me to get to by way of public transportation or even paratransit without horrendous, horrendous problems, so I got the EEOC involved. I was forced to step it up. I tried to do the chain of command, but my supervisor refused to submit my request for a transfer to a higher-level administrator, so I went to the EEOC, and I knew about the Fair Employment Act, and I worked with the union throughout this process. It was a traumatizing experience!

2. What is the worst part about your experience? How did it make you feel?

The worst part of my experience was that I took the position because I have always been very committed to the independence and employment of our community and anything to help our community move forward. That was my mission, as it is for most of the individuals or counselors who work there, but I was not allowed to grow and to do my work, which was to provide work to the consumers I worked with. You know, they liked my work. They liked working with me simply because I was an advocate for the consumers as well as myself, but my employer didn’t want adequate service. They didn’t encourage that. That was the hardest part.

3. What related obstacles or risks have you experienced? How does it affect you in other areas?

The outcome of that was the ruination of my career as a blindness professional. That situation completely ruined my ability to work in the community with adults. The blind and visually impaired community is a small one, and businesses are small, so everyone became aware of the fact that I was a counselor who was working with those consumers. I had an excellent reputation before all of this happened. I worked in the field for like 30 years doing various things for people, and no one would text me get back, even to this
day. So that’s how it affected me. I became homeless with a disabled adult child, and I didn’t have employment.

4. Can you identify any protective factors in the environment? Is there anything or anyone that helped you to deal with your employer’s negative attitude?

During the time, yes, I had an excellent support system. I had some really good friends, and I still have a couple of those good friends. There were a lot of people within the job who knew because, again, this is a small community, and this was a contentious situation, but they would not interact with me. So in a way it was like I was Typhoid Mary, but I had one excellent friend who was also a blind counselor. We were great friends, and she helped me, and the other friends were outside of work. My family was not working. My son also. He was very supportive.

5. What are some of the strategies that you used to cope with the situation and to deal with the employer’s negative attitudes?

I went to counseling, life management, and stress management because I was under a tremendous amount of stress. The counseling helped and, you know, church and state or whatever: God, having God, and believing in God and knowing that I would be able to get through this. Having overcome different things in my life, I knew that I get through it, so those are the things. Time was the other thing. I’ll never really be able to forget all that craziness, but time was the great healer too. A lot of time had to pass, because ironically, once I was recovered enough to be able to start actively going out here looking for work in 2016—this happened to me in 2011, but it took until 2016 until I was in a state of mind about, you know, job searching to get back into it, and I tried to do it. I did go to different places like the unemployment office, but they have no idea how to assist us with looking
for work. They were just so shocked, and it’s quite an experience, so, eventually, I ended up having to go back to the same company where I was a counselor at and go to a rehab counselor to get work. I had to make my peace with it, and I said, “Look, it is what it is, and they cannot deny you services, and you’ll get better treatment as a consumer than you got as an employee, so just do it,” and I did it. That’s how I got this job where I’m working now. I got the job on my own but, you know, in terms of the services that they provide like technology and some other things, they helped me to get employment.

6. **How did your experience change you? How did it help or harm you?**

That’s a good question. Well, it taught me that there’s a lot of misconceptions that people have about what a job actually is. Even though you think a job can be one way, it’s not until you actually get into that job that you find out what it is. So it made me talk to people and do my research. Even if something is wrong in the job, you really do have to look ahead and decide if you can afford not to have a job. You have to pick your battles, so the biggest thing I learned is that I cannot do this without peer support. If I’m in a situation where I don’t have other people in my same situation or who don’t understand what I’m going through or who isn’t willing to speak up, then I am just going to keep my job until I can do better.

7. **How did you or are you improving your relationship with your employer?**

I’m not willing to ever be put under the type of trauma and stress I was in with my former employer because it really negatively impacted my health and morale. It’s just not worth it, and I have enough ability at this point to, you know, use connections within, not only in this community, but other communities. Eventually, I will be able to find something
that’s going to work for me, or if it takes too long, I’m also interested in going back to
school to get my masters and maybe, at some point, my doctorate in psychology.

8. What can other employees with visual impairments do to deal with a similar
   experience?

I think it’s really important for them to make sure that they have a very strong peer
support system. If they are people who work, one thing we do need to do is just have a
really good coalition of people who are out there looking for work and people who are
working. We need to be each other’s greatest allies, and we need to network. We need to
brainstorm and find out how other people deal with it because you might have somebody
who is more fiery. If I had somebody like that available, they could have given me a
better way to deal with it, where it didn’t upset me as much, so network with peers, have
a very powerful and strong circle of friends in similar life situations, and just work
together. Hold the department of rehab accountable as consumers. Making sure that they
hire counselors who are aware of things that we are dealing with in our search for
employment. Be a part of self-help organization like the ones for the blind and visually
impaired. So, you know, utilize those things.

Table 9

Analysis of Interview with Participant 8

<table>
<thead>
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<td>Having no support from others</td>
<td>Having a support system Coworkers</td>
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mean geographically inaccessible locations.”

“I protested it.”

“I tried to do the chain of command, but my supervisor refused to submit my request for a transfer to a higher-level administrator.”

“The blind and visually impaired community is a small one, and businesses are small, so everyone became aware of the fact that I was a counselor who was working with those consumers.”

“So, in a way, it was like I was Typhoid Mary.”

“Time was the other thing. I’ll never really be able to forget all that craziness, but time was the great healer too.”

“I did go to different places like the unemployment office, but they have no idea how to assist us with looking for work.”

| Lived body: Having an increased physical reaction. |
| Lived other: Not feeling appreciated by others. |
| Lived space: Feeling vulnerable. |
| Lived space: Feeling lonely. |
| Lived time: Feeling like you have to change who you are over time. |
| Lived space: Feeling restricted. |

| Being on your own or left by yourself |
| Friends |
| Family |
| Going to counseling |
| Having a positive sense of self: Self-determination, self-awareness |
| Going to church |
| A belief in God |
| Knowing disability laws (e.g., Americans with Disabilities Act, Fair Employment Act) |
| Partnering with disability organizations |
| Partnering with federal agencies (e.g., EEOC) |
| Partnering with labor unions |
“You really do have to look ahead and decide if you can afford not to have a job.”

| Lived time: Thinking about your past, present, and future. |

Summary of Interview with Participant 8

Participant 8 began the interview by sharing multiple challenges that she faced at work. One of her greatest challenges was traveling. Her employer assigned her to a territory that was inaccessible. When she told her employer about it, she said they refused to reassign her to another one. Participant 8 stated that she was terminated by her employer. She explained how that single event ruined her professional career. Participant 8 believed she was treated unfavorably by her employer because of her visual impairment. After trying to resolve the situation with her supervisor, Participant 8 contacted a representative from her labor union and filed a charge with the EEOC. Participant 8 told me that she got her job back, but only for a short time. She stated that she was terminated by her employer again and that her situation was very traumatic. Because of this, she had to go to counseling to cope with it. She also stated that she solicited help from her friends, believed in God, and went to church.

Chapter Summary

Chapter 4 presented information on participant recruitment and the participants’ demographic details. The participants had a number of similarities and differences. For example, all participants had visual impairments and actively worked, but they varied in age, gender, ethnicity, education, diagnosis, and occupation. This chapter also presented an analysis of my interviews. I presented the best examples of the raw data that demonstrate the participants’ experiences in a question-and-answer-format. In addition, I presented significant statements and
themes, which included risk and protective factors, on various tables. I also provided a summary of each interview to remind readers of the main points. I conducted a cross-case analysis to examine themes, similarities, and differences between the participants. This is discussed in detail in Chapter 5.
CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

Chapter 5 provides an overview of the study, a cross-case analysis, and a discussion of the findings. The following question guided my study: What are the lived experiences of employees with visual impairments who are processing and overcoming perceived negative employer attitudes? Three subsidiary questions helped me answer the guiding question:

1. What are the lived existentials (lived time, lived space, lived body, and lived other) of being the object of an employer’s negative attitude?

2. What risk factors exist in the environments of employees with visual impairments who experience negative employer attitudes?

3. What protective factors exist or must be constructed in the environments of the employees with visual impairments to mitigate the experiences of negative employer attitudes?

The remainder of this chapter includes the study’s implications for counseling, considerations for future research, questions generated by this study, the conclusion, and a chapter summary.

Overview of the Study

The literature rarely addresses negative employer attitudes toward employed people with visual impairments (Bengisu et al., 2008; McDonnell et al., 2014; Crudden et al., 1998; Frank & Bellini, 2005; Golub, 2006; McDonnell, 2014; Papakonstantinou & Papadopoulos, 2009, 2010; Shaw et al., 2007; Shengli et al., 2017; Smith, 2002). McDonnell et al. (2014) noted that research on this population is quite limited. I found one qualitative study (Golub, 2006) and two quantitative studies (McDonnell et al., 2014; McDonnell, 2014) that explored this phenomenon using employers’ perspectives as their primary research data. I also found two qualitative studies (Frank & Bellini, 2005; Smith, 2002), three quantitative studies (Bengisu et al., 2008; Crudden et
al., 1998; Shaw et al., 2007), and three mixed-methods studies (Papakonstantinou & Papadopoulos, 2009, 2010; Shengli et al., 2017) that explored this phenomenon using the perspectives of employees with visual impairments as their primary research data. Although the previous research on this topic is valuable, it is insufficient. As such, a gap exists in the research literature.

This hermeneutic phenomenological study was aimed at exploring, understanding, and describing how employees with visual impairments process and overcome perceived negative employer attitudes. To accomplish this goal, I selected eight individuals who met the following criteria: (a) has a visual impairment, (b) currently works as an employee, (c) has experienced negative employer attitudes, (d) is between the ages of 18 and 79, and (e) communicates in English. I asked each person to respond to seven demographic questions. The demographic survey provided supporting research data that enabled me to understand certain characteristics of employees with visual impairments. Then, I asked each person to respond to several interview protocol questions and a few follow-up questions and probes “to achieve both breadth of coverage across key issues, and depth of coverage within each” (Ritchie et al., 2013, p. 148). I also listened for changes in the participants’ pitch and tone of voice because all interviews were conducted over the phone and recorded.

After transcribing the audio recording to text, I presented highlights of the participants’ responses and analyzed the text using the study’s theoretical framework. Two theories facilitated my understanding of the phenomenon through relevant models and concepts. The first was Bronfenbrenner’s (2005) bioecological model for human development, which demonstrated how the work environment can have an immediate and direct influence on an employee with a visual impairment. I also used this model to identify risks and protective factors in the work
environment. The second theory was van Manen’s (1990) hermeneutic phenomenology, the study of lived human experience, which I used to unfold meaning as it is lived through lifeworld existentials (lived space, lived body, lived time, and lived other).

**Cross-Case Analysis**

To determine the similarities, differences, and themes, I conducted a cross-case analysis and found several factors that appeared to cause a change in the participants’ behavior, physical well-being, thinking, beliefs, and social interactions, which I discuss in detail in the following paragraphs. I also found six risk factors and 16 protective factors that appeared to exist in the participants’ work environment. The six risk factors were having no support from others, having a lack of knowledge about technology, not asking for assistance, being on one’s own or left by one’s self, staying silent, and being the only employee with a visual impairment. The 16 protective factors were having a support system, family, friends, coworkers, partnering with people in the upper management structure, going to counseling or therapy, having a positive sense of self (e.g., self-determination, self-awareness, and self-reliance), going to church, having a private office, a belief in God, praying, mindfulness, knowing the disability laws (e.g., Americans with Disabilities Act and Fair Employment Act), partnering with disability organizations, partnering with federal agencies (e.g., EEOC), and partnering with labor unions. Table 10 illustrates the cross-case analysis of similarities, differences, and themes.

**Table 10**

_A Cross-Case Analysis of Similarities, Differences, and Themes_

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Categories</th>
<th>Similarities, Differences, and Themes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lived Space</td>
<td>• Feeling vulnerable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Feeling restricted</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Feeling lonely</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Lived Body          | • Having a lack of physical energy  
|                     | • Having an increased physical reaction |
| Lived Time          | • Feeling like you have to change who you are over time  
|                     | • Feeling like time is slowing down  
|                     | • Thinking about your past, present, and future |
| Lived Other         | • Not feeling appreciated by others |
| Risk Factors        | • Having no support from others  
|                     | • Having a lack of knowledge about technology  
|                     | • Not asking for assistance  
|                     | • Being on one’s own or left by one’s self  
|                     | • Staying silent  
|                     | • Being the only employee with a visual impairment |
| Protective Factors  | • Having a support system  
|                     | • Family  
|                     | • Friends  
|                     | • Coworkers  
|                     | • Partnering with people in the upper management structure  
|                     | • Going to counseling or therapy  
|                     | • Having a positive sense of self: self-determination, self-awareness, and self-reliance  
|                     | • Going to church  
|                     | • Having a private office  
|                     | • A belief in God  
|                     | • Praying  
|                     | • Mindfulness  
|                     | • Knowing disability laws (e.g., Americans with Disabilities Act and Fair Employment Act)  
|                     | • Partnering with disability organizations  
|                     | • Partnering with federal agencies (e.g., EEOC)  
|                     | • Partnering with labor unions |
Discussion of the Findings

My findings suggest that multiple factors contributed to the participants’ lived experiences. These factors are discussed here in the context of van Manen’s (1990) lifeworld existentials, Bronfenbrenner’s (2005) bioecological model of human development, and protective and risk factors.

Lifeworld Existentials

I used van Manen’s (1990) four lifeworld existentials (lived space, lived body, lived time, and lived other) as a guide for reflection. I discuss each lifeworld existential in detail in the following paragraphs.

Lived space. Lived space is that which people feel. More than half of the participants in this study shared how they felt restricted, lonely, and vulnerable. These findings were consistent with those in previous research (Bengisu et al., 2008; Smith, 2002). For example, Participant 4 said that he felt restricted at work because none of the trainings that led to a promotion were accessible. Participant 8 also shared that she felt restricted at work. She explained how she was assigned to a territory that was not accessible by public transportation or paratransit. Participant 1 observed that she did not feel safe at work. She believed other employees were always watching her. Participants 1, 4, 6, 7, and 8 all noted that they felt lonely at work even though they worked in a huge building around other employees.

Lived body. Lived body refers to our physical presence in the world. Some of the participants appeared to have a lack of physical energy when they were confronted by their employer. For example, Participant 1 said that she threw up her hands whenever her employer would push her idea aside. Participant 3 stated that her “heart fell into her stomach” after her employer added an extra step to her job duties. She said, “I felt paralyzed.” Participants 1, 2, 6, 7,
and 8 appeared to have an increased physical reaction when they were confronted by their employer. For example, Participant 1 stated that she just kept going. She said, “I smiled and acted like nothing happened!” Participant 6 said the world started to fade out as he was being criticized by his employer. He said, “I broke out into a sweat when I was thinking about how I could have disappointed him so much.” Participant 6 spoke in a low tone of voice when he asked, “How could I receive a low score on my performance evaluation when I was just recognized by upper management for doing a good job on a special assignment?”

**Lived time.** Lived time is that which is based on our feelings (subjective) and not on the clock (objective). For example, Participant 2 stated that he felt like time slowed down every time he disclosed to an employer that he has a visual impairment. Participant 3 also stated that she felt like time had slowed down after an extra step was added to her job duties. Lived time is also our temporal way of being in the world. For example, Participant 4, who is between 60–69 years old, reflected on his experiences with his previous employer and then compared them to his experiences with his current employer. Participant 5, who is between 50–59 years old, also reflected on her experiences with her previous employer and compared them to her experiences with her current employer. She explained how she plans to be more open with her current employer to avoid another termination. Participant 7, who is between 70–79 years old, stated that his experiences with his current employer reminded him of different situations that he had been obliged to “fight” through in the past. He said in a loud voice, “I had to stick up for myself!”

**Lived other.** Lived other is the way people feel about and behave toward others in the space they share with them. All of the participants stated that they did not feel appreciated at work. For example, Participant 1 stated that her employer will think she is “totally incompetent” if she asks for help. Participant 2 stated that almost all of the employers he interacts with will
treat him like a child after he discloses that he has a visual impairment. Another participant, Participant 3, expressed that she was the only employee who was given an extra step in her job duties, and Participant 4 noted that his employer avoided his inquiry about advancement opportunities. Furthermore, Participant 5 stated that her employer fired her right after he found out that she had a visual impairment. Participant 6 explained that his employer told him that he would not be involved in the accommodation process, and Participant 7 stated that his employer walked into his office, sat down, and told him that no one in the office liked him and then reassigned his secretary and graduate assistants to another department. Finally, Participant 8 said that her employer denied her request for a transfer after she had let him know that she could not access her assigned territory when using public transportation or paratransit.

**Bioecological Model for Human Development**

The bioecological model for human development has five environmental systems: microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, macrosystem, and chronosystem. I discuss the microsystem and macrosystem in detail in the following paragraphs.

**Microsystem.** The microsystem is a person’s immediate surroundings. It is the closest system to employees with a visual impairment because their workplace is part of their microsystem. Thus, an employee’s workplace has the capacity to affect his or her character, development, or behavior. In this study, several participants shared how certain negative interactions with their employer affected their character, development, and behavior. For example, one participant said that a negative interaction between her and her employer caused her productivity to decrease. As a result, she said that her stress level and migraine intensity increased. She also observed that she became less confident, which inhibited her growth in terms of advancing within the company.
Macrosystem. The participants’ employers had an immediate and direct influence on them; however, I am convinced that other influences or systems contributed to their experiences. The macrosystem is a larger system, made up of policies, processes, and procedures designed to influence employees indirectly. Some companies have policies, processes, and procedures that are discriminatory, which can affect employees with visual impairments. In other companies, they appear to be neutral or nondiscriminatory in intention, but can nonetheless affect employees with visual impairments. For example, Participant 4 explained that he could not participate in certain training sessions because they were inaccessible. When he told his supervisor about the problem, his supervisor sent him to human resources. Human resources acknowledged his complaint but did not resolve the issue. In short, one part of the system affected another part, which ultimately affected the entire system.

Risk Factors

Six risk factors appeared in the participants’ environments. The most commonly mentioned risk factors were (a) being the only employee with a visual impairment, (b) having no support from others, and (c) being on one’s own or left by one’s self. These findings were consistent with those in previous research (Frank & Bellini, 2005; Papakonstantinou & Papadopoulos, 2010). The participants shared how being the only employee with a visual impairment played a role in creating a negative work environment, which may be defined as any condition that makes it difficult for employees to do their jobs. The participants also indicated that their employers made it difficult for them to do their jobs after they found out about their employees’ visual impairment. For example, Participant 8 said that her employer denied her request to transfer to another territory and, as a result, she struggled to meet with her clients.
Participant 6 said that his employer never gave him adequate software, and as a result, he had a difficult time completing his work.

Many of the participants also shared how they did not have any support from others. They said that other employees never approached them, asked about their situation, or offered to help. Participant 5 stated that having “coworkers who have an attitude or aren’t willing to step up and help you out is probably worse than [having] an employer with a bad attitude.” The remaining risk factors that appeared in the work environment were having a lack of knowledge about technology, not asking for assistance, and staying silent.

**Protective Factors**

Sixteen protective factors appeared in the work environment of the participants. The most commonly mentioned protective factors were (a) having a support system (e.g., family and friends), (b) knowing disability laws (e.g., Americans with Disabilities Act and Fair Employment Act), and (c) having a positive sense of self (e.g., self-awareness, self-determination, and self-reliance). More than half of the participants appeared to have a support system. Participants 1, 3, 4, and 7 mentioned their family, and Participants 1, 2, and 8 mentioned their friends. They explained how their family and friends supported them emotionally, mentally, and physically. For example, Participant 8 stated,

I think it’s really important for them to make sure that they have a very strong peer support system. If they are people who work, one thing we need to do is have a really good coalition of people who are out there looking for work and people who are working. We need to be each other’s eyes, and we need to network.
The participants also appeared to have knowledge of certain disability laws, such as the Americans with Disabilities Act. For example, Participant 6 explained that “the Americans with Disabilities Act is there and … there is an obligation to provide reasonable accommodations.” Participant 3 also spoke about the Americans with Disabilities Act:

I also have that Americans with Disabilities Act card to kind of lean on. I’ve never had to use it, but it gives me a bit of comfort to know that the kinds of things I am asking for are not out of the ordinary and [that] they do not put undue pressure or expectations on an employer. They are reasonable. So, there is some comfort in knowing laws like the ADA.

Many of the participants appeared to have a positive sense of self (e.g., self-determination, self-awareness, and self-reliance). For example, Participant 2 stated,

I’ve come to realize, okay, I have an opportunity and a responsibility to make certain that that I don’t make it impossible for [employers] to come out of the other side of that valley and become collaborative, trusting partners of each other.

Participant 6 shared a similar sentiment:

I realized that my accessibility problems mostly affected me, but they were not separate and distinct from whether I brought intelligence, a good attitude, and a desire to make things work [to my job]. I wanted to pull my own weight in the world, and I think that people saw that and understood it.

Participant 7 stated that he was “just determined to win,” and Participant 8 said that she knew that she was going to get through her situation because she had overcome difficult things in the past. The remaining protective factors that appeared in the work environment included partnering with disability organizations, partnering with people in the upper management structure,
partnering with federal agencies (e.g., the EEOC), partnering with labor unions, going to counseling or therapy, believing in God, going to church, praying, and maintaining mindfulness.

**Research Questions and Identified Themes**

In this section, I discuss the relationship between the research questions and identified themes. I created categories for some of the themes because they were similar to each other. For example, family and friends are two quite similar themes. So, I grouped them under a category called “support system.” In the end, I had a total of 17 themes. Three themes were associated with lived space, two themes were associated with lived body, three themes were associated with lived time, and one theme was associated with lived other. Four themes were interpreted as risk factors, and four themes were interpreted as protective factors.

The first research question was, “What are the lived existentials (lived time, lived space, lived body, and lived other) of being the object of an employer’s negative attitude?” The themes that best answer this question were feeling restricted; feeling lonely; feeling vulnerable; having a lack of physical energy; having an increased physical reaction; feeling like you have to change who you are over time; feeling like time is slowing down; thinking about your past, present, and future; and not feeling appreciated by others. The second research question asked, “What risk factors exist in the environment(s) of employees with visual impairments who experience negative employer attitudes?” The themes that best answer this question were having no support from others, being on one’s own or left by one’s self, staying silent, and, finally, being the only employee with a visual impairment, which was the most commonly mentioned risk factor. The participants shared how their employers treated them as though they were “different” from other employees. Being on one’s own or left by one’s self and having no support from others were the second and third most commonly mentioned risk factors, respectively.
The third research question was, “What protective factors appear or need to be constructed in the environment(s) of employees with visual impairments to mitigate the experience of negative employer attitudes?” The themes that best answer this question were having a support system (e.g., family, friends, and peers), having a positive sense of self (e.g., self-awareness, self-determination, and self-reliance), partnering with disability organizations, and knowing disability laws. Having a support system was the most commonly mentioned protective factor. Most of the participants shared how their family and friends helped them work through their situation. Knowing disability laws and having a positive sense of self were tied as the second most commonly mentioned protective factors.

Table 11 provides an illustration of the relationship between the research questions and identified themes.

Table 11

*Relationship between Research Questions and Identified Themes*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Questions</th>
<th>Identified Themes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>What are the lived existentials (lived space, lived body, lived time, and lived other) of being the object of an employer’s negative attitude?</td>
<td>• Feeling restricted&lt;br&gt;• Feeling lonely&lt;br&gt;• Feeling vulnerable&lt;br&gt;• Having a lack of physical energy&lt;br&gt;• Having an increased physical reaction&lt;br&gt;• Feeling like you have to change who you are over time&lt;br&gt;• Feeling like time is slowing down&lt;br&gt;• Thinking about your past, present, and future&lt;br&gt;• Not feeling appreciated by others</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What risk factors exist in the environment(s) of employees with visual impairments who</td>
<td>• Having no support from others&lt;br&gt;• Being on your own&lt;br&gt;• Staying silent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>experiences negative employer attitudes?</td>
<td>• Being the only employee with a visual impairment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------------------------------------</td>
<td>------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| What protective factors appear or need to be constructed in the environment(s) of employees with visual impairments to mitigate the experiences of negative employer attitudes? | • Having a support system (e.g., family and friends)  
• Having a positive sense of self (e.g., self-awareness, self-determination, and self-reliance)  
• Partnering with disability organizations  
• Knowing disability laws |

**Implications for Professionals in Counseling**

There appears to be a metaphorical line in the sand when it comes to working with people with visual impairments. In my experience, many professionals in counseling do not go beyond a certain point when offering services to these people. For example, one of the largest counseling organizations in the South Carolina advertises on its website that it has a team of licensed professionals who provide services for a wide range of issues. Some of these issues include, but are not limited to, depression, anxiety, grief and loss, anger management, self-esteem issues, post-traumatic stress disorders, victims of violence or abuse issues, career difficulties, accident or illness recovery, and stress management. Based on this information, I believe that most of my former clients would have benefited from receiving these services; however, to my knowledge, most them were never given the opportunity.

A growing number of professionals in counseling do not believe they can work with people with visual impairments. Many of them see the person’s visual impairment as the “problem” instead of finding the actual issue. In this study, the actual issue was participants’ perception of their employers’ negative actions or interactions. One of the reasons I conducted this study was to shed light on the challenges that frequently occur between employers and employees with visual impairments so that other professionals in counseling can gain knowledge...
of and have the ability to assess the “problems” that diverse client populations might have. According to the American Counseling Association Code of Ethics (2014), “Whereas multicultural counseling competency is required across all counseling specialties, counselors gain knowledge, personal awareness, sensitivity, dispositions, and skills pertinent to being a culturally competent counselor in working with a diverse client population” (p. 8). This study is important because it offers a better understanding of the employees’ lived experiences, which enhances counselors’ ability to improve professional practice.

Implications for Counselor Educators

This study is also significant because it prepares counselor educators to teach in vocational and clinical rehabilitation programs. On July 1, 2017, the Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs assumed responsibility for continuing the mission and vision of the Council on Rehabilitation Education through its accreditation process, which includes a review of graduate-level rehabilitation counselor education programs. In addition, the Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs is charged with employing a minimum of three members of the Council on Rehabilitation Education. Because of this, the findings in this study can both assist faculty and prepare students in counselor education programs, who will be able to gain knowledge of and to assess the presenting “problems” of diverse client populations during practicums, on internships, and on the job. This study can also be used to develop continuing education programs that advance knowledge and skills in the counseling field.

Limitations of the Study

As is typical of qualitative research, the lack of generalizability is a limitation of this study. Qualitative researchers must produce enough data to describe the phenomenon being
studied, and this task usually requires only a small sample. Starks and Brown Trinidad (2007) suggested a sample of 1–10 individuals if there are multiple forms of collecting data; Creswell (2013) suggested a sample of at least five individuals. In this study, I used a sample of eight individuals to describe how employees with visual impairments process and overcome perceived negative employer attitudes. Even though using a small sample has many benefits, it does not provide the best foundation for producing broad generalizability.

Another limitation of the study is that it addressed only a specific issue with a specific group. The specific issue was negative employer attitudes, and the specific group consisted of employees with visual impairments. During the interviews, many of the participants spoke about other issues that played a role in their experiences. For example, a number of the participants shared how other employees (e.g., coworkers) were aware of their situation but chose not to get involved. Participant 5 noted that some employees can have negative attitudes and that these may be worse than employers who have negative attitudes. Negative employee attitudes toward this specific group are an important issue that did not receive a lot of attention in this study.

**Considerations for Future Research**

Negative employer attitudes toward employees with visual impairments is a topic that has not received a lot of attention in the research literature (McDonnall et al., 2014). In this study, I interviewed eight individuals who are legally blind or have poor vision. Because of this, other researchers can build on this study by addressing the same issue with a different group. For example, future research can address negative employer attitudes toward employees with deaf-blindness—that is, an individual who has both a hearing and a visual impairment. Individuals with deaf-blindness work in a variety of settings; however, research on the challenges they face in the workplace is relatively nonexistent. Researchers can also build on this study by addressing
different issues with the same population. For example, future research can address negative employee attitudes toward employees with visual impairments. As I mentioned in the paragraphs above, the participants in this study stated that other employees were aware of their situation but chose not to get involved. Future research on this topic can shed light on challenges that frequently occur between employees with visual impairments and their coworkers.

Questions Generated by This Study

Generating questions for further research is expected in qualitative studies. The questions that were generated in this study follow:

1. What are the risks and benefits of making a coworker aware of an employer’s negative attitude?
2. How do employees with visual impairments overcome perceived negative attitudes from coworkers?
3. What are the lived experiences of employees with multiple disabilities (e.g., deaf-blindness) who are processing and overcoming perceived negative employer attitudes?
4. How do employees with visual impairments develop self-efficacy?
5. How do employees with visual impairments cope with employment policies, processes, and procedures that appear to be neutral or nondiscriminatory in intention but that nonetheless disproportionately affect them?
6. How do employees with visual impairments process and overcome global employment challenges?

Conclusion

The guiding question of this study asked, “What are the lived experiences of employees with visual impairments who are processing and overcoming perceived negative employer
attitudes? Research shows that a perceived negative employer attitude can occur in different forms and in various ways (Crudden et al., 1998; Papakonstantinou & Papadopoulos, 2010). For example, some of the participants in Papakonstantinou and Papadopoulos’s (2010) study stated that they experienced a perceived negative employer attitude in the form of formal or cold relationships and by not being treated as an equal. Some of the participants in Bengisu et al.’s (2008) and Smith’s (2002) study noted that they experienced a perceived negative employer attitude during their quest for a promotion. Additionally, some of the participants in Frank and Bellini’s (2005) study claimed that they experienced a perceived negative employer attitude during the accommodation process. These experiences were noted in the literature and are similar to the experiences shared by the participants in this study.

The participants in this study experienced a perceived negative employer attitude in eight ways: (a) not being treated as an equal, (b) having formal or cold relationships, (c) not having advancement opportunities, (d) requesting accommodations, (e) job assignments, (e) disciplinary procedures, (f) trainings, and (g) termination. Three of them (job assignments, disciplinary procedures, and trainings) were not mentioned in the literature but emerged as a result of this study. There are two reasons these findings emerged in this study. The first reason is that most of the participants were between 60 and 79 years. Because they were advanced in years, they may have felt compelled to be more open, honest, and direct. The second reason is that the interviews were held over the phone. Speaking over the phone may have made the participants feel safe, which may have caused them to be more open, honest, and direct.

**Chapter Summary**

Chapter 5 offered an overview of the study and a discussion on the findings for each research question. The themes were developed through the lens of van Manen’s (1990) theory
and Bronfenbrenner’s (2005) theory. My findings reflect the participants’ experiences and were
discussed under the following categories: lifeworld existentials, risk factors, and protective
factors. Seventeen themes emerged as a result of this study. Three themes were associated with
lived space, two themes were associated with lived body, three themes were associated with
lived time, and one theme was associated with lived other. Four themes were interpreted as risk
factors, and four themes were interpreted as protective factors.
References


Appendix A: Recruitment Flyer

DUQUESNE UNIVERSITY
600 FORBES AVENUE ♦ PITTSBURGH, PA 15282

Be part of an important research study…

A Study on the Lived Experiences of Employees with Visual Impairments

- Do you have a visual impairment?
- Are you actively working?
- Have you experienced a negative attitude from your employer?

If you answered YES to these questions, you may be eligible to participate in this research.

The purpose of this study is to explore, understand, and describe how employees with visual impairments process and overcome perceived negative employer attitudes. For the purpose of this study, the term “negative employer attitude” will be described in terms of your perception of employers’ negative actions or interactions. You will have the opportunity to discuss your experiences. Your participation in this study and any identifiable personal information you provide will be kept confidential.

Interviews will be held over the phone or at a designated organization that serves people with visual impairments.

For more information about this study, please contact me at

James F. McNeil, MS, CRC (PhD candidate)
Department of Counseling, Psychology, and Special Education
Duquesne University
E-mail: mcneilj@duq.edu

I am a PhD candidate under the direction of Dr. Lisa Lopez Levers at the Department of Counseling, Psychology, and Special Education at Duquesne University. If you have any questions concerning this research or your participation in the study, please contact me or Dr. Lisa Lopez Levers at levers@duq.edu.
Appendix B: Demographic Survey

The following demographic questions will assist me in understanding certain characteristics of employees with visual impairments. Your responses will remain anonymous.

Please read the question and circle the best answer.

1. What is your age?
   18–27 years
   28–37 years
   38–49 years
   50–59 years
   60–69 years
   70–79 years

2. What is your gender?
   Male
   Female
   Other

3. What is your ethnicity?
   White/Caucasian
   Black/African American
   Hispanic/Latino
   Other

4. What is the highest degree you have received?
   Graduate
   Bachelor
   Associate
   High School
   Less than High School
5. Do you have a visual impairment?
   No
   Yes
   If yes, state your condition: ____________________________

6. Are you actively working?
   No
   Yes
   If yes, state your occupation: ____________________________

7. What is the name of your city and state? __________________
Appendix C: Interview Protocol

Interview Protocol Project: Overcoming Negative Employer Attitudes: Exploring the Lived Experiences of Employees with Visual Impairments

Time of interview:

Date:

Place:

Interviewer:

Interviewee:

The purpose of this study is to explore, understand, and describe how employees with visual impairments process and overcome perceived negative employer attitudes. For the purpose of this study, the term “negative employer attitude” will be described in terms of your perception of employers’ negative actions or interactions. Because you have firsthand experience, I would like you to respond to the following questions.

Questions

1. What experiences have you had with negative employer attitudes? (How did you respond? What were your lived experiences?)
2. What was the worst part about your experience? (How did it make you feel?)
3. What related obstacles or risks have you experienced?
4. Can you identify any protective factors in the environment? Is there anything that helped you to deal with the employer’s negative attitudes?
5. What are some of the strategies that you used to cope with the situation and to deal with the employer’s negative attitudes?
6. How did your experience change you? (How did it help or harm you?)
7. How did you or are you improving your relationship with your employer? (What do you like about this process?)
8. What can other employees with visual impairments do to deal with their experiences? (What makes you say that?)

Thank you for taking the time to participate in this interview. Your responses were recorded on audiotape, and everything I observed was written down on paper. I will remove your name and any other identifying information to protect your identity and honor your privacy.
CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN A RESEARCH STUDY

TITLE:

Overcoming Negative Employer Attitudes: Exploring the Lived Experiences of Employees with Visual Impairments

INVESTIGATOR:

James F. McNeil, MS, CRC, PhD Candidate, Duquesne University, mcneilj@duq.edu

ADVISOR:

Lisa Lopez Levers, PhD, Professor of Counselor Education & Human Development, Department of Educational Foundations and Leadership, School of Education, Duquesne University, levers@duq.edu

SOURCE OF SUPPORT:

This study is being performed as partial fulfillment of the requirements for the doctoral degree in Counselor Education and Supervision at Duquesne University.

STUDY OVERVIEW:

Research indicates that the greatest barrier in the workplace for employees with visual impairments is an employer’s negative attitude. For this reason, I am looking to recruit, select, and interview 8–12 individuals with visual impairments who have experienced a negative attitude from an employer. The research on this topic can shed light on challenges that frequently occur between employers and employees with visual impairments and can provide information that can assist in overcoming them.

PURPOSE:

You are being asked to participate in a research project that is investigating negative employer attitudes toward employees with visual impairments. The purpose of this study is to explore, understand, and describe how employees with visual impairments process and overcome perceived negative employer attitudes.
To qualify for participation, you must

- have a visual impairment.
- be actively working as an employee.
- have experienced an employer’s negative attitude.
- be between the ages of 18 and 79 years.
- be able to communicate in English.

PARTICIPANT PROCEDURES:

If you provide your consent to participate, you will be asked to complete a demographic survey that will help me understand certain characteristics of employees with visual impairments. In addition, you will be asked to allow me to interview you. This is a one-time interview that will take place at a rehabilitation-based facility or neutral location and that will last about 60–90 minutes. The interview will be recorded using a digital voice recorder and transcribed using speech-to-text software.

These are the only requests that will be made of you.

RISKS AND BENEFITS:

There are minimal risks associated with participating in this study, but no greater than those encountered in everyday life. For example, during our discussion you may experience some uncomfortable thoughts or feelings. However, the benefits of participating in this study include a sense of empowerment and an increase in knowledge.

COMPENSATION:

There is no cost for you to participate in this research project, and you will not be compensated.

CONFIDENTIALITY:

Your participation in this study and any identifiable personal information you provide will be kept confidential to every extent possible. All records, tapes, and any other materials associated with this study will be destroyed 3 years after the study is completed. Your name will never appear on any survey or research instrument. All written and electronic forms and study materials will be kept secure. Your confidentiality will be maintained on a private computer that is password protected. The audio recordings and field notes will be kept in a locked filing cabinet and then destroyed 3 years after the research project is completed. You will be given a fictitious name, and all other information that may identify you will be removed. In addition, your company, employer, and other employees will be given fictitious names, and all other information that may identify them will be removed. Therefore, no one will be able to determine how or if you responded. In addition, any publications or presentations about this research will only use data that are combined with all subjects.
RIGHT TO WITHDRAW:

You are under no obligation to start or continue this study. You may withdraw at any time without penalty or consequence by letting me know in person, over the phone, or through e-mail. If you choose to withdraw, the information you provide will not be used.

SUMMARY OF RESULTS:

A summary of the results of this study will be provided at no cost. You may request this summary by contacting me. The information provided will not be your individual responses but a summary of what was discovered during the research project as a whole.

FUTURE USE OF DATA:

Any information collected that can identify you will not be used for future research studies, nor will it be provided to other researchers.

VOLUNTARY CONSENT:

I have read this informed consent form and understand what is being requested of me. I also understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time, for any reason, and without any consequences. Based on this, I certify I am willing to participate in this research project.

I understand that if I have any questions about my participation in this study, I may contact James F. McNeil at mcneilj@duq.edu. I also understand that I may contact Dr. Lisa Lopez Levers at levers@duq.edu. If I have any questions regarding my rights and protections as a subject in this study, I can contact Dr. David Delmonico, chair of the Duquesne University Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects, at irb@duq.edu.

___________________________________ ____________________
Participant’s Signature Date

___________________________________ ____________________
Researcher’s Signature Date
Appendix E: Interview Protocol (Revised)

Interview Protocol Project: Overcoming Negative Employer Attitudes: Exploring the Lived Experiences of Employees with Visual Impairments

Time of interview:

Date:

Place:

Interviewer:

Interviewee:

The purpose of this study is to explore, understand, and describe how employees with visual impairments process and overcome perceived negative employer attitudes. For the purpose of this study, the term “negative employer attitude” will be described in terms of your perception of employers’ negative actions or interactions. Because you have first-hand experience, I would like you to respond to the following questions.

Questions

1. What experiences have you had with negative employer attitudes? (How did you respond?)
2. What was the worst part about your experience? (How did it make you feel?)
3. What related obstacles or risks have you experienced? (How does it affect you in other areas?)
4. Can you identify any protective factors in the environment? Did anything or anyone help you deal with the employer’s negative attitudes?
5. What are some of the strategies that you used to cope with the situation and to deal with the employer’s negative attitudes?
6. How did your experience change you? (How did it help or harm you?)
7. How has your relationship with your employer improved?
8. What can other employees with visual impairments do to deal with their experiences?
9. Is there anything you would like to add or share?

Thank you for taking the time to participate in this interview. Your responses were recorded using an audio recording software, and some of your expressions were written down on paper. I will remove your name and any other identifying information to protect your identity and honor your privacy. When my study is complete, I will e-mail you a link so you may access and read it.