

Conceptualizing the past and present to see a new potential for the future: a UDL aligned
job search strategy survey for individuals with hidden disabilities

By

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Abstract

Recent graduates that identify as having a disability struggle more than their peers in obtaining employment. A cross-Canada study conducted in 2013 estimated there to be over 42,000 unemployed post-secondary graduates with disabilities. Reports on post-secondary graduate unemployment rates and studies related to university and job search experiences do not differentiate between visible and non-visible disability. The complicated history of the disability experience needs to be kept in mind when considering the needs of individuals with disabilities and ways we can take positive steps forward in an evidence-based way. There is also a need to better understand the experiences and employment rates of people with non-visible disabilities. The purpose of this thesis is to develop a tool to assess job search experiences for university graduates with non-visible disabilities, the intention is to design the tool in such a way that it can be used by the individual as well as for conducting research. By designing a dual purpose tool, it can be helping individuals with hidden disabilities now while also contributing to the research processes that will help in building a better future.

A 3-part questionnaire was developed by taking the principles of universal design for learning from the classroom into the job search process. The tool consists of an interchangeable demographic section, one is meant for research while the other is designed in a more personal support way. The second section is a questionnaire meant to reflect on work and job search experiences survey. The final section is a UDL aligned checklist that is designed to scale responses. By using the principles of UDL there will be multiple means of accessing the assessment/research material, understanding the content, and expressing circumstances. This tool purpose will serve as a step toward more progressive inclusion by providing benefits to participants and providers alike combined with the multiple options for format delivery.

Key Words: Hidden disability, University, Employment, Career, Universal Design for Learning

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Dedication

Because life can be unpredictable. I dedicate this master's thesis to the memories of my Maternal (V.G. Lynch) and Paternal (D, L. Lyons) Grandmothers. You both taught me remarkable life lessons, both in life and passing, that differences should be cherished and we need to know our past to move the future forward.

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Chapter 1: Introduction of Conceptualizing the Past into the Now

Defined by the World Health Organization disability is a “complex phenomenon”, as a quantifiable category of difference which serves to reflect the interaction between the features of a person’s body and the features of the society in which they reside (“Disabilities” 2017).

Disability is a varied lived experience, meaning some are disabilities visible to the rest of society while others remain hidden which make them hard to perceive. A person who has an invisible or hidden disability for this study does not use a mobility device such as a wheelchair, crutches, cane, or service animal, as these examples are immediately obvious symbols of disability within society.

Hidden disabilities may be the result of conditions that should be visible in the opinion of general populations, such as vision loss people struggle to understand if your eyes look perfectly “normal”. The same can be said for mild and moderate brain injuries or autism. This does not mean that it affects a person’s life any less because it is not visible to others. Further examples of this can include mental illnesses, learning disabilities and physical conditions that do not require support aids. Self-identification must happen when needed so that those with a hidden disability can get their needs met; this can be easier said than done.

Those who live a hidden experience must be able to tell others of their disability and what it means for them to advocate for their needs, which come with more challenges than not due to the response they can be met with. However, it is likely that their experience with stigma and being misunderstood is a vicious cycle of one step forward one step backward. There are potential implications for the job search and interviewing process due to having to self-identify.

Could there be a way to help individuals to help themselves by adding another tool to their support box of options? My answer is yes, through making a survey support tool using universal design for learning (UDL) which is a flexible model of learning in education that was

created by the Centre for Applied Special Technology in 1984 (“CAST Timeline” 2017). The aim is to create a way to help individuals with hidden disabilities to conduct deeper self-assessments. The tool is also intended for research use at universities and for organizations that help people to find employment to gather data and assess how they can improve on supports and interactions. The aim of this thesis is to propose an approach for the future by bringing a universal design for learning framework together with a look at stigmatization. Stigmatization and stigma management were formally drawn in a sociological context by Erving Goffman in the early 60’s, as a way of establishing how those who are very different navigate their stigma(s) in society (Goffman, 1963; Low, 1996; Ragins, 2008). This thesis is about individual empowerment however, it is necessary to point that it does not negate the fact that change is most needed at the institutional level with employers, government and other social institutions. They need to take accountability for breaking down stigma and making employment more accessible.

Stigmatization is the experience of those in minority groups that are ostracised by those who consider themselves normal and/or that society considers normal. This thesis will show a new perspective on approaches for enhancing how we view the experience of recent university graduates with hidden disabilities by merging the lenses of hidden disability, stigma, and the barriers this can create, and UDL. It is important to mention at this point that hidden disabilities are often referred to using other word choices and minimal contextual differences such as hidden and invisible that can mean the same and be different all at once depending on the circumstances.

To plan into the future, we need to look back at how far we have come in the rights and access of people with disabilities. By looking back, we can understand the ways we can improve. It is arguable that disability and the stigmatizing mindsets that surround individuals with this

form of experience serve to shape the stories of those who are a part of this minority group. Most historians would argue that the past impacts the future and, this is very true in the case of the widely variable minority of people with disabilities. These individuals experienced nothing but forms of oppression and denial of rights until the shift towards any form of progress in the mid 1960's (Barns & Roulstone, 2005). It is through a broader look at a society that we can still see the impact of what colonialism did to First Nation Communities today, such as the establishment of the Truth and Reconciliation committee or how First Nations groups have responded to the Canada 150 celebrations (Puxley, 2017). In that Times Colonist article Puxley points out that Janiver one of Canada's pioneers in contemporary aboriginal art was denied access to fine arts education based on the racial assumption that by being native he clearly wasn't smart enough for higher education. In comparison, the first nation and disability communities have had a broadly comparable rate of injustices though the progress made to day is full of variables. Colonialism and centuries of repression carry similarities to disability stigmatization and both take on going advocacy to break the barriers and established mindsets (Grech, 2015). In the context of disability rights, society is moving on a similarly slow trajectory with strongest advancements between the 1960's to the 1980's across society including further advancements to inclusive education (K-12) which is just in the under the last 20 years beginning to be reflected in universities (Prince, 2008; Stienstra, 2010; Titchkosky, 2008; Low, 1996).

Society is co-existing in a world of differences and is made better because of these differences. Despite the coexistence that occurs society is divided into different segments (Prince, 2008; Goffman, 1959; Goffman, 1963) which has established barriers in different forms such as physical access to many aspects of society. Consider, the experiences of individuals have changed over time, arguably becoming more transparent. The attitudes of others not part of the segmented faction of society come with the most challenges, as well as, the same attitudes

that those with disabilities internalize and remain affected by in one way or another (Goffman, 1963; Low, 1996; Barns & Roulstone, 2005; Titchkosky, 2008). Attitudes take a long period of adjustment across society in general though they don't completely fade we evolve to challenge them. Or otherwise we would still have large residential schools and asylums.

The Evolution of Attitudinal Stigma

Historically speaking individuals who have had some form of deviation from normal physical capabilities and common behavior have been ostracized, hidden, institutionalized, or earn income in circus freak shows before the World Wars (Vargo, 2006; Church & Frazee & Ryan, 2005; Collections Canada¹, 2005). Asylums to the outside world were considered a haven for the different and diseased for centuries (“Asylum for idiots and the feeble minded”, 2013). However, regardless of the type of asylum, conditions were bearable to horrible. For example, Orillia Asylum in Ontario was for those deemed intellectually impaired, and it was open from 1876-2009. For those who lived there many forms of abuse occurred from verbal abuse to humiliation and physical harm (Blizzard, 2014). A few former residents reached a compensation settlement with the Ontario government (“Huronian survivor saw the worst”, 2013). The main criteria of the settlement are that they must be able to verbally state some aspect of what happened to them and produce their entire file from community services (Goar, 2014). The settlement also stipulated that those eligible would have had to live in the asylum between 1945-2009, and either be alive at the time of proceedings or families settling their estates from 2007 forward (Goar, 2013). This is one example of hundreds of institutions across North America where many were housed in deplorable conditions. This is a small glimpse into the history of

¹¹ Life account of Anna Swan (Tatamagouche, NS) the giantess of Nova Scotia that traveled with US Sideshows through the US, Canada, and the West Indies.

forgotten generations that were denied supports and access for further education the ability to better their lives.

Many asylums transitioned to residential schools for those considered unable to attend school in their communities. In Halifax, the asylum for the blind began this transitional process began towards the late 1800's, (Halifax School for the Blind Board of Governor's report 1870's). Students would graduate from these schools with minimal prospects, obtaining a menial job or returning home to nothing since further education often requires having the right connections, which is exemplified below. Keeping in mind over 110 years later this is an ongoing reality for tens of thousands of individuals with variable disabilities as they graduate from post-secondary institutions. Residential school programs have slowly given way to inclusive education in the public education systems since the 1950s and into the 1990's (Andrews & Brown 2012). The movements made by CAST where universal design for learning was created has laid an even stronger amount of ground work in generating equality through the learning process by finding multiple ways to make the same learning happen. This is reverse to the older mentality of adapting the special needs student to the environment they instead choose to restructure learning environment to work better for more diverse groups of individuals.

The history of wider societal events has also left their impact on the Canadian disability experience, taking a step backwards one more time. There was a sudden shift in perspective from the wider society in about the first 20 years of the 20th century because of the world wars. Young men were coming back to their communities from war with amputations, paralysis, blindness, and were often mentally scarred and the men who could be retrained through trades or a university education needed to be able to live a 'decent life' with minimal supports ("Disabled Solders", 2001). Halifax specifically had a population boom of disabled individuals in 1917 due to the Halifax explosion blinding and impairing the vision of hundreds of individuals (Kitz,

1989). These facts are a starting point for understanding how the landscape of acquired disability took shape in Eastern Canada; although there is very little conceptualization of how attitudes or access to education and work have shifted over the last 100 years.

Public discussions need to happen about the many questions that impact the well-being of those with disabilities. One such question is; how are individuals with invisible or hidden disabilities impacted through interactions in society, socially, emotionally, and economically? Canadian society is in an era where large gaps of employment inequality exist for individuals with disabilities with any form of disability hidden or otherwise. For instance, those with a disability who have obtained a university education are often just as under or unemployed as those without a degree (HRDC, 2013). However, there are notable individuals with disabilities and that have impacted society in one way or another are included below. Accounts of Hellen Keller, Stephen Hawking, and Temple Grandin, this includes their successes and hurdles that they have faced on their path to success. Though they are not Canadian their paths to post-secondary education are each unique as are their contributions to society, and their unending fights for equity. By looking at their successes and how they pushed forward, each embodies life and success not just despite their disability, instead it is as a part of their whole identity. These brief case studies offer a foundation of history and social movement showing, on a personal level, how successes form regardless of inequalities.

Success stories of individuals with disabilities who obtained university degrees.

The expectations of what a person with any disability can achieve have drastically improved over the 20th and 21st centuries. With any social movement, either individually or societally, there needs to be trailblazers who create paths for others and make the foundation for ripples of change. Access to university was uncommon for someone with a disability though there were some exceptions. The emergence of disability support centres on university campuses

emerged through the 1970s- 1990s (Madus, 2002). Which post-dates the educational experiences of those discussed below. However, Dr. Temple Grandin is a pivotal individual in this discussion as she had only a bachelor's degree by 1970 and was attaining graduate degrees through this emergence of support centres into the late 80's ("Timeline", n.d).

Humanitarian early 1900's. We begin with Helen Keller in the United States who obtained a degree from Radcliffe College² in 1908. In her early childhood, Keller became deaf and blind from a childhood illness (Brooks, 1956). Keller was a humanitarian who raised awareness for deaf-blindness along the way. Her success in the span of her life was often contested because of her disability, a regular assumption among journalist and critics was that Ann Sullivan, her only means of communication, had produced the work, not Keller herself (Green & Sicherman; 1980). She did have a varied network of support that took interest in what she could do instead of what she could not do. Such as, Mark Twain and Alexander Graham Bell were each interest in Keller and her potential for success (Hermann, 1998). Despite the successes to earn a living for many years, Keller and Sullivan became "strapped for cash" and did work in a freak show as the eighth wonder of the world a blind and deaf woman who could still think and communicate (Crawford, 2005). When Ann Sullivan, Keller's aid and communication support, passed away in 1936 and Keller began getting the same assistance from Winnie Corbally the nurse who cared for Sullivan and stayed on after her passing. Many of her critics were shocked that Keller's work and style remained unchanged. It still seems hard to believe in her lifetime, that someone, a woman, who could not see or hear could write, advocate and be a known public presence with what would have been considered "normal" intellectual capacity (Brooks, 1956;

² Radcliffe College was absorbed into Harvard University when they decided to become co-ed.

Green & Sichertman; 1980). Keller's work led her to be a humanitarian raising awareness for the deafblind community. If we take a widely considered notion that children are the gateway to the future then the fact that her legacy continues into children's literacy builds ongoing future thought for diversity.

Cosmos and Blackholes- One of the Greatest thinkers of the Modern Era. In 1965 theoretical physicist Stephen Hawking received his Doctoral degree in physics from Cambridge University while slowly losing control of his body. It is suspected that Hawking has the form of ALS that does not necessarily mean an early death and explains why he is living into his senior years after a diagnosis in his 20s (Harmon, 2012). Hawking's decline began during his Ph.D. and post doctoral studies being mild and then declining to the use of a power wheelchair and communication devices. He is living into his senior years after this diagnosis in his early 20s (Harmon, 2012). His deterioration means he went from being able to hide and manage his condition to where he is today, locked inside of his body using specialized communication equipment.

He was sworn into the Royal Society of London in 1974, one of the most ancient scholarly organizations in the world³ (Hawking & Sagan, 1988.). Carl Sagan discussed what it was like to witness the day Hawking was sworn in, the patience and acceptance as he fumbled with his signature in the ancient record book of inductees, "there was a stirring ovation. Stephen Hawking was a legend even then" (Hawking & Sagan, 1988, p. x). This is a positive representation of individuals' experiences who face progressively changing disability related barriers, however, it did not matter, he was and still is seen for his intelligence first above all else. Where would the

³ The same society that Issac Newton was sworn into centuries prior.

field of theoretical physics be if he had been denied or stunted based on his growing physical differences?

Livestock, Communication & Advocating. Dr. Temple Grandin identifies as having autism spectrum disorder, she sees it as a difference not as a disability (Grandin, 2010). She is an animal behavior scientist, by training, and designed what is now the industry standard for human livestock handling in over half of the meat plants in the United States. Dr. Grandin is also an advocate for those with autism, and has published books on the views of autism with a universal theme of advocating for neuro diversity. The books include “Autistic Brain: thinking across the spectrum” and “Different ... Not Less” which are among the most notable sources she has brought to the subject content. Often these books are recommended to families who have a child that is newly diagnosed.

Dr. Grandin has received a notable amount of publicity for her efforts, and has done several speaking engagements including 60 Minutes and Ted Talks (Grandin, 2012). Temple Grandin has also spoken at many conferences and received many honorary awards. In 2010 Time magazine included her under their hero's section for the 100 Most Influential People of that year. In 2015, she received an honorary doctorate of Laws from Dalhousie University (“Grandin receives honorary degree”, 2015). In 2017, Grandin will be inducted into the National Women's Hall of Fame, for breaking the glass ceiling in a male dominated field and her advocacy for those on the autism spectrum (Dimas, 2017). During her transition into and through post-secondary education she was highly misunderstood while completing her degrees. However, she did have great success going on to be a public figure through her advocacy and work.

Attitudinal Barriers Today: A Brief Discussion

Individuals who have disabilities often end up becoming increasingly subdivided into the disability communities based on diagnosis. The medical model of disability is a clear point of origin for this mentality around how to view disability which can be explained by the long-time reach and impact that the medical model of disability has had on society for centuries. The medical model of disability also explains why there are just as many barriers when an individual's disability is not visible. For the individual no matter of the disability, accessing government services and supports include the paperwork requirement of diagnosis specifics by a doctor, which required the ongoing use of the medical model of disability within society.

This is not an easy process as individuals with hidden disabilities often must continually face barriers obtaining the above-mentioned paperwork due to doctor attitudes and their views, the individual's level or severity of disability and the supports the individual identifies as needing. Further, individuals must re-obtain this paperwork over and over through the span of their lives. The cost of getting doctors to fill out the paperwork confirming that the individual in question is, in fact, disabled. The process is often lengthy, frustrating, and requires strong self-advocacy skills on the individual's behalf. There is a level of isolation that is created in this process as it leaves the individual to feel isolated by continually reaffirming that they do have a disability.

Hidden disabilities typically come with a complex layer of stigma. Sometimes the stigma is highly circumstantial bringing about confusion for those who may not be familiar with the disability in question. This is primarily because it is common practice in human nature to assess differences based on visual appearances, as anything else would be attention seeking behavior (Goffman;1963). Initial reactions by anyone in any part of society learning of the individual's

disability range “well you don’t look disabled” to silence, and the possibility of questions of a positive, confused or even negative nature.

There are different types of barriers that emerge in society, and there have been great strides in improving, and removing barriers, such as physical access to public spaces and improved building standards. From a legislative perspective, federally Canada is on the cusp of drafting disability legislation, which could result in further social improvements for advancement towards equal rights (“New accessibility laws to be focused on employment”, 2017). The depths of attitudinal behaviors around the perceptions of disability and the view society as a wider being takes toward hidden disabilities is difficult to unravel.

The idea of equality across society has practical applications, such as the slow yet continual improvements in education, and employment access. However, there are still systemic problems with how individuals interact with each other such as positions of control within institutions or institutional structures. With job markets, there is a compilation of different requirements, demands, and the need for diverse employees which all come with their own systematic issues. Advocates with disabilities, and those who support individuals with disabilities in the non-profit sector, share a similar message across the country: people with disabilities are an untapped resource for the job market. There is a consensus that the impact of attitudinal barriers directly affects the individual, meaning that there is a need for enhanced and on-going awareness (“Consolutions with disability groups”, 2010).

Often government funding that is offered to employers provides employment for six months or more, program depending, to pay the wages of an individual for that period. Keep in mind that funding of this nature does not require direct proof that the individual filling the position has a disability. This is an exception to most forms of declaring disability in society as self-identifying to the employer is not required, but often the individual will be funneled into

these short-term funded positions by support agencies where their disability has already been declared. After the money is gone for the funding the job is gone unless the employer has the financial means to keep the position going. This means that the individual is back to where they began, with the addition of a bit more employment experience.

How an individual manages their navigational strategies, which are developed over time, may provide a longer lasting solution to many of the systemic barriers that exist. However, there is also the over-medicalization of disability through generations of society that needs to be considered. Specifically, this needs to be considered in universities where students with disabilities are often forgotten about for some time and their needs are often not fully considered (Goffman, 1963; Titchkosky, 2008). Today this pattern continues to play out in a spectrum across the job market depending on the type and severity of disability, such as delays in accommodation or continual misunderstandings of needs (Disabled Persons Commission, 2015). Individuals with hidden disabilities have a slightly different path to navigating as person with a disability into the job market, and the need to decide when or if it's a good idea to disclose the nature of their disability due to fear (Dalgini & Bellini, 2008). Issues such as accommodations and fear of losing employment are often taken into consideration by these individuals.

In post-secondary education, a recent graduate with an hidden disability will have self-identified as a means of accessing many of the same services as their visibly disabled peers. They will have self-identified through interactions with support staff and using strategies and skills such as a strong level of maturity, self-advocacy, and stigma management. These three areas of interactive skills need to be developed and/or built upon by the individual for stronger changes at better employment outcomes following graduation (Blau, 1994). Using the university environment as a practice ground, the individual will have had employment-like encounters with others, given that university is closer to a work-like environment.

The Job Market.

In February 2016 Mark Wafer, a Tim Hortons franchise owner, wrote an article for the Globe and Mail around the unemployment of young people with disabilities (Globe and Mail, 2016). This was a public promotion of the *Rethinking Disability Report* produced by Frieden, Wafer, Birch, and Martin (HRSDC, 2013). The report itself identifies that 795,000 who have disabilities can work but are not employed and nearly 50% are not connected to the job market in anyway (ibid). The study cites that 340,000 (42.77%) of these capable non-working individuals also have some form of post-secondary education (HRSDC. 2013). Are the barriers within the job market? Within the individual's life and educational experience to that point? Or is a mix of strong stigma related-issues occurring on both the individuals and the employers? It is difficult to arrive at one specific answer, however, what remains clear is that over a quarter of a million Canadians with some form of disability remain out of the job market. More research is needed to better understand this area of poor employment rates, from individual, employer, and system perspectives will help identify evidence-based strategies for improving employment rates.

The unemployment rate among new university graduates with disabilities is substantially higher than their peers, and for longer periods of time. In 2012 Statistics Canada gathered data which found the unemployment rate for new graduates with and without disabilities across the country. There is more to the notable gaps in employment rates than the economy, which is often blamed for the lack of employment. For individuals with hidden disabilities, there is little known on their employment following post secondary education and this information is difficult to obtain, except for statistics and media coverage.

Strategies for Job Search.

The process of job searching has never had one right or wrong way to proceed, nor will it ever be a cut and dry matter. Over time there has been some literature published on how recent

graduates search for employment related to their degree. Specifically, in Canada and the US, there has been some focus in the academic community on recent graduates in the general context. Between 1999 and 2000 Saks and Ashforth were the first to explore the job search behaviors and methods used by recent university graduates. The second article they published focused on reporting the outcome of a study conducted with 121 university graduates who did not find employment just prior to becoming a graduate (Saks & Ashforth, 2000). They provided the participants with a questionnaire just prior to graduation and again four months later (ibid). The researchers identified that job searching, self-efficacy, and self-esteem should be contributing factors and play into the outcomes of searching for employment. The researchers found that the number of interviews obtained vs. the number of jobs offers tended to change some what over time as job search skills improved.

Bridgestock offers more of a theoretical and observational assessment of the experiences and odds stacked against recent graduates in obtaining employment in their field (Bridgestock, 2008). The identification is made by Bridgestock that the economy is fast paced, knowledge rich, and requires generic skills, as well as a completed degree (ibid). Bridgestock also places emphasis on self-managing the career building process. This is where the lines start to blur for people with disabilities as support is often needed and/or expected for the employment finding process, which makes self-management difficult.

There has been a focus by academics on how graduates improve their job searching skills over a short period of time. This focus considers higher levels of education and the self-management skills that are needed to keep moving forward with this process (Saks & Ashforth, 2000; Bridgestock, 2008). A question must be asked which is, is there a way to provide better insight and support to ready the individual before and/or just after graduation? Some may say that continued development for the future is needed. The impact of the incoming federal

disability legislation which is making employment access a cornerstone of developing a better quality of life for Canadians with disabilities, will be felt by all (McQuigge, 2017). By having a variable tool meant for individuals to do self assessments as they search for employment and research intentions that has the capacity to affect systematic changes.

Personal Reflection

As a person with multiple hidden disabilities and one completed university degree I have had a varied lived experience in job searching, and working short-term and part-time positions. The result of this is that I continually face unreliable employment. Do I directly experience attitudinal stigmatizing in accessing employment opportunities? Since I rarely make it to the interview process, it is hard to say with exact certainty if this is a result of disability stigma. I have experienced a host of injustices related to my disabilities including struggles for a diagnosis, bullying in elementary and junior high school by peers for learning and understanding my environment differently, and being singled out by teachers in earlier grades for forgetting to put glasses on to read. The barriers and stigma's I have encountered and worked around and against for years has led me down this path of research. Through the following pages I provide brief accounts of personal experiences from the time I entered public education until present day. It is in these experiences that I became curious and wondered how a flexible self assessment tool that doubled as a research tool could take shape.

By the time I reached high school I generally felt isolated and had been reduced to four courses, and had my own dedicated space in a back room for methods and resource periods despite decent academic success. I never acted out, I never distracted anyone personally, though I required the use of a CCTV⁴ at that time for my visual impairment and this was thought to be a

⁴ A closed-circuit television for purposes of magnification.

distraction to everyone around me. I was being consistently talked out of pursuing post-secondary education by school support staff out of fear it would be too hard for me, or that I “wouldn’t transition well”, instead of setting a plan to help me meet my goals like my peers. My parents had to advocate for what I wanted. It was only at that point that I was offered a customized upgrading year which would give me the credits I needed to apply to university. I was not allowed to do the four credits in one semester, instead the credits had to be done over a full school year and I was sent off for a second term of what was called an independent living semester in the same residential program. It still feels unfortunate to me that I lost the first term of my senior year of high school which cemented an even deeper sense of difference at a time when I was supposed to be planning my future, not being talked out of it. Therefore, I want to explore how a multipurpose variable formatted tool could take shape. My reasoning behind this is to try and reach more people who aren’t hitting the goals that come with attaining a university degree. The primary goal of degree attainment being finding employment, there is only positives such as economic gains and general societal improvements to come of this if attitudinal barriers on both sides can be reduced. By saying both sides it is evident from experience and observation that individuals with disabilities much like non-disabled counter parts internalize feedback creating a loop stigmatizing outcomes unless people push past it.

I completed an undergraduate degree and struggled to find work, so I had no choice but to reach out to a job search agency specifically meant for individuals with disabilities after months of getting nowhere on my own. Agencies such as this have one underlying goal, that is to place individuals in some form of employment whether it is short term contracts with expiry dates, part time work, or any other arrangements that might be able negotiate between the agency and the potential employer. In my case I jumped from a six-month contract to an eight-month contract where in both cases I had to advocate for why I should be employed. The first contract

was more of a struggle than the second because it was purely government funded and at first, I was denied and had to appeal. The name of the program was called the START program, which has the intent to provide the employer with six months of heavily supplemented wages for an individual with a disability to work for them. After the contract ended, the outcome went one of four directions: the employer could offer full or part time long term employment, a contract extension, or no offer. The main argument of my appeal was based on the question how could I get a START if I couldn't get a CHANCE? After I won my appeal I had a six-month contract with a non-profit organization. I went back to the agency and could secure another eight-month contract through a government funded non-profit run employment program, which had been operated by Easter Seals at the time. Funded short term grant programs clearly have instability even if there are a formal or informal agreement with the employer to consider hiring the individual for a longer term, often it doesn't happen for many reasons such as financial capabilities or the need for a longer-term employee in that specific job. This is where strong skills in communication, self advocacy, and the ability to be motivated during such changes.

I consider myself lucky to have had access to leadership development that in my communication skills and advocacy building events early in high school, if it wasn't for the YMCA youth exchange that brought over 60 young people with disabilities together in Saint Catherine's Ontario I don't think I would have the same sense of self motivated empowerment, had I not attended this empowering event at 14, that showed me that diversity is acceptable and variable. Events of that nature aren't as common anymore and still tend leave out a sub set of young people who are diagnosed late and often dealing with a few other factors, from learning to cope, to figuring out what it means for the rest of their lives and how that impacts their career decisions. This study is set to target late in age as most recent graduates from university will be in their early 20's. My thoughts on this is that the tool could serve as an added safety net of

realization for new and maybe even soon to be graduates in what they need or are currently missed from their pursuit of employment and skill development. Arguably the tool does have wider application such as being adjusted for all disabilities not just hidden, even as a pilot study it can't easily be explored inside of a thesis due to time, and resource constraints. The pursuit for employment as a person with a disability will hopefully change in the years to come with the new federal and provincial legislations that are underway. Though systematic processes do take time and require systematic approaches, the tool that is under development in this study has the capacity to give way to individual and institutional planning for success.

Even with my early leadership and advocacy events in my life, my short time experiencing the real world of employment out side of student work was a challenging total of 16 months' work of on the job learning experiences. I struggled with disclosing both my vision and learning challenges in detail, and instead I opted for an "as necessary" approach to disclosure. Overall this was beneficial due to the range of tasks, such as being administrative support to the project team of a national research study. I also learned to have more faith in my abilities as I was entrusted with the program development of an electronic device lending program. I exceeded my employer's expectations on that project by developing a training manual for parents and staff as well as writing the policies and projections, while also bringing in donations for the program. One point that I really struggled with though was relating and communicating with my co-workers. I was different than them, since I was there on a disability related grant. However, in time I did prove myself and became entrusted with increasing responsibilities. My experiences like many before me have all been by trial and error. By developing this tool, I am not setting out to end this valuable learning process, instead, I am looking to provide recent graduates with a self assessment inventory that can help them to see where they are good right now and where they need to put a bit more work in. While also providing universities with a

research model that can be used to explore this population that is not hitting the successful outcomes. The two intentions of supporting recent graduates while also proposing this as a research model allows for individual and institutional progress to happen all at the same time.

Everyone, with or without any type of disability, has systematic struggles to deal with throughout their lives. The fact that I have put my resume out nearly 300 times, over two years, to a wide variety of different employers makes me wonder if I do experience stigma in employment directly or if it's the intense learning curve for job hunting that exist for my generation. Yes, my abilities have been questioned through the duration of my education experiences to date. I have been called a flight risk by potential employers because I have "too much education". This type of feedback has often come from following up on my resume to many of the retail-based jobs I have applied for out of desperation of wanting employment. Is it a direct result of my hidden disability? It is possible, though I do not always identify on an application or in an interview, but searching me on LinkedIn will indicate my identifying as a person with a disability. Or maybe it is my minimal experience outside of non-profits for people with different types of disabilities? Given that my work history is nearly a 50/50 split of non-profit and academic research all around matters of disability in some form or another, it is not lost on me that I have accidentally become niche orientated. I see many of my peers with more visible disabilities have very similar outcomes to myself. By being able to better assess the individual job search process of those with invisible disabilities the research potential opens to offer stronger insight into an over looked population of young people with disabilities who tend to fly under the radar however, are likely in need of supports and understanding as much or more so than their visibly disabled peers. By offering a survey tool of this nature that can help the individual contribute to the wider research and help them receive support that they need at the same time.

The two things I know about my abilities and desires for success now, is that I am an advocate and a hard worker. I also believe in the abilities of those like myself for success which is why the tool was developed with the scaffolding of universal design for learning in mind, many people with disabilities myself included do not fit the mold for standardized assessments. I want to know more about why standardizing continues when documentaries, news articles and several studies indicate the existence of non-standard individuals, why does this continue to happen. By offering a survey tool intended for two purposes, with an interchangeable part to accommodate that in deliverable in multiple formats this goes against the traditional grains of standardize assessment. The day to day lives of individuals with disabilities is a micro perspective given that each every personal with a disability has some variability or another in how their disability impacts their daily living and ability to contribute to society. The macro perspectives of the disability experience in terms of this study are the societal sectors of education and employment. It would seem as though the problem lies with micro lives of individuals, and the macro aspects of society functioning and interacting in ways that for this variable minority group is more problematic than useful. If it was not for leadership building events in my life I am not sure my story would have worked out the same way. I feel that the foundation of my self-advocacy was solidified through programs such as a youth conference for youth with disabilities, leader in-training and counsellor in-training programs. The whole of society is completely complacent to the fact that we, as a larger society, are okay with the continual stalling on the matters of how we interact and react to differences of others regardless of ability.

Representation of matters such as the job market to society at large often comes from the media. Yes, we can recognize that the job market is weak or any other excuse that feels safer than continuing the battle for employment equity. For people with disabilities, what we have

seen from the media in the last ten years is that it is easy to find stories of how someone with a disability was wronged or is in need, and it is nearly impossible to find a success story. Coverage is coverage, and good or bad visibility in the media is crucial for informing society compared to previous decades. The lack of media coverage of positive success stories does reflect societal stigma and is a lost opportunity for youth with disability.

Awareness and acceptance take time. But how much more time must pass? How much further will acceptance really advance? The problem is often how the greater scope of the community understands and perceives disability, not just fixing physical access to public spaces. The kindest, most understanding, and the most open person still has the capacity to react poorly to the discussion of someone identifying as having a disability, if they are only familiar with the social misconceptions of a specific condition. The internalized process of each interaction from my personal experience creates isolation and anxiety, and I have come to find myself over analysing every encounter.

I sustained psychological abuse in the previously mentioned residential based program that started in my senior year of high school, though that I did not see as the abuse it was until recently. In hind sight, I realized I had in the years since that time in my life adopted a victim mentality which led me to the on-going struggles with matters of my mental health today and my slower momentum in academic progress. My take away from this recent discovery is that no matter how we stack it on a micro or macro scale, the past does impact the future just as much as each individual interacting in general across society.

Creating an interchangeable questionnaire that can be delivered in different ways, and used for both individual assessment in career support and as a research tool to assess the skills and needs of soon to be graduates with differences at universities, will contribute to a step forward toward more universalized understanding. This ultimately offers a way to analyze what

barriers remain to others being successful. The many factors and experiences that I have documented above show that on a personal level the past can shape the future if positive and negative experiences find a balance, and if an individual has, or can develop, strong self-advocacy over write this thesis to contribute to the body of existing knowledge around job support for individuals with hidden disabilities.

Closing Remarks

My personal reasons for this pursuit were not just based on my own experiences, but also the experiences of others I have encountered during my time in university. In the first year of my undergraduate degree I learned from a young man who was preparing to graduate and on the autism spectrum that he has no prospects and little hope of doing anything with his degree so he was moving home to Newfoundland to live in his parents' basement. I have an old friend in another province with a BA and a B.Ed. who is working for a group home because she was told her vision was a liability in the classroom.

I hope to see this tool develop, evolve, reach, and educate as many people in as many ways as possible. Therefore, the immediate purpose of the study was to develop the tool with two immediate purposes in mind. The first purpose to be a support tool for individuals with disabilities who are about to hit the job market after university by having another resource that allows them to assess and evaluate their current practices, it is possible they can see where they need to make improvements while also seeing their successes to date. The second purpose to also be flexible enough to serve as a research tool for collecting qualitative data to gain I see many potentials that this tool can begin to support such as awareness of the stigmas experiences and circumstances for the individual, the prospective employers, and the universities. As is with universal design for learning there is a lot of flexibility with this tool so that it can reach many more people who could benefit.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Literature that focuses on the ever-changing needs of new graduates with hidden disabilities is spread across multiple subject areas, and as such, needs to be considered from different but related relevant perspectives. It must be kept in mind that hidden and visible disabilities are often folded into the same category. Though divisions are given where possible disability is generally lumped into one vastly variable category full of confusion and misconceptions. This review is made up of 3 sections, beginning with one on stigma and ableism in society and looking at how this has informed the literary body of information. First with a deeper examination of stigma and ableism and then focusing the next two sections focus on empirical and theoretical research examining university and employment access barriers. University and employment are differentiated in this order because it is established that university education needs to be obtained before the employment search begins.

Placing university ahead of employment in this chapter establishes that pre-existing barriers and advocacy are forming, prior to graduation. However, there is an underlying feeling that those who do not improve their advocacy while in university may have the pattern of reliance on others continuing into the job search process. University and employment have similarities in that the barriers in both structures there have emerged from ableism and the effects of stigmatization in the wider society. The current barriers exemplify that where we are today being because of where we came from in the generations past.

Stigma Management

Stigma itself is a societal practice that serves to objectify difference and make it less than the normal ideals in society, which is essentially the development and actionable power of attitudes and the impacts that it can have on minority groups (Goffman, 1963). In the case of any disability, this manifestation of varied reactions is often referred to as ableism, which can take

many different forms from harmful to unintentional (Prince, 2008; Stienstra, 2010). With many social practices, we see steady and pronounced improvement across time. However, in the case of the stigma that is ableism, there has not really been any steady improvement more light starts and hard stops. This is attitudinal stigma and is often identified as an ongoing problem by specific disability groups, or by those who provide disability services directly. An individual with a disability can obtain success with the right supports and the development of strong self-advocacy skills. However, this is often easier said than done, and depends on each unique experience of everyone that identifies as having a disability. It is first crucial to understand the roots of stigma.

Stigma was first conceptualized by Goffman in 1959 with *The Presentation of Self* and continued in 1963 *Stigma: notes on the Management of Stigma*. Both publications are central to understanding how we interact in social settings, particularly how everyone manages differences. For those with hidden disabilities, there must be a great deal of effort put into what Goffman refers to as “concealment, and the back stage”, which means to keep it from the rest of society (Goffman, 1959; Goffman, 1963). Concealing a stigma such as a hidden disability really becomes a balancing practice for the individual. The only way to get needs met is by what you describe not by what people see when you have a hidden disability, but instead describing the diagnosis and how it impacts your life along with what you need to function at your best. Since it is assumed that those who live with hidden disabilities are non-disabled disclosing the stigmatized identity is the only way to get any needs meet that they could have (Low, 1996).

The performance in social engagement can be applied to any circumstances and should be taken into consideration. Performance of this nature is linked to how an individual prepares to interact and how others have varied levels of understanding or desires to understand.

The technical and dramaturgical perspectives intersect most clearly, perhaps, regarding standards of the work. Important for both perspectives are the fact that one set of individuals will be concerned with testing the unapparent characteristics and qualities of the work accomplishments of another set of individuals, and this other set will be concerned with giving the impression that their work embodies these hidden attributes. (Goffman, 1959, p7)

To summarize Goffman, stigma is a balancing act played by both sides of interaction.

The experiences up to the end of a post-secondary degree shape the skills, hopes and, expectations for the future. However, it could be argued that a person with a hidden disability is navigating not just with the positives of a degree, but also continually dealing with barriers. This includes the emotional baggage of past experiences, which could serve to impact their job search process. The emotional baggage from past experiences is likely to be found in the “backstage”, hidden where no one else can see it (Goffman; 1959). The phrase, “those who cannot remember the past, are condemned to repeat it” is vital to understand this process (Santayana, 1956). Taken from the *Life of Reason* by George Santayana this is a deeply philosophical quote that serves to summarize moving forward and can be applied how stigma has worked across time in society, we have not collectively learned enough from the past as of this moment.

There has been societal momentum that has become visible through disability awareness, provincial legislation, and forth-coming federal legislation. Goffman (1963) discusses that social integration, and social momentum, that may stop, either because it cannot be defined or those involved feel they are without a course of action, which is often the case for individuals with disabilities. This is a logical argument to consider in the self-advocacy efforts of individuals with hidden disabilities, and many feel it is easier to hide than self-advocate.

This individual personal experience does play into this because not all people with visible or hidden disabilities will feel this way. If this is the case, then is the ability for strong self-advocacy possible for all? Yes, but individuals have different capabilities based on personal experiences in their life. Test, Fowler, Wood, Brewer, and Eddy (2005) bring a detailed discussion of self-advocacy which is dependent on the desire for progress vs types of early experiences that individuals might need to work through to overcome. There are also the life skills that are needed for navigation which are built through the process of completing the post-secondary degree. As mentioned previously, when a situation falls flat in an interaction such as job searching or even an interview it is possible to feel ashamed or flustered. These feelings can deteriorate to “disorganised consequences” if a job interview or job search support meeting falls apart meaning it could take longer to find any sort of employment (Goffman, 1963). However, admitting nervousness to oneself could make the difference in maintaining control of the situation. Given that Goffman (1959) found that people tend to accept the “performer” more with explanations this way in the event of a faulty reaction taking the risk is still worth it to the individual. For a person with a hidden disability this gamble might be a continual learning curve from situation to situation depending on the circumstances.

Social stigma as its own form of identity according to Goffman, makes the “show” happen and the “self is the product of the arrangements” (Goffman, 1959). The individual with the stigma may resort to using it for “secondary gains”, which is an “excuse for ill success” and the execution of this kind of behavior can be seen at job search agencies who assist those looking for employment⁵. Another concept introduced by Goffman is the “virtual is implied and perceived” vs. “the actual identity which is the obvious and capable of spoiling the identity”. Which is

⁵Personally, witnessed this behavior on more than one occasion while waiting as a client of the agency myself.

elaborated on by Low in 1996, in the context of disability and negating the non-disabled identity by looking at the symbols vs circumstances and the differences that exist between the societal label or virtual identity versus the apparent identity. Goffman's stand point on institutionalization is that it focuses on the problem and not on interactions with others but instead to group individuals together by medical condition. The medicalization of disability is one of the oldest ways of viewing disability in society and has been historically responsible for asylums, institutionalization and a root reason for disability related stigma is a contributing factor to why society is loaded with this stigma (Prince, 2008; Barns & Roulstone 2005). The evolution of disability studies has served to call medicalization into question when possible and has offered deeper sociological understandings of how we see disability now as more socially complex than a medical matter.

From an alternative aspect, Tregaskis looks not only at the able-bodied perspective, but also at wider mainstream society expectations regarding appearance, behavior, and economic performance. Tregaskis identified that a common individualistic model is applied to those with no disabilities in disability studies which is problematic for both sides given that it seems to produce animosity and push too much power toward preconceived notations (Tregaskis, 2004). This model is a problem as it serves as structure for the us vs. them mentality adding underlying hostility depending on the circumstances. Meaning that those with disabilities are not going to see full social inclusion. Applying this to the employment and job search situations of recent graduates provides logistical reasoning for how layers of barriers could occur depending on the individual's experience

The generalized cross roads for stigma include how to be managing and preserving abilities vs. the individual's experiences from circumstance and how that impacts them. Basic guidance support and services are needed for any new graduate in the job search process. An

individual with a disability can obtain success with the right supports and the development of strong self-advocacy skills. Stigma management is its own entity within every aspect of society that does require members of minority groups to have strong self-advocacy skills to obtain any level of success such as a degree and a career.

University: Barriers and struggles in degree attainment

About 20 years ago Low (1996) introduced a Canadian context to the navigational needs of students with disabilities at a Canadian university. The focus of the research was on how students navigated disabled and non-disabled identities. Low found that “these processes are necessary yet inherently contradictory” (Low, 1996). This means that students with disabilities who’s aim was to obtain a degree then find employment had to, and still must, essentially use the university as at training ground to figure out their identity needs. Low detailed the experiences of nine McMaster university students and through descriptive interviews found out how they move through the identities on the campus. Low discovered how hard it can be for students with disabilities to move between the identities in a university environment. For example, though there are parallels with Goffman’s performance discussions, specifically when a visually impaired student discussed carrying a normal notebook, pen, and wrist watch for appearance sake it becomes about planned staging and how that student had created the plan in their “back stage” (Low, 1996; Goffman, 1959). One of the nine students in the study had a completely hidden learning disability and he preferred to allow people to just assume that he was a keener. His specific practice of staying hidden worked in university, more than 20 years later we will never know how well it translated for him to the job market. Navigation of student life and academics in university must in some ways set up structures of preparing for the interactions in the job search process and post-graduate employment in general.

Taking from Goffman and others mentioned above Low found a theme connecting when an individual's peer group does not see them as disabled and how that impacts their identity, which serves to play into social reactions and relations and sometimes causing individuals to question their disabled identity. Then it is possible to go one step further and specifically look at hidden disabilities in this context, if their close peer group really does not get their needs for example then this might serve to hinder how their self-advocacy skills evolve through university. The tactics of navigation that was found to be used in this study by the students who had a mix of visible and hidden disabilities was: speaking out, increased visibility, reasoning with others, using humour, adopting aggressive or assertive attitudes, avoid confrontation with others, and distancing from other students with disabilities (Low, 1996). Low's study provided detailed insight on experience of a select few students. It is important to add to this area of research with survey of skills and experiences of larger samples of students that represent the full university population.

Geyer (2014) examined the political skills and self-efficacy skills among college students. He then looked at general self-efficacy and five political skills which are: networking ability, interpersonal, influence, social astuteness, and apparent sincerity. Geyer's intent was the development of students' political mind sets. There are parallels between a political mindset and employment skills to consider for students with hidden disabilities who will be seeking employment post-graduation.

Titchkosky (2008) sought to provide a qualitative and sociologically informed perspective of disability studies while examining the circumstances, not just from the student perspective, but also defining the concept of ordinary talk and how it is used on university campuses to excuse decisions of accessibility as too expensive and to hide behind historical mind set, is essentially making the negative aspects and over assumptions that perpetuate the barriers.

One such example of ordinary talk is “you know things just weren’t built with people with disabilities in mind” (Titchkosky; 2008, 24). There is a historical key in that statement that yes old structures had zero consideration for individuals with disabilities in universities because there was traditionally no one attending who struggled with physical access. Now there are a large number on every campus across Canada who struggle with physical access or way finding through old university buildings.

Titchkosky observations are directly from the author's experiences in a large Canadian university. Titchkosky found ordinary talk justifies the exclusion of disabled people and narratives that are constructed in a way that allows those in the environment to reinforce and perpetuate the ongoing struggles for accessibility (Titchkosky, 2008). Titchkosky used an interpretive sociological approach to explore meanings of disability, and show how the meanings are generated through the talk that justified exclusion and inaccessible structures of university life. She also discusses the university as a workplace, showing the barriers and struggles with advocacy cross areas of society. Titchkosky also discusses the historical pretext as to why the barriers and ordinary talk are the way they are.

Employment expectations and job attainment:

There has been a small sporadic amount of job search literature that looks at recent graduates. One researcher who explored this process is Sask, who explored theory around the process recent grads might be undertaking for job searching and how behaviours change (Sask & Ashforth, 1999). In 2000 Sask & Ashforth conducted a study of over 100 soon to be graduates on their job search skills, and again three months later post-graduation. Findings discovered that over half of the participants improved on their skills needed to search for employment, even if that had yet to land a job.

Raggins focuses on the hidden stigmatized identity in the work and non-work environments. The author presents a model that examines individual and environmental factors for how and when disclosure happens, since it can happen at varying degrees and with the acknowledgment that it can feel out of control to the individual if they go about it too fast or too slow. The hidden stigmatized disabilities that the author lists in her research includes epilepsy, alcoholism, drug abuse, cancer, HIV/AIDS, stroke, mental disability, and mental illness. Employees might also have hidden stigmas related to religion, socioeconomic class, ambiguous biracial identity. Other stigmatizing life experiences such as child abuse, being sexual assault victim, criminal record, being adopted, being infertile are also discussed as accessibility stigmas for employers. For the stigmas listed there are also a lot of variability and different dimensions, but they do share common characteristics such as: hidden attributes all of which can be devalued in settings characteristics experiences some social/work settings causing the person in question to wonder if, when, or how they should share such details. There are more challenges for hidden stigmas due to concealing identity out of need to avoid prejudice and discrimination. This can cause psychological strain, emotional stress, and stress related illnesses as per Raggins' view.

Raggins over all purpose was to break new ground in examining antecedents and the consequences of disclosure through both work and non-work environments. Three antecedents to disclosure were discussed. These are firstly self-verification and centrality of the identity, of the individual which looks at the individual identifying to themselves that either they can keep going as they are or they need to start disclosing to have control over their identities (Raggins, 2008). The second was the anticipated consequences of disclosure which has the individual assessing just how bad disclosing will be, as well as, are they able to deal with the outcome. The final antecedent is the environmental support for the disclosure. The individual either has or does not have support in the work or non-work environment. In the act of disclosure, the response can

become confusing if the individual does not “fit” the societal stereotypes for each difference. This is a relatable aspect of any interaction for those with hidden disabilities.

There are role and relational interactions that seem to occur between the perceived stigma and the self-esteem of the individual (Srivastava & Singh, 2016). Srivastava and Singh discovered this fact when conducting a study of 138 physically challenged individuals in India who were either employed or students at a college. The intent behind this research was to add to the scarce amount of research around stigma and self-esteem for individuals with disabilities. The measures used in the study came from a combination of scales: perceived stigma scale (Fife & Wright;2000), self-esteem from Rosenberg’s scale (1965), and a ten-item scale based off Scheer and Jerusalem (1993). By combining those two older models of trying to stigma impact in the workplace and self-esteem assessment they managed to decently assess success rates of university students and employees with physical disabilities. Their means for conducting the study was in a mixed way through interviews and surveys to reach as many people in the most convenient ways they could. Srivastava and Singh (2016) found that there was more needed to add to the existing works than to push forward.

Hidden social identities is another term that exists in the literature on this topic. Clair, Beatty, and Maclean examined hidden social identities in the workplace, specifically looking at research from sexuality, illness, and racial diversity while also applying circumstantial factors such as stigma, disclosure, and identity. Their goal was to establish a generalized model of hidden identity management (Clair, Beatty, & Maclean, 2005).

The focus of their model was on revealing and passing strategies of identity management. Similar to Low’s navigating between disabled and non-disabled identities, Tsui and Gutek looked to better understand self-identification and the strategies that are used to do so. They highlighted that Tsui and Gutek (1999) defined demographic diversity as any characteristic that

serves as a basis for social categorization and self-identification, which comes in two types, visible and hidden. While many stigmas were considered in their literature review, illness was of most interest with a specific focus on chronic illness management. One example was of someone with MS; when hidden this disease takes some explaining on the part of the individual. But if they decide to disclose the illness what could specifically happen then? Clair, Beatty and MacLean also identify what is at stake, and more specifically what can be lost, when managing stigma in the workplace.

Wiihoven & Havinga (2014), in northern Holland, developed a generalized approach to tackle unemployment called the Worker Profiler. This approach could give a job seeker the chance of gaining employment within one year from the time they start. The profile consisted of 20 hard and soft factors directed at individual skill sets that would help indicate their fitness for job attainment. By trying to systematically target the skill sets of individuals into relatable ways for the employers their Worker Profiler clearly become a practical widespread hiring tool. There were an initial 600,000 participants in the development of the Worker Profiler, which is currently being upgraded to version 2.0 and studied further to examine for improvements. This country wide hiring tool was created to decrease unemployment rates therefore indirectly improving quality of living for those who participated. This is comparable the purpose and over all goal of this thesis to create a universally designed job search support tool to help recent graduates directly and to understand recent graduates' strategies and experiences and allow universities to better understand what is happening with a recent graduate's post degree employment. Where Wiihoven & Havinga managed to see a lowering in unemployment rates the future hope of the tool under development in this study is to see more recent graduates with hidden disabilities connected to the job market.

Closing Remarks

It is literature such as above in conjunction with present and future contributions to the field. As for navigating through literature there is often little division of the circumstances around disability. This often sets those with invisible disabilities up for added misconceptions once they identify as having a specific disability. As mentioned above, studies conducted that mix those with visible and invisible into the same cohort. This includes the study conducted by Low (1996) who interviewed students with disabilities that ranged from learning disabilities to blindness and visible physical impairments. The literature structure was set in such a way to account for the reasons the survey tool was being developed in the first place. By already having a focus in the previous chapter on the evolution of disability related stigma and the translation into the attitudinal barriers that exist today. This allowed for a deep focus of the literature.

The review of the literature its self was made up of three sections. The first was a compounded framework of stigma and ableism by looking at how each informs the body of literature. Then there was the empirical and theoretical research looking at the university environment and how students with disabilities experience the interactions for their education. Finally, the empirical and theoretical research looking at employment related barriers was also explored.

Chapter 3 Development of the Job Search Strategy Tool

As an initial step to understanding this employment gap in a way that can empower individuals seeking employment, it is important to understand how recent graduates with hidden disabilities navigate the job market. The goal of this chapter is to describe the development of, and initial feedback on a measurement tool that I designed to assess the extent to which graduates with hidden disabilities use strategies aligned with the skills that UDL is designed to develop. One purpose of this tool will be to empirically relate strategies developed

There are strategies that can be derived from experiences with universally designed segments of learning within their postsecondary learning experiences. UDL is a stronger more universal learning model than more traditional forms of teaching, which provides practical advice for integrating social and emotional aspects of the learning process into learning experiences (National Center on UDL, 2012), and focussing on developing expert learners. An expert learner is someone who can self-regulate and advocate for one's own needs. The UDL model is beginning to transcend learning environments into institutional leadership (Novak & Rodrigues, 2016), which serves to allow for further thought around UDL learned concepts, strategies, and sense of empowerment into systems other than education. Postsecondary environments aim to prepare students for the work world. Hence, it is then fair to suggest that each learner experiences the respective environment in very different ways, through meditational means individuals pick their paths towards success, however, they are likely to arrive at variable outcomes. Students with hidden disabilities often need to employ an added layer of strategies specifically in stigma management, self-advocacy, and generally accommodating their own needs while they pass from life as a post-secondary student into the job market (Reeve & Gottselig, 2011).

It is first necessary to keep in mind that universally designed learning is only beginning to become noticeable in postsecondary education in recent years (UDL On Campus, na). Often parts of the whole of courses are being constructed with the flexibility to create expert learners that are empowered and self-motivated with a goal of developing some mastery over their own individual learning experiences (Meyer & Rose, 2012; Rose & Gravel, 2012).

Strategies, as mentioned above, are plans for navigation of a goal that an individual develops and adapts to account for any number of circumstances and environment, such as the work an individual will put into classroom learning, on or off campus employment, and volunteer work. The three areas serve to result in the creation of transferable skillsets (Rose & Gravel, 2012). However, in the case of any disability related experience it is crucial to remember that each person has a different experience, outlook, and conceptualize their reality different usually based on internalized stigma from past experiences which could serve to impact their current situations.

The practice of universal design for learning is composed of three principles (National Center on UDL, 2012). The first is “provides multiple means of representation” which has the intended learning outcomes for individuals who are “resourceful and knowledgeable learners”. The second principle takes more of a focus towards strategic goal-directed learners by providing multiple means of action and expression. Finally, the third principle of universal design serves to provide multiple means of engagement for purposefully motivated learners. The principles add context to create a better understanding of self-advocacy and stigma management through the multiple levels of variabilities offered. Figure 1 below offers a visual context of how self-advocacy and UDL could come together to form a way to productively manage stigma.

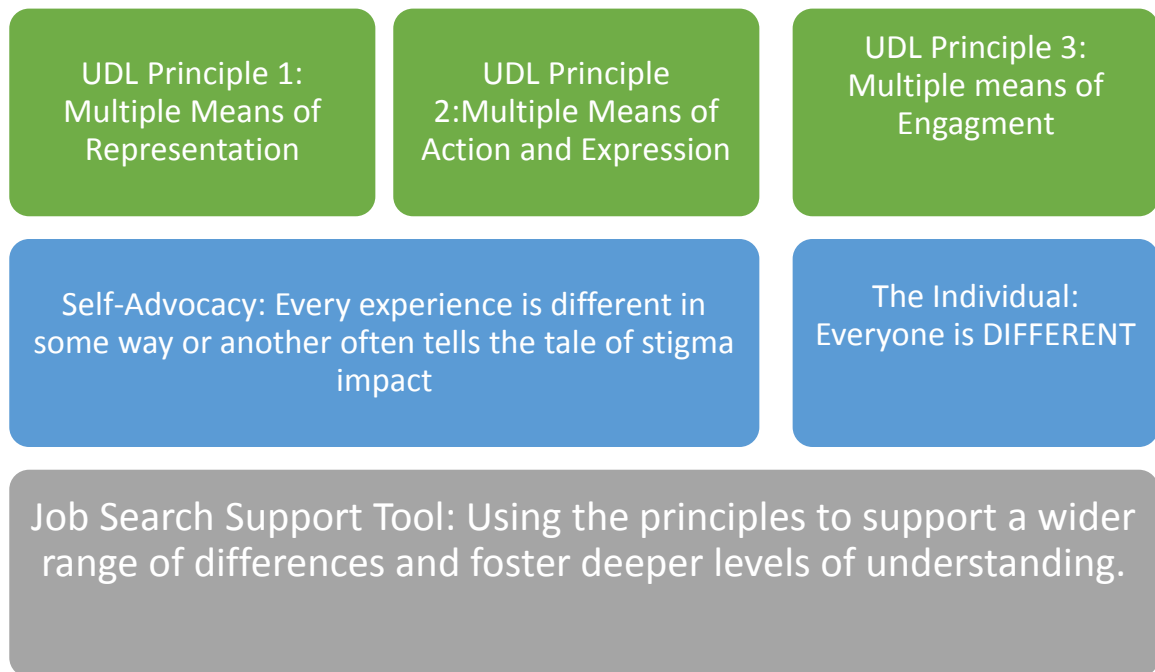


Figure 1: Visual overview of UDL implementation in design

These types of strategies that may emerge could serve to have real world applications such as self-advocacy and stigma-management. The hope for the individual in improving self-advocacy is that the support tool has the capability to become a self-assessment inventory where they can work with a career counselor or case manager to devise an action plan from the information. For universities and employers, the ability to use a survey tool of this nature could provide consistent data over time for monitoring progress of this diverse population, they would also have to capacity to expand to include all individuals with disabilities or minority groups in general. The ability to independently advocate for one's own needs regardless of ability, strategies for self-advocacy vary, meaning that some can do this better than others typically are established because of past experiences combined with family and levels of supports within the wider community. Stronger self-advocacy abilities may increase the odds of management of social stigma in the job market (Test, Fowler, Wood, Brewer, & Eddy. 2005). It is difficult to prospectively follow students through university into the job market in a way that assesses UDL

experiences and post-graduation job search strategies. However, as noted above it is deductible from above that people with disabilities generally struggle in the job market due to age old frameworks of stigma.

Stigma is imposed in environments by the thinking of others (Goffman, 1963). The stigma around disability in the job market had had a long history affecting employment outcomes (Prince, 2008). Stigma management is about how well a person of a minority and in this case with an hidden disability navigates the stigma issue during the job search and afterwards. Internalized stigma is the feedback that the person absorbs from how they were treated in a situation (Goffman, 1963). Levels of awareness among those in minority groups will vary from highly, moderately, or not at all. How individuals choose to cope or react will also vary from positive to negative or neutral. Internalizing situations that are directly correlated to one's own disability specifically or a derogatory questioning of their ability can serve to impair their self-advocacy skills serving to create a cycle of changes (Test, et al 2005). Post-graduation job searching and the learning at a university happens both inside and outside the classroom. in university, as transferable skills and used to search for work with job-search success.

Universal Design for Learning as contributing support for the job search process.

Novak and Ramirez, authors of *UDL for leadership* (2016), examine and document how they used UDL outside of the classroom where it originated and worked to build it into the level of school district management as a top down approach to changing the system and not just each independent classroom. When thinking of the environmental make up of school districts, the chain of command its school boards that serve as the body of management that keeps education happening. This means that the authors are discussing applying UDL across an employment structure though it is for the intent of enhancing education, school boards are governing management bodies. School board adaptations of UDL would then have a trickle down affect

each school level which is also an employment source. This top down approach of bringing UDL into the structure of a school board work environment. There was a cooperate strategic plan is where idea of taking UDL from the traditional means of classroom applications to the next step after university which is job searching for this study. The authors discussed the implementation of strategic plans across districts and the involvement of all stake holders for bringing this process together (Novak & Ramirez, 2016). Their methods and implementation practices seem to very strong and reliable if all parties involved stay informed and communicate in keeping practices current and up-to-date.

Christina Bosch a PhD candidate from University of Massachusetts at Amherst delivered the keynote for the second annual Pan Canada UDL Conference 2017. Bosch (2017) discussed at length her use of UDL in the American youth prison system. She explained the need for understanding learning through the S model of starts and stops of progress in learning that universal design for learning promotes this progression to happen at the individual's pace. Adding further that ongoing learning is a long series of linked S's which Bosch outlined in the Keynote speech. Looking to the idea of linking s-curves of learning that Bosch outlined the further presentation points that were given around the s curve model of learning and how this accounts for many who benefit from UDL. If an individual's learning curve literally goes up and down with short periods of leveling off as would be indicated in Figure 1 then there is a basis to show that if learning goes up and down within schooling the same points would translate at the post-graduation level as someone is learning how to find not just a job but a career. Taking this into consideration on a societal scale it is then possible to consider the job search process to be that link to accessing employment that better reflects their education, or at the very least serves to build on the obtained degree. Though the s model wasn't directly considered in the design on this survey construction at this present time, it still is worth drawing attention to in this section as

a means of understanding success rates for those struggling to find work. It appears now that the path to employment attainment and career goals can work very much like the S model of learning as there is the potential for an ebb, flow and a stagnant period. The hope going forward into the future would be to bring the s-model into the future study which can be found in parameters that is outlined in a later appendix. It will be used as a means of supporting data analysis by explaining learning engagement around levels of success outcomes. The S model bares some basic discussion in this section alone because on the development of a survey it is central to at least broach some discussion as to how the data will analyzed regardless of when the analysis will happen.

Research Questions

1. What is the feasibility of creating a three-phase flexible assessment tool constructed to assess UDL-aligned job search strategies and employment goal attainment?
 - a. What will the deliverable formats consist of?
 - b. Can situationally-based stigma be assessed for the impact on the job search process?
2. What could be the practical applications of such a tool? (For: Individuals, Universities).
3. Why could this tool serve as a crucial move forward for advancing job search strategies for individuals who live the hidden disability experience?

Methods

Overview

The original intent of this study was to launch the tool as a pilot which is still detailed below. The potential future pilot study is outlined below being placed in its own section to account for the effort and thought that has gone into the development of this tool and serves to

account for existing ground work in the theory and development of this Job search support tool.

The rest of this study is centered on the development and theory behind the creation of “The UDL Aligned Job Search Assessment Tool” meant to foster understanding for individuals.

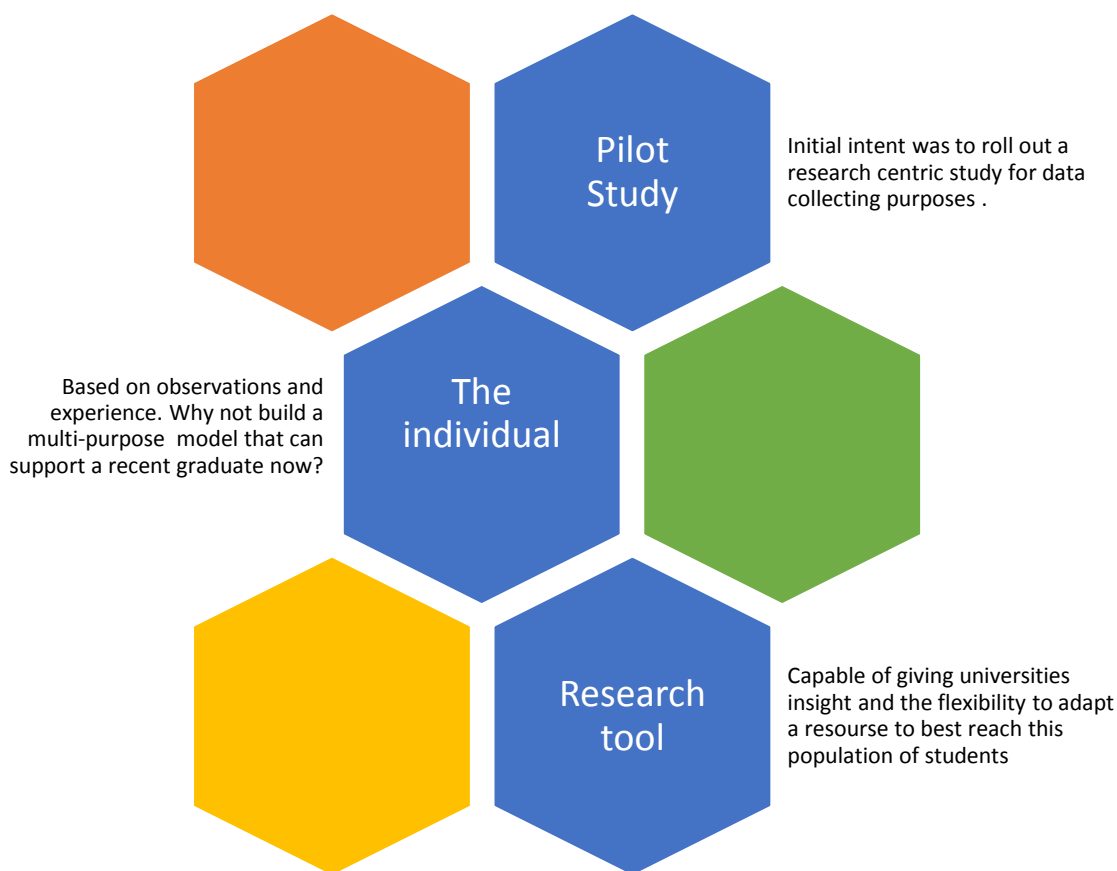


Figure 2: offers a visual of the steps that have gone into the thought process.

Measures

The means of measurement in this is the three-part survey tool designed for collecting data and assisting recent graduates in supporting their job search process at the same time. By having the two-fold aim the survey tool can have a much broader reach by actively supporting the individual while serving as a data gathering method. The three parts included the demographic form which can be switched for insert a or b depending on the intention of the

delivery. The second part is a questionnaire which is structured in such a way to provide support and gather data. The final part of the survey tool allows for a check list type of approach worded in such away from individuals and those conducting research to see the underlying means. The phrasings between each of the two checklist sections is phrased for yes and no responses which will hopefully cause those responding to go with their first instinct, which should produce an honest response.

Demographics Form.

There are two demographic forms that were designed based on specific intent of the survey tool. If the survey is being used as a means for individual support then that specific insert would be used. For individual purposes, the hope is for this section to serve as an introduction for seeing their existing circumstances on paper or another format they might choose.

If the survey tool is being used for research purposes the demographics insert would then be used instead. Data gathering form for the research specific section one is aimed at getting non-identifying data about their life experiences as pertaining to education and employment. There is just enough identifying information in this form for the researcher's purpose, such as date of birth, gender identity, information to confirm inclusion and exclusion criteria. Both inserts for the demographic section that makes up appendices a and b share the job status question identically. The reason for this is because this is a job search support tool that focuses on the job market, it is crucial to know the state of employment a participant has: in ideal job, employed but not ideal, unemployed, and actively searching.

Job-market Strategies Questionnaire.

In 1999 Sask & Ashforth conducted a two-part study with final year students just before and a few months following graduation to assess how job search skills and confidence changes

over time. Though this study served to assess changes over time in the wider population of soon to be and recent graduates in general, it does serve to set the premise that it is possible to study this population through a survey. This is the second section in the survey tool and was built based on similar aims as the researchers above. The essential structure is built for the purposes of this study, contains items that is open- and close-ended in nature. The survey begins small with some yes/no questions mixed with minimal contextual requirements progressing into reflective requirements.

Job Search Strategy Checklist

The third and final section of the survey tool contains a checklist of self-identifiable strategies people might use that align with principles of Universal Design for Learning. The language of each question is also phrased in different and similar ways with clear wording to reach different types learning styles. The checklist is comprised of actionable items that the participants can say they do or don't do in the process of job search and employment. This checklist contains three subscales, learning, self-advocacy, managing stigma, with a total of 27 items in the checklist of actionable items that people can say they do or don't do in job search and employment.

Current Development Process

The current evolution of this study now is primarily taking focused with creation and practicality of creating a tool of this nature. From the theories used to create the flexible structure, to consideration for delivery methods. Also, to keep the tool universally designed into formats to best serve the needs for as many different individuals as possible. The delivery method is arguably flexible depending on the circumstance. By making the first section with interchanging the inserts it allows for more potential. First meaning that on an individual support

basis all three sections still need to be used to gain a clear understanding of needs and circumstances though demographic based part a “About You” section needs to be in place. Keeping in mind the aim is support the individual not overwhelm. For data gathering purposes this would not be possible when the intent is to use a measurement tool consistently for comparison across groups or time points.

Limitations

The tool does contain a few limitations. There is an associated risk of placing blame on the individual for their circumstances now. More attention must be given to stigma cased in the work place. Along with hiring processes of employers specifically where stigma gets started in the hiring process. Stigma is a two way street, employers and other social institutions such as universities all have their own roles to play in changing this pattern that that history is less likely to repeat.

Closing Remarks

Through using universal design for learning and considering a possible analysis scaffold for a the previously mentioned future study there is potential to see the ongoing evolution of this survey tool from the development stage into more a testing stage. By using universal design in the creation of the measures developed for use within the survey tool to will allow for the ability to reach more diverse individuals outside the traditional contexts of career navigation. Particularly those with invisible disabilities who are often dealing with barriers and added levels of frustration from feelings of constantly being misunderstood. The use of core principles of universal design for learning has allowed for the ability to take a survey and break it into three sections all of which allows for variable types of engagement. This ranges from open ended thinking of where they are right now in life through either insert of part a. To the open and closed

ended questions of part b. Then there is checking yes or no boxes in different contexts in part c focusing how the job search process.

Chapter 4: Unpacking the Job Search Strategy Tool in Detail

Some attention needed to be directly to the details and reasoning that went into designing this job search strategy tool. First it is necessary to understand why the tool aligns with universal design for learning and why incorporating this learning model makes sense. Next some time is dedicated to decoding sections A, B and C of the entire survey tool. Sometime will also be dedicated exploring the options that could be made for multiple methods of being able to complete the survey tool regardless of ability. The discussion of producing the survey tool for multiple methods of delivery is purely in the early stages at this point because it is something that be tested through trial and error in the future study.

How does this flexible survey fit with Universal design for learning?

Though a better question to ask might be, how does this fit with finding employment as a person with a hidden disability following graduation from their university? By using this universal design for learning model to build the survey and taking a more UDL based approach for dissemination there is promise for this survey to change individuals directly, and universities and employers. What makes UDL diverse enough to move from the classroom and aid in the transition to employment? As previously mentioned there are three core principles that shape the foundation of universal design for learning (UDL), and each principle has its own scaffolding that provides an essential baseline. CAST who are the creators of UDL designed each principle in a similar manner, getting at the aim, the purpose, and the type of learner that each specific principle is aimed at providing a more targeted approach to learning for.

The first principle is multiple means of engagement that is targeted at “the why of learning”, which is aimed at supporting and creating purposeful & motivated learners. The second principle is multiple means of representation which takes aim at the “how of learning”,

by trying to aid with improving and/or creating strategic and goal directed learners. The final principle examines multiple means of action and expression. which is called “the what of learning”, the type of learners reached and built through this principle are resourceful and knowledgeable. The remainder of this section is going to unpack each principle and relate it to the flexible survey tool. As for relation to the minority group in question of recent graduates with hidden disabilities, it is crucial to realize that CAST created UDL for the needs of children with disabilities to better function in the classroom (Meyers & Rose, 2010). What they had found is that it wasn't the children that needed to be changed to fit, it was the environment that needed to be fixed for the children. Consequently, is it not then time to be looking at the employment gaps for individuals with disabilities in a similar manner? With the growing gaps notable across Canada as mentioned in chapter three, this survey is essentially just a tipping point of getting to the entire story as its primary focus is on job search strategies.

Multiple means of engagement as mentioned above, gets to the why of learning. The sub contexts inside this principle that allow this to happen are: options for self-regulation, options for sustaining effort and persistence, and options for recruiting interests. CAST finds that options for self-regulations include: expectations and beliefs that optimize motivation, facilitate personal coping skills and strategies, along with development of self-assessment and reflection. In the context of this flexible survey, the options for sustaining effort and persistence are strong. Section A for the individual offers points of introductory reflection to think about their culture, disability, education, and goals for the future in a loosely structured manner that is meant to see their story on paper and not feel like a test. Through the survey there are challenging phrasing layered into the text of the survey to get the individual to think and reflect constantly. For instance section c the employment checklist is a comprehensive example of this with positive and negative phrasing designed for continual thought and engagement. By designing this survey

with flexibility of being useful to individuals and universities along with employers there is hope of community based collaboration in the future on a wider scale.

The other relevant sub context of the multiple means of engagement principle is options for recruiting interest. CAST finds that recruiting interest can be best reached through finding ways for optimizing individual choice and autonomy, optimizing relevance, value, and authenticity, along with, minimizing threats and distractions and increasing mastery-oriented feedback.

The second principle of universal design for learning is multiple means of representation. Generally, in the context of this study this principle is much more structurally applicable in the format of the survey construction. As well, a more multiple point outcome in an indirect sense, given that the intent is for three very different groups of the recent graduates with disabilities, along with employers and universities. There are two intents and purposes for this job search strategy tool in that it is meant for immediate support for the individual as a part of career support and a social research tool a university can share in closing the vast and variable employment gaps. This model of universal design for learning was specifically designed by CAST to cover the why's of learning through the multiple means of representation. The sub points within this model that meet these goals are: options for comprehension, options for language (mathematical expressions and symbols), and options for perception. These sub points are outcomes that are achieved through multiple means of representation, action & expression, along with engagement.

By the descriptions laid out by CAST there are options for comprehension which include; activating or suppling background knowledge, highlighting patterns, critical features, big ideas, relationships to guide information processing, visualization, and manipulation then finally to maximize transfer and generalization. In the context of this survey there are some options for

categories which includes not only the flexibility of the design but the ability to disseminate it as a regular sized or large print paper copy, electronic copy, or through a mobile app delivery method.

The sub-point that focuses on options for language, mathematical expressions, and symbols, is a bit more difficult to quantify in the scope of this study as it is primarily words with some fixed multiple sections such as check all question in section A and placing a check mark in section C. Question by question there is descriptive non-pressuring instructions where necessary which is clearly stated. One such example is, *please select all that apply*. By offering multiple means of completing the survey there is an understanding in that for the individual has the freedom to use as much or as little technology as they are comfortable with in formats that they can relate to. By exploring mobile app platforms such as Survey Monkey this allows an individual to enter the information on a phone or tablet as opposed to paper.

Options for perception essentially encompasses format delivery meaning that every option given to these recent graduates with hidden disabilities should hopefully appeal to many as opposed to a singular font option for just paper copy. Offering ways of customizing the display of information within this principle the survey design and development has made room for offering alternative options for auditory and visual input which includes the multiple formats listed above that can be used with assistive technology. Also, consideration has been given to the ability to complete this survey in a group setting through the guided visual and auditory support of a workshop like setting where each person could be completing it with a moderator operating a Power Point slide presentation copy of the survey tool which can be found in appendix E.

The third and final principle of UDL as CAST has developed it is the multiple means of action and expression this is the how of learning aimed at strategic and goal directed learners. Such categories within this principle include: options for executive functioning that guide

appropriate goal setting, support strategy and planning development, use multiple tools for construction as well as, composition and have options for physical action.

At this point is the best time to add further description to deeper components of the tool that can only be considered when finalizing the steps for dissemination. The survey tool in its entirety is dedicated to helping recent graduates with hidden disabilities re-evaluate their current job searching process and circumstances and to see their steps in a new light and understand any ongoing trends. Without an active pilot study to refer to it is difficult to speculate with any sort of certainty how specific learners are going to adapt or struggle with this potential tool meant to empowerment them enough to strategize.

Decoding the Tool:

These next few pages are dedicated to understanding the logic and reasoning behind the creation of this flexible research tool. Going forward it would be a hope to take the contents of this chapter and shape it into a protocol manual to use the tool in different ways and to meet the needs of the many versus the needs of the few. For reference purposes, it must be noted that the survey will be discussed and referenced at length and within the appendices the paper version of the survey can be found. There is the design potential for making this survey available on a mobile and online format. Also, the paper copy which has been the instrumental core format for the development of the job search strategy support tool. Another format which is has been explored through this development process is a workshop power point related presentation that might be easier for some individuals to complete the survey tool in a group session. These multiple options are in line with two of the three UDL core principles. multiple means of representation and multiple means of engagement these multiple formations.

With the survey tool, its self-there are three parts, part A demographics, part B the questionnaire, and part C the checklist. The checklist for the individual in section C will

hopefully aid them in seeing what they are or aren't doing therefore laying a foundation for strategy. As a research data set, Section C can help universities and employers understand how a respondent is or isn't coping and possibly be able to pick out any key indicators from the tool as to how they can improve in the future.

Section A: Demographics

There are two interchangeable parts to this section depending on the purpose that the tool is being used for: For intake and career support: this demographic form serves from as a personal inventory of becoming aware of where they are at. For institutional research, these are standard demographics for scraping the surface of basic identity markers and beginning to contextualize individual circumstances.

For the individual:

Below you can see questions 1 through 4. For the sole purpose of the individual taking stock of their job search process, it doesn't seem that crucial. However, these questions are like questions that will be asked of them either by a potential employer on application or pre-employment forms and by disability specific career support agencies. Keeping in mind that a university career office is likely not going to be asking specific disability related questions because it is the responsibility of the student to disclose where they see fit. The final question around their cultural identity is very different in that it will hopefully be useful for them to see themselves from an outside lens similar to how a potential employer will. This question of culture is not meant to isolate or marginalize but more so to help them find a voice for themselves and builds on the next question of identifying their disability. There is a vast amount of conditions diagnosed that classify as hidden disabilities. For this tool, the choice was to select a ridged arraignment of conditions that fit this hidden disability classification. These conditions

include autism (and Asperger's), learning disabilities and/or ADHD, hidden physical impairment or chronic health condition (mobility, vision, hearing etc.) and mental illness (Depression, Anxiety, PTSD, etc.). Question 5 is a more loosely structured question which focuses on their actual job status recognizing that they either don't have any source of employment or not exactly close to where they ideally want to be. For section A, there is also another category which assess if they have landed the job they obtained their degree for/ the generally ideal job. By adding this for the research portion there, is the hope of establishing a curve for the institution or employer of how many successful individuals that they see as a comparison to those who are excellent potential employees that have just strayed off course for any number of reasons.

Question 6, by the individual accounting for the details of their degree this should be upheld as a job market assessment of their skill set in their fields and act as an indicator of what their degree means for the geographic region(s) they are willing to work in. In part B, there is also the opportunity to look at any additional degrees or certifications obtained which may help to diversify in a way the individual may not have previously considered. In question 7, individuals may or may not have considered further education for any number of reasons. This might serve to help them begin to consider it as a possibility or to just keep looking for work. Sometimes where the geographical job market is bad for the field this might be the only option. Question 8; is a further comments section where there is a nudge to the individual to do consider adding more details as way to help. Understand their actual needs or make clear the pathways they might have to take to access support. The next sub section of this chapter will focus more details for the institutional research demographic form of section A, including an explanation of the identifying markers needed to account for the data set.

For institutional research

This changeable insert, is a section of the tool can serve as the demographic intake form for understanding the surface details of any individuals' experiences. This is also, a way to loosely identify individuals within the data and not actually breach their confidentiality, through markers such as gender & geographic region.

The section from "About You" to question 4 is focused on first re affirming that no identifying markers of their identity will be used. Then, Simple ID markers such as date of birth and gender in questions 1 and 2. Question 3 as for them to identify their disability or to check more than one if in fact they have more than one disability which could be possible. For researchers. The question of cultural identity in question 4 could raise a few factors by either ruling in or out that there are individuals dealing with multiple minority identities in each geographical location. As mentioned in chapter 3, there as a wide varying percentage of those with disabilities in general living in some areas of the country compared to others. It is also worth considering at this point that population prevalence might just be a large mitigating factor that can't be controlled depending on province or city.

Section B: Questionnaire

The remainder of this tool remains unchanged in question content and needs to be viewed through the lenses of the reader and/or participant. Are you a researcher gathering data for a university? Or, are you helping an employer figure out how they can access an untapped population of potential employees? Or a career counselor at a job search support agency or university that is trying to help recent or soon to be graduates with hidden disabilities to assess their job search practices. The entirety of section B can be read in several different ways depending on the individual reading and interpreting. Also, it is important to keep in mind what

the individual will do with the information received from this section. Will it be processed for data collection? Or reviewed by the individual and a career counselor to see how they can move forward in to a better direction.

Section C: Checklist

Part A

The checklist takes a yes or no inventory of what the individual has or has not done up until this point. This does have the downside of relying on the honour system of the participant being honest. There is likely a better chance of full honesty for the research perspective as opposed to the career support end where naturally there may be a bit of defensiveness, fearing scrutiny given that they are already struggling to find a job. There is a UDL component being used throughout this part by shifting tasks but being focused on individual drive and their ability to be self-motivated.

Part B

This section is similar to part a above. However, there is some difference in the content as this section gets to independently seeking out and accessing services to support the job search process. The aim here is to see concretely yes or no answers to what recent graduates are currently doing. The placement of this content in this way is currently felt to be a way of summarizing so to speak. Without direct pilot and testing there is really no way to know how comes of any section will happen.

Applications of the UDL assessment and research job search tool for delivery

The delivery methods suggested below are ways in which the tool was considered throughout the development the tool. There positives and negatives to take into consideration which are

- Paper or alternative print formats- Print can be enlarged to meet visual needs.
- Word documents or form fillable PDFs- This will work across the board for those who are in the demographics as currently outlined however, may not always work for those who aren't familiar. Form fillable PDF's specifically if they don't technically line up well may have a risk of seriously raising anxiety therefore could affect outcome of the survey results.
- Microsoft Forms app on office 365 – This might work well for a research perspective through a university given that most use office 365 now campus wide.
- Survey Monkey – This is an online survey creating service that can also be used well on mobile devices. Depending on the specific survey respondents it may or may not be a good choice. Those with vision loss may struggle if they need to magnify particularly with section c. This problem could occur due to the table formats that would be duplicated.

There is a unique alternative option built in for completion. Alternatively, to independent completion of any type could be a Power Point slide show of the survey presented by a facilitator. This way the content can easily be created placing one question on each slide and delivering it to a small group of individuals for them to have auditory and additional visual feedback. This can make a huge difference for those who easily get over whelmed for whatever

reason, whether it be reasons of mental health, additional anxiety or autism among any other potential example.

Closing Remarks

By dedicating a chapter to decoding each part of the survey tool and insight on formats and how format development can continue, this provides deeper insights for the foundation of the survey tool. With the demographics section being available in two different formations there is flexibility for reaching two different goals. One goal is to directly assist recent graduates with disabilities in looking at who they are and where they are at in their life right now. While starting to scrap the surface of there their interest and aims currently are at. The other insert supports research as a means of initial data gathering for vague identity markers and to contextualize current circumstances.

The questionnaire that makes up section b allows either intended purpose to gather qualitative means of understanding the specifics of job searching, interviews, and work place experiences. For individuals, this questionnaire will hopefully serve as a tool while receiving job search support. For universities, this is a way to see first hand circumstances of their recent and soon to be graduates which may provide new insight and perspectives for how to better support the future populations at the respective university. The final section of the survey tool is the job search checklist which requires the respondent to answer yes or no to statements phrased to specifically see how they are going about job search in a fixed way that has no room for question. This allows for a directed means of opening direct conversation as to why the individuals seeking support are doing this and how they might make better improvements. From a research perspective, it allows more of a quantified look at how recent graduates have specifically tied and experienced.

Chapter 5: Summary

There is a need across the country to find new ways to help those with hidden disabilities raise their job market potential from university. The reason for this is so society can begin to lower the unemployment and unattached to the job market rates for these individuals. Through the *Rethinking Disability* government report, it was found that there was no separation of types of disability by visible or hidden. This means that there isn't a clear way to know how much of this subset is affected. However, if you look at fact sheets published by the disabled persons commission here in Nova Scotia there is a higher likelihood of encountering someone with a hidden disability, than a visible disability. The odds are that this variability will also be different regardless of the province though there is no easy way to prove it. By making a social investment in trying to better meet the needs of more recent grads and/or soon to be graduates with disabilities, more diverse employees are created. This could allow for old attitudes to begin to further fade away.

To understand the reasons why such flexibility in creating and further development a tool of this nature its important to look at what is currently capable of offering along with the potential of conducting the study. The reason the three-phase development tool was designed in this way is to first introduce the circumstances to individual or university researching the population through the demographics inserts. Then through the questionnaire that makes up the second section this gets at the individual's personal story to date which will hopefully allow for seeing what gaps they have that require support for success. With the checklist parts making up the final section it aims to provide a closed assessment through just yes or no answers meaning the outcome is left to the individual, as to how honest they wish to be.

Through the application of universal design for learning principles to this job search strategy tool the capacity exists to meet all the needs of variable levels of needs for completing and accessing this tool. By creating the original tool in different formats is because could serve as a great benefit to the job search process for individuals with invisible disabilities. The plans for deliverable format will consist of paper and electronic means. By offering a typical 12pt font representation of the tool it will allow for those who are more comfortable responding on paper for what ever reason. Through providing a 16-18pt font this will support those with vision loss who don't wish to respond electronically. As for electronic options either mobile, form fillable PDF, or Microsoft Forms are definite options. A workshop setting of a small group with a small group of fellow participants following along with a slide show of tool delivered by a facilitator. This unusual option of workshop orientated support was thought due to personal experience of accessing job search support and realizing collective awareness of not being alone could really serve to help individuals realize they aren't alone in this process. All proposed formats will need to be further explored and further expanded upon in the next phase of this survey tool creation.

The study to this date focused on the exploring how we have gotten to this point in society where individuals with disabilities are graduating pursuing degrees and hitting other milestones similar to their peers and still facing barriers. However, between addressing the relevant literature which took a theoretical look at what is socially known about stigma and over the past approximately 60 years and concentrating on initial development of the survey tool there really was no time to prepare and launch a full-scale pilot and detailed study. At this time, it can be stated though that in the way questions are phrased in each section there should be potential to deduct situational based stigma.

Based on the purposes of the survey tool to help individuals who are seeking support for the job search process along with the potential for universities to use it as a research means to

improve practices. This survey tool brings universal design for learning into the job search process allowing for a different approach in design through multiple formats and purposes with the outcome hopefully being a stronger plan for success both individually and institutionally.

It is unusual to move the principles of UDL from the educational realm to the workforce. However, in the case of resent university graduates with invisible disabilities it just made sense to use UDL for the universal context of it and the ability to reach more diverse individuals through clear language and varied situational points. To further extend on this point if more universal acceptance could be garnered for those of whom have hidden needs making them harder to believe then would it not be possible to consider wider society acceptance for nearly everyone? It would be a hope going forward in the future to study this tool as not just a general pilot but to conduct a specific study to see which specific questions might help individuals objectify and allocate their feelings around past stigma in a way that it is less likely to affect their job research process.

The flexible job search tool has the capability of supporting individuals as a career counseling tool directly either through their university career services or specific disability related job support agency. Universities can benefit from understanding how to better assist their hidden diverse populations in landing jobs in the field of study that they went to university for otherwise the degree is a loss to the individual and society as a whole.

Appendix A

- Note: for format purposed (Leave space as necessary) considers that at this time the tool is being considered for use in different ways allowing format flexibility.

Survey Instrument: UDL Aligned Job Search Strategy Tool

Demographics Insert for Individual Support

ABOUT YOU

Please Note: This information will be between you and your caseworker and/or career counselor.

1) Date of Birth: _____ / _____ / _____

(Year) (Month) (Day)

2) Gender: Select one

Female Male Other

3) Identity of your Disability:

Select all that apply. No one will know it is you.

Autism (Also Asperger's)

Learning Disability or ADHD

Hidden physical impairment or chronic health condition

(Mobility, Vision, Hearing, etc.)

Mental Illness (Depression, Anxiety, PTSD, etc.)

4) Cultural and General sense of Identity: Think about how you see yourself and your heritage along with any other points that play into how you navigate society.

a) Please describe in your own words.

b) Please specify if any of the following five describe you.

African Canadian Aboriginal Refugee

French Canadian (inclusive to Acadian and Quebec Heritage)

Recent immigrant (last 10 years) Born in Canada

Raised in Canada and NOT of a visible minority

5) Current Job Status: Select only ONE.

I do not have a job right now

In ideal job now

My current job is close to my ideal job

I have a job but it is not ideal

6) Degree:

a) Please specify your exact Undergraduate University Degree that you currently hold.

BA Major _____ Minor _____

BSc Major _____ Minor _____

BBA Major _____ Minor _____

b) Unspecified Program: (Please specify)

7) Plans for further Education:

a) Have you considered applying to another program? Yes No

b) Are you currently applying for further education? Yes No

If Yes, Please Specify:

8) Further Comments:

Please feel free to include anything else related to your story of obtaining and/or securing employment that you would like to share which might serve to better help you in your job search process.

Appendix B

- Note: for format purposed (Leave space as necessary) considers that at this time the tool is being considered for use in different ways allowing format flexibility.

Survey Instrument: Demographic Insert for Research Purposes

Demographics

Please Note: Any specific information about your personal identity WILL NOT be evident. When people read the reports, there is no way they will figure out who you are.

- 1) Date of Birth: (Year/Month/Day) _____ / _____ / _____
- 2) Gender: Select one. Female Male Other
- 3) Identity of your Disability:

Select all that apply. No one will know it is you.

Autism (Also Asperger's)

Learning Disability or ADHD

Hidden physical impairment or chronic health condition

(Mobility, Vision, Hearing, etc.)

Mental Illness (Depression, Anxiety, PTSD, etc.)

- 4) Cultural Identity:

a) Please describe in your own words.

b) Please specify if any of the following five describe you.

African Canadian Aboriginal

Recent immigrant (last 10 years) Born in Canada

French Canadian (inclusive to Acadian and Quebec heritage)

Raised in Canada and NOT of a visible minority

5) Current Job Status: Select only ONE.

I do not have a job right now

In ideal job now

My current job is close to my ideal job

I have a job but it is not ideal

6) Degree:

a) Please specify the exact undergraduate university degree that you currently hold.

BA Major _____ Minor _____

BSc Major _____ Minor _____

BBA Major _____ Minor _____

b) Unspecified Program: (Please specify) _____

7) Plans or hope for further Education?

a) Have you considered applying to another program? Yes No

b) Are you currently applying for further education? Yes No

If Yes, Please Specify: _____

8) Further Comments:

Please feel free to include anything else related to your story of obtaining and/or securing employment that you would like to share.

Appendix C

Survey Instrument: Job Search Strategies Questionnaire

The goal of the following questions is to look at how you strategize throughout the job search process.

1) Job Searching Phase:

- a) As you have been job searching have you been able to set your expectations and align your goals to match.

Yes No Sort of Had some help

- b) Is there anything you would like to add:

2) How long do you spend actively job searching over the course of a month?

(networking, reaching out for resources, applying for jobs, reading job postings etc.)

3) Please A and if B and C applies to you as well.

- a) When you find a job, you want to apply for, I tend to:

- a. Apply right away _____
b. Wait and plan carefully since there is time before the deadline _____
c. Avoid it for a while then quickly apply day of deadline _____
d. Do not bother applying _____

- b) Do you adjust your resume to make sure it fits the job posting?

Yes No

- c) *If you answered YES above:* How much time do you tend to spend doing this?

4) Are some job ads more complicated than others?

Yes No

Is there a specific example you can provide?

- 5) Can you reflect on your search so far and your hopes for the future in general?
- 6) Please answer all sections of this question:
 - a) How many jobs have you applied for since graduation? Please circle one.

| | | | | | |
|---|-------|--------|---------|---------|------|
| 0 | 1 - 5 | 6 - 10 | 11 – 15 | 16 – 20 | 21 + |
|---|-------|--------|---------|---------|------|
 - b) Of these applications submitted, how many job interviews have you had?
 - c) Of these interviews, how many jobs offers did you receive?
 - d) Of these offers, how many jobs did you accept?
 - e) Of these jobs, how many were short-term contracts?
- 7) What do you do to prepare for an interview?
- 8) Can you describe some of your interview experiences?
- 9) How do you advocate for your needs when looking for a job?
- 10) If at all, when and how do you disclose the nature of your disability?
- 11) What skills have you brought from your university degree into looking for employment?
- 12) Is your approach to time management the same or similar, comparing what you did in university to how you navigate the job market?
- 13) Is your approach to critical thinking the same or similar, comparing what you did in university to how you navigate the job market?
- 14) Can you share a little bit about how you navigated your university experience in comparison to how you navigate your employment experiences to date?
- 15) You are about to be asked to complete a checklist of strategies that you may or may not use when looking for a job. Before we move on to that, is there anything else you would like to add?

Appendix D

Survey Instrument: Job Search Strategy Checklist

Please make a mark under yes or no to tell us about which of the following things you do when searching for a job.

Part A: Things you have or have not done in the process of searching for employment

| | Yes | No |
|--|-----|----|
| Rely on others to tell me when a job op comes up | | |
| Keeping my resume up to date | | |
| Asking for and using feedback to make my resume better | | |
| Going to career fairs or events or learn about work opportunities | | |
| Networking online to make connections in the areas where I would like to work | | |
| Updating contacts from university to stay in touch and talk about career development | | |
| Doing an unpaid internship to gain practical experience | | |
| Doing a paid internship | | |
| Doing work that is not very relevant to what I want to do, just to get some experience. | | |
| Being flexible about how to apply my interests and skills to opportunities that arise. | | |
| Following up with prospective employers after I have applied to check in or to get feedback. | | |
| Using adaptive technology to help me learn about or communicate with prospective employers. | | |
| Set long term goals. | | |
| Set short term goals. | | |
| Pay attention to the extent to which I have met any of my goals. | | |
| Find new ways to achieve goals that I have not yet achieved | | |

Part B: Things you have or haven't done the process of searching for employment.

| | Yes | No |
|---|-----|----|
| Seek out opportunities myself by talking to or emailing prospective employers. | | |
| Look in the newspaper or at online employment sites regularly. | | |
| Make sure that I take time to take care of myself when I feel frustrated by the process. | | |
| I have people in my life that I can ask for help when I need it. | | |
| If I feel someone has underestimated me or judged me negatively, I take that personally. | | |
| If I feel someone has underestimated me or judged me negatively, I know that is reflective of them, not me. | | |
| When one strategy is not working for me, I know to take some time to figure out a new strategy to meet my goal. | | |
| I have reached out to an employment support agency to in hopes improving my odds in this job search process. | | |
| I have active conversations with my case manager at the employment support agency I have reached out to for help. | | |
| I prefer my case manager lead the discussions. | | |
| I ensure that my voice, needs, and concerns are heard at each meeting. | | |

Appendix E

The future pilot.

As previously mentioned the original intent of this study was to also conduct a pilot study of the self-report tool. This is the first step in developing a standardized approach to assessing job search strategies and goal attainment of recent university graduates in a way that is aligned with transferable skill development that many universities see as a priority for their students in North America. This pilot is situated in a larger design process, as guided by Streiner and Norman (2008). Steps in measurement development include (a) defining the basic concepts to be addressed, (b) conducting a literature review and study of relevant theory, (c) brainstorming a large number of potential items, (d) selecting response style (open ended and binary) for each item, (e) initial assessment of the face validity of the retained items by conceptually aligning items to the initial goals of the measurement tool, other job search strategy tools, and literature reviewed (f) projecting practical applications and universal access to delivery. My next steps will include launching a pilot that will hopefully be conducted as part of my doctoral studies. If extensive changes seem necessary after initial data collection, the next step will be to make revisions and re-administer the survey. If the revisions are minimal, then alterations will be made and the tool will be administered to a large sample of individuals with disabilities, stratified by type of disability and university degree obtained. Future intents for the flexible tool will hopefully be to meet the needs of the groups it is intended for on a large scale.

Participants of the future pilot.

Three individuals who have graduated from a university in Nova Scotia within five years of when the study is conducted and still reside in the province will be recruited to participate in this study. A purposeful sampling method will be used to recruit the three participants. One

participant will have a job and feels their career goals are met given their age and stage of career development, one will be employed but not in the area they would like to be in, and one who will be actively seeking but has not yet found employment. It will be ideal if these three people are comparable demographically and inclusion and exclusion criteria must be met (see below).

Purposive sampling will be achieved through collaboration with all intended parties that this tool is meant for which includes individuals with hidden disabilities who have recently graduate are willing to contribute to either the tool as a research data gathering means or through agreeing to it being a part of their career counseling. By trialing it in both capacities there are hopefully immediate takeaway for the individual through career counseling or they feel good to contributing to improving circumstances not just for themselves but also everyone like them.

Criteria

All inclusion and exclusion criteria is likely to be measured by self-report. The researcher will let the participants know what the inclusion and exclusion criteria are before going through the informed consent process. Once a person provides informed consent to participate they will be asked to complete a demographics form, which includes a checklist of the inclusion and exclusion criteria to confirm and document eligibility for the study through self-report. The researcher will look at this briefly to confirm eligibility to participate before moving forward with data collection.

Inclusion criteria are:

1. The participant has at least one hidden disability, characterized within at least one of the following 4 categories.

- a. *High-functioning autism*- Those from this neurodiverse spectrum that are capable of navigating through daily life themselves or with a combined use of technology and coping skills.
 - b. *Mental illness*- A diagnosis of a mental health matter ranging from anxiety and depression to borderline personality disorders and bipolar. Any other diagnosis that a student is willing to share will also be considered.
 - c. *Hidden physical conditions*- Hidden meaning that they don't require a visible aid except for glasses and hearing aids as they are commonplace items in society, more so than a cane or a wheelchair. Specific interest will be placed on those with any form of chronic pain disorder to those with cerebral palsy or other neurological conditions who can walk, or have perceptual impairment such as low vision, and hearing loss or functional deafness.
 - d. *Learning disabilities & ADHD*- Individuals with any sort of learning disability that requires them to find, develop and improve upon their learning styles to obtain the education they wish to reach. There is no expectation of a learning educational assessment to prove the diagnosis.
2. The participant graduated with a first bachelor's degree from a university within Nova Scotia within five years of the date of data collection.
 3. The participant lives in Nova Scotia.
 4. The participant accessed accessibility services for accommodations to meet their learning needs while enrolled in a university.

Exclusion Criteria

Exclusion criteria would likely be:

1. For this pilot study, individuals with visible disabilities, for instance those with mobility impairments that require a wheelchair, cane, walker, or crutches will meet exclusion criteria. This is in place so that initial findings from this thesis can contribute to the very limited field of empirical research documenting the experiences of students with hidden disability. This study also needs to have a more homogeneous sample given its small sample size ($n = 3$).
2. Individuals currently enrolled as a student will not be recruited for this study. The goal of this tool is to understand students who have graduated and are now fully invested in navigating the job market.
3. Individuals with post-graduate, master's or doctorate degrees will not be included in this study. Very few students with disabilities go on to this level of study, and the primary intent of this tool, once fully developed, will be to understand the alignment between the extent to which undergraduate program learning environments are universally designed and job search skills upon graduation.

Procedure of Pilot

There will be two stages in data collection with a short break in the middle. In the first stage, participants will complete the survey tool with the researcher by their side. Each participant will meet with the researcher one-on-one in a private room at the university that will sanction this research in the future. The participant will have the choice to read and write their own responses, or for the researcher to read the items while audio recording and taking notes to record participant responses. The second stage will involve discussing each item regarding its clarity and relevance. After item-analysis, participants will be asked if they would add, take away or change anything about the measurement tools (e.g. length, wording, topics, methods of

communication). The timeframe expected is approximately two hours per participant. The entire session will be audio-recorded to capture any clarification questions participants ask or comments made that might inform further development of the tool. If participants feel fatigued at any point in time, they will have the choice to stop the session and resume later if they want to.

Data Analysis.

The audio-recordings and written responses will be transcribed by the researcher. Qualitative responses to the actual measurement items will be described qualitatively for all participants, with similar formatting, to be able to observe similarities and differences. Close ended response patterns will be described through a table, documenting which strategies are reported to be used, and by which participant. The audio data from the second stage of data collection, assessing the actual tool, will be analyzed inductively, to generate themes and capture specific quotes that will facilitate the next steps in measurement development.

Expected Outcomes.

The end goal of the initial implementation plan is to have the survey tool thoroughly assessed for content and quality by three self-identifying individuals who meet the parameters set out for participants. At some point in the future it would be ideal to launch a phase two of the study by surveying a large portion of this diverse population of individuals with disabilities across one or more provinces to comparatively study the scope of the job market experiences for recent university graduates with invisibilities navigating the job market.

Implications.

This is a tool that will facilitate much needed research in the area of disability studies. It will also have practical utility as an evaluation tool for universities who aim to assess these transferable skills among their students and alumni.

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