Thank you. Yes, so I'm an anthropologist. That means that I want to understand people's lived experience while they are within their community. So the title of my project is The Enabled Environment: Navigating Public Bathrooms and Accessibility in the Okanagan. This is a community-based project in collaboration with the Okanagan Regional Library, as well as the Collaborative & Experimental Ethnography Lab and the Institute for Community Engaged Research here on campus. I just wanted to take a minute too to acknowledge that all this research took place throughout Okanagan nation land that is unceded and ancestral.

So public bathrooms are really complicated places. They have a whole host of complex social dynamics while also being entangled in very basic and private human functions. We don't really think about public bathrooms until of course you need one and you can't find one. So I'm here today to talk about bathrooms. A person I spoke with said it this way, "Nobody really wants to address bathroom issues because nobody likes talking about bathrooms. Nobody likes dealing with bathroom problems. They just want to pin these issues on individuals."

So I'm here again to talk about bathrooms. And specifically I'm asking, how do permanent fixtures and design features influenced the general and sensory accessibility of these spaces? Sensory accessibility relates to when you have objects or experiences in an environment that are a barrier to somebody experiencing sensitivity to either sound, touch, smell, or any other senses. Additionally, I want to understand how do people in the Okanagan approach accessibility, especially when it's related to less visible disabilities? As leading anthropologists state, "Disability is a fact of life at home and in the public sphere that demands anthropological attention as an essential form of human nature." For the one in five Canadians who identify as living with a disability, this has never been more relevant than with the recent passing of the Accessible Canada Act.

I want to take a moment here just to bring in some of this key language that's coming in. So this new act now defines disability as any impairment including physical, mental, intellectual, cognitive, learning, communication or sensory impairment, or functional limitation that an interaction with a barrier hinders a person's full and equal participation in society. The second piece of language coming out is the definition of barrier, which includes anything physical, architectural, technological, attitudinal, anything based on information or communication that hinders the full and equal participation in society of persons with an impairment.

This for some might not seem like a big deal until you realize the United States passed similar legislation 29 years ago, Australia 27 years ago, and New Zealand 19 years ago. We are in a very exciting, historic moment in Canada today. Another really exciting thing is that this legislation passed as I designed and conducted this research. It was receiving royal assent when I started my field work. And so a key part of this legislation is the need for greater cultural awareness when it comes to the lived experience of disability and approaches to accessibility. And this is where there's a huge gap in the research. No one is yet doing community-based research around public knowledge around accessibility and the implications of such legislation in Canada today.

So my research is a local qualitative case study that shows how when you partner with community members, you can actually bridge gaps in public policy and research applications. I want to emphasize here, this isn't a study of libraries. It isn't an audit of libraries, but rather it is a partnership with the library. So to do this, I conducted what is known as a mixed method sensory ethnography, which just means that I had a whole bunch of different data sets that were comparative and came together to tell a cohesive story by the end. I started out by doing public intercept surveys across our lovely valley. I did eight different intercept surveys at eight branches. And I stood there with an iPad and I had library patrons come up to me and fill out this four minute survey. Then I had 56 participants fill this out altogether. This was to understand what our library patrons' understandings of accessibility when you are in a public space, so not just in the home or in sort of anonymized spaces.

While this was going on, I also distributed an online staff questionnaire to 33 branches of the Okanagan Regional Library. And this was to understand what our library frontline workers' needs and experiences when it comes to navigating issues around accessibility. I had 52 people fill this out altogether. I also conducted two focus groups and this was to gain a more comprehensive collective community discussion around the sort of lived experience of disability and what were communities' perspectives moving forward. I also conducted one interview with an upper management board member of the Okanagan Regional Library to get an administrative perspective on values and motivations towards creating more inclusive public institutions. What I have just summed up there is roughly 160 hours of active data collection on my part and my generous supervisor, Dr. Fiona McDonald.

So when I talk to people about bathrooms, I found, in the form of the intercept surveys and focus groups, I found that they talked about things in sort of two categories. So there was all this cultural knowledge about public bathrooms. So you go in and you have these expectations. You want there to be a toilet. You want to wash your hands. You want to dry your hands, preferred if it was tiled and if it was light colored. Values that consistently came up were things like privacy, safety, and cleanliness. And people also talked a lot about the lived experience of navigating these spaces when you had children or when you were elderly or new to Canada.

The second area that I looked at that I've found people talk about were it's things related specifically to accessibility or what it's like to navigate these spaces when you have some type of a disability. So there were barriers that people would talk about, which can be everything from structural to the orientation of space. And then we've found across all the data sets, but I'm specifically talking about the intercept surveys here. When presented with the language of the act, the baseline understanding of barriers with limited. For example, from the intercept surveys when I went to the library with the iPads, but we found that 18 out of 56 participants had never heard of barriers in relation to accessibility before. This suggests that the language of the act, while inclusive and exhaustive, doesn't actually reflect the awareness or experience of the public.

This however shifted when we started talking to people about their lived experience of navigating these spaces. So a majority of participants from all data sets said automatic hand dryers, air fresheners, loud sounds, self flushing toilets, and fluorescent lights would be a barrier to someone experiencing sensitivity to sound, touch, smell, vision, or any other senses. Words that consistently came up from the qualitative data were things like, "These spaces are intimidating. They're frustrating and often triggering." People also talked a lot about sort of these informal and formal approaches to access, which we talked a lot about signage or how BC building code actually isn't accessible or the presence of accessibility auditors in some different spaces like this. So I brought all this data together. And we found that the public readily understands issues of access when they can physically see a wheelchair. However, when less visible impairments are present, the components of what an accessible and inclusive space looks like or feels like, it's really hard to grasp.

My next area that I wanted to look at were, what are the needs of the frontline workers in these public institutions? From the data, library workers requested more training opportunities and information regarding accessibility. They emphasized the need to consult with community members, especially people with disabilities. They highlighted the importance of visual signage in multiple formats and multiple languages including tactile lettering and Braille. They also addressed many limitations when it comes to budget, resources, organizational policies, and then their own physical capacities. The people working in these spaces said it this way. "When educated and trained, we are able to make strides in becoming more inclusive and accessible in general. Education is key."

So I brought all this data together and it's like, how am I going to finish this? I found this stated, well, we have a long way to go. We don't yet know where this legislation is going, but we do know what the Okanagan can do to bridge gaps and understandings and approaches to accessibility. I am now in the process of compiling a comprehensive community report, which is one of the first steps in meeting what the data shows, an opportunity for frontline workers of public institutions to learn alongside their community. This research matters because now a key community partner, a public library, I'm sure many of us hold dear in our memories and lives today, now has a resource to make any changes going forward. And that is the value of applied sensory anthropology today.

A project of the size is only possible to the amazing amount of people that are behind the work. I just want to emphasize that the weight of gratitude across these lists is equal and immense. So to everyone at Okanagan Regional Library who made this project possible, including all of my participants, thank you. To whole hosts of resources, UBCO and beyond, thank you. To my generous supervisors, Dr. Fiona McDonald and Dr. Christine [Shriner 00:00:10:45], thank you. And to the Urban [Cay 00:10:49] School who made this project possible by funding it, thank you. And thank you for your time.

Speaker 2: Questions for [inaudible 00:11:03]?

Speaker 3: At the start you said, Canada seems really far behind other countries like the U.S. and Australia.

Speaker 1: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Speaker 3: Do you have a sense of why that is? And why did it take Canada so long to [inaudible 00:11:20]?

Speaker 1: Thank you for the question. So the question is. Why did the Canada take so long to adopt this specific legislation? From my sort of background literature review and seeing other initiatives that Canada has put forward, Canada's legislation before this was primarily reactive. And it was under Charter of Rights and Freedoms and anti-discrimination laws. So that means that somebody has to have some huge grievance against them in order for them to pursue legal action. It's very odd, I will say, for a nation like Canada, especially when we have adopted UN charters around the rights of people with disabilities to not have a proactive form of legislation like this. So this is looking at removing barriers and preventing them before they happen. So it's a bit tricky to say exactly why Canada hasn't had it, but I would say they thought that anti-discrimination laws were good enough. And we've found that that is not the case. Yes.

Speaker 4: Thank you so much for doing this work. I think it's fabulous and needs more attention, so thank you. My question is in terms of demographics. What percentage of the population has a disability, warranted or divergent, in the people that were filling out these study surveys?

Speaker 1: Great question. So the question is what percentage of people either identified as having some form of disability or impairment? And going to have to fall back on research ethics because as an undergraduate student I am not allowed to work with any vulnerable populations. And so the only demographic I could actually sort of keep data on, according to my ethics, was that they were over 18. And then I did sort of some other demographics too, like are you middle aged or elderly sort of thing. So unfortunately I wasn't able to accurately reflect the voice of the people that this will be affecting at this project at this time. Yes.

Speaker 5: Do you have any new projects on the horizon?

Speaker 1: So the question is, do I have any projects on the horizon? So I'm in the middle of doing a self-directed studies with Dr. Fiona McDonald where we are compiling the community report. I will then take all of this data to the American Anthropological Association Conference in Vancouver in the form of a multimodal visual anthropology installation that'll kind of show people what it's like to be in the bathroom. And then I'm also in the process of doing an academic publication. And then looking beyond this year, I'm in the process of applying to Master's programs as well.

Speaker 2: [inaudible 00:14:25]