Who is missing? A critical analysis of disabled students' subjectivity in an ableist university culture

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Who is missing? A critical analysis of disabled students' subject positioning in an ableist university culture

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Abstract

Disabled Canadians have lower rates of post-secondary educational achievement than their non-disabled peers and consequently, lower rates of employment. Despite 30 years of awareness and attempts to address this discrepancy, the achievement rates of disabled Canadians remain significantly below non-disabled Canadians (Statistics Canada, 2017). Academia is not a welcoming place for disabled scholars (Titchkosky, 2011; Wendell, 1996) and post-secondary institutions have further work to do to fully include disabled students in their programs. This dissertation explores the complex arena in which power and social dynamics create hostile and/or welcoming environments for disabled students in post-secondary institutions. I ask, what subject positions are produced through university discursive practices and how do disabled students take up and/or resist these subject positions to give meaning to their university experience? I apply the qualitative, analytical approach of critical discourse analysis and draw on poststructuralist, critical social and disability theories in the analysis of two sets of data. The data includes interviews from six disabled students and four texts from the University of British Columbia Okanagan. The data was analyzed to uncover the types of subject positions that are produced through university discursive practices and how these discursive formations give meaning to disabled students' university experience. Two major findings emerged from the analysis. First, there is an absence of representation of disability in the university texts (e.g., policies, websites). Second, this absence engenders a cultural environment that produces and reproduces a hegemonic ideal of the normate (Garland-Thomson, 1997) student who is abled. This research demonstrates that, at the University of British Columbia Okanagan, the culture which is shaped through discursive practices is grounded in a ubiquitous ableism that remains unnoticed and unchallenged. It is time to recognize where ableism is at work and challenge the

practices it produces. Disability needs to be considered as one facet of the human experience of difference that has social, political, and cultural implications. Acknowledgement that disability exists in every facet of university along with an accurate representation of disabled students, educators, and scholars as valued, contributing members of the university community is a place to start.

Lay Summary

Disabled Canadians experience significantly lower rates of post-secondary educational achievement than their non-disabled peers. This dissertation explores the cultural environment of the University of British Columbia Okanagan and the experiences of six disabled students. The purpose is to uncover the hidden and unquestioned practices of ableism within the university culture. I demonstrate that disability is absent from university representations of what it means to be a student. This absence reinforces the ideal of a 'normal', student who is not disabled; rather, university students are expected to be 'abled'. This ideal has repercussions for disabled students. It becomes difficult for them to embrace their disability identity which hinders their success. As well, the university treats disability as a special circumstance, further marginalizing disabled students. To change these perceptions, a shift in culture that includes broad representations of disabled scholars as valued and contributing members of the community are required.

Preface

This study was approved by the full Behavioural REB of the UBC Okanagan. UBC

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Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to my wonderful family.

My mother who always believed in me and who I miss every day.

My father who encourages me in all that I do.

My husband whose unconditional love and unwavering support kept me going through the hardest bits.

My son whose limitless patience and kindness kept me grounded.

My daughter who always amazes me with her intelligence, humanity, and compassion.

My son-in-law who can make me laugh when I need it most.

My grandchild who begins a new chapter in my life just as I close this one.

Thank you for putting up with this long journey.

Chapter One: Introduction

Overview

Context of the problem. There are significant differences in educational achievement between disabled and non-disabled adults in Canada. The 2017 Canadian Survey on Disability (Statistics Canada, 2017) shows that working age adults who have disabilities in Canada have consistently lower formal educational attainment than their non-disabled peers. For example, 31.4% of Canadians aged 25-64 without disability have a university degree at the bachelor's level or higher while only 19% of the same aged disabled Canadians can claim this achievement. Participation rates of disabled people in higher education continue to be disproportionately low despite the existence of access and support programs in post-secondary education institutions. Participation in higher education is strongly linked to labour market participation and incidences of poverty related to unemployment and underemployment. This connection is even stronger for disabled people than for non-disabled as only 59% of disabled Canadians aged 25 to 64 years are employed, compared to 80% of non-disabled Canadians (Statistics Canada, 2018). Moreover, the 2017 survey found that employment rates decreased the more severe the disability with only 31% of severely disabled people in Canada being employed. This report also found that employment makes a difference with regards to income for disabled people but it still consistently falls short of those without disabilities. Attention has also been given to these inequities on a global scale since the United Nations' Convention on the Rights for Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) was adopted in 2006. The CRPD is relevant to Canadian jurisdictions as it was ratified by Canada in March, 2010. This convention recognizes the need for equality of benefits for disabled people to ensure independence, social, educational and occupational inclusion, and outlines a duty to make

reasonable accommodations, adaptations, or modifications within educational institutions for people with disabilities. It is clear that the current measures taken by post-secondary institutions to include disabled students do not adequately meet their needs, as low enrolment of disabled people remains a problem. This research project critically examined university institutional practices by uncovering the connections between power, social relations, and discourse. The cultural environment as it is constructed through social relations has a direct bearing on the post-secondary experiences of disabled students and as a result has an effect on their participation, inclusion, and success[1] within their education programs. The post-secondary institution itself has a large role in determining the type of cultural and attitudinal environment that students are required to navigate. Thus, examining institutional practices can help identify where change is needed to improve inclusion and increase participation of disabled students in higher education.

To date, research in the area of disability in higher education has concentrated on exploring and reporting the experiences of disabled students in higher education (Fuller, Bradley, & Hall, 2004; Fuller, Bradley & Healey, 2004; Hanafin, Shevlin, Kenny &McNeela, 2007; Holloway, 2001; Hopkins, 2011; Hutcheon & Wolbring, 2012; Jacklin & Robinson, 2007; Jacklin, 2011; Borland & James, 1999; Vickerman & Blundell, 2010). There has been a focus on the barriers that students continue to face and the facilitators that contribute to their success (Coriale et al., 2012; Garrison-Wade, 2012; Lopez Gavira and Morina, 2015; Strnadova et al. 2015). This type of research is instrumental in understanding the needs of disabled students from

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[1] In the context of this paper, the term success as it refers to academic programs, can have different meanings. For the most part, I have interpreted it to mean the successful completion or the passing of an academic course or program in the institution. I do not quantify success in measures of types of achievement in evaluation (for example achieving a particular passing grade). Passing and completion of a program for students constitutes success. Participants in this study and readers may attribute their own meanings to success in academia. Success may include meaningful participation in extra-curricular activities, receiving awards or scholarships, publication in peer review journal, attending or presenting at conferences, volunteering or working on campus. Success does not necessarily equate to meaningful participation or full inclusion in the institution.

their perspective and is therefore a key element in being able to provide students with accommodations that meet their specific needs. While there are recommendations for making institutional changes throughout the literature, there is a lack of research that focuses on analyzing the practices and the culture of the institution to determine the effects that these phenomena have on disabled students' participation and success in higher education. This type of knowledge can add significantly to the growing scholarship of critical disability studies and, more specifically, to the area concerned with disability in higher education. To this end, this research critically analyzed a specific university's discursive practices to understand how disabled students are situated as social subjects within a university culture steeped in ableism. It also explored what subject positions were available for disabled students to take up and/or resist. Further, how do these positions contribute to or detract from their participation and success in university?

It is important to continue to look at and develop this topic with the intent of unpacking and understanding the relationship between the cultures of academia and students' experiences. It is time to go beyond questioning what the barriers and facilitators for disabled students in postsecondary education are and begin to delve into the complex realms of the power and social dynamics that create hostile and/or welcoming environments in these institutions. It is time to ask different questions in the pursuit of achieving different outcomes for disabled people in school, in work, and in society.

Potential Significance. The results of this research contribute to the growing scholarship of critical disability studies and more specifically to the area of study concerned with disability in higher education. The latter is a growing area of concern as more and more disabled students enter university undergraduate and graduate programs to find a system that does not always

understand their needs or value their contributions. As Dolmage (2017), Titchkosky (2011), and Wendell (1996) have pointed out, the Academy is not a welcoming place for disabled scholars and post-secondary institutions have a long way to go to fully include disabled students in their programs. A critique of what is understood to be a student can discredit the taken-for-granted, common sense knowledge of student-hood as being 'abled'. This research exposes how dominance is established, produced and reproduced through discursive practices resulting in unacknowledged and unquestioned circumstances of discrimination that remain accepted as the status quo for disabled students. And finally, this research opens a dialogue to create a different set of discursive practices by developing new recommendations and reinforcing previously made recommendations for changes in university practice that will increase disabled students

Framework and General Question. The question that guided this project was, "How are disabled students situated as social subjects within the complex web of university discursive formations?" This question was answered using critical discourse analysis (CDA) to explore the following two questions:

1. What types of student subject positions, produced through university discursive practices, are available for disabled students?

2. How do disabled students take up, resist and/or occupy the subject positions produced within and through university discursive practices to give meaning to their university experiences?

The research project consisted of two sets of data that were collected and analyzed in the form of texts. Texts can be transcripts of recorded conversations, written documents, photographs, websites or artifacts (Phillips & Hardy 2002; G. Rose, 2012). What constitutes a text is explored in detail in the Methodology and Methods chapter of this dissertation. The first set of data

consisted of publicly available university documents. The second type of text analyzed using CDA were the transcribed semi-structured interviews of disabled university students. Critical discourse analysis was the methodology used to analyze and interpret these texts with the goal of uncovering university discursive practices that produce student subject positions that are considered natural and are taken for granted. As well, the analysis explored the ways in which the students took up or resisted university discourses to occupy particular student subject positions.

Theoretical Perspectives that Inform this Research

The study of disability has evolved through the development of models that are used to think about the topic of disability. The medical and social models have been predominant in the literature over the past three decades (see chapter two, literature review) More recently, and coming from postmodern theorizing, there has been movement in the disability studies community to consider disability as an identity (Linton, 2010) and a constituent of difference that makes up the human experience (Price, 2011). This re-framing of disability as identity and situating disability as a manifestation of the heterogeneity of being human signals a move away from a models system of theorizing disability. The following section provides information about the models of disability as this manner of thinking dominates the literature that has been written in past decades. It is relevant to understand the foundations of disability theorizing even as we move away from it. The following sections of this chapter explore identity and the poststructural theories that informed the development and implementation of this research project.

Models of disability. The medical model or individual model (Barnes et. al., 1999) regards any problems arising from a disability as resting with the individual. Interventions are

aimed at curing or fixing the individual so that they can achieve as close to normal functioning as defined by ableist norms function in their social and/or physical environments. As well, environmental adaptations in the personal sphere of the individual are considered and not much attention is given to the social or cultural implications of disability. On the other hand, the social model of disability takes the view that it is society that disables people (Finkelstein, 2002; Oliver, 1990). There is a clear distinction between impairment and disability. Impairment being the lack of or defective mechanism of a limb or of the body while disability is the disadvantage caused by contemporary social organization to people with impairments. The result is an exclusion of people with physical impairments from mainstream social activities (Oliver, 1990, p.11). Using this model to think about disability problematizes social arrangements rather than seeing the individual as being the problem. Disabled people are seen as an oppressed group in society and the onus for change is on society to accommodate or change rather than on the individual to change, adjust, or be cured.

Although the social model was developed in response to the lack of consideration given to the social realm within the medical model and to counteract the negative impacts this limitation poses, it retains aspects of the medical model. For example, impairment is determined by and diagnosed in terms of medical model descriptions of corporeal deficit; so, the concepts of deficit and 'fixing' remain intact. In this model, the target of what requires fixing has shifted from the personal to the social. One critique of the social model is that while it has succeeded in redirecting the onus of responsibility for change from the individual to society it too easily denies the relevance of impairment in the lives of disabled people (Morris, 1991; Shakespeare & Watson, 2001; Wendell, 1996). The necessity of downplaying the effects of impairment to highlight and change how disability is perceived and treated socially has resulted in the eschewal

of the body's role in how disability is experienced. By denying the relevance of impairment the social model misses the point that "people are disabled both by social barriers and their bodies" (Shakespeare & Watson, 2001, p. 17). The literature review more fully explores the implications of these models for research.

  Thinking Poststructurally about disability. This section explores the ways in which poststructural theories contribute to critical disability studies. Queer theory and poststructural feminism in particular are looked at to provide key concepts for thinking about the construction of identity, subjectivity, social relations, and power using a poststructuralist stance. For the most part, queer theories and disability theories have evolved separate and apart from each other. It is only in the past 15-20 years that there has been any real interest expressed to consider what queer theories might have to contribute to disability studies. This querying seems to be distinctly one sided with the disability theorists making initial forays into queer territory without an answering response (Clare, 1999; McRuer, 2003, 2010; McRuer & Wilkerson, 2003; Samuels, 2002; Sherry, 2004). Queer theory has utilized the metaphor of the deviant and abnormal body, which is closely associated with disability, to destabilize the concept of normalcy that maintains the idea of normal bodies without critique. In this way queer theory utilizes an ableist perspective that is unquestioned by current queer philosophers (McRuer, 2006; Samuels, 2002). Does this mean then, that the ideas they espouse cannot be useful to disability studies? Despite the areas of disconnect between disability studies and queer theory there are some valuable lessons to be learned from queer theory and perhaps, in the vein of reciprocity, some important insights for queer theorists to reap from disability theorists.

  Queer theory is recognized as an academic discipline, which is by its very nature ambiguous and resists definition (Jagose, 1996; Sullivan 2003). The aim of queer theory is to

question or problematize those 'taken for granted', normative understandings of sexuality, gender, sex, and any associated subjectivities and identities (Butler, 2004; Foucault, 1990; Jagose 1996; Sullivan 2003). This problematizing is important to consider as we start to apply the kind of thinking that has evolved through queer theory philosophizing to other aspects of everyday life. Sullivan (2003) asserts the importance of queer theory's critique of "normalizing ways of know and being" (p.vi) and explores the interdisciplinary potential of queer theory. She does not, however, take the opportunity to explore the implications of the application of queer theory musings to the discipline of disability studies. On the other hand, Samuels (2002) invites postmodern body-theorists to include the disabled body in their work, "not as a metaphor or sign for gender, but in all its real complexity" (p.73). Samuels (2002) concludes that disability theorists should not adopt Butler's (and other body-theorists) ideas uncritically but to not dismiss them wholeheartedly. Through this research, I propose that an appreciation of sex and gender as discursively constructed in culturally and historically specific ways (Butler, 2008; Foucault, 1990; Sullivan, 2003) is one method of understanding a phenomenon that offers important considerations when thinking about disability. This research explores the discursive production of disability in a higher education setting and the implications of particular positioning of disability in this context for disabled students.

Disability identity. The terms disability and queer can both be used to refer to identities. Individuals can claim an identity, or, in other words, individuals may self-identify as being disabled or queer. In this research, queer refers to a sexual identity that is anything but heteronormative and embraces a broad range of sexualities and gender identities (Jagose, 1996; Sullivan, 2003). In a similar fashion, a disability identity refers to identities that are anything but abled-normative and includes a broad range of ability. Identities are the places from which we

negotiate our social world; where we create and hold social knowledge and narratives that inform our values, beliefs, and guide our actions (Siebers, 2010). Identity is constructed through language and discourse within the social milieu and shaped through social interaction (Burr, 2015; Hall, 2001, Gergen, 2001). A poststructuralist perspective of identity provides some important frames of reference with which to consider identity: for example, the idea that there is no single, essential identity for each person, and that identity is fluid, contextual and never fixed (Burr, 2015; Davis, 2010; Hall, 2003; Gergen, 2003). In this way, there is possibility for a complex, multiplicity of self-hoods with which one can identify at any given time. Any identity "may be associated with feelings of community, solidarity and pride, or conversely with feelings of difference, exclusion and shame" (Sherry, 2010 p. 95). These feelings can shift over time or be experienced congruently. For example, a disabled person may feel pride in their disability status as a disability activist but at the same time experience shame or feelings of inadequacy as a disabled person in an educational setting. Identities and the feelings that are associated can shift over time as they are constructed/reconstructed/co-constructed discursively in specific historical and cultural locations.

The idea of constructed identities leads us to consider the type of social environments in which identities are formed. The social environment influences and directs the identities or positions that are available for people to take up and/or resist. For example, ours is an unequal society in which there are dominant and subordinate groups. Given this structure, it is understood that power and institutions of power influence identity (Burr, 2015; 1995; Hall, 1996, 2001, Sullivan, 2003). It is this influence to which Sullivan (2003) refers in her claim that "identity functions as a regulatory and regulating fiction" (p.84). If the only culturally available discourses in which we develop identity is one rich with ideas of subordination and dominance, normal and

abnormal, then the resultant identities reflect and reiterate these discourses and ideas of inequality and normality.

With regard to disability, Garland-Thomson (1997) uses the term 'normate' to designate the culturally constituted counterpart to the disabled figure. The normate occupies the neutral, unmarked space of normalcy (p.8) while the disabled figure is marked as different in which that difference is disparaged and conceived as deviance. These two representations "operate together as opposing twin figures that legitimate a system of social, economic, and political empowerment justified by physiological differences" (p.8). The resultant cultural dichotomy offers two options for identity in which one is neutral, ordinary, or even superlative and the other is marked, extraordinary, and undesirable. The crux of this dichotomy is not that it is "simply comparative but rather, (it is) co-relationally constitutive" (Campbell, 2009). The idea of the deviant, disabled figure upholds and constitutes the normate and vice versa. One cannot exist without the other. This concept is important as we begin to examine the idea of student-hood being fundamentally understood and represented as abled and explore how this interacts with or impacts the disabled student experience in higher education.

It is similarly important to understand disability as an identity in order to take apart the idea that there exists an essential materiality of ability in human beings that prescribes normalcy. It is this belief that there is an essentially correct way of being human that underwrites the damaging cultural dichotomy of normate/abled. Campbell (2009) contends that until recently disability studies has focused on the study of 'disablism' and has missed looking at the production of ableism This omission has resulted in the unconscious re-inscription of an "abled-bodied voice/lens towards disability" (p.4). She calls for a shift of focus to explore the ways in which disability supports, produces, and maintains ableism. Campbell defines ableism as:

A network of beliefs, process and practices that produces a particular kind of self and body (the corporeal standard) that is projected as the perfect, species-typical and therefore essential and fully human. Disability then is cast as a diminished state of being human. (p.5)

Campbell's goal in this ontological reframing is to expose how ableism is produced and maintained which in turn keeps disabled lives peripheral and marginal.

Garland-Thomson's term normate along with Campbell's definition of ableism and Campbell's call to refocus the gaze of disability studies to the production of ableism contribute to an understanding of disability identity as being constructed and maintained within a context in which abled-ness is the norm and disability is seen as inherently negative. In this way, identities can be seen as forced categories that are constructed and serve particular purposes. Specifically, this research explores how, through disability, ableism is continuously re/produced in the university setting through the uptake of dominant social values, ideas, and knowledge.

Processes that facilitate this uptake are interpellation (Althusser, 2001), hegemony (Gramsci, Hoare, & Newell-Smith, 2012), and reiterative discursive practices (Butler, 1993). These processes describe how dominant social values, ideas, knowledge, and practices are taken up by the whole of society without question and as a result, continuously reproduce and reinforce the dominant groups' superiority in an unequal system. These processes are much more complex and insidious than a dominant group merely exerting direct force over another group to maintain power. As well, they are not necessarily a set of conscious acts by any one group or individual. For example, hegemony is the idea that concepts, which benefit a dominant/governing group, are taken up by the general population as they are disseminated through institutions such as the education system and media. The result is cohesiveness between the governing group and the

citizenry whereby the population is imbued with the dominant view. The dominant view remains intact as it is understood to be the natural order of things and remains unquestioned. This chapter explores in greater detail the intricacies of subjectivity and power relations and pays particular attention to Butler's (1993) ideas of reiterative discursive practices. It is important to understand that individual and group identities can work to support the processes of subjugation that reproduce the dominant ideology. This exploration can help us understand the ways in which power operates through disability to sustain ableism. Further, comprehending these processes can call attention to points of entry and provide a means to undermine current social hierarchies and to create opportunities for personal and social change.

Subjectivity, social relations, and power. Queer theory has evolved from poststructuralist accounts of subject formation and social relations (Sullivan, 2003). Some tenets of poststructuralism contribute to a critical disability studies (Butler, 1990, 1993, 1997; Foucault, 1990). For example, constructs that are useful in considering disability in a postmodern context include: ideas that are critical of a dichotomous logic, ideas that reject universal truths and focus on the constructed, contingent and unstable character of subjectivity, social relations, and power. This section visits the ways in which Butler (1990, 1993, 1997, 2008) and Foucault (1990) deconstruct subjectivity, social relations, and power to explore how these ideas are helpful to a critical disability theory.

Queer theory (Butler, 1990; Foucault, 1990) and critical disability theory (Campbell, 2009; Davis, 2002; Garland-Thomson, 1997; McRuer, 2003; McRuer & Wilkerson, 2003; Samuels, 2002; Sherry, 2004; Siebers, 2010; Tremain, 2009; Wendell, 1996) have at their core a drive to denaturalize unmarked identities such as heterosexuality and the abled. They question the construction and presumed naturalness of the norm. Queer theory deconstructs the idea that

hegemonic heterosexuality is the natural expression of sex, gender, and sexuality while any alternative to heterosexuality is deviant or unnatural (Butler, 2008; Sullivan, 2003). In a similar vein, disability theorists question the idea that to be abled is the natural state of being and any alternative is deficient, deviant, and undesirable (Campbell, 2009; Garland-Thomson, 1997; Wendell, 1996). Further, McRuer (2006) puts forth the idea that a hegemonic norm, such as heterosexuality or abledness, is an assumed natural ideal that is a compulsory state of being and argues that compulsory heterosexuality and compulsory abledness are imbricated systems that are contingent upon each other. The compulsory aspect of each speaks to their naturalized status. He sees compulsory abledness and compulsory heterosexuality as a point of convergence for disability and queer theories as "both systems work to (re)produce the able body and heterosexuality" (p.306). For example, a queer body is first presumed able and a disabled body is first presumed heterosexual. Exceptions to these presumptions include an assumption of HIV positive status for gay men and the assumed asexuality for disabled people. Either way, ability and sexuality are intimately and perhaps irrevocably linked. As we come to understand that heterosexual norms shape the lives of disabled people and ableist norms shape queer lives, we acknowledge the interlocking nature of these systems of oppression (Razack, 1999). Furthermore, we need to take a closer look at how we are implicated in the systems of dominant/subordinate relations and question not only or own marginality but also how we are complicit in and contribute to the oppression of others through these re-constituting relations of power.

In the discussion of how abledness and heterosexuality are produced and reproduced in a context of normalcy, Butler's (1993) ideas of performativity of gender and Foucault's (1990) concepts of power can help. The notion of performativity "must be understood not as a singular

or deliberate 'act', but, rather, as the reiterative and citational practice by which discourse produces the effect that it names" (Butler, 1993; p.2). The performative aspect of subjectivity occurs in the actual 'doing' or operationalization of the discursive products of power by the subject. The repetition of the performative constantly reconstitutes the subject position and reinforces the dominion of the external power in this process. Butler applies the concept of performativity to the constitution of gender by separating the physiology of human sex from the expression of gender. Gender is an effect that is obtained by the reiterative 'doing' of gender. By showing that gender is performative, Butler is able to trouble the hegemonic idea that only two essential forms of sex exist and that by 'being' either one of these sexes a particular narrowly defined and natural gender identity is to be expected. Alternatively, the possibilities for diverse physiological sex configurations are opened up and expressions of gender are not necessarily linked to a person's physical form.

Foucault contributes to an understanding of how discourse has the power to define or consolidate hegemonic structures through his concepts of biopower, biopolitics, and subject formation. Foucault (1990) uses the term biopower to explain the measurement, regulation and, discipline of the human body through social institutions. Biopower is constituted by the diverse techniques used to achieve subjugation of bodies and control of the population through the establishment of the norm. The norm acts to qualify, measure, appraise, and order by effecting distributions around its centre. Brown (2000) points out that performatives are an exercise in the power of discourse to define normal.

> Performatives can only seem to succeed or fail in a context of normalcy, but that
> normative context has no foundation, essence or core. The normality ensures a context's
> ability to underwrite a performative's capacity to 'do something' but that normality must

stem from the repetitive, iterative and allegorical nature of performatives themselves.

(p.31)

Butler (1997) points out that performatives are an exercise of power – the power of discourse to define normal. She utilizes Foucault's (1990) ideas of subjection or '*asujettissemen*t' to discuss normativity and the machinations of power in the production of subjects. Foucault (1990) states that,

Power is everywhere, not because it embraces everything, but because it comes from everywhere. ...power is not an institution, and not a structure; neither is it a certain strength we are endowed with; it is the name that one attributes to a complex strategical situation in a particular society. (p.93)

In her discussion of subjection, Butler (1997) suggests that power is reproduced at the site of the subject through the reiteration and repetition of the discursive practices that have previously subordinated and produced the subject (Butler, 1997). Possibilities for the subject and subject constitution are limited by the available social context or discourses in which the power first subordinates and then forms the subject. This conceptualization of subjection provides a framework for looking at student and disability subject positioning for the purposes of this research. What possibilities for disabled student subject positioning are available in the social context and discourses of the university?

Brown (2000) points out that by incorporating Foucault's notions of power with her ideas of performativity, Butler has "solved a recurrent scholarly dilemma over how we understand that, despite individuals' resistance to power structures like gender, class, or sexuality, that they remain constantly oppressive factors in society" (p.31). As Butler (2008) points out, with regard to attempts to change the oppressive social situation of women in a similar fashion,

one ought to consider the futility of a political program which seeks to radically

transform the social situation of women without first determining whether the category of

woman is socially constructed in such a way that to be woman is, by definition, to be in

an oppressed situation. (p. 523)

It is important for disability theorists and activists to engage in a similar analysis and question

whether the category of disability is constructed in such a way that to be thus is to be in an

oppressed situation. For example, Sedgwick (2008) identified contradictory, minoritizing, and

universalizing inclinations which can apply to the disability movement. On the one hand, a group

claims a minority status and, on the other hand, argues that they are the same as everyone else.

For example, an assimilationist approach to activism and social change is a way of achieving

tolerance by making difference invisible or secondary through normalizing discourse that

emphasizes sameness. This is a tactic that has been employed by disability activists by claiming

that despite differences, disabled people are just like everyone else, playing down the difference

in order to be perceived to be as close to the acceptable norm as possible. Or, alternatively,

another tactic to endorsing sameness is the adoption of the term 'diversability' to replace the

term disability. The premise behind this term is the idea that everyone is different, therefore, we

are all the same. This is an attempt to normalize and promote the sameness of difference. A

further universalizing act is the idea of the temporarily abled which aligns or permanently

attaches the notion of disability with the normative abled category. Employing any of these

strategies to resist social hierarchies that favor abledness does not address the underlying issues

that the constitution of the disabled subject is such that to be disabled is to be oppressed. These

approaches can have an opposite effect by masking the very thing that requires addressing –

disability. These strategies are a forced attempt for disability to be seen as normal but can

inadvertently perpetuate the idea that there is something wrong or shameful about disability so that code words are preferable. These strategies for resistance of the power structures do not address the paradox of a subject formation that relies on discourse that creates the thing that it names (Butler, above) which, by its very nature, is oppressed.

If we think about disability as a performative, a 'doing' rather than a 'being', then 'disabled' is not a natural fact but is historically and culturally located. If disability is not linked to an essential physical attribute but is produced and re-produced through the power of reiterative discursive practice, then the body is the site of possibilities that are conditioned by its historical and cultural location. "As an intentionally organized materiality, the body is always an embodying *of* possibilities both conditioned and circumscribed by historical convention. In other words, the body *is* a historical situation, …and is a manner of doing, dramatizing and *reproducing* a historical situation" (Butler, 2008; p.521). The body becomes 'disabled' through a series of acts that are consolidated over time (Butler 2008). If the possibilities of disability are limited by what is culturally available and what is available is formed by discourses of deficit, tragedy, and abnormality then, the acts or performatives will embody those discourses and (re)produce oppressed 'disabled' subjects.

The intention of this analysis is not to leave the reader with the impression that to be 'disabled' is to be oppressed without options for other possibilities. Rather, the intent is to explore the ways in which the 'disabled' subject position is constituted and reconstituted as a means of accessing possibilities for alternatives and to re-formulate the construction of disability. By demonstrating that 'disability' is performative we question the hegemonic ideas of disability as tragic, deficient and abnormal. This type of questioning opens the way for different discourse, one that is not tied to deficit-based ideas, to be offered up and adopted.

In order to engage in meaningful analysis of disability in relation to the social context in which it exists it is important to understand the ways in which subjectivity, social relations, and power interact to create a cultural understanding and valuation of disability. The use of queer theory as a framework to gain this understanding is relevant not only because of its manner of deconstruction of body, gender, and sexuality but because of the ways in which queer and ability are intimately connected through the establishment and delineation of unquestioned hegemonic norms. At the same time, it is important to always be mindful of the fact that disability and queerness are not interchangeable concepts of the materiality of the body and while some parallels may be drawn they should be treated as distinct categories of oppression. It is for this reason that McRuer (2003) calls for an explicit naming of disability in queer theory and vice versa. "Claiming critical disability in queer theory (and vice versa) allows us to challenge the conflation of disability and queerness from a perspective that challenges even more the cultural devaluation of both" (p.98). In this instance, McRuer is referring to the ways in which disability has been used as a metaphor for queerness while maintaining a cultural equation of disability as deficient. For example, McRuer (2006) has been instrumental in promoting the contributions of radical queer thought in "forging the critical disability consciousness" (p.viii) and urges queer communities to acknowledge how politically unconscious debates about normativity "[are] shaped, in large part, by ideas about disability" (p. viii). Further, one of Samuels' (2002) critiques of Butler is that her "liberatory approach to sexuality takes as a matter of course that the 'metaphorics of illness' are always negative, and that somewhere, somehow, bodies do exist which deserve pathologization based upon the very material, biological 'realities' which she seeks to destabilize" (p. 69). Samuels (2002) describes this problem as the "representational double bind of disability" (p.70) whereby disabled populations remain marginalized and

culturally devalued as other disempowered communities' distance themselves from the metaphor of deformity/disability to make them more visible and valued. The result is that disability becomes the "'real' abnormality from which all other non-normative groups must be distanced" (p.70). Dolmage (2017) notes that "disability is used to shore up other stigmatization …[in particular], the categories of gender, race, and sexuality have relied upon the attribution of biological inferiority " (p. 10). This process serves as a reconstitution of a disabled subject position of deficiency and abnormality. By explicitly naming disability in queer theory queer theorists are then forced to look at the queer community's collusion in the oppression of disabled people. Similarly, it is as important for disability theorists to understand the complex ways in which these interlocking systems of oppression support one another and disability's role in subjugating queer subjects.

Butler (1997) suggests that the path to liberation is through the interrogation of regulation and a reframing of the subject position. She writes, "Foucault suggested that the point of modern politics is no longer to liberate a subject, but rather to interrogate the regulatory mechanism through which 'subjects' are produced and maintained" (p.31). As such, analyses of oppression which focus on liberating the oppressed without examining the complex mechanisms that produce and maintain the oppression combined with a scrutiny of our own complicity in these social interactions will continue to be partial analyses and ineffectual at promoting change. Changing the way that disability is thought about and the manner in which disabled people are treated in society is an important undertaking. To move an agenda of non-oppressive social practice forward an ontological reframing of disability away from the dualistic disability/impairment distinction is called for (Davis, 2010; Hughes & Paterson, 1997; Shakespeare & Watson, 2001). Along this vein, Davis (2010) proposes a mode of thinking about

disability that he calls dismodernism. A dismodern subject is everyone as all are disabled and

completed by technology or intervention. As impairment and dependency become the

expectation for all, "universal design becomes the template for social and political designs" (p.

314). As well, Hughes and Paterson (1997) suggest exploring phenomenological theory of

disability from a poststructuralist perspective that incorporates identity differentiation among

disabled people. As Shakespeare and Watson (2001) point out,

> disability is the quintessential post-modern concept, because it is so complex, so variable,
>
> so contingent, so situated. It sits at the intersection of biology and society and of agency
>
> and structure. Disability cannot be reduced to a singular identity: it is a multiplicity, a
>
> plurality. (p.19)

It seems that Davis' (2010) proposal and the suggestions of Hughes and Paterson (1997) and

Shakespeare and Watson (2001) are at odds with each other. While Davis' dream of a dismodern

subject is appealing, it ignores the differential experiences and multiplicity of subject positions

that not only disabled but all people occupy. Exploring more fully the implications of the

embodiment and discursive practices of difference within and outside of disability is an

interesting next step.

Situating this research. While exploring the many different ways of thinking about

disability and applying those models in discussions of theory, the aim of this research is not to

reproduce or promote models of thinking. The focus of the research, through its design, data

gathering, and analysis stages has been to further the discussion about disability as an identity

and disabled student subjectivity informed by poststructural social theories. Positioning disability

as human difference, as constituting one of a variety of human social, political, or cultural

experiences that is fluid and contextual, allows us to move away from thinking about models of

disability and the meanings associated with those models. As Linton (1998) points out, "When disability is re-defined as a social/political category, people with a variety of conditions are identified as *people with disabilities* or *disabled people*, a group bound by common social and political experience" (p. 12). This re-defining effectively collapses the various models of disability and ways of thinking about disability that are designed around the idea of the normate (Garland-Thomson, 1997) and normativity. In this way, disability is a means of human variety and difference.

A social/political definition moves us to eliminate the idea that a norm exists and that all people should strive to operate, either as individuals or within particular environments, as close to normal as possible. Instead, we begin to recognize and honour human variation in all its forms; physical, emotional, mental, spiritual, sexual, gendered, or racial. We also appreciate that human variation requires different ways of knowing, making meaning, and experiencing life. If we embrace difference in this way, there is more openness and space for equity and less need for a hierarchy of being-ness. One way of being is not necessarily better than another. Acceptance of a diversity in the ways that we know and experience our world can offer us a much richer and deeper way of knowing about ourselves, others, and our world.

To provide context for this idea I give myself up as an example. I identify as abled but at what point do the frequent blinding migraines, the daily pain in my back, neck, shoulders, and hips, the 'disordered' eating, the constant struggles with sustained attention, and the fight against depression and anxiety offer the disabled identity for me to take up? Is it when I acknowledge that these things effect challenges to my daily living, or when I present mainstream medical diagnoses and paper work, or when I have experienced discrimination because of one or more of these experiences? Is there an in-between identity? Why do I have to identify as either abled or

disabled? Disability identity is fluid and not always clearly distinguishable. For me, identity is muddied by an ingrained ableism that haunts me and invades my thoughts and actions through my desire to be seen as a capable, valuable, contributing member of my communities. Why do I believe that disclosing my differences will result in being perceived as less credible or capable? So far, I have been able to manage and to get by -- to pass. Am I a fraud or am I to be lauded? From the medical/social model's perspectives I should be lauded. I've been able to function 'normally' with self-directed interventions that do not require public consumption. From the social/political perspective I am a fraud. I subvert my differences, the very things that affect and have effect on my lived experiences, knowledge, beliefs, and values. I subvert those differences that make me this person. I withhold sharing these differences and my true experiences from the world thereby re-producing and co-constructing the very ideas that I critique in this paper.

     Clarifying terms. It is essential to be clear about some of the terms used in writing about disability in this research and to make explicit the ways in which they are used. First, this research does not offer a specific definition for the term 'disability'. Rather, it offers a way of thinking poststructurally about disability that, as a state of being human, is treated as fluid and contextual. For example, there are many ways to be disabled and in each situation disability can be experienced differently. Each individual who claims disability may, or may not, do so differently over time, and in varying contexts. Offering a definition provides the potential to delimit the possibilities of disability. Further, not defining the word allows the ways that we think about disability to be flexible, to recognize the uniqueness of each use of the word while at the same time acknowledging the unifying nature of its use. In a bureaucracy such as a university, this approach to thinking about disability becomes less practical and cumbersome as

decision making about who to serve and what services they receive are usually based on defined and define-able conditions; however, for the purposes of this research it works well.

Second, when we think about disability it is understood, to some extent, to be dichotomous in which you are either disabled or not disabled. In reference to non-disabled people the term 'abled' is often used. There are problems with using this term as not all disabilities are related to physical corporeality. The term 'abled' gives the impression that disability refers only to the physical body when, in fact, disability encompasses not only corporeal differences but other human attributes including intellectual, psychological, and emotional variances. As such, this research will use the term 'abled' to indicate non-disability. The dichotomous aspect of the language around disability can be problematic when we consider disability to be fluid and contextual but discussing this topic is somewhat limited by the language available. This limit should not prevent us from understanding the fluidity of the term.

Finally, this research uses the terminology 'disabled person' as opposed to 'person with a disability' or 'person living with a disability'. The reason for this distinction is that person-first language can give the impression that the disability itself is removed or removable from the person which is not the case. Disability is more likely to be experienced as an integral part of the person that shapes their lived experience in meaningful ways and it cannot be separated out from their lived experience. Language that gives the impression that disability is one-step removed from personhood could imply that it is a personal choice and it further sustains the notion that disability is a negative attribute that is tragic and should be remedied or cured.

Summary

This chapter has set the stage for the coming chapters by describing the medical and social models for thinking about disability and considering the ways in which these models

contribute to a hegemonic abled normative understanding of disability. It explores how poststructuralist, queer theorists' descriptions of subjectivities, social relations and power can be useful to critical disability theory. First, queer theorists' interrogation of hegemonic normativity is similar to disability theorists' own questioning of hegemonic abledness. It is an important and meaningful exercise to further this interrogation to incorporate the question of how we are implicated and complicit in the systems of dominant/subordinate relations in our every-day actions as well as in our theoretical musings. An understanding of how subject positions are formed and a deconstruction of current practice can provide new insights for bringing about change. As well, this knowledge is a site from which ongoing reflection and renewal of commitment to improving the social and cultural landscape for disabled people can take place.

Structure of the Dissertation: Looking Ahead

Chapter one introduces the research question and the purpose of the research. It provides the context and background of the research and details the theoretical perspectives used in thinking about the concept of disability. This chapter explores the application of poststructural theories in the analysis of disability.

Chapter two is the literature review that explores what the current literature asserts about disabled students experiences in higher education. Analysis of this literature reveals that three main paradigms for thinking about disability influence researchers' interpretation and application of findings in their studies. The three paradigms are the medical model, the social model, and a critical social model.

Chapter three outlines the methodology of Critical Discourse Analysis, the reasons for its applicability to this research project, and the manner in which it is applied. This chapter also provides the details of the methods used in conducting this research project.

Chapter four lays out and discusses the findings from the research. Two major themes emerged: the absence of disability representation at the university and the resultant production of the abled student as the norm. The ways in which the university's discursive environment, founded in these two themes, influences and impacts disabled students' positioning and experience within the university is further explored.

Chapter five is the conclusion that summarizes the study, offers recommendations for potential policy and practice changes, makes suggestions for further research, and some researcher reflection.

The last section of the dissertation contains the references and appendices.

Chapter Two Literature Review

Overview

The purpose of this study is to critically examine how the ableist culture of a post-secondary institution impacts the uptake, resistance and/or occupation of subject positions that give meaning to disabled students' university experience. Specifically, I want to link the subtle and taken for granted university cultural practices that produce and re-produce ableism with disabled students' understanding of student-hood and how they fit or don't fit in with these perceptions. In undertaking this study, it was necessary to conduct critical reviews of the literature which were ongoing throughout the study. Different bodies of literature and topics were critically reviewed for the various components that create this study. For example, the methodology chapter explores critical discourse analysis and the theory chapter applies post-structural theories. This chapter deals specifically with the literature pertaining to higher education and disabled students, disability, and inclusive education. A review of this literature provides an understanding of how the concept of disability is perceived and managed within the context of higher education. It also provides insights to disabled students' perspectives on their experiences in higher education and offers suggestions for increasing numbers of disabled students accessing higher education and improving their outcomes. Much of the literature reviewed focused on exploring and reporting student experiences, institutional policy and practice, and ways to improve acceptance of and be more welcoming to disabled students. This study is looking to uncover and explicitly link, through critical analysis, the covert cultural aspects of institutional discursive practices on disabled student experiences. In essence, I aim to highlight how both the student experience and institutional culture work through each other to maintain unfavourable situations for disabled students in higher education. Connecting these

facets of education by the application of critical discourse analysis has not yet been thoroughly explored in the current literature. This study hopes to further the scholarly conversation within critical disability studies as it is applied to higher education.

To conduct this literature review the search concentrated on peer reviewed scholarly articles, books, dissertations, and government publications. The main data bases used for the search were education and social work and these were accessed through JSTOR, ProQuest, and ERIC. Key words used for the search included disabled, disability, ability, post-secondary, higher education, inclusive education. As well, the literature reviewed for this chapter reflects international perspectives with researchers from Canada, the United Kingdom, United States, Israel, and Sweden. The time frame for when the search was conducted was from August 2015 to December 2017. The focus was on current literature from the past 10-15 years. I was not interested in a historical perspective of how disability has been treated in higher education; rather, the aim of this review is to situate this research project within the body of current literature addressing disability and post-secondary education.

The review started by looking at and summarizing the following categories within each document; topic, theoretical framework, methodology, key findings, further research recommended, and important quotes. The summaries were then analyzed looking for common themes and important gaps. These themes are summarized in the sections below and include a discussion with attention to the relevant areas of difference amongst authors and gaps that this study intends to address.

In keeping with the intent of critical discourse analysis and situating the literature and their discourses in the context of a broader political, social, and economic context, the chapter ends by situating post-secondary education and this literature within a neoliberal political

perspective. This political perspective helps us to understand how neoliberalism informs the education system to signal meanings such as: what is a student, what are university perspectives on disabled students, and what is the role of the university in society?

Findings

Models for thinking about disability. First, it should be noted that the division of the literature into models for thinking about disability reflects the historical scholarly discussion about disability and the ways in which disability has been understood and problematized in order to seek change. It is not my intention to promote a model-based thinking about disability; however, in the process of reviewing and analyzing the literature it became apparent that these models have influenced the type of research done and consequently the literature that has emerged with regard to disability and higher education. Chapter one gives a more detailed understanding of the models in the context of this research so, this will not be explored further here.

The theoretical approach or framework used to think about and discuss disability greatly influenced the questions, the framing of the issue, and the recommendations for change. The literature reviewed here indicates a general consensus that disabled students are under-represented in higher education and that this disparity needs to change to improve life outcomes for disabled people. How a particular researcher explores and discusses the issues varies depending on the model applied in the research. The literature reviewed applied four main models in exploring disability and higher education. They are the bio-medical, the social, the social justice, and the socio-cultural models. A deeper discussion of these models and their implications for my research is set forth in chapter three so will not be expanded on in great

detail here. Instead, this section examines the differences that these various models can produce within the same research topic as well as their contributions, and limitations.

The social model (Finkelstein, 2002; Oliver, 1990) is the predominant model of thinking in the current research on disability in higher education. Research that is based on the social model tends to report on the barriers and facilitators that are experienced by disabled students, with a focus on environmental and attitudinal barriers (Brandt, 2011; Cunnah, 2015, Fuller, 2004). Recommendations that flow from the research predominantly centre around increasing awareness, knowledge, understanding, and openness towards disability issues; offering different or better supports to students to further eliminate barriers; ensuring policy and practice are aligned; and, developing and promoting universal design for learning in education. In principle, the social model should be able to shift our thinking more radically about disability in post-secondary education; yet, it often falls short of moving us beyond remedies of universal design and improving academic accommodations. As Cunnah (2015) notes, "social model thinking has not resulted in the effective inclusion of disabled people in university and work based contexts" (p. 225). This could be due, in part, to the very strong links that the social model and current disability service structures retain to a bio-medical model.

Although the bio-medical model is the least overtly discussed, this paradigm is evident in more subtle ways throughout the majority of literature and could, in fact, be seen as the model that underpins, and in some ways, undermines the social perspective. For example, these two perspectives have a push-pull effect within disability services. On the one hand, the goal of social model thinking in services delivery is to reduce or eliminate barriers (environmental and attitudinal) for disabled students. However, to qualify for academic accommodations, the method most commonly used to reduce these barriers in higher education, the students' requests must be

supported by a medical professional's diagnosis and the resultant functional limitations experienced due to the 'condition'. Qualifying professionals preferably or even exclusively practice medicine in the mainstream medical system that tends to support the bio-medical paradigm. As such, this system relies assertively on a bio-medical manner of thinking as students must first meet the medical model criteria before they can enjoy the products (academic accommodations) of social model thinking. This close linkage between the two paradigms in a service setting can be problematic as they present quite different perspectives for understanding and managing disability related issues. The medical model understands the problem of disability to be located within the individual and focuses change agents on fixing the individual to improve their ability to function within 'normal' society. Contrary to this, the social model locates the problem of disability within the social and physical environments in which a disabled person operates and imagines enabling the social and physical environments as a means for liberating disabled people. The pervasiveness of the bio-medical model in this instance can pose a disservice to social model processes by restricting its applications.

This contradictory merging of two paradigms seems to limit the ways that researchers grounded in the social model think and write about disability. Although, I believe, the social model as a concept could potentially lead us to questioning and making problematic current practices of exclusion and inclusion that are taken for granted, it falls short of doing so in its current manifestation. To my mind, it is the researchers and writers who come from a more critical standpoint, that can be coined 'socio-cultural', who have come to problematize current arrangements, processes, and cultural aspects of the post-secondary education system's 'management' of disability (Annamma, Connor, & Ferri, 2013; Baglieri, Bejoian, Broderick, Connor, & Valle, 2011; Goodley & Runswick-Cole, 2014; Garland-Thomson, 2005; Opinini,

2008; Titchkosky, 2011). For example, using the perspectives of identity and category politics, Komesarof (2005) points out that merely incorporating individuals from marginalized populations without altering established regimes and re-imagining the culture of schooling does not meet the demand for educational justice. Merely ensuring equal access does not necessarily meet critical reform agendas (Davidson & Henderson, 2010; Komesarof, 2005). In this vein, Opini (2008) finds that "disability has been taken up largely as a unitary concept" (p.132), thus making it possible to treat all disabled students in the same way and effectively making invisible the structural and pedagogical obstacles experienced by disabled women, in particular. Opini (2008) focuses on women's experiences but it is easy to extend her analysis to see that the ways in which a white, Christian, domestic, Deaf student experiences a Canadian, hearing post-secondary educational institution is going to be vastly different from how a non-white, hearing, Muslim international student with learning disorders will experience that same institution. Treating these experiences as a single 'disability' access issue can create different structural and pedagogical obstacles for individual students that are not remotely considered or understood by the institution and has significant impacts on the institutional response to each of these students. With this in mind, acknowledging and considering gender, sexuality, privilege, cultural, and racial differences and the ways that these categories interlock (Razack, 1999) are crucial aspects to creating effective initiatives that address the needs of disabled students that are, for the most part, ignored. Furthermore, how a researcher approaches the topic of disability in post-secondary institutions influences their interpretation of the data, what aspects of the student or institutional experience are or are not problematized, and the recommendations they make for resolution and/or further research.

This research project uses a socio-cultural perspective in line with post-structural theorists who take up critical disability (Annamma et al., 2012; Baglieri et al., 2011 Coriale et al., 2012; Garland-Thomson, 2012; Goodly & Runswick-Cole, 2014;), crip theory (Goodley & Runswick-Cole, 2014; Sykes, 2009), critical race theory (Annamma et al., 2012; Kannen, 2008), and queer theory (Kannen, 2008; Opini, 2008; Sykes, 2009). The goal of this research is to explore the impacts that the university's ableist culture has on disabled students' experiences and what it means to be a university student. In addition, it demonstrates direct links between the institutional culture, the student experience, and meaning making by exposing taken-for-granted university practices that perpetuate and reinforce an ableist culture. Moreover, this research examines how these practices influence and shape students' perspectives of themselves as students. This exposure is an important step in the development of action plans for changes at the institutional level.

A review of the scholarly literature about disability and higher education reveals that much has been written about student experiences related to barriers and facilitators in accessing education, institutional perspectives in terms of policy and practice, actions and attitudes of faculty and staff, and some attention is given to institutional culture with a view to problematizing current practices. The following sections will explore the literature with these themes in mind.

The student perspective. To date, a significant amount of the research in this field has focused on the facilitators and barriers to higher education experienced by disabled students. In terms of facilitators, students identified that the most important supports they received from faculty members were their willingness to help, being available, responding to questions, and continuous evaluation (Lopez Gavira & Morina, 2015; Strnadova et al., 2015). Other facilitators

identified as precursors to success in higher education include social inclusion – friendship, peer support networks, education contacts, and a study environment that allows for and promotes diverse and flexible learning (Bessant, 2012; Coriale et.al., 2012; Garrison-Wade, 2012; Gibson, 2012).

With regard to what students described as barriers to their education, some common themes from the literature included: physical spaces that are inaccessible; confusing transition from high school to post-secondary (due to a lack of communication or information not readily available); 'attitudinal' barriers from individual professors, which is attributed to lack of understanding or lack of training to support professors' knowledge and ability to appropriately accommodate disabled students; bureaucratic processes intended to facilitate learning but which in practice create further barriers to disabled students; and, social exclusion (Coriale et al., 2012; Garrison-Wade, 2012; Lopez Gavira & Morina, 2015; Strnadova et al. 2015). Disabled students, then, deal with issues likely not experienced by non-disabled students that can add to their workload and have psychological, physical, and emotional demands that create additional barriers (Brandt, 2011; Jung, 2003; Lopez Gavira & Mornia, 2015; Madriaga, 2010)

Other barriers experienced can be more subtle yet extremely deleterious. For example, students receive the message that their presence at university is conditional on their ability to adapt to the demands of the institution (Cunnah, 2015, Riddell et al., 2005). When they are unable to meet institutional demands, disabled students will often see it as a failure due to some personal deficiency such as not trying hard enough, not being smart enough, or just not being well or healthy enough to properly engage (Erevelles, 2011; Valle et.al, 2011). Blaming individual deficiency rather than understanding systemic barriers is not limited to students self-blaming. Fletcher et al. (2015) found that educators tended to blame lack of success on the

students themselves: the students' personal situations or disposition rather than on institutional obstacles (see also Bessant, 2012, Riddell, 2005). When success is not achieved by a disabled student finding fault with the individual or their circumstance is the 'logical' conclusion in an education system that is tied to the neoliberal ideals of self-sufficiency, normalcy, and exclusion. From this standpoint, a good or 'normal' post-secondary student is one who can work independently, has high grades, participates in class, attends all classes, does not require too much extra support, and hands in assignments within prescribed deadlines. Students' whose disabilities make it difficult or impossible for them to achieve these markers of 'good student-hood' are considered to be performing poorly and can easily be passed over for opportunities that promote their academic and extra-curricular participation (Opini, 2008). Furthermore, it was found that disabled students who do not access institutional supports 'underperform' and that there is a persistent sense of student normalcy that continues to marginalize disabled students (Madraiga et al.,2011; Schreuer & Sachs, 2014). In some cases, requesting disability related supports is a difficult and conscientious decision that has to be made by disabled students. For example, those whose disability is not visible struggle with disclosure decisions: whether or not they should disclose, when to disclose, to whom they should or shouldn't disclose, and what the risks of disclosure are (Couzens et al., 2015; Davidson & Henderson, 2010). They may be put in a position of needing to confront their lecturers, teaching assistants or lab instructors about teaching methodologies and request a change which opens them up to the potential adverse effects of stigma or discrimination (Madriaga, 2007; Vickerman & Blundell, 2010). The concerns about the pervasive and discriminatory effects of stigma associated with disability informs disabled students decisions not to disclose their disability and, therefore, not receive the academic supports they need to be successful. Moreover, disabled students who do not receive

institutional supports underperform, which further leads to their marginalization (Jorgensen et al., 2005; Madriaga, Hanson, & Kay, 2011; Schreuer & Sachs, 2014). They can and are often simply dismissed as poor students who are then denied the benefits associated with being considered a 'good' student.

As noted above, the majority of the literature tends to take a social model perspective with discussions about student experience focused on the barriers and facilitators to education. Studies using this approach did not tend to question or problematize the structural, systemic or cultural components of the current education system other than to recommend more and better accommodations and supports. The underlying issues of the privileges of ableism that are inherent in the current system are not addressed. Given this significant lacuna, this research project highlights and questions the hegemonic ableist culture of post-secondary institution and how it affects the educational experience of disabled students.

About post-secondary institutions. There is agreement among researchers that disabled students are under-represented in post-secondary education. Exclusion remains a common practice through various oppressive practices that are seen as natural (Baglieri et.al., 2011; Komeseroff, 2005; Opini,2008; Titchkosky, 2011). For example, common cultural practices normalize exclusion of disabled people because disability is perceived as tragic and problematic and represents what Titchkosky (2011) describes as human "limit without possibility" (p. 82). This creates a culture that makes it acceptable and normal to exclude disabled people from everyday life and this exclusion is rarely questioned. The marked absence of disabled people in higher education is an obvious measure of the exclusion of this population but so too is the unacknowledged presence of disabled students and scholars. The invisibility of disabled students makes it difficult to discuss, embrace or critique something that does not seem to exist, thereby

further perpetuating the acceptance and iteration of a culture of exclusion (Barbazon, 2015; Everelles, 2011). This exclusion extends beyond the absence and invisibility of disabled students and scholars to the broader academic setting. Despite its relevance to most disciplines, the study of disability other than as something to be cured, rehabilitated, and normalized, is actively avoided (Dolmage, 2017).

Exclusion is in binary opposition to inclusion; you cannot have one without the other. In institutions of higher education, a culture of exclusion is considered desirable or even necessary. The very nature and value of the university degree is its exclusivity. Yet, there are social justice and equity considerations that are mandated and require attention; so, institutions develop policies and practices to address access for disabled students and to provide more opportunities for disabled people to participate in higher education. This strategy aligns with social model thinking and does not necessarily address inclusion or ensure engaged participation. Access and inclusion are different concepts; by focusing on access, institutions are more likely to perpetuate the exclusion of disabled people from higher education (Dolmage, 2017). While admission to higher education and access to the same information/knowledge seems to meet the social justice requirements, it does not ensure that disabled students will be able to fully participate and not be penalized for requiring non-traditional means of participating their knowledge. Simply adding disabled students to the mix without changing teaching and learning practices and the culture that informs those practices is not enough to ensure the inclusion and meaningful participation of disabled students. This research explores those cultural practices to expose how inadequate the premise of access is to meet the demands of full participation for disabled students.

The current institutional method used to provide access for disabled students is through processes of academic accommodation. Current accommodation practices are based on a bio-

medical model of disability that, as indicated earlier, determines eligibility for services based on a medical diagnosis or demonstration through professional medical documentation of functional limitations in an education setting due to a disability. This model of support aims to remove barriers and facilitate access so that disabled students can participate in the same ways that other, 'normal' students (those who do not require accommodation) perform (Baglieri et al., 2011; Redpath et al., 2013). Academic accommodation as a system of disability management reinforces a concept of normalcy in education, which results in the idea that restoring the disabled student to a close approximation of a normal student is the way in which they will have equal access to education. In this way, academic accommodations can be viewed as a remedial approach to equity for disabled students and understood as a cultural practice that actually undermines the full inclusion of disabled students in post-secondary education. For example, the manner in which accommodations are provided further demonstrates the institutional expectation of disabled students to adapt to the normalized, ableist requirements of the educational system (Komeseroff, 2005; Titchkosky, 2011). These processes are created by the institution and are intended to support students, yet they may actually hinder student access to post-secondary resources or success. The bureaucratic processes of requesting and receiving the accommodations can be experienced as barriers themselves which are not required of the privileged, enabled students who take for granted that they will have full access without the extra work (Jung, 2003).

Despite the negative implications of current accommodation practices, much of the literature does not see these practices as necessarily problematic; rather, there is a focus on more and better accommodation by adding to or improving a variety of recommended practices (Belch, 2011; Bessant, 2012; Brandt, 2011; Coriale, Larson, & Robertson, 2012; Cunnah, 2015;

Garrison, 2012; Holloway, 2001; Rao, 2004; Van Hees, Moyson, & Roeyers, 2015; Vickerman & Blundell, 2011). As well, many authors make recommendations for further research to explore what inclusive education means for post-secondary education (Barnes, 2007; Belch, 2011; Fuller et al., 2007; Holloway, 2001; Jorgensen et al., 2005; Madriaga, 2007; Redpath et al., 2013; Van Jaarsveldt et al., 2015; Vickerman & Blundell, 2010). There is also a recommendation to incorporate the principles of universal design for learning (more on these principles later) as one possible path towards a more inclusive system (Barbazon, 2015; Cunnah, 2015; Van Jaarsveldt et al., 2015). Some literature recommends that institutions move away from individual adjustments to a system that takes into consideration the diverse needs of all students (Baglieri et al., 2011; Redpath, Kearney, Nicholl, Mulvenna, Wallace, & Martin, 2013; Jung 2003). These approaches all have merit but fail to comprehensively confront the concepts of inclusion for disabled people in higher education.

Inclusive education. Inclusive education is an educational approach and philosophy whereby all students are valued, have meaningful educational experiences, and are expected to participate and contribute to the school community. It is intended to pose a challenge to exclusionary practices. This philosophy conceives of diversity in a broad sense including differences in areas such as ability, gender, culture, and ethnicity. Inclusive education began in school settings geared for children and youth. It is only recently that inclusive education is being addressed in higher education settings (Morina, 2017). The question of 'what inclusive education looks like in post-secondary education' remains unanswered. Baglieri et al. (2011) suggests that inclusive education is about confronting discrimination and creating a society based on social justice and equity. But, how is a culture based on equity and social justice developed in an education system that is fundamentally exclusive and grounded in ableism? Is it even possible

that social justice and social model thinking are commensurate with truly inclusive education, or do we need a completely different type of thinking that gives us the space and allows us to imagine new paradigms for inclusion? Baglieri et al. (2011) make the claim that the term inclusion itself has become so associated with disability that its usage "reifies taken for granted assumptions that the 'natural' position of this group is one of dis-belonging" (p.2124). The question of how to reform exclusionary practices that are characteristic of a system that celebrates the normal student remains unanswered, and a fulsome exploration of what inclusive education is and how it might be useful is lacking. However, the literature does provide suggestions for moving toward a more inclusive system and the following paragraphs will explore these recommendations.

The overarching theme behind the recommendations and suggestions that are found throughout the literature is that post-secondary education needs to eliminate exclusionary practices and ultimately create a shift in educational culture that does not tolerate discrimination based on ability. Dolmage (2017) points out that "the programs and initiatives that are developed in the name of inclusion do not yet deliver tangible means of addressing the ableism inherent in higher education" (p. 26). Creating a cultural shift is a tremendous undertaking and methods for achieving the shift focus on training the faculty and staff to increase their knowledge and awareness of disability issues in a number of areas which are explored below. Increased knowledge is linked to changing practices. To a lesser degree, the idea of educating disabled students themselves is addressed through recommendations for supporting and training for self-advocacy. No researcher claimed that any single idea or practice would resolve all the concerns that continue to exist in current educational systems but ideas for incremental change were

offered. The following table contains the general themes of the recommendations that can promote a more inclusive post-secondary education system.

Table 1

Summary of Recommendations

Theme	Literature
Implementation of training, education, and increased awareness for all staff and faculty to facilitate an understanding of disability related issues, improve their attitudes towards disability, and to understand their legal obligations to accommodate students, and the policies that guide their practice	Bessant, 2012; Brandt, 2011; Coriale et.al., 2012; Couzens, 2015; Fletcher et.al, 2015; Fuller et.al., 2007; Garrison-Wade, 2012; Gibson, 2012; Holloway, 2001; Komesarof, 2005; Lombardi & Murray, 2011; Lopez Gavira & Morina, 2015; Madriaga, 2007; Opini, 2008; Ralph & Boxall, 2005; Rao, 2004; Riddell, 2009; Strnadova, 2015; Van Hees et.al., 2015; Van Jaarsveldt & Ndeya-Ndereya, 2015; Vickerman & Blundell, 2010;
The need for flexible teaching, learning, and assessment practices.	Bessant, 2012; Boyd, 2014; Couzens, 2015; Fuller et al., 2007; 2007; Vickerman & Blundell, 2010
Promotion of reflexive practice and personal accountability on the part of educators.	Gibson, 2012; Kannen, 2008; Kioko & Makoelle, 2014; Van Jaarsveldt & Ndeya-Ndereya, 2015
Development of a sense of shared responsibility and collaborative effort across stakeholders and disciplines. This calls for a holistic approach to inclusion that does not hold student/disability services wholly responsible for disabled students but shares it across campus stakeholders.	Barnes, 2007; Belch, 2011; Holloway, 2001; Redpath et al., 2013; Van Jaarsveldt et al., 2015
Institutional policies and practices that are inclusive, broadly understood and implemented.	Holloway, 2001; Jorgensen et al., 2005; Madriaga, 2007; Vickerman & Blundell, 2010
A shift in educational culture.	Annamma, 2012; Baglieri et al., 2011; Belch, 2011; Brandt, 2010; Coriale et al., 2012; Cunnah, 2015; Davidson & Henderson, 2010; Dolmage, 2017;Fletcher et.al., 2015; Jung, 2003; Goodley & Runswick-Cole, 2014; Garland-Thomson, 2005; Opini, 2008; Price, 2011; Titchkosky, 2011; Valle et al., 2011; Vickerman & Blundell, 2010

(table created by Earllene Roberts)

While these themes are relevant to promoting inclusion, the call for a complete shift in educational culture is most germane to the work done in this research project, therefore, the related literature is given some more consideration here.

Calling for a cultural shift in post-secondary education. While some researchers whose works are based on the social model call for the need for cultural change, their call is more in keeping with the idea of increasing knowledge of disability issues in order to create an educational environment that is more welcoming of disabled students (Schreuer & Sachs, 2014). A framework based on the social model that is considered a potential avenue for increasing this knowledge is Universal Design for Learning (UDL). Universal Design for Learning is one method that is touted as a possible solution for broadening the scope of accommodation for all students and creating a system where individual accommodations are not as prevalent a response to managing disability (Barbazon, 2015; Couzens et al., 2015; Dolmage, 2017; Lombardi & Murray, 2011; Schreuer & Sachs, 2014). Universal Design for Learning is an approach to education guided by seven design principles with the goal being accessibility for all people without need for specialized adaptation (Powell, 2014). The seven principles are equitable use, flexible use, simple and intuitive information, tolerance for error, low physical effort, and size and space adequate for use. When applied, these principles can create an education system that: 1) is accessible and fair; 2) is flexible in use, participation, and presentation; 3) is straightforward and consistent; 4) presents information explicitly and readily perceivable; 5) provides supportive learning environments; 6) minimizes or eliminates unnecessary physical effort or requirements; and, 7) offers learning spaces that accommodate both students and methods (Powell, 2014). These principles and design concepts may be mistakenly dismissed as idealistic goals but are useful as a starting point for guiding strategies aimed at restructuring physical space, curriculum,

and social, cultural, or attitudinal barriers in universities. UDL has the potential to shift educational culture by highlighting the possibility of accessibility for all. Improving accessibility is accomplished through a broadening of current individual based accessibility practices by anticipating and designing for a spectrum of different needs in all areas of the institution of education. This would mean seriously re-thinking pedagogies, physical environments, and all manner of administrative and support systems within the academy; this, in itself, would be a positive move towards change. As Dolmage (2017) points out "UD becomes a way to plan, to foresee, to imagine the future (p. 122). While UDL may provide a framework with which to re-think these systems to generally improve accessibility, reliance on a single approach focused on access to create an educational culture change is insufficient to address the underlying cause of the problem in the first place – an educational culture founded on ableism. Without scrutinizing and critiquing the beliefs and values that, as a society, we hold about disability and disabled people, change will be superficial. In contrast, I found that researchers who use a critical approach to think about education, inclusion, exclusion, and oppression provide helpful insights to the power dynamics that produce and re-produce ableism in the education system. It is at this level of understanding that disruption and the need for change of our fundamental belief systems can be understood as the basis for an authentic shift in culture that recognizes and celebrates the benefits and contributions of disabled people alongside those of their enabled peers.

Theoretical systems that use a critical approach to examining culture and society share in the engagement of purposefully and substantially disrupting the ostensibly normative by questioning power dynamics that uphold and perpetuate normative discourses of gender, sex, privilege, and ability. For example, queer studies disrupts a gender binary system (Butler, 1990; Weedon, 1997) that is seen as natural or normal and renders it problematic. Similarly, critical

disability studies unsettles the ideal self/body that is enabled and privileged through ableism (Annamma, 2012; Garland-Thomson, 2005; Goodly & Runswick-Cole, 2014; Price, 2011). A standard of normal is established through everyday acts and interactions imbued with power (Annama, 2012; Foucault,1990;). It is these power dynamics that produce and reproduce insidious acts of oppression that go unrecognized, unnamed, and unacknowledged. Particularly in a hierarchical social system such as a post-secondary institution, these dynamics act to silence and marginalize discourses of disability. One way that disability remains unnamed in higher education is that it is treated discretely and is individualized. Some authors have critiqued this treatment of disability as a unitary concept (Annama et al., 2012; Fuller et al., 2007; Jung 2003; Opini et al., 2008). These authors critique the management of disability as a single, discrete category of oppression to be addressed in post-secondary education without taking into consideration other factors such as race, ethnicity, gender, or sexual orientation. Individuals occupy a number of positions related to ability, gender, culture and power and how these operate together are not considered in most aspects of university life. Some literature is dedicated to exploring these phenomena in more complex and complete ways, but, on the whole, this is an area that needs further development. Furthermore, current literature does not explicitly examine the practices of institutions that perpetuate the normative ideal of the enabled student and relate those practices to the experiences and consequential meaning making of their disabled students. Current research is productive but not exhaustive which is why this project uses post-structural theory and critical discourse analysis to interrogate and expand this knowledge.

The role of neoliberalism in post-secondary education. The culture of post-secondary institutions is significantly influenced by the context of the predominant culture within which they reside (Bessant, 2012). In the process of examining an institution in Canada, it is relevant to

consider how the politics of neoliberalism impacts the dominant discourses found in higher education. Neoliberalism is a theory of political and economic practices that have, since the 1970s, informed or become the basis of the hegemonic discourse that pervades all aspects of western social and cultural domains (Harvey, 2005). The basic premise of this form of thought is that human well-being is advanced and best served through an institutional framework emphasizing individual freedom, free markets, free trade, private property rights, and entrepreneurialism (Harvey, 2005). This mode of thinking has become entrenched in every social institution of our society, including post-secondary education (Harvey, 2005) with clear examples of neoliberal processes at the University of British Columbia Okanagan noted by Whiteley, Aguiar & Marten (2008). Under this type of regime, post-secondary education is a system that creates citizens with commodified skill sets that are marketable. Students come to university to get an education aimed at enhancing their marketability, which, in turn, helps them achieve career success and earn a good wage. Success is measured by an individual's ability to be self-sufficient, contribute to markets, work hard, and achieve personal financial security. Neoliberal discourses legitimate abled productivity as normative and desirable (Sykes, 2009). In higher education, these discourses are reified when disabled students state that their pursuit of higher education is an economic necessity and express a desire to be normal, prove their worth, and avoid labels or categories marking them as different (Madriaga, 2007). These same types of discourses are evident in the participants of this research project and are explored more thoroughly in following chapters with an emphasis on disrupting concepts of enabled normalcy.

Personal and individual freedoms are highly valued in a neoliberal regime. An important aspect of personal freedom is personal accountability and each individual's responsibility for their own actions and well-being (Harvey, 2005). A good neoliberal subject has freedom of

choice, is independent, and self-regulating. Because personal freedom is understood to be valuable and desirable, how it may be used as a tool of exclusion or normalization is not questioned. Individual success or failure is interpreted as being a result of personal virtues or failings rather than potential systemic flaws or deficiencies. (see also - writing about student self-blame above) Problems with efficacy as a student tend to be seen as the disabled students' personal or situational problem rather than due to institutional or systemic issues and barriers (Bessant, 2012; Erevelles, 2011, Fletcher et al., 2015; Valle et al., 2011). To combat these personal failures, one suggestion is that students would benefit from learning better self-advocacy or self-empowerment skills (Coriale et. al., 2012; Couzens, 2015; Garrison-Wade, 2012; Halloway, 2001). This emphasis on self-reliance and personal responsibility for success perpetuates an ableist academic culture grounded in neoliberal normalcy, which are not sufficiently disrupted through discourses of social justice or through applications of social model thinking. Harvey (2005) notes that the values of individual freedom and social justice are not necessarily compatible, that neoliberal rhetoric makes it difficult to form a collective that can engage in political action to promote and achieve social justice without offending the desire for individual freedom and the expression of particular identities (p.41). Thus, the earlier noted treatment or management of disability as a unitary concept without consideration of the fluidity or multiplicity of subjectivities available for students to take up and/or reject sustains and reinforces the neoliberal regime within the post-secondary system. This 'divide and conquer' approach to dealing with all forms of intersecting oppressions within institutions motivates the call for collaboration amongst critcialist fields of study. It is suggested that this is an appropriate place to begin to form alliances and build relationships across disciplines and to explore possibilities for collaborative work. (Baglieri et al., 2011; Goodley & Runswick, 2014; Opini,

2008, Sykes, 2009, Valle et al., 2011). This research project draws upon critical social theories with the intent of evincing this type of collaboration and drawing in of a critical disability studies to the fold of more established criticalist fields.

Summary

To achieve the goal of examining university discursive practices and the relationship of students' taking up and resistance of the resulting subject positions it was important to have a good understanding of what current literature asserts about disabled student experiences in higher education. The literature revealed three main paradigms for thinking about disability and this chapter briefly discusses how the application of these the models influences researchers' interpretation and application of findings in their studies. While the three models seem to be quite distinct they overlap and inform one another in multiple and complex ways. Not only by their application as an analytical approach in research, but in the ways that students qualify for, access, and experience the supports or accommodations they require to participate in higher education. Much of the research explores the student experience, the barriers they continue to face and the facilitators that make their higher education experience go smoothly. Students describe social inclusion, professors' openness and willingness to be flexible and an educational environment that promotes diverse learning as positive facilitators to reduce barriers to education. They also identified barriers such as inaccessible physical spaces, attitudinal barriers from individual professors, bureaucratic processes which create further barriers, and social exclusion. Studies applying the social model tend to describe, explore, and postulate on these facilitators and barriers and come up with solutions to improve the existing system. Studies that problematize the current system and take a much more critical standpoint tend to use critical social theories to expose the effects of ableism within an institutional setting. Often, the

researchers identify a need for a complete cultural shift for the higher education system. This calls into question what it means to be a student, what is the role of academia, and how neo-liberalism informs the education system to signal those meanings. This research project undertakes a critical standpoint to untangle how disabled students are situated as social subjects within the complex web of university discursive formations. It adds to the conversation by locating the problem within the university and points out how, at its most basic level, the institution unquestioningly reproduces ableism through its discursive practices. Those practices maintain and support the marginalization of disabled students despite compliance with legislated access and best intentions for justice or inclusion.

Chapter Three: Methodology and Research Approach

Overview

The previous chapters describe the theoretical perspectives that are applied to thinking about disability as a social phenomenon and the ways in which these theoretical perspectives influence how research on disability in higher education is conducted, analyzed and interpreted. This chapter describes the research methodologies and strategies used in this project which studies disabled students' subject positions and the impacts of an ableist culture on student experience within a post-secondary institution. The initial methodological discussion presents critical discourse analysis as the method used for analysis of the data. Further, the rationale for choosing this method and the ways in which it supports the post-structural, critical perspective of this study is fully explored. The second section of this chapter describes in detail the actual methods employed to conduct the research and explores issues related to a qualitative study such as validation, evaluation, and positionality. This section explains how each of these issues are addressed in this study.

The objectives of this research are to:

1) identify how university practices (re)produce an ableist culture that privileges abled students and scholars that results in the unintended exclusion of disabled students in higher education;

2) understand how these university practices are taken up or resisted by disabled students to inform their student subject positions;

3) understand how participants' positioning as students (how they identify as a student, what meaning they make of student-hood and how this compares to their own sense of student-hood) impacts their participation in their education program and university life;

4) generate recommendations for changes to university practices that will create a more inclusive culture in post-secondary institutions.

The guiding questions for this research project are:

1. How are disabled students situated as social subjects within the complex web of university discursive formations?

    a. What types of student subject positions produced through university discursive practices are available to disabled students?

    b. How do disabled students take up, resist and/or occupy the subject positions produced within and through university discursive practices to give meaning to their university experiences?

To pursue these objectives and answer the questions posed, a qualitative research method was deemed appropriate due to: the inductive and interpretive nature of the analysis, the multiple sources of data, the focus on discovering the meaning given to student-hood by the participants, the engagement with post-structural, critical social theories, and the attempt to gain a holistic, multi-faceted, culturally based understanding of the problem at hand (Cresswell, 2007). This inquiry explores and exposes the power-imbued, discursive space of a university that produces particular student subject positions. To do so, the research questions are complex and as such demand a complex approach that incorporates contextual examinations that thoughtfully deconstructs taken for granted understandings and knowledge about disability in higher education. For these reasons, critical discourse analysis of university texts and disabled student interviews was the qualitative methodology selected (Baxter, 2003; Berg, 2009; Fairclough, 1992; Lazar, 2005; Phillips & Hardy, 2002; G. Rose, 2012; van Dijk, 1993; Weiss & Wodak, 2003; Wetherell, Taylor & Yates, 2001; Wodak & Meyer, 2009; Yates, Taylor & Wetherell,

2001). The following sections of this chapter will explore in depth the rationale for this particular methodology, followed by a detailed explanation of the methods used to conduct this study.

Rationale for Critical Discourse Analysis

Critical discourse analysis (CDA) is a method of analysis that is useful for exposing the connections between power, social relations, and discourse (van Dijk, 1996; Weiss & Wodak, 2003; Wodak & Meyer, 2009). Understanding these connections unmasks how certain discourses are privileged over others and how this privilege results in taken for granted, unequal social relations that are (re)constituted by and through the dominant discourse(s) of the day. This type of analysis is embedded in broader social, political, and/or cultural theories that inform the subsequent critique or analysis. CDA is not used in a vacuum, nor does the discourse analyst remain neutral; rather, the analyst takes a position from which s/he conducts the analysis (Phillips & Hardy, 2002; G. Rose, 2012; van Dijk, 1993; Weiss & Wodak, 2003; Wodak & Meyer, 2009). The commitment of CDA is to bring a critical perspective to the analysis of text, to focus on the role of discourse in the (re)production of power, and to address social issues (Baxter, 2003; van Dijk, 1993, Wodak & Meyer 2009). This study engages CDA for a critical analysis of disabled student subjectivities in the power laden and predominantly hierarchical social structure of a university. To do so the analytical process draws on poststructuralist feminism. This is one of many feminist perspectives connected through time and place by a shared focus on a woman-oriented standpoint (Baxter, 2003; Fawcett, 1998; Lazar, 2005; Weedon, 1997). This theoretical perspective is compatible with a critical approach to discourse analysis as it incorporates the following six key aspects:

1. Location of individuals in multiple and diverse identities

2. Performative nature of identities

3. Co-construction of identities

4. Context specific gender issues

5. Power is viewed as omnidirectional

6. Resistance to notions of stereotyped subject positions (Baxter, 2003; Lazar 2005).

While the focus of the analysis is on student identity, disabled student identity, and the discursive environment in which these subject positions are constituted, it is not my intention to reproduce the discrete treatment of oppressions in my analysis. The poststructural feminist position demands attention to issues of gender and other categories of oppression. This is not to suggest that by employing feminist thought in the analysis of disability that the experiences of disability and gender are interchangeable; the connection is much more complex. Gender and disability interact with each other or as Razack (1999) puts it, they can be considered interlocking systems of oppression. These positions are inextricably entwined and affect each other in diverse and multiple ways. For example, Connell (2005) writes,

> Because gender is a way of structuring social practice in general, not a special type of practice, it is unavoidably involved with other social structures. It is now common to say that gender 'intersects' – better, interacts – with race and class. We might add that it constantly interacts with nationality or position in the world order. (p.75)

This view of gender as structuring social practice and interacting with other positions, such as race or class, in the world order is expanded upon here to include interaction with disability. In this way, disability subjectivity is produced by and produces a social structure that is also ordered around gender and gender politics. A poststructuralist feminist perspective is one way of understanding the interactions of a multiplicity of social phenomena in a discursively constructed

environment that accommodates the interplay and interpretation of meanings in a manner that is not fixed or prescriptive. Lazar (2005) states, "[T]he poststructuralist 'quest' … is to create spaces to allow the voices of relatively silenced groups such as certain categories of women (or indeed the disabled, the gay community, ethnic minority groups) to be heard with ringing clarity" (pp. 36-37). The critical tools that this theoretical perspective provides to the analysis of a gendered social order can easily be applied to a similar analysis of other social phenomenon ordered by unequal power relations. Further, whether or not participants perceive their experiences to be affected by a gendered social order in the manner described by Connell (2005) above does not preclude a poststructuralist feminist discourse analysis.

In order to use discourse analysis as a methodology it is also useful to understand disability as constructed through discursive practices. By combining these theoretical and methodological approaches (discourse analysis and social constructivism), we are able to explore the ways in which disability subjectivities are constructed in particular contexts such as post-secondary institutions. The central tenets of social constructionism are compatible with a critical stance of discourse analysis. Four key assumptions of social constructionism as described by Burr (2015) are that:

1) we take a critical stance towards taken for granted knowledge or understandings of our world and ourselves;

2) we understand our world from a historically and culturally specific context;

3) our common understandings of the world are co-constructed through our everyday interactions and discourses;

4) our constructed understanding of the world is bound up with power; some constructions of the world sustain some social actions while excluding others.

When these assumptions are applied to disability, common sense ideas about disability are challenged and rendered problematic. For example, hegemonic notions of disability as tragic, deficient, or somehow "a diminished state of being human" (Campbell, 2009 p.5) are questioned. If disability is a diminished state, then what is the state of human-ness that is not diminished; is there an essential state of being fully human? In a dichotomous understanding of disability, a non-disabled state is valued and considered fully human. Social constructionism challenges this notion that an essential form of human-ness exists, which we all, through normative standards, should strive to achieve. The (re)constitution of hegemonic norms is accomplished through reiterative discursive practices (Butler, 1990) that occur between people in their everyday interactions. Through these practices, contemporary understandings of disability are created in a temporal and cultural context. Social interactions are imbued with power relations that, as stated above, sustain some social actions while excluding others. It is through networks of power relations (Foucault, 1990) that the valuing and privileging of able-ness, that which is generally perceived as being essentially human, is sustained. Connell (2005) writes that gender "is not fixed but is constructed in interaction" (p. 35). This study takes the approach that disability is similarly constructed through interaction and language, given that language constitutes a form of social interaction.

Language and discourse. Social constructionism (Burr, 2015), poststructuralism (Baxter, 2003; Weedon, 1997), and critical discourse analysis (Wodak & Meyer, 2009) view language as a site of construction for shared cultural meaning and action in our world. Everything that we think or talk about is constructed through language. From a poststructuralist perspective, nothing has an essential or independent existence outside of language (Burr, 2015). Language is a social phenomenon as it occurs between people and is the site where meaning is

established. It is through language that identities are built, sustained and contested, societies are ordered, and power is exercised (Burr, 2015). In the *Archaeology of Knowledge*, Foucault (2010) expands on the notion of language in his description of the productive nature of discourse. Foucault stated:

> …in analyzing discourses themselves, one sees the loosening of the embrace, … of words and things, and the emergence of a group of rules proper to discursive practice. These rules define not the dumb existence of a reality, nor the canonical use of a vocabulary, but the ordering of objects. 'Words and things' is the entirely serious title of a problem; it is the ironic title of a work that modifies its own form, displaces its own data, and reveals, at the end of the day, a quite different task. A task that consists of not …treating discourses as groups of signs (signifying elements referring to contents or representations) but as practices that systematically form the objects of which they speak. Of course, discourses are composed of signs; but what they do is more than use these signs to designate things. It is this more that renders them irreducible to the language (langue) and to speech. It is this 'more' that we must reveal and describe. (p.49)

This description of discourse helps us to understand that discourse is not simply a vehicle of representation that can be analyzed in isolation. When thought of in terms of and equated with discourse, language can be seen as powerfully productive. It is also important to note that discourses are intertextual; they are not meaningful on their own (Phillips & Hardy, 2002). There are multiple discourses available about a topic at any given time. They can be competing or supportive of one another but the importance of the multiplicity of discourses is that they affect and are affected by other discourses.

Discourse, power and, knowledge. Power is a central concept to CDA and analyzing the relation between power, social interaction and discourse is a main theme of this methodology. As such, it is important to have a clear understanding of the workings of power in discourse and social interaction. One approach to understanding power is from a Foucauldian perspective that sees power as a constitutive or productive element of society. The important point of understanding power from a Foucauldian perspective for CDA is that discourse is the vehicle by which power is produced, transmitted, and resisted. Discourse is seen as productive or constitutive of social relations and as discourses are everywhere, so too is power. From a Foucauldian perspective, power is not viewed as something that is imposed from the top echelons of society down; it is not exercised in a binary fashion from dominant groups onto dominated. Power is omnidirectional and "exercised from innumerable points, in the interplay of non-egalitarian and mobile relations" (Foucault, 1990 p. 94). This means too, that there are multiple points of resistance that take the form of multiple and competing discourses. Foucault (1990) maintained that some discourses are more powerful than others because they are socially located in powerful institutions and because they claim to be "discourses of truth" (p. 97). Discourses of truth are created and sustained by matrices of power relations that are linked and (re)produced by systems of dominant or hegemonic knowledge and regulatory practices (Foucault, 1990).

Discourse is the site where power and knowledge come together (Baxter, 2003; Foucault, 1990; Lazar, 2005; Mills, 1997; G. Rose 2012). Foucault (1990) points out "that power and knowledge directly imply one another" (p. 27). In seeing power and knowledge as imbricated, G. Rose (2012) notes that the social effects of powerful discourse depend on assumptions and claims that the knowledge they put forth is truth. Furthermore, knowledge that is seen as truth or

as common sense remains unquestioned. As part of a critical theoretical and emancipatory social science, critical discourse analysis scrutinizes knowledge that is seen as 'truth' or common sense (Phillips and Hardy, 2002) to reveal unquestioned, unequal power relations. As well, CDA is interested in analyzing discourse for its role in the relationships of difference and the effects of difference in hierarchical social structures (Weiss and Wodak, 2003). It is for these reasons that the research proposes to draw upon CDA from a poststructuralist perspective to scrutinize the taken for granted and unquestioned understanding of student-hood as being non-disabled and the perception of the disabled student as absent (Titchkosky, 2011). Titchkosky (2011) points out that disability appears in university life through a paradox: "the presence of disability almost always fades into an absence, and in many ways a dominant depiction of disability is that it should appear as if it is not present, not appearing"(p. 96). As the absence of disability in university life goes unnoticed, it further entrenches and perpetuates the idea that students are abled and results in the silencing and apparent absence of disabled students. An effect of this type of absence is the internalization of abled norms or ableism that then become routine, legitimate, and normal. This normalization results in the production of a silent or invisible type of power. As Foucault (1990) points out, "silence and secrecy are a shelter for power, anchoring its prohibitions" (p. 101). In this case, the absence anchors the prohibition of disability in higher education.

Foucault's point that specific types of discourses are historically and contextually located provides a point of departure for the interrogation of particular social phenomena. For example, as Foucault (1990) questions the regulation of sexual behaviour in a particular historical time frame, one can look at the university's discursive and power practices that frame the formation of student subject positions at or over a given period of time. Since the object of inquiry is the

discursive practices of the university and an understanding of power relations follows a Foucauldian perspective, the use of CDA is warranted for this research. This approach also addresses the CDA commitment to an emancipatory agenda (van Dijk, 1993) as it provides an understanding of the ways in which power can be refuted and resisted through discourse. Foucault (1990) writes, "Where there is power, there is resistance and… this resistance is never in a position of exteriority in relation to power" (p. 95). By gaining a better understanding of how, heretofore, unquestioned university discursive practices create hidden barriers for disabled students this research can identify and foster resistant, counter discursive practices.

Discourse and subjectivity. A feature of poststructural feminist and social constructionist thought that is of value to CDA is the idea that identity or subjectivity is constructed through discourse. Burr (2015) writes, "our identity is constructed out of the discourses culturally available to us, and which we draw upon in our communications with other people" (p. 106). The implications of this statement are manifold. It means that there are a multiplicity of identities or subject positions that any one person can occupy at any given time; that identities are co-constructed through social interaction with others; that the identities available to us are context specific; and, that resistance to dominant discourse and stereotypical subject positions is possible through the development of alternative discourses. As noted above, power relations are always at play in and through discourse and as such relational force will also have a significant bearing on any analysis of identity and positionality. As well, different subject positions will hold varying degrees of power and this dynamic is also dependent on context. For example, a graduate student in a professional program may have a lot of social capital on campus amongst their fellow students and in their university program but experiences limited power in a professional practicum setting. Their identity as a graduate student remains the same but the

degree to which they are able to exercise power varies. In this way, we are never always powerful or powerless; the subject position we occupy and the context of the position is always relevant. While subjects are produced through dominant discourses and regulatory practices (Foucault, 1990), Davies et al. note that poststructuralism opens transformative possibilities through language (2006):

- to see what the new questions posed by Foucault and other poststructuralist writers, along with their conceptual repertoires, enable us to see about what we are now; and

- in making visible what we are now, to develop strategies (conceptual and practical) for making a radical break with current forms of domination, for imagining a new kind of subject. (p. 90)

CDA provides a framework to explore and make visible the 'what we are now' aspect of this type of research project. As a poststructuralist project, the research must work from within the language/discourse that produces the student subjectivities in order to critique it or to begin a transformative process. CDA offers this opportunity to work from within the language, analyze the power relations and dominant discourses that shape student subjectivities. This is the starting place to imagining different disability discourse and changing dominant regulatory practices.

The role of institutions. Since the research has occurred within a university setting, the role of institutions in the context of subject formation is worth exploring. To prepare for this research I looked to Foucault's *Discipline and Punish* (1995), for a theoretical grounding in institutional power and its effects on subjects. Foucault claims that subjection is obtained through the dispersion of disciplining discourses through institutional technologies and apparatuses. These technologies and apparatuses are the forms of power/knowledge that

constitute the institution and shape the ways in which the institution's practices bring about the effects of subjection (Hall, 2001; G. Rose, 2012). The dispersion of power through disciplining discourses and subjection are closely linked and described by the term 'governmentality' (N. Rose, 2007). These techniques of regulation are implicated in the process of subject formation and through this process also apply to the materiality of the body. This process influences how we understand and give meaning to our bodies. Foucault (1990) states, "[T]he body becomes a useful force only if it is both a productive body and a subjected body" (p. 26). In the case of the disabled body and the dominant discourses of deficit and tragedy that inscribe it, a disabled body in varying contexts is not considered 'productive'. For example, success in the university setting relies on particular kinds of productivity that have been evaluated as attainable by typical (non-disabled) students. Abled students are perceived to rightfully belong on a university campus; their participation in university life is seen as natural and is not questioned. But as Titchkosky (2011) asserts, "as partial participants, disabled students are typified as visitors who have overstayed their welcome, rather than as desired or necessary members" (p. 80). The regulatory practices, dominant and disciplining institutional discourses about student-hood can create an unwelcoming and even a hostile space for disabled university students. For these reasons, this research uses a critical approach in its aim to uncover the ways in which university discourses shape or influence disabled student subjectivities and what that means for their participation and success in higher education.

The use of a critical stance means questioning or critiquing those dominant, disciplining discursive practices of governmentality. In fact, Foucault (2006) defined critique as the "art of not being governed so much" (p.384). He saw that:

The focus of critique is essentially the cluster of relations that bind …power, truth and the

subject. And if governmentalization is really this movement concerned with subjugating

individuals in the very reality of social practice by mechanisms of power that appeal to a

truth, I will say that critique is the movement through which the subject gives itself the

right to question truth concerning its power effects and to question power about its

discourses of truth. Critique will be the art of voluntary in servitude of reflective

indocility. The essential function of critique would be that of desubjectification in the

game of what one could call, in a word, the politics of truth. (p.386)

Thus, the research uses CDA to critique and make visible the ways in which institutional

technologies and apparatuses of the university function to govern student subjects and to inquire

about the effects of these regulating practices on students.

Methods: Approach to the Research

Critical discourse analysis is an interpretive exercise and there are many different ways to

interpret a text or set of texts (Wetherell, Taylor, & Yates, 2001). This type of analysis does not

claim to be revealing an undisputable truth but its aim is to expose different ways of

understanding a social phenomenon that may be masked by being understood as the natural order

of things or to be a matter of common sense (G. Rose, 2012; van Dijk, 1993). As indicated

above, the analysis is informed by poststructural theories such as critical disability studies, queer

theory, crip theory (in many ways a melding of critical disability and queer theories), and

poststructural feminist theory. From these perspectives, an understanding of disability is based,

not on the hegemonic discourses of disability as tragedy, deviance or conversely brave

hero/superstar, rather, as one form of difference in a broad spectrum of human heterogeneity.

The theoretical concepts and ideas presented above come together to inform and frame the methodology of this research: a critical discourse analysis aimed at the discursive level. The university discourses are expressed and enacted through texts which then become the unit of analysis. The texts that are examined in this research include university documentation such as website, policy, and strategic plan as well as 'performed text' as created through interviews with participants and the spatial configuration of the university. A text can be transcripts of recorded conversations, written documents, photographs, artwork, websites, or artifacts to name but a few examples. A single text on its own is not meaningful but the interconnectedness of texts, the discourses they draw upon, the context of the production and consumption of the text is what gives the text its meaning and creates the site of analysis (Phillips & Hardy 2002).

The textual material was examined for evidence of ableist practices at the university that are continually (re)produced. Further, this study looks for discourses that compete with and/or supplement an ableist discursive space. A neoliberal capitalist discourse is also considered for the ways in which it interacts with other university discourses. The following sections will address the practical ways in which this inquiry was approached.

The Research Sample and Data Collection. This inquiry focuses on a campus of one western Canadian public university, the University of British Columbia Okanagan (UBCO). This university is located in the interior region of the province of British Columbia, in the medium sized city of Kelowna. During the sampling phase of this research there were 8334 students enrolled in this university with 159 students registered with the Disability Resource Centre. This particular university and campus was chosen because I am familiar with its policies and practices with regard to supporting and accommodating disabled students. Also, UBC considers itself one of the world's leading universities (Aspire, 2013) and as such, perhaps representative of what

similarly ranking universities might offer. However, UBCO was not chosen because of any perceived unique quality in the way it supports students; there was no indication that this university did any better or worse a job of including disabled students on their campus than any other public university in Canada. In fact, its mediocrity or lack of standing out in this regard added to its allure as a site for the inquiry with the hope that the analysis can be seen as applicable to other publicly-funded universities in Canada, or at least provide an acceptable point of departure for further examination at other universities.

The targets of the inquiry were twofold. The first target was the institution itself, represented by the three university texts that were analyzed to unravel the discourses at work within the institution. Secondly, six self-identified disabled students were interviewed to uncover the discourses that they take up and/or resist to give meaning to their own student experiences. Two distinct sets of data were collected and analyzed:

1. Existing university texts and,

2. Interviews with disabled students.

The first set of data, university texts, were accessed through the public university website. To determine which specific texts would be analyzed, it was important to understand which documents or resources others considered representative of the university. The following steps were taken to figure this out: examining the UBC Okanagan Academic Calendar, looking at the websites of different faculties, schools, and departments that constitute sections of the larger UBCO website, and informal discussions with the research supervisor, various staff, and students at the university. After much deliberation and discussion with the research supervisor I chose the following three texts which were also approved by the supervisory committee. Policy 73: Academic Accommodations for Students with Disabilities was the first text chosen as it

specifically addresses disabled students and is directly relevant to these students and this research. Place and Promise: The UBC Plan was chosen for the broad scope it offered as a mandate for the strategic plan of the university for a 10-year period. This document could shed some light on which ideas and plans were given priority from a high-level administrative perspective. The virtual tour Okanagan campus was chosen for how it gave a visual and a discursive representation of the Okanagan campus that could be visited by the general public, people considering this university for their or their family members' education, and newly admitted students. This particular text offered a look at how the campus presented itself to the public for a first impression. In the process of looking at these three texts a fourth textual analysis emerged – physical space on campus that is inaccessible and/or configured in such a was as to promote ableism. Analysis of space is also given consideration in the analysis.

The second set of data collected were qualitative interviews with six disabled students. Student participation was on a volunteer basis; there was no remuneration for participation. Students were recruited to the study in three ways.

1. The UBC Disability Resource Centre (DRC) had a database of disabled students at UBC Okanagan Campus. They sent an email with the recruitment letter attached sent to all students registered with the DRC. The investigators did not know to how many or to whom the email was sent. Students who were interested in participating contacted me directly.

2. Flyers with information about the study, an invitation to participate, and contact information for the researcher were posted in public spaces on the university campus.

3. Word-of-mouth (snowball) strategies were engaged. Students who participated in the study were asked to let others know about the study if they felt comfortable to do so.

The following were the criteria of selection for student volunteers. Those who could be interviewed must:

- be 19 years of age or older;

- be a registered student and attending the university in question; and,

- self-identify as or occupy the subject position of disabled.

Data in the form of transcripts from student interviews were analyzed. Interviews were conducted one-to-one and in person by me. The interviews took place in a private office on the campus. The students were asked to sign a consent form (see appendix D) and were given an information sheet (see appendix E) regarding: confidentiality and processes of maintaining participant confidentiality, the research purpose and process, how the information they provided was to be analyzed and used, how the completed study and its results were to be disseminated, and how information gathered would be stored and for how long before it is destroyed. The interviews were digitally recorded and transcribed afterwards. Transcription of the interviews from audio to a print was done by paid transcribers and checked for accuracy by me. The interviews were conducted in a semi-structured format with open-ended questioning and took 60-90 minutes each. The following questions were used to start and guide the conversation:

1. Can you tell me a story about what it is like to be a disabled student at this university?

2. Can you tell me a story about a time when disability became an issue?

   a. Are there any other stories you would like to share?

3. What do you think the university understands about disability? Has there been a particular situation where that became apparent to you?

4. Can you tell me a story about how disabled students perceived and dealt with at the university?

5. What does it mean to you to be a disabled university student?

6. Temporal – if appropriate – has your experience as a disabled student changed over time?

7. Have you had different kinds of experiences in different settings in the university? Can you tell me about those and how they differ? Why do you think these experiences are so different? Or, do you find that you are treated differently in different spaces of the university?

The approach to the interview process was informal and the aim was for it to be a conversation between the participants and me, the interviewer. Therefore, the questions were used as a conversation guide, as the conversation unfolded more questions spontaneously and naturally occurred as is common in qualitative research (Richards & Morse, 2013). Analysis of the transcripts was started and completed after all of the interviews were done. Regardless of the specific questions covered, the goal of the interviews was to uncover the discourses that disabled students take up and/or resist to occupy certain subject positions and make meaning of their experiences.

Some consideration was given to the number participants and if there should be a minimum or maximum number with regard to validity. In view of the methodological approach and the poststructural theoretical underpinnings of critical discourse analysis, it was decided that even if just one disabled student came forward the knowledge and information shared would be worthwhile. Qualitative research that employs poststructural theories allows that there are multiple ways of knowing, making meaning, and interpreting and that these are specifically situated in a historical, cultural and social context. As such there is no single objective truth to be discovered. As Hole (2004) points out, "an inquiry with even one participant provides insight and critical understanding of the phenomenon being studied" (p. 41).

Data Analysis. It has been noted by others that the actual processes or methods of 'doing' CDA, particularly from a Foucauldian, post-structural perspective (Berg, 2009), are not well documented (Baxter, 2003; Berg, 2009; Phillips & Hardy, 2002; Price, 2011; G. Rose, 2012, Wetherell, Taylor, & Yates, 2001). As Berg (2009) points out, this lack of step-by-step guidance can be partly attributed to the fact that "discourse analysis itself operates outside hegemonic discourses of 'research method', ….that it takes some time to learn, and that it is always fraught with the problem it seeks to define" (p220). These words bore out as, from the very beginning stages of analysis, the process was a messy journey in learning, contextualizing, reflexivity, re-grouping, re-thinking, and refining until the productive power of the discourse and what it was producing became apparent. To begin the process, an exploration of how to engage in data analysis was undertaken. In the absence of clear guidelines other means were considered. For example, G. Rose (2012) identified seven strategies for interpretation of "the rhetorical organization of discourse" (p. 220). They were:

- looking at your sources with fresh eyes;

- immersing yourself in your sources;

- identifying key themes in your sources;

- examining their effects of truth;

- paying attention to their complexity and contradictions;

- looking for the invisible as well as the visible;

- paying attention to details.

Keeping these ideas in mind, the data was read and re-read multiple times as understanding and ideas about what the data said emerged over time. Further, consideration was given to the university context, my own positioning, and keeping at the forefront of the analysis the idea of

the productive power of discourse. Throughout the process I was acutely aware that my own biases and unintended biases toward ableism were always at play. I was constantly checking as I understood that my own thought processes and discourses were charged with the very thing that I was trying to understand, define, and expose. The analysis was complex, time consuming, and offered multiple ways of seeing the emerging ideas. The non-linear aspects of the analysis meant that there was much back and forth between the different sets of texts and the literature as the ideas and findings emerged.

NVivo software was used to organize and code the data. Coding is a way to analyze the textual material that "enables the data to be organized in such a way that patterns, commonalities, relationships, correspondences or even disjunctures are identified and brought out for scrutiny" (Cope, 2005, p. 226). For this project, coding was used to examine and organize the data to uncover and think about the ideas and concepts that were being produced and re-produced through the discourses at work in the institutional context. In particular the focus was on uncovering what and how the discourses reiterated and reinforced the power relations that constituted subjectivities of student-hood. While coding and analysis of the data occurred, a more in-depth literature review was undertaken. This review later became the basis for Chapter Two of this dissertation. Coding and analysis were fully completed after the literature review was written. In this way, the literature review, the data, and the analysis informed one another over time.

Transcription of the interviews occurred after each interview. Initially they were transcribed verbatim. Later in the coding process the transcripts were 'cleaned up' removing verbal prompts to continue talking like - "okay, right, yes," and other noises that were not relevant to the analysis. To start the analysis of the interviews there was a read through of each

transcript in hard copy. These hard copies were marked up searching for common ideas, concepts, and messages that the participants discussed in their interviews. After careful reading and re-reading to see what the discourses were doing, I identified four major concepts or questions to think about in the next reading of the transcripts. The four concepts I identified were 1) positioning of self, 2) relationality, 3) performativity, and 4) discourse. The first concept looked at how the participants positioned themselves or talked about themselves. The second searched for indications of how the participants positioned themselves in relation to others, to the university, and to power. The third, performativity, looked at the participants descriptions of how they performed or acted within and through their descriptions of their experiences. The final concept, discourse, looked at what exactly was said and what meanings were being produced in the discourse. These ideas and concepts were not discrete, they interacted and supported one another, they bled into each other, and they gave meaning to each other.

Next, the pages of each transcript were affixed to a larger sheet of paper with four columns for those major concepts. Sections were highlighted in colour and notes were made in the columns inside the sections. This was used to begin the creation of a coding matrix. Once this process was begun and a coding framework began to emerge, qualitative data analysis software was engaged. NVivo was used to complete the coding. The transcripts were reviewed and coded many times. During the coding process, literature pertaining to disabled students in higher education was reviewed and the selected university texts were also examined. As new thoughts or ideas emerged, codes were adapted, and all of the texts were re-read, re-coded, and contemplated anew.

Ethical Considerations

UBC Behavioural Research Ethics Board approval was sought and given before participant recruitment began. All processes regarding disclosure of information about the purpose of the research to the participants, recruitment practices, consent, confidentiality and storage of data met the guidelines for BREB approval. For example, participants were:

- fully informed about the purpose of the research both verbally and in writing;

- asked to sign a Consent Form (see appendix A) at the start of the interview time and prior to any conversation taking place;

- not be interviewed before consent is provided;

- informed both verbally and in writing of potential risks of participating in the research, processes for accessing follow up support, processes for making complaints about the research, and how and for how long the data will be stored, (see appendix A).

Thought was given to ways in which the confidentiality and anonymity of the participants could be guarded. The research occurred within a small campus community where I was aware that some disabled students feared negative repercussions when disclosing their disability to their professors or faculties. It was important to ensure that the research did not accidentally 'out' any of the participants to the general campus community. For this reason, minimal demographics about the participants were gathered and any of this information shared in the reporting of the findings is done carefully and in non-identifying ways.

Issues of Validation and Evaluation. There are multiple perspectives on validity in the literature on qualitative research. These perspectives and their proponents are varied and often relate to the type of qualitative research methods and methodologies engaged (Cresswell, 2007). For this research project and for evaluative purposes, the concept of validity is treated not as a
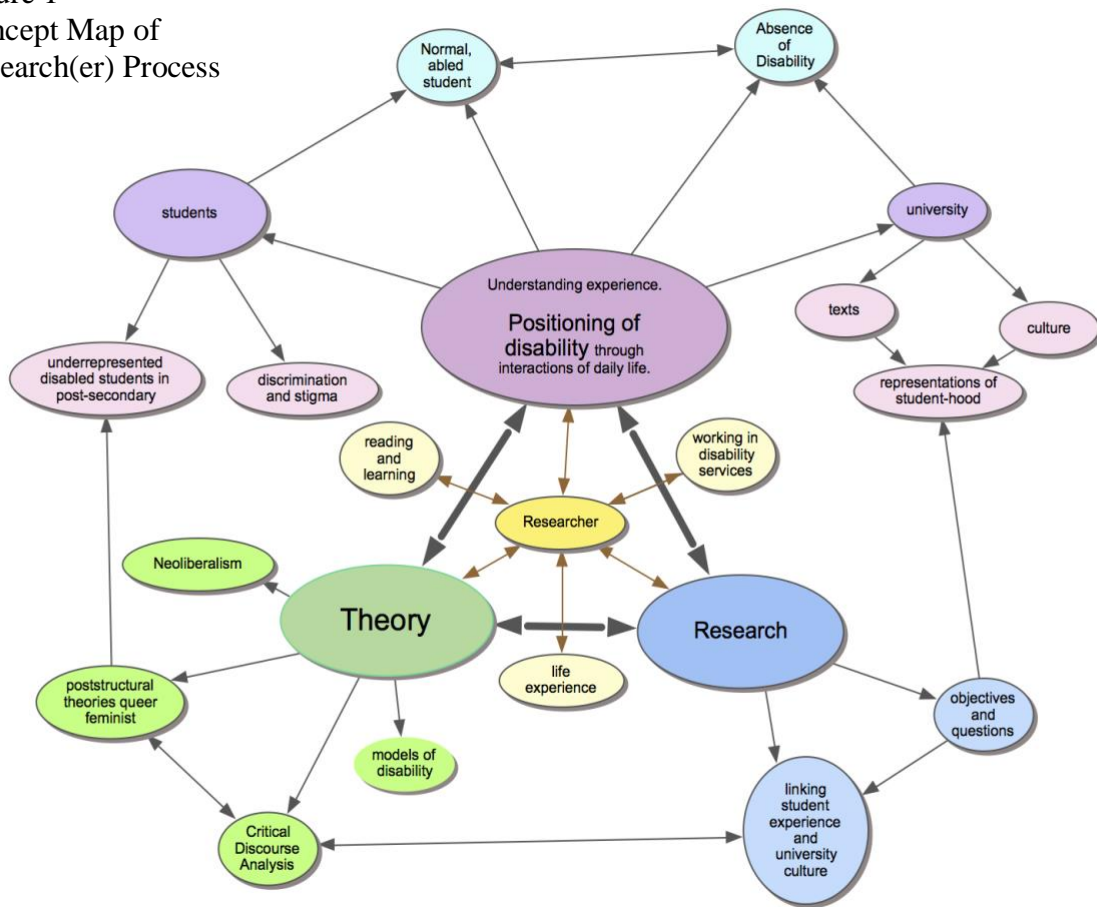
measure of 'truth', as this would be counterintuitive to the nature of this project informed by poststructural ideas. Rather, validity is a way of measuring or evaluating whether or not the research methods, methodology, research questions, and theoretical perspectives align in such a way that the explanations offered are meaningfully supported (Mason, 2002). Further, underlying every aspect of the research process is the researcher's own worldview, experience, and interpretation which adds complexity to the project and its evaluation. It may seem straightforward to think of the different aspects of the research process aligning in a linear fashion but this would be far too simple an understanding. A more complex explanation is offered by Richardson and St. Pierre (as cited in Cresswell, 2007, p. 207), who use the imagery of a crystal for a postmodern perspective on validation.

> I propose that the central imaginary for "validation" for postmodern texts is not the triangle – a rigid, fixed, two dimensional object. Rather the central imaginary is the crystal, which combines symmetry and substance with an infinite variety of shapes, substances, transmutations, multidimensionalities, and angles of approach. Crystals grow, change, and are altered, but they are not amorphous. Crystals are prisms that reflect externalities and refract within themselves, creating different colors, patterns, and arrays casting off in different directions. What we see depends on our angle of response – not triangulation but rather crystallization. (p. 963)

The concept map below is a simple diagram to portray the idea that all components of this research project are related, impact each other, and are influenced by, and influence, the researcher. In the chapters and sections above, the detailed explanations for the choices of theoretical perspectives and methodological approaches are given as they relate to the research objectives and questions. In the proceeding chapter, these same choices are applied in the

analysis of the data. The progression of this research process started with learning about and applying the poststructural theoretical perspectives to the phenomenon of disability and this process occurred over a period of time. Through praxis, my understanding of the positioning of disability via these theories crystallized continuously. The theory itself is re-visited time and again as knowledge and awareness unfolds. At different times, in different contexts, varying pieces of the research puzzle crystallized, changed, or materialized. The process itself is not static, or linear as different parts of the crystal come into being, into focus, or are re-visited to have impact on the whole picture. It is this progressive evolution of the research process that comes to mind when thinking about the crystal imaginary of validity. Further, it was my goal to maintain the integrity of a poststructural stance from the beginning of the process through to the end, and beyond.

Figure 1
Concept Map of
Research(er) Process

(Figure 1 created by Earllene Roberts)

Prolonged engagement is another measure of validation used in this research project. For example, I have been involved in disability services in higher education since 2010 and bring a rich understanding of the culture of post-secondary education and disability in this context through experience, practice, and immersion. Based on multiple interactions over a number of years with disabled students and the larger campus community I am confident that the student narratives presented in this project are not unique or atypical of disabled students' experiences in university. Further, through immersion in the culture of an academic institution I am also confident that the university texts chosen for analysis in this project offer a typical representation of disability in higher education. I believe that both sets of data used for this project provide a

realistic glimpse into the current culture of higher education and what it means for disabled students.

This research analyzed, separately and together, two sets of data, disabled students' interviews and university texts, to demonstrate the discursive culture of the university and what it means for disabled students operating in this culture. This approach is reflective of the type of crystallization described above. For example, it demonstrates that the phenomenon is more than one dimensional, that I understand the complexity of the issue at hand, and that research questions were approached from different angles (Mason, 2002).

From the stage of developing the proposal for this project, consideration has been given to the ways in which the research might be evaluated. This has provided a checkpoint by which to evaluate throughout the process that the research practices are consistent. For example, consideration has been given to the following points as the research developed:

- Is the connection between the discourses, texts and context demonstrated?

- Is the analysis operating at a discursive level?

- Are the questions posed by this inquiry answered?

- Does the research contribute to the ongoing scholarly dialogue around disability?

- What are some other interpretations?

Taken together, these practices devise the major methods that were used to maintain the integrity and consistency of the research process; to accomplish what was intended from the outset.

Researcher positionality. Critical discourse analysis, as a qualitative research method that is interpretive, takes into consideration the positioning of the researcher(s). Through interpretation, the analyst produces and is produced by discourse. As such, it is incumbent upon the analyst to be clear about her own position with regard to the phenomenon being analyzed and

to recognize the play of power, truth and knowledge in her own analysis. To position myself, I am an abled, mature student, white, middle-class, queer female who has approached disability as a field of study and work. My experience as an abled university student, sessional instructor, and university administrator in disability services offers a position of privilege from which I ask, "In what ways have I colluded in perpetuating inequality, with or without explicit awareness as I have navigated the university as a student, a staff member, and an instructor". Consideration was given to these thoughts during the planning and set up of the project as well as during the data collection and data analysis processes. For example, before starting the interviews, I reflected on the differences in how I am situated as a student doing the research compared to the students I interviewed. As an abled graduate student who has also worked and taught at the university and is conducting the research, I could be seen as being authoritative in some way or having a higher status at the university than the students being interviewed. Being an 'interviewer' itself is a subject position which draws upon specific sets of discursive formations which can be perceived as authoritative, in control, knowledgeable. The same can be said about being an 'interviewee' or participant in a research study. Another consideration that could be seen as an advantage or a limitation is that students who may know me from previous contexts at the university might be worried that the information that they share could make its way to university staff or faculty and that they cannot be honest as a result. I hope that my years of experience with building rapport in interview situations helped to address these issues by exploring any concerns that students may have had at the beginning of the interview and to reinforce the interview process as an informal conversation without ignoring the very real context in which the conversation is taking place. At the time of the interviews, none of the interviewees expressed any concerns about the process or the fact that I was the interviewer.

Chapter Summary

This chapter provides a rationale for the use of critical discourse analysis as a methodology for this research project. It describes the relationship between this methodology and the analysis of power, social relations, and discourse. This type of analysis is critical to the objectives of the project to understand how disabled students are situated as social subjects within the complex web of university discursive formations and ultimately, what does this mean for their participation and success in higher education. The second section of this chapter provides a detailed description of the approaches used in the planning and implementation of this project. Finally, there is a discussion about the issues of validation, evaluation, and positionality as they relate to this particular project. This chapter demonstrates the alignment between the theoretical perspectives, methodologies, and methods chosen for this research.

<center>**Chapter Four: Findings and Discussion**</center>

Overview

The purpose of this study is to critically examine how the ableist culture of a post-secondary institution impacts the uptake, resistance, and/or occupation of the subject positions that give meaning to disabled students' university experience. Specifically, the aim is to demonstrate the link between the subtle and taken for granted university cultural processes that produce and reproduce ableism with students' understanding and performativity of student-hood. This research contributes to the scholarly discussion about disabled students in higher education by probing and questioning the entrenched cultural practices of a post-secondary education. Previous research (see chapter two) has certainly looked at the policies and practices of institutions and explored disabled student experiences of facilitators and barriers to their education; however, this research examines the ways in which unquestioned university discursive practices impact student experiences and demonstrates how campus culture and student experience interlock to re/produce ableism. I question, how, while the university intends non-discrimination and fair treatment for disabled students (Policy 73), the negative outcomes for students remain relatively unchanged. Disabled people continue to be under-represented in post-secondary education in Canada (Statistics Canada, 2017) and those who attend continue to experience discrimination and exclusion.

This chapter reports on the main findings that emerged from the analysis of the data described in the previous chapter. This discussion demonstrates the idea that the subject positions available to disabled students and the meanings attached to these positions are shaped by ableism. As a result, the possibilities of disabled student-hood seem restricted, particularly to

finding ways of fitting in and being seen as a 'normal' student. The normate subject position (Garland-Thomson, 1997) is more powerful than a disabled subject position as is demonstrated in the ways that people attempt to fit what they conceive of as normal. As Garland-Thomson (1997) points out, "testimony to the power of the normate subject position is that people often try to fit its description in the same way Cinderella's stepsisters attempted to squeeze their feet into her glass slipper" (p. 8). In turn, this positioning reinforces a culture of normalcy in a university system that is already ambivalent towards disability. Thus, disabled students are left to navigate a university system that is abled normative while they reconcile their own personal equivocations about disability and their student identity.

Two major findings emerged in both sets of data. The absence of the representation of disability in university life and the perpetuation of the idea of a 'normal' student who is abled. These two concepts condition and support one another through entrenched ableism and, in turn, reinforce the assumption that 'abled' is the natural positioning of student. In the process of laying out the findings and the ensuing discussion, it is tempting to approach each of these concepts as discrete. It is sometimes difficult to tease out, particularly in the student transcripts, those narratives that point to enactments of absence and those that point to enactments of normalcy because of the close relationship of these concepts. The linear nature of the writing process makes it difficult to fully capture the ways that cultural phenomena interact to produce a significant effect. The idea that the whole is greater than the sum of its parts holds true in the analysis of the data in this chapter and the challenge of reflecting this in the writing is evident as the concepts and ideas blurr. This blurring is testimony to the complexity of the concepts and the difficulty of teasing out single or discrete elements that create the social and cultural environment within which we operate. The absence of representation of disability was markedly

evident in the university texts that were examined. This is demonstrated later in the chapter as we see that for the most part, disability doesn't seem to exist except in a specific policy created to guide the university's management of disabled students. This absence is produced by and reproduces the conditions of ableism that inform students' understanding of what it means to be a university student. This understanding is based on the ideal of a 'normal' student who is always abled. The analysis of these texts unpacks and demonstrates how the hegemony of ableism shapes the university experience for all students and, by doing so, perpetuates conditions of discrimination and exclusion for disabled students.

This chapter first explores the concept of absence of disability from the student perspectives and then presents the findings of the analysis of the four university texts chosen for this project. The final section looks at the concept of normalcy in university life and the ways in which the absence of disability creates and supports an expectation of normalcy in student-hood. Finally, it sums up the ways in which these phenomena interact to offer particular kinds of subject positions for disabled students to take up and/or resist.

The Absence of Disability in University Life

Student perspectives. As discussed in the literature review, the absence of reference to disability and the invisibility of disabled people in higher education creates a culture of exclusion that remains unquestioned due to what Titchkosky (2011) asserts is the perception that disabled people are "human limit without possibility" (p.82). This culture is not exclusive to higher education and can be found in all forms of cultural representation. For example, in his examination of the representation of disabled people in modern photography, David Hevey (2013) found that the use of images of disabled people continuously constructs them "as

outsiders admitted into culture as symbols of fear or pity" (p.433). Alternatively, he found that images of disabled people were entirely absent from most public photographic genres except charity advertising, health service magazines, or educational magazines that position disabled people as needy, passive recipients of care or services. Hevey maintained that this was due to what he calls the "structured absence of disabled people" which occurs because they are "read as socially dead and not having a role to play" (p.433). Further, this social absence creates a void in which disability and impairment are not connected to actual people so that the meaning attached to disability is made by the observers. What it means to be disabled is interpreted by non-disabled people based on its apparent absence, the dominance of the normate (Garland-Thomson, 1997), and the ubiquitous ableist ideology that frames disability as tragic, needy, and worthless.

The findings of my research underscores and unveils this interpretive process at work. For example, participants spoke about experiences of being asked why they need an accommodation since they don't appear to be disabled. Participants described instructors not knowing how to respond to their requests for accommodations, instructors expressing indifference or confusion regarding their disability, and instructors singling disabled students out in class to comment on their different needs because of their disability. Moreover, participants talked about the difficulty of disclosing to some or all of their professors, the negative reception they sometimes received, and how this translated to a sense of changed perception of them as a capable student. Participants also noted that there was a lack of awareness that disabled students exist on campus or that the Disability Resource Centre exists. Further, participants spoke of a desire to have dedicated spaces on campus that took their needs into consideration and that

having a community would help combat feelings of isolation and provide mutual support from others with similar university or life experiences

This absence of disability in higher education contributes to a shared understanding that what it means to be a student is to be abled (normal). This understanding reinforces the culture of normalcy that creates an environment in which disabled students experience difficulties with disclosure, negative or inappropriate reactions from instructors, lack of appropriate and/or comfortable space, and challenges in finding a sense of belonging with similar peers. Every participant had similar stories to share and the following narratives are excerpts from student interviews that highlight these types of experiences.

With regards to disclosure participant four spoke about feeling intimidated to disclose, carefully choosing instructors with whom they trusted their disability status information, and supporting other disabled students to feel comfortable with disclosure:

> I will ask for particular things from particular profs and I won't for others because I'm intimidated or whatever. And, you know, there (are) students with learning disabilities ….I hate to generalize or speak for others' experiences, but we've had negative experiences with teachers and that relationship. So, a lot of them don't feel comfortable asking these teachers for help. Or, they don't even feel comfortable admitting they have these kinds of problems; so, I've gone with other students and just sat there and provide support for them to talk to a teacher.

Participant three shared having feelings of humiliation due to the requirement of discussing their disability with all of their professors in order to access academic accommodations and the negative repercussions that existed after disclosure.

I found out that I had to, as part of my responsibility as a person with learning

disabilities, that I had to go to each one of my professors individually and introduce

myself as a person with disability who is accessing DRC ...support from DRC. And if I

didn't do that I couldn't access the support that I needed in order to study. So, I felt well,

one, [it] was almost like my personal choice was taken away. If I could have chosen not

to introduce myself to my professors in that fashion, I would have chosen not to because

it just set up a whole bunch more barriers with particular professors. And it created a

particular perspective of me from the professor's point of view. And also, I had to

introduce my disability before me. And it was absolutely humiliating. I didn't have to do

that once or twice. I had to do that with every professor with every single course I've had

to take at the university.

Participant five also spoke about an experience of disclosure that was uncomfortable and

demonstrated the lack of awareness of disability in the university context.

It was funny, in first semester when I handed the form to one of my profs somebody

asked me what it was. I told them, "I write my exams at the Disability Resources Centre.

He takes a look at me and he goes, "You don't look disabled." I say, "It's in here."

[points to head].

Moreover, this participant described how there is limited knowledge of the DRC within the

campus community.

But yeah, … most people don't know that it (DRC) exists. Most people don't know what

it is; so, it's not a very public thing. There isn't a very public view of the DRC amongst

the student body. … Actually, I would venture to say that most people don't know it

exists.

Acts of disclosure became uncomfortable and stressful for participants when they encountered instructors or peers who didn't expect it or know how to respond. Avoiding having to disclose and selective disclosure were preferable in order to avoid responses such as participant two described.

> **P2**: I've just found, not that they don't really care, because whenever I give them my forms so that I can write my tests, they sign it but I just feel like they don't really have that much interest in it. So, they'll sign the forms. You have to give them a letter informing them that you are disabled and usually I find that they don't know what to do with it or really [don't] care when I give it to them. So, I get the sense that "Okay, the disability centre will take care of you" like they don't really have to.
>
> **I**: So, disinterest?
>
> **P2**: Definitely, disinterest. Not their responsibility. They don't need to do anything. I've found that with most professors.

In the above situation the student described professors who were indifferent to the information about their accommodations and lacked a sense of responsibility towards the student. It is challenging for instructors to respond appropriately in a situation that seems foreign to them. Being faced with a disabled student in an environment and from a cultural perspective that expects its students to be abled can be disconcerting. A response of indifference, disbelief, or resistance is not surprising in this situation. Every participant in this study shared these types of situations happening to them multiple times. This participant went on to talk about how they felt that certain professors don't 'get it', don't understand about disability:

> I kind of feel like the DRC would obviously understand it (being a disabled student) more because they work with everyone with disabilities. I feel like they might have that sense

but I kind of feel like the (other) staff don't really have it. I've had one professor be really negative towards me writing my tests in a different location than in the class. I feel like they don't get that I can get everything done, it just has to be a different way. They don't really understand that as much. Certain profs. Some do, but some don't.

Two more participants expressed that the instructors and the university are, or should be, responsible for being aware of the presence of disabled students and making sure that they are received and treated appropriately. In these exchanges the students said that the instructors 'don't get it, but they should'. It was important to these students that they have faculty who understood their needs, who expected them in their classrooms, and who could properly respond to their presence. For example, participant three shared:

…I think, honestly, that it should be known in the university world or the academia world that there are people out there on the planet that learn in different ways. ...I think that the onus should be on the institution and the professors to take a course on how to teach people with disabilities so that the students themselves don't have to go through more anguish and pain and hurt. …I think that it should be the onus of the professors and the institution. …I know I am a person with disability. I know who I am. The professors who don't understand what that's like, then they need to go and figure that out if they want to teach people with disabilities or if they want to be in an environment where there are inevitably going to be people with different ways of learning. I often see that it's exactly the opposite and it's rather disheartening.

This participant further highlighted how a lack of knowledge about disability in higher education causes damage to students.

P3: One particular faculty would make really derogatory comments to me in public in front of other people and poke at my learning disabilities. And I just took it.

I: What kind of comments?

P3: Oh, it's okay (participant). I know you need extra time to figure that out because of your disability. In public. Meaning, public like in the classroom, with other students. Yep. So, literally took my identity away as a student in a graduate program. Yeah, it was brutal.

The excerpt from the interview above demonstrates how, for this student, being identified publicly as disabled negated their status as a student and put into question their legitimacy as a graduate student. . Yet, at other points in the interview, this participant expressed comfort with being identified as a disabled person and that they embraced this aspect of their life. It was also this participant who felt humiliated about having to disclose a disability status to each of their professors to receive their accommodations. It was within the context of the university that the subject position of 'disabled' became problematic for them.

The findings of this research demonstrate that 'disabled' is a subject position that is imbued with particular kinds of meanings in the context of the university that make it difficult to celebrate the diversity and contributions of disabled students. The meanings that are attached to this subject position were mostly seen as contrary to what it means to be a student; that "disabled" and "student" are somehow incongruent or incompatible. Identifying as a disabled student was not perceived to be desirable. As participant four puts it:

I'm happy to be called a student with a learning disability. Because that's what I'm used to, but there comes a point when that label becomes too much of a declining factor, like the disabled part rather than the potential and opportunity part. …I feel comfortable in

class but I feel so discouraged. There's been lots of points where [I ask myself]: should I just drop out of university and do something else with my life or…? And that's, tough (because) I do want to do a masters but I don't even know how it's going to be possible to write a thesis.

Instead of comfortably identifying as disabled, participants expressed concern that their difference made them less credible as students. Further, the participants all tended to be concerned with being like everybody else: not being treated as special or different, and proving that they are capable by minimizing their disability and their need for accommodation. The following quotes demonstrate the processing that participants undertake to feel or believe that they are students. Participant one shared:

…I consider myself a student and I'm a very high achieving student with a very high GPA and it's sort of a side note to me that, oh yeah, I have a learning disability. That I need to have some extra time for exams and things. ... I feel like if I needed to I could still be competitive without the disability accommodations but it would definitely affect my marks. I would not be at the top of my class, I would be, you know, middle of the road kind of student without it but I still feel like I could be a student.

In a similar vein, participant five minimized their disability when they stated:

I don't really think I'm disabled. And it's not a pride thing or anything. It's just that people are born stupid. People are born with all kinds of different things and for some reason the educational system has chosen to acknowledge the fact that I can do things but I need more time to do them; so they give me that more time. ...My perspective on it is that I'm not really disabled. I'm happy to get all of the advantages I can in terms of university, that's all that is for me. I associate myself with the [Disability Resource

Centre] because I can. Because it gets me extra time on exams, because it gets me notes emailed to me, because it gets me a bunch of perks that I wouldn't get if I wasn't associated [with the DRC]. I don't really think I'm disabled. ...It's essentially that you are different; you have this disability and the word itself says a lot. You are 'dis-abled'; you are not as abled as other people, as other students in this university. This is, first of all, is not true; in many ways I am far more able than many people in this university.

This participant wanted and needed to use the academic accommodations available to them at the university but at the same time denied having a disability. They were so uncomfortable with the subject position of disabled student that during the interview they blamed their learning disability on cannabis use as a young teenager and also shared that they thought they cheated on the psychoeducational assessment. They preferred to somehow see themselves as cheating the system than being a disabled student. Yet, at other points they discussed the very real challenges they experience in learning and explained them as just being 'different'.

Participants one and six discussed not using their accommodations unless they felt it was really necessary. For example, participant one felt the need to prove themselves as a student first:

Usually, I don't really need anything. I mean I don't go around telling people that I have a disability. When I first started I gave my prof's the paperwork saying that I had disabilities, but I didn't ask for help… ever. I needed to prove to myself, and to them, that I didn't need help.

Being seen as capable, as normal, and even as non-disabled was important to establishing an identity as a university student. This can mean denying the disability exists or not using accommodations as fully or, if possible, not at all to demonstrate capability. Their post-secondary experiences resulted in participants claiming and denying their disability at the same

time. The claiming of disability occurred so that they could access the accommodation services they required but that claiming was not the taking up of a subject position of disabled student that had positive potential. Rather, it was something that was only disclosed or claimed as needed and as little as possible. The kind of disabled student subject position available is not one that is seen as desirable. As a result, while there was a limited claiming of disability, there was also an aspect of rejection or denial of disability. The denial was further expressed in their desire to be like every other student, to be treated like other students, and not be perceived as essentially different from or less than abled students. Moreover, these assertions of abledness that frame disability as difference is the enactment of the concept of diversity where it is understood that 'everyone is different, therefore we are all the same' (Davis, 2011). This approach perpetuated the disappearance of the disabled student as a viable and valuable subject position within the context of the university and supports the ideal of the normal student who is not disabled.

Another topic of discussion highlighted the absence of disability on campus as participants brought up the lack of usable and comfortable space for disabled people and the desire for a community of peers with similar experiences. These two concepts are linked as it is easier to build a sense of community and belonging when there is a place in which to do so. The absence of a disability community leaves students feeling isolated; as if they are the only student dealing with disability or illness. For example, participant six found it difficult to make connections with other disabled students.

I mean I know which of my friends use the DRC and which don't. But I feel like if you don't have those kinds of social connections already, or you struggle to make those kinds

of social connections, it could be really tough to sort of feel [that] there are others out

there.

This lack of visibility was echoed by participant two who felt it would be beneficial to have a

community to combat feelings of isolation as a disabled student.

I think one ideal thing would be having more of community with other students with

disabilities …because I know that there are a lot [of others] in the classrooms that

probably have the same disability; I have met one. I don't know many people. I used to

have one friend that was (disabled) and we used to talk about it all the time. So, it'd be

kind of nice if there was a better community. Also, so that you could go and talk about it

with other people who would understand your unique situation in the university

environment. Because, sometimes you feel alone, like you're the only person like that;

but you're not. There are other people. It feels like that sometimes because people hide it

(disability). So, it would be nice to have a community around support.

Further, the built environment contributes to the reproduction of ableism not just because

of inaccessible spaces but also through the lack of space purposely designed and designated to

meet the unique needs of disabled students. Spaces are mostly built and assigned purpose with

the non-disabled (normal) students in mind. For example, participants noted that there are clubs

and collegia for different groups on campus but there seems to be something missing for disabled

students. As participant six described:

On campus it seems like everyone has a club. There is all the various student unions and

then there's the LGBTQ contingency. Then there's various types of support, particularly

for women students or for international students. But we (disabled students) just have the

DRC which is very official. We don't have a more casual… it would almost be cool to

see students with disabilities having a place that we can talk and provide support for other students with disabilities in a casual kind of way. Just to connect and even to just be social too. Because I'm sure it can be really intimidating for a lot of people to just have the DRC to go to. It's very official to ask for help or ask for resources. It makes it almost feel like it's on the record if you go. Which can be helpful, but sometimes you just have questions, or you want to complain, or you want to vent, or whatever and it would be nice to have a casual social outlet for that. I haven't actually done a lot of research to see if there's anything in place for that or anything but if there is it's not easily apparent; it's not advertised or anything. For example, even something like the collegiums they have for first or second years or graduate students; they have different categories. For people who can use different collegiums to have just a casual space that we could go and use and then you could talk to each other and that would be something that I feel like would be really sort of make it easier for some people.

Similarly, participant one talked about needing a comfortable space on campus to go between classes for rest.

And the other thing that I think about a lot. When I'm here and I would have time between classes and I would sit down to study, do homework, whatever. It is very painful to sit at this university. There is nowhere that is comfortable for me and I end up taking more medication, becoming more tired, and the day becomes longer. ...By the time I get home I can't even make dinner. I know that it's not the same for people that don't go through the pain that I do, the tiredness or whatever. But there's a lot of times that I wish that there was somewhere where I could lie down and take some of the stress off of my back or whatever is hurting that day.

Space can shape knowledge and behaviour, or at the very least, prescribe the type of behaviour that is expected in a particular place. As Hamraie (2017) points out, "...the built world is inseparable from social attitudes, discriminatory systems, and knowledge about which users designers most keep in mind. Put another way, how we structure knowledge, interact with material things, and tell stories about the users of built environments matter for belonging and justice" (p.3). The above participant quotes are about the lack of dedicated space for disabled or chronically ill students to find comfortable resting places or lounge space to safely gather, build community, and meet with peers who have similar experiences is another example of the university being an environment built on the assumption of non-disabled students. An absence of disability friendly spaces further reinforces the culture of normalcy at the university. Moreover, this absence shapes how disabled students interact (or not) with each other and informs how disabled students are valued by the institution and consequently, the lack of value they and others place on the subject position of disabled student.

Exploring university texts. The university texts examined for this research underscored the common representational practices described above: where disabled people are discursively present they are framed as outsiders, and otherwise disabled people are entirely absent. For example, in the UBC Okanagan virtual tour disability was not given consideration at all, while in *Place & Promise: The UBC Plan* disability was referenced only once in the form of a goal for enhancing the physical accessibility of the campus. The third text is a policy pertaining to how disabled students will be accommodated in their studies. In this policy, disabled students retain an outsider status since the university views accommodating them as a moral and legal duty

rather than enacting the ideas of equity or inclusion. The fourth text, built space is often inaccessible, or doesn't meet the needs of disabled people, giving the impression that disability is not expected to be present, that all users are abled. Taken together, the texts provide a framework for the institution's management of disability as a special consideration or special interest that does not warrant attention other than in a stand-alone document (disability policy) that deals with how disability will be treated by the university. It appears as though disabled people are not actively anticipated nor embraced by the university. If it were, there would be elements of disability named and woven throughout much of the university discourse. We would not have to hunt for it and we would understand from the first contact with the university that disabled people are not just welcome to join but are anticipated to actively engage and contribute. As Margaret Price pointed out in her Plenary Speech at the 2018 Association of Higher Education and Disability conference, "Passively welcoming is different from actively expecting". The following is a more detailed look at each of these texts and exploration of the absence of disability as it interlocks with normalcy to produce and be produced by ableism.

The Virtual Tour. The virtual tour of UBCO is a visual introduction to the university campus that can be found on the homepage of the UBCO website. Two students 'walk' us through the campus and their dialogue provides information about each of the six buildings and spaces that they visit. The points of interest that are highlighted throughout this tour include things like what food services are available, where security, fitness facilities and the bookstore can be found, conservation or sustainability information about the buildings, the cost of some of the newer buildings, and how certain spaces are designated for the use of students from specific populations. The university is represented as a safe, healthy, environmentally conscientious institution that is sustainable and welcoming to international and Aboriginal students.

The virtual tour has a strong emphasis on international/global programs. For example, in the tour of the Advising and Involvement Centre, they only include information about Go Global, the UBC international exchange program. There is no mention of Community Service Learning, Academic Advising, Work study, Tuum Est, or Career Advising despite the fact that all of these programs are housed in this centre. Moreover, Academic Advising employs the largest staff group and is the most frequently attended service at the centre. As well, in the interest of maintaining the focus on cultural and aboriginal diversity, Aboriginal Programs and Services, and the International Collegium are highlighted in this tour. This emphasis is not surprising as the development of this tour would have been based on the strategic plan of *Place and Promise* (discussed below) and in taking the lead from this strategic plan there is no mention of disability or even accessibility.

While sharing the information that is included in the tour is interesting and important for newcomers and people considering this university for their studies, not including accessibility information introduces the university in a particular way – based on what is absent. For example, the tour does not reference any of the student services that are abundantly available to help students who need academic support, health services, counselling services, or disability supports. There is absolutely no reference to the diverse population that exists on campus beyond specific lounge spaces dedicated to international and Aboriginal students. There is not a single mention about the physical accessibility of the campus grounds or buildings. These missing elements raise important lines of questioning. Does the absence of disability demonstrate a testament to the relative lack of importance that the institution places on disabled students? Does it speak to an obliviousness to the existence of disabled students on the campus? While one can only conjecture on intention or complicity, what is clear is that the absence speaks volumes about the

work that ableism does. For example, the taken for granted understanding that university students are abled remains unquestioned and reproduced in this text. The message sent to disabled students remains one of dis-belonging – where or how can they see themselves on this campus? How will their needs be met?

Disabled students can be left wondering about accessibility and how they might navigate this campus, or even if they belong on this campus. After viewing the virtual tour, the following questions remain unanswered. Are there accessible rooms within on-campus housing options such as wheelchair accessible rooms and washrooms? Are there dorm rooms with flashing alarms, rooms where it is possible to have a personal attendant close by? Is there braille on the signage? Furthermore, are classrooms and lecture halls physically accessible? Is there an FM system for people with hearing loss in the classrooms? What kind of accessibility services does the library offer, and where do you go if you need academic accommodations? For some students, this information is crucial to their choice of university and helps to ease their transition to any institution. A disabled student looking for this information to aid in their decision of whether or not to apply or even accept their admission offer would have to put in effort to have these questions answered. Furthermore, it is crucial information for all student to know that their university of choice is inclusive of disabled people by making this information readily available. Again, one is left asking, what is behind the absence of disability and the lack of representation of disability in the virtual tour?

Place and Promise. *Place and promise: The UBC plan* was published in 2010 and updated in 2012. This document is the strategic plan that describes the priorities that drive the university's academic and financial decisions (p.5). Although it is broad, the strategic plan highlights a specific set of values and commitments that are intended to guide the institution for

the ten years following its inception. The commitments that are detailed in the plan include: student learning, research excellence, community engagement, Aboriginal engagement, alumni engagement, intercultural understanding, international engagement, outstanding work environment, and sustainability. The single commitment that is made towards advancing a disability agenda is to "enhance accessibility of the physical environment at UBC for people with disabilities" (p.21). An analysis of the content reveals that the terms "world", "international", and "global" are used 49 times in this document and make up 1.85% of the text, while the word disability is used once and constitutes .04% of the text. Further, only one type of disability is acknowledged: disability that can be ameliorated by reducing barriers in the physical environment.

While the focus of this document is diversity, international (global) citizenship, and engagement, there is a limited view about disabled people. An acknowledgment that disabled people are an important part of the campus community and are considered in the strategic planning for this institution is missing. The concept of diversity is explored only within the context of culture and globalization. For example, of the nine commitments in this document, three are specifically related to enhancing cultural perspectives or engaging with people from other cultures and, one commitment, Aboriginal engagement, deals specifically with a particular cultural perspective. As well, the idea of a global perspective has a significant influence throughout this document with every commitment incorporating a cultural or intercultural approach. For example, in the text describing student learning, there are three references pertaining to international opportunities, cultural understanding, and a global society. Student learning does not specifically address accessible learning; rather, it sets the goal to "enhance the quality and impact of teaching for **all** students" (emphasis added) (p.9). The lumping together of

all students infers that students are an amorphous group defined by the understanding that they are all abled, thereby silencing a disability discourse. Without the naming of differences, the discursive practice remains a flattening of the characteristics of the student body. The wording is ambiguous. Does 'all students' include disabled students? The reference to 'all students' alludes to the inclusion of disabled students but is not explicit enough to be truly inclusive. The ubiquitous understanding of student-hood as abled prevents the necessary leap from understanding 'all students' to include abled **and** disabled students. Furthermore, references to culture and diversity do not include disability cultures or cultures arising from embodied difference within the document. The cultural perspectives that are referred to pertain specifically to ethnic and indigenous cultures found around the globe. For example, Place and Promise states that

> UBC welcomes responsibility for promoting intercultural understanding on its campuses. Working to build community in diversity, the University strives to increase access for all and particularly for historically disadvantaged groups. UBC is a safe place for significant conversations across profound cultural difference. Positioned to engage a full range of local, national, and international experiences and perspectives, UBC collaborates to reduce conflict and generate sustainable solutions to the complex questions of our time. (p.20)

The reference to increasing access for "historically disadvantaged groups" gives a glimmer of hope that the disability community might make an appearance in this document, but because it is being sandwiched between a sentence referring to intercultural understanding and another that talks about engaging "local, national, and international experiences and perspectives", that glimmer quickly dies. "Historically disadvantaged groups" is far too vague a reference in this

document to include disabled people or, for that matter, women, and queer folk who are also traditionally disadvantaged. Considering the narrow understanding of cultural difference that is emphasized in this document, it is not safe to assume that the document refers to any disadvantaged group that falls outside its prescribed scope which is focused on indigeneity and culture. The vagueness of the terminology lends itself to the question of whether or not it is intentional. Regardless of intentionality, it demonstrates the powerful, ubiquitous, productivity of ableism. Leaving disability an unmarked category provides space to assume that disability cannot be found at the university; yet, if challenged there exists the defense that the reference to all students does, in fact, include disabled students.

In this document cultural difference is treated as a discrete and singular aspect of the diversity paradigm that does not legitimately include disability, nor is there consideration given to the ways in which the multiple forms of oppression interlock to support and sustain one another. With this concept of diversity, it is easy to treat human difference as the thing that makes us all the same. This approach simplifies the concept of diversity which in turn simplifies the remedies, or in this case, the commitments, the goals, and the actions the institution will undertake to address how difference is managed or leveraged to ostensibly achieve the goals that the institution sets out for itself. It misses the mark by not tackling the true complexity of the situation and glosses over the pervasiveness of ableism and other forms of oppression that exist within the institution.

Policy 73. This policy was approved by Senate in 1999 and is presently being revised (2018/2019). This policy takes a rights and responsibilities, normative approach to the incorporation of disabled students into the mainstream student body. It is normative in that the aim of the policy is to provide minimal adjustments so that disabled students can attend and

participate at the university and be aligned as closely as possible with the standards for what is considered normal student-hood. The document starts by talking about its duty to provide academic accommodation and fair treatment of all students. It then continues to outline its responsibilities towards disabled students as well as the students' responsibilities when accessing university approved accommodation. The reduction of barriers and provision of opportunities to disabled students to welcome them as "participating members of the University community" (p.1) produces a sense of normalizing disabled students by giving them access to resources so that they can perform at the same level, or in the same manner as their peers. However, it does so without acknowledging that the manner in which students are intended or expected to engage in the education system may be at the root of the problem. Further, the language of the policy is not inclusive; instead, it positions disabled students as outsiders. Disabled students are given opportunities to participate but are not valued contributors to the University community. For instance, this policy states that the university's goal is to "ensure fair and consistent treatment of all students, including students with a disability…" (p.1). This goal of fair or equal treatment for all students does not address equity for disabled students. Though often conflated, these concepts are quite different in their intent, implementation, and outcomes. If the goal is equal treatment, then the intent that follows is that everyone has the same opportunity which is implemented by treating everyone consistently the same. For example, everyone has the same deadlines and the same form of evaluation with little or, preferably, no exception. The outcome is that discrimination occurs but is now justified on the grounds that it is equal treatment of all people. The Supreme Court of Canada found that the identical treatment of individuals and groups does not eliminate discrimination, nor does it meet our duty to accommodate (Canadian Human Rights Reporter, 2001). By contrast, when equity is the goal, the intent is that the same or

similar outcomes can be achieved by all people with potentially different forms of implementation. For example, how a person learns something and then demonstrates their knowledge might be different from others based on physical, mental, cognitive, or cultural differences. This policy uses an equal treatment lens with consideration given to disabled individuals' "distinct needs …in a manner consistent with academic principles" (p.1). Though vague, it is possible to interpret this policy in such a way that academic principles supercede an individual's distinct needs; and, despite the existence of this policy, the results can still produce discriminatory practices. The tension between the limits of accommodations and meeting academic principles plays out when an instructor or program determines that a specific learning outcome is an essential requirement of that course or program and/or there is only one evaluative method appropriate for determining achievement of that outcome or essential requirement. The essential requirement must truly be an essential requirement but there are times when a principle or ideal is treated as an essential requirement when it is not; this misunderstanding opens the door for discrimination against disabled students under the guise of upholding an 'academic principle'. Given the vagueness of terms and continued discrimination despite the implementation of the policy, it appears that equity for disabled students is not the purpose of this policy. Rather, it is to meet a legal and moral duty imposed by human rights legislation which, through the policy's own language, it potentially falls short of accomplishing.

Additionally, through its 'rights and responsibilities' lens, it locates disability as individual problems for students rather than as a problem with the system in which disabled students must operate. For example, the university's responsibility comes down to ensuring that a student is not discriminated against on the basis of their disability with respect to admission, providing reasonable accommodations (as determined by the university) to disabled students, and

ensuring that faculty and staff are knowledgeable about relevant policies and procedures, and are familiar with the broader issues regarding disability. This policy does not hold the university responsible for ensuring an educational experience that is inclusive, fully accessible, or easily facilitated. By placing the responsibility squarely on the student to identify themselves as disabled, provide particular kinds of documentation, and manage all of their disability related educational needs through the DRC, this policy actually creates a burden of proof, increased bureaucracy, and additional time-consuming work for disabled students. Failure to achieve any of the 'responsibilities' placed on them through this policy results in not having equitable access to post-secondary education. Based on this approach to incorporating disabled students into the institution, the student is the problem, not the university, its pedagogies or practices.

*Built Spaces***.** Physical space, its design and how it is used is also considered a 'text' that can be read or analyzed. Built space constitutes discursive practices of the university that also play a role in student performativity through the limits of physical access and the lack of disability friendly spaces described by the participants. Built spaces are a type of textual discourse indicative of the power relations at play. The reiterative power of the design of built spaces creates the stage in which the people in that space interact and perform. Gregson and Rose (2000) describe the idea that space, itself, can be thought of as performative.

> It is not only social actors that are produced by power, but the spaces in which they perform. …. We maintain that performances do not take place in already existing locations: the City, the bank, the franchise restaurant, the straight street. These 'stages' do not preexist their performances, waiting in some sense to be mapped out by performances; rather, specific performances bring these spaces into being. And, since these performances are themselves articulations of power, of particular subject positions,
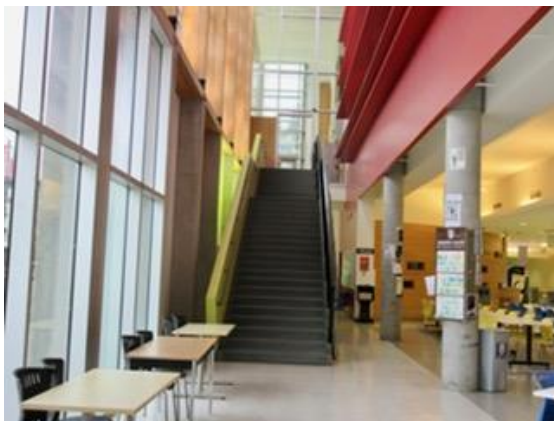
99

then we maintain that we need to think of spaces too as performative of power relations.

(p.441)

For example, as a place of higher learning, the campus was designed and built with particular kinds of students and faculty in mind. Those who are able-bodied are welcomed based on their ability to live, work, study and belong in these spaces. Those who are not able-bodied are welcomed by an absence thereof. To illustrate, when accessing the campus by bus your first visual cues are steep slopes and a large set of cement stairs. The privilege of ability affords an abled-bodied person no pause; they enter campus without thinking about how they are doing so. However, a wheelchair user, for example, would have to pause in order to strategize how to get to their destination. They may even have to request assistance to find the nearest elevator or to find a sloped path or ramp. The abled-bodied person has less cause to question their right to be in this place and simply takes for granted that they are welcome while the disabled person cannot take their welcome for granted. The designers and users of this access point were/are subject to the productive power of ableism. Who comes to this campus? Abled people. Who do we see entering and leaving? Able bodies. Who should we expect to see? The enabled. While the 'welcoming' aspect of this space is important, it is the reiterative power of this space that continuously bears weight on the expectation of normalcy at this university that sustains and reinforces ableism.

Another example of space that exemplifies the articulation of the power of the normativity of ableism is found in the University Centre building first floor foyer. As you walk in the main doors, the most prominent and obvious feature that you see is a large staircase. The elevator is tucked around the corner, under the stairs and needs to be searched out if you are unfamiliar with the building. The prominent display of the staircase demonstrates the taken for

granted expectation that the people using this space will be able and choose to use the stairs. It is another indication that abledness is taken for granted and disability is the exception. As well, the building is built on a hill and the outside also boasts a prominent staircase. Alongside the stairs there is a sidewalk up the hill to the second floor whose grade is an uncomfortable push for manual wheelchair users or a challenge for anyone with health or fatigue issues. Further, the elevator is not operational 100% of the time. During evenings and weekends the elevator is locked down and not accessible to the public; this in spite of the fact that the building hosts a cafeteria, the student pub, and other food establishments on the lower floor that are open evenings and weekends for students living on campus. The residence buildings are on the upper slope above this building so, students entering the building on the upper floor must use the stairs to access the lower food area or climb the steeply sloped sidewalk outdoors.

Figure 2
Photo: Prominent Stairs / Hidden Elevator

(Photo taken by Earllene Roberts)

Lecture halls are another built space that reproduce the types of students for which they were intended; able bodied. For example, several of the halls on campus are entered through a set of heavy double doors that do not have automatic door openers. The strength required to pull open the doors makes simply getting into the lecture hall a challenge and requires assistance.

Once inside, these rooms are tiered and the varied levels accessible only by steps. The room is not freely navigable by anyone other than the able bodied. Lecture halls that are not ramped provide seating for wheelchair users and others with mobility challenges only at the highest level of the hall or the lowest, floor level. Seating choices are extremely limited for anyone who uses a wheelchair or is restricted in their ability to navigate stairs. In some halls, the lowest level is accessed from a locked exterior door and has to be opened from the inside. Those who don't use stairs but want to sit at the front are forced to knock on the outside door and wait for someone to notice and let them in. Unless disabled students are comfortable drawing attention to themselves, they are forced to sit in the top level of the hall in a position that may not be ideal for being able to hear or see the lecturer or actively participate in the class. How they enter the hall and where they can position themselves limits the ways in which the disabled student can perform as a student. This space practically and allegorically places some physically disabled students on the margins of the class. They must ask for assistance to get into the room and, once in, can sit only on the margins. An understanding or expectation of student-hood as enabled physically, mentally, and emotionally produced these lecture halls. Unless something significant occurs to disrupt this understanding, these halls produce students with the same understanding or expectation of student-hood.

Furthermore, the absence of particular kinds of space is as performative in nature as the inaccessible spaces described above. Participants identified that space for disabled students to gather and build community and a quiet space for resting between classes when needed are missing. As participant one described earlier, students who experience fatigue or overstimulation from attending class or being in crowded public spaces, have no quiet place to relax or rest in between classes. While there are collegia spaces available on campus that provide a place for

commuter students to use between classes during the day, students who need a restorative space are left wanting. Participant one indicated that she had tried the collegia but found them an effort to get to, rather loud and overly stimulating, and not inviting to lay down or rest in because of the open and public nature of the design. The collegia have a lounge feel to them with soft comfortable seating, a kitchen area with sink, dishwasher, and microwave. They have an open concept design and are large rooms with the furniture placed in ways to create smaller seating arrangements and a cozy setting. They are quite comfortable and welcoming so, a great resource and well used. They tend to be busy, noisy spaces with lots of interaction and sharing as they are intended. They are located in a building away from the main academic buildings in the central campus. For able bodied people this is not a problem since the campus is not huge. However, for anyone who needs to give consideration to how they expend their energy and conserve it for the required activities of academics, they become too far away to easily access. Further, they are not a comfortable space for those who become easily overwhelmed or overstimulated and are not a quiet place to rest or restore energy between classes. The collegia are designed with a particular understanding of what it means to be a student. The students who use and benefit from these spaces are those that best fit the model of an abled student. No options are provided for students who need something different, forcing those students to perform as abled students and manage without having their needs met. For participant one this means taking more medication or not being able to complete her day, missing later classes because she is unable to legitimately rest in the time between classes. There are no purpose-built spaces for disabled students that could meet their needs outside of the classroom or for academic purposes. In terms of a gathering place, the university acknowledges the need for these kinds of spaces on campus as they dedicate separate lounges for Aboriginal, international, graduate, lower level and upper level students. There is no

similar space dedicated to disabled students. Disabled students are not treated as a distinct sector of the population who require such spaces. Implications of this absence are that students who attend the university do not need such spaces because all students are abled. Moreover, disability is not an identity category to be celebrated; where community can be built. The absence of communal space produces a particular understanding of disability as an individual phenomenon, not a movement or community.

This lack of purposeful space for disabled students shapes how they interact with their peers and perpetuates abled-privilege. Some disabled students feel unable to use non-academic spaces like collegia lounges, cafeterias and other 'hang-outs' because they are difficult to get to or are uncomfortable in some way. Abled privilege means that these spaces are more likely used by abled students. This brings us back to considering the powerful reiterative performative nature of these spaces. Who uses the space? Who designs and shapes knowledge about these spaces and how they are to be use? The abled people for whom they were designed use the space without questioning who isn't there? Who isn't represented?

It could be said that it is a choice to access collegia lounges, or other communal spaces on campus and that disabled students may choose not to use these spaces for their own personal reasons. However, choice in the context of inequality is structured by oppression (McBryde Johnson, 2013). In fact, it is not a 'choice' for a disabled student to not use a space that is uncomfortable or inaccessible to them. Just as it is not a 'choice' for a student to withdraw from a class or program when they are met with resistance when academic accommodations are required. The only choice they have is to not participate or adapt and participate posing as close to abled as possible. The underlying message to all students is that a university education is a privilege and if you are unable to work within the parameters set out by the institution then you

don't belong at the university. Participant four has heard that message quite clearly and shared, "Like, commonly I encounter people who say, 'Well, you're at university and that's a privilege that's not a right." Further, students compared themselves to other disabled students who might have a more difficult time than they. As Participant six noted,

Especially, for myself, I feel my particular disabilities don't actually affect my day to day life a lot. But for someone who might have communication barriers or things like that, then the process could be almost impossible for them without more intervention. For me, it worked out okay in the end, so I guess I'm ok with it.

This comparison leads them to feeling that they are somehow advantaged because they are able to navigate the university system more closely aligned to normal where others might have more difficulty. They appreciate their own privilege yet at the same time, they perpetuate the idea that it's better to be an abled, normal student.

The power of ableism brought these built spaces into being and through the performances of the social actors within these spaces, the power of ableism is re/produced. This ableist space impacts how professors treat disabled students and how disabled students interact with their peers. Inaccessible lecture halls and the absence of purposeful space for disabled students to find/create community or rest in between classes shapes how disabled students perform.

If specific performances bring spaces into being (Gregson & Rose, 2000) and are a performative of inherent power relations (Hamraie, 2018), then we witness ableism in action as the architects, planners, and university administrators design inaccessible and uncomfortable spaces for disabled people and the abled users of the space unquestioningly belong. Together, the discourses of Place & Promise, the Virtual Tour, Policy 73, and the campus built spaces convey the idea that disabled students in higher education either don't exist or when they do, it is as

outsiders; anomalies to be dealt with differently from other students. Place & Promise and the Virtual Tour sustain each other as the Virtual Tour seems to have been created with the tenets of Place & Promise in mind. Their emphases on cultural diversity, global perspectives, and a strong ableist grounding are complementary. However, Policy 73 is distinctly different from these two texts because it deals directly with disability; that 'thing' that remains elusively unnamed everywhere else in university discursive practices. Although Policy 73 is created to specifically address the incorporation of disabled students into the student body, it does not essentially compete with these texts, rather, it sustains and reinforces them by being exclusive to disabled students, thus keeping them in their place as outsiders who are merely being permitted access to the university. With disability discursively existing only in Policy 73 and missing in other arenas in the university, there is a sense of grudging tolerance rather than a welcoming or valuing of disabled students into the university community. This approach to incorporating or managing disability at this institution sustains the ideal of the normate student.

Normalcy in University Life

A result of the continued absence and invisibility of disability in the university is that the ubiquitous, neutrality of the normative construct ability/non-disabled is unquestionably sustained. Through its discursive practices the university promotes "standards of normalcy that exclude and disable many bodies while validating others" (Garland-Thomson, 1997). As seen in the participant quotes above, these students are striving to be seen as normal but continue to have experiences of exclusion. The bodies that are validated are those that are considered 'normal'. It is not one single act, text, or expectation that produces the phenomenon of the 'normal student' but, rather, it is the constant reiterative and citational practices of university discourses that produce and sustain this idea of what is 'normal' (see Butler, 1993). Students, faculty, and staff

receive and reproduce a constant stream of discourse that constitutes normalcy. As a result, university discursive practices "produce(s) a domain of unthinkable, abject, unlivable bodies" (Butler, 1993, p.xi); in this case, otherwise known as the disabled student. As Butler (1993) indicates, it is this 'domain', the unlivable bodies, that is excluded and that haunts normalcy as "the spectre of its own impossibility, the very limit to intelligibility, its constitutive outside" (p. xi). In other words, disabled students in their alterity are seen as insignificant and pose the impossible. It is difficult for many to imagine that a disabled person could be a successful student or scholar. This concept simply does not fit an abled-normative worldview. In many ways the disabled person remains the last abject subject position (Samuels, 2002). One of the last groups of marginalized people whom it is still acceptable to overtly discriminate against and exclude from public life. There is a pervasive valuing of non-disabled human life that underlies the understanding that a disabled person would be better off in life if they didn't have their disability; if only they were 'normal'. This hegemonic belief endures through a climate of what is considered 'natural'. For example, it is natural to be born with a fully abled body while disability is considered unnatural. This thinking calls to question what makes a life worth living? What lives are not worth living (Butler, 2004)? What causes people to say "I'd rather be dead than _____"? Fill in the blank with just about any disability and these words have been uttered. It is beyond the scope of this paper to explore these concepts much further. However, you don't have to look far to see public and widely supported arguments for genetic testing and pregnancy terminations of fetuses with Down Syndrome (Columbia Broadcasting System News, 2017) or acts of euthanasia that are undertaken because abled caregivers believe that the person would be better off dead (Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, 2010). These acts of genocide against disabled people are deemed acceptable to a vast majority of people in western societies.

They are a means of maintaining the 'natural' order of things. The point is not that the university is consciously discriminating against disabled students but, rather, through its unrecognized discursive practices it perpetuates the devaluing of disabled lives. It is this complicit alignment with ableism that provides a rich medium for the ubiquitous work of ableism to happen. Furthermore, because of the insidious nature of ableism it becomes harder to name and more difficult to combat. Disabled students experience this devaluing on a daily basis and either learn to navigate the system by posing as 'normal' as possible or leave. Leaving means that students sometimes have to request late withdrawals from classes because they've been ill or even exit the program altogether. For example, participant one indicated that they don't usually need anything, just when experiencing an episode of illness. They simultaneously emphasized their ability by mentioning consistently high grades and stated that "I am just as smart as they are!" They described the experience of having to withdraw from two courses because the professors weren't willing to accommodate:

> I've had two Profs here whose classes I've had to drop. Both right near the end of the semester because they weren't willing to work with my disabilities or the paperwork that I had from my doctor. The first professor that I had a problem with was really..., I think right off the bat when I gave him my paperwork, he just kind of scowled at me. He wasn't very happy about it. And when I got sick and needed more time, I went to talk to him and he was really grouchy with me and didn't want to give me any kind of leeway. I knew I'd fail the class if I stayed in it. …And then I had another prof last semester who was always very nice and upbeat, and when I talked to her she was always smiling and made me feel welcome. You know I got all the work done when it had to be in. I didn't have to ask her for anything extra. And then all of a sudden, I got pneumonia and I

missed two weeks of school. The third week I went to school but as soon as I was done I went home and to bed. I was just way too exhausted. I could hardly breathe. I was in so much pain. So, I made an appointment with her when I came back and I said, "Listen, what do I do because I want to finish this course. But I've missed pretty much three weeks of school with pneumonia. You've got the doctor's notes. You've got the stuff from the DRC." A huge 20 percent of our class was on participation. And, since I had missed all of those classes, I was going to fail that participation grade. So, instead of giving me some kind of leeway, she gave me extra work to do, and a couple of days extension on my huge research paper. And I said, "That's not enough. I can't..., you know I can try but I don't think that's going to happen." And she said, "Well, that's all I can give you." So, I tried. I did all the extra work and I handed it in. And, she actually never did ever get back to me on it with a grade or how I had done. …But I couldn't get the paper done, I was far too sick. And I had more than just her class, plus my two kids and everything. I couldn't get it done. So, I went to her again and I said, "You know, I can't do this. I'm still sick. It takes a while to get over pneumonia. You gave me extra work which I did." And she said, "Well we're getting towards the end of the semester and I just don't have time for you to take more than the couple extra days that I've given you." So, I said, "Alright then." And I had to drop the class because I just couldn't fail a class because the teacher wouldn't work with me. And it was very disappointing. I really try hard to not only succeed, but do well in the classes I take. And it just felt like I had failed, because no matter what I did, I wasn't able to complete those classes. And it's just devastating.

This student is not alone in this type of experience. Participant five described leaving a program at another university because of a lack of accommodation and lack of understanding of their needs as a disabled student on the part of the professors and the program. This student framed it as their own inability to memorize and regurgitate information at the speed that was expected in this particular program.

The power of the normate subject position was demonstrated in the ways that the students attempted to fit what they conceive of as normal. This was exemplified in the ways that the participants spoke of themselves in terms of their 'difference' (see Garland-Thomson, 1997). All of the participants perceived themselves as different from their peers in some way. They spoke of their differences as having both positive and detrimental effects. For all six participants, the difference created a need for self-advocacy with their professors to meet their learning needs or with another facet of the university for funding or other services. While advocacy was seen as a good skill to have and practice, there were negative aspects to it as well. The need to be a self-advocate created some resentment towards peers and towards the university. For example, participant five stated,

> I guess I've been doing it (all) my life and I truly feel like it's an excellent skill to have… but there comes a point when you kind of ...look at the other students you share a classroom with and you kind of wonder,... well, it's really selfish of me to say, but it's like their life is so easy.

Participant three said, "I have to spend equal amounts of time advocating for myself to get support in school; equivalent to the work on my thesis. And that, inevitably, is going to hurt me hideously later." While the skill of advocacy was seen as desirable, the difference that underpinned the need for this skill was not. The difference that set them apart from their peers,

their disability, forced them to see themselves as not a normal student and in some contexts deny that the difference exists. For example, participant five claimed that they had cheated in some way on the psychoeducational assessment and didn't believe that they were really disabled, but allowed the label to stick to take advantage of having the academic accommodations. This participant's internal ambivalence represents a mirroring of the university's equivocal stance towards disability. Every participant interviewed expressed similar ambivalence related to their disability and their experience at the university. Some students disclosed their disability only if they knew they would need to access accommodations in a particular class. All of them described the negative reactions they had received from professors when talking to them about their academic accommodations and, in four situations, professors' resistance or negative reactions caused the student to withdraw from the class. Each of them also described positive experiences with professors and other university staff. All but one of the students described a negative reaction to disclosing to a peer that they had a disability. The uncertainty about what type of reception they might receive from their professors or peers caused reluctance to disclose or identify as disabled students. As Campbell (2009) puts it,

> …the notion of disability as a state of ambivalence. …looks at the ways people
> with disability negotiate and experience internal ambivalence in their own lives as
> well as negotiate the ambivalence towards disability in society. How does the
> person with a disability negotiate the expectations and compulsions of ableism? In
> other words, do they choose to conform or hyper-mimic ableism or do they go it
> alone and explore alternative ways of being? (p. 160)

For these students, there was a general taking up of the ableist university culture rather than a resistance. For some, there was a clear understanding that the university system, its culture, and

traditional notions of pedagogy were at the root of the problem; that said, they were still not able to find their way to taking a disability activist stance and resist those systems. Rather, they found individual ways of navigating the system that involved both acknowledging their disability and denying it at the same time. .

The combination of Policy 73, the procedures associated with accessing accommodations, and the absence of disability representational practices in university texts are the discursive products and practices that produced the normative context in which the disabled student subjects enacted abledness through the process of performativity (Butler, 1993). These university discourses hold the power of ableism and, thereby, protect abled privilege. As possibilities for subject constitution are limited by the available discourses, disabled students performativities were limited by the powerful normative discourses available to them. As such, the power of ableism persisted through its reiteration at the site of the students, including the disabled student subject. As the disabled students navigated their way through this system by performing as closely as possible to the norm of abled student, they were unwittingly reiterating those power effects of ableism that are problematic in the first place.

Summary

This chapter demonstrated that the discursive environment of the university impacted disabled students' subject positioning as students and as disabled persons. This impact was discussed in terms of the two major findings : the absence of representation of disability in the discursive practices of the university and the subsequent dominance of a normate subject position. The university texts revealed that disability is either absent or is treated as a special consideration in policy and practice. Read together, the texts provide a picture of the institution as a place where disability does not exist or, if it does, is tolerated

based on the institution's legal and moral obligations to do so. This results in the production and reproduction of the abled student as normal and ideal. This ideal is taken as natural and remains unquestioned in the university culture. Further, the idea of the normal student is taken up rather than resisted by disabled students as is demonstrated in the performativity of their student-hood. The students' easily expressed that they identified as a disabled person while at the same time denying their disability or only disclosing their need for accommodations when absolutely necessary. There was a sense of needing to prove that they were capable and high achieving students, despite their disability. In the context of the university, identifying as disabled is not congruent with the subject position of student. Shaped by the university's discursive practices, disabled student is not a desirable subject position for students to take up.

Chapter Five: Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to critically examine the culture of a university with regards to disability and to understand the ways in which the culture shapes the experience of disabled students as they take up and/or resist particular subject positions. I questioned why, after 30 years of societal and institutional attention being brought to the under-representation of disabled students in higher education, was this issue still not resolved? What are we missing? Research on the barriers and facilitators to education have been excavated and addressed in a myriad of ways (Bessant, 2012; Coriale et.al., 2012; Cunnah, 2015; Garrison-Wade, 2012; Gibson, 2012; Riddell et al., 2005; Lopez Gavira & Morina, 2015; Strnadova et al., 2015); yet, its impact in creating significant change has been limited. The intent of this project was to take a critical look at the cultural and social forces at work. How could these aspects of the university experience be undermining the good work and best intentions of post-secondary institutions, their disability services offices, and the countless researchers who are all invested in creating change and improving outcomes for disabled students? This project became a quest to dig deeper into the cultural fabric of an institution to explore what unseen social forces are at work in producing what it really means to be a university student and why the subject position of 'disabled student' does not seem to flourish here. This chapter provides a brief summary and discussion of each of the previous chapters, discusses the contributions of this research to the field of critical disability studies and higher education, and considers recommendations for further research and university practices.

To start this process, I explored at some of the major theoretical perspectives that are applied when thinking about disability. Chapter one, the introduction, described and critiqued these theories and explained the rationale for using post-structural, critical social theories for

examining disability in an institution such as a university. Next, the literature review situated this research project within the body of current literature that addresses disability and post-secondary education. This review explored the ways that specific theoretical perspectives influence the types of research that are done and how findings are interpreted. I found that much of the literature explored the barriers and facilitators of access to higher education for disabled students. Barriers such as inaccessible built spaces, poor understanding of disability issues, harmful attitudes from faculty or staff, and either limited disability policy or policies that lacked clarity about disability were commonly cited as needing to be addressed. Recommendations for addressing these barriers tended to centre around increasing awareness of disability, changing policy to improve clarity about disability on campus, teaching and supporting student self-advocacy, and implementing the principles of universal design in teaching and learning methods and in the built environment. These are all good ideas that seem to have had limited traction in bringing about sweeping positive change for disabled students' experiences.

The third chapter discussed the theoretical perspectives of the methodological approach applied in this study and explored the specific method used for analysis, critical discourse analysis (CDA). I have drawn on critical social theories such as poststructural feminism, queer theory, and critical disability theories to provide the context in which I analyzed the data that was gathered for this project. This project took place at the University of British Columbia Okanagan and data was gathered over two years, 2013 to 2015. Two sets of data were examined using critical discourse analysis– transcripts from interviews with six disabled students and four university texts. The data was used to uncover the types of subject positions produced through university discourses and how those discursive formations give meaning to disabled students' university experiences. The small sample size and the case study approach of focusing on one

institution allows for a rich theorizing. It is likely that similar investigations across Canadian universities would produce similar results. It is my belief that this institution is typical of the way in which disability is treated at other Canadian universities. Further, the post-structural paradigm of the research allows for fruitful theorizing with small sample sizes. The purpose is to highlight the specific, delve deeply into the details and, in using CDA, bring a critical theoretical lens to the particulars being plumbed. As Silverman (2000) pointed out, "the distinctive contribution qualitative research can make is by utilizing its theoretical resources in the deep analysis of small bodies of publicly shareable data" (p.43).

The fourth chapter presented the findings of this research. These findings demonstrated that the culture at the University of British Columbia Okanagan, shaped through discursive practices, is grounded in ableism. This finding was determined through the discovery of an absence of representation of disability and the dominance of a normate (Garland-Thomson, 1997), abled student subjectivity. These two phenomena condition and support one another through the productive power of ableism. What does this mean for student positioning?

The possibilities that exist for disabled students are shaped by ableism. In this culture, it is difficult to resist or take up a position that essentially remains invisible, that is never represented within the context of university life and experience. What does a disabled student look like? Where do they belong in this campus community? How do we know that disabled students are thriving on our campus? How do we know that they are not? These questions are not asked and are deemed irrelevant because students are not understood to be anything but abled, so there is no reason to wonder these things. Further, the competitive and hierarchical nature of higher education promotes the expectation that students be able to handle the pressures of university, otherwise, they don't belong in a post-secondary setting. Disabled students are forced

to navigate the system by demonstrating that they are capable and at the same time access the services they require. There is no subject position readily available with which to identify as the 'disabled student' that is valuable or worthwhile. Therefore, the taking up of a disabled student position is seen to have limited benefit and is, more often than not, an undesirable position to hold. Thus, disabled students will consciously choose to function as close to 'normal' as possible. A 'normal' student is conceptualized as one who can succeed and even thrive in an educational system designed for abled persons. This is the system that produces and re-produces, through ableism, the normate figure (Garland-Thomson, 1997). For the disabled students who participated in this study, there was a general acceptance of the ableist post-secondary culture rather than an active resistance to it. For some, they understood that there are systemic causes to their discomfort in a post-secondary setting, but they still did not resist the systems, nor did they take a disabled activist stance. Rather, they found individual ways to navigate the systems that worked for them, typically taking on the normate student position whenever possible. For students who identified themselves as disabled people in other contexts, they denied or re-framed their disability and managed whenever possible to participate in their studies without accessing the needed supports they previously identified. Taking this path is understandable given the time, energy, and resources that are required to take on and maintain a path of resistance, the hierarchical power structure of the post-secondary institution, and the potential risks of being seen as a non-compliant student or a troublemaker.

The absence of the representation of disability further sustains ableism by reinforcing the idea that disability does not belong at a university. This can create tension in the instructor/student relationship. When instructors or other staff don't know how to approach disability in their classes or with students, the result can be a breach confidentiality, unintentional

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harm, and ultimately reinforcement of the abled norm of student-hood. These types of findings are not unusual as other researchers (Coriale et.al., 2012; Couzens, 2015; Madriaga, 2007; Opini, 2008) have found similar experiences in other institutions and made recommendations of further training and awareness for faculty on the issue of disability in higher education (as discussed in chapter two).

As noted above, the absence of disability representation in university discourses can lead to an understanding that disability does not belong at university except in some special circumstances. This can also be seen in the physical spaces of the campus. For example, despite being a newer university campus, the buildings and other physical spaces lack full accessibility at the time of this research. In some cases, it seems that accessibility planning in new buildings was done as an afterthought and not integrated properly from the planning stages. The resultant spaces range from somewhat accessible to completely inaccessible and are another example of the institution's practices that re/produce a system that reinforces an abled norm.

A combination of the phenomenon discussed in this research - the absence of disability and the dominance of a normate subject position - contribute to and are sustained by a culture of ableism. This research demonstrated that the ways in which these phenomena interact produce and reproduce the subject position of the 'normal' student which is seen as more desirable than that of the disabled student. The hierarchical nature of the institution and the perceived negative consequences of taking up a position of resistance deters students from blatant resistance, opposition, or activism. The idea that disabled student-hood is valuable or contributing to the university remains subverted. Acts of discrimination against disabled students remain hidden and tolerated, further discouraging students from taking a stance that puts them at risk of such being on the receiving end of such actions.

Contributions

The goal of this project was to go beyond looking at the facilitators and barriers to identify the unquestioned cultural practices that perpetuate limitations to disabled students' participation and success in higher education. By doing so, this research was able to further our understanding as to why disabled students continue to experience discrimination, feelings of isolation, and exclusion. As such, this project demonstrates that there is a link between the discursive practices of the university and the experiences of disabled students in a post-secondary education institution. A power-imbued, cultural environment that does not acknowledge or make room for disabled students does not provide conditions of success for disabled students. The subject positions available to disabled students are diverse but the ones that are taken up as it relates to student-hood are those that are best aligned with the normate, abled student; even at times when this may not be in the best interest of the student. For example, when a student decides to forego their academic accommodations in order to not have to disclose to a professor that they are disabled, they compromise their academic success. In the cultural environment of this post-secondary institution and for the students interviewed, resistance was limited due to the potential negative consequences that were understood to be inevitable. This finding implies that for an institution to truly be inclusive, disability needs to be visible, positive, and valued. Further, in order to convey this message, disability needs to be addressed in multiple and diverse ways throughout the discursive practices of the university. Disability can no longer be invisible if equitable access for disabled students to higher education is to be realized. Visibility of disability includes things such as (but not limited to) visible representation of disabled people in all facets of the university media and the assignment of designated spaces for the use of disabled students. If we truly want to have an inclusive institution, we need to go

beyond tokenism and address disability as a real and present phenomenon in all facets of university life. A broad approach to representing disability in university life in positive ways will also contribute to a more diverse understanding of what it means to be a university student beyond the normate, abled student.

The cultural shift that is demanded requires that we move away from ableism and thinking in terms of models of disability that are centred around concepts of normativity and start to look towards disability as one aspect of human experience that has political/social/cultural implications. We need to lay the notion of the normate to rest and move to a place where human differences do not create pecking orders. There is potential for the social/political/cultural framing of disability to create an alliance across different disability experiences and unite disparate individuals and groups to stimulate change. When the subject of disabled student is not equated to the abject subject it can be a valuable position to take up. This type of cultural shift is significant but required in order to create space for disability in higher education.

A methodological contribution of this research is the application of critical discourse analysis to the study of disability in relation to institutional practices. This approach helped me to understand the connections between power, social relations, and discourse that in turn highlighted the privilege of the abled student and the invisibility of the disabled student. This approach helped to uncover the ways in which the institution perpetuates a bias towards the abled student by examining and critiquing those daily practices that generally go unnoticed and unquestioned. This approach could be used to further explore the ways in which gender, class, race, heteronormativity, and ability become implicated in the production of the normate, abled student subjectivity. Moreover, an examination of the particular discursive practices of faculty in relation to student-hood would be a productive undertaking. This project focused on students

and, more broadly, institutional discursive formations but, given the close interaction and power saturated relationship between students and faculty, a closer examination of these relationships using a method like CDA could be highly informative. Further, what is the experience of disabled educators and scholars? If it is difficult to come out as a disabled student, what is it like to be a disabled educator or scholar in an ableist culture? These are questions that would contribute to the conversation around ableism in higher education.

One of the challenges of using CDA was that the concept of 'how to do CDA' is not well documented. In this study, it was through trial and error and re-visiting the analysis over and over again that the actual 'doing' of CDA emerged. It is my hope that this will contribute to qualitative research knowledge by providing another example of how to engage with CDA. It is difficult to create a definitive CDA manual because the process will emerge differently with each application based on the research problem and the data that is being analysed. However, I trust that this research provides an example of the application of CDA and furthers that conversation.

This research contributes to the literature by demonstrating the links between a university's discursive practices and disabled students taking up of the normate subject position (Garland-Thomson, 1997). The university's discursive practices result in an unacknowledged cultural bias towards ability which in turn impacts disabled students' navigation of the social environment by taking up the subject position that is most positively supported in this cultural milieu. In turn the students' normate positioning perpetuates and sustains institutional ableism. Further, I push the agenda that questions the status quo whereby disability remains unacknowledged, abled normativity remains unquestioned, and institutional ableism is sustained. I join the scholars (Annamma, 2012; Baglieri et al., 2011; Belch, 2011; Brandt, 2010; Coriale et al., 2012; Cunnah, 2015; Davidson & Henderson, 2010; Fletcher et.al., 2015; Jung, 2003;

Goodley & Runswick-Cole, 2014; Garland-Thomson, 2005; Opini, 2008; Titchkosky, 2011; Valle et al., 2011; Vickerman & Blundell, 2010) who call for a significant cultural shift towards eliminating ableism in higher education.

Recommendations

Consideration of disability in higher education is challenging and requires an ongoing exchange. One obstacle that needs to be overcome are the traditional ideas of what constitutes scholarship as these ideas reinforce narrowly defined and exclusive norms of what it means to be a student or a scholar, what is excellence, and whose knowledge has authority while at the same time claiming progressiveness and forward thinking. In the face of such tradition, the inclusion of disabled students and scholars meets resistance as education practices and practitioners maintain these values and beliefs of exclusivity.

Disability exists in all facets of the university and as such, needs to be acknowledged, demonstrated, embraced, and celebrated. Disabled students, staff, scholars, and faculty should be actively anticipated and welcomed (Price, 2018, Plenary Speech at AHEAD Conference). Disability should be named and recognized in every facet of university experience and life from application processes to orientation sessions for new students and staff, to curriculum and pedagogical practices, and research activities. Disability services and inclusion practices need to be well funded and fully resourced with staff and space to effectively do the work and provide the service. Every decision, every representation of the university needs to include disability.

Further, the university needs to engage with disability communities through its programs, curriculum, research, and sharing of resources. For example, UBC Okanagan could develop a disability studies program, offer American Sign Language taught by Deaf faculty members as a

credited language of instruction, and fully support research collectives or centres such as the Centre for Inclusion and Citizenship.

As the university aims to embrace diversity and to be inclusive, the framework for diversity needs to clearly articulate that disability is a category of marginalized and historically excluded people that are purposefully and meaningfully included in the inclusion plan. A robust plan for the ways in which disabled scholars, students, staff, and community partners are included needs to be developed. The plan should include a new position – a Director or Advisor to the leadership team whose role is to promote an inclusive environment that facilitates the advancement, growth, and development of disabled students, staff, and faculty through advocacy, policy development, and institutional intervention. The purpose and goal of the position is to develop and continue to find ways to sustain a diverse campus community that respects and embraces the contributions of its disabled members. Disabled people need to be a part of that planning and given space to speak up without fear of recrimination.

Previous researchers have recommended that students be supported to develop and practice self-advocacy skills (Coriale et. al., 2012; Couzens, 2015; Garrison-Wade, 2012; Halloway, 2001), that universities develop strong policies that are broadly understood and implemented (Holloway, 2001; Jorgensen et al., 2005; Madriaga, 2007; Vickerman & Blundell, 2010) and that mandatory training and education programs about disability be developed for faculty (Coriale et.al., 2012; Couzens, 2015; Fletcher et.al, 2015; Fuller et.al., 2007; Garrison-Wade, 2012; Gibson, 2012; Lopez Gavira & Morina, 2015; Holloway, 2001). While these are all good recommendations and these practices should not stop they haven't been successful in creating the sweeping changes to higher education that are required for institutions to be truly inclusive. I believe that movement towards these changes should continue but at the same time

research and practice needs to continue to consider the cultural effects of entrenched institutional ableism in university life. For example, further research should consider the analysis of instructors and other faculty members discourses about disability and their experiences as educators of disabled students and as disabled scholars themselves. This research project examined university texts but it was the relationships with their faculty that the student participants found to be most powerful in determining whether they had a positive or negative experience in any particular class. It was their interactions with faculty that informed their decisions about whether or not to continue in a course or program, to withdraw, or to switch programs. The faculty's willingness to work with them or accommodate them fully informed these decisions. This relationship and all of its power dynamics is a key aspect to disabled students experience in higher education and to the subject position that take up and/or resist and should be explored more fully. Further, continued research about faculty perspectives on disability can potentially tell us more about the cultural sustainability of institutional ableism.

This research project has shown that, despite good intentions and emerging inclusion practices, post-secondary education continues to exclude disabled students through its ableist discursive praxis. This project has been an exercise in challenging the status quo and advocating for changes that will more accurately reflect the student body, the educators, and the scholars who live and work in this place.

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Appendix A: Consent Form

Consent Form

Title of Study: University discursive practices and student subjectivity: Privileging ability

Principal Investigator: **Dr. Rachelle Hole**, Associate Professor

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Purpose of this research:

This research is being conducted as part of the dissertation work for a PhD candidate at the University of British Columbia, Okanagan Campus. The goal of the research is to understand how university culture shapes the university experience of disabled students.

The aim of this research is to gain information and knowledge that can be used to inform university policy and practices that will enhance participation and inclusion of disabled people in post-secondary education programs. Also, the results of this study will contribute to the growing scholarship of critical disability studies and in particular the area of study concerned with disability in higher education.

You are being invited to participate in this research because you are currently a student registered at the University of British Columbia, Okanagan Campus, you are 19 years of age or older and you identify as being disabled. We think that your experiences are important and can provide insights into this very important topic.

Study procedures:

If you agree to participate in this research you will be asked a series of open-ended questions specifically about your experiences as a university student at the University of British Columbia, Okanagan Campus. The discussion will be digitally recorded and take 60 – 90 minutes of your time. The interview will take place in a private location that is comfortable for you and is mutually decided upon by you and the interviewer.

Potential risks:

This research is considered to be a minimal risk to participants. You will be asked to talk about your day-to-day life experiences at the university.

Potential benefits:

This research project is of importance to disabled university students, non-disabled students and the university. By participating your perspectives and experiences will inform the findings of the research and contribute to shaping an inclusive and supportive university culture for all students.

Confidentiality:

Your privacy is important. The specific information that you share during the interview will be recorded and the recordings are then transcribed. During the transcription process, all names or identifying information is removed. A participant number is assigned to your transcript. Analysis is done from the numbered transcripts. Only Earllene Roberts and her supervisory committee will have access to the transcripts that will be stripped of all identifying information.

All information from the interview is kept in a locked office and any hard copies of information are kept in a locked cabinet. The only people who have access to this material are the principal investigator, Dr. Rachelle Hole, and the co-investigator, Earllene Roberts; they will have signed confidentiality agreements.

No identifying information will be included in any documents that are published as a result of this research project. All documentation pertaining to this research project will be destroyed after being stored in a locked space at UBC for seven years.

Choosing to stop your participation:

Your participation in this project is voluntary and you may withdraw your involvement at any time. Confidentiality remains intact regardless of your decision to be involved or not. Participation in or withdrawal from this project will not affect any services or supports that you may receive from the university.

Contact for information about the study:

If you have questions or concerns about anything to do with this project you can contact Dr. Rachelle Hole at 250.807.8741 or Earllene Roberts at 250.212.8735.

Contact for concerns about the rights of research subjects:

If you have any concerns about this project please contact the UBC Office of Research Services at 250.807.9412.

Consent:

Your signature here means that you agree to participate in this study and that you will receive a copy of this consent form.

_____	_____	_____
Name	**Signature**	**Date**

As the research continues, we may have more questions about your experiences of university life. If we have more questions we would like to call you to arrange for a follow up interview. If you agree that you can be contacted for a follow up interview please sign below. If you do not agree, do not sign and you will not be contacted.

_____	_____	_____
Name	**Signature**	**Date**

Appendix B: Interview Guide

Interview Guide

Topics & Probes

A. Review Consent Form

B. Introduction

I am interested in hearing about what it is like for you as a disabled student on this campus. I believe your insights and knowledge can contribute to a better understanding of how the university culture impacts your university life. I have a few questions here that I will use to help us get started but you can talk about any aspect of your university experience that you like or with which you are comfortable. Please feel free to pass on a question if you don't want to discuss it or if you feel it isn't relevant. There are no right or wrong answers; this is really about you and your experience. Do you have any questions before we begin?

C. Topics and probes to guide the conversation

1. Student perspective on disability

    a. Can you tell me a story about what it is like to be a disabled student at this university?
    b. Can you tell me a story about a time when disability became an issue?
    c. Are there any other stories you would like to share?

2. Student perspective on university

    a. What do you think the university understands about disability? Has there been a particular situation where that became apparent to you?
    b. Can you tell me a story about how disabled students are perceived and dealt with at the university?
    c. Have you had different kinds of experiences in different settings within the university? Can you tell me about those and how they differ? Why do you think these experiences are so different?

3. Student perspective on meaning of being a (disabled) student

    a. What does it mean to you to be a (disabled) university student?
    b. Has your experience as a disabled student changed over time?
    c. Is there anything else you would like to tell me about that we haven't covered here?

Thank you!