"Ableism in Academia: Where are the disabled and ill academics and educators?"
Nicole Brown, University College London
International Disability Rights Affirmation Conference 2021
November 26

[2021/11/26 11:30] Elektra Panthar: Hello everyone.
Today's presentation is being transcribed so those without audio or who require text only can participate in real time. The presenter may also use a teleprompter (speak easy) in local chat.
A little explanation about this service.
Voice-to-text transcriptionists provide a translation of the key ideas discussed, NOT a word for word transcription.
Voice-to-text services provide an in-the-moment snapshot of ideas and concepts, so that those who are unable to hear or to understand the audio program are able to participate in real-time.
You will see the transcription in local chat.
Transcription is provided by Virtual Ability, Inc.
The transcriptionists are:
Elektra Panthar
LoriVonne Lustre
The speakers will be identified by initials as they speak.
The following initials in the transcription record will identify the speakers:
NB: Nicole Brown

[2021/11/26 11:31] Anna Adamant: Hello to all of you today!
My name is Anna Adamant.
I am a member of the Virtual Ability group and a long time resident of Second Life.
My "second life" has included the last 17 years.
In that time, I have seen Second Life grow and change in so many ways.
I've been a builder, a teacher, a partner, a mom, a greeter, a mentor, a role player, a sandbox owner / moderator, and a store owner in my Second Life.
I have the pleasure of introducing to you today a talented woman who will be speaking on Ableism in Academia.
Her talk will center on interrogating the invisibility of disabilities and chronic illnesses.
Our next speaker will draw from her two edited books on ableism and her own research to paint for us a picture of disability representation.
She will also highlight the current trend for individuals to not disclose their needs and disabilities.
Among her roles in regard to the study of disabilities and ableism, she is an Associate Professor at UCL Institute of Education.
She is also Director of Social Research & Practice and Education Ltd.
Please welcome our next speaker, Dr. Nicole Brown!

[2021/11/26 11:35] Elektra Panthar: NB: Thank you very much for having me here today, I'm very excited to be here
I hope I won't be too incoherent this evening
I'm not very acquainted with SL, apologies
Thank you to all those working behind the scenes, it's a unique experience for me
It goes to show the adjustments needed for everyone to be working well
I'll focus on the question "where are the disabled and ill academics and educators?"
I'll draw from two edited books from a conference in 2018 - it feels like a different era now
Ableism in Academia: Theorising Experiences of Disabilities and Chronic Illnesses in Higher Education
https://www.uclpress.co.uk/products/123203
Lived Experiences of Ableism in Academia: Strategies for Inclusion in Higher Education
https://policy.bristoluniversitypress.co.uk/lived-experiences-of-ableism-in-academia

How I define disability
In many ways medically and legally, neurodivergent or chronically ill people are defined as disabled as well but not always feel like or are recognized as such
2017-18 statistics
Status of disability disclosure in academia
14.4% of disclosures in UK HE in 2017/18 were undergraduate students, compared to 9.3% of taught postgraduate students and 9.0% of postgraduate research students.
Overall disclosure rates (5.3%) lower among academic staff (4.3%) than professional services and support staff (6.1%):
-5.3% teaching-only academics
-4.2% teaching and research academics
-3.2% research-only academics.

Discrepancy within general public and higher education people
Disclosure rates and what they mean
From statistics we can see noticeable differences at transition points and in particularities of posts.
3 trends at play
General disclosure in general population is higher than in the academia
Many drop out , they don't feel like would have enough support to continue
Those that do continue are less likely to disclose their conditions and needs
Disclosure is a cost-benefit analysis, of sorts
In the most simple terms the cost outweigh the benefit in academia

It's the opposite in case of undergraduate students, they have aids and help
In academia disabled have to deal with stigma and pigeonholing
We have to work with the definition of disability
Equality act of 2010 in UK - disability is a long term impairment
It's a very clinical way to define it
Clearly we have a negative defective model of what it means to be disabled
In that definition
Often disability is outlined as wrong, as a disadvantage
Disabled people have often internalized this

People are struggling on a personal level to identify as disabled / neurodivergent / chronically ill

People are worried about being stigmatized

It also depends in the situation: compare narratives and discourses around cancer and schizophrenia

Society has a particular view when it talks about those conditions

With cancer there's the narrative of somebody battling something, schizophrenia is framed as something 'weird'

So it's difficult for many to disclosure certain disabilities, because of internalized ableism as well

Biggest problem is invisible disability academics

"Invisible disability in the academy is exhausting, peers & work conditions constantly overlook my needs. They have difficulty grasping fluctuations & often it's easier to just shrug off my needs"

Fear of repercussions and having to deal with other people's emotions

For example if a disabled academic is given an office instead of just a desk - there might be jealousy and the person might have to 'appease' their colleagues

We need to have a good representations of differences on all sorts of panels

Most of disabled academics want to be known for their work and research, they don't want to be the token disabled person in every panel

We think that we can be 100% inclusive, and that's a fallacy

We can realistically aim to meet the needs of 90% of the people

There are conflicting needs

For example some people need visual clues because of hearing loss or cognitive disfunction - on the other end visual stimuli cause overload for neurodivergent people

Another factor is lack of awareness

It's not always intentional but it's felt

Another important factor is internalized ableism

I want to point out a quote from a disabled academic person: "Invisible disability in the academy is exhausting, peers & work conditions constantly overlook my needs. They have difficulty grasping fluctuations & often it's easier to just shrug off my needs"

That's unfortunately the reality

What can we do about it?

It can't be a token approach, it needs to be structured and backed up financially as well

As individuals we can lead by example

If each one of us tries to demonstrate empathy we can get to a stage where there is equality

We have seen the shift during the pandemic, with the focus shifting to wellness, globally we have seen mental health have a more important position than we used to

Also acceptance than people work differently

There's a rise of work from home, companies trying to accept this

Particular kind of software have improved dramatically in a short period of time

There's a bit more of a heightened sense of community and empathy

We need more research, participatory approaches

Activism and social justice
Questioning and challenging the collective
There are kinds of experiences that are different
We can't lump all of the needs and difficulties in one category
Intersectionality is always very important, accessibility, relevance.
There's a danger that we are reverting 'back to normal'
But we saw a shift even before the pandemic, so now we have a momentum going and we have to capitalize on that
Thank you very much for listening

[2021/11/26 12:01] Fɪɴᴀ 小霜 (Sapphira Franizzi): ♪♪♫♬ APPAWS! ♪♪♫♬ *:-.,_,.-:*'``'*Yayyyyyyy!!!!*:-.,_,.-:*'``'*
[2021/11/26 12:01] DrShoo Resident: *clapping*
[2021/11/26 12:01] Sitearm (Sitearm Madonna): Very nice!
[2021/11/26 12:01] Anna Adamant Albion (Anna Adamant): Thank you so much for being here with us today, Dr. Brown!

[2021/11/26 12:01] Gentle Heron: Thank you. You've raised a number of issues that are very important in higher education.
QUESTION- In the US, most campuses have an Office of Disability Support (or some other name for that function). Its purpose is to provide technical assistance and advocacy with their professors for students who come in with designated special education needs, such as having had a formal IEP (Individualized Education Program) in secondary school. Do you have this in the UK? How can this campus Office assist and advocate for faculty and staff with disability-related employment needs, as supported through the ADA (Americans with Disabilities Act) legal requirements? Or should that assistance go through the HR (Human Resources) office? Should those two offices communicate and coordinate in order to better support disabled and ill faculty and staff?
[2021/11/26 12:03] LV (LoriVonne Lustre): NB: we have the same in the UK. Why are there different offices? Why is there a distinction between students and staff for supports like this. Including all health and wellness.

[2021/11/26 12:04] DrShoo Resident: I've read your blue Ableism in Academia book, and just wanted to thank you for this work and presentation today too. It's GREAT.
[2021/11/26 12:05] Gentle Heron: DrShoo [Ashley Shew] is another of our presenters today!
[2021/11/26 12:05] LV (LoriVonne Lustre): NB: Thank you very much for saying you have read the blue book.

[2021/11/26 12:04] Mook Wheeler: COMMENT: Invisible disabilities tend to be more difficult to "admit" to. Visible disabilities are obviously easier to admit to as they are more obvious. Personally, I have found that a 'silent pre-empting' works for me. I wear my Autism Alert lanyard with its Hidden Disabilities Sunflower colours. I no longer need to 'explain' myself after unfortunate moments, and I have found that people, spotting the lanyard, have been prepared 'in advance' for the unexpected. And they seem more accommodating, more forgiving of 'offences'. I believe people

do not like to be 'surprised', so the lanyard warns them and gives them time to prepare. It's the best personal workaround I have found for myself.
[2021/11/26 12:06] LV (LoriVonne Lustre): NB: I agree

[2021/11/26 12:06] iSkye Silvercloud (iSkye Silverweb): COMMENT: I recently had an experience with ableism in SL, in another group where I am involved in organising activities. One person complained there was a sound emanating from one of the parcels and it was audible across the entire region, and I said ok do you know where the source is? And he said I don't think you can help me solve this... long awkward pause. Then I said, "um..I used to use a hearing aid when I was younger. I know what sound, voice and music is." He was mortified and apologised profusely. We are now good friends and he understands a lot more about my abilities and limitations because I told him he should just ask me questions. Ableism is something that is still to be addressed even in virtual worlds
[2021/11/26 12:07] LV (LoriVonne Lustre): NB: I know how you feel about this. The Lived Experience book includes a chapter on hearing loss and academia.
I am profoundly deaf, but I struggle to call myself that. I know there is a difference between hearing loss and being deaf.

[2021/11/26 12:08] Gentle Heron: COMMENT - Virtual worlds don't "level the playing field" entirely, and certainly can actually cause OTHER disabilities here that don't exist in the physical world. So we all have to be more lenient with each other.
[2021/11/26 12:10] LV (LoriVonne Lustre): NB: Yes. We do have to be more lenient.
[2021/11/26 12:09] Sitearm (Sitearm Madonna): "virtual disability at times"

[2021/11/26 12:08] Varahi Lusch: COMMENT - As an educator myself, even when I have told people I am disabled and have frequent Epileptic seizures, people still project on my action and lack of actions as something an able-bodied person is 'choosing' to do. This has been a difficult problem for me, particularly in SL where 'technically' people believe that disability can be overcome/ignored. I can 'pretend' up to a certain point - 'mask' it, as you said - but eventually I get outed in one way or another when my lack of ability disappoints someone's projections. I have even heard some Ableist people in SL saying I use my disability as an 'excuse'. It does seem that often there is an imbalance in people's minds as you say where students get support and understand but teachers (by virtue of them being 'providers') don't. Taking my own space (like the private office example you mentioned) leads to people thinking I am selfish, and that is demoralising when I am just trying my best!
[2021/11/26 12:11] LV (LoriVonne Lustre): NB: With graduate students there is the additional issue of job security (or lack thereof). They see the world differently than full academic staff / professors.
[2021/11/26 12:09] Varahi Lusch: nods

[2021/11/26 12:11] Gentle Heron: Any other questions or comments? I know LoriVonne is catching up on transcribing.
If there are no other questions, let's show our appreciation to Dr. Brown for sharing with us today.
[2021/11/26 12:12] Fɪɴᴀ 小霜 (Sapphira Franizzi): ♥ Thank Youuuuuuuuuu!! ♥
[2021/11/26 12:12] Elektra Panthar: ♫♪♫♪ Applauds♪♫♪♫
[2021/11/26 12:12] DrShoo Resident: Thanks so much!

[2021/11/26 12:12] Shyla the Super Gecko (KriJon Resident): applause!
[2021/11/26 12:13] Slatan Dryke: amazing thanks
[2021/11/26 12:13] Varahi Lusch: Its great to have these things spoken about :)
[2021/11/26 12:13] Gentle Heron: Yes Varahi. It is important for us to advocate

[2021/11/26 12:12] LV (LoriVonne Lustre): NB: It looks like there are no more questions or comments.
Thank you for the kind applause. I have really appreciated being here.
[2021/11/26 12:13] Gentle Heron: Thank you for representing disability positively to your nondisabled colleagues.

[2021/11/26 12:13] Elektra Panthar: <>