UNEXPECTED JOURNEYS: THE PROFESSIONAL IDENTITY DEVELOPMENT OF CANADIAN ACCESSIBILITY ADVISORS

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Abstract

Through examining nine Accessibility Advisors' (AAs) stories of becoming professionals in their field, this study provides an important entry point into understanding the individuals whose work is central to supporting students with disabilities within Canadian research-intensive post-secondary institutions. AAs function as Third Space professionals, whose work straddles the academic/non-academic binary. Using a narrative interview prompt, the respondents describe an unplanned, but formative, journey that led to a committed career in disability advising. The analysis focuses on how respondents consciously and selectively create meaning between experiences using a three-dimensional analysis which examines temporality, sociability, and spatiality within narratives. The AAs' construction of their professional identities provides a lens through which to view how post-secondary disability support is tied to the medicalization of disability and advisors' acknowledgement of the social construction of disability. This study articulates how AAs are socialized to understand the value of the accommodations process, and how situating their work is neither faculty- nor student-aligned.
Keywords: Accessibility Advisors, professional identity, post-secondary education, narrative inquiry.

Résumé

En examinant les histoires de neuf conseillers en accessibilité (CA) qui sont devenus des professionnels dans leur domaine, cette étude fournit un point d'entrée important pour comprendre ces individus dont le travail est essentiel pour soutenir les étudiants en situation de handicap dans les universités de recherche. Les CA fonctionnent comme des professionnels du tiers-lieu, dont le travail se situe à cheval entre le monde universitaire et le monde extérieur. Dans le contexte d'une entrevue narrative, les répondants ont décrit un parcours non planifié, mais formateur, qui les a menés à une carrière engagée dans le domaine de l'aide aux personnes en situation de handicap. L'analyse se concentre sur la manière dont les répondants, consciemment et sélectivement, créent du sens, en utilisant une analyse tridimensionnelle qui examine la temporalité, la sociabilité et la spatialité dans leurs récits. La construction des identités professionnelles des CA permet de comprendre comment le soutien aux personnes en situation de handicap dans les établissements d'enseignement postsecondaires est lié à la médicalisation du handicap et à la reconnaissance de la construction sociale du handicap par les CA. Cette étude montre comment les CA sont socialisés pour comprendre la valeur du processus d'accommodement, et comment leur travail n'est pas aligné sur les intérêts particuliers du corps professoral ou des étudiants.
Mots-clés : conseillers en accessibilité, identité professionnelle, éducation postsecondaire, enquête narrative

INTRODUCTION

As Canadian post-secondary institutions acknowledge their role in ensuring education is equitable, diverse, and inclusive, there is a renewed interest in the effectiveness of supports for marginalized students, including students with disabilities (Tamtik & Guenter, 2020). The efficacy of current approaches to disability support through accommodations has been questioned, as student experience surveys as well as statistical comparisons suggest many students with disabilities do not seek out accommodations (Cole & Cawthon, 2015; Marquis et al., 2016). Before any evaluation of current policy and approaches to disability support, a study of the role of Accessibility Advisors (AAs) informed by their experiences facilitating access in post-secondary education is needed. Despite their central role in the support of students with disabilities in post-secondary institutions, AAs are largely absent from current literature on post-secondary support for students with disabilities. AA work involves supporting students and collaborating with faculty while being guided by institutional policies and human rights legislation. By understanding the professional identity development of AAs, this study offers a unique perspective on the post-secondary approach to addressing the needs of students with disabilities. The socialization of individuals into their profession interconnects the needs of students, the concerns of faculty, and the policy that guides their work. Examining AAs narratives of becoming professionals provides insights into the challenges of working within institutions with embedded ableism. As a result, this study articulates how AAs acknowledge the complexity and complicity of the role, the limitations of policy, and ever-changing student needs. Moreover, looking at AAs' professional identities helps to identify how they understand the accommodation process and how they are socialized to understand the value of this model.

LITERATURE REVIEW

AAs are an example of Third Space professionals. The concept of Third Space professionals refers to the increasing complexity of staff groups in post-secondary institutions, highlighting the inadequacy of the academic/non-academic binary (Whitchurch, 2012). Third Space professionals include staff whose work crosses disciplinary and organizational domains, sometimes referred to as "borderless" (Middlehurst, 2009). In this way, Third Space professionals are in a state of liminality, as their contributions are not fully articulated by position titles, job descriptions, or work outputs. AAs, in the academic literature, are typically associated with the one output of their work: accommodations. However, this focus on the accommodation facet does not account for the complexity of their work.

Identity construction is a common theme within the scholarship on Third Space professionals (Kensington-Miller et al., 2015; Simmons et al., 2013; Veles et al., 2019). Because of the domain-crossing nature of Third Space work, identity formation does not occur through the same socialization as it does in non-liminal roles. Veles and colleagues (2019) define Third Space professionals through active-driven work that requires collaboration across boundaries. A variety of roles have been examined through the lens of Third Space professionals: research administrators (Collinson, 2006), academic or writing coaches (Hughes et al., 2021; Zurhellen & Karaus, 2023), and educational developers or researchers (Simmons et al., 2013; Smith et al., 2021). Studies of Third Space identity development often seek to understand how staff reconcile conflicting values between areas and disciplines of work. As AAs, staff are both identified as enacting of institutional policy as well as resources to support students.

Current research on students with disabilities in a post-secondary environment focuses on either the perspectives of students or faculty members (Kain et al., 2019; Newman et al., 2019; Sokal, 2016; Squires & Countermine, 2018), or is a macro-scale evaluation of the institutional policies related to disability (Bruce, 2020; Dolmage, 2017). These approaches highlight the entrenched ableism within post-secondary institutions and their impact on marginalized learners. Limited references to AAs emerge in the literature; when AAs emerge, they appear in

reference to the output of their work: accommodations. In other words, AAs are often assumed to be instruments of institutional policy and human rights legislation, rather than agents that contribute to the disruption of ableism.

In the literature on students with disabilities, AAs appear in student comments on the accommodation experience (Aquino & Bittinger, 2019; Kain et al., 2019; Kutscher & Tuckwiller, 2019; Lambert & Dryer, 2018). For example, Hong (2015) presents student experiences with AAs as a subtheme in her review, in which AAs are described as intimidating and unhelpful. Similarly, Toutain (2019) embeds students' comments about AAs within a subtheme about receiving accommodations. Both works refer to AAs in terms of student challenges with the assessment and documentation requirements, equating AAs with institutional policies.

From a faculty perspective, references to AAs are also synonymous with accommodations. Various articles critique the accommodation model, often expressing concerns about how faculty can effectively support students without understanding student-specific disability challenges (Barfield et al., 2007; Nolan et al., 2015). Other critiques highlight the generic nature of accommodations. For example, Hsiao and colleagues (2018) critique the effectiveness of accommodations because AAs lack disciplinary-specific knowledge. Only Bulk and colleagues (2017) acknowledge AA work as challenging, embedded as it is within ableist practices. They recognized that AAs articulate the barriers in traditional teaching practices—a first step to identifying ableism with post-secondary andragogy.

Critiques of institutional accommodation policies and processes do not refer to accessibility advisors, rather to the Disability Support Offices (DSOs) that they work within (Hutcheon & Wolbring, 2012; Marquis et al., 2016; McKenzie, 2015; Squires & Countermine, 2018). As a result, AAs' work is described as an institutional response to a legal threat (Dolmage, 2017), which uses accommodations as the primary protection from disability-related human rights complaints. Bruce (2020) highlights how the accommodation process, based on values of independence and self-advocacy, places students in perpetual precariousness. This literature critiques the accommodation process as reaffirming normality and marks those with disabilities as inherently other. By associating AAs with accommodations, these studies overlook their potential agency as Third Space professionals.

Few works reviewed in this study engaged with disability staff directly in their research (Evans et al., 2018; Guzman & Balcazar, 2010; Miller et al., 2019). Only one study, Miller and colleagues (2019), examined the current accommodation process by consulting the staff, finding that accommodations are typically evaluated by one staff member within an office. This finding suggests the importance of AAs as the sole individuals involved in issuing accommodations. In promoting social justice work, Evans and colleagues (2018) noted the complexity of AA work, acknowledging both the breadth of contexts (academic and non-academic) and student needs. Unlike the scholarship that associated AAs with accommodations, this text describes an advocacy role for AA staff, challenging the institution and campus climate to move beyond legal ramifications and look at creating spaces of diversity and inclusion. Guzman and Balcazar (2010) engaged with a variety of DSO staff (including AAs) in an attempt to understand the perspective of disability staff. They found that AAs held a dual perspective on disability, working in a system based on the medical model of disability while simultaneously holding beliefs that disability is socially constructed. Limited by a survey with closed responses, Guzman and Balcazar's study suggests that AA work is more nuanced than implied by the research that equates AAs with their product of their work, accommodation. Holding both medical and social models of disability aligns with the liminal nature of Third Space professionals, who often reconcile conflicting values from different disciplines or domains.

By considering AAs as Third Space professionals, this study challenges the assumption that AA experiences are represented by the product of their work, accommodations. This article focuses on how AA professional identity formation contributes to understanding how

these professionals navigate between people and policy. Specifically, the article focuses on identity formation of AAs working in research-intensive universities in Canada. Understanding how AAs create a professional identity provides insights into the experiences that shaped their socialization into the field of academic disability services and the meaning they make from their actions. Through stories of their socialization, the article highlights the strengths of Third Space professionals' liminality. It emphasizes how AAs come to understand their role as both working within the existing system while acknowledging the limitations of the existing system for supporting students with disabilities.

METHODOLOGY

This article uses data collected as part of a larger study that interviewed nine Accessibility Advisors. Advisors were recruited from English-speaking Canadian universities from the U15, a group of Canadian, research-focused, post-secondary institutions, for a narrative inquiry into their professional identity development. The study received ethics approval (REB20-1943) from the author's institutions. The study also followed each U15 institution's research ethics requirements for recruiting staff. A narrative-based approach allows for in-depth and detailed reflection from each respondent and is commonly used to study professional identity (Bloom et al., 2020; Kasperiuniene & Zydziunaite, 2019; Swennen et al., 2010).

Participants

Nine advisors participated in the study, each completing a survey, narrative interview, and semi-structured interview. Six advisors came from Prairies-based institutions (Alberta, Saskatchewan, and Manitoba) and three from central-based organizations (Ontario and Quebec). They all work for organizations with more than 1,000 students registered with their disability offices. The participants had a minimum of one year of work experience as an Accessibility Advisor, with several having over 10 years' experience in the position. Seven participants held or were actively working toward a master's degree. All participants had completed an undergraduate degree.

Instruments

Three instruments were used in the data collection: survey, narrative interview, and semi-structured interview. The survey ensured that interested participants met the sample requirements—participants reviewed a medical practitioner's assessment of disability and determined academic accommodation for students. The survey also allowed for demographic information from participants outside the narrative interaction, reducing how these questions impacted the narratives presented.

The narrative interview, the focus of this article, used a prompt based on life story–style questions (Atkinson, 1998; Kim, 2016; Levitan et al., 2019; Valeras, 2010). Each participant was asked: *Imagine that someone was writing a profile piece regarding your career as an Accessibility Advisor. What would they include in this biography? Where would they start?* The prompt was open-ended to encourage the participant to talk without interruption for as long as they wanted (Atkinson, 1998). This approach emphasizes the meanings made by participants and does not guide the participant to include experiences. The prompt also used a setup that indicates the larger story structure (Hoyer & Steyaert, 2015).

A follow-up semi-structured interview occurred on a different date from the narrative interview because semi-structured interviews can stifle narrative production (Benwell & Stokoe, 2006). The follow-up semi-structured interview was included to allow participants to reflect on their previous narrative. After a story summary of the narrative, participants were asked to identify any missing elements, clarifications, or concerns. The interview also provided the participants with a chance to identify any elements or references that would identify them.

Procedure

Advisors at all English-speaking U15 schools were invited to participate in the study by an email recruitment message that linked to an introductory 11-question survey. Participants were recruited through an email invitation. When AAs' emails were unavailable, the invitation was sent to the general email for the DSO. Focusing on English-speaking members of the U15 group of Canadian, research-intensive universities provided a similar context for advisor work as well as reduced the risk of participant identification as these organizations have multiple advisors in their DSO. Within two weeks of completing the survey, the first of two interviews took place. The first was a narrative format interview (an unstructured interview with one prompt), which lasted 45–90 minutes. A follow-up semi-structured interview occurred at least two days, and at most two weeks, after the narrative interview. These interviews lasted between 15–45 minutes. All interviews were conducted in a private Zoom meeting with password protection. The audio of the interview was recorded and transcribed.

Data Analysis

This article focuses on the analysis of the first interview: the participants' responses to the life story prompt: *Imagine that someone was writing a profile piece regarding your career as an Accessibility Advisor. What would they include in this biography? Where would they start?* The participants' responses were treated as a story and analyzed as a whole (Polkinghorne, 1995). By looking at the whole, the analysis focused on how the respondents consciously and selectively created a becoming an access advisor story—a constructed narrative rather than a recollection of events. The data analysis followed the three-dimensional narrative inquiry space outlined by Clandinin and Connelly (2000), as well as used by Clandinin and colleagues (2007) and Estefan and colleagues (2016). The three-dimensional inquiry examines temporality, sociability, and spatiality within narratives.

Temporality: Organization of the Narrative

The first layer of analysis involved examining the temporality of the stories shared. It considers how the order of the events in a story is a tool for meaning-making. Past life experiences are not told solely chronologically, but are given new meaning through purposeful narrative structure (Clandinin & Caine, 2012). To conduct this analysis, an outline of the events was created based on the order of events that participants presented. Importance was given to beginnings, middles, and endings in the narrative construction (Polkinghorne, 1995).

Sociality: Meaning Constructed of Events

The next layer of analysis involved looking at the individual events within each stage of the narrative. The events were examined for how the participants attributed their impact or importance (Clandinin et al., 2007); in other words, how participants connected events to professional outcomes or insights.

Spatiality: Context in Which Events Occur

Lastly, each narrative was considered for the story's context and the spaces referred to in the story (Clandinin et al., 2007). These spaces are sites of practice where the narrative meaning is constructed and situated (Bamberg, 2008), including physical environments, organization, and institutions. After identifying the sites of practice referred to in the narrative, the analysis connects these sites to the events that occurred within.

FINDINGS

The AAs' responses to the prompt described an unplanned journey, rather than a planned career path, toward their work in post-secondary disability services. This journey is visually described in Figure 1.

This diagram synthesizes the common chronology, events, and context used in respondents' narratives. The diagram provides a visual representation of the temporal, social, and spatial analysis of the narratives. The narratives of all participants started by recounting the events in sequential order up to applying for and obtaining an AA role. The narratives included a beginning (prior experiences), a middle point (getting an AA role), and an ending (becoming a professional). Within each stage of the narrative, participants identified events and reflected on these events as a form of preparation for the AA role. At each stage of the stories, the participant situated the events in larger contexts or spaces, shaping the interpretation of the events. Representative quotes for each element are available in Appendix A.

Prior Experiences: The Beginning

Each participant started their narrative at a point before getting the Accessibility Advisor position. Often, these starting points occurred before participants were aware of accessibility advising as a profession.

Educational Experiences

Most participants started their narratives by recounting a series of chronological events leading up to their first job as an AA. Five participants started their stories by discussing their educational experiences. For example, Participant 2 commented, "Oh, I think in terms of where I would start, I think I would probably start shortly after I finished my master's." While the narratives often started with educational experiences, participants tended to minimize the connection between their educational background and AA work. They diminished this through phrasing like "I actually went to school for..." (Participant 6), or that you "don't go to school for this role" (Participant 1). None of the respondents noted that their education was directly tied to disability work; however, they included the value of this educational experience later when they were hired for the role.

Figure 1
Event Analysis: An Unplanned Journey
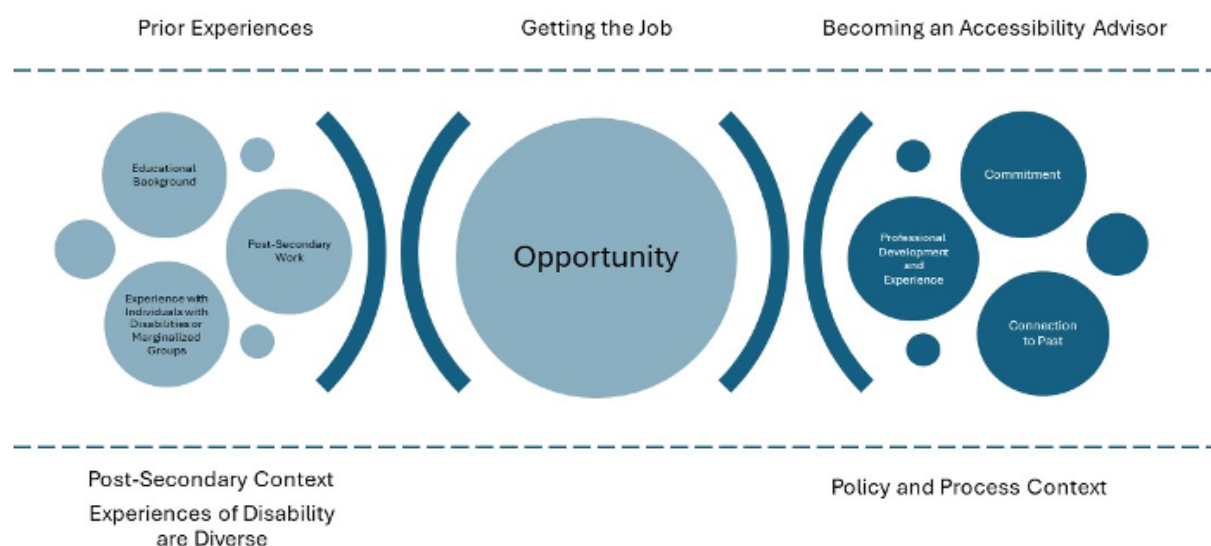
Post-Secondary Work Experience

Two participants started their narrative by mentioning their previous experience working in a post-secondary institution. This work experience led to both participants deciding to get an undergraduate degree as adult learners. As such, they began their narrative with their first work experience at a post-secondary institution. Participant 5 described the process as "then I started learning about all sorts of stuff and I started my education course-by-course while I worked full-time."

Post-secondary context. Underlining both the post-secondary work and educational experiences is the educational institution as a place, or spatial context of the narrative. In this way, seven of the narratives evoke their future post-secondary work environment by situating the start of their story there. This emphasis on post-secondary experiences suggests that respondents attempted to set up this context early in the narrative because they would later return to this context and location. The emphasis on their credentials at the start of the narrative, particularly by those with a graduate-level degree, highlights how Third Space professionals (not academic or administrative staff) need to emphasize their degrees to obtain cultural capital within these academic environments.

Working with Individuals with Disabilities or Marginalized Groups

Another common event included by participants was previous experience working with individuals with disabilities or other marginalized groups. In particular, five participants highlighted that these work experiences were often transitional or supplementary jobs rather than those selected for career building. However, their narratives (as a reflection) create these experiences with their awareness of disability. For example, Participant 1 began working with people with intellectual disabilities part-time, then autistic adults, which sparked "an interest in that world."
Seven participants noted how their interest in the area of disability support increased as they learned more about the field. Often this education and learning was not the product of direct study, but rather a byproduct of this employment. One respondent noted that they learned about the challenges of students with learning disabilities by answering the phone at a local organization. Another worked in an office where students with disabilities went for support and learned through casual conversation with the students as they waited. Two respondents, both having a social work background, did not situate their prior work experience within the scope of disability. Rather, these two respondents noted their work with marginalized groups and, more specifically, individuals with mental health challenges. In this way, they identify marginalization rather than disability as a key feature of their experiences.

Experiences of disability are diverse. Underlying the events associated with disability, all the respondents noted ideas of difference and otherness. When describing their experiences with individuals with disabilities, several advisors demonstrated actively reflecting on the word "disability." This ranged from referring to discursive models of disability (medical or social) to noting that individuals may not use this word to identify themselves. Throughout this discussion, the respondents' comments challenged the homogeneity of disability. For example, respondents used words like "exploring" disability (Participant 3) or placed "quotation marks" around the word "disability" (Participant 5). These approaches frame disability as contextual, rather than a fixed marker of identity.

Opportunity/Getting the Job: The Middle

A key shift in how the respondents explained their stories occurred as they described the specific details of their employment. Eight of the nine respondents emphasized the circumstances that resulted in their hiring, as they had not thought about the AA role before applying for their position. Two respondents applied for the role during a transitional period after the completion of their graduate degrees when they were searching for employment. These respondents stressed the importance of the job's location in the city in which they were currently living.

For example, Participant 1 noted that "I kind of snuck in on a mat leave…[when] home from grad school." Three other respondents moved into advising roles through other disability-support roles. Starting with casual or contract work, the respondents commented that they happened to be around when new positions were created, or new funding was available. This discussion of opportunity emphasizes the unplanned nature of the respondents' entrance into an AA role, but also how the respondents were prepared to act when a position was available. As Participant 4 notes, "Originally, I thought of it as very luck-based, but I would say it's more opportunistic…. I think that there's an active role to play there as well."

Becoming an Accessibility Advisor: The Ending

After getting the role, all the respondents highlighted a series of professional experiences and training that they received and sought out. These experiences were key to shaping their confidence in the role. These experiences also present a shift from viewing the role as temporary to viewing it as a career. This is particularly prominent in the stories of advisors who have been in the role for over five years. It is in this section of the narrative that the advisors highlight the sociality of their work as they express their commitment to the work and add further meaning to the experiences that were previously presented temporally.

Professional Development and Experience

While the participants tended to minimize the value of their formal post-secondary education (except for those with a social work background), they tended to stress the value of professional development and work experience in the field. Participant 1 summarized this in terms of educational credentials: "I've got a PhD-level knowledge of this job from PD [professional development], but I just haven't gone and got a PhD in…these areas." In other words, the variety of the work within the role means that "there was no real training manual or policy" (Participant 1).

However, it is through lived experience that AAs feel that they have a sense of themselves and their work.

Ongoing learning is also identified as appealing and a key feature of the role as a long-term career choice. The respondents describe the variation in the current position as informing their intention to stay in the role. None of the respondents mentioned any intention of leaving the position. All the respondents noted continuous learning or facing new situations frequently. Participant 6 described it as "every time you thought you had seen it all, you'd get something new…. This is a little bit of a stumper. I don't know what to do here. So, it kept you on your toes that way." These comments on growth and learning are consistent across participants' responses, regardless of their years of experience.

Respondents with over five years' experience as an AA highlighted that their roles, responsibilities, and titles have changed. As such, they reflected that they were able to progress in their career while still working as an AA: "Our profile has grown and continues to grow, so professionally I feel…fulfilled" (Participant 1). Participant 4 described the growth as, "little did I know there would be lots of opportunities that would present themselves and I would take on more, but there's a lot of growing you can do."

Policy and process context. The type of development and learning that is described by all advisors involved not only topics related to disability or their role, but also knowledge of the system and processes of the institution as a whole. As a result, respondents made a connection between this learning and how they work with students to navigate various systems. Underlying the discussion of learning what an AA role is, all the respondents situated these learning experiences within the context of legislation or organizational policy. They noted how they drew on the policy to inform their decision making, placing them in a neutral position between faculty and students. Their comments featured phrases like "a fine line" (Participant 8), "on everybody's side" (Participant 3), "a balance" (Participant 2), and "on the fence" (Participant 1).

Making Connections with the Past

At this point in the narratives, participants began to tie together what they organized temporally at the start of the narrative. They articulate these earlier experiences in terms of sociality by attributing new meaning to these early events in terms of preparation for their role. These summary sentences highlight the value of the journey that they described through the lens of their current work. Five respondents made this connection into a narrative end, including comments like "nicely married together" (Participant 4), "stuck with it and stayed with it" (Participant 6), and "feeling like all roads led here "(Participant 5).

DISCUSSION

Each participant noted the different routes that they all took to find themselves at the same destination. They highlighted the diversity of their background and education, which did not directly lead to a career in accessibility advising. However, they also highlighted the value of this experience and education as a tool for allowing them to work in a constantly changing environment. This comment directly counters concerns about the lack of standardized training and education for AAs, as suggested by Guzman and Balcazar (2010). Instead, respondents highlighted diverse education as well as prior professional and lived experiences as important to the overall success of Disability Support Offices. This diversity of experience is also addressed as supporting relationship-building. The importance of relationship-building for Third Space professionals has been discussed in previous studies (Stoltenkamp et al., 2017; Veles et al., 2019).

While the majority of the respondents had, or were in the process of obtaining, a graduate degree, only those with a social work background connected their degrees to their current professional practices. Rather, these educational requirements were described as important to the hiring institution. These comments highlight how graduate education constitutes a form of cultural capital within the post-secondary learning environment, aligning with the academic domain of post-secondary institutions. These findings are similar to other studies of Third Space professionals in which academic credentials are discussed as a tool for establishing legitimacy when working within a post-secondary environment (Kensington-Miller et al., 2015; Whitchurch, 2012).

When discussing their experiences with marginalized groups, the respondents' narratives avoid homogenizing the experience of disability. They demonstrate an awareness of the complexity of disabilities. Moreover, they also stress the agency of the individual, addressing how the individual understands themselves and their identity—which may or may not include the label of disabled (Evans et al., 2018; Seale et al., 2020). This suggests that, regardless of their different educational backgrounds, respondents have rooted their work within a social justice framework, even if they haven't labelled it as such (Bolt, 2004; Evans et al., 2018). None of the respondents used a deficit or a biomedical model approach to describe disability within their stories of becoming professionals. While AAs work within a system of accommodation that is based on the medical model, their student interactions are driven by non-oppressive practices, informed by the social model of disability.

As acting AAs, the respondents' narratives emphasize the role of policy and processes in guiding their actions. These comments highlight the need for specific institutional policy training as a key knowledge requirement for the job. Respondents also use this tie to policy to position themselves as neither faculty-aligned nor student advocate. While these comments suggest AA work is complicit with the ableist institutional structure, respondents emphasize certain elements of their policy alignment, such as barriers and bona fide requirements. By emphasizing these elements of the process, AAs focus on how the institution and teaching practices need to change, as actioned through accommodation. These respondents describe the policy as a tool to challenge embedded practices, much like Bulk and colleagues (2017). Not identifying as a student advocate may also serve to avoid the notion of accommodations as benefits or charity offered by the institution to the student.

All respondents commented about the growth and challenges of their work, which also suggests changes in the profiles and needs of students registering for disability-related support. The two respondents whose narratives were often different from other respondents were hired specifically to address the needs of students with mental health–related disabilities. These respondents also tended to draw a more specific connection between their education and practice, having engaged in a professionally focused graduate degree. These differences could reflect the increased number of students seeking support on mental health–related grounds (Kain et al., 2019; Sokal, 2016). It also suggests that the needs of individuals with mental health concerns inherently challenge the use of the biomedical model of post-secondary disability support, in which accommodations are meant to "fix" an identifiable deficit related to an educational need.

LIMITATIONS

As Evan and colleagues (2018) note, DSOs reflect the institution in which they are situated. As such, the narratives of becoming professionals shared by AAs are also products of the institutions in which the staff work. This study focuses on Canadian AAs who worked at large, research-intensive institutions. The policy and legal context within which each advisor worked would vary based on their provincial human rights and accessibility legislation. Provincial directives on reporting, student funding, and eligibility criteria can also shape AA socialization in the roles. In contrast to Canada, the United States has federal regulations. For example, the 2009 *Americans with Disabilities Act Amendments* provides directions specific to disability requirements for post-secondary institutions, further articulated by service standards set by the Council for the Advancement of Standards in Higher Education (Evans et al., 2018).

These AAs worked in research-intensive Canadian universities and, as such, may face faculty members and institutional practices that are more embedded with ableism. Brown and Leigh (2018) articulate how the academic research environment is tied to norms, achievement, and productivity—ingrained values associated with the ideal academic. This concern may not be as prominent at smaller undergraduate or community college institutions and may not as strongly impact these AAs. The *Accessible Canada Act*, passed in 2019, requires all federally regulated organizations, including research funding agencies, to publish accessibility plans and address barriers by 2040 (Canadian Human Rights Commission, n.d.). As a result, research-intensive institutions may face greater pressure to address accessibility to maintain research funding.

CONCLUSION

The primary support for post-secondary students with disabilities involves the implementation of academic accommodation. As scholarship continues to challenge the effectiveness of this model, research needs to better understand the key personnel involved in implementing academic accommodations, such as Accessibility Advisors. This study examines the professional identity construction of nine AAs at U15 universities, a group of Canadian, research-focused, post-secondary institutions. Using a narrative approach, it examines the respondent AAs' selection of experiences before and after working in post-secondary accessibility. Situating these experiences in the simultaneous discourses at play within the interactions between post-secondary education, disability, and policy, the participants provide a sense of how they shift between the medical and social models of disability. These narratives highlight the ways in which AAs construct the legitimacy of their work by positioning their role as neutral, exercising influence rather than power.

Bulk and colleagues (2017) argue that the surveillance and marginalization of those with disabilities occurs on three levels: societal, through disability discourse; institutional, through discriminatory design; and interpersonal, through oppressive interactions. While AA participants in this study acknowledge that they participate in an accommodation process that perpetuates the deficit discourse of disabil-

ity, at the same time, they use a social justice approach to engage in anti-oppressive interactions with students, through constructing experiences of disability as diverse and through self-reflecting about the larger structure within which they work.

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APPENDIX A:
REPRESENTATIVE QUOTES FROM NARRATIVES

Prior Experience	
Educational Experiences	"The fact that I had a […] graduate degree. Our unit has to publish and they're like, Oh, good, someone to do the writing, great" (Participant 1). "I think the fact that I was doing a master's in [subject] because it's really like an equity-based program where you do a lot of understanding around that" (Participant 7).
Post-Secondary Work Experience	"[Post-secondary job] sparked my interest and I didn't have any university education at that point. And I thought, if I'm going to go to university, maybe this is what I would go to university for" (Participant 9). "I was doing basic reception work. Again, I was thinking, I think I like this. Whatever. It's a great job […] Instantly I would hear [manager] talking with others about various professional development stuff or issues with students and I would hear this and I was fascinated with all of it" (Participant 8).
Post-Secondary Context	"A big underlying principle for me is authenticity in this to say, 'Yeah, this [the post-secondary institution] is weird, man'" (Participant 3). "I think one of our main jobs to connect. […] there is so much that it can be overwhelming and really, really hard for students to navigate. So we try and guide them in that respect as well" (Participant 4).
Experience with Individuals with Disabilities or Marginalized Groups	"I did some part-time work in my undergrad with people of intellectual disabilities, and so from that had sort of branched off and done some work with higher functioning autistic adults, and so started to really find an interest in that world" (Participant 1) "Having spent a great deal of my career in the area of mental health primarily and with a background in social work, that being fairly informed by social justice frameworks, I've always liked to get my feet wet in a number of different areas of what that might in fact look like. So whether it be helping someone navigate the mental health sector or even supporting them with other kinds of marginalization that they may experience" (Participant 3).
Experiences of Disability are Diverse	"I also help students explore disability. If they think they might have a learning disability, or ADHD […] I can help them with getting testing or letting them know where they can go to get testing" (Participant 3). "I tend to put quotation marks around disability just to acknowledge that this may not be the language that students may utilize to identify their own experience, and even just providing psycho-education around how broad an umbrella that could be. So whether it be a health impact, mental health matter, a neurological condition, et cetera" (Participant 5)

Getting the Job	
Opportunity	"Originally, I thought of it as very luck based, but I would say it's more opportunistic. I am always open to different opportunities, especially if it's something that interests me. And I'll keep my eye out for them, too, and I think that there's an active role to play there as well" (Participant 4). "The Accessibility Advising position opened up and I was looking for a new challenge; something different to do that still met my background. So I moved into that role and [x] years later, just went from there" (Participant 6)
Becoming an Accessibility Advisor	
Professional Development and Experiences	"There was no real training manual or policy. I spent three months following around the coordinator at the time, just, 'That's how you do it.' I still take all those lessons to heart." (Participant 1). "Our end goal is the same, but I think we all get there a little bit differently" (Participant 9).
Commitment	"When I first started, I thought to myself, 'Okay, I'm going to be really busy. I can stay in this role for a long time.' Little did I know there would be lots of opportunities that would present themselves and I would take on more, but there's a lot of growing you can do. There's a lot of experience that you can have, and it's been really nice" (Participant 4). "There's been enough change and sort of growth in the position that it hasn't gotten dull at all" (Participant 1).
Connection to the Past	"The two just got nicely married together, but it took me a long time to figure it out. There was never one point where I said my career goal was to be an access advisor. Just the opportunity came about, and I was like, 'This is a perfect fit.' This is ideal" (Participant 4). "I can strongly remember the moment in my career that I discovered that it was a career if that makes sense. I'm trying to figure out where I would start. Because my career has been very ... I feel like it's been very step by step. So it hasn't been accidental. I didn't necessarily just sort of fall into a job" (Participant 8).
Policy and Process Context	"My manager has always said to us, and publicly, 'I'm not an advocate for the student. I am an advocate for the university.' And that's important because that's something I always remember" (Participant 8). "I am all gung-ho to help, but I'm also part of the system and acknowledging that piece too and challenging myself around at what points am I complicit in student harm, and systemic harm, and institutional harm" (Participant 5).