

Representations of Women with Disabilities: A Discourse Analysis
of the University of Victoria School of Social Work
323 Anti-Oppressive Praxis Distance Training Manual: Section 17

by

Susan Elizabeth Anderson
B.S.W., University of Victoria, 2000

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree of

MASTER OF SOCIAL WORK

in the Department of Social Work

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Theories of anti-oppressive social work address social inequity through social justice perspectives. Recent literature in disability studies and social justice has not been extensively included in social work debate. I locate my research in between these two literatures. I examine how women with disabilities are portrayed in texts used in training undergraduate anti-oppressive social workers. I use an experience-based understanding of knowledge as a feminist social worker and a woman with a disability. The analysis of three texts shows that these particular depictions are wide-ranging though dated, and can unfortunately be mistaken as singularly definitive of all women with disabilities.

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DEDICATION

Finally, I dedicate this thesis in memory of my daughter Denise – whose short life of six years inspired and gave happiness to many, educated hundreds, offered copious amounts of unconditional love and showed me the wisdom of why becoming a social worker would be rewarding.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION TO THE THESIS TOPIC:

Since entering into graduate studies at the University of Victoria in the School of Social Work I have been intrigued by their mission statement emphasizing anti-oppressive praxis. My curiosity revolves around how social work students interpret the mission statement and apply associated objectives to practice. This inquisitiveness has also led me to reflect upon how students link theory to practice, and whether knowledge arising from the social work curriculum incorporates anti-oppressive practice.

In an effort to assist students with developing their professional practice, the School of Social Work developed an empowering mission statement: “the School of Social Work commits us to social justice and anti-racist, anti-oppressive social work practices and to promoting critical inquiry that respects the diversity of knowing and being” (University of Victoria Calendar, 2003, p. 112). Although I’m pleased the School’s mission statement is an integral part of their curriculum, I’ve developed some uneasiness regarding the application of knowledge about disability within this context. My concern centers on how the social work curriculum aligns itself within the context of a mission statement that simultaneously promotes an epistemology of anti-oppressive theory while still adhering to ontological values and beliefs located within the B.C.A.S.W. *Code of Ethics* (2003) and the B.C.A.S.W. *Standards of Practice* (2004).

One of the challenges for schools of social work is being able to teach their students the importance of linking theory and practice. One reason for social work students needing to understand the relationship between theory and practice prior to embarking on their practicum

includes the importance of students being able to work anti-oppressively with persons who are marginalized because of individual differences and/or diversity from the norms of society.

Social work researcher Lisa Barnoff (2001) clearly demonstrates this point.

Over the past few years, there has been much discussion and debate around the topic of “social work practice and diversity.” Members of marginalized groups such as women, people of colour, gays and lesbians, and people with disabilities, to name a few, have argued that traditional social work practice does not reflect their interests or needs and in many ways can serve to perpetuate oppressions. As a result of these critiques, social work has had to confront its exclusionary practices and the ways in which it contributes to the marginalization of certain groups (Barnoff, 2001, p. 67-68).

While social workers traditionally work with people oppressed by society, Barnoff’s (2001) example of social work’s “exclusionary practices” supports the notion there has been marginalization of persons with disabilities among others, within the social work practices themselves.

Unfortunately, persons with disabilities have also often been oppressed by presuppositions and stereotypes that hinder efforts to encourage social diversity. One example of this type of marginalization is the practice of equitable employment policies. While policies were developed in Canada to target individuals with disabilities as one of the four designated groups of people identified as historically disadvantaged within the workplace, sadly, many women with a disability are still being treated inequitably and discriminated against.¹ Even within social work approaches that are designed to address marginalization, persons with a disability and women still remain absent especially in research that embraces anti-oppressive practice. In my ongoing quest of developing a thesis topic about the subject of disability and social work, I was encouraged that disability studies are now considered a significant area of academic inquiry. British researcher Mairian Corker (1999) notes this

¹ In Canada persons with disability are designated as being one of the four groups of persons with rights to workplace accommodation. The other three groups of persons identified are persons of Aboriginal heritage, persons with a visible minority, and women (see <http://www.hrdc.gc.ca>).

development. Disability is “a serious topic of study” and, “one in which the latest research findings and ideas can be seriously engaged with” (p. xi). Given that in some quarters research about disability is important, I then asked myself if it might be prudent to focus my thoughts on developing a thesis topic integrating both professional and personal ways of knowing. I further contemplated how a topic could include both at the same time – that is research centering on disability and also addressing how knowledge about disability applies to training social work students.

While developing my thesis topic I decided to make the most of this opportunity; intending to use the results to promote social change. So, I asked myself how specific one needs to be in order to conduct an inquiry that involves such a broad topic. I concluded that more questions were necessary to guide my journey. I next questioned if I should only research a thesis topic on disability from a position as a feminist social worker. Or, would it be more appropriate to approach my research from a personal perspective – from the experiences of a woman with a disability? I decided to combine my educational privilege, location as a social worker and identity as a woman with a disability and incorporate my experiential wisdom in all these areas alongside a social work topic. While I sought (and am still seeking) to enhance my research with an epistemological stance through interdisciplinary ways of knowing, my quest overall remains to inform social work research with anti-oppressive knowledge about women and disabilities. One important consideration for me is also to ensure that a feminist perspective is included as a fundamental research concept. Although defining feminism is difficult for me I decided that I wanted to delineate how feminism influences both the epistemological and ontological stance of this particular research project.

Proposals for feminist research methods have either been directed to the elimination of unconscious sexist bias in the replacement of supposedly *objective structured interviews and quantitative analysis by more reflexive and interactive unstructured interviews and a method of writing sociology that is said to allow the subjects to speak for themselves (Scott and Marshall, 2005, p. 407).

Scott and Marshall also note that feminism is part of a much broader social movement

“combing theory with political practice, which seeks to achieve equality between men and women” (2005, p. 218). In addition, feminism fits well with my views of being a woman with a disability and the understanding that speaking from experience is a type of embodied knowledge. Embodied knowledge according to Tangenberg and Kemp (2002) related to how social work defines the experience. They note ‘issues of embodiment’ take women “through and beyond her own life, to connections between herself and a wider community of women, and between her immediate experience and the effect of larger social structures and institutions on her behaviors and self-understanding” (2002, p. 12). While it is definitely more complex to embark on my research through multiple roles as a student, social worker and woman with a disability, I feel this task may assist me in pulling together my own research, much like that of a sequence of dance steps moving towards a more formalized towards methodology that weaves through things and moves me and dances from one place to another.

Three years ago when I launched my journey of serious inquiry into developing my thesis topic, I began by journaling ideas. Through this process more questions surfaced for me. How would I narrow down my interests about disability studies into a do-able piece of research that a thesis requires? And, would my personal, deeply routed values and assumptions about social work practice affect my reflexivity (see p. 68 for a fuller definition)? I then considered whether or not my small piece of research might even be meaningful to

social workers and/or students with respect to enhancing awareness about how assumptions work in practice?

As questions evolved I became rather astonished that within the School of Social Work at the University of Victoria many of my classmates were unaware that narrowing a thesis topic on disability is a complicated task. I can only presume their response is related to a lack of knowledge there is such a vast array of topics within disability studies. For example, topics range from medical or sociological explanations of chronic illness and disability through detailing the psycho-social implications of having a life-long disability, and from feminist research into gendered experiences of disability to participatory action research carried out with individuals and groups identified as “disabled”. I realized that when I narrowed a topic, I still required a compatible theoretical and methodological approach to the topic. I also acknowledged that definitions of disability can be confusing. Even though many researchers are defining disability (see for example Corker, 1999; Linton, 1998; Mulally, 2002; Wendell, 1996), I think it is useful to define disability by what I define disability. I see disability as being a broad concept inclusive of social barriers that create a person’s inability to perform a task based upon physical, cognitive and/or psychological conditions associated with an impairment and/or condition that may affect functions of *their* own activities of daily living. Throughout the research I used this definition as a signpost that anchored my thinking as I made my way through various conceptualizations of disability.

In a further endeavor to narrow a topic, I was encouraged by the fact that social work is a profession where values do matter. Given that social work practitioners are influenced by assumptions made about social relations of oppression, I decided my thesis topic needed to reflect values contained in the British Columbia Social Work *Code of Ethics* (B.C.A.S.W.,

1984). As an undergraduate student I frequently turned to Article: 5.1 to support my research. The B.C.A.S.W. *Code of Ethics* (1984) notes values are integral to social work practitioners. “The social worker will respect the intrinsic worth of clients and act to ensure through reasonable advocacy and other intervention activities that dignity, individuality and rights of persons are safeguarded” (Article 5.1, p. 6).

Currently the B.C.A.S.W. *Code of Ethics* (2003) is much briefer than the previous liberalist version from over twenty years ago.² The 1984 edition of the B.C.A.S.W. *Code of Ethics* states that social workers should integrate values of dignity, individuality and intrinsic worth. I still believe these traits remain important to anti-oppressive practitioners; especially with respect to working across difference. Although the focus in the 2003 version of the B.C.A.S.W. *Code of Ethics* in Article 2 states “a social worker shall respect the intrinsic worth of the persons she or he serves in her or his professional relationships with them” I still believe that to be an authentic anti-oppressive practitioner values of dignity and individuality *must* be respected and made consistent with the objectives of the School of Social Work’s mission statement (2003, p.1). My research however, may uncover if what I see to be conflicting values are actually congruent.

As I continued researching a thesis topic, I began to explore the ontological implications of values and beliefs that impact persons with disabilities. I pondered how research about values such as dignity, individuality and intrinsic worth might become meaningful to other social work students training in anti-oppressive practice. I also wondered

² The term liberalism relates to an ideology where “a world where human beings are guided by enlightened self-interest, rationality, and free choice, and argue for the minimum intervention of the state in the lives of individuals” (Marshall, 1994, p. 290). However, social workers now accept a different view of the term, rather as being one of reform, liberalism today “does not wish to eliminate inequality but seeks to reduce its excesses by using the power of the state to provide opportunities, such as public education or public health care, that would not be available to some people without government intervention (see Mullaly, 1997, p. 52-53).

whether my topic about disability and social work be as highly regarded as topics such as child protection. And even though I made a conscious decision to include critical reflections as a social worker, I wanted to isolate ideas about how my ways of knowing might impact this project from the viewpoint of a woman with a disability. Although these two roles are challenging to separate, different ideas began to emerge.

With two different roles and viewpoints now established as part of my research, I then decided to query the process of how social workers comprise a professional discourse that respects individuals experiencing oppression in their everyday lives. I contemplated how complicated it is to make decisions in professional practice based upon knowledge derived solely from texts as written discourses. I reasoned the complexity may arise from a gap between the theory and knowledge students read about and the practice-based decisions they face in their community practicum. In addition, I wondered how students that are isolated in rural distance education locations are able to sort through intricacies of *their* critical thinking about specialized topics with limited interaction from training manual literature.

Over time my ideas progressed and priorities about my research shifted towards thinking about how social work students acquire knowledge about topics discursively through literature they read for courses. I became increasingly interested in how students located outside of the classroom (though distance education) learn about persons who struggle with oppressions in *their* everyday lives. Given the various ways of knowing arising about topics comprising disability studies, I then wondered if learning about disability in a distance education format can be clearly articulated to students through literature contained in training manuals.

Although it is commonplace to educate social work students via a distance curriculum, social work is a multifaceted profession embodying its own vocabulary, language and discourses. Researcher Carol Grbich (1999) states that “it is through language, for example, that certain things or people are either categorized together or separated out as different, and through language that value is attributed or denied” (p. 150). I thus reasoned it is vital that students learning about social work via distance education require access to discourses in training manuals that positively demonstrates the attribution of anti-oppressive values. In fact, literature included in *any* type of social work curriculum should incorporate the principle that Grbich suggests of attributing value thorough the use of language (1999, p. 150).

Each day during my activities of daily living, I experience ways of knowing from roles as a woman, social worker, graduate student, spouse, former parent, former registered nurse, and a person who has a visible disability. I am constantly aware that when choosing vocabulary to interact with other social workers, I may be supplementing my professional opinion with experiential wisdom obtained through my other ways of knowing. While these ways of knowing have fostered a keen interest about disability topics, they have also led me to being curious about how persons with disabilities are portrayed and depicted in literature; especially to social work students. Thus, while I speculated as to whether social work students might benefit from knowledge about how layers of oppression impact persons with a disability, curiosity from my personal understanding forced me to consider of how persons in society with disabilities cope with activities in *their* everyday lives. I reasoned that if researching discursive practices about power, oppression and disability, perhaps social work students could become motivated to search out literature encouraging social change.

Traveling even further down my path toward developing a thesis topic about disability and social work literature, I recognized the slice of the pie I planned to investigate was far too large. Again while I continued exploring ideas, I reflected on how I would approach a topic through a specific research methodology. I became fascinated by the profound influence discourses have upon readers. I then reasoned if consideration could be given to the diversity of experiential wisdom and different levels of background knowledge of social work students, then how representations about persons with a disability are chosen for training manuals might impact their assumptions about diversity and difference. I also wondered if I examined undergraduate curriculum in various schools of social work and sought out what type of social issues are being exposed about persons with a disability, would these issues influence social work students. Finally I reflected upon whether research can assist in determining if current literature about persons with disabilities in a training manual supported the School of Social Work's mission statement of anti-oppressive principles.

I decided to look for possible data sources and found one sitting right in front of me! At the University of Victoria, the School of Social Work offers their major piece of undergraduate coursework entitled Social Work 323 Anti-oppressive Praxis (SOCW 323) each calendar year. The course comprises six units of study in two formats – on campus and by distance. While the school utilizes a distance format for third year off-campus students training in anti-oppressive practice, in 2004-2005 approximately 70% of the students were enrolled by distance education. This is the same estimation for the 2005-2006 coursework load (Dr. Leslie Brown, 2005, e-mail communication). Given that distance education training is so predominant, I became curious about what was contained in the literature on disability studies located in the School of Social Work A.O.P. 323 training manual. While I wondered

what discourses about disability were present in the required readings, I was eager to find out how the readings depict persons with disabilities. For example, do the portrayals about persons with a disability assist in creating anti-oppressive images about an individual's activities with everyday life? And, are social work students able to differentiate if depictions of persons with a disability are portrayed anti-oppressively (or not) with the current literature contained in Section 17 of the training manual?

As I became increasingly interested in researching the Social Work 323 A.O.P. distance training manual discourses about disability, I began to explore how my relationship with writers of discourses are juxtaposed by my role as a woman, reader and social work practitioner. I recognized that if I undertook a discourse analysis to assist in identifying how discourses about disability support social work values, I would also have to ascertain whether or not the language existing in the current literature is anti-oppressive. I reasoned that for an inquiry into how discourses assist in the construction of portrayals about persons with disabilities, my research would involve all three roles – as a reader, as a social worker and as a woman with a disability. By being aware of my three roles I am able to position myself in my research so that I can speak from varied viewpoints in order to speak to multiple social issues from different perspectives. Carol Grbich (1999) supports invoking or using this type of positionality when she notes that research often requires several points of view.

Grbich (1999) states that research can be “viewed as a montage” like a woven tapestry where “multiple approaches and perspectives are needed to capture reflections of reality” (Grbich, 1999, p. 151). Grbich's research supports my notion that “multiple approaches and perspectives” may be necessary to gain knowledge and awareness of the range of social realities contributing to oppression that persons with disabilities endeavor to overcome. Thus

I am most hopeful that by also researching literature from several disciplines involving portrayals of persons with disabilities – specifically women with disabilities; it may be one step toward unraveling the connections between the epistemological and ontological orientations of particular social work practices. I am hopeful my research may also shed some awareness about the complexity of the epistemology and perhaps provide part of a process towards linking ontology required for social work students to deliver social services that are anti-oppressive, ethical and socially just. However, in order to unravel the complexity about the multiple roles comprising a woman with a disability (such as myself) I decided I needed to explore my identity, social location and personal self.

THE COMPLEXITY OF DEFINING IDENTITY, SOCIAL LOCATION AND SELF:

As a woman with a disability I am often questioned about which characteristics and language I use to define my identity. Although I try to address each inquiry with a polite, informative answer, I find it interesting that queries about my identity generally arise from persons without a disability. Questions frequently include – are you disabled? Are you permanently handicapped? Did you have an accident? And as I endeavor each time to respond, I've noticed the curiosity appears more often than not related to persons wanting information about social factors such as income, education and my status of marriage and children.

One issue gnawing at me since becoming a person with a disability is the possibility of improving how reflexivity is taken up by individuals vis-à-vis disability. Engaging reflexivity as part of my own critical thinking processes has not only improved interactions with persons in public spaces, but also has allowed me to evaluate my communication strategies. Not surprisingly, these reflections have also elicited a range of questions. Do I only perceive

myself as a person with a disability? Am I able to make the distinction that my role as a woman is just as significant with my role as an individual who has a disability? Or, am I being caught up and overly concerned with being perceived as part of a homogenous group of “disabled people” where society forms assumptions based upon the visual image of my wheelchair?

As part of the process to define who I am, I sincerely try to remember when speaking to persons unfamiliar with interacting with persons who have disabilities that *they* too can have questions that never get posed. Difficulty in voicing queries to persons who have a disability may often be a result of an awkwardness of not knowing how to phrase an inquiry rather than plain rudeness. Based upon my many experiences of awkward interactions, I further suspect that attempts from persons who are able-bodied usually want to elicit personal information to gain a more general awareness about disability and how it affects individual people. For example, some persons who initially appear nervous when posing a question revert to an expression of relief when provided with information about disability in general. When I’m also able to insert some subtle humour about myself into my answer, I am able to alleviate some of the nervousness, leading to a positive outcome. The information most often requested includes the process of applying and/or funding for wheelchairs, obtaining parking decals and/or accessible public transportation.

Working through the process of describing my identity and social location, I noticed the task to be both complex and ambiguous. While the complexity includes trying to remove the stigma of being perceived as “disabled” (in a collective sense), uncertainty arises as to whether social norms will ever acknowledge my role as a woman. In addition, I have noticed time after time persons unfamiliar with social issues concerning disability may be unaware of

the (negative) consequences of labeling individuals. This made me wonder if people generally lack insight about the impact stereotypes have on persons with a disability, could this be a source of oppression for persons with disabilities.

Over the past several years I have experienced the many assumptions people make with reference to my personal identity. For example, these roles and relationships not only form the basis of defining my social location, identity and perception of self, but also serve to enhance my dignity and self-esteem. Thus, when I experience presuppositions rooted in and arising from institutions in society, I've also noted that assumptions people hold about disability appear to have a powerful influence upon individuals politically, medically and educationally. These practices of labeling have had (and continue to have) a profound influence upon why I continue to juggle several roles. I've consistently noticed that being able to perform various tasks associated with social roles assists me in clarifying normative assumptions about persons with disability, as for example I am not on "welfare" and work in a profession requiring advanced education. Acting in various social roles also enhances my ability to be independent with activities of daily living such as driving a car while not being questioned whether I require personal care. I also believe assumptions are often made about persons using a wheelchair – as for example being unemployed and a drain on society.

I define these types of assumptions as ableist, meaning that I try to explain that ableism is a social construct comparable to other "isms" contributing to oppression such as racism, ageism, sexism and classism. Activist, Anne Bishop (2002, p. 151) defines ableism as "a social/political/economic ideological system that allows physically able people to marginalize and exploit people with disabilities." Canadian social work professor Bob Mullaly (2002, p. 167) defines ableism as "the systematic oppression of a group of people

with disabilities” that is “sometimes referred to as ‘disableism’.” “This form of oppression is manifest in the combination of personal prejudices, cultural expressions and values, and social forces that marginalize people with disabilities and portray them in a negative light, thus oppressing them” (see also Thompson, 1997; 1998). I prefer Bishop’s (2002) definition of ableism to Mullaly’s (2002). This choice is based upon experiences from my everyday life where I consistently try to counteract the marginalization and exploitation of ableism by transitioning in and out of a range of social roles using a positive attitude based upon my individuality – not as part of a group of persons with a homogenous label.

During each day, I continuously am positioned with having to ameliorate the impact that ableism has on me – often juggling a number of roles. This is physically and mentally exhausting. Fatigue arises from having to negotiate society’s expectations of each role. At any given time, and in any environment, my performance of each role may shift to ensure I am addressing the nuances of etiquette and adapt to social norms of “fitting in” with able-bodied persons within public spaces. Even the simplest decision like queuing appropriately in lineups becomes a mental exercise based upon making decisions because my wheelchair occupies extra space. In fact, this example is one that frequently elicits ableism in public spaces when persons that are able-bodied become frustrated when waiting in line behind me. Thus a simple decision as to which queue to line up in becomes mitigated only by the fact the physical movement with my wheelchair itself may take merely a slightly extra amount of time to complete. Acting in multiple social roles has also factored into my increasing awareness that persons with disabilities may perform differently within each of her/his environments. Thus in an effort to depict my own identity and social location, I sought to explore sociological

theories that define identity and social location as involving interactions among individuals, social roles and society at large.

The first theory I chose to work with arises from the works of Erving Goffman (1971). As a symbolic interactionist, Goffman is noted for his observations and development of social theories including (but not limited to) labeling, stigma, role and frame analysis – among individuals and how society perceives the complexity of these issues collectively. In the introduction to a lengthy collection, Lemert and Branaman (1997) describe Goffman's interactions about the rules of social life.

The general capacity to be bound by moral rules may well belong to the individual, but the particular set of rules which transforms him [*sic*] into a human being derives from requirements established in the ritual organization of social encounters. And if a particular person or group or society seems to have a unique character all its own, it is because its standard set of human-nature elements is pitched and combined in a particular way. Instead of much pride, there may be little (Lemert & Branaman, 1997, p. 111).

As Lemert and Branaman (1997) imply, the elements of human nature and morality may affect particular groups and/or individuals in society – such as persons with a disability differently. This inference supports my notion that persons with disabilities may experience social acts of inappropriate behavior from others as detrimental; sadly leading to a decreased sense of pride and lack of self-esteem. In my experience this happens through humiliation most often when she/he is labeled and/or marginalized in public spaces. However, consequences from the labeling process may be even more pertinent to persons with invisible illnesses and disabilities. My reasoning for this assertion is supported by a large number of women I have worked with who have consistently related to me that they do wish not to be subjected to how society assumes and portrays attitudes concerning the believability of a hidden disability. *Many* individuals (especially women) with invisible disabilities and chronic

illnesses have also related that it is their employers and the medical profession that “least understand” how difficult it is to physically and emotionally cope with non-visible conditions.

Just as Goffman (1971) wrote extensively about theories involving individuals and interactions with society, social work researchers Mehmoona Moosa-Mitha and David Turner (2005) describe how social work practitioners anti-oppressively interact with the outcome of social theories: “Social theories attempt to do two things; describe or provide an explanation of social relationships or social reality and attempt to redress these through a vision of social justice”(Moosa-Mitha, Turner, 2005, p. 3). Interestingly enough, while social theories involve a “vision of social justice,” social justice is also regarded as integral to social work as a principle of practice (see also reference to the University of Victoria School of Social Work Mission statement; Anderson, 2006, p. 1). This assertion also supports my perception of constantly seeking social justice as a woman who has marked physical differences from other able-bodied women. However, I do believe I can appreciate my personal quest for justice may elicit feelings of apprehension among persons unfamiliar with nuances of disabilities and chronic illnesses.

Validating and valuing individuality within society also requires recognition of self-determination as a part of one’s personal identity. While self-determination can involve persons having the right to choose how she/he determines a description of their disability, it also involves how she/he may choose to publicly identify to persons in society. For example, identifying oneself as a person with a disability to strangers is different than to close friends and/or relatives.

Recently the term self-determination has involved persons of aboriginal heritage and *their* rights to self-determine what is necessary for economic, political and social development.

In the discipline of social work, the concept of self-determination is also utilized within the context of an individual who is in need of services. "In social work practice, user self-determination refers to the right of service users to choose particular courses of action themselves even if that means that the person is exposed to risk" (Pierson & Thomas, 2002, p. 424). It is further assumed by social workers that "such a right to self-determination has long been regarded as a core social work value and essential to users" (p. 424). Thus I think if self-determination is a "core social work value," how individuals are respected with *their* individual identities should be included with undergraduate social work training.

Canadian social work researcher Ben Carniol (2005) has researched and written extensively on anti-oppressive social work practice. He notes that in relation to the diversity of identities with individuals, identity politics are part of teaching how to embrace diversity and difference.

Identity politics, for instance, addresses inequalities reproduced by the larger system on the basis of our different identities. To say to service users that we are 'all the same' not only denies the very differences that should be recognized and celebrated, but can also deny structural inequalities (Carniol, 2005, p. 64).

Building upon Carniol's (2005) statements about structural inequalities and individual identities, I turned to theory. Like Carniol, I wanted to discover if anti-oppression theory could assist me with objectifying the importance of acknowledging an individual self. I noted that anti-oppressive theory encourages the awareness of differences and diversity and how the two ideas can complement each other. While this theory is useful with my role as a woman with a disability, I also subscribe to anti-oppressive principles within my work as a community social worker. Anti-oppressive theory "invites the social worker to enter difficult spaces, create bridges and shares in the reinforcing of resistance to oppression" (Moosa-Mitha & Turner, 2005, p. 7). The "difficult spaces" that Moosa-Mitha and Turner communicate about

are challenging to persons with a disability, and often difficult to explain. Even so, anti-oppressive theory offers a way to depict why it becomes so difficult for persons with disabilities to promote awareness about *their* individual identities. I am hopeful that by promoting social change and including it into all areas of the undergraduate training manuals, the concept of anti-oppression will assist social work students in conceptualizing the link between individual identities and systemic oppression.

As a woman I frequently multi-task and perform social roles as a spouse, social worker, person with a disability, student, and former registered nurse and former parent. However since my living environment and community of public spaces I enter play such a key role in defining my identity, I have chosen to regard individuality inclusive of my personal space as a woman with a wheelchair. Author Sandy Slack (1999) embraces her identity, social location and personal space as a woman with a wheelchair. By writing *I am more than my wheels*, Slack (1999) is able to creatively express that “in this sense I have very little that puzzles about who I am, but I am more puzzled by what others perceive me to be” (p. 28). Slack describes her life using a wheelchair before and after acquiring her mobility challenges; relating her experiences in relation to concepts of time. “I often ask myself if I am two personalities – before and after” (1999, p. 30). Therefore, for purposes of this thesis I have concentrated my “after” period since 1993 where I expanded my personal space to include an electric wheelchair. I have also included a historical excerpt of the “before” period of time – prior to acquiring mobility equipment.

Since accepting my identity as a woman dependent upon using a wheelchair for mobility, I’ve come to realize that my social location *and* identity are closely linked to familial history and values. Although I was genetically predisposed to two progressive forms of

inflammatory arthritis (diagnosed in 1986 with ankylosing spondylitis and psoriatic arthritis), my goal has always been to return to school to complete studies in a discipline complementing my nursing education. While the choice of returning to university seemed fundamental, I encountered several persons who felt this choice was inappropriate. Interestingly enough not one person that felt my decision to pursue higher education was unsuitable was ever able to provide me with reasons that made any sense. In fact the consensus of opinions appeared similar – most persons felt I should “apply for pension” and “be happy with the money you get”.

My decision to return to school was also based upon my family history and values. Growing up in Vancouver my childhood comprised continuous interaction with four generations until the age of eleven. Each generation of persons promoted diversity and life-long learning through communication of tolerance, patience and kindness. In addition, my family considered it a privilege to have persons residing in our neighbourhood sharing cultural influences as first generation Canadians. These experiences were coupled with diversity from our own extended family members; thus enhancing my parents’ ethnicity. While both parents had different backgrounds (my father with English as a second language to Ukrainian and my mother who was of British descent), both were proud to be first generation Canadians.

Interestingly enough, my father taught civil engineering (despite having severe arthritis) to students sent to the University of British Columbia from Hong Kong; predominately speaking Mandarin as their language of origin. My mother worked in a bank in foreign exchange for over twenty years in Chinatown – now part of the downtown eastside of Vancouver. Persons that my mother worked with also had English as a second language and usually spoke Cantonese. Given that both my mother and father had immigrant parents, and

both parents worked predominantly with persons of Asian heritage, I was exposed to cultural diversity at an early age. In addition, my father utilized his ethnicity to volunteer as an interpreter for two Vancouver acute care hospitals. Thus, not only did familial diversity privilege both my sister and I with respect for persons with English as a second language, but also encouraged values of tolerance and patience; integral to successful social interactions with any person that struggles with language. Life-long benefits from childhood experiences also included a concentrated background of cultural experiences with exposure to a variety of religions, multi-cultural cuisine and holiday festivals.

Knowledge about persons with disabilities developed over years of experiential wisdom and later with formal education. My parents insisted on involving both my sister and me at a young age in voluntarism with persons who experienced disabilities. These experiences included taking an active role in physically caring for my maternal great-grandmother for a year prior to her moving to an extended care facility. In addition to caring for “Granny” (who was non-ambulatory in our home), my experience was supplemented with baby-sitting for a neighbour’s son with cerebral palsy and with familiarity through the Red Cross teaching swimming to children who had special needs.

Following graduation from nursing school, I chose to work in a critical care neuro-surgical unit. For the most part I worked with persons who suffered cerebral insults and spinal cord injuries. While many persons I nursed were quadriplegic, these persons often became dependent on ventilators and twenty-four hour care. Most persons with extensive disabling conditions became socially isolated by being placed into extended care residential facilities – often rooming with persons who are aging with cognitive deterioration. Eventually the young adults experienced a loss of self-esteem due to the lack of dignity, individuality and lack of

personal identity accorded to them by staff. The losses were often related back to our nursing staff by friends and/or relatives who were concerned and depressed about the level of care their loved ones received.

Now after many years of experience as a woman with a physical disability, I consider self-determination as vital to developing a unique identity and affirmative social location. Because self-determination is considered a value that enhances self-esteem among individuals with disabilities, it may also require ameliorating differences between oneself and able-bodied members of society. For example, researchers Michael Bach and Marcia Rioux are known for human rights work about persons that are developmentally challenged. They offer an interesting viewpoint based upon the notion of mutual respect. That is, the opening up of the politicized definition of self-determination and an exploration of how it affects individuals with disabilities.

People, communities and societies hold the principle of self-determination as one of their most cherished values. In a society increasingly defined by cultural, linguistic, ethnic and other differences, the promotion of self-determination is essential if there is a commitment to respecting these differences. Without mutual respect for self-determination those differences become the basis for conflict rather than dialogue and cooperation (Bach and Rioux, 1996, p. 319).

Just as Bach and Rioux (1996) note that respect is a value integral to self-determination, so too are social factors important elements in defining a personal identity. For example, income involves whether as a woman with a disability I am gainfully employed at a position commensurate with my level of education and experience. However, since adopting a wheelchair as part of my permanent mobility, my ability to successfully win a job competition has been markedly altered. Many job interviews I have attended have resulted in demeaning and humiliating situations. For example, during one interview a Human

Resources personnel representative abruptly inquired “are you sure you know how to drive...can I see your license” (B.C. Cancer Society, 2002, personal conversation).

On a different job interview I attended at the British Columbia Office of the Public Guardian and Trustee, one panel member repeatedly kept looking under the table at my skirt, shoes and wheelchair during the interview. And although these are examples of behaviors being inappropriate, I believe the conduct I observed during interviews may have been initiated by curiosity about persons (such as myself) who have differences from social norms of able-bodied mobility. Thus over several interview experiences, I have come to realize that there is a subtle, underlying competition between persons with disabilities and persons that are able-bodied.

Canadian researcher Anne Bishop (2002) states “as long as we who are fighting oppression continue to play the game of competition with one another, all forms of oppression will continue to exist” (2002, p. 19). The game that Bishop alludes to is an able-bodied world in competition with others in minority groups. Competition arises when persons with a disability are assumed to be at a lower level in the competition than persons who are able-bodied, only being allowed to participate as a conciliation to fulfill human rights legislation. In addition, the subordinate status of persons with a disability may impact one’s self-esteem being repeatedly unsuccessful securing positions for which they are fully qualified for.

Fortunately being accepted to graduate school has given my confidence a boost. As education is considered a hallmark to becoming successful for any woman in society, my quest to continue with a Master’s in Social Work has markedly increased my chances of gaining employment income. I immediately noted that adding “M.S.W. (candidate)” behind my B.S.W. signature not only gives credibility to job applications, but appears essential to jobs

where one's accreditation as a professional is required. As well this signature has assisted in being able to imply that even though my body visually appears different than able-bodied women, I have motivation and desire as any other woman might in furthering her education. It is also refreshing that some researchers (see Chouinard, 1999; Dorn, 1998; Moss and Dyck, 2002) are beginning to recognize that women with disabilities and women with chronic illnesses have finely tuned relationships within their bodies and their everyday environments. This kind of research indicates the importance of engaging in activities of daily living as a woman with a disability and/or chronic illness.

Social activities for women with disabilities and chronic illnesses also include struggling to maintain and seek out new friendships. Feminists Berenice Fisher and Roberta Galler (1988) address the issue of friendship for women with disabilities. "Like any people building close relationships, disabled and non-disabled women need to figure out a balance preserving autonomy and permitting reciprocity. This balance is not created in a social or historical vacuum. The definitions of what constitutes autonomy and reciprocity change without other values" (1988, p. 180). Sadly, over the past several years, for me, the balance of personal friendships has become unbalanced due to my dependence on mobility equipment. In fact my use of a wheelchair has clearly become an "inconvenience" to the majority of my friends, colleagues and relatives. Nevertheless, while my identity appears hindered by being a woman with a wheelchair, my ability to offer reciprocity through friendship has never wavered.

Past experiences going out with friends and/or colleagues include being marginalized within public spaces. These situations often involve scenarios of either having to abstain from entering buildings with persons I'm accompanying, and/or being abruptly told it is

“inconvenient” to meet. And since there are many recreational wheelchair accessible locations, refusals to meet have created not only embarrassment but also a loss of dignity and self-esteem. I have also come to believe social acts of refusing to compromise accessibility for an engagement of conversation and friendship speak volumes to how demeaning and humiliating the process of being marginalized is to anyone with a disability.

Unfortunately, lack of awareness about wheelchair accessibility is reproduced through professional relationships, as for example social workers and nurses. In my experience people who have little interest in accessibility issues are frustrated and unable to conceptualize what barrier-free public spaces might look like. What concerns me is two-fold. Are my personal experiences typical of professional practice principles in social work? And, do gaps in knowledge and/or understanding about accessibility arise from not being able to integrate theory and practice successfully? The latter is something that could be taught and learned from their social work training about spaces that persons with disabilities occupy in their everyday lives.

Geographers Ruth Butler and Sophia Bowlby (1997, p. 411) offer insight into how persons with disabilities have unique challenges in public spaces: “Challenging the physical environment is indeed essential to improved access to public space for disabled people but so also is changing the social environment, and in particular, changing social attitudes and behavior towards disabled people.” As Butler and Bowlby imply, it is the ability to correlate the logistics of physical accessibility along with social attitudes about the environment that remains at issue for persons with disabilities. It also continues to be personally frustrating to have to repeatedly explain and/or feel an apology is owed to persons that are able-bodied but are unwilling to assist with accessibility considerations.

So, where is my social location? And, what is the relevance to my personal identity and individual perception of self? Erving Goffman (1959) fluently describes the role of the self.

The self, then, as a performed character, is not an organic thing that has a specific location, whose fundamental fate is to be born, to mature and to die; it is a dramatic effect arising diffusely from a scene that is presented, and the characteristic issue, the crucial concern, is whether it will be credited or discredited (Goffman, 1959; cited in Lemert and Branaman, 1997, p. xlix).

Goffman's analysis provides intriguing concepts and ideas. For example, if the self is a character that performs differently in specific environments, then perhaps the self can be assumed to have multiple roles as part of her/his personal identity. And, possibly the self may also evolve over time. I further envision the self transforming and acquiring numerous roles by the characters society expects individuals to perform. Finally, I distinguish myself as a woman with a disability; performing numerous social roles as part of an identity of my personal self. While the physical challenges I face position me differently from able-bodied women, how I am located within social processes of diversity and difference need to be addressed to negotiate social norms.

SOCIAL WORK, ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS AND DISABILITY:

Social work is a discipline steeped in professional ethics and dilemmas. Compounding practice dilemmas are values and assumptions frequently creating difficulty with issues tied to social work ethics. Researcher Sarah Banks (2001) has written extensively on this topic, and highlights issues of personal values conflicting with ethical dilemmas in practice. "There is a general agreement amongst social work practitioners and academics that questions of ethics, morals and values are an inevitable part of social work" (p. 9). In social work practice a common dilemma dealing with ethics, morals and values arises when social workers must

balance the limits of subscribing to government policies while concurrently advocating for individuals in need of state social benefits. Such persons regularly requiring social benefits are often women with disabilities.

Unfortunately women with disabilities are also frequently devalued, oppressed and marginalized by legislation and policies leading to their denial of income assistance. However, while it is interesting to note that these same social benefits seek to enhance one's quality of everyday life, the situation may further lead to a predicament for social workers – how far to advocate within our professional praxis versus strictly adhering to policies. Complicating matters further for social workers is stress over balancing values of dignity and individuality for persons with disabilities while concurrently trying to resolve restrictions often dealt with by employers. Issues of employers not permitting social workers to use their discretionary authority to proceed while advocating for individuals may arise from a conflict within a mission statement of a non-profit society in incongruent with terms of state funded revenue. Professional praxis issues may be further complicated by choices social workers must make trying to deal with the immediacy of a person's physical and emotional condition as opposed to the constraints of policy and/or legislation to deal with these needs. However, it is interesting to note this dilemma is supported by the B.C.A.S.W. *Standards of Practice* (2004).

The B.C.A.S.W. *Standards of Practice* (2004) entitled "*Interpretation*" (Article 1.5) states: "Although not compelled to accept clients' interpretation of problems, social workers demonstrate acceptance of each client's uniqueness" (p. 1). The B.C.A.S.W. *Standards of Practice* (2004) then define a section entitled "*Integrity*". This section notes a broader

explanation of why practitioners *must* advocate for benefits of social change in order to practice as a social worker that is ethical and socially just.

Social workers promote social justice and advocate for social change on behalf of their clients. Social workers are knowledgeable and sensitive to cultural and ethnic diversity and to forms of social injustice such as poverty, discrimination and imbalances of power that exist in the culture and that affect clients. Social workers strive to enhance the capacity of clients to address their own needs and problems in living. Social workers assist clients to access necessary information, services and resources whenever possible. Social workers promote and facilitate client participation in decision making (Article 2.14, 2004, p. 2).

Because my thesis is based on research I have undertaken about portrayals of women with disabilities located within a training manual of anti-oppressive social work practice, it is imperative to state both as a social worker and as a woman with a disability how my own ethical considerations have been taken into account during my research process. I should also demonstrate experiential wisdom from both perspectives. Even though my research involves using a discourse analysis of social work training materials, I am hopeful that I will contribute to interdisciplinary discussions about discourses portraying women with disabilities. I also anticipate providing clear examples of anti-oppressive discourses about women with disabilities. As well, my literature review may be of assistance for future undergraduate social work training manuals.

From my own social location as a social worker and a woman with a disability, I outline ethical issues shaping the conduct of my thesis research in light of social work praxis. First, I wish to note that no where have I stated that any specific type of analysis or methodology is the only method of research for issues concerning disability topics. My research demonstrates a potential to incite awareness among social workers through diverse ways of knowing that concern the everyday lives of women with disabilities. I offer an expansion of ideas and theories incorporating discourses from interdisciplinary sources of

literature. In chapter two I have reviewed anti-oppressive literature representing a broad sample of women with different chronic illnesses and disabilities through a discussion of the work of eight authors whose work I present and discuss in my literature review.

Second, I maintain a commitment to the notion that social work does value individuality, dignity and intrinsic worth. Unfortunately these values may be regarded as insignificant and/or problematic when discursive practices of awarding benefits for women with disabilities are controlled by stringent criteria. For women with disabilities, qualifying for state policies are often based upon policies configured to accept bio-medical definitions of chronic illness and disability to obtain social assistance benefits. Thus, women often are subjected to having their private information divulged by third party sources with connections to medical authority, for example, insurance companies and government bureaucracies. As a community social worker I have often been faced with assisting women with disabilities with Ministry of Employment and Income Assistance Persons with a Disability designation and/or Federal Government Canada Pension (CPP) disability forms. Both of these sets of forms require extensive interviewing and accurate documentation. In addition, these two discursive practices require two or more appointments for completion; making poorly funded social service agencies reluctant to afford social workers the time required to complete forms adequately with the correct information required by legislated authorities.

Sarah Banks' (2001) insight into valuing confidentiality highlights an additional dilemma for social workers who often must verify information with medical sources of authority to substantiate a need for social benefit provisions. However, it is this step of third party corroboration that becomes problematic for women, who have been unable to have their needs legitimated by a physician. This dilemma has been especially salient with women who

may have chronic conditions that are both invisible and/or disabling, thus needing extensive medical corroboration to substantiate benefit approval. In my practice, I am always sensitive to the individuality, dignity and intrinsic worth of each person and strive to make my actions adhere to these principles of practice.

Third, I want to sustain a reflexive account of my dual roles as a social worker and as a woman with a disability (see my discussion in the reflexivity section of stage one of my discourse analysis). Although this method is difficult to explain over the long term, for this relatively small piece of research, I realize it is important as a social work practitioner to have my role as a community social worker clearly separated from my individual views and opinions. I have also learnt that professional views and obligations to the social work profession need not be compromised in making ethical and socially just decisions because of my identity as a woman with a disability.

Fourth and finally, I have come to recognize being able to negotiate the challenges and tension between my professional expertise and personal experience necessitates recognizing that *all* women with disabilities have a right to self-determination. By self-determination I mean that individuals are able to choose what amount and type of assistance *they* prefer in order to live their everyday lives. What is at issue, and thus becomes important to examine, is how social work students in their role as practitioners choose to demonstrate *their own* acknowledgement of values during their training and, later in practice.

DEVELOPING THE RESEARCH QUESTION:

My first attempt in trying to be concise formulating a research question arose when breaking down my topic into categories and themes. Although the exercise of defining categories limited the immediate framing of a question, I realized that posing a research

inquiry needed attention to detail. I also appreciated that the process required considerable time in order to clarify and approach each concept with critical thought.

As time progressed the process of refining the question became incredibly valuable. My thesis supervisor asked me to break down the categories of information into smaller ones. She then asked me to arrange the categories from top down from the most general to the most specific, like a funnel, ordering the concepts according to how data would be captured during the research process.

Disability Discourse

Social Work Discipline

Anti-Oppressive theory and praxis

Training social work students

Discourse analysis

Social work training manual

With the research themes organized in order of how the categories would move from the broadest to most specific, I recognized that key concepts and ideas needed to be re-examined with a more detailed interpretation. I then considered that “a research topic is an undesirable condition. It exists (at least in part) because of a lack of empirical knowledge, and there is some desire to fill this knowledge gap” (Yegidis & Weinbach, 1996, p.41). However, my desire to fill the gap of knowledge currently existing about women with disabilities in the discipline of social work was partially buoyed by American social workers Kathleen Tangenberg and Susan Kemp (2002). They note that “embodied knowledge may be especially salient to members of marginalized groups whose race or ethnicity, age, gender, or disability may affect service appropriateness” (p.16). I was also inspired their social work

research recognizes the significance of embodied knowledge for persons that have been marginalized – such as women with disabilities. Because I am seeking to examine a topic that is relevant to how women with disabilities are described, depicted, portrayed and represented in society by multiple oppressions, I value research that furthers the quest of examining different types of knowledge. Even though I will be examining discourses contained in a training manual, I soon realized the complexity of my research question would require a two pronged approach. Framing my thesis will be these two questions:

1. How are women with disabilities represented in the undergraduate social work 323 anti-oppressive distance training manual?
2. And, what discourses are evident in these representations of women with disabilities?

In order to formally address these questions, I have chosen to examine section 17 of the third year student distance education training manual for anti-oppressive praxis (Social Work 323) from the School of Social Work at the University of Victoria. Section 17 is composed of three readings on the topic of disability.

CHAPTER TWO

A REVIEW OF ANTI-OPPRESSIVE THEORY, SOCIAL WORK AND DISABILITY:

Over the past several years, research about anti-oppressive principles has become a pedagogical theme for training undergraduate social work students. “Starting in the 1970’s with radical practice, we moved to the ecological model, the systems approach, feminist practice, structural practice, and recently anti-oppressive practice” (Tester, 2003, p.127). Previous to the popularity of anti-oppressive social work theory, students understood oppression was often attributed to groups of persons being labeled, marginalized and stereotyped. However, while earlier social work theories did not always empower students to advocate and work with a person’s diversity, anti-oppressive theory appeared to lend itself to encouraging students to practice with diversity and difference integral to each individual.

More recently, social work research has been exploring how anti-oppressive theory applies to professional praxis. Further researching the literature about this topic, I noted that even some of the most current social work texts appeared limited regarding information pertaining to the diversity and individuality affecting persons with disabilities. One such Canadian social work text is *Challenging Oppression* (2002). Social work professor Bob Mullaly authors this text and prefaces his approach to anti-oppressive social work by posing two questions. (1) “What is anti-oppressive social work?” and, (2) “Why am I adopting oppression as the major explanation for social problems and anti-oppressive practice as the major approach in dealing with these problems?” (2002, p.ix). Mullaly introduces his text with a lengthy statement written from a critical and anti-oppressive standpoint. His statement took me aback by some of the language he chose. As a reader (in the role of a graduate social work student) I was disappointed in the tone of the writing. For example, in *Challenging*

Oppression (2002) Mullaly appears to introduce and portray social issues as deficiencies. When writing about types of oppression he makes assertions and notes social workers are still “dealing with these problems” (2002, p.ix). Although Mullaly further qualifies that social work historically trained students to deal with “problem” solving strategies, I noted he fails to clearly define which topics he feels are problematic (see Mullaly 2002, p.ix).

As I continued reading *Challenging Oppression* (2002) other issues caught my attention – from a critical perspective as a feminist social worker and as a woman with a disability. For example, as someone who possesses insider knowledge about how women with disabilities manage their activities of daily living, I expected language within this text to reflect anti-oppressive principles. In addition, as a feminist social worker I also became concerned by Mullaly’s repetitive list of expressions that excluded persons with disabilities. I noted this exclusion arose with discourses where the author consistently listed categories of social oppressions (see Mullaly, 2002, p. x, 150, 151). I also noted he leaves out references to disability in a sub-section entitled “Language and Discourse as Mechanisms of Oppression (and Anti-Oppression)” (2002, p. 139). He states “two important concepts for understanding and analyzing oppression and for developing anti-oppressive practices are language and discourse.” (2002, p. 88). Consequently, I wondered if student readers may be unduly influenced by social issues not mentioned within these types of textual representations. I also pondered if omissions about social issues concerning persons with a disability point toward oppression within the social work profession? For example, Mullaly notes “what conventional social workers treat as private problems belonging to isolated individuals, anti-oppressive social workers would treat as problems belonging to a society characterized by oppression along such lines as classism, sexism, ageism, heterosexism, and racism” (2002,

p.180). I began to feel that with the repetitive omission of disability, although Mullaly, steeped in anti-oppressive social work literature, may *claim* to advocate anti-oppressive theory for practice applications, he is (inadvertently) exclusionary by leaving out social oppressions such as ableism.

As part of my professional and personal quest to research anti-oppressive literature about women and disabilities, I thoroughly reread Mullaly's (2002) text. My purpose was to (hopefully) locate references about how social oppression affects persons with disabilities within their everyday lives. After finishing reading the text, I noted Mullaly affords only five paragraphs on disability or ableism. It was also interesting to note that there is no reference about women or men who have acquired chronic illnesses and/or invisible disabilities (see Mullaly, 2002, p. 167-168).

Additional unease from reading *Challenging Oppression* (2002) appeared in the section on ableism. This section appears to have several inaccuracies and omissions with respect to terminology used to describe persons with disabilities. For example, nowhere are persons with invisible disabilities mentioned. In addition, terms like "persons with mental disabilities" (see Mullaly, 2002, p.168) confuse individuals with mental illness with individuals who are mentally challenged by a congenital or cognitive developmental delay. Finally, I believe because language forms the basis of textual portrayals, it is imperative social work students be provided with texts that employ respectful, anti-oppressive vocabulary and terminology about persons with a disability.

HISTORY, THEORIES AND INTRODUCTION TO DISABILITY STUDIES AND DISCOURSE:

Over the last decade disability studies have slowly been blossoming into a more prolific area of research. From the mid to late 1990's research emerged in the area defined as

disability studies. While the category disability studies appeared to have a meaningful title, “creating the category ‘disability studies’ didn’t create the scholarship. Instead the name organizes and circumscribes a knowledge base that explains the social and political nature of the ascribed category, disability” (Linton, 1998, p.116). While Linton’s research appears to demonstrate why disability studies should be accepted by the academic milieu, a definitive description about this area of research still appears vague. As a result of the vastness of the array of topics and concepts making up disability studies, disability studies as a field of study, has opened up a debate about definitions, terminology and discourses more generally. Approaches range from attempts to understand how definitions of disability have been linked to social theories, to how meaning is attributed or inferred (semiotics) about disability through use of visual signage and gestures (see Woodhill, 1994).

Researchers have sought to define which areas of disability studies have implications for exploration into other disciplines. This process of inquiry within academia has now become part of an interdisciplinary recognition of the greater significance of disability topics in more conventionally delineated disciplinary fields of study, as for example, geography, sociology, philosophy, and women’s studies. One such area of research involves linking language about disability to sociological theories of power and other types of oppressions such as racism. Gary Woodill (1994) has written extensively on this subject and lists his beliefs through linking socially developed “isms” to the study of semiotics¹

Woodhill’s (1994) recommendations about disability and semiotics maintain there should be a “conceptual analysis of the link between theories of disability and vocabulary”

¹ Semiotics is “meaning-making through language, body language, visual images, or any other way of signifying” (Fairclough, 2001, p.229). Developed in a response to structuralism, sociologists became intrigued with the usage of semiotics from the analysis of Marxist and feminist ideologies. For persons with disabilities an example of semiotics is the inferred meaning from the visual use of the international blue and white wheelchair logo signage.

(p.219). He further notes “in particular, a social semiotics of disability should not be developed in isolation from a critical theory of disability that recognizes power and oppression. Such a theory, now being developed, would connect with theories of sexism and racism” (p.219). Although Woodhill’s writing is now over a decade old, his insight into how disability topics link to semiotics is still considered meaningful – especially research about how disability links to language through power and oppression. Critical thought about disability topics may also assist social work students to learn that ableism is socially constructed, and illustrate that persons with disabilities may be oppressed through discursive practices social workers engage in.

One of the most prominent recent debates has been questioning how society attributes labeling to groups of persons with a disability. It is interesting to note that researchers with experiential wisdom from having a disability attribute labels derived from mainstream definitions differently than more traditional ways of knowing. Mairian Corker (1998) is such a researcher. Through writing, teaching and research Corker presents as a woman who experiences deafness. Corker purports to discursively identify Western viewpoints that oppress groups of individuals on the basis of their disability. Although sadly Corker passed away, she believed passionately that:

The social model of disability separates disability from impairment, and then attributes the creation of disability to the dominant socio-cultural environment. In the Western world this environment is largely an oppressive one which views disability as deviance, damage, dependence – the so-called ‘sick role’ – and perpetuates labels and stereotypes which stigmatize, disempower, deskill and marginalize disabled people (1998, p. 221).

The social model of disability Corker examined also illustrates that disability exists through a group relationship with the dominant social and cultural environment – not with individuals.

Finally, Corker's (1999) research skillfully assists with portraying the significance of power depicted by language and the effect of power being attributed to discursive practices.

Even if we were to find consistent language which was acceptable to all disabled people, we would still not fully account for the different ways that language operates within discursive practice, and it is here that language is critically linked to issues of knowledge, and ultimately power, because particular forms are privileged (p.193).

Corker's awareness of linking knowledge, privilege and power to language is extremely useful. Her research not only sheds valuable insight into topics that social workers require in assisting persons who have disabilities, but draws out the relationship of privilege to knowledge and power.

As the 1990's evolved, researchers became inspired to seek out and expand theories of disability, examining social factors contributing to inequality and oppression such as education, poverty, income and gender. This decade also encouraged social practices addressing inequality of persons who experienced developmental disability. Often these same individuals were noted in research as being oppressed by a lack of opportunities to participate meaningfully as members of society. Canadian researcher Marcia Rioux (1994) describes the inequality persons with disabilities who are developmentally challenged face in their everyday lives. In *Disability is not Measles*, Rioux notes:

Assumptions about the meaning and content of equality can be identified in the mechanisms for distributive justice applied to disability. In other words, equality has implications for resource allocation, but resource allocation also reflects certain notions of equality (1994, p.68).

Rioux further adds "the history of how disadvantage has been created and how inequality has been constructed and justified is critical to an understanding of equality as a principle of social obligation" (1994, p.69). For example, if the discipline of social work incorporates social obligation as integral in attaining social justice, Rioux's work may discourage social workers

from developing presuppositions about disability issues and may encourage political actions about issues of equality.

During the 1990's it was also interesting to note in social work research emerged with a focus addressing a shift in power from individuals with disabilities having "problems" to structural factors causing group oppression (see Mullaly, 1997). In a text entitled *Structural Social Work* (1997) researcher Ann Davis highlights this shift in social work theory and practice. "In arguing for change of existing structures which perpetuate inequality, promotes an adversarial view of practice which simultaneously seeks to alleviate and transform the conditions in which oppressed clients find themselves" (Davis, 1991; cited in Mullaly, 1997, p.105). Note however, the use of Davis' choices to refer to persons as "clients" – an institutionalized term of labeling persons in need of social assistance. In fact up until the introduction of anti-oppressive social work practice, persons with disabilities were still being referred to as "clients" instead of persons and/or individuals (see Mullaly, 1997, p.105).

As the 1990's came to a close, social workers again advocated for persons based upon a position of different causes of power and oppression. The profession sought to align discursive practices with theories that encouraged a more critical and anti-oppressive approach. Subsequently as my research evolved, I pondered if shifts in thinking can evoke changes in theories and practice, could discourses about disability we utilize as social workers change over time and influence how we interact with persons who are identified as having disabilities?

FEMINISM AND DISABILITY: AN INTRODUCTION TO MORE WAYS OF KNOWING

Over the last decade feminist researchers have begun to demonstrate the value of experiential wisdom with written accounts of their personal journeys with disability and

oppression (see Fine and Asche, 1988; Gabel, 1999; Linton, 1998; Slack, 1999). However, it is important to note that in addition to feminist researchers portraying personal experiences about disability, this research appears to have enhanced awareness about gender and the further relationship to patriarchy and power. One such example is taken from researcher Carol Grbich (1999). Grbich outlines that feminists conducting research should acknowledge “the existence of gender-specific power relations favoring men at the expense of women, so that any textual search should reinforce the discourse of gender inequality” (p.152). Like Grbich’s insights into feminist theory, she implies language is a tool which seeks to emancipate diverse ways of knowing. Thus, for women who confront multiple oppressions in everyday life, textual representations of women with disabilities could become more meaningful if language was acknowledged as symbolic and interactive; objectifying individual personal identities and roles while still recognizing gender inequality.

Much of how feminist writing gained distinction arose from portrayals of how power is acquired (and dispossessed) through discourses. Thus, it only makes sense that feminist social work should draw upon interdisciplinary discourses within areas of study where marginalization and oppression against women have been repeatedly demonstrated. One such author who demonstrates the marginalization against women within minority groups is bell hooks. hooks (1984) asserts that “to be ‘feminist’ in any authentic sense of the term is to want to for all people, female and male, liberation from sexist role patterns, domination, and oppression” (bell hooks, 1984 cited in Foss, Foss, & Griffen, 1999, p.78). As well, hooks asserts she is “passionately concerned with education for critical consciousness” (1984 cited in Foss, Foss, & Griffen, 1999, p.69). This passionate concern of hooks has become a valuable

asset for the discipline of social work and the quest to instill critical thinking among practitioners, students and teachers.

As a further example of how diversity affects feminists and the oppression they suffer, Patricia Gunn Allen (1989) (speaking as a Native American woman) links issues of oppression to addressing power at a national scale. Gunn Allen notes that being “just” a woman from a minority group of persons often takes a backseat to issues deemed a priority by political forces of power. “You know, I just get really annoyed. Everybody was out marching because of Desert Storm, but Rodney King gets beaten half to death, and I didn’t hear a word”. Gunn Allen further explains her feminist viewpoint by stating²: “we could make a difference.... I often think the only real hope is feminism. That’s on my good days” (Gunn Allen, 1989, cited in Foss, Foss, & Griffen, 1999, p. 205). Gunn Allen’s (1989) viewpoint is an excellent example of the complicated nature of feminist values. For example, if her writing was simply put into the training manual as a piece of literature situating diversity embedded with other feminist literature, it may not unpack the positioning and social location she points out about feminism, power and oppression. However, if an opportunity was provided for qualification of Gunn Allen’s comments using one or two footnotes, it may better assist students in the awareness of complexity of diversity, differences and even further insight into layers of oppressions. Having students work through Gunn Allen’s perspectives on feminism, aboriginality, patriarchy, racism and experiential wisdom may also assist social work students to critically think about implications when working with women with multiple oppressions, such as with women with disabilities.

² Reference to Patricia Gunn Allen are her remarks about the American media representation of protest about political rallies war efforts at Desert Storm are meant to highlight the relationship of how racism has been given a back seat to her as a Native American woman interested in issues where she feels knowledge of these oppressions may advance the causes she believes will assist her and other Native American women to be portrayed within *their* everyday lives.

Feminist researchers have also been helpful with research identifying socially – driven assumptions arising from hegemonic sources of power such as the state. For example, recognizing the existence of stereotypes about issues such as poverty is critical to understanding how severe the impact may be to women with disabilities within their personal environments. As well, feminist researchers have begun to incite awareness about social issues such as environments and spaces traversed by women with disabilities as factors that contribute to marginalization. Michelle Fine and Adrienne Asch (1988) are researchers who have embraced disability topics and provide awareness about women struggling and being caught between boundaries which leave women with disabilities trapped within marginal spaces.

Disabled women will not soon leave their place at the margins. When they do, they need not lose what they have gained from having lived there. Yet all of us – disabled and not – will gain more by modifying our theory, our practice, and our society to eliminate the need for boundaries that differentiate between mainstream and margins (Fine, Asch, 1988, p. 335).

As Fine and Asch eloquently highlight, feminist ways of knowing can be acknowledged as integral in understanding how to “differentiate between mainstream and margins.” I also believe that differentiating “between the mainstream and margins” is part of the learning process for social work students – distinguishing that advocating for women in the margins is not only anti-oppressive, but ethical and socially just. For example, a feminist perspective may further assist with understanding how women with disabilities are portrayed and represented in *their* everyday lives. Thus, by researching several diverse ways of knowing, I am also hopeful feminist research will reveal how it has positively influenced discourses within disability studies.

DISABILITY STUDIES: A MORE RECENT APPROACH

At the turn of the century, literature from the field of disability studies rapidly expanded due to enthusiasm in two areas, activism and research. While the growth of interest is attributed to the academy embracing disability topics as an intriguing area of study, many researchers have relied upon expanding their interests through social activism. Thus I began to question – if academia sees disability topics are important, could perceptions from within the discipline of social work also progress and motivate students about disability topics? And could the social work discipline also train students to advocate for and with individuals with a disability (see also Albrecht, 2002, p. 27)?

Presently, distance education at the University of Victoria School of Social Work is the foremost source for training undergraduate social work students. Given this mode of education comprises up to 80 percent of social work courses,³ I began to question how students in a distance setting critically examining their practice with regard to topics they may know little about. And how can students develop awareness and knowledge about specialized topics when a training manual may include minimal and outdated research and/or provides no supplementary reading list about disability topics? While current literature on disability topics may provide a background in theory aimed at training undergraduate social work students, I believe students also require assistance learning how to incorporate critical thinking about social issues, such as the need to assist with alleviating social oppressions in practice.

Upon reviewing recent literature about disability, a further concern surfaced. In *Disability Studies Today* (2002) I noted a major part of research in this disability text involves researching oppression from a human rights perspective. Although it is laudable that research

³ See course calendar listings for undergraduate B.S.W. program 2006-2007 <http://www.socialwork/uvic.ca/>

in this vein strives tirelessly to combat oppression, I question if this particular research approach to disability is a further extension of the social model of disability? My notion is based upon years of observation about labeling and stigma. I have noticed issues arise with categorizing persons with a disability (such as myself) by use of generic labeling using “disabled” interchangeably as both a noun and/or adjective. Labeling persons with disabilities may also present difficulties when they arise within various contexts such as bio-medical terminologies as for example “physical disabilities” (see Collins, Barnes, Domenelli (eds.) 2002, chapter listings). In addition to stereotypes constructed about the disabled, I noted research about disability rights continues to fail persons (especially women) by not examining the multiplicity of social oppressions that overlap and weave the tapestries of everyday life. For example, even with the most up to date research on disability rights, it too appears to rely on challenging a broader political and judicial system basing claims on *group* rights and a persons’ right to participate in society based upon all persons conforming to a construct that identifies persons with a disability en masse.

Canadian researcher Marcia Rioux (2002) demonstrates such a relationship about rights and citizenship, with inferences referencing all persons with a disability.

Rights and responsibility as elements of citizenship entail that there must be some way of guaranteeing that they can be realized, if they are not to be hollow rights. The institutions of society, both the political institutions and social institutions such as schools, the labor market, and health care have to be able to guarantee the realization of those rights (2002, p.217).

Rioux then adds, “a citizen has to have both the right and the capacity to participate. Disabled people lack both” (2002, p.217). Interestingly enough, a different kind of oppression appears to be ignored even by experienced researchers of disability such as Marcia Rioux. That is the right for persons with disabilities not to be demeaned by language that uses collective terms as

“disabled people,” implying a homogenous group and a possibly inferring being disabled first and individuals second (see Barnes, 2002; Corker, 1999; Mercer, 2002; Oliver, 1997).

In the international disability rights movement of Great Britain, the expression “disabled people” is used in the collective sense. This choice of language makes different types of assumptions than for example, “persons with a disability.” Therefore, it is important to note that if one takes individuality seriously with the hope that dignity and intrinsic worth remain a social work priority, I believe a collective term like “disabled people” can erase one’s personhood and may perpetuate oppression that social workers seek to challenge. As a feminist social worker and as a woman with a disability, I fear that without a move for researchers to become engaged in examining why language is still considered acceptable with collective terms such as “disabled people”, researchers claiming to be conducting emancipatory research may unconsciously ignore individuality and perceive “it is proving ‘an impossible dream’ ” (Oliver 1997; cited in Mercer, 2002, p. 245).

While a number of researchers are claiming to explore theory from an emancipatory paradigm, Geof Mercer (2002) questions why feminist and interdisciplinary areas of study about disability appear consistently overlooked? Mercer argues that emancipatory research about disability addresses and encompasses “its ontological and epistemological location in a social model of disability, an associated commitment to a partisan approach in challenging the social exclusion of disabled people, and a broad account of ability to disabled people and their organizations” (p.245). Yet note here, Mercer’s use of the broad sweeping term “disabled people” may again en masse oppress individuals who are being made to endure stigma from labels that imply collectivity. Using terms that fail to recognize individuals first, may also

suggest that researchers have power to describe persons with a disability any way she/he so chooses; despite unique differences.

More recently a segment of research into disability studies moved toward recognizing that feminist principles can provide valuable insight into multiple social oppressions. Debates by feminist researchers are now examining the social model of disability being too narrow an approach. This premise is based upon the inclusiveness of traditional bio-medically constructed definitions of disability. Feminist theorist Carol Thomas (2002) notes these dynamics situated within feminist theory need to be explored to understand how negativity about disability arises through the use of language. Thomas (2002) explains the relationship of language and disability. "Rather, all social phenomena, including disability and impairment, should be understood to be woven through, and out of, cultural ideas and discursive practices: there is no 'reality' independent of ideas concerning it" (p. 49). Thomas prefaces her comments by stating "the work of feminists in disability studies is of particular note, but this should not be mistaken for a single set of ideas" (see also Thomas, 1999, 2001, 2002, p. 48).

I find Thomas's perspective appealing because she introduces a critique that identifies and encourages the fluidity of weaving cultural ideas throughout discursive practices. The concept of integrating knowledge with discursive practices is not only significant, but beneficial to social workers. The practice may assist social workers avoiding being involved with a power over dynamic. Finally, research from feminists could emphasize individuality in studies of disability; encouraging an embodied sense of self, inclusive of values such as dignity, intrinsic worth and higher self-esteem.

CRITICAL, ANTI-OPPRESSIVE THEORY, SOCIAL WORK AND DISABILITY:

The millennium brought forth a renewed interest for researchers to explore new directions with critical social work practice. While some of the approaches assisted working with persons with a disability, changes included how social workers researched topics about individuals and then assigned labels to individuals as “cases” and “problems,” (see Adams, 2002, p.85). Critical social workers now placed an emphasis on “achieving an authentic practice which expresses our values and understandings as empowered practitioners as well as empowering the client” (Adams, 2002, p.83). However, some of critical social work research appeared to negate promoting some of the genuineness that originally encouraged diversity and difference. Thus as I reviewed literature about critical social work I noted it too often relies on labels to categorize people with disabilities; mental health, physical disability and learning disability (see also Collins, Barnes, Domenelli (eds.), 2002, chapter listings).

While continuing to review *Critical Practice in Social Work* (2002) I became disappointed that such a recent social work text includes a chapter entitled “Physical Disability.” Bob Sapey (2002) authors a chapter where I discovered a large, bolded typeset disclaimer. It states “the examples I have discussed here are of men and therefore there may be other issues which should be considered in relation to disabled women, but nevertheless I am proposing that there is a possibility of positive social work practice with disabled people” (Sapey, 2002, p. 188). As a social worker and a woman that has a physical disability, I find Sapey’s disclaimer regarding the omission of women inappropriate. His reference to “there may be other issues...” when speaking about women creates an impression that “may” is only a possibility and women with disabilities are not being acknowledged with the same level of importance of disability research as men are. I also believe social workers with critical

thought towards developing anti-oppressive practice would welcome an approach that works *with* any individual, female or male.

After re-reading the chapter that Sapey (2002) wrote, I noticed that while the first half of his disclaimer refers to women's issues, the second half refers to social work practice. By combining two topics in his disclaimer, I believe Sapey negates the nuanced understanding of specific experiences of disability, each subject deserves. I also question Sapey's approach to critical social work practice. Clearly, if social work is purporting to be a discipline that values all persons we work with, then placing disclaimers in texts read by students speaks to a need for further critical thought to ensure discourses are free of oppressive disclaimers that are gender based.

Another piece of literature I reviewed includes a Canadian social work text – *Emerging Perspectives on Anti-oppressive Practice* (2003). Prior to reading the text, my hope was that women with disabilities might be portrayed as a worthy topic of discussion. Through twenty-seven chapters of anti-oppressive social work research, only one chapter addresses persons with disabilities. The chapter specifically examines workplace accommodation. While authors Don Leslie, Kay Leslie, and Michelle Murphy (2003) identify several anti-oppressive social work principles, throughout the chapter no where could I find any reference that even notes how women have struggled to be equally represented within the workforce.

Continuing on examining literature from *Emerging Perspective on Anti-oppressive Practice* (2003), I noted the text includes several chapters with discourses that appear mindful in recognizing oppressions (see Shera, 2003, chapter listings). Even though it is encouraging that persons with disabilities marginalized by society are recognized in social work literature and worthy of at least minimal attention, I failed to find any social work research representing

women with disabilities. It was also interesting to note that in this recently published text I found only one chapter referencing any feminist social work topics.

Donna Baines (2003) discloses “as a feminist practitioner I have grown somewhat accustomed to the lack of feminist analysis within social work” (p.44). Baines’ statement prefaces a much larger issue of how poorly represented women are within social work research. Baines develops her argument by stating “in a chapter that promotes the notion of race, class, and gender as a contentious but continuous amalgam, it is risky to single out one of the three aspects for closer examination and critique” (p. 44). I also question Baines’ use of citing only three categories of oppressions as being beneficial to women with disabilities. For example, if Baines had framed her argument that women need to be represented through *all* determinants of diversity (including but not limited to overlapping differences such as race, class, gender, chronic illness, sexual orientation, age and disability), her argument would be strengthened and anti-oppressive.

While the University of Victoria’s School of Social Work has now adopted anti-oppressive theory as an application for practice, I believe representations of women with disabilities should be included as an area of research and knowledge. My foundation for this argument is two-fold. First, without training that includes acknowledging the challenges of overlapping oppressions for women in their everyday lives, social workers may continue to be inadvertently oppressive by not understanding the depth, extensiveness, and pervasiveness of the layers of oppression. Second, in bringing to the forefront of social work education the power created by social acts of labeling and stigma, training could be encouraged to demonstrate a commitment to anti-oppressive practice inclusive of vocabulary that is

respectful and not demeaning. This would assist students in ensuring that the values of dignity and intrinsic worth are easily understood.

INTERDISCIPLINARY REPRESENTATIONS OF WOMEN WITH DISABILITIES:

Developing a literature review about women with disabilities and the associations with discourse research is proving to be an interesting journey. In addition to examining how women with disabilities are portrayed in the third year A.O.P. 323 Social Work distance training manual, I chose to review pieces of literature that reflect diversity about women with disabilities from disciplines outside of social work. My rationale and hope is that interdisciplinary research will involve furthering a curiosity about how necessary it is for *all* types of academic discourse to respectfully depict women with disabilities. I also hope that heightening insight will assist in eliciting awareness about the depth of oppression in women's everyday lives. Thus the literature I have chosen to review in this section is interdisciplinary, portraying ways of knowing about women with disabilities from social work, women's studies, sociology, geography, disability studies, personal narratives, and social psychology.

To date there appears to be a very small number of social work researchers focusing on representations of women with disabilities that directly (or indirectly) tie discourses to women's everyday lives with anti-oppressive theory or practice. One piece of American social work research in the *Journal of the National Association of Social Workers* is authored by Kathleen Tangenberg and Susan Kemp (2002). Tangenberg and Kemp have produced an exciting piece of ground work for linking theory to social work practice by proposing "an invigorated, more complex understanding of the body and its knowledge in social work theory, practice and research" (p. 10). The article details how women with chronic illness and disabilities are represented by language that integrates theory about disability topics to social

work practice. While Tangenberg and Kemp (2002) are enthusiastic about how they perceive experiences of women and their everyday lives, their approach appears somewhat hesitant. They note that ethically as social work practitioners we must be “mindful that social work has its own commitments and pre-occupations, and that these require us to thread a path through these contributions that has integrity and meaning for this profession and its purposes” (p.10). The “pre-occupation” Tangenberg and Kemp speak of are traditional social work practices of addressing the psychosocial⁴ needs of women as “problematic.” Tangenberg and Kemp strengthen their argument by including interdisciplinary works from other feminist researchers. “We are motivated also by a rich body of recent work in the humanities and the social sciences, which from a variety of different perspectives seeks to recenter the body as a focus of theoretical and practical concern” (Cereonetti & Moore, 1998; Clark, 1999; Stensland & Malterud, 1999; Williams & Bendelow, 1998 cited in Tangenburg & Kemp, 2002, p. 10). I believe Tangenburg and Kemp’s ideas of re-centering the body for theoretical and practical learning is significant to social work students in the quest of learning how to link theory to practice by understanding how women and *their* bodies are portrayed in relation to activities of daily living.

In contrast to social work research, an interdisciplinary example of research about women with disabilities is authored by Vera Chouinard (1999). Chouinard is a Canadian geographer who contributes a chapter in *Embodied Geographies* entitled “Life at the margins: Disabled women’s explorations of ableist spaces”. Chouinard notes that “for women with disabilities negotiating spaces of everyday life, such as the home and work place, is often a difficult, contradictory and oppressive experience” (1999, p.142). Like Chouinard, my

⁴ Psychosocial needs for women with disabilities often include developing opportunities of social inclusion with women that are able-bodied. Social needs should be acknowledged by social workers; including the ability to have one’s self-esteem, self-respect and dignity acknowledged as integral in enhancing one’s mental health.

journey of being a woman with inflammatory arthritis and an interest in disability topics has paralleled her description. Similarly, I experience daily challenges of negotiating spaces with a physical impairment and mobility equipment that places constraints upon activities of daily living. Constraints range from the inability to reach items dropped on the floor and getting in or out of a bathtub, to being barred from entering buildings for functions such as employment or banking, public washroom facilities, and restaurants or shops due to poorly planned spaces.

Chouinard's (1999) portrayals of women with disabilities focus on a key concept of how ableist spaces are comprised and arise from an exploration of economic, political and cultural oppression (see p.142). However I believe her depiction and research stretches beyond parameters of ableist spaces and explores her personal identity and relationship to academia; highlighting multiple challenges the journey with a disability has placed upon her quality of life. In a reference describing how she perceives that diversity and difference is quantified, Chouinard states "the social construction of disabling differences as markers of inferiority and 'otherness' has, at both micro and macro scales, helped to situate disabled women as 'out of place' in society and in the spaces of everyday life"(1999, p.150). The reference to being "'out of place' in society" clearly summarizes the continuing burden women with a disability are dealt when being perceived as "out of place" by societal norms.

Chouinard's (1999) exploration about environment and space demonstrates concepts social work students may benefit from, that is, awareness and insight into women's experiences with disabilities arising from Chouinard's knowledge of socially constructed micro and macro scales of oppression. This type of interdisciplinary literature may also be valuable for students learning how ableism develops through two diverse areas. First, in an excerpt like Chouinard's (1999), readers would be able to relate to her personal situation by

using their ability to visualize circumstances from the detailed imagery she includes within the discourse. Second, despite students being unfamiliar with geographical research Chouinard includes an important perspective that social work students require – linking theory to practice. Therefore, benefit may be derived in learning how oppressions arise for women with disabilities from a denial of entry to environments and spaces where they are often excluded. And, if students can apply further critical thought to issues that Chouinard exposes, they may become able to advocate for social justice, according women with disabilities their need to access spaces to improve one's quality of life.

While all women with disabilities should be represented with dignity and respect, I began to question why literature about diversity and difference still poorly understands about discourses involving the social model of disability. For example, within the social construction of implications for understanding disability, no reference appears to exist about how diverse impairments and chronic illnesses impact each individual. Further, I became curious how it might be best to educate social work students with topics – such as women with invisible disabilities. I hoped that references to chronic illness could be included with a range of depictions that go beyond an initial diagnosis. A case in point is women diagnosed with inflammatory arthritis such as Chouinard (1999). For example, women may initially have an invisible disability however, as the disease progresses a person may become visibly physically challenged with severe impairments. I believe knowledge about women with invisible disabilities could also include references to oppression from social and political forces of power, materiality of the body and relationships to space through inscriptions interpreted by women about their personal identities. As a further expansion of these ideas, a more extensive

portrayal of women with chronic illnesses and invisible disabilities is authored by Pamela Moss and Isabel Dyck (2002).

Canadian geographers Moss and Dyck (2002) examine women's experiences of everyday life through research involving the body and spaces. In their publication of *Women, Body, Illness* (2002) Moss and Dyck portray women with chronic illnesses and disabilities and further illustrate examples outlining variations of women's functionality, energy and ability – physically and emotionally from hours to days, and weeks to months. Throughout the publication these authors include an ongoing vignette utilizing a fictional portrayal of a woman called “*Patience*.” By interweaving the character illustration within the texts, *Patience*'s characterization clearly depicts the everyday life of a woman experiencing her chronic illness. Discourses detailing *Patience*'s activities of daily life elicits the position that on difficult days getting up, eating, showering and dressing may consume hours of one's time – only to be left in a state of physical exhaustion and pain. And, unless a ‘definitive’ medical diagnosis is ascertained, low self-esteem and depression may occur for women like *Patience* because health-care practitioners, friends, family members and co-workers may believe that the woman is not ill and that no symptoms truly exist.

Moss and Dyck (2002) focus their portrayals of how women labeled by a diagnosis of either inflammatory Rheumatoid Arthritis (R.A.) or Myalgic Encephalomyelitis (M.E.) experience their bodies through illness and disability and move in and out of layers of physical and emotional symptoms. Clouds of exhaustion are often compounded by pain arising from the demands of activities of daily living. Moss and Dyck provide additional information stating “defining chronic illness in terms of disability raises questions about which types [of illnesses] are disabling and to what extent” (2002, p.16). These insights provide awareness

into theories related to women and *their* bodies; including identity and space being portrayed and depicted through discourses to provide a medium of imagery for readers. The acknowledgement of women, bodies and illness also puts forth new ways of knowing about how women struggle in and out of personal spaces. Thus, the benefit to social work students may arise from awareness of time and energy spent by women with chronic illnesses and/or disabilities trying to accomplish physical tasks within *their* everyday lives, compounded by difficulty with thinking, memory and emotional stability as well as the structures they have to negotiate for treatment, income, family obligations, and employment opportunities.

In contrast to academic literature and theory, I read a moving narrative about a woman unable to speak for herself. Canadian author and activist Nicola Schaefer (1999) writes a passionate portrayal of her daughter living independently with severe developmental, intellectual, and physical disabilities. In *Does she know she's there* (1999) Schaefer explores her daughter Catherine's experiences through humorous⁵ vignettes of her activities of daily living. Throughout the narrative, Schaefer's values manifest clearly during each description about her daughter's living environment, detailing how intrinsic worth is integrated into Catherine's everyday life.

Pieces of literature portraying women with disabilities using humor are difficult to find, let alone produce. While one needs to respectfully approach humor through the eyes of the writer and subject, questions still arise. For example, is it ethically appropriate to include humor about persons unable to speak for themselves for students learning about the topic of disability?

⁵ Humor is a difficult topic in understanding discourse, especially when arguing that depictions of women with disabilities need to be respectful. While humor can elicit a great sense of ease, it is critical that the initiator of the humor be aware of the potential for the joke or comment to be demeaning; thereby furthering enhancing marginalization and/or oppression.

Schaefer's (1999) description of Catherine and her living accommodation includes the following analogy. "When I'm talking about Catherine's life, particularly her living situation, I try to stress that the arrangement we've helped her concoct should not be treated as an inflexible recipe" (p. 282). While I find it interesting that Schaefer elaborates and chooses to reflect upon her daughter's lifestyle inclusive of metaphors to ingredients, taste, availability and good cooking, the style she has chosen to judiciously craft words and phrases offers readers a sense of ease. As a social worker I found it enlightening that the language within Schaefer's publication becomes a medium to elicit imagery of the representation that ultimately gains the reader's respect for women like Catherine.

Schaefer's writing is powerful – both as a vehicle that provides a message that women such as Catherine are worthy of our respect in spite of, and because of her diversity and differences. For example Schaefer adds "had she been a different person, her requirements, and the set-up we created, would also have been different" (1999, p. 282). Staging Catherine's environment sets up the narrative to be especially significant. And although I recognize that many social work students may have never interacted with a woman like Catherine, I believe it is critical in portraying women with severe developmental challenges. My reasoning is two- fold. First, readers need to be able to relate to the imagery of an individual, for it is through an empathetic reading of Catherine's experiences that may provide the basis for informing theory and practice. Second, awareness of this type of engagement with a person with severe physical and cognitive challenges may encourage social workers to better respond to women who are developmentally challenged. For example, students could also learn to be more at ease in speaking directly with an individual who is developmentally challenged instead of just relatives or other health-care or service professionals.

Throughout my literature review search, I found it engaging to read portrayals of women with disabilities describing how they cope with a mental illness in everyday life. One useful example of literature from an education professor depicted her struggle with chronic depression. Susan Gabel (1999) speaks candidly about her personal challenges and experiential wisdom. In her opening statement, Gabel creatively frames her narrative with the following disclosure. "I offer a philosophical rather than an empirical critique of discourses of mental illness and while doing so, I draw upon my own experiences as a person who lives with depression" (1999, p.38). Gabel goes on to describe how embodied her mental illness has become and provides readers critical insight into how experiential wisdom can be developed academically in conjunction with discourses explaining her critical thinking (see Gabel, 1999, p.39). This discussion forms the basis of her analysis.

Within that conceptual framework, imagine any experience of disability, which of necessity is an experience of the body. If the person having the experience concludes that she is disabled, then she is, indeed, disabled. Contrastingly, if the person having the experience concludes that she is not disabled, then she is not disabled. Both conclusions would hold whether or not others observe the disabled-ness and whether or not they agree (Gabel, 1999, p. 38).

Again, I believe that social work students may benefit most by reading and critically thinking about analogies and metaphors related to describing disabilities such as mental illness. "My medication is my wheelchair and rest is my access ramp, or perhaps it is the other way round I am disabled. But am I mentally ill?" (Gabel, 1999, p. 39). Consequently, for social work students who have never had personal interaction with women who have a mental illness, benefit arises from engaging with Gabel's research both as a person with mental illness and also providing a non-threatening approach to a chronic illness often feared by society. In addition, this research illustrates that mental illness is a symptomatic experience that often fluctuates through everyday life.

Most portrayals of women with disabilities have been written personally by women who both experience and research *their* own everyday lives. However, in an unusual piece of research by a male geographer, Michael Dorn (1998) provides an intriguing account of a woman with a disability. Dorn's account of Patty Hayes includes her "life experiences of disability activist, designer and philosopher;" written in biographical style. Dorn's research is entitled "Beyond Nomadism: The travel narratives of a 'cripple'". The article expresses the everyday life about a woman with a severe neuromuscular disability. Dorn's discourses explicitly includes use of the term "cripple"; normally considered outdated and disrespectful (1998, p.183). However, as a woman with a disability bound (like Patty) by the constraints of environment and spaces due to my wheelchair, I was intrigued by Dorn's title with a reference to "cripple". In an epistemological turn, I discovered the term "cripple" is embraced and redefined through the depiction of wheelchair travels through various spaces within Patty's environment. However, I confess when this piece of research was initially recommended by my thesis supervisor – I read it with great reservation.

Drawing upon my experience as a social worker and woman with a disability, I am often apprehensive of how language about disability topics is expressed. However, Dorn's (1998) research has removed my fears. Dorn proves that by stating early on in the introduction his intent as a geographer is to illustrate and "show how a 'spatial dissident' exhibits a mature form of environmental sensitivity by remaining attentive and responsive to changing environmental conditions, in the process helping to chart new routes for others to follow" – dispelling any intent to disrespect persons with a disability (p.183). By conducting research that recognizes "environmental sensitivity" along with chronicling Patty's everyday life, Dorn takes responsibility for ensuring that discourse is respectfully demonstrated. By

stating “newly accessible public spaces become sites for dialogue between the disabled and the able-bodied” Dorn ensures a critical view is offered for readers to imagine how Patty’s journey is engaged with and, realized as thoughtful and considerate (1998, p.198).

Together the researchers and writers I reviewed in this section have portrayed women with disabilities using similar and effective strategies. These approaches include language as a communication medium of discourse to portray women with disabilities through clear, anti-oppressive images by using carefully chosen words and phrases. Included in the literature review is an appealing desire from all eight authors to write freely about multifaceted issues affecting women with disabilities. All authors cautiously demonstrate obstacles in the lives of women with disabilities as ongoing and oppressive; stemming from socially developed values and assumptions. For example, Chouinard (1999) argues about barriers experienced with her employment. She states: “when I raised this with my Dean and Chair, neither of whom were familiar with the law regarding disabled employees, I quickly realized that lack of awareness on the part of those in power was another barrier that people like myself had to struggle to overcome on a daily basis” (p. 145).

In contrast Gabel (1999) expresses an intriguing argument of her experience with social barriers.

If we look disabled, we are likely to be perceived as disabled to feel disabled. If we do not look disabled we are less likely to be perceived as disabled and to feel disabled. I argue that this is not necessarily the case and it should not be the primary way to interpret disabled identity (p. 38).

Equally so, while Dorn (1998) and Schaefer (1999) both author texts about the lives of women with disabilities, they are both able to create an argument that everyday experiences of women with disabilities do matter. Dorn documents Patty Hayes’ activities of daily living by further arguing the importance of her quality of life and dependency upon the environment with her

wheelchair. To demonstrate the accomplishment of simple activities of daily living he adds that Patty becomes skilled by being “able to develop trust in her own instincts and inclinations, intervening and rearranging the supposedly universal, external laws, guidelines and codes of her urban and domestic environment” (1998, p. 198). Schaefer (1999) portrays her daughter Catherine’s environment and argues that in order for her to increase her quality of life, Catherine’s input into the environment is critical to her success of accomplishing activities. Schaefer notes: “I was particularly pleased to see the dining room being transformed into Cath’s bedroom, in the design of which she and I had participated” (1999, p. 250).

Researchers Moss and Dyck (2002) detail results of their extensive study of the experiences of forty-nine women with chronic illness and disabilities. In their work they argue that issues of environment, space, identity, and quality of life are linked to women’s spaces and activities of daily living. Moss and Dyck further increase awareness about women with chronic illness and disability by arguing the significance of personal environments. “Our point was to illustrate how *some women* [*sic*] attempt to restructure their environments so as to coordinate more closely their lived spaces (embodiment) with their social and physical environments” (p.170). Moss and Dyck’s writing highlights that all women with chronic illness and disability are worthy of respect – publishing a text that exemplifies dignity and value that *all* women deserve when portrayed through research.

Throughout my review of the works of these researchers and authors, I have developed a sincere desire to interest social work students and practitioners in educating themselves about women with disabilities. I believe all women with disabilities portrayed in any piece of literature should be depicted as valued members of society, despite characteristics of their individual type of impairments being radically diverse from each other.

Representations of women deserve anti-oppressive depictions that justify and acknowledge dignity and intrinsic worth; inclusive of moving out of the margins and into spaces where they are accepted and welcomed as equal members of society. Finally, I believe any social work student deserves literature in their training manuals that has been written by women with disabilities that express their experiential wisdom in a format that reflects anti-oppressive practice values.

CHAPTER THREE

CHOREOGRAPHING THE METHODOLOGY: AN INTRODUCTION TO DISCOURSE ANALYSIS:

As a social worker and woman with a disability, I occupy a rather unique position of being able to draw upon social work theory and knowledge in both my professional and personal life. Yet, even being familiar with both roles, moving sideways and back and forth between them, I am mindful in my everyday life that *all* women with disabilities should be portrayed through respectful discourses in any role she chooses to assume. My initial preference for a methodology of discourse analysis was supplemented by an acknowledgement that the depictions of women with disabilities I examine also contained experiential wisdom. While this preference of analysis formed my preliminary approach, it soon became evident that I needed to explore a number of specific aspects of research in order to select the particular methodology.

I initially worked from an understanding of discourse analysis as a linear analytical process including succinct stages of word counts and sentence patterns that only theorists and linguists formulate. My understanding was broadened quite quickly when I investigated more thoroughly the types of discourse analysis. I soon realized that nearly any research strategy involving discourse analysis would fit well with uncovering the meaning of the representations contained in texts and that each type of discourse analysis brought with it a particular analytical process. Both these realizations prepared me for an analysis of depictions of women with disabilities within pedagogical material included in social work training courses.

I then reviewed various types of discourse analysis. Three of the types of discourse analysis included the works of Jean Carabine (2001), Norman Fairclough (2001) and Robin

Wooffitt (2001). Carabine's (2001) approach to discourse analysis shows "how we can apply Foucault's genealogical approach – his concerns with power" (p. 267). She traces the discursive influences causing shifts in understandings of motherhood over a 160 year period. The second researcher I explored was Norman Fairclough (2001). He developed Critical Discourse Analysis (C.D.A.) as a way to address social inequities through the use of language. Fairclough (2001) notes that, "C.D.A. provides a way of moving between close analysis of texts and interactions, and social analyses of various types" (p. 229). The third approach to discourse analysis I explored was Wooffitt's (2001) scrutiny of conversation. "Conversation analysis or (C.A.), is a method for the analysis of naturally occurring interaction" (p. 49). C.A. focuses on the interactive dynamics of using words. Although Norman Fairclough's (2001) method of C.D.A. immediately jumped out as being the most suitable method to further investigate my own topic, especially with his commitment to being critical how social issues evolve through discourses and are represented through texts, in the end I decided it would be best for this research project to continue reading and piece together a methodological approach that would be specific to my inquiry, and draw on three compatible approaches that would address the other's weaknesses and strengths. Thus I eventually settled on a choreography of a methodology that included Fairclough (2002, 2003), Grbich (1999) and Wetherell (2001). But before I review their work I need to account for the pathway I used to find their research.

Continuing the process of investigating suitable methodologies, I then took into account advice about choosing a specific research strategy by asking myself what purpose(s) I wanted my research method to fulfill. Janice Morse's (1998) work on strategies about research selection highlights the role of the researcher.

Research strategies are merely tools; it is the researcher's responsibility to understand the variety available and the different purposes of each strategy, to appreciate in advance the ramifications of selecting one method over another, and to become astute in the selection of one method over another (1998, p. 62).

Given Morse's (1998) insight into researchers becoming "astute" with her/his method selection, it made good sense prior to making a final decision to consider several additional questions about the research process.

In furthering my quest of deciding about a methodology and method of data analysis I took into account whether third year social work students are enrolled on-campus or in a distance format in Social Work 323 Anti-oppressive Praxis coursework. Once I determined that the majority of students are enrolled in SOCW 323 through distance education, I soon realized the distance component of literature social work students interact with includes an extensive quantity of textual discourses. What's more, I ascertained this particular piece of third year coursework provides students an opportunity to critically reflect upon theory and knowledge through a training manual of about twenty very diverse and specialized topics.

Given this information, I then considered social factors of the varied distance and geographical locations of students, the regularity with which students could verbally discuss literature located in the training manual (such as disability) with their peers, and whether or not there would be regular and/or intermittent interaction with their professor. I also felt it necessary to concentrate my research on literature provided via only one section of the distance training manual. My rationale for this choice is based on being a social worker and a woman with disability. As well being aware from my own experiential wisdom, there are issues linking theory and practice in understanding disability issues. I also considered that there may be different professors/senior instructors teaching and facilitating the coursework

who have varying degrees of experiential wisdom and/or teaching experiences with literature about disability topics.

Insight and personal knowledge elicited several more questions. For example, I wondered should distance social work students (dependent on learning from textual discourses) be expected to acquire knowledge about topics (such as disability) and become a speaker while in her/his practicum placement. I thought that since social work students frequently must perform the role of a speaker and resource person in a social service agency during her/his community practicum, do students have easy access to current knowledge about disability within their training manuals?

Subsequently, in another consideration about the methodology choice, I then reflected upon professional praxis. I contemplated whether one's social work practice can have both a direct and indirect relationship to persons in need of services (often referred to in social work practice as the client)? However, since most persons in need of services that have a disability may become directly dependent on the social worker assuming the role of a listener about their social issues, it seemed reasonable to assume that the knowledge a social work student imparts in her/his role of a speaker often impacts a person's quality of life. I reasoned that a social work student's knowledge is not only based upon information provided from coursework within distance training manual, but also from social policies and legislation. In fact, social work students often learn to facilitate a story through the role of a speaker from knowledge and policies they interpret during their first or second practicum placements.

Researchers van Dijk and Kintsch (1983) provide excellent insight into the topic about the role of a speaker. "When telling a story a speaker will engage in the social act, a speech act, of asserting something, or warning the listener about something..." (p. 7). In social work

practice a caution (warning) is often made by the social worker who must consider the best interest of the person in need. However, social workers are also obligated to advocate for persons/individuals (clients) while concurrently complying with the profession's *Standards of Practice* (2004) and legislation. The current mandate for all social workers has been created by the British Columbia Board of Registration for Social Workers and is also upheld by the British Columbia Association of Social Workers (B.C.A.S.W.) *Standards of Practice* (2004). With respect to a social worker's level of knowledge, a section on competency is included in the document: "Social workers are responsible for being aware of the extent and parameters of their competence and the professional scope of practice and limit their practice accordingly" (Article 2.1) (2004, p. 2). The article is further footnoted with a provision stating "a body of knowledge can be attained through education, clinical experience, consultation and supervision, professional development and a review of relevant of research and literature" (see footnote 4, 2004, p.2).

Now armed with additional information about issues of "relevant research and literature" complementing social work standards for professional praxis, a discourse analysis appeared the most logical choice to research textual representations. Equipped with this methodology decision, I then considered two other questions. Would applying a discourse analysis to texts be conducive to examining discourses from both my positions as a social worker and as a woman with a disability? And, do all styles of discourse analysis have similar approaches with examining language with respect to issues of power, oppression, social justice and social change?

Grbich (1999) notes that research as discourse analysis usually takes one of two formats: "an exploration of language structure through form, regularities, meanings and

linguistic patterns that can be compared and constructed” or a “contextualized events based in particular cultures that shape, and are shaped by, social context and identifiable power relations” (Grbich, 1999, p. 151). Grbich (1999) also states that while discourses contain “linguistic patterns” it is also essential to uncover how forces of power shape the patterns of language, as for example discourses of policies and legislation that oppress persons challenged with a specific disability. The challenge then becomes the responsibility of social workers to perform several roles as a listener, reader and interpreter of legislated regulations for persons in need of social assistance – making it fundamental that discourses in training manuals are up to date with information about topics prior to students embarking into practicum.

What's more, a major detail required by social workers in professional praxis is an obligation to understand and apply discursive practices with some comprehension of how language and discourse constitute social work terminology. This rationale led me then to wonder if the discursive practices used by social work students unintentionally oppress individuals with disabilities from the misapplication of terminology where students may inadvertently misinterpret the nuances and/or meanings. And, is there a further possibility of social work students not being able to apply knowledge accurately while out on practicum due to limited mandatory reading on specialized topics, such as disability? After much thought, I realized the selection of texts for a discourse analysis selection would also have to involve choreography of various types of discourse analysis to ensure which type of analysis would best fit my data source – distance training manual literature.

After investigating a number of methods of discourse analysis, I discovered critical discourse analysis assists with uncovering how the attribution of language reflects social factors contributing to power and oppression. Critical discourse analysis (C.D.A.) allows the

researcher to ask “how does language figure as an element in social processes?” It further questions “the relationship of language to other elements of social processes” (Wetherell, 2001, p.228). I believe Wetherell’s (2001) research highlighting the relationship of language to social interaction may assist social work students in understanding discourses may also be able to assist in laying the groundwork to facilitate the process of social change.

In social work practice, I have come to realize that power may be located in language. Unfortunately, I have also observed that social consequences arising from poorly understood discursive practices may adversely affect the quality of life for persons with disabilities (especially women). These same women often endure overlapping oppressions due to gender inequality and may become further oppressed by the consequences of inequitable practices through inadequately written communication in disability applications. However, after much thought about how discursive practices evolve I’m hopeful that by applying a discourse analysis as a methodology, it may support a “capacity to provide critical insight into the fine details of the interweaving of hegemony, ideology, power and practice in the development, maintenance and negotiation of discourses” (Grbich, 1999, p.156). That is, a discourse analysis may seek to discern and provide detailed “critical insight” into discourses about disability as they manifest in training manuals, written documents and legislation where theory and social practices about disability may be reproduced over and over again.

Discourse analyst Norman Fairclough (2001) notes in his research design that critical discourse analysis seeks to “discern connections between language and other elements in social life which are often opaque” (p. 230). For example in the discipline of social work, there exist opaque areas of practice where discretionary authoritative decisions are made – a process absolutely necessary if social workers are to assist women with disabilities. I realized

that critical discourse analysis may be useful in providing some of the background theory and concepts I need to inform my analysis as I worked to uncover information differentiating language patterns contained within disability studies literature. I am most curious to know if the process of discourse analysis may lend insight into whether a respectful and adequate portrayal of women with disabilities exists “where words, gestures, phrases and other conventions of speech, acting and writing have particular meaning” for women in their everyday lives (Grbich, 1999, p. 154). Finally, while I have choreographed and fine tuned bits and pieces of discourse analysis components and discussed them thus far, another important component of my analytical process is reflexivity and my comments emanating from a reflexive practice.

REFLEXIVITY:

Reflexivity is a practice that assists social workers to generate insight into their quest to practice anti-oppressively. Social workers strive to maintain a balance between “good practice and bad practice, or more appropriately, good practices and bad practices. Getting away from the need for the one right answer should not be taken as an excuse for the kind of atheoretical practice that can be characterized as ‘if it feels good, do it’.” (Ife, 2005, p. 9). As a community social worker I believe that by using reflexivity as a tool informing my professional praxis I am able to continuously learn how to gain insight into what I am doing and provide a pathway for me to improve what it is I do. As a tool to assist in facilitating a critical approach to how “good or bad” practice is linked, reflexivity is an ongoing exercise of improving and building upon new and/or previous social work skills and techniques.

I have come to value the relationship of critical thinking along with reflexivity when I examine social work ethics. An additional advantage to engaging in reflexivity is becoming

aware of both verbal and written discourse I use in my daily practices, mainly through the hundreds of discursive practices I perform over and over. This process requires that I consciously separate my feelings, thoughts and assumptions as a woman with a disability from my practice as a community social worker. In this sense, reflexivity has taught me to be aware of the choices I make with each individual that I work with and to learn from my choices, decisions and actions. The process has given me further insight into the acknowledgement that social work is a practice of ongoing reflections – sometimes in a quiet atmosphere where I can think through my own practice and the things I still need to work on – sometimes on the fly, in the moment, as an immediate act. At any rate, reflexivity is an important process I engage in that it contributes to critical thought and experiential wisdom about my own values so that I can forge a professional practice that values dignity, respect and intrinsic worth.

Critically reflective practice requires that a social worker be aware not only of the immediate circumstances of an individual, family group or community, but also of the wider social and political context within which they are located. Structures and discourses of disadvantage, dominant ideologies, and political reality all impact on a social worker's practice (Ife, 2005, p.10).

Finally, reflexivity has been purposefully placed in my methodology and my discourse analysis to give myself an exercise in being conscious about feelings, thoughts and assumptions I have related to and/or with the literature I examined. The wisdom I gained from performing the method of the analysis about identifying my personal values has already become invaluable. In my analysis I also generate a set of reflexive comments as a record of the reflexivity within which I engaged.

DEVELOPING A PLAN FOR DISCOURSE ANALYSIS:

My approach to the discourse analysis is composed of three initial stages of analysis; stage 1: definition of the context, stage 2: identification of power relations as a departure point

for change and stage 3: analysis compilation. My choreography of these stages and the method of analysis is a result of the integration of insights I gained from Grbich (1999), Fairclough (2001; 2003) and Wetherell (2001). By choreography I refer to a series of steps and maneuvers that danced and moved me with the data as I worked with the three texts. As I undertook the dance, I was able to read the data, reflect on the text and write up what I found. But before presenting results of my choreography I need to provide a description of the dance itself.

Initially I started to choreograph my research based upon Fairclough's (2001) critical discourse analysis methodology (C.D.A.). He describes his five stages of C.D.A.:

Stage 1 Focus upon a social problem that has a semiotic aspect. Beginning with a social problem rather than the more conventional 'research question' accords with the critical intent of this approach – the production of knowledge which can lead to emancipatory change.

Stage 2 Identify obstacles to the social problem being tackled. You can do this through analysis of:

- a) the network of practices it is located within
- b) the relationship of semiosis to other elements within the particular practice(s) concerned
- c) the discourse (the semiosis itself) by means of:
 - structural analysis: the order of discourse
 - interactional analysis
 - interdiscursive analysis
 - linguistic and semiotic analysis

The objective here is to understand how the problem arises and how the problem arises and how it is rooted in the way social life is organized, by focusing on the obstacles to its resolution – on what makes it more or less intractable.

Stage 3 Consider whether the social order (network of practices) 'needs' the problem. The point here is to ask whether those who benefit most from the way social life is now organized have an interest in the problem *not* being resolved.

Stage 4 Identify possible ways past the obstacles. This stage in the framework is a crucial complement to stage 2 – it looks for hitherto unrealized possibilities for change in the way social life is currently organized.

Stage 5 Reflect critically on the analysis (Stages 1-4). This is not strictly part of Bhaskar's explanatory critique but it is an important addition, requiring the analyst to reflect on where s/he is coming from, and her/his own social positioning (2001, p.236).

My three stages of analysis differ. I focus first on defining the context within which women with disabilities live, second on identifying various sets of power relations within which women with disabilities can locate themselves and effect social change and third on reflecting upon the insights I generated through my own analysis of the texts. As well, by focusing three stages upon the discourse analysis, I can take into account not only identifying social issues, but also aspects of my personal identity necessary for reflexivity. I wanted to ensure that like Grbich (1999), I put into practice (as best I could) the conceptual distinction among my various viewpoints. Through my choreographed approach, I was able to undertake an in depth and methodical process that assisted in discovering if representations of women with disabilities currently portrayed in the SOCW 323 distance training manual contain the anti-oppressive values of diversity and difference the School of Social Work endorses. Recall that Wetherell (2001) argues that discourse needs to be linked to the social processes and, by extension, social practices, including for example the training of social workers.

For this research I employed my discourse analysis framework to the current required reading and the two optional texts located in Section 17 of the School of Social Work A.O.P. 323 Distance Manual.

Required reading:

Wendell, S. (1996). Who is disabled? Defining Disability. In *The Rejected Body: Feminist Philosophical Reflections on Disability*. London: Routledge, pp.11-33

Optional readings:

Doucette, Joanne. (1989). Redefining differences: Disabled Lesbians Resist. *Resources for Feminist Research*. 18(2), pp.17-21

Driedger, Diane. (1992). Women with disabilities: Naming oppression. *Resources for Feminist Research*, 20(1/2), pp. 5-8

THE RESEARCH DESIGN:

For each of the three readings in the social work course on anti-oppressive praxis (SOCW 323), I applied my three stage analysis. In the first stage of analysis, I first explored language that described the context of the lives of women with disabilities, especially in relation to identifying social issues women with disabilities face. I also focused my analysis on how women with disabilities are socially represented in relation to the discursive practices issues that social workers engage in, in terms of evaluation, as for example income support applications, disability benefit applications, social housing referrals, employment training applications, and crisis counseling as well as social relationships with other able-bodied women and society at large. In the second part of the first stage of analysis, I examined the data through the role of a reader, through my experiences as a social worker and through the wisdom of being a woman with a disability.

While I have examined the texts methodically, there is an element of reflexivity in this stage that demonstrates how my ontological beliefs and values have been realized throughout the research method. The process of reflexivity is noted by researcher Carol Grbich (1999) as being significant. "Reflexivity, at the very least, involves a process of self-awareness that should clarify how one's beliefs have been socially constructed and how these values are impacting on interaction and interpretation in research settings" (Grbich, 1999, p. 65). Thus as I continued to uncover the data and piece together various steps and stages, I became mindful that the process may impact how the interpretation of literature about portrayals of women with disabilities may unfold. Therefore I also felt in the second stage of the analysis, through careful scrutiny and reflection, I was able to uncover several depictions

of women with disabilities underlain by various social issues imbued with hegemonic power relations. In short, I identified power relations as potential sites for locating effort to effect social change. I examined the texts again with an emphasis on how power manifests itself through different and various sets of relations.

In the third part of stage one, I reflected on my analysis to date. This process was crucial to pulling my analysis together because in this stage I formed conclusions and emphasized, insights from both my critical thinking and own reflections – a process all social workers can value in improving their attempts to link theory and praxis. For example, In *Critical Practice in Social Work* researcher Lena Dominelli (2002) notes “... in critical practice, professionals are considered as moral agents engaging in a moral activity. That is why the value of social justice is so important to practice. Promoting this value may constitute the key difference between traditional practitioners and critical ones” (p. 25). Dominelli’s engagement and encouragement of social justice as a vital skill for the social work profession and is also echoed in the final analysis. For the discipline of social work, my analysis may prove to be invaluable in identifying social issues affecting women with disabilities that theory and praxis may have overlooked.

In preparation for my analysis, I numbered the lines in each piece of writing for easier reference. Conducting the discourse analysis began with my own design of a computerized template, and different colour coded notations for each stage of textual analysis (see Appendix A sample coding sheet). As the analysis proceeded, I added other notes to each page. At the top of the page I recorded my initial impressions of the reading. In the middle section of the page I made notes on the texts from the position of a social worker. At the bottom of the page with a margin separating the above two categories, I wrote my reflexive comments as a

woman with a disability. When I went back to re-read the articles (three times for the second part of the first stage of the analysis), I concentrated only on marking in each category during each reading. This strategy enabled me to be consistent in coding across the three texts and to concentrate solely on one dimension of my reflexivity at a time: first as a reader, second as a social worker and third as a woman with a disability. For the second stage of analysis, my reading concentrated on reading each article to pick up the social issues as part of the context displayed by each text relating to power relations. Throughout these numerous critical readings, I made detailed notes as to how these observations link together so that I would be able to critically assess the depictions of women with a disability (third stage of analysis).

The series of templates I devised for my analysis contained the following processes:

- type out each article as the article is printed
- number the lines of each article
- colour code each article with social issues
- footnote each colour-coded set of social issues in each text and save in a separate file
- make three copies of each file that is colour coded
- extract the data of lines from within each footnote on a separate page
- do an additional file of another colour and code each footnote with an analysis of an explanation of a reader for all three articles (texts) from beginning to end
- repeat the above step for all three articles with a different colour coding and proceed with a separate file for each text as a reader and as a social worker.

- develop another set of three files with the same footnotes and analyze each set of lines of texts the sequence indicates and create files of reflexive comments
- for each text compile all three files of colour coding into one file with the footnote at the top and the three categories listed below in the same sequence: as a reader, as a social worker and reflexivity (see sample coding sheet in Appendix A)
- highlight each file in order with highlighter (bold) of each colour coded section and note the underlying social issue/theme that appears in each step of examination
- develop a file for each category of stage one: as a reader, as a social worker and reflexivity
- do an analysis of each set of boded comments and note the number of times and lines numbers that each comment appears in
- write the down in sequence the categories of each set of texts in order and place the analysis in a table format
- repeat all the above steps for issues of power and hegemony
- do the final analysis based upon the entire collection of information obtained in a sequential pattern located in a table within the thesis

During the writing of the analysis chapter, I also sorted through all my notes and files and came up with an ordered and synthesized picture of the readings. Together, these steps provided me with a discourse analysis of the way in which women with a disability have been depicted and portrayed in the three pieces of literature included in the distance education training manual for SOCW 323. The analysis also will provide me with information to assess

whether or not the depictions support the School of Social Work's commitment to training students anti-oppressively.

CHAPTER FOUR

DATA AND ANALYSIS:

In this chapter I present my critical discourse analysis of three pieces of literature from the University of Victoria School of Social Work Anti-oppressive Praxis training manual (SOCW 323: Section 17). The three pieces are:

Doucette, Joanne. (1989). Redefining differences: Disabled Lesbians Resist. *Resources for Feminist Research*, 18(2), pp.17-21

Driedger, Diane. (1988). Women with disabilities: naming oppression. *Resources for Feminist Research*, 20(1/2), pp. 5-8

Wendell, Susan. (1996). *The Rejected Body*. New York: Routledge.

In my analysis I follow the methodology outlined in the previous chapter. For purposes of this thesis, I chose to evaluate the literature alphabetically by the author's surname in order to apply the discourse analysis with a consistent, nonjudgmental process. As part of each analysis, I provide an abstract I wrote for each of the articles. I then report on each of the stages of analysis. The first stage identifies various social issues that define the context within which women with disabilities negotiate their identity and their social environments. The second stage of the analysis indicates which sets of power relations have been identified as influential in locating women with a disability within society. These sets of power relations are identified as departure points for change, that is, they are sites to deploy strategies for change or points for women with a disability to resist and struggle to change. The third stage comprises my own critical reflection on the analysis so far. It is here that I pull together my thoughts about how women with a disability are being portrayed in these three articles that comprise my data.

LITERATURE ABSTRACT: *Redefining differences: Disabled Lesbians Resist* (Doucette, 1989).

Joanne Doucette (1989) writes this article referencing her personal journey as a Canadian woman with a disability – inclusive of the experiences of eleven other women. All individuals in this study have identified themselves as women with physical disabilities along with *their* choice to disclose being lesbian. Throughout the article, excerpts from eleven interviews conducted by Doucette (1989) offers free rein to each woman to not only describe an identity but also depict her social location. As the illustrations evolve, uniqueness about each woman's experiential wisdom is realized. The portrayals Doucette creates include how women pursue daily struggles with social issues – issues such as lack of housing, employment, elementary and post-secondary education, inaccessibility of public spaces, lack of vocational training, validation of parenthood, assumptions about sexuality and an ongoing lack of accessible transportation. Doucette (1989) uses several vignettes that detail tension, conflict and resistance resulting from women seen as deviant from the norms in society. Finally, Doucette notes that the emotions the women experience significantly contribute to understanding *their* unique identities – hopeful of being socially accepted with a disability or choice of sexuality.

STAGE 1: Definition of context – as a reader (Doucette, 1989)

In this article, I noted that there is an abundance of simple and complex social issues identified as pertinent in the depiction of women with disabilities (also identifying as women who are lesbian). The categories of social issues about women with disabilities include: bio-medical inaccuracies; emotional abuse; exclusion to the workforce; fear; inaccessibility in public spaces; issues about motherhood; issues about

sexuality; labeling and stigma arising from assumptions/stereotypes; lack of affordable housing; lack of inclusiveness within peer situations as women, as women with disabilities *and* as women as lesbians; lack of vocational training; loss of self-worth and self-esteem; physical abuse; racism; unemployment; various levels of poverty/low income; verbal abuse. See Table 4.1. (Social issues are listed in the text and listed in the table alphabetically).

Table 4.1. Stage one: definition of context – as a reader (Doucette, 1989).

Social issues as a reader:	Frequency in text:
bio-medical inaccuracies	2
emotional abuse	6
exclusion to the workforce	2
fear	3
inaccessibility in public spaces	2
issues about motherhood	1
issues about sexuality	3
labeling and stigma arising from stereotypes	12
lack of affordable housing	2
lack of inclusiveness within peer situations as women, as women with disabilities <i>and</i> as women as lesbians	9
lack of vocational training	2
loss of self-worth and self-esteem	5
physical abuse	4
racism	5
unemployment	3
various levels of poverty and low income	4
verbal abuse	4

STAGE 1: Definition of context – as a social worker (Doucette, 1989).

The social issues I marked as important from the standpoint as a social worker are: anger and/or frustration; being segregated and/or isolated; benefits/drawbacks of group diversity versus collectivity; cruelty and/or abuse; discrimination in the workforce; emotional consequences and/or low self-esteem; examples of colonialism; fear and/or stressful issues; homophobia; lack of barrier free access; lack of education about social

issues; lack of rights evolving from legislation; lack of social housing; lack of social responsibility; medical inaccuracies; parenthood issues; patriarchy; poverty and low income; racism and/or ethnicity concerns; stereotypes arising from presuppositions; stigma and labeling. See Table 4.2. (Social issues are listed in the text and listed in the table alphabetically).

Table 4.2. Stage one: definition of context – as a social worker (Doucette, 1989).

Social issues as a social worker:	Frequency in text:
anger and/or frustration	9
being segregated and/or isolated	7
benefits/drawbacks of group diversity versus collectivity	13
cruelty and/or abuse	10
discrimination in the workforce	4
emotional consequences and/or low self-esteem	6
examples of colonialism	4
fear and/or stressful issues	13
homophobia	5
lack of barrier free access	5
lack of education about social issues	10
lack of rights evolving from legislation	3
lack of social housing	1
lack of social responsibility	5
medical inaccuracies	1
parenthood issues	2
patriarchy	2
poverty and low income	4
racism and/or ethnicity concerns	6
stereotypes arising from presuppositions	11
stigma and labeling	3

STAGE 1: Definition of context – as a woman with a disability (Doucette, 1989).

As a woman with a disability, I identified social issues from a reflexive standpoint involving my personal journey as a woman and one who is challenged by her physical limitations. The data on my reflexivity includes: a sense of self-esteem and/or feeling valued; being undefined and/or undecided about my opinion; examples of oppressive

issues to women with disabilities; feeling depressed; feeling empathy; feeling frustrated about assumptions; feeling insulted and/or disrespected; feelings of sadness; feeling opposed and/or in disagreement; feeling sincerity and/or hopeful; feeling there is a negative tone inferred; feeling valued and/or pleased; noting comparisons to social norms; sensing degrading and/or devalued imagery; struggling with my emotions. See Table 4.3. (Social issues are listed in the text and listed in the table alphabetically).

Table 4.3. Stage one: definition of context – as a woman with a disability (Doucette, 1989).

Social issues as a woman with a disability:	Frequency in text:
a sense of self-esteem and/or feeling valued	1
being undefined and/or undecided about my opinion	3
examples of oppressive issues to women with disabilities	2
feeling depressed	3
feeling empathy	21
feeling frustrated about assumptions	16
feeling insulted and/or disrespected	7
feelings of sadness	9
feeling opposed and/or in disagreement	8
feeling sincerity and/or hopeful	7
feeling there is a negative tone inferred	9
feeling valued and/or pleased	3
noting comparisons to social norms	12
sensing degrading and/or devalued imagery	6
struggling with my emotions	11

STAGE 2: Identification of power relations as a departure point for change (Doucette, 1989)

As a registered social worker who chooses to practice in the community from an anti-oppressive framework, I reread this article with an emphasis upon critically looking at which social issues have been linked to variables of power – inclusive of hegemony. The sets of power relations referred to by Driedger include eleven instances scattered across the following examples: power from the state, male gender, economic sources of

income, friends and/or family, colleagues at work, persons in society and other women with disabilities.

For example, Doucette (1989) identifies the challenge of being lesbian with male employers as a potential site of oppression. She (1989, p.18) develops her scenario by (lines 132-135) showing how the interaction between the woman and her boss took place. “Well, I asked my boss once if I could maybe do large appliance.... ‘No,’ he says, ‘I wouldn’t mind, but they are heavy and even if a dyke came in here, I’d still turn her down.’” The implications of a male supervisor using homophobic stereotypes to exert power over a female employee clearly places fear among any woman who may be apprehensive to admit she is an individual who is lesbian, let alone to identify if she has a disability. Doucette argues that power also becomes a tool through which persons in positions of power in a workplace (eg. owners, supervisors) may exert control over employees by making their personal viewpoints known – making it next to impossible for a woman in a subordinate position to expose her personal identity for fear of losing her job.

Canadian social work researcher Ben Carniol (2005) notes, “a different danger stems from power that is illegitimate – power that, when exercised, reinforces the condition of illegitimate privilege possessed by one group of people who abuse the well-being of others” (p. 6). In other words, Doucette’s example shows that even though a supervisor has authority in the workplace (a position of privilege), commenting about a woman being a ‘dyke’ is rooted in an illegitimate power relation – that of heterosexual privilege. Carniol reinforces the notion that privilege by persons in society may fuel how emotional and physical “well-being” may be portrayed as difficult, complicated and strained. With

the example of women depicted in Doucette's (1989) vignette with male supervisors in an appliance factory, the choice of wording "dyke" and "turn her down" brings an immediate red flag to individuals as needing to watch what they say in case unemployment looms as a result of a disclosure of personal information. Fear of unemployment then elicits further feelings of dependency and helplessness in women who fear poverty.

STAGE 3: Reflective comments (Doucette, 1989)

The list of social issues in Doucette's (1989) article is lengthy and details several social issues still contributing to the oppression of women who have disabilities. It was interesting to note that a number of social issues in this piece of literature arose within discourses from women who have disabilities and identify as lesbian specifically in relation to *their* frustration about women with disabilities *not* identifying as lesbian. These social issues included pre-suppositions about women with a disability and the lack of knowledge and acceptance of/for women who identify as being lesbian, verbal abuse by women with disabilities (that identify as lesbian) using disrespectful and degrading language and a lack of knowledge about how social factors contribute (or not) to inclusiveness and assumptions about a lack of understanding of sexuality and motherhood.

The range of social issues contained within Doucette's (1989) writing consistently demonstrated an ongoing association and/or relationship of inequality, often arising from assumptions of power and/or privilege. For example, in several of the phrases used to describe social issues, power arising from hegemonic sources of rule – such as political, economic and educational state sources – became the identifiable source of oppression.

In addition, the text consistently made reference to how women are viewed by others in society. “We are seen, and see ourselves, as different, as outsiders – outside the mainstream, rejected by the disabled community, excluded by the lesbian world” (see Doucette, 1989, p.5). I also found it interesting that while power and privilege are not explicitly mentioned by Doucette, even up until the last paragraph the text consistently portrays and represents this group of women as “outsiders” – judged by others in society seeing women with a disability who are identified as lesbian as being “different” and “cursed”.

Doucette’s (1989) exposure of her personal situation and the personal situations of eleven other women clearly shows her frustration through her writing these personal vignettes. The language utilized is often angry and harsh. Vocabulary choices such as “rage”, “shit”, “infantilized” and “ignorant” gave me a sense of reflexive empathy, but also feelings of sadness. I felt sad because the language in the text did not convey the range of possibilities for women with disabilities to face respectfully, or through an anti-oppressive way of knowing.

LITERATURE ABSTRACT: Women with Disabilities: Naming Oppression (Driedger, 1988).

Dianne Driedger (1988) is a Canadian feminist author who has chosen not to clearly identify and/or disclose through this piece of writing whether she is an individual that has a specific type of disability. While detailing a chronology of Canadian women becoming publicly recognized for organizing themselves as having disabilities, Driedger portrays her theme as a narrative tracing the evolution of the Disabled Association of Women’s Network (D.A.W.N.). Prior to forming the organization, an explanation to readers is illustrated by relating a complex picture of social issues women with

disabilities in Canada have sought in order to gain recognition. The imagery provides readers with an emphasis on how women with disabilities could meet, form a collective and work towards improving *their* quality of life. Discourses within this piece of writing highlight and carefully depict several types of oppression suffered by women with disabilities, as for example, patriarchy, stereotyping, labeling and stigma.

STAGE 1: Definition of context – as a reader (Driedger, 1988).

Diane Driedger's (1988) writing includes many references to social issues – creating a complex tapestry of how women with disabilities live their lives. These social issues include: advocacy; being socially included; exclusion of women with disabilities; labeling persons by groups; lack of financial resources; lack of human rights; lack of self esteem; lack of sexuality; lack of transportation; patriarchy; stereotypes/assumptions of incapability; tokenism; use of outdated vocabulary/language; women being subordinated; women with disabilities being humiliated. See Table 4.4. (Social issues are listed in the text and listed in the table alphabetically).

Table 4.4. Stage one: definition of context – as a reader (Driedger, 1988).

Social issues as a reader:	Frequency in text:
advocacy	2
being socially included	5
exclusion of women with disabilities	5
labeling persons by groups	7
lack of financial resources	1
lack of human rights	10
lack of self esteem	8
lack of sexuality	2
lack of transportation	10
patriarchy	3
stereotypes/assumptions of incapability	5
tokenism	2
use of outdated vocabulary/language	1
women being subordinated	6
women with disabilities being humiliated	5

STAGE 1: Definition of context – as a social worker (Driedger, 1988).

As a social worker I found Driedger's (1988) depictions to include the following:

assumptions through stigma from labeling; awareness and insight; comparison to social norms; courage and fortitude; feeling demeaned and humiliated; lack of gender diversity; lack of human rights; lack of public space accessibility; lack of recognition of sexuality and parenthood; lack of rights as a person with a disability; lack of self esteem and self worth; lack of social status; marginalization and segregation; patriarchy; racism; social change; social layers of oppression; tokenism; use of disrespectful language; violence and abuse. See Table 4.5. (Social issues are listed in the text and listed in the table alphabetically).

Table 4.5. Stage one: definition of context – as a social worker (Driedger, 1988)

Social issues as a social worker:	Frequency in text:
assumptions through stigma from labeling	7
awareness and insight	10
comparison to social norms	3
courage and fortitude	1
feeling demeaned and humiliated	3
lack of gender diversity	8
lack of human rights	7
lack of public space accessibility	5
lack of recognition of sexuality and parenthood	4
lack of rights as a person with a disability	9
lack of self esteem and self worth	5
lack of social status	4
marginalization and segregation	12
patriarchy	14
racism	1
social change	4
social layers of oppression	5
tokenism	3
use of disrespectful language	2
violence and abuse	2

STAGE 1: Definition of context –as a woman with a disability (Driedger, 1988)

As I reflexively read this piece of literature as a woman with a disability, I noted a number of emotions I relate to within my everyday life. These included: being hopeful; complex feelings associated with tokenism; encouraging and uplifting; feeling ambivalent; feeling demeaned or humiliated; feeling disappointed; feeling emotionally drained; feeling fearful; feelings of frustration; feeling pleased; feeling positively inspired; feeling validated; lack of individuality; lines noting determination; noting courage; not being taken seriously; noting unethical issues; sadness; uneasiness and vulnerability. See Table 4.6. (Social issues are listed in the text and listed in the table alphabetically).

Table 4.6. Stage one: definition of context – as a woman with a disability (Driedger, 1988)

Social issues as a woman with a disability:	Frequency in text:
being hopeful	3
complex feelings associated with tokenism	4
encouraging and uplifting	6
feeling ambivalent	5
feeling demeaned or humiliated	10
feeling disappointed	6
feeling emotionally drained	1
feeling fearful	4
feelings of frustration	11
feeling pleased	3
feeling positively inspired	9
feeling validated	4
lack of individuality	1
lines noting determination	2
noting courage	2
not being taken seriously	2
noting unethical issues	1
sadness	5
uneasiness and vulnerability	3

STAGE 2: Identification of power relations as a departure point for change (Driedger, 1988)

In this article power is demonstrated by Driedger (1988) where women are faced with the structural forces of hegemony and power in forming the organization of D.A.W.N. Issues include eleven examples of power from men in roles as men controlling disability organizations, men in roles of state legislators, economic opportunities being lacking for women with physical disabilities and power used in developing infrastructure of rules/policies of accessible spaces.

Driedger (1988) demonstrates the impact of gendered institutional power through her discussion of repeated attempts by women with disabilities to attain executive membership into organizations of persons with disabilities when, voting for memberships is largely undertaken by males. "Women were committee members and occasionally members of the governing councils of disabled people's Provincial organization, though in these roles they were often the carriers of coffee, or the workhorses that got committee homework done" (1988, p.6). Her depictions show that women in disability organizations participated, primarily in menial roles while men were located in positions of decision-making and policy formation. The men were positioned effectively to use the power attributed to them by patriarchal ranking and societal presuppositions that value men's contributions to society. In addition, Driedger documents the length of time it took for women to gain voting recognition within several disability organizations spanning two decades – clearly demonstrating the sheer magnitude and struggle women with disabilities endured to counter the processes of marginalization in order to gain institutional equality and recognition (see Driedger, 1988, p. 5-8).

STAGE 3: Reflexive comments (Driedger, 1988)

Through her writing, Driedger (1988) articulates a set of social issues that women with disabilities in Canada experienced during the history and formation of the Disabled Association of Women's Network (D.A.W.N.). Issues affecting the establishment of D.A.W.N. center on how women were represented by associations for persons with disabilities. The social issues addressed and portrayed over a twenty-five year period include representing women as suffering from patriarchy, gender inequality, tokenism, lack of accessibility, lack of public transportation, lack of voice about women and violence, racism and being subjected to demeaning and humiliating behaviors by both able-bodied women and men with physical disabilities (see Driedger, 1989). Given that the formation of D.A.W.N. was well over twenty-five years ago, it would be interesting to see if the same issues still have a similar impact with more recent formations of D.A.W.N. chapters or other organizations established to advocate for and with women with disabilities.

Discourses portraying personal situations of individual women contained language containing little to no explicit frustration and anger. In addition, each portrayal of women and disabilities was consistent in utilizing language that appears subtle and/or restrained. For example, Driedger (1988) chooses not to utilize swearing and/or rudeness to convey the oppressions that depict each vignette. Rather, she chooses language inclusive of hints of oppression and stereotyping through phrasing such as "occasional" and "tokenism."

Driedger (1988) effectively portrays how layers of social oppressions impacting women with disabilities are presupposed by other able-bodied women and men with

disabilities through a demeanor of being unsympathetic. Forces of power are illustrated in this article as being institutionally-based – often arising from hegemonic sources and fueled by patriarchal sources of political assumptions. These social issues affecting women with disabilities are further supported by documenting dates over a period of twenty-five years – illustrating that women with disabilities have become (and perhaps still are) represented by *their* ongoing experiential wisdom.

LITERATURE ABSTRACT: *Defining Disability*, (Wendell, 1996).

Susan Wendell is Professor of Women's Studies at Simon Fraser University in Burnaby British Columbia, Canada. This reading is a chapter from Wendell's publication, *The Rejected Body* (1996). In the article Wendell discloses that she is an individual with the disabling condition Chronic Fatigue Syndrome. This piece of literature captures a specific theme by examining and illustrating a plethora of definitions about the term disability. Definitions utilized are diverse and placed into the context of living within a global society. Wendell's quest to arrive at a succinct definition of "disability" is facilitated through utilizing a critical approach to reading definitions developed by the World Health Organization (W.H.O.) and United Nations (U.N.) and exploring how these definitions comprise or mitigate disability by being used as an adjective or noun.

STAGE 1: Definition of context – as a reader (Wendell, 1996).

As a student reader my initial comprehension of this piece of literature included a number of social issues: comparisons of persons to social norms⁸ cultural issues; disability and/or chronic illness with medical issues; documentation of official issues; entitlement from social benefits; examples of demographic social issues; examples of

discrimination; examples of gender inequality; examples of human rights issues; examples of oppression and marginalization; examples of poverty; influences upon women from patriarchy; inference of mental illness; issues from legislation and policies; issues involving family and social relationships; lack of health care benefits and/or wellness; lack of identity/self-esteem/demeaning issues; omission of persons with invisible disabilities; presuppositions / stereotypes / labeling / stigma; social justice needs; psychosocial support needed; the inability to access spaces and/or necessary technology. See Table 4.7. (Social issues are listed in the text and listed in the table alphabetically).

Table 4.7. Stage one: definition of context – as a reader (Wendell, 1996).

Social issues as a reader:	Frequency in text:
comparisons of persons to social norms	8
cultural issues	21
disability and/or chronic illness with medical issues	22
documentation of official issues	5
entitlement from social benefits	5
examples of demographic social issues	8
examples of discrimination	7
examples of gender inequality	4
examples of human rights issues	12
examples of oppression and marginalization	12
examples of poverty	7
inference of mental illness	4
influences upon women from patriarchy	4
issues from legislation and policies	12
issues involving family and social relationships	3
lack of health care benefits and/or wellness	8
lack of identity/self-esteem/demeaning issues	13
omission of persons with invisible disabilities	16
presuppositions / stereotypes / labeling / stigma	36
social justice needs	8
psychosocial support needed	4
the inability to access spaces and/or necessary technology	17

STAGE 1: Definition of context – as a social worker (Wendell, 1996).

The social issues I identified in and through this chapter of Wendell's (1996) as a social worker included: a lack of equality and/or human rights; a lack of social justice; assumptions of mental instability; bio-medical inaccuracies; comparing aging with disability; comparisons of demographic issues; comparisons of social norms and stigma; discrimination or prejudice; examples of cultural and/or global social issues; examples of lack of accessible environments and/or infrastructure; examples of poverty; examples of sexism/patriarchy; examples of social oppression and marginalization; lack of health care benefits for wellness; lack of psychosocial supports; lack of self-esteem from demeaning issues; lack of social benefits and/or entitlement; presuppositions and stereotypes and labeling; social issues involving topics of invisible disabilities; social issues requiring official documentation. See Table 4.8. (Social issues are listed in the text and listed in the table alphabetically).

STAGE 1: Definition of context – as a woman with a disability (Wendell, 1996)

Social issues included in Wendell's (1996) literature resulted in many hours of personal reflection. My own reflexivity concerning the social issues includes the following: acknowledgement of the profound struggles of daily living; being confused; condoning of others; contradictions; feeling a sense of being unrealistic; feeling acknowledgement/recognition/appreciated; feeling ambivalent; feeling appeased and/or encouraged; feeling courage; feeling depressed and/or sadness; feeling disrespected and/or annoyed; feeling empathic; feelings of exclusion; feeling frustrated/disturbed and/or bothered; feelings of happiness/ pleasing /satisfaction and being empowered; feeling oppressed; feeling respected; feeling that there is a lack of acknowledging chronic

Table 4.8. Stage one: definition of context – as a social worker (Wendell, 1996).

Social issues as a social worker:	Frequency in text:
a lack of equality and/or human rights	12
a lack of social justice	10
assumptions of mental instability	4
bio-medical inaccuracies	7
comparing aging with disability	7
comparisons of demographic issues	6
comparisons of social norms and stigma	34
discrimination or prejudice	11
examples of cultural and/or global social issues	16
examples of lack of accessible environments and/or infrastructure	12
examples of poverty	10
examples of sexism/patriarchy	9
examples of social oppression and marginalization	15
lack of health care benefits for wellness	7
lack of psychosocial supports	3
lack of self-esteem from demeaning issues	14
lack of social benefits and/or entitlement	11
presuppositions and stereotypes and labeling	32
social issues involving topics of invisible disabilities	16
social issues requiring official documentation	4

illness; feeling uninspired or disappointed; inappropriate and/or offensive; interesting/refreshing /curious; lack of recognition/validity; lack of uniqueness; opposed; overwhelming or an exhausting struggle; sensing a lack of individuality; sensing an unfortunate circumstance; sensing appreciation/pleasing; sensing assumptions; sensing clinical and/or prescriptive; sensing conflict and/or tension; sensing fear; sensing honesty; sensing lack of self-esteem/humiliation or being demeaned; sensing sincerity; sensing stigma and labeling; sexist/gender imbalance; unconditional support needed. See Table 4.9. (Social issues are listed in the text and listed in the table alphabetically).

Table 4.9. Stage one: definition of context – as a woman with a disability (Wendell, 1996).

Social issues as a woman with a disability:	Frequency in text:
acknowledgement of the profound struggles of daily living	3
being confused	7
condoning of others	1
contradictions	8
feeling a sense of being unrealistic	2
feeling acknowledgement/recognition/appreciated	3
feeling ambivalent	6
feeling appeased and/or encouraged	3
feeling courage	1
feeling depressed and/or sadness	8
feeling disrespected and/or annoyed	12
feeling empathic	16
feelings of exclusion	4
feeling frustrated/disturbed and/or bothered	22
feelings of happiness/ pleasing /satisfaction and being empowered	8
feeling oppressed	6
feeling respected	2
feeling there is a lack of acknowledging chronic illness	2
feeling uninspired or disappointed	11
inappropriate and/or offensive	15
interesting/ refreshing /curious	2
lack of recognition/validity	5
lack of uniqueness	4
opposed	1
overwhelming or an exhausting struggle	4
sensing a lack of individuality	7
sensing an unfortunate circumstance	2
sensing appreciation/pleasing	2
sensing assumptions	2
sensing clinical and/or prescriptive	4
sensing conflict and/or tension	2
sensing fear	2
sensing honesty	2
sensing lack of self-esteem/humiliation or being demeaned	14
sensing sincerity	3
sensing stigma and labeling	6
sexist/gender imbalance	6
unconditional support needed	2

STAGE 2: Identification of power relations as a departure point for change (Wendell, 1996)

Wendell writes a lengthy chapter that depicts primarily examples of the impact policies and regulations have on women with disabilities as compared to hegemonic descriptions of various sets of power relations with the state. Thus I divided the categories into two: power from policies and regulation (25 instances in the text) and a more direct influence from the hegemonic state with (23 instances in the text).

Wendell (1996) writes about how power works through complex examples. She focuses on the ways that institutional and systemic forces come together to shape what sort of decisions one can make in specific situations. For example, she draws on her own experience to show how this type of power works (lines 638-641): “how lucky I was to have built a professional life before I became ill that provided not only adequate disability insurance, but also the possibility of continuing my work with my new limitations” (1996, p. 27). Without having already shown her good citizenship as a professional, Wendell would have been able to draw on the privileges she earned being an academic that is, extended health care benefits and disability insurance. Because of the way in which she was positioned in the university as an institution, she was able to continue being a professional as a university professor while at the same time being disabled with Chronic Fatigue Syndrome.

Private insurance benefits like the ones that Wendell accesses are offered through multinational insurance companies often sub-contracted to unionized contracts through policies (e.g. group insurance) with language developed by lawyers entrusted by the organization or institution to include and/or exclude specific biomedical conditions of disability and/or chronic illness. Both the insurance underwriters and the policy makers

within the institutions are usually small groups of (mostly) male lawyers that seek to engage and utilize power through exclusive pieces of information that usually only the employer has access to. These small groups of policy makers, academic administrators and insurance lawyers do not usually include women with disabilities as part of their decision-making processes either directly as members or indirectly through consultative processes. Nor are they always sensitive to the needs of women with disabilities thus making it extremely challenging for women with disabilities in the workforce to deal with.

STAGE 3: Reflexive comments (Wendell, 1996).

In this piece of writing, Wendell (1996) compares and distinguishes definitions about disability through examining the specifics of language and terminology through critically scrutinizing social issues arising from a global perspective. While Wendell skillfully intertwines excerpts of her journey with Chronic Fatigue Syndrome, she further juxtaposes how women with an invisible illness may encounter not being believed, and then labeled and subsequently, stigmatized as someone “disabled”. For example, Wendell draws on cultural examples of social conditions to illustrate whether or not being “disabled” is taken up by societies within an equitable and/or unbiased process. I also noted throughout the data even though Wendell includes social issues as a basis to explore a definition about disability, social factors (such as different levels of poverty) become part of the portrayal of why a definition may be difficult to attain – especially for women who live within a global society.

Some of Wendell’s (1996) own reflexive and experiential wisdom appear in the text purposely, depicted alongside the collective, social issues involving women, such as

prejudice and discrimination, stigma, comparisons to social norms, inferences of mental illness, difficulties with being believed, low self-esteem and ongoing fatigue. In addition, social issues depicting women with invisible disabilities are illustrated through the text discourses with several examples of how patriarchal sources of hegemony affect state legislation and policies illustrating women suffering and becoming socially excluded.

Wendell deliberately chooses words and phrases in her portrayals of women with invisible illnesses and/or disabilities that keep the definition of disability open. In her writing, she remains ambiguous with regard to what is more important in defining what disability is. As such, her argument (intentionally) remains fraught with an undifferentiated amalgam of basic social issues such as education, infrastructure, accessibility, bio-medical associations and patriarchy. Finally, Wendell's representations of women with disabilities and chronic illnesses further illustrate that women are struggling and overwhelmed trying to negotiate structural power throughout all characteristics of *their* individual, cultural and social identities.

COMPARATIVE DISCUSSION:

Joanne Doucette (1989), Diane Driedger (1988) and Susan Wendell (1996) provide three diverse textual portrayals of women with disabilities through different analytical approaches. The methodology I employed, a discourse analysis, provides me with the analytical tools to further my understanding and awareness about how literature taken from a social work distance training manual demonstrates (or not) the anti-oppressive principles of the program with and about individual depictions of women with disabilities in their everyday lives. In all three texts, power, oppression, economics, community resources, poverty and lack of social supports are described as obstacles or

barriers to equitable environments and spaces where women with disabilities continually struggle to negotiate *their* activities of daily living. All three pieces of writing clearly illustrate – from my scrutiny as a reader, a social worker and a woman with a disability – that for women with disabilities, social spaces are often difficult to enter – let alone become socially accepted within them.

Canadian sociologists Andrew Mitchell and Michael Shillington (2005) provide a detailed description of social inclusion and exclusion.

Social inclusion and exclusion are multidimensional since there are many different domains of potential deprivation that come into play singly or in combination to create exclusion, and many different ways to promote inclusion. They begin with the thing we really care about – individual well-being – and then ask who is affected, and how (Mitchell, Shillington, 2005, p. 34).

For example, each of the texts shows how exclusionary social practices shape the environments of women with disabilities. Doucette (1989) notes that women with disabilities are excluded from spaces where accessibility is needed to provide “ramps, wheelchair accessible, sign language interpreters, FM systems, brailed books” (p.17). Driedger (1988) also notes that women with disabilities suffer from a lack of access to public spaces and should have “access to information, education, accessible transportation” and “sign interpretation” (p. 6). Wendell (1996) provides a more comprehensive list of the needs of women with disabilities to be able to participate in everyday life, including “education, training, and retraining; obtaining equipment, such as wheelchairs for basic mobility or computers for basic communication; modifying a home or a vehicle to enable a person with a disability to use it; hiring assistants to help with bodily maintenance and household tasks; even obtaining medical supplies such as medications and bandages” (p. 13). However, while this analysis by three feminist

authors revealed consistencies with regard to illustrating the physical needs of women with disabilities, approaches to individual topics and their writing styles differed dramatically.

Doucette (1989) individualizes women's experiences of living with a disability and being lesbian. Driedger (1988) provides a collective and historical response to the development of women organizations of women with disabilities throughout different parts of Canada. Wendell (1996), drawing on her own experiences, brings into focus a number of issues that are relevant to women with disabilities (and those living with chronic illnesses). It comes as no surprise then that even though the contexts each of the authors describe is similar – all write about Canada in the late 1980's and early 1990's – their analysis is different: Doucette's is more individualistic, Driedger's more collective and Wendell's more speculative.

Comparison of the text from all three authors is noted in my initial reading as a reader. These similarities include social issues involving poverty, unemployment, inaccessible public spaces, low self-esteem, labeling and stigma, presuppositions about social norms, patriarchy, oppression and marginalization from state legislation and policies and a lack of equality and human rights. The lists begin to diverge when I read them as a social worker, with more comments about problems facing individuals in Doucette (e.g. isolation, anger and frustration, fear, medical inaccuracies, lack of social housing, lack of rights, benefits/drawbacks of group diversity versus collectivity, lack of education about social issues, lack of barrier-free access), organization e.g. lack of accessible environments/infrastructure, lack of social justice, examples of cultural and/or

global social issues, lack of social benefits/entitlement, lack of psychosocial supports, comparing aging with disability).

My readings of the texts as a woman with a disability produced lists that were generally more depressing in Doucette (e.g. depressed, degrading and/or devalued, undefined and/or undecided, insulted, disrespected, feeling negative tone inferred), more mixed in Driedger (e.g. hopeful, ambivalent, disappointed, frustration, encouraging and uplifting demeaning and humiliating) and more complex emotionally in Wendell (e.g. happiness/pleasing/satisfaction and being empowered, feeling acknowledgement/recognition/appreciated, feelings of exclusion, sensing sincerity, being confused, sensing an unfortunate circumstance, feeling overwhelming or an exhausting struggle, feeling a sense of being unrealistic, feeling disrespected and/or annoyed, courage, interesting/refreshing/curious).

Doucette's (1989) writing style includes language that I initially viewed as frustrating but later came to understand as disrespectful. Examples contained in the texts included choices such as "stupid, can't think, slow" and "retarded" (see Doucette, 1989, p. 18). Although this a particular type of style that is part of some disability studies (see Mitchell & Snyder 1997; Rogers & Swadener, 2001 for a discussion of the range of discourses about disability) this may not be the most effective way to depict women with disabilities. Unfortunately, when Doucette condemns women who have disabilities and do not disclose as being lesbian, it gave me a strong personal sense of sadness knowing this writing is not anti-oppressive nor respectful of the women with a disability (such as myself) deserve.

In contrast, I found Diane Driedger (1988) used a much softer approach with her message, drawing me into her writing positively – both as a reader and social worker – by generating interest with the historical content of the social issues women with disabilities have faced and are making progress toward dismantling. For example, wording describing a politician’s choice of hiring a woman with a disability includes the phrase “young, female, in a wheelchair” and “not bad looking” (see Driedger, 1988, p. 5). Driedger draws attention to the fact that the only issue arising from this conversation with the male individual stating *his* opinion versus identifying an emotional reaction from the woman with a disability who is confronted by such disrespect.

Susan Wendell (1996) employs a more distanced approach in her writing even though she uses her personal experiences of Chronic Fatigue Syndrome from which to launch her arguments. She uses words that help the reader to understand how she feels, as for example, “exhaustion, pain, nausea, and dizziness, and I used a cane to keep my balance” (see Wendell, 1996, lines 602-603). The distance approach gives rise to difficulties when she uses outdated references to disability definitions using “handicapped” and “disabled” as nouns to describe persons in a collective sense – (instead of an adjective), giving readers the impression that labeling and loss of individuality are ignored. There is also a sense that women with disabilities are disembodied entities, being oppressed and marginalized through institutional and state power apparatuses. Sometimes the individual is lost.

SUMMARY:

In summary I found some answers to the questions framing my thesis inquiry. In regard to my first question of how women with disabilities are represented in the School

of Social Work 323 Anti-oppressive Praxis training manual, I was able to pull out three distinct portraits of women with disabilities. They varied depending on each author's interpretation, background, writing style, academic training and type of experiential wisdom. Regarding my second question, concerning what discourses are evident in the representation about women with disabilities, I was able to identify some discourses that informed the authors' depictions. They too varied depending on each author's interpretation, background, writing style, academic training and type of experiential wisdom; however, the discourses more clearly shaped the authors' (and my own) definition of the context within which women with disabilities live their everyday lives. Themes around the social factors that contribute to each woman's environment, as for example, poverty, employment, economics, stereotypes, normative assumptions, and abuse all three authors consistently noted. As well, all three authors tended to identify the sources of oppression from the state patriarchy, hegemony, poverty, unemployment, lack of accessibility to public spaces and social inclusion with able-bodied women.

In order to appreciate how these texts and the discourses represent women with disabilities, I reread them and let my experiential wisdom speak to how respectful and anti-oppressively the writings were (or not) before I decided to recommend any for future social work training manuals. In my analysis I took into account that qualitative research is indeed helpful in looking deeper into how writers depict their message. Valerie Janesick's (1998) statement danced through my head "...the qualitative researcher is like the choreographer, who creates a dance to make a statement. For the researcher, the story told is the dance in all its complexity, context, originality, and passion" (p. 53). Therefore, as part of my own "choreography" of an intense discourse analysis, I do not

believe that any of these three authors intended to give readers any message other than how passionately they felt at that time – perhaps also feeling *her* message would incite positive social change.

CHAPTER FIVE

FINAL THOUGHTS AND POSSIBILITIES FOR THE FUTURE IN SOCIAL WORK:

Throughout this piece of research, my thoughts have been focused upon how representations about women with disabilities are depicted, illustrated and portrayed in specific texts. This thesis research has had an impact on how I practice social work in my professional life. It has also motivated me to incorporate education with other social work practitioners into my own practice. Because I have extensively engaged with a method of discourse analysis by reading three scholarly articles included in a distance training manual for social work students, I have sharpened my own social work practice. For example, I am no longer afraid to complete social disability benefit applications or offer reassessment opportunities to individuals with invisible disabilities who have been previously turned away by my colleagues. I also consciously make an effort to practice social work with an eye to influence (positively) and to educate health professionals about the difficulties that persons (especially women) because of the difficulties already incorporated into the verification process of their disability or illness by physicians. In addition, I make time to assist new social workers with an orientation to discursive practices of filling out forms for government or private insurance disability benefits – explaining how invaluable a well completed application is in supporting the individual she/he is working with.

In thinking about the two research questions (see page 31) after completing the research, I need also to consider that representations involve “our uses of things, and what we say, think and feel about them – how we represent them – that we give them a meaning” (Hall, 1997, p. 3). Stuart Hall (1997) notes that persons in the role of students

need to understand and acknowledge that “meaning is also produced whenever we express ourselves in, make use of, consume or appropriate cultural ‘things’; that is, when we incorporate them in different ways into the everyday rituals and practices of daily life and in this way give them value or significance” (1997, p. 3-4). Hall’s insights support my analysis that meaning can be derived and incorporated into the everyday lives of each individual through “rituals and practices of daily life.” Hall’s contention is that discourses do produce meaning through language and simultaneously constitute the practices that support or deny individual experiences.

Given that extensive reading is part of the “rituals and practices of daily life” for social work students, the texts they read in distance training manuals are central to constitute a basis for training. If women with disabilities are depicted in singular or oppressive ways, or excluded from the conversations in training manual texts, then students may bring these narrow or exclusionary ideas into their own social work practice. For women with disabilities that a social work student comes in contact with, the effects of limited exposure to a range of disabilities women experience (e.g. invisible, physical, developmental or psychological) may put in jeopardy the service the individual might receive. The ways in which women with disabilities are portrayed in training texts appears then to be fundamental to shaping understanding women with disabilities in practice that informs a students’ practice as she/he applies knowledge about diversity and differences to a variety of practicum situations.

What is somewhat difficult for me to do in the role of a social work researcher is to recommend a prescribed set of readings for social work training manuals that would speak universally to an ethical practice, anti-oppressive values and social justice. What I

feel would be much more beneficial is to integrate the topic of disability throughout all areas of diversity in the A.O.P. distance training manual, and intersperse texts about disability studies into each section of study. My reasoning for this is two fold. First because social work is a discipline rooted in pedagogical practices, the discipline as a whole seeks to explore and work with the needs of individuals through the least restrictive environment. Including for examples persons with disabilities in sections of training manuals of other than in modules designed to raise awareness about diversity and difference would enrich the environment through which social workers come to practice social work. And, second because the B.C.A.S.W. *Code of Ethics* (2003) supports social change and social justice, a diversity of topics about disability that embraces areas such as culture, age, gender, sexual orientation and social factors of accessibility, education, employment and poverty, lends itself to being understood in the context of understanding more generally. For example, issues about social housing differ for women with disabilities than able-bodied women, just as the range for emergency funds for women with disabilities than for able-bodied women. Being able to grasp that disability has an impact of all activities of daily living matters for social workers because they build their practice on understandings of social processes and social justice.

Canadian social work researcher Carolyn Campbell (2002) notes this principle and states “central to anti-oppressive content is an understanding of the dynamics of oppression and domination and of one’s personal relationship to these dynamics” (2002, p. 32). These dynamics Campbell speaks about greatly affect how women with disabilities are currently still portrayed as victims of oppression and domination – sometimes through layers inadvertently applied by members of society unaware she/he is

doing so. I also believe what Campbell's research about social work pedagogy brings to light is vital to training future social work students. In other words, "questions about pedagogy should be standard in any review of programs of courses and should be an integral component of assessing such program innovations as distance education" (Campbell, 2002, p. 38). Drawing attention to pedagogical practices as they relate to the inclusion of course material regarding representations of women with disabilities is a constructive way to practice social work ethics, values and social justice.

My first research question of identifying what representations of women with disabilities are present in the School of Social Work 323 distance training manual speaks to a temporal issue of how women with disabilities in the twenty-first century are different than those depicted within the texts I analyzed. For example women with disabilities are not out of necessity or only angered, poverty-stricken, marginalized by educational opportunities, bitter and/or unhappy, without marriage/partnerships, without opportunities for motherhood/parenthood and without friendships they value and trust. Research now shows that the experience of women with disabilities in Canada – collectively and individually – is much more diverse than the three articles illustrate (see chapter 2 pp. 48-59). For example, individually, the definition of disability is changing especially in light of increases in chronic illness and disabling conditions. Also, in a collective sense, women with disabilities *and chronic illnesses* now have a voice through the establishment of the many chapters of the Disabled Association of Women's Network (D.A.W.N.) across Canada – a success that needs to be included into training manuals. This information will assist women to advocate individually and/or gain personal support from other women with disabilities.

My second research question as to which discourses are evident in the texts I examined, speaks to a wider issue of how diversity and differences is but one way to conceptualize disability. For example, York University¹ in Toronto, Canada now has broadened their Master's program of Critical Disability Studies to base its understanding of disability and service provision within a human rights paradigm, an increasingly popular way to look at disability in Canada. This concept and way of knowing of disability in Canada that examines the numerous facets of diversity through equalization of personal rights with policies and legislation can have an impact on how social workers attain social justice. In addition the program at York University has broadened their focus to include more interdisciplinary work, including law, women's studies, geography, philosophy, sociology, rehabilitation medicine to name a few.

Within the context of rethinking what disability is, perhaps a diversity and difference perspective needs to be but one approach introduced through readings about women with disabilities so that social workers will be able to understand the contemporary context of disability debates. Thus, as a result of this small piece of research, my hope is that the School of Social Work at the University of Victoria and perhaps the discipline of social work as a whole, will examine distance education training manuals more frequently with an emphasis on including and updating literature about women with disabilities to reflect the changing environment within which women with disabilities experience daily life. I am also optimistic that perhaps some of the readings I have suggested via my literature review (see e.g. Corker, 1999; Chouinard, 1999; Dorn, 1998; Gabel, 1999; Moss and Dyck, 2002; Rioux, 2002; Tangenberg and Kemp, 2002;

¹ See information on Critical Disability Studies Program for M.A. degree at <http://www.yorku.ca>

Schafer, 1999) might receive consideration as core texts or as highly relevant supplementary reading materials.

I look forward to continue my research into how women with disabilities are represented in social work literature. My hope is that all women with disabilities are seen to be valuable members of society and respected for the experiential wisdom they possess. Finally, my quest is to continue researching how social workers give and make meaning of their understanding of women and disabilities. To inquire about how social workers apply their meanings to professional practice through ways that are empowering, ethical and socially just, is the challenge I will enthusiastically carry on!

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APPENDIX A

Coding sheet¹

Querying the need for social support groups for women that are lesbians and have a disability:

As a reader:

There are structural and systemic power implications in this passage leading to patterns of layers of social stratification for women. While some of the women have formed a support group for women that are lesbian and have disabilities, marginalization arises when women as lesbians are segregated by having a disability. Unfortunately these same women may be precluded from lack of inclusiveness into social groups with other women, groups of women with disabilities and, groups of women as lesbians. Further, a lack of awareness is noted in this passage that a lesbian caucus exists evidenced by the conversation with other women. While the author's choice is not to specify what the women's social needs are, it may therefore become difficult for readers to ascertain what purpose the caucus will serve.

As a social worker: (SOCW)

1. Anti-oppressive praxis includes concepts of **diversity and difference** – here the inference of a loss of **power is noted by the segregation of a group for the “disabled”** lesbians that have identified a difference in their sexual activity from the norms in society and are also being identified as having a disability.
2. This passage depicts the author using the conversation between two women to show that **structural power in society creates divisiveness due to diversity among differing groups of women**.
3. Lack of awareness of the two women questioning each other about the disabled lesbian caucus **portrays a type of means (i.e. mechanism and process) that can address a power differential amongst societal forces that utilizes power through social practices of legislation and policies**.
4. The author could have used the opportunity with the conversation to be more definitive and emphatic about the purpose of the caucus. This would justify to readers that a **caucus mechanism is necessary to attain the rights entitlement by undertaking group action and exerting power through a collective voice**.

Reflexivity as a woman with a disability:

1. *As a woman with a disability for many years, I would be aware of the purpose of a caucus through knowledge from the experiential wisdom and educational opportunities. My concerns centre on women and/or students who may not be familiar with a caucus type of social structure and, how the benefits are usually purpose driven. Further, no specific purpose of the caucus has been alluded to in the discourse.*
2. *The formation of a caucus is valuable for women with disabilities providing individuals feel valued for their input and contributions within a group process.*
3. *Belonging to a caucus sometimes gives one a sense of higher self-esteem knowing that individual differences can be supported through power that is derived that brings many women in similar social circumstances together.*

¹ The format for the coding sheet has been amended from the coding sheet included in Doucette (1989).