Background
Legislators enacted the Americans With Disabilities Act (ADA) in 1990 with the goal of full inclusion of people with disabilities in society. Given the history of significant intervention (i.e. the ADA), the purpose of this study was to determine “why are people with disabilities continuing to experience barriers to participation in the community?”

While the ADA has been in place for over two decades, people with disabilities continue to experience barriers that limit their community participation (MacClain, 2000; Harris Interactive, 2010).

Methods
Participants were recruited through organizations that serve people with disabilities through email. To be included in the study participants had to be 18 or more years old, speak English, live in the greater Milwaukee community, and report being a person with a disability that uses a power wheelchair. Interested individuals completed a phone screen to ensure eligibility. Participants were recruited and scheduled until researchers attained saturation of the data (Charmaz, 2000).

Data were collected using two methods, participant observation during community based IDALs and a structured interview in a quiet community setting. Four to six hours were spent with each participant. Data was transcribed between the observation, interview, researchers clinical experience, and the literature to ensure trustworthiness.

Grounded theory was used to analyze the data into key themes. Researchers used Dedoose to manage data and to code the information for themes (Sadana, 2013).

Results
Four participants completed the study. Participant 1 is a 75-year-old female with a spinal cord injury, participant 2 is a 24-year-old female with cerebral palsy, and participant 4 is a 46-year-old female with hemiplegic stroke.

Participant observation was conducted at local pharmacies, grocery stores, restaurants, university campuses, coffee shops, and large retail stores. Participants visited the community using adapted vehicles, para-transit, rolling, or facility shuttles. Participants also reported that they were unable to rely on store employees or managers to understand what accessibility really means.

1) Barriers and Participation
All participants reported that they experience both physical and social barriers (examples listed below). These barriers make it more difficult and time consuming to participate in the community.

Physical Barriers
- Routes
- Doors
- Bathrooms
- Height and distance of merchandise

Social Barriers
- Others avoiding eye contact
- Being talked down to
- Experience rude behavior
- Others assuming incapacitated
- Others talking to friend/family instead of person with disability

2) Temporary Barriers
Many barriers of the physical environment were temporary in nature. For example, the placement of tables, chairs, and trashcans in buildings prohibited access to the participants.

3) Anticipating Needs
Participants also reported that they were unable to rely on store employees or managers to understand what accessibility really means.

4) Asking For Help
If participants traveled alone, they frequently had to ask for assistance to overcome physical barriers in the store to removing merchandise off shelves. Participants reported that asking for help can be difficult.

Discussion
The Americans with Disabilities Act has been in place for over two decades. While there has been obvious improvements (e.g. transportation), people with disabilities continue to be unable to fully participate in society due to physical barriers. Physical barriers exist for four reasons:

1) Buildings are exempt from the standards
2) Buildings fail to meet standards
3) Standards are based on the averages of lab-based data and may not meet individuals needs
4) Sometimes building owners choose to make things less accessible and convenient

“A public accommodation shall make reasonable modifications in policies, practices, or procedures, when the modifications are necessary to afford a person with a disability an equal opportunity to use the services, goods, facilities, privileges, advantages, or accommodations of that entity.”

Regardless of the reason, physical barriers are a fact of life for wheelchair users. To overcome physical barriers, people in wheelchairs often have to ask for assistance. Asking for assistance can be difficult when employees and other customers avoid, talk down, or are rude to people with disabilities. Asking for help is also a departure from the paradigm of independence for this population. Furthermore, once a person in a wheelchair finds an employee to help, they are often unable to provide accurate information or may be able to provide limited supports.

Currently participation in the community is heavily reliant on the social environment. This is due to the continued presence of physical barriers in the environment and the reliance of businesses on reasonable modification. As occupational therapy practitioners, we have to enable clients to navigate the social as well as the physical environment. As public health and social policy practitioners, we need to advocate and educate the general public, and promote policy and environmental design that is less reliant on the social environment for success.