

A QUESTION OF RIGHTS, SAFETY, AND FULL PARTICIPATION

A QUESTION OF RIGHTS, SAFETY, AND FULL PARTICIPATION: A
CRITICAL DISABILITY ANALYSIS OF THE EXPERIENCES OF
STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES IN THE MCMASTER UNIVERSITY
SCHOOL OF SOCIAL WORK

By HOWARD JASON DITKOFISKY, B.A., B.S.W.

A Thesis

Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies

in Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements

for the Degree

Master of Social Work

McMaster University

© Copyright by Howard Jason Ditkofsky, January 2011

MASTER OF SOCIAL WORK

McMaster University

(2010)

Hamilton, Ontario

TITLE: A Question of Rights, Safety, and Full Participation: A
Critical Disability Analysis of the Experiences of Students
with Disabilities in the McMaster University School of
Social Work

AUTHOR: Howard Jason Ditkofsky

SUPERVISOR: Ann Fudge Schormans

NUMBER OF PAGES: viii, 134

Abstract

Receiving equitable access in order to participate in post-secondary education is often a struggle for students with disabilities. This issue is not only alarming for the field of social work but also for post-secondary schools of social work. Literature that examines the challenges that students with disabilities encounter often reinforces a bio-medical model perspective, which consequently can further marginalize this population. In contrast, this research study is guided by a social model understanding of disability and conceptualizes disability as an act of social oppression. Using a critical disability framework, this thesis examines the personal experiences of students with disabilities to gain a better understanding of how the McMaster University School of Social Work supports its students with disabilities in regards to inclusion and their academic needs.

This thesis examines students with disabilities' experiences in areas such as the admissions process, academic accommodations, disclosure, classroom setting, field practicum, faculty/administration support, and feelings of inclusiveness. Findings suggest that students with disabilities experience discrimination and their rights being violated by faculty and field placement staff members in regards to disclosure of their disability and obtaining accommodations. These issues seem to stem more from a lack of understanding from faculty/staff members about providing accommodations than a malicious act. Normative assumptions carried by faculty about students also seemed to

contribute to students with disabilities' rights being violated. This research study also supports the literature that students with disabilities often have to engage in extra work in comparison to their non-disabled peers. The implications of this research study suggest that the McMaster University School of Social Work needs to be more proactive with addressing issues of disability. Adopting a social model understanding of disability and providing training for staff members are approaches that the School of Social Work can take to develop a more inclusive learning environment.

Acknowledgements

I would first like to thank the participants for sharing their experiences and enthusiasm to take part in this study. Thank you for your time, honesty and contribution to the sparse knowledge in this research area.

Thank you very much to my supervisor, Ann, for not only your knowledge on disability, but also your ability to articulate the many complexities of the disability issues. Your guidance and support will always be remembered.

Mom and Dad, thank you for all the love and support you have given to me to always do what made me happy in the end. Brian and Virginia, thank you for your encouragement, sense of humour through the tough times, and Bubba, being the brother I will always look up to. Deborah and Gordon, thank you very much for your love, always being an ear and being so supportive of my decisions throughout my life. Well Grandma, your nagging has paid off. I am and will always be grateful of your belief in me and encouragement to continue to better myself.

To the six, thank you for demonstrating good study habits when we were living together at Western and being there when I needed you the most. You guys have certainly been an inspiration for my academic journey.

Yo Megan, I did it! I do not know how I could have completed this degree and thesis without you. You have provided endless support, motivation and

patience, which have greatly assisted me to push on through right to the end. You always have my back and I am so thankful that I have you as my life partner.

Finally, I would like to dedicate this thesis to my son Benjamin Brian, who was born on the same day as my defense. Remember Son, that it does not matter how long it takes to reach your goal, but how you respond to the challenges on the way.

Table of Contents

Abstract	iii
Acknowledgements	v
Introduction	1
Theoretical Perspectives on Disability	4
Bio-Medical Model	4
Social Model of Disability	6
Critical Disability Theory	8
‘Disability’ and ‘Impairment’	9
My Definition of ‘Disability’ and ‘Impairment’	13
Literature Review	16
Accommodation Process	21
Normative Ableist Assumptions	24
Accommodation Policies	27
Methodology	29
Purpose of the Study	29
Study Design	31
Ethical Considerations	31
Participants	33
Recruitment	33
Data Collection	34
Data Analysis	37
Limitations	38
Insider Status	39
Findings	42
Participant 2	42
Participant 1	48
Participant 5	51

Participant 6.....	58
Participant 3.....	65
Participant 4.....	70
Discussion	78
Disclosure.....	78
Participants' safety.....	79
Control over disclosure.....	80
Accommodations.....	88
Rights being violated.	88
Lack of Understanding	93
Normative Assumptions	95
Justification of Exclusion	98
Extra Work	99
Implications, Future Directions, and Conclusion	105
Main Issues of Participants	105
Proactive Policies and Practices	108
Adopting a social model understanding of disability.	109
Training for faculty.....	113
Further Directions	114
Appendix A - Recruitment Email	119
Appendix B - Letter of Consent.....	120
Appendix C – Interview Guide	123
Appendix D – Recruitment Flyer.....	128
Appendix E - Background Information Form.....	129
References.....	130

Introduction

Students with disabilities often struggle to receive equitable access in order to participate in post-secondary institutions. Challenges in regards to accommodations, accessibility, and inclusiveness are issues that students with disabilities encounter. There also has been a lack of research that has addressed these issues. In addition, most literature that does examine the challenges that students with disabilities encounter reinforces the dominant bio-medical model perspective, which consequently places the responsibility and problem within the individual. Therefore, research is needed that critically examines issues of disability from an understanding that environmental factors such as university policy and practices play an important role in the inclusion of students with disabilities.

This qualitative research study critically analyzes and interprets the experiences of McMaster University School of Social Work students with disabilities. I intended to conduct a study that would not only inform the School about improving policies and practices but also present information based on the personal experiences of students with disabilities. It is essential for students with disabilities to be included in such studies so that they have the opportunity to voice their concerns and influence social change. By interviewing past and current McMaster social work students with disabilities, I gained students' perspectives of areas such as the admissions process, academic accommodations,

disclosure, field practicum and faculty/administration support. I also intended this study to influence the School of Social Work, as well as the university community, to work towards developing creative strategies to address social barriers and learning needs of students with disabilities. In preparation for meeting the requirements of the legislated standards of the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA, 2005), the School of Social Work is already taking steps in this direction by reviewing their disability-related admission policies and practices. As well, the School approached me to consider addressing this subject as part of my thesis. Therefore, in addition to my personal inspiration to examine barriers of students with disabilities, I was also supported by the School of Social Work to address this issue.

My personal reasons for choosing this topic were influenced by my own experiences with a disability, my interest in disability studies, and my social activism in this area. As a student with a disability, I have had to face many challenges during my academic journey. I have experienced feelings of being excluded, being discriminated against, and difficulties disclosing to professors. These challenges have greatly impacted my confidence and success throughout my academic years. It was not until 2003, when I was diagnosed as having a learning disorder, that I really began to take an active interest in my own learning abilities and challenges. Obtaining this diagnosis has provided me with access to academic accommodations that have assisted in improving my skills and success at university. However, I have realized that although I have an impairment, most

of the academic challenges I encounter are due to social barriers. Through personal experiences, I have found that universities in general are still deficient in many areas with regards to providing support for students with disabilities. I am now fortunate to understand that my past academic challenges were not because of a lack of effort and were not solely my fault. Many of my negative experiences - such as feelings of isolation and exclusion - were influenced more by educational institutions not providing me with equitable support.

During my studies at McMaster University, I have taken steps to further my understanding of disability and to become active in the field of disability, including completing a field placement at the Centre for Student Development's (CSD) disability services and becoming a member of the School of Social Work Disability Action Group. As a result of all my experiences, I am highly motivated to create social change so that academic institutions address all types of abilities in their approaches to creating inclusive learning environments. Therefore, I have been compelled to conduct research in this area so that other students with disabilities will receive the same opportunity and support as their non-disabled peers in order to succeed in university.

Theoretical Perspectives on Disability

Within the field of social work, it is important to understand how disability has been conceptualized over time. Disability has traditionally been understood from a bio-medical model but, more recently, is being viewed from a social model. In this chapter, these two models are explained and defined. I then compare and contrast the two perspectives and how they perceive and impact people with disabilities. I will close this section by articulating my use of the relevant theoretical constructs and terms.

Bio-Medical Model

Having the stature and support of the medical and scientific professions, the bio-medical model has often been the traditional perspective applied to explaining disability in western societies (Smart & Smart, 2006) and the perspective that has guided social work with people with disabilities (French Gilson & DePoy, 2002). Stemming from a positivist methodological approach, the bio-medical model relies on scientific evidence for explanations and applies medical terminology to defining disability (Smart & Smart, 2006). The model primarily understands disability as an individual pathology, as something ‘wrong’ that is physically present within the person (Albrecht, 1992; Longmore, 1995, as cited in Smart & Smart, 2006). Intervention requires a medical approach by way of treatment or rehabilitation (Mitra, 2006). The purpose of intervention is to subsequently eliminate the disability by focusing on scientific methods to fix or

cure the individual of their biological deficiency, their impairment (Devlin & Pothier, 2006). Therefore, this perspective emphasizes that it is the individual who needs to be modified to better integrate into western society. This has been the primary perspective that the field of social work has applied to people with disabilities. However, this perspective contradicts social work's commitment to social justice because it emphasizes that issues of disability come from within the individual instead of from social structures (French Gilson & DePoy, 2002).

Normative principles are heavily embedded in the bio-medical perspective and the resulting interventions (Smart, 2007). In regards to disability, this is the perception that people *without* impairments are the desired 'normal' state that people *with* impairments must strive towards resembling (Davis, 1995; Mitra, 2006). The purpose of medical intervention is then to help people with disabilities appear as close to 'normal' as they can (Whalley Hammel, 2006). Therefore, people with impairments are understood as being 'abnormal' and 'disabled' due to not having the same abilities as their 'able-bodied' peers (Mitra, 2006). Furthermore, impairments are not just viewed as 'abnormal' but also as an unwanted deficiency within the individual. Any problems or barriers that people with disabilities encounter are solely blamed on their impairment. Consequently, the whole individual comes to be viewed as being biologically flawed, deviant and inferior instead of just different in comparison to people without impairments (McCarty, 1993, as cited in Smart & Smart, 2006). People with disabilities then become conceptualized and categorized as being members of a subordinate group

(Smart & Smart, 2006). Furthermore, the onus to overcome barriers that people with disabilities encounter tends to be placed on them, instead of the responsibility being placed on society to more actively and effectively work to include all its members (Whalley Hammel, 2006). People with disabilities are then expected to resemble being able-bodied by any means necessary, such as through medical intervention or by working harder. This perspective has caused disability activists to argue that the bio-medical model contributes to the marginalization and oppression of people with impairments (Jung, 2003), which I will address more fully in the next section. However, the consequence of the bio-medical model's understanding of disability as an individual pathology and personal misfortune has resulted in negative experiences for people with disabilities. This has led disability activists to develop new perspectives.

Social Model of Disability

A perspective that has powerfully challenged the bio-medical model and that has provided a new approach to understanding disability is the social model of disability. The foundation of this model was developed from the principles of the Union of the Physically Impaired Against Segregation (UPIAS). Founded in 1972 in the United Kingdom by a group of disability activists, UPIAS was one of the first founding organizations in the disability movement (<http://www.gmcdp.com/UPIAS.html>). UPIAS states that it is society – and not impairment - that creates barriers and excludes people with impairments from complete and meaningful involvement in their social environment (Whalley

Hammel, 2006). Therefore, the social model of disability recognizes disability as a political matter, rather than as an individual biological deficiency (Frazee, Gilmour, Mykitiuk, 2006). Also in contrast to the bio-medical model, the social model of disability primarily understands disability as an act of social oppression, or 'ableism,' similar to racism, heterosexism and sexism (Frazee et al., 2006). It recognizes that people with disabilities typically encounter significant environmental barriers due to political, social, economic, material and linguistic factors (Devlin & Pothier, 2006). This model argues that, similar to other minority groups, people with disabilities experience discrimination with achieving employment, social assistance, housing, and education (Mitra, 2006). Responsibility is subsequently placed on society to modify how it responds to people with disabilities instead of the onus being on the individual to adapt to a society that is structured to exclude rather than include them (Jung, 2003). Overall, the issues of disability are understood to be the result of how society responds to people with impairments, instead of the result of only the impairment itself. The social model of disability has not only presented a new way of conceiving disability and creating space for disability activists to be heard, it has also led to political, economic, and social changes such as an increase in disability legislation, Disability Studies programs in universities, inclusive education, and more active involvement of people with disabilities in research (Peters, 2004, as cited in Whalley Hammell, 2006). In addition, it has provided the framework and lens to analyze aspects of disability through a critical disability theoretical lens.

Critical Disability Theory

Grounded in the principles of the social model of disability, critical disability theory applies an analytical approach to the examination of issues of disability. Although there is no lone definition of critical disability theory, it is essentially about using a critical theoretical lens to examine inequalities within aspects of the experience of disability (Devlin & Pothier, 2006). Devlin and Pothier (2006) state that this theory understands disability as a political matter and that power and context are essential components of its analysis. Therefore, this theory greatly challenges the bio-medical model by arguing that disability is not an existing biological characteristic within a person but instead a socially created or constructed category (Vehmas, 2004). Factors such as society's values and priorities, which members of society are (and are not) privileged, and the political and economic circumstances are recognized as contributors towards people with impairments being viewed as defective and consequently stigmatized, marginalized, and oppressed. Therefore, this focus on oppression and concern for social justice makes this a particularly relevant theoretical lens for social work practice, research, and education (French Gilson & DePoy, 2002). French Gilson & DePoy (2002) argue that this critical approach needs to be included in social work curriculum so that students can attain an informed conceptualization of the social barriers that people with disabilities encounter.

Another key principle of critical disability theory is its recognition that ableism is often embedded in social organization and social structures within

western society. Devlin and Pothier (2006) argue that the barriers that people with disabilities typically encounter are primarily due to societal prejudice, discriminatory behaviours, and a reluctance to revise traditional ableist assumptions and approaches to disability. They argue that the major assumption that reinforces the oppression and marginalization of people with disabilities is the binary notion of ability/disability. This entails people being categorized exclusively as either disabled or able-bodied. Embedded in and reflective of the bio-medical model's dominant perspective that impairments are defined as a personal deficiency and as abnormal (Bickenbach, 1993, as cited in Smart & Smart, 2006), this binary understanding not only de-values people with disabilities but privileges people who are considered able-bodied. As Mitra (2006) stated earlier, people who fit into the able-bodied category become viewed as the norm and the state that people with impairments must strive towards. Therefore, a common attitude and social value that disability activists challenge is the constant ableist striving for normalization in western society instead of valuing diversity in people (Oliver, 1996).

'Disability' and 'Impairment'

An essential component to both the social model and critical disability theory is how the language surrounding disability is understood (Devlin & Pothier, 2006). Terminology such as 'impairment' and 'disability' have become very important and controversial and can have different interpretations by different theorists; causing much debate. Although there are many definitions of

both impairment and disability, I will be discussing the views that are most relevant to this paper. In the social model and in critical disability approaches, the terms 'impairment' and 'disability' have been separated for political purposes (Oliver, 1996). I will make the reasons clear in the following paragraphs.

Finkelstein, (2001), one of UPIAS's founding members, was also a disability activist who viewed people with disabilities as an oppressed group. Like Oliver, he challenged the dominant perspective that people with disabilities were oppressed in society due to their having an individual impairment. He interpreted 'impairment' as the restriction of functioning at the personal level and provided the UPIAS definition of impairment as "lacking part of or all of a limb, or having a defective limb, organ or mechanism of the body" (Oliver, 1996, as cited in Frazee et al., 2006, p.225). This perspective does recognize that impairment can cause restrictions of activity; however these barriers are not defined by Finkelstein as being a disability.

Finkelstein (2001) strongly viewed 'disability' exclusively as a form of social oppression and as a political issue. This is reflected in the UPIAS definition of disability as "the disadvantage or restriction of activity caused by a contemporary social organization which takes no or little account of people who have physical impairments and thus excludes them from the mainstream of social activities" (Oliver, 1996, p.35). Finkelstein deliberately separated the terms impairment and disability as having different meanings. This was to demonstrate

that individual impairments do not oppress people - society does; and also so that disability activists could maintain disability as a political and not biological issue.

Developed after UPIAS, The Disabled People's International (DPI) is another disability advocacy group that had distinctly separated the terms 'impairment' and 'disability'. Formed in Canada in 1980, from a grassroots community of people with disabilities, the DPI's objectives are to provide a voice for and legitimize the needs of this population (Enns, 1987). DPI advocates for people with disabilities to be included in society and to have the same rights and opportunities as others (Dreidger, 1989). Established by and representing people with all different types of disabilities, DPI, like UPIAS, was a pioneer disability activist organization that challenged views that reinforced the bio-medical model (Oliver, 1996, as cited in Barnes & Mercer, 1997). They defined impairment as "the functional limitation within the individual caused by physical, mental or sensory impairment" and disability as "the loss or limitation of opportunities to take part in the normal life of the community on an equal level with others due to physical and social barriers" (DPI, 1982, as cited in Oliver, 1996).

Oliver, who was a member of UPIAS and actively involved in the development of the social model of disability, agreed with the DPI's definition of impairment. However, he critiqued the DPI's definition of disability by arguing that it reinforced the assumption that people with disabilities are striving towards a 'normal' way to actively participate in society (Oliver, 1996). In other words, by using the term "normal life" (DPI, 1982, as cited in Oliver, 1996) to define

what people with disabilities are lacking, the DPI, in its definition of disability, is implying that people with disabilities are living a life that is abnormal and inferior to people without disabilities. Therefore, Oliver (1996) argues that the UPIAS's definition of disability is vital for people with disabilities because it rejects notions that maintain normative principles and focuses on the recognition of differences in people.

There are critical disability theorists who challenge the social model as it was originally conceived and argue that the model does a disservice for people with disabilities instead of supporting them. Theorists such as Frazee et al. (2006) and Thomas (2004) have suggested that the social model's exclusive political focus on 'disability' contributes to minimizing the effects of impairments that are not easily 'fixed' by social change (e.g., intellectual or other cognitive impairments). Similar to Finkelstein, Thomas understands disability as a social oppression and as being a political term. However, she would then interpret restrictions of activity that are not caused by social factors to be defined, not as "impairment", but as "impairment effects", thus acknowledging the impact of these impairments (Thomas, 2004, p.581).

Shakespeare and Watson further complicate the picture. They critique Finkelstein's perspective of 'disability' and view it as not being a completely separate concept from 'impairment', or exclusively a form of social oppression (Shakespeare & Watson, 2001, as cited in Thomas, 2004). They understand 'disability' as a restriction of activity that can be caused by both social factors and

an individual's impairment – in this sense, they argue that the impairment itself can be disabling. This is disputed by Finkelstein and others who argue that the 'disabling' effects of impairment are not a 'disability' because they do not oppress the individual with the impairment. Shakespeare and Watson also do not view impairment as strictly a biological condition. As social constructionists, they argue that the discourse used to describe both 'impairment' and 'disability' are socially created, therefore both are a combination of biological, psychological, social and political factors. This debate around the meaning of 'impairment' and 'disability' is a very active and complex one. As well, the literature is very extensive and at this stage of my studies I will not be examining it in more detail. I have raised it as a means of providing some background to the issues and a backdrop to my own understandings of these two constructs: an understanding that is important to how I approached my thesis research.

My Definition of 'Disability' and 'Impairment'

I agree with the UPIAS definitions of 'impairment' and 'disability', and with the separation of the two as different things, however, I am not completely comfortable with the language that is applied. Personally having a learning disorder, I am not at ease with associating my impairments with terms such as 'defect' or 'lacking.' I find that these terms still pathologize my impairments and thus imply that this impairment is a 'problem', one that lies within me. For the purpose of this paper, I incorporate the UPIAS definition but also partly base my understanding of impairment on that of DPI. I see 'impairment' as functional

difficulties experienced by the individual that are caused by the physical, mental, and sensory condition that they were born with or acquired (DPI, 1982, as cited in Oliver, 1996).

I am influenced by Finkelstein and Oliver in that I view 'disability' as completely separate from impairment. I understand disability to be a political matter and a type of social oppression imposed upon people with impairments. Therefore, I define 'disability' as the limitation of full participation in society inflicted by social, economic, political, material, attitudinal, linguistic, and physical barriers. Thus, when I am discussing the experiences of students with disabilities, I am referring to restrictions imposed by social structures such as the University.

In regards to how I will refer to people with disabilities in this paper, I acknowledge that there are also many debates among disability activists. Although there are many descriptors applied by disability theorists, the two terms most widely used are 'persons with disabilities' and 'disabled persons'. Disability theorists who support the term "disabled persons" argue that "person with disabilities" language prevents disability from being recognized as a political and social issue (see Titchkosky, 2001): it keeps the focus on an individualized understanding of disability. They strongly argue that disability is about social oppression and not about the individual. However, for the purpose of this paper, I will be using the term 'persons with disabilities'. At this stage of my studies, I am more comfortable with this term because it recognizes that the individual is a

person first prior to anything else. Furthermore, in that I also understand disability to be a political issue, a function of oppression stemming from ableism, I believe that this term still demonstrates that the person is oppressed due to social barriers.

Literature Review

My thesis research was concerned to examine the question “What are the experiences of students with disabilities in the McMaster University School of Social Work”. This research question was approached with the understanding that disability is a political issue; a form of oppression based on an ableist framework. While biological factors are important and can pose barriers for students with disabilities, this research focused on how the policies and practices affecting students with disabilities unfold in practice at McMaster University, in particular in the School of Social Work, and how they might impact the social oppression of students with disabilities.

Literature speaking to the experiences of students with disabilities in post-secondary education that utilizes a critical disability perspective is sparse. The majority of existing literature regarding students with disabilities often centres on aspects such as legislation and the development of self-advocacy skills. These articles reinforce a medically-based rehabilitation model in which the treatments are based on “improving the function and well-being of individuals with medical diagnoses” (Granger & Fiedler, 1997, as cited in Gilson & DePoy, 2002, p.155).

The literature on disability issues frequently examines whether post-secondary institutions are meeting the requirements of disability legislation, instead of critically examining the social and other barriers encountered by

students with disabilities in these environments. This is an issue because legislation that mandates inclusion of and supports to students with disabilities often does not state how these policies should unfold within practice. As a result, the legislation itself does not necessarily prevent barriers. Pardeck's (2003) broad study examined how well twelve American schools of social work met the needs of students with disabilities by centring on the admissions process and academic accommodations. Focusing on the requirements of the 1990 Americans With Disabilities Act (ADA), the study evaluated whether the schools took the necessary steps to ensure that students with disabilities were not discriminated against when applying to and once in the program. Through interviews conducted with administrators, Pardeck found that the programs generally met the requirements of the ADA by implementing academic accommodations, having accessible facilities, and making efforts to place students with disabilities in accessible field placement agencies. The findings also revealed that the schools of social work had few students with identified disabilities in the program and that there was no effort made by these schools towards recruiting this population.

Pardeck's study is limited in terms of identifying whether these schools of social work were supportive to students with disabilities. Although it focused on whether the schools of social work had established procedures to meet the required mandate of the ADA, there was no critical analysis of how the procedures actually unfolded in practice. Questions such as how the academic accommodations were made available to students and how the schools determined

that the facilities were accessible were not explored. Another limitation of this study was that the data was not collected from students with disabilities. The perception that the schools of social work were meeting the needs of students with disabilities came from the perspectives of schools of social work administrators. This article reinforced that social work administration believes itself to understand what is needed for students with disabilities, while simultaneously excluding the value of the experiences of students with disabilities and their contributions to this field of knowledge.

The literature on disability also frequently focuses on improving the self-advocacy skills of students. Graham Smith, English, and Vasek (2002) argued that students with learning disabilities need to learn sufficient advocacy skills so that they can have better transitions and experience success as they move from secondary to post-secondary schools. They placed an emphasis on students being responsible for ensuring that they received the necessary academic accommodations from their professors. Palmer and Roessler (2000) also argued that self-advocacy and conflict resolution training is necessary for students with disabilities in post-secondary institutions.

Although the development of self-advocacy skills is important for students with disabilities, this literature generally emphasizes that the onus should be on the individual student to adapt to their environment, to identify and seek out the supports they need, and to create social change. Therefore, the literature on self-advocacy often reinforces a bio-medical approach towards disability by placing

the problem within the individual. These articles seldom apply principles of the social model and do not address how postsecondary institutions might take responsibility to ensure an inclusive learning environment. Consequently, this encourages post-secondary institutions to view students with disabilities as needing to change, and does not place the focus on having the school change. In addition, this relays the message that students with disabilities are abnormal when compared to students without an impairment, and that they must develop strategies to better fit in with existing social structures.

The above literature stems from a bio-medical model approach to disability. Thus, it focuses on disability as an issue within the person. Research regarding students with disabilities in post-secondary institutions rarely applies a critical disability perspective or views disability as social oppression. Although there has been progress stemming from disability activism in regards to social changes and greater awareness of disability in the broader society, universities – including schools of social work - have still not taken up the key principles of the disability movement (Dunn, Hanes, Hardie, & McDonald, 2006). Furthermore, French Gilson and DePoy (2002, p.157) argue that schools of social work take a medical diagnostic approach and understand disability as a “problem area” and “individual deficit” instead of as a marginalized population. This then becomes a social justice issue within the profession since the stated intention of the profession of social work is a dedication to promoting equitable opportunities, and the removal of barriers for marginalized populations (CASW, 2005).

The literature that is most relevant to the research I conducted takes a critical analytic approach regarding the experiences of students with disabilities in post-secondary institutions and emphasizes the impact of social factors. This literature discusses important issues such as support for students with disabilities, accommodations, and disclosure.

Critical disability theorists argue that addressing issues of disability has not been a priority among schools of social work. Baron, Phillips, and Stalker (1996) argued that students with disabilities experienced many social barriers during their studies in British schools of social work. Focusing on and valuing the experiences of students with disabilities, their study included questions regarding access, accommodations, field placements, and inclusion. Baron et al. found that students with disabilities encountered barriers due to the schools' disabling environment, normative assumptions, and unsupportive policies. Furthermore, they argued that the social barriers were the result of the schools of social work taking a reactive approach to addressing the needs of students with disabilities.

Dunn et al. (2006) also argued that there is a lack of support for students with disabilities within schools of social work. In their study examining how Canadian schools of social work have reacted to issues of disability, they, too, found that there was a lack of proactive policies and practices pertaining to many academic areas including admissions, accommodations, and field practicum. Dunn et al. emphasize the urgency for these schools to undertake a critical disability framework to address disability issues and to recognize students with

disabilities as a marginalized population. In addition, they argued that schools of social work need to take more initiative to prevent social barriers and should develop policies and practices that establish inclusiveness. They add that these approaches should be applied with consultation with people within the disability community. In contrast to interventions rooted in the bio-medical model, the approaches suggested by Dunn et al. support the principles of critical disability theory by taking a bottom-up approach to understanding disability (Devlin & Pothier, 2006). By including the insight and experiences of people with disabilities, the school would be legitimizing the participation and knowledge of this population (Dunn et al., 2006). This article strongly supports the application of a critical disability lens by recognizing that students with disabilities experience oppression due to the social organization of their schools.

Although Dunn et al. (2006) support a critical disability framework and address a range of academic areas, the study does have limitations. Including social work deans and directors as the research participants instead of students with disabilities reinforces the assumption that deans and directors have a critical understanding and are the 'experts' on issues of disability. Consequently, students with disabilities continue to be silenced and excluded from contributing to the disability discourse.

Accommodation Process

Although it is a right for students with disabilities to receive academic accommodations in post-secondary institutions, the implementation of these

processes is often a controversial and debated subject. Hibbs and Pothier (2006) examined the accommodation policy and process for students with disabilities at the University of Victoria and argued that it reinforced a bio-medical model perspective. They suggested that the accommodation policy reinforces normative ableist principles, pathologizes individual students, and further marginalizes students with disabilities as a group. They argued that having an accommodation policy that requires students with disabilities to self-identify and negotiate with professors places the onus on the individual student to adapt to the environment of the post-secondary institution instead of recognizing the need for the environment to be more inclusive.

Hibbs and Pothier (2006) argued that requiring students with disabilities to self-identify to faculty and university staff members in order to receive accommodations is flawed and can create an inequitable paradox. They emphasized that this process does not recognize that it is justifiable for students to choose not to disclose because of fear of being discriminated against or stigmatized. Not only does this process assume that self-identifying is safe, but it reinforces that the responsibility is on the individual student to obtain their accommodations. Requiring students with disabilities to negotiate their accommodations with their professors also carries underlying assumptions. This process assumes that there is a balance of equal power between students and their professors. However, there is always a power imbalance when a student's evaluation in the course is dependent on their professor. Therefore, students with

disabilities are placed at a disadvantage in situations where they are expected to negotiate their accommodations with their professors (Hibbs & Pothier, 2006). Jung (2006) argued that the accommodation process not only shifts the responsibility from the post-secondary institution onto the student, but it also creates the perception that the school is fulfilling its legislated duty to accommodate – regardless of how problematic and, at times, unsuccessful, the process may really be. This shift, referred to as the “individualization of accommodation,” occurs by having each student and professor be responsible to negotiate with one another the accommodations that need to be implemented (Jung, 2006, p.93). Although this process reinforces that each student has different individual needs, it also causes the knowledge pertaining to the accommodations to remain between the professor and student. Consequently, the accommodations implemented do not later on become shared and legitimized as common teaching practices.

Examining the accommodation process for students with chronic illness in post-secondary institutions, Jung (2006) found in her study that these students have to do ‘extra work’ in contrast to students without a disability. This work included “educating their instructors, learning to work in alternate media, seeking better types of accommodation, coming up with a plan for accommodation, and manoeuvring through the bureaucracy” (Jung, 2006, p.105). Although post-secondary institutions state that these tasks are necessary to meet the individual needs of students, Jung argues that placing these responsibilities onto students

creates additional burdens and barriers for them and further takes the onus for change off of the school.

A limitation to utilizing Jung's findings to better understand the experiences of McMaster University social work students with disabilities is that she exclusively examines female students with chronic illness. Furthermore, her participants were not recruited from a specific program of study such as social work.

Normative Ableist Assumptions

Critical disability literature frequently emphasizes how post-secondary disability policies and practices are developed for people who are considered not part of the 'normal' university population. However, it is the institution that determines the criterion of who and what is 'normal' when it comes to the school environment and the abilities of students (Hibbs & Pothier, 2006). This is exemplified when post-secondary institutions utilize terms such as 'not typical' or 'regular' in their policies to define students with and without disabilities. Therefore, Davis (1995, p.24) stated 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."

Due to normative ableist values, Low's (1996) research study on the experiences of students with disabilities at McMaster University found that they often become labelled as deviant by professors and peers. Low argued that ableist assumptions are embedded in university policies and in people's attitudes.

Similar to Jung's argument, that students with chronic illness have to engage in extra work, Low found that students with disabilities must spend extra time negotiating their environment and identity to fit into their social environment. She (p.239) stated that "for students with visual or mobility impairments, the number of environmental hazards on the university campus multiplies." Therefore, Low argued that students with disabilities are required to adapt to the university environment in order to be safe and to fully participate. Having to negotiate one's environment is not due to a personal impairment but is the result of the physical and social structure being designed for people without impairments. Normative assumptions continue to be accepted and reinforced when the university continues to have a physical and social environment that segregates students with disabilities.

Low (1996) also argued that students with disabilities spend much time negotiating their identities within the university context. Negative assumptions regarding their ability, intelligence, and sexuality are social barriers that students with disabilities frequently encounter. Participants in her study suggested that the fear of being discriminated against can often cause them to try and conceal their impairment. In addition, participants expressed that they often faced hostility when their experience of their impairments and the particular needs that they had as a result of those impairments did not fit in with others' perceptions of their diagnosis. In other words, when people have limited understanding of a particular impairment such as a learning disability, they may not recognize that particular

learning disabilities often affect different people in various ways. Due to the social organization of post-secondary institutions, students with disabilities can spend much effort challenging or giving in to others pre-conceived ideas of what 'normal' is, what a particular impairment 'should' look like, and how they should behave.

Similar to my research, Low's (1996) study included having face-to-face interviews with students with disabilities at McMaster University. However, as with Jung, Low examined their experiences on a more general level and not specifically in a program such as the School of Social Work. The students with disabilities in her study may or may not have encountered different experiences in terms of academic policies and practices and, while the results of this study can be generalized to some degree to social work, my research was concerned to look at the experiences of students in the School of Social Work specifically.

The studies by Baron et al. (1996) and Dunn et al. (2006) emphasize a critical disability perspective, exploring the barriers for students with disabilities in schools of social work. Baron et al., Jung (2006), and Low (1996) all include students with disabilities as participants in their studies and emphasize the importance of the students' input. Their approach is crucial because it recognizes that students with disabilities are the experts about their own experiences and creates the opportunity for these individuals to contribute to social change. Although Jung's and Low's studies were completed within Canadian post-secondary institutions, they are not specific to schools of social work. While

these are important articles that contribute to the critical disability literature, no study is yet available that specifically examines the experiences of students with disabilities within the McMaster University School of Social Work.

Before I go further in presenting the processes and results of my research project, I think it is necessary to set the stage for the readers' understanding of my results by explaining the accommodation process for students with disabilities at McMaster University.

Accommodation Policies

In order for students with disabilities to receive academic accommodations from professors at McMaster University, they must be registered at the CSD's disability services (McMaster University CSD, 2010). To be registered, students must meet with a disability coordinator (a process which may take weeks) and provide formal medical documentation of their diagnosis to prove that they have a disability. Once this is completed, students can discuss their accommodations with the disability coordinator, who then provide the student with a letter from the CSD that both verifies their 'fact' of their disability and need for accommodation, and explains what accommodations they require for each course. The accommodation procedure includes the student being required to personally reach out to their professors and to bring their accommodation letter to each of them to have it signed and then return the letter back to the CSD. This process must be completed at the beginning of each semester or when a new course begins. The stated purpose of this process is to provide students the opportunity to meet with

their professors and to “establish a good working relationship” (McMaster University CSD, 2010). The purpose is also so that professors receive the information required to provide the appropriate accommodations (McMaster University CSD, 2010).

In certain situations, professors do have the power and the right to refuse to provide accommodations for their students with disabilities. This can occur if the professor believes that providing a student’s accommodations will cause harm to other students or faculty (McMaster University, 2003). If the professor decides not to provide accommodations, they must receive approval from the Chair of the Department and Associate Dean. If the Associate Dean deems that the accommodations are not appropriate, the student does have the option to appeal the decision. The professor may also appeal if the accommodations are approved. In both cases of appealing, the final decision will be directed to the Senate Board for Student Appeals. Although this process is in place for students with disabilities to follow if professors refuse to accommodate their needs, barriers exist within the accommodation process that are complicated to address. As I will demonstrate from the findings of the participants’ experiences, obtaining accommodations is a complex process for many students with disabilities.

Methodology

Purpose of the Study

Like all other Ontario postsecondary institutions, McMaster University is affected by the recent Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA, 2005). The purpose of this legislation is to ensure that all resources and social services are fully accessible for people with disabilities. In preparation for meeting the requirements of the legislated standards of the AODA, the former McMaster University Committee on Disability Access (MUCDA)¹ proposed that each faculty, school and department begin by reviewing their admission policies for students with disabilities. MUCDA decided that, as a professional school, the School of Social Work would be the first department to conduct this review process (McMaster University Annual Accessibility Plan, 2009).

Examining the School of Social Work's admission policies is important. However, solely considering the admission policy is not sufficient to fully address accessibility for students with disabilities. Therefore, examining other policies and practices that impact students with disabilities while they are studying in the program was also necessary. Furthermore, I wanted to examine these policies and practices from the perspective of those most affected by them – the students with

¹ MUCDA has now merged with the Accessibility and Accommodation working sub-group of the President's Advisory Committee on Building an Inclusive Community at McMaster University.

disabilities. From my own personal academic experiences and knowledge of the literature on disability issues, I have found that there is a great amount of emphasis in post-secondary institutions – both in policy and in practice - on placing the responsibility on students with disabilities to ensure that their learning needs are addressed and that they feel included in the academic community. These approaches to disability issues often reinforce principles of the aforementioned bio-medical model, which can further marginalize this student population. These approaches also demonstrate the importance of examining relevant policies and practices from the perspectives of students with disabilities.

The purpose of including students with disabilities as participants was to gain their insight into how the School of Social Work does (or does not) support students with disabilities in order to influence the School of Social Work's disability policies and practices. This approach was not only intended to gain a better understanding of the experiences of students with disabilities, but also to enable this population to contribute to social change. Therefore, my hope is that this research study provides an opportunity for students with disabilities to actively participate in addressing the social barriers that impact them. It was also my intention that this research study not only provide the opportunity for students with disabilities to influence social work policies and practices, but that it also encourages the School of Social Work, and the university community as a whole, to think of different approaches to addressing barriers and needs for this

population of students, to work towards improving their disability policies and practices and develop strategies towards a more inclusive environment.

Thus, the goal of my Masters of Social Work Thesis research was to gain an understanding of how the McMaster University School of Social Work supports the inclusion and academic needs of its students with disabilities. To achieve this goal, I critically examined the experiences of students with disabilities. I wanted to gain the perspectives of students with disabilities on areas such as the admissions process, academic accommodations, disclosure, classroom setting, field practicum, faculty/administration support, and feelings of inclusiveness. The question being asked in this research is: What are the experiences of students with disabilities in the McMaster University School of Social Work?

Study Design

I conducted a qualitative study to look at the experiences of students with disabilities and to identify areas for further exploration and improvement. Conducting a qualitative study provides the opportunity for the researcher to personally interact with the participants and gain a more in-depth understanding of their experiences and responses (Gilgun & Abrams, 2002).

Ethical Considerations

Conducting research with students with disabilities as participants raised ethical issues that needed to be addressed. Students with disabilities are a marginalized population. They may not feel safe disclosing their disability-

related issues to others (Olney & Brockelman, 2003), especially to someone who is also in their program (as I am) if the barriers that they encounter are put in place by the School of Social Work itself. Based on the disability literature and my personal experiences as a student with an invisible disability, students may worry about being identified as having a disability, and about being discriminated against by faculty, administration, or peers, should members of these groups discover what they had said about the school. Therefore, there were necessary precautions that needed to be taken for my study to be a safe one for students to participate in.

Steps needed to be taken so that participants felt comfortable disclosing personal information and experiences and assured that it would remain confidential. It was important that the participants did not have to worry about others finding out what they had shared or that they participated in my research study. Furthermore, if participants did not feel secure discussing their thoughts and experiences during the interview, this would have undoubtedly impacted my research findings by not getting at some of their vital concerns. To address these concerns, I was the only one who had access to all information gathered from the participants. All information and data collected was kept off-site in a safe secure location. Names or personal information are not used in my write-up to prevent the participants from being identified. All of the information regarding the study including the procedures, possible risks and how I managed these risks was described in detail in the letter of consent (see Appendix B) provided to

participants. This information, issues around confidentiality and how I managed them in the study, were made clear to interested participants both in written form and verbally (at the time of the interview).

Participants

The population group that I aimed to recruit for my study was McMaster University, adult male and female, past and current social work students with disabilities – those who have a diagnosis or a suspected diagnosis of disability. Impairments included physical, sensory, cognitive, and issues of mental health. The School of Social Work alumni who were invited would have graduated in the past five years. This was intended so that the social factors that alumni encountered as students with disabilities in the School of Social Work were as similar as possible to those encountered by current students. Due to the time frame of the MSW program and the scope of this study, there was a maximum of six participants in the study. There were originally seven interested participants but one did not participate due to a scheduling conflict.

The demographics of the participants included: three male and three female students; three undergraduates and one graduate-level student; one undergrad alumnus and one grad alumnus. Impairments included physical, sensory, cognitive, and mental health.

Recruitment

In order to promote my research study to potential participants, an initial email (see Appendix A) was sent on my behalf by the McMaster University

School of Social Work administration to *all* social work undergraduate and graduate students, as well as to alumni, notifying them about the study and providing them with my contact information should they seek further details. By sending the email to all students, any individual student's disability status was not revealed to me or anyone else by the School of Social Work. Only those who chose to contact me following receipt of this email became known to me as students with disabilities. This initial email had two attachments. One was the Letter of Information/Consent which further explained the study and the measures taken to maintain confidentiality, and the second included the list of interview questions. Recommended by the McMaster University Research Ethics Board (MREB), the purpose of the two attachments was to fully inform interested participants about the details of the study and also to obtain a higher response rate by providing them with all of the necessary information right from the start. Interested students were invited to email me to find out any further information. Depending on the availability and convenience of the interested students, I arranged interviews with them through email. Flyers (see appendix D) were also posted in the McMaster University School of Social Work inviting students with disabilities to participate in my study.

Data Collection

For this study, I gathered my data by conducting one-to-one interviews with participants. Although my original intention was to conduct a focus group and/or individual interviews, I did not complete the former due to conflicting

schedules and the discomfort of some of the participants. The face-to-face interviews took place in meeting rooms either at the McMaster University Student Centre (MUSC) or at the McMaster University Mills Memorial Library. The rationale supporting holding the interviews on campus was that this was intended to be more convenient for the participants. It provided students with a location that they were more likely to be familiar with; provided participants with accessible rooms; and was also intended to benefit current students in regards to their class schedules.

Institutional barriers were encountered while attempting to book rooms for the one-to-one interviews at McMaster University. In order to book a room to conduct a one-to-one interview in the MUSC, I either had to book a study room or a meeting room. The issue with booking study rooms for one-to-one interviews was that they are intended for group use. Therefore, there was a minimum of four students required to book a room. In regards to booking a meeting room, there were administrative demands for social work faculty to reserve the room on my behalf – students were not permitted to book rooms on their own. This requirement created a potential issue of confidentiality by creating a situation in which faculty and administrative staff were aware of the fact of an interview happening, the time, and location of the interview. Furthermore, another barrier was created by the institutional rule prohibiting room bookings from occurring more than two days in advance of a meeting. Providing participants with sufficient notice regarding the MUSC meeting room time and location was

impossible. Although McMaster University libraries permit room bookings two weeks in advance, they only have study rooms available with a three person minimum rule – once again prohibiting this as a viable option for student research interviews. These policies provided barriers to interviewing participants from marginalized populations and with protecting their confidentiality.

There were, in total, five individual face-to-face interviews conducted. One interview was conducted by telephone for the convenience of the participant due to an issue of distance. The interviews were conducted over a three month period, from March to May 2010. The interviews each took about one hour to complete. At the beginning of each interview, I explained the procedures regarding confidentiality and the format of the interview questions. Participants were informed that they did not need to answer questions that made them uncomfortable or that they did not want to answer. They were also told that they may leave at any time during the interview if they were not comfortable participating. Consent forms were signed prior to the beginning of each interview. For the purpose of accuracy, I also tape recorded the interviews with permission from the participants.

I utilized an interview guide (see appendix C) to direct data collection. The interview guide was based on the MREB interview guide template, and questions were driven by the literature and by the purposes of the study. I applied two types of instrumentation for this research study. The main instrumentation that I used to gather data were the verbal open-ended questions that I asked during

the semi-structured interviews. The interview questions were designed to learn about the personal thoughts and experiences of the participants and to provide them with an opportunity to be heard. Using open-ended questions was also important because it provided space for the participants to talk about other aspects of access and inclusion that may not have been addressed by my interview guide. During the interviews, the participants were mostly talkative and willing to share a lot of information. They answered the questions that were relevant to them but also often raised their own issues, such as their experiences with having a disability during their childhood or outside of the academic context.

Once the interview was completed, participants were invited to fill out a brief Background Information Sheet (see Appendix E). This was a structured, brief, written questionnaire, the purpose of which to gather some background information such as their program degree status, whether they had a visible or invisible disability, and why they chose to attend the McMaster University School of Social Work. This form was optional for participants to complete.

Data Analysis

For the data analysis, all of the audio-taped interviews were transcribed. Due to time constraints, I had two of the interviews transcribed by a professional transcriber. The professional transcriber did sign an oath of confidentiality to keep all of the participants' information confidential. To analyze the data collected, common themes were identified by applying the constant-comparison method to the findings (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Moving back and forth between

the transcribed interviews, I identified the themes emerging from each individual interview, comparing and contrasting these emerging themes with those emerging in the others. Using this method, significant issues that were similar from each of the participants' interviews were grouped together as common themes. This approach is significant because it facilitates the recognition of various patterns in the information gathered (Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

Furthermore, interpretive data analysis methods were used. Interpretive researchers understand people's experiences to be socially constructed through interactions with others and individual meaning systems (Neuman, 1997). Applying this approach ensured that I considered the participants' social context as an important factor impacting their thoughts and social actions (Neuman, 1997). Therefore, I examined how social structures such as the School of Social Work and its policies have influenced participants' experiences during their studies. My interpretive analysis was also guided by the critical disability framework previously outlined, understanding power and context to be significant factors for examining the experience of participants with disabilities (Devlin & Pothier, 2006).

Limitations

A limitation of the research study is that it did consist of a small sample size. Therefore, I am limited to what I can conclude in regards to students with disabilities' experiences. In addition, there was not a large representation of various impairments. Regardless of the cautionary steps I took, the participants

still may not have felt comfortable discussing personal information with one of their peers (me). Therefore, they may not have been fully open or honest with their responses. Another possible limitation with this study is my own biases in regards to what issues I covered. Although I have strong beliefs in terms of the rights of students with disabilities and that more responsibility should come from social structures such as post-secondary institutions, I have to be careful not to push my beliefs onto others. However, I am confident that my own awareness and attention to this issue during the study minimized the possibility of personal bias.

Insider Status

As a student with a disability, having to interview other students with disabilities assisted me to identify with some of the participants. Furthermore, listening to some of the participants' experiences was, in a way, reassuring. I was able to witness that there are other students who have shared similar experiences to my own with their studies in the McMaster University School of Social Work. However, being an insider of this population also created personal challenges and concerns with conducting this study. I often felt that I had to silence myself and not interject with my own experiences in the participants' discussions. In these situations, I found myself wanting to reassure the participant that their challenges were not uncommon and that I, too, had had similar experiences.

As an insider within this population, a concern that I have is that I may have unintentionally focused on invisible disabilities in the development and

asking of my research questions. This was perhaps demonstrated by my later observation that many of the interview questions surrounded issues regarding disclosure and that, while to some extent this was an issue for all students with disabilities, it was more of an issue for those students whose disabilities were less visible, for whom most people would not be aware they had a disability unless they disclosed it. In regards to whether being an insider might have made participants more likely or less likely to be open with me, I did not disclose to them until after the interviews were completed.

What I will do in the remaining sections of this thesis is as follows. First, I will present the findings of my research. In the Findings section, I have written the stories of the individual participants based on their own words. Each participant's story is written separately. While there were overlaps, each student's experience was unique and this felt to me to be the best way to both present and honour what they shared. However, to protect their confidentiality, I did not include information about each of the participants that might identify them to the reader (e.g., their diagnosis, gender, and time in the program). Square brackets were used when a particular word needed to be replaced so that it would not identify the participant.

The Findings section will be followed by a discussion of the participants' stories, the themes that emerged from these stories, and their relationship to what is known about the experiences of students with disabilities in post-secondary education from the literature reviewed earlier in this paper. I follow this up with

recommendations for the McMaster University School of Social Work regarding ways it might make the school more accessible and inclusive for students with disabilities.

Findings

Using the words of the participants, I tell below each of their stories to present the findings of the interviews completed. I spoke with each participant individually about his or her experiences in the McMaster University School of Social Work. Due to their different disabilities and experiences, I present here each of the participants' stories separately. This will provide an understanding of the variability of the participants' issues and needs. I present the interviews in the order which seems to best tell the participants' stories, rather than in chronological order.

Participant 2

Participant 2 was eager to participate in my study and seemed very confident when talking about her/his disability throughout the interview. S/he appeared to be calm and prepared for the interview by being ready to answer the discussion questions. However, the participant generally expressed more about her/his thoughts regarding the issues of students with disabilities rather than her/his own personal experiences.

In telling the story of participant 2, I want to begin with disclosure of disability. When asked about disclosing her/his disability to the School of Social

Work, participant 2 stated “I don’t mind telling anybody this. With me, I don’t care. It’s pretty obvious I have a disability.” The participant seemed to feel that since her/his disability is quite visible to others, that disclosure was not an issue for her/him. Furthermore, when asked about disclosing specifically to faculty and about receiving her/his academic accommodations, s/he responded,

Like I said, once I come into a classroom; the teacher knows right away that I am in a wheelchair. They have all been great...they are great with my course load and assignments. My accommodations give me extra time so they are great. There’s no, I have no problems. I get it done on time anyways. But if I had a problem, my teachers always say, “take more time if you want.”

The participant again expressed that since her/his disability is visible, disclosing to professors has not been an issue. The participant feels that her/his professors have been understanding and supportive towards providing her/him with her/his accommodations. Therefore, s/he implies that professors are more accepting of the legitimacy of the participant’s accommodations and with having to implement them due to the impairment being evident. However, the participant did express that s/he had other issues regarding the accommodation process.

Later on in the interview when I asked about her/his thoughts or experiences regarding registering with the CSD in order to receive accommodations, participant 2 explained,

When I first came, X [disability coordinator], I saw X a lot. If I didn't see him, if he wasn't so positive, encouraged me to do things like, I probably would have dropped out. If I didn't have a relationship with X or the CSD, because they really helped me my first couple of, three or four years. They were so encouraging.

The participant expressed that if it was not for the support from a specific disability coordinator, s/he feels that s/he would likely have dropped out of the program. S/he emphasised that receiving encouragement and having someone to talk to were vital for her/him in her/his first couple of years of university.

However, s/he continued by stating how the CSD has changed.

But now, it's just like you have to do everything yourself now, like print this [accommodation letter] off, come see me [Disability Coordinator] for 10 minutes and print it off now. You're responsible. I'm all for taking responsibility for yourself, but when you're a disabled student, you're thinking of a million other things to do. Like peers in my class, they don't have to worry about nursing and stuff. I got lots of shit to think about. And I'm sure are lots of other disabled, like any disability. They have things to think about.

The participant expressed concern that the CSD currently requires students with disabilities to complete tasks such as meeting with their disability coordinator each semester and printing off their own accommodation letters. The participant seems to feel that too much onus is placed on students with disabilities in terms of

ensuring their academic accommodations. S/he expressed that the accommodation policy does not recognize that students with disabilities often have more issues to manage in comparison to students without disabilities. S/he further adds,

I love that place. It's a great place, really helpful. But they are changing everything now...I forget a lot of things. I'm so busy that I forget to do things. Now, like if you don't see your counsellor, you're going to be cut off from getting accommodation letters...It seems so punishing now.

Everything at the CSD, it seems so impersonal. Like no one wants to talk to you...it's just now starting to get very brutal. For the past [number] years, I can see it slowly changing...I like going in and seeing people and talking to them. They get to know you.

Although the participant stated that the CSD is helpful, s/he also seemed to express again that the Centre has become less personal and more demanding of students over time. The participant reiterated that sometimes s/he does not remember to complete every accommodation duty that is expected of her/him by the CSD. S/he expressed that failing to complete these duties such as meeting with her/his disability coordinator can result in not receiving her/his accommodation letters. Therefore, s/he seemed to imply that the CSD has become more punitive than cooperative towards students with disabilities in regards to the accommodation process. The participant emphasized that the CSD is currently more avid about ensuring that students with disabilities complete

specific tasks rather than ensuring that students with disabilities receive their accommodations.

In regards to ensuring that s/he obtains her/his accommodations from the CSD, participant 2 emphasized that having much experience dealing with the CSD has given her/him an advantage over other students with disabilities. S/he explained that,

It's a business and like [requesting an accommodation], it's impossible, because there's no time. If there's no time...look, I know Y [Disability Coordinator], who does the [accommodation], so I'll email her and say "Y, I need these [accommodations]" and she'll fit me in. Probably isn't right but if you are a student at home, what are you going to do? You're going to panic. You're going to say "oh my G-d, I'm screwed!" But I know I get [the accommodation]. I just email Y and say "Y, do me a favour, I'm having such a hard time", and she'll say "no problem". But if you don't know the system....

Participant 2 expressed that there is not always sufficient time to conduct the required steps for obtaining a specific accommodation from the CSD. S/he explained that understanding how the CSD functions and knowing the right person to contact helps her/him to receive what s/he needs. Not only does the participant's experience demonstrate that accommodations can be complicated and challenging to obtain, but that s/he depends on strategies and knowledge gained from experience to obtain what s/he needs.

In addition to the accommodation process, participant 2 expressed her/his concern when asked about the physical and learning environment of the classrooms. S/he stated,

This I like, their classes. They're all even. I think it's great because I get to sit beside people. I don't like lecture halls. You're stuck in the back and no one sits near you. And you can't talk to anybody.

The participant explained that certain classrooms prevent her/him from choosing where to sit and from socializing with peers. Lecture halls that are not completely wheelchair accessible force the participant to sit in designated accessible areas. These areas tend to be either right in the front or at the back of the class. As participant 2 expressed, in either of these sections of the classroom, s/he would not be sitting beside her/his peers. Having classrooms that are inaccessible not only make it more challenging for this participant to feel included in the University community but they also reinforce that it is acceptable to exclude people with disabilities. Furthermore, not having all classrooms fully accessible demonstrates that these issues are not a priority for the School of Social Work and that certain types of exclusion are more acceptable than others.

Participant 2 stated that s/he has always had "arrogance and cockiness" and that approaching professors regarding her/his accommodations is not a problem. Although participant 2 expressed that s/he did not have issues with disclosing to professors, s/he did raise concerns with obtaining certain academic accommodations from the CSD. S/he seemed to have focused on how the CSD

has become less supportive and more “punishing” towards providing accommodations. Furthermore, s/he seemed to depend on her/his learned experience about knowing how to work the system to obtain what is only her/his right to have.

Now I am going to present the stories of participants whose disabilities are not clearly visible to others and who have found the accommodation process with professors to be more complicated.

Participant 1

A telephone interview was conducted with participant 1 due to reasons of distance and travel convenience. Participant 1 explained that s/he had an invisible disability. Although s/he knew s/he had had related learning challenges her/his whole life, s/he was not diagnosed until towards the end of completing her/his Social Work degree at McMaster University. Therefore, s/he did not receive official academic accommodations during her/his studies in the School of Social Work. However, the participant was able to speak to her/his challenges of not having academic accommodations and the benefits of receiving them during her/his studies at another university.

When asked about her/his experiences in the School of Social Work, one of the major areas that participant 1 discussed was the evaluation of the curriculum. In regards to the Social Work Admissions Test (SWAT), participant 1 expressed,

I find that when people want you to write an essay question, write something off the top of your head, you know, just in a booklet, that's a difficult process for me, that's very intimidating, and you know, basically it takes half an hour for me to write something and it takes me probably twice as long to write something that someone else normally writes, and it would have a whole bunch of mistakes. So it's not really reflective of what...I mean the process isn't indicative of what some of my capabilities are.

S/he further explained that:

like if I were to write an essay...it wouldn't look anything like what an admission process would look like under that kind of time constraint. So it's kind of like pointless system if they were trying to determine if I was a capable student in that sort of context...So that would be the anxiety that I would have if you only gave me twenty minutes to write something and it's going to be a piece of crap and then you're going to exclude me from and you're not really not going to know what my abilities are. So there would be a total disconnect and then my anxiety level would start spinning because you couldn't explain the dynamics to someone on the spot.

The participant emphasized that the SWAT does not reflect her/his abilities and potential to become a successful social work student. In addition, s/he seemed to feel that the SWAT did not recognize her/his learning style and academic abilities as legitimate. S/he emphasized that s/he requires time to write essays and that

time constraints present a barrier for her/him. S/he explained that having to demonstrate her/his academic abilities under a time constraint caused her/him to have anxiety and to produce poor academic work. Furthermore, the participant seemed to be concerned that the SWAT process might prevent other students with disabilities who have the capacity to be successful in the program from ever being admitted into the program.

The participant went on to explain that, once s/he was diagnosed with a disability, s/he explained that s/he began receiving academic accommodations that created major changes for her/him.

I was able to produce pieces of work that was good and that was recognized with an A+ and that satisfied me because I always kind of known that there was an issue. It was always sort of frustrating. I knew I was smart but I couldn't conduct myself socially and show how smart I was. Like we all have different types of intelligence but I always felt I wasn't meeting my potential.

Prior to receiving her/his accommodations, the participant seemed to be discouraged about her/his academic work and about not being able to demonstrate her/his actual capabilities to others. S/he also explained that once s/he was diagnosed and receiving accommodations, her/his academic work and grades greatly improved.

The participant seemed to be a student that struggled with school without having a real understanding about the reasons for this. Although s/he expressed

that s/he was suspicious that s/he had learning challenges, s/he didn't seem to have known exactly what the issue was or what needed to be done. This particular participant, who experienced not having a diagnosis and academic accommodations until later on in her/his studies, was able to recognize the importance of her/his accommodation needs eventually being met. S/he explained that once s/he was diagnosed with a disability, everything that s/he suspected regarding her/his abilities was legitimized. By being provided with academic accommodations, s/he was able to demonstrate her/his intelligence and potential not only to herself/himself but to his professors. Furthermore, the participant seemed to develop more self-confidence and become proud of the work that s/he began producing.

Participant 5

Participant 5 was eager to participate in the interview. The participant seemed confident and comfortable speaking about her/his disability throughout the interview. I am going to begin with participant 5's responses when asked about disclosing her/his disability to the School of Social Work. Participant 5 stated,

Well it is easy for me because I have accepted it. It is different for people who accept their disability because, and I cannot speak for all but in my personal experience when I was younger I did not accept my disability. I did not accept that things were happening and changing to me, so for me it would not have worked and that is why school did not work for me but I

mean now that I am..., easier to disclose. I am more comfortable for what I have and who I am. Disclosure to me is fine. Sometimes it can be intimidating I guess.

Participant 5 seems to say that accepting one's disability helps to disclose it to others. S/he explained that although s/he has come to terms with having a disability, it took time for her/him to do so. S/he stated that school used to be more of a challenge for her/him but now that s/he is older, s/he has a good understanding of himself and the self-confidence to disclose her/his disability to others. On the surface, it may seem that the participant was contradicting herself/himself in that s/he stated that disclosure is not an issue for her/him but that it can also "be intimidating." However, participant 5 seemed to clarify this matter when s/he was asked whether s/he felt safe disclosing in the context of the accommodation process. S/he responded,

...Depends to who though, that's the thing, because sometimes, like I am okay always disclosing, I think I have, like, I think I am more mentally strong because I really don't care at times what people think about me but it depends what situation I am in, it's all based on different situations right.

Participant 5 argued that being "more comfortable for what I have and who I am" and being "mentally strong" have been essential factors to be able to disclose her/his impairment to others. However, s/he also seems to imply that these personal characteristics are not always enough to ensure that s/he obtains her/his accommodations from professors or that s/he receives them in a dignified manner.

S/he explained that there are other factors such as the social context that play a vital role for students when disclosing. Therefore, s/he demonstrated that disclosing one's disability is a complicated matter due to many influential factors such as the purpose, the individual's comfort level, and who they are disclosing to.

Although s/he articulated that s/he has an understanding of her/his abilities and rights as a student with a disability, participant 5 expressed that disclosing one's disability to professors for the purpose of retrieving accommodations can be daunting. Her/his discomfort with disclosing seems to be due to always being uncertain about how professors will respond to requests for accommodations and how the process will unfold each time. Consequently, the participant seemed to feel that s/he has to rely on the discretion of each professor to have the opportunity to fully participate in the course. S/he stated,

Sometimes it is like playing tennis, I am getting questioned, why do I need this time, what is exactly wrong, explain to me and when I say tennis it is e-mails bouncing back and forth and I have to justify why I need more time. I do not know. I feel like sometimes, I do not know, I feel so subordinate. I feel bad. I have had comments that almost made me feel like I am ruining their academic professor's... reputation.

With this statement, this participant demonstrated that some professors seem to have a lack of understanding of the accommodation process. The professors in these cases are violating the rights of the participant by questioning her/his

accommodation needs. The professors only have the right to learn what the accommodations are and how to implement them. Students have full discretion over sharing the details of their diagnosis and whom they wish to share it with. However, this participant explained that sometimes the accommodation process does not always unfold the way it is intended to and that justification of her/his learning needs is expected by some professors. Having to justify her/his accommodations to professors caused the participant to feel inferior and a burden to these professors. S/he further stated,

...it all depends on how it is taken right away and how that first meeting is. Like hi, here are some papers, here are accommodation papers. I sometimes feel like a subordinate again, if they are not asking me questions, I wonder myself, like is everything going to be good because I like to further discuss it...I do not want to take their time up when they are in class, so I usually request a meeting after, or I let them know right away, "if you have any questions can you please e-mail me or I can meet with you in your office?" Sometimes I guess it can make me feel uncomfortable just because you know they are Ph.D.'s and I think people have their own perceptions and assumptions about things so sometimes absolutely I can feel a little intimidated.

Although this participant has self-confidence and understands her/his accommodation rights, s/he still feels that s/he has to comply with the requests of professors. Being compliant was demonstrated by the participant taking pro-

active steps to ensure that the process runs as smoothly as possible for the professor. The professors' expectations put pressure on her/him to undertake what is necessary to be compliant to their requests.

Well cause I think that they think it is going to be extra work for them and I am not sure that, like I said, I think sometimes we as a society, as a student get labelled, as a student that there is labelling going on. There are roles and expectations that the student has, there are roles and expectations that the professor has right...I feel sometimes that maybe that they think like I am going to be more of a challenge, that this is going to be harder, they got to supply me with this, so it's almost going to be extra work...

It seems as though this participant has expressed that there is a role that s/he feels that s/he is expected to fill as a 'normal' student in a university. S/he seemed to feel that if s/he does not fit the criteria of this role, there may be negative consequences for the professor and her/him. S/he suggests that having accommodations that need to be implemented are not included in this role and therefore s/he becomes a burden once s/he discloses that s/he has a disability. The participant, in expressing that the professor has "perceptions and assumptions" regarding how a student should be, suggests that normative principles around what does and does not count as a 'student' are embedded in the perspectives of professors and thus further implies that students who have a disability are abnormal and deficient.

When asked what her/his thoughts and experiences were regarding the physical or learning environment of the classroom, a major concern that participant 5 expressed was that s/he encountered barriers to accessible course material.

Some of my readings are done with PDF's and they are really inaccessible because of the way they are saved or and if I try and convert it or change, which usually I cannot, but if I am able to change and convert it to a different format, so say PDF and switch it over to Rich Text or a word document, it loses its authenticity or it's illegible writing because I find it more than often that these PDF are not really even good copies.

This participant has expressed that there are many challenges to obtaining course material in an accessible format. The participant must dedicate a great deal of time and effort towards each course just so that s/he can participate in it.

Although the participant does not place blame with the professor, the responsibility seems to fall primarily on the student to make sure that s/he receives her/his accommodations.

Also in regards to the classroom environment, I asked the participant about her/his thoughts or experiences with Social Work course instructors or Teaching Assistant (TA) attitudes pertaining to her/his disability. S/he responded:

I just ask, I request things, I request handouts to be sent to me electronically, um some do not use ELM but some may, that would be a lot easier at times maybe for those who do not like disclosing I guess. If

there is always somewhere where you can get these handouts without kind of making yourself known so people can kind of lay low or play it low and just kind of, you know, make their way that way.

This participant explained that although s/he was comfortable requesting course material in electronic format, there are methods that professors and TAs could apply that would address issues of disclosure. S/he states that having course material available in an accessible format and location would eliminate the need for students with disabilities to have to request them. The participant also seemed to imply that these methods would assist students with disabilities with feeling more included in the program. S/he explained that this approach would allow some students to keep their disability confidential and to have the opportunity to maintain a low profile in the course. The participant later explained that providing academic material in accessible format would encourage inclusion in the School of Social Work.

When asked about how the School of Social Work could be more inclusive, s/he said, "...electronic copies of everything that should be read, I feel would be a huge bonus, um just having material that is readily available you know people read different so it is not just vision impairment, it is other forms." It seemed that the participant was not only emphasizing the importance of all material being in electronic format but also that it should always be readily available on the first day of class. My interpretation of the participant's suggestion is that having all material immediately accessible and available would

contribute towards a more inclusive environment by recognizing more students' learning needs.

Participant 6

Participant 6 was well spoken and thoughtful in her/his responses about disability issues. It seemed important to the participant to be able to share her/his personal experiences in order to provide context to her/his answers. When I asked her/him what her/his thoughts and experiences were regarding social work instructors or TA attitudes pertaining to her/his disability, s/he responded by talking about disclosure.

Well the thing about it, because I have an invisible disability you know, I always have to disclose you know, which is hard. I pretty much have to disclose my disability. It has become, later on in my undergrad I was doing a lot more disclosure but that was through the encouragement of one professor to disclose my story but, you know, because I have an invisible disability I always have to disclose my disability to people.

The participant expressed that having an invisible disability had caused her/him to always have to disclose to professors in order to obtain accommodations. S/he stated that disclosing her/his disability was difficult but that receiving support from a professor helped her/him to disclose more often.

To better understand her/his challenges, I asked participant 6 why disclosing her/his disability was difficult. S/he stated that "it is hard because you know the stigma of mental health disability. You never know how the next

person is going to react to you, so it is difficult, you know.” S/he articulated that deciding to disclose is challenging due to the negative connotations attached to the term mental health disability. S/he expressed that the uncertainty of how others will respond to learning that s/he has a mental health disability plays a vital role when considering whether to disclose. The unpredictability of how disclosing her/his disability to others will unfold makes disclosure difficult for the participant.

When asked about disclosing her/his disability to the School of Social Work, participant 6 discussed her/his experiences of when s/he first came into the program. S/he explained,

I had to tell my professors that I had a disability but at that point I was not really comfortable with talking about the fact that I had a mental health disability. I was not really that comfortable telling my professors that I had a mental health disability. I just basically told them that I had an invisible disability.

The participant stated that s/he did not feel secure disclosing to her professors that s/he had a mental health disability. S/he expressed that the stigma of having a mental health disability is so detrimental that s/he kept it hidden. Furthermore, by only telling professors that s/he had an invisible disability, participant 6 implied that certain disabilities are not as socially accepted as others within the university setting. Stigmatization plays a vital role when deciding to disclose her/his mental health disability to professors.

Disclosure was not only an issue for the participant with professors, but also with field placements. When asked if s/he disclosed her/his disability to field placement instructors, participant 6 responded, "I never disclose. I never did."

When I asked why s/he did not disclose, s/he stated,

I heard people talk negatively about people with mental health disabilities there... Yeah, staff members right, and just like the whole idea, I heard people talk negatively about mental health so I did not feel safe saying that I had a mental health disability there.

The participant expressed that hearing staff members speak negatively about people with mental health disabilities caused her to not feel safe about disclosing at the field placement. S/he continued,

Just because, if it was visible that I had a mental health disability probably somebody would never have said certain things in front of me, but because it was not visible, I just heard people talk and...the whole idea of stigma of mental health - I heard derogatory statements around mental health, people with mental health.

The participant explained that if her/his disability was visible to other staff members, they likely would not have made discriminatory comments with other people around. Therefore, the participant implied that one of the main reasons why s/he heard the comments was due to peoples' assumptions about the visibility of disability. S/he stated,

It is not visible, right, it is just the assumption, there is not the idea of there could be a disability and I think that does not make it inclusive right, so with that assumption I think, you know, unless you tell someone that you have a mental health disability then there is the assumption that you are healthy.

The participant expressed that the staff members' assumptions that s/he was "healthy" reinforced that s/he was working in an ableist environment. Therefore, s/he seemed to have immediately felt excluded by others when they clearly implied that having a disability was abnormal and deficient. S/he further explained that,

part of the whole idea of ableism. It is the whole idea that people just assume that you are not disabled, so with a mental health disability that assumption can be detrimental sometimes, right? Because if you are not, there are the people who do not understand why you are a certain way.

The participant expressed that ableism does exist and that s/he did not feel safe disclosing her/his disability. S/he expressed that s/he is afraid of others viewing her/him as unhealthy, deficient, or abnormal. S/he stated that s/he would have never been accepted if others found out that s/he had a mental health disability. Therefore, once the participant heard the discriminatory comments, there was no way that s/he would have felt comfortable to disclose to anyone at the field placement.

However, in the participant's second field placement, where the agency was more focused on mental health services, s/he stated,

The second placement I should say I did disclose...there were a lot of people who had mental health disabilities in that group of people and I disclosed because I wanted to establish a rapport with the people there so I disclosed there, because I felt safe.

Participant 6 mentioned that at her/his second field placement, there were many clients who had mental health disabilities. For the purpose of building a stronger relationship, the participant explained that s/he disclosed her/his disability to her/his clients. S/he seemed to have disclosed because s/he was working in a social context where mental health disability was common and accepted. The participant not only said that s/he was comfortable and safe when disclosing to others, but also that having a disability was an asset. S/he expressed that having a mental health disability benefitted her/him by allowing the clients to feel safer. Therefore, the participant was better able to build relationships with clients.

The participant reflected on how different her/his experiences were at each placement by stating,

these were two totally different field placements...totally different sense of welcoming or not welcoming. Again, one setting it was like negative to have a mental health disability and in another setting it was accepted and it was normalized and okay, so I felt safe to be able to disclose in that setting...Well it was open, you know, the whole idea of people with mental

health disabilities, you know in that setting was, you know, it was an open thing.

The participant expressed that the two field placements were opposite in regards to being an inclusive environment. S/he reiterated that the second field placement made her/him feel included, accepted, and safe to disclose.

We then spoke about the accommodation process and I asked the participant to explain some of the challenges that s/he had encountered with it. S/he stated,

I like to get the letter to the professor as soon as possible, in the first class...I like to meet the professor right away and "hi my name is", just kind of make that contact. I like to make that contact and sometimes the best way to do that is in that first class.

At McMaster University, students with disabilities who require accommodations are advised that they can either establish an appointment with their professor or talk to them after class. However, what this participant seemed to explain is that because accommodations do not get implemented until after the professor has heard about the student's need for accommodations, s/he feels more pressure to speak to her/his professors on the very first day. Consequently, this does not come without a cost for the participant.

...the only thing I think for me is when you're standing in a classroom full of people and you just get into a new classroom and you have to tell the professor that you have a disability and then there is a whole bunch of

people standing right there at the end of class and you hand them your disability (accommodation letter)...That is a problem, that's an issue, you know...Well you have no privacy. I always wait until everybody is gone and then I will approach the professor with my accommodation letters.

Participant 6, who seemed to feel very strongly about keeping her/his disability confidential from her/his peers, explained that the accommodation option of approaching professors on the first day of class makes confidentiality difficult. This necessitates that the participant feels s/he has to take extra measures such as waiting until her/his peers have left before s/he discloses.

In regards to the accommodation process in general:

Well, I think the whole you know, the whole idea of having accommodations does meet my needs, but I think the process of, you know, when I first started about [#] years ago, you did not have to take it to the professor and then take it back to the CSD. I have had it where I have taken the letter to the professor but I just never got a chance to take it back to the CSD and then my accommodation for that semester was threatened right...So that is a problem...I think the thing about it is the whole idea is cumbersome, taking it there and back to CSD it is just a bit cumbersome.

The participant expressed that in some ways the accommodation process does meet her/his needs. However, as with participant 2, s/he stated that the process can also be burdensome because of all of the required steps for students

with disabilities. S/he also seemed to believe that the accommodation process was too demanding and that if s/he did not meet the CSD's expectations, her/his accommodations would be threatened or not be provided. For this participant, the accommodation process was a complicated and concerning issue. The accommodation process does not seem to recognize the challenge that students with disabilities have when trying to ensure that they receive their accommodations when they need them, while maintaining privacy.

Participant 3

Participant 3 appeared confident discussing her/his impairment and her/his University experiences. S/he seemed frustrated with the process of professors implementing her/his accommodations. Participant 3 has a hearing impairment and s/he explained that:

I have a hearing system that they [professors] have to wear a part of it.

And I have the corresponding section that you put the hearing aids on so

that I could block out everything that is going on in the room and only

hear them [the professors]. So in a large room situation, I would have to

use that [hearing system] because I wouldn't be able to pick up what is

being said otherwise, like people's rattling and all the stuff that's going on.

S/he further stated that "there has been a number of times that a couple of the professors will go 'well, you know, I'm not sure, do I have to wear it (hearing

system)?" Participant 3 also said "there's been the odd one that sort of went 'I'll

just put it here.' Right, and if they wander, then you lose it [audio]." These

experiences demonstrate that many of participant 3's professors did not seem concerned about how crucial it was that they wear the microphone while lecturing. The professors seemed to have a lack of understanding about the disability and the accommodation rights of the student. Secondly, by questioning whether they had to wear the microphone or by leaving it on a table, the participant seemed to think that, on some level, the professors were challenging the legitimacy of her/his accommodations. The professors' questioning of the participant about whether they have to wear the hearing system also relays the message that the accommodation is a burden for professors to bear. The questioning places the student in a position where they have to weigh the benefits and risks when enforcing their rights.

When asked about how the professors' questioning made her/him feel, participant 3 responded,

A little bit defensive at first, because you don't want to put them on the spot...So if you don't mind alienating anybody right off the get go, I would say "yes you do" [to answer the professor]. So it does put you on the spot. So if they are questioning whether they should wear it, then all of a sudden you're sort of going "well, wouldn't you want to?" And it's [hearing system] not intrusive so why is it an issue for you to do that. And I'm not comfortable asking that.

Although the participant knew that s/he needed her/his accommodations, s/he seemed to feel that s/he did not want to single out professors by forcing them to

do something that they were hesitant to do. S/he seemed to express that enforcing her/his accommodation rights risked embarrassing professors and creating a power struggle in the professor/student relationship. Participant 3 expressed that “there’s a certain power that they have. And they have full control over your marking scheme.” This participant believed that s/he did not have an equivalent level of power to that of professors in regards to insisting that her/his accommodations be implemented. Although s/he seemed to know her/his accommodation rights, s/he believed that there were other factors to consider when justifying her/his learning needs, such as the professor having control over whether s/he passes the course. This placed the participant in a very uncomfortable position. Therefore, s/he always had to consider the risks at stake when insisting that her/his accommodations be provided by her/his professors.

When asked about her/his experiences in the classroom environment, participant 3 discussed how professors can sometimes create barriers for her/him from fully participating in the course. “I don’t think that they have any concept that when they open things up to big group discussions that you lose anybody that has a hearing impairment.” The participant expressed that professors who utilize class discussions involving large groups reinforce the assumption that every student can participate in the same way. Therefore, while class discussions may work very well for students who hear, they do not work well for students with hearing impairments. S/he explained that students with hearing impairments - such as her/himself - become excluded from these situations.

And the suggestions that I've made to professors to sort of alleviate that is if somebody is asking a question and something that is going to have value, then you just repeat the question, right?... as soon as they do that I can get the gist of what's happening as well. And I find that a lot of people don't do that...I have gone up and said you know "that's a very difficult situation and if you did this, I would have a better opportunity to join into what was happening too." You can't join into a conversation when you haven't gotten a clue what's going on. So if they do that, then I could join in and add to it. And again, I've never had anybody that said "no, I won't" but I rarely have had anybody actually do it.

The participant seemed to feel that even when s/he provided useful techniques to the professor so that s/he could participate in the course, the accommodation was often still not implemented. What s/he also seemed to be expressing is the amount of effort that is required on her/his part in order for professors to recognize that this is an issue. Although s/he has provided solutions that explain exactly what professors have to do, her/his accommodations are still not guaranteed to be implemented. S/he further stated "I don't feel that any other professors do or anybody I have ever met here would be unaccommodating on purpose. I think a lot of times it's just they are not aware. It's a non awareness, more than anything." It appeared that the participant perceived that it was unintentional – merely a lack of awareness - when professors did not provide her/him with accommodations. However, the participant did also state that even

when the professors are made aware of how to implement her/his accommodations, they don't always do so.

In regards to the classroom environment, participant 3 stated "the university has a very loud fan system and it's very difficult. If you're hearing impaired, it really sucks. It is bad. And it's everywhere. All these buildings, none of them are set up for good acoustics." This demonstrates another challenge that this student must encounter day to day in her/his classes. It is another example of how social structures are designed based upon normative ableist assumptions.

In regards to the accommodation process, participant 3 expressed her/his strategy to ensure that s/he receives her/his learning needs.

Usually at the beginning of the class, it's just easier to explain to them in person. If you call somebody, and now I found this in other universities, if you call and say "I have a hearing system and I need you to wear part of the apparatus that goes with that," then there's this oooh, because they are unsure of what they are getting themselves into. But if people see it, it's not usually a big deal.

Much like participants 2 and 6, participant 3 seemed to prefer to initiate discussing accommodations with her/his professors in the classroom. However, s/he added that in her/his particular situation, meeting the professor in person helps with the process because it allows the professors to visibly see her/his accommodation devices.

When asked whether s/he felt that the School of Social Work was inclusive, participant 3 explained:

The School of Social Work has their principles they want to uphold in terms of oppression, towards disabilities and everything, and that they make a really big effort when it comes to oppression towards minorities. But they may be not quite there on disabilities. I don't think they even recognize them sometimes.

The participant expressed that the School of Social Work does not fully include people with disabilities in its mandate to address issues of marginalized populations. The participant further stated that s/he believed the School does not always recognize people with disabilities as marginalized.

Participant 4

Throughout the interview with participant 4, s/he seemed rather anxious, spoke quickly at times and discussed many areas of concern. To the best of my abilities, I am presenting what I think to be the main issues. To begin the interview, I asked the participant what her/his thoughts and experiences were in regards to the admissions process for the School of Social Work.

As a person who is living with several disabilities, I would never...I did not apply as a person with a disability...I would not apply because my perception I wouldn't get in because...I would feel too concerned...I would not apply as a student with a disability. I would not perceive it as being safe here or anywhere else...better to just keep quiet. See if I can get in

you know based on other stuff and later when I need accommodation, go for it then. That way nobody can really say anything...and if I were to go back and do it again, I still would not say I identify myself as a person with multiple disabilities.

Although participant 4 described herself/himself as being “increasingly open” about her/his learning challenges, s/he expressed that s/he would not apply as a student with a disability to the School of Social Work. S/he stated that s/he does not feel it is safe to identify as a person with a disability to the School or in other social contexts. S/he believed that disclosing should be conducted only when it is absolutely necessary, such as when one requires accommodations. Therefore, s/he stated that it is better to keep one’s disability hidden during the admissions process in order to prevent anyone from challenging her/him based on having a disability.

When I asked why s/he would not disclose as having a disability, s/he responded, “because I feel I would probably be discriminated against.” I followed by asking in what way s/he would be discriminated. S/he explained,

Too much bother, look what we have to do. I don’t think a lot of people have the awareness of that. For me, a simple extension of a couple of weeks so that I can take the time to do what I need to do. Do it well, like work to my capacity so that I have extra time to do all of the reading.

As with participant 6, participant 4 expressed that s/he was afraid of being discriminated against when disclosing. S/he expressed that there is a lack of

recognition among faculty and staff in regards to understanding her/his learning needs. Therefore, s/he seemed to suggest that it is not worth the effort or risk to disclose, due to the fear of faculty and staff not accepting that s/he needs accommodations. Similarly to participant 2, s/he also expressed that her/his abilities and academic potential would not be demonstrated unless s/he received the accommodation of extra time when completing work.

Disclosing was also a major concern for participant 4 in other academic areas, such as field placements. When asked if s/he disclosed to her/his field placement supervisors, s/he said,

No way in hell. No I don't think it would have been safe at a [field placement] to say that...I wouldn't even consider it, no...Like I mean I guess, between [sensory impairment], [physical impairment], and [cognitive impairment], and [mental health], [mental health] is probably the biggest one. I think I felt there was a fear of being judged. That I would be judged and somehow, I wouldn't get through the program if they didn't see me as just a student like everybody else.

As with participant 6, participant 4 expressed that s/he did not disclose her/his disability to her/his field placement supervisor because s/he did not feel safe at the agency and that s/he was afraid of being judged. Also similar participant 6, s/he stated that it is not as acceptable to disclose having a mental health disability in comparison to other disabilities. Furthermore, s/he seemed to be afraid that if s/he did not appear as a student without a disability, then s/he would be judged as

incapable of completing the program. Therefore, s/he not only expressed that there are serious risks when disclosing, but that certain disabilities are more stigmatized than others.

The participant was able to go more into detail of her/his experiences with disclosure when we discussed the accommodation process with professors. The participant seemed to convey that there was a discrepancy between what the accommodation process entailed and the reality of how it unfolded in practice. Professors are required to implement those accommodations identified in the student's accommodation letter. However, this participant expressed that there was a lot of uncertainty with how the accommodation procedures would unfold in reality. In regards to bringing her/his accommodation letter to professors, participant 4 expressed that it was "pretty anxiety provoking. Right, because I have to approach them...meet them after class, approach them, hope they'll sign, what if they don't sign?" The participant expressed that certain steps required for the accommodation process created a stressful experience for her/him. Having to confront professors and wondering each time whether the professor would sign her/his accommodation letter contributed to raising her/his anxiety. S/he seemed to not be able to predict how the accommodation process would unfold with each new professor. This uncertainty seemed to be justified by her/his experiences with seeking and receiving/not receiving accommodations with professors in the School of Social Work. The participant recounted that, "one wouldn't sign, you

know that was really distressing you know because I'm like you wouldn't sign, what am I supposed to do?"

Regardless of the reason for the professor not signing the accommodation letter, this student was left feeling helpless and uncertain about what to do. Just like participant 3, s/he seemed to feel that s/he had a lack of power over ensuring that s/he received her/his accommodations.

Participant 4 also stated that "I had another professor ask me, 'well what is your disability?' and I said 'well I'm not going to tell you.' Dropped his class very quickly." This comment demonstrated that the participant experienced a professor questioning her/his disability when they had no right to do so. This placed the participant in a position in which s/he had to defend her/his right to keep the particulars of her/his disability confidential. Both of the previous comments reveal that participant 4 experienced having her/his right to accommodations violated by her/his professors.

Not only did the participant express that professors violated this right to accommodation, s/he also voiced that there was a lack of understanding from professors regarding her/his accommodation and impairment. S/he stated,

I had the one guy say "well you know that's not fair if you get more time, the other ones will want..." But it takes me twice as long to read everything, twice as long - if not more - to read.

This participant expressed that her/his impairment seemed to not have been understood by the professor as requiring accommodation, and that

accommodations would provide the student with an advantage over her/his peers. This caused the participant to unnecessarily have to justify her/his learning needs to her/his professor; to go beyond what was expected of her/him in order to ensure s/he received her/his academic accommodations.

In another situation, participant 4 expressed:

I've had one professor deny me. And I looked at her and said "are you kidding me? Like really? What do you mean you're denying me?" and she said "no absolutely not, you can't have more time."

Despite the University's policy to accommodate students with disabilities, the participant explained that s/he was denied her/his accommodations from a professor. Furthermore, s/he seemed to be completely surprised and unprepared for this. S/he seemed to not know what to do. This demonstrates that despite completing the required accommodation steps for students with disabilities, they may still experience having their rights violated. Furthermore, this participant seemed to have felt that this professor did not initially have a sufficient understanding of the student's right to accommodation. Consequently, the participant was, again, placed in a position where s/he had to explain the accommodation process to the professor. Participant 4 continued,

...And then, later, when she realized I was registered with the Centre (CSD), she said she felt terrible. We sat down and had a discussion about it. She said she misunderstood. And I thought "it's not my responsibility to educate you. You know, you're in the School of Social Work, you need

to educate yourself, you have a PHD, you go do some background work. I don't want to educate you".

Having to explain her/his rights and the accommodation process to the professor was not a task that the participant believed should be her/his responsibility. S/he strongly urged that the professor needed to take the initiative to educate herself on the accommodation process.

The participant expressed that the lack of understanding by some professors may be because they carry pre-conceived normative assumptions towards students. Participant 4 said,

I think a lot of assumptions are made about disability, about what you can or can't do or what people are able or not able to do...I think a lot of people just think, don't understand, and I think there's an expectation in social work that you just don't have problems like anyone else, too.

The participant seems to feel that professors have a lack of understanding of disabilities and that this may be due to pre-conceived normative assumptions towards, in this case, social work students. Believing that professors assume that every student does not have a disability consequently makes it more challenging for the participant to disclose. It can reinforce the perspective that s/he is deviant or deficient in comparison to her/his peers.

In regards to disclosing her/his disabilities to peers, participant 4 said "when I tell people, they would be like "really? No? But you come across as so confident."

In reference to using an accessibility parking spot for people with disabilities, participant 4 explained:

I got a lot of flak from other students with disabilities because they'd say "well, we see you walking out of your car and you look just fine to me" and it's like yeah but it took me an hour to get out of here and I'm in really bad pain. And because it's invisible I guess.

Therefore, s/he expressed that s/he had also experienced peers who assume that s/he did not have a disability. In addition, peers challenged the legitimacy of her/his disability because they could not see it. These experiences also demonstrated that people have pre-conceived perceptions of what someone with a disability should look like and how they should behave. It also points to the notion of there being a hierarchy among visible and invisible disabilities.

Taking part in the accommodation process seemed to constantly place the participant at risk of serious consequences. I perceived that the participant really did not feel safe disclosing. S/he expressed that s/he was worried about being judged and viewed as deviant by others. Although s/he knew the accommodation process was established and that professors were expected to fulfill certain duties, s/he seemed to still feel that there were no guarantees about how the process would unfold. Therefore, the participant explained that s/he really had to depend on the hope that professors would sign her/his letters and accommodate her/him.

Discussion

In this section, I will discuss the essential themes that arose from the participants' stories. The participants were asked to share their thoughts about their experiences with the McMaster University School of Social Work. The major themes that emerged from the participants' stories were disclosure, the accommodation process, and the physical and learning environment of the classroom. Although the participants had a range of disabilities, they shared similar experiences regarding these topics. However, for the purpose of this paper, I will only critically discuss the themes of disclosure and the accommodation process. It is also important to note that these two themes overlap a great deal.

Disclosure

As explained in the Literature Review, in order to receive accommodations, students with disabilities are required to disclose that they have a disability to the necessary personnel. Since the participants need accommodations to participate in the School of Social Work, they have little choice but to disclose and fulfill the requirements of the McMaster University accommodation policy. However, a common theme among the participants was that disclosure was not a positive experience. They discussed that they did not

always feel safe disclosing because they lacked control of the outcome and that there was a possibility of being discriminated and stigmatised. The primary sub-themes that emerged from the participants' discussion of disclosure are safety and control over the disclosure process.

Participants' safety.

The participants in this study demonstrated that disclosing their disability was something that they did not always feel safe or secure doing within the McMaster University School of Social Work. Although they seemed comfortable and accepting of their disabilities, the participants stated that they were afraid of being discriminated against due to having disabilities. Madaus (2008) similarly stated in her research that disclosing can be an issue for students with invisible disabilities because it increases the likelihood of being stigmatized. As with many of the participants in Olney and Brockelmans' (2003) study, the participants in my research study worried about others finding out that they had a disability. They reported that they feared being stigmatized, judged, and thought of as less capable by both McMaster University personnel and by field placement personnel. Participant 6, for example, expressed that s/he was afraid to disclose her/his impairment due to the stigma attached to having a mental health disability. Wahl (1999) suggests that this is quite true, that many people still hold stereotypical ideas about mental health issues and that people labelled with mental health issues are still highly stigmatised in our society. The possibility of stigmatization caused participant 6 to be uncertain about how others would respond to learning that s/he

had a mental health disability. This concern would seem to be a valid one as s/he also explained that s/he experienced field placement staff members making derogatory comments regarding people with mental health issues.

In regards to the fear of being stigmatized, participant 4 stated that “Anxiety is my big thing that I live with, that I’ve struggled with since I was a child...And so every day is like an exposure for me from the time I get up to the time I go home.” This is an important issue as Troiano’s (2003) study with students with learning disabilities found that stigmatization resulted in feelings of despair and low self-confidence.

Control over disclosure.

“Well the thing about it because I have an invisible disability you know I always have to disclose you know which is hard.” Participant 6 expressed that due to having a disability that professors cannot visually see; s/he always had to go through the process of disclosing in order to obtain accommodations. Since his participants also had invisible disabilities, Troiano’s (2003) participants were constantly faced with challenging decisions in regards to disclosing. Furthermore, his participants developed strategies to increase their control of what information was shared and to reduce opportunities for stigmatization. Students in my research study also talked about the ways in which they attempted to gain control over the process of disclosure. Since there was a fear of being discriminated against or stigmatised, the participants expressed that there were factors that played a role in more successful experiences of disclosure. They also

implemented strategies themselves that contributed to making them feel more comfortable with disclosing. Factors that contributed to a more successful disclosure experience did overlap with the disclosing strategies that the participants implemented.

Participants expressed that feeling comfortable to disclose depended on two primary factors: who they were disclosing to, and their own life stage. Participant 4 for example, stated that s/he felt more comfortable to disclose to social work professors that were “understanding, “flexible” and “aware” of the student’s impairment challenges in regards to completing the course work. S/he explained that it put her/him more at ease that “if they didn’t understand things or know things, then it seemed like they wanted to learn more about it.” Although it is not specifically in reference to disclosure, Troiano (2003) did find that a significant source of support for students with disabilities is from professors. He found in his study that students’ perceived social support from faculty contributed to being more accepting of their disability. Troiano also suggests that parents, family, post-secondary advisors, and support services personnel are important sources of social support for students with disabilities.

With regards to the importance of one’s life stage, participant 5 explained that being older than the average university student and accepting of her/his disability allowed her/him to feel more comfortable with disclosing. S/he explained that,

when I was younger I did not accept my disability, I did not accept that things were happening and changing. So it would not have worked and that is why school did not work for me but I mean now that I am easier to disclose. I am more comfortable for what I have and who I am. Disclosure to me is fine.

Participant 4 also seemed to suggest that being older contributed to feeling safer with disclosing. S/he stated that s/he is “probably a little bit braver five or six years later than when I first started the BSW program.” However, participant 5 added that disclosing can sometimes be “intimidating” and that it “depends to who though.” Therefore, s/he also explained that who s/he is disclosing to can play a role in her/his decision to disclose.

Another way in which the participants attempted to take control and to make the process more comfortable was to implement strategies that they developed for themselves, such as choosing the most suitable location, the most suitable means of communication, and the best time to disclose. Participants 2, 3, and 6 all stated that it was important for them to disclose to professors in person and to do so on the first day of their classes. Participant 6 explained that

I like to get the letter to the professor as soon as possible, in the first class...I like to meet the professor right away and just kind of make that contact. I like to make that contact and sometimes the best way to do that is in that first class.

However, s/he also stated that

when you're standing in a classroom full of people and you just get into a new classroom and you have to tell the professor that you have a disability and then there is a whole bunch of people standing right there at the end of class and you hand them your disability... Well you have no privacy. I always wait until everybody is gone and then I will approach the professor with my accommodation letters.

Although there were consequences to disclosing to professors in the classroom such as not having privacy from peers, it was necessary for the student in order to obtain accommodations as quickly as possible. Many students with disabilities such as participant 6 need their accommodations to be provided as soon as possible in order for them to learn and participate in the course. Therefore, waiting to disclose and negotiate accommodations on a later date and/or at a more secluded location may address privacy issues but it delays their learning needs being implemented. As a result, students with disabilities have little control over their safety concerns in regards to disclosing to obtain their accommodations.

In regards to methods of communication, participant 3 expressed that it is more helpful for her/him and also convenient for faculty, if s/he discloses in person rather than through other means of communication such as the telephone. This participant, who has a hearing impairment, explained that professors seem to be more understanding and confident if they can visually see the assistive technology such as FM device that they must use to provide accommodation for the students. By having them visually "see my [accommodation] letters,"

participant 4 also stated that by meeting them in person, professors seemed to be more understanding towards her/his learning needs. Baron et al. (1996) also found that students with disabilities spend time considering whether to disclose or not and the timing. They argue that “there appears to be no obvious safe way for students to disclose” (Baron et al., 1996, p.375).

As well, the participants developed strategies to select which information would be best shared in each situation to ease their stress about disclosing. In regards to strategies to control personal information, participant 6 stated that “I was not really that comfortable telling my professors that I had a mental health disability. I just basically told them that I had an invisible disability.” Therefore, due to the stigma attached to mental health disabilities, s/he hid her/his diagnosis and only disclosed that s/he had an “invisible disability.” Participant 4, who has multiple disabilities also expressed that it was more socially ‘acceptable’ to disclose having one disability over another. S/he stated that,

For me it seems it's more acceptable to say that I have you know [sensory impairment] than [mental health], right?...between [sensory impairment], [physical impairment], and [cognitive impairment], and [mental health], [mental health] is probably the biggest one.

Participant 2, who has a visible physical impairment stated that,

I don't mind telling anybody this. With me, I don't care. It's pretty obvious I have a disability... once I come into a classroom, the teacher knows right away that I am in a wheelchair. They have all been great.

Dunn et al (2006, p. 13) also discuss how schools of social work are more agreeable to accommodate physical disabilities than invisible such as learning disabilities and mental health.

The participants from my study seemed to suggest that there is an impairment hierarchy among students with disabilities in regards to disclosure. They argued that having a visible (i.e. physical) impairment is the most acceptable to disclose to faculty and that having an invisible mental health issue is the least. Similarly, Baron et al (1996) also found that students with 'non-obvious' impairments such as learning disabilities are more hesitant to disclose due to the fear of being discriminated against. The participants from Olney & Brockelmans' (2003) study also ranked disability labels within a hierarchy. Similar to the participants in my study, they expressed that acquired physical disabilities were at the top of the order, followed by congenital impairment, cognitive, developmental, and mental health issues being at the bottom. However, Olney and Brockelman also suggest that although their participants claimed that certain impairments have a higher social status than others, they did not necessarily believe it. Similar to my participants, where they ranked on the order, influenced their decisions regarding disclosing and how they thought others would respond to learning they have a disability. Whether or not my participants bought into the hierarchy, they seemed to strategize disclosing based on their awareness of it, in order to 'play the game' in a way that best serves their needs.

In regards to the timing of disclosure, participant 4 expressed that it is “better to just keep quiet. See if I can get in you know based on other stuff and later when I need accommodation, go for it then. That way nobody can really say anything.” Therefore, s/he seemed to suggest that it was more beneficial to not disclose when coming into the program and to only do so when it was absolutely necessary, such as for obtaining accommodations. S/he seemed to use this strategy to avoid being discriminated against for as long as possible. However, there are negative consequences to not disclosing to faculty when a course begins. Professors can sometimes think that late disclosures are the result of students with disabilities “trying to excuse poor performance” (Rocco, 2001, p.11) or as “special pleading” (Shevlin, Kenny, & Mcneela, 2004, p.5). Shevlin et al. (2004) argue that these notions do not recognize legit reasons of not disclosing such as fear of poor treatment or not wanting to be treated differently in comparison to non-disabled peers.

Troiano (2003) and Olney and Brockelman (2003) also found that students with disabilities often only disclose on a need-to-know basis. Troiano found that his participants demonstrated other strategies as well, such as disclosing near the beginning of the course and on a course-by-course basis. Similar to participant 4, Dindia (1998, as cited in Olney & Brockelman, 2003) suggests that students with disabilities implement this strategy to display their competency or to gain additional time until they feel safer to disclose. Olney and Brockelman (2003) label the act of utilizing strategies as ‘negotiating their identity’ and suggest that

students with disabilities often have to work towards demonstrating their value to others in a social context that minimizes the challenges of having a disability.

Hibbs and Pothier (2006) further argue that,

In this climate, it is understandable that some students are reluctant to self-identify as disabled, especially given the paradox that the bio-medical or psychological evidence required for accommodation points to and emphasizes the individual's particular physical, emotional, sensory, or cognitive limitations or deficits – in other words, what one cannot do – in a university environment that thrives on and rewards stamina, ability, independence, and mental fitness – what one can do.

This is a major issue because students with disabilities in the McMaster University School of Social Work program, as in most universities, are required to disclose having a disability in order to receive accommodations. Furthermore, accommodations for many students with disabilities, including the participants in my study, are needed for them to even participate in the program. Therefore, disclosure does not only involve deciding whether to maintain one's own confidentiality but it also creates issues for inclusion and equitable opportunity to complete the program. In other words, students with disabilities have little choice but to disclose and face many social barriers including being discriminated against. Furthermore, students with disabilities in the School of Social Work are constantly faced with the decision to disclose in many social situations during their studies. Students with disabilities may be faced with the decision to disclose

during the admissions process, to disability service staff members, faculty, administration, peers, committee members, and field placement supervisors and personnel.

Accommodations

The second major theme that will be addressed in this thesis pertains to the accommodation process. Accommodations overlap a great deal with the previous theme because students are required to disclose their disability in order to receive accommodations. In addition to disclosure, obtaining accommodations is a very complex process for students with disabilities that can cause much stress and difficulty to endure. Common issues experienced by the participants during the accommodation process included having their rights violated by faculty. Participants also expressed that faculty demonstrated a lack of understanding towards providing accommodations and carried normative assumptions. These caused consequences for the participants such as having to conduct ‘extra work’ in terms of developing strategies to attain their learning needs from professors and within other aspects of the accommodation process.

Rights being violated.

One of the common ideas that emerged from the participants’ stories was in regards to the barriers that they encountered when trying to obtain their accommodations from the School of Social Work faculty. As stated earlier, once students with disabilities are registered with the CSD and follow the required accommodation procedures, they should be able to exercise their rights to receive

accommodations. However, participants in this study suggest that it is not necessarily this straight forward in reality and that often their rights to receiving accommodations were violated by professors. Participants expressed in some cases that faculty insisted that students provide them with very personal information before considering whether they will accommodate the students' disability-related needs. Participants in this study also reported that sometimes professors refused to provide accommodations and/or do not follow through with them.

Insisting on personal information.

Several participants expressed in their stories that they experienced professors insisting on receiving personal information in regards to the participant's impairment. Subsequent to providing her/his accommodation letter, participant 5 for example, experienced professors asking her/him "why do I need this time, what is exactly wrong, explain to me." Participant 4 also stated that "I had another professor ask me, 'well what is your disability?' and I said 'well I'm not going to tell you'." Faculty are highly recommended not to request information on a diagnosis from students with disabilities as part of their decision-making processes around accommodation (McMaster University CSD Disability Services, 2010). They only have the right to obtain the relevant disability information provided in the student's accommodation letter. Therefore, faculty asking for this information violated these students' right to maintain the confidentiality of their diagnoses.

Not only does insisting on personal information violate students' rights, but it also further takes the control away from students to maintain confidentiality.

Regardless of how comfortable participants said they were with their disability, unexpectedly having intrusive demands for personal information imposed upon them by their professors seemed to be stressful and caused the accommodation process to be unpredictable for the student. Participant 4 for example stated in regards to the accommodation process that it is "Pretty anxiety provoking. Right, because I have to approach them...meet them after class, approach them, hope they'll sign, what if they don't sign?"

Not only did participants experience professors probing about their disability, but also some felt they were also being challenged about the legitimacy of their disability. This was demonstrated, for example, when participant 3 expressed that professors have questioned whether it was even necessary that they implement her/his accommodations. S/he stated for example that "there has been a number of times that a couple of the professors will go 'well, you know, I'm not sure, do I have to wear it (hearing system)?' Regardless of the professors' intentions, questioning the necessity of the accommodations can negatively impact the student. Participant 3 explained that professors questioning her/him caused her/him to be defensive and uncomfortable. Olney and Brockelman (2003, p.45) also found that students with disabilities experienced professors "invalidating or minimising" their disability-related challenges. However, these researchers do not focus on these issues as a violation of students' rights and

instead examine how students with disabilities manage the complex decision-making process that they must endure each time they require accommodations.

Although students with disabilities are never obligated to disclose personal information such as their diagnosis to their professors, the participants expressed that it is not always practical, easy or safe to refuse professors' requests in actuality. When professors insisted on information, participant 5 explained that s/he felt a lot of pressure to disclose. Despite having self-confidence and understanding her/his rights, participant 5 explained that s/he felt pressure to be compliant to the requests of her/his professors. Although students with disabilities have legislated rights to obtain accommodations, the University and faculty fail to take into account the power differential between students and professors in the post-secondary setting.

Participant 3 expressed that having to explain to faculty that her/his accommodations were a necessity, risked embarrassing the professor and potentially creating friction within the student/professor relationship. S/he stated that s/he was

a little bit defensive at first, because you don't want to put them on the spot. It's your education right? There's a certain power that they have. And they have full control over your marking scheme and they have control over all that end of it. So if you don't mind alienating anybody right off the get go, I would say 'yes you do' (to answer the professor). So it does put you on the spot. So if they are questioning whether they should

wear it then all of a sudden you're sort of going 'well, wouldn't you want to?' And it's (hearing system) not intrusive so why is it an issue for you to do that. And I'm not comfortable asking that.

Therefore, the participant demonstrated that the questioning imposed on students by professors, places them in a position where they have to choose between maintaining a good relationship with their professors and receiving their accommodations or maintaining privacy and control over the accommodation process. As stated earlier, Hibbs and Pothier (2006) also argue that expecting students to have to negotiate their accommodations with faculty assumes the notion that there is an equal level of power between students and their professors. However, as Hibbs and Pothier argued, power is not a 'commodity' that is within an individual but is, instead, "a fluid network of relations" based on relationships and roles (Foucault, 1995, as cited in Hibbs & Pothier, 2006, p.201). Therefore, students with disabilities cannot be expected to negotiate their accommodations with faculty when the students rely on their professors as the course evaluator (Hibbs & Pothier, 2006).

Refusing to provide accommodations.

Another violation of the students' rights occurred when professors refused or failed to provide the actual accommodations. Participants explained that they experienced faculty initially denying providing accommodations or not remembering to follow through with them in the classroom. Participant 4 expressed that s/he experienced social work professors verbally denying

accommodating her/him and refusing to sign her/his accommodation letter.

Participant 3 stated that s/he experienced professors saying they would accommodate her/him but did not follow through with the accommodations.

Rocco (2001) argues that professors who do not provide accommodations can be due to a lack of understanding of the consequences for the student. S/he explained for example that professors who refuse a request of providing course material in accessible format, results in the student not being able to learn or participate. Furthermore, s/he argues that this violates the student's civil rights.

Regardless of whether faculty intentionally did or did not accommodate, students with disabilities sometimes had to further justify their learning needs. Furthermore, despite following all the necessary accommodation steps, the onus is still placed on students with disabilities to ensure that their professors know what to do. However, participant 4 stated that having to explain to her/his professors how to implement her/his accommodations should not be her/his responsibility. Although the literature does not focus much on this issue as a question of students with disabilities' rights being violated, Dunn et al. (2006) do argue that the incapacity or refusal to accommodate should be understood as an act of oppression.

Lack of Understanding

I don't feel that any other professors do or anybody I have ever met here would be unaccommodating on purpose. I think a lot of times it's just they are not aware. It's a non awareness, more than anything.

In the above statement, participant 3 explains that faculty are not being malicious when they do not provide accommodations for students with disabilities. S/he expressed that it is more of a result of a lack of understanding by the professor. This lack of understanding of disability on the part of faculty is another theme that emerged from the participants' stories. In leading up to the quote above, participant 3 expressed that a professor demonstrated a lack of understanding of her/his accommodations by not realizing how essential it was to implement them. Although the participant provided the professor with instructions, the professor still did not follow through with implementing the classroom accommodations.

Participant 4 had a similar experience when her/his professor did not want to provide her/him with accommodations because s/he believed that it would have given the student an advantage over her/his non-disabled peers. This misconception of the purpose of accommodations caused the participant to feel s/he had to further justify her/his learning needs. Students being required to further rationalize their impairment and learning needs after completing the accommodation procedure steps demonstrates that the onus is still placed on the individual student to ensure they obtain their needs. It also reveals that a lack of understanding by faculty can lead to the students' rights to accommodations being violated.

Normative Assumptions

Baron et al. (1996, p.371) argue that professors begin with an “assumption of non-disablement” about students. They explained that this is when faculty apply teaching practices that are based on the assumption that all students are able-bodied or ‘normal’. Baron et al. note, for example, that the common teaching practices such as faculty walking around the classroom while lecturing and providing identical hand-outs for students are based on normative assumptions. Therefore, they argue that schools and professors have been resistant to changing these teaching methods, which have consequently excluded students with certain disabilities. The participants in my study demonstrated this in the following described experiences. In regards to her/his social work professors, participant 3 stated that “I don’t think that they have any concept that when they open things up to big group discussions that you lose anybody that has a hearing impairment.” Therefore, s/he experienced professors assuming that every student can participate in the classroom in the same manner. Similarly, participant 5 discussed that professors’ hand-outs are always distributed the same way and should be available in various accessible formats. Baron et al. (1996) argue that due to professors having normative assumptions, teaching practices such as the above mentioned reinforce the exclusion of students with disabilities.

This assumption of non-disablement seems to have particular relevance to students with invisible disabilities, such as mental health. Participant 5 also stated that,

It is not visible, right, it is just the assumption, there is not the idea of there could be a disability and I think that does not make it inclusive right, so with that assumption I think you know, unless you tell someone that you have a mental health disability then there is the assumption that you are 'healthy'.

S/he further explained

...the whole idea of ableism. It is the whole idea that people just assume that you are not disabled so with a mental health disability that assumption can be detrimental sometimes, right? Because if you are not, there are the people who do not understand why you are a certain way.

This participant seems to agree with Baron et al. (1996) in that there is an assumption of 'non-disablement' among students held by faculty. However, s/he adds that this assumption is based on the visibility of the impairment. So this participant is suggesting that unless faculty see the impairment, they will not initially believe that the student has one.

Participant 4 linked the perceived lack of understanding on the part of faculty to this notion of pre-conceived normative assumptions about students. I think a lot of assumption are made about disability, about what you can or can't do or what people are able or not able to do...I think a lot of people just think don't understand and I think there's an expectation in social work that you just don't have problems like anyone else too.

Participant 4 seemed to suggest that there is not only an assumption among faculty that students do not have impairments but also an assumption that social workers do not experience disability related challenges as well. Does this mean that only social workers without problems can help others with their issues? Given the high rate of people with impairments in society and that many people experience various challenges with their impairment, how can there be an assumption that social workers are exempt from these issues? This participant noted that this is not just between students and professors, but also with other academic-related staff members. In regards to her/his field placement, participant 4 expressed that s/he did not feel comfortable disclosing her/his disability to her/his supervisor because s/he was afraid of being judged. S/he further explained that s/he was afraid that s/he “wouldn’t get through the program if they didn’t see me as just a student like everybody else.” Therefore, s/he felt that disclosing was not even an option in regards to field placements. Baron et al. (1996) also found in their study that a student with a disability experienced having difficulty confronting a field placement supervisor because they were responsible for assessing the placement. The student in Baron et al. study believed that if the agency or field supervisor could not nor had difficulty implementing accommodations, then the student’s evaluation as a capable social worker would be threatened.

Participants expressed that there are consequences that result from faculty carrying normative assumptions regarding their students. Participant 5 stated,

I feel sometimes that maybe that they think like I am going to be more of a challenge, that this is going to be harder, they got to supply me with this, so it's almost going to be extra work...

The participant explained that since s/he has a disability, that faculty will assume that they will have to conduct extra work. The literature examined in this study did not address faculty viewing students with disabilities as being more work in comparison to their non-disabled peers.

Justification of Exclusion

As a result of having normative assumptions regarding students, the exclusion of students with disabilities from participating in university becomes rationalized and justified. Titchkosky (2008, p.50) uses the term “dis-education of the sensorium” to explain how people justify the exclusion of people with disabilities. She adds that the ‘dis-education of the sensorium’ is the process of how people make sense of issues of disability that are not the actual reality. Therefore, Titchkosky emphasizes the importance of better understanding how people make extraordinary issues such as the exclusion of a marginalized population become ordinary and normal. She questions how this ‘dis-education’ is so influential that people still do not question or challenge why students with disabilities are excluded. Therefore, the normative assumptions carried by faculty allow the School of Social Work to justify that they are meeting the needs of students, regardless of who is being excluded. By having a perspective that reinforces students with disabilities to take responsibility with fighting for their

rights and with adapting to the environment, they are excluding the students who do not fit within this framework. Carrying assumptions such as all students are able-bodied or that impairments are only visible, there may be much potential for students with disabilities to not use these services and to not receive their accommodations. By continuing to reinforce a biomedical model, the emphasis for disability issues becomes focused on the individual student to create their own justice (Hibbs & Pothier, 2006). The School of Social Work can then rationalize that students with disabilities who do not seek their services are not taking enough initiative or responsibility towards their own education. Therefore, “whether the reasons for lack of access are judged good or bad, the social activity of people seeking reasons makes lack of access reasonable” (Titchkosky, 2008, p.45).

Extra Work

Baron et al. (1996) argue that schools of social work depend too much on students with disabilities to take the initiative with explaining their needs. These tasks placed on students with disabilities reinforce a medical model approach to disability by placing the onus on the individual to adapt to their social environment. The participants are demonstrating that they are experiencing having to adapt and conduct far and above what is required of them as a ‘student’ in comparison to non-disabled students.

Low (1996) also found in her research study that students with disabilities expressed that professors did not understand that not all students participate in class in the same way. Low then argues that students with disabilities often have

to point out their disability to their professors in order to ensure that they receive the same access to course material as their non-disabled peers. Jung (2003, p.105) labelled the actions students with disabilities must take to educate professors about disability as “work processes.” Like Baron et al. (1996) s/he also emphasizes that these ‘work processes’ are ‘extra work’ that students with disabilities must endure in comparison to their non-disabled peers. Although Jung is referring to students with chronic illness, I found that the participants in my study also engaged in extra ‘work processes’ that their non-disabled peers were not experiencing.

As stated in the literature review, Jung (2003, p.105) listed the ‘extra work’ that her research participants experienced as “educating their instructors, learning to work in alternate media, seeking better types of accommodation, coming up with a plan for accommodation, and manoeuvring through the bureaucracy.” In comparison, my research participants also experienced having to conduct extra work when negotiating their accommodations with professors. Not only did my participants develop strategies or conduct ‘extra work’ in order to address issues of disclosure (as mentioned earlier), but also to try to make certain that they rightly obtained their accommodations from professors. To address not being able to hear what other students are saying as the result of faculty opening the lecture to the entire class, participant 3 demonstrated that s/he has had to further educate her/his professors by instructing them to repeat the main ideas of others so that s/he can follow the discussions. Participant 4 also stated that

In some classes I would say I have a hearing impairment, could you please look at me so I can hear what you're saying because when you're talking, or if a bunch of people are talking...

In another situation, this participant said that s/he has had to meet and sit down with her/his professor to explain her/his right to accommodations after the professor initially denied her/him. Similarly, Dunn et al. (2006) argue that students with disabilities not only have the responsibilities that come with being a student but also often have to take on the role as an 'educator' and dedicate extensive time and effort to educating professors about the accommodation process. Participant 5 explained that s/he also has often had to send multiple emails back and forth to her/his professors in order to justify her/his learning needs. In regards to obtaining accommodations from the CSD, participant 2 discussed that

It's a business and like [requesting an accommodation], it's impossible, because there's no time. If there's no time...look, I know Y [Disability Coordinator], who does the [accommodation], so I'll email her and say 'Y, I need these [accommodations]' and she'll fit me in. Probably isn't right but if you are a student at home, what are you going to do? You're going to panic. You're going to say 'oh my G-d, I'm screwed!' But I know I get [the accommodation]. I just email Y and say 'Y, do me a favour, I'm having such a hard time', and she'll say 'no problem'. But if you don't know the system.

Participant 2 demonstrates that similar to Jung's findings, s/he also had to conduct 'extra work' such as 'manoeuvring through the bureaucracy.' Pertaining to the accommodation process in general, participant 2 explained that:

I'm all for taking responsibility for yourself, but when you're a disabled student, you're thinking of a million other things to do. Like peers in my class, they don't have to worry about nursing and stuff. I got lots of shit to think about. And I'm sure are lots of other disabled, like any disability.

They have things to think about.

In comparison to their peers without disabilities, these participants demonstrated that students with disabilities often have to do so much 'extra work' in order to obtain their accommodations. If they do not take further action, they risk being excluded by not being able to participate in the course. In reference to professors opening the discussion to the class, participant 3 explained that "You can't join into a conversation when you haven't gotten a clue what's going on. So if they do that, then I could join in and add to it."

Participants demonstrated that they also have to apply these techniques while also being careful not to jeopardize their relationship with their professors. Participant 3 stated that, before s/he explains her/his accommodations to professors, s/he has to worry whether this will offend or embarrass them by singling them out. Interestingly, although the accommodation is a right they are entitled to receive, participants, to some extent, seemed to 'take care' of their professors in a gentle manner by being concerned not to provide them with extra

work. The participants did not, however, explain this. Returning to participant 3, s/he described, however, that even when s/he is sensitive to the needs of professors and provides accommodation techniques for them to use, they still do not always follow through with them. Therefore, more action needs to be taken on her/his part to ensure her/his accommodation needs are met.

Participant 5 expressed that s/he has to take precautions so that her/his professors do not worry s/he will be more of a challenge or a burden in comparison to her/his 'non-disabled' peers. Depending on the professor, s/he will either speak to professors before class begins or request to meet after class. S/he also makes sure to tell professors that if they have any questions, they can contact her/him depending on their convenience, such as by email or by meeting in person. These experiences demonstrate that students with disabilities not only have to worry about their comfort with the accommodation process but the personal comfort and understanding of disability of their professors. Not only did my participants engage in 'work processes' but they also demonstrated Jung's (2003) argument that the accommodation process becomes an individualized process for them. As explained earlier, Jung (2003) argued that having students negotiate and coordinate their accommodations each time with professors individualizes the accommodation process by placing the responsibility on the students to arrange their unique needs. Therefore, the School of Social Work reinforces principles of a bio-medical model by placing accommodation issues within individual students with disabilities and expecting them to ensure that they

fit into the 'normal' expectations of what professors believe are 'normal' students. Consequently, this creates additional responsibilities for students with disabilities by taking the onus for any needed changes off of the School (Jung, 2003). In addition, the accommodation process becomes an ongoing unpredictable procedure for students with disabilities as they need to always keep in mind that faculty may have a lack of understanding of the student's disability and their accommodations, as well as carrying normative assumptions. Although participants follow the necessary CSD accommodation steps and implement strategies to ensure they obtain their learning needs, it is clear that the accommodation process can be constantly stressful to endure.

Implications, Future Directions, and Conclusion

Main Issues of Participants

Significant issues that participants raised included a lack of awareness and understanding among social work faculty regarding their students' disabilities and the importance of implementing accommodations. Faculty's lack of understanding seemed to be as a result of professors carrying normative assumptions about disability, but also about what it means to be a university student. These concerns resulted in less control for the study participants and made the accommodation process unpredictable. Participants expressed that faculty's lack of understanding contributed to their rights being violated in regards to accommodations and the maintenance of confidentiality. The wider implications of this research study are that other social work students with disabilities are very likely having similar negative experiences. This research demonstrates that requesting and ensuring that accommodations are implemented may be a significant challenge for students with disabilities.

Overall, participants in this study reported having had negative experiences in regards to the accommodation process. Some participants did not feel safe disclosing to School of Social Work faculty and field placement staff members. They reported that the barriers that they encountered with the accommodation process were not due to their impairment but resulted from a lack of understanding and awareness by faculty regarding the process and the students'

disabilities. The participants in the research study seemed to be accepting of and to have a good understanding of their impairments. They seemed to have gained much experience with disclosure and with obtaining accommodations. This was demonstrated by the participants discussing the factors and strategies that were important for the accommodation process to be safer and to run more smoothly. However, the participants demonstrated that self-acceptance and planning do not guarantee that they will have their learning needs met. Therefore, this raises concern that any student with a disability, regardless of their self-acceptance and the strategies that they apply, may have negative experiences in regards to obtaining accommodations. However, there is an even greater concern for students with disabilities who lack self-advocacy skills, experience with post-secondary accommodation procedures and who are new to the environment, such as first year students. These students may have even greater difficulty and less success and, consequently, attention must be paid to this group of students with disabilities in particular.

Not only is there great concern that students with disabilities are having negative experiences while trying to obtain their learning accommodations, but also that there are many students with disabilities who do not disclose for the reason that they don't feel safe. It is worrisome that some at the university expect students with disabilities to readily disclose and take responsibility for their accommodation needs and to not understand that they may not feel safe doing so when the results of this study suggest they have limited control of the situation as

well as significant social barriers to overcome. Fear of being discriminated against, stigmatized, and having their request for accommodations denied, must be recognized by the School of Social Work as legitimate reasons why students with disabilities may not feel comfortable to disclose. As stated earlier, Hibbs and Pothier (2006) argue that it is unreasonable to expect students with disabilities to be comfortable to take part in a process that focuses on their limitations while simultaneously trying to establish themselves in an environment that encourages physical and cognitive strength. Participants suggested that disclosing and negotiating accommodations with faculty needs to be a predictable and consistent process. Therefore, students with disabilities need to know that it is safe and 'normal' to disclose having an impairment, which places the onus on the School to take responsibility for creating an environment to support this.

Participants also identified that there is a hierarchy of disabilities - that some appear more acceptable to faculty and field instructors than others and are then more readily disclosed than others. They expressed that visible disabilities are the most acceptable while invisible disabilities, such as mental health concerns, are the least acceptable. Participants expressed that normative assumptions were often held by faculty, in that all students were initially believed to be non-disabled unless the impairment was visibly seen. Normative assumptions were also demonstrated by faculty applying traditional teaching practices (i.e. group discussions) that expected all the students to participate in the same manner. Regardless of any intentions of faculty, a lack of understanding

and the existence of normative assumptions seem to be impacting their practice and reinforcing the exclusion of students with disabilities. This is a major concern for the School of Social Work as it contradicts its philosophy that “social workers must be actively involved in the understanding and transformation of injustices in social institutions” (McMaster University, 2010). Therefore, the School needs to examine how it conceptualizes and approaches issues of disability.

Proactive Policies and Practices

Participants in the study demonstrated that they are often required to conduct ‘extra work’ in comparison to non-disabled students in order to obtain their rightful accommodations. This ‘extra work,’ such as developing strategies for disclosing and educating their professors regarding accommodations, reinforce a bio-medical approach to disability by not only placing the onus on the individual student but also emphasizing that the problem lies within them. Participants expressed that students with disabilities are then conceptualized as ‘abnormal’ and consequently not given equitable treatment in comparison to their peers. Regardless of any support that students with disabilities may receive from individual faculty and other social work staff members, it sometimes would have been provided only after a negative experience, and after personal consequences (such as feelings of exclusion) had occurred.

Roberts (1996, as cited in Hibbs & Pothier, 2006, p.197) explains that “those institutions that are seen to be proactive generally initiate action

independent of demands or requests for change by those who are most affected” and that “institutions that are seen as reactive operate as passive agents of change in response to demands or requests for access or accommodation.” As stated earlier, Dunn et al. (2006) found that there are a lack of pro-active policies and practices among Canadian schools of social work regarding issues such as accommodations. This literature combined with what my participants expressed strongly suggests that the McMaster School of Social Work needs to be more proactive with addressing issues of disability.

Adopting a social model understanding of disability.

An approach that the School of Social Work can apply in order to be proactive is to adapt a social model understanding of disability. By understanding disability as an act of social oppression and not as an individual biological deficit, the School would then recognize students with disabilities as a marginalized population due to environmental barriers (Frazee et al., 2006). This framework would encourage the School to take more responsibility in regards to addressing issues of exclusion and discrimination for students with disabilities. Matthews (2009) argues that encouraging faculty to learn and put into practice the main ideas of the social model of disability can lead to post-secondary institutions becoming a more inclusive environment. Furthermore, the “knowledge, theory, and skills” that will develop from taking on a social model understanding of disability would reinforce the field of social work’s dedication to social justice (French Gilson and DePoy, 2002, p.163).

Dunn et al. (2006) found that although Canadian schools of social work have developed recent improvements to addressing disability issues, they argue that the schools' approaches have not reflected the notions and beliefs of people engaged in the disability rights movement. Thus, it is not only important that the School of Social Work adapt a social model understanding of disability, but also apply critical disability theory to examining issues of disability. Dunn et al. (2006) argue the importance for Canadian schools of social work to apply a critical disability perspective towards policy development in order to address issues for students with disabilities, such as accommodations. They argue, too, that faculty needs to adopt a critical disability framework so that "the inability or unwillingness to accommodate is recognized as an oppressed act" (p.13). In addition, adopting a critical disability framework is important for the School of Social Work because it reinforces their philosophy: that "power imbalances" and oppression are significantly associated with social structures (School of Social Work, 2010).

Dunn et al. (2006) recommend that policies and practices are developed in consultation with people with disabilities, such as students and community members. Leslie, Leslie, & Murphy (2003, as cited in Dunn et al., 2006) also recommend that schools of social work confer with students with disabilities. They also strongly urge that schools need to be creative when developing accommodations in order to establish inclusive education settings.

To assist students to feel safer to disclose in order to receive accommodations, Matthews (2009, p.233) argues that “a diversity of flexible and supportive teaching strategies is made routine and that students are made aware of their availability.” Simpson (2002, as cited in Matthews, 2009) suggests, for example, that departments permit certain accommodations such as ‘recording lectures’ available to all students so that each student with a disability who requires this learning need do not have to request permission from their professors. This suggestion can be applied in practice by the School of Social Work by stating on each course outline that lectures may be recorded as needed by students. Instead of placing the responsibility to make sure that recording is permitted on the individual student with a disability, explicitly stating this in the course outline would place the onus on other students to speak up if they had issues with class lectures being recorded. This may not only reduce the amount of opportunities for students with disabilities to have to request accommodations, but also create a more inclusive environment.

Another teaching strategy that faculty could apply to create a more inclusive and safer environment is to recognize, and also to verbally acknowledge in class, that students with disabilities can become marginalized by policies and practices of social structures such as universities – and to encourage discussions among students and faculty as to how to work towards change in the School of Social Work. Professors could also recognize and express to their students that power imbalances do exist between students and professors, but that they support

addressing these issues. By verbally acknowledging both of these issues, the professors would demonstrate support to this population in many ways. Students with disabilities might feel more confident to discuss their learning needs if they knew that professors not only recognized the environmental barriers they face, but that professors support the rights of students with disabilities. These acts by professors would legitimize the experiences of students with disabilities, and reframe the acts of oppression they experience as being less a function of their impairment than of greater social factors. For students with disabilities, not having to worry about justifying their accommodation needs may develop their self-confidence and contribute to them feeling safe with disclosing. It might also reduce the additional work students with disabilities are required to do as a result of current disclosure and accommodation policies, practices, and issues.

Specifically for incoming students with disabilities, a pro-active practice that can be applied would be to develop a mentorship role or liaison between students and faculty. For students with disabilities who have any concerns related to disclosure, their rights, and accommodations, it would be beneficial to be able to contact someone without having to identify themselves. Furthermore, the liaison should not be a social work faculty member. This liaison role would provide students with disabilities an alternative route to ask questions and become knowledgeable of the disclosure and accommodation policies and procedures while keeping details about their impairment confidential.

Training for faculty.

The School of Social Work needs to take a more active approach and provide training for faculty to address the above issues. Training can include learning about the social model of disability, strategies for implementing various accommodations, creating a more inclusive learning environment where more students can participate, strategies for easing disclosure and creating awareness around normative assumptions. Faculty and other staff members, including field placement supervisors, need to be aware that students with disabilities still experience being discriminated against and that there are legitimate reasons why they do not always feel safe and comfortable disclosing. The school can also provide faculty with resources and guidance. Similarly, Matthews (2009) argues that it is important for universities to provide faculty with readily available information and resources regarding how to implement a more inclusive learning environment. Dunn et al. (2006) also suggest that schools of social work implement workshops for faculty. They argue that training would raise awareness among faculty regarding myths about disabilities and encourage dialogue about improving accommodation practices. In addition, Ketterlin-Geller and Johnstone (2008) suggest that post-secondary institutions that implement workshops on disability rights can support faculty to better understand and provide accommodations. Therefore, more training for faculty may assist them to develop teaching practices that reinforce an inclusive environment. Providing disability-related training and resources would potentially lead to faculty having a better

understanding and being more sensitive to the social barriers that students with disabilities encounter in regards self-identifying and with obtaining accommodations. More training for faculty would also reinforce that the onus is not only on individual students with disabilities to make sure their accommodations are obtained and that they feel safe during the process – it would emphasize the responsibilities of others within the school and the larger university. This would hopefully reduce the ‘extra work’ that students with disabilities are required to engage in and create a more predictable and positive process for students while obtaining their accommodations.

Further Directions

To understand the experiences and barriers that students with disabilities encounter in the School of Social Work, it is vital that this population was included in this research as the participants. However, there is much research that still needs to be conducted in this area of study. Disclosure and the accommodation process were two major areas in which participants are encountering significant social barriers. Being safe and having control of personal information seems to be very important for students with disabilities in order to disclose and negotiate accommodations. Participants expressed that there were many factors and strategies that contributed to them being more willing to engage in the accommodation process. One important factor for some of the participants was who they were disclosing to. Participants for example, did mention that “flexibility” and “understanding” were supportive attributes that

faculty displayed. However, there needs to be further research conducted with students with disabilities that critically examines the characteristics, teaching practices, and attitudes that faculty and field placement supervisors can apply that are helpful – and not hurtful – to students with disabilities.

Future researchers who choose to include students with disabilities in their studies also must be sensitive to and aware of the ethical concerns regarding confidentiality. The fear that many students with disabilities have of being identified and discriminated against must be recognized as a serious and legitimate concern for any researcher who wants their participants to speak openly about their experiences. Careful precautions must be taken in regards to such areas as the recruitment of the participants, location of the interviews, and with who may have access to any information that can potentially lead to a participant being identified. This is especially important in research based in a particular educational program (e.g., the School of Social Work) or a community program – as opposed to broader-based research – where the chances of others being able to identify participants who are disabled are increased. Based on the related literature and from my own personal experiences, it is also essential for researchers who have students with disabilities as their participants to take extra steps in order to obtain informed consent. For example, if interviews are to be audio-recorded, it would be ideal to inform potential participants of such a few times, verbally and in writing, to ensure they are comfortable and understand the purposes of audio-recording. Since confidentiality is often a concern for students

with disabilities, precautionary steps such as this are necessary in order to increase the safety of the participants.

There also were other issues raised by participants that can be further examined in more detail. More in-depth analysis for example can be applied to understanding the differences in the experiences of students with visible and invisible disabilities. Although my study has a small sample size, it suggests that while there are many similarities between the two groups, the differences also appear to be very important. Other important areas for future study include looking at supports that facilitate more inclusiveness and accessibility in terms of the physical and learning environment of the classroom, as well as in field placements. It is not only important to examine the experiences and processes of exclusion, but also the practices, policies, and attitudes that work to foster inclusion. Universal design strategies can be applied to encourage accessibility. Ketterlin-Geller and Johnstone (2008, p.167) state that “for assessment purposes, the idea of universal design is not for all students to ‘pass,’ but for all students to be able to demonstrate their skills and knowledge without barriers.”

The ‘extra work’ that students have to endure in comparison to their non-disabled peers could also be further examined. This ‘extra work’ of the participants seemed to impact their ability to participate actively and fully in the University community, as well as impacting their overall well-being. Furthermore, additional research that examines how conducting ‘extra work’ affects students with disabilities with completing their degree is important.

Finally, further examination of the admissions process, including the SWAT and how indicative it is of students' abilities, would also be helpful.

Although I included past and current students with disabilities as participants in my study, there is still a large portion of the disability population that is not being heard. My research for example does not include people with disabilities who are not attending post-secondary institutions. Dunn et al. (2006) argue that many people with disabilities are not in post-secondary institutions because of unsupportive admission and recruitment policies and practices. Therefore, this group within the disability population, who are greatly impacted by the lack of support from post-secondary institutions, continue to be excluded from academic research studies. They do not receive equitable opportunities as do others, including other students with disabilities. Neither are they recognized as a marginalized community and given the opportunity to share their experiences in most research looking at post-secondary education and students with disabilities. As a result, their knowledge or experiences are not known, nor does it acquire any social value. Therefore, the experiences of people with disabilities within and outside the context of post-secondary institutions needs to be further examined.

Although I argue that the School of Social Work embrace a social model understanding of disability, this perspective needs to be integrated into the framework of all departments and services across universities. Self-identifying and negotiating accommodations for students with disabilities are simply not

black and white issues. These matters cannot be expected to be addressed solely by the CSD's accommodation policy and procedures. All departments need to take more responsibility regarding how they include students with disabilities into their programs. More critical analysis of how all university departments include/exclude students with disabilities is needed.

Appendix A - Recruitment Email

We are sending out this email to all current School of Social Work students and recent alumni regarding a study to be conducted by a McMaster University MSW student regarding the experiences of students with disabilities in this program. Do not hit "reply". Please see invitation and attachments below.

Interested in the opportunity to influence the School of Social Work's policies and practices regarding students with disabilities?

If you are a past or current McMaster University Social Work student with a disability, you are invited to participate in a 60-90 minute focus group discussion or one-to-one interview regarding your experiences within the McMaster University School of Social Work. The research is being conducted by a Masters of Social Work student (Howard Ditkofsky), who is completing his thesis and who will serve as the facilitator of this focus group. No one at the McMaster University School of Social Work will know whether you take part or the details of what you say.

The discussion will focus on questions related to the:

- Admissions Process
- Academic Accommodations
- Classroom Setting
- Field Practicum
- Inclusion

It is expected that this study will not pose any risks to you and you can withdraw at any time. I have attached a copy of a letter of information about the study that provides full details. This study has been reviewed and approved by the McMaster Research Ethics Board. If you have concerns or questions about your rights as a participant or about the way the study is being conducted you may contact:

McMaster Research Ethics Board Secretariat
Telephone: (905) 525-9140 ext. 23142
c/o Office of Research Services
E-mail: ethicsoffice@mcmaster.ca

Attached to this email are further details of the study and the discussion questions. The focus group and interviews will be held in an accessible room in the Student Centre. If needed, the one-to-one interview can also be held in a location of more convenience to you. Participants will receive a \$5.00 gift card for Tim Horton's. Refreshments will also be provided. Your attendance and participation would be greatly appreciated. No Direct benefits can be expected.

Do not hit "reply".

If you are interested or want to learn more, please contact the Student Investigator Howard Ditkofsky by email at ditkofh@mcmaster.ca

School of Social Work
McMaster University
1280 Main St W, KTH-319
Hamilton ON L8S 4M4

Appendix B - Letter of Consent

A Study of the Experiences of Students with Disabilities in the McMaster University School of Social Work

Student Investigator:

Howard Ditkofsky
MSW Candidate
Department of Social Work
McMaster University
E-mail: ditkofh@mcmaster.ca

Faculty Supervisor:

Ann Fudge Schormans
Department of Social Work
Kenneth Taylor Hall, Room 319
McMaster University
Hamilton, Ontario
(905) 525-9140 ext.23790
E-mail: fschorm@mcmaster.ca

Purpose of the Study:

The purpose of this research is to determine students with disabilities' perceptions on how the McMaster University School of Social Work supports their needs regarding inclusion, the admission process, and accommodations. By interviewing past and current McMaster social work students with disabilities, I hope to gain students' perspectives of areas such as the admissions process, academic accommodations, disclosure, classroom setting, field practicum and faculty/administration support. I hope to gain information from students that will contribute to better meeting their needs, personally and academically.

Procedures Involved in the Research:

I (Howard Ditkofsky) am conducting this research for my Masters of Social Work thesis. I am inviting current and former McMaster School of Social Work students with disabilities to participate in a focus group or one-to-one interview. I will be the facilitator of the focus group/interview, the data collector, and will analyze the data. No one at the McMaster University School of Social Work will know whether you take part in the study. The focus group/interview will discuss your thoughts and experiences regarding the admissions process, academic accommodations, and support of inclusion. I will be asking you questions about your personal perspectives and experiences on these areas. You might be asked to elaborate on your answers so that I have a better understanding of your experiences.

The focus group will be held in an accessible meeting room in the McMaster Student Centre. The one-to-one interview will also be held in the Student Centre or in a more convenient location for you, if needed. I will facilitate the focus group and it will have no more than 8 students as participants. The focus group process should take 60-90 minutes to complete. With your permission, the discussion will be tape recorded for accuracy.

The one-to-one interview should last about 60 minutes. Also with your permission, the interview will be tape recorded for accuracy. Participants can choose either format based on availability and comfort.

Potential Harms, Risks or Discomforts:

You may or may not feel some discomfort discussing personal issues regarding your disability during your experiences in the School of Social Work. Issues such as personal struggles or negative experiences may be uncomfortable to discuss with others. There is also the social risk that what is said during the focus group might be repeated outside the focus group by another participant.

Managing Potential Harms, Risks, or Discomforts:

You do not need to answer questions that make you uncomfortable or that you do not want to answer. You may also leave at any time during the focus group if you are not comfortable participating. I will ask

other members of the focus group to keep the information confidential but I cannot guarantee that they will do so.

Your comments will have no impact on your grades and/or services that you receive from the School of Social Work. The School of Social Work will receive only the final copy of my thesis, which will be without any identifying information. No one at the School of Social Work will know whether you take part or the details of what you say.

Potential Benefits:

Although that no direct benefits can be expected, I hope that participating in the study will be a positive experience for you by having the opportunity to share your perspective with having a disability in the School of Social Work. I hope that hearing the perspectives of students will have a positive impact on how future practices and policies are developed. Your participation could help advocate for future students with disabilities, ensuring that they receive the support that they require.

This study provides potential benefits to the university community as a whole to learn more about the barriers and needs of students with disabilities. In addition, this study provides the opportunity for the School of Social Work and other faculties to improve their policies and practices regarding students with disabilities. This study also has the potential benefit for faculties to develop strategies and to have more of an inclusive environment.

Payment or Reimbursement:

For participating in the focus group/interview, you will receive a \$5.00 gift card to Tim Horton. There will also be light refreshments provided for the focus group/interview.

Confidentiality:

Confidentiality cannot be guaranteed in a focus group setting. However, anything that you say or do in the study will not be told to anyone else by me. Only I will have access to the emails, audiotapes and written records. I will only be asking you to provide your first name during the focus group. Your privacy will be respected. Your name will be removed from transcripts and you will be assigned a pseudonym. The digital recordings and transcripts will be stored in a secured location within my home office. I am the only person who will see your responses to the focus group/interview questions. All information will be destroyed 6 months after the thesis is compiled.

Participation:

Your participation in this study is voluntary. It is your choice to be part of the study or not. If you decide to participate, you can decide to stop at any time, even after signing the consent form or part-way through the study. If you decide to stop participating, there will be no consequences to you. If you do not want to answer some of the questions you do not have to, but you can still be in the study. If you decide to withdraw during the focus group, information that is provided by you will still remain in the collected data. For participants who withdraw during a one-to-one interview, your information will be destroyed unless you tell me otherwise. Also if you withdraw from the study, you will still be eligible for the gift card. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your continuing access to services at the School of Social Work.

Information About the Study Results:

I expect to have this study completed by approximately September, 2010. Once the research is compiled, I will email a brief summary of study findings to participants who request a copy.

Information about Participating as a Study Subject:

If you have questions or require more information about the study itself, please contact me at ditkofh@mcmaster.ca

This study has been reviewed and approved by the McMaster Research Ethics Board. If you have concerns or questions about your rights as a participant or about the way the study is conducted, you may contact:

McMaster Research Ethics Board Secretariat
Telephone: (905) 525-9140 ext. 23142
c/o Office of Research Services
E-mail: ethicsoffice@mcmaster.ca

CONSENT

I have read the information presented in the information letter about a study being conducted by Howard Ditkofsky of McMaster University. I have had the opportunity to ask questions about my involvement in this study, and to receive any additional details I wanted to know about the study. I understand that I may withdraw from the study at any time, if I choose to do so, and I agree to participate in this study. I have been given a copy of this form.

Name of Participant

Date

1. I agree that the interview can be audio recorded.

☐ Yes

☐ No

2. ☐ Yes, I would like to receive a summary of the study's results. Please send them to this email address _____ or to this mailing address _____.

☐ No, I do not want to receive a summary of the study's results.

Appendix C – Interview Guide

NOTE: TEXT WRITTEN IN **ITALICIZED BOLD CAPITAL LETTERS** IS ADDITIONAL REMINDERS THAT IS MEANT TO GUIDE THE **FOCUS GROUP FACILITATOR ONLY**.

[THE COMPLETION OF THE INTRODUCTORY SECTION OF THE FOCUS GROUP SHOULD TAKE APPROXIMATELY 15 MINUTES]

I) INTRODUCTION

1. Hello, my name is Howard Ditkofsky. Thank you for agreeing to participate in this focus group meeting. Just to remind everyone, I'm looking at your thoughts and opinions regarding your experiences with a disability in the School of Social Work.

2. [POINT OUT REFRESHMENTS if available, people should use their first name only]. In a minute, we will all introduce ourselves. But first, I would like to walk you through the consent form that is in front of you. **[REVIEW INFORMED CONSENT FORM AND ANSWER ANY QUESTIONS ABOUT IT. COLLECT SIGNED CONSENT FORMS AND ENSURE THAT PARTICIPANTS HAVE A COPY OF THE LETTER OF INFORMATION.]**

Are there any questions about this?"

3. Before we begin our discussion of your thoughts and experiences in the program, I want to spend a few moments talking about confidentiality and to go over some basic ground rules for our focus group discussion today:

- The information which we will collect today will be associated to you as a group.
- We will not identify quotes or ideas to individual members of this group. Because of the nature of small communities, it is possible that people could link participants in this room to quotes in the report. This is why we need to talk about confidentiality.
- *We are* assuming that when we learn about one another's views, they remain confidential. In a small community (group) like this, people are identifiable to some degree by their views and opinions.
- Having said this, and having made these requests, you know that I cannot guarantee that the request will be honoured by everyone in the room.
- So I am asking you to make only those comments that you would be comfortable making in a public setting; and to refrain from comments that you would not say publicly.

- everyone's views are welcomed and important anything heard in the room should stay in the room
- All voices are to be heard, so I will step in if too many people are speaking at once or to make sure that everyone has a chance to speak
- I may also step in if I feel the conversation is straying off topic.
- after the discussion, participants will be asked to fill in an anonymous "background information sheet" to help generally describe the characteristics of the participants
- you can expect this discussion group to last about 1 hour

4. Use of Digital Recorder

As you will recall, the sessions will be recorded to ensure accuracy and reduce the chance of misinterpreting what anyone says.

- All tapes and transcripts will be kept under lock and key by me.
- Names will be removed from transcripts. Pseudonyms will be assigned to each participant so that they remain anonymous.
- Only I will have access to transcripts (with personal names removed) of this focus group.
- For transcription purposes I might remind you to say your first name for the first few times you speak so that when I'm transcribing the tape I can get used to recognizing your voice. (That will ensure I assign the correct pseudonym to each person's answers. I will give you a gentle reminder.
- I'll also ask that when using abbreviations or acronyms that you use say the full name at least once to aid transcription.

*[AT THIS POINT, GROUP MEMBERS CAN QUICKLY INTRODUCE THEMSELVES – remind them that it is **'first names only'**.]*

*[HAND OUT ANY MATERIALS THAT THE PARTICIPANTS WILL NEED DURING THE FOCUS GROUP INCLUDING PENS OR SCRAP PAPER. GIVE THEM A FEW MINUTES TO READ OVER ANY WRITTEN MATERIAL NOTING THAT **THEY CAN MAKE NOTES IN THE MARGINS BEFORE THE DISCUSSION BEGINS.**]*

5. Focus group discussion begins with the facilitator asking the first question.

Focus Group/Interview Questions

(for past and current undergraduate & graduate School of Social Work students)

Admission Process

1. What are your thoughts or experiences regarding the social work admission process as it relates to any disability you have?

Probing questions:

- What were your experiences in applying to the School of Social Work?
- What accommodations were made available for you?
- Was the Social Work Admissions Test accessible to your needs?

2. Did the School of Social Work's website meet your needs in terms of being accessible of your disability?

Probing questions:

- In terms of manoeuvring through and understanding the website, what are your thoughts or experiences regarding the website's information and layout?
- What are your thoughts or experiences regarding the website being welcoming and inclusive?

3. In terms of the admission process, what worked well?

4. In terms of the admission process, what, if anything should the School of Social Work do differently?

Disclosure

1. In regards to the application process, what are your thoughts and experiences regarding disclosure of your disability to the School of Social Work (administration, faculty, peers)?

2. What are your experiences or thoughts with receiving services and/or guidance pertaining to your disability from the School of Social Work?

Accommodation Process

1. What are your thoughts or experiences regarding the accommodation process?

Probing questions:

- Does the process meet your needs? How?
- If not, what are your concerns and thoughts?

2. What are your experiences or thoughts pertaining to the process of notifying your professors/T.A.s about your disability?

Probing questions:

- Do you feel safe disclosing?
- Are there any particular issues or concerns that you have with the accommodation process?

3. What are your thoughts or experiences about how faculty accommodates your needs with regards to course workload and assignments?
4. What are your thoughts or experiences regarding registering with the Centre for Student Development in order to receive accommodations?
5. In terms of the accommodation process, what did the School of Social Work do well?
6. In terms of the accommodation process, what, if anything should the School of Social Work do differently?

Classroom Setting

1. What are your thoughts or experiences regarding the physical and learning environment of the classroom?

Probing questions:

- Does it meet your needs in terms of your disability? (i.e. teaching styles, physical space)
- If yes, how? If no, how?

2. What are your thoughts or experiences with social work course instructor/TA attitudes pertaining to your disability?

3. Do instructors establish an inclusive environment in the classroom?

Probing questions:

- In terms of the classroom setting, what does the School of Social Work do well?
- What, if anything should they do differently?

Field Practicum

1. What are your thoughts or experiences with field supervisor attitudes pertaining to your disability?

2. What are your thoughts or experiences regarding disclosure of your disability to field supervisors or other workers in your placement?

Probing questions:

- In regards to disclosing, what if anything did the School of Social Work do well to support you?
- What, if anything should the School of Social Work do differently?

Inclusion in the School of Social Work Community

1. What are your thoughts and experiences with the School of Social Work creating effort to help people feel part of the School of Social Work, University and community?

Closing Question

Are there any questions or feedback that you may like to add?

Wrap-up:

- *Introduce the following anonymous “background information sheet” now.*
- *Remind participants about “what is said in the room should stay in the room”.*
- *Thank the participants.*

Appendix D – Recruitment Flyer

Would you like the opportunity to influence the School of Social Work's policies and practices regarding students with disabilities?

This is an opportunity for past and current social work students with disabilities to share their thoughts and experiences within the program!

I am inviting you to participate in a focus group or one-to-one interview regarding your experiences with having a disability in the School of Social Work. The research is being conducted by a student doing a thesis; therefore no one at the School of Social Work will know whether you take part or the details of what you say. The focus group or one-to-one interview will be held in an accessible room in the Student Centre.

The discussion will focus on questions related to the:

- Admissions Process
- Academic Accommodations
- Inclusion

No direct benefits can be expected

Participants will receive a Tim Horton's gift card. Light refreshments will be provided. If you are interested and/or want to find out more, please contact Howard at ditzkofh@mcmaster.ca

Appendix E - Background Information Form

Please fill out this sheet that will provide us with some basic background information about you. You do not need to answer questions that make you uncomfortable or that you do not want to answer.

- ☐ Current Undergraduate student
- ☐ Current Masters student
- ☐ Current Phd student

- ☐ Former Undergraduate student
- ☐ Former Masters student

What year did you graduate? ____

- ☐ visible disability
- ☐ invisible disability

How did you hear about the McMaster University School of Social Work program?

Why did you choose the McMaster University School of Social Work?

References

- Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act. (2005). Retrieved from <http://www.aoda.ca>
- Barnes, C., & Mercer, G. (1997). Breaking the mould? An introduction to doing disability research. In *Doing Disability Research*. The Disability Press, Leeds, 1-14.
- Baron, S., Phillips, R., & Stalker, K. (1996). Barriers to training for disabled social work students. *Disability and Society*, 11(3), 361-377.
- Canadian Association of Social Work. (2005). *Code of Ethics*. Ottawa.
- Davis, L. J. (1995). *Enforcing normalcy disability, deafness, and the body*. London, UK, Verso.
- Devlin, R., & Pothier, D. (2006). Introduction: toward a critical theory of dis-citizenship. In D.Pothier & R. Devlin, *Critical disability theory*, pp.1-22. Vancouver: UBC Press.
- Dreidger, D. (1989). *The last civil rights movement*. London: Hurst & Co.; New York: St. Martin's Press.
- Dunn, P., Hanes, R. Hardie, S. & MacDonald, J. (2006). Creating disability inclusion within Canadian schools of social work. *Journal of Social Work in Disability & Rehabilitation*, 5(1), 1-19.
- Enns, H. (1987). 'Role of organizations of disabled people'. Published by DPI-General Secretariat, Box 360 33-100 71 Stockholm, Sweden.

- Finkelstein, V. (2001b). The social model repossessed. The Disabilities Studies Archive UK, Centre for Disability Studies, University of Leeds.
- Frazee C., Gilmour J., & Mykitiuk R. (2006). Now you see her, now you don't: how law shapes disabled women's experience of exposure, surveillance and assessment in the clinical encounter. In D. Pothier & R. Devlin, *Critical disability theory*, (pp.223-247). Vancouver: UBC Press.
- French Gilson, S., & DePoy, E. (2002). Theoretical approaches to disability content in social work education. *Journal of Social Work Education*, 38(1), 153-165.
- Gilgun J., & Abrams, L.S. (2002). The Nature and Usefulness of Qualitative Social Work Research. *Qualitative Social Work*. 1, 39.
- Graham Smith, S., English, R. & Vasek, D. (2002). Student and parent involvement in the transition process for college freshmen with learning disabilities. *College Student Journal*, 1(13), 491-503.
- Hibbs, T., & Pothier, D. (2006). Post-secondary education and disabled students: mining a level playing field or playing a minefield? In D. Pothier & R. Devlin, *Critical disability theory*, (pp.195-219). Vancouver: UBC Press.
- Jung, K. E. (2003). Chronic illness and academic accommodations: meeting disabled students "unique needs" and preserving the institutional order of the university. *Journal of Sociology and Social Welfare*, 30 (1), 91-112.
- Kettlerin-Geller, L., & Johnstone, C. (2008). Accommodations and universal design: Supporting access to assessments in higher education. *Journal of Postsecondary Education and Disability*, 19(2), 163-171.

- Low, J. (1996). Negotiating identities, negotiating environments: an interpretation of the experiences of students with disabilities. *Disability & Society*. 11(2), 235-248.
- Madaus, J. W. (2008). Employment self-disclosure rates and rationales of university graduates with learning disabilities. *Journal of Learning Disabilities*. 41(4), 291-299.
- McMaster University. (2010). *School of Social Work*. Retrieved from <http://www.socialwork.mcmaster.ca/>
- McMaster University. (2009). *McMaster University annual accessibility plan*. Retrieved from http://www.mcmaster.ca/accessibility/docs/McMaster_University_Annual_Accessibility_Plan.doc
- McMaster University. (2003). *Academic accommodation of students with disabilities*. Retrieved from <http://www.mcmaster.ca/policy/Students-AcademicStudies/AcademicAccommodation-StudentsWithDisabilities.pdf>
- McMaster University, Centre for Student Development. (2010). *Disability Accommodations*. Retrieved from <http://csd.mcmaster.ca/sswd/accommodations.html>
- McMaster University, Centre for Student Development Disability Services. (2010). *Information for instructional support*. [brochure]. Hamilton, ON: Centre for Student Development.
- Mitra, S. (2006). The capability approach and disability. *Journal of Disability Policy Studies*, 16(4), 236-247.

- Neuman, W.L. (1997). *Social research methods: qualitative and quantitative approaches*. Third edition. Boston, MA: Allyn & Bacon.
- Oliver M. (1996). Defining impairment and disability: issues at stake. In: Barnes C, Mercer G, editors. *Exploring the divide: illness and disability*. Leeds: Disability Press; pp. 39–54.
- Olney, M., & Brockelman, K. (2003). Out of the disability closet: strategic use of perception management by select university students with disabilities. *Disability & Society*, 18(1), 35-50.
- Palmer, C., & Roessler, R.T. (2000). Requesting classroom accommodations: self-advocacy and conflict resolution training for college students with disabilities. *Journal of Rehabilitation*, 66 (3), 38-43.
- Pardeck, J.T. (2003). Social work admissions and academic accommodations for students with disabilities. *Journal of Social Work in Disability & Rehabilitation*, 2(1), 79-91.
- Rocco, T. (2001). Helping adult educators understand disability disclosure. *Adult Learning*. 12, 10-12.
- Shevlin, M., Kenny, M., & Mcneela, E. (2004). Participation in higher education for students with disabilities: an Irish perspective. *Disability & Society*, 19(1), 15-30.
- Smart, J. (2006). Challenges to the biomedical model of disability. advances in medical psychotherapy & psychodiagnosis, *American Board of Medical Psychotherapists*, 12, 41-44.

- Smart, J.F., & Smart, D.W. (2006). Models of disability: implications for the counseling profession. *Journal of Counseling and Development*, 84, 29-40.
- Strauss, A., & Corbin, J. (1998). *Basics of qualitative research techniques and procedures for developing grounded theory*. London, United Kingdom: Sage Publications.
- Thomas, C. (2004). How is disability understood? An examination of sociological approaches. *Disability & Society*, 19(6), 569-583.
- Titchkosky, T. (2008). "To pee or not to pee?" ordinary talk about extraordinary exclusions in a university environment. *Canadian Journal of Sociology*. 33(1), 37-60.
- Titchkosky, T. (2001). "Disability – a rose by any other name? people first language in Canadian society." *Canadian Review of Sociology and Anthropology*, 38(2), 125-140.
- Troiano, P. F. (2003). College students and learning disability: elements of self-style. *Journal of College Student Development*. 44(3), 404-419.
- Vehmas, S. (2004). Ethical analysis of the concept of disability. *Mental Retardation*, 42(3), 209-222.
- Wahl, O.F. (1999). Mental health consumers' experience of stigma. *Schizophrenia Bulletin*, 25(3), 467-478.
- Whalley Hamell, K. (2006). *Perspectives on disability & rehabilitation contesting assumption, challenging practice*. Edinburgh: Churchill Livingstone.

