

“Not the Limit of Our Imagination”: Exploring Student Advocacy Discourses in Support of
Universal Higher Education

By

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Table of Contents

Abstract	v
Definition of Terms	vi
Chapter 1: Introduction	1
Context: Inequitable Access to PSE	4
Neoliberalism in Canada	4
Associated Rights	6
Equity and Inclusion	9
Overview	10
Significance of the Study	10
Personal Positionality	11
Literature Review	12
Student Advocacy	12
Higher Education as a Human Right	13
Indigenous Rights to Education	15
Chapter 2: Theoretical Framework	18
Conceptualizing Social Justice	18
Social Justice Theory	20
Chapter 3: Methodology	24
Discourse Analysis	25
Social Semiotics	26
Method	28
Data Collection	28
Data Analysis	29
Diachronic Consideration	30
Coding	31
Orders of Discourse	33
Interpretation of Data	35
Interviews	36
Research Participants	36
Informed Consent	36

Feedback and Debriefing	37
Accuracy, Representation and Deception.....	37
Risks and Benefits	37
Anonymity and Confidentiality	38
Compensation	38
Dissemination	38
Limitations of the Study	38
Criteria for Ensuring Research Quality	40
Chapter 4: Data Analysis	41
Introduction	41
Discourses Constituting Society, Power, and Ideology	42
Personal Pronouns	44
Verb Tenses.....	46
Orders of Discourse.....	47
Document Introduction and Conclusion.....	49
Economic Discourses	56
Participant Perspectives	63
Social Justice Discourse	67
Participant Perspectives.	71
Indigenous-focused Discourses	74
Participant Perspectives.	79
Visual Analysis.....	82
Participant Perspectives.	90
“Right(s)”	94
Participant Perspectives.	96
Chapter 5: Discussion	99
Social Justice, Economic, and Indigenous-Focused Discourses	104
Human Rights Discourses – Benefits, Drawbacks, and Collective Identity	108
Recommendations	112
References.....	113
Appendix A.....	127

Appendix B 128

Appendix C 132

List of Figures

Figure 1: Mapping key elements of this study	8
Figure 2: Social Justice Pillars and Their Relation to PSE	26

List of Images

Image 1: Concluding page of Education Justice	51
Image 2: Concluding page of Education for All	53
Image 3: Page 14 of Education for All	55
Image 4: Page 2 of Education for All	59
Image 5: Image on p. 10 of Education for All	72
Image 6: Snip from p. 5 of Education Justice	79
Image 7: Snip from p. 6 of Education Justice	80
Image 8: Snip from p. 13 of Education Justice	83

List of Tables

Table 1: Rights Associated with the Realization of the Right to Higher Education	12
Table 2: Rights Associated with the Realization of the Right to Higher Education	44

Abstract

Though higher education should be accessible to all on the basis of merit, as per international human rights law, neoliberal policies enacted by provincial governments increasingly worsen financial access to post-secondary education (PSE) in Canada. The ongoing defunding of institutions and student aid are in direct conflict with this right, and represent a significant social justice concern. The Canadian Federation of Students (CFS), the largest centralized student advocacy body in Canada, fights against neoliberal policies that produce and reinforce marginalization of low-income students through a collective social movement in favor of universal PSE. Their lobbying and advocacy are informed by discourses performed on their website and by their members; this study investigates how these discourse frame and inform the CFS's movement towards equitable realization of the right to equitable PSE. Social semiotics (Hodge & Kress, 1988) and discourse analysis (Jørgensen & Phillips, 2002) are used as methodological frameworks to unpack how the discourse performed by the CFS in their electronic publications and by their members further their collective advocacy. Discussion of how these discourses could be used to improve PSE accessibility and inclusivity in Canada, along with suggested areas of future research, conclude this study.

Keywords: Human rights; discourse analysis; higher education; social justice; student advocacy

Definition of Terms

Although I explore these terminologies in depth throughout this thesis, I provide a short definition of them to situate the reader amongst the major conceptualizations I present.

Canadian Federation of Students (CFS): A national student union with over 500,000 members from more than 64 universities and colleges across Canada (Canadian Federation of Students, 2020). The CFS seeks to provide spaces and opportunities for students to engage in activism, which supports accessible higher education, including lobbying both national and provincial governments.

Discourse: Written or spoken communication.

Discourse analysis: A research methodology that seeks to understand linguistic and discursive practices that shape and maintain the social world. Jørgensen and Phillips (2002, p. 64) identify its aim “is to contribute to social change along the lines of more equal power relations in communication processes and society in general.”

Inequality: The uneven distribution of resources, opportunities, or power.

Inequity: The condition of being unjust.

Neoliberalism: A free market, capitalist political approach that favors individual interests over the collective. Neoliberalism aims to reduce government spending and influence and seeks decentralized economic measures, including the privatization of industries and services.

Orders of discourse: Thematic groupings of discourse.

Post-secondary education (PSE): This term is used to refer to any formal education obtained after high school in Canada, including universities, colleges, and vocational training. “Higher education” is used interchangeably.

Social justice: Understand the rights of all people equitably, with a focus on distributing resources in a way that equalizes opportunity for everyone in society. Most social justice efforts are aimed at supporting marginalized and disadvantaged individuals and groups.

Social semiotics: Semiotics is the study of signs and symbols as they function in communication. Social semiotics incorporates social change and the sociocultural context to allow

Social Practice: The means through which social relations are reproduced, challenged, and shifted.

Social practices are tied to specific contextual events and discourses in relation to the social

reality in which they are performed.

Social Reality: The existence of political and economic forces that intersect and interact to constitute a lived experience. Social realities vary between different contexts and for different people and groups of people. Social realities can be understood as ever-evolving with a great potentiality for change.

Student activist: any individual currently enrolled at a post-secondary institution who is involved in social advocacy, campaigning, or activism.

Universal higher education: A system of higher education in which tuition fees and financial barriers are not present, so students from lower socioeconomic statuses are not fiscally excluded from accessing post-secondary systems.

Widening participation: The effort to increase the breadth of students able to access and succeed in PSE, including low-income, marginalized, and racialized individuals and groups (Wilson-Strydom, 2015).

Chapter 1: Introduction

Post-secondary education (PSE) has typically been excluded from literature surrounding education as a human right (Kotzmann, 2015), though education is robustly enshrined by the United Nations in international human rights law (Hodgson, 1998; Kotzmann, 2018). Examples include Article 26 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR; United Nations, 1948), Articles 10, 13 and 14 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR; United Nations, 1966), and Articles 23, 24, 28, and 29 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC; United Nations, 1989). Canada has committed to all of the aforementioned human rights instruments, and therefore is responsible for ensuring the rights outlined therein are enacted in domestic legislation (United Nations, 2020). PSE is increasingly important in modern society as it allows for greater labor market access and provides opportunities to construct critical thinking and learning skills (Hajer & Saltis, 2018; Neem, 2019). In Canada, financial access to PSE is a limiting factor for Canadian students in higher education (Mueller, 2008). Total government student debt in Canada exceeds \$18 billion and the average student debtor owes upwards of \$26,000 (Pandurov, 2021), exemplifying the astounding scope of this issue. The financial barriers erected that lead to student debt and financial exclusion from PSE are inconsistent with Canada's commitments to international human rights law (United Nations, 1966; United Nations, 1989). The interconnectedness of PSE equity and overall social and financial wellbeing, particularly for marginalized groups, makes equitable PSE access an issue of critical social and economic importance.

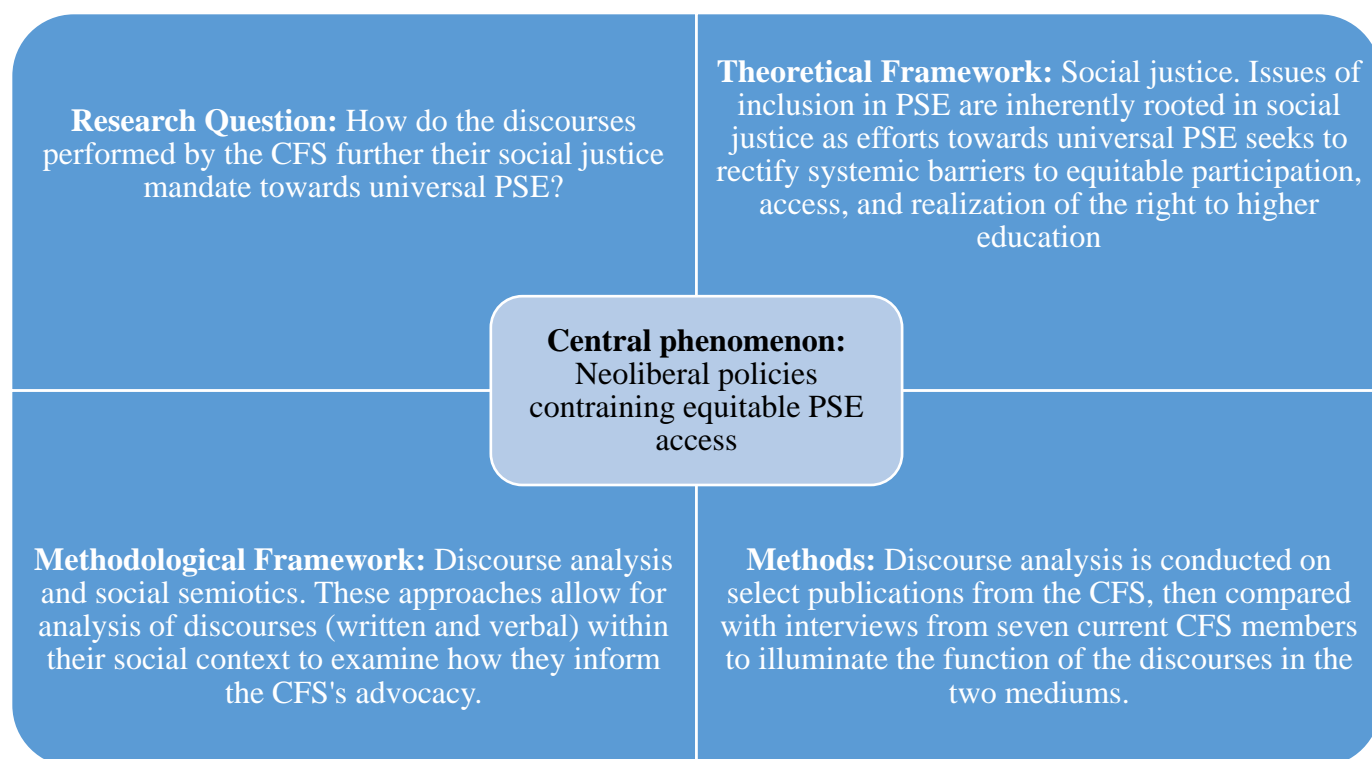
To address these systemic, neoliberal barriers preventing students from participating in PSE equitably, the Canadian Federation of Students (CFS), the largest student advocacy body in Canada, advocates for universal, tuition-free PSE. PSE systems that ensure equitable access via the elimination of financial barriers, including tuition and student debt, are referred to by the CFS and in this study as universal PSE. The CFS uses varied discourses in their electronic communications to support their mandate of universally inclusive PSE, with the ultimate goal of “a system of post-secondary education that is accessible to all [...] which is nationally planned, which recognizes [...] the validity of student rights.” (Canadian Federation of Students, 2020). These discourses aim to inform, empower, and strengthen student advocacy for universal PSE,

targeted at both internal stakeholders (CFS members) and external decision makers (provincial and federal politicians and policymakers). Social justice theory (Wilson-Strydom, 2015) is used as the theoretical framework to unpack these discourses. As equitable access to opportunity and resources are fundamental to any socially just system or process (Wilson-Strydom, 2015), and the CFS positions themselves as a social justice organization (CFS, 2020), approaching the deconstruction of their discourses from a social justice perspective provides the theoretical understanding to unpack *how* these discourses function to support the CFS's advocacy.

This study aims to investigate how the discourses performed by the CFS serve to further their social movement towards universal PSE, thereby closing the gap between what Canada has committed to through international human rights law and current PSE policy, practice, and management. To examine the CFS's discourses, I focus on two reports housed on the CFS website that directly address universal higher education. Using social semiotics (Hodge & Kress, 1988) and discourse analysis (Jørgensen & Phillips, 2002), this qualitative study deconstructs the CFS's use of written and visual communications in these documents and the discourses performed by seven CFS members in individual interviews. The discourses were examined thematically to determine the orders of discourse performed in both the electronic publications and in the interviews. Categorizing discourses in this way allows me to explore how similar discourses are employed in unique contexts to further the social advocacy and seek to enact concrete social change. These orders of discourse, explored in detail in Chapter 4, include economic, social justice, and Indigenous focused discourses. The below figure outlines key components of the study that enable the evaluation of discourses by the CFS that support and facilitate their advocacy.

Figure 1

Mapping key elements of this study



Note. This diagram illustrates the components of this study, including the central research question, methodological and theoretical frameworks, and methods used to investigate how the CFS's discourses function to further the movement towards universal PSE. The central phenomenon of neoliberal policies that restrict equitable access to PSE was explored in relation to this question using social justice theory, discourse analysis, and social semiotics.

To understand the nuanced discursive practices of the CFS, we must first unpack the current PSE funding structures in Canada to situate the analysis in its sociopolitical context. The following section details Canada's neoliberal policies that are in direct contradiction with equitable access to PSE. This provides the context and current state of Canada's PSE funding and management. Establishing universal PSE is intricately linked to addressing and mitigating widespread, systemic social inequities (CFS, 2020), therefore the following section also includes a breakdown of rights associated with the universal realization of the right to higher education. Human rights as an aspirational body of tools and law (United Nations, 2020) seeks to address systemic inequities, thus locating universal PSE within the broader scope of interrelated rights helps locate the CFS's social movement within the broader social justice landscape.

Context: Inequitable Access to PSE

Neoliberal policies are oriented towards privatizing, commodifying, and deregulating governmental economic activity, creating an environment of individualism and capitalist competition (Giroux, 2014). Neoliberalism places responsibility for social advancement and economic success squarely on the shoulders of the individual, without investing in social structures or supports which would benefit systemically marginalized and disadvantaged individuals and groups. Removing the onus from governing bodies to provide public goods and services, including higher education, shifts the PSE industry into an increasingly capitalist and privatized sphere, placing the burden of affordability upon the individual “consumers” (students). Former United Nations Special Rapporteur on Education Kishore Singh asserts that education should be globally conceptualized as a public good, as it plays an empowering role in an individual’s life (UNESCO, 2018).

Neoliberal policies that increasingly privatize higher education are in direct conflict with this conceptualization. Provincial governments in Canada are responsible for the funding of PSE institutions, and their neoliberal values and policies defund PSE institutions, making universities and colleges increasingly reliant on student tuition fees to function. The move from public funding to reliance on individual fees is indicative of the privatization of the PSE system in Canada, wherein students are conceptualized as consumers responsible for paying to access higher education. Requiring individuals to pay access PSE erects a significant financial barrier, specifically prohibitive for those without the means to pay the ever-increasing tuition and fees. This financial barrier is in direct conflict with the human rights conceptualization that higher education should be accessible to all on the basis of merit (United Nations 1966; 1989). Restricted access to PSE also limits an individual’s ability to access employment requiring higher education credentials, inhibiting their ability to realize nearly all of their other human rights (UNESCO, 2018).

Neoliberalism in Canada

In the early 1980s Canada experienced a dramatic shift in fiscal policy whereby the Bank of Canada introduced crippling interest rates, prioritizing individual wealth accrual at the expense of the overall economy. This shift included the increased responsibility for students to fund their own post-secondary education as public funding was consistently reduced. This was a stark shift towards neoliberal priorities that has continued to present day (Stanford, 2014).

Between 1985 and 2013, Canada's spending at all levels of government as a percentage of GDP fell from 48% to 41%, following neoliberal ideals that governments should reduce their expenditures to allow the free market to operate (OECD, 2020b). Notably, Canada has not signed on to the UNESCO Convention Against Discrimination in Education, which urges states to take all necessary measures to ensure equitable access to education at all levels, including PSE (UNESCO, 1960). Their lack of commitment to this convention is consistent with neoliberal principles emphasizing individual responsibility for success and prosperity, including financing one's own education and allowing PSE institutions to be governed as for-profit businesses.

These private market economics are increasingly included in Canadian PSE policy, as individual provincial governments strip funding from institutions and reconfigure student aid, lessening affordability and accessibility (Government of Alberta, 2019; Government of Ontario, 2019; Lawryniuk, 2019). Public spending for tertiary education has fallen 11% since 2000, while private spending (by private companies primarily on work-based training programs) and spending by individual households has risen (OECD, 2020a). As PSE institutions are defunded and non-repayable student aid (e.g., tax credits, bursaries, and grants) decreases, PSE becomes increasingly financially inaccessible for low income and marginalized students (Ennew & Greenaway, 2012). Funding for higher education is primarily the responsibility of the provincial government, though institutions also receive federal funds (Statistics Canada, 2017b). Federal funding is received through the unregulated Canadian Social Transfer, and each province is free to use the money as they see fit (Gauthier, 2012). The Government of Alberta introduced numerous changes to PSE in 2019, including implementing crippling cuts to operating grants of institutions, lifting the domestic tuition freeze instituted by the previous government, elimination of the tuition tax credit for students, and a significant reduction in grant and research funding (Johnson, 2020; Government of Alberta, 2019). Ontario implemented similar measures in 2018, cutting student grants nearly zero for most students, the result of a new calculation of a student's "need" (Government of Ontario, 2019). In turn, Manitoba is continually moving towards a neoliberal system of PSE management (Government of Manitoba, 2018). For example, the Manitoban government shifted responsibility for PSE from the Department of Education to the Department of Economic Development and Training to reframe the purpose of PSE as job-training sites (Brohman, 2020; Government of Manitoba, 2019).

Manitoban and Albertan governments aim to implement outcome-based funding models, where funding for PSE programs would be strongly tied to salary and employment outcomes of graduates (Barnetson, 2020; Government of Manitoba, 2018; White, 2020). The Nova Scotia Minister of Advanced Education has stated that institutions need to remain competitive in the market as justification for policies permitting consistent tuition hikes for both domestic and international students, resulting in Nova Scotia having the second highest tuition fees in the country (Government of Canada, 2020b; Ritchie, 2019). As institutions have little to no control over labor market needs, this funding mechanism serves little purpose other than to fund programs and credentials that support the governmental economic aims (Barnetson, 2020). These neoliberal measures, which defund student supports and the institutions themselves, demonstrate a clear mandate that ignores equity and inclusion and seeks to privatize PSE, making it increasingly inaccessible to marginalized populations (Taylor, 2020). In addition, neoliberal rhetoric fosters an environment of “blame and shame”; economically and socially disadvantaged individuals are accused of laziness and freeloading when relying on social support to negate inequalities that perpetuate their marginalization (Giroux, 2014). As PSE credentials are increasingly crucial to achieving financial success throughout one’s life (Hajer & Saltis, 2018), neoliberal economic policies thus generate a cycle of oppression wherein marginalized people have limited access to the tools they need to break free of poverty and dependency (Biss, 2017). As these neoliberal policies function to reduce equity, participation, inclusion, and the realization of PSE as a human right, the CFS engages in social justice discourses to dismantle these structures and reimagine a reality in which equitable participation of students in the Canadian PSE system is of high priority. Canada prides itself on being one of the most highly educated countries in the world (Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada, 2011; Statistics Canada, 2017a), with high numbers of PSE enrollment and graduation. Despite this, the neoliberal focus on increasing enrollment numbers to increase tuition revenue without focusing on the equity of access by marginalized and disadvantaged people in PSE results in grave issues of equity and inclusion for Canadian PSE students (Barnetson, 2020; Giroux, 2014; Hajer & Saltis, 2018), as detailed in the following section.

Associated Rights

The inextricability of human rights from one another make the lack of universally accessible PSE a grave threat to the realization of other human rights. Participation in PSE can

improve economic prospects (Hajer & Saltis, 2018), provide a network of future colleagues (Muller, 2002), and allow individuals greater ability to support their realization of other fundamental rights (UNESCO, 2018). Interrelated rights to the achievement of higher education include but are not limited to the rights to work, an adequate standard of living, and enjoyment of a high level of physical and mental health (United Nations, 1966; 2021). As demonstrated in Chapter 4, the CFS consistently relates PSE access and participation to other social justice concerns, including systemic poverty and racialized disparities relating to labor precarity. While thoroughly examining these systemic issues is beyond the scope of this paper, it is important to broaden the perspective of the CFS's fight for universal PSE to include rights that are made significantly more achievable by realizing the right to higher education. These interrelated rights are referred to here as associated rights. Table 1 outlines these associated rights, drawn from the International Bill of Rights, the trio of documents comprising the foundation of international human rights law and encompassing the most essential human rights in modern society (United Nations, 2020).

Beyond providing courses and credentials, many post-secondary institutions provide essential services to students. The institutions serve as community hubs, and services offered can help assure and realize other fundamental human rights for students. As examples, Article 25 of the UDHR asserts that “everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and his family, including food, clothing, housing and medical care and necessary social services” (United Nations, 1948); key services provided by universities can positively impact nearly every metric espoused in this statement. Post-secondary education provides the opportunity to develop imperative critical thinking and engagement skills (Neem, 2019), which can facilitate participation in public affairs and cultural life. PSE also can provide the communicative tools to express self-determination, partake in government, and engage in freedom of expression, all of which are considered critical aspects of achieving full human dignity (United Nations, 1948).

Table 1

Rights Associated with the Realization of the Right to Higher Education

Universal Declaration of Human Rights	International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights	International Convention on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights
Article 17 (property ownership)	Article 1 (self-determination)	Article 1 (self-determination)
Article 18 (freedom of thought, conscience and religion),	Article 3 (equality between sexes)	Article 3 (equality between sexes)
Article 19 (freedom of opinion and expression)	Article 12 (freedom of movement)	Article 6 (right to work)
Article 20 (freedom of association)	Article 18 (freedom of thought, conscience and religion)	Article 7 (safe and healthy conditions of work)
Article 21 (partaking in government and equal access to public service)	Article 19 (right to hold opinions)	Article 11 (adequate standard of living, including food, clothing and housing)
Article 23 (right to work)	Article 22 (freedom of association)	Article 12 (enjoyment of a high level of physical and mental health)
Article 24 (rest and leisure)	Article 25 (right to partake in public affairs)	Article 15 (participation in cultural life)
Article 25 (adequate standard of living)	Article 27 (enjoyment of culture, freedom of religion and use of own language)	
Article 27 (participation in community and cultural life)		
Article 29 (full and free development of personality)		

These rights, drawn from the International Bill of Rights, may be made significantly more attainable through the achievement of post-secondary education, particularly as PSE credentials relate to the labor market (Hajer & Saltis, 2018).

Source: United Nations, 1948; United Nations, 1966; United Nations, 1976

Equity and Inclusion

The equitable inclusion of marginalized students in accessing the Canadian PSE is undermined by the ongoing implementation of neoliberal policies, a reality that the CFS advocates against through their publications and advocacy. Though the number of upper- and middle-class students benefiting from higher education has increased in recent years, lower-class students are further excluded due to financial restraints (Ennew & Greenaway, 2012; Hajer & Saltis, 2018). Increasing enrollment without widening participation for marginalized groups, such as low-income students, does not necessarily correspond with equitable opportunity and access (Wilson-Strydom, 2015). The CFS has focused much of their advocacy lobbying for an inclusive PSE policy approach at both the provincial and national levels, employing discourse to highlight issues of inequity and inequality of access. Though students are excluded from higher education in many ways, this study focuses primarily on issues of equitable financial access as that is a key goal of the activists engaged with the CFS.

Students with lower socioeconomic status (those without familial wealth or independent resources to fund their education) pay more for their degrees than their peers as Canadian government student debt represents a 50% increase in cost for students (Government of Canada, 2020a). Upper and middle class students are those with sufficient means to access PSE without relying on government debt. Women represent 60 percent of Canada student loan recipients and 66 percent of loan borrowers who use the Repayment Assistance Program (available to those earning less than \$25,000 per year after graduation; Government of Canada, 2020a). Black students are more often discouraged from an academic path, and are as likely to not apply for PSE admission as white students are likely to be accepted (James & Turner, 2017; Letseka, 2010). First-generation students and Indigenous students have been identified as significantly less likely to engage in PSE (Palameta & Voyer, 2010; Schuetze & Archer, 2019). Colonial systems of PSE make access for Indigenous students in Canada particularly difficult (Ottmann, 2017), as Indigenous knowledges, pedagogies and ways of knowing and being are not

sufficiently represented in the academy (Taylor & Steinhauer, 2010). Though decolonizing work is ongoing, with many institutions intentionally engaging Indigenous stakeholders to improve Indigenous inclusion, access remains unequal (Ottmann, 2017). Access to PSE is reflective of equitable access at every stage of formal education, thus unequal access at the post-secondary level is reflective of a lifetime of inequity (Porter, 1970; Pike, 1980). As Covid-19 has caused the majority of coursework to move online, issues of unequal technology access, internet access and housing concerns (such as not having a quiet or private space in which to attend virtual classes) represent another way that low-income students are disadvantaged. Overall, students from underrepresented demographics struggle to enter into PSE and to successfully complete their credential, facing unique and diverse barriers to these achievements. Though different groups may face numerous obstacles in pursuing higher education, as discussed above, common to all is the unequal and ineffective efforts by governments implementing neoliberal ideals to remove these barriers.

Overview

This study reviews international human rights standards and Canada's legal commitments regarding access to higher education to set the social context. This review includes researching what human rights instruments Canada has committed to relevant to the right to higher education. Next, I explore current national and provincial policies that relate to the realization of this right to provide a thorough understanding of what the current state of equitable PSE accessibility in Canada looks like. Discourse analysis and social semiotics of the CFS's discourses, performed both in their website and in interviews with seven CFS members and executives. The discourses performed by the CFS verbally and on their website function to support universal access to PSE, thus understanding Canada's approach to providing access to the right to higher education is crucial context. These methodological frameworks has been chosen because social semiotics and discourse analysis are designed to identify and rectify social injustices (Hodge & Kress, 1988; Jørgensen & Phillips, 2002), consistent with the CFS's mandate, and the inclusion of human rights standards and law provide the context to engage in this analysis.

Significance of the Study

This research is critically relevant as chronic underfunding, neoliberal agendas, and attacks on PSE from provincial governments across Canada have made realizing the right to

higher education increasingly dependent on socioeconomic circumstances (Harden, 2017; Hoye, 2018; Lawryniuk, 2019; Nanowski, 2019). While previous literature focused primarily on the legal frameworks outlining higher education as a human right (Kotzmann, 2015, 2018; McCowan, 2012, 2013), this study explores how the CFS's discourses function in support of this right. Investigating the use of human rights, social justice, and economic discourses by the CFS in support of universal higher education is a unique contribution to the growing body of literature of social activism and social justice studies. The intersection of these discourses and social activism in higher education remains understudied (Kotzmann 2015; 2018), as is student activism in Canada broadly. Jacobs (2006, p. 49) posits that "a close scrutiny of texts and performative language offers a valuable resource for the applied social science researcher, by enabling important insights about the conduct of urban policy." Though discourse analysis is subjective, inherently unique to the person analyzing the material (Edwards, 2003), examining how the CFS's discourses contribute to and inform their social movement and attack hegemonic narratives of neoliberalism provides a unique contribution to literature and practice.

Personal Positionality

I embark upon this research project attempting to understand how the CFS's discourses function to address a critical issue of social inequity from a place of fascination and curiosity, and a simultaneous desire to understand possible remedies to a broken system that has impacted me personally. As a first-generation university student, I have always funded my studies independently and have undertaken approximately \$90,000 in student debt in the pursuit of my PSE. As a low-income student, I needed to work while I studied to support myself, which has impacted my academic grades, my learning capacity, student experience, and my mental health. I have personally served in numerous capacities in my student associations in all institutions I have attended, and have experienced great personal satisfaction by engaging in the practice of student advocacy and engagement. During my time with my undergraduate student union, I organized an advocacy campaign to encourage my department to remove a program requirement that severely limited students' ability to participate in the program due to financial and other restrictions, and was ultimately successful in getting this requirement changed. As a result of that advocacy, more students are able to pursue that degree path, and I believe that providing opportunities for inclusion in higher education systems is one of the most important and powerful functions of student advocacy. I therefore am captivated by equity and inclusion in PSE

broadly, and undertake this study to strengthen my own knowledge of these intricate systems with the lofty goal of producing action-oriented research that may be of use to student advocates working in this space. I am personally affected by the policies of the Canadian federal and provincial governments, and my work in PSE administration has demonstrated that there is a strong need for more financially accessible PSE and an inclusive approach to policy and practice. Though there exist provisions in human rights documents to guarantee students equal opportunity to advanced education opportunities, I noticed a glaring lack of human rights rhetoric in the higher education industry during my time working in student support roles, despite the clear need for improved inclusion of financially disadvantaged students. I approach this issue from the knowledge that the CFS's work has informed policy and practice to provide measures for increased support and inclusion for students (CFS, 2021c), though unpacking specifically *how* their discourse may contribute to these gains has yet to be studied.

Literature Review

Student Advocacy

Student advocacy as an effective mechanism for change is another well-reviewed area of literature, encompassed within a larger dialogue of social movement studies (Brown, 2002; Connor, 2020; Karter, Robbins & McInerney, 2019; Knott, 1971; Rosen, 2019). Social movement studies assert that a social movement is a collective effort put forth through informal interactions by people with a shared, collective identity (Diani, 1992; Flesher Fominaya, 2010; Polletta & Jasper, 2001). Strategically framing a social movement is a well-explored area of social movement studies (Benford, 1993; Benford, 1997; Snow & Benford, 2000). The “frame” of a social movement can be understood as the interpretive, intentional package developed by activists and collectives to engage members and the public, ultimately garnering support for their cause and mobilizing social change (Benford, 1997). The CFS frames itself as a social justice organization with a mandate to further universal PSE to provide equitable access to PSE students in Canada (CFS, 2020). Developing a coherent, unified collective identity is key to the success of a social movement (Polletta & Jasper, 2001). Ensuring that the social movement has a clearly defined goal and a strong sense of collective identity allows social movement actors to communicate effectively, garner support and action from members and the public, and respond to changing sociopolitical contexts via a flexible frame (Benford, 1997; Polletta & Jasper, 2001; Flesher Fominaya, 2010).

Knott (1971) notes that student activism dates back to the 17th and 18th century in colonial colleges where students would rally for policy change on their own campuses, and in the 20th century, students began to pay more attention to and advocate for issues outside of their campus. The most notorious event in recent Canadian history involving student advocacy is the 2012 Quebec student protests, where students rallied against rising tuition and ultimately were able to affect policy change in favor of financial accessibility to higher education (Giroux, 2013). Given the long history and contemporary applications of student social activism, ongoing analysis is required to understand the ways in which student activism has evolved, as their mechanisms, processes and methods are continually evolving (Harden, 2017).

Hoffman and Mitchell (2016) employed discourse analysis to evaluate the use of diversity language in student activism, specifically evaluating the institutional responses; the methodology of discourse analysis coupled with social semiotics in this study will function similarly. As the mechanisms used by student activists to advocate for their causes and seek change evolve constantly, continuous study into these tactics and mechanisms is needed (Karter, Robbins & McInenery, 2019). At several points in time authors have written about “new” student activists and activism (Bond, 1996; Connor, 2020), as the rapid evolution of student activism fast outpaces academic study. The delineation of “new” student activists acknowledges that student activism can contribute to a wide array of social movements, though student activists increasingly implement flexible frames for their causes and rely on strong collective identity to support their work (Connor, 2020). The specific use of social justice discourses by student activists in Canada has yet to be investigated, and as student activism and its various evolutions continue to be the subject of new study, this research will contribute to this growing body of literature.

Higher Education as a Human Right

The United Nations defines international human rights law as a system that “lays down the obligations of Governments to act in certain ways or to refrain from certain acts, in order to promote and protect human rights and fundamental freedoms of individuals or groups”, constituting an aspirational framework for member states to aim towards ensuring equitable treatment of their citizens (United Nations, 2020). The United Nations documents most critically relevant to higher education are the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR), and the Convention

on the Rights of the Child (CRC) (United Nations, 1989). Article 26 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) (United Nations, 1948) states that “Higher education shall be accessible to all on the basis of merit” (United Nations, 1948); while the UDHR is not legally binding, it provides a universal standard of essential rights which all member nations (including Canada) are intended to uphold. The inclusion of these discourses in the UDHR have supported the creation of two instruments of international human rights law: The International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) and Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC). Article 13(2)(c) of the ICESCR obligates states to make higher education “equally accessible to all on the basis of capacity, by every appropriate means, and in particular by the progressive introduction of free education” (United Nations, 1966). Article 41 of the CRC echoes Article 13(2)(c) closely, stating that state parties must make “higher education accessible to all on the basis of capacity by every appropriate means” (United Nations, 1989). Canada is party to all of the aforementioned international laws, meaning that the contents of the conventions are to be upheld in domestic law and practice. Though the CFS does not reference these documents regularly in their advocacy, the foundation universally accessible higher education is clearly elucidated in this set of documents, affording social movements like the CFS language to further their advocacy.

Ennew and Greenaway (2012), Lawson (2012), and Gilchrist (2018) discuss the existence of the right to higher education, though Jane Kotzmann (2015; 2018) while Tristan McCowan (2012; 2013) provide the most thorough and overarching arguments analyzing and supporting higher education as a human right. Kotzmann (2015; 2018) and McCowan (2012; 2013) state that claiming higher education as a human right is a complex issue that is supported by international law, and call for further clarity and research. This study addresses this gap by deconstructing the nature and intent of the CFS’s discourses in concert with the current state of PSE policy in Canada. Katarina Tomaševski (2004), the former Special Rapporteur on the right to education, provides a thorough framework through which to understand and analyze the right to higher education. Tomaševski (2004) and Kotzmann (2015; 2018) both argue that the focus on primary and secondary education in many international documents and priorities, including the Millennium Development Goals, contributes to the ambiguity surrounding the right to higher education. Though the authors recognize the deserved focus on primary and secondary education, the increased requirement for higher education credentials by the labor market (Neem,

2019), accompanied by the massification of higher education means that the right to higher education deserves its own attention and analysis (Hajer & Saltis, 2018). The ability to realize the right to higher education intertwines with four central pillars of social justice: equity, access, human rights, and participation. These pillars are mentioned in varying order throughout this text as these pillars are not hierarchical nor existing in any particular sequence.

Each of these pillars represents a critical element of social justice. The inclusion of human rights as one of the pillars speaks to the foundational nature of human rights in understanding social justice advocacy, like that of the CFS. In the context of this study, the CFS's discourse and social justice mandate centers around ensuring equitable access and participation by relying on human rights norms and precedents. The theoretical framework detailed below provides the conceptual background to understand how these pillars of social justice function in relation to inclusive access to PSE, including how the CFS's discourses function to counter Canada's neoliberal policies and practices.

Indigenous Rights to Education

When discussing the right to higher education in Canada, Indigenous peoples and their rights deserve individual analysis as they occupy a unique space in Canadian society in terms of educational history and systemic oppression. Colonial policies and legacy in Canada have erected significant systemic barriers for Indigenous learners, the depth of which cannot be adequately explored within the scope of this study. As the participants in this study identified Indigenous education as a significant area of concern when discussing and advocating for universal PSE, this section will briefly review the history and context of higher education for Indigenous peoples in Canada to provide the contextual background to understand this data. Drawing on the Cree concept of *wâhkôhtowin* (kinship; Donald, 2021), Indigenous education can and should be conceptualized as a mechanism to support and uplift Indigenous perspectives through a relational and community-based model (Jarvis, 2019; personal communications with Indigenous mentors including Dr. Evelyn Steinhauer). Though formal PSE systems are the topic of this study, I fully recognize and appreciate that "education" for many (if not all) Indigenous students takes place in formal and informal settings, including through land based and oral teachings that are starkly absent from formal PSE. Despite the perhaps permanent imperfection of weaving Indigenous knowledges and ways of knowing and being into colonial structures of formal PSE in Canada, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (TRC) stated that

they “believe that education is also the key to reconciliation” (Truth and Reconciliation Commission, 2015, p. 234). Thus, I include the following literature and information to help contextualize the use of Indigenous-focused discourses performed in both the interviews and the publications examined in this study.

Assimilative policies and practices have formed the cornerstone of colonial educational practices for Indigenous peoples since Canada’s inception (Pihama & Lee-Morgan, 2019; Pratt, 1892). The political intent of these policies was, at best, to integrate Indigenous youth into Canadian society (Pihama & Lee-Morgan, 2019), and at worst constituted a genocidal approach to culture, language and identity eradication (Pihama, 2019). Jackson (2019, p. 104) discusses three ways in which colonialization continues to influence and shape modern reality: the colonizer’s law as the pretense of reason, prioritization of the colonizers’ lives and realities, and power as a driving force in policy and process. As modern day Canada is a colonial state, with a long and storied history of wielding education as a tool of genocide and erasure (Logan, 2015), acknowledging the systemic barriers Indigenous learners face is critical to unpacking the reality of their limited access to and inclusion in PSE. Systemic oppression is conceptualized in this study as a combination of prejudice with limited access to social, political, and economic power on the part of a dominant group (Ayvazian, 1995). Race is a core component of systemic oppression (Wellman, 1993), though systemic oppression occurs due to numerous identities including class, race, sexual identity, gender, among others. The intersection of race and class in colonized education systems significantly obstructs Indigenous participation in PSE (CFS, 2019; Restoule et al., 2013), and was identified as a consistent area of concern by participants in this study, discussed further in Chapter 4.

Indigenous people in Canada hold the right to higher education through numerous international and domestic documents, including the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP, United Nations, 2007), the ICESCR (United Nations, 1966), the CRC, (United Nations, 1989), all numbered treaties (Elson, 2018) and the Constitution (The Constitution Act, 1867, s. 35). The inclusion of education as a provision in the Constitution and the numbered treaties in Canada is critical as signatories of the treaties intended Indigenous peoples to “receive the education needed to gain a livelihood and prosper, which now includes access to post-secondary education” (Elson, 2018). Additionally, the TRC called on Canada to end the backlog of First Nations students seeking PSE in Call to Action #11 (Truth and

Reconciliation Commission, 2015). Originally formed as part of a legal settlement between the Government of Canada and numerous Indigenous bodies (Truth and Reconciliation Commission, 2015), the TRC is foundational element of reconciliatory work in Canada. Mandated to inform all Canadians about the residential school system, the TRC and the resulting National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation (NCTR) are stewards of the records of this colonial legacy of human rights abuses.

UNDRIP (United Nations, 2007) upholds the Indigenous right to education in Article 14, 17 and 21. Article 21 (United Nations, 2007) states “Indigenous peoples have the right, without discrimination, to the improvement of their economic and social conditions, including, inter alia, in the areas of education, employment, vocational training and retraining [...]”. The implementation of neoliberal funding policies disproportionately discriminates against Indigenous peoples in Canada, as Indigenous people are more likely to live in a low-income household than non-Indigenous people. 24% of Indigenous people in 2016 lived in a low-income household, while 14% of non-Indigenous people in Canada were in the same economic condition (Anderson, 2019). The existence of neoliberal funding mechanisms for PSE in Canada therefore contradicts the principle of non-discrimination espoused in UNDRIP, and directly prevents the realization of the right to higher education guaranteed constitutionally and by treaty.

Indigenous conceptions of education generally envision education as a life-long learning process, and treaties must be interpreted generously and in favor of First Nations (Elson, 2018). Canada has historically framed education of Indigenous people as “civilizing” and “assimilation” (Miller, 1997), leading to the horrors of residential schools and the genocidal approach to strip Indigenous peoples of their culture, language and identity in favor of whitewashing them to fit in with Canadian society (Daniels, 2019, p. 88). Daniels (2019, p. 87) argues that this policy has been reformed and today it has been redesigned as reconciliation. Availability of formal learning opportunities to many Indigenous nations, reserves and communities in remote areas are sparse or non-existent, largely due to colonial policies segregating Indigenous peoples from their ancestral land and what are now urban centers with physical access to PSE institutions (Usher, 2003).

Engaging with colonial institutions like Canadian PSE institutions to obtain credentials of formal learning can be directly contradictory to the myriad of cultures and lived experiences of

Indigenous peoples, as everything from admissions to curricula to evaluation is designed through a system that does not consider Indigenous values or principles (Poitras-Pratt, Hanson & Ottmann, 2017). Though designated programs and initiatives exist to Indigenize Canadian PSE (i.e. Indigenous/Aboriginal teacher education programs, faculties of Native Studies), the systemic barriers preventing Indigenous people in Canada from realizing their right to higher education are plentiful and prohibitive. These barriers were introduced on the basis of race and class, as colonialists determined that Indigenous peoples were lesser than settlers and therefore had to be educated into assimilation. Pihama and Lee-Morgan (2019) identify education as both a target and tool of colonialism, attempting to erase Indigenous culture, language, and ways of life to facilitate a more homogenous Canada. Currently, Canada mobilized funding support for Indigenous students through the Post-Secondary Student Support Program (PSSSP), though there is a significant backlog of applicants and eligible students who have not yet received support (CFS, 2019). Financial exclusion prevents many Indigenous people from pursuing higher education initially (Elson, 2018), and barriers including underrepresentation, physical limitations and financial barriers within the academy further prohibit Indigenous students' success and completion.

Chapter 2: Theoretical Framework

Conceptualizing Social Justice

Social justice has undergone several transformations, and is often used fluidly. Rawls (1999) posited that one's place in society is the result of a "natural lottery", and argues for a construct of justice as fairness. While Rawls' (1999) focus on equal distribution of resources benefitting society's most marginalized provides a solid starting point to conceptualize social justice, this approach has been criticized for not taking into account individual circumstances and inequities. Wilson-Strydom (2015), in applying Rawls' (1999) theories to PSE access, notes that the simple equal distribution of resources is not sufficient to address inequities, as different students have different needs and therefore may need different resources. Young (1990) further critiques Rawls' theory by asserting that distribution of resources is simply not sufficient to address systemic societal inequities. She posits two components of injustice (oppression and domination), and names five faces of oppression (exploitation, marginalization, powerlessness, cultural imperialism and violence). Eisenberg (2006) expanded these concepts by directly

applying them to education policy. Eisenberg (2006, p. 13) describes the ways in which equitable opportunity for individuals fosters greater opportunities, greater access to material resources and improved sociocultural status and political power. Thus, equitable access to PSE is an example of this theory in motion. Both Young (1990) and Eisenberg (2006) speak to the importance of including decision makers from marginalized groups in the development of equitable policies and practices. In order to address systemic inequity, marginalized individuals and groups must be afforded the space and capacity to participate fully in institutional life and decision-making processes (Young, 2006). It is important to note that the application of social justice and its theories should not focus on erasing difference, but should instead focus on respecting difference and reducing oppression based on difference (Freire, 1968; Young, 1990). Prioritizing equitable participation in PSE uplifts marginalized people by limiting the erasure of marginalized voices and ensuring associated rights are achievable across class, as purported in Chapter 4 by several interviewees.

Fraser (1995, 1996, 2009) follows Young's disagreement with a narrow focus on distributive justice, and puts forward a concept of parity of participation to address this issue. Fraser (2009) focuses on institutional barriers to social equity, which is highly relevant to the social activism work regarding equitable access to PSE. Institutional barriers are present in a myriad of forms; though this research focuses specifically on the financial, other systemic hurdles present significant obstacles for students, including geographical, technological, adaptive, and other restraints. Participation in PSE in Canada has been increasing but not widening, therefore a focus on increasing the breadth of people able to participate fully in PSE on an equitable basis is a critical component of social justice work. Wilson-Strydom (2015, p. 149–150) applies Fraser's (2009) parity of participation to university access by arguing that recognizing the institutional barriers in place for students of alternate backgrounds (including racialized and poor students) is key to widening participation. Missing from Fraser's (1995, 1996, 2009) work is the interaction between individual needs and agency and the institutions; Leibowitz (2009) counters that students can and do succeed against the odds, in spite of their socioeconomic and class backgrounds. Seeking equitable access to PSE by understanding it as a human right does not ignore individual agency or the potential to overcome the systemic obstacles to access, but acknowledges that the obstacles should be removed as overcoming those obstacles should not be the norm for low-income students. In discussing social justice as a

concept and applying it to a higher education context, it is important to remember that mechanisms may exist that support marginalized students in accessing the systems, though these systems (e.g. student loans) are often inequitable and come at a great personal cost to the individual student (Government of Canada, 2020b).

The capabilities approach forwarded by Wilson-Strydom (2015) serves as a mechanism to address the gaps in the aforementioned social justice theories. The capabilities approach focuses the well-being on an individual and their ability to provide a reasonable quality of life for themselves (Nussbaum, 2000, 2011; Sen, 1985, 1999, 2006). In the context of higher education, this approach seeks to thoroughly account for individual agency while not minimizing the importance of structural barriers and social contexts (Wilson-Strydom, 2015). It is this understanding that a truly socially just approach to post-secondary policy and management would be able to adapt to these nuances, including equitable distribution of resources, representation in positions of power, considering oppression and domination, and recognition of individual agency.

Social Justice Theory

Miller (1999, p. 1) defines social justice as “how the good and bad things in life should be distributed among the members of a human society.” Wilson-Strydom (2015, p. 145) develops the definition further by stating that social justice lies within an intersection of politics, philosophy and legal theory, and that it involves “understanding and interrogating how different individuals or groups are faring in comparison with others in a specific context [...] or more broadly in society.” Social justice theories center around the ultimate goal of a fair, equitable and just society, focusing on ensuring resources are accessible to everyone regardless of marginalization. Social justice extends beyond the traditional concept of justice existing in civil and criminal law to consider the social realities and context that are embedded in just acts. Miller (1979, p. 20) states that justice is *suum cuique* (to each his due); social justice affirms that evaluating what every human is “due” requires thorough consideration of the social, economic, and political realities in which a person exists.

Power structures that produce and reproduce systemic inequalities and inequities (Foucault, 1972) must be addressed through a socially just approach (Miller, 1999). This includes post-secondary institutions that reinforce and reproduce inequalities by systemic exclusion of students

who hail from lower economic echelons of society, or who are from equity-seeking groups not adequately represented in the academy. Exclusion of students from these spaces perpetuates the lack of representation and inclusion in future curriculum, teaching, and policy making, as higher education is most often required to hold these positions. This cycle of exclusion is discussed further in Chapter 4. It is not sufficient to provide equal accommodations or resources to all students as each individual faces unique challenges in seeking to realize their right to higher education, and current supports are often inadequate to mitigate the barriers and allow equitable realization of the right to higher education.

Through their advocacy, and as communicated on their website and by the interviewees, CFS has reimagined a socially just system of PSE management as being as barrier-free as possible, with specific attention paid to the inequitable financial barrier that many students face through high tuition fees and resulting student debt. Because the CFS perform social justice and economic discourse throughout their advocacy to realize this universal system, this study uses the four principles of social justice to unpack this multifaceted construct. Each of the four pillars below are fundamental to investigate and understand the CFS's advocacy as they represent key components of a socially just system. Accessibility, equity, and participation are foundational elements of any system designed to be socially just, and rights is included as the fourth pillar as human rights comprise the basic building blocks of human dignity and equality. As the CFS seeks to widen participation, make PSE more equitably accessible, and further student rights (CFS, 2020), these four essential components of social justice form the foundation of analysis for their discourses and advocacy to deconstruct how they use these elements to effect social change.

- **Access:** A key goal of social justice is to perpetuate systems that provide access to resources to the people that need them the most. Accessing PSE in Canada is a significant financial undertaking, and neoliberal policies in Canada have made financial barriers a prohibitive factor for many students in realizing their right to PSE. The CFS aims to improve access to PSE through their advocacy and discourse. Though some low-income and marginalized students may be able to access PSE by undertaking significant debt, the systemic barriers that disadvantage marginalized individuals and groups reinforce an unjust neoliberal system. A socially just approach to ensuring equitable access would view education as a public good (UNESCO, 2018) and society would be responsible for providing adequate resources to ensure equitable access. Providing equitable access

therefore requires an investment of time and resources by the state (Canada) to develop an individualized system to deliver services and resources to those in need without miring students in debt.

- **Equity:** Equity is the fair distribution of resources throughout society, with focus paid to individual or collective circumstances that may necessitate additional resources (Miller, 1999). This aspect of social justice seeks to ensure that opportunities and resources are developed and distributed with strong consideration for individual circumstances and need. Though student aid programs exist in Canada on the basis of need and with the intent of inclusion of racialized and marginalized groups (Government of Canada, 2020a), they are not sufficient to equitably address the root causes of inequitable access to PSE. Student debt as a tool to improve equitable access to PSE is a neoliberal approach that negatively impacts the financial well-being of students for years to come (Canadian Federation of Students, 2020). A neoliberal approach to equity still focuses on personal responsibility, ignoring the diverse challenges faced by marginalized groups and individuals. A socially just system of PSE funding and management would develop an individualized approach to prepare people for PSE and the burden of affordability and accessibility would be shouldered by the state instead of individually.
- **Participation:** In a socially just society, individuals would be able to participate fully in their community and their field of interest without needing to overcome unequal barriers. Individuals who enjoy full participation in a socially just system are free and able to engage thoroughly in decisions and processes that impact their own lives. Students are excluded from participating fully from PSE due to the systemic barriers put in place by neoliberal policies. Students are also not free and able to participate thoroughly in PSE policies and processes as these decisions are made by high-level decision makers, often without direct consultation with institutions or students. Exclusion is cyclical, and a socially just approach to inclusion is necessary to disrupt this cycle. Without participating in higher education, individuals often experience a reduced ability to access the labor market, reduced opportunity to develop critical thinking skills, missed opportunities for networking and community building (Ennew & Greenaway, 2012; Hajer & Saltis, 2018). As achieving a PSE credential is a stepping stone to becoming a decision maker with the power to participate meaningfully, individuals have a diminished capacity to participate

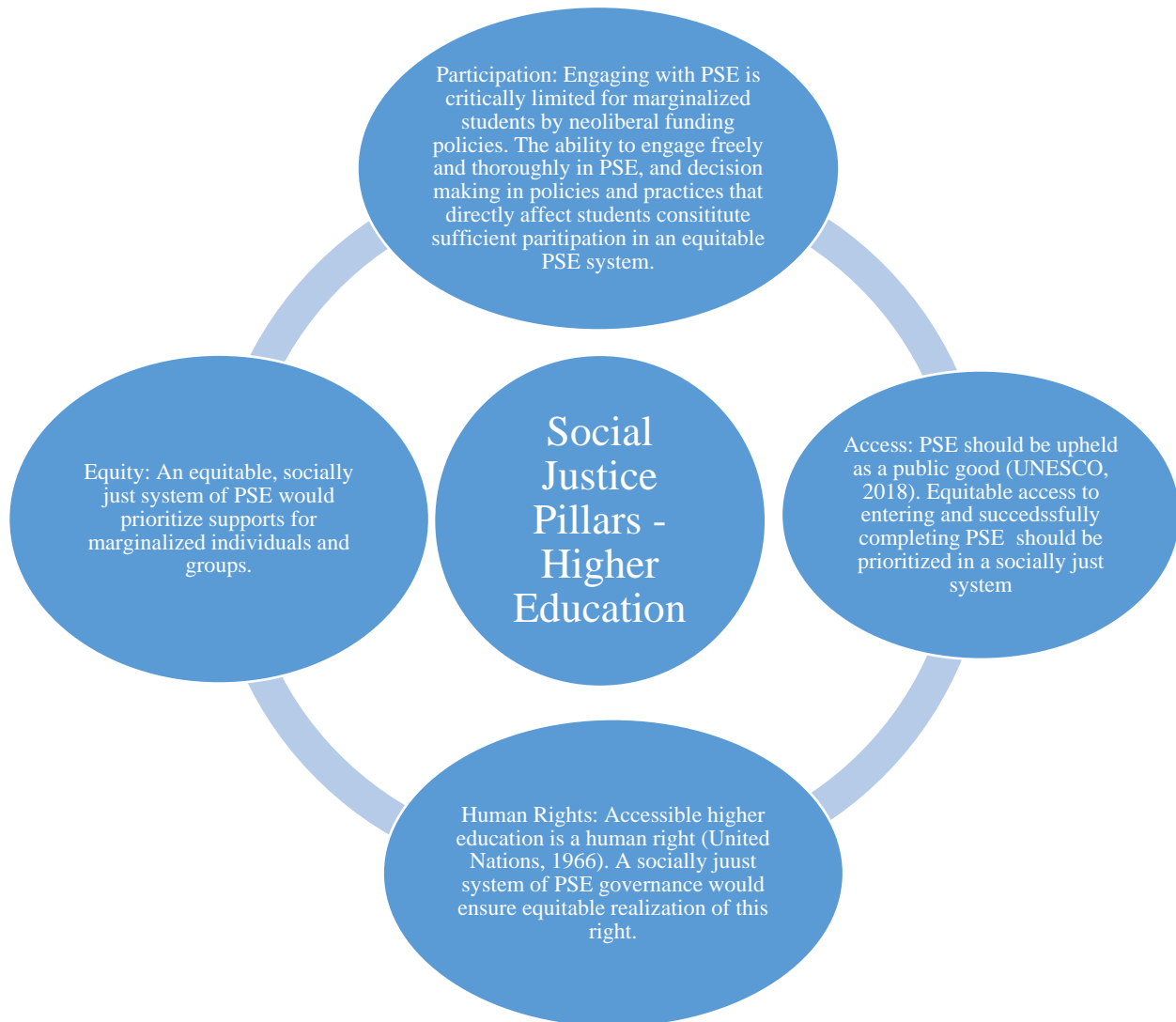
in future policy development as they are not in the privileged, well-educated echelon. The CFS aims to increase participation in PSE, particularly from marginalized and low-income people, and this research investigates how their discourse functions in support of this goal.

- **Human Rights:** The right to accessible education as a human right exists in numerous human rights documents (United Nations, 1966; United Nations, 1989). PSE being accessible on the basis of merit (United Nations, 1948) means that systemic barriers preventing individuals from realizing this right are in direct violation of this principle. Canada has committed to these human rights documents and therefore is expected under international law to uphold the principles and rights in domestic legislation and practice. The increasingly neoliberal approach to funding PSE is in direct violation of this right, as those with sufficient merit but inadequate resources are not able to realize this right akin to their peers. Social justice aims towards a society in which all human rights can be realized and enjoyed by people simply on the basis of their humanity. Human rights is an important final pillar to consider for this study as the neoliberal policies that constrict PSE access in Canada directly conflict with existing human rights.

The above pillars are an important theoretical basis for the study as they help identify and understand the intent and goal of the CFS's discourse use in support of their social justice mandate (Miller, 1999; Soken-Huberty, n.d.). When advocating for universal PSE, the CFS draws on each of these components of social justice in their discourse in both written and verbal communication. The analysis of the written reports, explored in Chapter 4, reveals the distinct ways in which these social justice pillars inform the CFS's advocacy. Ensuring students are equitable able to access and participate in PSE, therefore realizing their right to higher education, is a cornerstone of the CFS's social movement towards a barrier-free PSE system. These pillars also informed the basis of the interview questions for the seven CFS members, and occurred frequently in each interview (further detailed in Chapter 2). Figure 2 below provides a graphical representation of the pillars and illustrates their interconnected status.

Figure 2

Social Justice Pillars and Their Relation to PSE



Note. The cyclical nature of the four pillars of social justice: access, equity, human rights and participation, coupled with a description of how each pillar functions in relation to PSE.

Chapter 3: Methodology

In this qualitative study, I use social semiotics and discourse analysis to investigate how the CFS performs discourses on their website to support their advocacy for universally inclusive PSE. As the CFS performs these discourses through multiple modes, including written and visual discourse on their website, using a combination of discourse analysis and social semiotics leads a nuanced understanding of how these discourses function in relation to their social justice mandate and in addressing the neoliberal structures that constrict equitable PSE access.

Discourse Analysis

Jørgensen & Phillips (2002, p. 65) identify discourse as an “important form of social practice which both reproduces and changes knowledge, identities and social relations including power relations, and at the same time is also shaped by other social practices and structures”. Discourse is comprised of words, texts, visual and social symbols through which understandings and social realities are constructed and reconstructed, and refers to “language use as a social practice” (Fairclough, 1992 in Jørgensen & Phillips, 2002; Laclau & Mouffe, 1985, p. 66). Discourse analysis is the analysis of the patterns of discourse used by people in a particular context (Pedersen, 2011), and seeks to analyze these patterns with specific focus on how discourse constructs the social world through interrelation of individual words, phrases and texts (Jørgensen and Phillips, 2002). Gunnarsson (2009, p. 16) posits “In every strand of human communication, discourse plays a role in the formation of a social reality and identity.” In this study, discourse analysis is used to illuminate how the CFS performs discourses to form a specific social reality (universal PSE) by communicating with their members and external change makers. This research analyzes how discourses performed by students affiliated with the CFS is produced and consumed in order to constitute the social reality of inclusive PSE that they are aim to realize. Discourse analysis “attends to the relationships between language and social structure” (Rogers, 2004), and therefore is an appropriate methodological framework for this study as the CFS’s discourses are seeking to inform and shift existing social structures and practices.

Palmquist (1999) suggests that discourse can lead to significant shifts in the way an organization functions, as well as society as a whole. This methodology therefore helps me identify how the discourse on the website aligns or does not align with the discourses performed by the members, as well as understanding the ways in which the CFS seeks to enact social change. Discourse can create a community, as choosing particular words and images demonstrate one’s attitude towards the subject. Using discourse analysis to identify and recognize the power dynamics and social reality the CFS works and communicates in allow me to explore *how* discourse serves to develop the social movement towards universal PSE, creating a collective of engaged members and activists. Understanding the ideological position of the CFS functions in concert with the technical aspects of discourse analysis provides a nuanced understanding of how the organization uses discourse to further their mandate. Discourse as a social practice creates,

recreates and may interrupt social structures; in this study, the social structures in question are the neoliberal policies and societal status quo that allows inequitable access to PSE to be perpetuated. The CFS attempts to disrupt the status quo of inequitable PSE through their social justice, economic and Indigenous-focused discourses on their website. Examining the social context along with the discursive practice enables this study to get to the root of how the discourses can further the CFS's mandate (Fairclough, 2001).

Social Semiotics

Social semiotics is the study of signs, signals, and signifiers while taking into account the social context in which they exist and are interpreted (Hodge & Kress, 1988). While semiotics focuses exclusively on the signs, signals and signifiers, social semiotics furthers this practice by including social context in the analysis of discourse. In this study, theories of social semiotics (Hodge & Kress, 1988; Wilson, 2011) are used to investigate how the CFS's discourse on their website supports their aim of universally accessible PSE. This discourse was analyzed to uncover how their choice of signs, symbols, and texts function in support of the social justice mandate, intended to address increasingly neoliberal PSE policies. The CFS incorporates many images alongside their text on their website, and social semiotics mediate understanding of how these different mediums interplay in support of the CFS's mandate. Incorporating social semiotics into the methodology for this study is important to allow for an in-depth analysis of the CFS's use of discourse to locate their discourse and signifiers within the larger social context they operate in. Similar to DA, social semiotics aims to understand communication as a force that is both shaped by the social and cultural realities in which it exists, and as a force with the potential power to alter these realities and structures. Gee (2008) posits that semiotic domains are networked and therefore is connected to a system of communication and meaning much bigger than the text or image of study; social semiotics aims to address this reality by incorporating a sociocultural analysis into the semiotic study.

Social semiotics aims to explain how images, which include semiotic elements such as signs, icons, and symbols, convey meaning and function within a particular social and cultural context. In this study, images encapsulated within the chosen electronic publications were examined. Following the method of social semiotics, these images were analyzed with constant consideration of their social context, including understanding the time period of publication, any external social or political events that occurred at the time of publication, and the intended

audience (Hodge & Kress, 1988). The discourse performed by the CFS on their website influences how the reader perceives the content and messages, and therefore uncovering how the discourse functions overall in support of the CFS's mandate must include a thorough understanding of the semiotics at play. This analysis considers the CFS's role as a student advocacy organization, as their media is intended to incite action in their readers with a particular goal of encouraging action in support of their stated social justice mandate. Key components of semiotic analysis include the sign, object, icon, index, and symbol. The sign is anything that indicates something else, called the object, and the role of semiotics in this study is to understand how we derive meaning from these signs (Chandler, 2007). Icons directly represent the object they are referencing, while indexes have an implied association with a logical connection to the object. Symbols are connected to the object through societal convention, with no natural connection to the object itself (Chandler, 2007). The image choices made by the CFS throughout their website were analyzed with respect to these three categories of semiotic tools while considering the connection with discourse and the social context they are employed in. Semiotic analysis were conducted on the images to consider the complexities of information portrayed by the images, including consideration of the use of color, shapes and text in concert to convey a message (Gee, 2008).

Discourse analysis is not sufficient to deconstruct all elements of the discourses performed in the electronic publications and interviews, as both reports include ample imagery alongside the text. Social semiotics helps to address this gap by providing the means to analyze the graphic elements of the electronic publications, as both of the chosen publications contain prominent graphics and colors that contribute to the overall messaging. Using social semiotics along with discourse analysis for the electronic publications allows for a holistic understanding of the electronic documents, thereby informing the analysis of the interview transcripts. The interviews seek to understand how the information available on the CFS website influences the advocacy in practice, as represented by the CFS executives interviewed for this study. Understanding the orders of discourse contained in the electronic publications, therefore, is critical to wholly unpack to connect the electronic publications to the interviewees' activism and perspectives.

Method

Data Collection

The first mechanism of data collection was through a review of the CFS website to describe and articulate how the CFS performs discourse to advocate for universally inclusive PSE. As the website is a key tool used by the CFS to engage members and advocates, and house past campaign publications and material, the website publications provided a primary data corpus to deconstruct the discourses performed by the CFS in their advocacy. The website is available openly online (www.cfs-fcee.ca), and each webpage was reviewed to locate material that was most relevant to universal higher education and this study. Select pages and online publications were chosen for analysis based on their relevance to the study and prominence on the website. Pages not selected for the study include those specific to other campaigns the CFS is involved in, including international student health care, mental health toolkits, climate justice and a just COVID-19 recovery plan for students. As this study seeks to approach universal higher education from a rights-based perspective, the chosen publications directly address universal higher education and financial barriers that limit the realization of this right. The two publications, *Education Justice* and *Education for All* were transferred to an Excel spreadsheet, with each sentence occupying one cell in its own row, to allow for detailed analysis of each statement. The spreadsheet included columns identifying the key phrases or words contained in each sentence (codes), another column to note how the codes were used (context) and a third column for notes of how the codes fit into larger thematic categories (orders of discourse).

Alongside the data from the publications, semi-structured interviews were conducted with seven student members and executives of the CFS. After clearing ethics through the Joint Faculty Research Ethics Board (Appendix C), these students were recruited by the Manitoba branch of the CFS (CFS-MB) through email and social media. Each student was interviewed at their convenience, with the chance to ask questions about the study before, during, and after the interview. The semi-structured interviews were comprised of a series of open-ended questions to gain their perspectives on universal PSE, as well as to allow research participants to speak to and about CFS publications (see **Appendix A** for interview questions). The discourses performed in these interviews are compared to the discourses on the website to unpack the possible connections between the CFS's social movement and the participants' role in mobilizing this social change. Interviews were audio recorded via Zoom and field notes were taken to provide

two mechanisms for analysis. The resulting audio files totaled 3 hours and 46 minutes of interview data. After each interview, I transcribed the audio files into a Word document, capturing the responses verbatim and noting verbal cues including pauses and changes in tone. Verbal cues can communicate how the interviewee feels about the subject, critical to capture as these verbal cues can alter the meaning of words. The field notes were used to direct me to instances of the transcripts that were particularly unique, consistent with the orders of discourse found in the publications, or speaking to external context (i.e. ongoing political issues) that I needed to investigate further to incorporate into the analysis as per Fairclough (2001). The Word document transcripts were then copied into the same Excel spreadsheet, on a separate tab, for coding. Each interview was separated in both the Word document and Excel sheet by the sequential number relating to the order in which the interviews were done, along with the pseudonym assigned to each participant. The tab containing the interview data also had the same three columns for analysis (codes, context, orders of discourse) to allow for comparison between the textual and interview analyses.

Data Analysis

Jørgensen and Phillips (2002) stipulate that “discourse theory aims at an understanding of the social as a discursive construction whereby, in principle, all social phenomena can be analyzed using discourse analytical tools.” As the discourse examined in this study serves to support the CFS’s social movement towards universal PSE, discourse analysis is an appropriate method to analyze the data. Discourse analysis requires a micro examination of individual components of discourse, including words, phrases, and tone when applicable. Gee (2011, p. x) outlines numerous tools that are used to analyze discourse, specifying that these tools is “a specific question to ask of data.” The specific question asked of this data is how the CFS’s discourse furthers their social advocacy towards universal PSE, comparing the data sets of their website publications and the interviews of their members. Asking this question of the data to begin the discourse assumes the CFS does in fact create social change towards inclusive and accessible PSE. Examples of previous accomplishments by the CFS, alongside varied collaborators, include international student working rights, tuition freezes in several provinces, and expanded Eligibility to the Canada Student Grants Program (CFS, 2021c).

Data analysis begins by socially and historically contextualizing the data. Establishing the context includes: noting the language of the publications (English for both), publication medium

(electronic website PDF), date of publication, author, and source. I saved digital copies of all of the publications for analysis in the event the website was restructured or altered during the project and the data removed from public view. No such website alterations took place throughout the course of this study. The guiding principles of discourse analysis as outlined by Jørgensen and Phillips (2002) and Fairclough and Wodak (1997) were followed to ensure thorough analysis. Analytical rigor was ensured by repeated close readings of the publications to capture a breadth of codes, iteratively recording the data sets into Excel, color coding notes, and frequent reflexive discussions with my research supervisor to identify and minimize researcher bias (Maher et al., 2018; Wood & Kroger, 2000).

Diachronic Consideration

Schneider (2013b) identified diachronic analysis as discourse analysis that evaluates the same actors' communications at different points in time. This means that communication from the same producer, the CFS, was analyzed at two different intervals; in this case, the reports were published a year apart. *Education Justice* and *Education for All* were published in 2018 and 2019 respectively, representing two distinct periods in time. The codes therefore can be examined in relation to one another to understand how they change over time, considering other differences between the two documents (i.e. purpose, audience). I considered the sociopolitical context of both 2018 and 2019 in terms of developments to PSE funding, major governmental shifts at the provincial and federal levels, and political changes including the 2019 federal election. This information is provided in Chapter 1 and revisited in Chapter 4 alongside the data analysis. Though this analysis seeks to situate the discourses within their social, economic, and political contexts, data was not collected on the impact of these documents on consumers or policy change. Further research into the impact the discourse had on sociopolitical events would broaden the understanding of the efficacy and potentiality of performing these discourses in student advocacy, though is beyond the current scope of study.

The online documents obtained from the CFS website (CFS, 2018; 2019) are communicative events produced by the organization. The CFS worked collaboratively to produce and publish the documents, therefore no individual author is noted on either document. The documents were originally downloaded to capture their current form in December 2020, and accessed consistently throughout the study. At the time of writing the documents still exist on the CFS website and have not been altered through the course of this study. Exploring the production

process as per Fairclough's (1995) discursive practice method requires reviewing the institutional background of the organization. Background information on the CFS and their positionality in the Canadian student advocacy sphere is previously discussed in Chapter 1.

Coding

To begin the analysis, I developed a codebook based on the four aforementioned social justice pillars to construct the initial reference point for data analysis. The codebook is constructed first by codifying the aforementioned pillars of social justice. Key indicators I looked for at the outset include explicit mentions of rights (e.g. "education is a right", "student rights") and references to (in)equality, inclusion, participation, access, justice and (in)equity, such as "education for all". I chose these codes based on the four pillars of social justice, as these pillars constitute a holistic framework of social justice that allowed me to begin unpacking the discourse in the publications. The codebook is updated consistently throughout the analysis when a new code emerged. Each new code promoted a review of previously analyzed material to capture any instances of the code that may not have been prevalent enough to capture through a previous review. Explicit mentions of human rights and any international human rights documents are coded to capture the CFS's use of these terms and any intertextual support of their claims through international human rights discourse and law. Codes continued to develop as the data collection progressed, as discourse analysis encourages flexibility in its methodological approach to capture the best representation of the discourse possible.

To classify the discourses and identify relations between different patterns of discourse, coding was used to organize and analyze the data. Coding is a process whereby the researcher identifies common patterns and themes amongst the source material, then groups these individual codes into thematic categories through analysis. The codes I chose to begin the analysis with are the four aforementioned social justice pillars, looking for overt mentions of these four words or phrases that spoke to their meaning. For example, throughout the coding process I noted instances of both equity and equality, and noted their unique use. The terms were used interchangeably throughout the analyzed texts, therefore they were grouped together when determining the orders of discourse being used in each instance as the terms speak to the same broad purpose of assuring fair and just circumstances and opportunities for PSE. Looking at each sentence individually, I noted every instance of the four pillars while noticing other phrases, words, and/or themes that emerged. One such example of an emergent code is economic

discourses, as *Education for All* repeatedly relies on financial figures and mentions of economic benefits. Coding is an iterative process, meaning that as codes emerged throughout the analytical process, I returned to previously analyzed sentences to look for similar instances of these codes. As I noted the economic discourses in *Education for All*, I revisited *Education Justice* to ensure I captured all of the economic discourses to allow for accurate comparison. Codes are also to be analyzed in relation to one another, to deconstruct how the codes may be used in concert together to convey a particular meaning. For example, intertextual references to international human rights documents and conventions were most commonly performed when speaking about the Indigenous right to higher education. These instances employed the social justice pillar of “rights” alongside external references to source the existence of Indigenous rights to education. This emergence of Indigenous-focused discourses, along with the finding that advocacy surrounding this demographic of students is most often supported with human rights claims, is an important finding for this study and is discussed in more detail in Chapter 5. The text was also structurally examined to investigate how the layout and linguistic structure of the publications function in relation to the message. Instances of intertextuality were noted; if the publications make reference to outside material and sources, and when and how these outside messages are used. To identify the linguistic tools and mechanisms used by the publications I noted the form of discourse (e.g. formal, jargon, youth-focused, etc.) and publication tone. Examples of tonal choices include incorporating “we” to foster a sense of solidarity with the reader, or if terms like “should” and “need to” are employed to demonstrate urgency. These structural elements of the text were captured in a fourth column in the coding spreadsheet where I tracked notes pertaining to each sentence.

The interview transcripts were analyzed after the textual documents, therefore each transcript was analyzed with an initial set of codes and orders of discourse found in the textual analysis. As the interviews were examined, emergent codes were noted in the codebook and the textual pieces were revisited to review any potential overlap between the interviews and the publications. The interviews were analyzed similarly to the publications, with attention paid to the verbal cues including tone, volume, pauses, and laughter. Instances where the participant raised their voice, changed tone, emphasized a particular answer or word, engaged in nervous laughter or hesitation, and paused before or during an answer were noted to capture the breadth of verbal structure of their responses. When reviewing the words in the transcripts, these

structural elements of verbal speech were taken into consideration as they added emphasis or emotion to the code, making it unique from other instances. For example, one participant became highly emotional and cried while speaking about access to PSE, and her emotional response was noted in the Excel sheet along with her words to provide a complete picture of her communication for the response. Emotional reactions were common for many participants, and occurred uniquely in response to different questions; these instances of emotional display add rich nuance to their responses and were analyzed in concert with their words and phrases. The words themselves, along with any intertextual references such as treaties or external resources, were coded in the Excel sheet. The verbal cues were similarly noted within the transcript to capture the full scope of the participants' responses and what implications their tone, emotion and other verbal cues may have had on their meaning and responses.

Orders of Discourse

Once the codes were identified alongside any intertextual references and/or verbal cues, the codes were grouped together thematically into orders of discourse. Orders of discourse are simply categories of codes that are related thematically to one another. To identify the themes and categorize the data into the order of discourse, I repeatedly read each document wholly, and broke the documents down into their individual sentences. I divided each document into the individual statements and separated each statement in an Excel sheet to isolate each phrase. Isolating the sentences from one another allows me to focus on each lexical item uniquely in order to search for codes (individual words or phrases). I began this process by reading through to look for any instance of the four social justice pillars, as I know the CFS is a social justice organization. Designating the four pillars as my initial codes allows me to closely read the text through a social justice lens, consistent with the theoretical framework, and aligns with the process of discourse analysis to break down communications into their smallest component to evaluate the unique word choices (Edwards, 2003). In a third cell horizontally aligned with the initial text I noted the tense of the sentence and the personal pronoun used to capture the other discursive factors affecting the meaning and communication method of the sentence. As coding is a subjective process, I endeavor to reduce researcher bias in the coding by revisiting these texts on multiple occasions to look for different phrases or words that might stand out or repeat. Adding codes through each reading allowed me to search for repetition and connections between the codes as objectively as possible (Edwards, 2003). I read each document completely in this

way (focused on each individual sentence) twelve times to look for unique and repeated codes. I also read each line in concert with its surrounding text to ensure my own understanding, identify, and reify any common code repetitions and themes, and ensure overall context of the document was not lost through this discourse isolation process. I read the documents in this way countless times, and have also read them wholly an innumerable amount to ensure my own understanding and thoroughness of data collection.

To track my codes, I make notes in the adjoining Excel cell of direct mentions of each of the four social justice pillars, any other outstanding words or phrases like “oppression” or “debt” that were critical to the meaning of the sentence. Economic discourses emerged as a recurrent theme in both documents, though the frequency of economic words and phrases is higher in *Education for All*. Economic terms included any instance where the text provided a dollar amount, used the word “economy”, “economic”, “debt”, or “financial” to indicate a focus on monetary values or an economic-based argument. Another emerging code, found consistently in both documents, is the focus on Indigenous rights and inclusion in PSE. Codes for Indigenous discourses include “Indigenous”, “treaty”, and direct mention of Indigenous-specific programs or documents including the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People (UNDRIP) and the PSSSP. Through repeated close readings of the text and the resulting codes that emerged, I identified three broad orders of discourse: social justice discourses, economic discourses and Indigenous-focused discourses.

The social justice discourses were an anticipated result of the analysis, as the CFS positions itself as a social justice organization (CFS, 2020) and much of their public communication includes one or more of the four pillars of social discourse directly. The economic discourses emerged prominently through the analysis of *Education for All*, promoting comparison between the two publications and inquiry into why each order of discourse was employed in the respective publications. These findings are discussed in Chapters 4 and 5. Indigenous-focused discourses were noted as a minor theme in the two written publications initially, though when the interviews began and analysis of the transcripts was underway, the prevalence of Indigenous-focused responses and codes in the interviews prompted a review of the publications to search for consistencies between the use of these discourses by the participants and the publications. Mentions of Indigenous inclusion in *Education for All* and *Education Justice* are coupled with other social justice codes (i.e. equity, inclusion, participation)

so they initially fell under the umbrella of social justice discourses. The emergence of Indigenous-focused discourses as a significant discursive theme was a significant and interesting finding, discussed further in Chapter 4.

Interpretation of Data

To analyze the discourse at the level of social practice, I viewed the results of the coding and thematic grouping to unpack what the data revealed how the discourse functions in support of universal PSE, to answer my original research question. The process to determine “what does it mean?” was guided by Schneider (2013), who states:

This means combing your knowledge of structural features and individual statements, then placing those findings into the broader context that you established at the beginning. Throughout this process, keep the following questions in mind: who created the material you are analyzing? What is their position on the topic you examined? How do their arguments draw from and in turn contribute to commonly accepted knowledge of the topic at the time and in the place that this argument was made? And maybe most importantly: who might benefit from the discourse that your sources construct?

The data was interpreted with the central research goal in mind (to illuminate the function of these discourses in furthering the social change towards universal PSE), in full acknowledgement that the CFS operates from a specific political space with clear social and political goals. The potential beneficiaries of the discourses constructed by the CFS in their publications and by the interview participants include current and future PSE students, as the achievement of the CFS’s sociopolitical goals of shifting policy to provide “education for all” (CFS, 2020) would allow unrestricted access to higher education in Canada to those students of sufficient academic merit (United Nations, 1966). Financial limitations would no longer exist to exclude students from a lower socioeconomic class. As the issue of universal PSE access is an interconnected issue that cannot be isolated from other human rights concerns (discussed in detail in Chapter 1), wider benefits to related social movements or advocacy groups may also be realized as a result of this study and through the CFS’s advocacy. The discourses performed by the CFS and interviewees are aimed specifically to provide wide social benefit, recognizing that access to higher education does not and cannot exist in a vacuum without simultaneous realization of interconnected human rights (i.e. housing, food security, full and free participation

in culture, etc.). The social practice element of this study, then, recognizes the interconnected nature of social issues while focusing on how the CFS situates itself within the larger Canadian social advocacy context to encourage buy-in and action from members, executives, and policy makers at all levels of institutions and government.

Interviews

Research Participants

The data for this study were collected through seven semi-structured interviews with seven CFS executives and student members. The interviews took place over Zoom and averaged approximately 30 minutes each. The participants were recruited widely through the CFS email network and social media accounts. All participants volunteered to participate in the study after email and social media recruitment via the CFS's communication network. All respondents self-identified as female, one identified as Indigenous and two identified as international students. The participants were currently located in Manitoba, Ontario, Nova Scotia, with one participant residing abroad due to Covid-19 travel restrictions. I provided the participants with a consent form to outline the benefits and risks of participating in the study, and reiterated the participants' freedom to choose to skip any question they chose, or to terminate the interview at any time. The questions were designed to gather background information including their involvement in student advocacy and to elicit the respondents' opinions about universal post-secondary education, human rights, and inclusive higher education. The participants were encouraged to expand on their experiences and perspectives as much as possible. All participants are identified by pseudonyms throughout this document for anonymity, and were provided with copies of their transcript and were encouraged to review them for accuracy and potential modifications. No such modifications were received and therefore none were made.

Informed Consent

Consent forms were provided before the interview takes place via email, and the participants had the opportunity to have the form (**Appendix B**) read to them if they are unable or unwilling to read it themselves. The participant had the ability to withdraw consent and terminate the interview at any point during the interview process. The consent forms were electronically signed by the participants, and they received an electronic copy while one copy is retained for five years by the researcher. All correspondence regarding consent will take place

either over email through the secure University of Manitoba account or over audio/video conference with the participant, as physical meetings will not be taking place due to current health restrictions.

Feedback and Debriefing

Participants were able to provide their contact information to receive a summary of the report when they sign their consent form, along with the option to receive a copy of the full thesis. They were able to receive the non-technical summary, including amalgamated data, any relevant graphs and charts, and other easily understandable data points in advance of the final defense of the thesis. If they were quoted directly in the final report, they received a copy of the final report, alongside a directed pull out of the pertinent section they are quoted in, to ensure they had the opportunity to provide feedback on how their views are being represented. They will have a period of two weeks to provide such feedback (unless extenuating circumstances, determined on an individual basis, necessitate a longer review time). Any participant who dissented to how their view was represented or decided that they do not want to be directly quoted in the final report had the option to suggest revisions or request that their quote be withdrawn. These details were made available to the participants in the consent form.

Accuracy, Representation and Deception

Deception was not be used in this study. Participants are represented by a pseudonym in the final reporting of the results, and have had the opportunity to review how their views and thoughts are being represented in the final reporting before publication to ensure accurate representation. They had the opportunity to clarify their answers or request edits to most accurately represent them at the review stage.

Risks and Benefits

Expected benefits are an increased understanding of the student advocacy being done in support of universal higher education for the participants, and the sharing and amalgamation of these results may be beneficial to other advocacy organizations. The ability to share information of best practices may benefit future advocacy work undertaken by these individuals and organizations. Indirect benefits to participants may include an increased vocabulary of human rights mechanisms and standards that they can use to inform their work if they see benefit in

doing so. The risks to participants are no more than everyday life (as confirmed by the University of Manitoba Joint Research Ethics Board).

Anonymity and Confidentiality

The publications refers to participants anonymously, only identifying them by a pseudonym if quoting them directly. Any data that speaks to more than one student uses non-descriptive labels including "three students", or "the majority of participants". The identifying information that may compromise participant anonymity includes the consent form and the email that the participants are communicating from; these documents and correspondence are be stored on a password-protected computer and access is restricted to the researcher and research supervisor. The participants were assigned a pseudonym during the data collection process, and the participant is only be identified by this pseudonym. All of the responses were recorded, coded, and interpreted anonymously throughout all stages of the research process. Participants were only contacted directly to arrange the interview initially, and to review their responses prior to the reporting being finalized to ensure credibility and accuracy of results.

Compensation

Participants were not be compensated for their participation in this study.

Dissemination

The results will be disseminated through the publication and defense of my thesis, and will be submitted to peer-reviewed journals for publication and presented at conferences. The CFS will be notified of any publications resulting from the study in the event they wish to disseminate the findings to their membership. All of the avenues for publication are clearly stated in the consent form. Possible journals for publication include the Canadian Journal of Human Rights, Canadian Journal of Higher Education, Journal of Higher Education, and the Alberta Journal for Educational Research. One public presentation where the results of the study were used to inform the presentation about student rights was the CFS Skills Symposium, September 27, 2021.

Limitations of the Study

The study is limited by my own biases, positionality, and abilities as I am the primary researcher for this study. It is commonly accepted in discourse analysis that the knowledge that any interpretation of discourse is unique to the interpreter, and the acceptance that another person

or audience might interpret the same material differently (Schneider, 2013b). Due to the qualitative nature of the data and narrow scope, generalizability cannot be achieved and is not the goal of the study. Illuminating the function of these discourses as part of a much larger conversation on student advocacy and inclusive PSE in Canada is a primary goal of the study, to answer the central research question of how these discourses function in support of universal PSE in Canada. It is the hope that these findings can support future research and advocacy to generate concrete sociopolitical change. As previously indicated in my positionality statement, I am directly affected by these neoliberal policies and therefore sought to engage in this work to better understand what activism is being conducted in Canada to rectify these issues. As a human rights student through the University of Manitoba's Faculty of Law, I approached this issue from a perspective of intrigue of the intersection of human rights law and the social advocacy seeking to promote equitable PSE rights, which influences how the study was framed and conducted.

Due to the Covid-19 pandemic and the timing of this study, recruiting participants was challenging as the target participants are student activists with a plethora of advocacy and academic commitments. "Zoom fatigue", the phenomena of burnout caused by copious video meetings, was commonly cited as a reason for participants to decline the invitation to join the study. The participants were recruited by the Manitoba branch of the CFS (CFS-MB), and during the recruitment period for this study Bill 33 was introduced in Manitoba. Bill 33, which sought to expand the powers of the Minister of Advanced Education, Skills and Immigration, including granting the ability to increase student fees and control their disbursement. The bill was a major concern for the CFS-MB and local advocates as the power to regulate student fees currently lies with the individual student unions themselves, who are mandated to use those funds to provide support and resources for students. The bill also allows for the Minister to increase tuition fees overall, and the government has indicated interest in linking tuition to labor demands, erecting new barriers that worsen PSE affordability and accessibility. Many potential participants were engaged in urgent advocacy to fight this bill, clearly demonstrating the ironic nature of seeking to study student activists; the target population in this case was focused on engaging in their advocacy work which limited their available time to talk about that same work for research purposes.

Criteria for Ensuring Research Quality

Following the criteria laid out by Treharne and Riggs (2015) for ensuring quality in qualitative research, this study considers the following five prongs of ensuring research quality, along with a consistent mindfulness throughout every stage of the process on considering the end user of the data. The potential end users of this study are anticipated to be higher education practitioners, including those working directly in post-secondary institutions and those working in government policy; student advocates and activists in both individual and formally organized capacities; and human rights scholars and practitioners. With a diverse end audience in mind, ensuring the research quality through a thorough practice of ongoing reflexivity and consideration for a broad inclusion of diverse viewpoints and potential answers is instrumental in achieving a higher level of research quality (Maher et al., 2018).

Credibility is understood as the accuracy of the representation of the opinions and information collected from the participants, and the triangulation of data collected from the discourse analysis in comparison with the findings from the interviews contributes to the credibility of the research. The interviewees have the opportunity to review the written findings to ensure the accuracy and representation of their contributions, a provision that they are made aware of prior to participating in the process. This allows for greater credibility of the final reporting as the interpretation and writing of the final reporting is not solely reliant on the researcher's independent writing and representation.

Transferability is understood as the ability for the findings to be applicable in other contexts. Though the study focuses on the current Canadian context, human rights inherently is a system and field without boundaries that are tied to a geographical region, cultural group or time period, and therefore the rich description provided by the analyses contribute to the transferability of the research to other locales and contexts.

Dependability is understood as the replicability of the results. Because the interviews are designed to be semi-structured, allowing participants to contribute their opinions and understandings as freely as possible, the results should be replicable. The discourse analysis and establishment of higher education as a human right is compared to similar literature in other contexts, if available, and the discourse analysis in particular captures quantitative metrics (identifying the quantity of the use of a particular term, for example), supporting dependability.

Confirmability is understood as the findings being representative of the participants' contributions, not the researcher's personal interpretations and biases. The positionality of the researcher and the biases that are being brought to the project are acknowledged at several points throughout the reporting, including a reflexivity section acknowledging the positionality of the researcher embedded within the results themselves.

Authenticity is understood as the variety of viewpoints sought, and the transformative potential of the findings. Though the participants' inclusion criteria stipulates that they be involved in student advocacy prior to participating in the study, the researcher did not select particular participants in or out of the study for their individual viewpoints and opinions. All relevant results and viewpoints expressed throughout the study are represented in the final reporting, and it is our hope that the transformative potential of the results will extend beyond the participants themselves to wider practitioners in the field of inclusive higher education. Regardless of the details of the results of the findings, the results of this study provide a current and unique data set for practitioners and others in this field to consider transforming their practice accordingly.

Chapter 4: Data Analysis

Introduction

This chapter presents the major findings of the examination of two CFS electronic publications, chosen for their relevance to the scope and aim of this study. The publication analysis contains two core analytical dimensions: the discursive practice and the textual and graphical analyses. As part of the discursive practice analysis, the grammatical choices and technical features of the publications, including use of pronouns and tenses are examined. Including these grammatical and lexical choices allows for a contextual understanding of the discourses and how these communicative choices function for the CFS's relation to their audience (Edwards, 2003). The three orders of discourse performed in *Education Justice* and *Education for All* are deconstructed and related to their social practice as per Fairclough's three-dimensional model (Fairclough, 2001). This chapter focuses the intertextuality of both electronic documents, employing discourse analysis and social semiotics to deconstruct the discourses. Different textual and graphical elements of each document have been analyzed using discourse analysis and social semiotics to represent a holistic interpretation of each discourse.

Alongside the publication analyses, perspectives gained through semi-structured interviews with seven CFS executives and members are included to provide a holistic understanding of the discourses performed through both mediums. The interviewees are all current CFS members (at the time of their interview). Two participants self-identified as international students, one self-identified as Indigenous, and all seven identified as female. The participants attend or have attended PSE institutions in three provinces with CFS representation: Manitoba, Nova Scotia, and Ontario. The participants were assigned pseudonyms to protect their identity: Elise, Jane, Hana, Brooke, Kiera, Ashley, and Sierra. The participants were asked a series of questions to gain their perspectives on universal post-secondary education, their perspectives on using human rights discourse in their work, and the imagery contained in *Education Justice* to unpack the signs and semiotics within the publication.

To identify how the CFS's discourses within their publications overlap and inform the discourse of their members, I explore the CFS's use of discourse, I conducted seven semi-structured interviews and analyzed them through the same process of coding and discourse analysis. Collecting data via the electronic publications alongside the interviews allowed for comparative analysis of the orders of discourse relied upon in the two mediums. The interview transcripts have been analyzed using discourse analysis to illuminate the orders of discourse performed by each participant. The interviews also provide a window into the discursive and social practice of the CFS advocates in the contemporary social, political, and economic contexts. The CFS members highlight the same orders of discourse found in the website publication, demonstrating consistency between what the CFS as an organization publishes and the perspectives of their members. As the interviewees hold multiple positions within the CFS and are actively involved in student advocacy, the connection between the orders of discourse in the publications and the enactment of those perspectives and priorities in on the ground advocacy is illuminated. These discourses serve to inform CFS members on the priorities and perspectives of the organization, thus framing the social advocacy efforts and furthering social change towards universal PSE.

Discourses Constituting Society, Power, and Ideology

A key principle of discourse analysis is that discourse has the power to reinforce, alter, and produce social ideologies (Van Dijk, 2003). The CFS is working to shift power from the neoliberal structures restricting PSE access and construct an alternate reality wherein universal

PSE is fiscally prioritized (CFS, 2020). The current reality for marginalized Canadian students, including low-income and racialized students, is that of exclusion on the basis of financial privilege. The CFS seeks to alter that reality through discursively engaging members to advocate for political change in accordance with human rights and social justice ideals, including the prevalence of their references to the four pillars of social justice. The CFS has a precise ideological view of what the Canadian reality of PSE management and funding should entail (CFS, 2020), and performs social justice and economic discourses in order to communicate that ideology to different audiences. Through their advocacy (CFS, 2020), they reframe the issue of accessible PSE through a social justice lens. This reframing occurs through the linking of universal PSE to other social justice issues and through discourse featuring the four social justice pillars, detailed later in this chapter. Fairclough and Wodak (1997) argue that every instance of language use contributes to reifying or transforming society, therefore the discourses performed by the CFS in their electronic publications are understood to support societal transformation in the direction of universally inclusive PSE.

DA seeks to interrogate discourses at the textual, discursive, and social practice levels (Fairclough, 2001). Ideologies are understood in this study as “significations/constructions of reality (the physical world, social relations, social identities) which are built into various dimensions of the forms/meanings of discursive practices” (Fairclough, 1992, p. 87). As discourse holds power (Fairclough & Wodak, 1997; Van Dijk, 2003), and discursive practices are the mechanism through which that power is flexed, altered and shifted, social practice can be conceptualized in terms of an ideological struggle enacted through discourse. Fairclough posits:

There is a constant endeavor on the part of those who have power to try and impose an ideological common sense which holds for everyone [...] But there is always some degree of ideological diversity, and indeed conflict and struggle, so that ideological uniformity is never completely achieved. (1989, p. 86)

Therefore, the ideological struggle explored by this study is between the CFS’s social justice ideology of universal PSE, in service of broad and equitable realization of a fundamental human right. The discourses performed in the electronic publications and by the participants aim to communicate that ideology to the intended audiences. *Education Justice* aims to inform and inspire action in CFS members and student advocates, whereas *Education for All* is targeted

towards policy makers and elected officials. Appealing to these groups via lexical choices and discursive framing is key to the potential success of the CFS's advocacy work in supporting an alternate reality of inclusive PSE. Engaging both target audiences are integral to the overall development of the CFS's social advocacy. Engaging members in campaigning and advocacy demonstrates a united front to government officials and policy makers while simultaneously raising awareness of the issue, and appealing to policymakers furthers the ultimate goal of systemic policy change and resource allocation in favor of universal PSE. Obtaining ideological buy-in from a broad base to pressure policy makers in support of the CFS's ideology therefore is a critical component of analyzing their discourse. It must be considered that all discourse functions in service of shifting power from the neoliberal ideologies currently restricting PSE access and towards the socially just realization of a universal PSE system for all Canadians.

Personal Pronouns

The use of personal pronouns is indicative of the writer's discursive strategies (Gochecho, 2012) and can allow insight into the social distance or solidarity between the producer and consumer of the text (Bano & Shakir, 2015). Using the pronoun "you" in media puts the onus on the reader to reflect on themselves regarding the subject matter, whereas using "us" or "we" can draw the reader into the narrative, encouraging them to locate themselves within the issue being discussed (Hasan, 2013). *Education Justice* does not use the word "you", while *Education for All* employs the word four times, entirely in the preface when directly addressing the intended audience (elected officials and policy makers). Coding and analysis reveal that the CFS perform "we" as their most frequently used personal pronoun (see Table 2 below), further highlighting their intended audience to be students and activists who are encouraged to take action to rectify these injustices (Duncan, 1989).

Table 2

Breakdown of the frequency of three personal pronouns: I, We, and You.

Pronoun	Education Justice	Education for All
I	0	0
We	13	6
You	0	4

The CFS employs the personal pronoun “we” in both of the publications, discursively shortening the distance from the text producer (CFS) to the reader (Bano & Shakir, 2015; Suryaningsih, 2021). A fundamental component of building a collective and engaging in a social movement is “a feeling of group belonging that is typically expressed by the pronoun *we*.” (Van Dijk, 2004). Engaging with the audience through the use of this personal pronoun therefore supports the CFS’s mandate of social movement building (CFS, 2021), fostering a sense of collective responsibility for correcting systemically inaccessible PSE (and can allow insight into the social distance or solidarity between the producer and consumer of the text (Bano & Shakir, 2015). “We” is used dually through *Education Justice*, to refer to themselves as an organization and as a broader, inclusive word to include the reader in the discourse. The below example illustrates the performance of “we” as a personal referring to the organization itself:

Our belief in the need for equity to achieve accessible education is what *we* [emphasis added] call education justice. *We* [emphasis added] believe that education is a right and should be treated as a public good. It is a pathway to human development and well-being, social and civic participation, social mobility, community development, social solidarity, economic prosperity, and liberation from oppression. (CFS, 2018, p. 4)

Referring to themselves organizationally through “we” clearly delineates the CFS’s position on equitable PSE. The above example also demonstrates their direct relation of universal PSE to broader issues of social development and human rights, a consistent theme throughout *Education Justice*. “We” is also used to refer to the collective at large, including the reader and emphasizing the need for collective action. The use of “we” relieves direct responsibility from any individual group member, and from the CFS itself. Instead, this discursive tool situates the fight for universal PSE as a collective struggle requiring action from a unified front. The below example from *Education Justice* illustrates the collective identity required to further the CFS’s goals:

In a variety of ways, inequality and oppression serve as barriers to post-secondary education, in terms of both gaining access to post-secondary education and the ability to persist to completion of one’s studies. Our movement for accessible education therefore requires that *we* [emphasis added] fight social inequality and oppression, both on our campuses and in wider society. In recent years it’s been a trend for neoliberal institutions

to appropriate language of equity and anti-oppression to applaud their own band-aid policy reforms that fail to provide systemic change to systemic problems. (CFS, 2018, p. 4)

This statement above employs “we” to refer not only to the CFS as an organization, but as a larger collective furthering the social movement. The preceding statement provides insight into why student activism in support of universal PSE is critical. It simultaneously situates inaccessible higher education within a broader context of systemic social inequality, reinforcing the urgency of the issue. The statement following the use of “we” provides additional context for the reader, lambasting neoliberal institutions for performative equity without addressing the root cause of these issues. The severity of this accusation clearly communicates the CFS’s opinion that ongoing efforts to address anti-oppression and equity are far from sufficient, reifying the need for collective action by their members to enact systemic social change. This urgency and need for collective action is also communicated discursively through verb tenses, as explored in the following section.

Verb Tenses

The tense of a verb refers to the past, present, or future of the action in relation to “now”; the time of publication (Halliday, 1994). Both documents are written primarily in the present simple tense. This modality facilitates a close relationship between readers and the producers of the text (CFS; Wang, 2010). The present tense indicates that the issue is current, and coupled with the use of “we” as a personal pronoun imparts to the reader the necessity of their involvement in an issue that is ongoing. In the following example, the use of “are” as a present tense verb indicates that the issue is current. The second half of the sentence, including the historical element of systemic poverty, creates a link between systemic and ongoing marginalizations and contemporary reality. This statement relies on social justice language, employing the word “marginalized”, which delineates inequity, demonstrating how the present tense is performed alongside this social justice discursive code.

Students from marginalized communities are more likely to come from lower-income backgrounds and communities with historic cycles of poverty. (*Education Justice*, p. 7)

Similarly, the following excerpt uses the present tense alongside economic discourse to exemplify the current reality and magnitude of student debt. Using “are” along with “requires”, both present tense verbs, draws attention to the economic severity of the issue (using codes “costs” and “debt”) while clearly indicating to the reader that this issue is current and ongoing.

For most students, who are unable to afford these high up-front costs, pursuing an education requires incurring life-impacting levels of debt. (*Education for All*, p. 5)

Instances of past tense are employed to communicate the historical context of inequitable PSE access, providing readers with data indicative of the gravity of the problem and the mechanisms through which PSE has been restricted, such as in the below examples.

The deep federal cuts made to post-secondary education in the 1980s and 1990s were never restored. In most provinces, austerity was downloaded onto students in the form of massive tuition fee increases. (*Education for All*, p. 5)

Low- and middle-income students didn’t receive access to post-secondary education until after World War II when the federal government extended grants for free tuition and living costs to 35,000 returning veterans. Almost immediately, our PSE system changed. (*Education Justice*, p. 6)

The pattern of providing historical information in the past tense lends reliability to the documents, as readers can chronologically follow the historical trail of PSE inequality. This allows readers to conceptualize universal PSE as a longstanding issue with a history of worsening conditions for marginalized students. Both of the above examples refer to historical examples of post-secondary cuts, exemplifying how PSE policy has evolved over time to demonstrate to the readers that the issue of PSE inaccessibility is not new. By showing the progression of PSE policy, the CFS is simultaneously communicating the seriousness of the issue while subtly demonstrating that PSE funding policy can and does change, supporting their overall mandate of changing ongoing PSE policy in favor of universal PSE.

Orders of Discourse

The data analysis process revealed three orders of discourse performed by the CFS in the electronic publications: economic, social justice, and Indigenous-focused. These three orders of discourse are all performed in service of furthering the CFS’s mission of enacting systemic

change in support of the equitable realization of the right to higher education. The framing of any social advocacy effort is indicative of how the group views their cause (Benford & Snow, 2000), thus investigating how and when these discourses are used to further the CFS's social movement goals illustrates how they intend to shape an alternate social reality of inclusive PSE via their discourse. These orders of discourse were identified through coding and categorizing the codes thematically. The thematic sections were then named based on their commonality and the type of discourse they represented. The three orders of discourse are:

Economic Discourses:

- Economy
- Debt
- Labor/job market
- Dollar values
- Poverty

Social Justice Discourses:

- Social justice
- (In)Equity/(in)equality
- Access
- Inclusion/exclusion
- Oppression
- Direct mentions of education as a right
- Reference to human rights instruments (i.e. ICESCR, UNDRIP)

Indigenous-focused Discourses:

- Indigenous
- Indigenous rights to education
- Colonization
- UNDRIP
- Treaty rights
- Post-Secondary Student Support Program (PSSSP)

These orders of discourse contribute to a nuanced understanding of how the CFS performs discourse on its website and via its members to further their social justice mandate. To parse these discourses and elucidate how they are employed in relation to the social movement, I first explore the text in the introduction and conclusion of the each publication. Unpacking how the documents communicate initially and at their close with readers speaks to the overall goal of the text, as these sections contain critical information that the organization wanted to impart to the reader both immediately and to leave a lasting impression. I then explore each order of discourse in turn, first focusing on the codes and discourses contained in each publication before connecting each order of discourse to the participant responses. Connecting the discourses in the publications with those performed by participants demonstrates how the CFS's positionality, communicated via their website publications, is reflected in the perspectives of their members. This linkage illuminates how the CFS's organizational goal of universal PSE is channeled through their members, as their members are the individuals who then engage in social activism, campaigning and lobbying on the ground to further the sociopolitical agenda of universally inclusive PSE.

Document Introduction and Conclusion

The ultimate aim of the CFS's written discourse is to inspire activism (CFS, 2020), as they work to further inclusive PSE across Canada. The discourses found in the introduction and conclusion of both documents were examined to understand the structure of each document, exploring the discourses employed to respectively draw the audience in and to impart a final message. The introduction of both documents communicates the CFS's positionality and mandate through social justice discourses including codes of equity, inclusivity, and accessibility. The opening paragraph for *Education Justice* reads:

Since its founding in 1981, the Canadian Federation of Students has recognized that achieving its goal of a post-secondary education system that is accessible to all is, fundamentally, a struggle for social justice. What this means is that winning fully accessible education is inseparable from efforts to eradicate social inequality and the many forms of oppression within our society that create, reinforce and deepen inequalities. (CFS, 2018)

Social justice codes in the above paragraph include accessibility, social justice, inequality, and oppression. This paragraph sets the tone of the document by alluding to the deep enmeshing of post-secondary education with other systemic inequalities, the overall social justice positionality of the CFS, and the ongoing efforts by the organization to rectify these ills. The frequency of these social justice codes in *Education Justice*, intended for CFS members, clearly highlights the CFS's desire to impart this messaging to their members and advocates to further their social justice mandate.

As *Education for All* is structured differently than *Education Justice*, following a format akin to a government briefing note instead of a research report, I examine both the executive summary and the introductory text to capture two of the first communications within the document. *Education for All* co-opts the language of neoliberalism when indicating that the funding model currently downloads costs onto individuals, then turns it back to the reader (intended for policymakers and elected officials) to take action to rectify the injustice. The type of vocabulary employed here is concrete and strong – “crushing”, “high quality”, “commit” as shown in the below excerpt.

To create a system of accessible, *high quality* [emphasis added] post-secondary education, the federal government must move away from piecemeal reforms and a funding model that downloads costs onto individuals. Students are calling on all federal parties to *commit* [emphasis added] to reinvesting in public post-secondary education to end *crushing* [emphasis added] debt associated with pursuing an education. (CFS, 2019, p. 1)

The above paragraph concludes the executive summary of the document. The executive summary is the piece of the document that is intended to be read first and gives the reader context for the rest of the publication, thus these words are in a particularly strong position of the document to impart the gravity of the issue to readers. Considering the intended audience of elected officials and policy makers, these concrete, strong discursive choices afford minimal room for interpretation of the CFS's stance on this issue and their intent to garner support from change makers. As the overall purpose of *Education for All* is to lobby the federal government to introduce policy and funding changes, relying on practical, tangible phrasing through this

forceful phrasing supports the CFS's overall sociopolitical goals. Similarly, the opening paragraph of *Education for All* focuses on an economic order of discourse:

The deep federal cuts made to post-secondary education in the 1980s and 1990s were never restored. In most provinces, austerity was downloaded onto students in the form of massive tuition fee increases. While all students in Canada have faced dramatic fee increases, tuition fees for international students have become particularly burdensome with all provinces moving to a system of differential tuition fees. This policy has ballooned in practice with international students paying, on average, three times that of domestic students for the same education. International students are seen as cash injections for a starved system, instead of people with valuable experiences who enrich our campuses and communities. Average undergraduate international tuition fees rose to \$27,159 per year in 2018. (CFS, 2019)

Economic discourse codes above include tuition, fee, paying, cash, and dollar amounts of international tuition fees. Notable absent are the social justice codes present in *Education for All*. This publication frames their argument for universal PSE via financial figures, supported initially by historical information about cuts to PSE that have not yet been rectified. This document is intended for federal policymakers and elected officials, who may respond more strongly to dollar amounts and economic terms than social justice claims because they have individual budgets and political priorities to consider. *Education Justice* is aimed at educating CFS members and supporting student advocacy (CFS, 2018), while *Education for All* was produced as a lobbying document for distribution to federal politicians and policy officials during the annual lobby week (CFS, 2019). Switching the discursive frame depending on who the document is intended to communicate to exhibits the CFS's ability to recognize multiple facets of inclusive PSE as a social issue and tailor their discourse depending on who they want to persuade and engage. These communications are ultimately intended to convince each respective audience to enact systemic changes, either through advocacy or direct policy reform.

To close, *Education for All* repeat the CFS's stance and values, calling for action in support of social justice. These calls to action work alongside the personal pronoun of "we", explored further in the following section, to encourage direct engagement from readers in the CFS's activism and campaigns. This fosters a collective identity key to building and

strengthening a social movement (Flesher Fominaya, 2010), as readers are able to locate themselves within the movement and clearly see what actions are required for social change. The lexical choice to employ text that calls the reader to action (i.e. demand, fight) communicates the collective of CFS as a social moment. *Education Justice* links the fight for education justice directly to larger issues of oppression, as shown in Image 1 below.

Image 1

Concluding page of Education Justice



CFS, 2018, p. 13.

Social justice codes in the conclusion include accessible, poverty, discrimination, equitable, marginalized, and oppression. The implication of these discourses is that achieving universal PSE access would also serve to mitigate broader social injustices. Directly stating that “We also mean that achieving a truly accessible system of post-secondary education requires that we fight for social justice both on campus and in wider society – that is, for policies and practices that end poverty and discrimination” leaves no room for interpretation by the reader. These codes directly name systemic social justice issues, communicating to the reader the direct connection between the CFS’s. The resulting frame is that PSE accessibility as an issue that serves the greater good, furthering the social movement towards universal PSE by seeking buy in from readers with an existing interest in social justice. As an advocacy organization, the CFS aims to compel as many readers as possible to take direct action and join in their advocacy to demonstrate a critical mass of support to policymakers to improve the chance of systemic changes coming to fruition. The CFS holds significant space in the student advocacy realm as they represent upwards of half a million students across Canada, and their discourse in their publications and as performed by their members demonstrates their use of that power to promote their mandate of universal PSE. Seeking to sway audiences to understand inclusive PSE as a critical issue that merits immediate social change requires calculated lexical and discursive choices employed in both *Education Justice* and *Education for All*.

Found in the closing paragraph of *Education Justice*, “fight” is a commonly used term by social movement actors. The now-common phrase of “fight the power” was popularized by the rap song of the same title from Public Enemy (Enemy, 1989). Fighting for one’s rights is another common use of this word in the context of social advancement, particularly referring to usurping power and rights from the more powerful to systemically marginalized people and groups (United Nations, 2021). “Fight” occurs as an individual code four times in *Education Justice*, each time referring to fighting for student rights and education justice against systemic oppression. The use of this word repeatedly connects the CFS’s social movement to broader issues of social inequity as it is a frequently used word by social activists.

These lexical choices also overtly encourage action from the intended audience (CFS members and student activists) by articulating the organizational plan alongside an assertion that

students will continue to oppose neoliberal funding that worsens PSE inclusivity. This phrasing directly calls on student readers to join by assuring readers that the fight is ongoing. Disparately, the final page of *Education for All* demonstrates to policymakers and elected officials the popularity of inclusive PSE policies. The differences in the conclusions of these two documents illustrate the framing of inclusive PSE in two unique orders of discourse (economic and social justice), dedicated to two diverse audiences (policymakers and CFS members respectively). *Education for All* relies on dollar figures and percentages to assert the general popularity of free education and the connection between labor and higher education (see Image 2 for the concluding page of *Education for All*). The differentiation of the orders of discourse performed through both publications further reaffirms the strategic framing of universal PSE for different audiences, as discussed below.

Contrastingly, *Education for All* focuses on costs, debt, and funding. This vocabulary choice is indicative of their use of the economic order of discourse, and further reflects the framing of universal PSE as an issue of economic importance to students and to Canada. The closing of *Education for All* relies on citing percentages of Canadians supporting various aspects of an inclusive PSE system. Notably, the call to action and reference to rectifying societal ills is not present in *Education for All*'s conclusion. This omission reinforces the economic discursive focus, the implication being that the CFS is making the assumption that a statistical conclusion is more impactful to policy makers than highlighting the social justice elements of the issue would be. Instead, consistent with the style and structure of the document, they present statistical facts to demonstrate to policy makers that supporting these policies would not be unpopular with the Canadian public. The statistics they choose demonstrate a majority of Canadians in support of additional PSE funding, across a variety of metrics, as seen in Image 2.

Image 2

Concluding page of Education for All

PUBLIC SUPPORT FOR PUBLIC EDUCATION

Students are not alone in supporting a shift from piecemeal reforms to significant investments in affordable and accessible post-secondary education in Canada. A majority of Canadians agree that:

EDUCATION SHOULD BE FREE

When asked, 71 percent support "having a special new personal income tax on the wealthiest one percent of Canadians that would be used to eliminate university and college tuition fees for students."

85 percent of those polled believe that students take on too much debt today to get post-secondary education.

And 72 percent are comfortable with the statement "like Germany, Chile, Norway and other countries, Canada [should be] eliminating tuition fees for adult education, skilled trades apprenticeships and all programs in colleges and universities."

EDUCATION IS THE PATH TO A GOOD JOB

We know that the vast majority of new jobs require some form of post-secondary education, and Canadians agree. 79 percent agree that post-secondary education is required to have a good standard of living.

OUR SCHOOLS MUST RESPECT WORKERS

72 percent are not comfortable and somewhat not comfortable with universities using lower paid part-time employees to replace full time employees to help manage the cost of post-secondary education.

Nanos Research conducted an RDD dual frame (land- and cell- lines) hybrid telephone and online random survey of 1,000 Canadians, 18 years of age or older, between January 13th and 15th, 2017. The margin of error for a random survey of 1,000 Canadians is ± 3.1 percentage points, 19 times out of 20.

CFS, 2019, p. 16.

Reliance on economic vocabulary may make the proposition of investing in universal PSE more palatable to policymakers and politicians in Canada's neoliberal system. As neoliberal values emphasize individual responsibility and devalue public investment, clearly demonstrating the economic value in PSE investment appeals to the financial priorities of the intended audience. Subverting neoliberal language by co-opting financial and economic vocabularies strengthens the claim that universal PSE is a human right without relying on social justice terms; employing concrete statistics and numbers, generally sourced from the Government of Canada itself, frames the argument to appeal to policymakers. This discourse then functions ideologically to convince those with political power to prioritize the CFS's ideology via policy that supports the reality of a universally inclusive PSE system. Closing the document with statistics from an independent body indicating Canadian support for policies upholding universal PSE is in recognition of the political reality that popularity of policy decisions can be important factors in

consideration of adopting new policies, particularly those that involve increased government expenditure. The use of economic discourses and how they support the CFS's advocacy are explored in the following section.

Economic Discourses

Economic discourses are performed consistently throughout both documents, though *Education for All* relies on economic codes based on the frequency of their use. Approaching inclusive higher education from a primarily financial perspective, *Education for All* was produced with ample data and financial figures alongside the narrative accounts. *Education for All* contained 98 individual dollar signs associated with financial figures throughout the document, while *Education Justice* only contained nine. This reliance on financial figures indicates the framing of the discourse (Benford, 2007). *Education for All* supports the right to higher education by presenting statistical facts (Image 3) and compiling financial figures (Image 4) to demonstrate the gravity of the issue and the feasibility of funding it. As the CFS's ultimate goal is to provide tuition-free education to all Canadians, significant and ongoing investment by the federal government is necessary to reach that goal. Arguing for an inclusive and fully funded system of PSE from a purely socially just standpoint does not address the intricacies of how PSE would be funded or what services Canadians might potentially have to forego in favor of universal PSE. The CFS breaks down in detail the funding possibilities to eliminate this potential criticism (Image 3).

Image 3

Page 14 of Education for All

FUNDING

These proposals will be funded by the following revenue-generating measures :

PROPOSAL	AMOUNT
Eliminating the federal tuition tax credit	\$1.660 billion ¹²
Cancelling the federal tax credit on registered education savings plans, the Canada Education Savings Grant and Canada Learning Bonds	\$1.1 billion ¹³
Eliminating the Student Loan Interest Tax Credit	\$40 million ¹⁴
Ending federal subsidies for the fossil fuel industry	\$1.6 billion ¹⁵
Implementing a 1 percent withholding tax on Canadian assets held in tax havens, and capping interest payments to offshore subsidiaries.	\$2 billion ¹⁶
Limit capital gains deduction	\$10 billion ¹⁷
Eliminating the federal stock option tax deduction	\$740 million ¹⁸
Ending the abuse of the small business corporations federal tax rate	\$500 million ¹⁹
Implementing a \$50,000 lifetime limit for funds held in Tax Free Savings Accounts	\$137 million ²⁰
Reducing annual RRSP contribution limits to \$20,000 per year.	\$2 billion ²¹
Cancelling the corporate meals and entertainment expense deduction.	\$775 million
TOTAL PROPOSED OFFSETS	\$20.542 billion

Note. This image depicts a financial table occupying an entire page (CFS, 2019, p. 15).

The use of financial figures spanning an entire page in *Education for All*, communicated via a table instead of narrative text, demonstrate the CFS's value places in communicating these figures to their intended audience (elected officials and policy makers). Choosing to demonstrate the argument for universal PSE through this structure puts the financial components front and center for the reader, breaking down the economic feasibility of universal PSE. By highlighting, in detail, the financial possibility for this proposal, the CFS makes the information accessible to their intended audience in the hopes it will encourage them to adopt these strategies into their political platforms (CFS, 2019, preface). Debunking the common counterargument that universal PSE is too expensive and not economically feasible (Usher, 2014; 2016; 2017) via this chart may also further their cause by providing several areas from which to source funds. Providing the same information in a narrative form, embedded in a paragraph with other text, may detract from

the message that funds are available for this initiative with a reformation of other political priorities. Making the information clear and crisp allows for quick reference for their intended audience while providing a preemptive response to arguments that universal PSE is too expensive.

Contrastingly, *Education Justice* does not use graphics or charts to communicate economic discourses. This publication employs economic discourses primarily when speaking to student debt loads. Debt is represented throughout *Education Justice* as a burdensome necessity for low-income and marginalized students, constraining their realization of their full economic potential throughout and after PSE. Page 12 of *Education Justice* (CFS, 2018) summarizes this inequitable reality as “the burden of student debt perpetuates a cycle of poverty.” Here, the CFS directly links the debt undertaken by disadvantaged students in pursuit of their realization of the right to higher education is linked directly in this quote to poverty, a wider socioeconomic issue that extends far beyond the scope of PSE access. By linking these two concepts together, the CFS draws a direct relationship between the financial burdens associated with inequitable PSE access to larger societal issues of economic inequality. This broadens the scope of equitable PSE beyond simply affecting students, but frames it as having widespread ramifications relating to a pervasive and commonly known social justice issue.

This discursive choice serves to link two issues of social justice (PSE access and poverty), and in doing so, extends the social importance of PSE by associating it with poverty, an issue of great social stature. This reference to larger social issues grounds universal PSE as a facet of larger, systemic social justice problems. This may draw in readers who have an existing concern about poverty and inequality, who can now see the social and economic consequences of underfunding and privatizing PSE in relation to an issue they are more familiar. This social practice by the CFS makes the consequences of inequitable PSE access more understandable to a broader audience, while simultaneously communicating the gravity of the issue. Linking neoliberal PSE policies directly to poverty shifts equitable PSE from a niche concern that only impacts students to a broader societal concern with the possibility to negatively impact society as a whole. As services supporting those in poverty are expensive to run and maintain, and still are woefully inadequate to rectify systemic poverty (Canada Without Poverty, 2021), the connection can be made between these insufficient poverty mitigation measures and student loans that do not address the root cause of the issues. Generating a relationship between this ongoing

economic drain on societal resources and PSE inaccessibility further entrenches the economic importance of this issue, widening the scope and drawing in more readers who are concerned about systemic inequalities and monetary drains on societal resources.

Opting for economic discourses in concert with, or in lieu of, social justice or rights-based discourses may appeal most strongly to the target audience of *Education for All* (elected officials and government policy makers). Economic discourse performed by the CFS in *Education for All* is demonstrative of their reliance on financial facts and figures in the absence of textual narrative. By performing economic discourses, *Education for All* presents the equitable realization of the right to higher education in a format that may be more palatable and understandable by their target audience (elected officials and policymakers). Using the format of charts and graphics instead of lengthy narrative paragraphs may be more quickly understood by the target audience, as the advocates have a limited amount of time to capture the attention of the government officials. Formatting the information in this way also allows for comparative financial figures to be reported simultaneously, necessary when the CFS is elucidating economic phenomena in concert with one another (see Image 4, public debt and tuition revenues). As this audience exists in a professional sphere concerned with balanced budgets, public opinion, and resource distribution, focusing on the economic feasibility and benefits frames universal PSE in such a way that is easily integrated with the readers' ongoing work. Considering that *Education for All* was produced for an audience of federal elected officials and policymakers (CFS, 2021a), these discourses are intended to contest current social practice (neoliberal PSE funding) and generate a new reality of inclusive PSE via federal policy and investment. The preface of *Education for All* directly states this intent:

We hope that the recommendations in this document inform electoral platforms moving into the 2019 federal election. Following a robust get-out-the-vote campaign prior to the last federal election, youth voter turnout saw an unprecedented increase of 18.3 percentage points, from 38.8 percent in 2011 to 57.1 percent in 2015. (CFS, 2019, preface)

The above statement directly calls on politicians to prioritize PSE funding in their platforms while reminding them of the power of youth voters in recent elections. This paragraph serves to underscore the importance of appealing to youth voters while encouraging politicians to

incorporate the suggestions found in the document to engage this demographic. *Education for All* relies on data gathered primarily from Statistics Canada, as cited in their references throughout the document. This reliance on data generated by the federal government is a shrewd discursive practice to co-opt the language of the target audience and eliminate any potentiality for disagreement by the audience as to the accuracy of the facts. By using the vocabulary of the target audience, including their own data, the CFS addresses neoliberal policies constricting equitable realization of the right to higher education while subverting this narrative in favor of an alternate reality of inclusion and equity. These discursive and lexical choices function to empower the CFS lobbyists, aiming to convince those that hold the power to enact significant political change in favor of the CFS's ideology. The economic framing of these arguments also contribute to a wider discussion on Canadian finances.

Image 4, below, exemplifies the prioritization of *Education for All* to financial discourses in lieu of narrative accounts in support of universal higher education. The three bar graphs depicted in Image 4 provide statistical facts regarding college and university revenues and public student loan debt. Coupling revenue figures alongside debt metrics draws a direct relationship between these two economic entities; this discursive choice illustrates the CFS's inference of a relationship between tuition revenues and student debt. The raising tuition rates are a result of deregulation of the institutions by government (Government of Alberta, 2019; Government of Ontario, 2018) and the increased reliance of institutions on tuition dollars at the expense of rising student debt. This comparison is clearly shown in Charts 1, 2 and 3 within Image 4 below; as college and university revenues go up, so does student debt. This indicates that revenue into tertiary institutions rises simultaneously to debt levels, implying increased revenue for PSE being funded by student debt. Students with debt are therefore financing these institutions at their own expense, incurring interest on debts that follow them into their working lives (Statistics Canada, 2017b).

Image 4

Page 2 of Education for All



Note. Three bar graphs of revenue and student debt overlaid a photo of activists marching towards Parliament (CFS, 2019, p. 2).

These neoliberal measures privatize the institutions and allow them to operate increasingly like private businesses, seeking to maximize revenue through collection of tuition and fees. The result, as illustrated by these figures, is an increase in student debt. As demonstrated in Chapter 1, an increase in tuition disproportionately affects low-income and marginalized students (Ottmann, 2017; Palameta & Voyer, 2010; Schuetze & Archer, 2019).

Low-income students who undertake public debt pay up to 50% more for their degree than peers who can pay the costs upfront (Government of Canada, 2020a). The lack of social justice discourses in *Education for All* may be because socially just arguments do not resonate as strongly with policymakers in the CFS's experience, as confirmed by Hana and Elise in their interviews. The focus in *Education for All*'s text, specifically via the charts and graphics, is to concretely demonstrate to the target audience that universal higher education is financially feasible (Image 3). They also aim to highlight that these policies are supported by a majority of Canadians (Image 2). The economic discourses therefore represent a distinct an alternate frame through which to advocate for universal PSE. Providing the facts and figures to policy makers and elected officials may give them the tools and data to implement funding policies in line with the CFS's social justice mandate, stepping away from neoliberalism. Previous examples of this include but are not limited to:

- Tuition freezes in Ontario (2004), Alberta (2015), Nova Scotia (2011), Manitoba (2000) and Newfoundland and Labrador (1999)
- The establishment of needs-based grants throughout Canada (2008).
- Full-time off campus working rights for international students (2014)
- Increased grants for low-income students (2016)
- Grants for part time students and those with dependent children (2017)
- The CFS's success in influencing student loan policy, including a 6 month grace period for repayment and disability grants (2019)

As neoliberalism is a highly economic-driven ideology, co-opting the vocabulary is a shrewd choice to influence PSE policy, as illustrated by the select organizational victories of the CFS included above. This order of discourse can be powerful to influence policy and practice that supports inclusive PSE for this target audience, as engaging elected officials and policy makers in an economic language that is easily adopted into their platforms and policy. Removing the need to read the information in a narrative format and then translate them into economic metrics that can be incorporated into electoral platforms or policies may be why the CFS chooses to perform economic discourses in this type of lobbying document, to ensure a path of least resistance for their target audience.

Fairclough (1995) cautions against regarding discourses as “linguistic artifacts”, emphasizing that along with consideration of the social context, what is omitted from the texts must also be investigated. The prominent use of charts and figures instead of narrative representations of the information illustrates the CFS’s opinion that the information will be better and more easily received by their target audience in this format. As the ultimate goal is to influence the elected officials to incorporate these recommendations into their platforms and future policy, thereby enacting the social justice shift towards universal PSE (CFS, 2020). Omitting lengthy paragraphs then speaks to the CFS’s opinion that presenting the information through an economic lens would be better received by their intended audience.

Participant Perspectives

When asked about their perspectives on higher education as a human right, the seven participants all responded with some variation of an economic argument, referencing debt, dollar figures, financial programs, and overall economic benefit as the basis for their arguments. These codes were most prevalently found when the participants were asked to explain what universal PSE means to them. Each participant response to this question is included below:

Ashley: Universal post-secondary to me I would say would include the removal of tuition fees again so that financial barriers isn’t a factor even in accessing education

Brooke: I believe that tuition fee is definitely one of the biggest barriers, it is one of the biggest impediments towards the universal post-secondary education, and definitely low funding by government to colleges and universities is blocking the path to universal access to free post-secondary education.

Elise: I think post-secondary education in Canada should be accessible to everybody and I think that, you know, a lot of countries have shown that free post-secondary education is possible and viable and we know that education is a public good and we know that it’s time for Canada to start investing in education as a public good.

Jane: Universal PSE means accessibility for all in regards to education. Affordability, and then also equity within our post-secondary institutions so all students are afforded the same opportunities to succeed. I think a huge barrier is the financial barrier, at least from what I have heard from my experience, and especially as tuition rates are going through the roof, in Newfoundland as well I think tuition rates more than doubled for students and that really is a

huge barrier for folks. And, um, I have talked with students who have saved up for 6+ years to be able to attend post-secondary education as that's what's held them back for so many year. So I think that universal PSE, the first step would be to eliminate that financial barrier.

Sierra: That (pause) everyone has access to post-secondary education. Access in terms of being able to afford post-secondary education for one. Having all the resources that enables you to succeed and making sure that everyone from everywhere, race or religion, is able to access that opportunity equally.

Hana: universal post-secondary. I would just say that it's something that we all have access to. [Just] like you and I have access to healthcare, folks would just have access to post-sec. They wouldn't really have to worry about it they know they can go again to healthcare like to a doctor's and get a prescription, meet with a doctor or something. But I just think that it means that everybody, irrespective of your background, and your financial situation, and how long you have been on these lands, you have the exact same access across the board.

Kiera highlighted BIPOC inclusion in her direct response to this question, explored further in next section of social justice discourses, though she gave a clear and simple answer when asked how accessibility to PSE could be improved: "Make it free." All of these opinions presented by the participants demonstrate their strong, visceral prioritization of the elimination of financial barriers with the immediacy of their responses. The focus on economic barriers by the participants, six of whom referenced being actively involved in the CFS's campaigns and lobbying, is reflective of their alignment with the CFS's discourse. These six participants are continually working to educate fellow CFS members, members of the public, and lobby government officials at multiple levels. The diffusion of the CFS's economic discourses to these audiences of the campaigning, via their members and activists, has the potential to impact social change (CFS, 2021c), thus the internalization of these discourses by the participants speaks to the collective identity fostered by the CFS. Collective identity is a crucial component of social movement building and mobilization (Flesher Fominaya, 2010), and the continuity between the discourses performed by the CFS in the publications and by their members in these interviews demonstrates the strength of that collective identity. When the collective identity of a social movement group is harmonized and unified, the potential for influencing social change is heightened (Benford & Snow, 2000; Polletta & Jasper, 2001).

When asked about barriers outside of the economic or financial concerns, Elise had trouble answering the question initially as she is “so used to advocating and lobbying for inclusive higher education on the basis of economics.” Her challenge framing universal PSE in another way reflects her internalization of the economic arguments put forward by the CFS, and the strength of this collective identity by the organization. Additional facets of economic arguments for universal PSE were also presented, demonstrating the breadth of approaches to understanding the economic benefits and potentialities of universal PSE. Ashley also spoke about the necessity of post-secondary education as a tool to access the labor market, as exemplified below:

Ashley: Anytime there is relief it is subpar to what other folks are receiving and what we have really been calling for all along and what we continue to call for now is just a prioritization of the budget and in recognizing that by investing in PSE you are not only setting up you know the future of folks living in this country for success in terms of being able to engage in the job market, but there is also an economic return ultimately too that is beneficial, to the government to the country as a whole, so really trying to flesh that home and getting those elected officials in power to start making decisions that will prioritize the PSE sector while ensuring the students who are currently accessing it aren’t getting left behind in the process.

One method of performing economic discourses included highlighting the relationship between labor and PSE. The linkage between meaningfully accessing the labor market and PSE is well established in the literature (Hajer & Saltis, 2018), and Ashley honed in on this economic benefit of universal PSE as a function of supporting national economic growth, demonstrating a specific understanding of how universal PSE may relate to broader economic issues of labor access and national economic growth. As mentioned in Chapter One, securing stable and sufficient employment can be critical to realizing a host of associated human rights. Ashley’s connection between labor and universal PSE is therefore indicative of a crucial facet of advancing the CFS’s advocacy towards universally realizing higher education as a human right. Ashley also described student debt as a “drag” on society:

Ashley: When we talk about how PSE is supposed to be there to advance individuals forward as well as advance our society as a whole forward, um the current way in which it’s structured actually by students graduating with tens of thousands of dollars in debt, which many

of these folks leading these courses even still experience, as they're trying to navigate a precarious workforce, this actually has a reversal effect and the ability for folks to be able to later engage with the economy in many aspects and that overall creates a drag within our society.

This characterization of the financial burden students undertake to realize their right to PSE further reifies the discourse performed in both publications. *Education Justice* and *Education for All* both speak about debt as a component of larger financial inequality, identifying it as a hindrance for the overall economy. Examples of this perspective are below:

The burden of debt places limitations on one's credit, ability to receive a mortgage or business loan, buy a home, accumulate capital, start a family, or fund their children's education. Therefore the burden of student debt perpetuates a cycle of poverty. (CFS, 2018, p. 12)

Canadians utilize our post-secondary education system to a high degree but the current system requires that students take on unprecedented and life-altering debt loads to obtain an education that is increasingly a necessity in our modern economy. Bold national leadership is required to transform the current piecemeal funded system into a high quality, well-resourced system that will benefit not only students, but Canada as a whole. (CFS, 2019, p. 1)

These excerpts echo Ashley's assertion that debt creates a "drag" on society, limiting future economic opportunities for the individual student and stunting national economic growth. The potential return on investment and reciprocity of graduates to contribute to the national economy removes the narrative from an individual perspective (education benefitting solely the student) and shifts it to encompass a broader social and economic good. Situating universal PSE as an issue benefitting the collective, beyond just a subset of the population (students) may appeal to the policy makers and institutional decision makers that the CFS targets in their campaigns and advocacy (CFS, 2020). Serving the population at large to remove inequities is at the heart of any social justice movement (Wilson-Strydom, 2015), and Ashley's discourse mirroring the CFS's stance as reflected in their publications illuminates how the CFS positions itself to construct an alternate social reality of inclusive PSE through their economic discourses.

In framing universal PSE as a broad economic issue, advocates associated with the CFS are co-opting economic language employed by neoliberal entities (Government of Alberta, 2019;

Government of Manitoba, 2018; Government of Ontario, 2018) to further their own advocacy in favor of social justice and human rights. Demonstrating that benefits of advancing universal PSE through subversion of neoliberal vocabulary and discourse, speaking about labor and economic benefit, creates improved accessibility for neoliberal policymakers and elected officials to understand the cause in their own terms. When asked about potential drawbacks of increasing the use of human rights discourse and claims in her work, Hana directly affirmed the rationale for the heavy use of economic discourses:

Hana: I have also realized with certain groups of people, politicians or institutions, you do have to unfortunately use more of an economic stance and social benefits and that sort of stuff when the human rights discourse is not resonating with people. I would prefer the human rights discourse and that is something that deeply resonates with me, but I think it is also important to acknowledge that doing a mix of everything [is important] because you have different folks in the crowd, and you never know what peoples different ideologies are.

Hana discusses the importance of the collective in the above quote, stipulating that presenting a united front through specifically framed discourse (economic) is necessary to reify the power of the CFS as a collective and persuade those in power. Appealing to those in power and speaking to them in terms and formats they can easily digest and understand is important, according to Hana, to advance the social movement overall towards universal PSE. While human rights and social justice based discourses may appeal more strongly to CFS members and advocates (current and future), focusing on economic discourses for the purpose of advancing policy change and political shifts is a cornerstone of the CFS's strategy. This is recognized by the Hana in the above quote, highlighting the necessity for CFS advocates to fluently engage in economic discourses and social justice discourses depending on their audience.

Social Justice Discourse

Consistent with Hana's assertion above that "doing a mix of everything" is critical to engage folks with diverse perspectives and priorities, the inclusion of social justice discourses in the both the publications and interviews represents another frame through which the CFS understands and advocates for universal PSE. Codes constituting this order of discourse include rights, access, equity, participation, oppression, and social justice. The inclusion or exclusion of

social justice codes illuminates how the CFS frames their arguments for each intended audience, and social justice codes throughout both documents are used alongside one another in varying combinations; as rights, equity, participation, and access complement one another, this usage of the codes alongside one another is expected. Reliance on language including “social solidarity”, “social justice” and repeated instances of four social justice pillars speaks to the interconnected nature of the issue and the necessity for a collective movement towards solution (CFS, 2018). Below are examples of discursive statements reflective of social justice discourses in both documents.

Our movement for *accessible* [emphasis added] education therefore requires that we fight *social inequality* and *oppression* [emphasis added], both on our campuses and in wider society (CFS, 2018, p. 4)

When we say that we demand *education justice*, we mean that the cost of attaining education should not be a barrier for anyone. We also mean that achieving a truly *accessible* [emphasis added] system of post-secondary education requires that we fight for *social justice* both on campus and in wider society – that is, for policies and practices that *end poverty and discrimination* [emphasis added] (CFS, 2019, p. 13)

To facilitate a system of *accessible* [emphasis added], high-quality post-secondary education, the federal government must move away from piecemeal reforms and a funding model that downloads costs onto individuals. (CFS, 2018, p. 1)

These excerpts contain direct mention of accessibility, inequality and oppression, codes that all link to a socially just reality of PSE funding and management. Framing universal PSE in this light, as a tool to mitigate inequality and oppression, again extends the argument beyond the realm of education and students to illuminate the broader social implications. This is a key component of the collective identity formed by the CFS (Flesher Fominaya, 2010), enabling their activists to perform these discourses when they are mobilizing and campaigning. The use of these varied codes demonstrates the different facets of social justice that the reader should be concerned with. *Education for All*'s use of “accessible” pairs alongside economic discourses speaking to funding and costs, as examined in the previous section. The marriage of social justice and economic discourses provide a compelling blend of approaches that might appeal to a reader concerned with social justice as well as one focused on the economic nuances. Social

justice discourses are found most prevalently in *Education Justice*, aimed at providing information to CFS advocates and members, illustrating their position that these social justice discourses may be most compelling and engaging for this target audience.

The above quotes also link universal PSE as a social justice issue to the larger context, by including the phrase “in wider society” in the first two examples. The mention of ending poverty and discrimination is a high-level inclusion, as rectifying PSE access alone will not address other systemic injustices that perpetuate poverty and discrimination. Social justice ideals surface alongside the use of “we” as the pronoun of choice, enveloping the reader in the social movement. Coupling the use of “we” with an expansive perspective of the social justice issues associated with universal PSE demonstrates to the reader their potential place in the movement and the impact of advocating for these social changes. This coupling of social justice ideals with “we” is a linguistic tool to engage the audience and demonstrate to the reader that they a role alongside the CFS to mobilize for political change (Wang, 2010). This discursive practice is to the benefit of the CFS as they seek to engage members in advocacy and demonstrate the necessity of their organization and of the fight for inclusive PSE to the reader.

Education Justice frames inclusive PSE as an issue of significant social importance, intertwining universal PSE with broader social issues like poverty and discrimination. This is exemplified below:

When we say that we demand education justice, we mean that the cost of attaining education should not be a barrier for anyone, and that going into debt should not be a prerequisite, either. We also mean that achieving a truly accessible system of post-secondary education requires that we fight for social justice both on campus and in wider society — that is, for policies and practices that end poverty and discrimination. (CFS, 2018, p. 13)

As this document is intended for an audience of students and activists, and to a lesser extent the general public (CFS, 2020), the social justice and rights-based language are employed for their accessibility and appeal to those with concern for broad social issues. Linking the CFS’s text and discursive practices to the social practice, as per Fairclough (2001), we can understand how the CFS’s textual and structural choices indicate the intent to shift social status quo. As previously discussed, the neoliberal mechanisms through which PSE accessibility is worsened

are flexible and consistently enacted (CFS, 2018; 2019; Stanford, 2014). Therefore, the use of broad social justice codes in lieu of responding to specific contextual events allows the document to better communicate to members in different geographic locations, and for the information to be relevant over a larger span of time. *Education Justice*, therefore, does not talk about one or more specific instances of neoliberal policies, or frame their

Though the initial coding focused on the four social justice pillars, “oppression” emerged as a strong social justice code throughout the coding and analytical process. Oppression, as illustrated in the excerpt below, was directly referenced more than human rights, demonstrating the perception of the CFS of inclusive PSE as a solution to directly combat systemic oppression. The introduction of *Education Justice* states:

[Accessible education] is a pathway to human development and well-being, social and civic participation, social mobility, community development, social solidarity, economic prosperity, and liberation from oppression (CFS, 2018, p. 4)

The above quote reinforces the interconnectivity of systemic social issues as understood by the CFS, and their positionality that inclusive education is a means to tackle them all. Tracking the realization of the right to higher education from human well-being to liberation from oppression is a significant leap, though this discursive choice capitalizes on ongoing social priorities, including racial equity and poverty (Canada Without Poverty, 2021) to promote equality and rectify oppression. These lexical choices therefore contribute to the social practice of situating universal PSE in the same sphere of importance as economic prosperity, freedom from poverty and elimination of oppression. The use of oppression throughout the document situates oppression as a systemic barrier that can be alleviated by education inclusion (CFS, 2018, p. 4), and reminds readers in the concluding page that current financial systems are not enough to tackle these systemic barriers (CFS, 2018, p. 13). The discourses related to oppression widen the reader’s perspective on inclusive education, as the CFS aims to communicate that the issue is not limited to only students but is of importance to broader Canadian society. This intent to broaden the perceived impact of PSE beyond students echoes that found through the economic discourses; these two orders of discourse thus serve a similar purpose through different frames aimed at engaging a breadth of audiences. This pattern of widening the scope of education by the CFS to include societal benefits is found in both economic and social justice discourses. The

communicative methods employed by the CFS therefore promote the reader's understanding of the interconnectivity of the issue in association with existing systemic barriers, like oppression and poverty. The negative connotation of these words would automatically implore the audience to seek a solution to rectify these issues (Canada Without Poverty, 2021); the inclusion of universal PSE as a mechanism for solving these issues therefore may be understood positively by the audience.

Participant Perspectives.

Consistent with the interconnectivity of social issues demonstrated in the publications, the participants honed in on universal higher education as an issue intricately related to other basic rights and social circumstances. Social justice discourses were performed repeatedly throughout each of their interviews, including the four social justice pillars (equity, access, rights, and participation) alongside mentions of oppression and social marginalization. These lexical choices are consistent with the CFS's electronic publications. Focus on accessibility and inclusivity were prevalent throughout all interviews, including in the below examples:

Jane: Universal PSE means accessibility for all in regards to education. Affordability, and then also equity within our post-secondary institutions so all students are afforded the same opportunities to succeed.

Employing the two orders of discourse simultaneously illuminates the activists' ability to frame universal PSE in multiple ways, consistent with the CFS's publications. Depending on their involvement with the organization and their individual elected positions, these interviewees may be authors of future lobbying documents, reports, or campaign materials, so their fluent maneuvering of both orders of discourse may allow the CFS similar discursive flexibility in the future.

"Access" was a prevalent code performed by all interviewees, speaking to equity of access and participation in PSE for all students with a specific focus on racialized and marginalized people. The word "access" was mentioned 105 times between the seven interview transcripts. An example of access used in context is by Ashley:

Those are basic principles that you can't have universal access to education without meeting [human rights] standards too. Because again nobody's life is segmented to only

needing access to post-secondary education or no one is segmented in only needing access to one thing or another thing.

Elise spoke to accessible PSE similarly:

I think post-secondary education in Canada should be accessible to everybody and I think that, you know, a lot of countries have shown that free post-secondary education is possible and viable and we know that education is a public good and we know that it's time for Canada to start investing in education as a public good.

For Jane, accessibility is central to the concept of universal PSE:

Universal PSE means accessibility for all in regards to education. Affordability, and then also equity within our post-secondary institutions so all students are afforded the same opportunities to succeed.

Both of these examples highlight the positionality of the interviewees and the critical importance they place on accessibility as a pillar of universal PSE. The prevalence of this code indicates the high regard held by participants for accessibility as a core tenet of PSE in concert with other pillars of social justice. Intertwined with many of these social justice code is a focus on racialized exclusion in PSE relates to the wider reality of entrenching inequities. Preventing systemic change from within the system by restricting marginalized people from accessing the institutions early in their life perpetuates these inequities, and a socially just approach is necessary to include marginalized voices at all levels of PSE to foster systemic change. Elise speaks to systemic racialized exclusion of both professors and students, stating:

I think international students are often left behind, racialized students are very much left behind in our academic spaces and their voices need to be centered and prioritized, of course, professors too. I can count on one hand the number of racialized professors that I've had so, you know, of course it's not just a matter of finance. It's a matter of how equitable our institutions are.

Disrupting cyclical and systemic suppression and exclusion of diverse perspectives and knowledges requires shifting power from the hegemonic ideology of neoliberal values, enacted in Canada in this context through neoliberal PSE funding policies, towards prioritization of the universal realization of the right to higher education. Elise's quote illuminates the reality that

exclusion at one level of PSE (i.e. as a student) manifests as exclusion of racialized and marginalized people from participating in PSE institutions at all levels in the future. If low-income and racialized people are excluded from accessing PSE initially, then they are unable to obtain the credentials and experience they need to become educators in PSE. If they are excluded from teaching in PSE, not only are future generations of students robbed of the opportunity to learn from a diverse range of perspectives, but positions of power in the institutions are filled by people with enough privilege to access PSE as a student. The exclusion continues uninterrupted as the voices of racialized, low-income, and otherwise marginalized people are prevented from influencing the upper echelons of PSE institutions. This entrenched cycle of inequity and inaccessibility for people from marginalized groups is exactly what the CFS is striving to disrupt via their advocacy and social movement. The interconnectedness of these cyclical, systemic exclusions with the CFS's overall goal of rectifying exclusionary PSE systems demonstrates how the framing of their discourse can generate an alternate social reality by elucidating these issues. These discourses have the potentiality to catch the attention of a student who either feels systemically excluded themselves, or notes and disapproves of the lack of diversity and inclusion in their institution. Further fleshing out the CFS's collective identity by staunchly opposing these systemic exclusions may allow marginalized students to find an ally in the organization (Benford & Snow, 2000; Flesher Fominaya, 2010), sparking their interest in engaging in advocacy to further the overall social movement.

Kiera highlights this cyclical exclusion through the example of Indigenous language teaching (*italics indicate verbal emphasis*):

Indigenous students have fought so hard to make sure there's Indigenous languages within our [schools] but one thing they wanted is you have to have a PhD in order to be a prof and *teach* and one thing is we rely on very oral knowledge. If Indigenous languages aren't offered within our universities with enough people in [my province], how do you expect to be able to have the PhD in order to teach. So removing certain credentials for certain faculties, [...] removing those colonial credentials so folks are able to teach.

Emerging from the interviews is a persistent theme of decolonization of education and educational institutions as a mechanism to achieve equity and inclusion. The repeated references to honoring Indigenous knowledge systems, and decolonizing PSE institutions and the

knowledge systems themselves which flow through higher education demonstrates the participants' belief of a clear linkage between Canada's legacy of and ongoing colonialism and the neoliberal policies that restrict PSE access modernly. These discourses linked ongoing social justice issues of broader racial exclusion from PSE while focusing acutely on Indigenous representation in the Canadian academy. The participants have unanimously identified this lack of commitment to human rights and its relation to the colonial legacy of Canada, wherein particular groups and people were and are systemically oppressed and disadvantaged. In order to move towards a future wherein realization of the right to higher education is attainable for everyone in Canada, these interconnected oppressions and exclusions need to be addressed by politically prioritizing and sufficiently funding measures to rectify these ills. Participants expressed a strong belief that a total reimagining and deconstruction of the PSE system in Canada would be necessary to foster universal inclusion.

Indigenous-focused Discourses

Both *Education for All* and *Education Justice* feature specific references to Indigenous students, and this order of discourse emerged through the analytical process as a significant discursive tool relating to the sociocultural context of Canada's colonial history and the inequitable social status of Indigenous people today. *Education for All*'s second call to action is "Indigenous access to education", focusing on the existing provisions meant to ensure Indigenous access to education and how they are not yet adequate to realize that goal. *Education Justice* specifically identifies the unique impacts of inequitable PSE access on Indigenous peoples throughout the document, including under the heading "Differential Impact of Tuition Fees" (p. 7) and "Differential Impact of Student Debt" (p. 10). The interconnectivity of oppressions experienced by Indigenous people is cited on page seven of *Education Justice*.

Many Indigenous peoples – especially those living on reserves, continue to suffer inadequate housing, geographical isolation, disproportionate incarceration, high unemployment, domestic abuse, high suicide rates, addiction, and significant health problems. Fleras and Elliot (2007) state: '[n]early four hundred years of colonial contact have plunged many Aboriginal people into disarray and despair' leaving them 'as a group...at the bottom of the socioeconomic heap. Poverty is an enormous challenge: 'With one exception (Inuit women), men and women belonging to Aboriginal groups have lower income and earnings than British-origin people. This holds true even when

controlling for age and education. This suggests that Aboriginal people are poorer than can be explained by their low education levels and relative youth.’

The above quote highlights the significant and crippling social inequities experienced by Indigenous people in Canada, serving within this document as a contextual statement to advocate for specific attention paid to Indigenous education supports. Page eight continues to argue that Indigenous students are “being squeezed out of the system owing to the high cost of tuition fees and government under-funding of their treaty-guaranteed right to post-secondary education.” This assertion incorporates a lack of accessibility, participation, equity, and realization of rights, touching on all four social justice pillars conceptualized in this study while only overtly mentioning one (rights). Broadening the scope of inequities faced by Indigenous peoples in Canada links the need for universal PSE to broader social issues, again situating the CFS’s perspectives amongst a broader social movement towards poverty reduction and inclusion broadly across Canada (Restoule et al., 2013).

Though *Education Justice* continues on to discuss the hardships experienced by racialized students broadly, Indigenous students are afforded their dedicated section in this document. As *Education Justice* is intended to communicate to advocates and CFS members, the focus on Indigenous students is indicative of the organization’s priority to uplift and support Indigenous inclusion in PSE. Discourses found elsewhere on the CFS website support this priority, though deconstruction of all Indigenous-focused publications by the CFS is outside the scope of this study. The implication of this discursive practice is in direct connection to ongoing sociopolitical events and movements in Canada. Increasingly, Indigenous people are engaging in advocacy in support of their own rights and freedoms, along with advocating for social justice causes of many types (Noakes, 2020). The performance of these discourses in *Education Justice* may not only serve to attract and communicate to Indigenous readers by acknowledging the unique positionality of Indigenous student, but to educate non-Indigenous audiences of the specific conditions Indigenous students face when seeking to achieve their right to higher education. As social justice and human rights focus on uplifting all people equitable and with particular attention to individual needs, the focus on Indigenous students here connects more broadly to the social justice mission of the CFS to holistically promote inclusive education in Canada.

Image 5

Image on p. 10 of Education for All



Note. The black and white image depicts Indigenous people drumming and chanting while marching alongside CFS advocates (CFS, 2019, p. 10).

The inclusion of Image 5 in *Education for All* highlights the CFS's focus on Indigenous participation in their advocacy, depicting Indigenous males marching with drums against the backdrop of CFS signs in an act of activism. Recommendation two of *Education for All* specifically asks for investment in Indigenous access to education, and the text is supported by images depicting Indigenous participation in CFS advocacy like Image 5. As the lobbying document contains only three recommendations, the specific focus on Indigenous students as particularly excluded from PSE is a discursive choice that serves to underscore the priority by the CFS to seek equitable participation in PSE for Indigenous people. Recommendation two, consistent with the economic discourse performed throughout *Education for All*, outlines the Indigenous rights to higher education and some of their sources, and the inadequacy of current governmental initiatives for Indigenous education funding. Whereas *Education Justice* outlined the multitude of social hurdles and consequences of the lack of education for Indigenous peoples,

Education for All focused on the PSSSP and government failures to adequately uphold their commitments to Indigenous communities. Considering the audience of policy makers and government official, *Education for All* directly places responsibility on the intended audience by citing “[t]he failure of successive governments to uphold the responsibility for Indigenous peoples’ access to education” and the resulting dearth of credential achievement for Indigenous people in comparison to non-Indigenous people (p. 9). This bold discursive choice capitalizes on the opportunity to communicate with a group of change makers who have (on the whole) been responsible for this chronic underfunding and resulting inequity. Page nine also links these issues to poverty and intergeneration trauma resultant from residential schools, drawing on contemporary social priorities while discursively focusing on post-secondary education as a means to address these ills. These discourses provide yet another frame for the overall social movement towards universal PSE, capitalizing on historical and contemporary interest in Indigenous equity (Deer, 2021; Human Rights Watch, 2021) to garner support for universal PSE as a mechanism to rectify entrenched disadvantages.

The social practice in this recommendation draws on both historical and contemporary examples of ways in which Indigenous students are disadvantaged and excluded, seeking to present a compelling case to those in power to invest heavily in PSE to rectify these ills. Indigenous people in Canada are historically and contemporarily disenfranchised (Daniels, 2019), and the discursive focus on Indigenous rights promotes a power shift from colonial structures and ideologies towards one inclusive of Indigenous ways of knowing and being. The unique focus on Indigenous students grants their cause power within *Education Justice*; the focus on Indigenous inclusion communicates that a genuinely equitable PSE system must take care to include Indigenous perspectives and processes. The final paragraph of this recommendation (p. 9-10) focuses on the preservation and teaching of Indigenous culture, history, and languages in relation to reconciliation. Though the TRC is not cited in this paragraph, use of the term “reconciliation” evokes specific concepts to Canadians who are aware of the troubled and often contentious relationship between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples in Canada.

Directly relating Canada’s priority of reconciliation (Government of Canada, 2018) to the funding of PSE creates a compelling case in favor of the CFS’s social justice mandate. The document’s relation of PSE as a mechanism to preserve and grow Indigenous culture, traditions and languages frames the need for inclusive PSE in yet another light. Indigenous people have a

right to practice their own language and culture, as enshrined in UNDRIP, numbered treaties, and ICESCR, and the connection between PSE and these rights illuminates the interconnectivity of Indigenous rights and the need to support these rights via universal education. The recommendation concludes with a claim that it is the “responsibility of public colleges and universities to teach Indigenous and non-Indigenous learners about the history, culture, and languages of the First Peoples of Turtle Island.” Broadening the scope of this recommendation to include non-Indigenous people, highlighting the importance of education on Indigeneity for all Canadians is a discursive choice that again relates to Canada’s commitment to reconciliation and inclusivity throughout Canadian society (Government of Canada, 2018). Lexically referring to Canada as “Turtle Island”, and reminding readers that Indigenous people can also be referred to as “First Peoples” serves to engage in Indigenous terminology and center Indigenous knowledges to conclude the ask for sufficient PSE funding. Centering Indigenous phrasing reminds non-Indigenous audiences that Indigenous ways of knowing and being are unique but equally as important as Western vocabulary. Referencing Indigenous people directly as “First Peoples” serves to remind the audience that Canada has an obligation, as colonial settlers, to support and uphold the rights of Indigenous people as per their positionality as the first peoples of Canada, and further in accordance with legal treaties aforementioned throughout *Education for All*.

Education for All further reinforces their Indigenous-focused discourse through photos of Indigenous students with the inclusion of Image 5. This photo depicts four Indigenous students drumming and speaking, presumably chanting or singing in keeping with Indigenous traditions. The inclusion of this photo connotes the buy-in of Indigenous students to the CFS’s mission and work, and the traditional drums depicted suggests that traditional Indigenous values can be retained while advocating for inclusion in an inherently colonial system. The graphical representation of Indigenous students with traditional practices, in front of students carrying CFS signs, positions the CFS as an organization that can speak about Indigenous students and issues from an insider perspective. The CFS represents Indigenous students across Canada, and this photo communicates to the audience that they are in touch with the traditional values of Indigenous people and that Indigenous students, as illustrated here through their participation in the depicted protest directly support their mission. Indigenous people have consistently held elected executive positions on the CFS board (CFS, 2020); speaking from an inside perspective about Indigenous issues is of particular importance when discussing the Canadian sociocultural

landscape as Indigenous people are frequently “othered” and the unique positionality of Indigenous peoples and knowledges are not meaningfully prioritized in most Canadian systems and institutions (McKinley, 2019).

Participant Perspectives.

The seven participants mentioned Indigenous peoples as being particularly excluded from post-secondary education, with three participants speaking specifically to the need to de-colonize higher education and reimagine a system in which representation and inclusion for Indigenous peoples is prioritized (Jane, Elise, and Kiera). The language of colonialism was not present in the electronic documents analyzed earlier in the study, though the link between systemic oppression and colonization in Canada is well-known (Daniels, 2019). Ashley, Elise, Jane, and Kiera extend the argument for equity to include equitable knowledge systems, highlighting Canada’s often Eurocentric and colonial curriculum and practices.

Ashley: Our post-secondary education system as a whole is extremely colonial so we are looking at access for Indigenous student it’s not enough to just provide funding.

Elise: In general I would say like a public library, academia should be accessible to everyone and I think that they, academia, can afford to have its doors blown open, so to speak, (laughs). And that education benefits everybody and it should be an option if people want it. If people don’t want to pursue it then that’s fine, but this culture, I think it’s a very Western notion of keeping knowledge and presuming that only some people have access to knowledge

Jane: Certain folks have waited a little bit longer to enter post-secondary institutions have just had a lot of, um, (pause) fears in the sense that, for example for Indigenous students entering a colonial space is already quite difficult and also for a lot of them education in that sense is very colonial and not sure if they should be participating in that or if there are programs that would allow them to participate in that decolonization of education.

Kiera: So I would say having like these systems like inherently these are systems not built for BIPOC people to succeed in, so making sure that all of those are stripped of it and making sure that those folks are able to thrive and succeed within those places as well in a decolonial sense.

Inclusion of knowledge systems including Indigenous ways of knowing and being are prioritized by these participants, stressing that these knowledges need to be valued equally to Western-centric systems and knowledges. Equitable valuation of diverse knowledges was an interesting finding that linked to Indigenous-focused discourses, though Elise noted that alternate knowledges central to other racialized communities should also be included to achieve equity in PSE. Reimagining the way knowledge is conceptualized, learned, valued, and credentialed by PSE would require a complete overhaul of PSE systems beyond simply making the existing system financially accessible. It is notable that all seven participants independently represented these ideals in their answers, a pattern which may be indicative of both the CFS's organizational perspectives and a modern understanding of Indigenous issues that are increasingly prevalent in mainstream media (Deer, 2021; Human Rights Watch, 2021). Incorporating Indigenous-focused discourses in both publications and having it reflected by the participant's responses demonstrates that the movement towards universal PSE has contemporary relevance, addressing issues that are on the forefront of social importance in Canada (Deer, 2021).

Understood in the context of worsening PSE accessibility, the reliance on anticolonial rhetoric and the desire to implement sweeping changes that would see a fundamental shift in PSE management and delivery is an interesting outcome. The CFS in their digital media did not rely on the language of decolonization, though instances of referencing oppression of marginalized people and oppressive systems were prevalent alongside the social justice pillars. The human rights conventions and frameworks in existence are intended to combat exclusion of people experiencing compounded marginalizations (United Nations, 1948), though the participants in this study have indicated that the opposite is true through their focus on Indigenous and BIPOC students.

Focusing further on the Indigenous student financial assistance program, PSSSP, Kiera indicated that Canada's mobilization of existing initiatives to uphold Indigenous rights to post-secondary education was also lacking:

[Canada's commitment to human rights] is not where it should be. Let's talk about the PSSSP for Indigenous students, there was a backlog of 100,000, 200,000, 300,000 Indigenous students on there. You look at the water and we're supposed to have clean water on every reserve by this year. It's 2021 and like I come from a community that has

a boil water advisory and they're still under a boil water advisory and so are the other communities so when it comes to human rights I would say even in regards to education it's not up to par to where it should be.

The discourses of human rights included here, specifically the right to water and focus on Indigenous rights, are common human rights narratives in Canada today (Busby, 2016). Indigenous students are supported in their right to accessible education by domestic legislation and treaties along with international human rights law specific to Indigenous peoples (UNDRIP). Indigenous students are not sufficiently supported in realizing their right to higher education, as mentioned by all participants. The subtext connected with systemic racism and colonial curricula in PSE institutions further worsens PSE accessibility for Indigenous students. One participant, Kiera, self-identified as Indigenous during her interview, specifically identifying colonial structures and a lack of Indigenous representation in faculty members at her institution as significant barriers to equitable access to PSE for Indigenous students.

Mentions of oppression and colonialism were prevalently cited as significant issues that need to be addressed within PSE institutions to achieve equity and universal accessibility. As domestic and international law elucidating the right to higher education robustly support Indigenous students, the focus on their plight by the participants indicates the existence of a prioritization in student advocacy for Indigenous student inclusion. The implication in these discourses is if that Indigenous students are supported by an abundance of formal rights and still are not able to equitable access PSE, non-Indigenous students seeking to realize their right to universal higher education may not gain significant ground by employing these discourses. Though the participants indicated that human rights discourses are equalizing and provide a broadly understandable basis for inclusive PSE advocacy, the focus on Indigenous student rights and their contrasting realities suggests that the CFS prioritizes the most disadvantaged groups and uses human rights discourses to support those cases. Non-Indigenous students access PSE more frequently and with greater ease due to numerous socioeconomic factors (McKinley, 2019), therefore the focus of the CFS's resources and efforts is aimed to first support those who are most significantly excluded. Intertwined with systemic racism and colonial legacies that systemically disadvantage Indigenous peoples financially, socially and culturally (Daniels, 2019), realizing the right to higher education may be of most critical importance to this demographic. As higher education can be one of the greatest social, economic and political

equalizing forces (Manzoni & Streib, 2018), realizing the right to higher education for Indigenous students is of urgent importance.

Visual Analysis

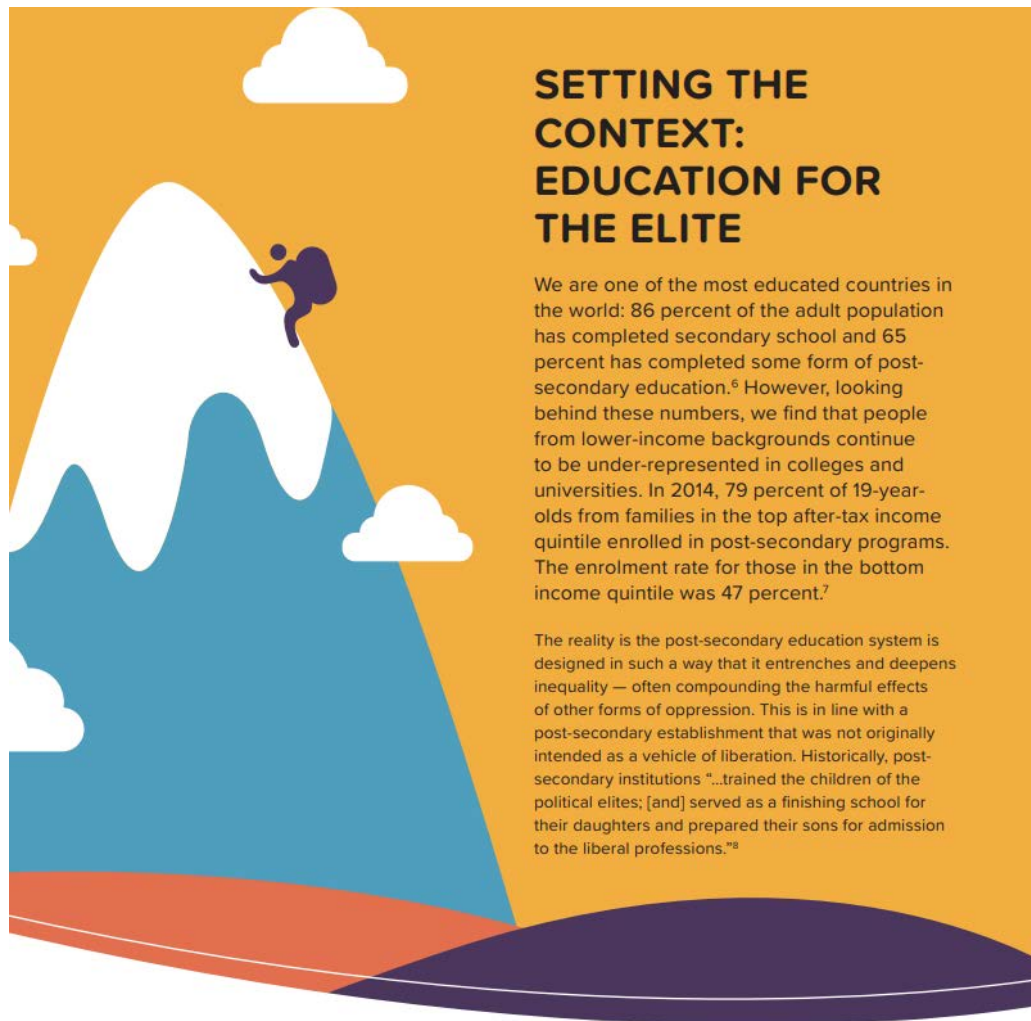
DA calls for a simultaneous analysis of graphic elements of a publication alongside the text itself (Jørgensen & Phillips, 2002). *Education Justice* employs a strong color story throughout the report, using bright tones of blue, purple, yellow and orange together on its cover and in various combinations throughout the text. The document also employs strong imagery at the beginning and end of the document, coupled with the introductory and concluding texts. On the second page of the report, accompanied by the title “Setting the Context: Education for the Elite”, a purple figure can be seen scaling a snow-capped mountain, nearly reaching the top of the summit (p. 5). This purple figure is also depicted wearing a large backpack, signifying the figure’s preparedness for their journey and perhaps the privileges this figure benefits from that has allowed them to achieve their success. Employed as a signifier for the elite and those who have achieved post-secondary, this figure and its relative preparedness and success exemplifies the associated text. The opening line reads “We are one of the most educated countries in the world”. The purple icon therefore can be simultaneously understood to represent Canada’s supposed success in education statistics, though the next line of text illuminates the lack of wide participation for low-income and marginalized students. The prepared climber here, with the privilege of supplies, is therefore not representative of all students seeking to achieve PSE success, but only of those with sufficient privilege to tackle the obstacles and engage in inequitable systems. As social justice, by definition, seeks to reduce inequalities and inequities through the removal of systemic hurdles, this combination of graphic and text communications can be seen to address the potentiality of the removal of these barriers via proper equipment and support.

In contrast, the next page introduces a smaller white figure who only bears a walking stick and is at the bottom of a mountain looking up towards the climb in front of them. The white figure is accompanied by text outlining the history of exclusionary PSE, including specific mentions of exclusion for equity-seeking groups and low-income students. The figures and mountains both are employed as icons, directly representing themselves while signifying a long, potentially strenuous journey culminating in a satisfying victory (Chandler, 2007). The view of the mountain that we have represents the climb as less steep, but the figure here is only

beginning their ascent. The figures on both pages are depicted scaling blue mountains, indicating that their ultimate goal is similar. The use of the white figure icon alongside text discussing the lack of inclusion in Canadian PSE therefore signifies the strenuous journey undertaken by students and advocates to rectify the systemic ills outlined in the text. The white figure does not have the same backpack as the purple, succeeding figure; this lack of support is echoed in the text by referencing systemic barriers of funding exclusion. Student debt as a result of neoliberal cuts to PSE funding is detailed on this page. We can now understand that the backpack of supplies, assumedly contributing to the success of the purple figure, represents adequate funding and a lack of systemic barriers prohibiting PSE access. Page six also employs the phrase “higher education remains out of reach due to steadily rising tuition fees.” Though the white figure appears prepared to attempt the ascent to the summit, indicated in their body language peering towards the peak and their bent legs indicating motion, the text suggests that this goal will remain out of reach as the white figure is not adequately supported in their journey. These discourses at the opening of the report communicate the social context of exclusionary PSE policies in Canada through textual and visual representation, setting the stage for the rest of the report to detail the systemic obstacles that work to prevent the white, unprepared figure from achieving their goals.

Image 6

Snip from p. 5 of Education Justice



Note. The only instance of the purple figure icon depicts them nearly having summited the peak, carrying a large backpack which could indicate the preparedness or privilege that has supported their journey (CFS, 2018, p. 5).

Image 7

Snip from p. 6 of Education Justice



Note. The first instance of the white figure icon depicts them beginning their ascent of a blue mountain with white clouds against yellow background ((CFS, 2018, p. 6).

The figures then disappear from the report until the conclusion, though the use of color throughout the document support the textual communications. Kauppinen-Raisanen and Jauffret (2017, p. 102) assert "color communication is grounded in human communication but goes well beyond colour associations". Caivano (1998) suggests that blue, turquoise, and green signify coldness, whereas red, orange and yellow represent warmth. The first textual page (p. 4) is on a yellow backdrop with blue and purple mountainous shapes, including three scattered white

clouds to depict the landscape. This page introduces the report, the CFS, and directly mentions three of the four social justice pillars (equity, access, and participation). Following Caivano (1998)'s color interpretation, the dominant yellow to open the document can signify positivity and hope. Page five continues this color story, using cool tones of purple and blue to offset the yellow. The yellow background and four white clouds still give the overall appearance of warmth, though the cool colors are prevalent. The blue mountains are also indicative in color of significant human rights organizations, including the UN and associated agencies and Human Rights Watch.

Page seven switches to a purple background, dropping the warm yellow in favor of the cooler purple. Instead of clouds, there are now white stars scattered across the page, signifying a shift to night from day. The mountains are now blue and orange, keeping the overall tone of the page in the cool range. A pull quote on a white background breaks up the purple, drawing the reader's attention to how marginalized students are disproportionately excluded from PSE as tuition fees increase. This page also begins to discuss the specific challenges faced by Indigenous peoples and the intersection of poverty and exclusion from higher education. The systemic inequities discussed in the text represent some of Canada's darkest and most shameful realities, therefore the color choice to maintain a dark background is communicatively aligned with the emotionally heavy text. Page eight continues with the purple background, which is more prominent and consuming as the yellow and blue mountains are smaller, and fewer stars scatter across the page. The use of color continues to bring the reader through an increasingly cooler color palette, as the information presented in the text continues to speak about the intersections of racialized people, students with disabilities, LGBTQ students, and the intersection of numerous marginalizations. The CFS does not pull any punches in their text, outlining the systemic exclusion of different equity seeking groups from PSE and the impact of this exclusion on their overall prosperity and futures. The use of cooler colors also can be understood to signify the grave threat systemic exclusion from PSE poses to marginalized people (Caivano, 1998). Though the purple chosen here is on the darker end of the spectrum, and is the darkest color employed throughout the report, refraining from using a darker shade of purple or a darker color also indicates that the social situations outlined in the text could progressively get worse.

Page ten contains text outlining further nuances in what exclusion from PSE means for women, and discussing why current debt and grant programs are insufficient on the background

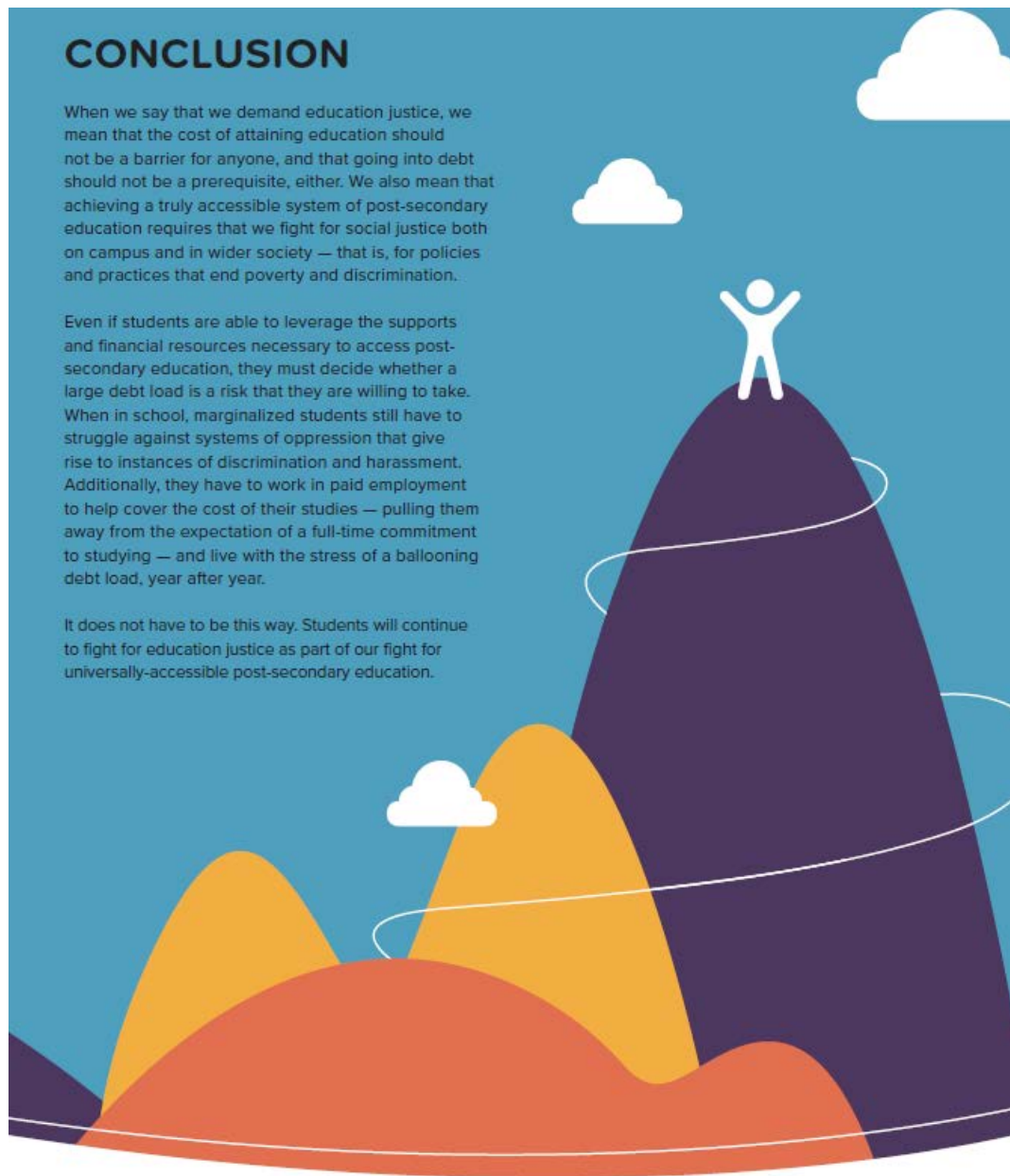
of cool blue. The mountains at the bottom of the page are purple and yellow, sticking to the cooler overall color scheme echoed in previous pages, though providing a lighter color story against which to consume the text. The blue background carries on to the next page, though the mountains are now purple, yellow and orange, mixing in warm colors alongside the cool. There are also three white trees adding contrast and brightness. Page twelve has the same blue background, though the bottom left quarter of the page is taken by a yellow mountain, with orange and purple smaller mountains accompanying it. The overall effect is brighter, with two white clouds scattered in alongside the mix of warm and cool tones. The final page carries through the blue background, though much of the page is dedicated to the mountains, the most prominent being the purple mountain. Atop the mountain is perched the triumphant white figure, tailed by a trail circling the mountain that delineates his roundabout journey to success.

The conclusion of *Education Justice* rests on a declaration that “students will continue to fight for education justice as part of our fight for universally-accessible post-secondary education.” (p. 13). The white figure icon eventually achieves triumph at the summit of the mountain, indicated by the body position of their hands above their head. The interplay of this victorious image alongside the opening text of “we demand education justice” indicates that the fight for education justice, as communicated by the CFS, will culminate positively with a successful conclusion. The image also shows a white line looping around the mountain from the base to the top, tracing the figure’s route and illustrating the length of the journey that has been accomplished. This image signifies hope and the potentiality of triumph in the fight for universal PSE, despite the existing systems and barriers designed to maintain the social status quo. Coupled with the middle paragraph on the page, outlining some of the systemic and interrelated barriers detailed earlier in the report, this communicates the challenges that lie ahead in achieving these goals. Though these barriers are present, and the outlined path is long and winding, the ultimate success will make the journey worthwhile. The mountain and figure icons are echoed from the beginning of the report; viewing the report as a whole organism in comparison to the graphics, the figure travels through the middle of the report to ultimately achieve success. The changing shape of the mountains, including from the beginning to the end of the report, is representative of the different and shifting ways in which neoliberalism is enacted in policy and practice. Though the obstacles that lie ahead for both the icon and more abstractly for the audience and advocates consuming the media are amorphous and fluid, the

hopeful iconography employed here provides hope for the audience to encourage engagement in activism that will support the realization of an equitable PSE system. The concluding line of the page, “Students will continue to fight for education justice”, employs vocabulary that indicates perseverance. This perseverance is graphically echoed in the triumph of the figure over the obstacles to achieve their ultimate goal. Choosing the present simple tense for this line conveys the CFS’s belief in the statement as a matter of fact, including both the current work undertaken by students in pursuit of universal PSE and promising that the work will continue until the ultimate goal of universal accessibility is achieved. The blue that occupies the background of the most pages also echoes other prominent human rights movements and organizations, most notably the UN. Blue has a long history of representing peace and justice (Jonauskaite et al. 2020), and can be considered an indexical sign representing a “fresh and calming impact” (Kauppinen-Raisanen and Jauffret (2017, p. 102). The choice to use blue backgrounds towards the end of the report when hope is demonstrated and action is called for echoes the blue used by other organizations and movements that have achieved remarkable success in furthering human rights and social justice (i.e. United Nations and affiliated organizations, Human Rights Watch).

Image 8

Snip from p. 13 of Education Justice



Note. Education Justice concludes by depicting white stick figure having triumphantly ascended the mountain against blue background accompanied by concluding text of the report (CFS, 2018, p. 13).

In addition to the social justice discourses performed textually by the CFS throughout *Education Justice*, the use of icons, symbolism, and color communicates the social justice journey required to tackle the issue of inclusive PSE in Canada. These elements function together to engage the audience on a literary journey through the report. Beginning with

illustrating the privileged climber, and outlining the perception of Canada's success in PSE versus the reality of inclusive participation, the report swiftly moves into darker territory through both use of color and text. Though the report details systemic oppression and the interconnected importance of universal PSE in detail, the accompanying palette moving from dark to light by the end of the report imparts hope and possibility to leave the reader feeling empowered. The aim of the CFS through these discourses is to educate the audience on the issue while encouraging activism, as ongoing social advocacy from a united front is their best opportunity to affect sociopolitical change. The social practice of these texts and semiotics support these changes, relating directly to ongoing attacks on accessible PSE while leaving the information broad enough to encompass any creative neoliberal methods in the future.

Participant Perspectives.

Participants were shown each of the above three images from *Education Justice* and asked what the images, along with the text contained on the same page, signifies to them. Participants were not asked to interpret the image depicting Indigenous activists from *Education for All* as that image contains a photograph of a real-life scene, where the interviews focused on the symbolic nature of the other images from *Education Justice*. These three images were shown as they all depict a scene including a human figure, whereas the rest of the report contains static images of mountains in varying colors and shapes. In response to the first image they were shown (Image 6), all participants indicated the difficult and perhaps treacherous journey of pursuing PSE, exemplified by Jane below:

For a lot of folks achieving post-secondary education is similar to climbing a mountain so it can be treacherous, it seems daunting, it is quite difficult to get to the top and the top. The top in the sense that finishing post-secondary education and so I think the image is just showing that it is designing a way to make it harder for some folks and for harder for some folks to achieve post-secondary education and so it really I think speaks to the institution itself and how it's set up. Showing that it is not an easy task for a lot of people to even enter the post-secondary education system. But ultimately reach the top to finish post-secondary education.

The steep incline of the mountain supported by the title “Education for the Elite” supporting this interpretation. Hana emphasized the steepness of the mountain in the image, noting that you might fall before reaching the other side:

That image by itself shows that for education it’s a steep climb, it’s a journey and it’s not easy, and there’s a lot to catch up (laughs). And you might fall! Before you get to the top or the other side!

For Sierra, the image reminded her of the American PSE system because of the high costs and tremendous debt that American students face. She stated that she believes “Canada is a little bit different but also that the rising cost of tuition continues to make it very expensive”. Brooke noted that the mountain climber indicated the baggage of loans and debts that people from lower income households accrue in pursuit of their educational goals.

For Sierra, Image 7 depicts what PSE feels like for her right now, specifically noting the tuition increase as a significant stressor. She stated:

It feels like you are trying to just get to the top and it is so hard, there might be rocks falling down on you at some point. So it is scary. It’s a very high mountain and it’s just so stressful. That adds onto the stress that students have [...] the tuition, the pandemic, and mental health issues all at the same time, and last year in [province] we did see an increase, so it just makes it really hard.

Her interpretation speaks to the barrier that high costs put in front of students to complete PSE. Even when students are able to enter into PSE, ongoing financial stresses contribute to significant stress which can limit the student’s ability to succeed (Simonelli-Muñoz et al, 2018).

Hana’s interpretation of Image 7 focused on finding space in PSE for everyone regarding their initial entry into the education system. She noted hesitancy of the figure in the image, stating that knowing where or how to approach PSE can be daunting. She stated:

It’s always applications and money and processes and bussing and dropping your kids off and getting food. It’s exhausting. [It is] something someone might want to approach but kind of really assessing it – can I do this? Will I be good at it? Will I succeed? Like being hesitant to approach it.

Hana's assessment of the overwhelm communicated via the image is consistent with the surrounding text detailing the historical increase of tuition and widening inaccessibility (see Image 6; CFS, 2018, p. 6). Honing in on the distance between the figure and the distant mountain peaks, Brooke likened the long journey ahead of the human figure to the "long history of people from low income houses and their struggles to access post-secondary education." She also noted that Canada has made promises to make PSE accessible to everyone, though there is still a long way to go, just as the figure in the image has a long way to go. The overall effect of this image is generating an understanding of the significant journey ahead of the CFS and advocates as they further the social movement towards universal PSE. Despite the relatively negative and gloomy reactions to this image, the final image in *Education Justice* fuels more positive emotions and reactions from the participants.

Image 8, depicting the human figure that has ascended the mountain on the concluding page of the report, evoked ideas of success, accomplishment, and perseverance for the participants. Despite the overall consensus that the participants believe the image represented someone achieving their goals of PSE and conquering the long journey Hana also mentioned the lack of finality of achieving such a goal.

Hana: I would just say all of, everything that they've overcome. I think also when we overcome these things it is still an amazing feat but I think when you're amongst it you don't realize how amazing it is because you have gone through so much um maybe not ever one feels this way, I feel this way, I know I deserve to be where I am because I have overcome so much. I have gone up and down up and down so many times. I didn't think that I would graduate to be honest. So I think that getting there is like amazing but also I feel like once you're up there it's exciting and it seems brief because once you're up there [tone changes, more jovial] it seems like you have another series of hills to climb so yeah. I think this person is really excited, and I see that white line as kind of that's the journey they kind of had to go through to get all the way to the end and yeah. I'm happy for them (laughs).

Hana's repeated use of "overcome" alludes to the difficulties she experienced pursuing PSE, resulting in a strong sense of pride as she reflects on her accomplishments. Jane similarly

noted that the goal of PSE should be achievable no matter how difficult the surrounding terrain is:

[The image signifies to me] that the person made it up the treacherous mountain of achieving post-secondary education and now they're at the top. But it shows that students should be able to get to the top regardless of whatever's there and the little swirl almost seems like a pathway in a sense that a pathway was created around the mountain that allowed the person to get to the top and I think that is the goal of the CFS to make that pathway around the mountain so that students can access post-secondary education and achieve what they want out of post-secondary education.

Both Hana and Jane's narrative of triumph over adverse circumstances aligns with the overall social movement goal of the CFS to broaden participation in PSE equitably. This goal in itself tackles systemic and widespread adversity, and requires significant dedication. The universality of PSE access, and the notation that PSE should be attainable by anyone, is also consistent with the CFS's perspective that "education is a right" (CFS, 2020). Providing a positive ending to the document, full of possibilities for accomplishment and change, as this image can be interpreted to allude to the achievability of changing PSE policy and providing equitable access for all. The overall joy in the image was noted by Brooke, who focuses on the parallels between the universality of human rights and the universality of PSE access:

I think this picture is a happy one (laughs). Finally the person has reached the pinnacle, the top. So I think I do agree with the text and say that it reflects that education should not be accessible just to a particular section of society. It should be accessible to everyone, just like human rights. It should be accessible to one irrespective of you know their social background, economic background, or cultural background. The fact that they're humans, they should be able to access education.

The image for Brooke is aspirational, symbolizing the possibilities of an equitable PSE system where people have equitable access regardless of background or status. Providing this point of hope at the end of the document may serve to engage readers with the organization and spark participation in future advocacy (Wang, 2010). Generating this engagement and furthering the social movement towards universal PSE ultimately contributes to the aspirational goal of universal realization of the right to higher education. As the universality of the CFS's mandate and movement towards universal PSE are ultimately supported by human rights law (United

Nations, 1948; 1966; 1989), this facet of the CFS's discourse deserves individual attention to understand how these discourses further the overall movement towards universal PSE. The following section explores the use of human rights documents and claims in the electronic publications, alongside participant perspectives on the use of human rights discourses in CFS advocacy.

“Right(s)”

The use of the code “rights” throughout both documents deserves close examination as the object of this study is to interrogate the functionality of discourse in service of furthering the realization of the human right to higher education in Canada. While both documents contain instances of the code “right”, neither document founds their rights-based argument in international human rights documents or law. *Education Justice* employs the term “right” two independent times; once in the introduction to the document, and once speaking to Indigenous students’ treaty-guaranteed right to education. The first instance (CFS, 2018, p. 4) – “We believe that education is a right and should be treated as a public good” – echoes the statement by Former UN Special Rapporteur on Education Kishore Singh (UNESCO, 2018) without directly citing it. This draws on human rights norms and terminology without directly invoking UN source material to intertextually support this claim. The conceptualization of higher education as a public good necessitates action by the state to sufficiently invest in the good, and to ensure equitable access for all to reap the benefits. Neoliberal principals directly contradict this conception, placing the burden of affordability on the individual. This shift in responsibility to access education from the public (government-provided) to private (individual responsibility) is exactly the sociopolitical context that the CFS is working to address through their electronic communication, though they do not draw on existing rights-based documents to support their work. A potential explanation for this exclusion is mentioned indirectly by Hana in her interview; she states that economic discourses are prioritized when lobbying to ensure appeal to audiences where different ideologies and sociopolitical stances exist. The prevalence of economic discourses performed by all participants as the justification for seeking universal PSE in the first place supports this assertion. The CFS’s prioritization of economic discourses would account for the lack of intertextual references to human rights documentation, though where social justice discourses exist there is opportunity for inclusion of these textual references. The

second instance of “rights” in *Education Justice* is in direct reference to treaty rights of Indigenous peoples.

In short, Indigenous students are being squeezed out of the system owing to the high cost of tuition fees and government under-funding of their treaty-guaranteed right to post-secondary education” (CFS, 2018, p. 4)

This assertion is nested under the heading “The Differential Impact of Tuition Fees”, a section dedicated to breaking down different student demographics and the impact of high tuition on each equity-seeking group. Though the section also devotes space to unpacking the plight of racialized and low-income students, and both terms could also apply to Indigenous students (Anderson, 2019), Indigenous students get special consideration in the document. Though Indigenous students are both racialized and often low-income (Anderson, 2019), they also hold the right to higher education through numerous legal mechanisms, including their treaty rights as mentioned in *Education Justice*. This specific reference to Indigenous treaty rights indicates an intersection of social justice discourse alongside Indigenous-focused discourse, though the CFS once again neglects to incorporate overarching human rights references and foundations in their communication. This omission could be intentional to avoid framing the duty to provide universal PSE to Indigenous students through an international lens, instead focusing on domestic law and obligations. Though rights are a component of social justice discourse, this omission of intertextual reference to human rights law, conventions, or documents is notable. The potentiality of including more human rights vocabulary and references in advocacy is addressed by participants in Chapter 5.

Education for All contains the first direct instance of “right” in the executive summary of the document (p. 1). This instance directly refers to post-secondary education as a right of Indigenous people, referencing Canada’s commitment to this right through treaties, UNDRIP, and the TRC. Though the support basis for this right is expanded in *Education for All* compared to *Education Justice*, critical human rights documents including the ICESCR (United Nations, 1966) and UDHR (United Nations, 1948) are still omitted. A possible cause for the additional intertextual human rights references could be the focus of the document itself. While *Education Justice* incorporates Indigenous students and discourse sporadically throughout the text, *Education for All* contains a dedicated section (Recommendation 2, p. 9-10) advocating for

Indigenous access to education. This specific focus on Indigenous students likely necessitated additional research for the lobbying document, and the inclusion of the intertextual support may have been added to strengthen the basis for this ask. Considering the intended audience for *Education for All*, it is to the CFS's benefit to remind policy makers and federal elected officials of Canada's commitment to Indigenous education outside of domestic treaties. Drawing on UNDRIP, an international document, and the TRC, a relatively recent report of significant cultural and political importance in Canada, provides a solid foundation for the CFS to ask for specific investment in Indigenous higher education. The first paragraph of page nine in *Education for All*, introducing Recommendation 2: Indigenous Access to Education, outlines the basis of support in treaties, UNDRIP and the TRC for specific funding to allow Indigenous students to realize their rights. As these documents provide a legal basis of obligation for Canada to provide these rights, they are sufficient to further the CFS's social justice goals and therefore the authors of the lobbying report may not have wanted to include the UDHR and ICESCR as they relate to human rights more broadly, and are less targeted to this issue. Calling on government officials to uphold human rights promises, such as enacting the principles in the UDHR and ICESCR, may not have been perceived by the authors as a strong enough basis for change, as elucidated by the participants in the following section.

Participant Perspectives.

A poignant result from this study by the participants was the overall lack of intertextual references to human rights, with the exception of locating Indigenous student rights couched in national treaty and international human rights. Human rights as an aspirational framework seeks to provide support and inclusion to all humans, which means uplifting the most excluded and oppressed people(s) as a matter of priority (Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, 2021). Participants were asked about their broad perception of Canada and human rights, and the responses were overwhelmingly negative, as displayed in the below examples. The interconnectedness of human rights is also discussed by our participants, illustrating that, as for all human rights, the right to inclusive higher education cannot be fully realized without supporting the whole person or student.

Ashley: I think Canada is actually really falling behind. We are actually the only G7 country without a federal post-secondary education act, and we really see that inhibit our abilities even across our provinces and territories to see stable quality of education across

the country. [...] So I think a really big first step in trying to level that playing field is by committing to a federal post-secondary education act and centralizing the conversation of PSE in this country instead of having it so segmented across the different jurisdictions of the provincial and territorial government.

In the above example, Ashley hones in on equity for funding and PSE management across the country, highlighting the inequities between provinces as a key failure of Canada's human rights engagement. Suggesting a federal PSE act would commit government officials to uphold a unified standard of tuition fees and funding across the country, but as PSE funding is within provincial jurisdiction (Gauthier, 2012; Statistics Canada, 2017b), this would require significant revisions to Canada's law and policy. Elise focuses on the disparity between perception and practice:

Elise: I think we would like to think we have a good track record. I think more and more we're acknowledging, and more Canadians have an understanding of Canada as not this image that we like to present ourselves as. Obviously, the reality is that we're terrible. We have a horrible track record and we have a history that is inseparable from violence and colonialism and we have the contemporary reality that actively engages in violence, not only domestically but internationally.

Elise's answer alludes to Canada's long history of human rights abuses, enacted through colonialism, though she expresses hope that more Canadians are understanding the gap between what Canada has committed to and what happens in practice. These discourses demonstrate her clear distaste for Canada's commitment to human rights, including the right to higher education. Brooke, an international student, speaks to her recent change of mind towards Canada and human rights:

I had a very neutral perception about Canada's human rights discourse until recently, but when I read about the residential schools, Indian residential school crisis I would say my perception changed for a bit and I would definitely now like to explore this area of Canada's human rights discourse.

The recent revelations around residential schools in Canada have shifted Brooke's perspective, though she did not feel well-versed enough in this issue to elaborate on the topic.

Kiera, a self-identified Indigenous student, focuses concretely on the Indigenous rights in her response:

Kiera: [Canada's commitment to human rights] is not where it should be. Let's talk about the PSSSP for Indigenous students, there was a backlog of 100,000, 200,000, 300,000 Indigenous students on there. You look at the water and we're supposed to have clean water on every reserve by this year. It's 2021 and like I come from a community that has a boil water advisory and they're still under a boil water advisory and so are the other communities so when it comes to human rights I would say even in regards to education it's not up to par to where it should be.

As the PSSSP seeks to rectify systemic injustices enacted on Indigenous people via colonialism (Truth and Reconciliation Commission, 2015), these discourses highlight Kiera's steadfast prioritization of Indigenous inclusion in PSE. She supports this prioritization by highlighting the PSSSP and a long standing boil water advisory as two ways in which Canada is failing to uphold its current commitments. This disparity between what Canada has committed to and what occurs in reality echoes Elise's sentiment that the gap between policy and practice needs to be addressed. This gap logically stems from the difference between overt and covert political priorities, as highlighted by Jane:

I think that politically whenever a state engages in human rights, political advantages and disadvantages underlie that, those actions. So it is really difficult for me to comment on whether Canada's stance on human rights is effective because regardless of whether we think we are helping or doing the right thing there really is more to it than that, and there are so many different dynamics.

Jane asserts that political priorities are at play in any human rights initiative: "I think that politically whenever a state engages in human rights, (pause) political advantages, disadvantages underlie [...] those actions." This perception reinforces the necessity for the CFS to lobby directly to elected officials and policymakers. Engaging in social justice and human rights work, including universally funding PSE to ensure equitable access, must be adopted as a political priority by those in power. As discussed in Chapter 3, the CFS uses economic discourses to appeal to policymakers and government officials to encourage them to incorporate universal PSE

as a priority in their political platforms and actions, thus embedding PSE into political priorities is a reasonable mechanism to mobilize universal PSE policies.

This perception of Canada as a nation that is, at best, partially committed to ensuring human rights domestically and abroad influenced the participants willingness to rely on human rights discourse in future advocacy. Canada's empty promises to Indigenous and racialized communities were cited by several participants as a blemish against their faith in Canada's commitment to human rights overall. The discourses surrounding rights broadly were in response to questions aimed at either Canada's human rights involvement or the use of rights discourses by the CFS, as participants favored other social justice terms like access, equity, and participation when discussing universal PSE broadly. Though there is a clear support for human rights amongst the participants, the use of rights in their advocacy is of uncertain merit given Canada's lack of follow through with previous human rights promises. The human rights discourses overlapped with Indigenous-focused discourses for many participants, drawing on the right to water as an example of where Canada has fallen short of its human rights commitments. This issue is of longstanding and critical importance to Indigenous communities, and has garnered international attention for the appalling conditions on reserve for so many Indigenous peoples (Human Rights Watch, 2016). The perception of Canada's involvement in human rights has the potentiality to influence the framing of the CFS's advocacy and publications going forward, discussed in more detail below.

Chapter 5: Discussion

Media can be a powerful tool to encourage informed citizenry and fuel public discourse (Christ & De Abreu, 2020), and the CFS use this medium to promote their social justice aims and engage internal and external audiences in the ultimate goal of an alternate social reality. As the CFS is producing electronic media via these publications, media literacy is a useful framework to understand the discourses. Duncan (1989) provides eight key concepts of media literacy:

- 1) All media are constructions
- 2) The media construct reality
- 3) Audiences negotiate meaning in media
- 4) Media have commercial implications

- 5) Media contain ideological and value messages
- 6) Media have social and political implications
- 7) Form and content are closely related in the media
- 8) Each medium has a unique aesthetic form

Following these guidelines, I conclude that the CFS's documents are constructed with the specific purpose to influence different audiences in support of their social justice aims and of universal PSE. The coding of each document, and the resulting differences between orders of social justice and socioeconomic discourses, illustrate the diverse audiences the CFS intends to reach with each document. Both documents seek to promote the CFS's ideological stance, that inclusive PSE is not only a right owed to Indigenous peoples and Canadians at large, but is also of social and economic benefit to Canada and therefore worthy of long-term investment. *Education for All*, reliant on socioeconomic statistics and lacking in inclusivity of the reader by personal pronouns, constructs the reality that investing in inclusive PSE is financially viable and beneficial to the country at large. They advance this argument through their repeated recommendations, each carrying a budget line and specific asks by the organization to inspire action by the audience (federal policy-makers and elected officials). The audience in this case (policy makers and elected officials) would negotiate that meaning by weighing the individual asks of the CFS against their own political priorities and commitments. These asks in this case include improved investment in the PSSSP, elimination of student loan interest, introducing a Post-Secondary Education Act, and elimination of tuition fees (CFS, 2019, p. 8). As *Education for All* does not include requests for other social services outside the scope of PSE, the audience has the choice to consider information not contained in the document to determine if the socioeconomic figures and arguments are convincing enough to mobilize into political and social change.

Education Justice, in contrast, performs social justice discourse consistent with the four pillars of social justice. The added code of "oppression", also found prevalently in the document, illuminates the CFS's positionality that the neoliberal funding framework of PSE is akin to systematic oppression. Systemic oppression is conceptualized in this study as a combination of prejudice with limited access to social, political, and economic power on the part of a dominant group (Ayvazian, 1995). Race is a core component of systemic oppression (Wellman, 1993),

though systemic oppression occurs due to numerous identities including class, race, sexual identity, gender, among others. This positionality facilitates the constructed reality of student debt and systemic oppression going hand-in-hand, as exemplified by the below quote:

Even if students are able to leverage the supports and financial resources necessary to access post-secondary education, they must decide whether a large debt load is a risk that they are willing to take. When in school, marginalized students still have to struggle against systems of oppression that give rise to instances of discrimination and harassment. (CFS, 2018, p. 13)

In line with Duncan's (1989) principle of audience negotiation, the codes from the analysis illustrate different orders of discourse between the two documents, most prevalently economic or social justice. When considering who the intended audience is for each document, the codes allow us to understand the differences in discourse use and the influence on audiences each intends to have. This constitutes a greater understanding of the social practice of these discourses (Fairclough, 2001), as the media are produced by the CFS and intended to be consumed by unique audiences. These discourses ultimately serve to further the social justice mandate of the CFS by positioning universal PSE as a broad social justice issue while demonstrating the economic feasibility of this alternate social reality.

Education Justice, aimed towards CFS members and advocates (CFS, 2018), social justice discourses including references to equity and access to appeal to their student members and incite action. For instance, statements such as "It does not have to be this way" (CFS, 2018, p. 13) demonstrate to the reader that their actions can make a difference and the alternate reality of universal PSE is achievable. Frequent mentions of the codes "access", "(in)equality" and "(in)equity)" speak to the disparity between classes when accessing PSE, reinforcing the social justice mandate of the CFS. Statements such as "student debt serves to entrench and deepen social inequalities which, in turn, weaken social solidarity as communities become more and more divided by financial barriers" (CFS, 2018, p. 12) reinforce inequitable PSE access and allow the reader to see the direct implication of failing to take action to change this system.

Coding and analysis reveal that *Education Justice* employs "we" as a personal pronoun, further highlighting their intended audience to be students and activists who are encouraged to take action to rectify these injustices. The use of the personal pronoun of "we" relieves any direct

responsibility from any one member or group, and from the CFS itself, instead situating the fight for universal PSE as a collective struggle requiring action from a unified front. *Education for All* exclusively uses “we” to refer to themselves as an organization, therefore situating the organization as the unified body advocating for these changes to decision makers. This lack of usage of “we” in *Education for All* to include the reader suggests that the CFS is not endeavoring to encourage the readers to situate themselves within the fight for inclusive PSE, but rather allows the reader to digest the information from a more removed position. This aligns with the intended audience of *Education for All* (policy makers and elected officials); this audience is reading the CFS’s recommendations and analyses in the document without locating themselves in the movement, though their role in furthering universal PSE comes from implementing the policy recommendations in their own political priorities. Including relatively little reference to social justice discourse, while framing the argument as a socioeconomic problem accompanied by realistic solutions is a cognizant choice to gain buy-in from the intended audience, as confirmed by Hana:

I have also realized with certain groups of people, politicians or institutions, you do have to unfortunately use more of an economic stance and social benefits and that sort of stuff when the human rights discourse is not resonating with people. I would prefer the human rights discourse and that is something that deeply resonates with me but I think that it is also important to acknowledge that kind of doing um a mix of everything, because you have different folks in the crowd, and you never know what peoples different ideologies are.

Relying economic discourses in *Education for All* is thus a targeted choice in order to allow the intended audience to understand the CFS’s positionality and priorities while providing the financial data to support the feasibility of these policy changes, as explored in Chapter 4.

Both texts, considered alongside the discursive practice of the distribution of the document to federal and provincial policymakers and elected officials, demonstrates the alternate social reality sought by this advocacy work (Fairclough, 1992). Intertextually, both documents rely on data from Statistics Canada to provide the figures to support the existence of an exclusive PSE system in Canada. *Education for All* relies on information provided by Finance Canada and the Office of the Superintendent of Financial Institutions Canada: Office of the Chief Actuary,

largely excluding sources from academic publications or grey matter to support their claims and asks. Coopting the terminology and statistics of the government in order to appeal to policy makers makes the claims and recommendations put forth by the CFS more airtight, as the elected officials cannot reasonably dispute the data originating from their own organization (the Canadian government). Contrastingly, *Education Justice* relies on documents from other public interest groups including the BC Poverty Reduction Coalition, the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives, and the Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada. It also supports its claims via media publications including from the Globe and Mail and Press Progress. This serves to locate the CFS within a larger sphere of social justice actors, interweaving universal PSE with other social justice concerns to sharpen the identity of the social movement as one that serves to rectify ills beyond PSE. This differentiation in intertextuality further speaks to the discursive differences of the documents. *Education Justice* may need to cite its sources more often, as they are making claims about different marginalized groups regarding their socioeconomic status and different metrics of oppression. *Education for All* brings in data primarily from the Canadian government, which may be an intentional choice as the intended audience are people directly associated with the Canadian government.

The discourse analysis and social semiotic analysis of the seven interview transcripts and two CFS online publications, *Education for All* and *Education Justice*, reinforce the following pillars of social justice: equity, human rights, participation, and access. Both documents also contain of the economic arguments accompanying activism in support of universal post-secondary education in Canada. Both data sets contain consistent references to systemic oppression, with participants honing in on Canada's colonial history as it directly relates to our exclusionary education systems. Social justice broadly seeks to rectify systems of systemic inequity (Wilson-Strydom, 2015), though the focus on Indigenous students demonstrates participants' perception that Indigenous exclusion from PSE is particularly egregious affront to socially just PSE. In the below two quotes, Kiera speaks to the breadth of Indigenous exclusion from PSE:

So I would say having like these systems like inherently these are systems not built for BIPOC people to succeed in, so making sure that all of those are stripped of it and making sure that those folks are able to thrive and succeed within those places as well in a decolonial sense.

[Canada's commitment to human rights] is not where it should be. Let's talk about the PSSSP for Indigenous students, there was a backlog of 100,000, 200,000, 300,000 Indigenous students on there. You look at the water and we're supposed to have clean water on every reserve by this year. It's 2021 and like I come from a community that has a boil water advisory and they're still under a boil water advisory and so are the other communities so when it comes to human rights I would say even in regards to education it's not up to par to where it should be.

Kiera performs all three orders of discourse in the above quotes, referencing Indigenous rights, financial and numeric metrics, and systemic exclusion. All seven participants performed all three orders of discourse in varying frequencies, indicating their personal understanding of universal PSE through multiple frames. Being able to code switch between these orders of discourse demonstrates the advocates' discursive flexibility, as exemplified in the below quote from Jane:

Universal PSE means accessibility for all in regards to education. Affordability, and then also equity within our post-secondary institutions so all students are afforded the same opportunities to succeed.

The use of the code "affordability" alongside "affordability" and "equity" demonstrates the ability to interweave economic discourses alongside social justice discourses. This has the potentiality to influence multiple type of stakeholders should they employ intentional orders of discourse geared towards their intended audience. The prevalence of economic discourses by participants reinforces that seeking to affect systemic change and shift power from neoliberal policies towards socially just PSE management requires the ability to engage in the vocabulary of the powerful while reframing the issue in cohesion with different ideologies. This adaptation of vocabulary and intertextual references from the government in the CFS's publications demonstrates their considered discursive practices in their media, intended to further their social justice mandate.

Social Justice, Economic, and Indigenous-Focused Discourses

In the literature, social justice is conceptualized as a system through which resources and opportunities are equitably distributed through society, irrespective of one's privilege or socioeconomic status (Wilson-Strydom, 2015). Consistent with this definition, my findings

reveal that the CFS pursues a socially just model for the “distribution” of education by seeking to foster equitable access. The social justice discourses performed by the CFS in their publications and by the participants fall in line with the capabilities approach, focusing on individual agency and well-being while accounting for systemic barriers and realities (Nussbaum, 2000, 2011; Sen, 1985, 1999, 2006). The CFS’s employment of “we” as a personal pronoun, and the reference by participants to advocacy that is continuously responsive to student needs aligns with respecting individual realities while bolstering the overall cause through communal advocacy (Duncan, 1989). Hana describes the process of consulting with students to understand the alignment of student concerns with organizational goals:

Hana: I spent a number of months now really connecting with the student representatives as well as student groups the best I can virtually. It’s obviously a specific situation right now with covid but it is really reaching out to students and talking to them and learning what their concerns are and building campaigns and workshops and events based on their concerns or their needs and bringing that back to our national office so they know what our students are talking about.

The ongoing consultation with student members and elected CFS officials provides invaluable information to direct the advocacy alongside the lobbying. This reflection on the priorities of student members affords the organization significant insight into how the advocacy and lobbying should be focused, framed within the broader scope of universal PSE and social justice. Ashley, drawing on childcare as an example, exemplifies this need for multifaceted approaches to universal PSE:

I think again it’s just coming back to students are a very diverse group of people, and there’s not going to be a quick checkbox that’s going to fix the realities of every student. [...] So we know that many students, in talking about the diverse realities, have loved ones that they have to take care of. Looking at the childcare initiatives that were introduced, I hadn’t recognized it myself because it’s not my own lived reality but someone who [...] is a student parent, they were expressing how these measures that are introduced are only going to be accessible to parents living in urban communities rather than rural communities because the reimbursements for childcare won’t cover independent daycare within households.

Though not every student will have childcare concerns, Ashley notes the imperative to consider individual circumstances when advocating for universal PSE, as achieving accessible higher education must account for a broad spectrum of lived realities. Though outside the scope of this study, the nuances of what universal PSE would need to include for Canadian students is a rich line of inquiry for future research.

The CFS positions universal PSE as a public good owed to every student regardless of their socioeconomic status, consistent with Miller's (1979) conceptualization of social justice *suum cuique* (to each his due). A focus on equitable resource distribution in terms of provincial and federal funds to facilitate PSE access for marginalized students is also prevalent in the economic discourses performed throughout *Education Justice* and the interviews. Focusing resources universally eliminates systemic barriers related to socioeconomic status of students, furthering socially just iteration of PSE management. Literature identifying the neoliberal origins and motivations that underpin our currently inequitable system are directly challenged by the CFS's economic discourses, specifically used to sway the political priorities of those in positions of decision-making power (Harden, 2017; Hoyer, 2018; Lawryniuk, 2019; Nanowski, 2019). The intertextual support employed by the CFS in their publications subverts this hegemonic power system by co-opting their statistics and data to frame universal PSE as an economically beneficial, yet still socially just, alternative.

The strategic employment of economic discourses prioritized in advocacy specifically aimed at policy makers highlights one of the key findings of this study. While the literature supports the right to universal PSE through human rights law (Kotzmann, 2015; 2018), and advocates with the CFS unanimously support the enactment of that right, the lack of specific human rights claims may be attributed to the tangible promotion of economic benefits and feasibility to achieve buy-in from those with decision-making power. The limited use of intertextual references to human rights documents in both *Education for All* and *Education Justice*, and framing universal PSE as a right, could be credited to the prioritization of broader social justice discourses (designed to draw a wide base of support and demonstrate the interconnectedness of the issue) and of economic discourses. Economic discourses are thus prioritized to appeal to individuals holding different levels of power, potentially with a range of ideological commitments, to garner support for universal PSE from policy makers. As the CFS seeks to effect legislative and policy change, the prioritization of economic discourses by the

participants aligns with the organizational mission and stated goals (CFS, 2020). The CFS does employ the phrase “education is a right” in several campaigns and on their social media platforms without grounding it intertextually (CFS, 2019; 2020), considering the findings of this study, I would consider this usage an example of broadening their social justice discourses to capture those who are compelled by their obligation to uphold human rights. For those who are compelled by alternate means, whether it be on the basis of economic prosperity, Indigenous and other racialized student inclusion, socioeconomic discrimination, or another metric along which students endure differential access to PSE, the CFS has included those discourses in different forms and combinations through their publications, and as reported by their executives and members. The conclusion can be drawn, then, that the CFS uses human rights discourse as one of many tools in its arsenal to advocate for universal PSE. Though any discourse performed to further their social movement toward universal PSE simultaneously supports the realization of this right, they strategically rely on alternate discourses to appeal to as broad of an audience as possible. Therefore, while there may be a dearth of direct human rights claims in their current work, their advocacy and activism ultimately is in service of achieving the aspirational realization of universal PSE that Canada has already committed to via international law.

Consistent with the literature on Indigenous rights (Elson, 2018; Pihama, 2017; Pihama & Lee-Morgan, 2019), the CFS draws on treaty rights (The Constitution Act, 1867, s. 35) and UNDRIP (United Nations, 2007) when asserting the right to higher education for Indigenous peoples. The focus on Indigenous discourses in both publications and in the participant responses, supported intertextually by references to international human rights law and conventions, aligns with current literature stipulating that Indigenous peoples hold the right to universally accessible higher education (Elson, 2018; Pihama, 2017; Pihama & Lee-Morgan, 2019). Though the publications were written prior to the recent focus on Indigenous issues in Canadian media brought about through the unearthing of mass graves at residential schools (Deer, 2021), contextualizing the interviews requires notation that they took place throughout the renewed focus on Indigenous-focused residential schools. Though this sociopolitical context may have bolstered the prevalence of Indigenous-focused discourses, the prominence of Indigenous inclusion in both electronic publications, published before the boost in residential school-related media, also supports the finding that the CFS is strongly committed to advocating for Indigenous rights to higher education. Employing intertextual references to human rights conventions,

declarations, and national treaties grounds the reader in a solid understanding of where the rights for Indigenous learners originate (The Constitution Act, 1867, s. 35; United Nations 1948; 1966; 1989; 2007), though there remains a dearth of intertextual support for the right to higher education for other demographics (Kotzmann, 2015; 2018).

Human Rights Discourses – Benefits, Drawbacks, and Collective Identity

Included in this study as a component of social justice discourses, human rights claims and terminology is notably absent from the CFS publications (see Chapter 4). Despite the existence of the right to higher education in international human rights law (United Nations, 1948, 1966, 1989), the CFS does not regularly employ intertextual references to these documents to support their universal PSE advocacy. To gain perspective into why this gap may exist, each participant was asked if they see any benefit to including human rights claims and discourse in their work, along with any potential drawbacks they foresee (see Appendix A). In response, Jane asserted that all of the campaigns run by the CFS directly relate to human rights, whether they are using human rights-based terminology or not:

Jane: I think our campaigns (pause) all our different campaigns address different human rights. We talk about them as student rights but student rights are really just human rights, but we don't really explicitly use that human rights language. Um, within our advocacy or activism, I think just because we want to streamline it to the student experience to not use generalized human rights language but all of our campaigns are essentially human rights campaigns, but tailored towards students. [...] But I think that all of the students that are involved know that student rights are human rights so I am not sure how much more beneficial that would be to the advocates or the advocating for certain causes.

In the above excerpt, Jane elucidates her perspective that student rights and human rights are inextricable, though the specific framing of the advocacy focuses on students as a specific demographic. For her, omitting human rights language allows for the specific focus on student needs and concerns to be prioritized. For Elise, the existence of human rights language as a product of nation states (mechanized through the United Nations) provides a conundrum:

Elise: I personally find the reliance on human rights language to be really compelling but again as a [...] student I get that there's a, you know, double edged sword and again I am

compelled by the thought of Hannah Arendt on the matter of human rights. And you know what she identifies as a paradox and this reliance on language and this reliance on an idea that needs the state's support, really. So um (pause) I guess I would say like I think it's also an interesting question on vocabulary and semantics, right. I think absolutely our work relies on, our work arguing for free education, relies on notions of universal human rights but some find that compelling and some people don't.

Elise characterized human rights language here as a double-edged sword, as it paradoxically depends on state support while seeking to challenge the practices of the state. She also refers to the need to target the discourse to unique audiences (as examined in Chapter 4), despite the foundation of universal PSE being rooted in human rights. Ashley identified human rights language as a "strong argument", positing that she would like to have more information about the foundation of PSE and human rights when advocating to government officials. Similarly, Hana noted that incorporating human rights language may make governments understand that "this is an obligation they have to their citizens." Sierra noted that human rights language may include more lived experiences through first-hand stories, which may resonate with individual people to improve the efficacy advocacy. Drawing on Hannah Arendt, Elise reaffirmed that she personally is compelled by human rights and would be interested to see more vocabulary in that sphere in student advocacy, while understanding the state (Canada) would need to also see the value in human rights in order to ensure efficacy. She also noted that incorporating other discourses, stemming from grassroots Indigenous advocacy or the "discourse of education that we might find in hip hop, for example", may assist in broadening the discourse to garner as broad buy-in as possible.

Consistently, participants identified the ongoing discrepancies between what Canada has committed to and what happens in practice as a hesitation to rely on human rights discourse in their work. When discussing potential drawbacks, Kiera noted that human rights language might also be seen as "too progressive and too aggressive" by government officials, which would be a detriment to the overall campaigning goals. Jane noted the CFS's concrete commitment to representing the student experience, so generalizing the discourse may detract from the student focus that the CFS is mandated to represent. Canada's lack of fulfillment of previous human rights promises support this perception, specifically the enactment of clean drinking water across Canada (Indigenous Services Canada, 2021). Highlighting this egregious human rights violation

(Busby, 2016), Hana, Kiera and Ashley expressed skepticism at the effectiveness of employing human rights discourses when lobbying policy makers when existing human rights commitments have yet to be fulfilled.

Hana: I think internationally Canada for some people is renowned as a human rights country, and I'm not discrediting some of the work that we have done around the world, but I think that folks are learning that there's so much happening in our own backyard and that is happening on these lands here, and it's important for the government to recognize that and do the important work that they're doing overseas just the same that they're doing in our own country.

Kiera: You look at the water and we're supposed to have clean water on every reserve by this year. It's 2021 and like I come from a community that has a boil water advisory and they're still under a boil water advisory and so are the other communities so when it comes to human rights I would say even in regards to education it's not up to par to where it should be.

Ashley: Unfortunately there are conversations such as even access to water that promises are made and not followed through on so hopefully we would at least be able to get more promises, things that we could be able to hold our elected officials accountable to in efforts to make positive change and work towards a system in the specific example of universal education um but I think it would definitely help the arguments and help advance the conversations.

Providing examples of ways in which Canada is not living up to current human rights commitments, both domestically and internationally, provides a rationale for not incorporating more direct human rights claims or social justice discourses in lobbying material for government officials. If gaining acknowledgement and commitment by the government to rectify human rights issues has not yet rectified these issues, this framing of universal PSE may not garner tangible policy change either. Hana reaffirmed the CFS's positionality as an organization that believes in human rights, but is disheartened that the human rights vocabulary and references that they do employ are still not resonant enough with policy makers to garner concrete commitments. She noted that while she prefers human rights discourse, and that it resonates with her (similarly to Elise), the CFS out of necessity focuses on an economic framing of universal

PSE to put forward to most “balanced” argument possible. The interconnectedness of human rights, including the right to basic needs like water and pharmacare, also demonstrate the wide scope the advocates take in their work, and the understanding that simply providing equitable access to PSE does not by itself solve interconnected social ills.

These responses from the participants, coupled with the analysis of their discourses, demonstrate their understanding of rights as a compelling argument that also may not be universally beneficial in advocacy. This suggests that the dearth of reliance on human rights documents in electronic publications may stem from a doubt of the effectiveness of rights-based vocabulary, given Canada’s inconsistent actions to enact current commitments, rather than a lack of awareness of the existence of these rights. The benefit of human rights vocabulary is understood by participants to be held in its universality and broad recognition across multiple contexts. Despite the participants acknowledging the benefits of human rights claims in their work, their skepticism that arguments that center on human rights based on Canada’s inconsistent enactment of existing promises would translate into significant and timely policy changes.

Elise highlighted another potential benefit of including more human rights discourse in advocacy work:

Speaking as a white settler, I find human rights is the most compelling and it’s also highly recognizable. Whether one finds it compelling or not, or whether one has reason to believe that it’s true or not, the language of human rights is highly recognizable. In some ways it is *the* frame of reference that we have.

If human rights forms the basis for *the* frame of reference, posited by Elise, the existence of the right to higher education in human rights law (United Nations 1948; 1966; 1989) may aid future advocacy efforts by providing an alternate discursive frame and a legal basis for claiming this right. Though the discourses performed in *Education Justice* and *Education for All* may not frequently draw on intertextual human rights references, the participant responses indicate the existence of human rights as a foundation of the CFS’s collective identity. As forming and fostering collective identity is essential for any social movement (Fisher Fominaya, 2010; Polletta & Jasper, 2001), ingraining human rights principles of universality and equity for all strengthen the collective advocacy of the CFS. Choosing to differentiate the discourses in

accordance with perceived acceptability of the target audience (see Chapter 4) may mean that human rights claims and discourses are not the preferred order of discourse, though the presence of human rights tenets is clearly enmeshed throughout the CFS's collective identity.

Recommendations

The study contributes to the understudied fields of higher education as a human right and student advocacy, while providing insights into discursive themes and mechanisms to influence different audiences in favor of socially just political change. It is my hope that the results of this study have the potentiality to inform future advocacy work for those striving for inclusivity across a multitude of disciplines. Understanding how discourse can be employed to support social advocacy may provide alternate activism tools for those tackling some of the most urgent and egregious issues of our time, and emboldening the work of advocates ultimately provides support for those they advocate for. As indicated in their electronic publications and interview discourses, the CFS continues to unify students across Canada to fight for universal student justice across, and contributes to dismantling harmful neoliberal systems that prioritize service to the most privileged in society. The discourses explored in this study illuminate how this advocacy is undertaken, and provides a snapshot into the discursive tools employed by Canadian student advocates at a time when PSE access continues to worsen through neoliberal political actions. Through social justice discourses, support with economic arguments and with focus on Indigenous students and knowledges, must be supported with widespread change enacted through policy, the CFS's discourses in this study illuminate the potentiality for these changes. The discursive and social practices analyzed here provide insight into how advocates seek to shift the locus of power away from neoliberal ideologies, best serving society's most privileged, towards a socially just and inclusive reality of universal PSE and the accessibility of higher education to everyone on the basis of merit. The strong collective identity demonstrated by the participant responses, stemming from human rights principles of equity and universality, reinforce existing knowledge that collective identity and cohesion in social movement building and mobilization is critical.

Future research on other social movements and advocacy initiatives in Canada would provide a more holistic picture of tactics and discourse used in activism. This information would be broadly beneficial to social movement actors advocating for a variety of causes across the country, as the methods through which activists communicate and lobby for their cause may be

transferable regardless of the content being communicated. Further studies into universal post-secondary education and the potential economic costs, benefits and potentialities for inclusion of equity-seeking populations would also broaden the knowledge base of this critical issue. As indicated by the participants, a focus on structurally decolonizing the curriculum and institutions, and improving access to PSE broadly is a desired outcome of PSE reform. Further studies to flesh out this concept would also provide a more complete understanding of the nuances of a Canadian PSE system that is inclusive at every level, from initial access to graduation to teaching in the academy. Realizing the right to higher education in other nations and jurisdictions, all of whom manage PSE access uniquely, would also be a rich area for exploration. Building on the results of this study to determine how education advocates in other nations are framing their cause and lobbying for social change could also provide immense benefit to the CFS activists by providing additional advocacy tools. Though Canada has a different demographic and geographic context than many other nations who have achieved tuition-free PSE in some form, comparative studies focused on the potentiality of enacting universal PSE would provide valuable insight to elected officials to inform future policy. Broadening the scope of study would also follow the fundamental principle of human rights that the realization of rights should not differ between any human, irrespective of their location, socioeconomic class, or other protected ground. As higher education becomes increasingly important and foundational for personal development and to access the labor market, this area of scholarship provides a wealth of opportunity for action-oriented research that improve our academic understandings of advocacy, higher education, and rights while simultaneously strengthening the foundation of knowledge upon which to construct a more inclusive social reality for all.

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Appendix A

Semi-Structured Interview Questions

Tell me about how you got started with the CFS?

Tell me about your work now.

What does “universal PSE” mean to you?

How could access to PSE in Canada be improved?

What do you think are some key barriers that prevent everyone from participating fully in higher education?

What would be some benefits of the CFS using more human rights claims in your communications? Drawbacks?

If you had unlimited resources, what would an equitable PSE system look like?

What comes to mind when you think of education as a right?

How do you feel about Canada’s and CFS involvement in human rights?

Can you provide any concrete example of success of CFS in helping PSE accessibility?

Is there anything else you would like to add?

Participants are also shown three images from *Education Justice*, the three images including a human figure, and asked for their interpretation.

Appendix B



71 Curry Place
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Consent Form

Research Project Title: Human Rights Discourses in the Canadian Federation of Students:

Supporting Universal Access to Post-Secondary Education

Principal Investigator: Danielle Milln, Master of Human Rights Student, Faculty of Law.

millnd@myumanitoba.ca

Research Supervisor: Dr. Bruno de Oliveira Jayme, Faculty of Education. Bruno.jayme@umanitoba.ca

This consent form, a copy of which will be left with you for your records and reference, is only part of the process of informed consent. It should give you the basic idea of what the research is about and what your participation will involve. If you would like more detail about something mentioned here, or information not included here, you should feel free to ask. Please take the time to read this carefully and to understand any accompanying information.

The purpose of this research project is to investigate the use of human rights language by student activists in the pursuit of universal higher education. An indirect benefit of participating in the research is that you may learn specific human rights documents, mechanisms, and protocols which may be applicable to your advocacy or student engagement work. The interview will be audio recorded and notes will be taken by the Principal Investigator, and these records will be stored for 5 years following the defense of the thesis (until May 2026). The data will be confidential, and will be stored on a password protected computer only to be accessed by the PI or the research supervisor. The data will only be stored electronically, and all email correspondence will be through official University of Manitoba accounts and therefore are secured by the University of Manitoba's email security. Immediately following the interview, you will have the option to ask any questions or clarify any of the information previously given. You will have the option to review the summary of the research findings by approximately January 2021, and will have the option to receive any information by either email or mail (contact information to be provided at the end of form). The research results will be disseminated through the publication of article(s) in academic publications, such as the Canadian Journal of Higher Education, and through the publication to the University of

Manitoba thesis collection through the University of Manitoba library. Personal identifiers will not be included in the dissemination of results.

Your signature on this form indicates that you have understood to your satisfaction the information regarding participation in the research project and agree to participate as a subject. In no way does this waive your legal rights nor release the researchers, sponsors, or involved institutions from their legal and professional responsibilities. You are free to withdraw from the study at any time, and /or refrain from answering any questions you prefer to omit, without prejudice or consequence. Your continued participation should be as informed as your initial consent, so you should feel free to ask for clarification or new information throughout your participation. The University of Manitoba may look at your research records to see that the research is being done in a safe and proper way. This research has been approved by the University of Manitoba Joint Faculty Research Ethics Board. If you have any concerns or complaints about this project you may contact any of the above-named persons or the Human Ethics Coordinator at 204-474-7122 or humanethics@umanitoba.ca. A copy of this consent form has been given to you to keep for your records and reference.

The following is an affirmation from you, the participant, to the Investigator, Danielle Milln:

- 1) I acknowledge that I am participating voluntarily and self-identify as being a student activist and/or involved in an advocacy organization.
- 2) I am able to read and understand this form independently or, if I am not, I have the option to have it read and explained to me by the researcher and that I have provided my consent both verbally as well as signing this form.
- 3) I understand that I will not be compensated for my participation in this project.
- 4) I acknowledge that I can withdraw at any time during the interview without negative consequence. I understand that I may decline to answer any of the interview questions and or terminate the interview at any point. I understand that my request for withdrawal means that all data provided by me and my information will be removed and destroyed by the researcher.
- 5) I consent to be audio recorded as part of the interview process. I reserve the right to request the recording device turned off for any or all of the interview without impacting my right as a participant.
- 6) I understand that the interview will take approximately 45 minutes. As part of the interview, all documentation (i.e. audio files, audio transcripts, and field notes) will inform the final study

report. I acknowledge that my personal information will be kept confidential and handled in accordance by provincial and federal privacy legislation. [This should also include specific details as was stated in the Data Management section].

- 7) I consent to be directly quoted and that all quotes will be anonymous and/or referred to by a non-identifying term (pseudonym).
- 8) I understand that my participation presents no risk greater to me than that of everyday life. I understand that through my participation benefits such as increased knowledge about the right to higher education and the ability to learn about alternate advocacy practices may be gained.
- 9) I understand that I will have the opportunity to review the final publication at [x date]. If I am uncomfortable with how my views or comments are represented, I retain the right to request withdrawal of my comments or request that the researcher make edits. I understand that this will be my final opportunity to withdraw and have my data upon withdrawal be expunged. After May 2026 I understand that all data I have provided contributing to the final report, thesis and subsequent publications will be destroyed.
- 10) To receive a final copy of the report, I consent to being informed and/or receiving it via email.
- 11) I understand that sections of the final report will be submitted to peer-review in academic journals, and as part of a thesis that will be deposited and available via University of Manitoba MSpace.
- 12) I acknowledge that I have read this form in its entirety, and that my questions have been answered satisfactorily prior to my consent being given. I acknowledge that I have received a copy of this consent form.
- 13) I recognize that this study has been approved by the University of Manitoba Joint Faculty Research Ethics Board, approval number J2020:059 (HS24257) and that I can contact them confidentially if I have any concerns or questions regarding my participation in this study at 204-474-7122 or humanethics@umanitoba.ca.

Typed name

Participant Signature

Date

Researcher Signature

If you wish to receive a final copy of the report, please include your contact details (email address preferred): _____

For any questions, comments, or concerns, please contact millnd@myumanitoba.ca or bruno.jayme@umanitoba.ca

Appendix C



**University
of Manitoba**

Research Ethics and Compliance

Human Ethics - Fort Garry
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PROTOCOL APPROVAL

To: **Danielle Milln** (Advisor: Bruno de Oliveira Jayme)
Principal Investigator

From: **Andrea Sz wajcer, Chair**
Joint-Faculty Research Ethics Board (JFREB)

Re: **Protocol # J2020:059 (HS24257)**
**Reducing Debt Sentences: Investigating the Use of Human Rights
Discourse in Student Advocacy in Support of Universal Higher
Education**

Effective: November 3, 2020

Expiry: November 3, 2021

Joint-Faculty Research Ethics Board (JFREB) has reviewed and approved the above research. JFREB is constituted and operates in accordance with the current *Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans*.

This approval is subject to the following conditions:

- i. Approval is granted for the research and purposes described in the application only.
- ii. Any modification to the research or research materials must be submitted to JFREB for approval before implementation.
- iii. Any deviations to the research or adverse events must be submitted to JFREB as soon as possible.
- iv. This approval is valid for one year only and a Renewal Request must be submitted and approved by the above expiry date.
- v. A Study Closure form must be submitted to JFREB when the research is complete or terminated.
- vi. The University of Manitoba may request to review research documentation from this project to demonstrate compliance with this approved protocol and the University of Manitoba Ethics of Research Involving Humans.

Funded Protocols: Please e-mail a copy of this Approval, identifying the related UM Project Number, to the Research Grants Officer at ResearchGrants@umanitoba.ca