

Identity, Mental Illness and Disability - May 7 2020  
transcript edited for coherence

Gentle Heron: Good morning and welcome everyone to Jadin's presentation today. Before she introduces herself and her build, I want to mention a few things. We are presenting in voice+text for maximum accessibility. I will be speaking Jadin's text aloud.

The text transcript of this session will be used as a public record of the event. If you do not want your avatar name associated with this event, please IM me. And do not type in local chat.

Keep your eye on Virtual Ability's blog, FaceBook and website for the evolving schedule of events and tours throughout the month of May. We call this collection of activities our Mental Health Un-Conference.

Jadin, thanks for sharing with us today. Please begin.

Jadin Emerald: alrighty and a big apology for being late!

Eme Capalini: It's hard to remember what day it is

Jadin Emerald: case in point, actually for why i'm no longer working ... cognitive issues in this particular case, hehe

Jadin Emerald: all right! i'm gonna use an updated notecard notes reader from a previous tour i gave

Please feel free to ask questions at any time.

Welcome to my Ethnographia build.

and allow me to introduce myself as the "same" person as Jadyn Firehawk! now in my retired incarnatiion

It's called "Reconstructing Identity After Disability: A 'Build Biography'"

We'll go inside shortly, and do a "highlights" tour of the build. But first, a little background.

In the physical world, I used to have career as a university professor.

After graduate school, I taught for 9 years before I became disabled.

In January of 2000, at the age of 37, I fell into a depression that deepened to the point where I became suicidal.

It was so bad that I actually carried out an attempt on my life.

At that time, I was teaching at the University of Texas, and I was a single mother to my 5 year old daughter.

That attempt landed me in a psychiatric hospital for the first time, and I was diagnosed with major depression.

I got back on my feet, and was able to teach for another year.

In 2001, though, I landed back in the psychiatric hospital, and that time, I was totally unable to get back on my feet.

My psychiatrist after that hospitalization took my full history, and recognized that I didn't just have major depression.

But, because I have also cycled through severely elevated moods in my life (manic and hypomanic episodes), he changed my diagnosis to bipolar disorder.

I went on medical leave from my job, but that time, I was totally unable to return.

Medication treatment for bipolar disorder is a hit-or-miss process that can take several

years, until the right medication combination to stabilize it can be found.

After a year, I was still extremely unstable, and my department could no longer hold my position open for me. I had to turn in my resignation.

(Today, it now takes a combination of 7 medications to keep me on a still somewhat precarious "knife edge" of stability, but it took many years to achieve that.)

That year (2002), I suffered a psychotic mania, and landed in the hospital again.

While in the hospital, an incident occurred between me and one of the nurses. I blew up in a rage at her over something minor, and that nurse happened to have a Filipino accent.

(The Philippines is where I was born.)

My attending psychiatrist (she later told me) witnessed it, and turned to a nurse next to her and said, "That patient has PTSD."

The psychiatrist later evaluated me, and took my history, and she confirmed a diagnosis of post-traumatic stress disorder.

My PTSD was caused by a history of childhood trauma, made complex, and difficult to treat, by the fact that it originated in early childhood.

Due to the PTSD and bipolar disorder, I've been on disability 2 times, once from 2001 to 2005, and again from 2010 until now.

(In between, I attempted to return to work, which, failed in the end, due largely to recurrent depression and sensitivity to stress.)

During the first time that I was on disability, I didn't have a computer or access to the internet.

The computer I had until then had been provided by my department, and I had to turn it back in when I resigned.

I couldn't afford to buy one of my own, at the time, nor pay for internet access.

Most of my time during that first period on disability, I spent taking care of my daughter, reading, and watching TV. (I've probably seen every episode of Law & Order that was ever made!)... and SVU and Criminal Intent

The second time that I was on disability, however, things were a lot different.

I had a computer, and I had access to the internet.

I had also discovered Second Life during the time that I was making my work attempt.

This has made all the difference in the world.

Now, fast-forward to 2015.

At a presentation that Tom Bukowski (Tom Boellstorff) gave at Virtual Ability, I heard about the Ethnographia project.

I immediately jumped at the chance.

In my application to the Ethnographia Project, I wrote that I am a disabled former university professor who has had to completely reconstruct my identity, which had previously been wrapped around "being an academic."

I wrote that Second Life has helped me to construct a new, many-faceted identity, which now includes being an artist, a builder (3D content creator), a philanthropist, and a teacher."

I wrote that I wanted to create something which "somehow represents this many-faceted, (re)enabled life that SL has made possible for me."

At the time, I had no idea of what exactly I wanted to build. I only knew that I wanted to be part of the project ... and this is the result

and so! at this point, let me set you loose and let you explore

Slatan Dryke: you did a great job !

John Laughing (thesoundofonemanlaughing): Thank you for sharing your story Jadin :)

Jadin Emerald: the signs tell the you my story

[09:36] Jadin Emerald: ty!

and please don't be shy to ask any questions

Gentle Heron: Jadin was not shy to share with us

Jadin Emerald: my openness about my own mental illness is what i consider to be my activism

and thank you all for coming

Eme Capalini: Did making this exhibit help you?

Jadin Emerald: Oh it sure did eme! It helped me to "integrate" the experience i've had in sl and because i had to reach back to piece together the narrative it helped me with my own therapy

Eme Capalini: awesome

Ludova (quippe.wylder): I'll explore a bit first, because you may have answered already, but I wonder why you think of bipolar as a loss of identity. I didn't think of mine that way.

Jadin Emerald: Ludova, in my case, the identity issue was the fact that i had it all wrapped up in my career. Maybe a professional hazard with academia! or maybe i just didn't know how to balance work/life well enough.

That was certainly the case. Excellent question though

Ludova (quippe.wylder): I guess I didn't, strangely enough.

I was a computer programmer with a master's.

And that's all I did.I didn't really raise my daughter.

John Laughing (thesoundofonemanlaughing): Can I ask, if you have a good relationship with your daughter?

Jadin Emerald: Excellent yes. There's this quote I love by Richard Bach that goes "There is no such thing as a problem without a gift for you in its hands."

and the biggest gift in my disability was in getting to focus on raising my daughter

Ludova (quippe.wylder): That applies very well to me.

John Laughing (thesoundofonemanlaughing): It can take a long time to get the ribbon and paper off :)

Gentle Heron: or even to recognize it as a gift not another brick thrown at you.

Jadin Emerald: Oh! I should mention!my Coronavirus Survival Store (all freebies). It's in Search. 42 free items in there, currently.

Ludova (quippe.wylder): I've seen that, Jadin. It's great.

John Laughing (thesoundofonemanlaughing): Oh that will be interesting

Eme Capalini: It's also in Jadin's profile

John Laughing (thesoundofonemanlaughing): I hope it includes windchimes, free or otherwise.

Jadin Emerald: It has a free sound soother hud, that has windchimes in it.

Slatan Dryke: Jadin your building is bigger than the last time I have visited, is it? I remember that it was smaller but for sure I have a wrong memory.

Jadin Emerald: I added the demo platform in the sky. There are some demo houses in the sky too, that are tp-able from the Coronavirus Survival Store. Tredi let me put them

here!