PLANNING RADICAL IMPERFECTION: GENERATING MEANINGFUL ACCESSIBILITY IN CULTURAL SPACES THROUGH LESSONS OF DISABILITY EXPERIENCE, CULTURES, AND HISTORIES

by

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Abstract

This major research paper investigates the experiences of people with disabilities (PWD) within cultural spaces in order to produce a framework for understanding how planners might provide meaningful accessibility within the built environment. The current practices of planners are not meeting the needs of most PWD because planners have not been given the opportunity to learn from disability histories, cultures nor experience. My research, therefore, engaged five participants who all identify as Blind, low-vision or visually impaired in a focus group and semi-structured interview, to gather insights into how the accessibility of cultural spaces generates meaningful inclusion for PWD. The central theoretical framework is "crip theory", an academic lens in which disability is valued as a source of knowledge. My research reveals how a "cripped" understanding of access, paired with the lived experiences of PWD in accessing cultural spaces, can be applied to improve the way planners engage with accessibility.

Keywords: Disability, Cultural Spaces, Cultural Planning, Accessibility, Crip

Acknowledgements

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1.0 Introduction

Urban planning and the other city-building professions have a lot to learn about access. In the March 17, 2023 issue of *Novae Res Urbis* (see Appendix A), a Toronto-area-based publication focused on municipal affairs and planning issues, the leading story's log line read: "winning STLC team worked in tandem to try to design a radically accessible space" (Durnan, 2023, p. 1). In the article, the CEO of TO Live, Clyve Wagner, was interviewed on how the design for the new St Lawrence Centre for the Arts will be "radically accessible", but did not elaborate on the term. "On many fronts," the CEO is quoted as saying, "the existing building is not physically accessible…if you have any kind of physical disability, you can't get to the backstage area, forget the dressing room or the stage… it also doesn't provide accessibility to the public" (p. 5). The focus on *physical* accessibility caused me to pause and ask–is designing a space that someone can *physically* enter actually that *radical*?

At first glance, the project seems to check all the boxes of accessibility. The author and Wagner both acknowledged that the redesign needs to be "accessible to everyone" (p. 1). Check. And they have acknowledged that people with disabilities (PWD) may want to participate in the arts and culture of Toronto, both as performers and as patrons. Check and check. What they have failed to acknowledge is the long and contended history of accessibility, which involved the activism, demands and collectivism of PWD to be considered valuable and necessary in public life (Hamraie, 2017). It involved different people with many different types of disabilities coming together and strategizing to create cross-disability access in space (Piepzna-Samarasinha, 2018). It has involved fighting both for and against the "disability-neutral" messaging of "access for *everyone",* in mainstreaming the access needs and wisdom of PWD (Hamraie, 2017, p.220). Focusing only on physical access erases the access needs of people with sensory, mental,

learning and other invisible disabilities, as well as the barriers to access created by social discourses and stigma.

To my mind, *radical* accessibility is *meaningful* accessibility. Meaningful accessibility will communicate to people with disabilities that they have been anticipated in a space, that they are welcomed and their way of being in the world is valuable and desirable. To achieve meaningful accessibility, I believe planners and other city-building professionals can apply a "crip" lens to the work they do. In a reclamation of the word "cripple", cripping disrupts an ableist notion that able-bodiedness is a superior way to be in the world, and instead, values disability for its difference and as a source of knowledge (Hamraie, 2017). Cripping challenges the notion of accessibility as a burden or excess, and undermines the normative perception of disability as an undesirable cultural identity (Piepzna-Samarasinha, 2018; Williamson, 2019; McRuer & Cassabaum, 2021). When we crip normative culture–a culture which excludes people with disabilities–our disruption creates an opportunity for social change and world building. Applying a crip lens to accessibility, therefore, transforms access into a meaningful and creative invitation for *innovative access* in spaces, rather than consulting a checklist.

To start thinking more radically about access, I have explored beyond conventional planning literature, and embraced the lessons offered through disability studies and disability arts. Because the arts are not subject to the same laws and standards which govern bureaucratic professions, they can function as non-capitalist tools for expressing the knowledge and experiences of marginalized groups. Under colonial capitalism valuation, worth may only be conceived through economic terms, however, art adds value to society by contributing multiple viewpoints and critiques (Collective, 2014). The use of art provides marginalized groups access to modes of self-representation and autonomous messaging which may otherwise be elided in

mainstream discourses or policy. Most importantly, artists are skilled in "prefigurative politics," an often public and collective imagining of different worlds (Piepzna-Samarasinha, 2018, p. 149). Piepzna-Samarasinha describes prefigurative politics as "waking up and acting as if the revolution has happened" which can be enacted through radical acts of care and arts practices (2018, p. 149). Prefigurative politics embody the ethos of cripping, simply by not accepting that normative culture is natural and permanent. There are arts and culture spaces in Canada today that have taken up calls for cripping access in service of what Piepzna-Samarasinha names "joyous work" (p. 152). Despite some cultural institutions' shift towards a radical integration of disability-centred access, many PWD still feel excluded from arts and culture spaces as a result of their access needs being neither anticipated nor welcomed.

I chose cultural spaces such as art galleries, museums, and theatres as my site of study because in general, these are spaces that planners consider to be essential sites for place-making and community building, though not explicitly for PWD (Markusen, 2014). For my research, I facilitated a focus group and semi-structured interview with people who identify either as Blind, low-vision or visually impaired (BLVI). My research questions were developed in the hopes of understanding the experiences of BLVI people within cultural spaces in Toronto: (1) what are the embodied experiences of people with visual disabilities in accessing cultural spaces in Toronto?, (2) what role can touch play in creating a sense of social inclusion and belonging in place?, and (3) how can planners apply a crip lens to their own practices to best create accessible public space? . The participants were selected based on their involvement in the arts–either as an artist, curator or patron–as I wanted to gather insights into how spaces might grant meaningful inclusion, and meet the access needs of someone with a visual disability. Upon investigation, my research evolved, and I was forced to check my own biases about the nature of access. Though I

had invited participants with visual impairments to join the study, there was not a *one-size-fits-all* answer to address each participant's needs. In other words, even though two people may have *the same disability*, their particular embodiments can be completely different. Two-thirds of PWD have two or more disabilities, and therefore, grouping folks into categories based on particular disabilities is arbitrary, and perhaps even pernicious (Morris et al., 2018). Embracing instead, a "cross-disability solidarity" can honour and value the participation and insights of everyone in the disabled community, no matter what labels a person may identify with (Sins Invalid, 2015). The data I gathered from my empirical research helped re-shape this MRP to fully embrace an understanding of cripped access, and therefore, I would like to credit my participants as co-researchers on this project. The final output of this MRP is a list of recommendations for planners, policy-makers and practitioners to provide more meaningful accessibility for PWD in cultural spaces and beyond.

The current understanding and practices of planners in relation to access (even the "radical kind") are not meeting the needs of most PWD because they have not had the opportunity to learn from the "cultures and histories and skills" of PWD (Piepzna-Samarasinha, 2018, p. 53). This leads to a limited understanding of accessibility, which is reflected in the policy and literature planners utilize for creating access. In the following paper, I will connect the literature and theory of disability studies, culture, and arts, with the missing nuances evident in planning literature concerned with accessibility and cultural spaces. Next, I will critique the existing Canadian policy that claims to enable PWD within public spaces. Further, I will detail the rationale of my research methods and analysis, including their strengths and limitations. After, I will present my findings and discussion of my empirical research with the participants of the study, exploring seven themes that contribute to the nuances produced to probe the "enduring

question" of, "what is access?"–and even "radical" access–in planning theory and practice (Forsyth, 2012). The themes generated using social constructivist grounded theory include: "access work" (Ross and Builing, 2019), the "emancipatory approach" to access (Sweeney, 2010), community connectedness, cultural competency, inadequate access avenues, navigating the unknown and recognition of personhood. Finally, I will list my recommendations for how a cripped understanding of access, paired with the lived experiences of PWD in accessing cultural spaces, may be applied to the way policy-makers, planners and practitioners engage with accessibility to make it truly radical.

2.0 Positionality

It is easy for one to primarily reflect on the parts of their identity that may affect their participation in dominant and mainstream power structures, but it is more difficult to immediately identify the parts of their identity that provides ease in their lives. During the data collection phase, I introduced myself to a participant as a queer white person in their mid-twenties attending grad school, but disclosed nothing about my able-bodiedness. It wasn't until the participant asked me if I identified as a person with a disability that I realized I had left out a key facet of my positionality that would affect the power dynamics between myself as a researcher and the participants in a project about accessibility. Though I had not asked participants to explicitly disclose the specifics of their disabilities, the recruitment documents had the specific inclusion criteria of identifying as someone who is Blind, low-vision or visually impaired (BLVI). Being non-disabled has provided me with the privilege to not only physically access almost all spaces I desire to enter, but that I can expect to feel welcomed and desired within that space once I am there. Inhabiting a white and cis-gendered body has also provided me with access and expectations for feeling welcomed in spaces, even ones I have never visited before and have no previous experience or connection. Unlearning the ableism and white supremacy I was born into as a Canadian, middle-class child in the 1990s is an on-going project, and fuels my desire to be an ally in racial and disability justice.

I recognize that I am also a product of what I have read and experienced. I have been particularly inspired by the work of Aimi Hamraie, Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha, Syrus Marcus Ware, Mia Mingus, Carmen Papalia, Chancey Fleet, as well as many other artists and scholars who are dedicated to disability and access justice. Creative and cultural spaces that are dedicated to welcoming and prioritizing folks identifying as SDQTBIPOC (Sick, Disabled,

Queer, Trans, Black, Indigenous, People of Colour), such as Tangled Arts + Disability[1], and

Theatre Passe-Muraille[2], have also influenced the way I conduct my research and orient my

desires for an accessible future.

      As a queer person, I relish in the joy that comes from being in a space that celebrates my

queerness. It is a feeling of welcoming and belonging that goes beyond being included; it is the

feeling of being centred, prioritized and desired. Though I am intentional in not equating the

experiences of queerness and disability, I believe the joy in being desired should be shared across

identities and justice-seeking movements. This also demonstrates my belief in the power of

solidarity, which tends to start in a concern and care for other peoples' wellbeing.

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[1] Tangled Arts + Disability is an art gallery located in downtown Toronto with a mission to support Disabled, d/Deaf, chronically ill, neurodiverse, k/crip, Mad, sick & spoonie artists, and increase opportunities for everyone to participate in the arts.

[2] Theatre Passe-Murialle is a theatre company based in Toronto that develops and produces plays that reflect the complexity of an intercultural society.

3.0 Literature Review

Introduction

This chapter aims to locate the missing nuances of providing meaningful accessibility for PWD in cultural spaces and beyond within planning literature. It is inevitable that planning researchers will have to look to other disciplines to answer enduring questions within the theory and profession, as cross-disciplinary skill sets will better create multifaceted theories and practices (Forsyth, 2012). Disability studies and disability arts have successfully investigated more avenues and techniques for access for PWD, which I believe planning researchers can learn to incorporate into their own practices. I will begin by highlighting the key perspectives and concepts developed by critical disability studies scholars, artists and activists related to the embodied experiences of PWD in public spaces. This section will demonstrate how PWDs challenge assumptions of accessibility and disability cultures, and how historical and contemporary disability activism has created pathways to accessible and disability-inclusive futures. Next, I will sketch a road map of the traditional and emerging approaches to access that have been explored adjacent to and outside of the planning realm. The alternate approaches to access and accessibility take direction from the principles of disability justice, which were developed by SDQTBIPOC folks within the community (Sins Invalid, 2015; Piepzna-Samarasinha, 2018). Third, I will flag concrete examples of access work being done in cultural spaces that prioritize and centralize the unique access needs of PWD necessary for feeling included, welcomed and desired. Literature in this area is primarily focused on the curation of museum, gallery and performance spaces. Finally, I will demonstrate the limited scope in which planning has provided access for PWD, and offer recommendations in which the gaps in both cultural planning and broader planning literature might be filled by adding the

perspectives developed in disability studies and disability arts. Ultimately, I want planners to understand that though their current understandings and practices in accessibility are not meeting the needs of most PWD, there is no need for decision-makers to "reinvent the wheel(chair)," as Piepzna-Samarasinha puts it, but instead to learn from disabled "cultures and histories and skills" that able-bodied people rarely ask after (2018, p.53).

3.1 Disability in public space

3.1.1 Disability Culture and Cripping

To begin, disability culture encompasses a diverse understanding of desirable and valuable ways of being in the world, forming unique historical, socio-political and aesthetic dimensions which have been created and experienced by PWD (Brown, 2015). Disability culture emphasizes the need for a collective identity that embraces difference, where pride in the "unique talents and attributes of each individual" is celebrated and a positive disability identity is nurtured (Brown, 2015). Fritsch (2012) explains that to crip is "to open up with desire to the way disability disrupts". "Cripping", therefore, is also a function of celebrating difference and valuing different ways of being in the world (Fritsch, 2012). "Crip theory" is a growing lens within academia which "affirms lived, embodied experiences of disability and the knowledges (or cripistemologies) that emerge from such experiences" (McRuer & Cassabaum, 2021, p. 1). Concepts within crip theory, such as "crip technoscience" (Hamraie & Fritsch, 2019), and "crip time" (Samuels, 2017), describe the range of relationships that PWD have with the design and pace of a non-disabled world. Crip technoscience credits disabled people as experts and designers within their everyday lives, using "skills, wisdom, resources and hacks" to disrupt ableist systems and centre liberatory projects for collective access within a non-accessible world (Hamraie & Fritsch, 2019, p.3). Crip time refers to the flexible approach to normative time frames for doing things, "like work schedules, deadlines, or even just walking and sleeping" (Samuels, 2017, p. 1) Crip time reminds us that "expectations of 'how long things take' are based on very particular minds and bodies," and therefore, creating access through flexible or "bent" time allows more bodies and minds to flourish (Jones et al, 2021, p. 313). Together, crip

and disability culture assert that disability is a source of knowledge which can change dominant narratives of how one is supposed to be in the world.

Developing a strong sense of crip pride and disability culture is necessary, as mainstream definitions of disability have historically disenfranchised PWD. Disability studies works with two core models of disability; the medical and the social (Hamraie, 2017). The medical model refers to the pathologization of bodies, assuming that an individual needs to be cured or fixed in order to adapt to the environment, and those who cannot adapt, are to be eliminated (Barnes, 2014). Conversely, the social model examines the deficiencies within the social and built environment that are disabling to bodies. Under the social model, disability is not a "thing-in-the-world" but a construct created when bodies meet an environment that was not developed with them in mind (Hamraie, 2017).

3.1.2 Constructions of Normal

Scholars like Aimi Hamraie (2017) and Sara Hendren (2020) use their work to expose the social constructs in which mainstream culture creates categories of "normal" and "deficient", based on the logics of the medical model. "Normal" and "average" are essentially aesthetic choices in which design becomes modeled after, creating standards for how a body *should* be instead of how it is (Hendren, 2020). Hamraie (2017) describes the discourses in which a "mythic average user" or "normate" becomes a template in which to design the world (p.19). From Da Vinci's "Vitruvian Man" to Le Corbusier's "Modulor Man", the world was designed to accommodate unrealistic, idealized human forms (p.20). The social construction of normal is also inextricably linked to the production of capital, for the production economy has been structured to privilege a normate-aligned body's ability to generate capital (Hendren, 2020). Under capitalism, a body's ability to function at the normate's standard of production is also

linked to an individual's social worth, and therefore, their belonging in culture and society (2020).

3.1.3 Denial and Lack of Use

The denial of PWD from public space through mechanisms such as institutionalization, and eugenics, "created the illusion of their non-existence, which results in non-accessible environments" (Hamraie, 2017, p.26). As recently as 2009, institutions in Canada were legislated to physically remove disabled people (as well as people of colour, Black, Indigenous, and poor people) from public life (Kelly & Orsini, 2016, p. 6). The eugenics movement sought to eradicate all people deemed "unfit" through harmful practices such as non-consensual sterilization (Tidgwell et al., 2020). These mechanisms–which so effectively segregated and killed PWD–meant that the general public no longer had exposure to this populace in public life. Designers and city-builders mistakenly interpreted the absence of PWD as proof of their non-existence, or at best, a disinterest in accessing public life.

Due to the on-going disability exclusion that has made PWD appear invisible in public life, scholars understand this phenomenon as a "vicious cycle of denial and lack of use", where advancements in accessibility infrastructure are disregarded and disinvested in (Hamraie, 2017, p. 183). Chancey Fleet (2019) argues that without having PWD (specifically people who identify as Blind, Low-vision or visually impaired) in decision-making roles, the "collective ability to improve nonvisual access to the public spaces of the future is blunted because so many of us are absent from public spaces today" (p.4). The lack of visibility of PWD in public space, therefore, becomes the argument for why there is a lack of accessible infrastructure that would welcome and include PWD in that space (Addlakha, 2021). Fleet argues that this cycle can also disempower PWD from advocating for themselves when there is inadequate accessible

infrastructure for fear of "rocking the boat" (2019). Activists have also used this very phenomenon as a platform of protest to demand better inclusion in public spaces, using tactics of visibility to make it impossible to ignore their exclusion (Hamraie, 2017).

3.1.4 Disability Rights Activism

Post-World War II was a turning point in terms of disability visibility, as the return of injured war veterans sparked new discourses around rehabilitation (Hamraie, 2017). This new logic led researchers and policy-makers to understand that some PWD could be rehabilitated, rather than institutionalized, in order to resume their participation in industrial capitalism (Hamraie, 2017). Therefore, from the 1940s-60s, rehabilitative technologies were developed as individualized solutions to access, which would come to be known as "barrier-free" design (Hamraie, 2017; Williamson, 2019). The popularity of barrier-free design grew in American college campuses, creating a platform for the designers to declare themselves as spokespeople on behalf of PWD (Williamson, 2019). Though the achievements produced by these rehabilitation experts would eventually help develop some of the first building standards for accessibility, their reach was limited to universities and single-family homes, "two sites of pervasive racial segregation, gendered divisions of labour, and economic accumulation" (Hamraie, 2017, p.11). This left much of the work for navigating barriers within the public to individual PWDs who were continually excluded from public life.

In the 1960s and 1970s, disability rights activists collectivized to demand access as a civil rights issue. Activist groups in the United States used guerrilla city-editing tactics to demonstrate how the built environment is disabling, creating "do-it-yourself" smashed curb cuts in protest of a lack of freedom of movement (Hamraie, 2017). By exposing the exclusion by design, the activists were successful in disrupting the naturalization of ableism in the built-environment and

revealed the need for collective access. The efforts of these activists gained wider attention,

sparking nation-wide protests and demonstrations for authoritative regulation on access in

transportation and public buildings (Williamson, 2019). Disability rights activists were therefore

responsible for putting pressure on governments to enact accessibility laws in North America,

securing civil and political rights for PWD which remain today (Williamson, 2019).

3.1.5 Disability Justice

Where the disability rights movement champions changes to changes to standards and

laws, the disability justice movement, by comparison, embodies the celebration of difference

central to crip and disability culture that advocates for the dismantling of all oppressive systems

that maintain normative order (Mingus, 2011a). Emerging in the early 2000s, disability justice is

a movement which seeks to amplify the voices of SDQTBIPOC folks under ten central

principles[3] (Sins Invalid, 2015). The eighth principle, interdependence, provides a nuanced

understanding of the relationships of care people build within communities, eschewing the

"myth" of independence (Mingus, 2011; Piepzna-Samarasinha, 2018). The disability justice

movement sees independence as a myth because people actually exist in the world via

interdependent relationships, "with other people, animals, space, objects, rhythms and

technologies" (Middleton & Byles, 2019, p. 80) Challenging the meaning of independence has

been a staple of disability culture, starting with the Independent Living Movement from the

1970s, which redefined "independence" as a "'self-determination' ... uncoupling assistance from

dependence" (Hendren, 2020, p.117). This redefinition of independence reflects the more radical

understanding of what accessibility gives access to–it allows others to give and receive care

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[3] The ten principles of Disability Justice are: Intersectionality, Leadership of Those Most Impacted, Anti-Capitalism, Cross-Movement Solidarity, Wholeness, Sustainability, Cross-Disability Solidarity, Interdependence, Collective Access, and Collective Liberation.

without connoting "moral superiority of the giver over the receiver" (Piepzna-Samarasinha, 2018, p. 41). Interdependence, therefore, reflects a collectivism that is willing to change the power structures that oppress PWD, and welcome PWD in public space by virtue of their existence, not their ability to be "independent" (Mingus, 2011a). Disability justice incorporates the logics of cripping, which exposes the ways in which disability has been made pathological and deficient in comparison to a neoliberal ideal of productivity, and centring the experiences and knowledges of those on the margins of disability identity (Piepzna-Samarasinha, 2018; McRuer & Cassabaum, 2021).

3.2 Approaches to Access

Narratives about access and accessibility have a contested history in describing how people are able to participate within a world built for the able-bodied. Primarily, lack of access is a civil rights issue and a failure of existing infrastructure and policy to anticipate different bodies in space. In city-building and design professions, the meanings of access and accessibility have been diluted and depoliticized, often acting as a synonym for "proximity" rather than as a meaningful way to include PWD in everyday activities (Sola et al, 2018). The disappearance of disability from the language further invisibilizes the needs and lives of PWD. In the following section, I will trace the history of the actions, policies and ideologies that have produced mainstream and critical understandings of access and accessibility.

3.2.1 Standardization

Standardization provides municipalities and organizations with templates and mandates to accommodate different bodies and minds in spaces, through legislation and codification (Hamraie, 2017). Thanks to the labour of disability rights activists, the setting of standards and enactment of laws has been essential for recognizing the human rights and freedoms of PWD and has helped make visible the inequities experienced by PWD in employment, housing and public space. In a perfect world, organizational compliance with the standards and laws would produce access for all PWD (Kurdi et al., 2019). Unfortunately, people with physical disabilities, such as wheelchair users, are mostly the anticipated users and beneficiaries of accessibility infrastructure and policy, leaving so many PWD with sensory and invisible disabilities excluded despite their rights to access (Kurdi et al., 2019). In many ways, the system requires a "legibility" of one's disability in order to acquire the benefits of legislations and standards, a process which Ellen Samuels terms "biocertification" (quoted in Hamraie, 2017, p. 146). The process of proving

one's disabilit(ies) in order to qualify for access rights demonstrates the rehabilitative logics in which these mechanisms were actually developed.

Laws and standards have not, therefore, actually resulted in the elimination of discriminatory systems and social attitudes towards PWD (Hamraie, 2017). Even with civil and political rights laws established, there continues to be arguments over the *extent* of how much laws should protect PWD rights (Williamson, 2019, p. 146). Williamson (2019) discusses the backlash to accessibility legislation and standards that arose in the twentieth century because PWD were imagined as a small and fringe population, and designing for their needs produced a discourse of access as excess or a burden (p.137). When access is understood as a burden or excess, designers and builders may only implement minimum requirements or try to cut corners to save money, if the organization has budgeted the resources to comply with the requirements at all (Williamson, 2019). Fleet (2019) notes that much of the accessibility infrastructure implemented for people who identify as Blind, low-vision or visually impaired (BLVI) "lags behind what can be technically achieved" (p.5). Though technically compliant with access laws and standards, the resulting infrastructure does guarantee its reliability or ease, but produces what she calls "clunky designs" that further disable PWD within the built environment (2019, p. 6). Problems also arise because accessibility laws and standards are interpreted and negotiated without disability perspectives, and have unclear or non-compulsory compliance stipulations (Hamarie, 2017).

Laws developed under a logic of rehabilitation, and standards designed to fit a limited range of users, will continue to exclude most PWD, especially those living at the intersections of racism, colonialism, sexism, homophobia, transphobia, and classism (Hamraie, 2017). There is

no doubt that standards and laws need to exist, however, scholars and activists are right to be critical of their origins and reach, opening up to the disability justice-based approach cited above.

3.2.2 Neoliberal Model of Accessibility; the Post-Disability Discourse

Functioning under neither a rights-based nor justice-based logic in normative culture, accessibility and access are generally understood through what Lee (2020) considers the "neoliberal model of diversity," where access is only considered valuable through its ability to broaden a consumer base through tactics of assimilation. The neoliberal model is a means to an end, and assumes that when PWD obtain access, they will function the *same* way that privileged people (who have always had access) will function (Lee, 2020). The model rewards those who can use access to "overcome adversity," and be able to participate fully in normalized society as if they were not disabled (Jones et al., 2021, p.313). This assimilationist approach creates a kind of inclusion known as "fictitious equality," where even if accessibility interventions are inputted, power imbalances remain firmly intact (Lamarre et al., 2021, p.202).

This neoliberal model manifests as a metaphorical checklist, where the addition of boxes is perceived as a burden on the provider (Lee, 2020). It is a top-down approach, where people will not receive access until their needs are considered for the checklist. However, since disability–like all identities–is not monolithic but rather entwined with other aspects of being, then there will always be more boxes to add to the metaphorical (and sometimes literal) checklist (Lamarre et al., 2021). It is also possible that adding a box for one access need may create "frictions" with an access need that is checked with another box (Hamraie, 2017). These problems arise because normative culture is trying to fit disability into a standard, rather than looking to change the culture itself.

In general, the neoliberal model of accessibility has been reconfigured under a discourse of what Hamraie (2017) terms "post-disability" (p. 220). They write,

> This discourse encompassed a series of claims, ranging from disability universalism (e.g., "we are all disabled") to disability neutrality (e.g., "design for everyone" rather than "design for disability") to antidisability (e.g., design focused on "eliminating" disability)...One post-disability logic was that even mentioning disability would produce stigma. Resembling the post-racial notion that talking about racial difference or oppression is racist, this logic purported that disability is a negative, stigmatizing quality.

Planners and policy-makers utilize this logic in articulating the liberal understanding of "curb cut theory"; the understanding that the implementation of accessibility infrastructures like curb cuts to allow freer movement for wheelchair users will have positive spill-over effects for other space users like people with strollers (DESA, 2014). The function of post-disability discourses, therefore, generally justify access and accessibility in their added value to *normative* users ("design for everyone"), rather than their added value to PWD (Hamraie, 2017). The discourses have contributed to the creation of Universal Design, an approach which purports that designing for everyone will eliminate the need for additional access aids or special accessible design features (Hamraie, 2017; Williamson, 2019). Universal Design has been lauded for its innovative approach to accessibility, however, the political messages about rights and inclusion of PWD become invisibilized (Williamson, 2019). These depoliticized and neutralized approaches to accessibility not only deteriorate the nuances of disability–Universal Design does not account for intersectional barriers marginalized PWD may face–they actually make it possible to imagine a world without disability in it (Hamraie, 2017). Post-disability discourses therefore erase the

possibility that difference is desirable, instead supporting neoliberalism's preoccupation with assimilation.

3.2.3 Critical Access

Instead of the post-disability and disability neutral discourses produced within the neoliberal model of accessibility, disability activists and scholars have been developing critical approaches to accessibility that reflect the ethos of cripping and disability justice. Aimi Hamraie (2017) explains that one must always be critical of access, and that access has the potential to offer a critique. Hamraie asks us to question the intentions of this access, to challenge the assumptions that all access is good access, or that access itself is a "self-evident good" (2017, p.13). It is important to apply an intersectional lens to a critique of the power dynamics involved in creating access and questioning who directs and who benefits from access.

Artist, Carmen Papalia's (2017) critical access framework, "open access," offers a challenge to the neoliberal understanding of access as a means to an end. Papalia's framework instead conceptualizes access as a process, explaining that access can never be "known completely, …enact[ed] perfectly or without friction" (Chandler et al., 2021, p.230). Open access asserts that PWD are experts in how their access needs are best met, positioning access as a constant negotiation rather than a checklist. Open access is therefore an opportunity to centre the needs, wisdoms, and experiences of disabled people and to understand that these needs and experiences are multiple and ever-changing. Open access imagines another way to be in the world, where caring for and co-existing with one another is what creates access; with a shift in dialogue, PWD gain control of their own narratives.

Mia Mingus' (2011b) framework, "access intimacy" rejects the idea that someone's access needs are a burden to another individual, institution, or society. Instead, she describes a feeling

that one gets when another person "gets" one's access needs without explanation. It's the feeling

of comfort one feels when they know "they have been thought of beforehand" (Bulmer, 2019).

Mingus believes that we can create conditions for the possibility of access intimacy, not just so

that someone feels as though they are being "helped," but that their presence in a space is

desirable. This framework also shifts the neoliberal approach for access by focusing on

accessibility as a pathway to belonging and joy.

Both frameworks promote disability-centred approaches that imagine an accessible future

from the bottom-up, rejecting neoliberal logics and invoking disability justice and crip ethos.

3.2.4 Cripped Access

The above critical access frameworks contribute to the artist and activist call to "go

beyond compliance", since standards and regulations are not enough for establishing a sense of

belonging for PWD in public space (Kurdi et al, 2019). It requires a conscious shift to actually

centring the needs of PWD, and not utilizing post-disability or disability neutral language when

describing the accessibility of a space (Hamraie, 2017). Truly going beyond compliance requires

a disavowal of neoliberal values such as independence and capitalist productivity, and instead,

valuing models of mutual aid, love and joy (Piepzna-Samarasinha, 2018). Cripped access is

therefore "joyful access", welcoming the challenges of including difference in space as the

central part of the visioning and design of that space (Silver, 2022, p. 119; Piepzna-Samarasinha,

2018). Fritsch's (2012) definition of cripping, "to open up with desire to the way disability

disrupts", emphasizes *desire* as one of the key features of cripped access for PWD. Desiring

disability for its difference is essential in any discussion around accessibility because it is a

demonstration of "life-saving, life-affirming love" (Piepzna-Samarsiha, 2018, p. 78). By

embracing and loving difference, accessibility can be used as a creative invitation for innovation

in spaces, rather than a burden and excess (Williamson, 2019). Currently, finding creative access solutions is an "invisibilized labour because it is a feminized, disability cultural labour," and therefore, the work to include people with differing disabilities goes unpaid (Piepzna-Samarasinha, 2018, p.154). Therefore, cripped access also requires changing the structure of who makes decisions related to access to a model where PWD are acknowledged and paid for their contributions and regarded as leaders (Piepzna-Samarasinha, 2018).

3.3 Cripping the Arts (and Culture)

Museums, art galleries, theatres and other cultural spaces have the culture-making power to change discourses about PWD. Ware and Sweeney (2014) criticize what they call "the antiquated notion that museums are neutral mirrors of a society reflected by artists" (p. 2). They argue that museums are responsible for communicating messages about PWD, Black, Indigenous and people of colour, through both representation and lack thereof (Ware & Sweeney, 2014). Disability artists have been traditionally showcased in museums as "outsiders," which assumes that the artist lacks technical skill and the ability to attach political intentions to their works (Gorman, 2007, p.48). Disabled artists struggle to be taken seriously by the mainstream art world and are frequently denied the space and training necessary so that they might work to improve their art and technique (Gorman, 2007). Larger Canadian cultural institutions are guilty of hoarding power in hands that are able-bodied and white; the planning realm faces a similar culpability (Pitter, 2020). There are cultural spaces today, however, where calls for cripping and disability justice are being taken up with joy and desire. In the following section I will outline a few of the techniques employed by various cultural spaces in a commitment to cripping the arts.

3.3.1 "Checklists are needed and necessary"

Primarily, cultural spaces apply a neoliberal approach to access, incorporating accessible design standards like the one developed by the Smithsonian Institution[4], to provide "starting guidelines" to find workable access solutions for audiences and patrons in exhibitions (Lee, 2020). Piepzna-Samarasinha (2018) writes that "access is far more to me than a checklist of accessibility needs–though checklists are needed and necessary" (p. 76). In the preface of the Smithsonian guidelines, the author describes the document as a "living document…like all

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[4] The Smithsonian Institution is a large museum, education, and research complex, located in Washington, D.C, established in 1846 in the pursuit of an increased diffusion of knowledge.

creative resources, [the design tools] must be mixed and matched and tested in different combinations" (Majewski, 2012, p.ii). These guidelines are an important starting point, and provide accessible opportunities such as hanging art pieces at a lower level on a wall for people who use wheelchairs or who are of shorter stature, providing headsets and audio guides to exhibits, and even offering touchable displays for non-visual patrons (Majewski, 2012). The concept of starting guidelines shows that the neoliberal approach to access can be a helpful stepping stone, but not a resting place in the pursuit of access equity.

3.3.2 Emancipatory Approach to Access

In her article, "Shifting Definitions of Access," Sweeney (2010) explores the different approaches to curating for disability-inclusive exhibitions so that "people with disabilities leverage all aspects of the exhibition…including audiences, curators, content developers and creators" (p.26). Argyropoulous & Kanari (2015) contend that museum spaces have paid a great amount of attention to physical accessibility and less to sensory accessibility (p.132). The emancipatory approach considers access in cultural spaces from four dimensions; physically (to the space), intellectually or emotionally or sensually (to the content), representationally (of disabled people and disability-themed issues), and in the decision-making (by and in collaboration with disabled people). Crucially, the approach not only understands accessibility in connection to physical access, but also as a means for providing meaningful pathways for PWD to perceive and understand the content within the space. The understanding that barriers to access are multidimensional can demonstrate an organization's recognition of a PWD's full personhood and communicate to the PWD that they are welcomed and desired in the space (Sweeney, 2010; Argyropoulous & Kanari, 2015). The approach also asserts that PWD bring a

unique perspective to leadership positions, applying complementary skills and knowledges that reflect a disability justice ethos.

3.3.3 Access Aesthetic Approach

Amanda Cachia's (2013) approach to curation involves viewing access as a "creative methodology," which reimagines access as a desirable aesthetic that makes a work interesting. Cachia uses access as the irresistible factor for the art, facilitating creative options for audiences and artists with various disabilities to engage with the art in a meaningful way. Blind artist Alex Bulmer (2019) relays a time when access extensions in a piece of video art allowed her to experience the art as a non-visual person. The original video, *Admiring All We Accomplish* by Deirdre Logue, showed a subject biting down on a balloon until it eventually popped. Bulmer says the access extensions to the video (audio descriptions and vibro-tactile pillows) were done in a way that, "didn't feel like a translation, but as part of the artist's work itself," because it communicated the meaning in a way that affirmed and celebrated her disability (2019, p. 5). The creation of access can be a collaborative project and dialogue between artists, curators and audiences. The access extensions in the piece that Bulmer describes were developed by another artist who was commissioned by the gallery in which the art was displayed. This enhancement of the work not only created a more meaningfully accessible experience for non-visual patrons, but the access created a network for the artists to work together again in the future. This approach embodies the idea that finding ways to accommodate people's access needs can be "joyous work," and can be used as an opportunity to develop lasting relationships and conditions for mutual aid (Piepzna-Samarasinha, 2018, p. 152).

3.3.4 Changing the Dominant Narratives of Space

Chandler (2017) offers an analysis of how, when different stories about disability are told, "meanings shift and new meanings emerge" (p. 332). To that end, a proliferation of new ways of interacting with space can help change the dominant narratives of how and who can use certain spaces. Because we are living in a world that is privileged towards the sighted, there are certain normative ways to perceive and interact with spaces. The normative, sight-privileged way to experience museum and performance spaces is through "silent and reflective contemplation" (Hetherington, 2003, p.1935). Artists, activists, and curators are challenging this socially constructed expectation for these types of spaces, with programming like relaxed performances, and touch-based exhibits (Lamarre et al, 2021; Argyropoulous & Kanari, 2015). A relaxed performance is welcoming to a disruptive way of being, allowing audiences to walk in and out of performances or to make noise, or just "inviting bodies to be bodies" (Lamarre et al., 2021). Because theatre spaces have rules that are hostile to some audience members (i.e., people with autism or tourettes), a relaxed performance redesigns the space so that "difference …[is] not an afterthought but a central–and artful–part of the equation" (Lamarre et al., 2021, p.188). Next, touch-based exhibits have been offered in many museums to improve the intellectual, emotional or sensorial access of people who identify as BLVI (Sweeney, 2010). According to Argyropoulos and Kanari (2015), "the issue of touch does not constitute a simple request of blind visitors. It is actually a proposal of making the museum less visio-centric leading to a new context within which the museum has to be reconceptualised or re-imagined" (p. 140). Dominant narratives of space can therefore be changed when we anticipate different users, including audiences and artists. This has important implications for a planners' understanding of space; there are no

inherently inclusive or exclusive spaces, but narratives about spaces have been developed

without different ways of perceiving the world in mind (Hall & Wilton, 2017).

3.4 Planning, Arts and Culture, and Disability

3.4.1 Cultural Planning and Disability

Cultural planning is a sector of urban planning that helps local governments to make decisions and investments in cultural and creative activities in a place. The majority of the literature that shapes these decisions focuses on the creative city discourse popularized by Richard Florida's "creative class thesis" (Grodach, 2013). According to the thesis, the creative city is an economically robust place "anchored by a flourishing arts and culture scene", which has successfully attracted a "highly educated and mobile creative class" (Locke, 2021, p. 52). By appealing to the consumption preferences of the creative class, cultural planners are meant to focus on producing an "attractive quality of place" through planned cultural districts and flagship projects above all other economic and social concerns (Grodach, 2013). Urban planners utilize creative city language to justify interests and investments in arts and culture in cities that reinforce neoliberal agendas; exacerbating gentrification, displacement and insecure labour conditions (Grodach, 2013).

Creative city discourse adopts a language that stresses the importance of public space and cultural diversity, however, researchers are still critical of creative city policies for exacerbating social and economic inequalities (Markusen, 2014). Critics of the creative city tend to the exclusions that occur under neoliberal regimes, including at the intersections of class, race, gender and migrant status, however disability is often missing from these critiques (Parker, 2008; Leslie & Catungal, 2012; Donegan & Lowe, 2008). For example, in their intersectional feminist analysis of creative city policies, McLean (2017) relays how radical arts practices have the potential to resist the neoliberal ideologies of creative cities. They write, "artists and activists are contesting this voracious neoliberal creativity and how these regimes exacerbate pre-existing

inequalities along the lines of race, class, gender and ability" (p.550). McLean includes "ability" as a marker of inequality that is affected by creative city planning, however, the author does not explicitly cite disability artists as change makers. According to the in-depth literature review performed by Kathryn Locke (2021) for their dissertation from Curtin University, none of the key texts on the creative city mention accessibility nor disability. However, disability is also largely missing from the critiques of the creative city, "when it is mentioned briefly, it is a marker of diversity alongside gender, ethnicity, sexuality, age or social class" (Locke, 2021, p.70). This reveals that not only are PWD not imagined as members of the creative class, but that their absence has largely gone unnoticed within the literature and policy, which ultimately facilitates inaccessibility within cultural spaces.

Cultural planning does not necessarily need to adhere to the creative city model but it could adopt an approach aligned with communicative planning techniques, such as building community capacity and social relationships with and between communities (Grodach, 2013; Loh et al., 2023). This model focuses on *existing* cultural resources including "nonprofit arts organizations, neighourhood-based creative businesses and resident artists", as the model draws on assumptions about the power of arts and culture to facilitate place-making and community building (p. 1750). Furthermore, cultural planning can adopt the logics of the emancipatory approach to accessibility, so that disability artists and patrons of arts with disabilities are anticipated in cultural spaces, as well as included in decision-making processes (Sweeney, 2012).

3.4.2 Disability in Broader Planning Literature

The absence of PWD within debates on the creative city reflects a similar absence that exists within broader urban planning literature. Planning literature has had very little engagement with physical, sensory, or intellectual disabilities, despite an increased interest in the role of

embodiment, affect and sensorial urbanism (Jaffe, 2021; Terashima & Clarke, 2021; Eyod, Kolcak & Biglieri, 2021). In a scoping review of the top five planning journals since 1912, Terashima and Clarke (2021) conclude that only 36 articles related to disability have ever been published. They go on to explain how even within these few articles, even fewer actually centre PWD within the study. Not only does their research reveal what they call a "precarious absence of PWD and disability perspectives" in planning literature, they propose that the dearth in literature may reflect that "PWD have been historically 'tucked away' in society and are still not as visible as other vulnerable groups" (p. 128). Similarly, in a review of Ontario's planning industry publications between 2000 and 2020, Eyod, Kolcak and Biglieri (2021) conclude that only 0.46% of the articles engaged with disability in a meaningful way. This invisibility functions as a rallying cry for researchers to not only explore the nuances of disability in public space, but to incorporate disability justice, critical and crip accessibility lenses to interrogate the normalization of disability exclusion.

In *very* recent years, researchers have been responding to the call for a more "relational and embodied" understanding of disability and inaccessibility in public space (Hall & Wilton, 2017). More researchers are attending to barriers within the built environment that create barriers for PWD in terms of mobility (Ross & Buliung, 2019; van Holstein, 2021; Middleton & Spinney, 2019), as well as specific research into the travel and mobilities of people who identify as BLVI (Wong, 2018; Middleton & Byles, 2019; Bredmose et al, 2023). Wong (2018) and Middleton & Byles (2019) utilize disability-centred methodologies in their studies, demonstrating an understanding of critical disability and accessibility knowledges. Conversely, the Bredmose et al. (2023) perpetuates a neoliberal understanding of accessibility as a goal of independent mobility, as well as locating the problem of disability within the BLVI person, rather than in the built

environment and social interactions. Hall and Wilton (2017) remind us that independence "fails to acknowledge that all persons depend to a greater or less extent on human and non-human others for their capacity to act" (p.739). Recalling the Sins Invalid disability justice principle of interdependence is therefore an essential element for urban researchers to incorporate into their analysis of disability in the built environment.

Utilizing understandings of disability developed from disability culture and disability justice, scholars have started questioning the physical, affective and emotional exertion required of PWD in order to gain access to public space, what Ross and Buliung (2019) call "access work". Access work is the inherent work involved in producing access, both in providing it and obtaining it, "eg., the tactical work undertaken by people whose bodies and social differences are overlooked in normatively designed access to spaces, services, systems, information, education, travel, and more" (p. 290). van Holstein (2021) argues that PWD have to do more work, or "tasks", in order to participate in the same activities as a non-disabled person, including both physical and emotional work that is often overlooked in planning literature and by policymakers. Middleton & Spinney (2019) discuss how "interdisciplinary theories and innovative methodological approaches" are required to address the neoliberal expectations for the most vulnerable to do more work and develop more just cities for all (p.96). The authors contend that access work should be questioned in order to expose and "disrupt inaccessible, inequitable and exclusionary elements" of the everyday lives of PWD (Ross & Builing, 2019, p. 290).

Finally, in the 2022 volume of the journal *Planning Theory and Practice*, editors Lisa Stafford, Leonor Vanik & Lisa K. Bates call into question planning's role in the oppression of PWD, invoking a disability justice lens for analysis. They write, "the hope for this edition is to engender authentic conversations and more deliberative transformative planning education and

practices towards disability justice by our urban planning profession" (2022, p. 105). The volume attends to issues of ableism in planning, embodied experiences as PWD in the built environment, with the articles either authored *by* researchers with disabilities or *with* PWD (2022). This promising turn in planning research should set a precedent within future literature to contend with issues of inaccessibility for PWD within public space, to address power dynamics and underlying assumptions of PWD within public space, and to embrace body-mind diversity and difference.

3.5 Conclusion

It is necessary for urban planners to be aware of history, culture, activism, creative movements and scholarship related to disability in order to provide meaningful access and accessibility in city-building projects. All design decisions are value-laden, and therefore, when PWD are excluded from design decisions, they are being implicitly told that their presence is not valued (Hamraie, 2017). Radical arts and curatorial practices have created multidimensional accessibility for PWD in cultural spaces, however, these practices have not been taken up meaningfully within the cultural planning nor broader planning profession. When access is cripped, it is seen as an opportunity for creativity, not as a burden, and communicates to PWD that they are welcome and deserve to have culture in their lives.

4.0 Policy Landscape

Introduction

The language used in policy documents and legislation to address accessibility has a profound impact on policy delivery and how policy makers and stakeholders understand the nature of access. This review will examine accessibility-specific, land use planning and cultural planning policies, critiquing their language and ability to create meaningful access within the built environment for people with disabilities in Canadian life. The federal, provincial, and territorial governments are primarily responsible for providing built environment, as well as health and social supports for people with disabilities living in Canada. Municipalities are constitutionally constrained within their powers to directly change the built environment so that persons with disabilities may participate fully in public life. The following section will outline the policies that address disability and accessibility in the built environment and public space, paying close attention to the documents that include cultural spaces.

4.1 Federal

People with disabilities in Canada are protected from discrimination under the *Charter of Rights and Freedoms* (1982) as well as the *Canadian Human Rights Act* (1977). The *Charter* and the *Human Rights Act* have legal precedence over all other laws in the Canadian legal system. Concerns over discrimination under the *Charter* and the *Human Rights Act* must be addressed on a case-by-case and individual basis, which makes overall progress of enforcement very slow.

In recent years, the federal government has taken steps to think more critically about their role in improving accessibility for people with disabilities in public spaces. Taking direction from disability rights activists who have asserted that no decisions will be made on their behalf without their participation ("Nothing about us without us"), the federal government has diversified its understanding of accessibility, suggesting that building an inclusive space requires more than just a physical accommodation (ESDC, 2022). The *Accessible Canada Act,* which was introduced to the government in 2018 as Bill C-81, identifies the built environment as a "priority area" in which barriers to accessibility must be prevented and removed (ESDC, 2020). The Canadian Accessibility Standards were also enabled under the *Accessible Canada Act*, which aim to direct the design of building interiors and external environments so that they are accessible and safe for people with a variety of sensory, cognitive, and physical abilities (Minister of Justice, 2018). Further, the *National Building Code of Canada, 2015* (NBCC), enabled by the *Standards Council of Canada Act* (1985) sets out technical requirements for the design and construction of new buildings, as well as the alteration, change of use and demolition of existing buildings. The NBCC lists the specific objective of "accessibility for persons with disabilities" in Section 2.2. of Division A, which results in specific stipulations for "barrier-free access to buildings", "barrier-free facilities for drinking, toileting, and bathing", as well as

"wayfinding and signage" (Lau et al., 2020). Individual provinces and territories can adopt the NBCC in its entirety, as well as choose to adapt certain parts into their own building codes.

In October 2022, Canada's *Disability Inclusion Action Plan* was released to the public with specific actions and targeted investments in key areas, including building and supporting accessible and inclusive communities (ESDC, 2022). This document addresses "physical, communication and attitudinal barriers" that prevent PWD from participating in their communities, demonstrating a more holistic understanding of accessibility (ESDC, 2022). The *Plan* also provides examples of how the government plans to approach accessibility issues from a critical perspective; on-going consultation with and leadership from PWD, a human-rights based approach and an intersectional focus (ESDC, 2022). However, the *Plan* has yet to be implemented and evaluated, and therefore, it is unclear when and how these goals will be put into action.

Though they provide a nation-wide example of what good accessibility legislation might look like, these plans and legislation only apply to the government itself, as well as federally-regulated public and private sectors. Though there is a commitment from the federal government to work collaboratively with provincial and territorial governments, disability stakeholders and PWD on the implementation, the federal government cannot penalize communities and workplaces for failing to comply with accessibility standards (ESDC, 2022).

4.2 Provincial

4.2.1 Accessibility-Specific

In Ontario, legislation for addressing the accessibility of the built environment is mandated under the *Ontario Human Rights Code,* 1962 (OHRC), the *Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act,* 2005 (AODA), and the *Ontario Building Cod*e, 1992 (OBC).

Enacted in 1962, the OHRC is the provincial legislation that protects people with disabilities from discrimination overall, mandating that all governments, private businesses and non-profit organizations in Ontario have a duty to accommodate "in a manner that most respects the dignity of the person". Disability is defined as a broad spectrum within the *Code,* specifically protecting the rights of people with "physical, mental and learning disabilities, mental disorders, hearing or vision disabilities, epilepsy, mental health disabilities and addictions, environmental sensitivities, and other conditions". As the prevailing law, failure to adhere to the OHRC can result in a case for the Ontario Human Rights Tribunal, even if an organization technically meets the requirements for AODA and OBC. Like the federal legislation examples however, all disputes are resolved on a case-by-case basis. The dispute process itself is incredibly onerous, and can take many years for a complainant to see a resolution.

Ontario was one of the first jurisdictions in the world to set specific and enforceable goals for accessibility through legislation; the AODA (Lau et al., 2020). Passed in 2005, the primary goal of the AODA is to develop, implement and enforce standards for accessibility in Ontario to make the province barrier-free by 2025 (Accessibility Directorate of Ontario, 2019). The standards, under the AODA, apply to all sectors of public, private and non-profit organizations with one employee or larger, however, their requirements depend on the organization's type and size (GAATES, n.d.).

The act enables the *Integrated Accessibility Standards Regulation (ISAR),* which establishes five accessibility standards, including the "Design of Public Space Standards" (DoPS) and "Customer Service Standards". The DoPS establishes the minimum requirements for obligated organizations to meet for creating or maintaining accessible public spaces. The Customer Service Standards establish the minimum requirements for organizations to implement and maintain policies governing its provision of goods, services or facilities, ~~as the case may be~~, to persons with disabilities. Interestingly, the DoPS and the Customer Service Standards are listed as two sections of Part IV of the IASR, where the other three standards (Information and Communication, Employment and Transportation) are listed as their own Parts. This emphasizes the inherent relationship between public space and customer service within the built environment, suggesting that the establishment of one standard cannot fully succeed without the other. Interestingly, there are several subsections within IASR that require organizations to consult with people with disabilities, however, there are no standards for how an organization must consult with people with disabilities.

The AODA lacks a strong enforcement mechanism (Onley, 2019). Provincial and municipal officials have little enforcement authority other than asking organizations to follow the standards (Onley, 2019). Organizations to which the accessibility standards apply are responsible for ensuring their own compliance with the guidelines, and must submit compliance reports to the Accessibility Directorate of Ontario. The compliance report does not require organizations to submit proof of how they have complied, only a checklist claiming they have done so (Onley, 2019). Though there are stipulations within the AODA on how the Directorate may issue a compliance order if an organization fails to comply with the standards, it is unclear how often and severely orders are being issued.

The *Ontario Building Code,* enabled by the *Building Code Act, 1992,* covers the accessibility of the indoor built environment (except for service-related indoor elements, which are included in the DoPS). Crucially, there is only one section of the OBC dedicated to accessibility - Section 3.8, which primarily focuses on barrier-free paths of travel, to accommodate physical impairments in the built environment. Section 1.4.1.2. of the OBC defines "barrier-free" as a "building and its facilities [that] can be approached, entered and used by persons with physical or sensory disabilities". Though the OBC does include people with physical and sensory disabilities, it does not address all the barriers experienced by the full spectrum of people with disabilities.

4.2.2 Land Use Planning

Land use planning is the process in which provincial and municipal governments manage their growth and development while balancing social, economic, and environmental interests and concerns. By virtue of guiding land use planning in the province, the policies set by the province and the municipalities have an effect on the well-being of people with disabilities in Ontario.

In examining the *Planning Act, 1990,* which governs the practice of planning in Ontario, Section 41 states that all site plans and drawings must be reviewed in order to confirm there are "facilities designed to have regard for accessibility for persons with disabilities". To authorize these site plan reviews, the Municipal council must appoint an "officer, employee or agent of the municipality". Though the Act does not explicitly outline who the authorizing body must be, according Section 29 of the AODA, in municipalities of 10,000 or more, a Municipal Accessibility Advisory Committee (MAAC) must be appointed to review the site plans for compliance with the AODA. For the most part, the MAAC is an unpaid volunteer position,

mostly filled by people who identify as disabled (at least 51% of committees must self-identify as having a disability). MAACs are fundamentally an advisory group, and therefore, the role does not provide any legal enforcement authority (Biglieri, 2016). Not only are MAACs overworked, but their advice is often ignored by municipal councils and developers (Onley, 2019). MAACs do not have the authority to enforce the accessibility standards the same way a fire or building code might be enforced, therefore, new barriers in the built environment are being approved, despite a duty to comply under provincial legislation (Onley, 2019).

Under Section 3 of the *Planning Act, 1990,* the province must issue a policy statement in which governments can set their policy directions. The *Planning Act* also enables the establishment of municipal Official Plans and Zoning By-laws, creating a hierarchy of policy so that all planning documents are consistent with those that come before. In the *Provincial Policy Statement, 2020* (PPS), Policy 1.1 directly and indirectly addresses the needs of people with disabilities:

1.1.1 Healthy, liveable and safe communities are sustained by:

"f) improving accessibility for persons with disabilities and older persons by addressing land use barriers which restrict their full participation in society;

g) ensuring that necessary infrastructure and public service facilities are or will be available to meet current and projected needs".

The PPS itself is very general and has no authority in enforcement, though land use planning decisions must be made to be consistent with its goals.

The *A Place to Grow: Growth Plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe, 2020,* enabled by the *Places to Grow Act, 2005,* is the regional plan directing land use planning and development in Ontario's Golden Horseshoe area. The plan does not explicitly reference accessibility for

disabled persons, but rather accessibility for the population at large, the predominant way accessibility is used in planning discourse (Kolcak, Eyob & Biglieri, 2021) When the word accessibility is used, it is broad and vague. In Policy 2.2.1.4d, the policy reads:

"Applying the policies of this Plan will support the achievement of complete communities that expand convenient access to:

i. a range of transportation options, including options for the safe, comfortable and convenient use of active transportation;

ii. public service facilities, co-located and integrated in community hubs;

iii. an appropriate supply of safe, publicly-accessible open spaces, parks, trails, and other recreational facilities"

The document does not provide any definitions for phrases like "expand convenient access" or "public services will be colocated in community hubs that are broadly accessible". This high level plan (which all municipal-level plans in the area of the Greater Golden Horseshoe must conform to) does not provide provincial direction in how to implement accessibility, who it is for, or why it is important for growing communities.

4.2.3 Cultural Planning

Cultural planning is the process in which local governments outline how cultural resources will be integrated and managed to achieve a community's goals. Ontario does not have a province-wide cultural planning document, however, the land use planning and cultural planning are closely intertwined and the *PPS* and the *Growth Plan* both have municipality-directed policies in which cultural spaces are addressed. Aligning with popular understandings of the role of culture in cities such as that of the creative city movement, both documents attend to the economic contributions of arts and culture (Grodach, 2013).

For instance, with the *PPS*, Policy 1.7.1e addresses cultural planning by directing municipalities to support long-term economic prosperity by: "encouraging a sense of place, by promoting well-designed built form and cultural planning, and by conserving features that help define character". The phrase "well-designed" is vague and does not refer specifically to accessibility. Similarly, in the *Growth Plan*, arts and culture are recognized as key elements of economically-strong community development. Under Section 2.2.3., "urban growth centres will be planned as focal areas for investment in regional public service facilities, as well as commercial, *recreational, cultural, and entertainment uses*". Further, access to arts and recreation is prioritized in Section 1.2., the policy's vision. It reads: "residents will have easy access to food, shelter, education, health care, *arts and recreation*, and information technology". That use of the word "access" is once again vague in the document. Its use here seems to refer to access as proximity for the community as a whole rather than the access of people with disabilities.

4.3 Municipal

4.3.1 Accessibility-Specific

Municipalities have few obligations under the provincial legislation to improve accessibility for people with disabilities. Under Section 4.1 of the IASR, municipalities are required to develop multi-year accessibility plans, "which outlines the organization's strategy to prevent and remove barriers and meet its requirements under [the] Regulation". The Toronto Multi-Year Accessibility Plan 2020-2024 is organized into eight sections of initiatives and outcomes for accessibility in the city, including the "Built Environment and Design of Public Spaces". The plan is directed at City of Toronto staff, and the initiatives only apply to City programs, services, infrastructure and employment practices.

To support compliance with provincial accessibility policy for exterior and interior environments, Toronto also has its own municipal accessibility design guidelines, the *Toronto Accessibility Design Guidelines, 2021 (TADG)*. Unfortunately, the guidelines only apply to City-owned assets, therefore, the site plans for private construction projects are only subject to the minimum requirements of provincial accessibility policy (which are poorly enforced to begin with). Under the "Objectives" section of the TADG, the authors write, "we're also pleased to share these Guidelines with businesses and organizations from all sectors. It is our hope that they too can use these Guidelines to proactively plan to build or renovate their properties and spaces to be accessible and free of barriers". Asking businesses and organizations to elect to use the guidelines demonstrates the limited reach of the municipal accessibility-specific policy in improving the well-being of PWD in public space.

In the section titled "Development", the *TADG* states that the guidelines "are consistent with or exceed existing requirements of the AODA and the OBC". In reference to "exceeding"

the existing requirements, it is possible the authors are referring to the policy's intentions to commit to the goals and principles of Universal Design. Under the "Objectives" section, it says "using accessible and universal design principles prevents and removes barriers for *everyone* so that dignity and independence can be sustained without impediment". Though the use of this language appears to be more progressive than other similar policy documents, it actually embodies what Hamraie (2017) refers to as a "disability neutral" discourse; promoting the value of accessible design because it aids the broader population, not people with disabilities (p. 220). Notably, Universal Design principles also make the assumptions about the "everyone" it is aiming to include that reflects a racially-neutral understanding of accessibility (Hamraie, 2017). The desire to "exceed existing requirements", or to "go beyond compliance", should instead reflect an understanding of the intersectional barriers PWD with experience in public environments, which require more systemic changes (Kurdi et al, 2019).

4.3.2 Land Use Planning

Municipal land use planning policies may also have an effect on the well-being of people with disabilities in the built environment. The City of Toronto recognizes people with disabilities as a "human rights protected group" under its "Vision Statement of Access, Equity and Diversity" (City of Toronto, 2023). The statement says, "every person has a right to fair and equitable treatment with respect to City services and facilities, without discrimination or harassment as outlined in its various human rights and equity policies, guidelines and procedures" (2023). The *Toronto Official Plan, 2022* (OP) only references the Vision Statement once in the document under Section 3.5.1, Policy 1i which reads that:

"1. Toronto's economy will be nurtured and expanded to provide for the future employment needs of Torontonians and the fiscal health of the City by:

i) supporting employment and economic development that meets the objectives of

Toronto's Workforce Development Strategy, including people-based planning and

the Vision Statement on Access, Equity and Diversity and promoting infrastructure

and support programs to ensure that all Torontonians, particularly equity-seeking

groups, such as racialized youth, persons with disabilities, single mothers and

newcomers, especially refugees, have equitable access to employment

opportunities".

Where the Vision Statement is referencing access to city-owned assets, this policy in the *OP* is

focused on equitable employment opportunities, which reflects the City's neoliberal mindset of

providing access for the sake of economic development.

Accessibility in the OP is also mainly understood in these neoliberal, disability-neutral

terms (Hamraie, 2017). In Section 2.2, for example, access is defined as the "ability for

everyone, regardless of their status in society, to use or receive resources, goods and services in

an equitable manner and fully participate in society". In Section 3.1.1 "The Public Realm",

people with disabilities are explicitly identified as deserving access to public buildings, parks,

and open spaces. In Section 3.1.1, Policy 27, the document outlines its duty to conform to City

and Provincial Accessibility Standards in order to ensure access to public spaces. This offers an

explanation for why the *Official Plan* intends to apply the ethos of "universal accessibility", as

outlined in the TADG, but fails to provide the definition of the phrase. The OP also outlines the

importance of encouraging the use of "universally accessible" design in site plans to be

reviewed by the City in Section 5.1.3 "Site Plan Control". The Section also references the City's

commitment to "barrier-free" communities, which is defined as a "built environment [that]

provides opportunities and experiences free of limitations", demonstrating an understanding of accessibility as physical only.

Finally, by-laws are the tools in which the City can implement the goals and policies under the *Official Plan.* City of Toronto's Zoning Bylaw 596-2013 reflects the OP's understanding of accessibility as physical-only, as seen in Section 200.15.1.5, where the by-law defines accessible as "free of a physical, architectural or design barriers that would restrict access or use to a person with a disability as defined in the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005, S.O. 2005, c. 11". This definition also reflects an understanding that accessibility need only be implemented to the minimum requirements of the legislations and standards, reproducing a discourse that accessible design is a burden on designers and developers (Williamson, 2019).

4.3.3 Cultural Planning

Toronto has a history of cultural policy development dating back to the establishment of the Toronto Arts Council in 1974, but progress has slowed in recent years (The Creative Capital Advisory Council, 2011). The most recent strategic planning document for cultural planning, *Creative Capital Gains Action Plan,* was published in 2011, and the *Official Plan* still cites the *Cultural Plan for the Creative City* document, which is from 2003. In the following section, I will analyze these cultural planning documents for their contributions to the well-being of PWD in cultural spaces.

The *Toronto Official Plan, 2022* does not explicitly discuss the participation of PWD in cultural spaces. In Section 3.5.2, "Creating Cultural Capital" the document recognizes the contribution the arts and culture make to the quality of life of a city's residents, however, the policy also invokes the rhetoric developed by Richard Florida's creative class thesis: "flourishing cultural life is a magnet attracting new residents to the City and convincing existing residents to

stay". It does not provide nuance of which residents are more likely to be able to access these spaces or not, and the section also does not question the accessibility of these spaces at all. The *OP* provides its "Principles for Success" in Section 1.2, , the first of which is "A City of Diversity and Opportunity", where a key goal is for "people to have equitable access to a range of leisure and recreational opportunities" . It is unclear if creative and cultural spaces were intended to be included within this range, however, many people go to cultural spaces for leisure and recreation. In total, there are six policies related to cultural planning in the *OP,* none of which imagine PWD as artists nor as consumers of arts and culture.

Arts and culture plans are key components to developing municipal cultural policies (Loh et al, 2022). In Section 3.5.2 of the *OP,* the policy suggests that "the City's Culture Plan will position Toronto as a 'Creative City', a leading international culture capital. The Official Plan policies support these efforts". Like many cultural plans of the early 2000s, Toronto's *Cultural Plan for the Creative City* document was published in response to the popularity of creative city rhetoric in urban planning (Loh et al, 2022). In the Executive Summary, the authors explicitly write, "the Culture Plan recognizes that great cities of the world are all Creative Cities whose citizens work with ideas, are intensely mobile and insist on a high quality of life wherever they choose to live". The document is organized into 60 recommendations for the city to develop its cultural sector to support the economic development of Toronto and establish itself as a creative city. The document asserts that a creative city offers a high quality of life to its residents and recognizes that cultural spaces are not distributed equally throughout the city, nor are there equal opportunities to access these spaces as "vulnerable groups" (p.30). The people within the vulnerable groups are not specified, and neither disability nor disabled person are discussed in the document. Recommendation 36, however, does outline a need for "a range of accessible

cultural programs and opportunities", but the document fails to define what is meant by "accessible". Meaningfully, Recommendation 38 also details the need for free and low-cost participation in arts and culture programs for "underserved populations", however, it is unclear if PWD were understood as one of those populations.

The *Creative Capital Gains Action Plan, 2011* includes people with disabilities as an equity-seeking group deserving of access to culture, however, the actions do not provide disability community-led actions (City of Toronto, 2011). The document has a chapter on "Access and Diversity", however, the main focus is on youth participation and ethnocultural inclusion, with one mention of "barrier-free arts and culture activities", as well as one mention of "free and accessible events" (p.18). The document demonstrates an understanding that PWD may want to participate in cultural events, however, it does not assume PWD as artists.

4.4 Conclusion

Access and accessibility are often invoked in policy documents and it is rare that they are explicitly defined. This contributes to the depoliticization of the word, as well as its capability to empower PWD to participate in public space, including cultural space. Next, at the federal level, accessibility policy is the newest, and sets the expectations for including PWD in public space more holistically than lower level governments. The policies at this level, however, have the least effect on the direct well-being of PWD. In Ontario, most provincial level policies identify PWD as an equity-seeking group, however, there is a lack of consistent and effective enforcement strategies which address the diverse access needs of PWD. Cultural planning and related documents generally fail to recognize PWD as deserving of access to arts and culture, and therefore, require an update at the municipal level. Finally, the reach of municipal accessibility policy is limited to City-owned assets, which excuses privately-owned cultural spaces from following more disability-inclusive guidelines for access and inclusion. A detailed discussion of policy recommendations can be found in Section 7.0 of this MRP.

5.0 Methodology

Introduction

This research focused on the embodied experiences of people who identify either as Blind, low vision or visually impaired (BLVI) who participate in cultural activities in Toronto. Cultural spaces were selected as the topic of study because they are considered essential sites in place-making and community building to policy makers, planners and practitioners, (Markusen, 2014) though not explicitly for PWD. Disability arts and culture has a long history of developing an accessibility aesthetic in which people with disabilities are made to feel more meaningfully included in arts and culture, where planning literature has little engagement with physical, sensory or intellectual disabilities at all (Jaffe, 2021). Toronto itself has been a central site for disability activism in Canada, both in the arts and beyond (Piepzna-Samarsihna, 2018). The research goal, therefore, was to marry the research and achievements from the disability studies and arts realm with the lived experiences of people with disabilities in accessing cultural spaces to expose policy makers, planners and practitioners to the gap in understanding how disability culture and disability arts research is relevant to the type of work they are doing. This study was reviewed by and obtained approval from the Research Ethics Board of Toronto Metropolitan University (REB2022-329) in November 2022.

5.1 Planning Cultures

This research aligns with what Ann Forsyth has designated "investigating issues of practical relevance" as well as "engaging with enduring questions" in planning research (2012). Papers that investigate practical applications are presenting: (1) the state of current knowledge in the area, (2) the evidence from this research project, and (3) how it applies to planning (p. 164). The research should also be presented as making a difference in planning related areas such as, housing, community development, urban design, etc. Papers that engage with enduring questions are meant to provide new insights on fundamental questions which often take the form of provocative critiques of planning (p.165). My research aims to challenge the practices of planners themselves when they are making decisions about the accessibility of public spaces, contributing to research probing the fundamental questions, "what is access?"

5.2 Participants

The study included five participants who self-identified as BLVI who participate in cultural activities in Toronto either as creators, curators or consumers of arts and culture. Though demographic data was not formally collected, participants were encouraged to share how they preferred to be identified, disclosing only what characteristics they believed were most important to share. In addition to some participants disclosing having multiple disabilities, participants shared personal identifying details such as age, gender identity, immigrant/citizenship identity, being a person of colour, being a parent, grandparent, spouse or partner.

To recruit participants for this project, I began by reaching out to existing artist collectives based in Toronto that focus on disability arts via email and telephone. I also used social media platforms such as the Network Connector[5], an online community for Deaf and Disabled artists, their friends and family to discover community and connect with other like-minded creatives. I also attended one in-person disability arts fair hosted by the Disability Collective[6], where I left paper copies of my recruitment poster with the event organizers. If participants were interested, they were invited to either reach out over email or telephone where I could send them either a written or audible version of the information letter and consent form. When the participants agreed to move forward with the study, they were invited to attend the focus group which was scheduled on Thursday, January 5, 2023. Those who could not attend the focus group were invited to participate in the study using the semi-structured interview method.

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[5] The Network Connector is the online directory service for Creative Users Projects, a disability-led national arts organization based in Canada.
[6] The Disability Collective is a not-for-profit organization and community of disabled artists dedicated to celebrating and showcasing disability in the arts based in Toronto.

5.3 Methodological Approach

I carried out my research using a participatory approach which is essential for adhering to an emancipatory disability research paradigm (Barnes, 2014), and a "nothing about us without us" framework. Participatory research is an umbrella term for the research designs and methods that require direct engagement with those affected by the issue being studied for the purpose of action or change (Cargo & Mercer, 2008). People with disabilities have often been mistreated in data collection, as they are treated as research objects who share their experience (Kroll et al., 2007). An emancipatory disability research paradigm aims to shift researchers away from doing research on people with disabilities, to doing research with people with disabilities (Peters, 2022). The research paradigm prioritizes the perspectives of people with disabilities, necessarily rejecting any associations with the medical model of disability (Peters, 2022). In that same vein, "nothing about us without us" is a call for the presence of people with disabilities in a "collaborative, decision-making or leadership capacity" within any project or decision related to people with disabilities (Peters, 2022). An emancipatory research paradigm changes the way research is done, requiring researchers to utilize methods that have the potential to empower participants as active partners in the research process (Barnes, 2014).

5.4 Methods

To achieve the outcomes of an emancipatory research approach, I chose to gather my data using an online focus group and semi-structured phone interview, to offer flexibility in how participants could participate. Four of the five participants attended the online focus group, and one participated in a semi-structured phone interview some weeks later. All participants were posed the same questions that focused on the participants' experiences of access or lack of access within cultural spaces in Toronto, as well as the affective dimensions of access and belonging in cultural spaces (see Appendix B for the list of focus group prompt questions). The questions were also supplied via email one week prior to the focus group, and three weeks before the semi-structured interview. In order to feel more included in the research production process, the participant using the semi-structured phone interview method was also given the opportunity to listen to and comment on the focus group participants' answers.

5.4.1 Focus Group

A focus group is a good method for answering questions of why and how phenomena are perceived or experienced, as well exploring "topical areas in which little research has been conducted" (Kroll et al., 2007, p. 691). The method was selected as the primary method for gathering research under the emancipatory disability research paradigm, as it has the potential to include the participants as conversation partners, storytellers, thinkers, observers, analysts, meaning makers, and co-researchers (Barnes, 2014). Kroll and colleagues (2007) write that "many experience focus group sessions as an opportunity to learn from each other, as well as contribute to social and policy change," which contributes to its successes in empowering participants in the research process (p. 691). The method is also considered particularly advantageous in its customizability, and a facilitator may choose to change the format of the

session to best address the communication styles or access needs of the participants (Kroll et al., 2007).

In a recent literature review on focus groups, Kornbluh (2023) has called for more attention to the dimensions of power present in focus groups, namely, ensuring equal participation, critical self reflection and transparency of the research process. To ensure that the accessibility of the focus group would go beyond minimal standards, I opened the session with the opportunity for the participants to describe their personal access needs when navigating a multiple person Zoom environment. One participant required the assistance of an intervenor to correct the live captioning mechanism built into the Zoom software. Throughout the session, the intervenor would type the corrections into the chat box, so that the participant was alerted to a problem with the captioning (e.g., the word "intimacy" was corrected from "into the sea"). Others agreed to follow the procedure I proposed, which involved an established rotation for the participants to answer questions. In retrospect, I should have continuously checked in with the participants to ensure their access needs were being met throughout the session. In one participant's feedback, they alerted me to the discomfort they experienced during the focus group due to the live captioning corrections being made by the other participant's intervenor. They explained that because their screen reader was reading out the words that were being typed in the chat box while the other participants were contributing, they had to turn off their screen reader in order to follow the discussion. Though I was not aware of it at the time, this dramatically affected the one participant's ability to contribute, and therefore, I was not able to mitigate the power dynamics that had arisen in the group. In trying to ensure equal participation through the established rotation, I had not addressed my own relationship to the power dynamics within the focus group. Though one participant wrote in their feedback that they appreciated the order for

answering questions, another wrote that they felt their position in the rotation order may have caused others to feel "silenced by the things I said". Kornbluh suggests that changing the format of the focus group may allow for "new perspectives and ease participant comfort", is a strategy for attending to power within a focus group (2023). Not only would this strategy have addressed the frictions created through the conflicting access needs of the participants but changing the rotation order could have changed the dynamics of the group of seeing the participant who was called on first as the de-facto leader of the conversation.

Despite this, the participants did display respect for each other as peers. The collaborative potentiality of a focus group was realized, to my mind, in the solidarity discovered between the participants. Though the participants were strangers to each other, after some time, the participants began including each other in anecdotal reflections, or acknowledging the contributions of others were going to be helpful to them in their own lives going forward. This demonstrated the advantage of a focus group in research of providing a "forum for mutual support" as Kroll and colleagues (2023) discuss in their paper.

5.4.2 Semi-structured Interview

The interview format allowed for extra time and space for the participant to reflect on personal experiences. The participant who opted for this format also submitted written answers to the focus group questions, and therefore, the interview allowed me the space to pull out more details and clarify answers. However, the format of going through the participant's written answers as well as the summary of the focus group participants' answers felt a bit rushed. In a follow up email, the participant told me that they had felt that I had spent too much time talking about the focus group which they could not attend, instead of focussing on what they had to say.

In the future, I will make sure to allot more time, or schedule two interviews in order to have equal space for all voices.

5.5 Analysis

Social constructivist grounded theory allows for a qualitative researcher to develop an analysis based on the observations and collected data, while acknowledging that a researcher will likely be aware of existing theory and literature related to the subject (Charmaz, 2008). Social constructivist grounded theory involves three stages: initial, focused, and theoretical coding. Initial coding involves examining transcripts line-by-line and summarizing the data into action-based, condensed interpretations. Focused coding involves drawing connections between the condensed interpretations of the data developed at the initial coding stage, essentially establishing which of the initial codes occur most frequently and significantly. In the final stage, theoretical coding, the researcher reexamines the focused codes while also thinking about the literature, theory and previous data related to the topic, so that they may decide which codes carry the most weight of analysis and develop clear and research-focused themes (Charmaz, 2008).

For this study, I analyzed the data from the focus group and interview using a social constructivist grounded theory approach. Using gerund-based phrases like "deciding to leave if the lack of access is harmful or intolerable", allowed me to capture as much nuance as possible from the original quote, and therefore, centring the participant's points of view and voice (Biglieri & Dean, 2021). Once I had examined and summarized the transcripts, I was able to produce two hundred and ninety-seven distinct initial codes. To achieve rigour in the data, I had my initial codes peer-checked and tested by Dr. Samantha Biglieri before moving on to the focused coding phase. After reexamining my initial codes, I was able to interrogate and organize similar initial codes into forty-one focused codes (see Appendix C for full list of focused codes).

In the final theoretical coding phase, seven themes were generated based on both the data and the

existing theoretical concepts which have been outlined in the literature review.

5.6 Limitations

The limitations of a focus group will always be the inability to generalize the data because a small sample size does not represent a larger population. The data gathered from my focus group and my semi-structured interview, therefore, was meant to reflect a narrow but precise scope, with a specific embodied experience within a specific environment. The focus group format was also a limitation in that the timing was constrained; the participants agreed to a certain amount of time and therefore, even though we did not get to all of the questions, we had to stop the session. Ultimately, this meant that fewer ideas were generated around the question of mobility (see Appendix A for the full list of research questions). Finally, to reiterate the critique from Kornbluh (2023), focus groups have the potential to create unwanted power dynamics within a discussion, making participants vulnerable to groupthink or afraid to speak their true opinions.

6.0 Results + Discussion

Introduction

The results of the focus group and semi-structured interview were able to shed light on the embodied experiences of the participants who identified as either Blind, low vision or visually impaired (BLVI) who participated as artists, patrons or both within Toronto's cultural spaces. In the analysis of the transcripts, seven themes related to access needs in cultural spaces were generated using a social constructivist grounded theory approach. "Access work" (Ross & Builing, 2019), and "the emancipatory approach to access" (Sweeney, 2010), were the first themes generated during the coding process. Both of these topics were discussed in the literature review; the former, as a recurring concept in transportation literature, and the latter, as a radical approach to access in museum and curatorial studies. The final five themes–community connectedness, cultural competency, inadequate access avenues, navigating the unknown and recognition of personhood–are novel contributions to the field(s), produced alongside the existing literature and theory also discussed in the literature review. Together, these seven themes have produced new contributions to the "enduring question" in planning, "what is access?", troubling the commonly held notion that access is only about physically getting into a space (Forsyth, 2012).

6.1 Access Work

"Access Work", as defined by Ross and Buliung (2019) refers to the inherent work involved in producing access, either to provide access or to obtain it. The literature on this topic demonstrates that PWD are disproportionately responsible for doing this work themselves, working doubly as hard as non-disabled people to participate in an inaccessible world. The participants' responses reflect that they are not only constantly forced to negotiate how much excess access work they need to do, but also that there is a cultural expectation for them to do this access work themselves.

6.1.1 Cultural Expectations for Doing Access Work

This cultural expectation seems to be set by the structure of our legal system, as it is designed to address human rights complaints one at a time, case-by-case. Violations of human rights laws put the work back onto people who have been discriminated against, using their own time and resources. This means that even when a PWD wins a legal case against an organization that has discriminated against them, there is no guarantee that they will not face the same discrimination at another organization. One of the participants, Michael, who was studying to be a lawyer at the time of the focus group, described the reality of living in an inaccessible world: "the fact that the door is shut means that you know you have to fight it to open it over again". This quotation suggests that doing this type of formal access work only has a temporary pay-off. The current legal structure does not create circumstances in which an institution, organization or business is obligated to do the access work on behalf of PWD, and therefore, the work is downloaded onto the PWDs themselves, and it is exhausting.

6.1.2 Stay and Advocate or Leave in Peace?

For the study, the participants were specifically asked about what it was like to come to a cultural space that does not accommodate one's access needs. The general consensus was that PWD are given two options; staying and advocating for their needs to be met in order to have access to the space or leaving. Making these decisions is a form of access work in itself, especially because they are constantly forced to make these decisions over and over again.

The participants discussed their personal access work thresholds, as none of the participants seemed particularly in favour of either staying or leaving because there were pros and cons to both options. Sometimes these thresholds were based on whether or not it was essential for them to be in space, as in for work or art practices. Michael discussed a $15,000 lawsuit he won in a particularly egregious human rights discrimination situation with the Toronto After Dark Film Festival[7]. He said, "I'm just simply asking for what I'm entitled to. I'm entitled to access any public space that I want and to experience any cultural event I would like". As a film critic, it was especially important for Michael to assert his right to be in that cultural space and have his access needs met *in order to* do his job. Similarly, another participant, Brennan, said that they were willing to be in inaccessible places if it was for work because at least they are being paid to be there. The ajority of the participants however, were generally going to cultural spaces for leisure, and therefore, deciding to stay and advocate means that they are forced to do extra labour that a non-disabled person does not have to do in order to enjoy a cultural space. Further, staying in a space and advocating for themselves can take a toll on one's mental health and energy levels. One participant, Kenneth, said, "if I find myself personally in such a situation, if I try maybe 2 or 3 times to, you know, lay a complaint, and nothing is being done about it, I

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[7] The Toronto After Dark Film festival is an annual showcase of Horror, Sci-Fi and Action films. Their website offers no descriptions of accessibility.

just leave for my mental health". Therefore, thresholds for access work can also be measured by mental health/wellbeing capacity, and therefore, leaving can be viewed as an act of self-preservation or "self-care" (Biglieri, 2021). Being in a space that does not meet one's access needs communicates to that person that they are not wanted there, therefore, the participants agreed that it was often easier to avoid these places. One participant, Sricamalan said, "I just leave and be at peace with myself instead of trying to, you know, force myself on where I am not being wanted and accepted."

Unfortunately, not forcing oneself to stay in a place where they do not feel wanted can perpetuate what Hamraie (2017) calls, "the vicious circle of denial and lack of use" (p.182). If PWD don't go to cultural spaces, they become further invisibilized within the public realm, along with their rights and access needs. This proves that there is an undue amount of pressure on PWD to do the access work of advocating for themselves, rather than putting the pressure on institutions to provide access. To this point, Brennan said, "ultimately, the most supportive infrastructure is willing and informed attitudes in staff from the top-down in the cultural establishment to enforce existing policies, and to go beyond–without relying on this labor being downloaded onto the disabled person". Staff of a cultural space can therefore offer to take-on the access work that can help a PWD decide to stay.

6.1.3 Middle Space and Survival Strategies

In my interview with Brennan, we discussed a possible third option that was not explicitly stated in the focus group, what they called a "middle space". According to Brennan, the middle space is where a PWD can stay in an inaccessible space by using the survival strategies they have built so they can accommodate themselves in a hostile society. The key difference between what Brennan identified as middle space and staying/advocating, is that in

this middle space, they are not expecting the space to be changed in that moment. In our interview, they said, "I see a lot of people like really uncomfortable in that middle space because it is an invisible license, it minimizes your needs and doesn't do anything to change it". Again, we see here PWD doing the access work and not the institutions, or those in power. Kurt and Michael described being in a middle space when they would go to the movies and have a friend or family member do the audio descriptions of what was on screen. They detailed the limitations of this method of access; that it can be embarrassing if the theatre is full and other audience members are hostile. Ultimately, the goal of middle space *is* to be limited, because it shows the gaps in access that an institution is providing. Brennan described normalizing access conflicts in the middle space, and to celebrate the disruptions that occur when survival strategies need to be invoked. They said, "that way it's not a big thing to be in a space that isn't working for you and say something needs to be different". Hamraie and Fritsche (2019) would group these survival strategies under their theory of "crip technoscience", which credits PWD as experts and designers within their everyday lives, using skills, resources, and hacks to disrupt ableist systems within a non-accessible world (Hamraie & Fritsche, 2019). This theoretical framework posits that accessible design should be led by and with disabled people, since their own embodied experiences are the key to creating equitable access in space.

6.2 Emancipatory Approach to Access

The "Emancipatory Approach" to access, defined by Sweeney (2010), recognizes that

even though a space may comply with accessibility standards and laws, it does not necessarily

make someone feel welcomed, important, and desired in the space (p. 26). Her analysis

specifically addresses access within a cultural space, which she approaches from four

dimensions: physically (to the space), intellectually or emotionally or sensually (to the content),

representationally (of disabled people and disability-themed issues), and in the decision-making

(by and in collaboration with disabled people). The participants' discussion examined their

desires for this holistic understanding of accessibility in a cultural space, which aligns

theoretically with all four dimensions of the emancipatory approach to access.

6.2.1 Physical Access

The participants discussed the enablers and barriers to physically being in a cultural

space. PWD often require accessible infrastructures to gain entry to cultural spaces such as

ramps, COVID-masking requirements, tactile walking surface indicators (TWSI), and tactile

maps. However, physical barriers such as crowding, cost, and time restrictions can also pose

challenges to a PWD's enjoyment of a cultural space. Knowledge about the latter types of

physical barriers will likely only emerge in discussion with PWD (as opposed to a checklist),

further solidifying the necessity to centre and consult PWD when planning to build effective and

meaningful accessibility.

The participants agreed that dedicated spaces where they were safe from crowding was

necessary for their enjoyment of a space. They discussed the successes they had seen with the

use of dedicated pathways for BLVI folks to follow for easy wayfinding without the fear of being

jostled by crowds or tripping over objects. Kenneth suggested that a cultural space could have a

dedicated space with noise restrictions. He said, "I feel it would be wonderful, for you know people with my disability, if there could be, you know, a different segment whereby it's less noisy." A dedicated quiet or crowd-controlled space would therefore lessen the barrier of crowds.

Cost was named as a barrier because of the extra cost of paying for the entry of an interpreter, intervenor or support person. Not only are these individuals helpful in the physical access of navigating a space, but a support person is also essential for a PWD's intellectual, emotional and sensual access to the content. Related to cost was time, which was also named as a barrier, especially when a person pays a certain amount for a specific time slot to be in a cultural space. Michael said he felt like he wished there were different pricing or timing models to participate in cultural activities, because it would help him to split up his time into smaller parts. Overall, he felt like he could not take advantage of everything a cultural space has to offer because of time or energy constraints. He said:

> "I get tired, I get overwhelmed. And if I'm going to the AGO, I'm paying a fee to go there. Maybe 10 minutes is enough for me but I feel like I need to get more out of it, because I'm paying for so much. I'm paying so much to go, and if you are obligated to see everything and I can't because I'm tired and maybe the first 10 minutes were great for me, and that's it."

To me, these stories tell us that lower costs and flexible or broken time can provide physical access. In critical disability studies, scholars work with the concept of "crip time", reminding us that the expectations for how long a thing should take, or how long one can enjoy being in a place, is based on a very "particular minds and bodies" (Jones et al, 2021). Working in crip time might offer better access for PWD in cultural spaces because it allows people to listen to their bodies without feeling negatively about themselves or their access needs. This means meeting

people where they are at, and allowing PWD to assess their own capacities and needs for participation.

6.2.2 Intellectual, Emotional, or Sensual Access

Intellectual, emotional, and sensual access needs can be met when cultural spaces anticipate the participation of people with different ways of being and perceiving. For those in the focus group, this type of access was achieved when audible and tactile access extensions were available in a space. The participants discussed that in general, they were seeing assistive audio devices and descriptive audio/video becoming available in more cultural spaces, however, there was no consistency across the board. Sricamalan discussed a positive experience he had at a theatre that provided audio descriptive sessions for their performances. He said: "not all the shows are [descriptive audio sessions], not acute, but some of them. So I have been and enjoyed it, but I feel it would be really useful for blind people and most places."

Tactile access features seemed to be less readily available in cultural spaces in comparison, however, the participants were enthusiastic about the kind of access touch-based infrastructures allowed. Kenneth discussed being able to touch and feel sculptures in art galleries and how it made him feel good about himself. He said: "I touch and feel the sculptures, because initially, I used to be very much involved in the production of these arts, so you know, I just go there to feel good about myself". The ability for this kind of access to make someone feel good about themself speaks to the necessity of the access. Especially in the arts, it is essential to have intellectual, emotional, and sensual access that communicates the same meaning that the artist originally intended. In order for this access to be provided effectively, the access extensions should not feel like what Bulmer calls a "translation" from the visual to another sense, but it should feel like it's part of the artist's work itself (2019). This may mean that cultural spaces

need to work with the artists themselves to add meaningful access extensions that allow for different ways of perceiving the art in a way that affirms and celebrates a person's disability.

6.2.3 Representational Access

Representational access can refer to the opportunities given to artists with disabilities, as well as creating a space that celebrates and centres different ways of being in the world, calling back to the aforementioned "accessibility aesthetics" (Cachia, 2013). Not only should spaces provide more opportunities for disabled artists to work with them, but the space itself should reflect an understanding of disability culture. Importantly, a space with representational access will allow "bodies to be bodies", and refuse cultural expectations for how one should interact in a space (Hendren, 2020; ; Lemarre et al, 2021). A space with representational accessibility understands the nuances of disability, and that having one piece of accessible infrastructure will not be enough because one size does certainly not fit all. Ideally, a space should have many options for accessible infrastructures. The participants discussed the importance of having more than one avenue for access because it allowed for choice and autonomy. Sricamalan said: "but if they can be seamlessly implemented giving people more than one choice. Right, then, that will hopefully lead to inclusion, and you feel you are welcomed there". This speaks to the importance of imagining the accessibility of a space from the beginning, not as an afterthought. Seamless accessibility is not always possible, but demonstrating the desire to welcome and include people in a space can definitely be conceived early in its development.

6.2.4 Access in Decision-Making

It is still rare to see PWD in positions of power, and according to research, cultural spaces like art institutions can be particularly hostile to these populations (Ware & Sweeney, 2014).

Though there are more opportunities for marginalized artists and curators, the higher positions of power are still almost exclusively held by able-bodied white people (O'Neill, 2020). It is worth noting that four out of the five participants had leadership roles related to disability activism or accessibility consulting, either through their work or artistic endeavors. Kurt discussed the importance of being made to feel part of a team within the decision-making process when discussing his access needs. He said: "what I've noticed in a lot of spaces I've been in, is like accommodating me is someone talking *about* me rather than talking *to* me". When PWD are included from the beginning or empowered to take on a leadership role, there is a discussion of access that occurs at the beginning of the project, reducing the concern of people being made to feel like an afterthought. Invoking "nothing about us without us,", it is important to design decision-making bodies that do not make decisions for people with disabilities, but by and with them (Peters, 2022).

6.3 Community Connectedness

Participants discussed several aspects of how access to cultural spaces can have an effect on their sense of community connectedness. Lack and loss of access to cultural space can mean a decreased connection to the broader community, the arts community or culturally specific communities, like the queer community or the Black, Indigenous, people of colour (BIPOC) community. Strong community connections cultivate a caring environment based on interdependence and desire for difference, where allyship and solidarity can thrive, even when the access isn't "perfect".

6.3.1 Isolated from Community

When asked if Toronto's cultural spaces adequately meet the access needs of the participants, each participant said no. Brennan described their experience in the city as "systemic segregation" because they consider large swaths of the city as not available to them, many of which are the places that are "inviting art and opportunity". Most participants agreed that they did not feel welcome in many of the city's cultural spaces because they were not accessible. Not feeling welcome in so many places meant that ultimately, the participants ended up doing a lot of things on their own or opted out of going to cultural spaces and events altogether. Sricamalan said, "I tend to stay away…My partner/spouse doesn't like it, you know, for family outing, family time. But I'd rather stay outside and even fall asleep, or enjoy my own music or something else". Sricamalan discussed not wanting to let his family down, but without having any adequate accessibility avenues, he is unable to enjoy participating in cultural activities. The burden of trying to be in a space that does not meet one's access needs in order to connect with the community can feel too great, and they run the risk of isolating themselves. Again, we can draw connections to the vicious circle of denial and lack of use, since a lack of visibility of PWD

in a space decreases the pressure on the space to address the access needs of potential patrons, and PWD are further excluded from their communities.

6.3.2 Importance of Belonging in Multiple Communities

Two participants discussed their experiences belonging to multiple communities, specifically the queer community and the Sri Lankan community in Toronto and Scarborough. Sricamalan and Brennan both cited the importance of feeling like they were welcomed and wanted within their culturally specific communities.

Sricamalan discussed the challenge of trying to navigate Canadian culture and Sri Lankan culture, while also feeling like his access needs aren't met in either community. However, he also said that belonging to both communities has its advantages, because he can feel supported in different ways: "I have the advantage of both worlds. So we have to look at the positives. And there are some things, you know. I am better off in that way compared to my cultural people, or in the other way, too, and the mainstream friends and community are also interested, inclusive to learn things".

Brennan discussed the frustrations they have felt as a PWD in the queer community, since in many queer cultural spaces, it is not assumed that PWD will be there. Brennan felt that queer spaces in Toronto have not met their access needs, either because they are not wheelchair accessible, they are not safe to navigate, or they are not COVID-safe. It feels to them as if, "the current younger generation of 2SLGBTQ+ community has forgotten a lot about community safety in exchange for the fun of partying". Brennan did say that some queer cultural spaces like the Buddies in Bad Times Theatre[8] were making a concerted effort to foster accessible spaces, using strategic intergenerational partnerships. Brennan discussed the access work being done by

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[8] The Buddies in Bad Times theatre is a theatre company located in Toronto dedicated to supporting artists and works that reflect the political and social principles of queer liberation.

elders in the queer community: "I think because people have been making requests more boldly there is more of an anticipation [of PWD] in certain spaces. Which is nice. There are some elders doing some great work around that recently". Meaningful accessibility is necessary, therefore, to bridge gaps between PWD and the other communities they belong to.

6.3.3 Care

The participants discussed a general sense of apathy that they felt from the wider community when it comes to including PWD in cultural spaces. The participants discussed that there were fewer opportunities for disabled people to do art because of a lack of resources and programming, but also a lack of affordable and accessible training/studio space. Brennan said, "there's so many things that are not accessible right now, and they need to be accessible, but nobody seems to be overly concerned".

Not only does this lack of care further exclude PWD from cultural spaces, but it can create a sense of resentment and apathy from folks within the disabled community. Michael said, "It's hard as well when you experience other people enjoying something but you are not enjoying it, because you can't get the benefit of what they have". By and large, non-disabled people are not willing to recognize the privileges they have to access spaces with ease, which is why PWD are more likely to do their own access work. However, Kurt said he sees apathy within the Blind community, because people are afraid that advocating for better treatment will take away the few rights and programs they do have. This observation aligns with Fleet's observations of "clunky designs" of infrastructure *for* Blind people that aren't designed *by* Blind people (2019, p.6). She says because there is so little progress in terms of accessible infrastructure for Blind people, there is an expectation for PWD to be grateful for inadequate infrastructure and so there tends to be little pushback against it.

Caring communities, on the other hand, can foster a sense of allyship, demonstrating support by listening and making a real effort to anticipate situations in which a PWD might come into an access conflict. Brennan said that they know buildings aren't going to have perfect accessibility at the exact time that they need it, but they can rely on human allies to "slow down and try to do their best to meet it with me". They describe what Mia Mingus (2011b) termed "access intimacy", where someone just "gets" your access needs without relying on the labour of the PWD. In our conversation, Brennan described feeling close to those who demonstrate access intimacy, even if it is an act as small as being handed a coffee cup with the drinking hole facing towards them.

The participants also demonstrated a desire to build solidarity with one another. After hearing about the others' experiences being excluded from different cultural spaces, Michael said, "If I went for example, if I decided to go with Sri to the art gallery, you can bet that both of us would be fighting for our rights. We wouldn't be embarrassed by the other. So that's really important, because most of us don't go to these cultural spaces by ourselves". This comment suggests that a cultural space should allow for supportive allyship and solidarity between PWD to advocate for their right to access.

6.3.4 Room to Learn from One Another

The participants within the focus group were kind and generous to each other, thanking one another for their contributions and taking notes of each others' experiences. Sricamalan said he would take some of the ideas generated from the focus group to his accessibility advisory committee at his workplace. Michael said that he was taking notes of the spaces that others in the focus group had mentioned, both to protect himself from going to a place that would exclude him based on his disabilities, but also so that he can go to new places that will anticipate his access

needs. He said: "something about talking with all of you is, you know, we learn from each other… I would never think I would be able to go to the [Art Gallery of Ontario's[9]] David Bowie Exhibit or you know, asking for an intervenor or a support person to come. Sometimes, you know we don't think of those things".

The participants were able to share in the joys and frustrations of being in cultural spaces as a Blind, low vision or visually impaired person. In sharing their experiences, they are also sharing their survival strategies with each other, which may in turn help them feel more confident going to more cultural spaces they may not be familiar with.

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[9] The Art Gallery of Ontario (AGO), located in Toronto, is one of Canada's largest art institutions that showcases a wide range of artists from around the world.

6.4 Cultural Competency

Integrating accessibility policies and accessible infrastructure into cultural spaces often requires the accountability and disability cultural competence of staff. Relying on staff to provide access avenues for PWD can be frustrating however, and the participants discussed the added exhaustion of trying to explain to uneducated and apathetic staff why their space should meet their access needs. Kenneth had very negative experiences with staff members failing to help when a cultural space did not meet his access needs. He wondered, "maybe they don't see why they should". Working in a public facing role, staff and people in power should not only be willing to address access conflicts that arise, but they need to anticipate that people who exist in the world differently to them want to come to the cultural space and have the right to experience culture. Major points touched upon within this theme were a staff's willingness to put in meaningful effort, even when "perfect access" cannot be achieved, and a respectful normalization of different ways of being in the world.

6.4.1 Try vs. Effort

The participants discussed what helpful and non-helpful staff in cultural spaces do when access conflicts arise. Brennan discussed feeling like they were being gas lit by senior staff, who would try to minimize the gravity of the situation. Kurt was particularly frustrated when he felt patronized by staff, especially when a staff member tells him that they are trying to accommodate his disability. He explained that there is a difference between effort and try: "People don't seem to understand that try and effort are two different words. 'Try', you try on a coat. You try a glass of wine. Trying is effectively sampling. But when you make an effort, you're putting in a full commitment". Putting in effort, therefore, demonstrates a willingness to make significant change in behaviour or in the environment. Even if staff aren't able to make a

space fully accessible at that moment, the commitment to making an effort shows the PWD that they matter and their presence is desired in the space.

6.4.2 No Perfect Access

Some staff may not put in the effort to address access conflicts because they are afraid that they will not be able to address everyone's access needs all at once. The literature shows that addressing all access needs at once is impossible, therefore, the pursuit of perfection in access should not be a deterrent for trying things and failing. Chandler and colleagues (2021) asks us instead to try to "fail better" in the pursuit of access (p. 237). Brennan even said in their interview "I'm trying to unpack how much of that is based in the pursuit of perfection [in access]. Like we have to get access perfect and right every time. But there is no perfect access ever". Staff instead can work with PWD to create imperfect access or alternatives that demonstrate a meaningful effort discussed above. Brennan described working with a dance company that only had practice spaces in an inaccessible building. The staff at the dance company recognized the shortcomings in their own space and made an effort to find Brennan an accessible space where they could practice. Finding the alternative, accessible dance space allowed Brennan to continue doing their art, and it fostered a deeper and trusting relationship between the staff and artist.

Brennan also brought up their concerns with expectations for disabled artists to be the ones to address audience access needs. As an artist, they have very little input into how much the cultural space will prioritize the accessibility of the show. They said: "the artist, as a visible person, is often the target for complaints when a show doesn't go right, including around access and that can become a site of a lot of lateral ableism". In audience and producer expectations for "perfect access", artists can be criticized for something that is out of their control. If staff were

able to perceive this problem and prioritize listening to audience members' needs (even if there isn't the budget for access), then artists would not have to bear the brunt of the criticism.

6.4.3 Normalizing Difference

Staff can also demonstrate cultural competence towards the access needs of PWD by normalizing the different ways of being in and perceiving the world. Normalizing a different way of perceiving the world can occur through initiatives that celebrate difference, like video games that rely on audio and tactile feedback instead of visuals. Unfortunately, not all attempts to normalize different ways of being in and perceiving the world are respectful. Kurt and Michael discussed their annoyance at spaces that trivialize their experiences as BLVI people, for example, a restaurant called Onoir[10] that claims to provide customers with a disability simulation experience. Kurt said: "I'm not a gimmick. Okay, It's like, oh, you go in and eat for an hour in the dark. But you're just sitting at a table and you think you know what it's like to be blind. No". PWD should not be made to feel like a gimmick in order to normalize their way of perceiving the world.

Participants generally agreed that one of the best ways institutions and staff can support this normalization is through the standardization of certain accessibility policies across cultural spaces. When organizations develop accessibility standards and policies that are public, it not only normalizes their implementation, but PWD can be more confident about going to cultural spaces or using a product. Kurt used the example of feeling confident that almost all of the movies and tv shows available on Netflix will have descriptive video. The staff at that company have therefore decided that in order to show that they value their customers who perceive their

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[10] Onoir is a restaurant located in Toronto that serves its food and drink in complete darkness, by a waitstaff who all identify as Blind. The website claims that customers will gain an understanding of what it is like to be Blind.

products auditorily, they have developed a standard of embedding descriptive video into their

content.

6.5 Inadequate Access Avenues

On the whole, Toronto's cultural spaces did not meet the access needs of the study's participants, and the discussions demonstrated the participants' frustrations and disappointment in the inadequate access avenues of these spaces. The participants discussed the barriers to access that they experienced due to lack of accessibility policies and prohibitive policies, as well as lack of accessible infrastructure or unhelpful or broken infrastructure. Once again, PWD are expected to do extra access work in order to advocate for themselves to be in these cultural spaces. When the accessibility features in a space were broken or inadequate, the participants said they were made to feel like an afterthought, unimportant and unwelcomed. The participants also discussed the inaccessibility of the complaint processes themselves, both within the organizations and from formal government processes. The participants further voiced their concerns for the little attention paid to budgets or funding for accessibility within cultural spaces, as well as the added costs put upon PWD trying to accommodate themselves. Finally, the participants acknowledged and discussed the added barriers to access that exist at the intersections of one's identity.

6.5.1 Policies and Infrastructure

Other than at the time of submitting a site plan, buildings and organizations are not regularly evaluated for AODA compliance, therefore, it is up to the discretion of the organization to provide accessibility through thoughtful policy and useful infrastructure. Without policies and infrastructure, PWD are inherently excluded from participating in cultural activities. Some of the participants described their frustrations when going to the cinema, because not all cinemas have closed captioning and descriptive video policies. For this reason, Kurt discussed the cultural space of the cinema as a place of the past, saying he used to go when his vision was better. There

were also concerns around crowding within cultural spaces, since excessive noise can make it impossible for one to enjoy a space auditorily. Kenneth suggested that a cultural space could have a dedicated space with noise restrictions and Brennan suggested that crowd control policies could also be more widely implemented. Finally, no touch policies were discussed as prohibitive among the participants. Sricamalan said: "in most places it is a taboo when we try to touch anything, and people get upset. Being in museums, and art galleries, we can't touch it right? So it is a shame, and it is a challenge". Cultural spaces can do more to offer multiple access avenues by permitting touching of various pieces, or providing replicas that can be touched.

The participants also discussed spaces with inadequate or broken access infrastructure, which demonstrates that an organization does not have an actual interest in including PWD. Brennan discussed being in a cultural space that was technically AODA compliant because there was mobility device accessible infrastructure installed, however, they were key-operated lifts that constantly broke down. They said: "I think they bought one of them used to be honest". Good access infrastructure not only supports the physical, emotional, or intellectual accessibility to a space, but it will celebrate the existence of different ways of being in the world, otherwise known as an "accessibility aesthetic" (Cachia, 2013). For example, instead of centering a foyer with a staircase, architects might try to accentuate the aesthetics of a ramp. For the most part, tucking away accessible infrastructure is more common in spaces, like offering wheelchair accessible entrances through the back door only.

6.5.2 Complaint Processes

Not only did the participants discuss the strain and energy consumption required for self-advocating against discrimination in cultural spaces, but several of the participants also had negative experiences with the complaint mechanisms and processes themselves. When making a

complaint about the lack of accessibility for people who identified as BLVI, Kenneth described feeling frustrated by management for making the process excessively complicated: "There were no options for people who were blind, and it was so annoying. And I tried again to reach out to the management… it was just stressful to me, so I decided to leave". Cultural organizations do not make it easy for PWD to assert their rights to have their access needs met, and therefore, it is often unclear who to take a complaint to, let alone feel like anything will be done about it. Brennan said, "Disabled folks have been advocating for change and have largely been ignored".

More formal complaint processes, like filing a complaint with the Ontario Human Rights Tribunal, can be even more inaccessible for PWD. Reflecting on his legal training, Michael, recognized his privileged understanding of the law and how to write formal complaints, but acknowledged that this was a skill that many PWD are not afforded. The systems themselves are very inaccessible to PWD because they do not adequately make accommodations. Brennan discussed a time when they had filed a human rights complaint but was rejected due to the rigid deadlines expected from the process. They said:

> It was dismissed because they wouldn't pick up my accommodation request for more time because I was setting up a computer to meet my visual accommodations and I had needed to buy a new computer because my old one died. Like a very human thing to happen. And I was like, I need more time. And because I have vision accommodation, and they don't just happen when you get a computer, and it takes a minute, and I'm not going to meet your 30 day deadline, you know. And they were like 'too bad, case dismissed'.

Feeling discriminated against within the systems that are meant to help PWD is a clear demonstration of a broken system that was designed to exclude certain bodies and minds.

The design of these mechanisms reflect neoliberal model of access that produces "fictitious equality", where power imbalances will remain firmly in place to oppress PWD (Lamarre et al., 2021, p.202). A helpful system would meet a PWD where they are at, and provide transparency and ease throughout the process.

6.5.3 Costs and Funding Concerns

The participants that worked or participated in the arts as artists agreed lack of funding creates further barriers to accessibility in the arts. Kurt discussed the struggles he faced joining several theatre companies that were inclusive of different ways of being in the world, including a theatre group specifically for BLVI folks, but they had gone bankrupt. He also discussed being in theatre groups that did not have mandates for inclusivity and accessibility, and therefore, their practice spaces often did not meet his access needs. He said: "I know they don't have a lot of resources, but they're not always the most accessible all the time. Unfortunately. yeah, I mean, I guess when you're low budget, I guess you can't always help it". Brennan also discussed the lack of funding for accessibility in the arts. They said: "[artists] don't have a say. So if there's no budget for access, there's no budget for access! No matter how much I stomp and like, scream, or whatever, or advocate in all of my nice words. It's not going to change how much funds you get". Brennan also discussed the added challenge of finding affordable *and* accessible practice spaces so that they can have a separate space away from their home to train and make art. As for consumers of art with disabilities, they also have to hope that the cultural space they are entering has a funding mandate or grant that can provide adequate access avenues.

6.5.4 Added Barriers at the Intersections of Identity

Finally, the participants discussed the added barriers that exist for BIPOC PWD in gaining equal access to cultural spaces. Sricamalan explained that the few opportunities that exist for PWD in the arts are even fewer for BIPOC PWD. Accessibility infrastructure and policies may not exist in many cases, as understandings of disabilities can vary across cultures. Sricamalan discussed the challenges he has faced as an immigrant to Canada, saying that in many ways he felt "doubly disadvantaged" because he felt left out of two cultures:

> And I grew up and stuck with Bollywood and East Indian and Sri Lankan cultural
>
> things. And so when we are participating in my workplace or in the mainstream,
>
> you know, even in conversations, you know, I don't have much clue of the films,
>
> and the heroes and things [being discussed]. And then, when I try to participate in
>
> my own cultural things, the intervenors or interpreters, you know, are not able to
>
> provide any service. They are helpless because nobody is from my culture who is
>
> in that field.

The accessibility supports that exist for Canadians do not offer adequate translation or multi-lingual services, which is a huge oversight in a country that claims to celebrate and support multiculturalism.

Brennan also brought up the possibility that PWD are at a disadvantage for learning about intersectional barriers which may block opportunities for solidarity. They discussed that the website they go to to unlearn their own complicity with white supremacy is not screen-reader accessible. Once again, we see the effects of what Fleet (2019) calls "clunky designs", which can be particularly noticeable in digital infrastructure (p. 6). When BLVI folks are not assumed as the imagined users of digital infrastructure, they are excluded from much of the content that is

produced. In order to build strong relationships and opportunities for solidarity, PWD need equal access to the resources necessary for learning about history and allyship.

6.6 Navigating the Unknown

Visiting new cultural spaces can be a source of anxiety for PWD as it is not always easy to determine if their access needs will be met or not. Without consistent access and communication of access across cultural spaces, PWD have come to anticipate that they will most likely not be accommodated, and their participation in the cultural activity will be limited or even impossible. The participants discussed feeling uncomfortable not knowing if their access needs would be met in a space, as well their experience with inconsistent access provided in cultural spaces. They also discussed the feelings they experienced when their access needs have been met, however, they described the moments as few and far between. According to the participants, navigating unknown territory is a risk, and many PWD opt out of visiting new spaces altogether in order to protect themselves from discrimination and disappointment.

6.6.1 Hard to Plan

Sara Hendren (2020) says access and freedom to wander are a taken for granted privilege of non-disabled people. Spontaneous travel, therefore, may be a luxury for those who don't have to plan out an accessible route or organize accessible transportation. An example from the focus group was when Michael discussed his weariness of impromptu street events that he has come across. It is impossible for him to know whether or not the spaces will be accessible to him if he was not aware of it beforehand. Some cultural spaces provide information about the accessibility of their spaces on websites or social media platforms, but this practice is not standardized. The participants discussed how even when places do have accessibility policies or plans, they are not always well publicized or easily accessed by PWD. Brennan discussed the importance of working with spaces that would collaborate with them in order to work out how Brennan was going to navigate their space for the first time. They also said that they have a list of questions

they need to ask of people who work at the spaces before they get there, so they can make a plan for how they might access the new space.

Cultural spaces need to be explicit about how their space can or cannot meet the access needs of PWD. They can do this with detailed explanations on their websites, as well as have trained staff who can clearly explain the layout of the space over the phone. Michael suggested, as well, that cultural spaces should have maps available before one enters the space: "and they would be tactile for my friends here so that they know what they're getting themselves into".

6.6.2 Inconsistent Access

There were some cases, however, that participants had come to expect a certain level of access. Sricamalan described feeling surprised when he was in a museum in Alberta that had absolutely no accessibility accommodations. He said: "they didn't even understand the audio guide, or descriptive [audio] or anything to do with that. They were totally ignorant in terms of accessibility for blind people or people with hearing challenges or anything like that". He noticed a huge difference between the places he went to in Canada that had provincial accessibility policy, and those that did not (only BC, Manitoba, and Nova Scotia have equivalent legislation to the AODA). This demonstrates that developing standards and legislation is a necessary approach to creating accessible environments. Even if they are limited in their enforcement, they still set a precedent to anticipate PWD in public spaces.

Kurt and Brennan both discussed how their expectations for access were different based on whether they were entering a space as an artist or as a patron. Disability arts have historically been presented in reductive terms within mainstream media and discourse, either as a "punchline, a curse or an inspiration" (Myers, 2019). This reductive understanding of someone's life experience has negative consequences not only in the immaterial realm that may affect

self-esteem and mental health, but also in the material realm that affects access to social benefits or funding structures of programming (Kelly & Orsini, 2016). Kurt felt that overall, his access needs as an artist were not met adequately because he does not believe promoting disability art is seen as a priority within art spaces. He explained that disabled art is more difficult to mainstream: "people don't understand us, and it's harder for us to make our art known". He felt that finding funding for the theatre groups has been particularly challenging, and that most festival organizers don't seem particularly concerned with the lack of representation. Brennan said that lots of the accessible training spaces have closed since the pandemic, and it is even more difficult for them to practice their arts. It is necessary for them to find accessible practice spaces because there is not enough room to work from their home. When disability art is mostly represented as being inspirational, arts have been seen in the mainstream as something that is "good for" people with disabilities as a form of "therapy" rather than a professional sector (Gorman, 2007). PWD are therefore frequently denied the space and training necessary so that they might work to improve their art and technique because the mainstream is quick to see art as being good for people with disabilities, but slow to see people with disabilities as being good for art (Lee, 2020).

6.6.3 Rare and Precious

The participants discussed what it felt like to have their access needs met in a cultural space, and because their access needs are met so rarely, many of them discussed feelings of surprise, distrust and disbelief when they were accommodated. Brennan called these moments "rare and precious", as the participants also said that having their access needs met made them feel important, cared for and gave them an ego boost.

Feelings of surprise, disbelief and distrust also seemed to point to feelings of internalized ableism and negative self-esteem. When asked about his thoughts on having his access needs met, Michael said:

> Sometimes, you know, I have a tendency to think that I may be hard to accommodate just based on negative experiences and a negative self-esteem. And when somebody actually does accommodate me, you know, and I'm sort of looking for the, you know, small print. I'm looking for the catch, what's the catch? But maybe there's no catch, maybe it's great, but I'm sort of in disbelief about how great it is.

In the same vein, Sricamalan said, "I feel like I owe them something or things like that". These statements provide insight into the impact discrimination and denial of access to public space has on a person. All people deserve to have culture in their lives, but a lack of access to cultural spaces communicates to PWD that they are not deserving of it.

6.7 Recognition of Personhood

> They can have all the ASL and ramps in the world…we won't come where we're
>
> not loved, needed, and understood as leaders, not just people they must
>
> begrudgingly provide services for (Piepzna-Samarasinha, 2018, p.76).

Borrowing from the above Piepzna-Samarasinha quote, PWD have described needing to

feel like they are loved, needed and understood as leaders in order for their access needs to truly

be met in a cultural space. Brennan discussed this feeling as having "the depth of [their]

personhood recognized". The participants discussed how being made to feel like this can only

really be achieved when they are seen as human beings, and when their human rights and

autonomy are respected. It is clear that ableism is still largely embedded in cultural spaces, as a

lack of meaningful accessibility communicates that PWD are still mostly imagined as burdens on

the healthcare system. Cultural spaces need to rid themselves of their continuing upholding of

ableism and learn from PWD about how they can best be included in their spaces. They must

demonstrate that they recognize PWD as deserving of having culture in their lives by providing

emancipatory access mechanisms in their spaces.

6.7.1 Human Rights and People First

The participants were candid in discussing their negative experiences with cultural spaces

in Toronto, some of which had caused them to feel less than human. Michael described being

made to feel like "a little fly that people swat away" when his access requests were denied from

the Toronto After Dark Film Festival. The participants agreed it was unacceptable for PWD to be

denied their human rights to be included in public spaces and activities and that it was clear to

them that if a space does not provide adequate access, it is because they are not recognizing

PWD as human beings. Michael said: "I think the question to ask is whether or not the cultural

space sees people with disabilities as human beings. I mean if they don't see us as human beings, then obviously they don't meet our needs".

The participants also discussed the possibility of changing societal perceptions so that their personhood and humanity is recognized in the mainstream. Michael said that if people want to be addressed with people-first language, their wishes need to be respected. Though lots of PWD use identity-first language, it is important not to assume how someone wishes to be referred to, and it is much better to ask the PWD how they would like to be described. Kurt asserted that he uses people-first language for himself because he believes in the power of language to change societal perceptions. He said: "If we speak of ourselves as people first, it will improve. I mean, I'm not saying it's a magic button….but I think it's one of the biggest steps to help. Like, one of the first major steps to help, like if we address ourselves as people, rather than what we are". This is a powerful affirmation for the need to design with disabled people at the helm.

6.7.2 Access Intimacy

Returning to Mingus' (2011b) concept of "access intimacy", the participants discussed the conditions of spaces that demonstrate a competency and unprompted understanding of different access needs. Access intimacy has the power to build a strong foundation in prioritizing the voices and access needs of PWD from the beginning. Kurt described these conditions as knowing he is seen as an equal; that his access needs are addressed enthusiastically and creatively, not begrudgingly. When the humanity of PWD is recognized in an organization or space, they will choose to do activities differently so the PWD can be included. Brennan discussed a zoom meeting they attended that had warm-up activity that required sight to participate. When the organization recognized their oversight, they quickly pivoted to make the

activity accessible for Brennan. This relates back to Brennan's statement that there is no perfect access, and creating opportunities to fail better. They said: "Even if they make mistakes that everybody will…those kinds of small acts of intimacy make me realize they understand the depth of my identity". Therefore, an organization or person can demonstrate that they recognize the full personhood of a PWD through small acts of access intimacy.

6.7.3 Self-Determination

Some of the participants discussed the opportunities that were denied to them based on ableist assumptions of what a body can do. Kurt discussed being discouraged from pursuing an education in theatre when he was younger. He said:

> I was discouraged from going for my BFA. Of course this was like the nineties in theater. I'm not sure too many people in the blind community have their BFAs. In theater, I mean. I know people who have developed blindness over the years, but they have some usable site, but unfortunately at the time my family and the, you know, itinerant teachers, everyone around me was basically discouraging me from going to school.

Without a full recognition of his personhood, he was not seen as someone capable of making his own decisions. The people in Kurt's life who discouraged him from pursuing fine arts education may have been worried that Kurt's disability would have made it impossible for him to participate. However, Kurt has returned to theatre and other performing arts that affirms his right to self-determination. This final finding reflects the ethos of disability justice, which celebrates the difference in the world, and challenges neoliberal understandings of productivity and independence. In participating in theatre groups for BLVI people, he can move beyond asking to

be included in mainstream culture, and instead be in a space that promotes the specific capacities

and assets of his blindness.

6.8 Conclusion

The themes generated using social constructivist grounded theory are an encapsulation of the discussions I had with participants on their experiences of access or lack thereof in cultural spaces. First, the discussion of the theme of "access work" demonstrated how the participants felt that they were constantly forced to negotiate how much excess access work they needed to do, such as self-advocating or adapting a space using their own survival strategies, and there was a cultural expectation for them to do this access work themselves. Next, the theme of "emancipatory approach to access", captured how the participants discussed the multiple dimensions in which a cultural space might holistically address their access needs. Further, "community connectedness" displayed how access to cultural spaces can have an effect on the participants' sense of community connectedness, which highlighted the need for cultivating caring communities in order to prioritize access. Then, "cultural competency" indicated how often the best access infrastructure comes in the form of culturally competent staff who are willing to put in the effort to make a space accessible. Further, in "inadequate access avenues", the participants discussed the multiple and insidious dimensions in which their access needs were not met; from lack of policies, to poor infrastructures, to unnavigable complaint mechanisms, high costs and deteriorating support at the intersections of identity. Next, "navigating the unknown" discussed the participants' feelings of discomfort not knowing if their access needs would be met in a space, as the moments in which their needs were met were few and far between. Finally, in "recognition of personhood", the participants emphasized that they only truly felt that their access needs could be met under circumstances in which they were seen as valuable and capable human beings. The combination of these seven themes contributes to the nuances produced to question, "what is access?"–and even "radical" access–in planning theory

and practice. Firmly different from a current understanding of why planners are involved in cultural planning, and where accessibility matters, the results and subsequent analysis demonstrates that PWD are essential informants on how to best implement accessibility plans. I believe that these results reflect an opposition to a preoccupation with providing access to cultural space in order to attract a creative class (Grodach, 2013), and instead reflect a desire for meaningful participation based on principles of disability justice and human rights (Sins Invalid, 2015). Importantly, this work seeks to directly refute the tendency in planning literature to "tuck away" the embodied experiences of PWD, and instead centre disabled voices as sources of knowledge for the profession (Terashima & Clarke, 2021).

7.0 Recommendations

Introduction

      The content of this MRP has been prepared in order to demonstrate how the research and achievements from disability studies and disability arts, paired with the lived experiences of PWD in accessing cultural spaces, may be applied to the way policy-makers, planners and practitioners engage with accessibility in public space. If planners are able to provide meaningful access, PWD can be made to feel included, welcomed and desired. The following recommendations are the results of some of the key lessons learned engaging in the empirical, theoretical, and policy-based research for this project.

7.1 Moving Beyond a Checklist

The sole use of a checklist communicates the erroneous idea that access can be quantified. The participants demonstrated, however, that having one's access needs met can be an emotional experience associated with belonging and care, which can be ineffable and impossible to quantify. Checklists create dichotomies between recipients of support and providers of support, re-establishing power hierarchies within access. Papalia (2017) tells us that access is a process not an outcome, and that one must develop a more fluid and dynamic perspective to access in order to encourage flexibility and iterations of established understandings of accessibility. Planners may want to start with a checklist of accessibility needs, but the checklist must exist as a living document that can be easily edited, rearranged and tested in different combinations to reflect the embodied needs of individual PWDs.

7.2 Co-designing Access and Policies

Co-design involves working with multiple stakeholders, which communicates the value of a diversity of voices in working towards addressing the diversity of disability itself. Invoking "nothing about us without us," co-design can actualize the imperative to not make decisions for people with disabilities, but "by and with" them (Lamarre et al., 2021, p.199). This necessarily means asking PWD what they need and paying them for their work. Changing the structure of who makes decisions related to access to a model where PWD are acknowledged and paid for their contributions can also deconstruct negative representations of PWD as passive recipients of top-down access.

7.3 Centring Difference and Crip Wisdom

When difference is centred, multiple ways of being are welcome to flourish in a space due to conditions that have anticipated their presence. Centring difference creates conditions for "access intimacy," demonstrating a valuation of the disabled experience as a form of wisdom (Mingus, 2011b). Centring difference can allow planners to think about different ways of perceiving and being in the world and create spaces that provide emancipatory, multidimensional access for different users (Sweeney, 2012). When difference is centred, access becomes a demonstration of "life-saving, life-affirming love" (Piepzna-Samarsiha, 2018, p. 78). By embracing and loving difference, accessibility can be used as a creative invitation for innovation in spaces, rather than a burden and excess (Williamson, 2019). Again, this requires engaging PWD, asking them what their needs are, and paying them for their access work.

7.4 Failing Better

Planners need to understand that access can never fully be known, nor enacted without friction, and therefore, the pursuit of perfection in access is a fool's errand (Chandler et al, 2021). Perfect access does not exist, but putting in an effort to listen to, include and accommodate someone can make all the difference. This will allow planners to instead "fail better" in the pursuit of access (p. 237). Part of this practice can be in eliciting user feedback on the accessibility of a space. Planners should welcome feedback from PWD on how they can do better, making it extremely obvious and easy for how to provide this feedback, and then commit to applying the feedback into their future practices.

7.5 Making Access Explicit and Irresistible

Planners also need to provide information about the accessibility of a space to reduce the "access work" and anxiety of PWD entering a space for the first time (Ross & Builing, 2019). Providing multiple ways to access the information on the access is also key; having a site description on a website or a phone number available with a trained staff member who can describe the access. Ultimately, planners should aim to design with an "accessibility aesthetic,"; where a space, project or policy cannot be executed in any other way than to creatively problem-solve for multiple access needs (Cachia, 2013). This requires thinking about access from the beginning of a design, not as an afterthought, and celebrating difference by utilizing design to emphasize the capacities and assets of disability.

7.6 Policy-Specific Recommendations

7.6.1. Move Goals into Actions

Action-plans, such as the federal Disability Inclusion Action Plan, 2022, need to move their goals into actions. Implementing outcome evaluation mechanisms can help governments produce information about the merit, worth and demonstrable benefits of an initiative (Guyadeen & Seasons, 2016). Setting the precedent for provincial, territorial and municipal policies and plans requires evidence of putting policy recommendations into action.

7.6.2. Strengthen Enforcement

Critics of the *Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act*, 2005 (AODA) have said "the law has teeth but they are not being used" (Onley, 2019, p. 49). Enforcement of accessibility-specific laws and standards like the *Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act* and *Toronto Accessible Design Guidelines*, 2020 (TADG) need to be strengthened.

a) Empowering Municipal Accessibility Advisory Committees (MAAC) to take on a stronger enforcement role could potentially provide municipalities with more power to discourage the submission of site plans that do not comply with the AODA. This would require recognizing MAACs for their work through sustainable compensation, especially those with disabilities.

b) The ability for businesses and organizations to elect to follow and apply accessibility guidelines like TADG perpetuates the discourse of *access as excess* (Williamson, 2019). The standards should apply to the private and nonprofit sectors just as much as the public sector, because PWD have the right to access all spaces in the built environment.

7.6.3. Centring and Compensating PWD in Accessibility Planning

Guidelines and standards committing to "exceeding existing requirements" must interrogate the additional barriers that exist for PWD at the intersections of identity, as well as consult with and hire people at the furthest margins, when making design decisions for public spaces.

7.6.4. Avoid the Creative City Model

Cultural planning policies do not need to adhere to the creative city model and creative class theory (Grodach, 2013). Cultural planning documents can reflect a desire for building community capacity and social relationships with and between *existing* communities, rather than aiming to attract new ones (Grodach, 2013). Incorporating accessibility policies that reflect the multi-dimensional approach that the "emancipatory approach to access" offers will strengthen the goals of cultural planning to promote the contributions of art and culture to the well-being of a community (Sweeney, 2012).

7.6.5. Avoid Disability Neutral Language

All land use planning documents must avoid "post-disability" and "disability neutral" language such as "design for everyone", when attending to accessibility (Hamraie, 2017). Though it may appear inclusive on the surface, this type of language justifies the value of accessible design and infrastructure based on its ability to help normative populations move freely, not on PWDs' right to feel included and welcomed.

8.0 Conclusion

This major research project (MRP) investigated the experiences of people with disabilities within cultural spaces, in order to produce a framework for understanding how planners might better provide meaningful accessibility within the built environment. It questioned the current practices used in cultural spaces, and how they either enable or hinder PWD feelings that they have been anticipated, welcomed, and desired. The empirical research revealed that for the most part, the participants did not feel as though Toronto's cultural spaces had adequately met their access needs and were excluded from participating in lots of the cultural activities available in the city. This research will contribute to the scholarship attempting to answer, "what is access?", one of planning theory and practice's many "enduring questions" (Forsyth, 2012). Planners, especially those involved in cultural planning, are generally aware of the importance of access to cultural spaces, however, there is almost no focus on the accessibility of PWD within the spaces in literature or policy. My hope for this MRP is that planners will understand the value in engaging with the creative work already being done to provide meaningful accessibility for PWD in cultural spaces, as well as centring and compensating PWD in access planning, as I have demonstrated in my literature review and discussion.

Working with PWD for this project was not only necessary to ensure the basis of my inquiry aligned with an emancipatory disability research paradigm (Barnes, 2014), but because I had so much to learn. The focus group and interview formats allowed for the flexibility to redirect the research to explore the real experiences of the participants, not just to confirm my preconceived assumptions. I am grateful to the participants for their time and effort in producing this research, and ultimately, helping me demonstrate to planners why this type of research is necessary. Future research on this topic should make an effort to cast a wider net, perhaps using

similar questions in the form of a survey, which could allow for a more accurate representation of the larger population.

Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasiha (2018) writes, "when disabled people get free, everyone gets free. More access makes everything more accessible for everybody. And once you've tasted that freedom space, it makes inaccessible spaces just seem very *lacking*" (p. 78). Utilizing cripped access, therefore, has the potential to make spaces feel radically *full,* because the access is based on care and "life-saving, life-affirming love" (p.78). Planners can take up the recommendations from this MRP–moving beyond a checklist, co-designing access and policies, centring difference and crip wisdom, failing better, and making access explicit and irresistible–and work to create accessible spaces that help shape a future where PWD are free and loved.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Page 1 of the March 17, 2023 Issue of Novae Res Urbis

■ WINNING STLC TEAM WORKED IN TANDEM TO TRY TO DESIGN A RADICALLY ACCESSIBLE SPACE

REINVENTING THE ARTS & CULTURE ECOSYSTEM

Matt Durnan

A new design vision for the **St. Lawrence Centre for the Arts** [STLC] seeks to dramatically alter how members of the public engage with the more than 50-year-old building by reimagining the centre as a radically accessible community hub that will open up and enrich the entire area as a cultural district.

Hariri Pontarini Architects (HPA) led a team that was announced as the winner of the St. Lawrence Centre for the Arts design competition on March 10, after being shortlisted by a jury of design and cultural sector professionals on behalf of **CreateTO** and **TO Live**. TO Live is an arms-length agency of the **City of Toronto** which operates the two-theatre venue at 27 Front Street East.

The winning team included **HPA, LMN Architects, Tawaw Architecture Collective, Smoke Architecture** and **SLA.** Their design called "Transparence" was selected as the ultimate winner in the international design contest of the five shortlisted entries (See: *In Brief: Short-listed Concepts for St. Lawrence Centre for the Arts Redevelopment, NRU Toronto, March 10, 2023*).

"What we were thinking with the Scott Street Plaza, is that it creates an entire cultural district. You take the existing Meridian Hall, you take the new design, you take Berczy Park which is really one of the favourite tourist spots in the city … And you take all of that and all of a sudden you have something that creates a whole district. It's the making of an ecosystem, it's making something which is bigger than the sum of its parts," Hariri Pontarini founding partner **Siamak Hariri** told *NRU*.

The design presented by the team features a high-performance transparent façade that wraps around the existing Brutalist structure. Indigenous design elements informed the concept of the design, with a nod to Wampum belts as an expression of collective agreement and community celebration.

Beyond the distinctive design elements that will catch the eye of visitors and passersby alike, is evidence of the clear commitment to creating a space that is accessible to everyone, a major improvement to the

Rendering of an exterior view of the winning design concept in the St. Lawrence Centre for the Arts international design competition. Hariri Pontarini Architects (HPA) led a team that included HPA, LMN Architects, Tawaw Architecture Collective, Smoke Architecture and SLA in the creation of this winning design concept they call "Transparence".

SOURCE: TO LIVE

Appendix B: Focus Group Prompt Questions

Researcher: Good evening, and thank you for taking the time to participate in this focus group. Tonight, I will be asking you to participate in a conversation about your experiences as folks who identify as either Blind, low vision or visually impaired participating in cultural activities in downtown Toronto. We will be taking several breaks over the next two hours, however, please take care of yourself and listen to what your body needs. If you need to step away from the computer for a time feel free to do so, but if you can put a note in the chat so we don't call on you and your not there. Before we begin, I want to check in with everyone on how we should best proceed with the focus group tonight. Maybe one at a time, we can go around and each share what has worked best for them in the past holding conversations over zoom. Let's start with X. This focus group is being recorded so that I can transcribe the conversation later, but the recordings will not be shared with anyone else. You may ask to stop the focus group at any time or skip any questions. Everyone should be given a turn to speak as much or as little as they like, and I will do my best to moderate the conversation and prompt discussion with a few questions. I will be asking folks to identify themselves within this group, mostly so we can ask each other questions or comments using preferred names and pronouns. I acknowledge that some of the participants have asked to not have their identity shared in the final documents being produced with the data gathered from this focus group. I ask that we all kindly respect one another's choice to remain de-identified, and to hold anything that is shared within the space. That being said, due to the nature of the focus group, I cannot guarantee that everyone will hold each other's identities in confidentiality, and this risk was noted in the consent forms that were signed. Now that I have started the recording, I would like to reaffirm the consent you have already given to conduct this interview.

Participants: YES or NO.

Researcher: (if yes) Let's get started. (if no) Thank you so much for your time.

1. If everyone is comfortable, let's start by introducing ourselves, and how we might self-identify or how we show up in the world. Please feel free to share only what you are comfortable sharing.

2. You have all indicated that you are either an artist or curator involved in disability arts, or have patronized cultural spaces like art galleries, museums, concert halls, theatres, etc. Would you begin by describing the cultural spaces that you frequent, and what you do in those spaces?
   a. What do these types of spaces mean to you?
   b. Are they an important part of your life?
   c. What would it mean to you if you could no longer access these types of spaces?

3. What are the policies, programs or pieces of supportive infrastructure (ie, railings, Braille signage, comprehensive audio descriptions, or something else) that can make a cultural space explicitly accessible for you?
4. When you are in a cultural space that is not explicitly accessible to you, do you have any tools, tricks or practices to make the space work for you?

Researcher: Let's take a 10 minute break and come back at [time].

5. Can you describe the feelings you get when you are in a space that meets your access needs?
6. Are there cultural spaces that you cannot access that you wish you could?
    a. What would make you be able to access them?
    b. What makes them inaccessible?
7. Do you feel that cultural spaces in Toronto adequately meet your access needs? Why or why not?
8. What do you wish people who do not identify as Blind, low vision or visually impaired knew about your experiences in cultural spaces?

Researcher: Let's take a 10 minute break and come back at [time].

9. Can you all describe how you might get to one of the cultural spaces we discussed earlier? This could include the route, the transportation type, if you were alone or accompanied, and anything else you might want to discuss. What kind of senses/supports did you rely on to navigate from your home to the spaces?
10. Why do you choose this route? Why did you choose this type of transportation? When picking a route, are there things you avoid or reasons you choose a route?
11. What do you wish planners/designers/people who work for the city knew about how you get around?
12. Any other comments?

Appendix C: List of Focused Codes Organized by Theme

Access Work	Community Connectedness	Cultural Competency	Emancipatory Approach to Access	Inadequate Access Avenues	Navigating the Unknown	Recognition of Personhood
cultural expectation to do access work	care	no perfect access	lower costs as access	concerns for accessibility budgets or funding	inconsistency of access	human rights
not being a bother	physical and/or emotional dis/connection to communit(ies)	changes in access to cultural spaces over time	touch and feel provide access	inadequate accessible infrastructure	Anxiety from not knowing the access of a new space	autonomy
not going where one is not wanted	learning from others	cultural competency of staff	assistive audio provides access	complaint process inadequate	rare and precious	people first
middle space		respect	physical access	spatial inequities in access to cultural space		access intimacy
threshold for access work		top-down inclusion	beyond	prohibitive policy		
survival skills		standardization	dedicated space as access	added barriers at intersections of identity		
self-advocating		visio-centrism	multiple access avenues			
			broken time as access			
			support person/intervenors provide access			
			access as an afterthought			
			access in the decision-making process			