

Article

## The University and Social Work Under Neoliberalism: Where’s the Social Inclusion for Disabled Faculty?

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### Abstract

There is an urgent need to increase the social inclusion of postsecondary faculty with disabilities by reducing the need to adapt to ableist and sanist neoliberal standards. In this article, two social work faculty with disabilities argue that their social exclusion is inevitable under systemic neoliberal priorities of individualism, efficiency, and productivity. We engage in a systems analysis of how educational institutions, namely universities, engage in practices and processes of social exclusion of faculty with disabilities through neoliberal ideologies, policies, and practices. Using an autoethnographic case study method, guided by an intersectional and disability justice theoretical framing, the authors challenge the ahistorical and non-relational tendencies of neoliberalism in its many forms. Using lived experience as data, the authors elucidate strategies to promote social inclusion aimed at universities and at the discipline of social work. In conclusion, the authors advocate for change at the structural level for the social work profession and for postsecondary institutions.

### Keywords

disability; disabled faculty; neoliberalism; postsecondary education; social work; university

### Issue

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### 1. Introduction

According to the 2017 Canadian Survey on Disability, approximately “20% of academic staff at colleges and universities self-identify as living with one or more disabilities” (CAUT, 2021, para. 3). Scholarship on the experience of faculty with disabilities in postsecondary settings centres mainly on pedagogical challenges in the classroom (Allen, 2015; Helmer, 2016; Woolley, 2022) and tends to ignore first-hand professional experiences of social exclusion. An exception is a report on the challenges of five tenured faculty with disabilities in Canada navigating neoliberal principles (Waterfield et al., 2018). Literature on the lived experience of subordinate groups that have intersectional identities, including individuals with disabilities (students, healthcare professionals, and recipients of social and health services) reveals their immediate accessibility concerns but does not ade-

quately address the need for systemic overhauls of the broader social system (i.e., neoliberalism) to enhance social inclusion (Cain & Velasco, 2021; Colbert & Chan, 2020; Drummond & Brotman, 2014; Harley et al., 2002; Hunter et al., 2020; O’Shea et al., 2020; Shaw et al., 2012; Toft, 2020; Vaughn et al., 2015). Social work regulatory bodies and professional associations have largely remained silent regarding the social exclusion of social workers with disabilities under neoliberalism.

Social exclusion can be understood as a form of oppression created by power relationships and historical and institutional processes that marginalize certain communities in society (Galabuzi, 2012) such as those with disabilities. Ideally, strategies and recommendations for social inclusion, particularly in the social system of postsecondary education, should emphasize the creation of environments where all community members are valued and able to participate fully (Dumbrill

& Yee, 2019). Neoliberalism is defined as the economic and political doctrine widely adopted in Western capitalist nations since the 1970s that emphasizes the free market—reducing the role of the state in business as well as the role of the welfare state in social protection—state deregulation, and the need for productivity and efficiency to reduce costs (Chernomas & Hudson, 2007; Harvey, 2009; Navarro, 2002). Social exclusion under neoliberalism is a multifaceted type of oppression exercised through ideological, cultural, economic, social, and political forces. These rely on market politics (acquisition of capital and capitalism) to respond to social issues in the nation-state of Canada. Historically, neoliberalism has reduced government interventions for collective and social problems. Instead, neoliberalism forces individuals, irrespective of race, gender, age, citizenship, and more to depend on their individual skills and the market to meet all of their needs. As a result of neoliberal advancement, business management models now govern faculties and schools of social work across the nation (Carey, 2008; Garrett, 2010). Social issues are constructed in an ahistorical fashion whereby individual responsibilities are provoked to address social problems (Weinberg, 2017). Within a neoliberal framing, institutions such as universities rely on hierarchical top-down approaches to policy and practice decisions by bolstering discourses of meritocracy (Baines, 2010, 2015) and responsabilization (Barry et al., 1996; Rose, 1996) to structure daily happenings. The dominant ideology in Canada, neoliberalism is manifested in the social exclusion of faculty with disabilities via capitalist principles of government and institutional austerity, individual accountability, efficiency, and productivity. Through these narrow neoliberalist principles:

We create people within whose minds and bodies we locate inability to contribute. Those we are afraid of, who work differently, who work more slowly, who need flexibility, and perhaps even those who require information in different formats, working situations that embrace limited mobility become all too difficult. (Goggin & Newell, 2005, p. 21)

Institutions such as universities position themselves as using the “disguise” of equity, diversity, and inclusion (EDI). As faculty members with disabilities at a Canadian university, we contend that universities hire disabled faculty (some with other intersecting identities) under EDI mandates, yet fail to prioritize social inclusion in their strategic priorities, policies, and everyday practices. Our approach to the social inclusion of faculty with disabilities is intersectional and expansive, as the social construct of disability is inherently dynamic: contingent on social, cultural, historical, and political markers. In examining the functional impact of our disabilities, we use a social model, which emphasizes external barriers to social inclusion as the primary source of “disability.” We strive to understand how external barriers, whether

visible (e.g., architectural) or non-visible (attitudinal or based in information and communication), prevent full inclusion for people with disabilities, rather than focusing on our individual disability-related limitations and responsibility to rely on reactive compensatory strategies and accommodations (Barnes, 2007; Goode, 2007; Oliver, 1986; Oliver & Barnes, 2012). It should be noted that the authors of this article recognize the importance of language. We feel that both person-first language and disabled-first language have merits, so we use the terms interchangeably.

## 2. Methods

This case study is formatted in a conversational, narrative, autoethnographic style (Chang et al., 2016) based on the authors’ experiences of living and working with varying disabilities at a Canadian university. Although we have multifaceted identities and experiences, emphasis is placed on the disability facet to illustrate systematic social exclusion. This style allowed us to collect data that reflects our personal and professional experiences in the institutions of universities and social work regulatory bodies and professional associations, within the confines of the broader neoliberal systems of government legislation, policies, and funding. Autoethnographic approaches are not traditionally used for systemic and structure-based analyses (O’Hara, 2018). We opted for this approach to underscore the importance of connecting “the personal” to “the political,” and therefore use our everyday experiences (thoughts, feelings, embodiment, intersectional identities) of social exclusion as data for systemic analysis (Pitard, 2019).

Post-modern feminists have used autoethnographic methods to create situated subjugated knowledges that challenge dominant discourses through critical intersectional perspectives (Collins, 1986, 1997, 2009; Haraway, 1988; Harding, 1991). In addition to an intersectional standpoint, we use a disability justice framework (Berner, 2015; Jama, 2020) to analyse the autoethnographic accounts. Both aforementioned perspectives consider lived experiences as knowledge sources worthy of exploration and validation to counter normative discourses and practices. In accounting our experience, each author speaks from their particular standpoint (i.e., disabled, white, cisgender, queer, male; and disabled, racialized, cisgender, queer, female) in ways that are not mutually exclusive, yet are fluid and unfixed with particular grounding in sociopolitical, cultural, and historical contexts of a given situation, practice, policies, and institutional processes. This point will be illustrated in the narratives below as discourse politics related to “born with,” “acquired,” and “invisible” disabilities play out in the lives of the authors. Therefore, we will point out the various and dynamic nuances of how institutional processes, attitudes of university administration and peers, and normative perceptions of disability, abilities,

and capabilities are understood and performed through various oppressive mechanisms (i.e., ableist, neoliberal, and sanist) and norms. We reflect on accessibility barriers that contribute to the social exclusion we experience every day and the ableist structures that sustain them. We believe that our experiences are not unique; rather, they are likely shared by most faculty members with disabilities, particularly those with intersecting identities. We were guided by three questions: What is disability justice? What does social exclusion look like in the university and in social work regulatory bodies and professional associations? How might we increase accessibility (and hence, social inclusion) for faculty with disabilities?

### 3. What Is Disability Justice?

#### 3.1. A Perspective: Author 1

“Disability justice” offers a blueprint for the social inclusion of people with disabilities. I consider it a liberationist framework. It’s about direct action, challenging oppressive capitalist structures, and creating solidarity among members of the disabled community. As a framework, it was initially defined in 2005 by a group of activists—queer disabled women of colour. Today, disability justice is formally defined based on 10 principles outlined in the Sins Invalid blog (Berner, 2015). Queer liberation theory (McKenzie, 2020; Mulé, 2012), another liberationist framework, has a lot in common with disability justice. Both models suggest that we take inspiration from and align with other social justice movements, like Black Lives Matter, to help disability communities develop tools and skills to remove barriers and challenge oppression.

I get excited when I think about applying disability justice to challenge ableist structures that result in barriers to social inclusion, instead of expecting people with disabilities to “fit in” and overcome their “deficits.” Challenging oppressive structures has become a more pressing need since Covid and the corresponding growth of the alt-right movement in Canada. We have less trust and social cohesion, and we need major social action to get our communities working together.

#### 3.2. A Perspective: Author 2

Disability justice cannot be separated from racial justice, queer justice, or land justice. You can’t advocate for one facet without the others. I am not able to separate my queerness from my race or disability, among other identity facets and experiences. Disability justice needs to speak to people’s lived experiences and identities. The principle of “intersectionality” outlined in the ten principles of the disability justice framework tells us just that (Berner, 2015, para 6). In the current neoliberal context, “recognizing wholeness” and “commitment to cross-disability solidarity” really pop out because considering an individual’s potential and capac-

ity cannot come at the expense of one identity facet over another (Berner, 2015, para 9). Historically, the discipline of social work and Western universities have minimized peoples’ uniqueness by highlighting reason over spirit and emotions. Neoliberalism makes it so that people are seen as ahistorical individuals floating around without social, political, and material realities and histories. Notions of merit, competition, and individuality need to be challenged from community-centred perspectives (King, 2015).

Neoliberalism is the antithesis of disability justice and intersectional perspectives. I can’t hyper-produce in academe (publications, research grants, and university commitments), despite the push from organizational culture and policy. “Publish or perish” haunts my nightmares. It’s why many individuals with disabilities have left academe behind. I must maintain a certain level of wellness to function as a spouse, sister, daughter, neighbour, and citizen. Academe makes no concessions for these other roles; I am a part of the machine and must function in an individualistic and ahistorical manner. Neoliberal ideologies, policies, and culture don’t allow time and resources for care and understanding and don’t value my focus on quality over quantity.

### 4. What Does Social Exclusion look like in the University, Social Work Regulatory Bodies, and Professional Associations?

#### 4.1. Author 1

My relationship with structural social work, first as a student and now as a faculty member, has been helpful. As a queer person with an invisible disability, I have never felt that I “fit in.” Social work appealed to me for my postsecondary education because it exposed me to critical, social justice perspectives that validated my lived experience of social exclusion and helped me to accept and value myself (as well as others with non-mainstream positionalities). Maybe more importantly, structural social work values action over the helpless acceptance of inequity (Mullaly, 2007).

I realize that in many ways I’m “lucky.” My disability and my queerness are largely invisible, that is, not readily apparent to others in an educational and professional context. It’s only when I “out myself” that I risk social exclusion due to attitudinal barriers. To avoid exposing my learning disability (LD), I have always had to work harder and longer than my classmates and faculty peers. I have had to develop creative adaptive strategies and be a strong and persistent self-advocate to access accommodations and supports to compensate for the impact of my LD, both as a student and later as a university faculty member.

My postsecondary education was meaningful and fulfilling in the context of my social location. That said, when we critically interrogate the broader social work profession, we see that we’re part of a system that

continues to marginalize certain communities, including people with disabilities. There are many specific examples of structural inequity. The Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP) provides far less than is needed to live on, let alone participate fully in society. But many social workers act as gatekeepers, deciding who “deserves” ODSP and who doesn’t. Social welfare systems like ODSP perpetuate the social exclusion of persons with disabilities, as they were intended to do by a capitalist system and government that perpetuate oppressive policies.

Compared to social workers on the front lines, as a university faculty member, I enjoy certain privileges, including autonomy from our oppressive social welfare system. I feel honoured to be a professor, helping students develop to their potential by exposing them to critical thinking and using it to evaluate policy and everyday experience and to see the profession of social work as an opportunity to create positive social change and work towards social justice. Unfortunately, significant barriers remain in the university environment, which claims to value equity, access, and inclusion. An “old school,” ableist mentality persists. This is not surprising when considering the university’s institutional history: how the university was founded, developed, and structured (for example, who is/was included and who was not).

#### 4.2. Author 2

When I think about everyday experiences of social exclusion inside the social work profession in a university setting, I am reminded that these experiences are raced, gendered, ableist, sanist, and homophobic. Social work as a discipline and as a practice has not handled diversity well. There is a track record of the residential schools, current child welfare policies and practices that continue to remove Indigenous children from their families, communities, and traditions, and mass incarceration of Black Indigenous People of Colour (BIPOC). There have been and are a plethora of calls to action put forth by BIPOC people and communities, and social work’s responses to these have been outdated, slow, and in some cases, non-existent. I start to question the underlying social work values outlined in the Code of Ethics (Baines, 2017) and have been questioning my purpose in social work as a faculty member. What systemic changes need to happen? One of the first things the profession and university need to do is to acknowledge that there are systemic failures with regards to how accommodations are understood and facilitated. Is the practice of dehumanizing racialized disabled people a part of seeking out accommodations? The education system wants people who can represent, perhaps, sometimes in a tokenistic way. Academe in general is not ready to meaningfully respond to the needs of disabled, queer, racialized people when it comes to deconstructing and challenging ableism and sanism. I remember reading an article about Kimberly Crenshaw (Steinmetz, 2020) discussing how

intersectionality is valid today. She was talking about holding multiple truths. One truth is that institutions can be terrible places for people with disabilities, queer-ness, and anyone who embodies significant “difference.” Yet, at the same time, the institutions can facilitate the changing of minds and hearts and engage in community-based, socially just research. This is a constant struggle in academe and this tension is also paralleled in social work—is it meant to surveil and incarcerate or to liberate? It seems like all of it is in a complex web, mixed alongside other social systems like healthcare.

Students and community members see that you have made it into academe, but they don’t see the emotional toll, pain, and ongoing challenges experienced around accommodations and accessibility at the university. There’s this notion that you have somehow overcome the challenges such as racism, ableism, sanism, heteronormativity, and such forces. In academe, there’s no overcoming these among other axes of systemic multifaceted and intersectional oppressions. Student constituents don’t really get that I need support as well. Faculty members don’t have a lot of access to some of the same resources (accommodations) offered by the university for students. Since we are somehow seen as “having made it” and somehow we don’t need support anymore. Perhaps, if there was an issue related to race at the university and in the profession, it would probably be taken up in very different ways than disability, accessibility, and accommodations issues. People are like, “well, you’re a prof., you make a certain amount of money,” and so that privilege that comes with being in academia and embodying that space does not carry over to other aspects of my being. I struggle with that a lot.

Having invisible disabilities, for example, mental health circumstances and chronic eye disease, has been very difficult to navigate at the institution. I look fine but I am not. I wasn’t born with any of these disabilities and acquiring these in my 30s has posed significant challenges in proving my capabilities to “do the job.” There is a definite privilege associated with invisible disabilities and I do pass most of the time. However, there are also some drawbacks. There is a lot of stigma related to madness and illness, and the linking of one’s competencies (personal abilities, intelligence, stamina, ambition) with scholarly outcomes and research mandates (productivity measured in quantity versus quality) happens immediately and swiftly, evident in the comments and practices of peers and administration. There is a silent accusation—*if you can’t handle the pressure and job, then leave*. Over the years, administrators and colleagues have minimized my challenges (advocating for software and more time) as I do not have visible disabilities. At the same time, prejudiced tropes about my race, religion, and ethnicity always underline conversations about disability. I have to perform an over-acting of gratitude for accessibility tools and be the grateful beggar. The patriarchal paternalism and benevolence are always part and parcel of securing accessibility.

## 5. How Might We Foster Greater Social Inclusion for Faculty With Disabilities?

### 5.1. Author 1

The university presents itself as an open, welcoming environment that celebrates diversity, including disability. Compared to their predecessors, students with disabilities are less likely to struggle to access adaptive academic accommodations. Advances have (thankfully) developed over recent decades, along with an awareness of their right to access postsecondary education. In general, faculty are more supportive, and universities now have designated disability services offices staffed by knowledgeable professionals.

Like students, faculty with disabilities have a legal right to accommodations. According to the Ontario Human Rights Code (Ontario, 2021) and the Accessibility for Ontarians With Disabilities Act (Ontario, 2016), universities are obligated to provide appropriate disability-related accommodations for employees, barring undue hardship (e.g., excessive cost) provided the employee (e.g., faculty) can reliably perform the essential duties of their position. That said, policies on accommodations only go so far in creating social inclusion. As a professor, it's still very much a balancing act when it comes to deciding when, how, and even if I should ask for accommodations, because of lingering misconceptions and attitudinal barriers about disability.

I applied for my current position when I was nearing completion of my PhD. Because I wanted to be true to myself, I disclosed my LD. Besides, I had already published an account comparing my lived experience as a student with LD at three Ontario universities, identifying discrepancies between what was officially claimed and my actual experiences in accessing accommodations and disability-related supports. I was encouraged by the statement in my job description that the university was "committed to employment equity and values diversity."

I was also open about the impact of my disability by providing a written description. I added: "As someone who has dealt with the lifelong challenges of having a learning disability, I have learned to adapt to my environment through hard work, perseverance, and resourcefulness." I stressed that my disability had led me to make my courses as accessible as possible for all kinds of students. This doesn't mean I make my courses "easier," but rather that I strive to reduce unnecessary barriers. I continue to integrate pedagogical practices that helped me as a student and avoid those that put me at a disability-related disadvantage. I am a strong believer in breaking down barriers by incorporating universal design for learning, not just for students with disabilities but for those in all social locations. Finally, in class, I am open about my disability to encourage students to ask me for support if they need it, without fear of stigma.

Since being hired, not surprisingly, I have continued to work hard to adapt and compensate for the impact

of my disability. We are evaluated according to output of publications and grant applications (especially the successful ones!). Typical Canadian tenure-track faculty positions are based on the expectation that research should account for 40% of the time, teaching should account for another 40%, and service the remaining 20% (CAUT, 2018). I know in my heart that an LD is about basic information processing, not about intelligence. There is no shame in using these to adapt to neoliberal constraints. That said, I face significant barriers as a faculty member. I use compensatory strategies; I must plan grant applications and publications at least a year ahead, and because I need far more time for research activities, teaching, and service, I work very long hours during evenings and weekends. Reading software allows me to "read" without the need to convert written words into sounds (basic information processing that is automatic for those without an LD). I use dictation software to get my ideas on the page quickly, although I require extra time later to correct its recognition errors. I fear asking for formal accommodations, as it may make me seem "incompetent" under neoliberal ableism.

Unfortunately, I have learned that I could not do without certain accommodations if I am to meet neoliberal standards of individualism, efficiency, and productivity. I need more time to transition between different types of tasks (such as teaching vs. research) because of my LD. As an accommodation, I have formally requested that my assigned classes be scheduled for the same day. Despite supportive documentation from the psychologist, I discovered a gap between what I need and what the university will support. While the university readily provided the software I need, it has taken years to access equally necessary (but less tangible) accommodations for scheduling.

The university's openness to EDI, as it was included in my job description, would appear to indicate open acceptance and clear protocols for faculty seeking disability-related accommodations. The university administration set limits, perhaps to save money or maybe to avoid setting a precedent. For me, it is a constant struggle. I worry that colleagues may think I am incapable or incompetent, or that my disability-related accommodations are an unfair advantage, so I mask. Ableism is alive and well in academia. We need more awareness, as for the most part, administration and colleagues don't seem to understand that disability does not equal "inability"; that accommodations are meant to level the playing field by removing unnecessary barriers. So far, I am holding my own. That said, sometimes I feel like an imposter—a fraud who does not belong here.

As professors, especially in social work, we want to advocate for change, but at the same time, we must be mindful of job security. We are fortunate to have tenure-track positions at our university, but job insecurity is far greater for contract instructors, who teach 50% of undergraduate courses in Ontario universities (Council of Ontario Universities, 2018). Having a critical,

action-oriented stance is important, but how far do you push? And how much do you risk by disclosing your invisible disabilities, let alone advocating for disability-related accommodations? Risk is a barrier. I think we've come a long way in supporting and providing accommodations for students with disabilities (even though we still have more work to do) but when it comes to university staff and faculty with disabilities, major barriers persist. The faculty union could play a critical role in reducing barriers, for example, by ensuring that collective agreements contain precise language that goes beyond vague statements about the duty to accommodate. This gets me thinking of an excellent article by Saltes (2020). They examined disability accommodation policies for faculty at 42 Canadian universities and found that more than half had no written policy at all, and that there was inconsistent policy implementation across those that did. Despite claims of commitment to human rights and equity, individualized and overtly medical language around disability results in the stigmatization of people with disabilities as incapable and may lead to a reticence on the part of faculty to disclose. Even the underlying legislation may contribute to marginalization of faculty with disabilities:

Although all university accommodation policies in Canada are underpinned by antidiscrimination legislation and provincial human rights codes, at times the language used in legal provisions contributes to the exclusion and marginalisation that it seeks to address by using terminology to define disability that is rooted within a normative paradigm thus categorizing disabled people as "other." (Saltes, 2020, pp. 79–80)

There is a need for collective responsibility on the part of faculty with disabilities to seek out and validate their (legitimate) need for accommodations—as opposed to the emphasis on individual responsibility imposed by society's dominant neoliberal ideology, one that frames disability as a personal deficit. It shouldn't be daunting to disclose the need for accommodations, and it shouldn't be difficult to access and maintain them. I think that many aspects of the individual role of faculty with disabilities should be far more accessible.

## 5.2. Author 2

Accommodation, accessibility, and equity are like the "F" word in academe. As soon as you say you have an accommodation issue or request or you say you have an accessible need issue, then people are like, "whoa, hands off"—and treat the need for accommodations like something dirty. We need to normalize talking about everyone having options and access and unpack this myth of meritocracy and challenge individualism rampant within institutions. When accommodations and accessibility are considered things that can get you into trouble in legal terms,

then people's defenses go up and they hide behind policies. The relational aspects of people interacting and trying to be a part of an institution of learning and of growth and critical orientations just really become the sidebar. For me, the relational aspect is very important and that's one of the ways that I really honour difference and sameness in teaching, research, and service work. Does it really matter to me at the end of the day that I need to see a doctor's note for a particular time that the student was away for mental health reasons or life circumstances? Some people may call me naïve in this regard. If someone is trying to con me, it's not on me but rather it's on them and about how they're walking and living their life. Matters of accommodation and accessibility are not just about obligation and duty and legality. For me, these are moral imperatives and existential undertakings.

## 6. Strategies to Enhance Meaningful and Sustainable Social Inclusion

Based on our conversations above, analysed through disability justice and intersectional perspectives, we make the following recommendations to promote social inclusion in social work regulatory bodies and professional associations and for university faculty. We highlight the need to challenge neoliberal assumptions and priorities.

Regulatory bodies and associations of the profession of social work, for example, the Ontario College of Social Workers and Social Service Workers (OCSWSSW) and the Ontario Association of Social Workers (OASW), have the power to promote social inclusion for members with disabilities. They should reconsider ableist requirements for practising social work that appear to be based on the perception of disability as an individual deficit. This is evident in the following declaration, required as part of the process of becoming a registered social worker. Applicants must:

Make a declaration regarding health and conduct so that, based on (their) past and present conduct, the College has reasonable grounds to believe that (they): Do not have any physical or mental condition or disorder that could affect (their) ability to practise social work or social service work in a safe manner. (OCSWSSW, 2023, para. 8)

Many social work scholars have critiqued such practices and policies as these affirm individualism and the medical model of disability, supporting a pejorative understanding of the disabled (Corker, 2000; Hiranandani, 2019; Mackelprang & Salsgiver, 1996; Todd et al., 2019). Social work's regulatory bodies could mandate professional development and training in meaningful social inclusion (e.g., with a disability justice and intersectional concept of disability that confronts prejudices like ableism, sanism, and whiteness). The most recent OCSWSSW (2008) handbook does not identify

any such mandate. While OASW's (2021) report highlights the importance of supporting those with mental health disabilities, it fails to include substantial resources related to disability and accessibility on its website. Although the OASW provides online courses and webinars for professional development on its website, a topic on disability and intersectionality is not offered (<https://olc.oasw.org>).

The Canadian Association of Social Workers (CASW) provides a Code of Ethics (CASW, 2005a) and guidelines for ethical practice (CASW, 2005b) for social workers and social service workers. While both use "diversity" as a catchall term, they do not refer to specific types of structural oppression, such as whiteness, sanism, racism, and, importantly in this context, ableism. Social inclusion of service users, social workers, and social service workers would be better served with a recognition of unique needs. The Canadian Association for Social Work Education (CASWE) is the accreditation body of social work education. Published accreditation standards in Canada were recently updated to include a recognition of intersectional experiences of oppression, but with only limited recognition of more specific systemic forces such as racism (CASWE, 2021, pp. 15, 16, 20). Despite such gains, the core basis for systemic inequities experienced by intersectional positionalities remains largely absent. As a consequence, anti-oppressive accreditation standards are not always met in a meaningful way, to the detriment of social inclusion in the practice of social work. CASWE could adopt a truly critical structural analysis that specifically targets ableism and incorporates intersectionality, as opposed to what appears to be a tokenistic, individualistic, and neoliberal approach. Another suggestion for CASWE is to stop scheduling annual caucus meetings (race, disability, queer) at the same time, as current practice leads to hard choices for individuals who have intersectional identities to attend one meeting at a time.

Shortcomings on the part of the two regulatory bodies persist, despite progressive, structurally based efforts to enhance social inclusion by CASWE's Persons With Disabilities Caucus. Since 1993, it has advocated for disabled social work students, staff, and faculty, motivated by the understanding that "ableism needs to be acknowledged as part of the anti-oppressive discourse within schools of social work and universities" (Carter et al., 2012, p. 127). Its ongoing efforts have resulted in a specific reference to "disability inclusion" in CASWE's accreditation standards (CASWE, 2021, pp. 6, 7, 19). In addition, as of 2012, after years of effort on the part of the caucus, "all social work schools in Canada were mandated to provide accommodations to students with disabilities and include disability curriculum as a required field of study" (Carter et al., 2012, p. 127).

Neoliberal governments have limited scope and responsibilities in the civic and political arenas, which includes postsecondary institutions. It would be ideal if they could provide more funding related to accessibil-

ity. However, this seems like an uphill battle, as many of the challenges faced by Canadian postsecondary institutions can be directly linked to the longstanding neoliberal emphasis on "efficiencies"—in other words, minimal government funding of the public sector, which in turn reduces accessibility for all students.

Canada is a federated state, in which the federal government provides funding to the provincial governments. Each provincial government then provides funding to publicly funded higher education. In recent decades, federal funding to provinces designated for postsecondary education has significantly decreased. In the early 1980s, federal government transfers to postsecondary education made up approximately half of one percent of the GDP. In contrast, in 2021–2022, federal transfers totalled a mere one-fifth of 1%—representing just 0.19% of GDP (CAUT, 2022a). In a separate analysis, federal funding in the late 1970s made up approximately 75% of revenues for Canadian universities, but by late 2010 was less than 50% (CAUT, 2020). Of the 10 Canadian provinces, Ontario provides the least amount of funding for postsecondary education (CAUT, 2022b, 2022c). As a consequence, student-to-faculty ratios are highest in Ontario (CAUT, 2022d). In the context of such austerity, accessibility for people with disabilities (i.e., with a personal deficit) would likely be seen as an "expensive frill."

Thus, neoliberalism has gradually undermined accessibility for faculty with disabilities, and (it could be argued) by extension, for students. Neoliberalism sees "disability (as) an individual impairment, and disabled individuals are responsible for governing themselves such that they conform with normative standards" (Waterfield et al., 2018, p. 337). Within these constraints, improvements should be made. Universities should ensure that a sanctioned, confidential, and relatively uncomplicated process to access disability-related accommodations is openly and readily available. Equity mandates could better address immediate individualized accessibility needs for faculty with disabilities by limiting the need to disclose, which they may perceive as a risk to career advancement, and which typically requires formal documentation.

In contrast, a disability justice lens views faculty with disabilities as legitimate and contributing members of society and strives to reduce and even eliminate external barriers to full participation. Promoting universal accessibility would reduce the need to request accommodations, an attempt to compensate for individual, disability-related deficits. For example, university policies could require that work-related documents, like timesheets, expense sheets, and annual reporting forms, be readily available in accessible formats. Universities could earmark funding for similar accessibility measures within each unit, as opposed to the common practice of sharing an incidental "pot of money" across units and for multiple expenses, such as travel allowances, office space, and teaching assistants (in addition to accessibility). They could mandate training on disability justice and employment equity for faculty and administration, to increase

awareness of stigma, dehumanization of people with disabilities, ableism, sanism, and heteronormativity (among other *-isms*). At the same time, advancements in universal accessibility would reduce the need for workplace accommodations as a reactive measure (Black et al., 2015; Vitelli, 2015).

Neoliberal organizational culture governs our behaviours, sets unrealistic timelines, and impacts daily interactions as social work faculty. Postsecondary social work education (faculties and schools across the nation-state) and its manifestation in practice through organizations and services has shifted toward a “management model” of governance (Baines, 2017, p. 57). This model is referred to as new public management (NPM). The lure of NPM lies in its cost-cutting measures and accountability reports. Through NPM, workplaces have become more regimented by making all processes rigid, uniform, and systematic. There is no place left for critical, porous, creative, and flexible nuanced processes and procedures. Such automated bureaucratic processes leave no space for individuals with disabilities to thrive. Seeking out accessibility resources, alternate work arrangements, flexible deadlines, and more time does not fit well within NPM logistics. Disabled staff and faculty that require such measures are marginalized through NPM, and are heralded as troublemakers that are slowing down productive processes (Baines, 2017).

Radian (2017) suggests that, in order to ameliorate the impact of neoliberalism and its NPM spawn, a turn to structural social work (Mullaly, 2007) and how it could impact the processes (procedures) and policies of institutions (i.e., social work regulatory bodies and professional associations and universities) must happen urgently. Radian (2017, p. 96) suggests that structural social work’s attention to “the personal is political” can be placed to substantiate the relatedness of everyday experiences of social exclusion embedded in the larger economic, cultural, political, social, and historical structures and ideologies. In this way, faculty and staff with disabilities cannot be scapegoated and blamed for systemic injustices. Radian (2017) discusses that, through individual and collective sharing of social exclusion and inclusion, a lot of the systemic impacts of the aforementioned can be “normalized” across the schools and faculties of social work. In this way, staff and faculty with disabilities can get together to validate each other’s experiences and strategize to change policies and procedures in their respective institutions. For example, the lead author recently initiated a “disability committee” of faculty across the nation-state to do just that. The goal of a united faculty with disabilities is to begin to target discriminatory policies and procedures that impact the everyday lives of staff and faculty with disabilities.

## 7. Conclusion

In this article, two untenured Canadian social work faculty with disabilities provide autoethnographic case stud-

ies based on their lived experience of living and working with disabilities at a Canadian university. Critiquing neoliberal policies and practices, the authors made recommendations to improve social inclusion with current constraints of individualism and the personal deficit concept of disability. By drawing on disability justice theory, recommendations were made to initiate structural improvements on the part of the above-mentioned institutions that would reduce the need for reactive adaptation. This work contributes to promoting meaningful and sustainable social inclusion of social work faculty with disabilities.

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## Conflict of Interests

The authors declare no conflict of interests.

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