SPATIAL AWARENESS, INTERSECTIONALITY, AND THE CAMPUS MAP: CENTRALIZING SPACE IN EQUITY, DIVERSITY, AND INCLUSION

ROBERT C. MIZZI
UNIVERSITY OF MANITOBA

EHSAN AKBARI
UNIVERSITY OF NEW BRUNSWICK

TANNAZ ZARGARIAN
UNIVERSITY OF THE FRASER VALLEY

CHRISTOPHER YENDT
UNIVERSITY OF MANITOBA

Abstract

Canadian universities continue to strive to promote equity, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) in higher education through their policies and programs. While these efforts can increase access and reduce discrimination and inequity facing marginalized students, critiques highlight these efforts as being overly simplistic or too generic. Further, the current literature around EDI discourses pays little attention to the spatial dimensions of marginalization. This project aims to identify how campus geography contributes to students' experiences of oppression and inclusion. For this study, 22 students from diverse backgrounds were recruited from three Manitoba universities and interviewed about their experiences of marginalization, with a particular focus on how campus spaces shape identity and belonging. The findings suggested that (a) multiplicity is erased in participants' interpretations of campus spaces, (b) spatial and social diversity shape student involvement, and (c) access and accessibility remain an ongoing concern. Based on these findings, the authors argue that an intersectional spatial analysis can potentially assist EDI efforts at Canadian universities.
Keywords*:* higher education, marginalization, spatial justice, intersectionality analysis, critical cartography

Résumé

Les universités canadiennes continuent de s'efforcer de promouvoir l'équité, la diversité et l'inclusion (EDI) dans l'enseignement supérieur à travers leurs politiques et leurs programmes. Bien que ces efforts puissent accroître l'accès et réduire la discrimination et les inégalités auxquelles font face les étudiant[e]s marginalisé[e]s, certaines critiques

soulignent qu'ils sont souvent trop simplistes ou trop génériques. De plus, la littérature actuelle sur les discours liés à l'EDI accorde peu d'attention aux dimensions spatiales de la marginalisation. Ce projet vise à déterminer comment la configuration géographique des campus contribue aux expériences d'oppression et d'inclusion des étudiant[e]s. Vingt-deux étudiant[e]s issu[e]s de milieux divers ont été recruté[e]s dans trois universités du Manitoba afin de participer à des entretiens portant sur leurs expériences de marginalisation, en mettant particulièrement l'accent sur la manière dont les espaces du campus façonnent l'identité et le sentiment d'appartenance. Les résultats indiquent (a) l'effacement des identités plurielles par les participant[e]s dans les interprétations des espaces du campus, (b) que la diversification spatiale et sociale façonne l'engagement étudiant, et (c) que l'accès et l'accessibilité demeurent des préoccupations constantes. À partir de ces résultats, les auteurs et l'autrice soutiennent qu'une analyse spatiale intersectionnelle peut contribuer à soutenir les efforts en matière d'EDI dans les universités canadiennes.
Mots-clés : enseignement supérieur, marginalisation, justice spatiale, analyse intersectionnelle, cartographie critique

INTRODUCTION

Spatial justice advances practices of interrogating the unjust distribution of resources, opportunities, and access (Soja, 2010). Space contributes to marginalization by delineating inclusive and exclusive spaces, cementing the realities of opportunity and oppression. For example, relics of colonialism that permeate campus spaces (Pedri-Spade & Pitawanakwat, 2022) and bathrooms that ignore trans realities (Ecker et al., 2015) continue to exist on campuses. Equity, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) policies, which in Canada are distinct from truth and reconciliation and Indigenization efforts (Raffoul et al., 2022)[1], do little to address these spatial inequities, signalling a significant oversight in integrating EDI. As Harvey (2000) argued, "all talk about 'situatedness,' 'location' and 'positionality' is meaningless without a mapping of the space in which those situations, locations and positions occur" (p. 293). Harvey further suggested that environments serving everyone are crucial for creating inclusive and equitable spaces. Universities Canada (2023) reports that 89% of Canadian universities have strategic plans that reference EDI, an increase from 77% in 2019. Although EDI discourses (i.e., policies and programs) can potentially alleviate difficulties facing marginalized students, there is a growing concern that these discourses are over-simplified, individualistic, and focused too much on raising awareness about identity differences and not enough on analyzing and improving organizational practices and cultures (Campbell, 2019; Mizzi & Star, 2019; Tamtik & Guenter, 2019). Additionally, EDI discourses may create an audit culture to "manage" diversity, which protects institutions from engaging in effective action (Ahmed, 2012; Wolbring & Nguyen, 2023) and maintains White supremacy (Kyra, 2014). A part of the problem is that EDI discourses hollow out, reduce, and homogenize social identities within experiences of oppression (Major, 2024; Reale & Seeber, 2011).

Equity, diversity, and inclusion discourses can also be interpreted as serving only hir-

1 Truth and reconciliation and Indigenization efforts are central to equity work in Canadian higher education, yet this article focuses specifically on EDI policies and practices. We do not examine Indigenous-specific initiatives in detail but acknowledge their critical importance and the ways they intersect with broader equity goals. Major (2024) provides distinctions between EDI, Indigenization, and reconciliation.

ing purposes (Byrd, 2019; Major, 2024) or as merely inserting identities into unmalleable academic programs (Collins, 2019). A spatial analysis of human experience is one example in which EDI discourses in higher education have largely been silent, potentially occluding their impact. Identities, as relational cartography reveals, are non-linear and expressed in multiple forms at once, emerging through the continual co-production of identity and space. When EDI frameworks ignore the multiplicity of life experiences, they flatten this complexity, obscure how spaces form, and actively shape and reproduce oppression (Guyotte et al., 2024; Monreal & Popielarz, 2022; Reale & Seeber, 2011). Critical exploration of maps is one approach to configuring and articulating spatial analysis.

Researchers in urban planning have long argued that equity mapping is essential for fair access to public spaces and in ensuring the equitable distribution of resources (e.g., Knaap, 2017)—a consideration that is vitally important for universities, given that educational spaces can both contribute to and resist inequity (Annamma et al., 2017). Interrogating engagements with campus maps reveals the relationships among power structures, lived experience, and space (Rodó-de-Zárate, 2014). Findings from such research suggest how space contributes to a system of domination, order, and control over social groups while privileging others, thus potentially informing equity policies (Trudeau & McMorran, 2011). As such, EDI discourses miss a critical dimension by overlooking how space itself co-produces belonging, exclusion, and identity. As relational cartography shows, belonging is not a stable outcome, but a shifting set of spatial relations shaped through encounters with people, places, and institutional narratives. When EDI frameworks treat inclusion merely as representation, they ignore how spatial design, pedagogical practices, campus culture, and student services actively configure who feels welcome and who is positioned at the margins. Attending to spatial dynamics opens possibilities for multiple forms of belonging to emerge and creates conditions that support the diverse ways students learn, relate, and succeed (Monreal, 2021). Understanding these complex dynamics reveals that inclusion is not a fixed state but an ongoing process shaped by the everyday practices of a learning environment (Monreal, 2021; Monreal & Popielarz, 2022).

This article examines how campus maps operate as spatial tools that normalize particular practices of inclusion and exclusion across three Canadian universities. Through spatially informed EDI discourses, students can better identify and navigate the potential tensions in higher education. Conversely, they will learn about safer social spaces that affirm their identities and which spaces to avoid. Learning about the politics of spatial regulation and how space produces social identities can foster respect for human diversity (Scott, 2020).

The next section of this article reviews the literature on spatiality, critical cartography, and intersectionality to help frame the project. The study design, which contains methodology and data analysis, follows the literature review. The discussion then turns to the study findings, followed by a conclusion containing implications and recommendations.

SPATIALITY, CRITICAL CARTOGRAPHY, AND INTERSECTIONALITY

Spatiality

Space is socially produced and shaped by political power, economic forces, cultural meanings, and everyday practices (Harvey, 2000; Lefebvre, 1991; Massey, 2005; Soja, 2010). This perspective has inspired a “spatial turn” in the social sciences, shifting attention from an exclusive focus on time and historical sequence to how geography, location, and spatial relations structure social life, power, lived experience, and cultural meanings. Lefebvre (1991) argued that social and cultural life must be understood spatially, as societies actively produce space through spatial practices, representations, and lived meanings. He proposed a spatial triad consisting of spatial practices (perceived space), representations of space (conceived space), and representational spaces (lived space). Spatial practices refer to

the material routines of everyday life, representations of space denote abstract conceptions produced by institutions, and representational space refers to space as lived, sensed, and symbolically experienced. This framework has helped researchers understand cities as contested sites of power.

In Lefebvre's (1991) analysis, capitalism produces an "abstract spatiality" that is homogenized, measurable, and regulated through maps, zoning, property relations, and bureaucratic systems. Lefebvre et al. (1996) advanced the notion of the *right to the city*, arguing that inhabitants should have a collective right to shape and transform urban space rather than cities being organized primarily for capital or state control. This idea has been expanded by Harvey (2012) and is central to Soja's (2010) conceptualization of spatial justice. Soja insists that spatiality "is an integral and formative component of justice itself" (p. 1). Inspired by these theorists, we argue that efforts to make universities more equitable require an analysis of space as practised, conceived, and lived. Critical cartography provides theoretical and methodological insights for such analysis.

Critical Cartography

Critical cartography describes an approach to map-making that moves beyond traditional, neutral representations of geographic information by foregrounding the inherent subjectivity and potential for bias in maps. In doing so, critical cartography highlights the social, political, and cultural dimensions of cartography. According to Crampton (2010), critical cartography offers researchers a tool for interrogating how people, identities, and objects are produced through mapping practices. Rather than assuming maps are neutral representations, this approach enables scholars to question the power relations embedded in how maps are made, circulated, and used. Critical cartography helps researchers examine the historical and spatial contexts in which maps emerge, the forms of knowledge they organize and legitimize, and the material and social effects these mapped knowledges generate.

In practice, critical cartography has been used to examine diverse forms of spatial oppression, marginalization, and emancipation. Scholars have shown that maps are historically gendered, often disregarding how different genders experience and navigate space in uneven ways (Ferber et al., 2016). Maps have also been regarded as racist by drawing boundaries that delineate racialized, imperialistic, and capitalistic spaces, resulting in inclusion and exclusion and the stratification of opportunity and oppression (Vélez & Solórzano, 2017). They are also viewed as heteronormative for ignoring queer realities (Brown & Knopp, 2008) and ableist for insufficient attention to accessibility (Gould et al., 2020; Wolbring & Lillywhite, 2021). As Vélez and Solórzano (2017) argue, maps and the spatial logics they represent often determine who feels a sense of belonging and who is rendered marginal. Without an intersectional framework, critical cartographic analyses risk overlooking how mapped spaces differentially enable or constrain individuals along axes of social difference.

Intersectionality

Audre Lorde (1984) writes, "there is no such thing as a single-issue struggle because we do not live single-issue lives" (p. 138). Therefore, and in alignment with the recent critical cartography literature, research on power structures, lived experience, and space must centralize intersectionality to further understand the interconnected causes and effects of marginalization (Gibson et al., 2019; McElroy, 2018; Pyne & Taylor, 2019). Critically analyzing maps through intersectionality links multiple interpretations of space with power, highlights normative and narrow underpinnings of space, demonstrates that maps are political, and critiques dominant structures that regulate practices and people through maps (Brown & Knopp, 2008; Crampton & Krygier, 2006). Four guiding principles that unpin intersectionality are: (a) race, class, gender, sexuality, and other systems of power are interdependent and shape one another; (b) intersecting power relations lead to complex interdependent social inequalities; (c) the social location of individuals within intersecting pow-

er relations shapes their experiences; and (d) solving problems, such as forming epistemic resistance to hegemony, requires intersectional analysis (Collins, 2019). Although there is a critique that intersectionality is too pluralistic to effect change, social action as a way of knowing responds to this critique by positioning the action as insightful and as expanding community. For example, the heterogeneity of local Black Lives Matter projects underscores the challenges of "flexible solidarity" or of tackling multiple causes under one roof. However, it widens the circles of political struggles and forms a new synergy of ideas and actions (Collins, 2019). Projects based on intersectionality seek to unearth more profound experiences with racism, sexism, capitalism, colonialism, and other forms of political domination and economic exploitation (Case, 2017; Collins, 2019). There is scarce research that focuses on how multiply-marginalized students mitigate social and spatial marginalization and negotiate their differences on campus (Duran & Jones, 2019). The research suggests that multiply-marginalized people experience structures that fail to protect them (Crenshaw, 2015), which results in a lack of resources, safety concerns, incomplete knowledge development (Chan et al., 2017), and little investigation into the effects of equity discourses (Byrd, 2019). To extend this line of inquiry spatially, Soja's (1996) concept of Thirdspace provides a useful theoretical lens.

According to Soja (1996), Thirdspace is a dynamic, hybrid, and relational space where material realities and conceptual meanings intersect, creating possibilities for transformation. It foregrounds how interlocking systems of power are organized spatially, demonstrating that hegemonic structures not only recognize difference but actively produce and regulate it. Thirdspace challenges binary and fixed ways of thinking, emphasizing that marginalization is relational and spatially constituted. Thirdspace adds another analytic layer for understanding how oppression operates across both material and symbolic dimensions. Multiply-marginalized people experience mental health challenges (Chan et al., 2017; Cyrus, 2017), social exclusion (Choo & Ferree, 2010; Harris & Patton, 2019), and uncertain performance expectations and minimized potential for achievement (Cook-Sather, 2018). Such difficulties can result in isolation, stress, demotivation, vulnerability, diminished self-advocacy, and increased dropout rates (Cyrus, 2017; Fay et al., 2020). Further, multiply-marginalized people face mutually exclusive categories and are seldom allowed to articulate their diverse experiences and understandings (Crenshaw, 1989). Through using Thirdspace as a reference point, a critical cartography of campus maps can illuminate how EDI discourses are spatially enacted and experienced by multiply-marginalized people.

STUDY DESIGN

The purpose of this research project was to critically understand how university campus maps shape the experiences of multiply-marginalized students. The project's objective was to identify how and to what extent physical space and campus geography reflect and contribute to the experience of oppression among students. The research questions were: (a) How does the campus geography produce students' social, political, and relational realities? and (b) What are the students' interpretations of how campus maps impact their lives? The project repositioned students who experience inequities as knowledgeable of EDI discourses rather than as products of policy regulation (Bourassa, 2021; Scott, 2020). Given the documented absence of student voice in equity policies (Chan et al., 2017; Cook-Sather, 2018; Tamtik & Guenter, 2019), a study centralizing multiply-marginalized students can detect the spatial and relational nature of oppressive power on campus and envision a different social reality (Anderson, 2012; Cook-Sather, 2018).

To facilitate data collection, we used the virtual or print versions of campus maps in use by the participating universities at the time. These maps functioned as an analytical device to investigate the study participants' experiences. Basing campus geography on intersectional inclusivity and participatory insights helps foster a more fulsome sense of inclusion on campuses. Analyzing the campus map with study

participants functioned as a form of social action, questioning what administrators purport through their equity decisions if space is not a consideration and creating a necessary dialogue about domination and regulation, intersecting forms of power, and normative assumptions. This study centred on student agency to resist and remake campus spaces, while also shedding light on how spaces dominate and regulate student identities.

Interviews with participants were selected as the data collection method (Lichtman, 2013), lasting approximately 45 minutes per participant. We drew on Lefebvre's (1991) spatial triad—perceived (students' everyday spatial routines on campus), conceived (the university campus map), and lived dimensions of the space (material, sensory, emotional, social, and relational experiences on campus)—to help structure the interview protocol and subsequent data analysis. The participants were asked to apply shapes and colours to signal their interpretations of campus maps and to elaborate on sensory and temporal experiences on campus, juxtaposed against the maps and movement patterns. Following Sullivan (2012), students were asked to be familiar with their campus maps before the interviews, noting the frequency of visits, spatial understandings of inclusion, and risky spaces or avoidance (inclusive of non-university-affiliated spaces on or around campus). Participants were prompted to use any colour of their choosing to circle an area, or use an emoji (heart, star, etc.) to signal positive or negative alignment with a campus space, as long as each response featured a different colour or marking. In-person interviews were audio-recorded, with participants marking a physical map that was kept for analysis. Virtual interviews were audio- and video-recorded, with a copy of the relevant campus map shared on screen for participants to edit.

We conducted our study in three universities within the province of Manitoba. After human ethics approval was received at all participating universities, recruitment for the study took place on each campus through various means (mailing lists, posters, and social media ads). The research team recruited 22 students: 14 from the University of Manitoba (UM), five from the University of Winnipeg (UW), and three from Brandon University (BU). Study participants were current students who identify with social identities that include or extend to gender, sexuality, ability, race, or other political systems (Duran & Jones, 2019). That said, the students were members of various social communities that overlap: Indigenous (four students), 2SLGBTQ+ (11 students), racialized (14 students), cisgender female (16 students), and disabled (10 students).

A discourse analytic method to facilitate data analysis allowed us to focus on the production of human experience (Warriner, 2008) and compare the data to critical cartography and intersectionality. Further, by analyzing interview transcripts and marked-up campus maps as "social texts," we were able to examine different contexts and strengthen the generalizability of our findings (Talja, 1999). When reading the social texts, we coded them to identify recurring concepts, such as evidence of different understandings of space. Codes were then organized into categories to enhance data organization and interpretation. These codes were then developed into themes (Lichtman, 2013).

STUDY DATA

The study participants spatially rebalanced the oppressive and relational nature of power on their campuses. In Lefebvre's (1991) terms, the mapping exercise facilitated reflection on the campus as imagined by planners, policy makers, and institutional structures (conceived space). Analyzing the campus maps also generated dialogue on how these spatial structures organized students' campus lives (perceived space) and how these spatial experiences impacted them on affective and symbolic levels (lived space). The study participants articulated how their campus consists of racist, ableist, sexist, and hetero/cissexist spaces. We categorized the data into three areas: (a) erasing multiplicity, (b) affirming spatial and social diversity, and (c) access and accessibility.

Erasing Multiplicity

As Lefebvre (1991) described, study participants explained their life experiences to understand how space impacts their interactions and decisions. There were 11 participants who identified a need to erase aspects of their identity to address their political or safety concerns. For example, a UM female Métis student with a disability emphasized her disability in her interview responses rather than her female or Indigenous identities. She explained, "I do not have that same kind of prejudice toward me because I do not look Indigenous even though I am. But there are other things, being in a wheelchair or just being female, for goodness' sake." In another example, a UM racialized queer student stated:

> I find that it is often tough to be involved in South Asian communities just because there is still a lot of stigma around queerness. It is hard to be there in a safe way, to be there openly. I often do not interact with too many South Asian folks, whereas within the queer community, my experiences have been amazing.

In the participants' critical cartographies[2], we experienced further erasure of multiplicity when participants discussed their experiences. Figure 1 profiles the experiences of a UM participant who identifies as queer, female, and Indigenous.

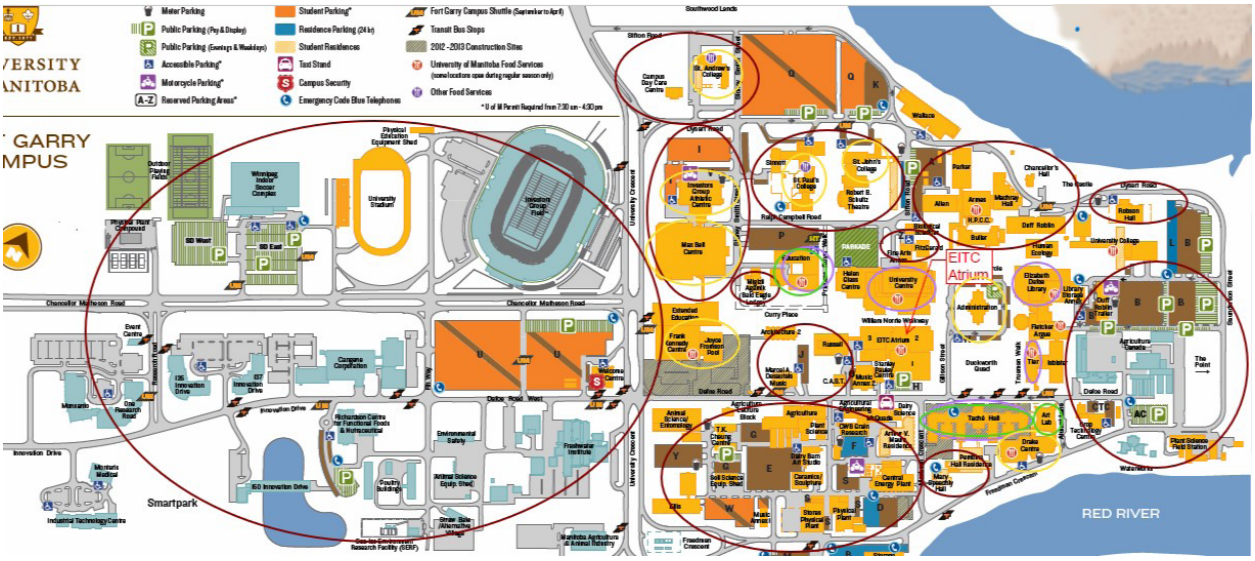
As shown in Figure 1, we observed that queer or female identities are not reflected in the map. Emphasis was primarily on Indigenous inclusion, with the Indigenous student centre, the food court, and the library being frequently highlighted spaces. Also, a UM student who identifies as cisgender female, bisexual, and neurodivergent offered the following perspective in Figure 2.

2 In figures that follow, the legends paraphrase participants' input to explain the colours, shapes, and emoticons they used on their campus maps.

Figure 1.

- Blue – Avoid due to toxic work environment or smells (agriculture, engineering, business; construction zones)
- Yellow – Inclusive spaces (Indigenous student centre, Art Lab)
- Red – Frequent visits (gym, inexpensive restaurants)
- Green – Infrequent visits (quiet space such as a separate college or the library)

Figure 2.



- Purple circles – Frequent visits (university centre and program-specific buildings)
- Yellow circles – Lack of safety (recreation facilities, due to hyper-attention to bodies; Catholic colleges, due to legacy of homophobia; administrative building, due to complex bureaucracies; and Faculty of Business, due to the presence of wealthy students and capitalism). The student purposefully avoided these spaces, as they negatively impacted her sense of belonging.
- Maroon circles – Never attend due to personal and professional reasons
- Green circles – Inclusive spaces (Faculty of Education, Taché Hall, Art Lab)

As shown in Figure 2, we observed that the people who typically occupy each building impacted her spatial engagement. She also described how people in a particular building triggered memories from her past. She shared:

> The kids of those families that were too rich for White Ridge [a lower-middle-class neighbourhood in Winnipeg] are all in the Drake Centre [Faculty of Business]. They are all going to be accountants and entrepreneurs. They are going to have their own businesses. So, it is not that the Drake Centre does not feel safe for me; it is more that *the people* in the Drake Centre do not feel safe for me [emphasis added as per intonation].

In these examples, study participants' erasure of multiple identities impacted how they navigated and engaged in the spatial power geometries of their university campus. Risk and safety shaped the perceptions of those occupying different spaces. Furthermore, we observed that many participants foregrounded different aspects of their identities in different spaces, as particular spatial contexts made certain identities more salient than others.

Affirming Spatial and Social Diversity

Lefebvre (1991) suggested that conceptions of maps elucidate the political landscapes that shape human lives. In this study, maps were also interpreted as political devices used by the administration to produce its version of student and spatial diversity. Our study participants needed their multiple identities affirmed, including acknowledging painful histories and demonstrating inclusive changes. Overall, 13 students

deliberately sought out their identities through maps and campus engagement, a designated safe zone, changerooms for trans students, disability-friendly virtual spaces, a daycare, or a Black and people of colour lounge. One BU participant, who is an asexual, disabled female, shared, "We have a lot of people from rural areas who are not exposed to a lot of differences, and then they come on campus and see it is different and that different is bad." However, other study participants noted that this visual representation approach can be problematic. In one example from a UW racialized female with a disability, "Equity has great rhetoric that looked great on posters. But, in reality, my personal experience would deviate very far from those pictures and what that rhetoric says." Also, a UW participant shared that the racialized students were given a storage closet to support their organizing efforts, unlike the offices given to other student groups. A visual representation, along with a sense of unbelonging and a lack of safety, suggests an incongruence between affirming diversity and spatial practice. This incongruence may reflect Bourassa's (2021) concept of "productive inclusion," in which institutions manage forms of permission that do not challenge existing power structures but instead absorb, manage, and exploit difference in ways that serve neo-liberal capitalism. Rather than eliminating exclusion, inclusion becomes a technology of power that selectively incorporates marginalized people only insofar as they are helpful, manageable, or value-producing for institutions.

The classrooms were also regarded as a critical space for affirming spatial and student diversity. One UM cisgender female, bisexual, and neurodivergent student shared that professors must model inclusion and diversity in their classrooms. When they do, she is more likely to attend class. She shared, "The professors have been pretty clear about inclusion and diversity and creating good relationships with everybody. The values of those faculties align with my own values." This data point suggests the student–teacher relationship can itself be understood as a spatial production. Lefebvre (1991) argues that space is socially produced, thus enabling classroom environments to be shaped through relational practices. In this sense, pedagogy becomes a spatial practice through which classrooms can be produced as more inclusive and participatory environments. Participants suggested that instructors can cultivate spaces by prioritizing student agency, comfort, and connection, fostering dialogic learning, and integrating intersectionality into course curricula. The participants emphasized offering online learning options, quiet/low-noise participation, and access to natural, meditative, and scent-free learning experiences. Given participants' favourable response to the mapping exercise used in this study, instructors can also invite students to map their campus experiences. As one BU participant shared, "I always feel better when I'm in a place where the community is welcomed."

However, the data indicates that there are still other significant challenges related to student and spatial diversity. As one UM participant, who identified as South Asian, non-binary and disabled, shared, "In the gym, they do not have gender-inclusive changerooms; it is just one massive changeroom. I typically pick a corner and avoid everyone else." The lack of gender-inclusive changerooms does little to affirm this participant's gender identity. The same participant further problematized the importance of scent to their neurodivergence. They explained and provided Figure 3.

> I am neurodivergent. I have a diagnosis of ADHD and autism. So, I try avoiding the really busy spaces because I get overstimulated easily. There is Tim Hortons [a coffeeshop], a burrito place, and Starbucks. There are so many scents from all the coffee and everything, which is overwhelming sometimes. The good part about being on the Bannatyne Campus [UM] is that it is all scent-free.

Figure 3.

- Red – Frequency of visits (library for its diversity)
- Green – Inclusive, often situated within the red circles (gym for its diversity)

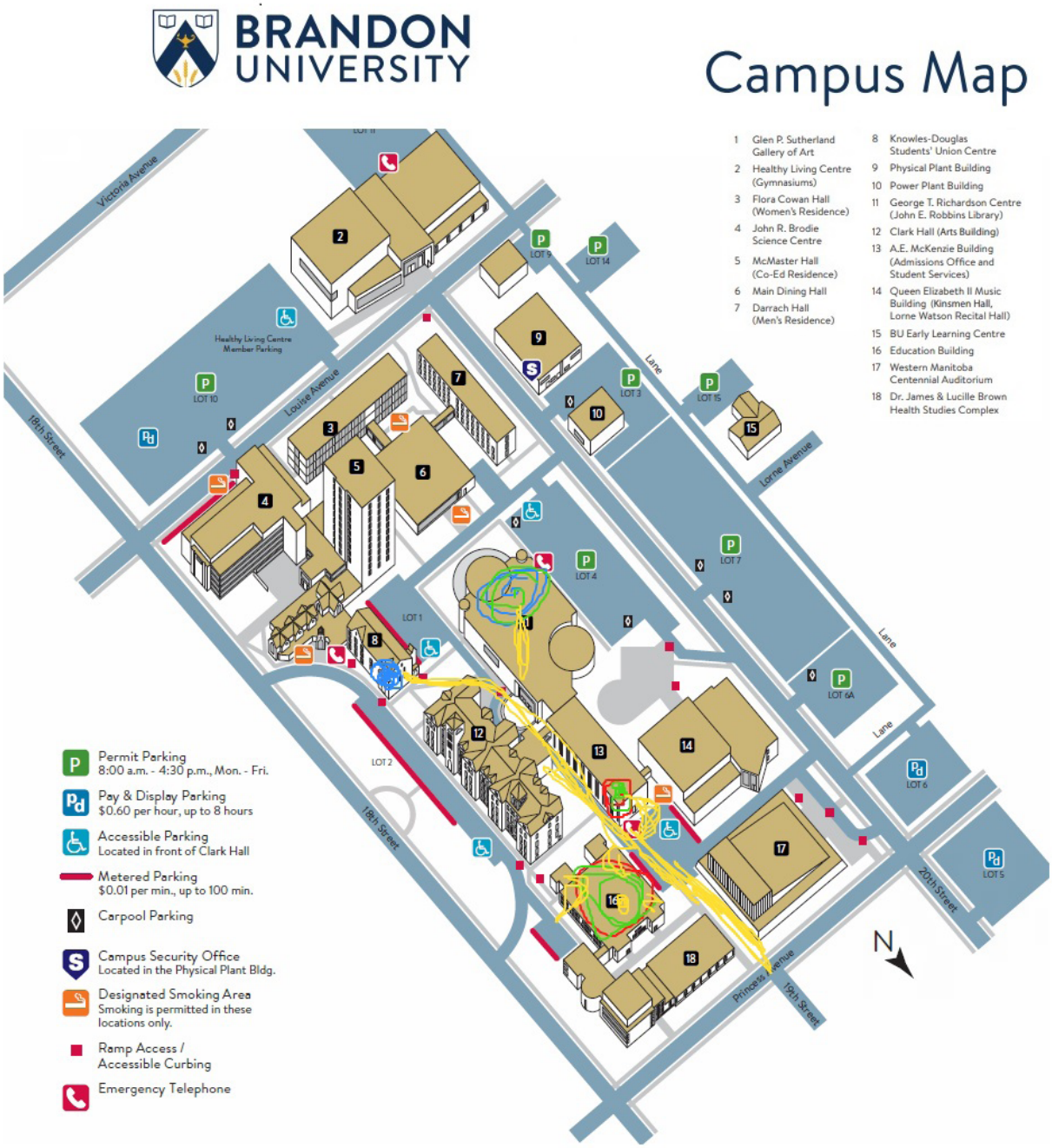
As shown in Figure 3, diversity and the structured patterns of participants' engagement become prominent, but it also reveals what is missing: large areas of the campus that none of the participants inhabit or mention, such as the Catholic colleges, the students' centre, and the agriculture and animal sciences buildings. This shared absence is itself an important data point.

Access and Accessibility

Lefebvre (1991) suggested that understanding maps, their purposes, and conventions can foster critical spatial awareness. Analyzing campus maps helped us identify access and accessibility issues, which we interpret as central to campus engagement. Having access to spaces was prioritized by all participants, underscoring the importance of inclusive and equitable spaces for everyone and fostering critical awareness of different social realities. For example, a trans/non-binary UM student with a disability shared, "He [the Student Accessibility Coordinator] helped me get into the right residence room that's larger than the average student [room] to accommodate my service dog." This example illustrates how institutional interventions can materially shape students' capacity to inhabit campus space in ways that affirm their identities and needs. Further cementing the need for supportive spaces, many participants stated that they purposefully access campus spaces to find serenity, to connect with others who are like them, and to recharge, such as racialized spaces, natural spaces or gardens, and communal eating areas. In these contexts, spaces can escape neo-liberal forms of inclusion and can be made by students to be (or feel) inclusive. These peaceful and self-curated spaces appeared to function as sites where students could momentarily escape the pressures of institutional life, enacting their own forms of belonging and inclusion. In this way, their practices resonate with Lefebvre's notion of the right to the city, as students actively claim and produce spaces that feel open, livable, and affirming.

Figure 4 is a map from a BU Indigenous (Métis) female student with a disability, further reflecting the theme of access and accessibility.

Figure 4.



- Red – High Frequency (home faculty)
- Blue – Infrequent (library, student union)
- Green – Inclusive (library, home faculty)
- Yellow – Avoidance (icy paths, which are hard on ankles; elevators with restricted access; bathrooms in the basement and therefore difficult to access)

Figure 4 shows how space positively and negatively impacts students' experience. The home faculty helped the student build connections and familiarity with the space but also isolated the student from other aspects of campus, as indicated by the yellow lines. Although the library was experienced as inclusive and safe, the student visited it infrequently, suggesting that comfort alone did not drive engagement; other factors, such as program requirements, social opportunities, or perceived relevance of the space, influenced usage. The yellow spaces became more pronounced in the winter.

In another example, an Indigenous woman with disabilities and in a wheelchair explained how virtual classrooms have positively shaped her involvement: "All Indigenous meetings are now virtual. For me, that is a real plus. Because having to go to campus every day to be able to partake in a sharing circle or a ceremony is just too much." She also shared that because of her disabilities:

> I would have to take a ramp to go outside and then over to the Disabilities Office and use their ramp to go in. Often, the ramps are not free of snow and ice. I know it is just a little laneway to cross, but it can be really, really difficult. Many times, I have not made it. Actually, every time a student sees me and offers their assistance. It is not something I can do by myself a lot of the time.

Usually, underground tunnels provide support; however, at the UM, they do not extend across the entire campus. One unit that is inaccessible by the tunnel is Disability Studies, one of her main program areas. Figure 5 shows a map with heart emojis, illustrating areas where she can access and find enjoyment (Indigenous student centre, university centre, library, Handi-Transit), and cross emojis indicating areas to avoid (the entire southeast of campus due to treacherous terrain). A purple line was created to further illustrate restrictive access.

Figure 5.

- Heart – Inclusive spaces/frequently accessed (Faculty of Education, Indigenous student centre, university centre, library)
- Cross – Avoidance/inaccessible (parking, Agriculture building, Faculty of Arts, Student Services)
- Purple – Roadways or areas with limited accessibility or under constant construction with

Overall, the data in this section suggested how space produced student interactions and decisions. There was an understanding of maps, their purposes, and conventions, drawing attention to questions of access and accessibility.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The research findings suggest a need for intersectional spatial analysis to advance current EDI discourses on campus. Intersectional spatial analysis understands space as a relational meeting point where identities, power, and practices converge. From this view, the same space can simultaneously enable belonging for some while excluding others. Even when institutions claim "inclusivity" or "belonging," the relational dynamics within those spaces, shaped by intersecting identities, can produce very different experiences of who feels welcomed and who does not (Forde, 2024). For example, at the UW, the racialized students were given a storage closet to help with their organizing efforts, relegating them to second-class students relative to other student groups with assigned offices. At the UM, accessibility ramps were not or seldom snowplowed for students who require wheelchairs. So, while inclusion initiatives '"checkmark" EDI efforts as a completed activity (e.g., by counting students with disabilities or Black students as present), a spatial analysis reveals a bounded inclusion. As a result, students have an additional burden of navigating toxic or oppressive spaces or avoiding them altogether. Avoidance would mean students losing significant social, wellness, and learning opportunities in those spaces. They must advocate for change without meaningful systemic support and seek compromises or allowances. Consistent with Wolbring and Lillywhite (2021) and Major (2024), our data also suggests that students experience uneven access to institutional power, resulting in not all students feeling equally positioned or empowered to advocate for change. However, the fact that the participants could identify supportive and problematic spaces on the maps, and that no participant identified the entire campus as supportive of their multiple communities, speaks to their burden of dislodging the fixedness of EDI discourses or "productive inclusion" (Bourassa, 2021). Applying an intersectional spatial analysis means learning about spatial concerns (e.g., Catholic churches and their homophobic legacies, historic buildings as symbols of colonialism, inadequate disability accommodations) that are occurring on campus and identifying ways in which the space can be emancipatory and pedagogical, rather than exclusionary and oppressive. Through a Thirdspace lens (Soja, 1996), these sites are not fixed containers of meaning but relational arenas where material structures and lived experiences intersect, making visible both the reproduction of oppression and the possibility of transformation. For example, such transformative efforts might include religious colleges initiating queer-affirming programs, campus safety programs accounting for racialized experiences with police, Indigenous programs incorporating Two-Spirit realities, and buildings integrating gender diversity perspectives. Space must teach why changes are necessary and affirm student backgrounds.

The current research project raises awareness of student experiences with EDI discourses on university campuses. For example, the data showed that, despite gains, there is unevenness across the EDI spectrum (Wolbring & Nguyen, 2023). This unevenness translates to oppressive noise, whereby the volume of racism, ableism, homo/transphobia, and so forth prompted most students in this study to seek serenity in nature, including lawns, gardens, or other outdoor spaces. For some, their limited mobility meant disconnections from other spaces. Mobility can mean inaccessibility due to seasonal or design constraints, but it also can mean feeling unsafe and excluded when entering particular social spaces (e.g., gyms, bakeries, religious venues, homogeneous buildings). The fact that many participants called for this spatial inclusion reflects that oppression continues despite EDI promises. Furthermore, our study shows that maps are political tools that can allow people to notice, visualize, and reflect on the spatial structures that impact their interactions and what is absent. Maps can help people imagine more inclusive pathways.

IMPLICATIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS, AND CONCLUSION

This study has practical implications for interest holders, which we hope will change university campuses' geographies to better suit student diversity. First, EDI practitioners and policy makers must co-construct spatial-social justice into their training and initiatives, recognizing that spaces are relational and co-constructed with social identities, and that these relations profoundly shape students' experiences, sense of belonging, and academic achievement. A listening tour engaging students about their spatial interactions may be helpful. Second, there are implications for faculty development. Instructors can learn to infuse intersectional spatial awareness into their pedagogy, which may mean collectively analyzing how space produces identities, promoting spatial justice, and reflecting on how space amplifies student voices. An equity audit of a classroom may reveal deeper considerations of spatial inclusion and exclusion. Third, designers of campus services and spaces must infuse EDI into their practices and consult multiply-marginalized students throughout the design process (Mercer-Mapstone et al., 2017; Roy et al., 2021).

The findings point to several recommendations. First, there is a pressing need to examine how space actively constructs and shapes student engagement. Spaces operate as relational meeting points where identities, power, and material conditions intersect, often normalizing practices of inclusion and exclusion. When these spatial norms shape students' sense of safety or possibility, and institutional leaders fail to recognize their impact, opportunities for meaningful student development, connection, and participation are lost. Campus maps can communicate respect for diversity by depicting a range of opportunities, enabling individuals to connect and learn about differences. Including key information about different groups in these visuals and attending to spatial reconfigurations may better reflect diverse realities. Visuals that teach about diversity, such as featuring historical alums from marginalized communities, may be useful. Campuses can promote interactivity and informal learning by having students produce oral histories (e.g., podcasts) that are accessible across campus, explaining imagery, signs, landmarks, and their histories. While maps may now display the Indigenous student centre or accessible bathrooms, more work is needed to show where racialized, queer, and women's groups gather, as well as inclusive elements such as gender-inclusive washrooms, accessible routes, distances by foot or wheelchair, and cultural groups. Finally, further research on spatial justice and its impact on belonging and inclusion on university campuses is warranted.

In conclusion, this study showcased student perspectives on how space shapes their social and educational journeys across three university campuses. Drawing on Lefebvre's (1991) spatial triad—perceived, conceived, and lived space—we identified identity navigation, social inclusion, and accessibility as central themes. We argued that EDI discourses on university campuses must consider spatial dimensions and address problematic areas. An intersectional spatial analysis offers direction for these changes and can inform future campus map designs.

REFERENCES

Ahmed, S. (2012). *On being included: Racism and diversity in institutional life*. Duke University Press.

Anderson, G. (2012). Equity and critical policy analysis in higher education: A bridge still too far. *The Review of Higher Education*, *36*(1), 133–142. https://doi.org/10.1353/rhe.2012.0051

Annamma, S., Morrison, D., & Jackson, D. (2017). Searching for educational equity through critical spatial analysis. In D. Morrison, S. Annamma, & D. Jackson (Eds.), *Critical race spatial analysis: Mapping to understand and address educational equity* (pp. 3–7). Stylus.

Brown, M., & Knopp, L. (2008). Queering the map: The productive tensions of colliding epistemologies. *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*, *98*(1), 40–58. https://doi.org/10.1080/00045600701734042

Bourassa, G. (2021). Neoliberal multiculturalism and productive inclusion: Beyond the politics of fulfillment in education. *Journal of Education Policy*, *36*(2), 253–278. https://doi.org/10.1080/02680939.2019.1676472

Byrd, D. (2019). The diversity distraction: A critical comparative analysis of discourse in higher education scholarship. *The Review of Higher Education*, *42*, 135–172. https://doi.org/10.1353/rhe.2019.0048

Campbell, A. (2019). Equity education initiatives within Canadian universities: Promise and limits. *Perspectives: Policy and Practice in Higher Education*, *23*, 1–17. https://doi.org/10.1080/13603108.2019.1631226

Case, K. (2017). Toward an intersectional pedagogy model: Engaged learning for social justice. In K. Case (Ed.), *Intersectional pedagogy: Complicating identity and social justice* (pp. 1–24). Routledge.

Chan, C., Erby, A., & Ford, D. (2017). Intersectionality in practice: Moving a social justice paradigm to action in higher education. In J. Johnson & G. Javier (Eds.), *Queer people of color in higher education* (pp. 9–29). Information Age Publishing.

Choo, H., & Ferree, M. (2010). Practicing intersectionality in sociological research: A critical analysis of inclusions, interactions, and institutions in the study of inequalities. *Sociological Theory*, *28*(2), 129–149. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9558.2010.01370.x

Collins, P. (2019). Intersectionality's definitional dilemmas. *Annual Review of Sociology*, *41*, 1–20. https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-soc-073014-112142

Cook-Sather, A. (2018). Listening to equity-seeking perspectives: How students' experiences of pedagogical partnership can inform wider discussions of student success. *Higher Education Research and Development*, *37*(5), 923–936. https://doi.org/10.1080/07294360.2018.1457629

Crampton, J. (2010). *Mapping: A critical introduction to cartography and GIS.* Wiley-Blackwell.

Crampton, J., & Krygier, J. (2006). Introduction to critical cartography. *ACME: An International E-Journal for Critical Geographies*, *4*(1), 11–33.

Crenshaw, K. (1989). Demarginalizing the intersection of race and sex: A Black feminist critique of antidiscrimination doctrine, feminist theory and antiracist politics. *University of Chicago Legal Forum*, *1989*(1), 139–167. https://chicagounbound.uchicago.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1052&context=uclf

Crenshaw, K. (2015, September 25). Why intersectionality can't wait. *The Washington Post.* https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/in-theory/wp/2015/09/24/why-intersectionality-cant-wait/

Cyrus, K. (2017). Multiple minorities as multiply marginalized: Applying the minority stress theory to LGBTQ people of color. *Journal of Gay & Lesbian Mental Health*, *21*(3), 194–202. https://doi.org/10.1080/19359705.2017.1320739

Duran, A., & Jones, S. R. (2019). Using intersectionality in qualitative research on college student identity development: Considerations, tensions, and possibilities. *Journal of College Student Development*, *60*(4), 455–471. https://doi.org/10.1353/csd.2019.0040

Ecker, J., Rae, J., & Bassi, A. (2015). Showing your pride: A national survey of queer student centres in Canadian colleges and universities. *Higher Education*, *70*, 881–898. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10734-015-9874-x

Fay, D. L., Fryar, A. H., & Meier, K. J. (2020). Intersectionality and equity: Dynamic bureaucratic representation in higher education. *Public Administration*, *2020*, 1–18. https://doi.org/10.1111/padm.12691

Ferber, N., Atteneder, H., Jekel, T., & Stieger, S. (2016). A practical approach for gender- and diversity-informed geomedia education for teachers in training. *GI_Forum*, *1*, 269–281. https://doi.org/10.1553/giscience2016_01_s269

Forde, S. (2024). Spatial intersectionality and transformative justice as frameworks for equitable urban planning in divided and post-conflict cities. *Cities*, *147*, 1–3. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cities.2024.104796

Gibson, S., Loukaitou-Sideris, A., & Mukhija, V. (2019). Ensuring park equity: A California case study. *Journal of Urban Design*, *24*(3), 385–405. https://doi.org/10.1080/13574809.2018.1497927

Gould, R., Parker Harris, S., Mullin, C., & Jones, R. (2020). Disability, diversity, and corporate responsibility: Learning from recognized leaders in inclusion. *Journal of Vocational Rehabilitation*, *52*(1), 29–42. https://doi.org/10.3233/JVR-191058

Guyotte, K., Flint, M., & Latopolski, K. (2024). Cartographies of belonging: Mapping nomadic narratives of first-year students. In R. Raaper (Ed.), *Contemporary dynamics of student experience and belonging in higher education* (pp. 7–22). Routledge.

Harris, J., & Patton, L. (2019). Un/doing intersectionality through higher education research. *The Journal of Higher Education*, *90*(3), 347–372. https://doi.org/10.1080/00221546.2018.1536936

Harvey, D. (2000). *Spaces of hope.* University of California Press.

Harvey, D. (2012). *Rebel cities: From the right to the city to the urban revolution*. Verso Books.

Knaap, E. (2017). The cartography of opportunity: Spatial data science for equitable urban policy. *Housing Policy Debate, 27*(6), 913–940. https://doi.org/10.1080/10511482.2017.1331930

Kyra. (2014). *How to uphold white supremacy by focusing on diversity and inclusion.* Model View Culture. https://modelviewculture.com

Lefebvre, H. (1991). *The production of space* (D. Nicholson-Smith, Trans.). Blackwell.

Lefebvre, H., Kofman, E., & Lebas, E. (1996). *Writings on cities*. Blackwell.

Lichtman, M. (2013). *Qualitative researcher in education: A user's guide* (rev. ed). SAGE.

Lorde, A. (1984). *Sister outsider*. The Crossing Press.

Massey, D. (2005). *For space*. SAGE.

Major, R. (2024). This isn't plug and play: Intersectionality, Indigeneity, and EDID work. *AlterNative: An International Journal of Indigenous Peoples*, *20*(1), 77–84. https://doi.org/10.1177/11771801241235320

McElroy, E. (2018). Mapping the anti-eviction struggle in the San Francisco Bay area. In kollektiv orangotango+ (Ed.), *This is not an atlas: A global collection of counter-cartographies* (pp. 38–49). Transcript.

Mercer-Mapstone, L., Dvorakova, S. L., Matthews, K., Abbot, S., Cheng, B., Felten, P., Knorr, K., Marquis, E., Shammas, R., & Swaim, K. (2017). A systematic literature review of students as partners in higher education. *International Journal for Students as Partners*, *1*(1), 15–37. https://doi.org/10.15173/ijsap.v1i1.3119

Mizzi, R. C., & Star, J. (2019). Queer eye on inclusion: Understanding gay and lesbian student and instructor experiences of continuing education. *Journal of Continuing Higher Education*, *67*(2/3), 72–82. https://doi.org/10.1080/07377363.2019.1660844

Monreal, T. (2021). "Here being 'in' school is worse": How Latinx teachers navigate, recreate, and instigate hostile spaces in the U.S. South. *Educational Studies: Journal of the American Educational Studies Association*, *58*(1), 50–73. https://doi.org/10.1080/00131946.2021.1994972

Monreal, T., & Popielarz, K. (2022). Teaching for spatial justice: A framework for social studies educators. *The Oregon Journal of the Social Studies*, *10*(2), 34–43.

Pedri-Spade, C., & Pitawanakwat, B. T. (2022). Indigenization in university and its role in continuing settler-colonialism. *Janus Unbound: Journal of Critical Studies*, *1*(2), 12–35. https://doi.org/10.2021/ju.v1i2.2377

Pyne, S., & Taylor, D. R. F. (2019). Conclusion: Building awareness to bridge relationships. *Cybercartography in a Reconciliation Community*, *8*, 237–250. https://doi.org/10.1016/B978-0-12-815343-7.00012-9

Raffoul, J., Ward, J., Calvez, S., Kartolo, A., Haque, A., Holmes, T., Attas, R., Kecheog, J., Kustra, E., & Mooney, J. (2022). Institutional structures and individual stories: Experiences from the front lines of Indigenous educational development in higher education. *AlterNative: An International Journal of Indigenous Peoples*, *18*(1), 163–172. https://doi.org/10.1177/11771801211062617

Reale, E., & Seeber, M. (2011). Drivers of inequalities in higher education and the unexpected consequences of equality policies. *Higher Education Policy*, *24*, 185–211.

Rodó-de-Zárate, M. (2014). Developing geographies of intersectionality with Relief Maps: Reflections from youth research in Manresa, Catalonia. *Gender, Place & Culture*, *21*(8), 925–944. https://doi.org/10.1080/0966369X.2013.817974

Roy, J., Chittle, L., Ismail, E., & Kustra, E. (2021). Students as partners within a centre for teaching and learning: A qualitative analysis of challenges and benefits. *International Journal for Academic Development*, *28*, 481–494. https://doi.org/10.1080/1360144X.2021.1964970

Scott, C. (2020). Managing and regulating commitments to equality, diversity and inclusion in higher education. *Irish Educational Studies*, *39*(2), 175–191. https://doi.org/10.1080/03323315.2020.1754879

Soja, E. W. (1996). *Thirdspace: Journeys to Los Angeles and other real-and-imagined places*. Blackwell Publishers.

Soja, E. W. (2010). *Seeking spatial justice.* University of Minnesota Press.

Sullivan, R. (2012). *Place of promise? Queer students' negotiation of risk, danger, and safety at the University of British Columbia* [Doctoral dissertation, University of British Columbia]. https://open.library.ubc.ca/cIRcle/collections/ubctheses/24/items/1.0073395

Talja, S. (1999). Analyzing qualitative interview data: The discourse analytic method. *Library & Information Science Research*, *21*(4), 459–477. https://doi.org/10.1016/S0740-8188(99)00024-9

Tamtik, M., & Guenter, M. (2019). Policy analysis of equity, diversity and inclusion strategies in Canadian universities—how far have we come? *Canadian Journal of Higher Education*, *49*(3), 1–16. https://doi.org/10.47678/cjhe.v49i3.188529

Trudeau, D., & McMorran, C. (2011). The geographies of marginalization. In V. Del Casino, M. Thomas, P. Cloke, & R. Panelli (Eds.), *A companion to social geography* (pp. 437–453). Blackwell Publishing.

Universities Canada. (2023). *Equity, diversity and inclusion at Canadian universities: Universities Canada's 2022 survey on equity, diversity and inclusion*. https://univcan.ca/wp-content/uploads/2024/09/UC-2023-EDI-Report_EN_FA_Web.pdf

Vélez, V. N., & Solórzano, D. G. (2017). Critical race spatial analysis: Conceptualizing GIS as a tool for critical race research in education. In D. Morrison, S. Annamma, & D. Jackson, *Critical race spatial analysis: Mapping to understand and address educational equity* (pp. 8–31). Stylus.

Warriner, D. (2008). Discourse analysis in educational research. In K. King & N. Hornberger (Eds.), *Encyclopedia of language and education* (rev. ed.; pp. 203–215). Springer.

Wolbring, G., & Lillywhite, A. (2021). Equity/equality, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) in universities: The case of disabled people. *Societies*, *11*(2), Article 49. https://doi.org/10.3390/soc11020049

Wolbring, G., & Nguyen, A. (2023). Equity/equality, diversity and inclusion, and other EDI phrases and EDI policy frameworks: A scoping review. *Trends in Higher Education*, *2*(1), 168–237. https://doi.org/10.3390/higheredu2010011