

ONTARIO UNIVERSITY EDI STRATEGIC PLAN ANALYSIS:  
POWER EMBEDDED IN POLICY DISCOURSE

CHLOE JONES-WESTGARTH

Supervisor: Dr. Qiang Zha

Supervisor's signature \_\_\_\_\_

A Research Project submitted to the Graduate Program in Education  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
for the degree of

Master of Education

Graduate Program in Education  
York University  
Toronto, Ontario

August 2024

Acknowledgment:

*I would like to begin by thanking my Supervisor, Dr. Qiang Zha, whose mentorship, guidance and encouragement were invaluable during my time at York University and throughout my research process. Thank you to Dr. Sarah Barrett for taking the time to support my research project as a second reader and providing invaluable feedback. Appreciation to York University for providing me with the facilities and resources essential to my research.*

*I want to express my sincere gratitude to my beloved family and friends who have supported me throughout my academic journey and Master's Degree. Your patience, words of encouragement, and love have meant the world to me. A special thank you to my partner, Dr. Guillaume Dugied.*

**Abstract:**

This Major Research Project (MRP) in the York University Graduate Program in Education (MEd) explores the policy and action planning discourse in terms of Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) at the top five most populated undergraduate universities in Ontario. The potential impact of this research is significant, as EDI policies are crucial for fostering inclusive academic environments, yet their implementation and impact vary widely across institutions. This research aims to explore how universities articulate their commitment to EDI through policy documents and the extent to which these policies address the needs of Black student populations.

This project identifies the educational attainment gap and underrepresentation among Black Canadians in higher education (HE), as well as how EDI practices and policies (PSE) are addressing racial inequity in Ontario during the last decade. Common trends include a focus on fostering a sense of belonging and addressing systemic barriers, while notable gaps exist in the areas of policy evaluation and accountability. The MRP applies discourse analysis as the primary methodological approach to understanding the power embedded in Ontario university's EDI action planning documents.

Critical discourse analysis is a powerful tool for examining how language, terminology, and racial identity reflect and refract power structures and values within an institution. This research adopts several theoretical frameworks as the guiding methodology to contextualize university commitment to impactful and accountable EDI. The MRPs' contribution to the field of policy discourse and EDI in higher education provide a nuanced understanding of how policy discourse shapes institutional commitments to equity, diversity, and inclusion, specifically for Black students and Ontarians, identifying gaps and inconsistencies in current EDI action planning documents.

**Keywords: Equity, Diversity, Inclusion (EDI), EDI policies and Action Plans, Discourse Analysis, Ontario universities, Black Students, EDI in Higher Education**

**Acronym and Discourse Disclosure:**

ABCDE Model: Strategic planning guide by Universities Canada Organization to promote EDI planning strategy in university spaces - Assessment, Baseline, Components, Details, Evaluating.

African-Canadian/ Afro-Canadian: People of African or Caribbean ancestry and/or origin who habitat in Canada or are Canadian by birth origin or citizenship.

BIPOC: Black, Indigenous, and People of Colour.

Black: In this report, I will use the term Black to describe a racial identity that encompasses various ethnicities and cultural backgrounds within the broader category of people of African descent and ancestry. This term is complex and multifaceted, as within the category of "Black people", discourse and categorization are diverse and based on cultural, national, and linguistic background and geography. I choose to use this language with intention as a unifying term to address issues related to systemic racism and inequality within education.

DEDI: Decolonizing (or decolonization), equity, diversity and inclusion.

EDI: Equity, Diversity and Inclusion.

HE: Higher Education (university/college level post-secondary education)

PSE: Practices and Policies

Racialized Minority/ Community/ People(s): This term is closely tied to racism. It defines someone who is a member of or is perceived to be a member of a group that has been subject to a racialization process in a dominant society.

## **Table of Contents**

<b>Acknowledgment:</b> .....	<b>2</b>
<b>Abstract:</b> .....	<b>3</b>
<b>Acronym and Discourse Disclosure:</b> .....	<b>4</b>
<b>Table of Contents</b> .....	<b>5</b>
<b>Introduction and Research Question</b> .....	<b>6</b>
<b>Positionality:</b> .....	<b>8</b>
<b>Chapter 1: Historical, Policy, and Social Context to Ontario's Current EDI Landscape</b> .....	<b>8</b>
Origin of EDI Within Higher Education.....	13
Addressing the Black Canadian Educational Attainment Gap.....	14
Current EDI Landscape.....	17
<b>Chapter 2: Theories and Frameworks</b> .....	<b>20</b>
Critical Race Theory (CRT).....	20
Intersectionality.....	25
Black Feminism.....	29
Freedom Dreaming.....	30
<b>Chapter 3: Literature Review</b> .....	<b>33</b>
<b>Chapter 4: Discourse Analysis</b> .....	<b>39</b>
Discourse Analysis Methodology.....	41
Identification of University EDI Policy and Procedure Document.....	44
CRT Discourse Analysis:.....	45
Freedom Dreaming Discourse Analysis.....	52
Conclusion.....	54

## Introduction and Research Question

The ability to address social, political, and economic inequity requires a comprehensive understanding of the complex processes which shape our hierarchical patriarchal society. Social transformation necessitates that we must look to our histories to contextualize our present and move forward to a future that is grounded in equity, diversity, and inclusion. Education is a fundamental institution where inequities shape the experiences, realities, and outcomes of future generations. However, historical legacies of enslavement, segregation, and oppression have laid the foundation of the current colonial education system in Ontario.

Post-secondary university institutions have a long history of being spaces of exclusion for racialized minorities; this exclusion is justified and reinforced through processes of racism and bias. Historically, the belief that Black, Indigenous and People of Colour (BIPOC) did not belong within higher education was so profound that institutional policies supported the exclusion of people from these spaces on the basis of race, heritage, gender, and identity. The transformation of public opinion and social movements is fundamental in fighting for inclusion. However, these histories still hold relevance today and shape current educational institutions' capacity for accepting alternative epistemologies, fostering accessible environments, and supporting racialized and "other" students.

The problem my research will highlight is racism and, in particular, anti-black racism within the higher education system and the processes which push racialized minority students to the margins. In response to institutional racism deeply ingrained within the university system, institutions have implemented equity, diversity and inclusion policies and programming. In spite of these policies and initiatives, we continue to witness the persistent trend of disparities in the quality of education, admission and graduation rates, and Black student experiences, which has

been shaped by the processes of institutionalized racism. With increasing qualitative research and advocacy calling for more support for racialized students in Ontario, it is evident that there is an urgent issue that remains unresolved within the current landscape of Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) policy.

As such, my research questions aim to engage with Ontario University's current EDI policies to highlight the power embedded within these policy documents and assess how discourse shapes student experiences and outcomes. I will examine racist historical underpinnings, the importance of EDI policy and initiatives to BIPOC accessibility, the role of discourse in articulating and validating identity, as well as EDI policy limitations and future implications.

I use the following questions to guide my research:

How do universities publically articulate their commitment to EDI, considering the language, scope, and depth of the statements? How can theoretical frameworks (DisCrit, Black Feminism, Freedom Dreaming) allow for the conceptualization of the political, social, and economic processes and contexts interplaying in the racialized landscape of university spaces in Ontario?

### Positionality:

As a Black woman in academia, I am very aware of the lack of diversity among my peers and university faculty; this motivates me to understand the impacts of accessible and achievable higher education on diverse communities, specifically Black Canadian communities. My mother, a first-generation Black university graduate, fostered my privileged position to have access to and understanding of how to navigate academic spaces. From this place of privilege, I have dedicated my work to bearing witness to the suffering and the excellence of Black students, faculty, change makers and authors in the academy. My positionality has granted me a deepened understanding of the institutional racism, aggression, inequity and exclusion faced by BIPOC students. As well as recognizing the potential of EDI in education and the impact access can have on racialized communities, I also recognize we have the power to motivate, connect, and dismantle generational legacies of oppression. I note my positionality as it is intertwined with my research and as I bring my experiences, biases, and dreams to the analysis of Ontario University's current EDI policy landscape, discourse analysis and future of EDI.

### **Chapter 1: Historical, Policy, and Social Context to Ontario's Current EDI Landscape**

The current social configuration of our educational, political, social, and economic landscapes in every community, city, and province contains historical fragmentations that intertwine with the landscape's current configuration. Cultural landscape research, as pioneered by geographer Carl Sauer, works to understand the essential character of a place at any given time, conveying a sense of place through a focused analysis of social and economic conflict (Hayden, 2017, p.111). These conflicts express the most basic historical narratives highlighting how humans have chosen to interact with one another and the natural world. Within a Canadian

historical context, it is known that European colonizers choose to interact with Black, Indigenous and other peoples as non-human or their property and with incivility. The land known as Canada today was previously deemed New France and British North America in the early 1600s when the buying, selling and enslavement of Black peoples drove the colonial economic enterprise. Institutional enslavement and Indigenous genocide are the legacy of Canada's conception and the first recorded examples of social and economic conflict to transform the cultural landscape.

Anti-slavery legislation was introduced in spotted locations across Canada in 1833 and declared nationally by the Slavery Abolition Act of 1834, abolishing slavery and making the practice of human enslavement illegal in every province and territory (Henry-Dixon, 2016). This victory for freedom was fought through resilience and activism. Former enslaved Black activists and authors launched public campaigns against slavery across Canada and England. Black activists, such as Ignatius Sancho and Olaudah Equiano, were integral to the abolitionist fight. As activism grew more intensive, the opinions of the public began to change as dehumanization and violence were perceived as immoral and no longer justifiable. However, while people of African descent fought for freedom, they did not win equality. After slavery was abolished, significant racial segregation, discrimination, oppression and prejudice in Canadian society continued as a legacy of institutional enslavement. Organizations and assemblies began to address the ongoing condition of being Black in Canadian society and considered the necessity of the rights and freedoms of future generations of Black Canadians.

The 1850s saw anti-slavery societies, Black community organizations, and movements such as the North American Convention for Colored Freemen and the first edition of "*The Provincial Freeman*" (Henry-Dixon, 2016). "*The Provincial Freeman*", was the first newspaper publication by Black reporters in Canada for the Black community to have their stories, ongoing

and opinions shared. As Black people began to enter society as individuals instead of property, policy and legislation were formed to segregate and limit Black access to spaces, public goods, and opportunities. Racial discrimination was incentivized and normalized within political and policy landscapes in all institutional spaces, including law and education. Acts of resistance, resilience, and activism were the cornerstones of the legal prohibition of racial discrimination; the Ontario Racial Discrimination Act of 1944 and the Saskatchewan Bill of Rights Act of 1947 are examples of significant legal shifts in Black equality (Henry-Dixon, 2016). Civil right movements in Canada began to receive greater traction and recognition throughout the 1950s, with leaders such as Bromley Armstrong coordinating union protests and sit-ins inside businesses that refused to serve Black customers. Armstrong was a founding member of several organizations which shaped the landscape of Black equality in Canada, and served in several governing organizations such as the Ontario Human Rights Commission, the Toronto Committee on Race Relations and the Board of Governors of the Canadian Centre for Police-Race Relations (Henry-Dixon, 2016). Due to the efforts of Armstrong, his colleagues and countless other Black Canadians, the 1950s and 1960s saw great strides in anti-racial practices, policies, and legislation at the federal and provincial level, notably the end of legal segregation in Ontario (1946), the Ontario Fair Accommodation Practices Act (1954), and the Canadian Bill of Rights (1960). As provinces and territories slowly implemented similar Acts, activism was constant, shaping public opinion, pressuring government bodies to reform and being the fire starters that have shaped the cultural landscape of the Nation.

These notable waves of social change concerning the justice for and equality of Black Canadians resulted in cultural shifts in ideology and public opinion. I contend that we are witnessing another wave of social change today, distinguished by a recent swell in equity

initiatives focused on race. This shift is notably influenced by events, such as the tragic death of George Floyd in 2020 and the activism of the Black Lives Matter movements in North America. Anti-Blackness remains a taboo topic, silenced and largely unrecognized by the dominant society, with many citizens distancing themselves from the realities of racial disparities in Canada by focusing on the racial relations in the United States. The imagined cultural landscape of Canada as tolerant and welcoming of diversity produces barriers in addressing the realities of anti-blackness within the Nation. The structural violence and institutionalized racism that have impacted the Black Canadian community for generations have produced the untold realities of what it means to be Black in Canada. Author Robyn Maynard's "Policing Black Lives: State Violence in Canada From Slavery To The Present Day" brings to light the untold Black experience and the processes that shape it. Despite the Black population consisting of 3% of Canada's National demographic, Black people are 1/3 of those killed by police and have three times higher rates of Federal incarceration (Maynard, 2017, p. 10). Moreover, Black youth and children are the largest demographic in foster care and are far more likely to be expelled or pushed out of provincial high school systems (Maynard, 2017, p. 10). These quantitative facts tell a disturbing and unrealized story of the realities of what it means to be Black in Canada. Maynard also highlights, "... the United Nations Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (CESCR) confirmed that anti-Black racism in Canada is systemic" (Maynard, 2017, p. 12). The CESCR made this conclusion based on the tremendous racial inequity in fundamental sectors such as education, healthcare, housing, income and employment, and child welfare rates. Government policy action and inaction have shaped the realities of anti-Blackness and inequity. This new wave of social movements and action carries a fundamental goal to have institutional racism, state violence, and inequity identified, acknowledged and changed. The systemic nature

of anti-Black racism in Canada must be approached and understood through a multidisciplinary and intersectional lens. The potential solutions to these problems and inequities will require us to be challenged and to be willing to unlearn and be open to the possibilities of a future Canada in which equity, diversity and inclusion transform our policies and attitudes.

A significant structural condition affecting Black communities at present is the failing of higher education system, specifically within the post-secondary university landscape. Education, although considered today a public good, was initially intended to be inaccessible to the masses and reserved for white, wealthy men. Ontario universities officially and unofficially reject Black candidates' applications based on race. For example, the University of Queens allowed the racist restriction of applicants to remain in practice until 1965 and only officially removed the institutional policy in 2018 (Henry-Dixon, 2021). After official racial restrictions were overturned, unofficial mechanisms for anti-Black and racist practices thrived within the academy. Henry and Tator (2009), authors of "Racism in the Canadian University: Demanding Social Justice, Inclusion, and Equity" argue that the epistemological and ontological constructs of racism within the academy are perpetuated through processes of racialization: "...instances where social relations between people have been structured by the signification of human biological characteristics in such a way as to define and construct differentiated social collectivities" (Henry & Tator, 2009, p.100). Racism within universities and the academy at large operates within other forms of oppression to produce racial inequalities, shaping the university landscape and the ways racialized students and faculty navigate this space. I hypothesize that the historical transformation of EDI policy and initiatives has been made possible by the success and advocacy of other equity, diversity and inclusion-based initiatives and activities, including the civil rights

movement, employment discrimination policies, the fight for gender equality and LGBTQ+ movements.

### Origin of EDI Within Higher Education

The origins of EDI policy and initiatives are rooted in the 2005 Athena Scientific Women's Academic Network (SWAN) charter from Advance Higher Education Academy (HE) in the UK. Advance HE is a not-for-profit UK collective founded in 2003; the organization was accountable for establishing the UK Professional Standards Framework for higher education institutions and teachers within the United Kingdom. The Athena SWAN charter was developed to address gender inequity in higher education and research, utilizing an intersectional lens to establish the ten principles of the SWAN program (Lillywhite, 2021, p.2). Notable elements of the charter principles are firstly, to identify and self-reflect on institutional and cultural obstacles impacting BIPOC faculty and students; second, to advance research distinction, innovation and imagination within the post-secondary sphere across all disciplines; and finally, to affect how academia confronts the social and accessibility concerns disabled people face (Lillywhite, 2021, p.2). The Athena SWAN charter inspired the introduction of the Race Equity Charter in the landscape of higher education in the United Kingdom. The success and well reception of the first example of EDI in higher education inspired the charter to be adopted by other Nations, including Australia (Science in Australia Gender Equity, SAGE-Athena SWAN); the United States of America (See change with STEMM Equity Achievement, SEA-Change and NSF ADVANCE); and, Canada (DIMENSIONS: Equity, diversity and inclusion) (Lillywhite, 2021, p.3)

In Canada, a parallel organization to Advance HE is Universities Canada, a membership organization offering direction and a unified voice for higher education, innovation and research. Despite Canadian Universities and higher education institutions having various policies

concerning components of EDI, such as equitable employment policies, sexual harassment and conduct, and policies to protect and support students and faculty with disabilities, the October 2017 Universities Canada publication of “Principles on Equity, Diversity and Inclusion” enriched and guided EDI standards and advancement. The Canadian Tri-agency funding agencies, the Canadian Institutes of Health Research, the Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council, and the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council, co-developed the Dimension Charter (May 2019) to reconfirm EDI as essential for “...institutional and individual safety, trust, belonging, privacy and power differentials must be recognized and proactively addressed” (Lillywhite, 2021, p.4). EDI policy and initiatives, as known today, are relatively new and rapidly advancing topics within Canadian educational institutions.

#### Addressing the Black Canadian Educational Attainment Gap

The progress of racial equity within society at large has expanded the opportunities and proportion of racial minorities attending higher education in Canada; as of 2016, Statistics Canada revealed that racial minority census groups displayed a more significant proportion of university attendance compared to the general Canadian population. Despite the inclusion of racial diversity in Canadian higher education, Black respondents highlight an underrepresentation of Black Canadians in post-secondary education. Statistics Canada revealed the following quantitative information. The quantitative information utilized in James et al., (2017) “Towards race equity in education: The schooling of Black students in the Greater Toronto Area”, received the following.

- In 2016, 2.7% of university certificate, diploma, or degree holders at bachelor level or above identified as Black, compared to the Black population comprising 3.5% of Canada's total census population (Statistics Canada, 2016c, 2017b) (James et al., 2017 ,p. 32).
- Among Black women aged 25-59, there is a noticeable gap in educational attainment. 28% had attained a bachelor's level or above, compared to 33% of women in the rest of the Canadian population. This specific area of concern is highlighted by Statistics Canada's data from 2020. In 2016, 94% of Black youth aged 15-25 desired to obtain a university degree, whereas only 60% believed they would achieve it, contrasting with over 80% aspirations and perceptions among the rest of Canadian youth (Statistics Canada, 2020) (Robison, 2021, p.5).
- Between 2006 and 2011, in the Toronto area, 25% of Black students applied and were accepted to an Ontario university, compared to 47% of white students. In contrast, 60% of other racialized students applied and were accepted (James, et al., 2017, p.32).
- In the same Toronto study, 43% of Black students did not apply to any post-secondary education, compared to 17% of other racialized students and 26% of white students who did not apply (James, et al., 2017, p.32).

These statistics are not sensationalistic; they highlight a concerning trend of an education attainment gap for Black Canadians, a trend deeply entrenched with issues of classism, racism, and sexism. Statistics Canada thought race-based data collection had identified differences in education outcomes of the Black population and racial minorities, emphasizing the importance of understanding the unique experiences and barriers faced by Black Canadians. The umbrella

discourse surrounding racial equality and minority equity negates the unique experiences of the Black community, as highlighted in the data. Black youth and students will not bridge the education gap through a catch-all minority-driven EDI initiative. “Framing Diversity and EDI Practices: A Comparison of Strategic Planning and Recruitment Materials in Two Canadian Universities,” by Michelle H. Robinson, *Western University* (2021), identifies the educational attainment gaps and underrepresentation among Indigenous and Black Canadians in higher education (HE), as well as how EDI practices and policies (PSE) are addressing racial inequity in Ontario.

Universities Canada advocates for EDI PSEs to be implemented in several areas of university operations to improve racial representation and achievement of racial minority groups. These recommendations include increasing recruitment and supporting underrepresented students through business and community group partnerships, targeted financial aid, improving transfer pathways, specialized university preparation programs, increasing campus safety space, and student coordinator services unique to underrepresented groups (Universities Canada, 2019). However, as the racial educational attainment gap widens, Black students are continuing to be pushed to the margin. Author Michelle Robinson identifies a pattern of Black erasure in EDI official documents, meaning not only that Black students' needs are not being addressed within institutional plans, but also that staff and students are unable to see themselves in the institution, compounding feelings of unwelcome (Robinson, 2021, p.8). As such, the current landscape of EDI is failing Black students and Canadians. Successfully addressing racial inequity in EDI PSEs in higher education relies on understanding and validating the unique needs, experiences and identities of Black Canadians.

## Current EDI Landscape

The current state of EDI in university spaces, as it explicitly addresses racial equity, is a result of Black activism like the civil rights movement; the historical policy analysis previously represented highlights the long road Canadian society has walked to arrive at what is known today as the current EDI landscape. Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) in university spaces has gained increased attention nationally as institutions acknowledge the importance of diversity in relation to education and research. Research by Universities Canada has found that 70% of Canadian higher education institutions have or are developing specific EDI plans, and more than three-fourths of Canadian higher education institutions have EDI goals embedded in their institution's strategic planning documents (Dave & Jason, 2021, p.99). EDI goals, initiatives, policies and statements can be found across university policy, departments and institutions, including position titles, marketing materials, conferences, and university mission statements. When analyzed closer, EDI sentiments and values are scattered across policy documents such as those regarding workplace conduct, sexual assault and harassment, human rights, employment, disability accommodations, access initiatives and admissions as well as various code of conduct policies. Universities commonly release yearly EDI reports, progress reports, action plans, and EDI frameworks to highlight the various institutional implementations of EDI across campuses, clubs, initiatives, course programming, hiring practices, committees, and student access initiatives, among other avenues of EDI strategy implementation. Since the approach to EDI varies among university institutions and each university has the freedom to shape its own EDI initiatives for its students and faculty, it is challenging to measure or compare the expectations and experiences of universities regarding EDI; due to each university's independent operations.

Policy processes undergo a systematic breakdown into five fundamental steps, as outlined by Dr. Micheal. J. Prince in “Public policy: Five core elements” (2013). First, the issue is identified, followed by the establishment of an agenda. Subsequently, a policy is crafted to address the identified problem, involving a thorough analysis of the issue and potential solutions. The fourth step encompasses implementation of the policy, and finally, the process concludes with an evaluation (Dr. Prince, 2013). In Ontario, universities are independent, self-governing institutions protected by unique private statutes. However, provincial and federal governments play a significant role in funding, oversight, and policy-making. Officially operating independently of government control means that universities consider institutional principles, stakeholder influence and public perception when making institutional decisions. An institution’s position on a particular issue and action or inaction to address said issue illustrates the value-led nature of the policy process. The influences of policy leaders' belief systems and social influences on policy are formed by the dominant discourse, social epistemology, and the socio-political nature of present society, as highlighted in the historical policy analysis.

“Doing Equity and Diversity For Success in Higher Education” Chapter Eight, “Decolonizing Academic Spaces: Moving Beyond Diversity to Promote Racial Equity in Postsecondary Education” by Frank Tuitt and Saran Stewart (2021) highlights a conceptual framing guideline for impactful decolonizing restructuring in higher education:

1. Decolonizing the mind through ways of knowing and knowledge construction;
2. Decolonizing pedagogies;
3. Decolonizing structures, policies and practices; and,
4. Reimagining the academy from a decolonized lens.

Discourse, specifically discourse embedded within policy, mirrors the knowledge and social construction of our world. Linguists define discourse as language use or the use of language, while social theory emphasizes the connection between language and power relations. Professor and author Susan Goodwin at the University of Sydney states, "Policy as discourse approaches start from the assumptions that all actions, objects, and practices are socially meaningful and that the interpretation of these meanings is shaped by the social and political struggles in specific socio-historical contexts" (Markauskaite et al., 2010, p.186). The discourse used to address inequity, forge inclusivity and promote diversity in university spaces utilizes racial discourse, which is deeply entrenched in power relations. In the later chapter, theoretical frameworks will be presented to qualify EDI policy's construction of truths, followed by a chapter dedicated to the conceptualization of policy discourse and analysis of the language use and connection between eurocentric epistemology, race, discourse, identity and EDI. The research further employs discourse analysis as a methodological lens, utilizing internal and cross-institutional analysis to investigate the nuanced use of language in EDI policies, diversity statements, and strategic plans. This work looks to examine critical terms and concepts related to EDI, exploring the implications of these terms within the documented discourse and policy. Furthermore, the study aims to unravel the dynamics of power relations embedded in the language, assess the extent of inclusive language use, and look into the sensitivity with which racial categorizations are acknowledged within these documents. By doing so, the research endeavours to illuminate how linguistic constructs may impact the lived experiences and perceptions of diverse groups within university communities, and leverage this language to decolonize structures and foster an EDI landscape where all community members are validated, represented and celebrated.

## **Chapter 2: Theories and Frameworks**

### **Critical Race Theory (CRT)**

EDI policies in university settings are essential for cultivating inclusive, safe and accessible academic environments, specifically for students and faculty of Colour. The development and analysis of these policies frequently draw on various theoretical frameworks to support policy development, consultation, implementation and analysis. This theoretical review will explore the key theoretical frameworks used in the analysis and development of EDI policies in higher education and serve as a support for the contextualization of the comprehension of the processes which shape the educational EDI landscape. One prominent framework frequently referenced in literature is Critical Race Theory (CRT). This framework is particularly relevant to EDI policy as it addresses and challenges the role of race in society.

CRT serves as the analytical framework lens that allows for the critique and challenge of the function of race in culture. This race-centred epistemology permits the analysis of white supremacy, racist ideologies, and their implicit and explicit impact on policy initiatives aimed at supporting African-Canadian, Indigenous, and racialized students' engagement in higher education. Delgado and Stefancic (2001) are regarded as the pioneers of CRT and the five primary tenets that hallmark this theoretical framework. The tenets are as follows: (i) belief that racism is usual or ordinary; (ii) interest-convergence, the process whereby the white power structure will encourage racial advancements for Black people only as long as white self-interest is promoted; (iii) race as a social construction; (iv) intersectionality, how combinations of identity unfold in various settings; and, (v) emphasis on voice or counter-narrative (Ladson-Billing, 2013, p. 37). To approach the notion of equity in education, we must

acknowledge the systems of oppression which have led to inequity; which is a significant strength of CRT. The theoretical framework offers an approach to policy analysis with clear principles that enable policymakers to adopt CRT as a form of policy analysis. This approach addresses race, racial bias and discrimination, promoting institutional efforts to achieve meaningful equity and inclusion through funding and programming.

“Handbook of Critical Race Theory in Education” (2013), “Chapter Nine: The Policy of Inequity - Using CRT to Unmask White Supremacy in Education Policy” by David Gillborn, delves into the application of CRT in EDI policy within educational spaces and highlights the application of this framework to the topic of EDI in higher education. Interest convergence, contradiction-closing cases, and interest divergence are three vital elements cited in a CRT perspective on policy. These essential tools provide a radical perspective to education policy analysis that goes beyond traditional policy analysis methods and promotes great justice and inclusion. First, interest convergence is often misinterpreted as a peaceful negotiation between racial groups and White power holders; in actuality, it expresses the realities of mobilization and activism that force White interests to align with minority negotiation demands. Mobilization and resilience create a condition where " ...for White interests—taking some action against racism becomes the lesser of two evils because an even more significant loss of privilege might be risked by failure to take any action at all” (Lynn & Dixson, 2013, p. 135). Interest convergence highlights the intersection of race and class interests in policy processes and supports the contextualization of landmark events of race equity and the timelines of historical policy advancement. Secondly, contradiction-closing cases refer to the address of apparent injustice through shifts in policy, offering clarity and an uncontradictable understanding of equity and fairness (Lynn & Dixson, 2013, p. 135). Policy experts, however, debate the impact of

contradiction-closing cases as many argue these shifts in policy or examples allow institutions to negate responsibility or realities of ongoing injustice by referencing these cases as a means not to validate the continued lived experiences of racism, inequity and mistreatment within their institution. This argument is posed by many when approaching EDI in education, as these policies are defined as superficial or curtains to hide behind throughout the literature (Haithe, 2003, p. 330). Finally, interest divergence explores the embodiment or protection of white supremacy through the creation and manipulation of racial groups' interest divergence.

Institutions manipulate conflict among racial groups to preserve self interests, divert attention from addressing institutions systems of oppression, and justify inaction due to minority inability or unwillingness to organize (Lynn & Dixson, 2013, p. 138). CRT guiding principles bring people together through common struggles and shared experiences; when space is made for collaboration and support among groups, shared experience, unity, and activism can impactfully change the landscape of EDI within a community, system or institution.

Many studies demonstrate that the application of a CRT perspective on policy can significantly enhance how communities interpret and experience the outcome of contribution-closing cases and policies. For instance, a study conducted in the Netherlands between 2000 and 2007 across the Nation's universities found a negative perception or experience by identifying female university students and faculty in regard to the impact and intention of gender equity policies (Haithe, 2003). "Gender Diversity Policies in Universities: a Multi-Perspective Framework of Policy Measures" found that gender equity-based policies across all 14 universities were unchanged or unaddressed for all seven years of the study (Haithe, 2003, p. 330). This case study emphasises how universities are implementing these policies or contradiction-closing cases and then hide behind them to evade public scrutiny, the progressive

needs of students and faculty, as well as their accountability to their statements of caring about EDI. This case study also demonstrates that contradiction-closing cases need to be living documents that are adaptive to the changing needs of community members and that accountability should not end with one policy or financial donation. Overall, CRT offers robust tools for challenging existing frameworks and paradigms, which, while sometimes admirable in their intent, must constantly be transforming and adaptive to change.

Situating policy within a critical race praxis is a second application of CRT to support the analysis and contextualization of EDI policy in higher education. The CRT tenets support the confrontation of dominant ideologies by committing to social justice and validating the experimental wisdom of racialized populations. The marriage of CRT as a theoretical framework and the practical component of policy construction is met through the intersection of the ideational, performative, and material aspects of race praxis. Sociologies Yamamoto (1999) recognized a shortcoming of educational literature in utilizing CRT as an operative tenet to identify and solve the issues of racial injustice within education (Lynn & Dixson, 2013, p. 293). Conceptualized from CRT, critical race praxis takes the five fundamental CRT tenets and works to apply the theoretical framework to real-life issues facing communities and historically disenfranchised demographics.

The tenets of Yamamoto's work (1999) on race praxis are as follows:

1. Conceptual: Examining the racialization of a controversy and the interconnecting influences of heterosexism, patriarchy, and class while locating that examination in a critique of the political economy (p. 130).

2. Performative: Answering the question as to what practical steps are responsive to the specific claim and defining who should act on that claim (p. 131).
3. Material: Inquiring into changes, both socio-structural and concerning the remaking of the democratic structure of public institutions, in the material conditions of racial oppression. Examples would include access to fair housing, health care, quality education, and employment (p. 132).
4. Reflexive: Commitment to the continual rebuilding of theory regarding the practical experiences of racial groups engaged in particular antiracist struggles (p. 132).

The branch of CRT that holds the fruit of race praxis provides an extension of CRT, which can be practically utilized in the analysis of EDI policy as well as in the process of policy development. The conceptual tenets promote the diversity and intersectionality of a university population that is to be surveyed, identified, and considered when assessing community needs and identity. The performative tenets support the query of whose voices are needed and the collaborative nature of policy development, including inter-institutional partnerships and community outreach; put simply, this considers who has a seat at the table in policy processes. Material tenets promote accountable action that creates equity-focused infrastructure and equitable access to goods and services. Finally, reflection ensures that policy doesn't stagnate and continues to evolve and change with the dynamic experiences and needs of racial groups and community populations.

In my research, I will adopt the theoretical framework of CRT as the guiding methodology to contextualise the gap in educational success among Black Canadians. This framework will provide a structured lens through which to analyse and interpret the current EDI

goals and strategies implemented in Ontario universities. Ultimately, leveraging CRT will contribute to a nuanced understanding of Black visibility and sovereignty in envisioning, leading, implementing and measuring impactful EDI policies and practices.

### Intersectionality

EDI policies, statements, action plans, and initiatives are essential to shaping the academic sphere, which should cultivate an environment that welcomes, respects, and validates the diverse identities of a university community. One prominent framework utilized in the analysis and development of EDI strategies is intersectionality. Intersectionality is a framework which allows for insight into lived experiences and identity where social categorization intersects, composing a person's identity and, therefore, their social advantages and/or disadvantages (Crenshaw, 1989). Intersectionality is a concept developed by Kimberlé Crenshaw to deal with the reality that most issues of social justice, like sexism, racism, and classism, often overlap, creating what Crenshaw calls "...multiple levels of social injustice" (Crenshaw, 1989). Understanding intersectionality and using it as a lens can provide valuable insight into how effective policy development and implementation are contingent on recognizing and addressing the diverse identities and needs of the communities served.

“Intersectionality and Public Policy: Some Lessons from Existing Models” by Olena Hankivsky and Renee Cormie (2011) emphasizes the critical role of intersectionality within public policy development and analysis. Intersectionality policy works to identify and address "...the way specific acts and policies address the inequalities experienced by various social groups, taking into account that social identities such as race, class, gender, ability, geography, and age interact to form unique meanings and complex experiences within and between groups in society" (Hankivsky & Cormie, 2011, p.217). An intersectional policy approach varies from

traditional policy methods, which endeavour to comprehend and address issues of diversity and justice, one identity at a time, while another is isolated. This means that identity categories are typically seen in isolation, with gender, sexuality, and race being viewed as separate entities. This approach assumes a uniform experience for individuals within each category, for example, assuming that all women have the same experience. However, it fails to acknowledge the complexities of intersectionality, such as being a black woman or a first-generation Canadian woman, which can significantly shape an individual's experiences. Hankivsky and Cormie argue that a traditional policy approach that does not incorporate the theoretical framework of intersectionality leads to an "additive approach" to social inequity and discrimination (Hankivsky & Cormie, 2011, p.219). This approach harmfully identifies and prioritizes those facing what the institutions define as the most discrimination, and allocates them the most resources and financial support. Consequently, an additive approach can cause universities to favour specific identity categories in isolation, and give members of marginalized groups incentives to compete for EDI-based funding and other advantages among one another instead of collaborating and meeting at the intersection of shared identity and marginalization.

In order to achieve impactful EDI outcomes, intersectionality in policy development and analysis must be successfully implemented in every stage of the policy development process. Policy processes undergo a systematic breakdown into five fundamental steps, as outlined by Dr. Micheal. J. Prince (2013).

1. Agenda setting (problem structuring): Critically identifying the central actors and stakeholders on a policy project can acknowledge the biases and experience people bring to the space. Comprehending the who, where, and why of a policy issue is critical to the first step of agenda

setting. Understanding how different social groups will experience policy outcomes forces an intersectional lens to be utilized when identifying policy goals and problem statements (Prince, 2013).

2. Policy formulation: The development of policy proposals involves identifying a problem through an intersectional lens. Applying an intersectional research methodology can help policymakers foresee the needs and potential impacts on marginalized groups; informing decisions at this stage (Prince, 2013).

3. Policy implementation and monitoring: Mobilizing finances and resources allows policy projects and initiatives to come to fruition. Implementing the policy through administrative units and including targeted populations ensures an intersectional approach. The meaningful inclusion of the targeted populations can transform how a policy is received by those it affects and increase its impact.

4. Policy assessment (evaluation): Policy evaluation enables institutional units to determine whether policy actions comply with an intersectional policy approach and whether the policy objectives were achieved. Reflection on policy outcomes also helps institutions remain accountable in upholding the effectiveness of policy and EDI action planning (Prince, 2013).

Intersectionality has been accepted and successfully utilized across disciplines, including political science, law, medicine, and the arts, as the framework inspires social understanding, empathy and disciplinary collaboration. This framework fosters comprehension of simultaneity

and interlocking forms of oppression, promoting more comprehensive EDI initiatives and policy efforts. “Intersectionality as a methodological tool in qualitative equality, diversity and inclusion research” by Doyin Atewologun and Ramaswami Mahalingam (2018) illustrates how intersectionality has been employed to develop institutional comprehension of inequity and anestrus in power relations with respect to intersecting identities (Atewologun & Mahalingam, 2018, p.156). By recognizing organizational structures and processes which make gender, race, class, and sexual orientation invisible, universities can identify, deconstruct and rebuild specific regimes of inequity and uproot institutional mechanisms of oppression. The authors commend intersectionality as a critical lens in approaching EDI, highlighting the framework's innovative method of understanding life experiences at the nexus of numerous positionalities (Atewologun & Mahalingam, 2018, p.158). Integrative frameworks allow for a multidivisional approach to tackling inequity in higher education. By leveraging an intersectional policy approach, universities can understand the diverse needs and identities of those within their community and create a more equitable and inclusive academic environment.

In my research, I will adopt intersectionality as a theoretical lens to critically approach the discourse analysis in Chapter Four of the major research project. This framework will provide a structured lens through which inclusion and presence of intersectional identities within policy documents will be promoted and leveraged. Intersectionality will be imperative to the project's methodological approach, which involves conducting policy discourse analysis. Intersectionality will also inform the data collection methodology, particularly in terms of identifying discourse markers and guiding data collection, analysis, and interpretation. Ultimately, leveraging an intersectional lens will contribute to a nuanced understanding of identities present within the current EDI landscape and PSE, highlighting the success or

limitations of EDI PSE to support students, faculty and community members at the intersections of disadvantage, experience and needs.

### Black Feminism

The fundamental goal of EDI initiatives and policies within the academic space is to address and resolve the institutional inequality faced by students and faculty. Gender equity is a common subject emphasized in university EDI actional planning and policy documents; gender discrimination and bias have created inequities and adverse outcomes for females within the academy. Black feminism is a theoretical framework used to address gender-specific and non-gender-specific dimensions of EDI. Understanding how Black feminism is applied can provide valuable insight into broader policy development and implementation processes.

Black feminism originated in the 1900 post-slavery period with the work of Black women activists, abolitionists, and writers who set into motion the principles of what we currently refer to as Black feminist theory. Contemporary Black feminism found its claim in the second wave of American feminism in the late 1960s; this feminist movement is commonly referred to as White feminism as the concerns and rights of White women were fought for and addressed in this social movement. The exclusion of the intersectional identity of Black women inspired Black academics and activists to create their own groups and organizations, like the Combahee River Collective. Formed in response to the lack of inclusion, validation and recognition of the distinct oppression faced by Black women, the Combahee River Collective is a group committed to fight against racial, heterosexual, sexual and class oppression, reflecting on how these significant systems of oppression are intertwined (CRC, 2014, p.29).

“The Black Feminist Statement” by the Combahee River Collective (2014) emphasizes that the conciseness of Black feminism creates room for sexual politics, patriarchal oppressions,

and feminism in the discourse, allowing Black bodies to be represented and not lost under the umbrella identity of females. Black feminism allows for several identities and forms of oppression to be addressed as the discourse does not address one or two issues but a range of oppression, such as sexuality, race, gender, class, and culture. Traditional methods of addressing racial and gender inequities generally examine the primary outcomes of each social identity in isolation, treating people's experiences independent of their other intersecting identities and overlooking how they interact and contribute to differential experiences, possibilities, and results in education. This political framework is especially relevant to EDI policy in education as it critically examines intersectionality and brings consciousness to oppressive mechanisms with an antiracist and antisexist perspective.

Black feminism is pivotal to understand the dynamics of intersectional and institutional oppression within the context of this research. While the discourse on EDI PSE commonly focuses on the female identity and utilizes feminist perspectives, there is a notable absence of Black feminism, highlighting potential limitations in the field currently. Integrating Black feminism into the methodology of EDI analysis ensures a comprehensive examination of impactful PSE, guiding the selection of appropriate policy and action plan development. Using this theoretical framework will help identify patterns and relationships that might otherwise remain obscured, enhancing the robustness of the project's findings.

### Freedom Dreaming

The development and analysis of EDI policy frequently draw on several theoretical frameworks to address systemic inequity inspired by change or a vision of issue resolution. The motivation or vision for a future in academia where everyone is welcomed and acknowledged and where Eurocentrism is challenged forms the foundational basis of the EDI policy process.

Freedom dreaming is a theoretical framework that outlines the vision of a desired future and the process of actively working toward its actualization. Author Robin D. G. Kelley of “Freedom Dreams: The Black Radical Imagination” (2002) pioneered the theoretical concept of Freedom Dreaming. Freedom Dreaming emphasizes that addressing inequalities, building awareness, and taking tangible steps to bring about positive change empowers individuals or groups to create meaningful impacts in their lives and the lives of others (Kelley, 2022, paragraph 9). Freedom Dreaming goes beyond simply understanding and implementing EDI policies or campaigns; the theoretical framework calls for widening the scope of social change to focus on a collective radical imagination that upholds a vision of freedom. A Black radical imagination inspires solidarity and a profound knowledge of the mechanisms of oppression to generate a new way of being (Kelley, 2022, paragraph 4). This framework is relevant to restructuring the academic field through a reinvigorated EDI policy landscape as it inspires a radically different future for all, with equity, diversity, and inclusion at the forefront.

“Freedom Dreaming Antiracist Pedagogy Dreams” by Spaulding et al., (2021) addresses the inequities faced and experienced by black students in the North American education system. The objective of the literature is to not only identify and address the oppressive systems and mechanisms that create barriers in the education system, which ultimately fail Black children, but rather to deconstruct the basis of education with EDI at the forefront. A Freedom Dream for racial equity in education invites university stakeholders, policy actors, and community members to construct a freedom dream focused on healing, love and Black joy (Spaulding et al., 2021). The importance of curriculum reform as a healing mechanism is emphasized by all authors who advocate for reconstructing history curricula. Addressing inaccuracies and omissions in colonial histories and narratives, particularly those related to Black experiences, exposes and dismantles

the implicit and explicit anti-Black discourse, ideology and bias. Toronto Metropolitan University's (TMU) recent "Confronting Anti-Black Racism Initiative Student Report" (2023) identified a diversified curriculum as the number one recommendation for improving the university's EDI efforts. In the process of developing their EDI action plan, "The audit, completed in 2022, identified Black teaching staff across faculties and programs and found 116 courses across the university with Black-, African- and Caribbean-centred content ... a goal to achieve 100 percent of undergraduate and graduate programs at the university, offering a suite of courses that centre the experiences of Black students, promote Black scholarship and apply principles of anti-Black racism in curriculum, teaching and learning" (TMU, 2023). TMU's Presidential Implementation Committee to Confront Anti-Black Racism (PICCABR) is the group that facilitated this audit; with the radical Black freedom dream of seeing Black achievement and excellence in higher education, the PICCABR has taken action-driven steps to see this freedom dream flourish. The authors call for more inclusive literature emphasizing the need to acknowledge and celebrate Black contributions and Black genius within classrooms, courses, and lecture material. The authors echo student and community outcry for other universities to ensure EDI initiatives and policy are not performative by challenging readers to save antiracism work from being a performance. EDI initiatives can bring about impactful change and shape an antiracist education space through the inspiration of a freedom dream, creating spaces of healing, justice, and diversity that will allow for racial, gender, economic, and other inequities to be addressed.

The utilization of freedom dreaming is pivotal to understand the intention and desired outcome behind the conceptualization of a project and, within the context of this research, the motivations and goals of EDI in university spaces. Integrating freedom dreaming into the

methodology ensures a comprehensive analysis of student, community and stakeholder contribution to the policy-making process, guiding agenda-setting through experiences of inequity, aspirations and action. Overall, adopting freedom dreaming underscores the role of advocacy in creating change and emphasizes envisioning a future that bridges the racial educational attainment gap with impactful, transformative EDI in the university space.

### **Chapter 3: Literature Review**

Lilach Marom's "Resistance, Performativity, and Fragmentation: The Relational Arena of EDI/D in Canadian Higher Education" (2023) highlights the implications of mainstream adoption of EDI within Canadian higher education. The author identifies three institutional layers of EDI to examine the external and internal factors that derail consequential engagement with EDI. The outward layer identifies external critiques specifically in regard to discourses of EDI curving academic freedom and the articulation of EDI within the educational space. The central layer addresses the mainstream transition of EDI and terminology as well as instituted resistance to change. Finally, the core layer highlights policy, action planning, and the actors and community members engaging in EDI processes (Marom, 2023, p.1084). The objective of this literature is as follows: to understand academics and expert engagement with EDI in navigating tensions and institutional relations in higher education; the author proposes the following research question: What does the relational arena reveal about the institutional approach to Decolonization, Equity, Diversity and Inclusion DEDI? Lilach Marom's argument that DEDI discourse currently addresses simply the surface symptom of a more expansive and complex

underlying problem of inaction within higher education is the primary focus of this literature review.

Marom's (2023) work utilizes theoretical frameworks, literature review, case study data analysis, and a visual conceptual model as part of the methodological approaches to contextualizing the issue of the performative nature of EDI in higher education (HE). The theoretical framework of ethical relationality, or kinship relationality, pioneered by Dwayne Trevor Donald (2009), highlights an epistemological understanding of human relationality that aspires to deeply comprehend how our different histories and experiences place us in respect to one another and place. The historical legacy of institutional racism and marginalization within the academy reproduces the division seen today. The kinship relationality of colonialism and Eurocentrism as a "shared condition" experienced in the academic space, calls for rehabilitation through a profound cultural transformation. Donald positions the gap between performing EDI and fundamental transformation in higher education (HE) as a disconnect of ethical relationality (Marom, 2023, p.1088). The approach of EDI as including different voices or discourse as "add-ons" to goals of social justice negates the transformation of collective relations. Marom's proposal for a new approach to EDI, which focuses on creating HE systems in which diverse knowledge systems enrich each other and all humans can flourish, underscores the importance of equity and fairness in higher education (Marom, 2023, p.1088). The theoretical framework of ethical relationality, or kinship relationality, supports the argument that traditional EDI approaches such as diversity workshops, EDI statements, and multicultural celebrations create a sense of inclusivity, diversity and inclusion without challenging the institutional processes that construct hierarchies and marginalization.

The literature was selected due to the significant contribution of the author's critique of the current EDI landscape in higher education. The majority of literature on the topic of EDI in university spaces emphasizes the theoretical frameworks and policy processes which produce EDI outcomes. As the topic is relatively recent, research has been limited in exploring outcomes or critique of EDI action plans or outcomes, either from within institutions or externally. The keywords utilized to identify and select Lilach Marom's "Resistance, Performativity, and Fragmentation" include: HE, EDI Policy, EDI Discourse, Performance, and limitations of EDI. Much of the literature produced by the preliminary search ranges from 2018 to 2023; however, the most relevant search outcomes were present in more recent years, from 2022 to 2023. Mason's work was selected due to the literature's capacity to be applied to the Ontario University EDI landscape, as the author clearly and expertly identifies trends, policy commonalities and dominant discourse within the larger context of higher education. A critique of EDI efforts can be a sensitive topic as objectively, the intention of EDI is widely supported, but there is a lack of research due to the recent emergence of the topic. A possible limitation of the study is the author's insertion of their own experience within higher education. Incorporating their experience of dissatisfaction in institutional communication and experiences of confrontation with colleagues when discussing EDI in academics illustrates a potential for subjective bias, which could compromise objectivity and impact the applicability of the literature. However, the author's combination of quantitative interviews, policy analysis and theoretical approaches is a significant strength of the work. Due to the lack of research and analysis of EDI approaches in higher education, the autoethnographic methodology incorporating interviews by faculty, staff, and administrators who took part in EDI/D processes in a university in British Columbia offers a new perspective and contribution to the field of EDI policy analysis (Marom, 2023, p.1092).

Two key findings from Marom's research on EDI discourse in higher education are the apprehension of policy actors to critique EDI discourse and, secondly, the distinction between performative and impactful EDI strategies and action. Actors involved in EDI policy processes within the British Columbia university (institution not named) expressed a need for more energy or a refusal to invest energy in conversation or debate regarding EDI discourses. The high workloads of those within the academy who participate in EDI initiatives, combined with the mental exhaustion of systemic resistance to change, result in the avoidance or disengagement of those who hold opposing ideologies (Marom, 2023, p.1094). The second identified reason for avoiding criticism of EDI in HE is a refusal to engage in studies and programming that would challenge current institutional processes that construct hierarchies and marginalization. Author Marom (2023) "Resistance, Performativity, and Fragmentation" found that despite the confidential nature of the study, participants withdrew; this speaks to the opposing discourses about EDI/D and fear of being perceived as publically critiquing EDI/D. The author's findings show that those appointed to better and advance EDI, as well as those within the community who are affected by the outcomes of EDI, are unwilling to engage in critical discussion, raising significant concerns about the future of EDI decision-making processes.

The second key finding from the article by Lilach Marom (2023) is that there is a disconnect between EDI performance and transformative outcomes in higher education. The expectation that universities have an EDI statement, action plan, cultural celebrations, and a diverse social media page can be observed in various institutions across Ontario. Often, institutions will utilize partnering universities' action plans or initiatives as the frameworks or scaffolding for their own. The performance of EDI shields institutions from allegations of an institutional culture of inequity and from being cancelled from resisting progressive social

action. Cancel culture or being cancelled refers to a social environment in which institutions, collectives or individuals publicly withdraw support based on action or inaction of unacceptable beliefs or practices. To maintain public support and protect their institutional reputation, universities often mirror one another's EDI/D action and policy planning (Marom, 2023, p.1094). A standard approach across universities in competition with one another allows institutions to adhere to the existing standard without being too progressive in order to avoid being perceived as politically threatening. Author Lilach Marom addresses the concerns of EDI as performance, "The wide support of EDI/D on a performative level does not open space for (and at times stands against) institutional transformation. For example, the embracement of land acknowledgement on a discursive level can act as an institutional gaslighting tactic, shifting the focus from issues of sovereignty and land rights" (Marom, 2023, p.1103). The enthusiastic participation in the discourse of EDI is widespread; however, the resistance of university actors and change makers to participate in on-the-ground implementation is a critical disconnect in the performance and impact of EDI in higher education.

Lilach Marom's "Resistance, Performativity, and Fragmentation: The Relational Arena of EDI/D in Canadian Higher Education" (2023) is a consequential contribution to the field of policy discourse and EDI in higher education. The literature challenges actors in university spaces to move beyond traditional EDI discourse and add-on frameworks to unsettle the foundation of Western intuitions, which create the inequity EDI endeavours to counteract. Themes of performance, discourse, and impact emerged across the article through theoretical frameworks, qualitative interviews and scholarly research. The significant finding or argument by Marom highlights that EDI policy and action is not a linear process and cannot be contained within a to do list, which represents meaningful engagement in community connection and

impact. The finding of this work will have significant implications for the research and practice of EDI in higher education as it challenges traditional approaches to EDI and offers a space for conversation regarding closing the gap between EDI performance and true institutional change. The current policy processes structure drivers from Western knowledge systems, which diminish influential engagement with diverse knowledge systems and knowledge knowers (Marom, 2023, p.1102). The work in the literature presented does not offer a solution for transforming the EDI landscape within higher education; achieving such an outcome would be unrealistic and non-beneficial. Instead, the article invites a critical approach to EDI discourse and action by identifying a gap in achieving impactful EDI. The article, however, fails to validate the significance of discourse to policy formation; ensuring inclusion in action planning translates to outcomes for specific demographics within the educational space. Marom's critique of existing studies' concentration of discourse over subsequent actions constitutes a pivotal contribution to her work. However, we must value the role of discourse in EDI policy and adapt the discourse to translate policy and planning documents into positive and impactful outcomes. As previously emphasized, EDI action planning and policy are not linear processes. The division between discourse and action will not be bridged by abandoning or fixating on one or the other. Discourse analysis in relation to studying university outcomes and data relevant to analyzing EDI will transform the higher education landscape and be a vital step in deepening ties and self-reflexivity of the mission of higher education.

## **Chapter 4: Discourse Analysis**

The construction of racial discourse is a production of social, political, scientific, and historical processes. Notions like race are not innate truths but rather socially constructed phenomena often enforced and reinforced through scientific reasoning, a discipline which we often associate with fact. “Time, Place, and Others: Discourses of Race, Nation, and Ethnicity” by Avtar Brah (1994) underscores the role of science in perpetuating ideological agendas of oppression through an interdisciplinary lens. The author provides a relationally codified analysis of racial discourse (Brah, 1994, p.807). Past illegitimate scientific findings worked to legitimize specific ideologies and construct hierarchies of suppression. This same scientific discourse shaped broader social and power structures that legitimized processes of colonization, slavery, and segregation; the lasting legacy of such scientific discourse can be seen today within institutionalized structures and education. The attributes assigned to "Blackness" (criminals, unintelligent, dangerous) can be traced back to social and physical scientific findings on Black bodies, observed and dissected in the name of science (Maynard, 2017, p. 25). By critically approaching racial discourse, we are rejecting the final truth or constructed truths, "...these critiques comprise a systematic and thorough deconstruction of a variety of academic discourses of the period, laying bare their underlying assumptions and internal contradictions" (Brah, 1994, p.811). By engaging in academic pursuits, people have the power to transform societal narratives and contest oppressive discourses. On an individual level, these discourses can significantly impact how individuals and communities inhabit space and construct identities based on enduring stereotypes and ideologies inherent in identity-based discourses.

Discourse analysis refers to a research approach which utilizes language materials such as conversation, written text, and media to examine evidence of phenomena beyond the individual

person (Taylor, 2013, p. 2). The phenomena beyond the individual person contextualizes individual discourses, offering greater general evidence of social priorities and values shared by society members in a larger context. Discourse analysis refers to a range of approaches found in an abundance of disciplines and theoretical frameworks, such as sociology, political science, sociology and public policy. The interdisciplinary nature of this research enhances its richness, as discourse is embedded with power and expresses social phenomena. The convergence of academic disciplines and theoretical frameworks allows for discourse to be contextualized through many lenses and better understood. A discourse approach within policy analysis research critically examines the practice of analysis and, therefore, the traditional methods of policy study practices. A critique of traditional policy analysis methods, such as the economic models of behaviour, is that these methods narrow the capacity for exploring the political power and value inherent to policy discourse. "Policy Analysis as Discourse" by Louise G. White (2013) "...concludes that analysis grounded in multiple sources of ideas and information promises to make policy research more intellectual, value conscious, and debate-centered" (White, 2013, p. 509). Within policy and critical discourse analysis, White emphasizes the collaborative nature of research as critical discourse enables participants to examine their preferences and positionality, providing the possibility to unlearn the ideology of social hierarchy. The central point of argument or discussion within the field revolves around the different social constructions and policy definitions within policy documents and planning (White, 2013, p. 512). Much of the discourse within the policy sphere can be defined as value discourse, which refers to the relationship of acts to value and the acknowledgement that specific values are generally preferred over others. This critical analysis encourages stakeholders to examine their own

positionality and inherent bias before examining the policy agenda, expanding the capacity for critical reflection and equitable, diverse, and inclusive policy discourse and outcomes.

### Discourse Analysis Methodology

My research and MRP apply discourse analysis as the primary methodological approach to understanding the power embedded in university policy discourse in Ontario university institutions. Critical discourse analysis is a powerful tool for examining how language, terminology, and, specifically, racial and identity discourse reflect and refract power structures and values within an institution. Policy analysis of university EDI planning and policy documents convey the commitment to equity, diversity and inclusion within an institution and landscape. This methodology will allow for the examination of who is represented in policy, whose needs are addressed and the potential impact of EDI on student outcomes. The incorporation of four theoretical frameworks: Critical Race Theory (CRT), intersectionality, Black feminism, and freedom dreaming deepen the analysis and provide insight into the ways race and intersectionality impact educational attainment gaps and underrepresentation among Black Canadians in higher universities. Utilizing discourse analysis through these theoretical lenses allows for interdisciplinary approaches and collaboration of academic experts, university actors, national institutions and community voices. This intersectional cross-disciplinary methodology holds the principles of critical policy discourse analysis.

I have chosen to select a sample of the five universities with the highest undergraduate student population in Ontario. The chosen institutional sample is most appropriate for meeting the research goals of cross-institutional policy discourse analysis as all five institutions are influenced by similar or the same political, social, and economic landscape and provincial policy.

The following will be encompassed: the University of Toronto, York University, University of Ottawa, McMaster University and Toronto Metropolitan University (TMU). This selection ensures that the research is comprehensive and representative of the diverse landscape of higher education in Ontario, instilling confidence in the validity and applicability of the findings.

Toronto Metropolitan University (TMU) has been excluded from the discourse analysis as the institution does not currently have a university-wide statement of EDI commitment nor a cross-institutional action plan. As informed by an Executive Director of TMU Office of the Vice-President, Equity and Community Inclusion (OVPECI), the institution is currently in the process of creating such EDI strategy documents and commitments. Despite the notable efforts and initiatives currently in place and operated by the OVPECI, the university's lack of action planning documents makes cross-institutional analysis unfeasible. The lack of a current EDI action planning structure or statements is likely due to the recent restructuring and renaming of the university institution.

The discourse analysis data was retrieved from publicly available university EDI policies and statements, which are commonly located on university websites adjacent to institutional mission statements and alongside equity office home pages. The following highlights documents utilized for the discourse analysis from the identified above universities, as well as a justification of the selected discourse. The institutional action planning and strategic planning documents were selected due to the shared content and intention of the documents; the most recent EDI action planning document was identified and utilized. Due to the commonality of these documents, they serve as a standardized EDI document, which can be analyzed cross-institutionally. A primary general analysis was conducted during the project's preliminary

construction to identify documents, trends, and common data utilized across Ontario Universities to support the selection of identity discourse to be included in the final project. The identity discourse and racial discourse identified were selected based on trends in EDI documents as well as discourse, which identified Black Canadians, intersectional identities, and racial minorities. Racial discourse analysis illustrates how universities articulate their commitment to EDI through policy documents and the extent to which these policies address the needs of Black student populations. The following identity and racial discourse will be identified: Black, Black-Women, People of Colour (POC), racialized/racialized minority, visible minority, Indigenous, International Students, Women, 2LGBTQ+, People with (dis) abilities, and any intersectional identity discourse.

Due to the scope of the project focusing on action planning documents and reports, the capacity of the discourse examination will not extend to university EDI-driven policies such as the Human Rights Statements or Employment Equity Policy. The reason for this decision was to condense the scope of the project while upholding standards to produce an in-depth EDI source analysis.

## Identification of University EDI Policy and Procedure Document

### **University of Toronto (UofT)**

Action Plan Document:

University of Toronto: People Strategy, Equity & Culture. (2023). *Equity, diversity & inclusion report 2023*. [Equity, Diversity & Inclusion Report 2023](#)

EDI Statement:

University of Toronto Governing Council. (2006). *Statement on equity, diversity, and excellence*. [Equity, Diversity and Excellence, Statement on \[December 14, 2006\]](#)

### **York University (YU)**

Action Plan Document:

The President's Advisory Council on Equity, Diversity and Inclusion, Division of Equity, People and Culture. (2023). *Decolonizing equity, diversity and inclusion strategy 2023-2028*. [YORK UNIVERSITY - Decolonizing, Equity, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy](#)

EDI Statement: N/A

### **Toronto Metropolitan University (TMU)**

Action Plan Document: N/A

EDI Statement Document: N/A

### **University of Ottawa**

Action Plan Document:

Vice-President, Research and Innovation, University of Ottawa. (2021). *Equity, diversity and inclusion in research: Continuing our journey*. University of Ottawa. [Equity, Diversity and Inclusion in Research: Continuing our Journey](#)

EDI Statement: N/A

### **McMaster University**

Action Plan Document:

Associate Vice-President, Equity and Inclusion, McMaster University. (2020). *Towards inclusive excellence: A report on McMaster University's equity, diversity and inclusion (EDI) strategy*. [Towards Inclusive Excellence: McMaster's EDI Strategy](#)

EDI Statement: N/A

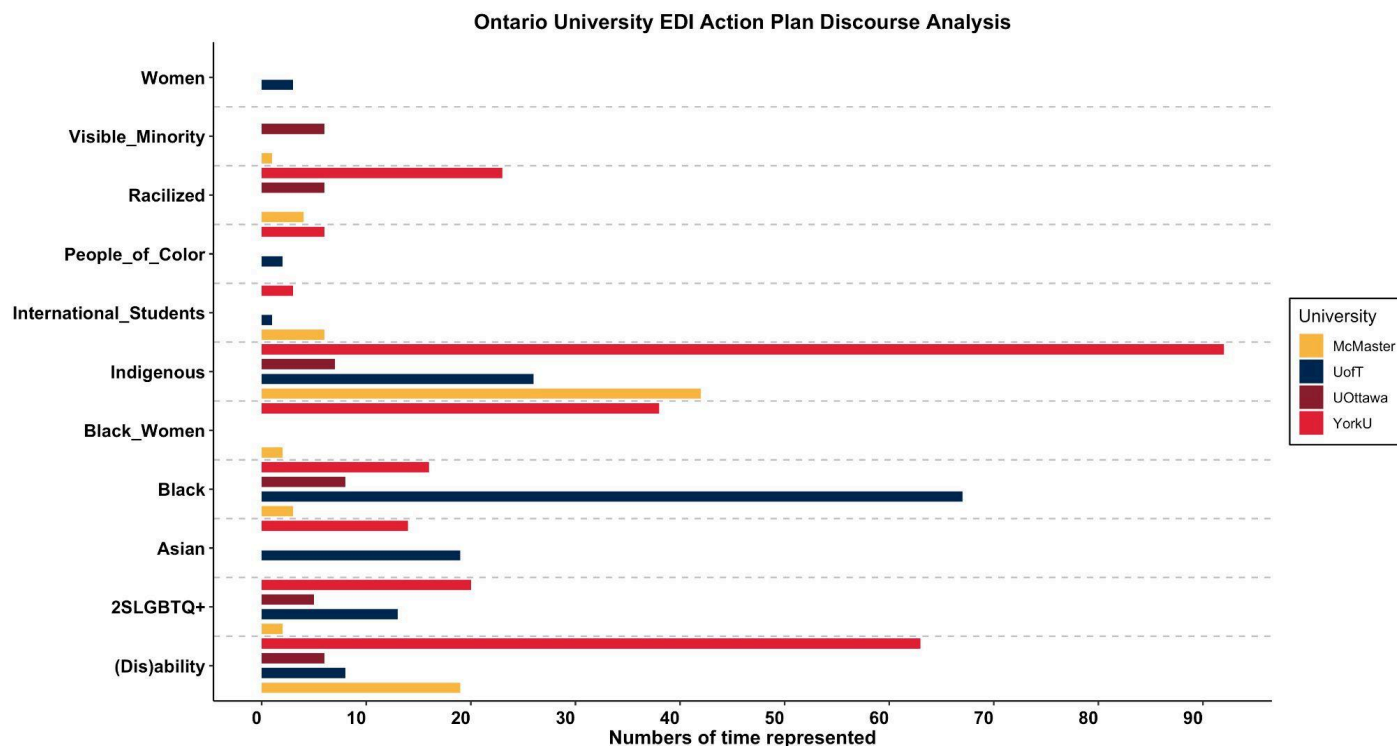


Figure <sup>1</sup>

The figure represents the number of times a term or identity discourse was present in each of the action planning/ strategic documents referenced previously, color-coded by university.

### CRT Discourse Analysis:

The product of the discourse analysis highlights the correlation between utilized identity discourse and evidence of social priorities or values shared by a larger institution. Delgado and Stefancic's (2001) theoretical framework of CRT provides five tenets that challenge the function of race in culture as normal; these tenets are also applicable to policy discourse analysis. The acknowledgment of racism as a normal social process was recognized across presented institutions as anti-racist, and affirmative action discourse can be present throughout all action

<sup>1</sup> Jones , C. (2024). *Ontario University EDI Action Plan Discourse Analysis* [Dataset]

planning documents. A university which presented a shortcoming in acknowledging the normality of racism and the first tenet of CRT is UOttawa, as the institution references the systemic barriers to EDI without explicitly acknowledging the barriers present within their learning environment and identifying who is impacted by these barriers. UOttawa also failed to address the historical role of universities in creating educational barriers and the role of universities in fostering current institutional bias, which continues to sustain the barriers to EDI. A university which exemplified the first tenet of CRT is Western University. Anti-black racism and racial barriers to education were not only addressed and validated, but quantifiable commitments are presented in the action planning document to combat these barriers. In 2019, the President's Office contributed \$100,000 over two years to support intersectional anti-racism educational programming needs (Western University, 2019, p.11). Western also utilized the framework of the myth of meritocracy, Stewart & Valian (2018), which identifies inequity as normal in the academic space (Western University, 2019, p. 6). The second tenet, interest convergence, can not be critically applied to discourse analysis; however, the performance of elements of planning documents that pledge commitment to EDI without providing an actionable plan to address the commitment can be identified as interest convergence. The interest-convergence tenet is not applicable to the level of discourse analysis utilized within the MRP and requires an in-depth interpretive analysis of EDI commitments and translated action outcomes.

Thirdly, race as a social construction, despite being fundamental in the framework of CRT, the acknowledgment of the process of the social construction of race, racism, and racial bias is seldom emphasized in Ontario University EDI planning documents. However, racial discourse, as identified in the chart above, is utilized, such as 'Black', is embedded in the

language. The reality that ideological agendas of oppression are perpetuated through a relationally codified analysis of racial discourse is not highlighted by any university, with the exception of York University. York University exemplifies the third tenet of CRT through the definitions section of the document, where terms such as marginalization and patriarchy are defined, and the social construction of power, which opposes biological or innate differences, is highlighted. To summarize, universities will use discourse without defining or highlighting the power embedded in the discourse they utilize.

The fourth tenet, intersectionality, will be highlighted explicitly as a separate theoretical framework standing alone outside of CRT. The fifth principle of CRT emphasizes the importance of storytelling in empowering the voices of individuals and communities, challenging dominant cultural narratives. University collaborative efforts with non-institutionally organized bodies are one way to facilitate counternarrative discussion; the other is collaborative efforts with institutionally organized groups in which members carry voices from minority or racialized communities (BIPOC). In the University of Toronto's EDI strategy report, collaboration is emphasized in nearly every instance of racial and identity discourse; collaboration was fundamental in the university's approach to addressing concerns related to various identity groups, such as Black, 2SLGBTQ+, Indigenous, and others. It identifies groups, student organizations, institutional offices, and discipline offices that work together to address the highlighted concerns in the planning document. UofT's EDI report (2023) was developed in collaboration with students, faculty and networks, which expanded to the Black Research Network, The Office of Vice-President, People Strategy, Equity & Culture, Faculty of Kinesiology & Physical Education; New College; and School of Continuing Studies and another collaborative effort across the tri-campus community. Other university planning and report

documents lacked community collaboration and crossed institutional collaboration, impacting the reports and planning documents developers' opportunity to hear the counternarratives, stories and external voices who were not invited into the institution EDI planning process. York University Executer summary states, "The York University Decolonizing, Equity, Diversity and Inclusion (DEDI) Strategy is a community-informed strategy, resulting from the collaborative efforts of the President's Advisory Council on Equity, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI)..." (York University, 2023, p. 5). As highlighted, the document fails to emphasize who was invited to participate in the collaborative efforts. However, all planning documents set future intentions to deepen collaboration with student groups, community experts, and minority-led institutional groups and networks. Overall, CRT can help institutions identify deficiencies in planning documents and reports, improve upon them, and continue to develop areas where CRT principles are exemplified in the University's EDI strategies.

### Intersectionality Discourse Analysis

Intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1989) as a theoretical framework examines identity where social categorization intersects, composing a person's identity and, therefore, their social advantages and disadvantages. For the purpose of methodological discourse analysis, intersectionality leads the identity discourse term selection process and identification of trends in the preliminary review of Ontario University EDI documents. The project accessed the use of intersectional identities by looking for the compound of two or more identity categories together, for example, Black-Women, Black Queer community, Indigenous 2SLGBTQ+, Minority First Generation Students, etc. The outcome of this intersectional query revealed a considerable underrepresentation of intersectional identities or none at all. The intersecting identities of being

Black and being a student, graduate, alumni, or youth were the only examples of intersecting Black identities throughout all evaluated planning or report documents. The expectation that university policy or planning documents include every combination of identity categories intersect is not the objective argument underscored; however, by identifying intersections of variability or need, a unique insight can be acquired to generate impactful action planning. By neglecting to incorporate intersectional identity discourse, Ontario universities demonstrate a disconnection from ethical relationality by utilizing discourse as add-ons (Marom, 2023, p.1088). Including or identifying traditionally marginalized groups with singular identity categories like Black, Indigenous, disabled, or 2SLGBTQ+ exemplifies institutions' position of seeing identities in isolation from other identity categories. The approach isolates and assumes a uniform experience for individuals within each category, producing a one-size-fits-all solution for all Black students or all women, neglecting the nuanced experiences unique to the convergence or intersection of identity categories.

An example of an institution whose policy documents and EDI action plans utilize an additive approach to identify discourse is UOttawa. The Social Science and Humanities Council identified five underrepresented groups to center the institution's policy and EDI planning efforts: Women, Indigenous Peoples, Visible minorities/Racialized Persons, LGBTQI2S+ Community and Persons with Disabilities. The university's initiatives and supportive policies, diversifying hiring practices, strengthening best practices in scholarly research, and initiatives to develop learning programs are designed by the five identity categories defined as EDI champions. Intersectionality calls for intersectional policy formulation development; it involves identifying a problem, which must be done through an intersectional lens. Without the use of

intersectional policy formation, aspects of intersectional identities are overlooked, and their unique challenges go unaddressed for those who experience overlapping systems of oppression.

### Black Feminism Discourse Analysis

“As if Gender Mattered: Feminism and Change in Higher Education” (2003) by Haithe Anderson applies feminist critical policy analysis to the policy construction and development in post-secondary education, a contested space of academic accessibility. Anderson emphasizes the importance of discourse in the language of the policy, as male-dominated language is embedded with a patriarchal sentiment which has been accepted as knowledge, law, and power throughout history. Injecting policy with feminist discourse allows us the opportunity to express gender equity, post-positive feminism, and critical theory (Anderson, 2003, p.328). The author highlights the propagation effect of Feminist Critical Policy; the more inclusive the policy is, the more diverse academia will become, adding new voices, identities, and experiences and creating further diverse discourse that will make academics more diverse (Anderson, 2003, p. 330).

The unique intersection of gender and race, which constructs the fundamental identity of Black women, is central to Black feminism. When policy and action planning documents validate and explicitly consider Black women in the policy process and EDI action planning outcomes, several identities and forms of oppression are addressed. In relation to the planning documents presented, not one university addressed or included Black-Women in the EDI policy planning documents. The findings of the discourse analysis closely align with an intersectional perspective, confirming that the university policy uses a performative approach when addressing issues related to Black identity and women. By failing to address the intersectional identities and system of oppression unique to the Black female experience, universities reveal a continued

utilization of an additive approach to identity discourse. The analysis also reveals that the policy fails to acknowledge the specific experiences, perspectives, and EDI (equity, diversity, and inclusion) needs of Black women (Marom, 2023, p. 1088).

By failing to validate the present experiences of Black women in Ontario and within the university community, not only have universities' EDI policies and planning failed Black women but also deprived other marginalized groups of benefitting from the address of a range of oppression, such as - sexuality, race, gender, class, and culture, etc.

In Ontario, among Black women aged 25-59, there is a noticeable gap in educational attainment; 28% had attained a bachelor's level or above, compared to 33% of women in the rest of the Canadian population (Robison, 2021, p.5). The multidimensional, complex issue of the Black Canadian Women's Educational Attainment Gap does not necessarily need to be addressed with complex solutions. Experts in the field widely agree upon the benefits of mentorship programming, minority-targeted funding programs, spaces devoted to those of specific identities, education opportunities and impactful policies which hold people and institutions accountable for bias, harassment, and (anti-black) exclusionary actions. Aspects of these solutions are emphasized throughout Ontario University EDI planning for university-wide invites. However, by excluding discourse on Black feminism and the intersectional identities of Black women, there is a possibility that the initiatives may fail to address the educational attainment gap for Black women. The outcomes of the discourse analysis also highlight the absence of Black women from university documents, which can translate into a feeling of exclusion for those whose identities are not addressed and validated. Using Black women and the Black community (BIPOC) in photography and confirming commitments to curating a highly diverse society with EDI at the core is performative if the institution does not want to include them or their identities

in practices and policies. Author Nancy Leong reveals this trend of token diversity in universities by analyzing the overrepresentation of BIPOC students in media, photography and university materials (Leong, 2014). Leong explains this phenomenon as racial capitalism, the extraction of value from one racial identity for another, "...since white people are historically and presently a majority in America, racial capitalism most often involves a white person or a predominantly white institution extracting value from non-white racial identity (Leong, 2014). When institutions claim diversity and equity without the implementation of successful policies, incentives and funding to support claims, they are extracting the value from non-white-racial students without giving back. Black feminism offers a unique lens to enable the identification of patterns and relationships that might otherwise remain obscured, allowing the distinction between performative and impactful EDI strategies and actions to be identified.

### Freedom Dreaming Discourse Analysis

Freedom dreaming allows us to envision a desired future and actively work towards its actualization by addressing inequalities, building awareness, and taking tangible steps to bring about positive change in our lives and the lives of others (Kelley, 2022, paragraph 9).

Universities aim to express a vision for EDI efforts, fostering core values and actualizing future goals. Some examples of the university's vision for the future of this institution EDI are as follows:

"York aims to facilitate a decolonizing, inclusive, diverse and collaborative ecosystem that promotes individual and collective flourishing. Achieving an inclusive and equitable community is not a destination but rather a journey that requires ongoing attention and action" (The President's Advisory Council on Equity, Diversity and Inclusion Division of Equity, People and Culture, 2023).

"The goal of the EDI Action Plan is to identify strategies and actions that strengthen institutional commitment to EDI in research and create an inclusive climate for uOttawa researchers and trainees whereby systemic barriers that prevent full participation of members of underrepresented or disadvantaged groups are addressed" (Vice-President, Research and Innovation: University of Ottawa, 2021).

A vision for the future of EDI in Ontario universities that does not involve addressing and representing the identities of Black students fails another generation of Black Ontarians. The Dimension Charter (May 2019), a Canadian educational institutional EDI plan which set the stage for modern EDI planning strategies, reconfirms EDI as essential for "...institutional and individual safety, trust, belonging, privacy and power differentials must be recognized and proactively addressed" (Lillywhite, 2021, p.4). The pattern of Black discourse exclusion and underrepresentation supports the argument that Ontario University institutions are not prioritizing the experiences, needs and processes to address anti-Black racism and address the education attainment gap for Black Canadians. This is not just a matter of discourse but a matter of urgent action. Based on the university documents assessed, Black appears 27 times on average, in contrast to Indigenous, which appears 42 times on average. Moreover, when Black appears in these documents, the term Black is more than not addressing anti-Black racism, expressing a theoretical framework, not the humanity of the Black community or people. However, Indigenous is more than not accompanied by Indigenous People, Indigenous community, or Indigenous Students, highlighting the personification of Indigenous and reconciliation discourse. Decolonization and Indigenous reconciliation are explicitly emphasized throughout all planning documents; however, often, commitments to addressing anti-Black racism and Black inclusion are relegated to separate documents. The separation of Black discourse and the Black identity to exclusively be addressed in separate policy documents and

action plans can be interpreted as indicating that the issues of the Black community are not considered to be issues for the university as a whole.

The historical legacy of racism, exclusion, and anti-black epistemologies has resulted in institutional racism and marginalization within the academy, perpetuating the divisions we see today. The commitment of universities to racial reconciliation recognizes the institution's responsibility in perpetuating collective and individual suffering and honours the generational impact of institutionalized racism, past and present. The current structure of EDI action planning documents and utilization of the Black discourse brings into question where the Black community fits into Ontario University's freedom dream for impactful EDI. The inclusion of Black people in institutional planning documents will not only help in working towards a future of meaningful EDI for Black students, but also in identifying various systems of oppression and exclusion that impact other communities, preventing them from realizing their freedom dreams.

### Conclusion

Universities Canada is a membership organization that offers a unanimous voice for Canadian universities to support institutional advancement, strengthen communities, and discover solutions for dominant issues facing academia and the world. All five of the universities accessed in this project (UofT, UOttawa, McMaster, TMU, and YorkU) hold membership within Universities Canada, meaning they are supported by and informed by Universities Canada on issues, solutions, and positions within Canadian HE. Over the past decade, Universities Canada has played a crucial role in addressing global issues of inequity, discrimination, and exclusion within the education sector. They provide recommendations, strategies, and action plans to support institutions in changing their culture to promote EDI. The ABCDE Model for strategic planning provides a guide to planning strategic EDI change efforts in five stages, offering a

similar structure and guidance to action planning as seen in stages of policy development (Universities Canada, 2017).

**The ABCDE Model for strategic planning provides a guide to planning strategic EDI change efforts in five stages:**

A – **Assessment** of the internal and external environmental factors;

B – establishing a **Baseline** for the past and current status of the organization for future goal setting;

C – development of the **Components** of a strategy, including vision, values, mission and objectives;

D – **Developing** the specific details of a plan, including measures and tactics;

E – **Evaluating** progress against objectives and the efficacy of implementation

The positioning of the ABCDE model intends to increase the capacity of Canadian universities to integrate EDI in their teaching, research and government in an impactful and accountable way. However, a policy and action plan standardized model only provides the fundamental structure for guiding the complex process of EDI-driven initiatives, planning and governance. Without the integration of theoretical frameworks such as CRT, intersectionality, Black Feminism, and Freedom Dreaming, the outcome of policy processes offers surface-level solutions which do not account for the complexity of racialization and the process of marginalization. The current examples of lack of anti-black racism discourse and intersectional discourse have produced a trend of Black exclusion from EDI strategic planning in university spaces. The discussion of anti-Black racism in university institutions needs to acknowledge the historical legacy of racism, recognize Black knowledge and excellence, and prioritize education in building relationships and reconciling with the Black community. This call for action is within an institutional capacity as Indigenous Truth and Reconciliation is acknowledged and has been addressed in transformative ways in Ontario Universities, specifically within the last decade. Social transformation necessitates that we look to our histories to contextualize our present and move forward to a future that is grounded in EDI. By validating the Black experience and the

process which shapes the current education attainment gap experienced by Black Canadians, universities allow Black students to see their realities and lived experiences validated and addressed. “The Black feminist statement” by the Combahee River Collective (2019) states, "Black feminists often talk about their feelings of craziness before becoming conscious of the concepts of sexual politics, patriarchal rule, and, most importantly, feminism..." (CRC, 2019, p.30). The Black community has seen hundreds of years of atrocity, marginalization, racism and neglect. The mechanisms of racial oppression, as stated by the principles of CRT, are normal, and when gone unidentified, the mechanism of oppression can go undressed. EDI policy and strategic planning must continue to evolve and not only recognize the needs of Black Ontarians but also take accountable steps to address said needs.

I argue that race-based affirmative action policies in post-secondary spaces are not only critical to deconstructing the barriers of embedded racism in these spaces but will also send ripples of inclusivism through larger society. The freedom dream of absolving the educational attainment gaps and underrepresentation among Black Canadians in HE should become fundamental in all EDI policy and planning in Ontario Universities. This freedom dream will not only have significant impacts on Black Canadians but also contribute to the province's overall betterment and Public good. “For the Public Good,” Berdahl et al. (2024) define public good as an aspirational direction toward which we as a society seek to move ... a state of improved well-being...” emphasizing activities done for public good benefit society by advancing societal well-being (Berdahl et al., 2024, p.7). The well-being of the public good and the future of impactful EDI in higher education require a comprehensive reconstruction of discourse. Ontario University's EDI strategic planning currently only addresses surface symptoms. By including

Black discourse in EDI planning, institutions can widen their capacity to close the gap between simply performing EDI and making fundamental transformations in HE.

## **Bibliography**

- Anderson, H. (2003). As if gender mattered: Feminism and change in higher education. *The Journal of Higher Education (Columbus)*, 74(3), 321–336.
- Atewologun, D., & Mahalingam, R. (2018). Intersectionality as a methodological tool in qualitative equality, diversity and inclusion research. In *Handbook of Research Methods in Diversity Management, Equality and Inclusion at Work* (pp. 149–170). Edward Elgar Publishing. <https://doi.org/10.4337/9781783476084.00016>
- Brah, A. (1994). Time, place, and others: Discourses of race, nation, and ethnicity. *Sociology*, 28(3), 805–813. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0038038594028003010>
- Berdahl, L., Malloy, J., & Young, L. (2024). *For the public good: Reimagining arts graduate programs in Canadian universities*. University of Alberta Press.
- Combahee River Collective. (2019). A Black Feminist Statement. *Monthly Review (New York, 1949)*, 70(8), 29–36. [https://doi.org/10.14452/MR-070-08-2019-01\\_3](https://doi.org/10.14452/MR-070-08-2019-01_3)
- Crenshaw, K. (1989). Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics. *University of Chicago Legal Forum*, Vol. 1989, Iss. 1, Article 8. Available at: <http://chicagounbound.uchicago.edu/uclf/vol1989/iss1/8>.
- Delgado, R., & Stefancic, J. (2001). *Critical race theory: An introduction*. New York University Press.
- Goodwin, S. (2011). Analysing policy as discourse: Methodological advances in policy analysis. In L. Markauskaite, P. Freebody, & J. Irwin (Eds.), *Methodological choice and design* (pp. 167–180). Springer Netherlands. [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-90-481-8933-5\\_15](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-90-481-8933-5_15)
- Hankivsky, O., & Cormier, R. (2010). Intersectionality and public policy: Some lessons from existing models. *Political Research Quarterly* <https://doi.org/10.1177/1065912910376385>
- Hayden, D. (2017). Urban landscape history: The sense of place and the politics of space. In *Understanding Ordinary Landscapes* (pp. 111–133). Yale University Press.
- Henry-Dixon, N. (n.d.). Black enslavement in Canada. *The Canadian Encyclopedia*. Retrieved July 15, 2024, from <https://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/black-enslavement>
- Henry, F., & Tator, C. (2009). *Racism in the Canadian university: Demanding social justice, inclusion, and equity*. University of Toronto Press.

- Henry, F., & Tator, C. (Eds.). (2018). *Racism in the Canadian university: Demanding social justice, inclusion, and equity*. University of Toronto Press.  
<https://doi.org/10.3138/9781442688926>
- James, C. E., Turner, T., George, R. C., & Teele, S. (2017). *Towards race equity in education: The schooling of Black students in the Greater Toronto Area*. York University.
- Kelley, R. D. G. (2013). *Freedom dreams: The black radical imagination*. Beacon Press.
- Kelley, R. D. G. (2022, August 1). Twenty years of freedom dreams. *Boston Review*.  
<https://www.bostonreview.net/articles/twenty-years-of-freedom-dreams/>
- Ladson-Billings, G. (2013). Critical race theory: What it is not. In M. Lynn & A. D. Dixson (Eds.), *Handbook of critical race theory in education*. (2nd ed., pp. 32–43). Routledge.  
<https://doi.org/10.4324/9781351032223-5>
- Ladson-Billings, G. (2019). Just what is critical race theory and what's it doing in a nice field like education? In *Critical race theory in education* (1st ed., pp. 7–30). Routledge.  
<https://doi.org/10.4324/9780429503504-2>
- Leong, N. (2014, November 24). Faking diversity and racial capitalism. *Medium*.  
<https://medium.com/@nancyleong/racial-photoshop-and-faking-diversity-b880e7bc5e7a>
- Lillywhite, A. (2021). Equity/equality, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) in universities: The case of disabled people. *Societies*, 11(2), 49. <https://doi.org/10.3390/soc11020049>
- Lynn, M., & Dixson, A. D. (2013). *Handbook of critical race theory in education* (1st ed.). Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203155721>
- Markauskaite, L., Freebody, P., & Irwin, J. (2011). *Methodological choices and research designs for educational and social change: Linking scholarship, policy, and practice* (1st ed.). Springer Science + Business Media.
- Marom, L. (2023). Resistance, performativity, and fragmentation: The relational arena of EDI/D in Canadian higher education. *Canadian Journal of Education*, 46(4), 1083–1114.  
<https://doi.org/10.53967/cje-rce.6071>
- Maynard, R. (2017). *Policing Black lives: State violence in Canada from slavery to the present*. Fernwood Publishing.
- Michelle, R. (2021). Framing diversity and EDI practices: A comparison of strategic planning and recruitment materials in two Canadian universities [Master's research paper, Western University].

- Prince, M. J. (Director). (2013). *Public policy: Five core elements* [Video]. YouTube. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wPzsyh31mN8>
- Spaulding, E., Adams, J., Dunn, D. C., & Love, B. L. (2021). Freedom dreaming antiracist pedagogy dreams. *Language Arts*, 99(1), 8–18. <https://doi.org/10.58680/la20213140>
- Rice, J. J., & Prince, M. J. (2013). *Changing politics of Canadian social policy* (2nd ed.). University of Toronto Press.
- Robinson, M. H. (2021). Framing diversity and EDI practices: A comparison of strategic planning and recruitment materials in two Canadian universities [Master's research paper, Western University]. [https://ir.lib.uwo.ca/sociology\\_masrp/57](https://ir.lib.uwo.ca/sociology_masrp/57)
- Taylor, S. (2013). *What is discourse analysis?* (1st ed.). Bloomsbury Publishing Plc. <https://doi.org/10.5040/9781472545213>
- Thomas, D. S. P., & Arday, J. (Eds.). (2021). *Doing equity and diversity for success in higher education: Redressing structural inequalities in the academy*. Palgrave Macmillan. <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-65668-3>
- Universities Canada. (2017, October 26). *Principles on equity, diversity, and inclusion*. <https://univcan.ca/media-room/media-releases/universities-canada-principles-equity-diversity-inclusion/>
- White, L. G. (1994). Policy analysis as discourse. *Journal of Policy Analysis and Management*, 13(3), 506–525. <https://doi.org/10.2307/3325389>
- Wolbring, G., & Lillywhite, A. (2021). Equity/equality, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) in universities: The case of disabled people. *Societies*, 11(2), 49. <https://doi.org/10.3390/soc11020049>

## Appendix A

### Ontario University EDI Strategy Documents

This appendix consists of the EDI action planning and EDI strategic planning documents and reports for the Ontario universities utilized in the discourse analysis: University of Toronto, York University, University of Ottawa, McMaster University and Toronto Metropolitan University (TMU).

#### **University of Toronto (UofT)**

Action Plan Document:

University of Toronto: People Strategy, Equity & Culture. (2023). *Equity, diversity & inclusion report 2023*. [Equity, Diversity & Inclusion Report 2023](#)

EDI Statement:

University of Toronto Governing Council. (2006). *Statement on equity, diversity, and excellence*. [Equity, Diversity and Excellence, Statement on \[December 14, 2006\]](#)

#### **York University (YU)**

Action Plan Document:

The President's Advisory Council on Equity, Diversity and Inclusion, Division of Equity, People and Culture. (2023). Decolonizing equity, diversity and inclusion strategy 2023-2028. [YORK UNIVERSITY - Decolonizing, Equity, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy](#)

EDI Statement: N/A

#### **Toronto Metropolitan University (TMU)**

Action Plan Document: N/A

EDI Statement Document: N/A

#### **University of Ottawa**

Action Plan Document:

Vice-President, Research and Innovation, University of Ottawa. (2021). *Equity, diversity and inclusion in research: Continuing our journey*. University of Ottawa. [Equity, Diversity and Inclusion in Research: Continuing our Journey](#)

EDI Statement: N/A

**McMaster University**

Action Plan Document:

Associate Vice-President, Equity and Inclusion, McMaster University. (2020). *Towards inclusive excellence: A report on McMaster University's equity, diversity and inclusion (EDI) strategy*. [Towards Inclusive Excellence: McMaster's EDI Strategy](#)

EDI Statement: N/A