

SEEKING TRUTHS: ABLEIST MEDIA REPRESENTATIONS AND TORONTO'S YOUTH

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ABSTRACT

Seeking Truths: Ableist Media Representations and Toronto's Youth
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This MRP examines the impact that ableist media representations have on youth living with disabilities in the GTA. More specifically, it seeks to answer three essential questions, (1) How have ableist representations of disability in media impacted the way youth with disabilities see themselves? (2) What representations of disability would youth with disabilities like to see in mainstream media? (3) What is social work's role in changing these ableist media tropes and stereotypes? Using a narrative research methodology, this researcher collected the stories of three Torontonians between the ages of 18 to 29 years old, who self-identify as living with a disability. Episodic interviews and thematic data analysis were used to reveal several significant findings. Overall, participants felt that the media does not accurately represent their experiences of disability, often relying on stigmatizing stereotypes that influence their interactions with others, ultimately impacting the way they feel about themselves.

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CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

In today's world, we are continually being exposed to media. From broadcast media such as film, television, and internet, to print media like newspapers and magazines, we are continuously absorbing and consuming media content. As such, mass media has become a primary source of information and knowledge production for an extensive amount of people (Black & Pretes, 2007). However, despite the media's informative nature, how it chooses, frames and represents what it considers to be 'true knowledge,' is extremely problematic. This is especially true when we examine how people with disabilities are represented. Often disability is portrayed in media in a very ableist manner, creating social stereotypes and perceived limitations that are internalized by viewers and contribute to the further discrimination and minoritization of people with disabilities (Schwartz et al., 2010). As such in this MRP, I will be examining these ableist media representations and their effects on people with disabilities. More specifically, I will be looking at the impact of these representations on the self-esteem of youth, living with disabilities in the Greater Toronto Area (GTA).

Social stereotypes of disability are often produced or upheld through Hollywood's frequent use of disability tropes in film and television. A 1999 study by researcher Jack Nelson determined that there are six distinct stereotypes of disability used as literary devices in media. These include representing the person with the disability as the victim, the hero, the threat, the burden, the maladjusted individual, and the one who should not have survived (Nelson, 1999). All six tropes were determined and categorized by Nelson over twenty years ago, however despite this passing of time, not much has changed. Today, representations of people with disabilities are often missing in the media, and in the few instances where people with disabilities are present, the portrayal is inaccurate (Schwartz et al., 2010). Instead, narratives of disability are

often sensationalized in Hollywood to captivate the audience's attention and interests (Samsel & Perepa, 2013). As such, I hope to contest these representations of disability by creating an MRP that not only highlights the impact that these representations have on youth with disabilities but also challenges this sensationalism by introducing real narratives of what it is like to live with a disability in the GTA.

Researcher's Positionality

In the process of writing this MRP, I have come to reflect on my own experience as a person with a disability. I was diagnosed with Cerebral Palsy (CP) at six months old, a neurological condition caused by injury to the developing brain. CP impacts my motor function, coordination, posture, and movement, but can vary in degree from person to person. As an individual with spastic diplegic CP, my condition primarily impacts my lower two limbs. Growing up, I wore daily corrective devices known as AFOs or Ankle and Foot Orthoses. While the devices helped with spasticity and movement difficulties, they also made my condition more visible to peers. Thus, creating a sense of othering that often left me feeling different, weird, or strange.

By the time I was in high school, I desperately wanted someone to understand and address how I felt. Thus, I began to seek comfort in fiction, looking to media for a sense of inspiration, advice, and belonging. While I could find shows and films depicting teens my age overcoming issues I identified with, very few had disabilities. In a rare case where a character did identify as a person with a disability, they were often depicted as pitiable, sensationalized, or a burden to those around them. As such I could remember feeling that if I could not reach a sensationalized standard--a talented, inspirational person with a disability--then, I was nothing more than a pitiful burden to those around me. Ultimately this did not do wonders for my self-

esteem. Looking back, I can see that these feelings and thoughts were internalized from what I saw in the media. No one in my family or friend group ever told me to see myself this way. Instead, I saw myself this way because I believed it was how I should be as a person with a disability. I thought that it was how everyone else saw me.

Through this experience, I began to question why people with disabilities are portrayed in certain ways. Furthermore, I began to wonder if anyone else shares a similar story, and if so, how I could work with them to challenge the negative representations of disability that exist today. As such I chose to pursue a master's degree in social work, so that I could produce a body of research that challenges these problematic fictional narratives, centers voices, and highlights the multiple truths that exist when one lives with a disability. I hope that this research will help social workers understand that it is essential as helping professionals living in a media-rich era, to educate ourselves and others on the ways that media further marginalizes people with disabilities. By doing so, we provide ourselves with a better understanding of contemporary issues faced by this populace, thus creating an opportunity to support them better in overcoming oppression. This is especially important with this population as it has been my experience as a person with a disability, that we generally have more contact with social workers than the average person, due to our frequent use of services and supports. As such social workers should be prepared and knowledgeable enough to support us in our concerns.

Conceptual Framework

Various theoretical approaches have been used to inform studies on disability and media representation. For this study, I have created a conceptual framework informed by my understanding of critical disability theory (CDT). As a framework, CDT acknowledges that disability is a question of power, as our current society's liberalist approach to disability frames it

in terms of misfortune; holding the able body above all others (Pothier & Devlin, 2006). Critical disability theory challenges these ableist notions so that those with disabilities can fully participate in our society (Pothier & Devlin, 2006). It examines how people with disabilities experience ableism in both covert and overt ways, acknowledging that they have the right to independence and self-determination (Pothier & Devlin, 2006; Procknow, Rocco & Munn, 2017). As a framework, CDT focuses on four central themes. It views disability as a social construct, interrogates and deconstructs language, questions liberal ideals of citizenship, and focuses on the empowerment of people with disabilities (Pothier & Devlin, 2006). The way that CDT is used in research changes depending on the researcher and the study it informs. Some researchers focus on all the themes present in CDT while other researchers use CDT in a more umbrella-like fashion, choosing specific concepts and ideas to create their understanding of the theory in ways that uphold central themes. For this study, however, my knowledge and application of CDT will encompass a conceptual framework that includes three concepts, ableism, epistemic violence, and epistemic resistance. All of these concepts uphold the central themes of CDT.

Ableism

As a concept, many definitions of ableism exist; according to Fiona Kumari Campbell (2001):

ableism is a network of beliefs, processes, and practices that produce a particular kind of self and body (the corporeal standard) that is projected as the perfect, species-typical and therefore essential and fully human. Disability is cast as a diminished state of being human. (p. 44)

In this idea, ableism works by creating an ideal subject or body, whose worth is based on their ability to perform particular tasks. As such, anyone who does not possess this ideal body is automatically placed in a position of lesser worth. Through an ableist perspective, one would view disability as a difference to the body and self, and thus something that is intrinsically negative and needs to be cured, diminished, or eliminated (Campbell, 2008). In the context of this MRP, I will be drawing on this conceptualization of ableism, to examine how the media portrays disability in ways that uphold ableist notions. For example, we can use this understanding of ableism to examine the 2004 film *Million Dollar Baby* by Clint Eastwood. In this film, the main character acquires a disability through injury. However, rather than portray the character's newfound experiences of disability, the film ultimately ends with the character finding "peace" through assisted suicide (Black & Pretes, 2007). In this example, it is evident that ableist notions are present because the character's worth diminished once disability touched their life. Their a-typical body is now only worthy of elimination, as they are portrayed as being better off dead than disabled. Using Campbell's (2001) conceptualization of ableism in my research will allow me to examine how media portrays disability in ways that uphold certain stereotypes and contribute to the oppression and stigmatization that youth with disabilities face.

Epistemic Violence

The concept of epistemic violence emerged from postcolonial studies and can be found in such works as "Can the Subaltern Speak?" by philosopher Gayatri Spivak (Dotson, 2011). According to academic Maria Leigghio (2013), epistemic violence "refers to the ways certain persons or groups within society are disqualified as legitimate knowers at a structural level through various institutional processes and practices" (p. 123). Essentially, epistemic violence attempts to silence particular groups, by denying their knowledge, experiences, and ways of

being. As such, epistemic violence can be enforced by damaging one's ability to speak and be heard (Dotson, 2011). For epistemic violence to occur the individual or group must first be excluded as a legitimate knower or knowledge holder. For this to happen “certain constructions become necessary to justify the disqualification” (Liegghio, 2013, p.125).

In the context of people with disabilities, the media constructs disability in ways that do not necessarily reflect actual life experiences (Schwartz et al., 2010). However, these representations have the power to influence society’s attitudes and beliefs, effectively becoming dominant narratives of disability that we rely on for understanding (Samsel & Perepa, 2013; Smit & Anns, 2001). One such narrative is this idea that people with disabilities are pitiable or pathetic, and as such are “childlike, incompetent and in need of care” (Black & Pretes, 2007). Narratives like these are particularly dangerous, as they call into question a person’s ability to know or understand, thus disqualifying them from being a legitimate knowledge holder. As such people with disabilities experience epistemic violence when society holds these narratives as truth, effectively silencing them as legitimate knowledge holders and preventing their actual experiences and voices from being heard. In the context of this MRP, I will be using this concept to examine the ways that youth with disabilities have had epistemic violence enacted upon them through ableist constructions of disability in the media.

Epistemic Resistance

Finally, I will be relying on the concept of epistemic resistance as a way to challenge the epistemic violence that media imposes on people with disabilities. Epistemic resistance first emerged as a concept in 2013, in the work of critical feminist philosopher José Medina (Jonestone & Lee, 2018). According to Johnstone and Lee (2018), epistemic resistance is “a way to counter the oppression and violence embedded in epistemic injustice” (p. 247). Epistemic

injustice is an umbrella concept that branches into an array of areas including testimonial injustice and hermeneutical injustice (Fricker, 2012). As such, I would argue that individuals who encounter epistemic violence are also experiencing what Fricker (2012) calls testimonial injustice. Testimonial injustice occurs “when a speaker receives deficit of credibility owing to the operation of prejudice in the hearer's judgment” (p. 1319). Essentially, an individual experiencing epistemic violence is excluded as a knowledge holder due to a loss of credibility based on prejudiced assumptions. These same individuals encounter testimonial injustice when their experiences and knowledge are silenced by listeners, who, influenced by prejudice doubt their credibility. As a concept, epistemic resistance focuses on countering epistemic injustice. However, as shown above, epistemic violence and epistemic injustice are intrinsically linked, and as such I will be using epistemic resistance as a concept in my MRP to challenge epistemic violence. Epistemic resistance embraces the idea of multiple standpoints or realities (Johnstone & Lee, 2018). According to Medina (2013):

the goal of epistemic resistance is to fight against ignorance, to know oneself and others in certain respects, to learn and facilitate the learning of others, to resist epistemic vices and to work toward epistemic virtues, to meliorate epistemic habits and attitudes, and in short, to collaborate in the pursuit of epistemic justice (p.17).

Therefore, by giving youth with disabilities the opportunity to voice how ableist narratives in media impact them and giving them an opportunity to tell their truths, I am producing a collaborative project that focuses on introducing counter-narratives that challenge epistemically violent and ignorant portrayals of disability in the media.

This MRP will begin in chapter two with a literature review, whereby I will highlight some of the key themes and elements that have come about in research, which pertain to media

representation, disability, and self-esteem. I will also emphasize the gaps present in the literature and discuss how my research questions will attempt to address these gaps. In chapter three of this paper, I will describe my research methodology and outline my participant criteria, data collection methods, and ethical considerations. Finally, in chapters four and five I will discuss my findings and make recommendations on how social work practitioners can address the issues highlighted in this MRP.

CHAPTER 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

When reviewing the literature, there were four significant themes present: the discourse of pity; sensationalism and the supercrip; invisibility and underrepresentation; and the concept of the idealized body, stigma, and self-esteem. In a pragmatic sense, the literature was informed by five different research paradigms; these include positivism, pragmatism, interpretivism, post-modernism, and critical or transformative studies. Furthermore, several academic disciplines were used in my literature review. These include psychology, sociology, social work, disability studies, education, and journalism.

While the context of my research will be focusing on the experiences of youth living within the Greater Toronto Area, it's important to note that it was virtually impossible to find studies in the literature that focused on this particular geographical region. Instead, the literature contained research from all over the world, with a majority of studies occurring in the United States and Australia. To obtain this literature, I used a variety of research databases. I accessed all of my studies through Ryerson University Library Archives. Supporting material, for example, textbooks and memoirs were accessed online through Google Scholar and Ryerson University Library.

Discourse of Pity

Several studies emphasize the presence of pity as a discourse that surrounds disability in the media (Black & Pretes, 2007; Burns, 2016; Hayes & Black, 2003; Kamanetsky, Dimankos, Alsemand, Saleh & Ali-Mohammed, 2016; Samsel & Perepa, 2013; Schwartz et al. 2010; Sikorski & Schierl, 2014). Researchers Rhonda Black and Lori Pretes examined 18 feature films that had character(s) with disabilities and found that most films depict disability through “stereotypical portrayals of self-pity and self-destructive behaviours” (Black & Pretes, 2007,

p.80). Often these characters are seen fighting against their “pitiers” who frequently tell them that they are brave and courageous for living life with a disability (Black & Pretes, 2007). What we can conclude from this is that what makes these characters courageous to others in a film, is not their actions but their willingness to exist in a state of ability that other characters view as pitiful and problematic. This reactionary behaviour or need to fight is often portrayed in a negative light throughout the film with the character later engaging in private self-destructive behaviours fuelled by their own self-pity (Black & Pretes, 2007).

Furthermore, a 2003 study by Hayes and Black examined images of disability in Hollywood films using Foucauldian Discourse Analysis (Hayes & Black, 2003). In this study, Hayes and Black determined that the discourse of pity is often used to frame disability as a problem of social, political, and emotional confinement. As such, the emotions of people with disabilities on screen “must be bottled repressed and allowed to simmer or be released in the backstage area of the home” (Hayes & Black, 2003, p.119). In other words, people with disabilities are not permitted to show emotions such as anger, fear, or sexuality, as this creates discomforts for their able-bodied counterparts; they are essentially experiencing emotional confinement (Hayes & Black, 2003; Parsons, Reichl & Pedersen, 2017). Using a discourse of pity to frame disability as a problem is also a tactic used on the small screen. In a 2016 study researchers Kamenetsky et al., examined the portrayal of disability in charity advertisements on T.V. By comparing the impact of older negative charity ads on audiences’ perceptions of disability with the impact of more modern positive ads, the researchers determine if pity is fundamental in charity advertisements to elicit helping behaviour in viewers. Through this process, Kamenetsky et al. found that female participants felt more sadness than their male counterparts when viewing charity ads that portray people with disabilities, and as such felt a

greater willingness to help (Kamenetsky et al., 2016). These feelings are what charities count on, as many charities believe that feelings of pity help yield more donations (Kamenetsky et al., 2016). This is problematic because through this discourse people with disabilities become the adorable and loveable posterchild in desperate need of a cure, “sending the message that if benevolent others contribute money, we can make disability go away” (Hayes & Black, 2003, “Whence Pity,” para. 15). Furthermore, despite a charity organizations’ belief that pity helps causes, Kamenetsky et al. (2016) also found that the amount of donations a charity receives is not “contingent on stigmatizing depictions that elicit guilt and pity” (p.12). Therefore, while the discourse of pity is commonly used in these commercials, it is not necessarily needed to help gain finances for charitable foundations (Kamenetsky et al., 2016).

The literature also revealed that the discourse of pity is, in fact, more damaging than helpful to people with disabilities as it often seeps from the media into their everyday lives (Schwartz et al., 2010). According to Black and Pretes (2007), if media portrays “individuals with disabilities as a dependent victim or sullen objects of pity, then classmates, co-workers, and community members may be more likely to “see” individuals with disabilities through this lens” (p. 66). In fact, a 2014 study by Sikorski and Schierl examined contextual cues in articles depicting people with disabilities. They found that these media articles were, in fact, able to impact a participant’s attitude and perceived acceptance of people with disabilities (Sikorski & Schierl, 2014).

Moreover, in a 2013 study conducted by researchers Samsel and Perepa, the impact of media on teachers’ perceptions of students with disabilities was also examined. In this study, teachers acknowledged the media's role in impacting how they perceived students with disabilities (Samsel & Perepa, 2013). Ultimately the study found that the teachers felt that what

they see in the media reinforces their feelings of pity and sympathy towards (Samsel & Perepa, 2013). As such the media ultimately impacts the treatment students with disabilities receive throughout their educational journeys. These studies demonstrate that people often rely on what they see in the media as primary sources of information, especially if they have not encountered disability in their everyday lives (Black & Pretes, 2007; Samsel & Perepa, 2013; Sikorski & Schierl, 2014).

Furthermore, in a 2016 study researcher Shawn Burns explored the role of disability studies in broadcast journalism education to determine whether in-class teachings about disability can influence the ways that broadcast students choose to portray people with disabilities in their future work. This study found that lessons in the classroom regarding media representations of disability and the role news media play in impacting vulnerable groups changed students' perceptions of disability in ways that stayed with them beyond the classroom (Burns, 2016). Furthermore, Burns determined that his students felt pity or sympathy for people with disabilities until they were given the opportunity to hear lived experiences first-hand (Burns, 2016). Thus, reinforcing the idea that people regularly feel pity or sympathy toward people with disabilities until they have an opportunity to hear realistic stories (Burns, 2016; Schwartz et al., 2010). In fact, a 2009 study by Schwartz et al. used films with realistic portrayals of disability as a pedagogical tool, to discuss issues and change viewers' perceptions and attitudes towards people with disabilities. The researchers found that the films had a profound impact on participants' perceptions of disability, and diminished feelings of pity and sensationalism toward people with disabilities (Schwartz et al., 2010).

Discourse of Sensationalism

Multiple studies also looked at the discourse of sensationalism as it manifests in media through the supercrip trope (Black & Pretes, 2007; Burns, 2016; Hargreaves & Hardin, 2009; Hayes & Black, 2003, Schwartz et al., 2010). According to Black and Pretes (2007), the supercrip is a stereotypical trope used in film and television that shows the person with the disability as “one who overcomes obstacles and becomes an inspiration to others” (p. 79). As such, it is often used in film and television as an antithesis to the discourse of pity (Hayes & Black, 2003). Due to the positivity that inspiration implies, however, there has been some argument as to whether or not this portrayal is, in fact, problematic (Black & Pretes, 2007; Hayes & Black 2003). Researchers Hayes and Black believe that portraying people with disabilities as inspirational supercrips, is equally as degrading and problematic as more historical representations of disability where people with disabilities are shown to be repulsive or freakish (Hayes & Black, 2003). This is because it implies that people with disabilities should be pitied until they can demonstrate that they are deserving of respect by overcoming their limitations and accomplishing astonishing feats (Hayes & Black, 2003).

Furthermore, the discourse of sensationalism and the supercrip frequently impacts the everyday lives of people with disabilities (Hargreaves & Hardin, 2009; Schwartz et al., 2010). In a 2009 study researchers Hargreaves and Hardin, choose to examine sports media as it pertains to disability and found that athletes with disabilities are often represented in disability sports media using a supercrip model. As such they are portrayed as “a ‘hero’ for ‘overcoming’ their disability and accomplishing something incredible” (Hargreaves & Hardin, 2009, “Disability in Sports Media,” para. 10). Thus, it is not surprising that most athletes with disabilities begrudge this stereotype (Hargreaves & Hardin, 2009). Female athletes also felt that the supercrip, when

intersected with gender, creates a source of double discrimination, as they now have to deal with the supercrip stereotype on top of issues of underrepresentation and hyper-sexualization (Hargreaves & Hardin, 2009). This creates feelings of frustration and exhaustion, resulting in female athletes feeling tired of the way that women with disabilities are portrayed in sports media (Hargreaves & Hardin, 2009).

Moreover, studies have also shown that the discourse of sensationalism and the supercrip has now impacted the education system as well. In a 2016 study by Shawn Burns, several journalism students used words like “inspirational” and “inspiring” when describing people with disabilities in media assignments despite being told that this language perpetuates stereotypes of the supercrip and traditional representations of disability in media (Burns, 2016). This is extremely problematic as these students will one day graduate and potentially create media that upholds supercrip stereotypes. As such disability studies material should be integrated into journalism education (Burns, 2016). Arguments for increasing student exposure to real-life experiences of disability, were also made by researchers Schwartz et al. In a 2016 study Schwartz et al. found that films depicting everyday experiences of disability can be used as an effective educational tool to “generate discussion and change attitudes about disability” (p. 847), effectively combating stereotypes of the supercrip.

Invisibility and Underrepresentation

In addition to pity and sensationalism, several studies also discussed the issue of invisibility and underrepresentation in media (Parsons et al., 2017; Samsel & Perepa, 2013). In a 2017 study Parsons, Reichl and Pedersen examined television ads. In the study, the ads showed both non-disabled individuals and individuals with physical disabilities. According to Parsons et al. (2017), “only one percent of regular characters on American broadcast TV had one or more

disabilities” (p.208). This statistic is particularly alarming, as over 11 percent of people living in the US and Canada identify as having a disability (Parsons et al., 2017). As such, it is clear from these statistics, that media does not provide an accurate representation of disability’s presence in our world. Instead, people with disabilities are often ignored in the media, or if they are present, they are represented in problematic ways (Schwartz et al., 2010). According to Parsons et al. (2017), this underrepresentation creates invisibility, which “only serves to further isolate and stigmatize this group” (p. 208).

Furthermore, while some researchers in this literature review advocate for increased disability representation in media (Samsel & Perepa, 2013), Parsons et al. do not necessarily take this stance. While their study does reveal some positive results in regard to increasing disability representation, they also found some problematic data. One of their goals was to determine whether participants’ attitudes towards people with disabilities depicted in the ads are impacted by their own gender role beliefs. The researchers found that the attitude of male participants towards the rights of women with disabilities in the ads became more negative after viewing the advertisements (Parsons et al., 2017). Nevertheless, there is still a demand for increasing disability representations in media. Samsel and Perepa’s (2013) study revealed that several participants agreed that people with disabilities are underrepresented in the media, and as such there should be an increase in television programs portraying them in a positive light.

Idealized body, Stigma, and Self-esteem

Finally, three studies focused on the concept of the idealized body and the effects of stigma on self-esteem (Brown, 2012; Munro & Huon, 2005; Slater, 2012). In a 2005 study, researchers Monro and Huon examined the media’s conceptualization of the ‘idealized body’ and its impact on the appearance anxiety and body shame of young women. The researchers found

that participants' appearance anxiety increased after viewing T.V. advertisements that portray an 'idealized body' that is tubular, thin, and able-bodied (Munro & Huon, 2005). Those who do not meet this criterion tend to experience negative feelings towards their bodies. In fact, Munro and Huon found that body-shame decreased in participants when they were exposed to images that did not depict this ideal body, instead showing bodies that were more like their own (Munro & Huon, 2005). Although this study is not about people with disabilities, it is still relevant to this MRP, as people with disabilities experience body shame just like everyone else. People with disabilities tend to have bodies that are not ideal in the eyes of the media and are therefore excluded from representation (Slater, 2012). This exclusion can create feelings of stigma, leading to larger more problematic issues (Parsons et al., 2017). In fact, a 2014 study by Robyn Brown examined how gender and disability may influence psychological stress. Brown found that perceived devaluation is an issue for both men and women with disabilities, and the evaluation of the self and social relationships are related to perceived devaluation and psychological stress. Furthermore, Brown (2014) found evidence that stigmatization results in perceived devaluation, which is linked to depression in people with disabilities, with women reporting higher levels of depression and lower self-esteem (Brown, 2014).

Research Gaps

The majority of studies presented in the literature exist within a positivist paradigm (e.g. Brown, 2012; Munro & Huon, 2004; Parsons et al., 2016; Sikorski & Schierl, 2014), and as such use methodologies and methods of data collection that are in alignment with this paradigm. This paradigm may not be the best fit to use when looking at issues around disability and media representation, as positivism strives for concrete answers or 'single/ universal truths' (Grey, Plath, & Webb, 2009). Disability in itself exists on a spectrum, and one's experience of

disability is easily influenced by a number of external factors such as gender, race, and sexuality. The evidence-based experimental structure of a positivist study does not allow participants to elaborate on these multiple realities or experiences of disability. Instead, their opinions are quantified, rationalized, and deduced to a single explanation or answer to the research problem.

These points are further supported by the methods of data collection used in some studies that use quantitative methods of data collection such as surveys, Likert scales, and questionnaires (e.g. Brown, 2012; Munro & Huon, 2004; Parsons et al., 2016; Sikorski & Schierl, 2014). This is problematic, as Chilisa (2012) states that “the questionnaire or survey is a top-down method of collecting data that mirrors the worldview of the researchers on their perception of the topic to be covered... it is conceived within the positivist paradigm” (p.78). Essentially, the participant must choose the option that best represents their experience from a series of choices in the questionnaire. Therefore, the participant is unable to state their own opinion or experience on the phenomenon being studied. As such, studies that exist within this paradigm fail to include research participants in knowledge construction, through the top-down approach to data collection. Furthermore, such studies tend to examine how able-bodied people perceive people with disabilities. The studies do not actually tell the reader the opinions and perspectives of people with disabilities; instead, they highlight how able-bodied perceive people with disabilities. Effectively silencing the voices of this already marginalized group. A stronger paradigm to use when looking at this research topic is one that supports the use of qualitative methodologies and data collection methods.

The studies in the literature that exist within the interpretivist paradigm (Hargreaves & Hardin, 2009; Samsel & Perepa, 2013), use a phenomenological approach as their methodology, and interviews as their primary data collection method. This is a useful approach when looking at

something as multifaceted as disability as it provides for a greater understanding of this issue. In fact, phenomenology provides the researcher with a "deep understanding of a phenomenon as experienced by several individuals" (Creswell, 2013, p.82). This is done through collecting data in an interview process which allows the participants the opportunity to speak about their personal experiences. The above studies that used this methodology and data collection method effectively highlighted the opinions of their participants, ensuring that it was their voices and knowledge being heard. For example, in the 2009 study by Hargreaves and Hardin, an "auto drive" interview technique was utilized whereby participants were able to take control, and "talk freely about what they think and feel about sports media," thus highlighting their voices and concerns in an objective manner ("Interviews," para. 24). While we can see from this example that there is a beneficial aspect to placing a study within an interpretivist paradigm, the paradigm fails to push toward social change. The critical or transformative paradigm studies (e.g. Burns, 2016; Schwartz et al., 2010), produced research that highlights the voices of participants while simultaneously working toward social change.

Furthermore, out of the literature available seven of the studies looked specifically at representations of disability in media (Black & Pretes, 2007; Burns, 2016; Hayes & Black, 2003; Kamanetsky et. al., 2016; Parsons et al., 2017; Samsel & Perepa, 2013; Schwartz et al., 2010). Most of these studies examined films and their portrayal of disability, while others looked exclusively at how disability portrayals are perceived by media consumers. In addition to these seven studies, three looked specifically at the impact of stigma, self-esteem, and the idealized body (Brown, 2012; Munro & Huon, 2005; Slater, 2012). By looking at the literature, I have determined that there are very few studies that look specifically at how people with disabilities feel regarding ableist media portrayals. Most studies look at film or sports, and how disability is

being represented within them. Furthermore, I was unable to find studies that looked at how these ableist media representations impact how people with disabilities feel about themselves (self-esteem). Finally, only two studies took a critical or social justice approach to research, and only one out of the ten studies presented were informed by the discipline of social work.

Research Questions

To address these gaps, I will be conducting a study that focuses on how people with disabilities feel the media has impacted them specifically. I will be using a narrative approach to highlight and center their voices and experiences, creating a body of knowledge that resists and challenges the dominant narratives around disabilities present in the media. Furthermore, this paper will ultimately end with suggestions for social work practice. By focusing on these areas, I am hoping to produce an MRP that both addresses current gaps in literature and contributes to social change. The following research questions will be used to create a study focused on these goals: (1) How have ableist representations of disability in media impacted the way youth with disabilities see themselves? (2) What representations of disability would youth with disabilities like to see in mainstream media? (3) What is social work's role in changing these ableist media tropes and stereotypes?

CHAPTER 3. METHODOLOGY

This chapter will discuss the methodology used in this study. To begin, I will introduce the methodological framework I have chosen, emphasizing its overall benefits and congruency with the theoretical framework, research questions, and study goal. I will then provide a detailed outline of the research design, highlighting participant eligibility criteria, data collection, data analysis methods, and ethical considerations.

Narrative Research Methodology

A narrative research approach was used in this study to highlight and center the voices and experiences of youth living with disabilities in the GTA. As a research method, a narrative researcher will collect stories from participants discussing their experiences while making connections between these experiences and broader social issues (Pinnegar & Daynes, 2007). By doing so, researchers provide “a voice to disadvantaged people whose perspectives have been silenced and marginalized” (Sunderland, Chenoweth, Matthews, & Ellem et al., 2015, p.51). As such, a narrative research approach has often been the methodology of choice for disability researchers, “given that self-advocates with a disability have fought strenuously to assert their own voices and experiences for decades” (Sunderland et al., 2015, p.49). As a narrative approach focuses on highlighting the voices and experiences of the participant, it is only fitting that a disability researcher chooses this approach to uphold and advance this fight.

As mentioned in Chapter 2, much of the literature does not acknowledge the opinions of people with disabilities, instead focusing on how able-bodied individuals perceive disability through media. As such, I chose to address this gap by creating a study that focuses on highlighting the voices and experiences of people with disabilities, particularly how they feel they have been impacted by ableist portrayals of disability in the media. To accomplish this, a

narrative research approach will be used, as it will allow the participant the opportunity to talk about their experiences of ableism in the media and express how they think these media representations have affected how they see themselves as people with disabilities. Furthermore, it will give the participant the opportunity to talk about their life as a person with a disability, providing real-life stories and experience that counter fictional portrayals. This is what narrative researchers call counter-storying, and it allows participants the opportunity to resist hurtful narratives about their lives by providing “a means of ‘talking back’ to injurious master narratives” (McKenzie- Mohr & Lafrance, 2017, p. 190). According to Mckenzie-Mohr and Lafrance (2017):

in any given context, some stories wield more power than others. When circulating widely in a culture (e.g., through the media, policy documents and everyday talk), such stories can achieve a type of ‘master status’... and come to embody that culture’s shared understandings thereby cultivating and maintaining behavioural norms...central to their power is their invisibility as they become taken-for-granted as ‘Truth’(p. 191).

As such media tropes of disability, particularly ones that represent people with disabilities as the victim, the hero, the threat, the burden, the maladjusted individual, and the one who should not have survived, are all master narratives that are taken for granted as ‘truth’ by able-bodied viewers. When narratives are oppressive and harmful such as the ones that exist around disability in the media, they need to be challenged and contested. Counter-storytelling supports individuals in voicing new and more accurate stories that portray their lives, thus resisting the dominant cultural or master narratives that are present (McKenzie- Mohr & Lafrance, 2017). From a social work perspective, narrative research allows social workers the opportunity to develop our understanding of a person or group and create a space for social justice work and change in

practice (McKenzie- Mohr & Lafrance, 2017). Since the goal of this study is to not only to center the voices and experiences of people with disabilities but also to resist dominant narratives and encourage change in social work and broader society, a narrative approach was most appropriate.

Data Collection Methods

The data in this study was collected using episodic interviews. Episodic interviewing is a data collection method spearheaded by researcher Uwe Flick. It assumes that one's life experiences are remembered as narratives and are encoded in the mind as either episodic knowledge (concrete evidence such as time, places, events) or semantic knowledge (abstract knowledge that is more generalized and lacks context); both knowledge types are complementary to each other and inform our world knowledge (Flick, 2000). According to Flick (2000), the primary purpose of the episodic interview is to “ask the interviewee to remember a specific situation and to recount it. Which situation he or she remembers or selects to respond to this invitation is not fixed by the interviewer” (p. 80). As such the episodic interview has a less structured interview format than other data collection methods, thus allowing the participant the opportunity to provide narratives around different types of situations and experiences.

Since my study examines how people with disabilities feel they have been impacted by disability representations in the media, it was important to use a less structured data collection method so that participants have the opportunity to tell a variety of stories that they feel are relevant to the topic. Furthermore, as a method, episodic interviews focus on collecting stories on specific events or ‘episodes’ in a participant's life, creating a more focused narrative (Flick, 2000). For the purposes of this study, this was a more appropriate method of data collection than other narrative research methods, because I only want to inquire about stories that focus on a participant's encounters with ableist media. As such other forms of narrative data collection

which focuses on collecting a participant's entire life history from beginning to end, would provide an extensive tale that is not needed for this particular study (Flick, 2000). Collecting narrative stories for this study, that speak specifically about a participant's life and their experience with ableist media, will result in more focused counter-stories. Centering the voices and experiences of people with disabilities, while simultaneously challenging the dominant or 'master' narratives of disability present in the media.

Data Analysis

For this study, I choose to use a thematic approach to data analysis. In a thematic analysis, the researcher identifies themes within the participant's story. When analyzing a narrative interview using a thematic approach, the "emphasis is on 'the told'- the events and cognitions to which language refers...primary attention is on 'what' is said, 'rather' than 'how,' or to 'whom,' or 'for what purposes'" (Riessman, 2008, p.58; pp. 53-54). As such the researcher is finding themes in what was actually said to them instead of looking at the interview through a structural or dialogic way, where attention would be paid to how a story is told, or to whom it is said (Creswell, 2013). I selected thematic analysis to examine the data for two reasons. First thematic analysis is considered to be a viable and useful option for analyzing episodic interviews and is recommended by Uwe Flick (Flick, 2000). Secondly, I would like my research to be beneficial to the social work profession. As mentioned in Chapter 2, one goal of this study is to assist social workers to better understand how clients with disabilities are being marginalized by media, so that they can better support their clients to overcome this marginalization. However, for social workers to know how to support individuals, we need to know 'what' we are supporting them with. Using thematic analysis allows me to identify the 'what' from

participant's stories, thus creating an opportunity to draw conclusions and make helpful recommendations for the profession.

Recruitment & Participants

Participants were recruited for this study using several recruitment methods, including e-mail and study flyers. Please see the e-mail and flyer attachment in Appendix A and B.

A mass e-mail was generated and sent to my network, with a tagline encouraging recipients to forward the e-mail to anyone whom they feel may be interested in participating. No follow up was done between myself and those e-mailed originally, to ensure there was minimal pressure to participate. In addition to e-mail, I also used flyers as a recruitment method. These flyers were posted around Ryerson Campus in areas that students with disabilities were more likely to frequent. These included the Access Centre, Test Centre, SLC, Ryerson Library, Sally Horsefall, and Eric Palin Hall.

This study included the narratives of three participants between the ages of 18 and 29 years old—more details about participants provided in the next chapter. Each participant self-identified as having a disability, and currently lived within the Greater Toronto Area. One-to-one interviews were conducted with participants, in which they were asked to tell the researcher about a time where they watched a television show or movie, that they felt portrayed disability in negative ways. Participants were then given the opportunity to discuss the impact these portrayals have had on how they see and feel about themselves as a person with a disability. Since this study required participants to discuss their experiences, psychological discomfort was considered to be a minimal risk factor. To minimize this risk, participants were reminded that they could take breaks, skip questions, or stop participation if they wished to do so. During the interview process participants were also provided with a list of resources and services available

in the GTA, that could help manage any psychological discomfort that arose during the interview process.

Due to the population of this study, there were specific ethical considerations that needed to be addressed. Regarding research, people with disabilities are considered to be part of a vulnerable group. This is because in some cases they might not possess the capacity to consent fully. Although this issue was not encountered during the interview process for this study, I still made preparations in case, by putting opportunities in place that make the consent process more accessible. I created assent and consent forms so that participants who do not have the capacity to consent fully, had a more accessible form to read and sign. I also planned to provide a consent form to their parent or guardian and provide an option for verbal consent.

In the next chapter of this MRP, I will discuss the findings in the research. Using the themes identified through thematically analyzing the episodic narrative interviews of my participants. The final chapter ends with recommendations for the profession of social work. These recommendations will highlight ways that social workers can better support clients with disabilities overcome oppression and marginalization associated with ableist media representations.

CHAPTER 4. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The narratives presented in this chapter are the experiences of three Torontonians who self-identify as persons with disabilities. All three participants come from diverse backgrounds, including Toronto's trans, Black, and newcomer populations. This diversity provided the study with unique narratives and distinct intersectional experiences of disability that all come together through a mutual interest in disability activism and involvement in the helping professions. All participants in this study have encountered ableist portrayals of disability in the media that they feel have impacted their self-esteem in some way. It is important to note that the participants were free to discuss any media within the realm of film and television and were not asked to provide opinions on specific movies and television shows. In other words, the researcher did not offer any suggestions of ableist portrayals in media during the interview process, but rather, the participants chose which films and shows they would like to discuss. Furthermore, to maintain participant confidentiality within this study, all participant names and event locations have been replaced with a pseudonym.

Emmett: Emmett is a current university student in his 20's, who identifies as a person with a disability. Emmett has stated his diagnosis to be Cerebral Palsy in addition to a Sensory Processing Disorder. Emmett's experience of disability intersects with his trans identity, creating a unique experience regarding media consumption.

Patricia: Patricia is also a current post-secondary student in her 20's. Due to her diagnosis of Bipolar Disorder, Patricia identifies as a person with a disability. Race and anti-Black sanism are central parts of Patricia's story. Despite these difficulties, however, Patricia is proud to call herself a "strong Black woman".

Alexandra: Alexandra is a graduate student in her early 20's, who self-identifies as a person with a disability. As you will hear from Alexandra's story, her parents' journey as newcomers from Portugal will play a part in her experience of disability and her childhood diagnosis of Cerebral Palsy.

Encountering Ableism: Is it Realistic and Relatable?

When discussing disability representations in the media, all three participants questioned the media's capacity to portray disability in a realistic and relatable manner. Below, Emmett is describing his perception of Dr. Shaun Murphy, the main character on ABC Studio's television show *The Good Doctor*.

I do think that it's overdramatized and, like it, it makes me upset that like even though I have- I have like Sensory Processing Disorder but like not necessarily Autism, a lot of my meltdowns do look like that. But like, it's not necessarily consistent with like those small- the small things that the character gets upset over. Like, those are very small things that maybe some people will get upset over to that extent, but I think that's like overdoing it (Emmett).

From Emmett's recollection, we can see that this particular representation of an individual with a Sensory Processing Disorder such as Autism, is unrealistic. Emmett felt that the representation did not accurately portray the diverse experiences of individuals with Sensory Processing Disorders and instead dramatized the symptoms as a whole. While Emmett does agree that some individuals may react in similar ways to Dr. Murphy, Emmett felt that this representation not only failed to portray his experiences accurately but the experiences of millions of others with the disorder as well.

There's multiple types and multiple variations of disability...but, like, um, and I recognize that it might be difficult to show in one character, but also at least like acknowledge that that's a possibility. That like, not every person, with Autism, not every person with Cerebral Palsy, has-has like, similar experiences (Emmett).

Moreover, the show's failure to represent or mention the multiple and nuanced variations of Autism Spectrum Disorder ultimately essentializes the experiences of those with this disability. Fundamentally, essentialism is the generalization of a particular group, based on the idea that there are a set of traits or attributes specific to that group's identity and function (Bogart, Rosa, and Slepian, 2019). As such, "essentialism is often used to describe beliefs that there are real, underlying differences and rigid boundaries between social identities" (Bogart, Rosa, & Slepian, 2019, p.596). ABC's homogenous portrayal of Autism Spectrum Disorder essentializes the disorder, as it leads viewers to believe that all people with Autism experience the condition in that way, failing to show the diversity within the disorder, and disability itself. As such, the symptoms and experiences of Dr. Murphy, become synonymous with the experiences of all individuals living with Autism Spectrum Disorder, silencing the narratives and experiences of individuals like Emmett.

Furthermore, on their online platform, ABC studios describe Dr. Murphy's character as "a young surgical resident with Autism and Savant Syndrome" (ABC Studios Online, 2019). Essentially ABC Studios has chosen to represent Autism Spectrum Disorder in a particular manner, relying heavily on what Black and Pretes (2007) call the supercrip trope, which portrays the individual with the disability as "one who overcomes obstacles and becomes an inspiration to others" (p. 79). Emmett states that "the point of him being in the show, is just to prove that he's capable working in a fast-paced environment, that has to do a lot with communication." While

relying on this trope may seem harmless as society generally views inspiration as a positive aspect, it is complicit in creating dominant narratives that are inherently ableist. According to Campbell (2008), ableism “includes the idea that a person’s abilities or characteristics are determined by disability or that people with disabilities as a group are inferior to non-disabled people” (p.153). Thus, what makes Dr. Murphy’s character inspirational to viewers is not his success as a doctor, but his success as a doctor with a condition that makes him “intrinsically inferior,” and as such should have prevented him from achieving the success that he has.

Despite these unrealistic and problematic aspects, Emmett was still able to relate to the character in some ways.

Last week I was watching *The Good Doctor*. And in the episode, he ended up getting fired from his job. Because the new management in his job realized that he had Autism and was not communicating well with the um, with the patient... The previous managers, they had no problems with like someone coming with him, like another colleague coming with him to speak with the family, so that there would be less pressure for him to do it independently if he didn't want to. And um, so the new managers didn't accommodate for that and were like, if you can't do it independently you can't do it at all... But then he ended up like having like, a meltdown. Like a sensory meltdown, because he was like, I don't know what I'm going to do right now. Like, that's a very stressful situation for anyone. So, like, I like identified with like, what if I get fired from a job? Like, what if that happens and I don't know what to do with myself?... It made me realize that's like a reality that could happen, it's a possibility but like... and yeah! If like that ever happens, like not only would I be really sad, but also like, bad things happen when your accommodations are not met in the workplace, and that can

happen very easily to someone with a disability... And like it was interesting because usually I get those reality checks from, like, people in wheelchairs or like people with physical disabilities. But that's the first time I actually had that realization in like something that's more invisible, I guess (Emmett).

While Emmett found Dr. Murphy's portrayal of Autism Spectrum Disorder to be an unrealistic dramatization that excludes the narratives of many individuals living with the disability, he did find Murphy's interactions with other characters to be somewhat relatable. More specifically, Murphy's experiences of ableism at the hands of other characters who were unwilling to accommodate. Based on Campbell's perspective, ableism operates by creating an ideal subject, whose worth is based on their ability to perform particular tasks. Anyone who does not possess these capabilities is automatically placed in a position of lesser worth, and should, therefore, be cured or eliminated (Campbell, 2008). Murphy's character was deemed unworthy based on his "inability" to communicate effectively with patients, ultimately resulting in a loss of employment. At this moment, Dr. Murphy's character is encountering ableism. This encounter is something that Emmett identified heavily with, as it opened his eyes to the potential difficulties that he himself might encounter in the workplace.

Like Emmett, Patricia also questioned whether the media represents her condition in a realistic and relatable manner. This is evident when we examine her experience watching the Netflix series *Black Earth Rising*. This series represents the experiences of Kate Ashby, an adopted black woman who is a survivor of the Rwandan genocide (IMDB, 2019). Like Patricia, Kate's character in the series is also living with Bipolar Disorder.

I experience the highs and the lows and whatever. But I find that because it's film because you're trying to portray somebody's whole life in maximum of two and a half hours, you take everything that that person-she's like 30 in the show-so, everything that she's experienced in 30 years and shove it into two and a half hours and you're going to get extremes (Patricia).

Like Emmett, Patricia found the overall portrayal of the character to be dramatized, focusing on the extremes of what it is like to live with Bipolar Disorder. However, despite the dramatization of the disorder, Patricia did find some relatable and realistic aspects.

I remember when I was on meds, just this feeling like I was a robot or like, if I miss my meds. And it's drilled into you so much, don't come off your meds. Don't miss your meds. And people kept asking her every time she had a feeling like, oh um... Did you take your meds? And I'm just like, oh my God, like that-I can relate to that so much. Like, that's a true thing! (Patricia).

From Patricia's experience, we can see that she was able to make connections with the character, particularly around the character's interactions with others. It is important to note, however, that Patricia is relating to more than just a simple interaction, she is relating to the character's encounters with ableism. Through Campbell's (2008) conceptualization we know that "an ableist viewpoint is a belief that impairment (irrespective of 'type') is inherently negative which should, if the opportunity presents itself, be ameliorated, cured or indeed eliminated" (p.154). Within the film, Kate's emotions were consistently attributed to her diagnosis, leading to questions about whether or not she took her medication. This upholds a narrative that disability, in this case, Bipolar Disorder, needs to be cured, managed, or controlled.

Like the character, this is an encounter that Patricia identifies with, as she too has experienced the same interrogative questions around medication and treatment.

So, the way that people interacted with her, I felt like was a really good representation for me, of how people interacted with me knowing my diagnosis. So, that part was very realistic. It's the way that she experiences the disorder in and of itself, that is just like, oh, no, that's not me. And I can't really think of any characters that I've seen portrayed that I'm like, yeah, this is pretty close. (Patricia).

As with Emmett and Patricia, Alexandra also questioned the media's capacity to portray disability realistically. Below, she is talking about her experience watching the films *Me Before You* and *The Upside*. Alexandra mentions that in both stories, the main character acquires their disability through an accident, which results in a permanent injury. As such, the main character ends up viewing their disability as the end of the world, and in the case of *Me Before You* eventually chooses assisted suicide.

So, but like, with both those stories, it was, it's always the same narrative, when they do choose it's like, uh, like, the person, the main character with the disability didn't choose to have the disability... it was because of a freak accident. and then their really like, their, "it's the end of the world!" Like, that's the narrative in both of those stories. And of course, I understand that's some people's experiences, but a lot of people it's not. I didn't even realize I had a disability till I was much older. Because that's all I ever knew! So, I don't want to silence that story...like, I think it should be told, but I don't think it should be the only story that's told. (Alexandra).

As an individual who was born with Cerebral Palsy, Alexandra finds this narrative challenging to relate to because as she states, “I didn’t even realize I had a disability till I was much older. Because that’s all I ever knew”. What Alexandra means is that she has always lived with a disability and as such does not know what there is to “miss” about being able-bodied. Despite not being able to relate to the experience of acquiring a disability, Alexandra still leaves room for this narrative and acknowledges that it may be reflective of some individuals’ realities, it is just not reflective of her own.

Furthermore, as with Emmett, Alexandra believes that this narrative should not be the only experience of disability shown in the media, as other narratives do exist. Like Emmett, what Alexandra dislikes about these portrayals is how they essentialize experiences of disability. For example, based on *Me Before You*, viewers might assume that all people living with disabilities feel like it is the end of the world, and as such are better off dead. This is because the film fails to present compelling counter-narratives, for example, showing others embracing their disability. Moreover, Alexandra has identified a problematic dominant narrative that is often used in films that portray people with disabilities, a narrative that describes “individuals with disabilities as being unable to lead successful lives” (Black & Pretes, 2007, p.80). This is what Black and Pretes call the better-off-dead trope (Black & Pretes, 2007). This trope upholds ableist notions as it sends the message that because the individual’s body is now in a “diminished state” of being, they are no longer “worthy” of life and are thus deserving of “elimination” (Campbell, 2008).

Moreover, like Emmett and Patricia, Alexandra was able to find some relatable and positive aspects in the portrayals that she brought forth during the interview. The excerpt below highlights her thoughts on the movie *The Upside* with Kevin Hart and Bryan Cranston.

And, I liked parts in the movie, I think they address things that are often not addressed when um, ah, when um, there are movies with people with disabilities in them. Like they talked about um, employment, and they talked about, um - like, and he talked about a sex and sexuality, which is never talked about. And they talked about friendship. (Alexandra).

These aspects were relatable and positive to Alexandra because it demonstrates the everyday realities of people with disabilities. Like everyone else, people with disabilities seek employment, have intimate relationships, and experience friendship. Seeing a portrayal that demonstrates this only makes it more relatable to the viewer, as they can see aspects of their life reflected in the representation.

Essentially, all three participants identified that media generally portrays disability in a very extreme and dramatized manner. This made it difficult for participants to relate to the representations, even if the character was portraying the exact condition that the participant identified as having. Both Emmett and Patricia felt that while the representations of the conditions themselves were unrealistic, the interactions that the characters had, and the situations they found themselves in, were relatable to some degree. This was because these situations and interactions showed the character encountering ableism to some extent in their day-to-day lives. Whether it be through education and employment like Dr. Murphy's character, or medical cohesion and sanism as is the case of Kate Ashby, both characters were encountering systemic oppression as a result of their disability, and this oppression was easy to identify and relate to for participants. Furthermore, both Emmett and Alexandra felt that the lack of variation in disability within these portrayals, and their failure to show a diverse array of experiences creates a very essentialized reality of disability that silences the voices and experiences of many people,

making it not only problematic and epistemically violent, but difficult to relate to overall. It is important to remember, however, that while participants found portrayals to be generally overdramatized and unrealistic, there were still relevant, realistic, and relatable aspects that participants enjoyed seeing.

Dominant Narratives and Stigma: How Do Portrayals Impact Us?

As mentioned previously, several of the portrayals brought forth by participants, relied on stereotypical tropes and storylines that were inherently ableist. While some storylines were more relatable and, in some cases, more positive than others (i.e., *The Upside*), they still had an impact on participants and the way they felt about themselves. Below Patricia is recalling how she feels when watching television shows that depict individuals with Bipolar Disorder.

Okay, so. Um, so, in watching the show, I think for me, sometimes, like when I'm watching characters, particularly with Bipolar Disorder, because that's my diagnosis. I'm always like, here we go now. Now my friends are gonna watch this, and they're gonna be like, oh, so do you experience this, and do you experience that? I find with shows and movies, that happens a lot. And then I get angry, because like, I find that a lot of the portrayals are so stereotypical. So, I'm like okay, if that's not my experience, this is great (sarcasm). This is the color that I'm gonna get painted with. Because bipolar disorder is mental illness, it's an array of colors within any illness. The people are as different as the people are different in the general population. But you get painted as-okay, so if you're bipolar, then you're green. And if you're schizophrenic than your red. And then everybody who has Bipolar Disorder, living with Bipolar Disorder is green. ...that's really frustrating to me because it's like, I might have Bipolar Disorder. And the way that I experience it in my life is not the same as this character on the TV show. And

I'm not saying nobody experiences it the way that she does in the show. But it's just highly problematic when I see it in film, because there's no discourse surrounding it. You know, there's no discussion that we're going to have after. (Patricia)

Through Patricia's narrative, we can see that media portrayals of Bipolar Disorder definitely impact her life. Anger, frustration, and annoyance are the primary emotions brought up for Patricia as a result of these portrayals. Patricia herself attributes this reaction to media representations being "so stereotypical," so much so that everyone with Bipolar Disorder "is painted" with the same brush. Fundamentally, what Patricia is saying is that by always showing a single account of what life is like with a Bipolar Disorder, the media has created stereotypes that uphold dominant narratives.

So, for example, in the film *Black Earth Rising*, Patricia found that when Kate's character was angry, other characters often "attribut[ed] that to her being bipolar, as opposed to just [her] being in a pissy situation". Furthermore, Kate was often shown to rely heavily on medication to maintain her condition, and as Patricia points out:

there were no alternative methods. So yeah, she exercised a lot and stayed fit, but there was no link made between that and her, you know, maintaining her mental health, it was all like, oh, the medication is her saving grace, which I find is pushed on me a lot. (Patricia).

In most films showing someone with mental health, medical intervention, and medication are shown to be an essential part of the character's everyday life. So much so that they are often shown as being "unable to live a successful life" without it (Black & Pretes, 2007). This stereotype upholds a dominant narrative that often surrounds mental health, the medical model.

This model in itself is inherently ableist as it sees disability as an “illness” or “condition” that influences an individual’s existence in negative ways, making their life and experiences inferior to that of a non-disabled person’s (Emens, 2009). This is a narrative that Patricia feels is pushed on her a lot, and when intersected with race, leaves Patricia feeling like she is “defective in some way” and “falling short” as a Black woman.

I find that a lot of the times, like, women of color in general are portrayed as strong and resilient, and whatever. And that goes as a counter narrative to having mental illness. Like, somehow, we be-or I've always felt, anyway, like, the perception is that I'm defective in some way. And I'm falling short as a Black woman, because I'm living with a mental illness. (Patricia).

In addition to directly impacting her self-esteem, Patricia also recounts how these ableist portrayals affect her interactions with others. Below Patricia talks about André, a character with Bipolar Disorder on Fox’s popular television show *Empire*.

It caused such a disruption in my life...I feel like the people who've been in my life, most of them have been in my life for a long period of time, and kind of know who I am, and whatever. But then [they] started to interrogate things through this new lens because they all thought they had gotten a degree, because André is bipolar, right. And it was just this changing point for me, and then I realized, I'm like but why are you watching this? (Patricia).

Patricia’s experience demonstrates just how powerful the media can be. In fact, according to Patricia, her friends now “think they’re experts because they’ve seen the character on T.V.”

Essentially, Andre's portrayal of Bipolar Disorder influenced Patricia's friends so much that they began to stigmatize her. This stigmatization can indirectly impact one's self-esteem as research has shown that stigmatization results in perceived devaluation and leads women with disabilities to report higher levels of depression and lower self-esteem (Brown, 2014).

As with Patricia, Alexandra also felt that media had impacted the way she feels about herself as a person with a disability. In the excerpt below, Alexandra talks about a negative high school experience that she chalks up to body image and low self-esteem.

I remember being in the 10th grade in a computer technology course. And I remember we took a—we had to make a short film. And I remember I couldn't watch the movie because I saw myself walk. And it was the first time I've ever, I had ever watched myself walk. And I couldn't do it, I had to leave the room. And I think - maybe had I seen more people walking the way I walk, in like movies, I wouldn't have been so ashamed of it. Because I literally felt shame over seeing myself walk. Because in my mind, I grew up my whole life never thinking I had a disability. That's probably one of the first times that I was like...Oh, shit, like it's-it's a thing. Like, this is how you walk! And people can see it!
(Alexandra).

In this narrative, Alexandra mentions feeling shameful when confronted with the existence of her disability. This feeling was so intense for Alexandra that she had to physically leave the room so that she would not be able to see herself walk on video. Her experience differs from Patricia's in that she does not attribute her emotions to stereotypical representations present in media. Instead, Alexandra indicates lack of media representation as being responsible for the source of her shame. Research has shown that women are generally underrepresented in the media, and are

only shown when they have an ideal female body that upholds the societal standard (Parsons et al., 2017). As such, “women with disabilities are marginalized both because of their status as disabled and also because of their gender” (Parsons et al., 2017, p. 209). While Alexandra does not attribute her shame to a specific ableist portrayal like Patricia, stigmatization is still responsible. One could argue that dominant narratives around beauty and what society considers beautiful, is responsible for the conceptualization of the “ideal female body.” This concept allows for the exclusion and therefore, stigmatization of entire groups of people, particularly women with disabilities. So, while Alexandra does not attribute this experience to a particular portrayal, her experiences can still be linked to media’s exclusion and stigmatization of people with disabilities based on ableist standards of beauty.

As with Patricia’s experiences, ableist media portrayals have made an impact on Alexandra’s interactions as well.

I had one guy that I really liked in high school that told me, that was like, if you weren't the way that you are, I'm sure a lot more guys would like you. And I remember listening to that, and like feeling crushed in a lot of different ways. Like one way was like, Oh, I really like this guy, like any other girl, and he's like, rejecting me, which sucks! Then on top of that, it's like you're rejecting me because of who I am. It's something I can't change and it's something that - would never affect a relationship like if we ever gone into one, right? ... I think the reason that like when I was in high school, that guy said that to me, is because you know it-it's not talked about. It's like, you grow up thinking like, oh, like you don't want to date-it's like kind of like mental health. You don't want to take someone with depression and anxiety, whose sui-possibly suicidal, who has schizophrenia...It's the same with disability, like people with disabilities won't

be able to do this, this this, ex, ex, ex, and ex, they're going to be dependent on you. So, it's a burden, right? (Alexandra).

In this recollection, Alexandra talks about an experience of romantic rejection, that she attributes to ableist media and its constant portrayal of people with disabilities as burdens. In this incident, Alexandra felt crushed, not because of the rejection, but because it was over a part of herself that she cannot change. Furthermore, Alexandra thinks that the media's failure to show people with disabilities in romantic relationships may be a part of why that boy said that to her, as "it's not talked about". Filmmakers continue to perpetuate the stereotype that people with disabilities are asexual beings (Black & Pretes, 2007). This along with "the burden to family/society" trope that we often see used in the media, creates stigmatization that "effectively renders individuals with disabilities as asexual beings, confined to remain in platonic friendships with the able-bodied population" (Black & Pretes, 2007; Parsons et. al., 2016, p. 224). Again, as with Patricia, this stigmatization has the potential to impact the way Alexandra feels about herself, putting her at higher risk of developing depression and low self-esteem (Brown, 2014).

In the excerpt below, Emmett also speaks to the power of the media and its ability to create stereotypes that stigmatize people with disabilities.

A lot of the T.V. shows and movies they, they feature the parents, they feature the caregivers, the people that support them. And those are all super important and like wonderful, but then they don't show how capable the person is independently. Um, and, like, and I can't speak to this, but um, there's, there's all-there's always an element where it involves the family that like the parents are like concerned. They're like, their like teenager is going off to university or something like that, and that's a very normal

reaction. But when it involves disability and, and accommodations, and like, um, support people, um, I think that undermines um, people's own autonomy, in terms of realizing, like, realizing that, like, by watching these that they can also like do that all by themselves, if they, if they want to, and if they are capable. I mean, just like recognizing people's potential to be as independent as possible, without their parents. Or without, like, I'm not saying that people shouldn't have support systems, I'm just saying, that like that element of like, family and support people around the person with a disability, only get shown because the person has a disability and not because they're like, a human being that needs support. Which is fine, but like, having that representation, engrains in society that like people need support when doing that and that they don't have their own autonomy in terms of advocating for themselves. Because like, personally, like - I moved out when I was 18. I like did all my organization of my own personal care, independently. (Emmett).

Like Alexandra, Emmett is highlighting the use of the “burden to family/society” trope that we often see used in the media, which generally portrays the person with the disability as a dependent individual who eventually becomes a burden to those around them (Black & Pretes, 2007). Emmett emphasizes that the media’s overreliance on this narrative stigmatizes people with disabilities by undermining their autonomy. This narrative has the power to render invisible efforts of self-advocacy and agency, as people who believe in it assume that people with disabilities are not capable of independence, effectively excluding and stigmatizing the experiences of independent people like Emmett.

As shown above, all three participants have experienced stigma, brought forth by stereotypes in the media; stereotypes meant to uphold dominant narratives that are inherently

ableist. For some individuals such as Patricia and Alexandra, stereotypical portrayals of disability directly influenced how they felt about and saw themselves. For others like Emmett, these stereotypical portrayals created stigmatizing situations that have the potential to influence one's self-esteem and self-worth. Furthermore, through the participant's narratives, ableist portrayals have been shown to impact interactions with able-bodied populations in negative ways. In Patricia's case sanist portrayals of Bipolar Disorder changed the ways that her peers saw her, ultimately leading to stigmatization. For Alexandra, lack of representation created stigmatizing high school experiences that lead to feelings of rejection and shame. In Emmett's case, these ableist portrayals construct stigmatizing assumptions that erase Emmett's efforts of agency and independence, and ultimately enacting epistemic violence.

Resistance: Let's Challenge and Change!

As we can see in the participant's narratives above, media representations rely on stereotypical and ableist portrayals of disability that uphold dominant narrative in our society and creates stigmatizing situations for people with disabilities in the real world. So, what should media show? Alexandra, Emmett, and Patricia all have opinions on why changes in media representations are essential, and how we as helping professionals can go about enacting this change. Furthermore, all participants have highlighted what they would like to see in the media regarding disability.

Um, I met a little girl the other day with a disability, and she's ten years old, and she already had this, all this um, issues with body image. Like, no one will ever love-like ten years old, and like, no one will ever love me. I'm never going to have a boyfriend, I'm never going to have a job, and it's like, why? Because you wear braces? Because you were taught -like at ten years old for you to already believe that, it's

because something or many things are telling you that that's gonna be the reality. So that's why, it makes me upset, because little girls, who are ten years old, and little boys think that their disability is all that they are and that it's a bad thing and it's not! (Alexandra).

As a social worker, Alexandra frequently encounters mentorship opportunities, whereby she can talk to younger individuals with disabilities. Above she tells a story about an encounter that she a young girl who wears braces. In this story, Alexandra states that the young girl was under the impression that no one would ever love her, and that she could not be successful due to her disability. Alexandra accounts the little girl's low self-esteem to internalizing negative media representations of disability. So much so that Alexandra states, "it's because something or many things are telling you that that's gonna be the reality." These encounters are upsetting for Alexandra but also motivational, as they encourage her to resist and challenge. Alexandra ultimately wants little girls and little boys to know that their disability is not all that they are and that it's not a bad thing!

I don't know like I have friends with disabilities. I have, I have a disability. One day, if I choose to have children, they might have a disability. I don't want them - to you know, like, think that their less than or they-they're treated differently because they're a little bit different. Disability is a part of life, at one point in our life, we're all going to have to deal with it. Why do- why is it so negative? Like why is it portrayed as such a negative thing? You break your leg you have a temporary disability. One day when we're older, we are not able-bodied like we once were when we were younger, it-like even me, when I get older, it will be different, the way I navigate through the world will be different. It's, inevitable-it's, it's, you can't avoid it. Um, so it's just frustrating that

it's like - like, don't normalize it, but like, there's so much stigma around it, like tell a different story. Like we fall in love, we get jobs. Everyday experiences, we do horrible things to our friends sometimes, like we're not like - I don't know like, there's good things! We're like everybody else, right? We just may do things a little bit differently. (Alexandra).

Alexandra also highlights the fact that from a medical perspective disability does not discriminate, and as such we should all care about how its portrayed because these negative portrayals may one day impact us or someone that we love. Instead, we should be telling a different story, stories of everyday experiences, stories showing people with disabilities in loving relationships, in successful careers, experiencing conflicts, and ultimately being happy.

I have a job. I have-I have bills to pay. I have aspirations. I went to school. I've made a lot of mistakes that a lot of, -I-I'm just gonna guess are very common 24-year-old mistakes. I'm sexually active, like, I go to church, there's so many things! Like, I'm a part of a community. I'm very invested in like my Portuguese heritage. Like, there's so many things going on, that's just one thing! And yeah, I have to take it into account for certain things. Like, right now I'm sitting on this couch, I'm like Okay, I got to move soon. You know, because I have pain. But it's like, that's just one thing. One thing! Just show, just show, just show that! That's it! ...Like it's-so, okay, I have my disability, but then I have extra strengths in other places. ... Like, okay, maybe I'm not-I don't walk like everybody else. But I think-, I believe in God, and I think God gave me, extra in other places. I think I have a big capacity to love people, right... And I-I think I'm pretty empathetic, and I-I care a lot. And I-as I work more, and I'm like more invested in society, I see that, that's

not something everybody has. So, I think that's what people also have to understand.

Don't feel sorry for us! I feel -I feel so lucky sometimes, it is a superpower, I really think it is! (Alexandra).

To challenge these unrealistic and stigmatizing portrayals, we need to show people like Alexandra, who live life doing everyday things, because as Alexandra puts it, “we’re like everybody else!” Rather than see her disability as a pitiable experience, Alexandra calls for us to expunge the narrative of pity because while she may have a disability Alexandra sees it as a gift, a superpower that has given her a capacity and perspective that she would not otherwise have.

Patricia also shares a similar perspective to Alexandra when it comes to looking at her disability. She too sees it as a gift that has equipped her to see the world in a way that benefits her profession.

I feel like sometimes, like for me, like my mental illness feels like it's almost like it's a superpower... And I'm like when I look over my life you might think this is like the most illogical thing ever. But I wouldn't be who I am, I wouldn't be equipped to do the work that I do, had I not experienced the things that I've experienced. And a major part of that experience is the Bipolar Disorder. So, in a lot of ways I'm super grateful that I am that person. Because some of the empathy I have, some of the resilience I have, I have to attribute to that. It hasn't been all bad, you know.

Furthermore, as an individual in the helping professions Alexandra feels that Social Workers do have a role in demolishing ableist portrayals in media.

I think it affects the people we work with and ourselves. So it affects our work, and i-it's affecting it in a lot of ways and negatively. So do we have a role? I think like, you

know, ah, a lot of agencies have accessibility committees. I think the minutes from those meetings, the insight that shared, should be shared with larger media. I think that we should be putting out proposals for like short stories and documentaries like, I don't know like, we have ah, an amazing film festival in Toronto every year. I think, even something as simple as creating an accessible space, making sure diversities talked about, maybe that will pick up and become the norm across systems. Maybe it's something that like, it's kind of like, - feminist and the LGBTQ + community advocated very much to be represented in the media. Um, - but they also made systematic change, like through policy and whatever, and I think that kind of stuff affects media when it's talked about more when it's more visible. (Alexandra).

Here Alexandra has acknowledged that social workers are ultimately in positions of power, and as such should advocate for changes within our agencies that ensure the voices of clients with disabilities are being heard. On a larger scale, we could be doing more advocacy-based projects that highlight the real life lived experiences of people with disabilities. Alexandra suggests making creative and collaborative projects with service users like documentaries or short stories that highlight their experiences and resist the epistemic violence they have experienced by having their voices silenced. This is similar to what Schwartz et al. accomplished in their 2010 study, where they used film to dispel ableist stereotypes of disability and highlighted the real-life experiences of documentary subjects through an educational lens. Alexandra also recommends ensuring that there are adequate positive representations of disability in our agencies. Below Alexandra talks about an experience where she was a service user and encountered an individual in the helping professions with a disability.

And then my, like, kind of support person, didn't have a hand. So like, okay, we didn't have the same disability, but she has a disability. So she knows what it's like. I was like, oh my God, you get me! Like oh, I don't feel weird. Because, like, you don't have a hand and you have a job, and you're talking to me, and you know, and you're living your best life! You know, like, I think um, that is validating. Like as a child, like you need to see people who look like you. So, you don't feel different. Like, because everybody else is telling you your different and different in a bad way...that one person without a hand was my saving grace... I think there should be a priority to hire people with um, disabilities because they do get it. And um, their experiences like although can be different, there are going to be things that are the same (Alexandra).

As we can see, this experience was validating and positive for Alexandra, and she finally felt like someone understood her as a person with a disability as such Alexandra recommends that agencies in the helping professions make it a priority to hire people with disabilities.

Like Alexandra Patricia also had some particular reasons as to why she would like to see changes in media representation. Below, Patricia tells me a story about her sister, who she sadly passed a few years ago.

Something important just came back to mind because I thought about my experience. But I had a sister um, - that died. She was killed in a hit and run. The police ruled it as suicide. Truthfully, it's not clear what it was. She did have some like mental health issues. Um, she called them issues, so I will stick with that word, issues. Um, and, she also had anorexia, and one of the things that she constantly complained about was that she's like, "oh, I have anorexia, but Black girls don't have anorexia, right?"... it caused, like, so much turmoil for her, the fact that she couldn't see herself represented, even though she

could see the illness represented, and it was debilitating for her. You know it was so difficult....that speaks to the importance of media, not just for educating the public, but for providing some sort of comfort. Comfort or like space for individuals that are consuming what they're pushing. So, it's important! Representation is important for that reason...(Patricia).

Here Patricia is advocating increased representation of people with disabilities, specifically people with mental health disabilities. To Patricia, media is more than something that we see or watch; it has the power to impact us and, in some cases, provide comfort when we are feeling stigmatized, excluded or dejected. It is not enough however, to increase representations of disability in media, according to Patricia, we need to increase intersectional representations of disability that take race and other identities into account. This is important because as Patricia has shown in her narrative how one experiences their disability and interprets media representations, change depending on race, sex, gender, sexuality, etc. Like Patricia, Emmett would also like to see an increase in intersectional representations of disability in the media. Below he highlights his experience as a trans person with a disability, and how difficult it is to find a representation that intersects those two identities.

As like a trans disabled person I don't see any representation of like, gender minorities, or sexual minorities um, that have disabilities within the media... you would find trans folks or disabled folks, and never both. Like even about like, sexual orientation or, um, while I mentioned gender identity before, but like, and like race is like nowhere to be seen at all. There's no intersectionality at all. (Emmett).

Like Alexandra, Emmett also feels that individuals in the helping professions have a role in resolving this issue. However, his solutions revolve more around one-on-one intervention. “I do think we have a role in, um, I think, our role would actually be like, to ensure that people don’t internalize those messages as much as they would if we didn’t intervene” (Emmett). Emmett believes that helping professionals may not be in positions powerful enough to “our role is to make sure that people actually don’t internalize it-in, in so much of a way that like, um, it affects their, their well-being or their mental health.” With that being said, however, Emmett still believes that advocacy is essential, “I think that advocacy is a point, like you can advocate on anything... like it doesn’t matter what your role is right”? To Emmett disability activism and activism in general, are the responsibility of everyone, not just people in the helping professions. This is similar to Patricia’s perspective, as she elegantly points out, “we all have a responsibility, and not even just those of us in a social work role. Because, I mean, these people can’t make these movies if we’re not paying to go see them, you know? If they’re not getting the viewership on T.V.”

Regarding the role that the helping professions play in resolving ableist media portrayals of disability, Patricia recommends that we extend our professional aspirations.

And I feel like as social workers, sometimes we get into particular professions, and we think that, oh, like, this is what a social worker does. So when I graduate, I’m going to go, and I’m going to work with CAS, and when I graduate I’m going to go and work in a health clinic, and as a part of a team, and connect people to resources and blah, blah, blah. But how many of us think oh, when I’m done this, I’m going to go and work for some media company, or whatever. And then, with the knowledge that we have, bringing it into that sphere of saying, like, we need to change this. Like this character is

always portrayed this way, and this should be different or whatever. So, it's also broadening our scope of what we think we could do.... So, having a team of ten writers, which I never did quite understand... ten writers and two producers, and this and that. Like, why not include a nurse and a social worker? Especially when you're going to try to battle these issues. Go on the front line and have a panel of people living with mental illness to inform what you're doing, because to go out there and just do the same thing in a different way is just madness! That was intentional (laughs). (Patricia).

Here we can see some similarities between participant perspectives. Like Alexandra, Patricia also feels that it would be helpful to have individuals in the helping professions and clients involved in media creation. This would undoubtedly combat the silencing of our stories and voices have been silenced by dominant narratives, thus helping to resist the epistemic violence we have historically experienced and enabling an act of epistemic resistance.

CHAPTER 5. IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE

Listen...

In the previous chapter, we had the opportunity to hear the insightful narratives of three individuals. Their stories provided a chance for us to see just how impactful media portrayals can be on the lives of people with disabilities. As we can see in these narratives, the stigmatization and resulting internalization of ableist messages within media portrayals, brought forth feelings of anger, shame, sadness, pain, and frustration in the lives of participants. Ultimately, as social work practitioners, we should focus on preventing the harms that come from internalization; however, I acknowledge that it be relatively challenging to prevent someone from internalizing messages, as we do so every day. However, as Emmett so elegantly pointed out in his narrative above, we can work towards supporting the individual through the negative feelings associated with the internalization. To do so, we need to exercise an essential skill, listening.

As shown in the narratives, stigmatization can create feelings of exclusion and silence the voices and experiences of those who are stigmatized. By genuinely listening to what people with disabilities are telling us, for example, how they feel, what they would like to see represented, their hopes and dreams, their challenges and struggles, and their accomplishments, we are already succeeding in creating change. We are participating in the act of epistemic resistance, reversing the effects of epistemic violence, and challenging the dominant narrative that says the voices and opinions of people with disabilities don't matter, a narrative that has been internalized by many, including people with disabilities themselves. Moreover, at the very least listening helps to validate the feelings and experiences of clients with disabilities.

Get Involved...

Furthermore, several of the participants suggested that social workers get directly involved in media creation in order to advocate for change in media representations. The idea is, that if we change the ableist portrayals to more positive representations, there would be fewer negative messages for people with disabilities to internalize. While this sounds all well and good, how do we do it? Alexandra recommended creating agency driven media projects such as documentaries or short stories that center the voices of clients with disabilities and highlights their lived experiences. We could then showcase these works at prestigious media events, like the Toronto International Film Festival, for example, or The Hot Docs Canadian International Documentary Festival. This could be a collaborative opportunity between several agencies in the GTA and their clients, with the focus again being on epistemic resistance. Showcasing realities through these projects could help generate discussion in both the social work community and media itself.

Expand Your Practice...

Another recommendation would be to expand our career aspirations as social workers. As Patricia stated in her narrative, many of us have a very narrow view of what social work looks like, imagining support coordinator roles, or a child protection worker. But what if we expand our view? What if we take our anti-oppressive perspectives to the media itself? Maybe you become a social worker who works as blogger part-time, or you write a letter to the National Film Board of Canada advocating for change in media representations of disability. In both examples, you would directly influence media creation utilizing your skills as an anti-oppressive social worker.

Center Lived Experience...

Finally, at the very least, we can make sure we are hiring social workers with disabilities in our agencies. While everyone has a unique and personalized experience of disability, there are some experiences and encounters that are exclusionary to all people with disabilities—e.g. ableism. Everyone with a disability has encountered systemic oppression as a result of our societies preference for able-bodied people, at some point in their life. While one can study ableism and the power structures present in our society, it is virtually impossible to grasp the impact ableism makes on an individual, unless you can encounter it at some point yourself. Essentially, what the practitioner with disability possesses is lived experience, and as clients with disabilities encounter these practitioners, there is an opportunity to build a validating connection based on a mutual understanding of existing as a disabled person in this world. Furthermore, hiring practitioners with disabilities places them in positions of power, creating positive representations for service users that directly challenge the ableist narratives showcased in the media.

Conclusion

Please note that this study does not reflect the experiences of all youth with disabilities in the GTA and can only speak to the experiences of those who participated in the study. We must not essentialize the experiences within these narratives and attribute them as being reflective of all people with disabilities, as that only creates and perpetuates stereotypes, which is the exact opposite of what this MRP is trying to accomplish.

Based on the narratives presented in this MRP, it is safe to say that ableist representations of disability media can impact the self-esteem of youth living with disabilities in the Greater Toronto Area (GTA). Anger, shame, sadness, pain, and frustration were all emotions

that participants experienced at some point, as a result of how disability is portrayed in the media. Ultimately, media portrayals rely on stereotypical tropes that uphold, and in some cases, create negative dominant narratives within our society. These narratives stigmatized these youth, often placing them in situations where they were belittled, berated, or excluded by others, resulting in feelings of shame, sadness, and in some cases anger. Others simply felt these emotions based on the media's inability to adequately capture how they experience life as a person with a disability.

The most significant thing to take away from this study is the participant's stories of resilience and resistance that despite living in an oppressive world, they still viewed society as the problem and not their disability. Several participants felt that their disability was a superpower or gift that gave them a unique perspective of life, and a fantastic capacity to love, connect, and empathize with others.

We must not dismiss the role that the media has played in silencing the voices of people with disabilities. We want representation that shows real-life experiences, real-life accomplishments, real-life failures, and real-life aspirations. We need representations that do not essentialize our experiences. We want representations that show the diversity that exists within our conditions and disabilities in general. We want representations that show the intersectionality as human beings, our race, our gender identity, our culture, and our heritage. We want representations that show us! Because as Patricia so eloquently put it, we are dope!

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS NEEDED

Seeking Truths: Ableist Media Representations and Toronto's Youth

Are You:

- Between the ages of 16-25?
- Do you have a visible or hidden disability (diagnosed or self-identified)?
- Currently living within the GTA (Toronto, Durham, Halton, York & Peel Region)?

If you answered yes to the above noted questions you may participate in this study. The study is designed to examine how youth living with disabilities in the Greater Toronto Area, feel their self-esteem has been impacted by ableist portrayals of disability in media.

If you wish to participate in this study, you will be asked to:

Share your experience as a consumer of film and television shows that portray characters with disabilities, and how these experiences have influenced how you see and feel about yourself as a person with a disability.

You will be asked to participate in a one-on-one interview with the researcher. 3-4 participants will be interviewed for this study.

Your participation will involve one interview session that is 2 hours in length.

In appreciation of your time, you will receive a \$10 gift card to either Starbucks, Tim Horton's, or McDonald's. All participants will receive two TTC tokens as reimbursement for their travel costs.

To participate in this study, you must provide your consent to participate or have assented and received consent from your parent or guardian.

If you require a support worker or interpreter please feel free to bring them to the interview, as one will not be provided for you.

If you are interested in participating in this study, or would like more information, please contact:

Kendra Belle - Ryerson University MSW Candidate

Email: kendra.belle@ryerson.ca

This research study is being conducted by an MSW graduate student (Kendra Belle), in partial completion of their degree requirement, under the supervision of Dr. Samantha Wehbi (swehbi@ryerson.ca); and has been approved by the Ryerson Research Ethics Board - REB file number (2018-480).

APPENDIX B

Recruitment E-mail

SEEKING TRUTHS: ABLEIST MEDIA REPRESENTATIONS AND TORONTO'S YOUTH

To Whom It May Concern:

My name is Kendra Belle and I am a current Graduate Studies student in Ryerson University's Master of Social Work program (MSW). I am presently working on a major research paper in partial completion of my degree requirement. The purpose of this research project is to examine how youth living with disabilities in the Greater Toronto Area, feel their self-esteem has been impacted by ableist portrayals of disability in media. In other words, I will be looking for stories of the participants experiences as a consumer of film and television shows that portray characters with disabilities, and how these experiences have influenced how they see themselves as a person with a disability.

My hope is to produce a body of work that highlights the opinions of participants, providing them with the opportunity to voice why they feel negative media representations of disability are harmful to people with disabilities. Furthermore, I would like this project to be a resistance against these stereotypical media portrayals, by emphasizing participants stories to provide true representations of what its actually like to live with a disability in today's world.

I am currently looking for 3 to 4 participants, who are willing to partake in a 2-hour one-on-one interview with the researcher. The participant will be given a \$ 10 gift card to either Tim Horton's, Starbucks, or McDonald's, as a thank-you for their time. All participants will receive two TTC tokens as reimbursement for their travel costs. If you would like to participate in this study you must be between the ages of 16 and 25 years old, self- identify as having a disability (visible or hidden), and presently live within the Greater Toronto Area (Toronto, Durham, Halton, York, and Peel Region). Furthermore, to participate in this study you must consent to be in the study or have assented and received your guardian's consent. If you require a support worker or interpreter please feel free to bring them to the interview, as one will not be provided for you.

Your participation in this study is a choice, and there will be no consequences should you wish to decline or withdraw your participation. I appreciate that you took the time to read this letter. If you do not wish to participate however, please feel free to send this letter to anyone who you think would like to.

If you are interested in the study, or wish to obtain more details, please feel free to contact me at the email provided below or contact my supervisor (Dr. Samantha Wehbi, swehbi@ryerson.ca). Please note that this study has been approved by the Ryerson Ethics Board - REB file number (2018-480).

Thank-you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Kendra Belle, BSW

School of Social Work at Ryerson University

kendra.belle@ryerson.ca

APPENDIX C

Interview guide

1. Introduction

Thank-you for agreeing to participate in this study. I would like to begin by reminding you that you can stop the interview at any point in time. Furthermore, please remember that you can decide what experiences/stories you choose to tell me, and for how long you would like to speak. I do have a few guiding questions for you, however you may choose to skip questions if you do not feel comfortable answering them. I would like you to remember that this is a story of your experience as a media consumer and its impact on you. Therefore, you can decline to answer at any point in time without consequences. Since the nature of this discussion may cause some discomfort, there is no requirement for you to answer every question or discuss every experience in detail.

2. Background

Before I ask you to tell me a story about your experiences as a consumer of television and film, is there anything you would like me to know about you, either about your experience as a person living with a disability in the GTA, or your experience as a youth with a disability?

3. Story

I would like to hear a story about your experience as a film and television consumer, and how you think examples of disability in these media platforms have influence how you see yourself as a person with a disability. Please feel free to leave out anything you don't wish to share.

Possible Guiding Questions:

Which television shows or films do you watch contain characters with disabilities?

- How does the character feel about their disability?
- How do the other characters in the show see the person's disability?
- Why does the individual see their disability as such?
- Why do other characters see the disability as such?

Have you ever felt like a representation of disability in film or television, has influenced how you felt about yourself as a person with a disability?

- How does the way the character view their disability, influence how you see yours?
- Does the way the other characters view the individual's disability, influence how you see yours?
- Did the character/story inspire you?
- What do you feel when you see this character?

Do you think these shows influence how others see you?

- What emotions do the characters show toward the individual with the disability?
 - Inspiration/Amazement
 - Pity
 - Fear
 - Hatred
- How do you think these representations influence how viewers treat people with disabilities?

4. Resisting the Dominant Narrative

- How do these shows/films accurately represent your experience of disability?
- What would you like able-bodied viewers to know about these television shows and films?
- What would you like the producers, creators, and actors to know about their work?
- What would you like to tell the readers about life with a disability?
- How can social workers better support youth with disabilities, who feel the impact of these media representations?

5. Concluding Remarks

Thank you again for your participation in this study. I appreciate that you took the time to speak with me and tell me your story. Is there anything else you would like to add to the discussion that we have not already talked about? Do you have any questions or concerns with our interview?

As stated in the consent/assent form that you signed, I would be happy to share my research findings with you once I have finished the study. I have provided my contact information with you for this purpose. Thank you again for sharing your time and knowledge with me.

APPENDIX D



SCHOOL OF SOCIAL WORK
FACULTY OF COMMUNITY SERVICES
Accredited by the Canadian Association of Schools of Social Work

Ryerson University Consent Agreement

You are being invited to participate in a research study. Please read this consent form so that you understand what your participation will involve. Before you consent to participate, please ask any questions to be sure you understand what your participation will involve.

SEEKING TRUTHS: ABLEIST MEDIA REPRESENTATIONS AND TORONTO'S YOUTH

INVESTIGATORS:

This research study is being conducted by Kendra Belle, supervised by Dr. Samantha Wehbi, from the School of Social Work at Ryerson University.

If you have any questions or concerns about the research, please feel free to contact Kendra Belle at kendra.belle@ryerson.ca or Samantha Wehbi at swehbi@ryerson.ca.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY:

This study is designed to examine how youth living with disabilities in the Greater Toronto Area feel their self-esteem has been impacted by ableist portrayals of disability in media. For the purpose of this study, self-esteem is defined as how someone feels about themselves, and ableism is defined as the discrimination and oppression that people with disabilities experience in society. Furthermore, in the context of this study, an ableist portrayal in media is considered to be any representation of disability in television and film, that participants feel contributes to the discrimination, exclusion, and oppression of people with disabilities.

To be eligible to participate in this study, you must be between the ages of 16 – 25 years old, identify as having a visible or hidden disability and live within the Greater Toronto Area. You must also consent to be in the study or have assented and received your guardian's consent. 3-4 participants will be interviewed for this study. This research study is being conducted by a graduate student as part of a Major Research Paper in partial completion of their degree requirement and has been approved by the Ryerson Research Ethics Board - REB file number (2018-480).

WHAT YOU WILL BE ASKED TO DO:

If you wish to participate in this study, you will be asked to:

- Share your experience as an individual living with a disability in the Greater Toronto Area. This will be done in a one-to-one interview with the researcher that is two hours in length. Please note that this interview will be audio recorded.
- The researcher will be looking for specific stories on your experience as a consumer of film and television shows that portray characters with disabilities, and how these experiences have influenced how you see and feel about yourself as a person with a disability.

Example of interview Questions:

1. Which television shows or films do you watch contain characters with disabilities?
2. Do you consider these characters to be a positive and accurate representation of people with disabilities? Why or why not?
3. Can you please tell me any stories in which you felt that a negative representation of disability in film or television, has impacted how you felt about yourself as a person with a disability?

Duration and Location:

- Please expect the interview to last two hours in length.
- The interview will take place at Ryerson University Library or Student Learning Centre (SLC). A private meeting room will be reserved at the library or SLC to ensure privacy.
- The researcher is open to conducting the interview at alternate quite public meeting locations (i.e. local coffee shop, community centre, or library); as long as this guarantees your privacy.

Demographics and Research Findings:

- The researcher will need to know your name and age. You can also disclose the type of disability you identify as having if you would like to do so.
- Research findings will be made available to all participants. The research findings can be e-mailed by the researcher or picked up in person by the participant. For the purpose of convenience, participants can also download and view a copy of the research findings from the Ryerson Digital Repository at: <https://digital.library.ryerson.ca>

POTENTIAL BENEFITS

Your true lived experiences can be an act of resistance against the stereotypical representations of disability that we see in the media. While participation in this study will not change this issue on a large scale, it has the potential to better the reader's understanding of disability using true perspectives. Thus, potential benefits include the positive feeling of sharing a personal experience that will contribute to the growing understanding of disability. Furthermore,

the research findings may help create discussions around improving social work supports for youth with disabilities living within the Greater Toronto Area. Please note that despite these possibilities this researcher cannot guarantee that you will receive any personal benefits from participating in this study.

WHAT ARE THE POTENTIAL RISKS TO YOU AS A PARTICIPANT:

The risk of participating in this study is very low. You may experience some discomfort when asked certain questions regarding your experiences of media and its impact on your self-esteem. Some participants may find that answering these kinds of questions can cause feelings of discomfort, and are therefore encouraged to take breaks, skip questions, or stop participation (either temporarily or permanently) if they wish to do so. To minimize this risk, resources to help you deal with stressful emotions will be provided at the interview.

This research study also presents the potential for minimal social risk. As a participant, you will be asked to share stories of your experiences. These stories may contain people (i.e. your family and friends), places, and events that are recognizable to a reader. As a result, the reader may be able to deduce your identity and therefore your diagnosis through your story. This could lead to potential loss of privacy and embarrassment (especially if you are very private about your disability). To minimize the risk of this happening the researcher will be providing participants with pseudonyms and changing the names of identifiable people and locations in their stories. Thus, reducing the likelihood that you will be identified.

CONFIDENTIALITY AND DATA STORAGE:

This researcher will use extensive measures to protect your identity in this study. While this researcher would like you to provide your name during the interview process, a pseudonym (fake name) will be assigned to you in the published material of this research project. Personal information including your birth date or address will not be recorded.

The only individual to have access to your information will be the researcher. If this researcher requires guidance from the supervisor of this project, this researcher will provide ONLY excerpts of the transcripts (with no identifying information) to their supervisor. Information will not be made accessible to any other parties.

To ensure your stories are accurately portrayed in this project, your interview will be audio recorded. This recording will be done using an audio recorder, which will be stored in a locked box in the researcher's room. Only the researcher will have access to both the key of the box, and the key of the room. The audio recording will then be transferred to the researcher's private password protected computer and will be deleted from the audio recorder immediately upon transfer to the computer.

Once the audio file of your interview has been transcribed, you will have the opportunity to review and edit the transcript. The researcher will e-mail the transcript to you in a word document. You will have the opportunity to review the transcript and inform me of any changes you would like me to make. I will then make these changes and provide you with a copy of the edited transcript. Once you verify that you are happy with the transcript, the audio file of your interview will be immediately deleted from the researcher's computer. Please note that transcripts and participant email lists will be password protected and stored on the researcher's computer. Both the transcript

and the e-mail list will be destroyed in late August 2019. Finally, signed consent forms will be stored in a locked box at the researcher's home, and will be shredded one year after the completion of this project.

INCENTIVES FOR PARTICIPATION:

The incentive to participate in the study includes a \$10 gift card to either Starbucks, Tim Horton's, or McDonald's. Participants can specify (out of these three options), which store they would like their gift card for when scheduling their interview with the researcher. Gift cards will be provided at the beginning of the interview. If the participant chooses to withdraw their participation during the interview, they will still receive the gift card incentive.

COSTS OF PARTICIPATION:

All participants will be given two TTC tokens as reimbursement for their travel cost. Other costs of participation such as parking and gas will not be reimbursed.

PARTICIPATION AND WITHDRAWAL:

Participation in this study is your choice. You can choose whether to be in this study or not. If any question makes you uncomfortable, you can skip that question. You may stop participating at any time and you will still receive the incentives and reimbursements described above. If you choose to stop participating you may also choose to not have your data included in the study; please inform me of this choice by May 1, 2019. If you choose to not have your data included in the study and have informed the researcher of your choice, your data will be deleted immediately. Your choice of whether or not to participate will not influence your future relations with Ryerson University or the investigator Kendra Belle involved in the research.

QUESTIONS ABOUT THE STUDY:

If you have any questions about the research now, please ask. If you have questions later about the research, you may contact:

Kendra Belle
MSW Candidate at Ryerson University
kendra.belle@ryerson.ca

Samantha Wehbi
MRP Supervisor
swehbi@ryerson.ca

This study has been reviewed by the Ryerson University Research Ethics Board (REB file number 2018-480). If you have questions regarding your rights as a participant in this study, please contact:

Research Ethics Board
c/o Office of the Vice President, Research and Innovation Ryerson University
350 Victoria Street
Toronto, ON M5B 2K3
416-979-5042
rebchair@ryerson.ca

SEEKING THE TRUTH: ABLEIST MEDIA REPRESENTATIONS AND TORONTO'S YOUTH

CONFIRMATION OF AGREEMENT:

Your signature below indicates that you have read the information in this agreement and have had a chance to ask any questions you have about the study. Your signature also indicates that you agree to participate in the study and have been told that you can change your mind and withdraw your consent to participate at any time. You have been given a copy of this agreement. You have been told that by signing this consent agreement you are not giving up any of your legal rights.

Name of Participant (please print)

Signature of Participant

Date

I agree to be audio-recorded for the purposes of this study. I understand how these recordings will be stored and destroyed.

Signature of Participant

Date

APPENDIX E



SCHOOL OF SOCIAL WORK
FACULTY OF COMMUNITY SERVICES
Accredited by the Canadian Association of Schools of Social Work

Ryerson University Assent Agreement

You are being invited to participate in a research study. Please read this assent form so that you understand what you will be asked to do. Before you agree to participate, please ask any questions to be sure you understand what your participation will involve.

SEEKING TRUTHS: ABLEIST MEDIA REPRESENTATIONS AND TORONTO'S YOUTH

INVESTIGATORS:

This research study is being conducted by Kendra Belle, supervised by Dr. Samantha Wehbi, from the School of Social Work, at Ryerson University.

If you have any questions or concerns about the research, please contact Kendra Belle at kendra.belle@ryerson.ca or Samantha Wehbi at swehbi@ryerson.ca.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY:

This study looks at how you think negative examples of disability in media have influenced how you see yourself as a person with a disability. For this study, a negative example of disability in media can be any television show or film that you watch, that shows disability in a way that you feel causes the audience to have an incorrect, unfair, or hurtful understanding of what it's like to be a person living with a disability.

To be able to participate in this study, you must be between the ages of 16 – 25 years old, see yourself as someone who has a noticeable or hidden disability and lives within the Greater Toronto Area. You must also consent (agree) to be in the study or have assented (agreed) and received your guardian's consent (permission for you to participate). 3-4 participants will be interviewed for this study. This research study is being conducted by a graduate student as part of a Major Research Paper, as part of their degree requirement.

WHAT YOU WILL BE ASKED TO DO:

If you wish to participate in this study, you will be asked to:

- Share your experience as an individual living with a disability in the Greater Toronto Area (Toronto, Durham, Halton, York & Peel Region). This will be done in a one-to-one interview with the researcher.
- This interview will be two hours long and will be audio recorded.
- The researcher will be looking for stories on your experience as a viewer of film and television shows that have characters with disabilities, and how these shows make you feel about yourself as a person with a disability.

Example of interview Questions:

4. Which television shows or films do you watch that have characters with disabilities?
5. How do these characters see their disability?
6. How do other characters see disability?
7. Can you please tell me any stories in which you felt that a negative example of disability in film or television, has influenced how you felt about yourself as a person with a disability?

Duration and Location:

- You will be asked to speak with the researcher in an interview that will last two hours in length.
- The researcher will book a private meeting room at the Ryerson library or Student Learning Centre (SLC) for the interview.
- Only you and the researcher will be in the room at the time of the interview. However, you may have a parent or guardian present if you wish.
- If you are not able to come to the SLC/Ryerson Library or are not comfortable with that interview location, the researcher can do the interview at a public location of your choice (i.e. local coffee shop, community centre, or library).

Demographics and Research Findings:

- The researcher will need to know your name and age.
- If you wish too, you can tell the researcher the type of disability you identify as having. However, it is your choice whether or not you provide this information.
- Research findings (results of the research) will be made available to you after you participate. You may pick these findings up in person, or the researcher can e-mail them to you. You may also access the research findings online at: <https://digital.library.ryerson.ca/>

POTENTIAL BENEFITS

Telling your stories can help challenge the negative examples of disability in film and television. While your participation will not change the issue, it may help the readers of this research to better understand disability in a more truthful way. Potential benefits to participating include the positive feeling of sharing a personal experience that will add to our growing understanding of disability. Furthermore, the research may help create discussions around improving supports for youth with disabilities living within the Greater Toronto Area. Please note that despite these possibilities this researcher cannot promise that you will receive any personal benefits from participating in this study.

WHAT ARE THE POTENTIAL RISKS TO YOU AS A PARTICIPANT:

The risk of participating in this study is very low. You may feel uncomfortable when asked certain questions regarding media and how it makes you feel. Therefore, you may take breaks, skip questions, or stop participation (either temporarily or permanently) if you wish to do so. Resources to help you deal with stressful emotions will be provided at the interview. This research study also presents the potential for minimal social risk. As a participant, you will be asked to share stories. These stories may include people other than yourself, for example, your family and friends, or even places and events that are recognizable to a reader. As a result, the reader may be able to tell your identity and therefore your diagnosis (the type of disability) through your story. This could lead to loss of privacy and embarrassment, especially if you are someone who likes to keep your diagnosis to yourself. To reduce the risk of this happening the researcher will be changing your name and the names of identifiable people and locations in your story. Thus, making it harder for the reader to identify you.

CONFIDENTIALITY AND DATA STORAGE:

This researcher will try her best to protect your identity in this study. While this researcher would like you to provide your name during the interview process, a pseudonym (fake name) will be given to you in the published material of this research project.

The only individual to have access to your information will be the researcher. If this researcher requires guidance from the supervisor of this project, this researcher will provide ONLY the necessary excerpts of the transcripts (what was said in the interview with no identifying information) to their supervisor. Information will not be given to any other person.

To ensure your stories are told correctly by the researcher, your interview will be audio recorded. This recording will be done using an audio recorder, which will be stored in a locked box in the researcher's room. Only the researcher will have access to both the key of the box, and the key of the room. The audio recording will then be moved to the researcher's private password protected computer. Upon moving the recording to the computer, the recording on the audio recorder will be deleted immediately.

Once the audio recording of your interview has been transcribed (written out), you will have the opportunity to review and edit the transcript. The researcher will e-mail the transcript to you in a word document. You will then be able to review the transcript and let the researcher know what changes you would like made. The researcher will then make these changes and provide you with a copy of the edited transcript. Once you have confirmed with the researcher that you are okay with the transcript, the researcher will immediately delete the audio recording of your interview from their computer. Please note that both the transcript and the e-mail list will be destroyed in late August 2019. Transcripts and participant email lists will be password protected and stored on the researcher's computer. Finally, signed consent forms will be stored in a locked box at the researcher's home, and will be shredded one year after the completion of this project.

INCENTIVES FOR PARTICIPATION:

As a thank-you for participating in this study the researcher will give you a \$10 gift card to either Starbucks, Tim Horton's, or McDonald's. You can choose (out of these three options), which store you

would like your gift card for when you schedule your interview with the researcher. You will receive your gift card at the beginning of the interview. Please note, that if you choose to stop your participation during the interview, you will still receive the gift card as a thank-you for your time.

COSTS OF PARTICIPATION:

All participants will be given two TTC tokens as repayment for their travel cost. Other costs of participation such as parking and gas will not be reimbursed.

PARTICIPATION AND WITHDRAWAL:

Participation in this study is your choice. You can choose whether to be in this study or not. If any question makes you uncomfortable, you can skip that question. You may stop participating at any time and you will still be given the gift card and TTC tokens discussed above. If you choose to stop participating, you may also choose to not have your data included in the study; please inform me of this choice by May 1, 2019. Your choice of whether or not to participate will not influence your future relations with Ryerson University or the investigator Kendra Belle involved in the research.

HOW TO WITHDRAW PARTICIPATION:

You may let the researcher know of your choice to stop participation by communicating in verbal or written form by May 1, 2019. Once the researcher has been informed of your choice to stop participation, all data collected on you will be deleted immediately. You may speak to the researcher directly or have a parent/guardian do so on your behalf if you wish. Contact information to reach the researcher is provided below.

QUESTIONS ABOUT THE STUDY:

If you have any questions about the research now, please ask. If you have questions later about the research, you may contact:

Kendra Belle
MSW Candidate at Ryerson University
kendra.belle@ryerson.ca

Samantha Wehbi
MRP Supervisor
swehbi@ryerson.ca

This study has been reviewed by the Ryerson University Research Ethics Board (REB file number 2018-480). If you have questions regarding your rights as a participant in this study, please contact:

Research Ethics Board
c/o Office of the Vice President, Research and Innovation Ryerson University
350 Victoria Street
Toronto, ON M5B 2K3

416-979-5042
rebchair@ryerson.ca

SEEKING THE TRUTH: ABLEIST MEDIA REPRESENTATIONS AND TORONTO'S YOUTH

CONFIRMATION OF AGREEMENT:

Your signature below indicates that you have read the information in this agreement and have had a chance to ask any questions you have about the study. Your signature also indicates that you agree to participate in the study and have been told that you can change your mind and withdraw your assent to participate at any time. You have been given a copy of this agreement. You have been told that by signing this assent agreement you are not giving up any of your legal rights.

Name of Participant (please print)

Signature of Participant

Date

I agree to be audio-recorded for the purposes of this study. I understand how these recordings will be stored and destroyed.

Signature of Participant

Date

APPENDIX F



To: Kendra Belle Social Work

Re: REB 2018-480: SEEKING TRUTHS: ABLEIST MEDIA REPRESENTATIONS AND TORONTO'S YOUTH

Date: February 8, 2019

Dear Kendra Belle,

The review of your protocol REB File REB 2018-480 is now complete. The project has been approved for a one year period. Please note that before proceeding with your project, compliance with other required University approvals/certifications, institutional requirements, or governmental authorizations may be required.

This approval may be extended after one year upon request. Please be advised that if the project is not renewed, approval will expire and no more research involving humans may take place. If this is a funded project, access to research funds may also be affected.

Please note that REB approval policies require that you adhere strictly to the protocol as last reviewed by the REB and that any modifications must be approved by the Board before they can be implemented. Adverse or unexpected events must be reported to the REB as soon as possible with an indication from the Principal Investigator as to how, in the view of the Principal Investigator, these events affect the continuation of the protocol.

Finally, if research subjects are in the care of a health facility, at a school, or other institution or community organization, it is the responsibility of the Principal Investigator to ensure that the ethical guidelines and approvals of those facilities or institutions are obtained and filed with the REB prior to the initiation of any research.

Please quote your REB file number (REB 2018-480) on future correspondence. Congratulations and best of luck in conducting your research.

Dr. Patrizia Albanese, PhD
Chair, Ryerson University Research Ethics Board



The Following protocol attachments have been reviewed and approved.

Belle_Kendra_MRP Flyer-Ethics DEC 2018.docx (submitted on: 07 Feb 2019)
FEB 7 2019 Ethics Recruitment E-mail Belle_Kendra .docx (submitted on: 07 Feb 2019) FEB 7
2019 Assent Agreement Ethics Belle_Kendra.docx (submitted on: 07 Feb 2019)
Belle_Kendra_Interview Guide MRP-Ethics DEC 2018.docx (submitted on: 07 Feb 2019) FEB 7
2019 Ethics Flyer Belle_Kendra.docx (submitted on: 07 Feb 2019)
Belle_Kendra_MRP Consent Agreement - Ethics DEC 2018.docx (submitted on: 07 Feb 2019)
FEB 7 2019 Mental Health Resources Ethics Belle_Kendra.docx (submitted on: 07 Feb 2019)
Belle_Kendra Recruitment E-mail MRP - Ethics DEC 2018.docx (submitted on: 07 Feb 2019)
Belle_Kendra_Assent Agreement Final Ethics DEC 2018.docx (submitted on: 07 Feb 2019)
Belle_Kendra Mental Health Resources Ethics DEC 2018.docx (submitted on: 07 Feb 2019)
FEB 7 2019 Interview Guide MRP-Ethics Belle_Kendra.docx (submitted on: 07 Feb 2019)
FEB 7 2019 Consent Agreement - Ethics Kendra_Belle.docx (submitted on: 07 Feb 2019) FEB 7
2019 Comments to Chair.docx (submitted on: 07 Feb 2019)

If any changes are made to the attached document throughout the course of the research, an amendment MUST be submitted to, and subsequently approved by the REB.

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