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Can disabled people's experiences of exclusion in pandemic higher education encourage the promotion of inclusive research practices?

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Abstract

The Coronavirus pandemic has undoubtedly caused significant disruption in how higher education operates, both in terms of the processes of teaching and learning, and research cultures. In light of these challenges and necessary changes, there is a clear opportunity for rethinking cultures, specifically those where qualitative person-focused research is carried out and, by so doing, promote inclusive research practices. In this chapter, written by three disabled academics, we contend that, for such inclusive research practices to emerge, disabled people's experiences of conducting and participating in research, as well as being in academia in general, need to be considered. We demonstrate that disabled people's experiences of disadvantage and how they respond to exclusionary barriers faced within academia offer important insights and facilitate innovation for building inclusive research cultures, post-pandemic. Empirical data supporting our argument comes from two focus groups conducted during the pandemic with seven disabled people, including the authors of this chapter. These focus groups explored the barriers that disabled people encounter when conducting and participating in academic research. Our suggestions for how to implement inclusive research practices going forward are grounded in these narratives.

Keywords: Disability, inclusive research, higher education, Coronavirus pandemic, ableism

1. Introduction

Since the onset of the Coronavirus pandemic in December 2019, the higher education sector has had to navigate markedly different ways of working, and this includes how interactive research is conducted in the field, for instance, with members of the public, school and university students, and workplace colleagues. Conventional qualitative practices that have long been viewed as set in stone, such as researchers conducting fieldwork through face-to-face interviews held in close proximity, have had to be fundamentally re-thought in order to ensure health protection both to researchers and participants, so as to prevent COVID-19 contagion (Banks et al., 2022).

Myriad evidence has come to the fore regarding the considerable challenges and potential pain that so many disabled people and their families have encountered during this pandemic period (e.g., Read et al., 2023). We do not downplay the significance of these. However, we have previously noted how, as a consequence of the pandemic, the far-reaching challenges to academic practices present a clear break state; an apt moment to evaluate the extent to which higher education is inclusive (Parfitt et al., 2021). This includes reflecting on research practices. In this chapter, we begin by applying theoretical ideas of ‘academic ableism’ (Dolmage, 2017) to contextualise long-standing and contemporary barriers that disabled people may encounter when participating in and carrying out academic research. We then apply insights from crip theory (McRuer, 2006), specifically, ‘cripistemology of crisis’

(Danylevich & Patsavas, 2021), to the nexus of the global Coronavirus pandemic and the ways in which academic research is executed. We propose that disabled people's experiences of crises, such as when they navigate higher education and try to surmount the quotidian barriers that they encounter, provide profound insights for promoting inclusive societal change for all people, whether they be disabled or not.

2. Theoretical background

Ableism refers to the structural valuing of 'able-bodiedness' and 'able-mindedness', which permeates all facets of society (Campbell, 2009; McRuer, 2006). When considering ableism in relation to the COVID-19 era, we have previously shown how disabled people feel that decisions taken by government in order to mitigate the negative implications of the pandemic remain underpinned by ableist principles (Read et al., 2023). These ableist principles perpetuated a narrative of disabled people being seen as 'expendable' casualties, when it came to taking actions designed to protect the needs of non-disabled people: or in other words, they were being perceived as 'less than human' (Read et al., 2023, p. 40). Academic ableism, or the devaluation and discreditation of disabled people's bodies within higher education (Dolmage, 2017), continues this narrative. For instance, disabled university students and staff have reported intense feelings of vulnerability during the uncertainties of the pandemic era. This situation was exacerbated by the sense that universities were unkind and uncompassionate spaces, which did not routinely consider their needs (Parfitt et al., 2021).

To deepen understandings of academic ableism, we draw on ideas of 'crip' (McRuer, 2006), namely, 'cripistemology' (Johnson & McRuer, 2014) and the associated

'cripistemology of crisis' (Danylevich & Patsavas, 2021). Crip is an activist stance which attempts to reclaim the value of disability through challenging traditional ableist structures (McRuer, 2006). Cripistemology works to expose the ableism embedded within systems and society by placing experiences of disability and disabled people's experiential knowledge at the forefront of issues (Johnson & McRuer, 2014; Mitchell et al., 2014). Cripistemology of crisis, therefore, describes the value of putting to work disabled people's lived experiences when addressing global or local challenges (Danylevich & Patsavas, 2021).

Perhaps unsurprisingly, the extant literature which supports the idea of academic ableism and crip, is evidenced by experiences reported by both disabled university students and staff (e.g., Brown & Leigh, 2020; Rodgers et al., 2023). With regard to academic ableism, scholars have concluded that it permeates all aspects of the university environment, from the physical infrastructure of, for instance, teaching rooms, to the everyday practices and systems through which higher education institutions operate (Dolmage, 2017). From a student perspective, research investigations have demonstrated how disabled students are expected to accept a substandard learning experience compared to their non-disabled peers. For example, while reasonable adjustments or accommodations to support disabled students may be provided in theory, enactment of these may mean that learning remains inaccessible (Wertans & Burch, 2023). Studies have also shown how university staff may view disabled students' impairments and need for support with suspicion, allowing for a culture to emerge that obliges students to prove or justify their support needs (e.g., Kwon, 2023; Williams et al., 2018, 2023). Experiences from disabled staff are similar, with staff reporting unease regarding disclosure of

their disability identity, owing to their fears around stigmatisation, discrimination, and potential implications for job security (e.g., Brown & Leigh, 2018; Read et al., 2021; Lindsay & Fuentes, 2022). Another strand of scholarship in the field has demonstrated how disabled staff need to invest additional time and energy in navigating academic systems that do not take into consideration many disabled people's lived experiences (e.g., Merchant et al., 2020).

Turning to crip theory and the application of cripistemology as a theoretical lens for analysing academia, Abes and Darkow (2020) have described the importance of using disabled university students' contributions as a means of reframing traditional medicalised attitudes associated with disability (e.g., people as burdens and objects of pity). Similarly, Rodgers et al. (2023) emphasised the insights provided by applying the notion of 'crip time' (Kafer, 2013) to the academy. This illuminates how disabled staff may be excluded from universities due to ableist understandings of temporality, such as their being unable to work relentlessly long hours or fulfil the workloads typically undertaken by non-disabled colleagues (Rogers et al., 2023). Using the theoretical optic of crip time can render visible and therefore, open up to challenge, these everyday ableist practices which would otherwise go unheeded.

While academic ableism and crip theory helps us to explore academic culture, in this chapter, we focus on the practices associated with conducting and participating in academic research. Higher education has held a long-standing viewpoint, albeit misguided, that the 'best way' of researching is without doubt, what is routinely practised (Bruce, 2021). However, disability studies researchers have argued that conventional research approaches are profoundly ableist, and as such, often

exclusionary to disabled people (e.g., Tregaskis & Goodley, 2005). Exclusions may manifest in multiple ways: distorted power imbalances in favour of typically non-disabled academic fieldworkers (e.g., Liddiard et al., 2019); the unacknowledged time and energy that disabled people invest into contributing to research (e.g., Mills & Sanchez, 2023); or indeed, the inaccessibility of the research process, caused for example, by information about studies being written in inaccessible language (e.g., Nind, 2017).

Inclusive research from a disability perspective is an umbrella term covering numerous methodologies and terminologies (e.g., emancipatory research, participatory research, user-led research etc.; Nind, 2014). Inclusive research has been developed predominantly in the context of learning (intellectual) disability research but has expanded to encompass collective experiences of disabled people and other marginalised groups at risk of experiencing oppressive research practices (Nind, 2014). Inclusive research practice, as defined by people with learning disabilities, rests on the belief that the following tenets should be upheld by disabled and non-disabled scholars: ensuring that the research is owned by disabled people; guaranteeing that the value and wisdom of disabled people and their experiences are recognised; and that research is dedicated to furthering rights for, and making a positive difference to, disabled people (e.g., Nind, 2017; Walmsley & Johnson, 2003; Walmsley et al., 2018). These tenets also exist within other academic strands of disability activist research, such as mad studies, in terms of advocating for the importance of the voices of people with mental health conditions being heard in service provision (Beresford, 2021). The collective message of inclusive disability research is to challenge the pre-existing ableist barriers which prevent disabled

people's participation (Liddiard & Watts, 2022). To enact the above tenets requires a willingness and commitment to think about doing research in a different way: ways that are bespoke and sensitive to individual projects (Nind & Vinha, 2012). We actively endorse such research practices that are inclusive at every stage, and which treasure the insights of disabled people (e.g., Iriarte et al., 2023; Nind, 2017; Nind & Vinha, 2012). This chapter contributes to the theory and practice of such scholarship.

3. Overview of research and Methodology

To refer back to our Introduction, we contend that the pandemic period provides a unique opportunity to reflect on, and rethink how, academic research is 'done' within universities. We were convinced that the opportunity that the pandemic offered had to be seized in order to capitalise on the moment. For, unless attention is given to disabled people's stories about their experiences, as well as their ideas for how inclusive practices can be implemented in research scholarship, then academia will fail to learn and the post-pandemic period risks perpetuating the ableist exclusion in research that typified the past (Banks et al., 2022).

Empirical data for this chapter comes from two focus groups, conducted with a total of seven disabled people over the two sessions, who were experienced in being both academic researchers and research participants. We as authors convened the focus groups in dual roles as participants and facilitators of the discussions (e.g., Parfitt et al., 2021). This was achieved through the authors asking pre-designed focus group questions from a topic guide, but also organically contributing our own lived experiences to these questions as part of the focus group discussions. These focus group discussions centred around how we as disabled people were experiencing

higher education during the Coronavirus pandemic era, and what recommendations and learning strategies we thought could be generated and implemented to help promote inclusive research practices within academia, going forward. Our focus group conversations fluidly shifted between our collective experiences of being a researcher and in being researched. The two focus groups were conducted online via Google Meet, and were recorded and transcribed. No data was collected regarding demographic characteristics and impairments of participants in order to ensure the anonymity of all individuals in the focus groups, including us as researchers. In taking this stance, we recognise the importance of intersectional identities regarding our experiences as disabled people navigating pandemic higher education (e.g., Blell et al., 2023; Wagner et al., 2022). Our forthcoming findings therefore should not be viewed as reflective of the heterogeneous nature of disability and the experiences that disabled people have faced within the pandemic academy, both in the UK and internationally (Parfitt et al., 2021).

3.1. Ethical approval

Ethical approval for this study was granted by the School of Education Research Ethics Committee, Bath Spa University. For this study, all participants, including the authors, provided their informed consent to participate.

3.2. Data analysis

The data were subjected to thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). In our coding, we implemented a process of 'action coding' (Saldaña, 2015) in which social behaviours that our focus groups reported on in relation to academic research methods, were coded as meaningful, such as the awareness of academic barriers

and the potential for innovative ways of working inclusively in research. In our forthcoming findings, we describe the key three themes which emerged: (i) critiquing the exclusionary nature of conventional research practices; (ii) what does inclusive research mean to disabled people?; and (iii) using the Coronavirus pandemic as an opportunity to learn from disabled people to rethink how research happens. Below, the extracts that we have included from the focus group transcriptions are deliberately substantial in nature so that through this chapter we can share effectively the depth and emotions associated with participants' experiences.

4. Findings

4.1. Critiquing conventional research practices

Participants discussed at length their frustrations with the exclusionary and ableist nature of conventional academic research. These conversations covered a number of different domains. One such example was around the barriers and inaccessibility associated with conventional research methods, such as how certain techniques or technologies may not be appropriate for particular impairment groups (e.g., video calling software for online interviews being inaccessible). Another example was around the ableist planning and costing process for research, which risks actively excluding disabled people from taking the lead in studies (e.g., time commitments for disabled people and financial implications of this). Below, participant 1 expressed frustration at how disabled people may live with poor job security when it comes to research projects in academia. Given that disabled academics are more likely to be employed on insecure contracts as compared to other non-disabled academics (Brown & Leigh, 2020), the burden of investing their own resources in contributing to

planning a study with no guarantees that it will materialise as funded research, is substantially disproportionate:

[Another] thing for me was around the costing and the planning of inclusive research, particularly in the current climate of COVID in that we are designing very new and very current projects, talking about very powerful issues or have the opportunity to do that, but actually when you look at the finance process, typically people only get paid once the funding is there, and so there's a real issue for people that want to be involved in co-produced work and the planning, but perhaps have to invest their own time, have to invest their own energy, and if it's not funded, then they might have invested weeks of their time for not really a lot of benefit.

Our focus group conversations went on and critiqued how inclusive research was perceived in academia. Participants felt that there was typically a disconnect in terms of academic researchers potentially perceiving their research to be inclusive, even though in reality, it often replicated conventional exclusionary practices. One such example was shared of participants being excited at the prospect of participating in 'inclusive' and coproduced research studies, only to find that critical power imbalances existed within the research design. This meant disabled people were viewed as having less influence in shaping projects than the typically non-disabled research team members. Participant 2 described their experience of not having a voice in a supposedly equitable research process:

Has anyone else, I don't know if any of you guys have been participants in research where you are supposedly included, and actually are not? You are the charity case ... There's been a couple of projects where I've found with the best intentions ... I've wanted to be included so I've joined up [as a participant], but then found actually I didn't really have a voice, and I was still being facilitated in a particular way. And, you know, I wasn't equal to the people running the project.

Participant 1 reported on their involvement in 'inclusive' research. Their frustration emerged from the fact that even though they shared their experiences as a participant or interviewee willingly with the aim of bringing about social change, it was in fact, the academic researcher who benefited from this sharing of their knowledge:

I've been involved in so many projects as a disabled person where my voice has been used to further somebody's career. And I've had really nothing after the project is finished ... I must have given my story countless times to various academics ... I've no idea what they've done with it. I've no idea where it's gone, or ... what's being done with the information. And we often think about inclusive research as actually doing the work, but actually, being inclusive to me is the whole sort of loop, and actually us being kept informed in terms of ... what our story is going to do. Because actually ... when we think about traditional research, it's nearly always the academic, it's nearly always the professional, that benefits from the story that we give. And, it's like this sort of milking us for our individual stories to further their careers in a

sense. And that's not inclusion to me, because it shows a real imbalance in worth and in value, so, they kind of see the researcher role as the valuable role, when actually they wouldn't be a researcher if they didn't have our story. They would have nothing to research.

4.2. What does inclusive research actually mean to disabled people?

Given that participants were concerned that academic researchers and disabled people may hold differing views and expectations about what inclusive research means in practice, focus group discussions turned to address the term 'inclusive research' itself. As can be seen in the forthcoming extracts, participants expressed concern that the terminology lacked validity and depth. Participant 3 spoke about how 'inclusive research' lacked specificity, which they acknowledged could be feeding into this difference of understanding between academic researchers and disabled people:

...it was quite evident to see that different people had entirely different ideas about what [inclusive research] means. There's no kitemark that says this is inclusive and that isn't inclusive, and that was quite difficult for me to judge what some people were talking about.

Other participants questioned the meaning of the term 'inclusion' itself, due to its origins potentially coming from limited understandings perpetuated within the academy. For instance, Participants 4 and 5 discussed how the term 'inclusive research' may be 'too passive' or 'tokenistic':

I struggle with that term (inclusion), because ... to me, it feels too passive, like 'well, we'll include these people because we kind of have to, or because it's the right thing to do', but not because actually, maybe their new way of doing things, or a new response, or a new way of thinking ... can actually be really beneficial. So, it's not just about having to include, it's about ... 'why are disabled people's voices important?', because actually we can think about things in a different way, and that is really important. (Participant 4)

To me, inclusive research is a kind of synonym for tokenistic research. So, I would say ... emancipatory research is desirable. Inclusive research is problematic as a whole, because it does give people the sense that they can ... define themselves in terms of the other with the disabled person. It tends to be even written into proposals and plans ... I prefer 'equality' rather than inclusion ... Can inclusive research ever be unproblematic? I don't know. (Participant 5)

Acknowledging the rhetoric surrounding inclusivity in research, as described by Participant 5 above, participants expressed the view that inclusion should be evidenced in action and intent. Participant 1 spoke of the importance of academics recognising the value of disabled people's stories as data, and how subsequent findings are taken forward:

... what inclusion means to me ... it's being able to really understand the sense of value [over disabled people's stories] ... it has to be a real sort of

cycle over research in terms of, yes, we provide a story, but actually we need to know where the story is going, and what's going to happen from that story.

Participant 6 provided examples of actions from their own research practice to show how small/micro inclusive changes can be enacted in various ways. Nonetheless, as Participant 6 explained, this requires commitment from the researcher to recognise the importance of making reasonable adjustments or accommodations during fieldwork. The inclusive ways of working enhance both the study information as well as enable the voices of individual participants to come through:

But with my own participants, ... they all had mental health issues, but they had such diversity across them that I had to work very, very differently. And some of them were much more vocal than others were. And so, I found that where with some of them I maybe just had one interview, where I was really having to bring them out, others I had maybe eight or ten short interviews because ... they just couldn't concentrate for too long. And, you know, there was such diversity in between. It would have been very, very easy to then just have certain voices overruling all of the other voices. And I think there are things we can do as researchers ... if we want to be inclusive ... we obviously do have to amend our methods to what best suits the person that we're trying to work with. But then when it comes to analysis, there are other things we can do, so instead of looking at every interview separately and coding that way, then it would be bringing them altogether ... And it is small things, but actually, they end up having a really significant impact on what the outcome is, and on generating more equality across the voices of your participants.

An issue shared in the focus group discussions was the challenge to keep inclusivity at the heart of participants' own research. Some expressed the view that it could be difficult to avoid continuing exclusionary rhetoric and the practices that they are trying to change. For instance, Participant 2 talked about their awareness of how being a disabled academic researcher came with a degree of privilege. This privilege worked hand in hand with the fundamental risk of unintentionally continuing ableist approaches to research: *'and I think I've probably done it as well'*. Participant 2 continued and pointed out how this kind of privilege further related to the esteem and credibility that being an academic could have in terms of drawing attention to the issues affecting disabled people. They described how their own voice could not necessarily reflect the experiences of those disabled people who have no experience or involvement with the higher education sector:

So, it's very difficult unless you are very articulate to become involved in, as a participant, and not kind of, kowtow to the people around you ... especially if you've been, come up through the ... charitable model. If this makes sense. And the problem is if you're mouthy and articulate, and you speak up, you then end up speaking for an entire tranche of people who may not be represented by what you're saying, but you're just louder...

4.3. The Coronavirus pandemic as an opportunity to learn from disabled people.

While focus group discussions referred to how conventional academic research was exclusionary for many disabled people, participants acknowledged that the pandemic

era had forced universities to reflect on and change some unquestioned and taken for granted ableist practices associated with research. We have written elsewhere (Read et al., 2023) of how the pandemic period has opened up a moment in time whereby disabled people's insights and experiences can be beneficial in promoting positive change. In this chapter, we apply this argument to promoting innovative research practices. Specifically, participants spoke of how they saw that research with and by, rather than on, disabled people could help teach the wider academic community about how inclusive research could be put into practice. It was noted that non-disabled academics and professionals were becoming increasingly familiar with different working methods: ways of approaching research that have been familiar amongst disabled researchers for considerable periods of time. As an example, Participant 4 described how a community-based project was at risk of closing because of the restrictions brought about by the pandemic. Drawing on their personal experiences of the barriers they often faced within conventional community engagement, they were able to suggest some recommendations regarding the implementation of technology, which in turn, led to the project remaining open in a virtual rather than in-person space. Participant 4 further shared how their experiences of promoting positive change was not unique. The commitment to thinking differently would be more commonplace if academia recognised the value of what disabled people have to offer:

So, I think we are at a point where we can say these are all things that we were doing as disabled people. These were our ideas. This is not just about including us, this is about saying actually, I think these people have something that they can really offer, in ways of thinking about the world, you know, that's

evolving into a very different place, whether it be pandemics of virus, or whether it's climate change, we can be creative in our thinking about things. And I think, let's use this now to provide those examples and say, 'use us, use our way of being different as something as an asset', not just as somebody that you should include in these discussions.

Participant 4's experience was echoed by Participant 2, who described some skills and qualities that disabled people have developed as a consequence of their being 'left behind'. These they confirmed as essential for carrying out inclusive research. While the pandemic era effectively promoted awareness of the skills of many disabled people to navigate the novel barriers brought on by COVID-19, these skills were consistently employed across multiple crises, before, during, and likely following, the pandemic.

What's been really interesting is, as well as things like Ebola, and some of the kind of, crucial major disasters, and always the people that get left behind, being ... disabled people ... And, had there been more ... representation [there would be] ... ways to utilise our imagination as disabled people, our skills, our resilience, our ability to work within isolated situations, to work around barriers, to be adaptable, to be thinking in ways that people might find bizarre, but are actually, you know, really exciting and different.

To get to the point where deep learning about inclusive research could happen, participants generally agreed that the higher education sector needed first to recognise the value of disabled people's insights and experiences. Participants

suggested that a starting point for this was the universities recognising and rectifying '*what's gone wrong, and how it can be done differently*' in their practices (Participant 5). In addition, it was felt essential that non-disabled researchers needed to appreciate the potentials that could emerge from working differently (Participant 1):

I think the beauty of doing research in inclusive [ways] ... is that you are having to do things in a very different way, in a very non-traditional way, and the real ... issue that we have in doing that is not actually doing the research in a different way, but actually being able to show people that there's a value in doing it in a different way. And I think it's the value that we often miss ... in discourse, whenever disabled people say ... we're offering different ways of thinking, different ways of working, it's not really a value to other people if it's not really part of their world, and they don't really see why they have to do it.

To achieve recognition and for the true value to surface, participants pointed to the need for a systemic shift in terms of how academia defined and carried out, so called 'inclusive research'. Participant 5 described that '*it's not just so much saying we have this extra knowledge, you can find [that] out if you wanted to, it's actually saying that your norm, your idea of what counts as worthwhile, is somehow ideologically based*'. Participant 5 concluded with saying '*in the research, we need to be represented in it as knowers, but also as agents. So, we need to have some agency in it.*' Reflecting on the opportunity that the pandemic offered academia to learn much from disabled people, Participant 1 called for fundamental 'mutual respect' and the need for 'equity' in the processes and in the uses of the outcomes of research:

I think it's just about that sort of mutual respect in terms of, the researcher has to really understand ... that the value of their research is coming from the stories that they're being given. And so there has to be much more of an equality in terms of the contributor, but also the data analyst, or the analyser, or whatever word you want to use.

5. Discussion

In this chapter we have reported on two focus groups that were held during the pandemic era. Our purpose was not only to hold the emotions and suffering of that moment, but also to take stock. The COVID-related lockdown measures being enforced across all areas of life, encouraged us to imagine 'post-pandemic' working in higher education. Serendipitously, the focus groups comprised disabled academics with first-hand knowledge of carrying out interactive people-focussed research, as well as substantial track records of being on the receiving end of such practices, as study participants. This range of insights provides multiple angles from which we can reflect on our knowledge about exclusion shared in the focus groups and move the discussion forward to promote inclusive and emancipatory research practices in academia, post pandemic.

At first glance, the narratives we gathered were accounts of disabled people's experiences during the pandemic. We contend that our narratives must not be dismissed out of hand as out of date. For, we propose that the accounts in this chapter offer expertise regarding how future crises, in whatever form they present, can be managed effectively in academia, providing that the wider academy acknowledges the tried and tested approaches that disabled people routinely use to

navigate barriers, such as those pertaining to access and communication (Danylevich & Patsavas, 2021). Returning to our focus groups, a powerful, yet straightforward example given by one participant demonstrated how they had shown non-disabled professionals how it was possible to continue working on a community-based project while under government-enforced lockdown restrictions that were prohibiting them from accessing public spaces and carrying out face-to-face engagements.

Deep consideration of the focus group exchanges produced three headline topics of analysis. To start, we addressed conventional research practices. Our critique of conventional approaches that typify academic fieldwork amongst communities demonstrated that there are longstanding challenges relating to this, both from the perspective of disabled people when acting as participants, as well as when disabled people are deployed as academic researchers. In the case of the former, ingrained views of the wide research remit of the academy invariably leads to studies that are said to be inclusive, but which fall far short of this in practice. The latter case concerns disabled academics actually having the chance to carry out research. This is likely to pose a significant cost to themselves, not least owing to the time and labour involved, with no guarantees of seeing these investments returned in the form of long-term positive change, such as of enduring employment or benefits to disabled people's groups.

The academic ableist assumptions with which the focus group participants battled could be summed up as rooted in the absence of agency they had often experienced. In the design and execution of research studies, the devaluation and

discreditation of disabled people's experiences remained widespread. However, participants demonstrated how small changes in their own practices had allowed for disabled individuals to contribute fully to fieldwork, such as via accessible interviews addressing issues of social justice for disabled people. When research is routinely undertaken to collect disabled people's experiences, a longstanding concern is what the end use or uses of their narratives will be. It could appear that the investigating research team are often the prime beneficiaries in terms of career advancement and academic achievement, while the disabled participants are left with little in return. Another concern raised was the positionality of disabled academics themselves. Given the education and privilege we have accrued through association with higher education institutions, we have to be mindful of facilitating others who live and work without such experiences and capital.

We raised the question as to whether the pandemic era offered a break state: a moment when as one participant put it, academia could look back at '*what's gone wrong, and how it can be done differently*'. This was considered in the context of the ableist ideologies apparent in the academy's taken for granted ways of working, specifically, with respect to research practices. In the focus groups, much so-called inclusive research was condemned as being little more than universities adopting popularist jargon in the pre-pandemic era. Post pandemic, inclusive researchers should have to reach for, and demonstrate values of, practices which embrace the importance of diversity, and the value and wisdom of underrepresented voices, such as disabled people. A crip activist stance (McRuer, 2006) is strongly supported in participants' suggestions that adopting authentic inclusive and emancipatory research methods led by disabled people is a desired way forward, because this

directly confronts the conventional ableist mindsets underpinning the contested everyday research practices within higher education.

To conclude, we return to the guidelines suggested for ensuring that research is inclusive, namely, that it is owned by disabled people (Nind, 2014; Walmsley & Johnson, 2003). This means that the insights, knowledges, and experiences of disabled people are acknowledged at all stages of the process, with the ultimate aim in executing the research being the enhancement of the rights and lives of disabled people. As disabled academics, we recognise that this is easier said than done, in that positive rhetoric recognising the importance of inclusive and emancipatory research is not necessarily translated into practice. We ourselves find it a challenge to step outside of the deeply ingrained scholarship that has been laid down by many earlier generations in academia. However, our participants have shown how positive changes in inclusive and emancipatory research is possible and achievable, when there is a willingness to do things differently. We continue our work and mission towards ensuring that all disabled people have equitable access to, and involvement in, inclusive and emancipatory research.

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7. Competing interests

The authors have no conflicts of interest to declare regarding this chapter.

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