Normalizing Marginality: A Critical Analysis of Blackness and Disability in Higher Education

By

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A thesis submitted in conformity with the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
Department of Social Justice Education
Ontario Institute for Studies in Education
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Abstract

This dissertation examines the experiences of Black undergraduate and graduate students with disabilities enrolled at the University of Toronto, Canada. The study employs an intersectional framework to explore the experiences of twelve Black students in relation to interpretive categories of Blackness and disability in this university setting. Using interpretive sociology, critical Black and disability studies theories, my study illuminates the ways students navigate the everyday complexities of Blackness and disability in University life. In employing qualitative methodology, this study investigates the University of Toronto’s disability accommodation policies, practices and procedures that organize the lives of Black disabled students. In essence, my study addresses marginalization by mapping the University’s bureaucratic practices influencing students’ academic progress. In relation to this mapping, the dissertation explores how Black disabled students navigate their experiences in accessing the bureaucratic ordering of accommodation and how this influences their academic endeavours.

This critical analysis reveals that the University of Toronto is failing Black disabled students through its disability accommodation policies and practices. It also indicates that the marginalization of Black disabled students is normalized through the routine orders of
accommodation processes. Ultimately, this study shows how categories of “Blackness” and “disability” act to circumscribe educational opportunities for students with disabilities. These categories are typically informed by anti-Blackness and the bio-medical versions of disability generating “individual lack,” which conceals the complex ways hierarchies of power are enabled by the social construction of normalcy. My aim is to raise a collective awareness of anti-Blackness in negotiating equity in educational opportunities in universities for students with disabilities. The study concludes by discussing how the impact of colonialism and structural inequities within accounts of Blackness and disability continue to produce injustice in university settings.
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Preface

This dissertation discusses the phenomenon of marginality in relation to the bureaucratic policies contributing to the discrimination against Black disabled students. My research focuses on the University of Toronto disability accommodation policies and practices. Through a qualitative investigation of the university with regard to the way bureaucracy intersects with Blackness and disability, this dissertation explores the provision of accommodations within educational practices and draws from twelve interviewees’ experiences with disabilities at the University of Toronto. My aim with this study is to delineate the bureaucratic policy system in order to understand how Black disabled students are expected to negotiate their learning experiences. In so doing, this research contributes to the development of a greater understanding of how Blackness and disability are constructed in universities.

While there are growing concerns of students relating to the problems of accommodation and educational practices in the university environment, the university as a social institution manages and maintains its role of providing what it deems to be accessible disability accommodation. This study begins with the understanding that “disability” does not mean the disabled person’s inability to perform, but rather the university’s failure to provide accessible accommodation (Kuusisto, 2018, p. 1; Titchkosky, 2011). For example, a visually impaired person is not disabled because they cannot see, they are disabled because the education system is designed by able-bodied people “for seeing people, [and] is made of many things that are inaccessible to non-seeing people” (Kuusisto, 2018, p. 1; Shakespeare, 2002; Oliver, 1996). Universities espouse working to “eliminate” problems such as systemic discrimination; however, they continue to fail to do so, especially in the ways they deal with students who are marginalized in complex and compounding ways (e.g., through race, Blackness, disability, class, gender, sexuality and other forms of marginality). For those bureaucrats who have seen meager changes in policy designed to address the problems of disability accommodations, these changes
may appear to be sufficient because any change will feel significant given the nature of how systemic shifts are experienced and perceived by those inside the bureaucracy. For students, however, these have been insufficient. This dissertation is based on research designed to understand the issue of intersectional discrimination, marginality and the nature of how it is that bureaucratic elements such as disability policy have continued to support this discrimination. This critical analysis aims to understand the absence and presence of disability in the university and pursue ways to address marginalization.

A key issue is that while communicators for the bureaucracy continuously espouse beliefs associated with the elimination of marginalization, that marginalization continues to be the consequence of various ways that the university pursues “inclusion,” and can be described as a systemic barrier to students’ academic achievement. The system is in a spot where marginalization is acknowledged as a problem; yet, oftentimes students are expected to negotiate these accommodations with their professors. Accommodation for disabled students persists as a problem because it is easier for people in the bureaucracy to say they own up to the problems than it is to actually address them. The question arises: why are students’ classroom experiences disconnected from the disability accommodation process? As Titchkosky (2011) reminds us, “when disability is taken as something that basically does not belong, it allows for the management of disability as an exception” (p. 34) “[where] the assertions of inclusion help to normalize conceptions of those who are essentially excludable” (p. 39). While some systemic changes will happen, they are typically conservative and fail to address the fundamental factors affecting the issue of marginalization. This dissertation describes what several of these problems are and how they have impacted Black disabled students who have been marginalized by the design of the university system. Moreover, I argue that it is not enough to take ownership of a problem; leadership must be taken by people in the system in order for the problems to be successfully addressed in such a way that systems of accommodation could be transformed.
In this dissertation, I describe the problem of systemic marginalization and how it is that the actors in the system deal and speak about changes, but the problems persist in spite of their actions, as changes are insufficient and ineffective. The qualitative investigation is designed in order to explain the gaps that persist in the accommodations available to Black disabled individuals and the failures of this university to adequately address them. The ways that students and members of the bureaucracy interact are explored with regard to the meaning of being Black and disabled in the university system, where accommodation is understood to be necessary for these students. The issues of policy and the way it sustains the university, as well as the marginalization of Black disabled students, are key elements of my study.

From a practical standpoint, the objective of this dissertation is to inspire thought among people in the university system so that we can consider ways in which the bureaucracy has been a problem for people who have been systematically marginalized, and we can determine ways in which these problems can be addressed. Hence, my dissertation proposes some ideas about why the problem exists and suggests the foundation of a framework for considering the problem. By approaching this problem through the scope of deep, immersive discussion with marginalized people in the university and review of documentation which supports university standards and practices, this dissertation gives the reader a foundation for understanding the ways in which this problem plays out in practice where the phenomenon can be understood. While this dissertation describes the problem of marginalization in relation to a case of the bureaucracy of one particular university, the problem is one that permeates through culture and can be observed in other institutions, even those beyond the university system. For this reason, my dissertation can contribute to understanding the ways in which intersectional marginalization happens in different places in society.

In my study, a strong sense of conflict arises between Black disabled students at the University of Toronto and the accommodation system itself. For example, the people in the
university do appear to care about the marginalized, yet there is no thought about what disabled students experience, nor about how the impact of colonialism continues to inform this experience. Nor does the university consider the social construction of normal ways of being a student. The problem is one where the system has values and methods so deeply engrained and unexamined that there needs to be some aggressive reflection and intervention in order for there to be change. The bureaucracy wants to maintain itself and the nature of changes that would be necessary to deal with the issue of marginalization in that it would require actors within the system to do more than be complacent when dealing with the problems with which those who are disabled are faced. The experience of both the Black disabled student and the people within the bureaucracy is one where there is a lack of understanding as to why conditions cannot be improved. In order to understand the lack of disability accommodation for students with disabilities in this university, the bureaucrats will say, “we have done more, and the problem is solved.” On the other hand, “current forms of assistance” as a “problem maker” are not so easily noticed, let alone solved, as they require students to understand the aims and interests of the overall system – a system steeped in hierarchies of power and one which is borne of this bureaucratic tool of the colonial legacy.

This dissertation articulates an understanding of why that is and considers the implications of this situation. My dissertation aims to be a much-needed inquiry into the challenges facing Black disabled students in universities. Students must understand that universities can do more for them, but are structured in such a way that improved treatment for disabled students must first be valued. The problem is that the university is focused on its economic value rather than its value to the students. Change is necessary in order for all parts of the bureaucracy to be satisfied, including students and members of the system. Overall, the changes that must be undertaken have to happen at the core. This will take people engaging the system and changing it in ways that are wholly transformational and that give priority to the
needs of these disabled students. While this prospect is daunting, if this does not become a focus about the way in which the bureaucracy works, then there will be continued “solutions” that produce little more than problems and perpetuate unresolved issues. Black disabled students will not have access to the educational institution in such a way that would support their ability to become successful students. The result will be continued discrimination and difficulties students experience to obtain a quality education.
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Chapter 1: Introduction

Section 1: Disability, University and the Need to Study our Relations to Accommodation

Education and the pursuit of an advanced degree requires an element of personal passion, an intrinsic reason why someone would choose to pursue a difficult task to subjugate their need or preference for immediate gratification, and it must go beyond the perceived honour and prestige of laurels and sashes. It is a journey of introspection with a tangible goal, conveying a deeply personal meaning to the subject of great public importance. In researching for and writing this critical analysis of Blackness and disability in higher education, I realized that the ethnographic inquiry was indeed introspection on an extremely public level. I share much in common with many of the research participants, while attempting to take a dispassionate analytical view of their common experiences as a Black student with a disability attending the University of Toronto. Although I did not participate in the study in terms of being one of my own research interviewees, it is important that my personal experiences be included in this research if not only for context, but also as a validation of my personal lifelong educational journey as prime experience from which to begin this inquiry.

This dissertation examines twelve Black disabled students through their experiences in the university system. I aim to understand the nature of the marginalization that these students experienced through both the bureaucracy of the school and their interactions with agents of the bureaucracy such as staff members and faculty whose decisions fortify the foundation of discrimination and injustice that they experience, because of the failure of accommodation policies and procedures. According to the Ontario Human Rights Commission (2018b), colleges

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and universities in the province of Ontario, Canada are lagging behind in providing accessible accommodation to students with disabilities (p. 1). In this study, I explore how Black disabled students are perceived within university accommodation policies and practices and how it affects being a university student over time. Again, I am interested in how the categories of Blackness and disability intersect in the university experience. This study aims to address issues of access, inclusion, equity, marginality and the policy-based bureaucratic system through which Black disabled students are expected to negotiate their learning experiences. Moreover, I argue that the university systemizes marginalization through accommodation processes based on concepts of normalcy from which disability deviates. Although the focus of my research is analytical, its application is practical in that it aims to unveil the challenges that are particular to both categories; it will discuss the entire concept of disability accommodation policy as to whether it is equitable in relation to Black disabled students based on their personal experiences. The experience of Black disabled students is one where they are essentially “invisible” to the bureaucracy. When they finally communicate their need for accommodations that the university is responsible for providing, the bureaucracy responds by fighting against these students looking for full inclusion and equity with respect to an accessible education that other non-disabled students are capable of receiving.

Accordingly, in reflecting upon what it means to be researching and writing this study and the benefit to be derived in this regard, the truism “out of sight, out of mind” came to me. There is a very famous book in African American literature, Ellison's *Invisible Man* (1952), in which the experience of African Americans is likened to being an “invisible” population in American discourse. As Ellison (1952) writes:

> I am an invisible man. No, I am not a spook like those who haunted Edgar Allan Poe; nor am I one of your Hollywood-movie ectoplasms. I am a man of substance, of flesh and bone, fiber and liquids – and I might even be said to possess a mind. I am invisible, understand, simply because people refuse to see me. Like the bodiless heads you see sometimes in circus sideshows, it is as though I have been
surrounded by mirrors of hard distorting glass. When they approach me, they see only my surroundings, themselves, or figments of their imagination – indeed, everything and anything except me. (p. 3)

I have been intrigued by Ellison’s story as he explains that he is an “invisible man” simply because others refuse to see him. Indeed, these are feelings which remain with Black disabled students, particularly those who require accommodation. This story resonates with me regarding my own experiences as a Black man with a disability. In support of this exploration, my investigation of Black disabled students’ experiences at the University of Toronto dealt with the visible and invisible, the minority status of being racially Black as a visible trait, and the often-invisible trait of disability, which cannot be easily ascertained upon outward inspection of the study participants. Many participants had learning disabilities that are considered by the study subjects as “invisible.” Often the subject of visibility and invisibility is one of legal discernment, where Black students are classified as “visible minorities” by the Government of Canada and University. Regardless of whether in certain townships they represent a majority of the population, Black individuals are classified as “visible minorities.” In this chapter, I will argue that the idea of “invisibility” is useful: (1) as a descriptive term, with reference to the political strategy of Black disabled students resisting the erasure of their future educational possibilities based on limited significations applied to their bodily identities in the university environment, and (2) in theoretical terms, recognizing the limitations of models of the body, or bodily visibility, to fully represent all aspects of our complex and multi-varied identities as human beings.

Ellison’s illustrative anecdote above is particularly fascinating as it highlights how invisibility is equated with the power to marginalize Black bodies. However, we can see the significant implications of his depiction of the body problem that may be termed the “colonized body.” In my work, the application of Césaire’s (1972) deconstruction of colonialism and Goffman’s (1967) theory of human interactions alongside a Marxist informed analysis allows us to understand how the “invisible body” that is represented in this story is a “colonized body.” Does the
“colonization of the body” in contemporary society make us all complicit in this process? I am thinking here of Frantz Fanon’s (1967) theory that colonial Europeans’ control of thought industries made Black or disabled persons accept their colonized, subordi nate position as natural. I wonder to what extent we all slip into unquestioned thinking of the “colonized body” – the “thingification”\(^2\) of the Black and/or disabled body – as part of our everyday experience (Césaire, 1972, p. 342).

Chataika, McKenzie, Swart and Lyner-Cleophas (2012b) remind us that: “…disabled people should be comfortable in their bodies, and should learn that to be different does not mean to be inferior” (p. 392). While we can understand the underlying need to address the complex, multiple perspectives of different forms of oppression, the fact that recognition of this complexity results, in practice, in the overlooking of the intersectional reality of disabled persons’ experience of oppression is unacceptable. That is, Blackness and disability cannot be discussed outside contexts of power. However, I believe that while disability is a phenomenon that is central to the experience of a significant portion of our population and indeed is a condition that we will all likely encounter as we age, it is also a topic that is an absent presence in our university discourse (Gill & Erevelles, 2017; Titchkosky, 2011). For example, in the daily lives of most of the academic community, students with disabilities probably seem invisible; the only sign of their presence being the “Under Repair” signs placed on disability access elevators, mobility ramps or bathrooms around the university.

I feel that Black studies broadens and deepens my understanding of the next frontier in civil rights. In much the same way as Black people have been fighting for generations against systemic

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\(^2\) Césaire (1972), in “Between Colonizer and Colonized,” posits that colonization is based upon an equation: “colonization = ‘thingification’” (p. 342). Césaire contends that in this equation there is “no human contact, but relations of domination and submission which turn . . . the indigenous man into an instrument of production” (p. 342). From this point of view, the “colonized body” may be seen to be not only about domination and submission, but also the subordination of the body to market forces as a means of production which – as Marxist theory argues – are controlled not by the proletariat but by the capitalist class.
institutional discrimination, the struggle for students with disabilities is only beginning. There is a need to render this invisible population visible, with its needs foregrounded in public discourse in a way that it is not at present. Indeed, it is fascinating to note how the same issues (e.g., segregation, integration, access, inclusion) seem to recur in both the older civil rights movement and the contemporary struggles of students with disabilities. In this context, I believe that Black and disability studies can play a critical role in foregrounding issues and developing models that will foster greater understanding of disability issues among the educational institutions. However, this is only part of the struggle. As was the case with the civil rights movement, it is necessary to engage with the policymaking elites to develop political and social policies to address the needs of the student population with disabilities. Thus, disability is theorized not as a “given” or a biological determinant, but as a cultural construct whose manifestation has varied significantly depending upon the national/cultural context in which it is created and engaged.

In this critical analysis, I argue that in the university environment, disabilities have historically been whatever educators – a group including not simply teachers, but administrators and education policy makers – “need” it to be to ensure the maintenance and “invisibility” of normalcy. The question now becomes: What do educators need disability to be? This question is challenging and provocative as it predicates “disability” as something for which the definition is critical not only to those categorized under its rubric, but in particular to educators (teachers, administrators and educational policy makers) who “need” it to “be” something. If one assumes these educators to have power, this question suggests that this power is dependent – to some degree at least – upon the definition of disability in the pedagogical environments under their control. Ferri and Connor (2006) argue that the need of educators to define disability reflects the importance of classrooms as, in Bhabha’s (1994) words, “innovative sites of collaboration, and contestation, in the act of defining society itself” (p. 2). Ferri and Connor (2006) suggest that:
One of the socializing functions of education is that individuals come to know their place and that of their peers. In this way, education institutions, through their various sorting mechanisms, can be thought of as a colonizing force. . . . Once separated into different spaces, students are socialized into an us/them binary that reaffirms culturally defined differences or “markings” such as Blackness or disability. (p. 129)

For instance, the enduring power of the medical model of disability in our culture is indicative of the need to develop and promote alternative models to contest with the medical establishment in the public arena. Critical disability studies, I believe, is important to the development of alternative models to the medical model of disability. Moving from the political to the personal, researching and writing this study is also a means for me to challenge my own ignorance. It is easy to conceive of people with disabilities as “Other”; but it is more challenging to situate ourselves within the field of disability. Still, it is important to recognize that some individuals in the academic community of people with disabilities seek to emphasize difference – probably in much the same way as many Black students seek to emphasize difference as a means of representing their identity.

Furthermore, disability is something that we will all share eventually. After all, there is a strong likelihood that as many of us age, we will encounter visual loss, such as macular degeneration, or mobility impairments of one sort or another. Moreover, given the “rate” of disability in any population (See World Report on Disability, 2011), all of us are connected to disability, if not personally, then through family and friends. From this perspective, whether we may realize it or not, everyone is a member of the disability community. It would then appear to be self-evident that, as disability is something that unites us all, the study of disability – as a sense-making device and a multi-faceted construct, including a range of constituent discursive practices – would be of critical value to the human collective. Thus, I feel that by researching and writing this critical analysis of Blackness and disability in higher education, I am gaining access to and an understanding of reality in a way that our dominant culture effectively denies. In Western culture, disability is often represented in terms of a narrative of tragedy, whereby a disability is projected as a tragic loss that removes or alienates the individual from the general population. In contrast, I am
interested in the narrative of daily university experience, and seek to gain a better understanding of how disability is a fact of life for so many of us. Narratives that illuminate the incorporation of Blackness and disability into daily existence as an everyday reality are something that I find fascinating. For me, these narratives are about the endless adaptability of human beings and the sheer diversity of human experience. I feel that researching and writing this study is enriching and transformative.

My hope in this study is that I emerge with a greater knowledge of Blackness and disability issues, and also with more effective conceptual models by which I can critically understand the world in which I live and those with whom I share it. I hope that this study will allow for a greater understanding of the issues of access and accommodation in new ways, so that it will become part of our first nature to think critically and interrogate “ableist” or “anti-Black racism” discourses wherever they occur, no matter how subtly they may be represented. Critical Black and disability studies enabled me to think more clearly about those individuals’ disabilities and their needs, and allowed me to incorporate these experiences to deepen my own understanding of the operations of political, institutional social forces in shaping our perspectives upon the world around us.

To be sure, it is important to note that Blackness is not a disability, and that this dissertation approaches Blackness and disability from the standpoint that there is a unique phenomenon at play when a student is both Black and disabled. This phenomenon is multi-relational in nature, where the marginalization, discrimination and injustice experienced by students taking part in this study cannot be understood through the context of Blackness being a disability. However, I examine the way in which Blackness and disability create a different experience than that which a student who is only Black or only disabled would experience in the university system. When Blackness and disability are present in the same body, as this study explores, university accommodations become increasingly difficult to obtain, and agents of the university, such as staff and faculty, create barriers to accommodation by either ignoring the
needs of students or using microaggression in such a way that students are discouraged from seeking the accommodations they require in order to be productive in the classroom. I explore how when Blackness and disability are both present in the same body, it appears to look like weakness and an opportunity to obtain access to services fraudulently. The findings of this research support this proposition in that faculty appear to work quite diligently to require greater proof of their disability from Black disabled students. It is essential to confront this injustice; however, the value of this dissertation is in articulating the dimensions of the problem and proposing ways in which the issue could be addressed.

From the perspective of the Black disabled student, when they enter the university setting, there are specific elements of the system which are seen and experienced. Blackness in the university system will typically lead to marginalization and fear because of the way in which the system is structured. Access to higher education is difficult among Black people because systemic racism makes it unfeasible from an economic perspective, and prejudiced approaches to administration and teaching lead to a lack of comfort among Black students. This dissertation explores the nature of this marginalization and fear from the standpoint of the interactions that students have with faculty and administrative staff. This marginalization is magnified when students are both Black and disabled. For these Black students, they will look at faculty and the way in which they treat other students who hold similar characteristics when understanding what their place is in the university system. They understand that the university system creates marginalization and fear for other Black and disabled students; hence, this is the experience that they will have. From my own personal experiences, I understand that Black students are seen as a danger. It is this sense of disquiet animating my personal story as important background information for this dissertation (Smith, 1999; Titchkosky, 2011). In this dissertation, I reflect on my own personal experiences where I had staff discriminate against me and create new policy to create barriers in my education. Participants in the interviews performed in this dissertation
contributed data related to their own experiences where they have seen themselves perceived as a threat or danger as well.

In this context, I draw upon a range of personal stories germane to the subject, and will contextualize my personal experiences. This chapter is divided into three sections: in section one, I provide the background and context for researching and writing my study and by presenting my objectives, discussing my personal experiences with the accommodation policies and procedures. In section two, I discuss my personal experiences with disability growing up in Jamaica. I believe this story is of importance as it illustrates the intertwined nature of social oppression, and the need for an intersectional analysis that enables understanding of the complex everyday survival strategies of people with disabilities in resisting social oppression. In the third section, I use a disability studies perspective to theorize my experience as a Black student with disability accessing accommodation at the University of Toronto. It is not my intention to supplant or trivialize the unique experiences of the student participants in this research project. It is my contention that subjectivity not only serves to enrich this study, but also what I have experienced serves as a foundation for launching this critical inquiry. This research also projects itself into my personal context and being. It resonates with my long interest in critical disability studies, and it largely does so at the convergence of disability and education issues.

Section 2: Brokenness, Blackness, Masculinity and the Inscribed Body

The truth about stories is that that’s all we are…. I tell the stories not to play on your sympathies but to suggest how stories can control our lives, for there is a part of me that has never been able to move past these stories, a part of me that will be chained to these stories as long as I live. (King, 2003, pp. 2-9)

The experience of disability described in this story is a personal one; however, it is also an experience that cannot be understood without being placed into its contextual frame. It is the experiences of a Black male growing up with a disability in Jamaica. It is an experience that can
only be understood at a crossroad, the intersection between interpretations of the “brokenness” of
disability, the colonized Black body, and the performance of masculinity. Thus, the experience of
disability is often an intersectional one, an experience that necessitates theoretical flexibility,
inclusive of multiple interpretive frames to more effectively understand the cultural production
of Blackness and disability in our societies.

In this section, I argue that this anxiety, and also its legacy, are powerful and pernicious
forces with regard to Black masculinity and disability in contemporary Jamaican society. I
further argue that both Black masculinity and disabled persons have been and remain objects of
cultural fear and sites of deviance. It is important, from the outset, to define the theoretical,
political and personal origins for this section’s exploration of the discourses of Blackness and
disability in our culture. In making an argument with regard to intertwined cultural anxieties with
relation to Black masculinity and disability, I do not mean to subordinate one to the other in any
respect. Thus, while I would argue that Blackness and disability have operated in our culture as
distinct discourses, I would also agree with Jarman (2012) that these discourses also function
“fluidly” and are “often employed to undergird one another” (p. 92). In this critical analysis, I argue
that the cultural conception that allowed (or, perhaps more accurately, determined) my perception of
the experience as being about disability is both extraordinarily powerful and subtly pervasive.

3 I should note, from the outset, that in focusing on “Black masculinity” in my experience, I am
not ignoring the equally complex and insidious cultural discourses linked to Black female and
other forms of gendered bodies. As critics have noted: “Black people [in general] carry the
stigma of promiscuity or excessive or unrestrained heterosexual desire” with this “racialization
of promiscuity” continuing into the popular culture of our present day (Hill-Collins, 2004, pp.
97-98). Indeed, I believe a strong argument can be made that discourses representing and
circumscribing Black women’s bodies are as culturally significant and pernicious as those
associated with Black male bodies. In this context, the decision to focus on Black masculinity in
conjunction with disability in this experience was for: (1) practical purposes, given limitations on
the size and scope of the study; and (2) my knowledge, personal experiences and scholarly
situation is more tied to Black “masculinity” than Black female bodies and their representation in
our culture.
As I will show, such complex encodings can only be disrupted by a process of cultural (self) interrogation informed by critical disability studies with a focus on “normate” culture (Garland-Thomas, 2002, p. 10). In this context, I will argue that the construction of the “normate” is a manifestation of social and cultural power “written” upon the bodies of both nondisabled and people with disabilities by medical authority. Issues of marginalization will be explored, referencing scholarship connecting disability issues and anti-Black racism in the contemporary context, in order to illustrate how “normal” and “disabled” bodies must be understood in terms of social power (Titchkosky & Michalko, 2009). The concepts of the medical and social models of disability will be defined – this study operating from the theoretical perspective of the latter – to better understand how this process of marginalization has historically occurred and continues to define Blackness and disability in an inequitable way. As Garland-Thomson (2002) states, “disability theory’s most incisive critique is revealing the intersections between the politics of appearance and the medicalization of subjugated bodies” (p. 10). What this means is that the bodies of those that are “different” are treated as something problematic. Therefore, they are thought to be in need of medical care and maintenance. In this sense, the bodies of the disabled are marked as being inferior. Another way in which disabled bodies have been constructed as inferior is through the political economy. In particular the capitalist production model has resulted in a new way of understanding disability. Indeed, I assert that this is an especially critical point in exploring this experience of disability, as the following events occurred at an interpretative crossroads that had the effect of obscuring, for many years, my understanding of the role of disability in my experience, to which I now turn.

I was born and grew up in Jamaica. My father abandoned me and my family when I was about five, and within a year of my father’s leaving, my mother sent me to be raised by my grandmother. Paternal abandonment and children being raised in grand-matriarchal families are not uncommon familial circumstances in Black Jamaican society. Historians and sociologists
generally agree that these familial patterns are due to colonialism and the efforts of European plantation owners in colonial Jamaica to disrupt African enslaved families in order to ensure control of a divided workforce. Colonialism is the basis of this widely-noted feature of Jamaican society for the males to be strong, independent and roguishly irresponsible, a situation that makes a child more vulnerable to neglect and abuse – this is how I now make sense of what happened to me.

I am not sure why I focused on my education, but from a very young age I was strongly attracted to this. Unfortunately, my school was a three-mile walk from my grandmother’s home and although education was important to me, I could not afford to attend school on a regular basis. My grandmother rose a punitive hand rather than a helping hand to facilitate my efforts. Compounding these circumstances, although I loved the idea of learning and listening to my teachers, the words they wrote on the board, or that were in the books we read, often did not make sense to me. I realized then, “unquestioningly,” that I was broken – a personal observation that did not go unnoticed by my fellow students and family. My grandmother was embarrassed to have a “broken” grandson. With my mother’s assistance, one day my grandmother decided to punish me for not being “man enough” by tying me to a pole on the veranda of the house and beating me until I lost consciousness⁴. These beatings left visible scars on my body and even

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⁴ Given the sheer extraordinary multiplicity of gender identities (as well as other interrelated dimensions of Blackness, disability and class), to speak of not being “man enough” is built upon assumptions about femininity. It is important to note how Black masculine identity, a racial identity, is shown to be closely linked to heterosexuality. The significance of this is that Black homosexual activity would logically be seen as somehow a repudiation of one’s identity as a Black person. Consider, for example, in Jamaica when men get “emotion,” they are deemed disabled or too feminine, and thus, these men are denounced as homosexuals. This suggests that the origins of prejudice against gay men in Jamaican society may derive from the fact that they could be defined as an internal “threat to the integrity of the nuclear family” (Hill-Collins, 2004, p. 106). Moreover, consider the significance of the “punishment” these men suspected of a “crime” are subjected to: stigmatization as deviant and predatory. This stigmatization has been internalized by the Black Jamaican community as an essential core of Black masculine identity itself. From this perspective, we can see how extraordinarily complex is “compulsory heterosexuality” in Jamaican society (Rich, 2003, 1980; McRuer, 2002). The extraordinary level of masculinity in this culture –
though my teachers questioned my grandmother about them, the abuse continued. To compound my abuse, I was also called derogatory names, teased, and humiliated in public by the other students and people in the community.

For my current purposes, it is important to emphasize that neither my grandmother, nor mother, nor even myself, saw my learning difficulties as an instance of disability. Rather, it was framed within the cultural context of Jamaican society, and its privileging of the cultural production of masculinity. My grandmother saw me, and indeed, I saw myself at the time, as a broken man. My grandmother soon abandoned me as being without value, and by the age of fifteen I was homeless. This experience may sound very sad and it was certainly incredibly awful to live through. Fortunately, after years of struggle, education, research, and inquiry into disability, Black, and cultural studies, I have come to understand how intersectionality renders our interpretation and experience of disability incredibly challenging and complex.

People assume that “disability” is in some bodies and not in others; it is, however, in the social spaces between bodies (McGuire, 2010, p. 2; see Michalko, 2002; Titchkosky, 2007). “Brokenness” is, then, not in individual bodies; it is made between people. Within this context, critical disability scholars suggest that the conceptualization of disability as “brokenness” is related to taken-for-granted conceptions of a loss of hope and possibility. In this sense, “hope and, with it, possibility, therefore become tied to non-disability…[impairment] is conceived of as
a life without possibility” (McGuire, 2010, p. 6; see Titchkosky, 2005). For instance, “disability is [commonly] understood and experienced… as a disturbance to the ‘normal’ biology of the body. It is conceived of not as a collective matter, but as an individual one” (Michalko, 2009b, p. 101; Levinas, 1969). From a commonsense perspective, my learning disability was “invisible” to my grandmother, my mother, other students, and the community. Accordingly, I was punished and abandoned as my puzzlingly “broken” body symbolic of a deprivation of hope or possibility.

Internalizing my disability was rendered all the more complex by the requirement of the performance of (Afro-Jamaican) masculinity in Jamaican society. As Alcoff (1999) suggests, “racism and colonialism create significant challenges for the creation of equilibrium in one’s body image” (p.18). This suggestion explains, at least in part, why the appearance of disability in my personal experience described above did not immediately and unquestioningly strike me as an instance of disability. It was only through years of struggle to educate myself that I was able to more critically engage with this experience and achieve some measure of “equilibrium” in my body image, recognizing the discursive inscriptions of colonialism on my body and masculinity, and the possibility of performative disruption of these discourses.

While scholars have long noted the parallels between Blackness and disability-based prejudice, one aspect of this common experience is only recently attracting critical attention: the complex cultural anxiety with regard to Black masculinity and disability. In our culture, the history of institutional discursive practices with relation to the sexuality of Black men as well as people with disabilities can be seen as closely intertwined. One way they are intertwined is under the cultural assumptions that ground the objective of disciplining bodies deemed deviant within common culture. As one scholar writes, for both groups their “Nonconforming sexuality functioned as a foundational indicator of otherness and was deployed . . . to secure the public’s approval of medical regulation and confinement” to control what both institutional and popular discourses
represented as the “sexual promiscuity” and “excessive appetites” of Black men and people with disabilities (Jarman, 2012, p. 96).

“The Performative is Political” is a self-conscious reference to the famous feminist activist slogan that is intended to highlight the political seriousness of the concept of “performing” in our discussion (Butler & Athanasiou, 2013; Hanisch, 2006). In everyday usage the term “performing” has connotations of theatricality and playing a role that is distinct from one’s actual true self. In the context of this study, however, the concept of “performing” is theoretically grounded in cultural theories of political resistance to hegemonic authority with reference to Blackness, disability and gender. In particular, I assert that Blackness and masculinity have been and remain socially constituted and culturally governed as objects of cultural fear and sites of deviance.

As Arendt (1958) observes, while bodies have undeniable physicality, they also exist in the meanings ascribed to them in social spaces between individuals: “In acting and speaking, [wo]men show who they are, reveal actively their unique personal identities . . . while their physical identities appear without any activity of their own in the unique shape of the body and sound of voice” (p. 179). For me, this quotation regarding how we reveal our identities to others has clear relevance to the concept of embodiment and “all the many and various ways that we (self and other) accomplish relations to being in possession of the bodies that we are” (Titchkosky, 2007, p. 13).

One of the most significant aspects of the theory of embodiment and its relation to meaning making is the potential for disruptive readings, that is, the capacity to “disrupt the taken-for-granted relations of embodiment” (Titchkosky, 2007, p. 13). My concern for this body problem raised by Arendt’s text is informed in part by my personal experience growing up in Jamaica – where I was read, categorized and defined by others on the basis of Blackness and disability. In growing up, I believed that people’s view of me was shaped by the social, economic and political conditions of our environment and not necessarily by any particular performance of my own. It sometimes seemed like I was a “tabula rasa” or blank slate upon which people – often members of my own
family – projected a range of preconceptions about Blackness, masculinity and disability. Arendt (1958) suggests that we make our “physical identity” “appear” to others through our action but not necessarily with explicit consciousness of doing so. In contrast, the concept of embodiment suggests that there is an active, performative aspect to embodiment. In other words, we enact our embodiment with some possibility of conscious intentionality, but can this be said for all of us?

Consider the problem of students with disabilities. One of my research interests in the field of disability studies is the dynamic relationship that has historically existed between students with disabilities and educational institutions. It is fascinating to see how students with disabilities have historically been inscribed by educational institutions in ways analogous to how I found myself serving as a “tabula rasa” for others in my youth in Jamaica. For example, children with disabilities are not active agents or actors to the same degree as adults. As their psychological and cognitive development has not matured, some people argue that they cannot enact their embodiment as we adults can. Indeed, their immaturity renders them acutely vulnerable to having their identities inscribed by external forces, often without their input or influence. This being said, in Arendt’s (1958) work we can see how her conception of the nature of action bears striking relation to the idea of enacting embodiment. She notes that:

Action and speech go on between [wo]men. . . . Most action and speech is concerned with this in-between, which varies with each group of people, so that most words and deeds are about some worldly objective reality in addition to being a disclosure of the speaking and acting agent. (Arendt, 1958, p. 182)

While many readers might problematize Arendt’s positing of a “worldly objective reality” here, her focus in this writing is on the liminal space between humans in which we enact our identities and are conditioned by environmental aspects of the space – and I would add race, too. Moreover, this “worldly objective reality” understood from a phenomenological orientation is merely the “world-taken-for-granted” – that is, the world as it appears as “just there” that we rely on in daily life in an unquestioned way – made to seem as if it is objective. Given that, as is well-known, a
dozen witnesses to any given accident or event will often have a dozen different recollections, our performative enactment of embodiment in this in-between space is likely to be diversely viewed and interpreted by others.

There is a phrase from the Bible in Hebrews that seems appropriate here: “a great cloud of witnesses.” This cloud seems connected to the idea of enacting embodiment as well as Arendt’s “in-between” space, since these ideas suggest that the performative enactments and intersections of identity and interpretations are critical to the definition of who we are. This is a very positive thing for the definition of power, which is not possessed by an individual, an institution, or even a hegemonic authority, but instead by the cloud of witnesses or web of relationships that dominate our culture. While we may not necessarily be who we appear to be, neither are we necessarily what some authority categorizes us to be – meaning is determined, instead, by the cloud of witnesses that lies between us all.

In my critical analysis, Kawash’s (1998) theoretical model of the “homeless body” is particularly illuminating in this regard. She argues that the “homeless body” is not the homeless person or the human body that a homeless person possesses, but rather a site of contested cultural meaning (Kawash, 1998, pp. 324-325). Thus, she further suggests that the “homeless body” is a site of paradoxical inscription, for while it is recognized as present, society nonetheless seeks its erasure in order to preserve “the homogeneity and wholeness of the public” (Kawash, 1998, p. 329). Of course, it is impossible to ever effect this erasure in actuality, but the attempt by society to do so creates the “contagion” effect – the “invisible cordon” – that surrounds the homeless body. The “invisible cordon” around the reclining body suggests the concept of “contagion” as if the other riders somehow feared something might spread from this “homeless body” to themselves. In this study, I am interested in considering how we – as a society – in our public space perceive (or inscribe through reading) the bodies of those who have historically been marked as different or alien
to the body politic. In a sense, we recognize the homeless as “limit-figures” who are under threat of erasure, and unconsciously fearing such a consequence for ourselves, we physically avoid them.

A demonstration of this effect can be seen on the main downtown streets on almost any day, as passers-by can be seen to walk wide arcs around the forms of homeless people sleeping on sidewalks or in disused doorways. For example, she recalled a recent experience of witnessing how on the Toronto subway at least a dozen or so passengers on a platform created a similar “invisible cordon” around a visually impaired woman with a white cane. The woman was not swinging the cane widely, or moving at any real speed; this would be illogical for a visually impaired person after all. It was fascinating, however, to observe how almost the whole population at one end of a subway platform seemed to furtively watch the woman without comment to each other, and in a “uniform response” created a cordon about her, without communicating with her in any way. Based on my experience of homelessness in Jamaica and my volunteer work in Toronto, I would argue that Kawash’s idea of the homeless body as the site of contested meanings and cultural production actually illuminates valuable avenues for resistance to marginalization. For example, in the context of my Jamaican experience of disability, as a child I did not understand how my body had already been inscribed by complex historical forces born of the colonial legacy. In my own volunteer work with homeless people in Toronto, I know very well how “material” issues of race, Blackness, masculinity, disability and class play critical roles in the experience and definition of homelessness.

Kawash acknowledges that, “race, [disability,] gender, sexuality, age, and class” all play important roles in defining not only who becomes homeless, and how this occurs, but also how homelessness is “experienced” (p. 324). While she is clearly not dismissing or overlooking race, (dis)ability, or class/privilege as factors in understanding homelessness, she argues that “approaching homelessness through the customary frameworks that emphasize the different identities or experiences of homelessness may miss something of the ideological or discursive force
of the spectre of homelessness for the public” (Kawash, 1998, p. 324). The author notes how racist and masculinist assumptions are frequently “politically manipulated” as part of policy responses to the “homeless problem” (Kawash, 1998, p. 324).

Kawash (1998) notes how North American society has “produced” homelessness as part of a binary opposition, opposed to the “public”: “The homeless body figures in contemporary public discourse as the fundamental threat to the public use of public space” (p. 325). Instead of focusing simply on the effects of the “war on the homeless” in marginalizing people and excluding them from participation in society and the body politic, Kawash contends that the reiteration of this discursive tactic enables definition and assertion of the “proper, public body” (p. 325). This enables us to understand the “violence” that has been an integral feature of the “war on the homeless” in North American society (Kawash, 1998, p. 334). As Kawash explicates, “the antagonism that the imaginary whole of the public aims to disavow or exclude is thus not just the sign of the failure of any whole to be whole; it is an ongoing practice of violence” (p. 337). Consider, for example, how the strategies of containment and displacement noted by Kawash in the downtown cores of major metropolitan centres such as Toronto and New York – strategies to increasingly restrict and destabilize the sleeping areas, eating and even waste production of the homeless – have enabled the construction of new corporate entertainment districts and condominium neighbourhoods, with heightened property values and increased wealth for new settlers in these areas. Kawash suggests the construction of these new public spaces and public identities required the discursive production of an “Other” against which this new “Public” could be defined and, in fact, celebrated. One of the most fascinating themes of Kawash’s analysis is the multi-layered analogy between the body corporeal, the “homeless body” and the body politic. The “homeless body” is a discursive construct; it overlaps with the corporeal body in that this discursive construct embodies anxieties over physical “pollution” of public space by “dirty” homeless people. These representations of the “homeless body” are promoted and manipulated by “public servants” in order to re-map and regulate public
spaces to “secure public space from the homeless threat” (Kawash, 1998, p. 335) in support of diverse, primarily capitalist/corporate agendas.

While Kawash’s point is undeniably strong, it may also seem to reduce the experience of homelessness to a class-defined phenomenon while overlooking the role of agency. A perspective that opens discursive analysis beyond class may assist us in this regard. For example, the experience of homeless “Urban Aboriginals” in Canadian cities is one defined heavily by racism. Yet, these Aboriginals’ cultural heritage has reinforced their agency and capacity to resist the modern mapping of public space to exclude them – an agency no doubt informed by their centuries of resistance to the experience of being “mapped” for containment and exclusion by Euro-American settlers.

In this context, Kawash’s (1998) discussion here suggests that we as a society inscribe certain bodies – those of historically marginalized groups, who lack significant power to resist inscription – as “limit-figures.” Does the physical presence of these bodies we have tried to socially erase render them sites of “social contagion” in the public arena? This is a disturbing and, frankly, repugnant thought, for it suggests that the majority of us are all to one degree or another complicit in the inscription of contagion and limit-figures in our society. Indeed, as commentators have noted, the use of the human body as an inscriptive surface upon which to “write” a vast range of messages is a phenomenon that stretches back in time to the very origins of human society itself (Grosz, 2009, pp. 138-140). Of course, it is possible to reference numerous examples of such inscription encountered in the public sphere on a daily basis. Humans seem to have a predisposition towards marking ourselves and inscribing – sometimes through contested processes of “reading” – different meanings upon the bodies of others. For example, young people may inscribe themselves with hip-hop clothing and styling that reflect “masculine culture” to project a message of strength – a message that can be read, from other perspectives, as an inscription of self-marginalization, or of bravado masking a lack of self-confidence. What is occurring here, I will argue, is what Foucault might call a “technique of self-production” (Grosz, p. 143; Foucault, 1988). However, the key
question relates to the “very status of the body as product – the question is whose product?” (Grosz, p. 143). This latter form is, I would argue, particularly significant. As Grosz (2009) notes, less openly violent, but no less coercive, are the inscriptions of cultural and personal values, norms and commitments according to the morphology and categorization of the body into socially significant groups – male and female, Black and white, and so on (pp. 141-142).

In my critical analysis, the human body is a site of enduring contestations of power in our society, and we must more clearly understand the processes of inscription and reading – the rules of engagement in this public arena – in order to foster greater equity and humanity in our interactions with our fellow beings. My, and my grandmother’s, interpretation of my “brokenness” was a culturally framed interpretation that served the interests of colonial power which has inscribed generations of Afro-Jamaican bodies in complex ways. Gender and masculinity were deeply intertwined with these interpretative frames in a colonial context as gender and masculinity are intertwined with homelessness, disability, and Blackness (notably urban Aboriginal) in a Canadian context. As a disabled individual, home and social institutions can commonly be far apart from one another. Education is an example of such distance. It is therefore well known that one of the most common racist stereotypes historically applied to Black males is related to their masculinity, whether in Jamaica or Canada. Black masculinity is commonly seen as being a rogue agency, with Black males being all too frequently represented as irresponsible “slaves” to their own body. While admittedly Jamaica has made significant strides against cultural racism, the enduring nature of this cultural myth of Black masculinity as being inherently irresponsible to the point of violence remains testimony – I believe – to the cultural power of racism in Jamaican society. Fanon (1967) was, I believe, the first Black theorist I read whose work made fully visible a world I had hitherto only perceived in shadows. Growing up in a post-colonial Jamaica, many people believed the European colonialists and empires were relics of history. However, many others – including myself – were not so sure. To me it seemed as though the legacy of empire endured in complex and
potent ways. Indeed, when I first read Fanon – a writer whom I had been told was controversial for his discussion of violence and anti-colonialism – it was not his treatment of violence that resonated with me so much as his examination of the power of colonialism at the level of culture and language: a colonialism of the mind.\(^5\) It may be argued, however, that the characteristic of “colonialism of the mind” is also evident in Fanon’s analysis – although implicitly rather than explicitly. One of the critical insights of Fanon into the processes by which Western and European colonization dominated Black people and Arab worlds lay in his argument that these processes were not simply material. That is, colonization was not successful only because Europeans had more advanced technology or better weapons. As Fanon (1967) recognized, colonization was particularly effective because it operated at the cultural and linguistic level as well, colonizing the minds of Black people and Arabs and making them complicit in their own colonization.

To better understand the importance of “colonialisms of the mind,” one needs only to look at a map of the world in the time of the European colonial empires in the 19th and 20th centuries. In doing so, we see relatively tiny European nations with a small population, such as Great Britain,\(^5\) Some have argued that colonialism came to an “end” with the collapse of the European colonial empires and powers at the end of the Second World War in 1945. However, it can be argued that this transformative period of European hegemony is indicative of their enduring control of other territories or cultures. Scholars have argued that colonialism continues to take place in other forms, such as in the educational institutions. It is from this perspective that my study critically explores this problem of colonialism. My study asserts that there are many characteristics of colonialism, such as colonialism of the mind and the rule of (colonial) law (Fanon, 1967; Césaire, 1972; Adams, 1999). While it must be acknowledged that there exist many definitions of colonialism in general, it can be argued that all the definitions seem to incorporate features such as: the occupation of territories by settlers; the eradication, removal or control of the occupants; and the exploitation of their land for economic gain. However, it is noteworthy that these features do not adequately describe the full complexity of the colonial process, nor do they give us a clear understanding of why this phenomenon is so powerful and continues to endure in modern history. Therefore, more a critically valuable approach would be to focus on the characteristics, noted by a number of scholars and commentators, through which the process of colonialism operates, especially in the context of education (see Wynter, 2003; Erevelles, & Minear, 2010).
controlling most of the world’s surface and a huge portion of its people. Regardless of the technological or military advantage of the colonizer, such a colonial empire could not have been built or controlled without a system of indoctrination whereby the colonized peoples were taught to accept their oppression. It is through this process that colonized peoples are often mentally and ideologically subordinated to the extent that they are reduced to being willing partners in their own oppression and even marginalization. Fanon (1967) argues that we are not only talking about the “racialized” body, but also the “body of culture” which, in its colonial form, is assimilative and a critical tool in the subjugation of a population (p. 222). Culture is a powerful tool of hegemonic power, as it controls not only how people are represented, but also the very terms that they can use to represent themselves. One of the most insidious capacities of colonialism, Fanon suggests, is how Black people are taught to reject their old culture in favour of European culture, a cultural frame in which there is nothing positive to associate with being Black. I will show that we are operating in a society where our meaning-making apparatus has been colonized by hegemonic discursive practices. As Fanon (1967) further observed, initially believing himself a subject searching for meaning, only to realize that as a Black man. He argues that:

…I found that I was an object in the midst of other objects, the Black man has no ontological resistance in the eyes of the white man. Overnight the Negro has been given two frames of reference in which he has had to place himself. . . . In the white world the man of colour encounters difficulties in the development of his bodily schema. (Fanon, 1967, pp. 96-110)

From this perspective, our cultural/media texts almost exclusively talk of disability as a troublesome difference, a “problem,” and not as a viable status – in much the same way as they almost exclusively talk of Black men as figures of barely contained or imminent violence, as physicality without the intellectual, as being morally tainted or criminal. These are “recognized” as natural facts, with their status as discursive constructions obscured and hidden. Fanon is here dealing with how language itself can be a prison that limits the potential of the colonized body to define itself. In such circumstances, when there are no other options available, Fanon suggests
the colonized need to re-take the language of the oppressive culture and make it their own. Even to the level of liberating an explosively potent term such as “nigger” – with all of its incredibly negative signification – and retaking it for the benefit of Black people. Fanon (1967) notes that Black racism is not limited to its cognitive or psychological impacts. Furthermore, he argues that, we cannot understand the complexity of racism by focusing on a single aspect of the phenomenon: “The analysis that I am undertaking is psychological. In spite of this, it is apparent to me that the effective alienation of the Black man entails an immediate recognition of social and economic realities” (p. 4). From this perspective, I would argue that in our culture we still internalize – to a significant degree – the psycho-social representation of Black masculinity as a force that is not merely full of fear, but is also imagined as inherently disruptive and threatening of social order.

According to Fanon (1963), “Because it is a systematic negation of the other person and a furious determination to deny the other person all attributes of humanity, colonialism forces the people it dominates to ask themselves the question constantly: “In reality, who am I?” (p. 250). Anti-Colonial theorists have long noted the important role played by education system in ensuring the control of colonized people. Much as was the case with Aboriginal Canadian children in residential schools, Black children in colonial Euro-American society were indoctrinated in a culture wherein they had no place: “the child was now being exposed exclusively to a culture that was a product of a world external to himself. He was being made to stand outside himself to look at himself” (Thiong’o, 1996, p. 17). A key challenge that arises in the process of reflection upon the various topics discussed in this study is the sheer scope of this pedagogical project. Colonialism at its height encompassed the greater portion of the landmass and population of the planet and its colonization of the cultural diversity of the world continues to shape our bodies, minds and cultural discourses to the present day. Coming of age in the Jamaica of my youth, everyone was aware – though most of us lacked the theoretical apparatus to describe it – how colonialism left us with contradictions: politically we claimed to have thrown off the shackles of
imperial Britain, but everyone knew how colonialism continued to define our minds and our cultural and social practices. While the era of the European colonial empires may have passed, the colonization of the mind continued. Walter Mignolo (2012), Sylvia Wynter (2003) and Alexander Weheliye (2014) speak of this as the “coloniality of power” – something that Foucault did not take into his account of power. In this, the vestiges of colonialism remain pervasive in society. The artefacts of colonial domination are present in institutions, systems and the structure of how we live. Nonetheless, the working of power takes its roots from colonialism, which is not just an event of the past, but an ongoing productive force.

Consider the role of religion in this ongoing reproduction of power born of the colonial legacy. Religious education through the reading of the Bible is one example of the complexity of cultural colonization in the Jamaica context. The paternalistic elements of religion and the way they permeate the politics of colonialism emboldened oppressors. In this respect, Silvera’s (1992) analysis is informative as it explores the historic and cultural origins of homosexuality in Afro-Jamaican society, as well as the cultural and religious origins of the biases against it. Silvera’s (1992) discussion of the role of the Bible in both fuelling and shaping homophobia and masculinity in Jamaica is especially fascinating, and complements her discussion of homophobia among Black activists struggling against racial prejudice. Silvera notes that:

Our foreparents gained access to literacy through the Bible when they were being indoctrinated by missionaries. It provided powerful and ancient stories of strength, endurance and hope which reflected their own fight against oppression . . . The

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6 The evolution of popular religious belief in Jamaica similar to other Caribbean Islands where enslaved populations were encouraged to adopt the Christian beliefs of the European masters, in that the British ruling class resisted the implications of equality associated with sharing a common faith with their enslaved population. As a consequence, the African enslaved population incorporates religious rituals and traditions of their African heritage into their everyday spiritual practices. Moreover, from the earliest manifestations of African spirituality in Jamaica, religious rituals and observations took on a political manifestation as acts of resistance against oppression and the colonial system. In the word of commentator, these Jamaican practices represented “ritual aggression against the slave system” (Barrett, 1997, p. 18).
importance the Bible plays in Afro-Caribbean culture must be recognized in order to understand the historical and political context for the invisibility of [homosexuality]. (1992, p. 523)

Of course, while Silvera’s argument is fascinating, not everyone would agree with it. It may equally be argued – even on the basis of Silvera’s analysis – that the Bible may simply be a justification for deep-seated gender or racial prejudices in Afro-Jamaican culture. Consider, for example, the comment of a friend of Silvera’s mother that: “Things are different now in Jamaica. Now all you have to do is not respond to a man’s call to you and dem call you sodomite or lesbian” (Silvera, p. 524). Thus, Silvera’s argument suggests that homophobia in Afro-Jamaica society may not be fuelled by religious doctrine so much as by gender power relations in the community. However, Afro-Jamaican culture is extraordinarily conflicted when it comes to religion and the Bible, for while it has been co-opted and represented as a source of strength and cultural resistance to colonialism, we understand that it too is an instrument of that same colonialism. Personally, as far back as my collective memory extends, access to primary education was through missionary religious schools where the Bible was a central component of my studies. Studying the Bible not only taught me literacy, a key avenue to power, but it also provided me with powerful stories of people struggling against oppression and enduring in the hope of salvation. These lessons permeate my Afro-Jamaican cultural expression, most notably in the Rastafarian beliefs that infuse reggae music, for example:

"I Am That I Am"
Peter Tosh, 1977 – Abridged

I'm not in this world
To live up to your expectations
Neither are you here to live up to mine

I don't owe no one
No obligation
No I don't mean none
So everything is fine, fine
[Chorus:]
I said I am that I am
I am I am I am

[4x]

Don't underestimate
My ability
Don't definate my character
Don't belittle
My authority
It is time you recognized my quality

[Chorus]

Learn to love
To love your brother
Don't covet your neighbour

Flee from the city
It's getting shitty
It is full of out-a-quity

[Chorus]

I am the rock of the ages
You cannot move I at all
I am the son of lightning
You cannot move I at all
Son of Jacob
Cannot move me at all
I am the son of Moses
You can't move I at all
I am the son of David
You cannot move I at all
I am a firm ripe diamond
You cannot move I at all
You could a shed more tears
You cannot move I at all
You could a full of evil
You cannot move I at all
You could a try more nuttin’
You cannot move I at all
And you can try make a something
That can't move I at all
And could a come with ism
You can't move I at all
And could come with skism
That can't move I at all\(^7\)

Singing this song, “I am that I am” by Winston Macintosh, was a mode of resistance to stand up against parental abuse, social oppression and injustice in colonial Jamaica. Abuse from parents and others can be harsh and should be feared. Thus, there are times when I had to fight back and challenge these abuses, even if it meant that I had to jeopardize my wellbeing. If there were relevant laws in Jamaica, they were not observed or used to protect children from parental abuse, or other forms of abuse, at that time. Consequently, parents had the ultimate authority to discipline their children to the fullest extent, even if it meant abusing and seriously hurting them.

By exploring the nature of marginalization that is inherent within my story, one can realize how lyrics articulate the oppression that colonization imparts upon the Black bodies. The allegorical themes in this song were a form of resistance to colonization and annihilation of the self. To illustrate the personal impact upon my own consciousness of Fanon’s radical critique of colonialism and the processes of decolonization, a further considering of this song by Macintosh is illuminating. According to (Brkich, 2012) music can be used as a vehicle to challenge racism, ableism or “overcome feelings of powerlessness and personal guilt” (p. 3). In this context, singing the song was a way to give an inner freedom that responds to all negativity surrounding my Blackness and disability.

Moreover, cultural productions – most notably reggae music – remain as defining characteristics of the idealism and spirit of resistance of a Jamaica that, while often fragmented politically and racially, endeavours to sing as one in the global chorus. According to Fanon (1967), colonialism operates through a range of ideological agents, such as the Church, and “dehumanizes the native, or to speak plainly, it turns him into an animal” (p. 42).

\(^7\) Winston Macintosh – 1977
Fanon’s (1963) writing is particularly important in the history of colonization as he draws attention to the complex nature of colonialism: that colonialism is not simply about conquest, domination and economic exploitation, but more importantly, it is about mental and cultural subjugation and erasure. For Fanon, colonialism is an especially insidious and destructive process as so many of its key functions occur at the mental, cultural and pedagogical level. Thus, unlike wars and conquests of one European people by another – where each population retains its identity and culture – colonialism is critically concerned with cultural erasure and mental domination. This resulting split or bifurcated consciousness is perhaps the aspect of colonialism that is most acutely personal to me (DuBois, 1903; Wright, 1993). Who am I – as a Black Caribbean man – receiving my earliest education in a religious (European Christian) school, learning a European language (with dialect) as my native tongue? The first time I saw Shakespeare’s *Othello*, I was suddenly on the outside looking at myself – but was it myself, or a cultural construct of identity that had been shaped for me by colonialism? Of course, while this is a personal view, I acknowledge that I am far from alone in this regard. Thus, colonialism was as much a pedagogical and epistemological project as it was a military, political and economic one. It endeavoured to not only control people’s bodies, their social institutions and their economic means of production and resources, it also sought to control colonized populations’ minds and cultures: it taught them how to see themselves through the colonizer’s eyes, through the colonizer’s language, using the knowledge constructs and concepts of the colonizer, and in this conceptualization of the body.

Set against this background, the complexity of this analysis of the pedagogical operation of colonialism is particularly interesting. Decolonization and resistance are terms that carry an immense weight of significance, for colonialism was never simply a matter of politics or economics. Its enduring legacy to the present time is cultural and psychological, for the colonialism of the mind continues to define our lives. To use a metaphor from our computer culture, how can we decolonize when our cultural “operating system” – the collective discourses and texts with which we represent
and make sense of the world around us – is built upon source code originating in Western Europe in the 19th century, modified only by a cultural “Service Pack” produced by American cultural industries in the 20th century? While I am Black and have been exposed and shaped by a range of cultures and texts over the years, my Afro-Caribbean cultural background remains preeminent. However, colonialism compels me to question who I am, for I know very well how significantly this cultural background has been determined by Western European interests over the course of generations. When Fanon (1963) writes that the success of colonialism lies in how it forces the colonized to continually ask themselves, “In reality, who am I?” – he is not being “defeatist” but a realist with regard to acknowledging the full spectrum of colonialist power. This spectrum includes obvious manifestations of power – economic, racial, political and military control – to effect domination (Wynter, 2003). In this analysis, the metaphor of the computer operating system is again useful. How can I be truly certain of a decolonized-self-status when I know that core elements of the “operating system” that I use to perceive and represent the world around me were themselves products of colonialism?

People, either in Jamaica, Canada, or any cultural frame, constitute their identities and sense of the world at the intersection of differences. In terms of my own experience, while I initially interpreted my disability in terms of masculinity, I came to understand it in terms of Blackness and disability, and eventually as a cultural mélange of all three marginalizing social positioning. In this context, I argue that it is not only through an inclusive theoretical and cultural apparatus that we can come to understand the full complexity of the disability, marginality and potential for resistance in our society. It is also important to engage in inductive reasoning and introspection regarding the experiences of others. All people have a story, and it is important to understand their story and what it means within these frameworks. This work demonstrates that when we are able to situate ourselves in the colonialist discourses that permeate our culture, we are better able to address the complexities and issues of our culture and understand how to create a
more equitable human society in the years to come. In this section, I have shown how critical theorists’ complex work depicts colonialism as a set of processes that involve not only physical struggle, but also psychological and pedagogical struggles as well as cultural marginalization.

Nonetheless, growing up as an abused, homeless youth in Jamaica, I learned firsthand the ways in which these obstacles result in social, economic, and psychological marginalization of the abused male body, and after immigrating to Canada, the category of Blackness made my previous challenges more comprehensible. After moving to Canada, I also recognized the importance of obtaining an education, not only to avoid returning to a life of homelessness, but also as a means of helping others avoid the same fate. It is these experiences, in part, which motivated me to apply to the Transitional Year Programme (TYP) at the University of Toronto to gain entry to post-secondary education, and later to pursue an undergraduate degree in Equity Studies at the University of Toronto. During my undergraduate experience I enrolled in a number of courses in Disability Studies taught by Professor Rod Michalko that examined equity and the body, which ultimately encouraged my interest in how individual social position is frequently reflected institutionally.

For instance, I became interested in critically examining my early challenges living on the streets of Jamaica and my experiences immigrating to Canada, both of which had several unanticipated benefits. First, these critical examinations served to strengthen my personal resolve; second, they afforded me a unique opportunity to gain experience occupying marginalized social and material spaces, and finally, they reinforced my belief in the necessary connection between critical thinking and survival, whether that survival is physical, psychological, or intellectual. Racial, disability, sexual, and gender diversity within the TYP student body, and understanding the systemic and personal challenges faced by these historically marginalized groups, has broadened my understanding of social and educational systems, including their ability to exclude individuals who lack significant power to resist social and
institutional exclusion in Canada. Undoubtedly, my belief in the value and necessity of education comes from the personal and the rough academic journey I have travelled over the years. It also comes from my journey into an unfamiliar environment as a young child who experienced physical violence and social oppression in Jamaica, and as an immigrant to Canada who encountered institutional anti-Black racism and personal exclusion. The experiences of these homeless people were similar to mine because of the marginalization and intersectional discrimination they have experienced through their lives. As it was for me, education as an institution was far from home because of disability and discrimination.

Section 3: University Accommodation: Stigma, Fixed Identities and their Disruption

This story begins at the [University of Toronto] . . . where all stories begin: in collective imaginative relations to what is deemed story-able about people, [Black disabled students,] places, and things. I begin with one way of orienting to . . . [the university system] – as places where things happen, since they are places organized by times of inclusion and exclusion. Improving . . . [accommodation] for [students with disabilities] . . . is certainly part of the story, but it is not the whole of it, nor it is the end of it. (Titchkosky, 2011, p. 103)

I begin in the middle: this story lies in a personal experience of the Learning Disability Assessment Test in September 2013, at the University of Toronto. During my first year of PhD studies, my academic accessibility advisor informed me that I had to renew my accommodations with the Accessibility Services Office. She also told me that my accommodation file must be updated in order to continue to receive accommodation. This was very shocking to me because I received accommodations throughout my undergraduate and graduate Masters degree studies at the same university and through the same office. She recommended that I must present myself for another assessment test. After a series of tests, lasting eight days and consisting of 15½ hours of testing with two different psychologists, one of the psychologists diagnosed me with Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), for which she said the only cure was treatment with
medication. During this time, I felt intimidated, nervous, fearful, and anxious throughout the administration of the various tests. Additionally, in 2004, I was also classified with a learning disability, a classification of a set of experiences that have shaped my educational career and life from childhood. Moreover, in a 2004 exam period at the University of Toronto, one of my instructors, upon noticing that I took longer than the scheduled time to complete my exams, recommended that I go to the University’s Accessibility Services for an assessment. Two days after a lengthy six-hour test, a psycho-educational consultant informed me that I have a learning disability. These are the tests that I was now requested to retake at the start of my PhD journey.

As a graduate student studying for a PhD, this was disconcerting, stressful and contributed to feelings of trauma. This trauma emerged because of the stigma that is attached to having a learning disability in a graduate studies program. I experienced an extraordinary fear because of this diagnosis, and I was concerned about what this diagnosis would mean to me, including a concern for how my peers and mentors would view me in the program. Stigma is a scary experience, and when it is attached to Blackness and a learning disability, it can contribute to questioning your ability. Again, I was left to ask, “Who am I?”

This experience took me through a range of emotional responses that I have yet to fully resolve. While I have extensive experience with disability in theory and practice, being labelled with PTSD that necessitates ongoing medication to maintain a normative state left me somewhat confused. My emotional responses wrestled with my critical understanding of issues related to this diagnosis. I struggled personally with the issues of labelling and stigma, normality and deviance, the performance of normality (with assistance of medication), and general expectations of the desirability of the normative condition. Coincidentally, this personal experience occurred during a period in which PTSD has become a prominent story in the Canadian news media. The news articles were of particular concern as they revealed the stigmatization linking PTSD to deviant behaviours, such as substance abuse and crimes of violence, but also the role of “experts”
defining PTSD in ways that augmented their authority while sensationalizing the condition with dramatic statistics (Global News, November 29, 2013).

In this context, I draw upon a range of critical and theoretical works to explore the implications of the above experiences and news reports from within a critical disability studies perspective. I will argue that disability must be understood in terms of lives lived within the gap between the “Real and the Representational” (Garland-Thomas, 1997), that is, between the raw experiences (sometimes confused) of people living with disability (such as myself) and the cultural representations of disability which can serve, at one and the same time, as discursive sites of oppression and resistance. The experience of life through the eyes of the disabled should then be considered similar to that of others under colonialism. Within this framework it will be seen, as per the adage of second-wave feminism, that for people with disabilities, the “personal is political” (Hanisch, 2006, p. 1). The phenomenon of PTSD has long been recognized, even if it has only recently come to be formally incorporated into the language of medicine. For instance, during the American Civil War, PTSD was conceptualized as “soldier’s heart” (Schroeder-Lein 2008), the symptoms of which were “palpitations, rapid heartbeat, and lightheadedness . . . related to severe mental or emotional stress” (p. 128). PTSD has doubtlessly existed in every war; however, it has varied whether PTSD is understood more as a deficiency of the PTSD sufferer or as a by-product of a pathological environment. As Withuis (2008) writes of the First World War, “soldiers who today would be defined as ill were executed as deserters” (p. 9).

8 The statement “the personal is political” is usually attributed to feminist author Carol Hanisch (2006), who wrote a paper with this as the title published in Notes from the Second Year: Women’s Liberation in 1970. However, Hanisch asserted that she was not the author of the adage, and suggests that it was more likely coined by her editors in response to widespread thinking among feminists about the intersection of private lives and political (that is, public power) relationships. The relevance of “the personal is political” to a disability studies perspective is significant, and can be related to the disability activist phrase, “nothing about us without us,” since disability status, including diagnosis and treatment is, not just personal but also political.
Although PTSD became an accepted disorder, recognized by both scholars and policy-makers, there continues to be some controversy over the political functions of PTSD. Bloche (2011) writes that PTSD has attracted numerous skeptics, that is, people who believe that PTSD is a failure of “courage and resilience” (p. 68) that prevents people from suffering from it “from taking responsibility for their own lives” (p. 68). As the above discussion indicates, there is considerable reason to be concerned at one’s being assessed as possessing a disability. First, it is necessary to recognize that while such assessments are often arbitrary, they nonetheless produce considerable cultural meaning that has historically been applied in a discriminatory fashion. Second, it must be acknowledged that this discriminatory process has – in its implied construction of a “normality” or standard of normalcy – clear analogues to discriminatory practices that have historically reinforced sex, race and gender discrimination. The nature of the discrimination experienced becomes understood as acceptable through a framework according to which only certain types of people are considered important. Discrimination then takes a shape that is similar to that of oppressed people under colonialism.

Thus, while it must be emphasized that there is nothing wrong with the possession of a disability, the history of this concept – particularly in terms of segregation and differential treatment in the field of education – gives reason for concern to any individual (such as myself) who has thus been designated. Given my personal perspective on issues of equity as an individual of Black Caribbean background, the issues of power and discrimination that have historically been associated with the assessment of disability are unsettling. From this perspective, it should not be denied that disability represents a critical platform for resistance to our social institutions’ tendency to define “normal” status. However, it must nonetheless be acknowledged that the concept of “disability” itself has deep cultural roots in Euro-American society as an imprecise and sometime flawed discriminatory label (Davis, 1995). In this analysis, for the concept of “disability” to be effective in an educational context, it must be revisited from a range of critical perspectives to interrogate the
concept and construction of “normality,” thereby fostering more egalitarian templates of social order.

Once it is acknowledged that PTSD is not the victim’s fault, and also that PTSD is a disability in terms of the ways in which it renders people unable to function properly in ordinary life, then there are important political repercussions. The first such repercussion is that the victim is not responsible for the disability. The responsibility shifts to the state or to other individuals (such as abusive spouses). If the divisions between these zones are not so sharp – if, in fact, a home or a neighborhood can function in the same way as a war zone – then it becomes more difficult to classify PTSD as a disability. As long as PTSD sufferers are actually in circumstances of genuine threat, they cannot be said to be disabled; rather, their PTSD symptoms

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9 One reason that PTSD is defined as a disability is that, as Chemtob et al. (1988) pointed out, there is a sharp distinction between a war zone (or any zone of combat) and a zone of ordinary life. However, on closer examination, it is not clear that the distinction between combat and non-combat zones is as sharp as Chemtob et al. assumed it to be. Scholars who have studied violence within relationships, particularly male abuse of women, have concluded that such violence essentially turns homes into war zones, which, in effect, means that the PTSD acquired by abused women and other victims of domestic violence is functionally identical to the PTSD of soldiers (Roberts, Gilman, Breslau, Breslau, & Koenen, 2011). At the same time, it is also the case that poor neighborhoods are akin to combat zones, not only because of street crime and domestic violence but also because of the onerous police presence in such enclaves (Nikulina, Widom, & Czaja, 2011). Thus, if PTSD as understood as a biological adaption to a combative or otherwise threatening environment, then the idea of PTSD as a disability is itself deeply reliant on the assumption that there are sharp divisions between cultural zones (such as a war zone versus a domestic community). If the divisions between these zones are not so sharp – if, in fact, a home or a neighborhood can function in the same way as a war zone – then it becomes more difficult to classify PTSD as a disability. As long as PTSD sufferers actually are in circumstances of genuine threat, they cannot be said to be disabled; rather, their PTSD symptoms will make them more likely to take the kinds of actions that will assist in their survival (Schroeder, 2008). Just as importantly, if PTSD is a disability that oftentimes arises from service done on behalf of the state, then the treatment of PTSD can no longer be approached as a personal matter. In other words, it is no longer appropriate to exhort the individual with PTSD to conveniently get over his or her condition.
will make them more likely to take the kinds of actions that will assist in their survival (Schroeder, 2008). It then becomes plausible for the disability of PTSD to give rise to civic and criminal penalties and, in the case of warfare, to be treated therapeutically by the state on whose behalf individuals acquire PTSD in the first place.

PTSD presents a useful opportunity for addressing a number of questions related to disability, in particular the question of what society needs disability to be. For some people the very existence of PTSD as a recognized disability presents a challenge to the symbolic integrity and strength of a society, especially as such strength is symbolized by the military. For others, PTSD is an indicator of personal moral or character failings. Yet for others, PTSD is a disability that calls attention not to any deficiency of those who suffer from it, but rather to the violence that characterizes so much of human life, from the battlefield to the bedroom (Bauman, 2013). As such, examining the nature, characteristics, and evolution of different approaches to PTSD offers an opportunity to understand which different segments of society require PTSD-related disability to be, and for what reasons. Clearly, the definition of PTSD-related disability and consequent treatment reflects irreconcilable political viewpoints. As such, the definition and treatment of PTSD as a disability can be understood not only scientifically but also as the end result of a process of political contestation between various parties. In other words, any attempt to define PTSD solely as a biological phenomenon fails. While PTSD is certainly associated with a physiological substrate of detectable symptoms (Agaibi & Wilson, 2005; Cohen, Friedman, Keane, & Foa, 2009), these symptoms can only be labelled as a disability within the context of a cultural zone.

Soldiers with PTSD returning from the Civil War were disabled in the sense that their hyper-vigilance and other PTSD symptoms actively harmed them in terms of being able to live ordinary lives as farmers, businesspeople, fathers, or spouses. On the other hand, a woman with PTSD who lives with an actively abusive husband is not necessarily disabled by her PTSD,
because her PTSD might be responsible for increasing her chances of survival. Thus, even though it is possible to reach a consensus that PTSD is a genuine disorder, it is far more difficult – indeed, impossible – to reach an objective consensus on whether PTSD is a disability, and perhaps the aim of such consensus is also not desirable. Whether PTSD counts as a disability depends on the distinctions between zones (such as zones of war versus zones of peaceful domestic life, as well as zones of masculinity versus cowardice) and how cultures make sense of such zones.

Having provided a description of how the definition of PTSD as a disability is reliant on the ultimately cultural factors of distinct zones, it is possible to apply this theory to real-world cases of PTSD definition, treatment, and lack of treatment in order to reach relevant conclusions about what society needs PTSD-related disability to be, and why. Clegg, Courpasson, and Phillips (2006) wrote that there are three kinds of power, namely formal, informal, and hidden power. Hidden power was described by Clegg et al. as follows:

It does not focus just on observable behavior but seeks to make an interpretive understanding of the intentions that are seen to lie behind social actions. . . . These come into play, especially, when choices are made concerning what agenda items are ruled in or ruled out; when it is determined that, strategically, for whatever reasons, some areas remain a zone of non-decision rather than decision. (p. 210)

A historical overview of PTSD indicates that it must have first arisen in formal combat situations, in which the fighters were more likely to be male (Schroeder, 2008); given the machismo of warfare, it is in the interest of all militarist societies to pretend that warfare is noble and that warriors are somehow superman. To name PTSD is already to acknowledge that warfare brings about collateral damage on all sides and that warriors are subject to the same pains, traumas, and disabilities as anyone else. When modern medical methods and scientific research made it impossible to continue ignoring PTSD, attempts were made to redefine it as a personal failing rather than an indictment of violence in society. At this stage in the evolution of PTSD discourse, PTSD was either stated or hinted to be cowardice, weakness, or, at any rate, some kind
of deficiency on the part of the sufferer. PTSD is classified more as a personal pathology (for which responsibility shifts to the sufferer) than a disease (for which responsibility shifts to the system in which the disease arises). Gender expectations blamed individuals, particularly males, for not living up to what society demanded of them.

For the disabled, another element of the stigma that is experienced when seeking accommodation is the feeling that we are inhibiting the optimal intellectual growth of the class by requiring services. The Foucault (1995) story “Harrison Burgereon” takes place in a society where rather than accommodating the requirements of people with different needs, they use implements as a way of disabling people. The focus in the story is on creating equality by disability. The idea that abilities of others would be restricted or modified would be disruptive to society in unacceptable ways, but in Foucault (1995), it is the way in which the government sought to create an equal society. This story is a reflection on the fears that lay latent in the classroom and which create stigma. It is based on the perception that students who are disabled can hold back students who are not. This is reflective of Wynter (2003), who discussed the issue of colonialism in institutions and the way in which it informs the way that protocol is designed.

There is a paternalistic element of the way in which institutions manage disability and consider the way in which the issues of the disabled should be handled. The power held by those who are not Black or disabled is maintained by having policy in place which requires the disabled to prove the degree of their disability to in turn receive accommodations in order to balance out and make equal the conditions for performance, learning, housing, etc.

**Defining Disability and Real Consequences**

In attempting to understand how disability may be understood within this gap between the Real and the Representational, two critical readings had particular resonance for me in
reflecting upon the PTSD diagnosis. Titchkosky (2000), in exploring the role of the “official text producers” of a society in terms of defining disability, observed:

Such official definers of disability have usually come from medical jurisdictions, but sociologists, too, have a long history of producing textual knowledge on and about disabled people. The latter has typically treated disabled people as expressions of the problem of involuntary deviance, subject to processes of stigmatization who employ a variety of techniques and technologies in order to manage, cope with, or hide the problems that impaired senses, minds and/or bodies are assumed to generate. (pp. 198-199)

This observation has clear relevance to both my personal experience with medical diagnosis of disability and PTSD and to news articles on PTSD and stigmatization. “However men [sic] define something as real, it will be real in its consequences” (W. I, Thomas, 1971, pp. 274-277). Similarly, Titchkosky (2007) notes, there are “real consequences for the ways in which disability [and Blackness] can be read, written, thought about, lived” (p. 12). As Hanisch argues, with reference to how the “official text producers” in the period of Second Wave Feminism believed women’s discontent with their social condition was – in the view of the medical establishment – a medical/psychological condition that could be “cured” with therapy:

Therapy assumes that someone is sick and that there is a cure, e.g., a personal solution. I am greatly offended that I or any other woman is thought to need therapy in the first place. Women are messed over, not messed up! (Hanisch, 2006, p. 2)

Consider, for example, Taylor’s (2011) demonstration of how the medical model of disability – which is surprisingly resilient even to the present day – identifies people with disabilities as being determined by their bodies. She notes that: “the medical model of disability positioned the disabled body as working incorrectly, as being unhealthy and abnormal, as in need of a cure” (Taylor, 2011, p. 194).

Contrary to this, Shakespeare (2002), in one of his earlier engagements with the social model of disability in contradistinction to other political framings of disability, observes how the North American understanding of disability is based upon clear analogies with the Civil Rights
struggle that has been so significant in transforming our understanding of race and culture. Shakespeare (2002) observes: “the North American approach has mainly developed the notion of people with disabilities as a minority group, within the traditions of US political thought” (p. 4). Shakespeare makes a case for disability theorists – particularly those in the United Kingdom – to consider a revision of the social model of disability that has becomes the orthodox critical model for understanding disability in the academic context. Contrary to the popular view of disability as some medical condition (e.g., visual impairment, mobility impairment) that restricts an individual in some respect – a view known as the “medical model” of disability – the social model of disability (particularly in the UK) conceptualizes “disability” as something quite apart from any person’s medical condition. Instead, as critics argue: “In our view, it is society which disables physically impaired people. Disability is something imposed on top of our impairments by the way we are unnecessarily isolated and excluded from full participation in society. Disabled people are therefore an oppressed group in society” (Oliver, 1996, p. 22). In a sense, it may be said that people with disabilities are in a position analogous to that of Fanon – over a generation ago – in that the forces of institutional oppression are not troubling themselves to cloak their discursive strategies that identify people with disabilities as “deviant” and even “subhuman.” Indeed, the power of institutional oppression to define the selves and bodies of people with disabilities is effectively as absolute as was the power of colonial masters.

Titchkosky’s (2000) observation raises the implication that while disability is defined discursively by the “official text producers” of a society, this representational frame is nonetheless distinct from the real lives of people with disabilities. As Titchkosky (2000) notes, with regard to the definition of disability in the medical/sociological context, “Medicine studies pathology, sociologists study deviance, and both begin with a similar conception of the disabled body – the condition of having, and thus being, a problem” (p. 208). While medical and
sociological thought may define disability as a discursive project, as Titchkosky (2000) notes, this perspective has “real consequences for real people” (p. 208).

The second critical text that resonated in this regard, and interrelates significantly with Titchkosky, is Butler’s (1993b) “Imitation and Gender Insubordination.” In exploring the idea of fixed identity categories, Butler argues that these can open possibilities for both oppression and resistance, stating, “identity categories tend to be instruments of regulatory regimes, whether as the normalizing categories of oppressive structures or as the rallying points for a liberatory contestation of that very oppression” (Titchkosky, 2000, p. 208). Butler’s insight allows people with disabilities to understand the possibilities of “re-colonizing” the identity categories and definitions that demarcate their lives and experiences. At the same time, however, Titchkosky’s observation reminds us that while we may be interested in engaging in “liberatory contestation,” we cannot ignore the fact that these identity categories have “real consequences for real people.”

To illustrate this gap between the representational and the real, the illustrative example of PTSD offers some illumination.

“Problem People”: PTSD and the Industry of Disability

In the introduction to Rethinking Normalcy, Titchkosky and Michalko (2009) make the point that defining disability has, in most cultures, not been according to the self-definition of people with disabilities. For example, in Western cultures, institutional professions exercise this power in conceptualizing disability as a tragic problem:

Despite the impossible belief that disability is not a broad social issue, there are still people and institutions that begin from the premise that disability is simply a rare and anomalous personal tragedy. It is precisely this “personal tragedy” conception of disability that acts as the impetus and provides the foundation for the study of disability. Professions such as medicine, rehabilitation, counselling, and special education have their own ways of defining disability. . . . What these professions share in common, however, is that disability is a personal tragedy wrought with problems, problems for which solutions must be sought. That disability is a personal problem of tragic proportions requiring the assistance of
the helping professions makes this story the major one that disabled people in Western cultures are forced to inhabit today. (Titchkosky & Michalko, 2009, p. 2)

As Titchkosky and Michalko (2009) point out, the existence of these institutions defining disability as a problem that they seek to “cure” raises a seeming paradox, for while “this has led to a gigantic helping industry, it has not resulted in changing the marginalization and discrimination faced by disabled people on a daily basis” (p. 4). Identifying a similar problem, Hurst (1999) suggests: “disabled people’s own organisations happened as a direct action against the oppression of the medical rehabilitation professionals and psychiatrists, and their assumption that they ‘owned’ disability, and by inference, disabled people” (p. 25). From my personal experience, given my years of work in this field, this feeling among people with disabilities that they are resisting being “owned” by institutions – whether by the medical establishment, or government agencies such as the Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP) – is both widely-held and deep. It is almost as people with disabilities feel they are resisting a form of “slavery” whereby their bodies, and how their bodies are represented in cultural space, are being controlled or defined by others.

While this insight may seem obvious, I would argue that it is extraordinarily significant in understanding disability today. Consider its implications in reference to the news articles on PTSD. It is not surprising that the term “tragedy” or “tragedies” is used in articles and applied to people with PTSD as a mental illness. It is very interesting to note that this usage is common among people in the “helping industry,” medical professionals, and in calls for more money to be spent on PTSD research and new therapies. I should emphasize that in raising this point, I am not saying that scientific or medical research should not occur or not be funded. What I do believe is important is the point highlighted by Titchkosky and Michalko above, that the existence of a “gigantic helping industry” (2009, p. 4) with control over the definition of disability, invariably as a “tragic problem,” does not seem to result in any change in the marginalization of people.
with disabilities. In a sense, the industry needs people with disabilities to be “problem people” to justify, at least in part, their existence. The power to define something, to define people, is a very real power, and not a thing that any institution will yield without a struggle (Smith, 2005; Butler, 1993b; Foucault, 1995; W.I. Thomas, 1971).

In considering my own experience with the PTSD diagnosis, the only “cure” I was informed about was medication for the treatment of symptoms. However, the linkage of this “cure” with medication meant that it was provisional, dependent upon institutional dispensing of medication, and that I would possibly never achieve “normalcy.” In effect, I would always be a “problem person.” This issue with fixed identity categories is a major reason why people with disabilities are suspicious of identity politics and resistant to even claiming the social identifier of disability. As Garland-Thomson (2002) observes:

The refusal to claim disability identity is in part due to a lack of ways to understand or talk about disability that are not oppressive. . . . Nonetheless, by disavowing disability identity, many of us learned to save ourselves from devaluation by a complicity that perpetuates oppressive notions. (p. 22)

Garland-Thomson’s (2002) above statement illustrates the complex double-bind confronting people with disability – the pervasiveness of social labelling and reduction of people with disabilities leaves few avenues to self-identification that are not oppressive, yet avoiding self-identification can be complicit in that same hegemonic and discriminatory order. This position is not unlike that assumed by Butler (1993b) when she noted her unease and anxiety with “being” a lesbian, that is, operating under the fixed identity category of lesbian or homosexual. In part, this stems from her unease at entering into a contest that may result in her being “re-colonized” within this category.

Butler (1993b) also makes the point that this definitional struggle is related, but exists apart from the reality of who she is as a subject. Butler (1993b) suggests that the representational field is a site of performance in which she performs being a lesbian as an identity category, but
explicitly cautions that this does not exhaust or limit the reality of who she is as an “I.” In Butler’s (1993b) words:

When and where does this playing a lesbian constitute something like what I am? To say that I “play” at being one is not to say that I am not one “really”. . . . This is not a performance from which I can take radical distance, for this is deep-seated play. . . . What “performs” does not exhaust the “I”; it does not lay out in visible terms the comprehensive content of that “I.” (p. 311)

Butler is addressing the distinction between the Representational and the Real as a performative space, that is, the making and defining of an identity category, and the acceptance of a willingness to perform within this category as a political act, while nonetheless emphasizing that this definition does not exhaust who one is as a subject. Fixed identity categories with respect to disability, as with gender or race, have always possessed a performative aspect:

Race, gender, and sexual orientation may seem self-evidently fixed at birth, yet there is a strong “performative” element to the lived experience of identity. As the French philosopher Simone de Beauvoir famously wrote: “One is not born a woman, but, rather, becomes one.” (Potolsky, 2006, p. 128)

Restated, while I may have a learning disability or PTSD, these are not what I am as a person, as a human being. While one may “perform” disability as a political act of resistance, contesting the power of institutional forces to re-colonize the sign of “disability” by controlling its definition, one engages in this performance – even when it is “deep-seated play” with “real consequences for real people,” with recognition that it does not limit who one is.

In this chapter, the success of oppressive forces in our society lies in their capacity to stigmatize us within the frame of a defined identity. Consider, for example, how in the news articles on PTSD, it is closely associated with deviant behaviours (domestic violence, drug abuse, addiction, suicide). The stigma of PTSD is then attached to these problems, thereby attaching our own identity to them. The stigma extends beyond the element of PTSD and to factors related to the phenomenon itself.
One way of understanding the underlying politics of the definition and treatment of PTSD is through the notion of zones, which are themselves cultural constructs. In this critical analysis, zones are defined as socially constructed areas of education which students participate, a zone is something like a context. Zones would be such areas of education as the classroom, extracurricular, accessibility services and activities, as well as states of mind such as testing. Consider, for example, the American Psychological Association’s (2000) diagnostic criteria for PTSD, which include the following criterion: “The disturbance causes clinically significant distress or impairment in social, occupational, or other important areas of functioning” (p. 256). As Chemtob et al. (1988) pointed out in their seminal definition of PTSD, some of the characteristics of this disorder – including hyper-vigilance and rapid response to perceived threats – are highly useful in actual combat situations. The imagined biological basis for this aspect of PTSD is the so-called fight or flight response, which employs adrenaline and other neurochemical control mechanisms to generate hyper-vigilance and other forms of response to real and perceived threats (Everly & Lating, 2013).

In terms of the theory of zones developed previously, PTSD – as developed in the scientific discourse – appears to have broken down the pre-modern understanding of zones of masculinity versus zones of cowardice and reconfigured them as zones of combat versus zones of non-combat. The scientific understanding of PTSD made it easier to shift the essence of this disability from the zone of judgmental gender expectation to the zone of an assessment. If PTSD is reconfigured as a disability that arises from some kind of faulty zone within society (such as zones of war, domestic abuse, or crime), then the treatment of PTSD necessarily involves the removal of sufferers from such zones and their rehabilitation into a zone of normativity; the disabled, abuse spouse, or child rape victim must be brought back home, literally and therapeutically.
What Is to Be Done?

Framing the issue of PTSD within a critical disability studies perspective, and understanding the gap between the Representational and the Real, gives some illumination to my question of how to respond to this label of disability and its implications for my life. One possibility is opened by the contention that an individual can engage in an “identity” as a social performance in order to “pass” while, at the same time, attempting to isolate this from my own sense of personal identity. Feminist theory offers insights as to how such a strategy may occur. As an example, feminists note that in research conducted in the 1920s, it was shown how women would engage in a “performance of womanliness” as a social defense mechanism. As critics argue, the attributes of femininity “could be assumed and worn as a mask” as a strategy of playing against, and resisting, the forces of social convention (Potolsky, 2006, p. 130). Indeed, whenever one engages in such a contestation of power in terms of “fixed identity categories,” this is a clear and present danger that is arguably a reason many people with disabilities avoid engaging with the category of disability as much as possible.

With regard to disability, it is fascinating to note echoes of these perspectives in the words of Nancy Mairs (1996) in writing about how the language of our culture – at the basic metaphorical level – alienates her from her body and defines her disability as shameful:

The fact that the soundness of the body so often serves as a metaphor for moral health, its deterioration thus implying moral degeneracy, puts me and my kind in a quandary. How can I possibly be “good”? (p. 57)

As Titchkosky (2000) notes, it is important to recognize the “resources, institutional support, and authority” of the “official text producers” in our society to ideologically define the bodies of disabled people (p. 198). Moreover, the power of normalcy to “construct” disabled persons as non-normative and stigmatized – is challenging to address because our society. As Titchkosky (2000) writes, everyday practices, such as the use of language, “[encode] normalcy as the expected but taken for granted ground the ‘we-the-normals’ experience, an experience that does not usually
obtrude upon one’s consciousness. Instead, normalcy is the unmarked viewpoint from which deviance is observed” (Titchkosky, 2000, p. 207). The echoes of Titchkosky in Mairs’ above statement are striking, as we understand the pervasive power of the dominant culture – at the level of language itself – makes it extraordinarily challenging to develop strategies of resistance.

However, it may be proffered that in a more complex analysis, women are subverting this same structure by using their agency in the mode of selection and deployment of the attributes of “womanliness.” This perspective was emphasized by the French feminist philosopher Luce Irigaray as she laid out a framework of gender performance as a strategy of resistance. Irigaray (1985) contended that women should play with the social conventions of femininity “without allowing themselves to be reduced to it” (p. 76). In this way, such a performance would undermine the claims of hegemonic social authority that being a “woman” was a matter of biological destiny and not, as Irigaray and other feminists contended, a social role (Irigaray, 1985, p. 76).

These findings are support for the idea that passing is not only a feminist phenomenon, but it happens in many marginalized communities. The following chapters explore “passing” in more detail. The phenomenon of passing also extends to Blacks who are disabled as well. Research related to the phenomenon of passing among Blacks has found that the marginalization that they may experience in different social institutions, such as education and work, will motivate significant changes in the way that they compensate for their positions where they will appear “whiter” (Fordham, 1993). The term “passing” is a fascinating concept, which has had a long and contentious history for Black people. In a racial context, “passing” refers to people of one racially-categorized group attempting to “pass” or be accepted as a member of another racial group. This form of “passing” is highly determined by social power relations in a society. Typically, it involves a person or group attempting to be accepted as members of another particular group. In this study, “passing” is also a concept that is shaped, at its core, by an often-internalized awareness of
social power relations. I would also argue that, from a theoretical perspective, “passing” is a concept that is not necessarily dependent upon people believing one is not what one appears to be. As Michalko (1998) observes: “the person who passes is always aware of social situations and how they are interactionally produced, and is thus always aware of what interaction is necessary to fit naturally into them” (p. 104). In other words, in order to “pass” one must create an identity that is not quite one’s “true” self or who they think or know their self to be – if such a thing can be said to exist – but is nonetheless a highly mediated relation between oneself and one’s awareness of social expectations. In studies on passing among the disabled, researchers have found the same phenomenon (Samuels, 2003).

There is much that needs to be done to address the current problems that exist at the intersection of Blackness and disability. These activities oriented the progression of my research to the point where the study is focused on the way in which Universities approach their treatment of students with disabilities. This contributes to the formation of identity and is an element of the underpinnings of the growth that students experience in the university setting.

**Mind the Gap**: Life, Disability and PTSD

In this section, my study employed PTSD as an example that helped orient and frame the interest in understanding disability more generally, and how this orientation to disability grounds some of the research interests. For the university student, there are several disabilities which are carried into the university setting. These disabilities can require accommodation on the part of faculty and administration to ensure that the student has equal access to the preparation and

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10 Oddly, this “gap” kept recurring in my thoughts in terms of the famous London Underground subway warning – repeated automatically at subway stations in London, England for years – to “Mind the Gap” – being the gap between the subway platform and the old subway cars. The voice recording of this phrase, which is featured in many British movies and TV shows, somehow encapsulated the importance of this issue – and also provided a title for this section of my study.
growth which happens in the university setting. The current section reflects on this; however, in the reflection, the example used is PTSD. There are several other disabilities which could be utilized; however, PTSD was what contributed to the frame of this research and interest in the problem.

In the process of writing, re-writing, and reflecting on PTSD and disability for this study, I became mindful of the metaphorical statement that people with disabilities live in the “Gap” between the Real and Representational. People with disabilities and/or people labelled with one or another designation of associated bodily or mental attribute or condition, such as PTSD, live their daily lives suspended in the gap between themselves as an “I” and the power of institutional forces pressing to define them with a label or designation. For instance, Foucault (1995) defined the term “enclosure” to better understand how social institutions would limit and separate people from one another (p. 141). With further introspection, the thought occurred to me that I cannot consider myself as an “I” totally divorced from my social condition or fixed identity categories. While I do not accept the power of institutional forces to totally limit nor fully define me or my possibilities, at the same time I cannot ignore the very real fact that these forces define the world through which I move on a daily basis. They have, as Titchkosky (2000) noted, “real consequences for real people” (p. 208). This gap and its consequences are part of what animates the research of this dissertation.

“I” am not defined by the diagnosis of PTSD; however, at the same time, the fact that it has troubled me and it has caused no little amount of reflection lends credence to the view that I cannot consider my reality in isolation from the representational. In a sense, we all exist in a state of dynamic tension, living our daily lives in the gap between the Real and the Representational. What this view suggests is that we cannot ignore the fight, despite our best efforts to try to avoid it; what is going on in the greater world regarding the definition of fixed social identities is typified by those associated with disability or PTSD.
In the classic movie *Casablanca* (1942), the protagonist Rick, played by Humphrey Bogart, is often seen as representing an isolationist United States that has retreated from the fight against fascism in Europe. At one point, as Rick is debating engaging in the fight with Signor Ferrari, Sydney Greenstreet laments that in the modern world, “Isolation is no longer a practical foreign policy” (*Casablanca*, 1942). In a very real sense, this statement can be seen to apply our understanding disability in terms of living lives in the Gap between the Real and the Representational. While it is undeniably exhausting and emotionally troubling at times to be continually navigating the innumerable forces in this Gap, it is worth reiterating that it also undeniable, as second-wave feminism noted so aptly, “the personal is political” (Hanisch, 2006, p. 1). This analysis has important social and political consequences especially when contracted to taken for granted relations to disability as problem, or when naturalized as excludable in the processes of stigmatization.

On the other hand, the medical establishment has taken what Lukes (1974) described as the liberal approach to power. In the liberal approach, people’s descriptions of their wants and experiences are taken seriously and responded to with policy measures, which in the case of PTSD includes (a) full acknowledgement of this disability as arising from environmental causes and (b) state-sponsored treatment. The militaristic perspective was associated with Lukes’ (1974) radical theory of power and Clegg et al.’s (2006) third dimension of power; the scientific perspective was associated with Lukes’ liberal theory of power. The analysis supports the conclusion that the definition of PTSD and steps taken towards its treatment are highly dependent on the political standpoints associated with the views of the disability.

The difference between these interests and those that are averse to acknowledging the true nature of PTSD can be illustrated through Lukes’ (1974) definition of the three stages of power.
Lukes’ (1974) Three Dimensions of Power:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Power Dimension</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Liberal</td>
<td>The liberal takes men as they are and applies want-regarding principles to them, relating their interests to what they actually want or prefer, to their policy preference as manifested by their political participation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reformist</td>
<td>The reformist, seeing and deploring that not all men’s wants are given equal weight by the political system, also relates their interests to what they want or prefer, but allows that this may be revealed in more indirect and sub-political ways – in the form of deflected, submerged, or concealed wants and preferences.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Radical</td>
<td>The radical . . . maintains that men’s wants may themselves be a product of a system which works against their interests, and in such cases, relates the latter to what they would want and prefer, were they able to make the choice.</td>
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Power is an important element of my research. Through power control current social paradigms can be maintained or disrupted. The approach taken by universities with regard to the Black disabled students is such that the current paradigm is maintained through policies which dictate what disability means and the way in which the personal disability of an individual may be handled. From personal experience, the way in which this is handled in the university setting is in such a way that the university maintains control over the person and their personal construction of their disability by maintaining the nature of accommodation. This is power, and is how the system is maintained – by making the disabled prove their disability. My research project interpreted what this power does to the Black disabled students who would need to deal with faculty and administrators on a level where it is maintained.

**Summary**

In Chapter 1, I did not include the ascertaining of personal history of the participants, although it was germane to who they are as individuals, as it does not bear relevance to the study
other than the personal biographical information they chose to include in response to the interview questions. Many of the participants did choose to include anecdotes and pieces of their personal history with regards to their experiences with Accessibility Services and as Black students at the University of Toronto, and they did provide some contextual perspective. My Blackness, my broken-ness, and my personal isolation and marginalization brought me to this investigation. However, the roads that led to the arrival of the participants at the University of Toronto were not as important as their contemporary collective experiences as Black disabled students. This analysis shows commonality with many of the research participants, as many have learning disabilities and their disabilities are “invisible.” Several of the participants also have been diagnosed with PTSD, and thus, I have a measured amount of empathy for them.

In essence, I believe that we cannot yield ground, but must contest every inch of the definitional “no-man’s land” that disability and PTSD are intellectual and cultural battlefields. While it is inescapable that we are represented as “problem people,” especially when we refuse to admit that we are “problems,” it is critically important that we not accept this classification as limiting us, or defining who we are as human beings. We live lives that interact with our disability, our Blackness, our gender, our age as fixed identity categories, engaging in performative politics in contesting these definitional categories in public spaces, while retaining our sense of ourselves as “I”s that nonetheless stand apart from the performance in some respect. Thus, there are also political interests that militate on behalf of the recognition of PTSD-related disability as a result of environmental circumstances rather than personal weaknesses. It is imperative that this phenomenon be understood in the scope of how it plays out in social institutions. Investigating this phenomenon and what it means in educational institutions is therefore significantly important from an academic and practical perspective.
In Chapter 2, I introduce the problem and make the case for investigating the issues of marginality and accommodation in the university setting. The chapter discusses the significance and justification of the study. The core significance of my research is based on the issue of accommodation and the way in which it is unique to the Black disabled students in the university setting. Black disabled students in this university setting must have accommodations which support their needs and academic performance, or they are likely to not perform to their optimal abilities to become successful students. This study is justified in Chapter 2 based on the idea that Black disabled students should have equal access and receive reasonable accommodations which will facilitate their studies.
Chapter 2: Engaging Marginality and Accommodation in the University

Introduction

My critical analysis addresses the phenomenon of marginality in relation to the bureaucratic policies and practices contributing to the discrimination of Black disabled university students’ experiences. This phenomenon is particularly noteworthy for how it defines a remarkable convergence of representations of Blackness and disability, as both an internalization of stigma and anti-Black racism, while at the same time being a mode of resistance to these types of oppression. In the university setting, administration and faculty hold a high degree of power over the future development of students. For Black students who are disabled, accommodation is key to their being and potentially thriving in the university setting; however, they may fail to access the appropriate accommodations because of having to deal with the bureaucratic arrangements in this university setting. For these students, the lack of power to access appropriate accommodation when they are not given it is a challenge they must face continually. This creates significant challenges with the only recourse being an appeal to the system that judged the nature of their disability to be insignificant enough for assistance in the first place.

These challenges are faced by students with disabilities globally, which is highlighted by Chataika, McKenzie, Swart and Lyner-Cleophas, (2012b) who show how in African countries disabled students face “inaccessible environments, lack of reasonable accommodation, negative attitudes, discriminatory application and admission procedures, and a lack of disability policies and resources that unnecessarily disadvantage [them]” (p. 394) in higher education. Accommodation, therefore, matters greatly in the university because it is both pivotal to academic success and there is a complete lack of power in terms of students’ ability to receive the accommodations they require in order to be successful.
Significance of the Study

Identity categorization, both on an informal and administrative level, is an everyday reality for Black disabled students. Little research has been done on addressing marginalization stemming from social identities that operate at the intersections of Blackness and disability. The recognition of the inequity when identifying people according to set categories has progressed from ambivalence toward anti-Black racism and other forms of marginalization to their recognition – but still from a colonial, Eurocentric perspective – to today’s emerging recognition of the inherent violence in forcing such post-colonial paradigms (Bhabha, 1994, pp. 57-68).

Canada also faces its share of such post-colonial experiences. While research has focused on disadvantages faced by marginalized groups, the study of how the intersection of such groups impacts their experiences in specific contexts has only been addressed in the last several decades (Stuart, 1992). One area where this can be effectively studied, and where it needs to be addressed, is in the education system. As previous research found (Baker, 2012), Black students experiencing disabilities and academic underachievement face significant problems in Toronto’s education system. This is significant because the effort to fight social marginalization requires addressing systemic differences in income, opportunity, and education. When racially or otherwise marginalized student populations are less likely to have degrees in higher education, addressing this marginalization is a logical step in addressing systemic marginalization in society as a whole (Wotherspoon, 2014).

The intersection of Blackness and disability identity, and its impact on education, has long been a research interest of mine. As mentioned above, earlier research (Baker, 2012) into challenges facing Black students with disabilities makes it a logical next step to follow up with an examination of a similar population in universities facing such issues. The focus has been not only to formulate the theoretical essence of disability and Blackness in an education setting, but also to analyze its practical implications. For example, thinking about the intersection of
disability and Blackness has led to questioning the concept of “normalcy” from which disability, and to an extent Blackness, differs. In the literature, this idea has been roundly criticized, and yet prior research has shown that it is often still used on a practical level where disabled students are often treated as less able, rather than as living with another form of human experience. Critical research on education also found a correlation between race, class and the labelling of students as “disabled” and school expulsion rates.

Thus, Black students are three times as likely to be labelled as “mentally retarded” and one and a half times more likely to be called learning disabled as are their white peers (Annama, Connor, & Ferri, 2013). Educators argue that disabled students are oftentimes regarded as people who are “less able” rather than people whose education requires reasonable accommodations (Liachowitz, 2010). This is true particularly for students from populations that have historically been racially marginalized, for example, Black Canadians and First Nations people (Wotherspoon, 2014). The acceptance of these stereotypes, and the creation of commonly accepted terms that are truly nothing more than subtle terms to describe individuals with certain characteristics, are ways that marginalization becomes normalized. For Black disabled students in a university setting, it can be extremely difficult to feel truly accepted and conforming to societal standards.

This is disconcerting and reminds us that the old tenets of racist assumptions are still operative within the medical discourses that determine who is disabled and who is not. There are obvious political and social, let alone moral, grounds on which to challenge these assumptions and critical reinjection of Black identity theory appears to be more pressing than ever in the field of education. The problem is perhaps not that academics are unaware of theories of Black identity; rather, they perhaps have not always taken into account how medical/educational institutions and authorities have operated under this notion of normativity as a condition of whiteness. This is a particularly alarming issue for education professionals, who need to be made
more aware of the “markers of identity” that come into play when discourses of Blackness and
disability are created outside of the academic realm (Annama, Connor & Ferri, 2013, p. 3).

In this regard, I propose a deeper intersectional approach to disability and Blackness,
such that we are mindful of how social categories are constructed by specific institutions and
discourses (Annama, Connor & Ferri, 2013). In this view, I am aligned with theorists who have
noted how difficult it is to get beyond the mere “anticategorical” view that sees race as only a
social fiction (Annama, Connor & Ferri, 2013, p. 4). This, to me, seems inadequate for
addressing how the educational system has labelled or restricted people based upon race, and this
is also true of so-called disabled students. For instance, Gates (1986) argues, with reference to
the use of the word “race” to describe bodily difference, that “the sense of difference defined in
popular usages of the term ‘race’ has both described and inscribed” a vast range of cultural,
intellectual, artistic, physical and even religious attributes (p. 4). In Gates’ words we can see how
social theory used in application to racialized bodies can illuminate something of the multi-
layered significance of the representation of disability and the body. As Gates (1986) points out,
when we use words to represent bodies and bodily experience, we are not only using them to
“describe” bodies but also to “inscribe” bodies. In other words, we are “writing bodies” and
defining their outlines and boundaries in social space. This can be a potentially explosive
practice when we consider how representations of the body, like those implied by a concept such
as “race” – can be “so very arbitrary in application” (Gates, 1986, p. 4). This study is interested
in how Black disabled students may exist between categories and, as a result, are subjected to a
different discourse of ableism that may be informed by racist or bigoted assumptions (Annama,
Connor & Ferri, 2013).

This research is significant for several reasons. It explores issues dealing with the
defining of both Blackness and disabilities as well as of “normalcy” within a higher education
setting. It also examines how marginalization is systematized and institutionalized through
curricula and disability accommodation policies and practices,\textsuperscript{11} and it explores the practical application (or lack thereof) of scholarship related to disability and identity-race politics. These examinations have direct, real-life applications of systemized marginalization of school violence, a worrying phenomenon of the past few decades. Watts and Erevelles (2004) show that instead of being the product of individual actions, recent (in 2004) episodes of school violence are the result of oppressive social conditions arising from social categorization and marginalization (Watts & Erevelles, 2004). These conditions are seen as structural violence, and the overt school violence is simply a symptom of the frustration over these systemic problems.

Thus, research into systemic oppression directly links to school violence. Structural violence is the manifestation of violence that corresponds to the systematic ways in which institutions and social structures control and exploit populations. This violence is particularly insidious for how it restricts individual agency as a source of resistance, and how – by manifesting itself in a systematic fashion through a number of large social structures – it renders all those who are part of the structure complicit in the violence. Other scholars have shown that knowledge and education are the most effective tools for dealing with oppression. However, recent data revealed that in Ontario, Black students with disabilities of various forms have educational participation and attainment levels that are well below national averages (Wotherspoon, 2014; Baltman-Cord & Holmes, 2013). This research contributes significantly to the research gap on Blackness and disability in higher education institutions in Canada. It also contributes to the developing discourse on decolonizing Blackness and disability in developing an emancipatory model of learning rather than a compensatory one. This research is based on a strong theoretical component by seeking to draw out the implications for pedagogy within educational institutions.

\textsuperscript{11} I prefer to use the terms “disability accommodation” rather than the University of Toronto’s “academic accommodation.”
It offers insight into the task of overcoming or doing things differently in a world with restrictive conceptions of Blackness and disability. While the processes of marginalization have always functioned in terms of connecting individuals with “discrediting” attributes, it is important to note that this is a definitional process related to fixed identity categories. The research addresses how the taken-for-granted meanings that shape disability in higher educational environments serve to produce, reproduce and legitimize a certain category of these students. At this point, it is important not to overlook the reality that when we are talking about student with disabilities, we are talking about humans with lives, thoughts, aspirations and fears that transcend the “definitions” that are imposed upon them by the larger society. As one critic observes: “Whether one lives with a disability or encounters someone who has one, the actual experience of disability is more complex and more dynamic than its representation usually suggests” (Garland-Thomson, 1997, p. 12).

However, disability scholars argue that disability is a “socio-political phenomenon, one that marks an occasion to interrogate what we ‘normally’ think of and experience as ‘normal life’” (Titchkosky & Michalko, 2009, p. 7).

As Ferri and Connor (2006) observe, because barriers are assumed to be inherent within the individual, as opposed to structural or external, the overcoming trope obscures the privilege enjoyed by the dominant group. As this privilege is obscured, the dominant group is positioned as deserving of success, rather than unfairly advantaged by virtue of their social positioning (Ferri & Connor, 2006, p. 130). Thus, by constructing disability as deviant and rooted in bodily impairment subject to “fixing,” social reproduction serves a useful role for social and political elites in obscuring the arbitrary basis of their power with the assumption that it – like disability or Blackness – is a natural given in our society that can be taken for granted. This research is important because it questions the ways in which Black disabled students could be better included in educational settings.
Justification of the Study

The intersectionality of Blackness and disability is an under-investigated reality of daily life for a significant section of the student and provincial population. In the academic years of 2014–2015, the University of Toronto Accessibility Services provided services to approximately 4,300 University students, an increase of nearly 23 per cent of the previous academic year (University of Toronto, AODA & ODA – Accessibility Plan, 2016b, p. 9). The aim of the University is to provide equity in educational opportunity for all disabled students, stating on the Accessibilities Services portal:

The University will strive to provide support for and facilitate the accommodation of individuals with disabilities so that all may share the same level of access to opportunities, participate in the full range of activities that the University offers, and achieve their full potential as members of the University community. (University of Toronto, Academic Accommodations, 2018, p. 1)

The reality experienced by Black disabled students at the University of Toronto has diverged from these lofty objectives, as related anecdotally within the University community. The equity in opportunity has been noted through related experiences to fall short of the mark, and society’s misgivings and innate prejudices have crept into the accommodation process, again related anecdotally, and lack a concerted investigation into the experiences of Black students with disabilities. These private observations cannot be formally addressed and redressed for grievances some of the subject students may have.
**Research Questions and Objectives**

This study investigates the following three key research questions:

1. How are the categories of Blackness and disability constructed through University disability accommodations policy texts?

2. How do these categories impact Black students who negotiate marginalized spaces within the University?

3. In what ways can a critical understanding of Blackness and disability be used to better inform educational practices?

The problem of marginalization extends beyond examining the experiences of Black and disabled students respectively. Rather, it is also about how the two identities complement each other. For instance, are there ways in which the challenges facing each identity of Black and disabled students are more than the sum of their parts? Accordingly, how should the intersectionality between two identity categories be addressed? It would seem that scholars have identified that it is critical for society to rethink its perceptions of normalcy. As Titchkosky (2000) argues: “Normalcy is the unmarked site from which people view the stigma of disability” (p. 204). Thus, the issue for administrators in university and other educational settings is to find practical ways to support these societal changes. For example, can university administration be instrumental in changing how society thinks? The study faces some challenges, as virtually any study does, since it approaches the problem from a critical social perspective. From this perspective, the study sees many of the efforts of schools as insufficient and less than progressive (despite being well-intentioned), as they are founded on principles of identity politics that are centered on a concept of normalcy. My objective of the research questions is to provide
connections and possible implications of theoretical research on Blackness and disability in practical implementations in higher education settings.

To pursue the three research questions, this dissertation examines the ways in which Black students are marginalized as they negotiate learning experiences within the University of Toronto. For this project, 12 undergraduate and graduate students, 18 years or older, who self-identify as Black students who experience disability, were interviewed with seven semi-structural open-ended questions. Through a qualitative study, these interviews reveal what accommodation has been like for Black disabled students at the University of Toronto. Simultaneously, I examined the Ontario University accommodation policies from 2014 to 2018 as they relate to Black student with disabilities. By utilizing textual analysis of policy from 2014-2018, the study aims to explore how dominant narratives such as discourses regarding merit, competition, Blackness and disability justify or naturalize the exclusion of these students seeking accommodations within higher education institutions. The study analyzes how the taken-for-granted meanings of Blackness and disability shape educational environments and serve to produce, reproduce, and legitimize conceptions of successful and unsuccessful students. This approach was chosen to better understand how the category of Black university students from diverse backgrounds is constructed in higher education settings. The research substantively contributes to the body of knowledge on Blackness and disability in higher education by seeking to draw out the implications for pedagogy and service provision within educational institutions in Canadian society.

Summary

The collective experience of the individuals that participated in this investigation addresses the primary deficiencies in policy and the practical application of policy when striving to ensure equality to all University students. The inequities experienced reflect a larger societal
problem that has a commonality for all Black students in a post-colonial paradigm, and this is exacerbated when intersected with disability. This study seeks to record the experiences of Black university students with disabilities at the University of Toronto to qualitatively examine their experiences and raise awareness of the inequities that exist due to societal paradigms that pre-exist this study and continue to influence the participants’ experiences subjected to these historical conditions. The understanding of the individual experiences and their collective understanding of Blackness and disability through labelling ingrained in the process of meting out the requisite accommodations guaranteed by policy and law is a necessary step towards redress.

Chapter 3 discusses the literature review and issues of disability and marginality in the university setting. The chapter expresses that the current approach taken by administration and faculty fails to appropriately address the needs of the disabled and places the disabled in a position where they are not treated with the respect they require in the university setting. To further express this problem and how it is that previous scholars and writers have touched on it, a robust literature review including both narratives and scholarly research is included in the following chapter. My chapter begins by introducing the approach taken to the literature review and the constraints placed on the types of literature included in the study. The literature review continues with a discussion of the experience of Black students with disabilities in the university setting. This discussion exposes the findings of previous research and narratives which support the importance of the current research. The literature review continues with the discussion of colonial vestiges in the education system and the nature of what identity is in education. The colonial vestiges in the education system are ties which bind down people, especially those who are at intersections of discrimination. My literature review discusses how these are related. The chapter continues with a discussion of the critical approach to critical Black and disability
studies. These sections of Chapter 3 explain the importance of understanding the experiences of the disabled and Black from an interpretive standpoint. My chapter then closes with a discussion of identity, stigma, the normalization of marginality and the nature of disability accommodation politics and practices in the university setting. These sections illustrate the importance of addressing the problems which Black students face in the university setting.
Chapter 3: Literature Review

Rather than simply identifying Black suffering and naming racism (and opposition to it) as the sole conceptual schemas through which to “understand” or “know” Blackness or race, it is emphasized that a Black sense of place, Black histories, and communities are not only integral to production of space, but also that the analytical interconnectedness of race, practices of domination, and geography undoubtedly put pressure on how we presently study and assess racial violence. (McKittrick, 2011, p. 947)

Introduction

The review of literature is based on various bodies of literature. First, I review the handful of studies addressing Black students’ experiences in higher education. The second section focuses on critical Disability Studies literature with an emphasis on the experiences of Black disabled students and the extant gaps in the research that is focused on this group. The third section examines the literature in Black studies and is focused on the challenges of Black students encounter in higher education. The forth section explores Black students’ identity, stigma and normalization of marginality in higher education. The fifth section engages with literature on bureaucratic accommodation politics and practices of Black disabled students. This chapter is delineated into five sections, where the colonial impact on the state of education is defined and the fields of critical Black studies and disability studies are discussed, including themes of identity, stigma and the normalization of marginality. This chapter concludes by discussing the state of disability accommodation politics and practices and summarizing key discussions. The objective of this literature review was to contribute an evidence-based guide to understanding what it means to be Black and disabled in higher education as a foundation for the context of this dissertation. The literature review incorporates empirical research with personal narratives as a way to develop a robust understanding of the problem.
Black Students with Disabilities in Higher Education

This section examines the existing literature on the experiences of Black students with disabilities in higher education. Research that is focused on the intersectionality of Blackness and disability in higher education is sorely limited. This gap in the literature may also be evidence that research addressing the intersection of Blackness and disability in the higher education system, especially in Canada, is still in its nascence. My study discusses the scholarly literature on stigma, normalcy and the normalization of marginality that Black disabled students experience, as well as the nature of discursive bureaucratic accommodation practices impacting these students. Research and the narratives of respected scholars in Black and disability studies seem to agree that racialized people have differential experiences in education, particularly in higher education. The experiences of Black disabled students are indicative of the way in which normalcy and coloniality continue to shape educational institutions (Wynter, 2003; Mignolo, 2012; Titchkosky, 2011).

My study is generative for critical Black and disability studies because it focuses on how Blackness and disability are constructed through power formulations in education and social institutions. This review of scholarly work explores research studies spanning several decades, highlighting existing theoretical models and concepts of Black identity. This study presents a disruptive framework aimed at oppressive hegemonic discourses in education and pedagogic practices. An important element of this study is to understand the intersectional experience of Black disabled students in several different social institutions over time in order to determine whether there are social changes impacting these students in social institutions, and if so, to determine common themes in these changes and how they may impact the findings of the current research. A review of the body of literature associated with Black disabled students provides evidence that higher education is an institution in society that is especially problematic for students with subject position categories at the intersection of Blackness and disability.
The literature was largely silent on accommodation politics and practices for the disabled and/or how they impact Black students. I selected a few personal narratives from critical Black scholars with experience of being treated as less privileged in society. The sources included in this chapter are part of an exhaustive search I conducted of scholarly reviews on Black and disability narrative literatures. In this sense, narrative can provide a useful tool for marginalized people to achieve a voice. Narrative analysis is an excellent tool for giving marginalized people a voice because it allows them to tell meaningful stories to the mainstream. Ultimately, the perimeter of the gap in scholarly literature where research related to Blackness and disability is lacking was determined through the critical review of scholarly literature. My study contributes to the fields of Black and disability studies by foregrounding the unique identity of Black disabled students.

**Colonial Vestiges in the Education System and Questions of Identity**

Research has studied the experiences of students with disabilities in higher education and found that the system can be seen to be damaging the self-worth and identity of these students, since it privileges non-disability as the normative condition through its structure and curriculum (Wotherspoon, 2014). The study examines scholarly literature in higher education on the construction of normalcy in the context of corporate and colonial power, describing how this function is analogous to the oppressive role of Canadian education for students with disabilities. According to Bhabha (1994):

> The great connective narratives of capitalism and class drive the engines of social reproduction, but do not, in themselves, provide a foundational frame for those modes of social identification and political affect that form around issues of sexuality, race, . . . the lifeworld of refugees or migrants, [disability or Blackness] . . . (p. 6)

Bhabha further suggests that while social reproduction in our society is driven by capitalism and class, it is critical to acknowledge the existence of locations of culture beyond even these forces.
Bhabha’s argument has points of theoretical overlap with the assertion of Ferri and Connor (2006) that the modern classroom is not only a powerful site for the social reproduction of normalizing methodologies of knowledge in our society, but that it is also a key point of contention between inclusionary and exclusionary discourses (pp. 129-131). The fact that Canadians with disabilities of various forms have educational participation and attainment levels below well below national averages is a critical issue. Typically, for Canadians between 16 and 54, people with disabilities are 1.5 to 2 times more likely than Canadians without disabilities to have less than a high school degree, and about half as likely to have a university degree (Wotherspoon, 2014, p. 267). While it must be acknowledged that educational services for students with disabilities in Canada have improved in recent years, educational researchers and commentators in the field of disability studies note that we must consider the initiatives and supports that educational institutions have put in place to accommodate these students with a critical eye. One reason for this is that many of these accommodations were not developed by the educational system but, instead, were driven by legal rulings and human rights challenges (Wotherspoon, 2014, p. 268). The obstacles faced by students with disabilities were several. Students reported that some professors were very accommodating while others were not at all willing to accommodate disabled students. There were also problems with study materials, particularly for students with visual impairment, who relied on PDF files or audio versions of textbooks, versions that were not always available. Moreover, some students, especially those in graduate programs, who had to work to support themselves cited the hurdles they faced in their work lives as particularly challenging and contributing to difficulties in the academic setting (Smith, 2005; Annable, 2003; Aubrecht, & La Monica, 2017).

Consequently, Connell (2011) argues that we need to see disability from a “southern perspective” (p. 371). That is, we need to see that most ways of thinking about disability are grounded in colonialist, privileged thought that is geographically located in rich, northern countries and ignores the reality that the majority of the world’s disabled people reside in poorer
countries. There is, therefore, an alternate reality that represents the experience of the majority of the world’s population. Although I am studying the intersection of disability and Blackness in higher education, this point is interesting in that it shows that there are other perspectives on how society can develop that do not stem from the learned centres of the rich and developed world. Alongside the study of women’s issues, the challenges facing Blacks in North America have been the focus of scholarship for a long time now. These are just two of the categories that have come to form “identity politics,” the identifying of others in terms of marginalization and oppression. However, these frameworks of multiple identities do not always work well together. Gilroy (2001) finds that identity is often perceived as antagonistic, as cultures, ethnicities, and other categories are pitted against each other, and that this approach has seen a resurgence in the past decades (p. 7).

Such categorization also ignores subtler differences between people and often overrides individual histories. Walcott (2003) states that an important part of empowering Black people in Canada is reconnecting with their historical roots and culture, particularly in diaspora communities (p. 134). Diaspora culture is an important expression of their heritage and identity and moves away from simplistic concepts of Blackness. One of the challenges of Black identity is that being Black has actually erased other valid identities. Hall (2001), in defining identity as bound up with history, shows that Black people in North America have faced categorization simply as Black, rather than identity categorization that reflects their historic heritage (p. 26). In Hall’s (2001) discussion of the experiences of the Caribbean diaspora, he posits that while white people are often differentiated by their country of origin or ethnic heritage (i.e. Irish, German), Black people are identified simply as such rather than by differentiating their immensely diverse heritage. Thus, studying the Black student population means grouping together people from diverse historical and social backgrounds. Some of the issues they face may be universal to all Black people, others may be specific to certain communities and economic, political, cultural, or
social backgrounds. Hall (2001) describes how Black people are consistently confronted with an identity of being from somewhere else. In one telling episode, he describes an interview with a Caribbean man in Martinique who speaks of his African heritage, but in perfect “lycée” French (Hall, 2001, p. 32), and that this man identifies as French as much as Black. This puts into perspective the fact that white people, at least in North America, can define themselves in more specific terms, such as being French, but Black people are defined racially and do not have the freedom to self-identify easily in other categories.

The academic approaches to this intersection of Blackness and disability have been varied. Some theorists have treated certain categories of difference as simply nuances of other categories. For example, one criticized stance is that of treating the oppression of Black women as simply a nuanced version of marginalization of women. Erevelles and Minear (2010) argue that disability faces a similar challenge in that it is often relegated to the status of nuance rather than an identity category in itself. Yet it is undeniable that being Black and disabled often results in more than the sum of the challenges inherent in each identity. The idea of racial inferiority is grounded in the same principle of departure from a “normal” state as disability (Erevelles & Minear, 2010, p. 133). In the educational system, a significantly larger proportion of students who are labelled as disabled or that have difficulty learning are Black than white. Erevelles and Minear (2010) view this as a particular method of marginalization (p. 132). Blackness can thus exacerbate problems associated with exclusion and marginality as Black individuals with learning difficulties. However, conditions in marginalized communities often do not accommodate these and thus contribute to learning and behavioural problems stemming from disabilities (Erevelles & Minear, 2010, pp. 137-139). Being Black and disabled are two categorical differences that exist on their own, but also inform each other in particular ways when they are present in the same individual. For example, as Mapedzahama and Kwansah-Aidoo (2017) note “the Black body . . . has always been constructed as a problematic difference
to whiteness: an inferiority and an “other.” Blackness . . . is a social construct persistently conceived of as an opposition to whiteness: It is not only that which defines whiteness but is also inferiorized by it” (p. 1). Education is a very important part of the struggle to empower disadvantaged communities. Another scholar describes how knowledge is the primary tool that oppressed people need in confronting discrimination and oppression (Hill-Collins, 2015, 1990, p. 536). This knowledge helps both by offering oppressed groups knowledge about the mechanisms and processes of how they are oppressed, but more importantly, it offers them the tools to fight this oppression.

In addition to the education system, colonial vestiges continue to exist in other social institutions in places, which were once under European rule. For instance, Lewis and Carr (2009) examined the role that colonial vestiges have played in social institutions in Jamaica and how it relates to the notion of Blackness. Historically, being Black in Jamaica meant taking work positions where there is a lack of skill and a high degree of labour. Gender also plays a critical role in the scope of the type of labour that a person would be expected to take part in; however, Blackness was an identifying trait of a person who was not in the elite class. Lewis and Carr (2009) discussed societal hierarchy in contemporary Jamaica as maintaining the vestiges of the social structure built on the use of slave labour, and that even after institutionalization of slave labour disappeared, the general social perception of the free and the enslaved remained as an influencing factor of which people would hold the greatest privilege. While Blacks in Jamaica were no longer enslaved, there were institutional elements that contributed to Blacks having substantially less power and opportunity in social institutions, such as in the workforce or education.
Towards a Critical Approach to Disability Studies

The nature of critical disability studies is to understand the culture of disability and the way that economy, society and policy impact the disabled person, along with their recursive impact back to policy, economy and society. Researchers approach disability studies from the perspective that the social phenomenon of disability has significantly marginalized the disabled person to the point where many lack empowerment related to successfully contributing to the world. The experience of disability is unique in that disabled people understand themselves as “problems” that must be solved. Titchkosky (2000) discusses the ways in which scholars have described disability in the past, with the general understanding of disability constructed by people who have had experience with the disabled, not people who are disabled themselves. Titchkosky (2007) raises an important point in noting that disability, and other identity categories, do not exist in isolation, but always as part of an enactment between people. These categories are not simply individual consciousnesses, they are an interaction between different consciousnesses (p. 23). Thus, it is only in the realization of the inequity of these categories that the process of “disidentification” can take place (Muñoz, 1999). An important part of destroying these boundaries is the recognition of the diversity of human experience.

Alongside recognizing differences and pluralities of human experience, it is also necessary to desire such pluralities, such alterities (Titchkosky, 2007, p. 25). Simply attempting to address systemic inequity is not possible without addressing the patterns of behaviour that define and “perform” social identity within society (Kannen, 2008, p. 149). Moreover, disability is investigated from the perspective of being related to “problem people,” with the idea that society must work with the disabled in order to overcome their troubles. The implication of this is that the disabled bring with them flaws that must be dealt with if a disabled person is brought into a work, education or other social institution setting. Disability is therefore a social problem which extends beyond the disabled individual and will have implications for people who remain
in the social sphere of the disabled. From an administrative standpoint, this can mean specific accommodations for the disabled; however, these accommodations further support the notion of the disabled being a problem requiring solutions, rather than supporting the empowerment of the disabled student.

Another common theme in disability research is understanding the gap in labour market opportunity and the lack of success of disabled applicants. Baltman-Cord and Holmes (2013) propose ways in which the economy of Ontario could be enhanced through inclusion of disabled people in the workforce at greater rates. The researchers noted that about 29% of small and medium businesses in Ontario experienced difficulty filling positions and that this was because an absence of qualified workers (p. 6). The researchers also found that there is a rich pool of disabled people who are looking for opportunity. A key reason for this opportunity gap was that employers lacked faith that the disabled could fill positions adequately. The difficulty in filling these positions is expected to persist because the mindset of the small and medium business owner contributes to the economic marginalization of the disabled.

Disability studies has grown over the past few decades in such a way that it has transformed the traditional construction of what disability research would undertake, where the response of the public to disability would be supported by research, to the point where disability studies have exposed the implications of being disabled in society and the ways in which people are able to overcome these difficulties. Linton (1998) briefly discusses the history of disability studies, noting that there had been an alignment between the way in which researchers and society had viewed disability. This connection was tight enough that one supported the other in such a way that the approach to the disabled where they were viewed as being a problem requiring a civic response was the norm among researchers and the way in which legislators saw disability. Transformation in the way in which academics approached the topic of disability and identity came with the development of the objective of social change being drawn from academic
discourse. The successful transformation of the discussion was based on a transformation of the way in which social structures and legislation would approach the issue of disability to the point where it would be possible to improve the life of those who are disabled while understanding the social phenomenon of personal disability with greater robustness.

McRuer (2006) argues that disability must transcend the domain of identity politics. This is because it is not a single, monolithic experience, but a diverse one that should not be seen as an identity, nor a personal tragedy, but merely as another form of human experience. There are several reasons for this: one is that the diversity of the experience of disabled people has come more to the forefront, but more importantly, it highlights that people experience different levels of “ability,” even those who are not labelled as disabled. In fact, McRuer (2006) argues that disability is a necessary product of an exploitative society – workers that begin their working lives with youth and vigour are worn down and descend in capabilities while producing goods and participating in an inequitable system.

The economic marginalization of the disabled is most prevalent in areas where there is a lack of resources and a confluence of several social problems. Being able to prioritize disability in these social and economic scenarios is difficult because of the planning which must go into the ongoing distribution of social service resources in order to address the needs of the public. Back, Keys, McMahon and O’Neill (2016) investigated the issue of labelling students with disabilities in the urban school district. Their study was focused on expressing an understanding of the nature of disability and the way in which it has implications for the identity of people in the system. The conflict under investigation in the study was the difference between disability-first and people-first language with the understanding of how it is that research could contribute to understanding specific linguistic implications on personality and the way that disabled people saw themselves. The conclusion was that it is important that schools move towards creating an improved language for dealing with individuals with disabilities as well as the development of
positive disability identity. Achieving this would be important, especially in communities where there is intersectional marginalization of citizens. The urban setting is such a community where both Black and disabled people will more commonly live, with there being several Black disabled people in the community.

This critical analysis also demonstrates that Black identity matters to the formulation of disability studies because it brings some of these other ideas about the “other” and normalizing powers to the discussion. It also matters because it provides a space wherein Black disabled students are able to articulate their racial identities without being subsumed under this general category of “being” disabled. This is both a cultural and political point because it recognizes that marginalized voices can be differentiated and also united under a common goal, and thus it creates a critical place for thinking about inclusion. Therefore, as I have argued, it is not sufficient to rely wholly upon post-modern disavowals of stable identity, as there needs to be some space for racial identity to be expressed so that people do not feel that they are subjected to the same old “gazes” that DuBois and hooks revealed and interrogated. There is much to learn from these voices, as they have deep roots in an historical struggle for awareness and recognition identity inclusion.

Therefore, I take a Black studies approach to this question of how Blackness influences disability studies; I will rethink some of the ways that Blackness has been discussed in the field of disability studies. The provocation here is partly tied to Bell’s (2006a) claim that disability studies have failed to engage with issues of Blackness, race and ethnicity, “thereby entrenching whiteness as its constitutive underpinning” (Bell, 2006a, p. 275). Bell (2006a) points to the problem that I am interested in here, which is that education will remain limited and uncritical of itself if it does not consider how Black identity has shaped the contours of the field. This seems especially true for pedagogical reasons because, as mentioned earlier, constructs of Blackness and marginalization are inherent to our educational institutions, and the result is that there are potential issues regarding social disadvantages that affect disabled and able people alike. However, Bell is instructive in his
own post-modern distrust of the term “disability,” since he rightly points out that it is used in ambiguous ways through the literature (Bell, 2006a). The question for me is how Black/disability identity in higher education can inform how we think about the “body politics” of disability (Bell, 2006a; Sandhal, 2004; Rajchman, 1995).

The term “body politics” is central here because it harks back not only to this issue of embodiment, but also to Butler’s (1997) recognition that performing and theorizing identity is necessarily a political act. It also comes back to Foucault’s questions of how the body is written upon by discourses, and in this sense, disability studies itself “writes” upon the disabled body. Recognizing this is critical, because if identity is unavoidable, then the discipline of disability studies has to be careful about how it deals with questions of Black identity. Hall (2001) makes a similar point when discussing Caribbean identity when he says that this cultural identity in academic discourse “presents itself as a problem” (p. 24). One problem, as I have tried to articulate, is how to negotiate the critical problem of refusing fixed identities while trying to reclaim some authentic identity for the Black marginalized students.

Kannen (2008) states that social identities, both dominant and subordinate, are one of the ways social cohesiveness is built and maintained. These identities are one of the main reasons frameworks and patterns of inequity are perpetuated throughout the world (p. 149). Furthermore, a person’s concept of self, his or her identity, is made up of several components. As one of these major components, James (1981) lists the “social self” – how a person is seen by others (p. 159). This suggests that how one is seen has a direct impact on one’s own concept of self. James (1981) describes how such self-image is defining, in that it prompts people into action and gives them an ideological and moral framework in which to live (pp. 59-61). Alongside Blackness, disability is another identity category that serves to define and delineate social cohesion and patterns of dominance. Disability is often thought of in terms of what it is not. That is, it is compared to a concept of “normalcy” that somehow portrays everything else as insufficient.
Disability thus often suffers from a portrayal and categorization as a personal tragedy. Bell (2003b) relates how oftentimes people who are identified as disabled are never given the choice of defining themselves other than in terms of tragedy. Sandahl (2004) poignantly describes how, in a theatrical adaptation that describes real life experiences, the categorization of a man as both Black and blind (disabled) is problematic for the society around him as it creates confusion about which “non-normal” identity category to which he belongs. It is in this context that society deals with disabled individuals. Disabled people are often viewed as a personal problem burdensome to society (Titchkosky & Michalko, 2009, p. 106) – simply because they often cannot perform the same tasks under the same conditions as “normal” people (Taylor, 2011, p. 200).

The primary goal of society toward disability is prevention, after that, cure, and finally, if the previous two are impossible, to make the individual look and feel as “normal” as possible (Titchkosky & Michalko, 2009, p. 3). Even the Canadian government does not recognize disability as a way of life, but as an “abnormal” condition (p. 5). In this way, it places disability in a different category than other groups it considers disadvantaged due to other life circumstances. Taylor (2011) draws interesting parallels between how animals and disabled people are treated in showing how some bodies (human or animal) are treated as normal, some as broken or dysfunctional, and some as food. She finds that disabled people are often compared to animals in metaphorical terms when describing their disability and the differences between their bodies and those of “normal” people. However, these paradigms of normalcy and exclusion have not been left unchallenged. Smith (2000) relates how perceptions of Black people as criminals and inferior were purposely challenged at the turn of the 20th century.

There has been a critical momentum in trying to reconfigure the “intersections” of Blackness and disability (Annama, Connor & Ferri, 2013). The attempt to create a dual theory of Blackness and disability has been intriguing since there has been an admitted impasse on these
grounds (Annama, Connor & Ferri, 2013). For example, one area of concern is on sociological grounds, since Black students are three times as likely to be labelled as “mentally retarded” and one and half more times likely to be called learning disabled than their white peers (Annama, Connor & Ferri, 2013, p. 3). This is disconcerting and reminds us that the old tenets of racist assumptions are still operative within the medical discourses that determine who is disabled and who is not. There are obvious political and social, let alone moral, grounds on which to challenge these assumptions, and critical reinjection of Black identity theory appears to be more pressing than ever in the field. The problem is perhaps not that academics are unaware of theories of racial identity; rather, they perhaps have not always taken into account how medical institutions and authorities have operated under this notion of normativity as a condition of whiteness. This is a particularly alarming issue for special education professionals, who need to be made more aware of the “markers of identity” that come into play when discourses of disability are created outside of the academic realm (Annama, Connor & Ferri, 2013, p. 3).

In this regard, I would propose a more intersectional approach to disability and Black studies, such that it is mindful of how social categories are constructed by specific institutions and discourses (Annama, Connor & Ferri, 2013). In this view, I am aligned with theorists who have noted how difficult it is to get beyond the mere “anticategorical” view that sees Blackness as only a social fiction (Annama, Connor & Ferri, 2013, p. 4). This, to me, seems inadequate for addressing how the educational system has labelled or restricted people based upon Blackness, and this is true also of so-called disabled students. My interest is in how Black disabled students may exist between categories and, as a result, are subjected to a different discourse of ableism that may be informed by racist or bigoted assumptions (Annama, Connor & Ferri, 2013). A serious question for professionals and practitioners in the field is that there appears to be a “perpetual over-representation of how Black students within dis/ability categories” (Annama, Connor & Ferri, 2013, p. 22).
This is a sociological problem, but I would argue that by re-theorizing identity in the field of Black Studies, we may be able to reach a better understanding of how Black disabled students are seen through these various gazes and how they conceive of themselves within these institutions. Hall’s question of “Who needs identity?” is pertinent here because I would agree with him that we do not need to get rid of the adjectives Black or disabled, but we need to re-conceptualize identity as a relationship “between subjects and discursive practices” (Hall, 2000, p. 16). That is, Black identity can be better theorized in education by placing it in what I earlier called a dialectic of gazes that are informed by the practical and theoretical language we use to describe conditions or experiences (Oliver, 1996). This view of Black identity fits in, I believe, with both the identity-based approaches and also the post-modern ideas of performing or enacting identity.

This means that I agree that social disability is a fluid state and also a fluid subject of academic criticism (Barnartt, 2010). The fluidity here suggests that racial and disabled identities can intersect and at times remain independent of one another, meaning that one can reclaim a racial identity that is not necessarily dependent upon being a disabled person (Barnartt, 2010). This is an important point because it opens up a space to discuss disability as a changing term depending upon the context in which it is used. This view certainly admits that the notion of identity remains elusive, but it also admits that certain identities can be reclaimed as the discourses surrounding them alter (Bauman, 2004). It recognizes that one must look for the “fissures” in the “totalizing view” of those markers, which have historically come to define Black people’s experience as a transmitted product of European culture (Samuels, 2014, p. 7). Consequently, Samuels’ (2014) analysis is helpful in showing how a concept of fluidity speaks against this embedded notion that “personhood is biological,” and one can understand how remnants of this 19th century view are operative in many of the discourses surrounding identity of the self (p. 7).
This is indeed dangerous ground for marking the disabled body or the racialized body because the presumption is that there is some way to detect these identities as one might view a fingerprint (Samuels, 2014). The political implications in assuming a biological or physiological definition of Blackness and disability are obvious to critics perhaps, but there is often an uncritical acceptance of some of these ideas in the discourse of disability (Samuels, 2014). Sandahl reconceptualizes Black identity as something that is not just performed but is constituted by relations with others and the body politic (Sandahl, 2004). She speaks of a potential resistance along these lines by talking about “dismodernism” as a development of the civil rights disability movement (Sandahl, 2004, p. 581). This view is in accord with what I am arguing here because it acknowledges the fluidity of identity, but it also notes the fact that what we have in common is our differences, which can lead to transforming the self (Sandhal, 2004).

Sandhal’s (2004) stage metaphor, in conjunction with Butler’s performativity, is operative for my view of the intersections of Black and disability identities because it leads to an awareness of how the body is watched and cared for in spaces and in discourse. In exploring the idea of the dismodern ethic, Sandhal (2004) argues “for a commonality of bodies within the notion of difference,” and thus caring about the processes of embodiment as a central concern (p. 581).

The intersection of Blackness and disability has not been well understood in the academic literature to this date. There is a marked lack of consideration with respect to how disability studies can incorporate theorizations on Blackness into a pragmatic understanding of how to address marginalized voices in higher education. I would argue along these lines that Black studies in disability studies matters because it reminds us that versions of “identity politics–based political organizing, which involves performance, remains an effective means for social change” (Sandhal, 2004, p. 582). This does not mean that we need to resort to the typical identity politics that reifies identity through the institutional powers in play; instead, we can draw upon this idea
of difference and commonality to help Black disabled students and others claim a strong sense of personal identity that recognizes how injustices can threaten their experience and autonomy. Performance, whether in the classroom or on the stage, is therefore an important concept if it can bring individual experience into the realm of the collective (Sandhal, 2004). In this, instructors and education institutions must grasp “the distinction between the physical impairment and the social situation” (Shakespeare, 2002, p. 3).

An awareness of how these identities can speak to one another in disability discourse is therefore extremely valuable for expanding the social categories of understanding at work in and out of the classroom. The question is whether the incorporation of Black identity in disability studies is a ground for social theory, or if it remains only a good “basis for a political movement” (Shakespeare, 2002). By this, I mean to ask whether Black identity in the field can become neatly aligned in terms of social oppression, or if it needs to be treated somewhat discretely in the subject matter. This is a question that seems to plague several critics now working in this area in terms of how best to describe the intersections and how to unify them into a larger discourse (Annama, Connor and Ferri, 2013).

This is a major point of reflection throughout this study, and while I do not have a failsafe answer to the question, we can rupture the notion of a fixed racial and disability identity without losing the notion of identity-based resistance that we have seen in many of the racial theorists considered. Intersectional thinking, and the notion of social oppression, is therefore necessary to accomplish this. Black identity should be theorized more in education since such theory may help us to alleviate some of the seeming “ambiguities” that riddle the term, at least as it relates to the question of identity (Bell, 2006a).

In the scope of disability studies, there are several points at which there are intersectional overlaps in scholarly literature. However, there is still a lack of formal research in the intersection of Black disability studies. Franzino (2016) discussed the Lewis Clarke slave
narrative to express a perspective related to the way in which the intersection of disability and race should be investigated. Franzino (2016) expresses that the slave narrative can be juxtaposed with the topic of disability through the comparison of the abolitionist to the way in which the non-disabled handle the issue of how the disabled should be approached. Franzino (2016) noted that there are parameters of disability, which should be reconfigured in order for disability to be understood with greater depth in the scope of critical race studies. The most common conceptualization of Black studies is that there is a lack of access and room for leadership by people who are experienced at this intersection. For people who are Black and disabled to gain power, it is important that they focus on working to gain leadership, because the system lacks investigation from the standpoint of Black disabled individuals. Franzino’s (2016) analysis was that critical race investigation should include greater discussion of the role of disability; thus, disability studies should have a greater relationship with Black studies in order for there to be a more effective understanding of the topic at large.

**Black Studies: Double Consciousness, and Identity-Based Resistance**

DuBois’ (1903) early writing on double consciousness is important to my initial evaluation of the significance of Black studies on disability because one has to negotiate two different categories of identity, even though it is arguable that both remain tied to the identity of a marginalized group. Double consciousness and the dialectic of Black identity also find significant echoes elsewhere apart from disability studies. Moreover, double consciousness can be witnessed in theorists of race and disability, as subjects negotiate multiple identities or find some ways of bridging them in a coherent manner.

This represents a significant challenge for anyone interested in critically evaluating how Black and disability studies matters in the university. They provide a strong theoretical analogue to the kinds of discussions that need to happen with respect to how one might escape the trap of
seeing oneself only through the eyes of the medical authorities (e.g. biomedicine) that define experience and the idea of being a “normal” embodied subject. The dominated spaces wherein these racial identities are constructed are of concern for any critic who is interested in addressing these constructions. I argue that one must work through some of these earlier complications of race representation in order to arrive at a better understanding of how these different, but sympathetic, identities can impact each other and create a critical conversation about marginalization, normative views, and representation. Black identity, seen in this way, becomes a kind of dialectical process of existing within this representation of doubleness or hybridity (DuBois, 1903; Bhabha, 1994). It is also a psychological formulation insofar as the consciousness of the individual is shaped by both his or her racial identification and by the powers of the dominant culture or race that create normalized ideas of what it is to hold this identity. This is an important point to be considered as I look at the dichotomy between identity-based resistance and the later post-modern attempts to challenge the fixities in any categories of identity representation.

The representation of race is therefore a complex one that has raised issues of identity formulations as a mode of political resistance (hooks, 1992). As hooks (1992) points out, theorizing Black experience remains a “difficult task” since it is often “socialized” (normalized) by educational systems and media (p. 2). She maintains, “many Black people are convinced that our lives are not complex, and therefore unworthy of sophisticated critical analysis” (hooks, 1992, p. 2). This view represents one of the central threads within race, theory and the post-colonial experience of the marginalized because it asks people to consider how complexities in identity representations are constructed and influenced by hegemonic cultural norms and narratives and need to be untangled or re-imagined as contested (Gilroy, 2000). Thus, hooks (1992) argues that productively resisting identity and cultural norms “a fundamental task of Black critical thinkers . . . struggling to break with the hegemonic modes of seeing, thinking that
block our capacity to see ourselves oppositionally to imagine, describe, and invent ourselves in ways that are liberatory” (hooks, 1992, p. 2).

hooks’ (1992) claims have productively impacted my own thinking on both Blackness and disability as they expose this notion that embodiment is connected to the ways one has a space with which to see themselves in opposition to dominant and normal representations. The liberatory impulse in these critical reflections on racial identity can be related back to this even more complicated question of how one who is marginalized both by race and disability can counteract and resist hegemonic identity constructs that have been forced upon them. Recognizing this tension as a key problem in how Black and disability identity interact and counteract normalized ideas is central to my study as a first step in thinking about how best to theorize the problem in the field. Strategies for resistance should be carefully calibrated because there are pitfalls in the identity-based politics of resistance, which is why subtle thinkers such as hooks and DuBois can be foundational for exposing how this doubleness creates a “master/slave dialectic” in the mind of the oppressed (Fanon, 1963). That is, following his use of the concept of double consciousness, he writes that being the “other” is connected to the notion of the world. He writes, “what parcels out the world is to begin with the fact of belonging to or not belonging to a given race, a given species” (Fanon, 1963, p. 40).

Fanon’s (1967) analysis is important to this study because he recognized that “the Black man has two dimensions,” but he realized the language used to describe this can be either oppressive or liberatory (p. 17). Fanon illustrates how the identity of the repressed must confront those authorities, whether of culture or language, that imposed definitions and attempt to refuse the subject’s right to reclaiming an identity that is not neatly coordinated with the norm. Fanon (1967) asserts that power and discourse are important aspects to any attempt at identity-based resistance. He writes, “To speak means to be in a position to uses a certain syntax . . . but it means above all to assume a culture.” Fanon illustrates how the marginalized subject not being
able to speak or exist in a culturally “normal” way is given an “inferiority complex” that can debilitate any hope of resistance or participation (p. 18).

That is, if one accepts the notion that his or her identity is spoken through the language of the dominant social culture, then this person may give up his or her ability to resist and to reclaim a more authentic identity resulting in the marginalized person always negotiating. Being aware of the power of these discourses, he or she might find a way to articulate and to embody an identity that is not determined by the powers that be. The dialectic of race, disability, and normalized identity becomes perhaps even more complex in this case because there is more than one identity that can resist the normal. However, the more classic sites of theoretical resistance are helpful to my study as it examines how these theories may or may not collate with post-modern formulations of the same problem of categories of identity.

According to McKittrick (2013), the “interlocking workings of human worth, race, and space” demonstrate “the ways the uninhabitable still holds currency in the present and continues to organize contemporary geographic arrangements” (p. 6). Additionally, interlocking identities and oppressions align with the experience of disabled students (Hill-Collins, 1990). For example, some have called for the reconceptualization of race, class, gender, and other marginalized identities as participating in an “interlocking system of oppression” such as power (Hill-Collins, 1990, p. 536). The concept of interlocking is foundational for this chapter because it shows similarities in the ways that categories of identity are normalized by dominate powers. To be sure, there needs to be some nuance in such an analysis so as not to conflate different representations and categories of identities. However, from a theoretical standpoint, we need to examine how we talk about resistant identities along shared lines from post-colonial and feminist critiques of hegemonic power.

By considering Black identity in a larger sense of social and political contestation, one can productively map some of these issues onto the intersections of Blackness and disability
within the educational system (Linton, 1998). The production of knowledge and identity is therefore influenced greatly by how racial categories are produced, reified and shaped by much of the thinking that seeks to understand the possibility that identity-based resistance might take back some of the categories and definitions that have become operative in the system (Linton, 1998).

In thinking through some of the racial theories of identity and resistance in the work of DuBois, hooks, Fanon, Gilroy, and other theories, we can begin to see how the issue of identity-based politics becomes both complicated and necessary in terms of addressing the double consciousness of identity. There is certainly a tension involved in this study with fixed or normalized identity that will need to be addressed. Hopefully, through a pragmatic solution, the marginalized individuals will be able to reclaim a sense of racialized/disability identity without falling into the trap of absolutely fixed or normal categorizations that lead to a reactionary identity politics (Mollow, 2004). It is important to think about these identity-based modes of resistance as they are based on the race theory that has been among the most influential modes of critique. The post-colonial critiques show that colour lines in term of race can bleed into other lines of discrimination, which often create the sense that there are two “camps” to be negotiated (Gilroy 2000; Fanon, 1967).

Moreover, Fanon (1967) explains how colonized Black bodies are constructed by European imperial power as being “intellectually deficient” with “racial defects.” As Gates (1986) notes, while European thinkers were quite willing to acknowledge the common humanity between white Europeans and Black people throughout history, many prominent European thinkers nonetheless argued that Blacks were a less intelligent or capable “species” of humanity, and thus it was morally permissible for Europeans to enslave them (p. 519). They occupied a different world. If the social expectation was that Blacks were inferior, unintelligent or sub-human – given prevailing social
representations of Black individuals in Euro-American culture – there are limits on the openness of audiences to performances of Black individuals that contradict this expectation.

However, I assert that Black culture was supplanted, to a great degree, by European colonial cultures and values. In the process, Black people internalized inferiority as a fundamental part of their identities. As Fanon (1967) notes: “A feeling of inferiority? No, a feeling of invisible and Black identity is irrelevant. ‘Sin is Negro, as virtue is white’” (p. 106). Here Fanon is making an important point about the “inferiority” of Blacks: this inferiority is not simply a matter of being intellectually or culturally inferior, but morally inferior as well. Indeed, as Fanon makes clear, in the colonial mind set which generations of Blacks have internalized, to be Black is equated with being “sinful,” for if “virtue is white,” then to be Black is to be inherently immoral and corrupt. As a result, Fanon (1967) notes that, “in Europe, the Black man is the symbol of Evil . . . Satan is black . . . when one is dirty one is black – whether one is thinking of physical dirtiness or moral dirtiness” (p. 146). Similarly, Taylor (2011), a disabled scholar, has been told that “I walk like a monkey, eat like a dog, have hands like a lobster, and generally resemble a chicken or penguin” (p. 191). These are not incidental aspects of Taylor’s work, but are critical to her argument as she asks what it means to be framed in such terms. As Taylor (2011) argues: “What does it mean to be compared to an animal? To be called a ‘Monkey Woman’? Is there any way to consider these metaphors beyond the blatant racism, classism and ableism these comparisons espouse?” (p. 194). These ideas demonstrate the significance of Taylor’s work because like Fanon, she is situating herself – and her “self’s” complex relationship to her body – as a site of struggle to explore and challenge the social construction of normalcy and the modalities of power and domination in our culture. Just as Fanon famously inverted the discursive power of racist colonizers by celebrating himself as a “real nigger,” Taylor similarly uses the discourses that denigrate her and people with disabilities as “animals” for her own discursive purposes.
Consequently, Black identity continues to remain a complex critical issue in the theoretical literature that has not quite found a stable solution; however, it has certainly been formidable as a critique of cultural power and the repression of ideas and discourses that enforce identities (Davis, 1995). The question that follows is how “classic” readings of identity critique, Black oppression and resistance fit in with the post-modern skepticism of categories of identity and how this contributes to a re-reading of Black studies. For example, the above critiques of post-modern skepticisms attempt to create a dialogue with Black identity, since many theorists have demonstrated how a nuanced reading of race identity and discourse can be enlivening to disability studies.

From its roots, Black studies has been an area of academic thought that has been connected to struggle. Black Arts and Aesthetics programs in universities were designed to understand the history and sociology of Black people. The programs were created to understand the uniqueness of what it is to be Black, especially in the United States. These programs began as a part of the university system in the United States in the late 1960s-early 1970s. The programs welcomed the discussion and academic study of Blackness into the university system through programs where powerful Black voices could enter into academia to educate on the Black experience through poetry, theatre, fiction and critical writings of Black artists. Wynter (2006) expressed disappointment in the trajectory that these programs headed because of the role that college administrations had in reducing the programs to the point where they were only another element of the overall ethnic studies packages in universities. This was partly because the Black experience was reduced to the level of being concerned with the issue of multiculturalism, and rather than being concerned with Black Arts, the focus was on the general nature of African American Studies. Given this special nature of these programs, the aggressions that Black people experienced in the United States became less significant.
In previous writings, Wynter (1994) also explicated the nature of how Black studies was organized in the university setting insofar as the design of the curriculum associated with Black studies was such that the Black intellectual was limited by the nature of the discussions that they could engage in the classroom. Wynter touches on the nature of the Black American experience as being unique and distinct from the White experience to the point that there should be an entirely different approach to it than the approach that other cultural studies received. Wynter (2006) noted that the White and Euro-American construct of the United States as a nation of immigrants is an idea that is limited in nature, because while the United States is made up of the descendants of immigrants, these immigrants had a history of excluding Blacks from the approaches taken to the design of education institutions. This had a significant impact on the nature of education, especially in the scope of the way in which Black studies would be handled. Black studies became another part of the overall multicultural study group, and the nature upon which it was handled by scholars was dictated by the White-led administration, which sought to control the structure and function of the Black academic environment. Wynter does not necessarily indicate that this is done out of malice towards the Black academic; rather, it is a consequence of the nature of an educational system where the curriculum is inherently racist against Blacks. Thus, the structure of the curriculum of Black studies would indeed take the same shape where it would be infected with White supremacist thought.

There is an abundance of research that addresses Blackness and what it means in several institutions. Narratives from critical Black writers contribute to an in-depth understanding of Black studies, as they are a voice for the experience of people who lack privilege in higher education where their voice would be less likely heard. Nonetheless, their experience should inform scholarly work and function as an enhancing force influencing Black studies, as the scholarly system has been designed by people of privilege, with a lack of access for Black and disabled people. The narrative of Lorde (1984) notes that “the master’s tools will never dismantle
the master’s house” (p. 112), a quote which, in this context, is understood by the author to mean that it is important to work outside the confines of traditional scholarly practice when investigating Blackness because of the control that non-racialized people have had on the field. In her narrative, Lorde (1984) described the position of people at the intersection of Blackness and being female as being at the lowest end of the societal hierarchy; however, for those with privilege, people in this position were most threatening to those with power. She described the differences of Blacks and women from other people in the population as a factor creating strength, and that genuine change to social order was a significant threat to the privileged. Indeed, the privileged will allow people who are without privilege to “beat him at his own game” (Lorde, 1984, p. 112); however, by doing this, Blacks and women continue to play the game, which has contributed to their intersectional marginalization. Administrative regulation does not protect people who are marginalized; it continues their dependence on a system which has left them without privilege.

The narrative of Lorde (1984) is important, as it expresses her experience in the social hierarchy where she perceives a lack of access exists for Black women based on institutional elements. hooks’ (1992) essays are critical of popular culture and the ways in which it supports the systemic elements described by Lorde. hooks describes the acceptance of advertising, fashion and popular culture as designed by Whites at the top of the social hierarchy as damaging to Blackness. At the same time, hooks described issues current at the time of her writing (1992), such as the Hill-Thomas trial and the transcending popularity of Madonna as being events which both support the view the privileged have of Blackness and the appropriation of Black culture by Whites. Her essays are influential in general because they are a critical expression of the belief of how actual events in culture are having implications for people marginalized in society.

While Black studies and disability studies are proposed as having a place together because of the marginality of these different elements of identity, a more robust approach to the
issue of academic study in the scope of Black studies has been suggested in previous research. This research has noted that the confluence of Black studies with science and mathematics could contribute to a stronger understanding of Blackness and disability in education. McKittrick (2016) proposed a highly interdisciplinary approach to the study of Blackness where other factors such as science, geography and Black creative text are all factors which are incorporated into the way in which Black studies is approached. This is because of the nature of the social production of racial scripts and how they take on a biologically deterministic nature. This extends from the general way in which humans are conceptualized and would go beyond the scope of traditional Black studies where the arts are a significant element which is investigated.

The nature of the shape that Black studies should take is also a matter of discussion among researchers. Lynn (2004) discussed the debate among scholars related to the extent to which race should be accepted as a critical pedagogy and the nature of how it is that Blackness fits into schooling and society. Lynn (2004) notes that over the course of the past few years there has been substantial growth in the way in which schooling and society is viewed in the scope of academic study, and that through the application of critical investigation it is possible to develop a stronger understanding of the way in which Blackness is nested in social research. Schooling is an area of specific interest because of the necessity to understand the approach to schooling and education that is taken towards Black students. Through the current research it is possible to develop a stronger understanding of the impacts of administration on the way in which Blackness will play a role in the accommodations that students expect and experience at the university level.

**Identity, Stigma and the Normalization of Marginality**

The marginality that disabled people have experienced in Western culture is relatively significant in terms of the way in which the disabled are presumed to be problems or trouble that
must be dealt with. Michalko’s (2009a) discussion of disability shows the way in which
disability has become an element of culture and how it is that disability is perceived to be
trouble. Thus, disabled people are trouble and have problems which must be dealt with, and the
normalization of the disabled has led to the idea that disability must be limited or eliminated
from social order. Disability is viewed as a conditional feature and the goal should be to
eliminate disability from life, or to learn ways which disability can be hidden or mitigated.
Michalko (2009a) points out that through disability there is a phenomenon of normalization
where people learn to not engage with the disability of another person. He adds that disability as
a social element gives evidence of the way in which people understand the norming of what their
disability may be and the ways in which other people experience disability.

The idea of identity is complex with several elements; however, identity is both how we
see ourselves and the way the world views us as well. As Bauman states:

[Identities will] float in the air, some of one’s own choice but others inflated and
launched by those around, and one needs to be constantly on the alert to defend
the first against the second; there is a heightened likelihood of misunderstanding,
and the outcome of the negotiation forever hangs in the balance. (p. 13)

Based on this understanding of identity, it is an element of human construction that could only
be understood at a single cross-section in time, and that as time passes, the nature of our
identities will change significantly. Identity is therefore a human factor that is limited in the
ability to encapsulate it as a consistent, longitudinal element of who we are. Bauman (2004) also
exposes how these identities are not always so solid in nature, especially on ethical grounds, if
we need to interpret other groups as deficient, less free, or less moral. A good example of this for
our purposes is the case of disability studies, since there is certainly embedded in the construct an
assumption about what one should have the “ability” to do or to what degree one is free from
being overdetermined by physical or mental conditions. The dialectical approach of Bauman’s
readings should give us some analytical tools for investigating disability discourse and
evaluating how it tends to create categories or divisions. Moreover, Bauman’s approach to the interesting question of being a “stranger” and its moral implications is helpful in showing us how there are categories in so-called gray areas that create trouble for sociological analysis or anxiety for social relations. This will prove helpful in seriously re-thinking the types of categories we set up or ideas of “otherness” that perhaps cause us anxiety even if we try not to think about them.

As disability is an element of the identity that is outside the self, and it is something that people may not always see. It is important for people to understand the nature of how it is that identity is negotiated and the way in which the experience of living with disability changes from one social setting to the next. Low (1996) investigated the issue of disability on a college campus to understand the way in which the negotiatory process works where a student who is disabled in some aspect is able to handle the different scenarios of their day where they will be disabled in some contexts but will be able-bodied in others. The researcher concludes that there is a contradiction, which exists when an individual has to negotiate the nature of their disability. Given this contradiction, there are difficulties that the student faces in terms of expectations of accommodation and the appetite for these accommodations dependent on their environment.

The idea of identity has grown to the point where it has become increasingly complex, with a reflection of these complexities present in the ways in which academic study is performed and the ways in which people see themselves and the groups that they belong to. Alcoff (2006) discusses identity as growing in the form of the way people see the differences between themselves and others. The researcher noted that this difference is supported through academic literature as demographic elements such as gender become important factors influencing the nature of current research and the ways in which the implication of this research is understood. Alcoff (2006) noted that this is also a part of the way in which we understand politics, social status and economic strata. These factors become parts of the way in which people perceive our identity. These differences become barriers to understanding and can be the foundation of the
way in which groups of people will marginalize one another. Elements of identity will inform other people that there are significant differences between themselves and others, and based upon these differences, people can align their agenda along the lines of whether or not they will support people or not. Race is viewed as one of the most important forms of social identity in that it is an illustrative element of identity, as it is something people see and it is a part of the identity of an individual that is separate from the individual’s self-perception. Race matters to an extent and as empires have a way of dividing groups, according to matters of descent, race, disability, religion, culture and class. As C.L.R. James (1989) once wrote, race is not equal to class in colonial situations, but to see race as merely incidental is a grave error too (p. 283). Blackness is a penultimate visible identity element because it is something that people are able to see, rather than something that people rely on based on their conceptions.

According to Bauman (1990), sociology remains “a way of thinking about the human world” that considers “the experience of ordinary people in ordinary, daily life” (p. 8-9). What this implies is that such experience in principle is accessible to everyone, even though it is not always so in practice. In this respect, the sociologist can help by thinking more deeply about daily human life and seeing the “social in the individual, the general in the particular” (Bauman, 1990, p. 10). Sociological discourse therefore remains wide open and intimately bound with common sense while making an effort to adhere to the “rigorous rules of responsible speech” (Bauman, 1990, p. 12). Therefore, it is obliged to speak to questions of human interaction and interdependence with careful distinctions between what is supported by available evidence and ideas that are grounded in belief only (Bauman, 1990, p. 12). The goal is to gain insights into “forms of life other than our own,” which may prompt us to rethink some of the alleged boundaries that have been created between “us and them” and to draw lines of communication with “the other” (Bauman, 1990, p. 17). Bauman’s (1990) study stresses the conceptual and practical relations between freedom and dependence, which are particularly important for
disability studies. The goal is to consider how one’s freedom to choose certain actions is also bound to others, especially when one’s freedom appears to draw boundaries for another (p. 21).

Bauman (1990) discusses the self and social relations and describes a phenomenological approach that measures individual points on an imaginary line marked by social distance (p. 38). This view considers one’s associates, contemporaries, predecessors, and successors, such that they make up one’s “mental map” (Bauman, 1990, p. 39). Mental and physical proximities are part of this evaluation of social distance, including factors such as population density and one’s capacity for fellow-feeling or the ability to “perceive other persons as subjects like us” (Bauman, 1990, p. 40). The problem is that this creates perceived distinctions and divisions that impact one’s relations with others and foster “us” and “them” attitudes, involving emotional attachment, antipathy, trust, suspicion, security, or fear (Bauman, 1990, p. 40). Bauman explains this notion that the “us” and “them” perspective makes sense only in opposition, and without such divisions, “we would be hard put to make sense of our own identity” (1990, p. 54).

Identity and the intersection of Blackness and disability is further discussed by McKittrick (2000), who discusses the issue of the body of the Black woman. McKittrick reviews the narrative of Marlene Philip, discussing the way in which she had influenced the nature of the social construction of the Black woman’s body and the way in which subjectivities and dominant narratives had a role in the way in which the body was understood and how it is that Black womanhood is unique. This critical analysis is evidence of the novel nature of Black studies among the investigation of other areas where Blackness has been investigated as being an intersection with another topic. The woman’s body is constructed as being different with some limitations in the scope of the capabilities of women. While these differences in capability exist, there is still the issue of the way in which women can contribute to society. Women are also seen as having the ability to offer something unique that men cannot. This differs from disability, where disability is seen as something that must be overcome. The woman is not expected to
overcome her womanly nature of the difference in physical attributes. As this is the case, while sexism persists, the experience of disability is unique from sexism – while both women and the disabled are considered to be creating a dependency, the extent to which this happens is much different among women than among men. For this reason, my research aims to understand the intersection of Blackness and disability in higher education institutions.

Butler’s (1997) notion of “writing on the body” is salient here because it is a part of this post-modern critique of institutional power, but it also moves beyond notions of embodied identity that are tied to the facts of physiology (p. 403). For example, her main critical force for this research concerns the idea that the natural body is not denied per se, but it is “reconceived as distinct from the process by which the body comes to bear cultural meanings” (Butler, 1997, p. 403). Butler’s (1997) work assumes that identity, including racial or disabled identities, are “performed or enacted” in a kind of theatrical way (p. 403). There is something false about the ways in which identity is enacted, but there is a kind of metaphorical stage on which people perform based upon certain expectations or cultural determinations. Such a view can perhaps be applied to the earlier discussion of double consciousness insofar as there is always a set of eyes that lord over other people’s sense of their own identities (Butler, 1997). In this respect, we can say that Foucault’s post-modern critique is aligned with Butler’s as they both assume that cultural powers attempt to construct other people’s subjectivities. What is difficult to reconcile is whether or not a stable identity is possible within post-modern discourse, since it is based upon a high level of scepticism about if we can even use terms such a “human” or “woman” without playing into the hands of those institutions that have set these up as normal categories.

In fact, this is an area of consternation for this study, so I would prefer not to take post-modern scepticism to its ultimate logical end concerning the arbitrary nature of all reality (Butler, 1997). Rather, I do acknowledge that identity in general can be said to be an arbitrary construct, but I am interested in a more pragmatic understanding that would also take seriously the notion that one
can reclaim a more critical identity-based mode of resistance, while accommodating the critiques of those post-modern theorists that hold a deep suspicion of education institutional power (Butler, 1997). Indeed, as Butler (1997) herself points out, any theory of gender (or Blackness) constitution, “has political presuppositions and implications,” and so it is impossible to develop a theory of identity or race that does not express some kind of political philosophy (Butler, p. 413). That is, by even positing intersections between the self, Blackness, and gender, one is involved in a political discussion of identities that demands one makes distinctions, even while admitting the concepts are difficult to pin down (Alcoff, 2006). However, for the case of my study, it is one thing to use a term, such as “disabled person” or “Black person,” and yet another issue altogether to assume “a normative vision” or “ontological” category (Butler, 1997, p. 413).

Identity, in this more social sense, becomes the complex understanding of who we are. Titchkosky (2000) discusses the way in which intersectional marginalization of different elements of identity are able to contribute to the way in which people see individuals that are poor, Black or disabled. She describes the perception of people at this intersection as being vulnerable in nature, and that social and economic differences at this intersection can be excused in the minds of people as being natural elements of being Black and disabled. Factors such as wage gap, employment and the lack of empowerment that the Black and disabled experience are therefore constructed as being based on the disparity between the opportunities for people from their social background and the limited abilities to perform tasks among the disabled. There is a lack of consideration of how it is that social differences are a consequence of a recursive system where people who are disabled are held back. Further, just as there is the insistence that the Black and disabled are vulnerable, there is also the insistence that the people who are the class in control are the strong in society. What this means is that the Black and disabled are dependent on the non-disabled and the non-racialized for opportunity and to receive benefits related to social and economic opportunity and development. There is a normalization of the marginality that
Black disabled individuals experience in society given that “vulnerability” puts these students in a position where social institutions must accommodate them and the administration of these institutions must create policies where there is different treatment for the disabled based on the different nature of their capabilities.

Ultimately, the discussion of how disability and Blackness are understood, and discussion of the elements of identity and the social and economic aspects of life which come with them, has been approached from an understanding of the way in which impairments and diverse abilities contribute to different ways of life. McRuer (2010) discusses the differences between the way in which disability and queerness are understood in that there are significant differences between the way in which factors such as the heterosexual-homosexual binary is understood and the way the able-bodied-disabled binary is understood (p. 302). He reflects on the nature of disability as a factor which resonates in politics because of the role that able-bodied people play as having greater control. The able-bodied are able to set the agenda and the disabled must follow with that agenda because of their lack of positioning in government and society. There is a nationalism among some disabled people which emerges where the disabled and their diverse abilities have been marginalized to the point that their identity carries a stigma of being incapable of living autonomous lives to the degree that the able-bodied are capable of living.

**Addressing Disability Accommodation Politics and Practices**

For several institutions, it is important that discrimination is addressed in employee agreements, contracts and the regulations related to what is expected from employees. For the University of Toronto (2016c), Article 9 addresses the issue of discrimination against employees on the bases of several identity categories. These terms cover several layers of identity and are an explicit expression on the part of university administration and executives of the protection
against unequal treatment for workers on the basis of characteristics which should not have a negative impact on their ability to perform work duties.

The point of disability accommodation practices is to address the issue of the socially disadvantaged in order to work towards greater equality of results. There are individual and structural reasons for social inequalities, and because of the multitude of reasons which exist, the system has thousands of people that are impacted (Wotherspoon, 2014; Chataika, 2018). It would be difficult, if not impossible, to successfully address these inequalities. For this reason, general policy is designed as a means by which the diverse needs of students can generally be addressed. It is important that this be a central part of educational opportunity because education is generally considered to be the key for the extension of social and economic rewards and opportunity in society. Equality of access and treatment of students are two key factors which precipitate the equality of rewards and the ability for there to be a move towards socially responsible activities on the part of administrators. Wotherspoon (2014) notes that compulsory education is one of the primary ways that the government is able to facilitate the reduction in inequality in Canada because education is a key way in which the poor, indigenous and disabled are able to gain access to social systems and economic elements that they did not have any degree of access to otherwise.

The issue of how disability should actually be addressed by administrators is a difficult issue because of the way in which disability is conceptualized. Titchkosky (2011) recognizes that the nature of how disability is handled at the level of organizational bureaucracy is such that the classification of disability includes the inabilities of disabled students and restrictions from activities. Practices on the university level recognize disability as an aspect related to the framing of time and the way in which daily life is structured. Titchkosky does this through analysis of the history of ordinary narratives that reflect on the perpetuation of presence and absence of disability exclusion and inclusion. She describes how disability is an issue for inclusion, and she
concludes that based on the idea of disability as a present factor, which bureaucracies address as though it is an issue which is not-yet present. Titchkosky’s (2011) work presents further evidence of the way bureaucracies address the conditions in which disability is considered and the way bureaucracy is addressed in the classroom from the standpoint of the way considerations of bureaucracies are perpetuated in the education system.

Summary

This chapter covers several forms of literature related to Blackness and disability, and the way in which the intersection of these aspects of identity intersect. The literature in the review includes scholarly journal articles, texts, narratives and documents from university accommodation policies and practices. These pieces of literature contribute to the articulation of a current gap which exists in Black studies where the intersection of Blackness and disability has not yet been investigated to support understanding of ways in which administrative policy in the university setting impacts the lives of Black disabled students. The foundation of this gap was articulated as being an element of the overall approach to education where colonial elements continue to shape the institutions. However, institutions also foster anti-Black racism which has been, and continues to be, a central factor in the education system. A significant body of the literature illustrates that colonized educational institutions preserve and perpetuate a system of structured inequality based on Blackness, disability or gender (McKittrick, 2015; Wotherspoon, 2014; Fanon, 1963; Hill-Collins, 2015). There are elements of the education setting where there is a value placed on being both an able-bodied and non-racialized individual. Thus, the university system carries vestiges of what education was designed to accomplish in the scope of preparing for economic success and the people who the system was designed to accommodate. Barriers persist for Black disabled students who must struggle to overcome in order to obtain a place in an education program and to be able to be successful in these programs. Clearly, at both the
secondary and postsecondary levels, there is considerable institutional resistance in our society to full inclusion and equity with respect to accessible education for students with disabilities. Education is, of course, critical to not only personal and intellectual growth and development, but also to attaining economic self-sufficiency.

I discuss disability studies in terms of the scope of how it is that disability impacts individuals and how individuals with disabilities will impact society. I review disability studies related to the implications of being disabled and how it is that society views disability as problematic and a kind of trouble that social structures must facilitate overcoming. Through the development of social structures related to disability, the disabled person becomes viewed as vulnerable and dependent without the autonomy of the non-disabled person. For this reason, there is less confidence in them in society. Further, it can have an impact on the way in which the disabled person sees themselves.

The review of Black studies exposes that the nature of what Black studies and academic programs were originally designed to be has changed because of influence by non-racialized administration of programs to the point where they have become another element of the study of multiculturalism. They are less an opportunity to understand Blackness and are now focused on the generality of Black-Americanism. This is a problem because it is a systemic denial of what it means to be Black and has resulted in taking away the understanding of the phenomenon of Blackness.

Identity and normalization of marginality was addressed as being the construction of the Black disabled student and the ways in which they have been marginalized in educational institutions. The Black disabled individual is seen as being highly dependent on the government and having a lack of economic options. The Black disabled student identity is experienced through factors not relevant to their self at all times; however, it has implications on their life.
The chapter concludes with a discussion of how policies are developed which affect accommodating Black disabled students.

In Chapter 4, I describe the theoretical framework and methodology employed in my study. The chapter is an overview of the underpinnings of this research as well as a description of the methods used to explore the problem and respond to my research questions. The chapter begins with a discussion of the theoretical framework. My framework is based on the need to theoretically address the intersection of being a Black disabled student at the University of Toronto. The chapter describes the way in which this intersection is addressed by a discursive framework and how it relates to bureaucratic policies and practices organizing students in the university setting. The chapter then discusses methods of critical analysis. The critical analysis demonstrates that it is important to consider the ways in which students’ bodies are written upon and read through the language of Blackness and disability in education institutions. In my project, critical theoretical approaches within Black studies perspectives are used to disrupt the ways in which the process of colonialism operates in education institutions. My discursive approach facilitated interrogation of the problem of colonialism, its pedagogies and cultural production of marginalized students.
Chapter 4: Theoretical Framework and Methodology

Introduction

This chapter provides an overview of the theoretical and methodological underpinnings of my study. It engages interpretive sociology as well as critical Black and disability studies theories in order to illuminate the ways students navigate the everyday complexities of Blackness and disability in university life. I use a discursive intersectionality framework to explore some of the shared experiences of Black students with disabilities attending the University of Toronto. This framework allows me to attend to bureaucratic policies and practices derived from the twelve interviewees’ experiences as these are deployed within encounters between administration personnel and University faculty when seeking accommodation. This exploration of the numerous social issues, including racialization, requires a delineation of the common experiences of the participants in order to provide insight into their life at the University, and this is linked through normalization and subjugation. My study explores how the identity of Blackness and disability might be a necessary component of unsettling the stable Blackness-disability discourses and practices that are apparent in public, regulated spaces (Wynter, 2003). My critical analysis demonstrates that it is important to consider the ways in which students’ bodies are written upon and read through the language of Blackness and disability in education institutions. As discussed earlier, it is important to note that Blackness is not a disability; this dissertation approaches Blackness and disability from the standpoint that there is unique phenomenon at play when a student is both Black and disabled.

Informing this study will be an examination of how legacies of colonialism continue to impact Black university students’ experiences. I use critical theoretical approaches within Black studies perspective to disrupt the ways in which the process of colonialism operates in education institutions. A discursive approach allows me to interrogate the problem of colonialism, its pedagogies and cultural production of marginalized students. Black disabled students, often with
great difficulty, navigate the very systems designed to accommodate their needs as individuals. I will show how institutionalized accommodation procedures relegate students to an alternative status despite the stated goals of the University and civic policies to equalize avenues of opportunity regardless of status.

Common experiences of stigma and marginalization were replete throughout the interview process as described by the study’s participants. For example, Saga, a first year undergraduate Arts and Sciences student noted that: “I think of the term ‘disability’ as being ‘ableist’ and another convenient way of categorizing and stigmatizing individuals based on their different learning needs” (Interview 12, December 15, 2016). At the same time, Paige, a second year Masters student stated that she had to avoid several barriers “while I was going through my university experience – not allowing them to block me or to stop me from, you know, experiencing or attaining what it was that I wanted to attain. Ignoring some of the stigma, some of the snobbery that existed” (Interview 3, July 13, 2016). Even reflecting on past experience, David, a fourth-year undergraduate student paraphrased a conversation with a professor where the professor said he would not need to meet to discuss performance in the classroom, and that “This stigma can also inform my identity and academic achievement” (Interview 8, October 31, 2016). For example, the participants’ experience of marginality and stigma are very important in considering the theoretical history of the self as a social and cultural production, and its political and social justice implications. Moreover, it is important, within the context of a study informed by anti-Black racism critique, to recognize or acknowledge the struggle against Blackness and its attendant structural inequalities in educational institutions. As the investigator, reflection on my own experiences as a Black disabled student from Jamaica was part of the inspiration for the design of this research and the induction that took place. The reoccurring theme of incredulity with regards to the needs for accommodations and the inequity of expectations with regards to
students’ racial minority status can be related when placed within the confines of these two theoretical frameworks (Walcott, 2011).

**Section 1: Intersectional Theory Framework**

It is commonly believed in cultural studies circles in North America that the concept of intersectionality was introduced by Crenshaw (1989) in an examination of the experiences of Black women’s struggle against racism and systems of social oppression. Crenshaw (1989) argued that a single-axis analysis was insufficient, and true insight into their common experiences would be gained through a multidimensional review of both racial aspects of discrimination of the Black experience and female subjugation that was the progenitor of the feminist movement (p. 139). The inability of the single-axis approach for the analysis of the Black feminist experience explored by Crenshaw serves as a model for developing my framework for this study of the common experiences of Black students with disabilities. The examination of students and their common experiences will provide insight into their encounters with the University, and their conflicts with regard to both accommodation and discrimination that exacerbate the marginalization of these individuals that, according to both law and policy, they should not be encountering. Yet, at the intersection of Blackness and disability, many experiences of marginalization are to be revealed that cannot be due to one’s status as a racial minority or as disabled. Moreover, as I discussed in the introduction, exploring the complexity of Blackness and disability can reveal the unique phenomenon of intersectional marginalization and that the implications of this phenomenon must be understood. In particular, this study explores how educational progress intersects with power and resistance by examining how marginalization of Blackness and disability in the university setting are normalized by school policies and practices.

In analyzing the power structure of the University and its Accessibility Services, the mono-system analysis of racism or ableism each provides an incomplete description of the social
inequalities. A similar issue is noted by Crenshaw when she describes a single-axis approach to inquiry. Likewise, Hill-Collins (2015) notes that the true complexity of inequality in social relationships:

Intersectionality can build on this foundation by moving beyond a monocategorical focus on racial inequality to encompass multiple forms of inequality that are organized via a similar logic. As an initial step, this framework can be applied to other social formations and knowledge projects that reproduce inequality, for example, social formations of patriarchy, capitalism, heterosexism, and their characteristic knowledge projects. Yet, intersectionality goes farther than this mono-system analysis, introducing a greater level of complexity into conceptualizing inequality…. (p. 5)

When Hill-Collins went on to describe the forms of knowledge project with the intersectionality framework, she noted that there were typically three primary investigatory approaches in describing this social construct. The first is intersectionality as a field of study, as the object of the investigation, making descriptive determinations of why this social construct exists and how it fits into the prevailing power relationships. Ultimately, this approach makes the concept of intersectionality the focus of the investigatory inquiry by extrapolating the facets of the power structure and discriminatory nature of society. The second approach uses the concept of intersectionality as an analytical strategy, where the concept is employed to render new knowledge of the social world in which these power structures and discriminatory patterns are allowed to exist, foment, and reinforce the power structure paradigm.

My investigation seeks to uncover the origin, nature, methods and limits of the intrinsic discriminatory foundations of the power structure as is exists in society. The subjects of this investigation find themselves confronting the unraveling of the meaning of intersectionality by exposing the causal roots of the discriminatory institutionalized power structure and historical progression of these social constructs that culminated in the current circumstances. Where the first approach is the “why?” of intersectionality, the second investigatory approach is the “how?” seeking the explanation rather than the description of the social construct. Finally, the third
approach examines the critical praxis of the discriminatory social construct, and how it relates to the subject of social justice and resistance to the power structure and inherent discrimination. Hill-Collins (2015) stated that this third approach diverges from the scholarly inquiry into the examination of the discriminatory practices, in a broader sense. While the first two approaches are looking at the “why and how,” this third approach asks “where?” Not in a physical sense – this question asks about the locality in the social construct that provides a focal point for any resistance. A tangible manifestation of intersectionality, where the efforts of social justice and resistance can be applied to deconstruct the discriminatory power structure as it exists in the community that the participants in the study are members of by virtue of their Blackness and disability.

In considering the challenge of resisting this pervasive institutional power structure, I found potentially one avenue for resistance in a quotation from hooks (1990) cited by Titchkosky and Michalko (2009, p. 6) in their work on normalcy and disability. Acknowledging the reality of the marginalization of people with disabilities, these scholars go on to note:

hooks tells us “that . . . margins have been both sites of repression and sites of resistance.” . . . hooks suggests that respecting the voices, lives, and events found at the margins of a society might be a way to begin to resist and remake the centre’s norms. (Titchkosky & Michalko, 2009, p. 6)

The theoretical purchase of this approach lies in its ability to acknowledge that Black students with disabilities – as with other oppressed groups in our society – are not going to suddenly occupy the centre of our culture. Indeed, even when members of these groups are scholars, writing significant texts and conducting research widely recognized in their academic communities as important, they can still represent as marginalized objects. The concept of intersectionality as explored by disability scholar Titchkosky (2007) allows us to understand the complexity of marginalization and how the process of identification of disability and Blackness is deployed institutionally. She explains that within this process, marginalization and oppression can often be so difficult to interpret. While
sociologist Bauman (2004) states that “wars of recognition” that seek to define identities are subject to marginalization and oppression (pp. 35-37), he also points out how these identities are not always so solid in nature. Their fluidity manifests especially on ethical grounds if we need to interpret other groups as deficient, less free, or less moral. Disability studies, for example, is certainly embedded in this construction and deployment of normalcy which animates the assumption about what one should have the “ability” to do or to what degree one is free from being overdetermined by physical or mental conditions.

Titchkosky further observes – with reference to the discursive analysis of disability, which I also relate to, and to Blackness through Butler’s (2004) concept of “recognition” – that it is obvious that our culture does not, in the main recognize disability as having a “viable” status: “Butler theorizes the social act of recognition, in which some people are recognized as less than human and produced as non-viable” (Titchkosky, 2007, p. 6). This begs the question: why? To address this question, we can make use of the theoretical concept of intersectionality (Titchkosky, 2007, p. 3), and how we make meaning at the intersecting differences of our identities. For instance, when Titchkosky (2007) argues that “viable status is not granted to disability” (p. 6), she is highlighting how difference remains fundamentally unacknowledged in our culture. At its signifying core, difference remains fundamentally alien within our culture. Disability and Blackness are often represented not just as a diminishment or a departure from a normative standard, but as something radically alien within our culture and thus, often, a taboo. In addressing Titchkosky’s

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12 The arguments of Shakespeare (2002) in this regard mirror my own personal experience and reflections on this issue. Humans are complex entities that, in general, tend to resist being pigeonholed as being defined by this or that quality despite what society may seek to impose upon them. In this analysis, the social model of disability – while undeniably accurate compared to the medical model – should take into consideration the complexity of human identity and the range of potential social roles that are a consequence of this identity. Arguably, this more nuanced social model would represent a more accurate reflection of the complex conceptualization of disability in our modern education institutions.
statement above, we can make use of the theoretical model of intersectionality in order to explain how we make meaning at the intersecting differences of our identities. In addition, upon reflection on Walcott (2003)’s discussion on writing as a Black man, there is a unique phenomenon at play in the academic communication of Blacks, which requires further investigation.

Given this complex context of recognition, misrecognition, and a failure to imagine, I proffer that it is only through an inclusive theoretical and cultural apparatus that we can come to understand the full complexity of disability, marginality and the potential for resistance. As hooks (1990) notes in her commentary on marginalization as a form of resistance:

When Bob Marley sings, “We refuse to be what you want us to be, we are what we are, and that’s the way it’s going to be,” that space of refusal, where one can say no to the colonizer, no to the downpressor, is located in the margins. (p. 341)

From this perspective, hooks’ theoretical engagement with the meaning of marginality can be used to make sense of the strategies of students with disabilities who resist the foreclosure of their future education possibilities based on the limited significations that are applied to their social identities. These identities are eclipsed in social space, and in theoretical constructs, highlighting the limitations of theoretical models in attending to their Blackness and disability.

Consequently, McCall (2009) considers the “the complexity of intersectionality” as an apt framework for and exploration of inherently complex social investigations. McCall (2009) therefore observes that “research practice mirrors the complexity of social life” (p. 49). The desire for simplification of the social constructs such as Blackness and disability in order to facilitate the explanation of a social phenomenon can be frustrated by the very nature of the complexities of society. I investigate precursors to the constructs in which society has evolved to its present state and the development of the power structure that provides the pillars on which discrimination rests in the system. McCall (2009) recounts three methodological approaches to addressing the issue of complexity in the investigation of intersectionality, and I integrate these methodological approaches into the intersectionality framework of this project.
The first methodological approach related by McCall is *anticategorical complexity*, which seeks to deconstruct analytical categories, recognizing that society is too irreducibly complex to readily facilitate simplification in broad terms, but isolating and investigating each nuanced aspect of the social framework. This approach rejects categorizing society, and is at the far end of the analytical spectrum. The second methodological approach lies in the middle ground and is deemed *intracategorical complexity* by McCall. This approach focuses on broad categorization that is intellectually comfortable for investigations while maintaining a certain amount of contempt for the categorization paradigm. It is useful for the investigations into “people whose identity crosses the boundaries of traditionally constructed groups” (McCall, 2009, p. 50). This middle ground of categorization is contrasted with the third methodological approach of *intercategorical complexity*, which creates comfortable categories that fall in line with traditional forms of methodological approaches. This “provisional” adoption of categorization for the facilitating of research is the least popular methodological approach as noted by McCall and employs methods of defining categories to facilitate research rather than seeking to allow the investigatory process to evolve independently. The comfort of categorization may seek to usurp the aims of research at the expense of delving deeper into the complexities that lie at the core of this intersectionality framework.

This discursive approach examines all aspects of the Black student with disabilities experiences at the University of Toronto. The intersectionality framework allows all aspects of the common experiences to be integrated into a single theory of marginalization and normalcy associated with the University power structure that is purposed to facilitate and foment an educational environment of both inequity and discrimination.
Discursive Bureaucratic Policies and Practices Framework

The issue of disability in the University environment is one of the two key pillars of this investigation, and is part of the larger issue of the University bureaucracy that removes the individuality of the student and seeks to “classify” or “categorize” them with an identity dominated by their disability. Let me use Titchkosky’s (2010) characterization of the power of bureaucracy in order to develop my version of a Discursive Bureaucratic Policies and Practices Framework:

The global process of bureaucratizing embodiment recommends that it is fair, or morally correct, legally efficacious, or even tacitly neutral to regard disability as a condition attached to some people while disregarding the ways disability is differentially conceptualized around the world. (p. 3)

Extending Titchkosky’s analysis of bureaucratic arrangements in educational institutions, my study examines these institutional bureaucratic practices and discourses through a critical lens. As part of the process of this critical analysis, I utilize theoretical approaches in order to explore the complexities of students’ experiences within this education institutional setting. The interaction between students and administration serves to diminish the former’s personhood because as clients, students are framed in a manner that the bureaucratic apparatus can recognize. While some modicum of accommodation is granted through routine or systematic practices, bureaucracies do so with little measure of the success or failure of the students as individuals in the classroom environment. The routine practices that grant accommodations are often disconnected from the actual student performance or experience in the classroom. The task of administration is to assess and approve accommodation needs as efficiently as possible and within policy guidelines. Accessibility Services is “helping” students in the spirit of the university discourse of inclusivity, but what they are also doing is “helping” according to their bureaucratic policies – and they “help” only according to their own conception of disability. That brings us to the following question: why and how are students’ classroom experiences
disconnected from the accommodation process? It is possible because the University may just be content with participating in symbolic activities. The process of granting accommodation is merely symbolic and a whole apparatus is built up to create a perception of accommodation based on Blackness, disability or class.

The stated goal of these laws and practices with regards to disabilities is to provide a “barrier free” and accessible University environment to all disabled students. Inside the bureaucracy the subject can be lost, and as observed by many, the service to the bureaucracy supersedes service to the individual student requiring services or accommodations. Titchkosky’s insights, particularly with regard to the University of Toronto, will provide a valuable backdrop for the framework of Discursive Bureaucratic Policies and Practices. It is important to work with a guiding discursive framework to understand the experiences of Black disabled students in this university by questioning the bureaucratic ordering of accommodation for those with learning differences (Titchkosky, 2011, p. 12). Indeed, sociologist scholars have defined bureaucracy as a system of power in which the hierarchical and regularized structure of the institution governs itself and has control over others (Titchkosky, 2011; Weber, 1947). According to Titchkosky (2011), “these procedures are usually put into text[s] that [enforce] rules and regulations which are implemented by an office in a supposedly predictable fashion” (p. 8). The issues of policy and the way it sustains the University, as well as the marginalization of Black disabled students, are key elements of my study. From a practical standpoint, one objective of this study is to inspire thought among people in the University system so that we can consider ways in which the bureaucracy has been a problem for students who have been marginalized in complex and compounding ways (e.g., through race, Blackness, disability, class, gender and sexuality and other forms of marginality) and determine ways in which these problems can be addressed.

In addition to an examination of the Discursive Bureaucratic Policies and Practices of the experiences of Black students with disabilities, my investigation into the social structure in
which they live and interact is also guided by sociologist Smith’s (2005) writings on institutional ethnography, which provides insight into the students’ personal experiences from an institutional context. The University bureaucracy in and of itself can be an impediment to the academic performance of the student. Smith (2005) further notes in her exploration of institutional ethnography that:

If we take up the realities of students’ work lives as the actual situations in which they produce tests and assignments for the instructor to grade, we can see that grades may be strongly affected by the number of courses a student is taking and hence the kind of pressure of time and anxiety that hits at the end of term. . . . Physical disabilities transform the work of getting to the library, to class, to materials, and so on. All these matters take time; traveling from home to the university takes time. The work of getting to class, to the library, to making what’s to be studied into a form in which it is accessible, dealing with the university bureaucracy – all of these also take time, and all of these take longer for a student who’s disabled. Time deployed in ways such as these diminish what is available for intensive study and writing or preparation for tests; less time spent in study and preparation means lower grades. (p. 148; emphasis added)

The observation of the time aspect and the interaction with the University bureaucracy will be a key observance when querying the participants. Following the provisos of the Discursive Bureaucratic Policies and Practices Framework, my study focuses on the experiences of students both in the classroom setting and negotiating the bureaucracy of Accessibility Services while pursing the reasonable disability accommodations necessitated by their disability and guaranteed in both statute and policy. As Titchkosky (2011) argues, bureaucratic policy and practices are used to manage accessibility and accommodations for students with disabilities. She further notes that, “paradoxical power [is] to make disability an unmanageable state of exception in the University environment” (p. 10). For instance, many participants in this study noted that the accessibility system is designed to meet the needs of students with disabilities, but it appears that there are more problems and barriers to accessing these services being generated.

Observations in interpretive research require understanding the experience of participants and how they may have come to construct their reality in the University setting. The educational
institutional environment is one where students may access several different types of accommodations. For each student, the experience of access can be different, depending on a multitude of reasons. For the Black disabled students, this experience can be much different than what it is for a student who is middle-to-upper class, able-bodied, white and has not sought services. The Black disabled students accessing accommodations is a key element of my research. In some ways, this reflects on the work of Titchkosky (2011) and the way in which bureaucracy works in the scope of students with disabilities; however, it is also a reflection on the nature of the experience of students who are Black as well. The stories of these students are important because it is essential to understand the experience of seeking accommodations for these students. As Christine, a fourth year undergraduate Arts and Sciences student stated: “I have often felt stigmatized and marginalized by faculty members at the onset of disclosing my need for accommodation” (Interview 1, April 19, 2016). The experience of seeking services should be interpreted to understand how it is that students feel and the way in which they seek their experiences in terms of the services offered by the university. An example here is the experience of working with housing to access services related to accommodations if a student is disabled in such a way that they cannot walk without assistance. Their experience would be reflective of the way in which a disabled person is accommodated in the education system.

The question of permeability of services offered emerges because students are deterred from accessing services, and must decide as to whether they are willing to face trauma or discourtesy or having again to prove eligibility. As racialized students with a disability, the participants in this study make a heuristic demand for personhood through “ability” and “access” as they try to overcome an epistemic violence that emerges when they interface with these bureaucratic policies and practices. The study argues that these students not only have to worry about the everyday complexities of Blackness and disability in University life, “but also about their future [education] within it” (Thomas-Long, 2010, p. 153).
In facilitating understanding the Black disabled students’ experiences of normalization and marginality through bureaucratic procedures surrounding accommodations, insights from both Césaire’s (1972) “Between Colonizer and Colonized” and Titchkosky’s (2011) *The Question of Access: Disability, Space, Meaning* provide guideposts on how to theorize social oppression and control. Both social oppression and control are exemplified in varying forms of colonization and exclusion and are central concerns in the narrative of education institutions. Indeed, just as Césaire (1972) conceptualizes colonization in the form of conflicting narratives of the same reality – “They talk about . . . [but] I am talking about . . .” as exemplified in an interpretive third and first person interface – Titchkosky (2011) argues that the “fight for access . . . is also an interpretive space” (p. 91). In this interpretive context in which divergent narratives contest with each other for epistemological control over our physical, social and cognitive space within education, this also reproduces disability as a problem that education already is troubled by and needs to deal with through cognitive and physical interpretations of the self in an interpretive community. In this study, power is the capacity to control our perspective on the world and how we interpret it. My study aims to show the ways in which Accessibility Services – like Césaire’s colonizers – would prefer that their point of view, their “facts,” be accepted as the meaning of accessibility.

However, if we hold a prism to these “facts” – as in the bureaucracy policy and practices, what may filter through from the point of view of the students – may become very different interpretations, conceptualizations or “facts”: an interpretive space in which the meaning is . . . access denied! It is therefore important to emphasize that in representing the struggle for inclusion or the struggle against colonization and anti-Black racism as a struggle for control over narrative, interpretation and meaning is a challenge that goes to the heart of such struggles against oppression in all its myriad forms (Walcott, 2017; Titchkosky, 2011). Césaire depicts two distinct points of view representing the world of colonialism: the point of view of the colonizer who “throw facts at my head” and celebrates the achievements of colonization in terms of mileages of
roads and railroads, and the point of view of the colonized that focuses on the human cost of such achievements with people enslaved in the process. This point is similarly made by Chataika (2012a) who noted the roles of disability and development in postcolonialism as being intertwined. Perhaps the most significant aspect of Césaire’s observation is his acknowledgement of the key role of education in teaching the dominance of the colonizer’s explanatory narrative: “I am talking about millions of [wo]men . . . who have been taught to have an inferiority complex, to tremble, kneel, despair, and behave like flunkeys” (Césaire, 1972, p. 343).

Similarly, Titchkosky (2011) notes, that language is critically important in understanding representations of disability and exclusion in that our social groups’ “way of saying things” is “representative of the cultural grounds of possibility from which they emanate” (p. 74). What we say, and how we say it, not only reflects but also creates the world in which we live. In other words, exclusion is made viable and possible by how we represent it in language. It is significant how in Titchkosky’s depiction of contesting narratives that even the most absurd exclusion is rendered reasonable. In considering the absurd justification of exclusion for Black disabled students, a tantamount analogy comes to mind of one going up to the counter at McDonald’s and being told that they do not have any hamburgers or fries. Then upon complaining that they have signs showing they indeed have hamburgers and fries, being told: “Well, isn’t having a sign of something better than nothing at all?” While surreal and darkly comic on one level, in terms of education institutions and the construction of the social self, such narratives are important because they teach colonized people to have an inferiority complex (Césaire, 1972). Yet think about the meaning of this language: power here is in the hands of the administrators while the disabled student is denied agency over their own educational future as a consequence of the design of policies in their physical space, as the following chapters will demonstrate.

According to the social model of disability, a visually impaired person is not disabled because they cannot see, they are disabled because the education system is designed by able-
bodied people for seeing people, which is made of many things that are inaccessible to non-
seeing people (Kuusisto, 2018, p. 4; Shakespeare, 2002; Oliver, 1996; Finkelstein, 2007).
Moreover, Weber argued that the depersonalization of work processes successfully eliminates
personal feelings from decision-making in bureaucratic organizations (Cosner, 1977, p. 2). The
rationality of decisions in a bureaucracy is based on what will maintain the system; the
bureaucracy depersonalizes itself from humanistic considerations. As bureaucratic policies
permeate most modern institutions, people understand these policies to be normal elements of the
way institutions work. Bureaucracy becomes a problem because of the extent to which it
supports marginalization and discrimination. For example, for a disabled student, the stigma of
disability contributes to the design of policies where the school values standardized tests, which
may have discriminatory elements embedded in them. These tests can discriminate based on
Blackness and disability, and as they are necessary parts of decision-making, it could impact
placement and acceptance for students.

Thus, society has continued to be bureaucratic and develop the ways in which to detach
emotion from decision-making and create further bureaucratization in the systems and processes
of institutional environments (Cosner, 1977, p. 2). The structure of bureaucracy creates
difficulties for disabled and Black individuals as University students. These difficulties are
related to the bureaucracy of universities failing to develop institutional policy that sufficiently
meet the needs of students, while embedding discrimination into the system, which could address
their personal needs. The difficulties for these students are related to the need for specific
accommodations that the bureaucracy as an impersonal and rational system would not recognize
or acknowledge. In order for these accommodations to be respected by a bureaucratic system,
they must become a part of the policy of the system. The structure of the bureaucracy poses the
problems; however, it can also function as a solution when policies are designed and accepted
into the system. They must support the continuation of the bureaucratic system as a productive,
efficient and effective entity. The crafting of policy that would grant the required accommodations for Black disabled students would require rationality in terms of how disabilities and Blackness are linked to the accommodations granted by the bureaucracy.

As has already been shown (Titchkosky, 2011), the University power structure and process of bureaucratizing embodiment lies in the fact that Accessibility Services espouses a policy of inclusion, and yet it practices routine exclusions whereby “lip service” is paid to respect for disabled students. The University as a bureaucracy is keen on self-preservation. Based on Weber’s conceptualizations, its administrators routinely invoke policies and procedures and maintain the entrenched hierarchical structure. In so doing, they engage in practices that resist meaningful or even sustainable structural change. For instance, some participants reported that they experienced racial discrimination or were treated as “problem” to the system when they interacted with administrators when seeking accommodations at Accessibility Services. Thus, disability and Blackness inequity suggests that these laws and policies, however strong or well-meaning, are not enough without the will and the general acceptance of the need for inclusion, support services and reasonable accommodations for students with disabilities. This framework allows for integration of their status as a racial minority in a purported environment of equality, as well as their status of disabled requiring reasonable disability accommodations per legislative requirements and University policy.

**Research Relating to the Identified Frameworks**

The two key frameworks identified are used to represent the underlying aspects of the collective experiences of the participants. In this research, the intersectionality of Blackness and disability is analogous to Crenshaw’s examination of race and sex. As in Crenshaw’s (1989) research, the dual status of racial minority and disability are individually sources of historical discrimination and subjugation of the individual. Thus, each alone would provide ample material
for an investigation into discriminatory practices and inherent biases at the University or the Accessibilities Services hierarchy. However, the intersectionality of these two frameworks, when viewed through the lens of Discursive Bureaucratic Policies and Practices, provides a unique perspective into the collective experiences of the participants and the subject population they represent. Their experiences juxtapose the stated goals of equality in both racial and accommodation policies and their practical applications in the University’s educational environment. It is therefore important to note that the legal and policy requirements of equality, as examined within these two theoretical frameworks, in practice fall short of their lofty expectations. The practical experiences of the participants, as documented by this study, reveals an environment far remote from the expectation of equality.

Section 2: Methodology

Effective qualitative research requires that the researcher become familiar with what participants say so as to engage and analyze the experiences of the participants. This requires a methodology which permits the free expression of opinions and feelings of those included in the research. While guiding them through a serious discussion of their life experiences and experiences at the University is crucial, I was careful not to evoke an answer suited for my hypothesis, but instead permitted the participant to explore their own emotional reflections and relate their assessment of the organizational nature of both the University and its Accessibility Services. In the potentially prejudicial role as both researcher and member of the selected group, it was all the more important that a kind of impartiality was maintained but in relation to an element of empathy, as many of the personal history and experiences of the participants are replete with trauma and difficult anecdotes that are essential to the inquiry. The balance between distance and embrace is essential to elicit the experiences, and thus the methodology is the most important aspect of my research project.
Qualitative Research

The difference between qualitative and quantitative research is part of the fundamental understanding of research methodology. When seeking to gain insight into a particular social phenomenon or paradigm, qualitative research is the obvious choice, and thus the chosen method I have selected for my inquiry. The exploration of the experiences of the participants is the crux of this inquiry. Documenting their encounters with the general environment of the University of Toronto with respect to both Blackness and disability could be accomplished through quantification of the number of microaggression experiences, length of time to obtain requisite accommodations, or the grade point average of student with disabilities compared to the able, contrasted with the racial minority. For instance, Black students who face discrimination or disability labelling often face disadvantage in schooling, which inevitably reproduces inequality.

My study engages critical and interpretive methods and theories within sociology as well as Black and disability studies in order to illuminate the ways students navigate the everyday complexities of Blackness and disability in University life. By examining student experiences, the study highlights how accommodation as a facet of access “performs” or “enacts” inequality.

Qualitative research, as noted by Smith (2005), “is ordinarily treated as limited in its implications because any statements it might make are restricted in significance to the particular setting of the ethnography” (p. 42). For example, Smith argues that the local experience is permeated with the extra-local modes of authority and power (in this case, university bureaucratic control). However, simply providing the chronology of racial and disability experiences will not assist in the exploration of racial and disability discrimination, as this is encountered in experiences of marginalization and stigma. Again, this is noted by Smith (2005), contrasting her endorsement of qualitative research with the cited abundance of quantitative research available in sociological inquiries. Thus, quantifying the injustices does serve to document the inequities, but does little to relate the human experiences. It is of interest to note
the numeric preponderances, but to truly attain the depth of understanding the experiences of the individual, and thus the meaning of collective production of marginalization, are the true aim of this research. In another example to support the use of a qualitative inquiry, bolstered by Crenshaw’s initial supposition of an intersectionality framework, she used a review of multiple judicial examples of the intersection of race and sex. The review of these court cases was proffered by Crenshaw (1989) in her initial investigation into intersectionality stating:

[one] way to approach the problem of intersectionality is to examine how courts frame and interpret the stories of Black women plaintiffs. While I cannot claim to know the circumstances underlying the cases that I will discuss, I nevertheless believe that the way courts interpret claims made by Black women is itself part of Black women’s experience and, consequently, a cursory review of cases involving Black female plaintiffs is quite revealing… to illustrate the difficulties inherent in judicial treatment of intersectionality. (p. 141)

Thus, Crenshaw did not statistically analyze the outcomes of the judicial inquiry, she used the rulings of the court as anecdotal evidence to support her theoretical framework, using the courts’ rulings in place of individual interviews to provide the qualitative data. Similarly, this study uses interviews, in place of judicial review of key cases, as anecdotal evidence of the intersectionality of Blackness and disability. I examined the experiences of participants with regards to their interface with the institution’s bureaucratic policies and power structure at Accessibility Services so as to explore how marginality is produced even as disabled Black students are offered services and/or accommodation. The interpretations of the experiences of the participants in my study can be directly paralleled to the courts’ rulings in Crenshaw’s initial inquiry into intersectionality as Crenshaw critiques antidiscrimination, feminist theory and antiracist politics. Crenshaw (1989) discusses the intersection of race and gender, expressing that there is a lack of consideration in society for the experience of Black women. In general, the stigma carried by Black people is such that it is believed that their experiences are much less important than the experience of Whites, and that there is a stigma that follows the Black experience. The stigma of being a Black
individual is one which contributes to the difficulties which persist in the lives of Black people where a lack of privilege makes it difficult to gain access to services.

The selection of the qualitative research paradigm was reinforced by the prior inquiries into the Intersectionality and Discursive Bureaucratic Policies and Practices frameworks by both the originators of these social constructs and subsequent related investigations based upon these social theories. Additionally, as I seek to further knowledge regarding the intersection of Blackness and disability and the experiences of the participants as this relates to marginality and stigma, it is altogether fit and proper to pursue this manner of data collection and exploration with regards to the theoretical framework I have chosen.

Data Collection

The aim of my investigation is to foment a greater understanding of the experiences of Black students with disabilities at the University of Toronto in the theoretical frameworks of Intersectionality and Discursive Bureaucratic Policies and Practices, and following the example of the initial investigations. Accordingly, I determined that the best course of collecting qualitative data was through interviewing current students. Although the policies regarding equality of treatment by the University in both racial and disability constructs has been in place for a number of years, and the experiences of past students may be illustrative, I felt that the currents students would provide the most insightful views on this subject. Their ready availability for in-person interviews, and the freshness of their experiences, would not be influenced by the passage of time nor subsequent experiences with other social institutions outside the University experiences, which may affect their opinions. I was seeking current views, not retrospectively influenced by the passage of time or in the context of greater societal effects that may temper or conflagrate their opinions, judgments, or perceptions. I was seeking insight sharpened either from the stinging of fresh wounds, or contextualized with the totality of the
student perspective of the requirements and pressures of academic life and associated environmental influences uniquely acquitted of the passage of time or life outside academia. I was seeking students’ perspectives, not those of professionals musing on their academic experiences, where workplace or societal immersion may temper or sharpen their opinions.

It is within the confines of the University where I was seeking to find the participants’ views of McKittrick’s (2011) “Black sense of place” (p. 948) where the plantation mentality can be either reinforced or instilled by the institutions of the University for Accessibility Services. McKittrick (2011) noted:

A Black sense of place is not a steady, focused, and homogeneous way of seeing and being in place, but rather a set of changing and differential perspectives that are illustrative of, and therefore remark upon, legacies of normalized racial violence that calcify, but do not guarantee, the denigration of black geographies and their inhabitants. (p. 950)

The sense of place identified by McKittrick for the purposes of my research is not a physicality, but rather a social construct within the University that the established power structure seeks to maintain over these students. Similarly, the plantation mentality is now similarly referenced by noting: “The plantation evidences an uneven colonial–racial economy that, while differently articulated across time and place, legalized Black servitude while simultaneously sanctioning Black placelessness and constraint” (McKittrick, 2011, p. 948). Therefore, there is an analogous comparison to be made of the University and its Accessibility Services to maintaining a power structure and social construct similar to the slave plantations that sought control over the labour forces for the benefit of the owners.

Nonetheless, I did not want a retrospective opinion of the participants’ experiences, I needed to know how current students in the midst of the environment viewed these institutions of power as to properly fit within Smith’s method. Smith (2005) noted that: “institutional ethnography is not an experimental approach . . . if it is to serve those whose standpoint it undertakes as its starting point, it must produce accurate and faithful representations of how
things actually work” (p. 42). In keeping with the spirit of “how things actually work,” contemporaneous insight into the confluence of the experience of Blackness and disability in the University setting was essential. As Crenshaw (1989) used the contemporaneous records of the court to develop her theories of the intersectionality framework, the in-the-moment opinions of the participants were equally necessitated.

Figure 1 below highlights an in-depth understanding of the participants’ collective experiences at the University of Toronto. Further, the flowchart is a diagrammatic depiction of the fourteen components of Intersectionality and Discursive Bureaucratic Policies and Practices in relation to my research. The chart begins with stated goals of creating access, reasonable accommodations and eligibility for Black disabled students. Reasonable accommodations are a focus for both Blackness and disability; however, equity is only focused upon for Blacks, while eligibility is only focused upon for the disabled. This leaves the Black disabled students at a point of intersectionality where the focus of bureaucracy may not support these factors through accessibility services. The outcomes observed are then discrimination, stigma, normalcy, and barriers when accessing accommodations, anti-Black racism, and marginalization.
Figure 1: Blackness and Disability Research Flowchart

Stated Goals
- Equity
- Reasonable Accommodations
- Eligibility

Blackness
Intersectionality

Disability
Intersectionality

Bureaucracy

Accessibility Services
Discursive Bureaucratic Policies and Practices

University Faculty and Staff Power Structure
Discursive Bureaucratic Policies and Practices

Observed Outcomes
- Discrimination
- Barsers Accessing Accommodations
- Anti-Black Racism
- Stigma
- Normalcy
- Marginalization
Documents Collection

The data from the interviews was recorded in audio format. The Informed consent forms, interview digital audio recordings and transcripts are kept in a locked filing cabinet in the Disability Studies office at the University of Toronto that is accessible only to the investigator. All data obtained from the participants may be kept for five years, and the identity of the interviewees will be destroyed following the first publication (this includes publication of the thesis). Any data input into the computer is password-protected. Electronic files shall be deleted from the computer hard-drives and paper documents are to be shredded within the department of Social Justice Education/OISE after a maximum of five years.

Interview Process

The interviews were conducted on the University of Toronto campus between April 2016 and December 2016, at a location that was convenient for the participants. Each interview took approximately one hour to complete. There were seven interview questions, which served as a semi-structured guide and starting point for a one-on-one open-ended interview with undergraduate and graduate Black students with disabilities. These interview questions I prepared were to elicit a deeply personal response to their experiences at the University of Toronto with respects to accessing Accessibility Services. The institutionalization of a power structure under the auspice of providing assistance to students with disabilities is at the crux of these questions, with an open-ended nature to ensure that they were not leading with any presupposed assumption, but truly provide key insights into their experiences. The interview method was chosen to ask these seven key questions.
Interview Questions

1. Please tell me about your experience of being a Black disabled student at the University of Toronto?

2. What has accessing accommodation been like for you?

3. Have you had any accommodation experiences with administrators? If yes, what has this been like?

4. Have you had any accommodation experiences related to professors or Teaching Assistants? If yes, what has this been like?

5. In your experience, are there any experiences of marginalization in the University that might be related to being a Black disabled student? If yes, can you tell me about this?

6. In your perception, what factors do you think have shaped your University experiences?

7. Do you experience Blackness and disability playing out at the University of Toronto in any other ways, or ways you haven’t mentioned yet?

I instructed the participants to reflect on the questions asked in the interview. During the interview, one of the participants exhibited extreme anxiety and required a diversionary conversation to continue. Many of the interviewees volunteered voluminous amounts of personal information and experiences, while others chose to answer curtly, and additional questions were posed to elicit additional useful perspectives and information. Accommodations support was provided to some participants ahead of time via email with the interview questions in PDF files.

The Researcher’s Role

In interpretive research, the general assumption is that subjective and intersubjective meanings of the world are created by people as they interact with the world. Given this, the role of the researcher in interpretive research is to understand the phenomenon under investigation through the meaning that people assign. Walsham (1993) notes that in interpretive methods of research we must start at our knowledge of reality and the domain of human action, where it is acknowledged that they are social constructions of humans that apply to researchers as well.
Therefore, there is a limitation that the researcher must concede where there is no true objective reality. This goes against the grain of positivism in that it is acknowledged that in absence of objective reality, it is not possible for researchers to replicate previous work in a valid and reliable way. The researcher’s role is to interpret the world and understand the data as being representative of the interpretations of others as collected in conversation with respondents. Smith (1999) discusses the role of the researcher in writing social research as being such that their interpretations of the data should be nested in their constructions of the world and acknowledged as such. As the investigator in this research, my acknowledgement is at the forefront of the study.

Being both Black and classified as disabled, it was important that I maintain my position of dispassionate neutrality as to not influence the discussions and responses to the interview questions. As qualitative research requires induction into the data, eliminating bias was a significant element of the research. Additionally, this key essential component of objectivity needed to be maintained throughout this investigation, with regards to the interpretation and presentation of the results. Although passion is an indispensable component of meaningful research and promotes thoughtful and courageous conclusions, it is also a pathway to a loss of objectivity and unbiased results.

**Maintaining a Notebook**

As a frame of reference during and after inquiry, a notebook of observations was maintained. The notebook functioned as a personal resource for personal opinion and insight. These insights were valuable for reflection on the findings of this research and interpretation of results. As the investigator of this research, airing personal ideas in a notebook also contributed to reflecting on possible bias that manifested in the approach taken to interpretation. Maintaining a notebook also contributed to understanding what oppression is and how it should be
interpreted. The notebook worked as a tool to articulate these thoughts and contributed to conclusions related to interpreting oppression.

**Ethical Issues**

This study obtained all ethical approvals from the University of Toronto’s Research Ethics Board prior to commencing the data collection in order to retrieve information from participants attending the University of Toronto. Therefore, the Tri-Council Policy Statement for Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans (TCPS) guidelines and requirements were closely and stringently followed (University of Toronto, Ethics in Research, 2010). At the beginning of each interview, I informed the participants that they have the right not to answer any interview questions, that he or she can withdraw from the study at any time and that their responses can be deleted from the research study if they so choose. I also had available the email, phone number and address of counseling services at the University of Toronto. Many of the participants became emotional when describing their experiences with the accessibility personnel and professors. In one instance, I had to spend considerable amount of time making one of the male participants comfortable with the questioning and alleviating some of his anxiety through diversionary discussions of sports and non-research related interactions. I had a certain amount of empathy for the participants, as I too fell within the potential research pool.

**Informed Consent**

One of the key ethical considerations as per the University and TCPS is the requisite informed consent prior to the beginning of any human research projects. Since this research project clearly falls within the confines and scope of these policies the Informed Consent letter was provided to each participant, and the records of which are maintained and available upon the request of any of the participants (Appendix D). As an incentive was offered for participation (Appendix G), the ethical guidelines required that it not be coercive in nature as to jeopardize the
safety or volunteerism of the participants (Tri-Council Policy Statement, 2010, p. 29; see University of Toronto, Ethics in Research, 2010). As noted, the incentive was a five-dollar gift certificate, a token amount, and thus it was unlikely to be deemed coercive.

**Participation Letter of Invite**

I used snowball-sampling method (i.e., asking the interview participants to refer fellow students that might be willing to participate in the study). Recruitment posters were posted on the University campus. I invited potential participants via letter, email, and some chose to contact me directly by email or telephone to discuss an interview date/location. The letter of invite clearly defined the scope of the investigation and nature of the research, with additional provisions regarding privacy and the token financial incentive for participation. This letter falls within the ethical guidelines for human research projects at the University of Toronto (Appendix E). The recruitment email was similar to the formal invitation, but did not contain the totality of information, as brevity is requisite for email communication to be effective.

Additionally, recruitment posters were placed throughout the University of Toronto campus requesting an email or telephone response. Through snowball sampling method and recruitment posters I was able to obtain the requisite number of participants, twelve, representing a diverse cross-section of the targeted population of qualified participants. The study participants ranged from undergraduate to post-graduate students, although weighted a slight bit towards a majority of female, with three male participants and nine females. The breakdown of the participants is listed below and all participants have been given pseudonyms (Table 4-1).
Table 4-1 Population Demographics of Participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interview/Date</th>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Level</th>
<th>Discipline</th>
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<td>Arts and Sciences</td>
</tr>
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<tr>
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<td>Kimberly</td>
<td>2nd</td>
<td>Masters</td>
<td>Humanities and Social Sciences</td>
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<td>Oct. 14/16</td>
<td>Folake</td>
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<tr>
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<td>David</td>
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<td>Dec. 15/16</td>
<td>Saga</td>
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Confidentiality and Anonymity

The results of the interview, tape-recorded conversations and transcripts, as noted above, were maintained in a secure location to protect identities of the participants. I used pseudonyms in all interviews and changed the names of colleges and graduate departments where they were enrolled. I also informed the participants that pseudonyms would replace their real names. In addition, details other than minimal personal data with regards to disciplines, level of education, and disability were kept to a minimum as to protect the individual identities of the participants. Only someone with the deepest amount of insight would be able to identify the participants. This minimal amount of personal information exposed in the results is necessary to contextualize the results and provide meaning with regards to the theoretical framework that underlies this inquiry.
Protection from Harm

The nature of this investigation involves deeply personal and potentially troubling revelations and insights of the participants. Many of the disabilities experienced by the participants involved anxiety and post-traumatic stress and counseling services and resources were made available to the participants if they required them. Additionally, resource availability was reinforced to participants if they chose to access them privately after the conclusion of their participation in this inquiry.

Releasing Information

No personal data other than the transcripts of the interview and minimal information with respect to gender, nature of their disability, and level of education at the University was included in the presentation of the results of my research. It is important in both ethical requirements and my personal commitment to the participants that they not be identified in the research, or as a result of the presentation of the results. During the review of the letter of consent, I informed the participants verbally and by letter of consent to indicate if they would like to receive a copy of the final report of my research findings. The majority of participants indicated that they would like an electronic PDF attachment of the final report.

Data Interpretation

The transcripts of the individual interviews were examined to establish a common experience of the participants with respect to the key theoretical frameworks noted above. Each individual participant related their own experience in both the classroom and with Accessibility Services with respect to the interview questions presented. In presenting the research results, and conclusions with respect to the individual and collective experiences, the best interpretation was the presentation of the participant’s own experiences in their own words. Thus, numerous direct quotes from the interviews are presented, and sometimes minimal editorializing associated with
these quotes accompany their narration. In many ways, the participants’ words speak for themselves, and their personal reflections on their experiences provide the best evidence of the University’s environment with regards to both Blackness and disability.

Limitations or Challenges

Among the major challenges encountered in this research are the candid and truthful responses to the research questions. I accept the statements of the participants as fact, and many of the anecdotal accounts of their experiences are clear violations of University policy and legal requirements of equity with respect to treatment of racial minorities and individuals with disabilities. However, the open acceptance and non-judgmental interaction with the participants is crucial to elicit candid and unreserved commentary from the participants. Many of the participants related their experiences of formal complaints and the inaction of the University as part of their experience, and expressing doubt or incredulity with regards to their responses to the interview questions would tarnish their results and stifle the honesty I was seeking to evoke from the interview process.

Summary

The methodology employed for my investigation into my critical analysis of Blackness and Disability in higher education is designed to present the experience of participants within the ethical and research guidelines of the University. It is therefore important to note that I took steps to maintain my objectivity and dispassionate presentation with the research participants. Nonetheless, it is my firm belief that I succeeded in both meeting the ethical requirements of human research subjects and objectivity through the methodology employed. While these theorists all share an underlying preoccupation with how identity and the self are deployed and used by elites as strategies of discursive power and political control, I believe that extending this analysis
to Blackness and disability in higher education opens critical space to explore further the modalities of power and domination.

The following chapter is an exploration of the intertwining of Blackness and disability in the process of making the marginalized student in university life. The chapter is divided into six sections. Section 1 addresses the participants’ definition of “identity” and self-description of how they described themselves in terms of their personal introspective assessment of racialization contextualized in the university in relation to impairments that have been assigned the value of disabling. Section 2 discusses the role of Blackness and disability in marginalization. Section 3, philosophical approaches to subjectivity and power. Section 4 explores how normalcy, Blackness and disabilities are constructed in educational settings. Section 5 addresses Black students’ experience of microaggressions. Finally, Section 6 concludes by summarizing how the impact of colonialism and structural inequities continue to produce injustice in University settings.
Chapter 5: Disability Identity, and the Self as a Site of Struggle

The truth of the precarious and forever incomplete status of identity needs to be, and tends to be, suppressed and laboriously covered up. . . . National identity painstakingly construed by the state and its agencies . . . aimed at the monopolistic right to draw the boundary between “us” and “them.” (Bauman, 2004, pp. 16-22)

Introduction

This chapter begins with an exploration of the social construction of “identity” with reference to the Black disabled university students’ experiences. I attend to the works of various critical theorists associated with Blackness, disability, identity, gender and the body that theorize the cultural production of the self as a site of struggle in the university environment. With regard to problematizing the self in this chapter, this approach to the self is useful as it focuses on need to destabilize the artifice that the “self” is a given building block of modern education institutions. I argue that any postulation of the “self” as a cultural production and platform for social justice necessitates a radical subversion of existing modalities of the individual and individualizing self in our society. This recognition of the self as a social and political construct has undeniably been important in the advancing the cause of political and social justice in diverse contexts around the

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13 Some have estimated that approximately 600 million people in the world living with disabilities and, of those, it is estimated nearly 70 percent live in developing countries (Chambers, Sukai, and Bolton, 2011, p. 7). Studies conducted by the World Health Organization (WHO) “World Report on Disability,” found that over one billion people worldwide experience some form of disability (WHO, 2011). In Canada, some estimate is that approximately 4.4 million disabled or 14.3 percent of the population, whereas in Ontario the percentage of the population living with disabilities is slightly higher with 15.5 percent comprising 1.9 million people (Statistics Canada, 2012, p. 1; Chambers, Sukai, and Bolton, 2011, p. 7). Similarly, in Ontario, data from the 2011-2012 academic year revealed that approximately 21,668 universities students were registered with disabilities at publicly funded universities (Ontario Chamber of Commerce, 2013, p. 7; Ontario Ministry of Training Colleges and Universities 2013). In postsecondary education, the percentage of the student population is nearly half, with 6 to 7 percent of the students reporting disabilities (Chambers, Sukai, and Bolton, 2011, p. 7). The majority of the students reporting disabilities to officials and accessing services are female and although the qualitative information used in the Provincial Education Report (2011) did not provide specifics, the male/female ratio of the participants was weighted heavily female which anecdotally reflects this lopsided representation.
world. For example, by the late 20th century it had become widely acknowledged in both scholarly and popular environments that “labelling” people with a particular “identity” is not only inaccurate but also often harmful to both the subject and the wider society. For example, Black students who are labelled as disabled not only face challenges stemming from their disability, but also faced institutional consequences of this categorization. With respect to Blackness or disability – among the most powerful stigmas in our culture – it has become accepted that labelling can have an adverse impact on how a person sees themselves and how others will see them. Labelling therefore has negative implications for people who are Black or disabled in the education system; however, it is a process which continues (Smith, 1982; Back, Keys, McMahon & O’Neill, 2016). In understanding this process, it is important to recognize or acknowledge the continuum of not only oppressive social constructions of the self across time, but also of revolutionary theory and practice resisting these same constructions. As we have seen in following this thread across decades of intellectual thought and political/social struggle, this social construction of the self is often deployed in order to apply to reinforce a social/political hierarchy through the association of qualities of inferiority/superiority and normative/deviance with physical bodies.

Commentators and theorists have traced this practice across the broad tapestry of human history. For example, Wynter (2003) demonstrates how European elites would periodically revise their conception of the “self” in order to reassert their claims to power in response to wider social and cultural change. Thus, the concept of “race” was advanced – and quickly incorporated as a natural “given” of social order – as European society began to secularize and expand with greater contact with cultures outside Europe. Through this process of secularization, European culture discursively revised the “basis all human groups had millennially ‘grounded’ their descriptive statement/prescriptive statements of what it is to be human, and to reground its secularizing own on a newly projected human/subhuman distinction instead” (Wynter, 2003, p. 264). According to Wynter (2003), the modern world is engaged in a struggle between a conception of ‘man’ versus
a broader definition of ‘the human’. Thus, the identification of ‘man’ with a concept of physical, intellectual, and moral superiority. Wynter (2003), states that race is the single most effective tool of domination utilized in the modern world (p. 263). Race allows this (as do other tools) by creating social identities or categories that define behaviours and relationships.

There is also the question of identity politics which can be read as fraught with creating categories of understanding that fall into the dominant culture’s agenda of creating an “other” existing outside of the norm (Rajchman, 1995). One of the major claims of postmodern thinking is that identity should be called into question as a stable category of being and representation (Rajchman, 1995). This remains a prominent critique that has affected several areas of social and political thought, but has also impacted the ways in which one talks about identity politics, especially in terms of gender and race. There is an argument that a subject’s identity has been “overrepresented,” meaning that the conception of the human is itself a product of Western and bourgeois thinking (Wynter, 1994) that is defined as the “coloniality of being” where dominating classes and powers have decided what it is to be an autonomous person with full rights (Wynter, 1994). Therefore, our struggles with representing race, Blackness, disability, class and gender are bound up in this history of oppression that has been propagated by colonizing and often Western powers (Wynter, 1994).

Wynter grapples with the complexity of the relationship between body and socially-constructed self. Wynter (2003) theorizes that the “body” serves as a cultural “anchor” for the self in terms of identity, suggesting that: “gender . . . has a biogenetically determined anatomical differential correlate onto which each culture’s system of gender oppositions can be anchored” (p. 264). Interestingly, however, she contends that while “race” is a “purely invented construct,” identity – given this “anchor” – is not (Wynter, 2003). It is understandably difficult grappling with issues relating to the bio-genesis of the self (Cooley, 1902; Fanon, 1963; Davis, 1995). However, Smith’s and Wynter’s comments as presented above highlight not only the basis of this modern
labelling or construction of the self in discourse, but also the challenges of interrogating or subverting these processes. For example, in Western countries today, it would be either implicit or a minority view that Blacks disabled people were subhuman – or inferior – due to their physical/biological characteristics. Yet, in those same societies, the struggles for civil and disability rights persist due in large measure to the success of authoritarian forces at redeploying their discursive capabilities in subtle ways.

Identity is an important individual and social phenomenon. For the Black disabled individuals, the ways in which society contributes to identity is important to consider in terms of how it is that the Black disabled person sees themselves and the ramifications this has with regard to how others see them. This is also related to the way that people see the types of assistance that are given to the Black disabled students to support equality.

In this chapter, I explore each of the twelve interviews and investigate each aspect as a separate item, following the traditional paradigm of investigatory analysis, and then attempt to contextualize the participants’ common experience with regards to their racial ethnicity and disability status. What this investigation reveals is that the participants’ “identity,” though readily defined by Accessibility Services and their professors, is not established by these outside influences and continues to be as individualistic and amorphous as the subject of identity construction is infused. Additionally, noting that the commonality of experiences reflects many societal problems associated with Blackness and disability, reflecting a strong mandate to revisit the issue of how the university integrates this population into the mainstream of the university. In direct terms, one of the key arguments for this study is that “identity” is not only defined solely by circumstance or opinions, with a sub-claim that the current efforts by the university to address the issue of accessibility are inadequate.

The existential concept of identity and identification is far more complicated than the biological categorization of living beings by seven divisions of Kingdom / Phylum / Class /
Order / Family / Genus / Species, or any other structured labelling process, would suggest. It also transcends the feeling of self that an individual has, such as, do they have a strong self, are they a good person, do they fit in with a group, or who are their peers? In terms of identity, “Identification turns out to be one of the least well-understood concepts” (Hall, 2000, p. 16). In philosophical terms it is a combination of all the structured ways we may refer to self, combined with a good mixture of contemplation of the question of where in the grand metaphysical scheme of the master plan of existence I exist, or what section of intellectual territory might I occupy. This philosophical debate regarding identity is found within my discussion of the student interviews.

**Blackness, Disability and Identity in Higher Education**

I gathered the qualitative data from twelve Black students with disabilities at the University of Toronto (2016), all of whom met the qualifying criterion of the study. I selected participants that were willing to discuss their observations and opinions regarding their experiences. The participants were interviewed based on their experiences and no preferences were given as to the type of disabilities or areas of study. I asked each of these students’ seven open-ended questions to elicit a response and was surprised at their honesty and candour. The majority of the participants indicated that they had negative experiences with the administration personnel at Accessibility Services. Several noted delays in the disbursement process such as the Ontario Bursary for Students with Disabilities causing financial stresses, or delaying in purchasing of assistive technologies for their studies. Nearly all participants stated that they had encountered racism either regarding their Blackness, their disability, or both. It was noted that

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14 On March 10, 2016, I obtained all ethical approvals from the University of Toronto’s Research Ethics Board prior to commencing the data collection in order to retrieve information from Black students with disabilities attending the University of Toronto.
some of the comments by participants perceived as racist in nature bordered on outrageous and extremely difficult to fathom on a 21st century university campus. Regarding prejudice towards their disabilities, nearly all students cited the fact that their disabilities were hidden – not readily apparent. In class or outside of accommodation pursuits, many chose to pass and appear “normal” to the other students and faculty who were not aware of the students’ disabilities. A number of students voiced a reluctance to take full advantage of accessibility services due to prejudice from the professors and teaching assistants. For example, some professors noted in classes that the disabled students had an “advantage” over the other students due to the accommodations afforded them to compensate for their disabilities.

For example, Denise, a second year Master’s student, stated that:

One of my professors weren’t very supportive. Due to my “invisible” disability I had to prove to them as well by showing them my documentations to prove that I have a learning disability. And after showing him my documents he told me that he doesn’t believe that this class is for me. (Interview 11, November 29, 2016)

In addition, Barry, a first-year undergraduate, reflected on an incident where a professor asked him about a wheelchair, stating:

Most of my professors and Teaching Assistants were supportive, but I had some were not as supportive. I had a few professors who question my disability. I literally had to justify my disability to my Political Science class professor. He then asked me where is my “wheelchair,” because my disability is not physical. (Interview 9, November 18, 2016)

Interviewee David, a fourth year undergraduate student, reflected on his experience with a professor whose dealings with their disability has impacted their identity:

Oftentimes I find that my identity appears as a problem where I found myself [being] marginalized in the classrooms. One of my professors refuses to provide me with class notes and accessible class reading materials. I reported my concern to the accessibility services officer and they told me that there is nothing they could do about it and I should try and negotiate my accommodations with my professor. I also found some of the class sizes were too large (over 150 students in one classroom) and it was very difficult to meet with professors on an individual basis. (Interview 8, October 31, 2016)
In all, the experience of these students has generally been such that it has had a detrimental impact on their self-improvement.

The analysis of this qualitative data is guided by the principles of intersectionality\textsuperscript{15} as a framework that goes beyond the measuring of outcomes and beyond any single dimension of a lone variable. This version of intersectionality points us toward the multifaceted relationship between the social location and the structural inequities of public policy examined by the interaction of several factors and their interdependence with societal norms and expectations, institutionalized prejudices, and the members of the oppressed class that dwell in the cross-sectional complexity of the interaction between these social factors (Hankivsky et al., 2012, p. 18; Hill-Collins, 2015). The accessibility requirements of the university are a matter of public policy and provincial law implemented at the university level, and the administration of the policy is effected by the administration of Accessibility Services as well as the professors and teaching staff.

The policy regarding the accommodations afforded to students with disabilities as experienced by Black students collided with structural prejudices and discrimination on both accounts of Blackness and disability. An analysis based solely upon disability and the experiences of students would be different from an analysis based strictly upon racial discrimination and the Black experience of a racial minority at a major university. In many interviews, the participants noted that their “disabilities” were “invisible,” but their “Blackness” was an inescapable influence upon their experience at the university and in the social setting. The interdependence central to the intersectionality analysis cannot be viewed without first

examining the individual characteristics and components of the Black disabled students’ experiences.

“I Ain’t Disabled”: Disrupting Identity Politics

The self-identification required for the Accessibility Services application does not capture the complexity of the identity process. For instance, forms such as learning assessment and admissions forms for both the undergraduate and graduate levels make identity issues increasingly problematic for Black students with disabilities. The “identity” that concerns me here is the participants’ description of how they described themselves in terms of their personal introspective racial assessment contextualized with the outside views of their impairment assigned to them by university or medical professionals. I sought out participants to understand how they fit into the student population of the University of Toronto.

For example, Saga, a Black male first year undergraduate Arts and Sciences student, responding to a question regarding experiences as a Black disabled student at the University of Toronto:

I aint disabled. I am already struggling with stigma attached to my Blackness and the whole concept of “identity politics.” And so, I think of the term “disability” as being “ableist” and another convenient way of categorizing and stigmatizing individual base on their different learning needs. (Interview 12, December 29, 2016)

It is interesting to note that the participant chose to use the word “stigma” when discussing his Blackness and “stigmatizing” with regards to his disability. He cited “identity politics” and “convenient way of categorizing” with regards to the issues of Blackness and disability, two interpretations of outside views on his identity. As Goffman (1967) argues, while our “face” or public identity we project is “self-delineated,” which we perform or enact “in terms of approved social attributes” (p. 5) and with an interest in avoiding stigma. To this end, it is necessary that the individual “passing” be highly aware of social expectations in order to play against them. Of greater
importance, the participant refused to self-identify as disabled in no uncertain terms; he was, he insisted, a student that learned differently and required some special conditions in order to conform to the “normal” requirements of the class.

A reoccurring theme of the participants’ university experience is the negative labelling associated with their Blackness or disability. Paige, a Black female second year Master’s student in the Humanities and Social Sciences, stated the importance of:

...knowing myself, and basically, not allowing barriers that arose while I was going through my university experience – not allowing them to block me or to stop me from, you know, experiencing or attaining what it was that I wanted to attain. Ignoring some of the stigma, some of the snobbery that existed. (Interview 3, July 13, 2016)

Paige relates that the university continues to be a site of barriers for students with disabilities. These barriers, including structural barriers when accessing accommodations, seemed to signify systemic barriers to students such as herself. Interestingly, she felt as though seeking accommodations for her disability victimized her because she was often forced to place herself in vulnerable position and plead for these accommodations. Paige was unable to distinguish whether her negative experiences when accessing accommodation was due to her race or disability or both.

This student once again described the accessing of Accessibility Services as placing a “stigma” upon her academic career. The reoccurring theme of stigmatization is replete throughout the interviews, relating to the use of Accessibility Services, and the accommodations afforded the students. After all, while there may be legislation or university protocol for university accessibility for students with disabilities, and students with disabilities may represent a minimum portion of the student population, barriers to access remain the norm as opposed to the exception within the university environment. If students with disabilities feel they are not welcome in the university environment, is it not logical that many would prefer to stay away from accessibility
services and avoid the energy drain of continually overcoming and/or improvising around structural barriers?

At the same time, the professors demonstrate that they do not appreciate the purpose of the modified testing, or curriculum conditions. David, a Black fourth year undergraduate student in the Arts and Sciences, noted:

I asked the professor if it was possible for me to meet with him to discuss my grade. He told me that there is no need for that . . . This stigma can also inform my identity and academic achievement. (Interview 8, October 31, 2016)

David’s concern is that he will be perceived as not properly earning his academic achievements and his identity will be tainted forever. Low (1996, p. 246), in analyzing identity development of disabled university students, viewed it as a three-part negotiation: negotiating their disability identity, their non-disability identity, and their physical environment. This ongoing negotiation and attempting to fit in as “normal” or “mainstream” is of particular concern to students with “visible” disabilities. In an environment where a sense of potential stigma thrives, some students do not want to draw attention to themselves any more than they already have, as noted by Christine:

I need to take an elevator because I have trouble going up the stairs and my knees give out. I ask someone who works in the building [University of Toronto] “Where is the elevator?” and then she sent me into a wild goose chase. I feel like she just looked at me, and thought, “What do you need an elevator for?” And she sent me to the stairs (giggling). And so, I look at them anyways because at that point I’m just frustrated. At that moment, I had to take out my little stick. But, I was still having difficulty accepting using the stick. The stick it makes me feel worse because the other students always look at me with pity. The stick had a complex range of symbolisms for me and society in general. You know I don’t like using it. I think everyone be looking at me. But for a little thing it is sure useful. I forced myself, but there is always this little fear in me, “Please don’t give out. Please don’t give out. Please legs get me up the stairs.” It’s little things like that. It’s just humiliating. (Interview 1, April 19, 2016)

Rather than continue the search for the elevator, she chose to suffer the pain of using the stairs instead of subjecting herself to further insult. Given my work in critical disability studies and issues of stigma and marginality, I am struck not only by the participant recognition of how her use
of the stick would lead people to label her as a student with a disability – a label that she clearly resisted – but also how she used the stick as a means of resisting this foreclosure and “troubling people.” In a sense, the participant’s stick – this “little thing” – can be considered a “prop” in her performance of disability. Like any prop in a stage or film production, its meaning derives almost entirely from its usage by characters. In this case, the participant seemed to be aware of how her disability (and possibly gender or Blackness) contributed to her social invisibility. In this context, she made use of the stick as a device to mitigate this invisibility. In this highly self-aware performance, the participant seemed to acknowledge how the stick “tagged” her as a student with a disability; a process that could result in yet another layer of social oppression and stigma. However, what was remarkable about this participant’s use of the stick as a “prop” in her performance of disability was that – I would argue – she used it as a part of an improvised strategy to “trouble” people, resisting the reductionist oppressive means by which society often “reduces” individuals with disabilities to a “single attribute” (Garland-Thomson, 1997, p. 12).

It should be emphasized that the use of the terms “performance” and “prop” in this discussion should not be interpreted as implying bad faith or an absence of legitimacy in any way. Rather, these terms speak to our roles as “social actors” and – from a theoretical perspective – to the theory of performative identity as presented by critics such as Judith Butler. While Butler and Young’s arguments – that performances of identity are required by hegemonic authority as sources of legitimacy and power – are well-founded, it is important to note that neither critic regards this as being the limit of performance. Indeed, it may be argued that for both critics – writing with regard to the performance of disability and Blackness respectively – performance can also be deployed as a mode of resistance by social actors (Butler, 1997). While the participant knew full well that the stick – an integral “prop” in her performance – was a well-known social marker of disability that served to identify herself, nonetheless she deployed it in such a way as to resist reductionism and assert her social authority as a Black female student worthy of recognition. For example, the participant used
the stick as an assertion of presence, and a means of overriding her “invisibility.” Moreover, like any good actor, the participant in her performance was highly cognizant of how her performance was being “read” by her intended audience. The participant’s self-awareness of her performance is made evident by her clear ambivalence in using the stick – as she understood it as a social marker that could reduce her – yet at the same time she recognized how this “prop” could be “useful” if deployed well and in a calculated manner. Against this backdrop, I nonetheless argue that many Black students with disabilities are – reflective of Christine’s statement above – using their performances of disability as improvised strategies of resistance to this social production of marginality, and/or labelling. I would argue that the participant’s anecdote illustrates the complex double-bind confronting students with disabilities – the pervasiveness of social stigma and marginalization of individuals with disabilities leaves few avenues to self-identification that are not oppressive, yet avoiding self-identification can be complicit in that same hegemonic and discriminatory order.

The students when negotiating are attempting to avoid further stigmatization, as Folake, a Black female second year graduate student in the Humanities and Social Sciences clearly articulated: “Being Black and disabled there is this stigma that we’re not smart enough” (Interview 7, October 14, 2016). As Fanon (1967) relates, Blacks will have to work harder and prove twice as much to society that they are in fact equally intelligent as their White peers. It is the concern of this stigmatization that leads students to forgo utilizing Accessibility Services even though it might aid their educational aspirations and accommodate their disability needs. Sara, a Black female second year graduate student who also teaches undergraduate courses in the Sciences, related: “It wasn’t until my final undergraduate year of university that I even considered registering with Accessibility Services, due to the stigma that is often attached to persons with disabilities” (Interview 24, November 24, 2016). When attempting to navigate their disability through the use of Accessibility Services, the fear of stigmatization of their non-
disability identity brought about an internal conflict of inaction and foregoing needed accommodations or assistance for fear of diminishing sense of self, academic or otherwise. While all of the participants viewed themselves as university students at the highest levels of academic success at a prestigious university, they feared an identity of being non-deserving, second class, or unworthy by others, by their fellow students, the non-black or racial minority, able others, or their professors. Their anxiety was reinforced through comments from fellow students, advisors, and advisors as typified by statements by Denise, a Black female PhD student of Humanities and Social Sciences, who stated: “Most people including the accessibility advisors would say, ‘Well, if you need accommodations, why are you here? Why not go to a community college?’” (Interview 11, November 29, 2016). The student’s peers, faculty and advisors clearly did not recognize her identity as a university student.

The responses of the participants in relation to their identity stands defiantly in stark contrast to their personal assessments of their character. Where the outside world sees them as advantaged by the accommodations and having an easier path to academic success, they introspectively note a struggle against the stigma associated with their disability and often inadequate efforts by the University to accommodate. Finally, while it is prescribed by the legislative code or university rules that discrimination and segregation is not to be tolerated, their reality is a campus experience where these mandated ideals have not yet manifested themselves, and the institutions that profess to assist them have fallen far short in their efforts. This, of course, has consequences for how people conceive of themselves and forge identities.

The Role of Blackness and Disability in Marginality

The racial construct identity of Blackness is often used in context of anti-Black racism as the visible disability in a white society. Adjei (2016) notes that: “Within visceral anti-Black racism’s context, there is a hypervisibility of Blackness” (p. 3). It is an outward manifestation
that those who choose to discriminate can readily identify and assign a relative social value, a clear demarcation of social rank, status, or perceived intelligence. Tavernier (2008) couched the use of Blackness as a social stigma in the context of Dominican Republic / Haitian prejudice and discrimination against the dark-skinned inhabitants of Hispaniola (p. 98). This phenomenon manifests itself in such a way that there is a stratified racism at play. Some can experience racism while also replicating their experience.

My study aligns with critical Black theorists who want Black people to embrace their Blackness, their culture and their heritage. For instance, hooks warns against imitation that results in colonized people seeing themselves in the eyes of the colonizer, and which often leads to despising the very culture that was once a source of joy and spiritual fulfillment. She calls for appropriation of this discourse to embrace the tendencies which represent Blackness “one dimensionally in ways that reinforce and sustain white supremacy. . . . [Black] folks who ‘love Blackness,’ that is, who have decolonized our minds and broken with the kind of white supremacist thinking that suggests we are inferior, inadequate, marked by victimization . . . often find we are punished by society for daring to break with the status quo” (hooks, 1992, pp. 17-19). However, Fanon (1967) criticizes the notion of embracing Blackness. For him, the Black soul as we know it is a European man’s artifact, an existential deviation forced upon the Black people by European culture. In fact, the definition of “Black” emerged from a racist culture and invariably reproduced a culture that classified humans not according to their skills and abilities, but according to the colour of their skin. Even though such a term might appear to be politically correct in the 21st century, it is still problematic. Rather than discourage racism, the expression actually perpetuates the racist stereotyping of the so-called “other” (Fanon, 1967, p. 85). The expression “Black” is also problematic because it insists on separating into groups and categorizing individuals on the basic of their skin colour. Emerging from the colonial discourse of Africa and other imperialist propaganda in the 19th century, the term “Black” has a negative
connotation. Like the expressions “people of colour” and “non-white,” the term “Black” has emerged from a global cultural that has fed and continues to feed on racial discrimination and negative stereotypical imagery that perpetuates European imperialistic ideologies and discourses.

Fanon (1967) argues the very notion of “Blackness” itself is a construct of the societal order of oppression that was created by the oppressor, and I believe that race is constructed like other categories of oppression such as disability, gender and sexuality. Like other social constructions, race emerges from and exists in its representation in cultural values. However, as a social construction, race is a difficult and changing concept where we can see the implication of these constructs of marginalization on the image of non-normative bodies and minds as built through oppressive categories. One of the interesting features of race, and Blackness in particular, is how it depends for its power upon the social acceptance of its objectivity. Of course, it may be argued – in objection to the idea that social construction have – that as these categories and labelling processes are social phenomena, they are readily addressable and subject to revision. However, this view ignores the power of social construction in our contemporary culture. Human, race, and disability are themselves founded upon modes of social construction and signification. Indeed, it may be argued that nothing truly exists for us without some cognitive social constructions of its existence. This serves to explain why systemic discrimination is so enduring and pervasive in our culture; it is, quite simply, economical to those engaged in it.

If used in the framework of ableism versus disability, Blackness describes the most visceral forms of anti-Black racism, referring to a visible trait that cannot be hidden, disguised, or normalized through accommodation. A significant majority of the participants noted instances of racism in their educational experience comingled with their experiences as disabled students seeking accommodations through Accessibility Services.

In terms of the common experience of a Black disabled student at the University of Toronto, Paige shared an insight common to many in this study: “So-called visible ‘minorities,’
we are definitely the students that are expected not to succeed” (Interview 3, July 13, 2016). This expectation can hit some students like a silent conspiracy of low expectations that appears pervasive within the University community. As Sarah, a female in a male dominated field of Sciences, stated: “[I felt like] people are watching and expecting me to fail” (Interview 10, November 24, 2016). A more explicit example is related by Kimberly, regarding a research paper she was proposing for a graduate level sociology course lamenting about lower expectations. She said: “Your race, your Blackness – which is vast in terms of how it plays out – does play a role in an academic institution because it is similar to the system you have any other institution” (Interview 6, October 11, 2016).

This theme of Blackness being treated as an invitation to lower expectations was repeated in the interviews when I asked, “Do you experience Blackness and disability playing out at the University of Toronto in any other ways, or ways you haven’t mentioned yet?” The underestimation of abilities and the assumption of not being able to achieve at the same level as non-Black students was stated either overtly or implied through the conduct of the professors. The racially biased conduct demonstrating lowered expectations was subtly implied in most instances by not calling for their input during class discussions, or for their answers to questions.

This quiet racism of lowered expectations – a form of discrimination against students utilizing accommodations through Accessibility Services – needs to be juxtaposed to the perceived advantage for students with disabilities that is assumed to be afforded through additional assignment or exam time, alternate test locations, or other modifications. The University follows the Ontario Human Rights Commission’s guidelines on educational accommodations by stating: “an appropriate accommodation at the post-secondary level would enable a student to successfully meet the essential requirements of the program, with no alteration in standards or outcomes” (University of Toronto, Academic Accommodation, 2018, p. 1). I believe the important part of the statement with regards to students is the phrase “no
alterations in standards or outcomes.” It became abundantly clear from the interviews that there were increased expectations in terms of ability to perform and unwillingness to provide further assistance to the students outside the classroom.

The impression is that the professors think it is easier to take the exams with accommodations, not that the students perform at a higher level. Stephanie related a similar impression, noting:

I have to prove over and over again that I am truly intelligent enough to be a university student, or they look at you, as “I don’t know if you’ll work hard enough,” when I have to write my test or exam at the Test Centre. There is that negative connotation of how the professors or Teaching Assistants would give you a lower grade as opposed to the general class. It’s how they treat you, students with a disability, not necessarily the words that they are saying. It just that kind of sounds like the “others” as opposed to just a student. (Interview 4, September 13, 2016)

Black disabled students in university may feel that they not only have to justify their intelligence from a racial perspective, but also that their disability may compromise their ability to add value to classroom discourse. Titchkosky (2000) suggests that disability is a social construct that enacts stigmatization making normalcy distinguishable for the people understood to “belong” to the university (p. 204). Disability identification, in this sense, can be racist and also contributes to the marginalization of Black student with disabilities. Thus, visual signifiers of marginalization – Blackness, disability and gender – function as heuristic of normative mechanisms to enact not only lowered expectations but also other forms of oppression. While Wynter (1994), notes that the struggles with Blackness, disability, gender, and class are bound up in this history of oppression that has been propagated by colonization and imperialism. That is, we can take note of the differences in racialized embodiment without resorting to those more pernicious ideas about physiological differences per se. It is possible at critical moments to say that “we’re all disabled by injustice and oppression of various kinds,” even if some of us experience a greater degree of injustice because of Blackness, disabilities or gender (Sandhal, 2004, p. 582).
In this way, defining disability as marginal to the ordinary goings-on of university life limits some people, while allowing those who are taken-for-granted members to use other people’s marginalization as a way to validate the dominant normative state of university life and work. This presents a problem of how to define what disabled identity is or how it can be phrased. Butler (1993a) contributes that the post-modern critique leads to a more productive understanding of gender, identity, and race (Blackness) in terms of how one conforms these categories. Her emphasis on the body and identity insofar as it is inscribed with ideas and definitions are often part of a dominant discourse. In the same way, Foucault (1995) suggests post-modern thought generally operates in terms of interrogating the discourses that are embedded in education institutions and practices. That is, if identity cannot be ascribed to any stable categories of being, then it must be a constructed product of society and political discourses (Foucault, 1995). This implies that the notion of normalcy is a power construct that shapes the ways in which we not only think about our own identities, but also how we assume others are identified (Titchkosky & Michalko, 2009).

The approach of defining Black disabled students through “abnormality” is degrading in that it portrays the “normal” life as the only one worth living (Titchkosky & Michalko, 2009, p. 4), and maybe the only one worth imagining. Yet, this is the approach easily taken, including university administration personnel and other official institutions such as the Canadian government (p. 5). The expectation is that the accommodations afford the disabled students an easier test environment, giving them an advantage over the other members of the class. This experience is reflected in what David said when discussing the stigmatization of being disabled when the professor refused to meet with him regarding a grade. Consider David’s explication in this situation:

I received a low grade on one of my assignments, which I worked very hard on and thought I should’ve gotten a higher grade. I asked the professor if it was possible for me to meet with him to discuss my grade. He told me that there is no
need for that, because students with disabilities should be given the same exam time as non-disability students and as far as he is concerned I have an advantage over my course-mates. (Interview 8, October 31, 2016)

Additionally, many of the participants voiced a strong opinion that they are not disabled, in the cases of those receiving assistance from Accessibility Services due to a learning disorder; they just learn differently and require alternate means or a different environment for testing to compete with other mainstream students.

This sentiment was expressed most vociferously by Saga, when he boldly declared: “I ain’t disabled, [I have] different learning needs” (Interview 12, December 15, 2016). The common thread of different learning “needs” was expressed by Kimberly, objecting to the label:

I will not agree to be called disabled – I will not label myself as a Black disabled student. I choose not to label myself as disabled. I do accept that I’m a Black student in the social context. The idea of being a disabled student – I do not agree with the term because I feel that everyone’s learning needs or learning issues are unique to him or her. So when they assess services or they have learning issues in the school, they may be approached in a different context and have different experiences. (Interview 6, October 11, 2016)

She can accept the “social context” of being a Black student as a statement of fact, but avoiding the term disabled qualified her learning experience as different but not due to an individual impairment. The general appraisal is that learning disabilities, as classified by Accessibility Services, do not constitute a true disability of those interviewed; a physical impairment is what many consider disabled. This opinion was related by Christine, stating:

I have a hard time dealing with what they call [being a] disabled student. I didn’t like it. I didn’t consider myself disabled because my granddad is blind. He’s dead now but he was blind. And so, when I thought of disability, I thought of him. I thought of “disabled” as someone who is physically impaired. (Interview 1, April 19, 2016)

This sentiment is echoed in the responses from participants who indicated they have physical impairments. In the case of Folake, who suffers from chronic back pain, noting her disability is invisible, she has to struggle with it all the more, adding that she fears that the professors and
accessibility advisors will not believe her when she voices her extreme discomfort, and feels the need to just tolerate the pain as to not raise undue scrutiny or criticism:

My disability is invisible; a chronic back pain. I always have this consciousness of fear that if I tell my professors or accessibility advisors that I wasn’t feeling well, and I wasn’t able to do an exam or complete an assignment on time they would not believe me. However, if I experience pain during class time, I still forced myself to school. I am afraid that my professors would think that I am faking my illnesses. (Interview 7, October 14, 2016)

From this perspective, the cultural context of Blackness, disability, class and gender played a role in the perceptions of many of these participants (Hill-Collins, 1990, p. 540), as when Folake experienced accommodation as vulnerability. Within the construct of Black feminist thought, there is the identification of the need to resist domination by social institutions, such as universities or other formal organizations (Hill-Collins, 1990, p. 541).

This particular theory is captured in Folake’s insight regarding the need to “deal” with the professors or Accessibility advisors and other entities that are supposed to help her with her disability, but often made her feel the need to prove or justify that she was entitled to the services and not looking to “game” the system. Despite Folake’s apprehension about dealing with these university services, she continued to do so because she understood that her actions of pursuing these services not only ensured she got the assistance she was entitled to, but it was also a way to resist the institutional barriers that she believed were placed in those settings. However, some of the students facing learning challenges did not voice objections to the “disabled” label. The contrary was true for several of the participants who embraced their disability. They did not view their disability as a disadvantage or insurmountable challenge, rather it was an integral part of their identity and part of their student experience at the University of Toronto. Barry is a first year undergraduate Arts & Sciences student who took pride in accepting the label placed upon him:

I am proud to be a Black disabled man. But being Black and disabled is very challenging for me in the university. I’ve been asked many times by my peers
how did I get into such an elite university and if I have what it takes to succeed in it. (Interview 9, November 18, 2016)

The sense of pride and accepting the challenge was a reoccurring theme in several interviews. Paige phrased the sentiment succinctly by simply stating, “I’ve learned to ignore certain aspects of how I’m treated, and what to some people it means to be labelled disabled. But that’s me! Because that’s my personality!” (Interview 3, July 13, 2016).

Time and again, the participants were hesitant, reluctant, defiant, or ambivalent in making a declaration that they were disabled. Nonetheless, all were in agreement that disability self-identification was necessary if one were to qualify for Accessibility Services. This identification was universally accepted as an indispensable aspect of their university experience, yet it presented many difficulties. The participants all indicated that they needed the accommodations and support associated with embracing this label, despite the accompanying stigma and administrative entanglements for adaptive and/or financial reasons. Nearly all participants had lived with disability for their entire lives, some learned to live with it on their own and spent several years at university without assistance, and many learned to hide their disability from their peers to avoid marginalization. Though some embraced their disability, many reluctantly accepted the label and all were in near agreement that others’ perception of them used this label as an unflattering way to describe their identity.

**Philosophical Approaches to Subjectivity and Power**

The area of subjectivity is a deep philosophical questioning and attention to one’s self, or related self-governance of one’s own actions related to society (Foucault, 1994, p. 90). In the context of the investigation of Blackness and disability, it relates to how participants care for themselves in a university setting, with regards to their disability and state of being a racial body. It speaks to the action that the participants take to exist in an environment where they are subject to two disadvantages perceived by society: the fact that the participants are Black, a racial
minority historically discriminated against in terms of educational opportunities, and live with a disability that also hinders their performance in a university setting. It goes beyond mere adaptation and accommodation; subjectivity speaks to the specific actions the participants take to facilitate their university education career. There are two primary avenues taken by the participants to care for themselves; first is to assuage the stigma of being Black in an environment where prejudice still exists, despite or even through the legislative and policy efforts of the provincial government and university. Second, subject to the shortcomings of the accommodating goals of the establishment, students navigate the different service organizations to mediate the impact of their disabilities on the university’s treatment of their studies. The notion of caring indicates methods employed to assuage the negative effects from society regarding their Blackness and disability. These methods may not necessarily bring comfort to their lives; they only mitigate the negatives. In terms of their status as a racial body, these efforts would be aimed at finding a personal refuge from the racism and societal stigma.

Sometimes, the participants either chose to ignore the racism, or embrace their ethnicity and surround it with pride. Saga used a perceived disadvantage of being Black to his advantage and to confront racism head-on, educating himself by being an avid reader and then joining an organization that actively fights anti-Black racism:

I found other people at the university who have struggled in similar ways like me. I’ve always found myself like people would say that he’s smart. Or I think I’m smart, because I’m inclined to like reading a lot. I am more comfortable in carrying on an intellectual conversation. I have a thirst for gaining knowledge. I’ve been treated differently even by my own people [Black people] at the university. Having the experience of being around Black students on campus, I feel honored to be in that circle. Many people consider me strange; my own Black people. I might be seen as a strange person. I can be a bit critical about certain things. I am definitely seen as a shit disturber, because I am also a member of a social movement. (Interview 12, December 15, 2016)

Saga’s statement is particularly interesting for we see here how a Black disabled student drawing a close connection between the struggle against ableism and anti-Black racism. I believe the
participant’s statement is particularly significant for it is an experience that one encounters again and again: people with disabilities feel a particular affinity to the struggle against stigma or discrimination. As a Black person, I believe this sense of affinity is connected to bodies – notably, how the bodies of individuals with disabilities are subject to discipline and definition by the medical and education institutions and the government in an analogous way to how the bodies of Black people were enslaved and controlled. Taking pride in his intellect and being a “shit disturber,” Saga’s terms can be understood as behaviors of self-care. He noted the struggles of his peers, and with regards to his disability, as noted earlier, he just doesn’t consider himself disabled.

Similarly, Barry used “pride” to overcome the stigma of disability and racism, again as noted above, he stated, “I am proud to be a Black disabled man” (Interview 9, November 18, 2016). Many of the participants, on the other hand, chose to alleviate the stigma of being disabled through enduring physical pain in order to hide it. Christine endured pain to climb a flight of stairs to avoid the humiliation of being sent the wrong way by a student aid when seeking an elevator, rather than be further stigmatized as disabled. Recall that she stated: “I look at them anyways because at that point I’m just frustrated. I forced myself but there is always this little fear in me. Please don’t give out. Please don’t give out. Please legs get me up the stairs” (Interview 1, April 19, 2016). She also separated herself from herself in order to deal with stigma. Similarly, Folake endured severe back pain to avoid the stigma of disability, or worse, faking a disability: “If I experience pain during class time, I still forced myself to school. I am afraid that my professors would think that I am faking my illnesses” (Interview 7, October 14, 2016). In this regard, Folake’s statement echoes Cooley (1902) theorizing the “self” as a sort of manifestation of “self-consciousness” in the social world. While Cooley was focused,
understandably, upon the social dimension of the self, it is important in this chapter not to lose sight of its physical and psychological aspects. In Cooley’s (1902) words:

> We think of the body as “I” when it comes to have social function or significance, as when we say “I am looking well today...” We bring it into the social world, for the time being, and for that reason put our self-consciousness into it. (p. 185)

While Cooley, and later theorists, tend to approach the self as a social (and political) construct, his reference to what might be termed the bio-social genesis of the self – the role that our physical bodies, their attributes and features – should not be overlooked (Fanon, 1963; Davis, 1995; Foucault, 1995). The relationship between the body and the self would prove to be a challenging issue for later theorists, as they grappled with the complex problematic of how physical bodies impact social and political conceptions of the self with reference to gender, Blackness and disability (Bauman, 2004; Wynter, 2003; Bhabha, 1994). And in this, there is the normalization of the marginalization that happens in higher education at the intersection of Blackness and disability. The problematic challenges that Black disabled students experience continue to persist in this university.

It is noteworthy that the primary significance of Cooley’s conception of the self in the theoretical history of the self was the then-revolutionary idea that the self was not a fixed entity or a biological/metaphysical given but that it was, in fact, a construction deeply rooted in human social order. Theorists such as Fanon (1963) also pursue the implications of early conceptions of the self to another level of analysis in their radical interrogation of the relationship between the social construction of the self and the instrumentalities of imperial power. While Cooley approached the

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16 The idea of the self has probably changed very little from the concept of the “looking-glass self” as posited by Cooley (1902), a U.S. pioneer in the field of sociology, at the turn of the twentieth century. Cooley theorized this “self” as a sort of manifestation of “self-consciousness” in the social world. In Cooley’s (1902) words: “We think of the body as ‘I’ when it comes to have social function or significance, as when we say ‘I am looking well today...’ We bring it into the social world, for the time being, and for that reason put our self-consciousness into it” (Cooley, 1902, p. 185). While Cooley, and later theorists, tend to approach the self as a social (and political) construct, his reference to what might be termed the bio-social genesis of the self – the role that our physical bodies, their attributes and features – should not be overlooked.
“self” from a sociological perspective, Fanon’s understanding of the self as a social construct developed as an outgrowth of his professional psychiatric research into the colonized self in the context of colonialism. In Fanon’s (1963) words: “If psychiatry is the medical technique that aims to enable man to no longer be a stranger to his environment, I owe it to myself to affirm that the Arab… lives in a state of absolute depersonalization” (Fanon, quoted in Bhabha, 1994, p. 58).

In the course of his professional work, Fanon evolved a theoretical conception of the self in the context of colonialism. Fanon (1963) argues that one of the most important – if not the most important – instrumentality of power exercised by the Euro-American imperial powers in the colonized territories of Asia, Africa and the Americas was how the agents of empire managed to determine the colonized people’s conception of their “selves.” In other words, imperialism was dependent upon a social/political construction of the “self” of the colonized peoples as inherently inferior and subordinate to the colonizers. For example, disability in Southern Africa was the focus of Chataika’s (2018) analysis, where she noted the unique experience of the disabled person and disability politics in the region. Chataika’s discussion can be paralleled to the nature of disability being impacted by colonialism, where the disabled are perceived as being dependent citizens. An example of this is the nature of access to education and the rights of the disabled person in education environments (Chataika, McKenzie, Swart & Lyner-Cleophas, 2012b). By achieving this end, the colonizers transformed the way in which Blacks saw themselves because of the dominant imperialist ideals. They understood themselves through the prism of how those with power and control of the colonies saw them.

While Cooley touched upon the complex association between the physical body and the self, Fanon felt compelled to grapple more directly with this problem as he came to terms with the exercise of power along racial lines. In Fanon’s (1967) words:

I had to meet the white man’s eyes. An unfamiliar weight burdened me. In the white world the man of colour encounters difficulties in the development of his bodily schema. . . . I was battered down by tom-toms, cannibalism, intellectual deficiency,
fetishism, racial defects. . . . I took myself far off from my own presence. . . . What else could it be for me but an amputation, an excision, a haemorrhage that spattered my whole body with black blood. (pp. 111-112)

Fanon’s statement is illustrative not only of the dramatic power with which Fanon framed his theoretical analysis, but also of the complexity of the colonized “self” that he was exploring. Fanon, as a colonized subject, is “burdened” by the “weight” of multiple racist associations/determinants of the Black or disabled “self.” To be “Black or disabled” is to be symbolized by “tom-toms, cannibalism, intellectual deficiency, fetishism, racial defects” (Fanon, 1967, p. 12). In other words, the colonized Black or disabled “self” – in the colonizer’s judgement (to use Cooley’s 1902 term) that the colonized has come to accept as reality – is inherently inferior and subordinate to the colonizer.

In this critical analysis, the study of Blackness and disabilities in the university is important beyond even such issues as labelling and stigmatization of students. Indeed, the wide differences in the definition of Blackness and disability in the university settings represent critical evidence of the fact that disability is not a physical given but a cultural construct. In terms of caring for their accommodation needs, all of the participants sought services through Accessibility Services. At times, the need for care to avoid stigmatization associated with societal views on disability, and the use of disability accommodations, conflicted directly with their educational needs for these services. Several of the participants delayed accessing these services, trying to get by without the accommodations. This conflict of needs confronted in order to fit into society and avoid any stigma, or take care of their disability needs for accommodations, speaks to the discriminatory nature of the University students’, staff’s, and professors’ prejudices against disabled students. Yet, with the stigma of being disabled that most of the participants felt, they seemed trepidatious regarding signing up for Accessibility Services.

A key component of racism and discrimination is power. A basic conception of racism is “a system of ignorance, exploitation, and power used to oppress” (Solorzano, Ceja, & Yosso,
In another more succinct conception of racism, it is “the belief in the inherent superiority of one race over all others and thereby the right to dominance” (Solorzano, Ceja, & Yosso, 2000, p. 61). When defining racism, they suggest three key elements: (1) One group believes itself to be superior, (2) the group that believes itself to be superior has the power to carry out the racist behavior, and (3) racism affects multiple racial and ethnic groups (Solorzano, Ceja, & Yosso, 2000, p. 61).

A fundamental inherent quality of racism is power, and the power to oppress, assert, and act upon the beliefs of racial superiority (Wynter, 2003). The implication is that without the inherent power, there is no racism. In the interviews regarding their experiences as Black disabled students at the University of Toronto, there is a continual citing of the power held by the administration of the university, Accessibility Services, and the professors and teaching assistants. In terms of the hierarchy of the institution, the students are at the low end of the power structure. The professors may be tenured, and in several instances the students would complain regarding racist remarks, insensitivities, or the students avoided taking any action, citing the futility of the efforts against the power structure of the institution. In specific instances listed later, blatantly racist remarks are allowed to pass with excuses from administrators of oversensitivity by the students, or students are asked to work it out with the professor.

The power of the university is foundational; the admissions department decides who can attend, the departments set the course and degree requirements, and Accessibility Services determines eligibility and what accommodations can be made for disabled students. These powers are not exercised in a vacuum, as they do have to answer to the provincial government that establishes legislative requirements upon the University for Academic Accommodations as prescribed by Ontario’s Human Rights Commission. However, the University does have the power to decide how to comply as well as to structure what students must do to qualify for services or admission. The power of the University is great, and the ability of the aggrieved
student to combat racism is limited at best, and generally viewed as inconsequential. It is therefore understandable why many of the participants stated when confronted by the institutional racism: “Just give me my degree and let me leave” (Interview 10, November 24, 2016). In this, we see that the student does not feel engaged in transformation and only sees benefits of the transaction that comes from the effort expended to gain the degree, not the personal development that came with it.

Fanon (1967) illustrates that the marginalized subject, unable to speak or exist in a culturally “normal” way, is given an “inferiority complex” that can debilitate any hope of resistance or participation (p. 18). That is, if one accepts the notion that his or her identity is spoken through the language of the dominant social culture, then this person may give up his or her ability to resist and to reclaim a more authentic identity. This results in the marginalized person always negotiating and being aware of the power of these discourses, so that he or she might find a way to articulate and embody an identity that is not determined by the powers that be. The dialectic of Blackness, disability, and normalized identity, becomes perhaps even more complex in this case because there is more than one identity that can resist the “normal.”

By considering Black identity in a larger sense of social and political contestation, one can productively map some of these issues onto the intersections of Blackness and disability within the educational system (Linton, 1998). The production of knowledge and identity is therefore influenced greatly by how racial categories are produced, reified and shaped by much of the thinking that seeks to understand the possibility that identity-based resistance might take back some of the categories and definitions that have become operative in the system (Linton, 1998). For example, as hooks (1995) notes, the production of meaning about identity within popular culture is involved in a hegemonic process. She argues that Black identity is defined in the mass media as being self-consciously subordinate to white male identity:
They [Blacks] are represented in this manner by white cultural productions, particularly in television, film, and advertising. The colonizing culture’s manipulation of representation is necessary for the maintenance of white-supremacist capitalist patriarchy. (hooks, 1995, p. 105)

The ideas illustrate that identity is created by popular culture through the production of meaning about Black bodies. While these meanings, and the identities they frame, can often be completely absurd and divorced from reality, this qualification is insignificant in comparison with the need for the corporate producers of popular culture to project stabilizing, hegemonic discourses. A popular culture artefact has the potential to illustrate how the creation of meaning about bodies can be critically hegemonic with respect to larger societal concerns about identity.

**Constructing Normalcy in Education**

Education can be perceived as an institution that helps reproduce the status quo – inequality. For Black disabled students, the education system can have a negative influence on their self-worth and identity given the normative structures of education, including accommodation practices and policy, which privileges the expected student – a middle-to-upper class able-bodied white male (Goodley, 2014; Titchkosky; 2003; Garland-Thomson, 1997). For students with disabilities, the classroom experience today involves the construction of normalcy and some placement in relation to this, be it one of marginalization or conformity. Indeed, as Wotherspoon (2014) notes, educational inclusion for students is frequently contingent upon those students accepting and emulating the standards of physical and social normalcy that are privileged by social institutions (p. 268). The construction of “normal”\(^\text{17}\) is a manifestation of social and

\(^{17}\) Davis (1995), in “Enforcing Normalcy,” explores the origins and development of the “notion of the ‘normal’ as an imperative” (p. 26) as part of a linked series of discourses and practices intersecting nationality, race, [Blackness,] disability, gender, sexual orientation and ability in the 19\(^{\text{th}}\) century. Thus, a critical point in this development was when the eugenicist Francis Galton adapted the idea of the “bell curve” – or the statistical modelling of human experience, and “substituted the idea of ranking for the concept of averaging” (Davis, 1995, p. 33). In other words, Galton and the eugenicists imposed a socially-defined framework of exclusivity on data modelling human experience. For instance, we could use statistics to describe everyone in a classroom in terms
cultural power that is read and written upon bodies of both able people and those with disabilities by educational systems that sometimes harness medical authorities and other unexamined societal assumptions regarding both Blackness and disability. This, without a doubt, calls into question the normative standards that are offered by the educational system, or the medical authorities that create identities based on European notions that shape how people are expected to fit. Disability, in this sense, is not so much a physical reality as a social construction that historically and culturally frames individuals as “different,” as having an impairment and thereby having or being a problem with and for the normal order of things, including education. A cultural frame – like a picture frame – represents a line or means of demarcating and can be conceived of as a social limit. Disability, much like Blackness (another “mistake” of DNA replication? – Gilroy, 2000), has historically been deployed to limit the opportunities and potential of individual with disabilities. The concept of “normal” must therefore be questioned in terms of how it is used in education and social institutions to support conceptions of disability and the lack of appreciation for racial formulations of identity (Hall, 2000). Following from the premise that the education system continues to be a “construction site” for normalcy, I explore the implications of how Black

of any given performative criteria; say, the capacity to shoot a basketball, or play a piano. Galton’s innovation was to not only realize how a “population can be normed” (Davis, 1995) but, more significantly in terms of eugenics, the defining of “undesirable deviation” (p. 34). In other words, while all human actions can be charted on a “bell curve,” Galton and the eugenicists “ranked” certain performances as “deviant.” In place of an “inclusive” statistic spectrum, Galton (whose research led directly to current IQ testing) substituted an “exclusive” defining of “normal” vs. “deviant” (Davis, 1995, p. 33). He notes that the eugenics movement came to define a whole range of human characteristics as “unfit” (p. 35) and grouped individuals sharing these characteristics into the “defective classes” (p. 37). The dehumanizing potential of eugenics in this regard – with particular reference to disability, Blackness and gender – is very unsettling. The authority of science to denote some humans as members of “defective classes” carries profound implications for our understanding of equity and our common humanity. Of course, parallels to this practice can be seen in numerous other colonized territories, where the colonized peoples were or are represented by science and “objective” observers as inherently inferior. The perceived inferiority of these people is then used to “justify” their conquest, control and elimination.
students with disabilities who do not reflect the privileged normative way of being will not enjoy accommodations to help them with their studies, nor other successes that education is supposed to offer. Disability studies interrogates normalcy, with scholars pointing out that “the problem is not the person with disabilities; the problem is the way that normalcy is constructed to create the problem of the disabled person” (Davis, 1995, p. 24). One of the basic principles in disability studies today is the theory that normality and disability are not references to physical realities so much as constructions defined and developed by social institutions:

The meanings attributed to extraordinary bodies reside not in inherent physical flaws, but in social relationships in which one group is legitimated by possessing valued physical characteristics and maintains its ascendancy and self-identity by systematically imposing the role of cultural or corporeal inferiority upon others. (Garland-Thomson, 1997, p. 7)

As this passage suggests, the associated concepts of “normalcy” and “disability” are both products of social power that have historically had, as their fundamental purpose, a discriminatory role in social relations. These power relations among the colonizers and the colonized were reinforced by the cultural representations of deviance in association with Blackness and disability. Thus, Blackness and disability makes an appearance as representation, and these representations have “reality” in the sense that they can determine and limit the social potential for disabled students upon whom they are often imposed. Such representations often carry with them overtones of “deviance” that implicitly separate the objects of the gaze from the education community surrounding them. As coded within these representations, deviance is therefore a complex social phenomenon. Becker notes that: “Social groups create deviance by making the rules whose infraction constitutes deviance and by applying these rules to particular people and labelling them as outsiders” (Becker, 1963, p. 9). From this perspective evident in Becker’s statement, representations carry with them “codes” that also label the object of the representation as distinct from the education institutions, which defines the codes, and the representations within it. I would therefore argue that this is one of the subtle ways in which systematic discrimination operates in in education institutions.
and society. This systematic discrimination is rarely overt, and so it is difficult to empirically measure its operation. Nonetheless, those who are subject to it recognize its power. Indeed, the difficulty of empirical measurement of such social representations may be one reason for the tendency of scholarship to emphasize the validity of autobiographical writing as a scholarly tool; works that obviously lack statistical significance and yet allow critics to address elusive and subtle social operations. One of the interesting features of these representations is how they depend for their power upon the social acceptance of their objectivity. For Black people, their representation in Euro-American culture has been marked for centuries by the close intertwining of racial identity and anti-Black racism with deviance.

Indeed, as scholars have noted, the construction of the default “normality” in Euro-American culture occurs not only with respect to individuals’ status as nondisabled/disabled, but also in terms of gender and race. For example, the “normate” in this cultural context is white, male, heterosexual and able-bodied (Garland-Thomson, 1997, p. 8; Goodley, 2014). Similarly, Titchkosky (2003) notes:

“Normate” is a concept that references the idea of an unmarked category of persons that are culturally regarded as “definitive human beings” . . . for example: white, able-bodied, average height, white teeth, unblemished . . . heterosexual, male, etc., wielding authority and power. . . . Normate is also made use of to bracket the taken-for-granted status of normalcy. (p. 157)

With this being the prism through which normalcy is viewed, Black disabled students do not have the chance to ever being considered “normal” since to be perceived as Black and disabled is to simultaneously be perceived and made marginal. What this means is that the educational institutions are dependent on keeping some student population marginal. By keeping these students marginal, they gain a number of social, political and economic benefits. The “normate” is defined by those with “cultural capital” to reflect their particular bodily configurations and – through the defining of these configurations as the normative human – thereby accentuate their own social and cultural authority at the expense of those classified as possessing disability. Scholars have
noted that there are clear associations between this discriminatory process and discrimination in terms of Blackness and disability in the education system. As Garland-Thomson (1997) writes, “the non-normate status accorded disability feminizes all disabled figures” (p. 9). As Garland-Thomson’s statement reveals, the construction of “normalcy” and “disability” possess clear analogies to the social processes involved in Blackness, class and gender discrimination in our society.

Consider, for example, how the classification of students with disabilities occurs in our contemporary education classrooms. In the case of students categorized under the rubric of “learning difficulties,” scholars note that “socio-economic and cultural factors interfere with the development of cognitive and language skills” (Barnes & Wade-Wooley, 2007, p. 9). Similar inadequacies are evident in the diagnostic assessment criteria and identification procedures for learners with disabilities in sciences, which has led to “the number of students identified as having a math disability [being] over-inflated” (Baptist et al., 2007, p. 14). Conversely, there is also controversy over how educators label students as “gifted” (Foster, 2007, p. 36). However, critical disability studies facilitates the analysis of the cultural construction of disabilities in the education classroom, and we – like the characters in The Wizard of Oz\(^\text{18}\) – are enabled to see “behind the curtain” and interrogate otherwise hidden operations of power in our educational institutions.

Consequently, “normal” is one of those innocuous terms that can have a devastating emotional effect upon those students that lie outside the peak of the bell curve. When a student is on the “wrong end” of the curve of normality, they are likely to be marginalized and stigmatized.

\(^{18}\) There is a moment in the classic 1930s film The Wizard of Oz when the puny wizard who has disguised himself behind the illusion of the great and powerful Oz is sniffed out by Dorothy’s dog, Toto. Realizing he has been exposed, he attempts to recover his power by commanding Dorothy and her friends with the famous line: “Pay no attention to that man behind the curtain.” This classic movie scene serves as a useful illustration of the complex reasons why educators “need” disability in the classroom. It is through the cultural definition of deviance, in terms of cultural markers such as race, Blackness, disability, gender, class that educators shape the understanding of how normalcy in our society’s educational institutions – and ultimately in society itself.
In terms of socio-economic status and physical ability, the word “normal” sets the scales for “privileged,” “disadvantaged,” “abled,” and “disabled.” Some people suggest that a suitable synonym for “normal” is average, but with regards to education, often the terms “acceptable,” “expected,” or “standard” and the antonym of “abnormal” are the actualities at work. Additionally, conditions that lie within the majority are considered “normal.” Unfortunately, when discussing “normalcy,” abilities or even Blackness become intertwined with these terms in education or society as racist or in the most extreme cases eugenicist (Davis, 1995, p. 35). Able and white students would be considered “normal” with the Black disabled students falling outside the “normal” range. When related in these terms, this discussion seems absurd; however, the experience of the participants this study relates a different interpretation of “normal.” They are experiencing university education outside normalcy. As noted above regarding Blackness, there was a lowered expectation of the racial minority student on the University of Toronto campus.

As expressed by Folake:

There is also the maintenance of racist stereotypes in the university and the demonizing of Black students. If a Black student should not live up to the university ‘expectations,’ then the entire Black students’ population will be ostracized. I believe our collective Blackness becomes the embodiment of these spaces. The university likes to brag about how diverse they are, but anti-Black racism is so normalized here such as in the classrooms, with my peers and administration personnel. (Interview 7, October 14, 2016)

From this perspective, we need to move away from the nice buzz-words – diversity, inclusion, accessible, equity – which are all very good, but like all buzz-words, they lose their power from being continually cited in the documents of political and education institutions in our society. According to Thomas-Long (2010), diversity in the university is a continual struggle for Black students, which is closely related to the issue of access and equity (p. 48). A university may use “respect for diversity” in its Mission Statement, but does anyone really believe these education
institutions when they use such terms? Instead, I assert that universities must address the hard questions of our time – frankly, openly, and without being silenced.

Speaking to the terms “normal” and “abnormal” with regards to race and ability, Saga stated:

What is a “normal” person, or what do we expect a disabled person to look like? Are we not human beings anyway? We’re defined based on our categorization such as our Blackness, disability, gender and sexuality surrounding the “abnormal.”19 (Interview 12, December 15, 2016)

Noting that because he is Black and disabled, as noted before, he does not consider himself disabled, but feels the university does not consider him “normal.”

This was a common experience with other students as well, using another antonym of “incompetent” in terms of making assumptions about the disability of Sarah, a Black second year PhD student. She stated that:

It’s interesting because we assume disability means incompetency. I often say I am high-functioning, which is problematic because it means you’re assuming disability means you can’t be high-functioning. I think a lot of my professors had to come to terms with the idea that I was a Black female with a disability. And I was one of the highest performing students . . . since I was studying sciences. It was obvious I wasn’t “normal” in their eyes and that I was not supposed to be there. I would sit in the office and ask questions. I would have professors look at me and shake their heads in front of me and give all kinds of body language to show they thought I was stupid. (Interview 10, November 24, 2016)

A student, performing at the highest levels, but due to her Blackness and disability was considered stupid by her professor – all due to the concepts of normalcy and majority.

Discussing stigma in the university, Titchkosky (2015) suggests that: “…disability and

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19 Foucault (1978) has argued that anti-Black racism has its basis in sexuality associated with Black bodies and the fear of miscegenation: “Racism took shape at this point. . . . It was then that a whole politics of settlement . . . family, marriage, education . . . received their colour and their justification from protecting the purity of the blood and ensuring the triumph of the race” (p.149). While I do not necessarily agree with Foucault on this point (acknowledging that which came first may be a fruitless “chicken & egg” question), it is undeniable that cultural fear and sexual stigmatization have long be conflated with representations of Black masculinity in Euro-American culture.
[Blackness] are used to point out the act of dehumanization within the social political orders of the day, and are also used for the ongoing accomplishment of dehumanization” (p. 6).

In terms of ability and disability regarding learning disabilities, which most of the participants indicated as a reason they were classified as disabled, some indicated that they learned differently, had trouble concentrating in classroom settings, or needed a few accommodations. None of the participants indicated that their learning disability was a deficit, nor that they could not function as a university student. The concept of normalcy should not apply to the ability to be in the university and compete academically with other students. It may be more appropriate to use normalcy as a measure for what accommodations are needed with regards to the middle of the bell curve – the “normal” student. Instead, it is being employed as a yardstick to measure the Black disabled students against their able peers by stigmatizing them as different, and in many ways as inferior.

From this perspective, I will argue that an ordinary perception of disability is not informed by a disability studies perception, but by unexamined conceptions of disability that conform to the normative order of society. While the differences between the two are complex, I argue that the former focuses on the individual with a disability, representing her/his life as a management problem, while the latter focuses critical attention on “normate” society itself and the processes of cultural production which it fosters, imposing a range of cultural preconceptions about people with disabilities on both these people and the society at large. Although troubling these preconceptions can be challenging and unsettling – particularly with respect to how pervasive and powerful these conceptions can be – this study offers the possibility of systemically disrupting oppressive social hegemonic disability-knowledge in this regard.

Nonetheless, I approach the theme of “disability as the problem in need of erasure” by drawing a connection – via analogy – between the Black students lived experiences that resonated for this analysis and the theoretical, scholarly discussion of the origins of normalcy and eugenics
theories in 19th and 20th century Europe and North America. From this perspective, we can understand how the theorizing of disability and Blackness enables us to critically engage with the discourses and practices of power that shape our everyday lives. I would argue that while we like to imagine ourselves as an inclusive society – and we would prefer to dismiss eugenics as a tragic and isolated aspect of history – there is a deep structural continuum connecting these movements and students’ lived experiences in our education environment. Students are often being “erased” from our education community and social spaces in very real and effective ways.

**Black Students’ Experience of Microaggressions**

The concept of microaggressions is rooted in critical race study during the 1970s, a subtle and generally unconscious form of discrimination that makes reference to the deployment of discriminator stereotypes and expectations as they are made manifest in daily interactions and practices, often in stark contrast to the publicly held or stated principles and beliefs of the microaggressor (Solorzano, Ceja, & Yosso, 2000, p. 62; Pierce, 1970). Another related term in relation to subtle enactments of prejudice is “aversive racism’ referring in part to whites’ aversion to being seen as prejudiced, given their conscious adherence to egalitarian principles” (DeAngelis, 2009, p. 42). The University of Toronto is known to the Black disabled students that participated in this study as an institution that celebrates and appreciates its diversity, as stated by Folake, delineating all the elements setting a backdrop for microaggression in her interview statement: “The university likes to brag about how diverse they are, but anti-Black racism is so normalized here such as in the classrooms, with my peers and administration personnel” (Interview 7, October 14, 2016).

At the micro level, the aggressions that the Black student experiences can be confounding and confusing. The microaggression contributes to the disengagement that the Black student experiences and can motivate the student to develop a different perspective on their university
experience. The microaggression works by reinforcing what the student perceives to be as a stigmatization or prejudice inside and outside of the classroom. The Black disabled students respond with feelings that the classroom is not open to them. In response, the student may become reclusive from the classroom.

Part of the challenge in addressing racism in education institution is that it has become very covert. As overt racism and racial discrimination have become “unfashionable,” it has been forced to assume new forms. As one critic notes, these new forms of anti-Black racism lack the overt racist signifiers of the past (e.g., racial epithets) but nonetheless subtly continue to define racism in terms of exclusion:

Apart from the way that racial meanings are inferred rather than stated openly, these new forms are distinguished by the . . . closeness it suggests between the idea of race and the ideas of nation, nationalism, and national belonging. We increasingly face a racism which avoids being recognized as such because it is able to link “race” with nationhood, patriotism and nationalism. (Gilroy, 1999, p. 245)

It is important to recognize Gilroy’s statement above that this view of anti-Black racism is not limited to the Canadian context. Indeed, it may be argued that the United States and nations in Europe share this similar experience of living in a paradox: citizens of a racist society that refuses to acknowledge that it is racist (Feagin & Melvin, 1999, 1994). In this context, we must acknowledge the systemic and subtle manifestations of racism and ableism in our society, and not be deceived by the superficial signs of “colour-blindness.” For example, by understanding racism in the sense of systemic discrimination and exclusion, we can recognize individual cases within the broader pattern.

The belief in campus diversity by the University establishes the “egalitarian” ideal for the aversive racism that is replete through the participant interviews. The participants in this study encountered these conditions in their daily lives, either at the hands of their professors or teaching assistants, the Accessibility Services administrators, or their non-Black campus peers. In some cases, some of the comments border on blatant racism. Sarah, for example, experienced an incident during her third year as an undergraduate student exemplary of microaggressive
conduct: “In my third year undergrad, I had a male professor who made a lot of problematic comments including references to smart monkeys [emphasis added] during lectures. He also said some of these things to me personally” (Interview 10, November 24, 2016). This conduct was so prevalent with this professor that she considered taking action, as shown from her interview transcript:

Interviewer: Did the professor make these comments privately or in class?
Participant: Some of them were private and some during lectures. For example, there was a comment made by the professor about “smart monkeys”? However, some students didn’t have a clue that such comments are wrong, as they’ve never dealt with systematic forms of oppression around their body or their people being called animals. (Interview 10, November 24, 2016)

In nearly all of the cases of microaggression, the participants indicated a reticence to report in order to avoid trouble, or negative ramifications with regards to their university standing. As noted during the interview with Sarah concerning this outrageous incident:

I did document the conversations, but I didn’t follow through with it because you are so beaten at the end of it all, you don’t even have energy to take people down. You just get to the point where you say, “I am done. Just give me my degree and let me leave.” (Interview 10, November 24, 2016)

In an extremely blatant racist rant by one of the professors that Christine had, she observed him clearly stating: “‘Black people are all freeloaders’ and he said basically that we should all go back to Africa and work out our problems” (Interview 1, December 15, 2016). In response to a reluctance to act against a tenured professor, Christine recounted the advice by registrar: “I am always told to just suck it up and move on. Suck it up just to get your degree. And the registrar seems to discount the way it was making me feel. You know. I was being abused and nobody cares” (Interview 1, December 15, 2016). The racism went unreported and no action was taken – just the hurtful residual effects remained.

The failure of the University to take action against microaggressions is excused by claiming over-sensitivity on the part of the aggrieved student, as noted by Folake: “I was once
called a ‘ghetto gal’ from the poor neighbourhood by another student. I reported the incident to my college registrar and they told me that I was overreacting” (Interview 7, October 14, 2016). Regardless of the complaint filed by the student to the registrar’s office, no one seems to care about this problem. This is a classic example of the success of colonialism of the mind in which injustice is tacitly accepted by all parties concerned. The microaggression is experienced by the students. In turn, the student interprets it to mean that the student is not welcome in the classroom, and rather than experiencing personal development and transformation, they reflect on it being another example of marginalization.

Moreover, words representing social experiences of bodies and difference can have enormous power. Consider, in the context of the students’ usage of derogatory terms representing body, class and disability, the history of words used to describe Black bodies. As is widely acknowledged, words that reference the concept of race – a concept whose scientific accuracy is problematic at best – have historically had significant social power. As Zora Neale Hurston observes: “Race consciousness is a deadly explosive on the tongues of [wo]men” (Quoted in Gates, 1986, p. 4). This is because it is impossible to truly generalize with any degree of accuracy the experience of a person of one race or another.

DuBois’ (1903) concept of “double consciousness” has been influential in theorizations of race insofar as it points to a site of psychological and social contestation within the experience of Black identity. His concept aligns with contemporary post-colonial theorists (Gilroy, 2000; Hall, 2001) who also suggest that Black people find themselves living in-between two camps, or two categories of identity and belonging. These scholars theorized that there is a dislocation of identity at times when one must negotiate different cultural ideas of identity and race that confront each other or create a feeling of hybridity, to use Bhabha’s notion (Bhabha, 1994). Black identity, in such formulations, is always a site of contestation as the awareness of one’s doubleness, or when considering sexuality, a thirdness. This remains an important mode of
critically thinking about the subject here, and it shapes what I am calling the more classic notion of identity-based resistance. This fits with the overall theme of marginality. That is because through the double consciousness described by DuBois, Blacks experience marginalization on the level of identity. Inaction by the University was noted by David when:

One of my professors refuses to provide me with class notes and accessible class reading materials. I reported my concern to the accessibility services office and they told me that there is nothing they could do about it and I should try and negotiate my accommodations with my professor. (Interview 8, October 31, 2016)

The other instances are subtle and correspond to the classic constructs of microaggression. The subtle nature of microaggression requires greater comprehension of the interaction between the aggressor and the target: “The study of microaggressions looks at the impact of these subtle racial expressions from the perspective of the people being victimized, so it adds to our psychological understanding of the whole process of stigmatization and bias” (DeAngelis, 2009, p. 42). Considering bias and stigmatization in relation to investigations into microaggressions, the resultant tangible manifestations of this understated form of racism, the participants’ responses yield a plethora of cases of this behavior. The concerns of stigmatization are replete throughout the interviews, and numerous examples were proffered in earlier sections.

Again, microaggressions are often unintentional, unconscious, or innocent in their presentation, but in context the signs of blatant racisms and hurtful results are felt by the participants in the form of marginalization and reduced expectations. Lorna from her experiences felt that, “I think I am judged differently in terms of my intellectual acumen given the fact that I am Black” (Interview 2, May 14, 2016), and when in study group, “Some of my peers I encountered in a study group were literally unfriendly towards me. I have had to overly justify my research and my opinions. . . . I knew the problem was not me or my intellect. It was obvious to me because no other students were treated as a ‘problem’” (Interview 2, Lorna, May 14,
Cooley’s statement above is perhaps the most important element in terms of the subsequent theorizing of the self as the idea of the “judgement” of oneself by others, for this judgement implies some measure by which aspects of the social order impact how we see ourselves positively and negatively. The exercise of judgment is an exercise of power. When that power can be exercised in the consciousness of another – in effect, leading a person to feel ashamed or mortified, to judge him or herself in accordance with the judgment of others in a social unit – we are dealing with significant social and political power.

Instead of exercising power physically – controlling others by physical force and compelling their bodies – this conception of the self allows us to understand how power can be exercised so that people self-censure and limit their own options in accordance with social judgement. In other words, the “looking-glass self” establishes the theoretical foundation for the recognition of the self as a key modality of social and political control.

There were numerous times when Lorna felt the need to prove herself, and this act in itself was disabling. By actively seeking to prove herself, she was acting as though her existence was “not enough” and this need to justify her existence was also disabling. Lorna notes that, “I have a response of fear and anxiety when I experience the trappings of Blackness and disability. I simply want to flee the scene and save myself from the violence” (Interview 2, Lorna, May 14, 2016). The notion of violence features prominently in the participant’s experience as a Black disabled student. Violence is a way to enforce normalcy within social and legal systems to assert hegemony on the basis of Blackness, gender, disability or class (Titchkosky, 2007; Hill-Collins,
some post-colonial theorists, such as Fanon, argue that since “violence . . . governed the ordering of the colonial world,” violence is an inevitable component of decolonization (Fanon, 1963, p. 40). However, Fanon also warns that violence against oppressors can be cyclical; that is, indiscriminate violence can lead to the oppressed themselves setting up systems of exploitation (Presbey, 1996). Fanon further argued that violence fundamentally defined the meaning and practice of colonialism, and as such, violence is central to the effort to resist and overthrow colonial rule. For Fanon, violence is both the poison of colonialism and its antidote. Among the instances related that typify microaggression in interactions with professors is the experience of Kimberly, regarding sociology research for one of her course’s study projects:

For instance, my initial reason for seeking this advice because this professor was dealing with methods in terms of “how do you go about doing your research.” The conversation ended up becoming a question of my purpose and the impossibilities. There was already assumed limitations before I even really got to express my intent. Like I didn’t even get to see the full breadth of what this study could do. It was spoke with the context of “you can’t do this.” But I didn’t get a why. It’s hard to prove. (Interview 6, October 11, 2016)

As in many instances of microaggression, the cases are all contextual and difficult to establish the offence, because often there is no explicit or overt intent to discriminate – it is “micro.” In the classroom, again, there is a subtlety associated with the microaggressions, as Denise detailed: “I always notice that when I put my hands up in class they’d go over [not acknowledge] me. And if I have something to say you will cut me off” (Interview 11, November 29, 2016). This theme is repeated in several other interviews.

The insidious nature of microaggression, the subtle contextual acumen and the lack of foundational proof for action by university authorities or administration left these participants with little course of action for relief or validation of their concerns. David ended with a sad commentary on his university experience: “I will leave the University with one thing in my mind: that we’ll never be equal, because we’re not truly welcome” (Interview 11, November 29, 2016). Nonetheless, when performing studies concerning the treatment of marginalized groups,
one aspect of social identity is their outward manifestation, and observability by outsiders or vested parties. In this case, these identity traits are often taken as distinct and sometimes ambiguous categories: the visible, the invisible and the non-visible. In general terms the visible and invisible refer to physical qualities and quantities of the identity of the individual (Alcoff, 2006, p. 11), and in this study, to Blackness and disability. The third aspect of visibility is the non-visible, which is attributed to the mental state or self-affiliation of the identity of the individual, often sexual orientation, political persuasion or personal philosophy that cannot be tested for through physical means. The facts of visibility and invisibility factored prominently into the responses (seen or unseen) of the participants. The participants spoke of their Blackness being readily apparent for their peers and professors to judge and make assumptions; however, many had disabilities that were “hidden or invisible,” and only by virtue of using Accessibility Services and having disability accommodations were their disabilities known. Zaine stated, “My disability, given that it is invisible in nature, makes it difficult for people to identify what is ‘wrong’ with me” (Interview 5, October 10, 2016). The learning disabilities and their revelation through accommodations resulted in much of the stigmatization spoken of earlier.

Summary

The current policy of Accommodation to individuals with identified disabilities has several shortcomings, especially when considering its application to racialized bodies and their specific needs of equality. The twelve participants of this study presented themselves with several types of disabilities, with the majority being “hidden or invisible.” The majority of the “invisible disabilities” were learning disabilities as classified by Accessibility Services when making the determination for eligibility for benefits. The examination of the participants’ particular disability, diagnosis and testing, and accommodations afforded for their academic needs were outside the scope of this investigation. My focus on the experiences of Black students
with disabilities at the University of Toronto with respect to interactions with their peers, professors, advisors, and service providers lends insight into the meaning of the production of marginality as part of the normal workings of the University.

A reoccurring theme throughout the interview process was the issue of stigma and marginalization. The participants reported feeling stigmatized with respect to both their identity as a racial minority, Black, and as a disabled student receiving accommodations for their disability. The University has made a longstanding claim of being a welcoming environment for racialized bodies, where the strength of the student population lies with its diversity – diversity being an essential part of the University experience. The experiences of the students in this study are contrary to the stated goals of the university with respects to diversity. The most glaring examples of this were the several instances of blatant racially disparaging comments and attitudes that went unchecked and tacitly endorsed by the university. The first example is of the “smart monkey” comments related by one of the participants. These comments were not made in passing on a single occasion, but part of an ongoing pattern of discussion. This graduate student went as far as to document the instances, but was hesitant to file any complaint due to a fear of becoming labelled as a troublemaker and negative repercussions on her academic career. However, the “smart monkey” comments were made in a disparaging way towards Black students, and the participant noted that it was most likely that the white professor making the comments realized how offensive they were in the historical context of the dehumanization of Blacks and referring to them as animals. The second and far more egregious incident of blatant racially disparaging comments were with regard to the insinuation by one of the professors that Blacks were lazy and should go back to Africa to sort out their problems over there. In this particular anecdotal story, the student did complain to the administration, and the complaint was dismissed as the student being too sensitive and the incident ended there with the student
realizing that complaining did not help matters, and she should just complete her degree and move on.

The other recurring aspect of the racial stigmatization was the numerous instances of microaggressions, which were far more prolific than the disparaging racial comments. The majority of the students indicated that they were subjected to microaggressions throughout their academic career. In cases of being marginalized in classroom discussions, we repeatedly saw the underestimation of their abilities with regards to capabilities to undertake research and comprehend academic subjects by other students and during office visitations with their professors. The cumulative effect of these was a general sense of an unwelcoming environment at the university for Black students. Judging from the anecdotal evidence presented during the interviews, there were far more instances than those related, and these incidents had become so commonplace that they were accepted as the reality of university life. Again, students that complained were told they were being too sensitive, and the general attitude was to tolerate these incidents, obtain their degree and move on. Although one of the participants did take a militant attitude and took up with a social activist movement.

The majority of students were treated with contempt and the near universal opinion of the professors was that the disability accommodations provided an advantage to the Black disabled students, and that their success was largely due to the facilitation of these accommodations. Again, the descriptor of stigmatization was applied to their experience. Many of the participants were reluctant to enroll with Accessibility Services for fear of this stigmatization, several students denied that they were disabled, and a few embraced their disabilities. Thus, the students felt marginalized by their treatment as Black disabled students, due to anti-Black racism and contempt for the accommodations afforded disabled students.

Stigmatization is quite powerful, and it can have implications for the personal growth and development of the stigmatized. In the higher education setting, the experience of stigmatization
will contribute to marginalization through the assumptions, attitudes and both micro and macro relations of the Black disabled students. Subsequently, marginalization of the student is produced through the student’s experience in the classroom and with administrators. The intersectional nature of marginalization is such that it can have implications for the identity of the student and lead to a negative impact for the personal growth of the student.

In Chapter 6, I discuss the university’s bureaucratic disability accommodation policies and practices. The approach taken by the university towards accommodating the student is focused upon in the scope of document from the school and students’ discussions with administrators from the university. This discussion centers on understanding how it is that the university meets the accommodation needs of students through pre-defined policy and procedure. This chapter contributes to the discussion of how marginality is normalized in the university setting by describing how policies, practices, and politics at institutional levels are structured and the way in which Black disabled students are impacted.
Chapter 6: University Disability Accommodation Policies and Practices

The ways in which policies, practices, and politics at institutional levels are structured… [position] blacks as disposable and unnecessary burdens to the state and therefore expected to fend for themselves in times of crises. (Adjei, 2016, p. 4)

Ensuring that all Ontarians are equally able to access and use the services and programs we develop and provide is at the heart of great public service. (Ontario Ministry of Training, Colleges & Universities, Accessibility, Plan, 2014, p. 1)

The opportunities and operations of education are always already normal and good whereas disability is always already other, and so we attend to disability only to make it disappear into this unquestioned good. . . . Bureaucratic ordering of . . . [accommodation] transforms disability into its other, to be addressed through plans, processes, and policies of inclusion whose fulfilment is signified in the act of same-ing. (Titchkosky, 2011, p. 102)

Introduction: The Promise of Accessibility

The University of Toronto has a codified and expressed policy: the commitment to provide accessibility for all students, regardless of disability. According to its statement on the Accessibility Services website:

The University will *strive* [emphasis added] to provide support for and facilitate the accommodation of individuals with disabilities so that all may share the same level of access to opportunities, participate in the full range of activities that the University offers, and achieve their full potential as members of the University community. (University of Toronto, Academic Accommodation, 2018, p. 1)

This affirmation for all students is a lofty goal, but one that does not appear to be manifesting in the work lives of the Black disabled students interviewed for this study.

In the previous chapter, I showed that this promise of accessibility is riddled with unspoken caveats and invisible barriers that often humiliate and degrade students, who must nonetheless use the programs to achieve success academically. Still, students may be blocked by these same programs and many of participants expressed feeling subjugated to a “plantation mentality” and subordinate to the power structure in navigating the system. According to
McKittrick (2013), “Deciphering a plantation logic, then . . . identifies the normalizing mechanics of the plantation, wherein black subjugation and land exploitation go hand in hand” (p. 11). This normalization is experienced prior to even receiving supports or program access. One way this occurs is through putting students in need of accessibility services into the student loan nexus. Students requiring accommodations often lack a party that will work to facilitate ease of access, and while students are being put in a position of indebtedness, they are also in a position of subjugation. The Bursary for Students with Disabilities (BSWD) is particularly important for Black students with disabilities because it is the only financial program that facilitates access to educational services for these students in the university (Ontario Human Rights Commission, 2018a). However, in order for students to qualify and even be considered for the BSWD, students must show proof that they are “disabled enough” to receive funding from the Ontario Student Assistance Program (OSAP) to cover disability accommodation related costs. The system makes it difficult for Black students with disabilities to gain access to services, and it is a barrier in which the system normalizes processes of accommodation through bureaucratic procedures in the university setting (Titchkosky, 2011). The general consensus from participants was that the University’s Accessibility Services requirement is that they must apply for OSAP. As noted by Folake, OSAP “is an ‘oppressive system’ by how it functions as a tool to foster the exploitation and traumatization of students” (Interview 7, October 14, 2016).

The understanding that Folake has in relation to OSAP is based on her own experience and the way in which the program links loans and services. In order for students to obtain services through Accessibility Services, one metric which the university uses to measure whether a student is worthy of granting accommodations is whether the student is eligible to receive OSAP. The problem is that there are reasons outside of being disabled which pose great difficulty for the student in relation to accessing OSAP funding. Students who have made mistakes on OSAP in the past or who have failed a credit check, declared bankruptcy, filed a consumer proposal, or registered for a
consolidation order, and/or are an international student may not be eligible to receive OSAP (University of Toronto, Academic Accommodations, 2018; Ontario Human Rights Commission, 2018a). For students with disabilities who may have had difficulties with OSAP, this element of the evaluation process makes it even more difficult for the student to access accommodation measures. OSAP is therefore a tool which contributes to the difficulties of Black disabled students who require access to programs which can improve their education experience.

OSAP essentially works in such a way that it is a tool of power which controls the provision of services in the university setting. Students who cannot gain access to OSAP are at a disadvantage in that they are limited in the degree of assistance they are able to rely upon in the university setting and with regard to the extent to which they can rely on the school to improve their educational experience. For Black disabled students, these problems are important because OSAP can make the difference for them between accessing supports which contribute to their educational experience and the resources that will enable them to survive in the university setting.

Nonetheless, OSAP is a significant barrier for students and can pose several difficulties for students as they attempt to work within the system to gain access to accommodation.

The OSAP morass includes a variety of traps and confusions which can make accessibility for Black disabled students difficult. Students with disabilities may not understand what they are qualified for or how much they are qualified to receive. This can make application for funding arduous. Further, Black students with disabilities may not understand what they are eligible for because of different income measures or accommodation tied to OSAP. For instance, some of the major specific consequences of OSAP for students with disabilities are explained by Phillips and Collins (2017):

[For students with disabilities] 40% [or higher] course load counts as full-time status. But full-time status at the University doesn’t translate to full-time status. A 40% load also means less funding. There can be long wait times before the loans are approved, often held up until the required assessments arrive, and given wait time for appointments students may end up having to pay out of pocket for e.g.,
first or last months’ rent, course materials, etc. Managing OSAP can be like having a full-time career because there is a need for constant reporting. If you change a course load, add a course, withdraw from a course, do badly in a course, need some time away for e.g. episodic disability, OSAP monitors closely and adds or subtracts payment. A low grade in a course that indicates a lack of progress or success according to OSAP triggers a requirement for a letter and explanation. If that happens twice, you can’t take any more courses until you repay. Having to think about reporting at a time when health or disability related concerns are predominant is tricky to say the least yet missing the deadlines has an impact on loans and interest on loans. (pp. 9-10)

The requirement for resources can also place a strain on the student related to the potential that they could be denied access to OSAP because of any mistakes that could have been made in the past related to financial difficulty that the student had with OSAP prior. At the same time, the constraints placed on eligibility for OSAP make it difficult for students to gain access to the financial resources they require in order to successfully receive the loan. Black students with disabilities may also be dependent on accommodations in the university setting which may be restrained from them because they did not have access to accommodations which would assist them in completing the appropriate paperwork. For example, in order for students to be eligible for the BSWD, they must be self-identified with either permanent or temporary disabilities and enrolled full-time or part-time with the Accessibility Services Office and also eligible for OSAP (and have at least $1.00 of financial need) which taps into some non-repayable grants (University of Toronto, Academic Accommodations, 2018; Phillips, S. & Collins, 2017). Students with disabilities who are eligible for OSAP can receive up to $10,000 for learning supports (e.g., computer, accessible [assistive] technology). There is also an annual $2,000 grant for full-time students identified with a permanent disability which is filtered through OSAP (Phillips, S. & Collins, 2017; University of Toronto, Academic Accommodations, 2018). In this study, some students who are able to navigate the bureaucratic accommodation system and qualify for OSAP and BSWD must account for every dollar spent through the constant reporting of receipts and such surveillance
can be read as yet another form of policing the Black body, and/or be experienced by the participants as such.

Accommodation is tied to eligibility for OSAP such that students must be pre-diagnosed with a disability and must never have defaulted on OSAP in the past or be overdrawn (University of Toronto, Academic Accommodations, 2018; Ontario Human Rights Commission, 2018a). In addition, every five years a disabled student must also undergo another psycho-educational or learning disability assessment in order to be eligible for the BSWD in order to continue to receive accommodation. The much-heralded example is that students with disabilities in higher education will be denied OSAP loans if they have reached 520 weeks the (lifetime limit) maximum amount of funding allowed per week of their studies. According to Thomas-Long (2010), “graduate students who depend on OSAP might not always be eligible because they might have reached their OSAP limit by the time they enter graduate [studies]” (p. 7). For students with disabilities, these are unfair requirements which make it difficult for the student to gain access to the resources that they require in order to be successful in requesting accommodations in the classroom. For this reason, it is important to understand the administrative difficulties that students may experience in the process of gaining access to resources from the university.

The Issue of Blackness and Disability with Accessibility Services

This chapter explores the students’ experiences between administration personnel and University faculty when seeking the bureaucratic ordering of accommodation for their studies. The shared experiences are similar to a subjugated request for preferential treatment rather than a facilitation of the delivery of a common right to those in need; it is the colonial attitude of the powerful bestowing a privilege to those deemed worthy. That is not to portray wrongly the common experience, which the participants had with accessibility services as replete with negativity, as most indicated that some of the administrators and employees were helpful and
personable. The helpful hand cannot come at the expense of personal dignity. The dichotomy of expressed goals of accessibility and equality are at odds with the common experience of accommodation made with an underlying tone of beguilement, meeting the statutory obligations of accommodation with unspoken reservation and mistrust of the disabled individual.

Accommodating students with disabilities is a legal obligation of the University, stating the policy of inclusion, but practicing exclusions is just as common, as noted by Titchkosky (2011): “assertions of inclusion help to normalize conceptions of those who are essentially excludable. .. Essentially excludable – this is a dominant conception of disability that operates in everyday life” (p. 39). I aim to demonstrate that practices of exclusion and discrimination often appear acceptable when bolstered by lofty goals and bold statements. The claimed benevolence of Accessibility Services should not be confused with acceptance and inclusion; the aspect that they acquiesce to the legal requirements of the Province and University should not come at the expense of the dignity of those they serve. The expression of support for accessibility is not the same as practicing accessibility for those needing it. For example, disability is always treated as an absent present within the university environment (Titchkosky, 2011); significantly, the accessibility services office holds the prism through which access is filtered, interpreted, or granted.

The university experience for most Black disabled students as noted in previous chapters is that their status of a racial minority is one that cannot be concealed; the visceral anti-Black sentiments are a dark undertone to all aspects of life. The open incredulity noted regarding their deservedness for accommodations is intrinsically tied to their performance expectations with the “advantages” of the accommodations, not with respect to their university endorsed need for the same accommodations. Such experiences throughout, as noted earlier, are of discount and dismissal, rather than accommodation and acceptance. In terms of the racism, ableism, and the attempted mitigating factors of accessibility, only perpetuate that, “Abled privilege also
reproduces itself based on its relationship to normalcy. [Anti-Black] racism and ableism as discursive practices form the backbone of the . . . need to maintain privilege” (Pickens, 2014, p. 38). The implied superiority reinforced through the condescending attitude of delivering services and accommodations, as required by policy and law, is merely a means of supplementing the power structure and asserting superiority.

Black students with disabilities who require accommodations at the graduate level often face barriers to accessing services such as unmet expectations and discrimination (Myers et al., 2014; Annable, 2003; Chataika, McKenzie, Swart & Lyner-Cleophas, 2012b). For example, Denise stated: “my accessibility advisor asked me, ‘why do you need accommodation? Our records showed that you have already completed your bachelor’s degree. Now that you are in graduate school, you should be able to work independently without accommodation’” (Interview 11, November 29, 2016). Black disabled students who were once assessed as having a permanent learning disability, and were provided support to facilitate their academic career, are expected to work independently at the graduate level because the status of “permanent disability” no longer applies to them. At this level, what was conceived as permanent now becomes a temporary disability. It is expected that once the disabled student reaches the graduate level, they are no longer in need of accommodations because the student has learned to “manage or overcome” their disability. In order for disabled students to continue to receive accommodation at the graduate level, they must undergo another psycho-educational or learning disability assessment to “prove” that they are worthy of accommodation. However, any attempts made by students with disabilities to obtain accommodation at the graduate level will face problems and extreme frustration, as will be discussed further in this chapter. These students are perceived as a “threat” to the educational institutions because they disrupt the notion of normalcy that is embedded in the systematic practices of disability or accessibility services. Disability is generally viewed as a “problem” that exists in the disabled’s individual in need of bureaucratic solution “in order to
cure, care for, or contain [the] disability” (Titchkosky, 2011, p. 17; Oliver, 1996; Shakespeare, 2002; Goering, 2015). As Titchkosky (2011) notes, “disability is taken as an (unessential) condition the individual must overcome, adjust to, or succumb to” (p. 141). It is noteworthy and clear from the participant statement above that the coloniality of power and social construction of normality are crucial factors in the ways in which Accessibility Services advisors respond to the needs of students with disabilities seeking services. Thus, while there were rarely overt signs of prejudice towards the participant from those in authority in this university, the insidiousness of this lies in the fact that this prejudice is extraordinarily difficult to resist, for it can rarely be isolated to a single obvious incident or individual. Instead, the participant’s statement reveals a general pattern of prejudice towards Black students with disabilities under the control of this University’s Accessibility Services Office.

The written policies regarding disability are completely silent on the issue of racial minority status. Plainly stating the university’s policy on disability services:

...the University is committed to developing an accessible learning environment that provides reasonable accommodations to enable students with disabilities to meet the essential academic requirements of the University’s courses and programs. (University of Toronto, Academic Accommodations, 2018, p. 1)

The policy goes on further to suggest that it will ensure that these accommodations for accessibility are not altruistic, but do meet the letter of the requirements proposed by the Ontario Human Rights code where it states, “academic accommodations for students with disabilities are provided in accordance with the statutory duty arising from the Ontario Human Rights Code” (University of Toronto, Academic Accommodations, 2018, p. 1). The acceptance of the duty to provide accommodations for disabled students is irrespective of race, colour, or ethnicity, and does provide an extensive grievance procedure in the advent that someone experiences discrimination based upon their status, so by extension, the policy of accommodation on the university is irrespective of the disabled students’ Blackness. However, that is not the common
experience of the participants interviewed for the study. They noted an underlying tone of racial discrimination, not in the form of a denial of requisite services, but through softer, covert means of perpetuating the plantation mentality and condescension associated with the power structures involved.

The participants were not directly queried on their experiences with accessibility services with respect to their racial minority status, their Blackness, in my second question that asked: “What has accessing accommodation been like for you?” This open-ended question deliberately removed race from the question; however, the answers received were replete with their common experience with the racial aspects of the services provided. Saga noted in direct terms:

My advisor at accessibility services knew that I have a disability, and my “disability” is invisible. I have a learning disability, what we now call “invisible” disability. However, I can’t remove my Blackness, but I can remove my disability. What is a “normal” person, or what do we expect a disabled person to look like? Are we not human beings anyway? Although I often ask myself, “Who am I?” If you are a Black person and have a label, it will have an impact on you for the rest of your life and can prevent you from fully participating in society (e.g., even getting a job and this label criminalizes you). (Interview 12, December 15, 2016)

His answer does contain other issues to be explored later, but the inseparable aspect of him being a racial minority features prominently in his response. The attitude that his status of disability, although “invisible,” being a deviation from the “normal” is concurrent with this visible outward appearance. He is different from other disabled students seeking services, and it is as plain as the colour on his face.

This is concisely relayed by Zaine when she stated, “I had come to the realization that due to my Blackness I am judged, with or without a disability” (Interview 5, October 10, 2016). Again, this response is to my question asking about accessing accommodations – his response highlights the unfortunate prejudice stemming from the feeling of being judged. Notably, it is the responsibility of Accessibility Services to “Judge” the students on their need for accommodations; this seems reasonable in light of the simple fact that
these accommodations are only available to students that require them because of a
disability. It is clearly stated in the university policy that it is the duty of Accessibility
Services to carefully scrutinize each application for accommodations. The University of
Toronto has an accessibility services office on each campus to assist students and faculty
with disability accommodations. The role of these offices is to:

Review the student’s medical documentation on a confidential basis; Verify the
student’s disability on behalf of the University; Determine with the student based
on the documentation provided whether accommodations are required and, if so,
what accommodations would be effective and act as a resource for faculty in
assisting with the implementation of accommodations in the classroom.
(Academic Accommodations, 2018, p. 1)

It is expected for Accessibility Services to carefully review each application; however, it is
clearly stated that no persons should be refused accommodations based on perceived biases to
their race, class, etc. The paternalistic approach to accommodation is typified in an example from
Stephanie, where the accessibility services insisted that she apply for OSAP prior to receiving
classroom accommodations. Students’ accommodation is filtered through coercive measures by
which they are forced into a financial arrangement with the provincial government’s OSAP. The
program facilitates student loans, and the information gathered is used to determine students’
eligibility for accommodation. These processes also lend themselves to the commodification of
disability because students must engage with OSAP. Stephanie stated:

Initially, I would say that if I wasn’t strong willed, I would have been
discouraged. For me, there is a lack of respect and [there is a] racial hierarchy
when accessing accommodations at accessibility services and it has become
institutionalized. One of the things I thought was negative was that I would have
to been on OSAP in order to actually receive any accommodations from
accessibility services. I think that’s ridiculous. If I didn’t already apply for OSAP,
that was kind of something they pushed at you first – apply for it to see if you
would be eligible. I just thought that as a university they could have been a bit
better at assisting me. (Interview 4, September 13, 2016)

The university required the disabled student to apply for OSAP prior, again asserting control
over the student in almost a plantation or paternalistic manner. The attempt to control and
supervise all aspects of the disabled students’ lives, because they were disabled, seems to be the most plausible explanation of the requirement to register with OSAP. This has been cited by other participants in a negative light as noted by Barry calling “OSAP the ‘abusive and oppressive system’” (Interview 9, November 18, 2016).

The opinion regarding Accessibility Services is not universal disregard or a necessary evil; there are a number of participants that felt the system was not adverse to their Blackness, and that it did not serve as a means of “exploitation, or control.” Some students expressed that they had positive encounters with Accessibility Services and felt that they were helpful in obtaining accommodations for their particular needs. In terms of lamenting the services received, Sarah enthusiastically stated:

It’s interesting. For me it wasn’t stressful. I think I am organized and detail-oriented. I’m not struggling with a physical disability or illness. I know students who fit that side of the spectrum and Accessibility Services hasn’t been effective for them. All I needed them to do was arrange my tests, and potentially give extensions when needed. Given that those were the supports I needed, it was sufficient. I needed to take exams in my own private space. I would not have made it through university without those accommodations. I went from being suicidal and not in school to maintaining an 80 and above percentage throughout undergrad in the sciences. (Interview 10, November 24, 2016)

Sarah went further stating that, “Accessibility Services was a life saver for me” (Interview 10, November 24, 2016; emphasis added). The experience for David was also complimentary; however, there were some reservations as he notes, “I have had a great experience thus far accessing accommodations with accessibility services. The only issue I had is the design of the learning assessment tests. I believe the process of the learning assessment test is culturally framed” (Interview 8, October 31, 2016).

In noting that the learning assessment test was “culturally framed,” he was echoing to a lesser degree what the other participants were seeing as well. Accessibility services is designed for assisting the majority of the student population, and not anticipating the cultural needs of the
Black student population. This sentiment was reiterated by Kimberly regarding the cultural issues:

I never felt initially that I had someone who could connect with me from more of a social-cultural level and whom I could trust. Trust in terms of the information I’m going to be sharing with the person. For example, will they see me the way I see myself, or are they going to treat me topically. My concern was about how would I be treated as a student that has accommodation needs but not under their context. (Interview 6, October 11, 2016)

The common experiences are as individualistic as the students, and they vary between each of the students, but the general theme is that some feel the program is helpful, some feel it is controlling, and yet others feel it is a necessity to get through their courses and must tolerate the injustices that are sometimes dispensed to them in the name of assistance.

What seems to be integral in these experiences is that they are dependent upon the administrator with whom the participant interacted when navigating the system. This is difficult for the Black disabled students because it also depends on the chances that an administrator has considered their own biases. Christine explains that she experienced both ends of the spectrum with her advisors at accessibility services:

My first advisor (lady) at Accessibility Services I had, she was great. I have a hard time dealing with what they call [being a] disabled student. I didn’t like it. I thought of “disabled” as someone who is physically impaired. I have seizures and other health issues. I have that mentality that these are just things to be overcome and are not really disability. And I just look at it as if you are differently challenged. For example, my accessibility advisor tells me I should get over my disability. (Interview 1, April 19, 2016)

The process of determining eligibility for accommodation seemingly creates further vulnerabilities within and among these students. These vulnerabilities are specifically linked to the construction of eligibility for services inasmuch as they are linked to the construction of subject position categories into which students are typified.

Studies have suggested that for students with disabilities, “administrators sometimes react to requests by interpreting the laws arbitrarily and by setting contradictory or inequitable policies”
Moreover, the notion of power emerges as particularly relevant in the participant’s experiences with the accessibility advisor. Educational institutions are powerful conduits of hegemonic power as they not only shape how people are represented, but also the very terms which they can use to represent themselves. She later noted after Christine changed advisors that her experience changed, relating that:

Accessibility services need to be tailored to the needs of students. Whenever I meet with my accessibility advisor, I always leave that place traumatized. The previous advisor I had, she acts like you are just there to try to steal or you are trying to take advantage of the system. And so, every time I meet with my advisor, she is giving me a hard time. I always experience barriers accessing accommodations for my studies. Instead of my advisors addressing my accommodations needs she was treating me as “problem” – now I become the problem instead of her dealing with my challenges. I had to deal with anti-Black racism, ableism and genderism. (Interview 1, April 19, 2016)

The programs at Accessibility Services as they were experienced by the participants in this study are directly tied to their encounters with the individual administrators involved. The first advisor Christine encountered was “great” and “helpful”; however, her experience changed as she had to relate to issues of anti-Black racism, ableism, and gender-based discrimination. This means returning to a critical notion of embodiment that redefines “ableism” as a condition of being able to articulate one’s identity beyond normalizing modes of understanding (Goodley, 2014). To examine the role of being a woman, Black and disabled, Octavia Butler wrote several short stories having a protagonist with these attributes (Pickens, 2015, p. 170). These stories poignantly illustrate the interplay between race, gender and disability in a context of what society viewed as normalcy (Pickens, 2015, p. 168). For a Black disabled student, there are stereotypes that can never be rebutted because of the context of normalcy in our society.

Titchkosky and Michalko (2009) state that studying disability is only possible if researchers (and ultimately society) release their hold on the concept of normalcy and approach a more pluralistic view of human experience (p. 11). Titchkosky (2007) suggests that disability is an opportunity to evaluate how identities are constructed and how we might otherwise construct
meaning in the relations between people (p. 16). While the so-called dependency of disabled students on others is seen as putting a burden on the system and society, this does not recognize the interconnectedness of society and that even “normal” people are dependent on others in order to function within that society. What makes the life experience different for disabled students is that their options within life are limited due to the existence of systems and tools that are constructed for the non-disabled population (Taylor, 2011, p. 201). By adhering to a model of normalcy and seeing accommodation of disabled individuals as an “extra” step, rather than recognizing a plurality of experiences, society in effect creates disability (Shakespeare & Watson, 2002, p. 11). The social model of disability, one that is used to gage the progressiveness of thinking on disability, suggests that it is society that renders disabled people as such by not constructing itself to include them (Shakespeare & Watson, 2002, pp. 9-12).

All three characteristics are so far from the societal definition of normalcy that marginalization for students with these characteristics is bound to occur. The advisors with Accessibility Services are the gatekeepers to the necessary accommodations that the participants of this study need to meet the requirements of their individual programs, the tools for their collective success in their academic endeavours, and the denial or impeding of accommodations is a form of punishment for refusing to conform. Although not directly congruent to the experience of the “urbicide” referred to by McKittrick (2011) as destroying a “sense of place” or home, the accessibility services should allow a safe place for disabled students where they can thrive and exist as others in the academic community, and through the plantation mentality of denying all things necessary – unless complete capitulation and contritional acts are performed – then there is exile. As McKittrick, 2011, Notes:

In terms of the willful destruction of a black sense of place, then, a limited conception of race, and a limited conception of the plantation prevails: Blackness is recognizably placeless and degraded and therefore justifiably without, which is not only the commonsense outcome of our analytical queries but also evidence of a myopic plantation past. (p. 594)
The participants suggested that their Blackness and disability exacerbated their experiences in the university classroom and with accessibility services. Moreover, it seems there is a taken-for-granted conception of disability that operates in the university as grounds for disqualification – thus a blurring between anti-Black racism and disability – one way or another, the question of who belongs seems to be raised by the participants’ statements. I would argue that the conception of disability reflected a popular perception of disability, as being localized in an individual, and at the same time, disrupted by how the participants called attention to their “shortcoming” regarding disability. This “shortcoming” was normalcy, defining disability while – in the process – obscuring itself from perception. Nonetheless, the reality of the existence of this shortcoming necessitates our “de-cloaking” normalcy and shifting the social location of disability from the stigmatized individual to the larger society that is engaged in constructing disability.

However, many of the participants expressed concern on the issues of power and discrimination that have been associated with the learning assessment tests. It cannot be denied that medical science and technology have contributed significantly to the well-being and standard of students with disabilities, in ways ranging from mobility to adaptive technologies for those with visual or auditory disabilities. At the same time, however, critics have argued that assigning “medical meaning to disability” results in treating “the person with the condition rather than ‘treating’ the social processes and policies that constrict disabled students’ lives” (Linton, 1998, p. 11). As this criticism assumes, the concept of “disability” has meaning in popular society primarily in medical terms. While this meaning would seem to be clear and unqualified, in reality it is a construction that is flawed by social biases:

The term disability, as it has been used in general parlance, appears to signify something material and concrete, a physical or psychological condition, considered to have predominantly medical significance. Yet, it is an arbitrary definition, used erratically . . . by professionals who lay claim to naming such phenomena. (Linton, 1998)
Nonetheless, the power to classify someone as possessing a disability represents significant social authority. Regardless of whether the student actually possesses a disability or the nature of the disability, the labelling as such, it may be argued, has been characterized by a long history of discrimination. This is particularly the case in the field of education, where being assessed as having a disability has resulted, until very recently, in one’s being marginalized from the general student population, with all of the negative emotional and social impacts stemming from this marginalization (Middleton, 1999, p. 13). Indeed, many studies have found that students assessed as possessing disabilities have not only noted differences in their teaching environment, but also a general dismissal of their intellectual abilities and needs by the education establishment.

**Disability Acceptance**

The participants of this study are all self-identified as Black disabled students at the University of Toronto. The universal trait is their Blackness and that they are navigating the complexities of university life as a disabled individual, and the convergence of these two “defining” characteristics are examined and extracted from the interviews. Their varied and sometimes common experiences will define the practical application of the Ontario Human Rights Code with regards to persons with disabilities. Therefore, when I use the defining “identification” of “disabled,” it is in the context of the cacophony of legislation, rules, and administrative interpretations thereof, not as a descriptor of the individual. As Saga clearly stated when questioned on his disability: “I ain’t disabled” (Interview 12, December 15, 2016). I further questioned Saga, “How do you access accommodations with accessibility services if you are not ‘disabled’?” His reply succinctly encapsulated the common experience: that he has accepted this societal label as a means to access the needed, and legally mandated, accommodations for him to adapt the university environment and educational structure to his unique form of comprehension. He added: “My disability is ‘invisible.’ I have a learning disability, what we now call ‘invisible’
disability. What is a ‘normal’ person”? (Interview 12, December 15, 2016). Consequently, if we consider my interview with the participant in this study, his comment about being “invisible” becomes understandable. Indeed, I will argue that the more “troubling” the disability, the greater is the interest of society in the maintenance of keeping the person invisible. Consider, for example, the phenomena of segregation and institutionalization; arguably the most extreme examples in the history of western society of the exclusion of those branded deviant from the general population (Malacrida, 2016; Ferri & Connor, 2006). From this perspective, it is understandable why the participant expressed that his disability is socially invisible.

Therefore, it may be speculated that the participant Saga’s success in his performance of disability was due, at least in part, to him being at the intersection of multiple social oppressions – Blackness, disability, class, masculinity – from this experience, Saga expresses an intuitive understanding of oppression that can develop as a part of one’s everyday lived experience at that intersection. Perhaps, as Butler, Garland-Thomson and other critics suggest, the success of such performances can lie in the choice of attributes that one chooses to deploy. It is noteworthy that people with disabilities – much like Black individuals in their performance of racialized identities – are resisting how hegemonic cultural forces in our society have traditionally sought to foreclose their identities within a narrow frame. While our bodies have an obvious corporeal or physical existence, they exist in arguably more complex and multifarious ways in “cultural encoding” comprised of both “conventions of representation and the complexities of identity production without social narratives of bodily differences” (Garland-Thomson, 1997, p. 5). As one critic observes, while the cultural encoding can be complex, the output of this process is almost invariably reductionist: “disability cancels out other qualities, reducing the complex person to a single attribute” (Garland-Thomson, 1997, p. 12). Performing disability may nonetheless be regarded as

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20 Garland-Thomson’s statement here is of particular note when we consider how easily one can replace “disability” with “race” in the sentence. Thus, instead of “disability cancels out other
a valuable strategy as it offers us a means by which people with disabilities can improvise, assimilate and re-deploy the attributions of social reduction – markers of disability that hegemonic social authority uses to limit the identities of people with disabilities – as a way of asserting one’s “own” identity in everyday life. Moreover, the performance of disability can be considered a strategy of economy that enables individuals – with a minimal array of gestures and improvisations – to optimize their life experiences and resist the foreclosure or reduction of identity by hegemonic social forces in our culture. In attempting to problematize this construction and performance of lived identities and issues of social stigma, passing and social hierarchies, I rely on the work of disability theorists such as Michalko (1998) when discussing the concept of “passing” which places particular emphasis on what Goffman (1967) refers to as “impression management”. In other word, a blind person who is attempting to “pass” as sighted must become a skilful social actor capable of “calculative and attentive interaction.” The critical issue here is one of “stigma.”

As Michalko (1998) notes with regard to rehabilitation from disability, “Rehabilitation is fundamentally interested in the restoration of a condition or status in which, before restoration, one lives in degradation . . . or, as Goffman might say, a ‘stigma’” (1963, p. 69). In a sense, as with all performances of the self, this is a performance of a highly complex order in that one is playing a dual role; both oneself and a “passing” persona. Again, as with all performances of the self in social settings, this dual role is significant. Similarly, Butler (1993b) notes, vis-à-vis her own social performances of gender: “This is not a performance from which I can take radical distance, for this is deep-seated play, psychically entrenched play” (p. 311).

qualities, reducing the complex person to a single attribute” we have: “race cancels out other qualities, reducing the complex person to a single attribute.” As we toggle between these distinct, yet very closely related, sentences, it allows us to understand the theoretical proximity of “disability” and “race” in this discussion.
From the outset, it must be acknowledged that the concept of “performance” is contested in the sense that its precise definition is notably elusive. A strong argument has been made by a number of theorists and critics that performance can, by definition, encompass a wide range of human social behaviours in which actions are intended to influence other participants in the social relationship (Schechner, 2006, pp. 29-30). Thus, the concept of performance has come to be applied to an extraordinarily diverse range of human activities and behaviour. In this regard, Butler’s (1993a) concept of performativity is particularly useful in the analysis. She contends that performativity is:

Not a [single] “act,” for it is always a reiteration of a norm or set of norms. . . . Moreover, this act is not primarily theatrical; indeed, its apparent theatricality is produced to the extent that its historicity remains dissimulated. . . . (p. 12)

Butler’s discussion of performativity is informed by her focus on issues of gender construction and, in particular, how heterosexuality is constructed by discursive power as a normative human condition (Butler, 1993a). Her concept of performativity may be seen to be useful to this study of the performance with particular reference to the role of Black disabled students in their performance, especially as Butler argues that performativity enables the “recasting of the matter of bodies as the effect of a dynamic of power, such that the matter of bodies will be indissociable from the regulatory norms that govern their materialization and the signification of those material effects” (p. 2). Michalko (1998) states above that these performances are all interactional, as the self is created in the space between people. As Titchkosky (2007) notes with reference to the appearances of disability that these are “enactments” of “social life. . . . The meaning of disability lies ‘between’ people and not merely in people” (pp. 17-18). In assessing such an enactment, as one critic observes, we must focus on the intersections of the categories of disability, Blackness, gender, and class: “Wherever social stratification exists – and it is evident in all complex societies – gender, race [Blackness] and disability are . . . carried in the broader class structure” (Meekosha, 2006, p. 171). In my analysis, I argue that the participant Saga’s appearance of disability achieved for him the
desired end because it contained enough multi-layered semiotic or symbolic volume that it overrode the everyday filters or “blinders” that most people have with regard to disability.

In this regard, Titchkosky’s statement above echoes Walcott’s (1996) discussion of the performance of “Blackness” with reference to self and expressive cultural practices, such as rap and hip hop, can be seen to have clear associations with the theorizing of appearance and performance of disability. All of this begs the question: Why do people – whether they have disabilities or are Black – attempt to pass? Michalko (1998) addresses this by using the highly allusive metaphor of shadow: “Blindness becomes a mere shadow of its former status. . . . There is a qualitative and quantitative difference between the self and its shadow” (p. 67). Michalko is here interrogating the moral character of rehabilitation which informs the socialized view that the condition of sight is the normative state of being and blindness is its shadow, a condition of lower status. Such a conception influences what can and cannot be learned about disability and disability identity and ultimately has an influence on how any “social change” does and does not make an appearance. These differences are significant and, I will argue, shape the objectives of people with disabilities and Black people who attempt to pass. In a sense, passing can be seen to be an act of resistance to exclusion. From this perspective, it is understandable why people with disabilities would seek to “pass” as people without disabilities. Given the pervasiveness of prevailing social discourse – together with the fact that we build our “self” interactively and so cannot easily ignore dominant social expectations – it is clear why many would prefer to take this route if possible. Of course, this opens the door to discussion about what is an “essential” self, even in a social context. Certainly, I will argue, it is a performance of “Blackness” that – in its complexity – has clear parallels with the performance of disability as referenced in *The Mystery of the Eye and the Shadow of Blindness*.

There is resistance to applying an actual label, and as discussed further in this chapter, the associated negative implications and stigmatization establishes a baseline of tension. Acceptance of potentially negative stigmatizing labels brings it to confluence with the experience of
Blackness on the university campus. The requirement of a disability as the gatekeeper for obtaining accommodations through Accessibility Services, these services are only available to students that are deemed eligible and therefore accept the label of “disabled.” According to the University website, “[we are] committed to developing an accessible learning environment that provides reasonable accommodations to enable students with disabilities to meet the essential academic requirements of the University’s courses and programs” (University of Toronto, Academic Accommodations, 2018, p. 1).

The acceptance by Accessibility Services is the threshold experience and milestone common to all of the participants, and it is one where the power structure is most prominent, because without these accommodations, most of the participants in the study would be unable to participate in their university studies. Again, using Saga as an example, and building upon his experiences with Accessibility Services, he relates a very traumatic and humiliating experience of personal subjugation:

I had difficulty learning and the accessibility services advised me to do the Learning Assessment test, which was very traumatizing for me. The assessment test lasted for two days, 3 hours a day. In a way it places me in a vulnerable position. The process of getting these accommodations it required me to go through a psychological boot camp. And this psychological boot camp also felt like I was in a psychological war zone and this process is very violent. This violence I experienced was very real! I was in that assessment room asking myself, how can I escape this violent space? Why are they playing tricks with my brain? I don't know, but it certainly feels that way. I really wanted to escape at this moment, but no, I say to myself, my disability accommodations depend on it. During the assessment process I had to reveal a lot to the person who administered the psychological test. I had to tell them my personal medical history in order for them to approve my accommodations. (Interview 12, December 15, 2016)

The participant not only had to prove his disability to Accessibility Services, but also had to personally accept his disability associated social stigma, a label that he rejected. Foucault (1994) notes, when stating the conditions of a punitive society, that there are four forms of punishment, while only one involves confinement: the first was to banish or exile that offender; the second
was a legal penalty of compensation or prepayment of damages to the injured; the third involved marking or labelling: “Expose, mark, wound, amputate, make a scar, stamp a sign on the face or the shoulder, impose an artificial and visible ‘handicap’, torture – in short, seize hold of the body and inscribe upon it the marks of power” (Foucault, 1994, p. 23; emphasis added). The assessment process that the student must go through has implications in terms of their degree of accessibility; thus, the student internalizes the elements of assessment as parts of their identity.

The important aspects as emphasized are the labels as “marks of power” which remain part of the ongoing medico-bureaucratic circulation of power. The acceptance of the disabled label, since as noted by most of the participants, their disability is “invisible”, and other than the attaching of a label, they are indistinguishable from the able.

The power aspect of the accommodations is crucial to understand; the accommodations are vital to some of the students’ ability to achieve in their classrooms. The ability to withhold or delay the disbursement of the accommodations can adversely affect their performance in the classroom. As noted by Folake, whose accommodation were delayed:

I had great difficulties accessing accommodations such as getting a voice recorder, laptop and assistive technology to help with my studies. When I applied at accessibility services for bursaries to buy assistive technology it takes them months (4 months or more) to approve the bursary. Sometimes, when I received the bursary the seminar is already finished which means I may have to give the money back. (Interview 7, October 14, 2016)

She noted that the power over the disabled students is great in and of itself, and withholding the necessary accommodations can create its own set of problems confronting the power structure. In severe cases the experience can be much more than annoying, as it can mean the end of an academic endeavour. Barry did not conform to the system and he says, “I was left in the dark and as a result . . . dropped out of school for 2015-2016 academic year” (Interview 9, November 18, 2016). The system of assessing students to determine academic accommodation needs was not a negative experience in totality; however, the students did encounter the shortcomings and
inherent biases that were a source of frustration, as can be expected when dealing with bureaucracy of the university. David, reflecting upon his experiences with Accessibility Services notes:

I have had a great experience thus far accessing accommodations with accessibility services. The only issue I had is the design of the learning assessment tests. I believe the process of the learning assessment test is culturally framed. I also believe that the learning assessment tests are too long, and they’re designed so that each student fails. It doesn’t a give fair or accurate reflection of the person actual ability. I have low vision, which I informed the psycho-educational assessment administrator of before the assessment, but still all of the testing materials were in small prints. The learning assessment administrator only gave me five or ten minutes to complete a task. (Interview 8, October 31, 2016)

The accommodations are dependent upon the assessment tests administered by Accessibility Services, a capitulation to the power held by the institution requiring that they surrender their individuality to the commonality of a uniform discipline or label marking them with symbolic submission. The assumption here is that students are receptacles or passive – they are what Foucault (1995) refers to as “docile bodies.” He notes that “docile bodies” rely heavily on the idea of how social institutions and various power centers use discipline and control one’s individuality. The docility of a body is forged through the various disciplinary measures that are usually brought forth to limit the actions of a person within the regulated norms (Lorde, 1994, p. 47). This type of discipline is often defined through the slow and deliberate measures that are brought forth in how powerful individuals access the human body, as well as how they integrate their norms to isolate and categorize a particular person. Foucault (1995) defines this type of discipline through the creation of docility within the individual:

Thus, discipline produces subjected and practiced bodies; docile’ bodies. Discipline increases the forces of the body (in economic terms of utility) and diminishes these same forces (in political terms of obedience). In short, it dissociates power from the body. (p. 138)

Through the direct manipulation of the body, the oppressor can ascertain the nature of the mental function of the student by creating these obstacles to their individuality. The “dissociation” of
self is part of this physical exertion of force that enables the eventual political docility and apathy that results. This is one important aspect of how power seeks to make the body submissive through various institutional means, and therefore, bring about the ideological apathy that makes a body docile in order to maintain that power. Within the large social scale, the docile body is important for people who wield this power, as they use discipline to master the physical to eventually dominate the mental or political ideology of the person. However, these assessment tests are not the true measure of their individuality, but a common threshold through which they all must pass and accept the authority to which they must submit. Assessment tests and the subsequent determination of eligibility for services are often reflective of the hierarchies of power that exist within the university setting. The testing process and respective materials are replete with cultural biases and have been noted in the participant interviews.

As noted earlier by David, “The only issue I had is the design of the learning assessment tests. I believe the process of the learning assessment test is culturally framed” (Interview 8, October 31, 2016). It is the conformance to the dominant culture that is required to access their services, and the resistance to incorporating the culture of the clients as noted by Denise, as a lack of sensitivity to the cultural norms of the Accessibility Services client, requiring a capitulation to the dominant majority cultural norms:

It almost seems to me that if you are marginalized, you have to give in to the trauma and the violence. This is the only way to get the service. And that, to me, always felt very demeaning. Being marginalized and having to access accessibility services for accommodation is traumatizing. Even though you need this help it’s traumatizing because you’re consistently going in and saying here is my heart, that’s how it beats, it’s healthy, but it does have one glitch that doesn't really beat really well. Over here on the left ventricle no one wants to do that. If I call for help, why don’t you ask me what I need? Don't say how can I help you and then when I give you a one-way answer, don't treat me like I'm trying to hide something from you. It's my cultural influence that makes me so guarded. It's not that I’m trying to hide anything. I’m just not an open person. And then, I’m talking to people who don’t look like me. (Interview 11, November 29, 2016)
In noting her cultural divergence from the accepted norm and having to accept the dominant cultural aspect of revealing personal information, as she noted, it “doesn’t make me feel good,” because she had to admit to an unfamiliar party that she needed help. It is only through the subjugation of self, an acquiescence to the dominant culture, and an acceptance of the power of the gatekeepers of statutorily mandated services and aid that she is able to access the services she needs. This is a complex process where the student can only transform into what they want to transform into if they become what the system and access to its services make the student. For the disabled student, these demands have ramifications for their identity and can conclude with the student changing in ways that they did not think would happen.

As Gilroy (2009) notes in discussing the loss of humanity when confronting the dominant culture, the subservience removes the cultural identity through the colonial attitudes of the ruling class:

Struggles against racial hierarchy have contributed directly and consistently to challenging conceptions of the human. They valorised forms of humanity that were not amenable to colour-coded hierarchy and, in complicating approaches to human sameness, they refused the full, obvious force of natural differences even when they were articulated together with sex and gender. These struggles shaped philosophical perspectives on the fragile universals that had come into focus initially on the insurgent edges of colonial contact zones where the violence of racialized statecraft was repudiated, and cosmopolitan varieties of care took shape unexpectedly across the boundaries of culture, civilization, language and technology. (p. 7)

The often open contempt with which some of the participants were viewed in attempting to access needed services made them feel as if they were cheating the system, and unless they surrendered to the dominant culture, they felt that were not worthy of supports, nor even of their legal rights. Only through accepting the power structure were they able to gain acceptance from Accessibility Services.
Normaley – Who I Am Is Co-Constructed with the University

Many students who participated in this study did not view themselves as disabled; they acknowledged a difference in learning methods, the amount of time required to complete an assignment or take a test, or a different need in terms of testing environment. The command to normalcy is shown as a dichotomy of personal perspectives and introspections, an “A” or “B” decision and demarcation, an “either/or” proposition:

Equally as ironic, the compelling and seductive character of normalcy conceals the compelling and seductive character of the margins, and it conceals this not only from its “view” but from ours as well. Normalcy accomplishes this concealment by conceiving of marginality as a kind of “nowhere” and also as a “somewhere” where no one wants to be since it is virtually uninhabitable. From the standpoint of the centre, no one desires to inhabit a disabled body, or disabled senses or minds, since to do so is tantamount to barely living at all. The centre conceives of disability as a devalued life where its only hope for even a semblance of value is to evoke the “human spirit” and to “overcome disability,” to adapt, to adjust, and to live as normally as possible. Such a conception of the relation between disability and normalcy holds out only two options for disabled people: we overcome our disabilities and are heroic or we do not and are tragic. (Titchkosky & Michalko, 2009, p. 7)

From this perspective, for many participants in this study, “disability” is not a defining characteristic – or their particular trait that qualifies them for Accessibility Services is not a deviation from the “normal” but an integral aspect of their being. This sensibility is best represented by Saga’s defiant stance of the self-affirmation “I ain’t disabled” (Interview 12, December 15, 2016), which I have mentioned before. There is not concept of a “normalcy” contained in that statement. There is a perception that disabilities make someone different from the “normal” student population.

Even among the participants there was a varying concept of “normalcy,” as Christine noted earlier: “I have a hard time dealing with what they call [being a] disabled student. I thought of ‘disabled’ as [meaning] someone who is physically impaired” (Interview 1, April 19, 2016). While she did not accept Accessibility Services’ normalcy definition, as her disability was learning-based, it offers her unique challenges in comprehension by contrasting her personal
experience with her grandfather’s, who was blind. Christine accepts that she was disabled because that disability was visible to the outside world, and this was something that she had to overcome in order to navigate a “normal” world. Consider, for example, Shakespeare’s discussion of the findings of studies that note how people with disabilities are often highly resistant to identifying themselves with their disabilities. As Shakespeare (2002) writes:

Many disabled people do not want to see themselves as disabled, either in terms of the medical model or the social model. They downplay the significance of their impairments and seek access to a mainstream identity. . . . There is also the issue of multiple identities. (pp. 20-21)

This is a fascinating finding, as it clearly parallels the experience of the participants who refuse to identify themselves by their impairments and, instead, insist upon being identified as individual human beings. In this study, the social model of disability must consider disability not only in terms of social oppression, but also in its implications for the identity of those with impairment.

Obviously, many impairments impact the lives of those who possess them. However, the question is: do these impairments define their identity? Are we more than the accidents of fate that influence the pigmentation of our skin or physiological condition?

In the construct of the power structure of the administration of Accessibility Services, the normalcy is that disabled students prove their need for services by reaffirming that they personally deviate from the normal, and thus necessitate their access to remedial services. The requisite acknowledgement that the student is not “normal” is part of the threshold discussion of eligibility for Accessibility Services. Among the normalcy aspects of the common experience with Accessibility Services is the presumed need for other forms of financial assistance available to all students with or without disabilities. The university-imposed “normal” is that disabled students are thus required to apply for financial aid through OSAP in order to be eligible to receive accommodation.
This is another form of labelling, as noted above, but also another way to further distance
the student from normalcy. As noted by Stephanie in her interview:

One of the things I thought is negative was that I would have to be eligible for
OSAP and receiving at least $1 in government loan in order to actually receive
any accommodations from accessibility services. I think that’s ridiculous. If I
have a notable disability, I think that the university should find a way to assist me
even if I’m not eligible for OSAP. I just thought that as a university they could
have been a bit better at assisting me. (Interview 4, September 14, 2016)

This conceptualization of normalcy means that the student requires accommodations and must
ascribe to their personal deviation from normalcy with regards to their physical or mental acuity,
but they must also ascribe to their financial deviation for normality requiring their enrollment in
OSAP. Therefore, in conformance with the power structure, they are not only physically or
mentally normal, but lacking financial normalcy as well. The acceptance of this is difficult for
many participants that do not consider themselves disabled, but able and requiring some
accommodations for their alternate needs in learning requiring certain accommodations. The
additional subjugating requirement to seek personal financial assistance is just another form of
labelling and marking the students as noted earlier as a form of punishment or incarceration.

Among the student participants, there is an open refusal to personally accept the labels of
normalcy imposed upon them by the social power hierarchy, as previously noted by Kimberly: “I
choose not to label myself as disabled. I do accept that I’m a Black student in the social context.
The idea of being a disabled student – I do not agree with the term because I feel that everyone’s
learning needs or learning issues that are unique to him or her” (Interview 6, October 11, 2016).
There is an unequivocal denial of personal labels and deviation from normalcy, but an
acceptance that she must bear these labels imposed upon her to receive the promised
accommodations from Accessibility Services. The common experience for the participants is that
they must accept the label and the social construct of their deviation from normalcy; however,
others choose to embrace their moniker of disabled. For example, Barry embraced the label,
using all the associated negative connotations as a badge of honour showing his personal strength to overcome what society has determined as a disadvantage and hindrance to success. From this perspective, marginalization of Blackness and disability must be understood as issues that legitimize the hierarchical system of power and privilege. The noticing of difference from the “norm” is always the making of marginality, and thus the power of normalcy is itself normalized.

It is noteworthy that the very notion of “marginality” denotes a distancing from a centre, a centre often characterized as normal. Thus, marginalization is the process of departure and distancing from this constructed norm and is propagated in the space between individuals, but also between institutions (such as universities) and individuals. I assert that marginalization in this sense is a social process done by people to other people. Despite this departure from normalcy, there are social and textual signifiers that seek to define students based on their categorization, surrounding the “abnormal” in various normalizing rules and regulations, which limits their activities and forecloses future educational possibilities. Such attempts at foreclosure are often efforts by hegemonic authorities to limit the educational possibilities signified by “Blackness” and “disability.”

**The Gatekeeper of Services – Institutional Power**

The power of institutional oppression to define the selves and bodies of Black students with disabilities is effectively as absolute as was the power of colonial masters. As one medical authority observes, with regard to the medicalization of deviant behaviours:

> Defining deviant behaviour as a medical problem allows certain things to be done that could not be otherwise considered; for example, the body may be cut open or psychoactive medications given. This treatment can be a form of social control. (Conrad, 1975, pp. 18-19)

From this perspective, Conrad’s statement illustrates the value of considering the manifestation of the social construction of the self in the form of disability. Where oppressive social forces now veil their discursive practices with regard to Blackness, they are often still open with regard to the power
they exercise over the bodies and selves of students with disabilities and the interests in promoting “social control.” Disability is rarely imagined as a way of being – instead, it is something that I believe affects being. Understanding disability as a social construction, Taylor (2011) demonstrates how the disabled person is constructed by medical and institutional power as being “abnormal” and “intolerable” – these findings are striking and, I argue, significant. Indeed, Taylor underlines this parallel when she describes the “medical and scientific colonization [of] the disabled body” (p. 194). Thus, we should be very suspicious with respect to these issues of enforcing normalized controls on identity, and Conrad’s (1992, 2011) work in this regard is conversant with Foucault’s critique of institutional powers that try to determine one’s subjectivity. Essentially, institutions are enforcing on the disabled that there is a set of constraints which define the nature of their disability. Just as there are constraints, the prognosis of what these disabilities mean is pre-determined, which then contributes to the perception of the disabled surrounding the limitations on their activity.

As Titchkosky and Michalko (2009) argue:

Disability brings normalcy into view and allows for the possibility of wondering how normalcy came about or how it was constructed in the first place. No one “normally” thinks of “normalcy.” Everyone does, however, typically take normalcy for granted, thus rarely disturbing its implicit claim as being the good life and the only life worth living. . . . Disability . . . allows for the possibility of critically interrogating this claim. (pp. 6-7)

The implications of this argument are significant, for they speak to not only of disabilities in our education institutions, but also to the underlying taken-for-granted assumptions about what/who is valuable and what/who is not in our social environments. Within the university context, this process of obscuring the origins of normalcy and disability enable both to be taken as natural or fixed “givens.” Disability and the “location” of the barriers to an individual’s achievement in his/her body are thus useful to those forces controlling education policy in our society as they serve to obscure the arbitrary foundation of privilege among the dominant elite.
As Ferri and Connor (2006) observe, because barriers are assumed to be inherent within the individual, as opposed to structural or external, the overcoming trope obscures the privilege enjoyed by the dominant group. As this privilege is obscured, the dominant group is positioned as deserving of success, rather than unfairly advantaged by virtue of their social positioning (p. 130). Thus, by constructing disabilities as deviant and rooted in bodily impairment subject to “fixing,” educational settings for social reproduction serve a useful role for social and political elites in obscuring the arbitrary basis of their power with the assumption that it – like disability – is a natural given in our society that can be taken-for-granted. Towards this end, educators “need” disability to be a natural impairment of individuals’ bodies, with the barriers to their aspirations being inherent in their bodies as well. In obscuring the cultural foundations of disabilities, educators also obscure the cultural foundations of power and wealth.

Moreover, the notion of the intersectional is a critical tool through which to re-think how the lines of identity have been drawn, but it also is valuable in how I am using critical Black studies to de-construct some of the same categorical or identity issues at work in the policing of Black disabled students in the educational system. By policing, I refer to Foucault’s (1978) critique of how institutions, such as the medical clinic, enforce disciplined discourses of understanding to be a compelling way of thinking about how the embodied person becomes subject to various definitions and terms of identity.21 I found Foucault’s (1978) analysis of how institutions, such as the medical

21 However, Foucault focused attention on medicalization and institutional power disciplines and controls of the human bodies. Gradually, the medical model – though it remains still influential in some parts of the medical and scientific establishment – gave way to a social model of disability which conceptualizes disability as a social construct developed from the ideological and discursive practices of a society. Given the fundamental insight of the social model of disability – that the concept of “disability” refers not to a physiological state so much as to a social construction – we can understand how disability exists in our contemporary mediated culture in terms of its representation. I argue that this representation has “reality” in much the same way as racist representations of racialized people have “reality” in a mediated mass culture, with both being social constructions that validate and support systemic discrimination against particular groups. In this context, the study argues that the social model of disability should be revised as conceptualizing
professionals, enforce disciplined discourses of understanding to be a compelling way of thinking about how the embodied person becomes subject to various definitions and terms of identity. Foucault (1978) writing on the history of sexuality, for example, reveals how the discourses that encouraged repression actually served to uphold a bourgeois order and economic system. He defines the relations between sex and power as one that has used ideas of prohibition, silence, and transgression in order to “discipline” or “control” bodies that fall outside of the norms of society (Foucault, 1978). Gilroy (2005) asserts that Foucault’s critique is not so distant from the above statements of colonial power, especially Fanon (1967), which exposed how domineering forces created categories of human and non-human or civilized or uncivilized in order to set up a system of institutions that could police these differences. Gilroy’s analysis of post-colonial melancholia is directly related to such post-modern critiques of institutions and cultures that attempt to “educate” subjects about what it is to be a human or what it is like to be a Black person within a more dominant culture (Gilroy, 2005). The concept of institutional power has been revealed in previous sections, noting that it is intrinsic to the ability to access the accommodations through Accessibility Services and their ability to mandate that the students seek all available forms of services regardless of whether they are needed or not in order to be eligible for accommodations. As noted by the participant Stephanie, it takes courage and determination to stand up to the institutional power, insisting on complete capitulation to their requirements and submission to obtain services; worse, there is a lack of respect and there is a racial hierarchy when accessing accommodations at accessibility services, and it has become institutionalized. As noted earlier by the participants in order to receive accommodation such as getting assistive technologies for their disability not only as a social mode of oppression, but also as a model that incorporates issues of identity.
studies, they must be eligible to receive OSAP, which is the most blatant example of control and institutionalized power.

Likewise, Foucault (1995) posits that the foundation of omnipresence in a hierarchal structure resides in his theory that it is within society as a whole that power is spread to the masses. Within this construct, the power of social relationships is part of the fabric of how people and organizations define control and the need to categorize knowledge. Foucault defines this through the understanding he has developed through the widely dispersed collusion of social relationships that stem from institutional and cultural influence (Cahill, 2000, p. 47). Within this context, the premise of power is not something that can stem from any particular part of society, but it is inherently a part of the structure of how human beings interact with one another. Although major institutions, like the military or educational institutions may be a part of the way power is distributed, it is a social “discourse” that allows for human beings to be taken into these multi-faceted systems when they adhere to a particular identity. This creates the subjective nature of power as being part of the more personal and larger interaction between social discourses that does not emanate from any single idea.

However, Foucault does not imply that power simply comes from all directions and without a purpose; some institutions impose a non-subjective and intentional discourse in which power can be distributed throughout society. In this manner, the essence of power arises from society as a whole, but it is also part of a non-subjective discourse of larger social institutions that define and enforce various norms and regulations – there is the operation of power producing its subjects.

Social Construction of Eligibility – “You Look Alright to Me”

Accessibility Services, as noted earlier, through the University guidelines, has absolute authority to determine the eligibility, appropriateness and necessity of disability accommodations
The facilitation for this bureaucratic ordering of accommodations is through Accessibility Services, and as noted earlier, there are additional requirements placed on top of the student’s disability to obtain access.

Consequently, the rights of disabled students to education are defined and “protected” not only by the law but also by policies enacted by our educational institutions, such as postsecondary institutions. In these ways, accommodations will be made to aid students with disabilities in their studies. The stated purpose of these laws and policies is to ensure that students with disabilities have the same opportunities to education as other students. However, under these laws, the most common occurrence is that the disabled student is burdened with proving that they have a disability and that a reasonable accommodation or adjustment in the teaching instruction and assessment practices of educators is both required and doable (Fuller & et. al, 2009, p. 7). The coupling of the eligibility with OSAP punishes those that do not conform to the required norms, as experienced by Barry. He states:

I had a traumatic experience with accessibility services. For example, my advisor did not submit my paper work to OSAP on time, so I was punished and suspended from receiving OSAP for one year. Having to deal with the bureaucratic system of the university made me fall behind in my studies. And my advisor told me that I should “try harder.” I asked her, how can I work harder when the university has not provided me with adequate accommodation? (Interview 9, November 18, 2016)

The notion that Barry was not succeeding because he was not “trying hard” enough rather than attempting to complete the coursework without statutory accommodations demonstrates a fundamental lack of understanding of accommodations on the part of administrators and social misgivings of why accommodations are needed in the first place.

This fundamental lack of understanding goes beyond mere ignorance of legal requirements for accommodations, and is expressed in an underlying incredulity directed at those who do not show outward manifestations of a disability. There is a social expectation that
someone with a disability should look different. This contributed a negative experience with

Accessibility Services by Stephanie:

I think I had both positive and negative experiences. I am grateful for the positive ones because they really kept me going. I had a really good advisor, but when I am doing test and exams there were some biases: they not truly supporting my learning challenges (disability). They thought I was faking it, so to speak. For example, my advisor told me I was looking “healthy today.” I think initially speaking administrators assumed that I didn’t have a learning disability. Ultimately, it was kind of like, “Why do you think you have a learning disability?” or, “did someone tell you “you had a learning disability”? as opposed to me saying, “Here are my difficulties and these are the reasons why I feel this way.” It didn’t seem like it was true to them; it didn’t seem real. (Interview 4, September 13, 2016)

The comment of “you look healthy today” and questioning her on why she thought she had a learning disability demonstrates the social construct that there is an expectation that disabled students “look different,” beyond any status as a racial minority.

The students noted that receiving accommodations from accessibility services can be challenging, sometimes both emotionally and traumatically. Thus, there is a confluence of disability being a problem that can be either “fixed” or viewed with contempt as an irritant to those who must contend with their administrative duties to render accommodations for eligible students. This seemingly uncompassionate view of individuals with disabilities is not unique to the university, as noted:

There is nothing new; disability is a problem and it is one of the many problems’ sociologists have studied, for some time. Involuntary deviance, stigmatized master status, management of a spoiled identity, passing, coping, etc., are some of the most systematic representations of disability as a problem produced by sociologists. I agree there is nothing new about treating disability as a problem. Manifestations of the problem of disability and even institutional processes of its amelioration and control are things, which sociologists have studied for many years. (Titchkosky, 2009, p. 40)

The stigmatization of their identity because of a disability is one reason many of the participants choose to delay or forgo the needed and statutorily obligatory accommodations need for them to participate in all aspects of university education.
The public knowledge of confidential information regarding disability is among the stigmatizing aspects of utilizing accommodations, as it is impossible to keep secret that a student is taking advantage of alternative testing venues. As Folake laments:

I was stigmatized and devalued for contributing in my undergraduate class discussions when my classmate rudely interrupted me. He asked, what type of disability do you have? And the professor commented by telling me another student (white) had something more important to say. Clearly, this suggests that I am intellectually inferior. And I dropped the course because I realized I wasn’t welcome in it. Being Black and disabled there is this stigma that we’re not smart enough. (Interview 7, October 14, 2016)

The accessing of accommodations is not viewed as a right for students in need, but a potential source of embarrassment, as related by Denise, a single mother and graduate student:

I found that most people including the accessibility advisors would say, “if you need accommodations, why are you here? Why not go to a community college?” That was one of their arguments to deter me from even doing an undergrad degree. And layered-on top of that was the fact that I was a single mother. So, in their eyes as a student with a disability and a single mother, it was too hard for me to develop critical and analytical thought. So why not just save the government’s money and just go to a community college because that would be better. If I tried to attain a bachelor’s degree, it is just going to take too long. It’s a waste of time. It was traumatizing. It was stigmatizing, and it was always very embarrassing. One of the greatest anxieties you have is about being looked at as a Black student. I’m a mom and a student with a disability so now if I need help, how do I approach my professor? So that my professor doesn’t look down at me and say, “another disability student” because it always felt as if I was begging for accommodations that they said was part of my right as a student — to attain help. (Interview 11, November 29, 2016)

The reluctance to access accommodations is typified by Zaine stating her reluctance to register with Accessibility Services until her last year as an undergraduate:

It wasn’t until my final undergraduate year of university that I even considered registering with Accessibility Services, due to the stigma that is often attached to persons with disabilities. I finally found the courage to register to receive accommodations in spite of the stigma, because I had come to the realization that due to my Blackness I am judged, with or without a disability. (Interview 5, October 10, 2016)

The attempts by the university to “facilitate the accommodation of individuals with disabilities so that all may share the same level of access to opportunities, participate in the full range of
activities that the University offers, and achieve their full potential as members of the University community” (University of Toronto, Academic Accommodations, 2018, p. 2).

While the processes of stigmatization function in terms of connecting individuals with “discrediting” attributes, it is important to note that this is a definitional process related to the fixed identity categories discussed above. As we have seen, identity categories are produced by regulatory authorities and have historically informed social and educational practices with regard to both Black identities and for disabled people. These categories, characterized by essentialism, obscure the complex lived identities of Black disabled persons who do not fit within the imposed binaries of society’s institutional powers. Critical Black and disability studies penetrate the cracks and gaps in these categories and allows for a more accurate, and fundamentally emancipatory, approach to identity politics for our education communities. As one of the early scholars writing on stigmatization as a sociological phenomenon observes, in order to be “normal” or “stigmatized” does not really describe people as real beings, in terms of the full expression and realization of lived lives, but instead, as “perspectives” that are generated in “social situations” (Goffman, 1963). Nonetheless, despite the goals of the accessibility program and the legislation and mandates to aid students, there is a palpable incredulity when examining their worthiness and intellectual parity with able students and those who are not racial minorities. In this critical analysis, my study of Black disabled students in the educational institution is important beyond even such issues as labelling and stigmatization of learners. Indeed, the wide differences in the definition of Blackness and disability in classroom settings represent critical evidence of the fact that disability is not a physical given but a cultural construct. For Black disabled students, understanding disability in the classroom as a complex socio-political phenomenon opens the possibility of a more complex critical analysis of inclusion and exclusion and, ultimately, a more just and progressive pedagogy for learners and educators in the 21st century classroom.
Summary

The use of Accessibility Services and the organization of accommodations for Black disabled students at the University of Toronto, as demonstrated, are a right to be enjoyed by all Canadians with disabilities, regardless of social, ethnic, and economic status. It is a universal necessity of the post-secondary educational system, and one of the fundamental rights outlined in the Ontario Human Rights code (University of Toronto, Academic Accommodations, 2018). There is no question that all eligible students should receive needed services without reservation nor resentment. It is unambiguous in the statement of the University’s policy and the law of the Province. However, in its practical application, many of societies’ shortcoming in terms of racial bias, distrust of racial minorities, and intrinsic discrimination by the able against the disabled are manifested. In the interviews of Black students with disabilities, it is demonstrated repeatedly that despite lofty elite statements to the contrary, a plantation mentality of wanting to provide assistance but maintain control of this segment of the population shine through the glossy overcoat.

I have shown that the plantation mentality is evident in several experiences of Black disabled students in the university system. The validity of the student’s disability is challenged, while accommodations which would support equity for the student are held back from the student, with the student having to prove that they should be given accommodations. The university is controlling Black disabled students by questioning their needs, which in turn has an impact on the students themselves, where they will either question their own validity or lose faith that the university system is a place where they belong – possibly both. The university takes it upon itself to espouse that they will provide accommodations and will even state in forms and documents what these accommodations are; however, students must be prepared to constantly prove that they require these accommodations. This approach to the learning environment reinforces the plantation mentality as the student continues to see the classroom experience as
being one where access to equality is controlled and for each element that would support their equal treatment, they defend their position that their different abilities make them require access.

In questioning the veracity of their disability after it has been conclusively established as per the medico-bureaucratic requirements, there is overlaid an additional requirement designed to place dominion and control over the Black disabled students through the requirement to register with OSAP. I have shown that although these efforts in most cases may not be intentional and purposeful, the subjugation of Black disabled students does occur as a matter of the bureaucratic polices and practice due to the inherent prejudices that are still replete in the university and society. The bold statement that “all may share the same level of access to opportunities” (University of Toronto, Academic Accommodations, 2018, p. 2) should have a caveat that accommodations are provided within societal expectation of the conduct of Black students. The Black disabled students interviewed for the qualitative study expressed difficulty with their studies that were attributable directly to their disability and the lack of consistent assistance with accommodations and they could not separate this from their experience of Blackness.

Therefore, these students are also faced with managing the issues or stereotypes that may arise because of interpretation of their Blackness, which could not be separated from their experiences of disability. In this way, these students felt their presence at the university was questioned because of their Blackness and disability; they were left uncertain as to what played a role and when in their marginalization. Their peers oftentimes expressed or implied that they did not truly earn their spot at the University because people with their racial background usually demonstrated difficulty with understanding educational concepts. Blackness and disability have several similarities when viewed through a societal prism. Unfortunately, these similarities are negative in that they are used as tools for marginalization and shoring up the boundaries around normalcy. This marginalization separates these students from the centre and forces them to justify their existence and place within the university setting. This separation is another form of
social oppression and amputation that has no place in the educational system. In this analysis, while we can understand the reasoning underlying the need to address the complex, multiple perspectives of different forms of oppression and marginality, the fact that recognition of this complexity results, in practice, in the overlooking of the intersectional reality of Black disabled students’ experience of oppression is unacceptable. Thus, we cannot approach or understand the disabled students’ lives and experiences if we focus exclusively on one mode of inequality without taking into consideration different modes of oppression and how they intersect relationally in their lives.

In Chapter 7, I revisit some of the key discussions in this study, including the impact of stigma and normalization of marginality through the bureaucratic disability accommodation policy and practices. I use my own narrative as a way to help revisit the problems I have discussed throughout the dissertation chapters regarding normalizing marginality in higher education. It discusses how this ongoing trail of the challenges of disability, access and the bureaucratic ordering of accommodation impact Black disabled students in the university setting. This chapter ends with concluding reflections on the research and what it means in terms of changes that must be made in order for the problems identified in this study to be addressed.
Chapter 7: Conclusion–Normalizing Marginality

Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to reflect on the findings of my research in order to understand how marginalization of Black disabled students has become normalized within higher education. People at the intersection of Blackness and disability have a long history of being marginalized. The normalization of marginality was discussed at length in the literature review. One of the key contributions of my study was identifying the way in which marginalization of people at this intersection works in the higher education setting in Canada. In this chapter, concluding remarks are made based on the findings of this research in relation to the way in which this marginality has been normalized in, and by, the bureaucracy of universities in Canada, and the way in which formal documentation is used to support this orientation. Personal experience is used in conjunction with the experience of participants in the research in order to give a holistic explanation of the way in which marginality has become normalized. The following sections characterize some of the way in which marginality has been normalized within the university system.

This study reveals that Black disabled students face many challenges related to normalization and marginality through bureaucratic procedures surrounding disability accommodations in higher education. The multi-relational marginalization experienced by Black students at the University is a phenomenon that seems to be tied to similar experiences which Black and disabled scholars have discussed over the course of the past few centuries. The marginalization that students experienced occurred in part because the nature of the marginalization was such that it had been embedded in the practices of the institution. The policy and procedure of the University supported the marginalization which Black disabled students had experienced in several unique ways; however, analysis of the experiences of these students
exposes that the ways in which the university as an institution supported their marginalization, and the discrimination they had experienced was similar to the ways in which other Black and disabled scholars had experienced institutional discrimination in the past. This is evidence that discrimination has several layers, and just as people themselves can be discriminatory and act in ways which will marginalize individuals, this can be an element of the practices of institutions in such a way that people acting as agents of the institutions in professional roles may not even notice that they are perpetuating the discrimination embedded in the systems in which they work. The Black disabled students who experience marginalization and discrimination often perceive themselves as needing to assume their rightful place and become invisible. Overall, my research is further evidence that there must be more done in order to meet the needs of the Black disabled students in institutional settings as the assembly of rights in these institutions are such that it is too easy for the structure to violate them. There is a paternalistic element which is inherent in several social structures in which we work and learn, and to achieve true equality, it is important that people work together to transcend these structural barriers, so that there can be transformation in the ways in which institutions work.

As previously discussed, my personal experiences with the accommodation evaluation and screening process with Accessibility Services aligns with several of the participants’. The insistence on labelling those who do not conform to normalcy provided an implied excuse for the differences all individuals have from one another; however, the disabled students’ differences are given a label and stigmatized from the societal label. An example of this in practice can be seen in the phenomenon of “labelling,” with its emphasis on agency and interpretation, and how marginalized students can distance themselves from stigmatized status and use their developing identities for strategic purposes (Williams, 2008, p. 93). I commiserate with the participant who defiantly stated, “I ain’t disabled,” and our collective disabilities do not define us as human beings. We are individuals; we are all “I’s.” In my personal reflection, I see that my personal
struggles with the colonial mindset and continued anti-Black racism overshadow the labels placed upon me with respect to a disability. The resistance to my personal past is, though not inconsequential, only a minor part of the resistance that myself and the participants of this study must continue to navigate. We are navigating a university plantation that feels the incessant need to label, categorize, and control a population of the student body.

**Ways in which Marginalization is Normalized**

There is a perpetuation of the marginalization of Black disabled students which remains a constant element in the education system. My research uncovered an extensive and constant theme which exists where Black disabled students are marginalized by faculty and administration. The nature of this marginalization is such that it creates a learning environment where the student perceives mentors as not trusting them and where requests for accommodations are viewed as unreasonable by staff. The design of the system is such that the bureaucratic policy and procedure make it difficult to obtain access to accommodations, and this makes the performance of students in the classroom who are Black and/or disabled more difficult. However, as Titchkosky (2011) asserts, “We can wonder about what is really meant when people talk about access, struggle for inclusion, or even get surprised when issues of access arise” (p. 9). The learning environment is a threatening space rather than a safe space where students feel as though being Black or disabled makes them a target for discrimination by their professors and the administrators whose duty it is to facilitate their access to resources to which the non-disabled and non-Black have ready access.

My study uncovered that Black disabled students at the university experience a high degree of discrimination at the hands of professors and administrators, to the point where the stigma drives them to either not mention their disabilities or to hide their disabilities. The research uncovered the feelings of Black disabled students in the university system as being such
that they see their opportunities as coming with significant barriers. These barriers are microaggressions which make the learning environment hostile for the students (Levchak, 2018; Pierce, 1970; Solorzano, Ceja, & Yosso, 2000). A prime example of this was from the twelve interviews conducted where the participant noted that the university boasts that they are diverse; however, anti-Black racism has become normalized to the point where peers, administrators and faculty do not see this abuse. Speaking from my own perspective, my own experience with faculty has led me to similar beliefs.

Not only is the marginalization of Black disabled students perpetuated by the education system, but it is also embedded in the nature of its function. My study shows that the operations of marginalization and discrimination in the educational institution are not simply “accidents” of social interaction, but are processes that serve the interests of powerful institutions. The education system is designed in such a way that faculty are expected to monitor and surveil student performance individually and as a group. One way in which this is achieved is through inquiry in the classroom. One of the interviewees experienced microaggression in the classroom when their professor referred to some students as “smart monkeys,” which for some students in the class this was a dehumanizing comment because of their experience with being referred to as animals because of their race. The lack of sensitivity of faculty to this issue is a microaggression because it systematizes the idea that students can be broken down into groups of animals for the description of how students perform in the classroom and what the nature of their ability may be. For Black disabled students this can be a threat to the way in which they perceive the educational institution because it contributes to the idea that students are not really people, and that the reason for the teacher-student paradigm is that the student is an animal that must be broken by the professor. This microaggression can also lead to implications drawn by the student regarding whether they are a “smart monkey” or a “not-smart monkey,” which for the student would be even more challenging for the nature of the education experience, primarily because the student
would see themselves as being an animal because of race and an animal with a lack of ability because of disability or Blackness.

As marginalization and discrimination of Black disabled students has become an essential element of the nature of the function of the education system, it should be considered a complex issue. There are no simple solutions for the problems caused by the marginalization in turn caused by the structure and processes embedded within the education system; however, it is important to recognize that the problem exists and to begin to theorize on the ways in which this phenomenon could be confronted and dismantled. There is no panacea for the problems created by the marginalization and discrimination inherent in the education system; however, it is important to begin now with exploring what potential solutions exist and the ways in which these solutions may be implemented in order to properly address the problems. In my own experience, the classroom can provide several challenges, and the administration of policy and procedure in the university setting can further facilitate the nature of the challenges which exist and the difficulties for the ways in which the barriers created by a lack of accommodation and the ways in which policy may be manipulated by administration can make the work of students increasingly difficult.

Reflecting on personal experiences with being both disabled and Black in the university setting, my experiences with challenges in the university setting associated with the way the system works and how people think of the Black and disabled were similar with those that participated in this research. However, I feel that a discussion of my own experiences can shed further light on the feelings that the Black and disabled have when participating in the university system. The university system is one which acts both with ableism and anti-Black racism. The participants in my research expressed instances where the system was racist and ableist against them, just as agents of the system such as faculty and administrators shared the same behaviours. Holistically, the system follows a colonial path in which racist and ableist views are accepted,
and there is still a lack of mechanisms present in the system to protect those who are victims of the system. The microaggressions that I experienced in the university setting were significant in nature and a reflective discussion of those experiences situated within the discussion of the challenges that students face in academia can facilitate greater understanding of the difficulties that students must experience when they seek to become academics. However, people within the system continue to utilize their power in such a way that it would create barriers to their learning experience through systemic policy and procedure.

**In the Skin of a Black Man**

O my body, make of me always a [wo]man who questions! (Fanon, 1967, p. 232)

Surveillance is nothing new to Black folks. It is the fact of anti-Blackness [in the education institutions] . . . Under these conditions of terror and the violent regulation of Blackness by way of surveillance, the inequities between those who were watched over and those who did the watching are revealed. The violence of this cumulative gaze continues in the post-slavery era . . . when enactments of surveillance reify boundaries along racial lines, thereby reifying race [Blackness], and where the outcome of this is often discriminatory and violent treatment. Of course, this is not the entire story of surveillance, but it is a part that often escapes notice. (Browne, 2015, pp. 8-21)

As a Black disabled student and reflecting on my own personal experiences and the experiences of students who participated in this study, I am able to feel what Fanon (1967) is saying about his body that makes him a man who always questions. One way these questions arise is when the body is met by the gaze of the other. Fanon also “prays” to his body; he prays for those questions, which relates to how the gaze of others makes one into a question, but he comes to question that he has been made questionable by the gaze of others. I question what harm is done by accommodating Black disabled students so that they are able to perform alongside, or on the margins to, students who are not disabled. I ask why it is that I, as a Black man, would require a watchful eye; why school policy related to security would change, thus removing my access to accommodation. These are personal questions, however, upon reflection
of the findings of this research, it would appear that others likely ask the same questions. Personal experience as marginalized people contribute to our understanding of the perceptions that the world has about a Black person. The evidence which backs it up is in the nature of how we must prove our disability as though accommodations are things which all students desire. In reflecting upon Browne (2015) related to the ideas on surveillance and the ways in which Black men are surveilled, I consider my own experiences where my own university would watch to make sure I was working and not sleeping. As a Black disabled man, it is difficult to imagine what kind of damage the school would believe I could do – but I know the Chair was thinking that far ahead.

In mid-December 2017, while working on my dissertation in the office of Disability Studies Research, the Department Chair entered the office. She requested that we speak privately. The Department Chair informed me that she was told that I had been spending more hours in the Department than what would be considered normal and that it was possible that I was living in the office. On its face, this would be a reasonable discussion to have with a worker who was also engaged in academic study if there were some staff who believed that I was spending the degree of time in the office that I was because I was deeply involved in academic study; however, there was no other evidence that I had been using the office for living quarters. The only evidence that the office was being used for anything other than workspace was the length of time I would occupy the space. Rather than approaching me to determine if I was too involved in academic projects, she sought to question whether I was misusing the office for my own purpose. As a disabled person lacking accommodations and requiring the use of assistive technology that only the office held, it was necessary to work in the office for long hours, sometimes until 3:00am. This being pulled aside and questioned was an example of the microaggressions that engaged Black and disabled scholars’ experience in the school. The scholar’s efforts to overcome a lack of accommodations where students with disabilities have a
lack of access to resources are met by questions regarding a misuse of resources, and the lack of adequate accommodation is not questioned nor even acknowledged. In this instance, the Department Chair was treating me, a Black disabled student in their 5th year without funding, as a problem.

The Department Chair was informed during the conversation about the lack of resources that I have had to deal with and that I was in my 5th year without funding, while expected to complete my dissertation process in the same amount of time as non-disabled students. I required the resources in the office, and the office is a space that I had the right to occupy; however, the Department Chair sought to challenge my right to occupy the office. She asked whether I have the assistive software needed to work on the project at home. The Department Chair further pursued the idea that the office was being used as living quarters, while there was still no evidence and now a reasonable explanation for the use of the office was provided. As a disabled student, the challenges that the Department Chair continued to approach me with made it increasingly evident that her interest was in preventing me from having access to the accommodations that I require, and that she was interested in using the policy and procedure of the university as a way of doing so. She inquired about how staff and security could not know whether I was sleeping in my office if the office door was locked. The Department Chair informed me that I have the privilege to use the office, however, I could only use the office if sitting around my desk, if I did not have the privilege of using the couch to lay upon, and that the couch would be removed from the office. I asked the Chair why she was keen to remove the couch from the Disability Studies Research office and she said, “it is her job as the chair to protect the Department.” The denial of the privilege of having a couch in an office where not only disabled staff work but disabled research is performed, and therefore, disabled and non-disabled students may use the office, exemplified the lack of effort to accommodate students who have different needs.
From this point forward, staff and security in the department behaved in a way which made me feel as though I was not welcome in a department where I had served as a researcher for both my MEd and PhD – seven years – and where I was to complete research related to the topic of marginalization of Black disabled students. Through January to April, when working late, a security guard would knock loudly on the office door. The knocking was disturbing and contributed to anxious feelings, especially at night. When using the ground floor cafeteria, security would closely watch my behaviour while taking notes when seeing me. This came to a head on April 5, 2018 when I was carded by security and informed that because of a change in Department policy, I would need to leave my office, and that I did not have the privilege of working in my office past 12:00am. This barrier is evidence of the way in which staff used the bureaucracy of the school as a way to prevent me from diligently working on my research project, and instead forcing me to leave my office at 12:00am while working on the project.

This barrier is evidence of the way in which ableist and racist agents within the university system will work with the bureaucratic system in such a way that it would prevent students who require special accommodations from having the right to work in their office space to complete projects. The accommodations required are such that it would facilitate completion of the project on time. The university is not open to either giving me the time I need in order to complete the project on time or providing me the privilege of using the technologies that I require which are not available at home. For this reason, there are substantial barriers that come with the lack of accommodations which contribute to a difficulty in the learning environment where my efforts are limited by the Department invoking policies which appear to be security measures designed to prevent Black disabled students from working on projects in response to belief that office space is being used for purposes other than working on school projects. Overall, this is a traumatic series of events that created synthetic barriers to the learning experience which never needed to be created to begin with.
According to Titchkosky (2007), the fact that education institutions are the arbiters of the interests of the dominated body – or, more precisely, arbiters of the interests of privilege operating in the guise of the collective – allow us to understand why “vulnerability” is such a semiotically-loaded meme in our culture (p. 7). In understanding this ontological marginalization and erasure, we need to understand how they are dependent upon the fact that institutional operations are obscured. That is, disability becomes a tragic impairment and a non-viable status within institutions that construct some member’s privilege as “natural” – one of the most promising paths of resistance is to reveal the artifice underlying this construction. In other words, “treat disability [and Blackness] as an interpretive issue” (Titchkosky, 2007, p. 9). As it is in our collective interests to understand and appreciate disability, strategies to disrupt the “habit worlds” of racist and ableist discourses can be seen as serving the common good in challenging the institutional powers structure. Indeed, the success of this strategy can be seen in the counter-narratives explored by Bell (2003b) – where the academic communities take it upon themselves to resist the colonizing power of hegemonic institutional power. Critics in the field of education note that education institutions have long been used by hegemonic power in societies to perpetuate values and standards of critical concern to those forces.

**Concluding Reflections**

It is important to consider the cultural role of the disabled in most societies, where the disabled are considered to have a problem which requires solving; thus, the disabled are problems which would require those who are not disabled to solve them as problems. But the disabled are not problems and should not be viewed through a paternalistic lens where ableist and racist policies place the disabled in a position where they depend on able-bodied people “fixing” them or designing a path through which they must live their lives. This is not a socially just approach to the position of the disabled in society and is regressive in nature as it supposes
that the able-bodied (as they may be) have power and influence through their able-bodiedness that the disabled do not have (Michalko, 2002). The challenge for society goes beyond the dismantling of the elements of a system which supports ableism and anti-Black racism to the point where the vestiges of these phenomenon could be removed, and also requires a fundamental change to the way in which people view the Black disabled person. We are seen as a problem while asking for little compared to what we can offer society. The Black disabled individuals are capable of doing great things in life, however, the current paradigm in which our institutions exist are such that we are not able to achieve our total potential. Black disabled people are stuck behind in a system that does not support their performance or growth as people. Rather, the systems are structured to support white middle-class able-bodied students, while the problems and barriers faced by Black disabled students make it difficult for them to succeed academically. For instance, my experience was one where both microaggressions within the policy and procedure of the school as well as racist and ableist views of faculty and administration threatened my ability to be successful as a student.

As Levchak (2018) notes, when Black individuals experience microaggression, they are symptomatic of the broader social problem of white supremacist thought, institutional anti-Black racism, and hatred that fuels racially motivated macroaggressions, bullying, intimidation and harassment with physical violence (p. 7). The systemic oppressions by white supremacy were evident at every turn of my attempts at academic progression and success, all too often contributing to the violence and trauma of being a Black man in academia. The paternalistic and plantation mentality of the university and its agents were disruptive to my experience and based on the primary research featured in my dissertation, and have been disruptive for several other students at the institution (McKittrick, 2013). Prior scholarly work, the narratives of Black disabled people over the course of the past two centuries and the current work all align in a way which describes a consistent theme where those in power seek to maintain that power by
imposing a hierarchy where social assistance becomes a tool with strings attached and help that comes from agents of the system becomes a justification for ableism and anti-Black racism. As Fanon (1967) notes, racism and colonialism depend in no small way on Euro-American power convincing Blacks of their own inferiority. In many such cases, for even the Black man, white is the colour – he has always been told – of power and acceptance (p. 9). White being the “default” renders people of other races, cultures and heritages inherently flawed or diminished. In a very subtle yet important way, we can see that the power of the university lies in its capacity to not only project and support power, but also to conceal it.

I can attest to the feelings that participants in this research felt. Participants felt discriminated against, and the cross-sectional marginalization that they had felt as being both Black and disabled were unique lived experiences for each person, however, the overarching themes remained consistent. My own lived experience was similar in nature to that of those who participated in this study in that both the system and agents of the system acted in a way which was both racist and ableist towards me. Having my department Chair behave in such an antagonistic way was distressing. The only way that I could feel was as though I was seen as a problem that needed to be solved when my only objective was intellectual growth. Her behaviour towards me was not consistent with her behaviour towards White or able-bodied students. The system supported her behaviour as she was able to have security staff monitor and surveil my activities, even while there was no reason to believe that I was taking advantage of my access to assistive technology in the building for anything other than to complete my project. As Browne (2015) argues that surveillance is the lived experiences of Blackness in “which surveillance is practiced, narrated,” and normalized through acts of violence (p. 9), she also points out that “the organizational framework of our present human condition that names what is and what is not bounded within the category of the human, and that fixes and frames Blackness as an object of surveillance” (p. 8). The system was exploited by staff in such a way that their racist and ableist
attitudes were rationalized. My accomplishments and documented progress on this project should stand as rationale enough to accept that I was completing my project in earnest; however, given the design of the education system and the attitudes of staff, I was subject to marginalization on par with what someone who had not done anything to earn the trust of the system and those who are agents of the system should have. I am not the only one, however, my experiences should be reflected upon as further evidence of the ways in which racist attitudes permeate through the structure of policy and procedure and are made to flesh through the behaviour of faculty, administration and security staff. This is a disappointing finding, nonetheless, in conjunction with other findings in my research, appears to be common in academic institutions.

It is difficult to speculate based on these findings alone, or even in light of other peripheral research in the area of anti-Black racism and ableism in educational institutions, why it is that the system continues to work in the way it works, even while academics and professionals both are cognizant that these problems exist and that there must be a concerted response to them in order for there to be a satisfactory conclusion to this problem. As Mitchell and Snyder (2000) noted, “nearly every culture views disability as a problem in need of a solution” (p. 47), and upon reflection of previous literature and the findings of the current study, it appears that this is a consistent sentiment felt in academia in terms of the ways in which students are approached. As a Black disabled man, the education system is designed in such a way that policy and procedure are structured as though I must be solved. The nature of assistance and accommodation is such that there is a belief that effort must be taken in order to accommodate me, and that to support my plea for accommodation, there must be documentation and bureaucracy that supports the notion that I require assistance. The agents of the system, the faculty and the administration – in too many cases, these people facilitate a continued stigma which will follow the disabled student, even while the student only requires simple accommodations which will support equal access with able-bodied students.
This research uncovered the sentiments of disabled students where their perception was that faculty often will marginalize them and their requirements. This is a violation of social justice in the education system where engaged students willing to learn should have reasonable accommodations. As a Black disabled man, I am not a problem in need of a solution, I am a student in need of accommodation because I am made to function in a system that does not imagine disability and Blackness as essential to its way of being. Students with disabilities struggle for inclusion and reasonable accommodations while another struggle is occurring subtextually: a struggle also to define their identity and to learn who they are as people with disabilities. As a Black man, I am particularly cognizant of issues of discrimination and prejudice, and for this reason, my above experience impacted me by expanding my understanding of the struggles for access and equality in our society.

Being a Black man is also not a rationale for the behaviour of staff where I would be treated as though I do not belong in spaces of higher education. The completion of the degree programs which I have completed at the Baccalaureate and Master’s level is evidence that I am a scholar engaged in learning. Accomplishing the degree of performance that I have at this school up to this point should be evidence enough that I should not have to worry about staff or security monitoring and surveilling my activities. Without evidence that I could pose a threat to the safety and security of the institution, it is blatant anti-Black racism and an assumption that, because of the skin I am in, I do not belong in the university environment. While there is a lack of evidence supporting the harassment and surveilling I experienced, there is also evidence that other Black students have had similar experiences compared to the recent instances of anti-Black racism and harassment in higher education institutions such as the University of Yale and Florida. For example, a white Yale University student saw a Black graduate student sleeping in the common room of their dorm and called police, effectively racially profiling her. The student was interrogated by campus police officers and carded (Griggs, May 12, 2018, p. 1). Similarly, Black
students from the University of Florida, who were celebrating their graduation, were violently grabbed and pushed offstage by the US Marshal (Wootson Jr., May 7, 2018). In each of these incidents, Black students are reproduced as though we do not belong in spaces of higher education. These incidents appear to provide evidence that higher education has a pattern of practicing and/or facilitating anti-Black racism and serves to highlight the symbolic status of Blackness as a form of outsiderness (Mignolo, 2012; Bhabha, 1994). Moreover, I argue that anti-Black racism is ingrained in the hearts and minds of some people and having economic, political and class privilege power over certain people is a potent recipe for reinforcing racism and exclusion in higher education. Anti-Black racism in higher education is important especially for people in positions of authority and especially where one’s freedom depends on fairness and equity.

As Levchak (2018) reminds us, anti-Black racism is embedded in everyday interactions of Black students’ experiences “when they are watched, followed, or surveilled by members of the academic community and law enforcement as though [we] are dangerous or don’t belong” (p. 26). In particular, these injuries are, of course, the product of a general practice of anti-Black racist culture that normalizes the violence, surveillance, assaults and isolation of Black disabled students in these plantation colonial institutions (Wynter, 2003; Mckittrick, 2011; Fanon, 1967; Browne, 2015). However, given the violence bestowed upon Black male bodies in society, there is irony in the fact that we are looking to the university to get the tools to do better in the world, yet it is in academy that lies the same dangers. According to Walcott (2016), “Black life is lived in the constant … [danger] of violence on the road to death” (p. 192). He is highlighting the many lives of Black men who end up being murdered. Furthermore, Fanon (1963) argues that “violence … governed the order of the colonial world” and that the initial contact between oppressor and oppressed was “coloured by violence” (p. 50), concluding that it is only logical that violence is necessary to conclude this process. As Hill-Collins (2017) observes, “social institutions routinely [reproduce] power hierarchies where violence is vested less in speech but rather in
bureaucratic action and custom” (p. 1463). I would argue that institutions are, by definition, socio-political constructions created and maintained by violence to ensure the power structure and control – for example, on Black disabled bodies.

Fiske (1998) argues that surveillance is also a way of enforcing normalcy, “where those who have been marginalized in to the ‘abnormal’ have surveillance focused more intensely upon them” (p. 81). This statement is reflective of my encountered with the Department’s Chair, where surveillance reifies the social construct of my Blackness and disability in the University (Lyon, Ball & Haggerty, 2012, p. 72). Ultimately, this racist equation explains, at least in part, the deep cultural fear of Black men that inform Western culture to this very day. It must be acknowledged that Fanon was writing over a half-century ago about the treatment of Black men as threatening simply by reason of our Blackness, and thus sinfulness. Likewise, Fanon recounts travelling on a train in Paris in the 1950s, when he painfully experienced the physical reality of his colonized body, “as one that has always already been transformed by the negative stereotypes placed upon [his Blackness], into a subhuman reality” (Wynter, 1999, p. 21; Fanon, 1967). Upon seeing a young white boy, the boy points at him and cries to his mother, “Mama, see the Negro! I’m frightened!” Thus, Fanon further asserts that, “Now they were beginning to be afraid of me” (p. 112). However, Black individuals today still internalize – to a significant degree – the psycho-social representation and visible representation of our Blackness as a force that is inherently disruptive and threatening of social order.

In social space, as Goffman (1967) observes, we all live within a “world of social encounters”. In the course of these encounters, an individual – as a social self – attempts to “act out” a particular pattern of behaviours by which those the individual interacts with gain an impression of the individual. Goffman (1967) contends that it does not really matter if a person intends to act out these behaviours and acts or not, as the end result is the same in that people gain an overall image of oneself. The faculty and administration in these schools behave in a way that is entirely
consistent with one another to the point where Black students should be prepared for a system where they must deal with behaviours of their mentors and the people that run institutions creating barriers and pressure that people who are non-racialized do not have to experience. This is an unacceptable, albeit common occurrence and we should not be forced to experience this treatment because of our identity. We must all work and live our lives in a culture that – for Blacks and people with disabilities – defines and regulates our identities. Nonetheless, there is the possibility that we can define spaces in the margins where we can make our own language, culture, discourse and assume control of who we are as people.

Consequently, the racist and ableist attitudes of agents of the system are supported by the policies and procedures entrenched within the bureaucracy of the university system, just as the policies and procedures embedded within the bureaucracy of the system support the racist and ableist attitudes of agents of the system. This is an iterative phenomenon, and even as there are token efforts by those within the system to provide examples of change, the perception that change is happening within the system is just as detrimental to the Black disabled student as the system’s structure and the agent’s attitudes are to the success of students working within it. True, substantial change cannot happen without an approach to the system where there is a fundamental dismantling and realignment of the elements within the system and the adjustment of the attitudes of agents. The disabled can no longer be perceived to be problems which require solutions, they must be appreciated because of their diverse lived experiences which they bring to the classroom and their unique abilities. The system must be designed to accommodate needs and not to stigmatize those who have needs. Black students should not be treated as though they are potential criminals that require monitoring, and staff should not rely on bureaucracy as a rationale for racist activity in the approach taken to students. The current paradigm simply does not support achievement of equality, and the nature of the changes required to get to that point remain quite far from being realized. The cultural norm where people with disabilities are seen as
problems in need of solutions “situates people with disabilities in a profoundly ambivalent relation to the cultures and stories they inhabit” (Mitchell & Snyder, 2000, p. 47). Successful change must confront this consistency that has been deeply embedded within most every culture in order for successful transformation to happen.

Nonetheless, the stratification of Canadian society, along the lines of disability, Blackness and class remains pressing, and these strata are reproduced in educational institutions. In this sense, educational systems are reflections of anti-Black racism remaining in the larger society. It is only by opening up the discussion of Blackness to these other interpretative categories of social oppression and injustice that we can achieve institutional change. Black identity is undeniably a social and political construct; it is important to understand how both oppressors and the resisting forces advocating social and political justice conceptualize the Black identity in relation to the physical body. This analogy between the role of education globally as a reinforcement of colonial and corporate power upon a colonized Black disabled body, and the role of Canadian education in constructing normalcy as able-bodied in the classroom and imposing this value system as normative upon students with disabilities, allows us to understand the profound and negative impact of this value system upon students. I am suggesting that this impact goes far beyond stigmatizing or labelling students. Along with other disability scholars, we witness the construction of normalcy in the classroom – with able-bodies as normative – and how it can result in an entire cohort of Black disabled students continuing to see their “human capital” as being of secondary worth to able-bodied Canadians (Wotherspoon, 2014; Rizvi, 2009). The long-term damage of this system to Canadian society can be inferred, again by analogy, when we consider the worldwide effect of the damage done by colonialism and unchecked corporate hegemony.

Behind my work here is the assumed existence of a hegemonic educational system in Toronto and globally exported constructs of Blackness and disabilities as problems in need of a solution, and “for which solutions must be sought” (Titchkosky & Michalko, 2009, p. 2). Of
course, while the historical record suggests that education systems in Western countries have tended to serve the interests of class and cultural elites, nonetheless there exist many educators who do not want “disability” to be anything, and who in fact recognize it as a phenomenon of social exclusion. It is truly remarkable that the marginalized and oppressed Black disabled student can be held to be solely responsible for their own marginalization and social exclusion. Thus, the marginalized learn their “place” in education, but most importantly, they learn that they may never be equal. Indeed, the only hope that they are given of even approaching acceptance is to disavow and destroy their own selves and seek equality. What is clear is that education is used in many forms to normalize oppression and like law, to set in place a plantation colonial system, which nonetheless asserts and reaffirms the inherent superiority of the oppressor (McKittrick, 2013). Evidence in my research suggests that students at the intersection of Blackness and disability face problems and structural barriers in the university environment that other students at other intersections will never face. In this context, in order “to implement social change that embraces” inclusion and equity in the university system, we can begin to learn from the experiences of marginalized students who occupy multiple disadvantaged positions within educational institutions (Titchkosky, 2011, p. 12).

As I have demonstrated, how disability and Blackness are culturally constructed allows us to also explore how normalcy is similarly culturally constructed, and yet obscured, as a taken-for-granted foundation for social, economic and cultural privilege in our society. In disrupting the university systems of power and inequity, critical Black and disability studies are effective as an equity resource in that they illustrate methods to challenge ableism, racial discrimination and oppression. It must be acknowledged that institutional discrimination, ableism and anti-Black racism are normalized and deeply embedded in university policies, practices and patterns. However, the ongoing institutional discrimination, marginalization, anti-Black racism and exclusion experienced by Black disabled students has given these students a “unique kind of
burden which is both ‘symbolic’ and ‘material,’ derived from the notion of . . . Blackness or [disability] as a cultural trope and a set of subject positions” (Mapedzahama, & Kwansah-Aidoo, 2017, p. 5; see Farrugia, 2010). Critical Black studies theorists suggest that anti-Black racism and institutional discrimination in Canadian society is a complex and insidious phenomenon that cannot be easily combatted. This is especially so given the denial of its existence by the Canadian state. Thus, the fact that racism has clear economic “value” for the capitalist corporate elite of our society is all the more troubling. Given the deep roots of racism and racist exclusion in our culture, together with the “usefulness” of the practice of excluding vulnerable Black disabled students from full participation in university environments, the challenges of anti-racist action and ableism in our society are arguably as great as they ever were in the past – only different in complex ways. This analysis allows us not only to understand how people talk about Blackness in our culture, but how this talk, this policy and these practices are deeply implicated in the power dynamics of our society and, in particular, in structures of domination based on coloniality, disability and normalcy. From this perspective, stigma and the normalization of marginality in academia is a complex social problem with no easy solution. The problem of accommodation and marginalization of Black disabled students is not only perpetuated by the university system but is also part of how it functions normally. My study found that the University of Toronto lags behind in providing accessible accommodation to students with disabilities. Accommodation can be understood as a systemic process of marginalization.

Accommodation is power that administrators hold over students’ heads to establish control and illustrates that systemic marginality is a default position for Black disabled students. Moreover, accommodation is a form of power operating through the normative orders of university bureaucratic processes (Nguyen, 2015; Titchkosky, 2011). In Titchkosky’s (2011) words, power is used as a “justification to perform acts of discrimination and exclusion”; it is also to enforce normalcy as a mechanism allowing for the various ways of saying that disability
or Blackness is an unexpected non-participant, or even a negligible entity (p. 86). Thus, power is used as a way to marginalize these students, particularly in the scope of their Black bodies.

For these educators seeking broader cultural change and socially just pedagogies, the classroom represents a critical avenue to long-term success. The distinctions made between Blackness or the disabled and the abled are a part of what should be a serious reflection and examination on how to change the discourse surrounding education, access, marginality, accommodation and pedagogical action. It is only by opening up the discussion of Blackness and disability in higher education as a form of social oppression and injustice that we may achieve social change.

This dissertation offers an interdisciplinary contribution to the fields of Black studies and disability studies as well as policy studies and contributes to discussions of the systemic inequity and the lack of supports available for students with disabilities in higher education.
References


Barnes, M., & Wade-Wooley, L. (2007). Where there’s a will there are ways to close the achievement gap for children with learning difficulties. *Orbit, 37*(1).


Hanisch, C. (2006). *The personal is political: The women’s liberation movement classic with a


University Press.


Appendix A: University of Toronto Ethics Approval

PROTOCOL REFERENCE # 32658
March 10, 2016

Dr. Tanya Titchkosky
DEPT OF HUMAN, SOC SC & SOC JUSTICE
EDUCATION
OISE/UT

Mr. Leroy Baker
DEPT OF HUMAN, SOC SC & SOC JUSTICE
EDUCATION
OISE/UT

Dear Dr. Titchkosky and Mr. Leroy Baker,

Re: Your research protocol entitled, "Blackness and disability in higher education"

ETHICS APPROVAL

Original Approval Date: March 10, 2016
Expiry Date: March 9, 2017
Continuing Review Level: 1

We are writing to advise you that the Social Sciences, Humanities, and Education Research Ethics Board (REB) has granted approval to the above-named research protocol under the REB’s delegated review process. Your protocol has been approved for a period of one year and ongoing research under this protocol must be renewed prior to the expiry date.

Any changes to the approved protocol or consent materials must be reviewed and approved through the amendment process prior to its implementation. Any adverse or unanticipated events in the research should be reported to the Office of Research Ethics as soon as possible.

Please ensure that you submit an Annual Renewal Form or a Study Completion Report 15 to 30 days prior to the expiry date of your current ethics approval. Note that annual renewals for studies cannot be accepted more than 30 days prior to the date of expiry.

If your research is funded by a third party, please contact the assigned Research Funding Officer in Research Services to ensure that your funds are released.

Best wishes for the successful completion of your research.

Yours sincerely,

Matthew Brower, Ph.D.
REB Chair

Research Oversight and Compliance Office - Human Research Ethics Program
McMurtrie Building, 12 Queen’s Park Crescent West, 2nd Floor, Toronto, ON M5S 1S8 Canada
Tel: +1 416 946-3273 Fax: +1 416 946-5763 ethics.review@utoronto.ca http://www.research.utoronto.ca/for-researchers-administrators/ethics/
Appendix B: Interview Guide for Student

BLACKNESS AND DISABILITY IN HIGHER EDUCATION

A University Doctoral Project

Student Interview Questions

1. Please tell me about your experience of being a Black disabled student at the University of Toronto?

2. What has accessing accommodation been like for you?

3. Have you had any accommodation experiences with administrators? If yes, what has this been like?

4. Have you had any accommodation experiences related to professors or TA’s? If yes, what has this been like?

5. In your experience, are there any experiences of marginalization in the university that might be related to being a Black disabled student? If yes, can you tell me a bit more about this?

6. In your perception, what factors do you think have shaped your university experiences?

7. Do you experience Blackness and disability playing out at the University of Toronto in any other ways, or ways you haven’t mentioned yet?
Appendix C: Recruitment Posters

Blackness and Disability in Higher Education

Are you Black, experience disability, enrolled as a student at the University of Toronto and are 18 years or older?

IF YOU ANSWERED YES TO THE QUESTION

Please consider participating in this Ph.D. research project

$5 Tim Horton’s Gift Certificate for Compensation

To participate or for more information, please contact

Leroy at XXXXX or Email: XXXXXXXXXXX@utoronto.ca
Appendix D: Student Letter of Informed Consent

BLACKNESS AND DISABILITY IN HIGHER EDUCATION

A University Doctoral Project
Informed Consent

You are being asked to participate in a doctoral research project. By signing your name, you acknowledge that you have read and understood the information provided in the Letter of Invite and that you give your informed consent to participate in an interview regarding Blackness and Disability in Higher Education. This informal interview may take an hour to complete and will take place on a day, and at a time and location on any of the University of Toronto campus that is convenient to you.

I want to let you know that your participation in this research is voluntary and that you have the right to withdraw at any time. You can end the interview at any time or refuse to answer any question. Simply contact me by phone, email or in person if you wish to discontinue your participation. In such event, any information that you share with me in the interview will be destroyed. There will be no negative consequences attached to either declining to participate or withdrawing from participation in the project. If you choose, I will be the only one with access to your identity, which will be kept confidential. Interview data, interview recordings and transcripts will be kept in a password-protected area of my restricted-access computer and locked filing cabinet.

There is a $5 Tim Horton’s gift certificate to compensate for arriving at the interview. Moreover, you will be able to share your experiences and perspectives in a confidential and non-judgmental manner. Your participation will be valuable to my research and you will contribute to the body of knowledge on Blackness and disability in higher education.

If you have any questions about this project, please contact me at XXXXXX@utoronto.ca or my thesis supervisor Dr. Tanya Titchkosky, at XXXXXXXX@utoronto.ca. If you have any questions about your rights as a research participant, please contact the University of Toronto Office of Research Ethics by phone XXXXX, fax XXXXXXX, or mail (McMurrich Building, 12 Queen’s Park Crescent West, 2nd Floor, Toronto, ON M5S 1S8).
Interviewee  Print Full Name  

I give consent for my interview to be audio recorded:  ☐ YES  ☐ NO

I choose to:  ☐ disclose my name  ☐ remain anonymous

If you choose to remain anonymous, would you like to choose a pseudonym:

__________________________

Giving of Consent

I have read this consent form and I understand what is being requested of me as a participant in this study. I freely consent to participate. I have been given satisfactory answers to my questions. The investigator provided me with a copy of this form.

Interviewee Signature  ____________________________ Date ____________

Interviewer Signature  ____________________________ Date ____________
Appendix E: Student Letter of Invite

BLACKNESS AND DISABILITY IN HIGHER EDUCATION

A University Doctoral Project

Student Letter of Invite

January 10, 2016

I am conducting doctoral research on the experiences of Black disabled students at the University of Toronto. If you identify as Black and experience disability, and enrolled as a student at the University of Toronto and over 18 years old, please consider participating in my research project.

During the interview, I will ask you questions about barriers or access to accommodations, barriers accessing course materials, assistive technology, Blackness and disability. If you would like, I can send you the questions ahead of time, which will serve as a guide and starting point for the interview. This informal interview may take an hour to complete, and will take place at a day, time location on any of the University of Toronto campus that is convenient to you.

There is a $5 Tim Horton’s gift certificate to compensate for arriving at the interview.
Moreover, you will be able to share your experiences and perspectives in a confidential and non-judgmental manner. Your participation will be valuable to my research and you will contribute to the body of knowledge on Blackness and disability in higher education.

I want to let you know that your participation in this research is voluntary and that you have the right to withdraw at any time. You can end the interview at any time or refuse to answer any question. Simply contact me by phone, email or in person if you wish to discontinue your participation. In such an event, any information that you share with me in the interview will be destroyed. There will be no negative consequences attached to either declining to participate or withdrawing from participation in the project. If you choose, I will be the only one with access to your identity, which will be kept confidential. Interview data, interview recordings and transcripts will be kept in a password-protected area of my restricted-access computer and locked filing cabinet.
If you have any questions about this project, please contact me at XXXXX@mail.utoronto.ca or my thesis supervisor Dr. Tanya Titchkosky, at XXXXXX@utoronto.ca. If you have any questions about your rights as a research participant, please contact the University of Toronto Office of Research Ethics by phone XXXXXXX, fax XXXXXX, or mail (McMurrich Building, 12 Queen’s Park Crescent West, 2nd Floor, Toronto, ON M5S 1S8).

Thank you for considering my request to participate in my project and I look forward to hearing from you. Please email or call so that I can set up an interview with you at a time and location at the University of Toronto campus that is convenient to you.

Sincerely yours,

Leroy Baker, Ph.D. Candidate
OISE/University of Toronto
Appendix F: Recruitment Email

Dear….

I am conducting doctoral research on the experiences of Black disabled students at the University of Toronto. I am hoping that you will be able to assist me in obtaining participants by forwarding the attached “Letter of Invite” to students in your faculty. I am looking to interview Black students who experience disability, who are 18 years or older and enrolled at the University of Toronto. The participants will come from a cross section of disciplines, including professional programs. Your help would be greatly appreciated.

Thank you very much for your time and assistance.

Sincerely,

…………………
Appendix G: Compensation List

Research Investigator
Leroy Baker, Ph.D., Candidate
Social Justice Education
252 Bloor Street West, Office 12-223
Toronto, Ontario M5S 1V6 Canada
XXXXXXXXXX@utoronto.ca

BLACKNESS AND DISABILITY IN HIGHER EDUCATION

INTERVIEW    Completion and Compensation List

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