Racial Literacy and Disability -The Dyslexia to Prison Pipeline
Transcriptions by Nikita Agarwal, LLM, 2024

Introduction music.

Reakash (Rae): Hi, y'all, my name is Reakash. I am a Canadian lawyer and LLM student at Columbia University.

Pri: And my name is Pri. I am an (*sigh)* exhausted Indian American third year law student, and I am really excited to be here today.

Rae: Pri and I are students in the Fall 2024 Columbia Law School Critical Race Theory Workshop. As part of this class, we've developed this podcast which examines the intersectionality of disability and race here in the United States.

Pri: We would like to begin our podcast with a Land Acknowledgment. We acknowledge that Columbia Law School sits on the territory of the Lenape People. We recognise that every member of the CLS community has benefitted, and continues to benefit, from the use and occupation of this land since the institution's founding in 1858. By offering this land acknowledgment we affirm the indigenous sovereignty and affirm that land acknowledgement is insufficient. It does not undo the harm that has been done, and continue to perpetuate it now against indigenous people, their land, and their water.

Rae: That statement uses language developed by the Olhone tribe.

Music.

Pri: Let's get into it. But first, Rae, how are you doing today?

Rae: I'm doing okay (Sigh). It's been a challenging year. We are living through a genocide and exam season is breathing down my neck, to be honest. But I'm safe, I'm fed and I live with a very cute cat. So, I'm managing as best as I can. How about you?

Pri: Same. I'm devastated. Heartbroken. And like I mentioned before, exhausted. But I'm also grateful for the safety that I have right now. I think this year has been extremely clarifying in a very painful but important way. Clarifying about what this school (*Sigh)* and what this country stands for and what they aim to do. It's all out in the open now.

Rae: Yeah (*sigh*). I'm glad you raised this Pri. Especially the deep disappointment that accompanies witnessing Columbia's indifference and antagonism to pro-Palestinian students. I'm looking forward to unpacking that a bit more later in the podcast.

Pri: Yes! Now more than even I think it's important to speak truth to power. And I see what we are doing in our Critical Race Theory course and in this podcast project specifically, as a part of that effort. In this episode we are going to expose one way that

America oppresses marginalized communities. We are talking about disability and race, specifically the Dyslexia to Prison pipeline.

Rae: Pri, I understand that you (*emphasis)* identify as Dyslexic. Tell me more about that.

Pri: Yeah. So it took me a while to get a formal diagnosis but I always struggled to read in school as a result of what I now know, was my dyslexia. It still affects how I read and write today.

Rae: Got it. And, how do (*emphasis*) you define dyslexia?

Pri: Thanks for that question. I've heard a lot of definitions over the years. In the first DEV Act, the American Government defines dyslexia as "an unexpected difficulty of reading for an individual who has the intelligence to be a much better reader". (*Pause)* I personally don't like this definition a lot. I identify more with a definition I came across, um, in a paper written by a PhD student, who is also dyslexic. The scholar's name is Craig Collinson. In his dissertation, he argues that dyslexia is defined primarily as the inability to meet social expectations associated with psychological predicates such as reading, spelling or remembering.

Rae: So, Pri, why does that definition resonate more with you, than the first or other definitions?

Pri: I like the way this definition incorporates the idea of social expectations. I didn't start living as a dyslexic person until I got to school and was told to read. It was at that specific moment (*emphasis)* when I failed to meet that social expectation that I became dyslexic. As I kept failing to meet this demand to read my dyslexia started impairing my life.

Rae: Your definition makes a lot of sense to me. Also, your experience of entering the classroom as a defining moment in your life reminds me of the conversation I had with our first guest, Ameer Baraka.

Pri: Yes! I am a huge fan of his advocacy. Tell us more about Ameer.

Rae: Yeah! Ameer's awesome. Ameer is an Emmy nominated actor and advocate who has appeared in more than 30 films and TV shows. He grew up in New Orleans Housing Projects and was not diagnosed with dyslexia until he was incarcerated. He is now a leading voice in dyslexia advocacy and pushes for incarcerated people to be screened for dyslexia. He also advocates for early reading support for children with dyslexia to help disrupt the school to prison pipeline. Ameer started by telling me a bit about his early years.

Ameer Baraka: Well I, I uh had uh, brother and sister. Deshawn Harris and Roshan, (*repeated the name)* Roshanne who were precocious children. They read very early on. We lived in poverty. I didn't have a dad. My dad was a heroin addict. My mom was

much derelict in her duty. I had a grandmother who had a third grade education but she believed that the only way the Negro could get out of poverty, was through education. This woman believed in education (*emphasis)*. She knew the value (*emphasis)* of reading and writing even though she had a third grade education. And so, she was very strict about vocabulary words. You had to read, fluently and I got a lot of whoopings because she thought I was not being attentive. She did not have the bandwidth to realise that I had a, uh, a problem. But later on she caught on to it but it impacted me tremendously because I saw my brothers and sisters who were able to read fluent, who got a lot of attention from the Principals, the teachers, my (*uh)* my parents, my mother and my grandmother and I was left out.

Malcolm X: Something that has been created by the system. The system is designed to make the Negro, uh, student lose his interest in education almost before he even gets started in school. And the parents usually who are also limited where education is concerned, and have, or have run into so many barriers and obstacles despite the fact that they had education, sometimes they ask themselves, what's the use. So as long as the system that we are in, exists (emphasis), and the survival of this system depends upon the continued exploitation of the black man in this country.

Ameer Baraka: So, what that did to me, psychologically, was damaging—I was damaged early on as a child. I was early on in the third grade. I became very disengaged with school and marred by my lack of praise—the lack of praise that I didn't receive. And so it really turned me against school. I hated school at a very early age. So I would say that dyslexia started, started its negative impact on my life in third grade.

Rae: Ameer shared how painful not having this affirmation during his developing years was for him. The experience undermined his self esteem and ultimately drove him to pursue his affirmation elsewhere.

Ameer: And so I, in the third grade when we grew up in the projects, I was looking for an unconventional way to escape school. And so I knew that I couldn't do the Commissioner way by going to school, learning and growing and educating myself. Third grade I knew— I was just scanning the projects, seeing a way out. So I would wash cars, I would wash windshield wipers. I would sell them watermelons for guys for guys who had me, start hustling. Cutting grass on Sundays. And I got good at it. I became a hustler. Kids were just inside sleeping on Saturdays and Sundays. I was trying to make money because I knew that education, that word was frightening to me like. People coming out of schools, they would talk about that you need an education, that word was frightening to me. I knew I could not function. And so in the third grade I started skipping school. I was sleeping in the project hallways every Friday because you get a spelling test on Fridays and I never passed a spelling test in my entire life and so I never felt good about myself at all. So, uh, I say this sixth grade. I uh, I never forget. I was in junior High School. There was this girl that I was, I liked this girl. Sweetheart. You kids like girls right. She was a beautiful black dark-skinned chocolate sister. And she and I went to different elementary schools. And so, the teacher called

me up, the first day of school in English class to read. I fumbled through the whole paragraph, I was sweating profusely. I knew (*emphasis)* that day that I was going to be a drug dealer. I made it up in my mind that I'm sell drugs. And I just start selling dope. I knew my couldn't, my mama would beat me. I would catch whoopees. I just, I couldn't read, I couldn't function, I was illiterate. And, uh, my brothers and sisters, they kept accelerating, just kept accelerating. And so, I would get into fights just to get out of class, I would yell at the teacher just to get out of class. I would get suspended to get out of school. I did not want to sit in their classroom. I could not function in their classroom. I was really good in the streets. I made a name for myself in the streets and so I said I'm gonna be a drug dealer.

Pri: That was amazing. A lot of what Ameer said— like his shame of not being able to read feels very familiar to me. However, Ameer's experience is also unique from my own for many (*emphasis)* reasons. One stark difference is Ameer's experience has been criminalised and incarcerated.

Rae: Yeah. And unfortunately, Ameer's experiences align with the systemic issues of the criminalisation of dyslexia and the wider criminalisation of people with disabilities. One study, out of the Texas Prison found that eighty percent of incarcerated people were unable to read. Further, 47.8% of those prisoners struggled with processes associated with dyslexia. Research from the Dyslexia Alliance for Black Children demonstrates that dyslexic, black students often learn differently and are more likely to exhibit what is traditionally defined as Lower Literacy Performance and Decreased School Engagement. Students with disabilities are almost twice as likely to be suspended throughout each school level compared to students without disabilities. Excessive exclusionary discipline increases the likelihood that excluded students will be held back a grade, drop out of school, or experience youth criminalisation in the juvenile detention system. Black students with disabilities lost approximately 77 more days of instruction compared to white students with disabilities. I know that is a lot of stats but basically each of these factors increase the likelihood that a black student with disabilities will be criminalised as an adult and spend time in prison. Ameer was generous enough to speak to his first-hand experiences during our interview.

Music.

Ameer: Our systems, our prison systems are replete with people who cannot read. Here's the situation of the system. I figured it out! In 1852, Lincoln signed the Emancipation Proclamation that freed the Negros.

Abraham Lincoln: All persons held as slaves within any state, or designated part of a state, the people whereof shall then be in rebellion with the United States shall be then, henceforth, and forever, free.

Ameer: However, they did not free the Negros. Why? Because this country, this country that we are living in right now, was the engine of free labor. Blacks were the engine of free labor. It was just free labor. And they need free labor. So what they did was, they

set the Negros free and then they came up with the Black Codes. Right?! Okay! That Negro is on the street corner. It's 10 o'clock. Arrest him. He's drunk. Arrest him. A white lady says that he is, she looked at him. Arrest him.

Gunshot

Ameer: So they put you back in prison. Right! And then what they did was, they came up with, uh, it was a law, it was called, convict leasing. So now that I got all these Negros who are emancipated and I got him back in prison now for these erroneous crimes. Right! Petty crimes. Now I'm going to lease you out to someone, Mr. Johnny, that's seven miles away. So I got 1500 hours in my prison, I'm going to lease you to out to Mr. Johnny because he needs his fields cleaned out and I get the money for it. Bring that until today's time. In the penitentiaries, they make jeans, women lingerie, they make hats, they make shoes, they make stop-signs. 15% of our appliances are made in prisons. Kitchen appliances are made in prisons. And, who's getting that money?! The people who invest in that prisons. Know what they paid me? After four years of labor in the prisons? I left with a cheque for 82 dollars.

Rae: Wow!

Ameer: Four years worth of labor. So we need illiterate people. And they will not stop it. It will not stop. Its called capitalism. And if you think you are important. You gotta be crazy. You gotta be crazy. I know my place in this country. I have no place in this country.

Music.

Pri: That was really, really heavy.

Rae: Honestly Pri, I feel a little angry every time when I think about Ameer receiving a cheque, from the State, for 82 dollars after having labored for four (*emphasis)* years.

Pri: That is honestly infuriating! I want us to, uh, take a second, and look into his story a little bit more. What role do you think, race doing in Ameer's story, but also in the dyslexia to prison pipeline more generally?

Rae: Yeah! That's a good question. I was hoping we might use this portion of the podcast to engage scholars on the topic. Now we reached out to several scholars but several declined (*sigh),* citing Columbia's treatment of pro-Palestinian students as their reason for denying our quest for an interview.

Pri: Yeah. This is frustrating because there are so many incredible scholars that I really wish we could be in conversation with right now. But, I'm still hoping that we can bring their ideas into our discussion even if they aren't able to be here. Rae, what are some perspectives you have encountered that might shed light on the role of race on the dyslexia to prison pipeline?

Rae: Yeah, I'm happy to share. But, I mean, (*laughs shyly),* bear with me, I'm no expert. One excellent book that I read is called Black Disability Politics (*sound of page flip)* and was written by Professor Sami Schalk. In her book, Professor Schalk explains that disability is inherently tied to racism and other oppressions. Black Disability Studies explores both the lives of black disabled people and the relationship of race and disability to other systems of privilege and oppression. A major intervention of black and critical race disability studies is to expand (*emphasis)* our conceptualisation of disability. Prof. Schalk argues that disability functions as an ideology, epistemology and system of oppression, in addition to an identity and lived experience. She writes that existing disability studies and disability rights frameworks have been developed with little attention to the types of disabilities most common in poor and racialised communities. And without (*emphasis)* this critical race lens traditional disability discourses cannot account for the ways in which disability politics manifest in black communities. Black folk and other people of colour experience disabilities as the impact of capitalism, interpersonal violence, state violence and state neglect. So, Black Disability Politics engages with disability as a social and political rather than an individual and medical concern.

Pri: I absolutely love this. I can't wait to talk about it more. First though, I want to just note how much this critical perspective of disability differs from the ways we are currently thinking of disability rights.

Rae: Yeah! that's super important to know. So on one hand Critical Disability Theory analyses disability as a cultural, historical, relative, social and political phenomenon. It is a framework for an analysis of disability that centres disabled people and challenges the ableist assumptions that shape society. So, Critical Disability theorists direct their scholarship towards an advocacy for the liberation (*emphasis)* of those who are devalued and pathologized by an ableist world. In contrast, disability rights has a more narrow set of goals that include advocating for specific rights for disabled people or seeking remedies for disabled people who have had their rights infringed by the state or a third party.

Gavel sound. Court is now in session!

Rae: So its not that disability rights is invaluable. Its more, that it can be bit limiting.

Pri: Exactly! You know other scholars like Subini Annamma, Beth Ferry, and David Connor have also written about what they called Disability Critical Race Studies, or Dis-Crit. The Dis-Crit lens is based off of the work of critical race scholars who studied that how race was a construction, it was used to marginalise certain groups. Dis-Crit brings disability into this paradigm, by exploring how disability and race are both socially constructed in order to facilitate the oppression of marginalised communities. Professor Annamma herself talked about this in a lecture she gave at the Haas Institute of Disability Studies Cluster. I think we should take a look at what she has to say.

Prof. Subini Annamma: So in order to enter these education spaces I needed to uh, engage in a framework that was intersectional. And as you said, what I did was draw from Critical Race Studies and Disability Studies to create Disability-Critical Race Theory. Uh, with, along with my colleagues we came up with a conceptual framework that afforded particular affordances. First, beginning with the recognition that racism and ableism are normal, not aberrant. Aberrant, bodies different from the ideal are identified as problematic. Second, once identified those differences are more likely to be constructed as deficits and pathologized through labelling. Third, those labelled deficits or disabilities are viewed as needing to be remediated, rehabilitated, or redistributed into spaces less visible. The people up here, just to make it clear, are people I think as intellectual ancestors of folks who refuse single axis labelling. These interdisciplinary foundations allow Dis-Crit to, one, reject the false binary between normal and abnormal, between ability and disability, and between general and special education by forcing the unstable connections of these dialectical relationships into the open to be examined. Two, address how processes of racism and ableism position unwanted bodies out of the boundary of the normal in order to justify their removal. Throughout history, this quarantining of race to disability bodies in a system of white supremacy meant those to be constructed as furthest from the margins of ideal norms, such as white, male, able, upper class, heterosexual will always be most susceptible to violence in education. Three, recognise the expertise held (emphasis) by mostly marginalised communities and students of colour. This intersectional framing allowed me to bring different theories, processes in questions to bear on education. A Dis-Crit framework explores how mostly marginalised disabled students are both socially and spatially positions-the way they resist structural violence education in courses, and what they can teach education. Consequently, Dis-Crit is a tool for me to both examine and reconceptualize education's contributions to both problematic and liberatory classroom spaces.

Music

Rae: Yeah that was, that was really helpful and insightful and I was wondering how this insight from Professor Annamma help us understand the dyslexia to prison pipeline specifically.

Pri: Yeah! I think my choice definition of dyslexia already hints at how I view it as being socially constructed. You know like Ameer said, I think that most dyslexic kids remember the moment they became or were disabled. That moment is usually in a classroom when society in the form of your teacher and an English curriculum tells you to do something that you just can't do. And its that act (*emphasis)* of telling children to read in a certain way, that act is a choice, and this choice constructs dyslexia. This perspective has been articulated by you know, many scholars, like Barbara Riddick for example, who wrote a paper about the social model of dyslexia. The social model of dyslexia talks about how the literacy standards themselves construct dyslexia by imposing these expectations upon children who just can't read that way. I think the work of Dis-Crit ties the construction of dyslexia to race, and the larger project of oppression by showing how it uniquely impacts minorities and marginalised groups.

Rae: You know Pri, what you're talking about reminds me of something brilliant that you shared in class that I kind of think about all the time. That is the people who are most likely to be labelled as dyslexic are people of colour, migrants because dyslexia is more pronounced in the English language specifically. The dyslexia label can also uniquely harm people of colour while the white people go to schools where they automatically, just have more access to reading and writing support, making the impact of dyslexia less pronounced. Whereas low income black and brown people may not attend school with those resources. Instead, as Professor Annamma said, and Ameer's story illustrates, lower income black children with dyslexia are more likely to be labelled as stupid and ignored. Which can have a devastating impact on their self-esteem, lead them to avoid school, and pursue alternative ventures or behaviours that ultimately lead to their criminalisation and incarceration.

Pri: Yes exactly. You know wealthy white people are also more likely to afford accommodations if they are diagnosed with dyslexia. And that helps them compensate for any reading and writing impediments. Meanwhile, poor folks of colour are not only less likely to get accommodations— because of cost— but in some cases the accommodations system actually works with the carceral system to facilitate their marginalisation. Something that I think is especially true for black communities. You talked about this earlier when you touched upon how students with disabilities are more likely to be disciplined and suspended—a reality that disproportionately affects black kids. As a social worker, I often saw that the low income, black students that I worked with, get diagnosed with dyslexia and then be labelled as trouble and othered like I never was. They were put into special needs classrooms or District 75 schools that are automatically more heavily policed and more surveilled than regular schools. Its this combination— of othering and policing—that puts these students at high risk of incarceration. You know this is something that educators like Mathew Ward call the Special Ed to Prison Pipeline. And the dyslexia to prison pipeline, it's a part of that.

Rae: That was a really helpful breakdown Pri. Thank you. What I'm hearing you say is that educational standards themselves create (*emphasis)* what we now understand to be learning disabilities— like dyslexia. This construction along with the machinations of the carceral system facilitate the ongoing oppression and criminalisation of already marginalised groups. You know, these insights call up for me part of your interview with our next guest.

Pri: Yes. And thank you so much for that beautiful summary Rae. So Dr. Stovall is a Professor at the University of Illinois in Chicago. And an abolitionist educator who has worked in high school classrooms and in curriculum development. Dr. Stovall thinks deeply about dismantling disability and racial injustice in the classroom. My conversation with him gave me so much insight into the construction of disability and race as tools of oppression, and also how they manifest in what he calls 'the Dyslexia to Prison nexus'.

Dr. David Stovall: Yeah I mean, I think when you talk about dyslexia and any type of "disability" and I get this stuff from folks from disability studies. We always have to consider that disability is socially constructed. So its not this thing, that's like, people have made these categories and its all based on this false conception of what is deemed to be normal. Right! And normal is this terrible (*emphasis)* word that is white supremacist, that is imperialist, that's colonial, all of these things. So now when you think about learning (*emphasis)*— what would it mean, specifically, to say the premise of our learning is how we take care of each other. Right?! So now, so what does it mean to now think about the ways in which people learn. So when you go, so you know there's are other countries in the world who say "Look! Dyslexia is just a different way of learning and seeing". So now, how do, how can we try to incorporate that kind of learning and seeing in our classrooms. What is it, what is our responsibility to each other? Right! So again, kind of like, how people have gotten away from the term, school to prison pipeline, and really start talking about a school-prison nexus. Right, so I think you all, in your work can really start to think about twos dyslexia-prison nexus. Right! Its really around the ways that people have been positioned who have had their particular disability unaddressed. So you think about the work of Subini Annamma, right, who is at Stanford. Right! Its this idea of that, if you know if you look at prisons, and you see all of the untreated traumas (*emphasis)* and disabilities that are in that space. Now we gotta ask a different question. Rights! Its this thing around where was this determination made— that this grouping of people will be othered. So if we think of that thing specifically in a classroom space. Now its about how are we paying attention to make sure that those students needs are all considered as part of the collective need of the classroom. Right! So now how do we begin to think about the ways in which people learn and now make those adjustments based on that learning and then say 'Alright this particular modification allows us to see, where (*emphasis)* and how (*emphasis)* his person learns. So now, in what ways can we this support them.

Background sound.

Rae: Another, super insightful guest! That's awesome! Now one thing he talked about at the end with regards to his approach in the classroom reminds me of the work that Disability Justice advocates engage in. Cultural workers like Patty Berne explain that Disability Justice framework understands that all bodies are unique and essential and that all bodies have strengths and needs that must be met.

Pri: Yeah you know this concept all bodies of honouring all bodies and not viewing any as bad or abnormal as well as centering the need… That could do a lot to dismantle the dyslexia to prison nexus, and the carceral system more generally.

Rae: Pri (smiles)! That is like you are describing Abolition.

Pri: Yeah! It does, doesn't it! And I actually talked to Dr. Stovall about this. He gave a really helpful definition of abolition. And how this concept applies to the classroom.

Dr. Stovall: I think one of the things…*Background noise.* I think the most important thing about Abolition is the determination that something is unacceptable. Right?! So if you look at the criminal legal system we know that prisons don't work. We know that prisons do not deter or decrease crime. Rights! We know that they are extension of the slave state. And, it is an apparatus to actually limit the access and opportunity of certain people because, largely because of minor infractions. Right! So Abolition says that is unacceptable. Now the other part of Abolition says, because that thing is unacceptable what we are willing to do to create something in its place. So, right, I always think of Abolition as a constructive practice. It is not a destructive practice. Right!? It is determination and there is a constructive practice. What are we willing to do knowing what we know. Right! So if we think about education and schooling, right, we know that in many cases, in many places, where black and brown folks are being educated. Black, brown, indigenous folk, south-east Asian folk, are being schooled (*emphasis).* Again this a rewards and punishment for regurgitating white supremacy, that those schools do not have what those folks need. There's a (*fumbled and repeated thrice)* caveat in this. Because people think about those schools as dysfunctional schools. And I think we have to trouble that a little bit. Right! Because those aren't dysfunctional schools under white supremacy. Right! Those are schools that were intended to do exactly (*emphasis)* what they are doing, under white supremacy. So Abolition says, "What are we willing to do to refute that? And now we are placed at with the things that get students what they need. What are we constructing— by way of curriculum, by way of pedagogy, by way of classroom design that now allow students to actualise their world, what they need and the possibility of doing things different. Right! So Abolition says, "You must do things differently to create the capacity, to create something different."

Pri: That was incredible. I love his vision of a non-hierarchical, need based education system that centres care. Rae, what do you think?

Rae: Yeah. I loved it! I think he is such an inspiring scholar and advocate. And his views align really well with the work of a Canadian writer and organiser I am a really big fan of. In her book, Care Work, Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha explains that Disability Justice centres sick and disabled people of colour, queer, and trans-disabled people of colour and everyone who is marginalised in mainstream disability organising. Disability justice organising is super important and has had a huge impact in disability discrimination law.

Slogans! What do we want? Civil Rights. When do we want it? Now!

Rae: For example, the Black Panthers Party's active support for disabled organisers, two month occupation of the Department of Vocational Rehabilitation helped force the passage of Section 504—the law mandating the disabled access to public spaces and transportation.

Pri: What's Section 504?

Rae: Yeah! Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 was the first piece of Disability Rights legislation passed in the United States. Section 504 is a federal law that protects individuals from discrimination based on their disability. Section 504 set the stage for the enactment of the Americans with Disabilities Act. Drawing from Civil Rights movement era legislation from the 1960s, legislators in the House and Senate developed Section 504. And initially, Nixon vetoed it! Disability Justice Organisers with Disabled in Action initiated an action in New York City in front of Nixon Headquarters. On the first day they stopped traffic at rush hour. The following are reflections from some of the Disability Justice advocates who organised in favour of Section 504. This excerpt is from the documentary 'Crip Camp'.

Excerpt:

Music.
First person: They lied about the thing in Vietnam. They lied about every damn thing in the world. They lied war again about how they are treating us. They are lying about how they are treating physically disabled and mentally retarded in this country.

Second person: We wanted to, be able to mobilise disabled individuals in DC to spread the feelings of the disabled community around the United States. And that in unity we do have strength. And that we must expand the fight that we are fighting from, so that we don't have to fight each other and that we can all get our adequate services. That's really what this was getting into.

Rae: Eventually, Nixon caved to the political pressure. And signed the Rehabilitation Act with Section 504 included.

Pri: Thats so cool. I always really love watching examples of organising, especially from folks in our past. It reminds me that we have a lot of people we can learn from. However (*sigh)*, even Section 504 didn't go far enough right. You know I think that something that David would argue. In our conversation he talked a lot about a Universal Accommodation System, and what a truly equitable society would look like.

Music.

Dr. Stovall: When I first, got, *uh,* abreast to Disability Studies. And a scholar beforehand, he said—"I want you all to think about bathrooms." Right! And I when, I thought, I was like huh! He said now you think about a wheelchair accessible stall. He said "Whoa. What if every stall, was, accessible to someone who used a wheelchair." And he said I was like, Oh that's it! What would be it mean to have an adjustable (*emphasis)* sink. Right, so I was like yes (*Excitedly mumbles)*. So not just for one grouping of people, but for everybody. Right. So you can go to the airports and you see stuff like this. Right. Every (*repeats it twice)* bathroom stall has bars. Right. For folks who are, who use wheelchairs. You got these adjustable sinks. You got these, and they are not these overly burdensome costs. Right! So its getting that out of the way. Right. Now say, what if everybody had this. What if we had rolling, if we just think

about classroom assignments, what if we had rolling assignment dates. What if we had a window. Right. So you say “Right now this is finals week here. This is the last week of class.” You are saying, last week is finals week. During the school year what if you had open, what if you had windows, what if we had assignment windows. And you say, “alright, look this particular assignment you can turn in between this date and this date in opposed to a deadline.” So its rethinking how we limit the access of folks by now re-imagining what that means to incorporate the largest grouping of people. Right! So now its a different strategy.

Music.

Pri: I think he, and other scholars like Talia Lewis talk about Disability Justice as a contrast to the more scarce Disability Rights framework that you mentioned that our legal system uses. Like Ameer noted, both ableism and carceral injustice are byproducts of American racial capitalism— which dictates that only certain people get access to the resources they need to thrive. The anti-discrimination regime set out by 504 doesn’t remove that.

Rae: I hear you! So mainstream Disability Rights frameworks can have the effect of simply assuring that a few *(emphasis)* disabled people, most often the ones with economic or racial privilege, can succeed in a system that works to oppress them. Like Talia Lewis and Angela Davis have said, “the only way to systemically address these injustices, is to undo this oppressive foundation entirely”. I think care work, Abolitionist teaching and other disability justice practices can help us do that.

Pri: Completely agree. You know this conversation was really hopeful, and educational. It was also a lot! How do you feel?

Rae: Honestly Pri, I feel really grateful that you were so vulnerable and thoughtful throughout the podcast creation process. You shared a lot about your lived experience that I think truly enriched our conversation. I’ve learnt a lot working with you.

Pri: Rae, I have learnt so much from you. And like I said, I hope that this conversation is healing and enlightening for other folks. Even though I know that it was for the two of us. I’m hoping that our podcast project is one step towards the free and just future that I know we are all trying to create.

Rae: Big. Big agree Pri! So, to our listeners, Thanks for listening!

Music.