

Bodyminds Like Ours

An Autoethnographic Analysis of Graduate School, Disability, and the Politics of Disclosure

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"I don't understand, you write such smart papers . . . I worry this 'accommodation' would make your peers uncomfortable, can't you do without it? . . . Why are you taking so few classes? . . . I wish I could take my time like you do . . . Although we have your records, we need further documentation of your disability to provide the accommodations you are requesting . . . Haven't you spent years dealing with this? Why is it still such a big deal? . . . 'Everyone's disabled when it rains. You can't drive to that part of campus without a permit' . . . I get tired all the time, too! . . . We all get depressed sometimes . . . Have you tried acupuncture? . . . The committee is sorry to inform you that your grant application was denied because your 'time-to-degree' process does not meet the required standards. . . . Disabled people receive too many benefits . . . People with your disability don't go to graduate school; I think you need to consider a more realistic career path . . ."

These are just a few of the many micro (and macro) aggressions that we, as disabled graduate students, experience daily in the academy.¹ The culture of academia presumes that the bodyminds (Price 2015) best suited for academia are those that demonstrate discipline, restraint, productivity, and autonomy. Too often, disabled, neurodivergent, and chronically ill bodies are framed as unproductive, impaired, dependent, disorderly and, therefore, of little intellectual

or productive value. Graduate students with disabilities, therefore, encounter significant barriers to participation. Not quite “novice” and not quite “scholar,” disabled graduate students must navigate a complex web of power. The connections among academic norms and rituals; institutional policies; hierarchies of race, nation, class, gender, and sexuality; and the corporeality of our bodies present circumstances that are distinct from the struggles of disabled undergraduate students or disabled faculty members. In this chapter, we argue that the convergence of white capitalist academic institutions and the discourse of able-bodyminds as good, productive, disciplined, and capable promote the exclusion and erasure of graduate students with disabilities in academia. Together, we discuss this precarious positioning within academia; the politics of disability disclosure in critical and justice-based fields of inquiry; how concepts of passing and performing disability intersect with other aspects of our identities (race, class, gender, sexuality, nation); and the contours of “crip life” as scholars-in-training. We narrate our experiences facing and resisting barriers meant to exclude our bodyminds from academia—an institution created and structured around the ideal, productive body that is ideologically predetermined for white, cisgender, heterosexual, able-bodied males.

Through mutual exchange and “risking the personal” (Keating 2000, 2), we build our collective wisdom and offer visions of change that not only increase accessibility and inclusion for graduate students with disabilities but promote holistic transformation. Keating (2007, 125–26) argues “Blame and guilt are not useful but accountability is.” We share our experiences as an effort to shift toward mutual accountability and change. Through our vulnerability and transparency, we invite you into our experiences and set aside shame and guilt so that, together, we can envision futures that are inclusive and accessible for all.

ANGELA: In our first brainstorming session, we identified five deeply embedded components of ableism within the academy: ideology, bureaucracy, physicality, temporality, and sociality. Acknowledging these features of academic ableism is incredibly significant because people often think of ableism in terms of individual (in)actions or attitudes; but as with other forms of oppression, ableism is built into the foundation of academia. Can we begin our discussion by expanding on these ideas?

SAM: Ideologically, graduate students represent “the best and brightest” in their field. The myth of meritocracy ignores structural inequalities that allow some to succeed at the direct expense of others and

inherently assumes not just a bodymind that is *capable* but one that is superior. This “superior” bodymind could never be a disabled bodymind because disability always already serves as the other. Disabled graduate students constitute a paradox that academia is trying to assimilate—either through erasing our disabilities in order to rightfully include us as *able* or by using our disabilities as justification for excluding us as *unable*. The issue and focus is, of course, our bodyminds and not the structures, practices, or policies of the academy. Moreover, graduate students exist in a liminal space within the academy; we are classified as students *and* as university employees/staff. We’re a category that blends/exceeds the employee/student binary; thus, the resources, accommodations, and support we need are often hard to acquire or do not exist.

AMANDA: And when people think of ableist structures, they immediately think of physically accessible doors and buildings. These accommodations, or lack thereof, are certainly important ways our experiences on campus are constrained. When we point to the physical ableism of the structural hierarchy imposed in graduate school, we are also signifying the kind of physicality needed to maintain the “proper” graduate student timetable. Our bodyminds cannot work forty hours a week, let alone the sixty our “good” graduate student peers do. We cannot take as many classes, attend as many meetings, or read/write as fast as is expected. We physically cannot bear the toll of this labor and are told repeatedly that this is a failure inherent in our bodyminds. This, of course, coincides with the temporality of graduate education, which is, in our current neoliberal moment, continuously speeding up. There are “time-to-degree” benchmarks we inevitably miss and funding opportunities tied to these markers. Graduate students are expected to progress through programs at a timely rate and through each milestone in a particular way. This usually leaves disabled graduate students behind, because we simply cannot work in this way.

Relatedly, so much of academia involves social connections. These networks are typically built through traveling to conferences, but can be as simple as going out with your cohort or attending dinner events with visiting scholars. For disabled graduate students, it can be very difficult, if not impossible, to keep up with our daily lives and attend these “off the clock” engagements. Conference travel is particularly strenuous on our bodyminds, mean-

ing post-panel dinners or late-night networking is rare. We often miss out on the kinds of connections built between our peers and with potential mentors. Disabled graduate students feel isolated, misunderstood, unsupported, and without recourse—regardless of our specific academic location or the encouragement we have from our advisors.

TINA: This speaks to our history. We have never met each other “physically,” and have only communicated through online venues. Someone said their colleagues were surprised we were writing a group paper having never met in person. This, too, highlights our experience of academia as ableist. For most, networking, collaborative research, and writing, are acts that happen in person. Here, our disabilities intersect with our class (making the funding of travel difficult); sexuality and gender (the bodily labor of reproduction, for example); and cultural norms (notions of extended family who might also need care—not only are we supposed to be able-bodied and put academia first, but our families should also be able-bodied and not require our care). For so many reasons, our first virtual meeting was a moment not only for networking and beginning collaborative writing but also one of building community. Doing academic work in this nontraditional way, with people we “don’t know,” is one way we are thinking about academia differently and in a way that works better for our bodyminds.

SAM: What has been most surprising to me has been the kinds of ableism I’ve experienced within Feminist/Women’s Studies. I struggle with the field, particularly as a person who is chronically ill, neurodivergent, queer, and trans. I feel excited to work in a department where there is an equal emphasis on the study of “disciplines”/“disciplinization” as there is on dynamics of power/oppression/privilege and so forth. Still, I feel academic feminism has a ways to go before we’re living up to our expressed commitment to disability, in both practice and curriculum. While the field’s social justice orientation acknowledges ability status as one vector of power, I sometimes get the feeling that “disability” is tagged on at the end (much like the B or T in LGBT).

ANGELA: Right, people know they should be attentive to disability, but that doesn’t always translate to action. I routinely get the feeling of “oh yeah, that’s important but we’re still fighting other fights, so we’ll come back to disability later.” Folks are often unaware how

their ableism manifests in their scholarship and academic work. When I try to call attention to this, I'm told that it "wasn't their intention" and everyone is "still learning" to think about disability. This situates me as the "insider," there to explain how ableism and dis/ability are working in that moment.

AMANDA: We often become the voice of information for our and all disabilities, which we simply cannot do—that in itself acts as a potential silencing of other bodyminds and an act of violence on these bodyminds that are continuously marginalized through their misrepresentation. Yet, we are also continuously called forth to speak for bodies that we cannot speak for—I know I've often had to say, "I can't speak for that narrative" or "I'm literally not qualified"—which then silences us when we finally can speak for our own bodies.

SAM: I would also like to consider the consequences of the Cartesian bodymindspirit split in social justice scholarship. So much academic work is framed as solely an *intellectual* endeavor, relegated to the mind. Like indigenous and women of color, people with disabilities critique academic intellectualism that attempts to transcend the body and advocate that the (disabled, queer, brown/black) body is a valid onto-epistemological location (see for example Moraga and Anzaldúa 1981, Moss and Dyck 2002). Moreover, self-care is often encouraged but not always feasible for graduate students. Lorde's assertion that self-care is a radical act becomes stripped of its transformational qualities when we merely *think about* "self-care" but are not actually allowed to *do* acts of care (1988, 131).

AMANDA: Panels and speakers at my university who talk about self-care always put the onus on the graduate students to step forth and take action: see a therapist, go to yoga and stop the pattern that "you" bring onto "yourself." I find that my University conflates the individual with the entire system: "we're all tired" (Keating 2007, 24–26). Therefore, no one ought to "stand out," no one ought to push and test these boundaries. Self-care becomes this tricky place where the graduate student has to work within a rigid, designated space.

SAM: I've been to workshops and panels where "self-care" is represented in either/or terms—described as "relaxation" or "leisure"—implying that the opposite of self-care is production and activity. While these panels have, no doubt, produced important questions,

definitions of self-care that emphasize *leisure* and *idleness* make me wary because they approximate capitalist notions of production. This conversation reminds me of Betcher's critique (2007, 6–10) of “wholeness” in western cultures where brokenness is interpreted as a sign of pathology, motivating people toward “wholeness.” “Broken” and socially unacceptable bodyminds like ours inherently contradict the notion that bodies should be “whole” and, therefore, tuned for maximum efficiency and productivity.

AMANDA: This points toward the “incurable” disabled bodymind, or the bodymind that is not the demarcated disabled body. Disability Studies theorizes this body as the supercrip (for example, Clare 1999)—we are currently discussing and pushing back against this construct—which is pushing so hard against the overarching machine: the academy. Often these bodyminds are thought of as courageous for even going to grad school, better yet if they work in Disability Studies. However, if these individuals push too hard against the academy, the academy will often remind us of our social and hierarchal place. As long as we are Foucauldian docile bodies, the machine is okay with us.

TINA: While *some* disciplines recognize the need for self-care, what that means for the disabled bodymind requires even more bodily labor for us. There's a lack of recognition by the academy, and those who inhabit it, that our bodyminds must *always* do more work and that for us, self-care means something very different than it might mean for others the academy also marginalizes.

Speaking specifically about my discipline, I had conflated the radical praxis of a few with the field as a whole. A qualitative methods class I took revealed to me how deeply embedded ableism is in geography. In that class, I was inspired to write about fieldwork and research for disabled students in geography, but when I started researching, I found nothing. There were articles theorizing disability, sure, but not much about actually “doing” research while disabled. It was as if my body, and bodies like mine, had not been considered.

So, it seems that geography has yet to really deal with the fact that disabled bodyminds wish to do more than obtain a bachelor's degree. And, as is the case with almost all academic departments, graduate student and faculty requirements are conceived of in ways that automatically preclude the disabled body. Funding

packages are not reconceptualized for students who need reduced course loads. Research funding is not thought through for those whose bodyminds will not be the ones driving, travelling, standing. Most advisors don't think about advising students that don't "fit the mold" *unless* they encounter a disabled student. And so the disabled student, aside from learning new ways of thinking, new literatures, and planning research, is also trying to "teach" the advisor, the department, the discipline about disability. And all that extra work is not factored into "productive" time. This means that while I was once a staunch disciplinarian, fiercely identifying as a geographer above all else—today I see I cannot be a geographer. I cannot belong to any one discipline, because they were *all* formed and created without the inclusion of disabled bodyminds. Some try harder than others to add and stir us in, but I can't be stirred into a structure that is predicated on a body I do not have. So I see myself as interdisciplinary. Intersectional. Feminist. Geographer. Anthropologist- and Sociologist-adjacent. Just like we often have to cobble together our accommodations, which we can never disentangle, which cannot *but* intersect with our other aspects of our identities, we have to cobble together our disciplines.

SAM: Tina's discussion of methods reminds me of many women of color theorists who have to "make a way out of no way" when there weren't methods that acknowledged the wisdom of their communities (Phillips 2006, xxvii). While clearly women of colors' insights are manifested from their specific race-class-gender lenses, there are important areas of commonality, specifically, where people with disabilities have had to assert their experience as oppressed people as a valid form of authority.

ANGELA: This year, my university surveyed graduate students about their experiences. Questions specifically asked how students felt about the ways faculty/administration/peers treated them based on race, class, gender, sexuality, ethnicity, and citizenship. But not a single question asked about ableism or disability. It was as if the disabled graduate student, or ableism, simply couldn't exist. Relatedly, it's the twenty-fifth anniversary of the ADA, which is often credited with "opening the doors" of higher education for disabled people. What has been your experience, with asking for, and receiving, accommodations through your university's Office of Disability Services (ODS)?

AMANDA: I no longer go to ODS. They're incredibly kind, but for the most part, they deal with undergraduates, which is not what I need. I go straight to my professors who have given me extensions and have (often) been gracious.

ANGELA: Right, ODS doesn't seem to understand the needs of graduate students. During my second year, I asked ODS if the 1–3 day extension for papers could be adjusted. I explained that while this works for undergraduates, it doesn't accommodate a graduate student's workloads. I was assured this accommodation was “set up to work for everyone.” After an hour-long conversation, ODS agreed to “work on the language” of my accommodation letter, encouraging professors to grant me extended time. A week later, I was informed that if I needed more than 1–3 days, I had to get further testing to quantify my disability. At that point, I decided to figure it out myself. From then on, I met with the professors—outed myself as disabled—and talked about my need for extended time. If the professor wasn't willing to work with me, I simply could not take their class. These are exactly the kinds of invasive conversations and interactions that ODS is supposed to handle. Now that I am out of coursework, ODS can do even less for me because none of the accommodations they offer make sense with preliminary exams or dissertation work.

SAM: A friend at another university has multiple, chronic illnesses and her colleagues frequently imply that she is “the golden child” because she receives extensions when she needs them. I'm frustrated because they don't understand that extensions aren't a reward or prize. Personally, I decided against pursuing official accommodations with ODS. I barely have the financial means to pay for my basic medical care, let alone the additional medical costs incurred by having it officially documented for my university. I've disclosed my ability status and have generally been met with understanding; however, there seems to be a culture of silence regarding disability among graduate students.

TINA: Clearly extensions means we: a) do not manage our time wisely and are, therefore, b) not a good “fit” for academia, and c) get special treatment we do not deserve. (For more on how other marginalized groups, such as women of color, negotiate hegemonic practices of the academy, see Garrison-Wade et al. 2011 and Gutiérrez y Muhs, Niemann, González, and Harris 2012). In general, my

experiences can be summed up as follows. Institutionally, asking for and receiving accommodations, has been a failure. Particular individuals in ODS, the university, and professors, are kind and helpful. What bothers me about accommodations is that they are individualized. Classes, programs, and TA responsibilities are not designed with accessibility in mind. Just like the university, which was created by and for rich, white, men in a racist-sexist-heteropatriarchal society; women, people of color, people with disabilities, and so on, have been “added in.” They try to add us in and stir us into their already ableist-sexist-racist structures to make some sort of “diversity” soup. But why can’t classes be designed to be accessible from the start? We were never conceived of as belonging; we were never meant to be citizens of the university. So it is no wonder that we hit walls and continually encounter the limits of disability offices and “reasonable” accommodations.

ANGELA: This struggle speaks to my next question. Disability disclosure has impacted every aspect of my graduate experience—from disclosing to my department that I needed to take medical leave, to professors each semester asking for accommodations, to colleagues/peers when they ask why my path doesn’t match theirs. Disclosing never ends. And now, as an instructor, I disclose to my students. I do this as a political act of resistance and solidarity, to stand with other disabled students and to challenge the myths surrounding disability. I went from never wanting to disclose and feeling really horrible when I had to, to now feeling like it is imperative to my survival and my politics—even if I often still hesitate before doing so. How has disclosing your disability impacted your experience as a graduate student?

TINA: I agree, it is “imperative to my survival and my politics” to disclose. And yet, sometimes the work of it all—not just disclosing, but then working to obtain what you need—is a job unto itself. Dealing with individuals has its upside. Helpful and friendly staff and professors make my heart smile. But what’s harder to talk about are those people who don’t seem to get it. They don’t get the extra work we have to do. They don’t get that asking for accommodations is *reasonable* and not special treatment. They don’t get that their policies—from funding, to time to completion of various “benchmarks”—cannot fit neatly onto our bodies. And I think the worst part of disclosing is being *forced* to disclose. And we are

forced to disclose in ways/details we do not want to share because for some, describing something based on our lived experience is *still* not enough.

In a recent grad meeting, in which I participated virtually, we discussed the creation of shared online space for graduate documents. One student advocated a particular platform that my disability makes difficult to use. I voiced two reasons for going with another platform, one of which was accessibility. I was then asked, “What do you mean by accessibility? It’s certified by some association for the blind so it’s accessible.” This white, able-bodied man’s question required me to reveal the specificities of my medical history. My word, that it was inaccessible, was not enough. But it’s more than individuals; we have to think of the entire university as disabling. As Kuusisto says, “The academy disables itself. Failed architectures and insufficiency of imagination always speak the tacit unspoken phrase: ‘your body is a problem’” (Kuusisto 2015, par. 6). It’s not just administration. It’s not just the buildings. It’s not just the policies. It’s not just some individuals. Thankfully there are some understanding professors who put their “critical/social justice theory” into practice through action. But there are also those who force us to disclose, who question our experiences of ableism and accessibility simply because they are not identical to their own experiences, or to their notion of what accessibility and disability are “supposed” to look like.

SAM: I am sad and frustrated that you were coerced to disclose. I’m thinking about the politics of authenticity here. It seems that this person needed to know that you had an “authentic” reason for switching to more accessible technology. That leads me to think about how bodies get coded as more (or less) authentically disabled where “authenticity” is defined by the able-bodied gaze (Jones 2013).

AMANDA: It seems like disability and disabled-identifying bodyminds have to render themselves through this very narrow lens that is always preceded by the able-bodied gaze, which always privileges the able-bodied transcription of the disabled narrative, identity, body, etc. Brueggemann states that she purposely claims a deconstructed, precarious identity since it calls attention not only to the disability (which incites dialogue) but to her ability to claim autonomy and agency (Brueggemann and Modellmog 2002, 316).

Theoretically, I like to think of the disabled body as continuously “becoming,” especially in relation to identity (Butler 1990, 33). How will we reconfigure our identities in relation to our disabilities, especially since disabilities are not fixed? The concepts of passing and coming out really challenge how I feel about identity, especially misconceptions about the construction of identity through coming out as disabled. This is one area where I perform my disability. I went through a brief period of time where I was very open about being disabled, mainly because I never knew when my disability would present itself so I would prepare other people—if I exposed the disability, then other people wouldn’t be so alarmed when my disability exposed itself. However, grad students and professors alike were really taken aback by my medical-like frankness. Some wanted to coddle me. Then there are those who reacted very aggressively toward me, silencing me. Suddenly thrust into this polar vortex of rapidly shifting identities where I had to accommodate myself toward others’ inability to see me, I was really frustrated, anxious, and depressed. So I stopped disclosing. It was important for me to think about this shifting identity because, as Simi Linton (1998, 21) says, passing can engender anxiety. However, disclosing can produce a different type of anxiety. Before, I wouldn’t take my medication in public; now I am more open about it, letting other people assume what they want. After an EEG, I will go to a coffee shop to reward myself and I won’t wash the glue out of my hair. Little things like that slowly, but inconspicuously, drift attention away from able-bodiedness.

TINA: Your points about identity, Amanda, bring us to the concept of intersectionality. For me, my disability cannot be disentangled from other axes of difference and power that simultaneously work to oppress and privilege me. Upon returning from medical leave, I needed to use a wheelchair. My privilege as a married woman with a husband who happened to be on sabbatical allowed me to take classes I otherwise could not—I needed him to drive me, to get into rooms and open the doors not built for my chair, doors I cannot open for automatic buttons apparently are too expensive to install. (I was told it was because of fire codes, which, upon checking, turned out to be false).

Moreover, I experience the dual-bind of race/nationality and ability: the invisibility of my race/immigrant status and the hyper-

visibility of my disability, as well as my family's immigrant cultural norms and ideas about ability. I benefit from white privilege despite not identifying as white growing up because of my immigrant background and culture. (Ahmed 2014 suggests that students of color with disabilities are even more depleted by the academy.) My sister and I were the first in our family to graduate college, and my disability necessarily intersects with the immigrant work ethic and need to do what was denied to my mother. As a girl, my mother was allowed to complete more education than her brothers (the fifth grade). She desired to continue further, however, but her gender precluded it. At the same time, I struggle with my family's immigrant cultural norms about disability. Some wish I didn't have to disclose and see me using a chair as sad, as demonstrating my illness. They do not see it as an empowering aide that actually gives me *more* mobility. A picture of me attending class in a wheelchair on Facebook causes transnational reverberations from family in my home country. Questions. Pity. Concern. Until I can explain, the wheelchair, and hence the photo, signifies disability instead of successful independence.

ANGELA: I'm quick to "come out" as a queer, working-class femme, but I always seem to pause before coming out as disabled. I don't think it's as simple as internalized ableism, but I'm not sure why I hesitate. (For a recent discussion of disability studies, internalized ableism, and coming out "crip," see Talley 2013). Becoming disabled has strengthened my identity as a working-class person, complicated my identity as a queer, and taught me how to better understand my white privilege. Since becoming disabled, I better understand how capitalism shapes our bodies—marking us as usable/unusable and disregarding us when/if labor cannot be extracted. I was raised by a single mom living paycheck to paycheck, so living without a safety net is not new to me. My understanding, though, of how able-bodiedness is in its own way a social safety net has completely shifted my understanding of socioeconomic oppression. Like many working-poor, my identity was constructed on "working-hard." Now I understand more clearly how social institutions and systems are structured so that individual "hard work" doesn't make much of a difference—it's your ability to claim membership within, and gain privileges from, your race, class, gender, citizenship status, and having an able-body. Under capitalism, it's

a kind of twisted privilege to be considered worthy of exploitable labor; I never would have known or thought that to be true until I became disabled.

With my disability, participating in the queer community is harder. Staying out late, being at shows or clubs, or even going to Pride impacts my bodymind, and I soon decided these activities weren't "worth it." As a result, I've felt disconnected and alienated from my community. I recently connected with a neuroqueer community and these spaces help me think about how my disability—neurodivergence—queers me (Finley 2010). This helps me understand how my sexuality/gender intersects with my disability. Conversely, my whiteness facilitates passing as able-bodied. I am presumed to be competent and knowledgeable and "belonging" in academia. No one has ever *overtly* accused me of "milking the system" or "playing the disability card," because I am assumed to be "working my hardest" thanks to white privilege. Studies show that students of color are tracked out of education, often through "special education," and rarely get to college, let alone graduate (Ferri and Connor 2005; Wagner, Newman, Cameto, Garza, and Levine 2005). My able-bodied whiteness helped get me to college, and even after becoming disabled that same whiteness helps me stay in graduate school.

SAM: I struggle with identity-based language to describe myself because I am limited by the language I choose and the politics of identity. (Should I refer to myself as "disabled" or not? Am I allowed to use that word?) I move among terms as needed to help people understand my experiences, but I could describe myself as a white, working-class, transmasculine, queer, neurodivergent person with a chronic illness. I'm realizing more and more that my disabilities are eclipsed as my gender expression approximates a white masculine norm. Whiteness and masculinity are coded as expressions of confidence, intelligence, and capability in Western culture. The more I approximate this ideal, the more invisible my disability seems to become. While not intentional, I get asked to lecture on gender-related issues more than any other area of my research/activism. I love lecturing on issues pertinent to transgender studies, but I sometimes feel tokenized and that it contributes to the invisibility of my disabilities.

My gender identity makes it difficult for me to access scholar-

ships and grants targeted to scholars in my field. Trans folks frequently do not qualify for scholarships geared toward women, or students doing research in feminist/women's studies (e.g., AAUW 2015) because there is an assumption that the grantees would automatically be cisgender women. Thus, I've had to be creative when it comes to finding money which means that I have to strategically use "supercrip" narratives to my advantage, omit my gender identity, and allow my feminine legal name to carry my application through.

ANGELA: I'm intrigued, Sam, by your discussion of using the supercrip narrative, and how those narratives intersect with other identities. I've certainly done this too, and it makes my heart hurt every time. I hate that it often feels like the only option available—play into the narratives that oppress us to survive. This ties into the idea of passing. . . . As if disability is something you can just "get together" and then it doesn't impact you anymore. The problem, of course, is our bodyminds, not academia.

SAM: It's true, I disclose now to lend authority to my experiences, usually drawing from medical authority as a form of "verification." I often feel that my subjective experience is not enough. Thus, I have to draw on other sources of authentication, but I risk reproducing harmful psycho-medical models of neurodivergence and disability. We all seem to navigate a dangerous web of truth/truths to survive.

ANGELA: Speaking of survival, can we talk a bit about funding? The limited years of graduate student funding is a barrier that causes me serious distress. My department does everything it can to fund folks, but with each new semester past the guaranteed years, there is the renewed chance they won't be able to cobble together funding or a teaching position. Are there other barriers, or issues, that we haven't talked about yet that anyone would like to discuss?

TINA: Funding is definitely an obstacle. Part of the problem, as Angela alludes, is that funding is not thought of through the lens of accommodations, nor does it include the complexities of health care. Just like we often have to fight for accommodations, it seems we are always fighting for funding, regardless of our university.

SAM: My barriers include not only structural issues but lack of insight. The people that know about my ability status often seem to lack a fundamental awareness of what it means to be a person with chronic and mental "illnesses" (Wendell 2001). I prefer to teach

face-to-face because it adds much needed structure and socializing to my life. However, teaching face-to-face takes up most of my “spoons” (Miserandino 2003). Paired with my visible queer/transness, I grapple with transphobia on a daily basis, which expends energy in ways that able-bodied, cisgender, neurotypical people do not face. When I teach, my physical body acts as a bridge for inviting students to shift toward critical consciousness, and I often need to pull up the drawbridge for the rest of the day (Anzaldúa 1990, 147–48). My colleagues will go back to their offices and work more, but I can’t do that. When I teach online, I can get depressed because online work promotes social isolation. There has to be some middle-ground where I can work effectively, but I haven’t been able to find that middle-ground yet. I think there is room to really delve into our consciousnesses and assess what (if any) assumptions we—scholars and academics—might hold about the lives and bodies of graduate students with disabilities. However, I feel I’ve been extended accommodations *already* and that I should have been able to “catch up” or “get over” whatever was preventing me from working at the expected pace. I had to tell my dissertation committee that I was so ill last semester that I made very little progress on my dissertation. It felt shameful to admit. Generally, I get the sense that not only are graduate students going through some “rite of passage,” but that graduate students have not “earned” time away from our work like accomplished scholars who can reduce obligations that might interfere with their research.

ANGELA: The one thing that frustrates me most is the response I get from folks when I talk about life as a disabled graduate student. I’ve been told to “seriously consider the implications of forging a politics from a wounded identity.” I talk about disability because I need us to “imagine otherwise,” and then work to build that reality. I say *need* here not want, because academia is in a particular moment of possibility—every day there is more talk about how the status quo is unsustainable. The precariousness of graduate school for disabled people must be a part of this conversation.

We invite scholars to join us in reimagining graduate education for bodyminds like ours. This begins by examining the regimes of truth that guide our work in the academy and how these “truths” contribute to the exclusion and

exploitation of disabled graduate students and other marginalized people. How can we think about “professional development” differently? How can graduate programs help students with disabilities prepare for academic futures that actively incorporate our lived realities?

First, graduate programs should consider how their politics, structures, and rituals impact disabled students. Academics should honestly assess how they participate in these systems and work with people with disabilities to increase our participation, to value different ways of thinking and being. Academia should not “accommodate” the individual but, rather, redesign programs to be inclusive from their inception. The concept of “progress” in graduate education must be one of the first things to change. University structures are rooted in progress narratives. The expectation that graduate students should engage in multiple physically, spiritually, and psychically demanding academic activities such as teaching, research, professional development, writing, networking, funding, and job searching is not a sustainable way of life for *anyone*. However, these expectations disproportionately impact students with disabilities. Practically, this means allowing flexibility in “time to completion” and recognizing that graduate students should not be considered financial burdens on departments because they require more funding. Equal funding timelines for all does not lead to equality or social justice. Departments and programs cannot see disabled graduate students as financial burdens if we value critical theory and destabilizing capitalism and other oppressive structures.

Next, graduate programs and professional organizations should provide support for professional development for disabled grad students. Establishing travel funding specifically for working-class, disabled scholars/graduate students would bolster our scholarship and participation. Organizations and conference committees can livestream, and use communication access real-time translation (CART) and American Sign Language (ASL) in some, if not all, of the sessions, as well as allow virtual presentations and participation.

Programs should illustrate a commitment to disability in course offerings, programming, and pedagogical instruction. Training should be offered for faculty, staff, and students to understand disability as a social justice issue. Some ways to incorporate disability may include workshops like “dismantling ableism” or “unpacking my ableist knapsack” to facilitate greater understanding of ableism in the academy. Scholars should reframe their disciplinary “canons” by examining canonical works through the lens of disability. With excavation, scholars may recognize that disability already exists in various disciplines, helping rupture preconceived notions about the existence

of disability in academia. Likewise, programs, events, and classes should be held in buildings that are physically accessible—buildings with doors that stay open and can be opened by someone in a wheelchair or someone with fatigue; gender-neutral and physically accessible bathrooms; classrooms with easily movable furniture; adjustable lighting; and “access copies.” Whenever possible, programs should be livestreamed, with CART and ASL translation or, at least, recorded.

Lastly, faculty should also develop a strong working relationship with ODS—one that goes above and beyond knowing they exist. All instructors, including TAs, should be taught how to develop accessible classes and access measures as a part of teaching *before* a student has to ask for an accommodation. It should be widely understood that teaching in an accessible way is a necessary component of inclusive, equitable education. With this, ODS should be reimaged in order to better meet the needs of graduate students. As our experiences have demonstrated, accommodations on an individual basis do not sufficiently destabilize structural ableism or reduce inequality. Thus, graduate student accommodations must be collectively revised and shared. Moreover, how to obtain them should not be part of the “unwritten” rules of academia.

We hope that our collective discussion can be a starting point for reimagining the university in a way that includes disabled bodyminds. We have posed questions that require deeper thought, and discussion, by all in academia. We have also offered concrete changes that departments and ODS can take to include bodyminds like ours. But also, we have written together to challenge the isolation that we have all felt as disabled grad students. We write together—volunteering our time, energy, and spoons—to collectivize. Finding one another, and writing together, has been our collective first step to challenging and transforming the structures that disable us.

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