

“Disability Access, Barriers, and You”

Camisha L. Jones

ACCESS

- Session's pace and practices will prioritize our bodies and minds
- You are welcome to honor human needs (eat, drink, stim, stand, move around, etc.)
- When speaking, please use a microphone or signal you want to contribute so it can be brought to you.
- I will briefly describe visual content.
- Much of what I will say be available in large print on slides and handouts so people can read along.
- No small group discussion as an access consideration
- If at any point there's something you'd like more support on, just let Camisha know. Interruptions are welcomed! Pivoting is possible.
- Anyone requests?

“The Sound Barrier” by Camisha Jones

Exactly 2

That’s the number of times most people tolerate being asked: “Could you repeat that?”

Then conversations come to an abrupt halt like a telephone line gone dead.

No one likes being hung up on so I pretend to hear when I don’t.

I shake my head “yes” when the answer should be “huh!?”

Being hard of hearing is kinda like filling in the blanks of a Wheel of Fortune puzzle.

Ca__ You U__dersta__ __ The Wor__s Comi__g Out M__ Mouth?

My ears are constantly tuned to a station with a weak signal.

Broken radios are considered throw-away items so I hide my affliction.

It wasn't always this way.

At first, I tried different techniques.

I asked for specifics: "Could you repeat the last three words?"

I gave instructions: "It helps if you enunciate and pause between the words."

And when that didn't work, I asked "Can you just write it down?"

I glanced at the pen and paper pushed back at me,

the backs of those who hear well as they walked away
and wondered to myself what seemed so unreasonable
about exerting half the effort I did.

I have a memory.

It is of walking down the street with a friend.

He is on my right and we are talking.

He places his hands at my waist

and they guide me to the right. He shifts to my left.

He knows I hear better that way.

When I still don't understand what's said,

he repeats himself a 3rd time.

It isn't just the words I hear.

It is in moments like these that I know

even with these "defective" ears,

I'm able to hear everything that's really important.

About Camisha Jones

- Unashamedly hard of hearing, chronically ill, and disabled
- Long history of doing anti-bias work but was not politically disabled through over a decade of that work. For 2 decades, lived with disability without using the D word.
- The effect of experiencing barriers and ableism led to deeper connections, awareness, and advocacy related to disability
- Exposure to spaces where disability and access are centered raised the standard of access expectations. Being expected made me feel valued, welcomed, and safe.
- Believes disability and access centered practices provide benefits to all people

Session Objectives

- reflect on inherited narratives related to disability, chronic illness, and neurodivergence
- learn about barriers that may exist in the workplace
- discuss ways to make access a standard, rather than the exception

Overview of Session's Two Reflection Exercises

1. You'll be invited to consider messages you've taken in around disability
2. You'll be invited to consider potential barriers in the workplace

Potentially Triggering Content Notice

The reflection activities in this workshop might open you up to thinking about your personal journey related to disability, chronic illness, and neurodivergence.

For some, this may prompt remembering painful experiences with ableism. **Please do what you need to do to take care of yourself.**

I will not be offended if you choose not to participate in these activities or to not stay in this space.

Aspirational Overview of the Session

- Welcome and Opening - 10 min
- Defining Disability - 10 min
- Reflecting on Messages about Disability with short debrief - 10 min
- Reflecting on Barriers in the Workplace - 10 min
- Tips for Making Workplaces More Accessible - 20 min

There's a lot I want to share.

Interrupt if we need to sit with info a little more!

What Do I Mean When I Say “Disability”?

**According to the CDC,
1 in 4 adults in the US has a disability
(28.7% of the population)**

- 13.9 % Cognition (serious difficulty concentrating, remembering, or making decisions)
- 12.2 % Mobility (serious difficulty walking or climbing stairs)

**These shifted places from last year
and I suspect I know the reason why.**

SOURCE for stats:

<https://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/disabilityandhealth/infographic-disability-impacts-all.html>

WSJ



Long Covid Knocked a Million Americans Off Their Career Paths

Years after infection, even answering email remains arduous for many

Article by Jennifer Calfas
and Paul Overberg
August 26, 2024, 5:30 am

Image of a femme person standing outside on a porch wearing a pink shirt and white pants, with hands resting on the porch's railing. House behind the person is tan and white with trees to the left of it.

Photograph by Nicole Wolf
for Wall Street Journal

“LongCovid has pushed around 1 million Americans out of the labor force, economists estimate. More than 5% of adults in the US have Long Covid, and it is most prevalent among Americans in their prime working years.”

According to the CDC:

**1 in 4 adults in the US has a disability
(28.7% of the population)**

- 7.7 % have an independent living disability
- 6.2 % are deaf or have serious difficulty hearing
- 5.5 % have a vision disability
- 3.6 % have a self-care disability with difficulty dressing or bathing.

Every category has a slight increase this year from 2023.

SOURCE:

<https://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/disabilityandhealth/infographic-disability-impacts-all.html>

According to the Americans with Disabilities Act:

“A person with a disability is someone who:

1) has a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities;

2) has a history or record of such an impairment (such as cancer that is in remission);

or 3) is perceived by others as having such an impairment (such as a person who has scars from a severe burn).”

From ADA.gov

Some examples of people that are included in the definition of disability used for the ADA that may not come immediately to mind are people who experience:

- diabetes,
- asthma,
- migraines,
- alcoholism,
- anxiety conditions,
- major depression,
- obsessive-compulsive disorder,
- cancer
- a short term injury that becomes long term such as a broken leg,
- Long COVID

This is of course not comprehensive list.

Disabled people are always in the room.

What Messages Have You Received About Disability, Neurodivergence, and Chronic Illness?

Think of people who were disabled, neurodivergent, and/or persistently sick (or perceived as any of these) in the community you grew up within.

- What were the primary narratives/themes about them among those you were in community with?
- What messages did those experiences relay to you in regard to differences related to physical, emotional, and mental embodiment?

About These Messages

This is conditioning we've been exposed to around disability. Whether we intentionally think of it or not, we carry this baggage with us wherever we go.

It influences our decisions, language, actions, and culture.

As with all conditioning connected to issues of bias, it takes intentional and ongoing action to unlearn it.

Unlearning Conditioning involves...

- Building relationships with people different from yourself
- Exposing yourself to different perspectives, art, books, media, and history of and by people different from yourself
- Being open to feedback and uncomfortable conversations that have the ability to deepen your awareness
- Being open to continual personal growth, getting out of your comfort zone to do things differently

Access Barriers Reflection Exercise

This next exercise is about access barriers:

- Recognizing barriers and privileges we hold plays an important role in expanding inclusion.
- Without awareness about the barriers that exist, there's no chance of reducing them and improving how people experience the workplace.

Access Barriers Reflection Exercise

For this exercise, I want you to think about your workplace, the ways you interact with others virtually or in the office, and the day-to-day activities you engage in. I am going to ask you a series of questions based on access needs different kinds of people may have in the workplace. You do not need to know the answers to these questions. The point of this exercise is simply to consider them.

Let's start. If you are comfortable doing so, close your eyes.

Think about what it was like before your first day on the job. Did you wonder if accessible parking was available or if there would be an accessible entrance with a ramp? If there is a ramp at your workplace, how far do you have to walk to get to it? Is it clear how to get in the building? Are curb cuts often blocked? Does the entrance door require you to manually pull or push it open? Is there ever anyone present to offer support? Inside the building, how wide are the doorways, bathroom stalls, hallways, and spaces between furniture?

Think about times when you've been invited to a meeting. Is information provided to you upfront that assures you that you will be able to communicate, understand others, understand what's happening in the space, and participate as fully as possible? If not, is information provided about who to contact and how to contact them to communicate needs? Is the person listed someone you'd be comfortable contacting to make a request? How far in advance would a request need to be made and do you have a sense that there's a budget to cover requests? Do you know how meetings will be structured in advance?

Think about your experiences at meetings. Do people describe visual content? Do people share written content verbally? Do people speak at a fast pace or simultaneously? For virtual meetings, do people call in from quiet locations? Is chat used frequently and are there alternate ways to contribute when it is used?

Think about how you receive information at your job. How often does your job require you to process large amounts of information quickly? Is information shared in alternate formats? Do people seem to get frustrated when someone doesn't understand things immediately or need things repeated multiple times?

Think about emails you've received. Do they include image descriptions or alternative text describing photos and images? Is text legible? Do you have access to assistive technology to help with understanding the email? If the email prompts you to visit a website, complete an online form, or review an attached document, are they typically formatted in a manner you understand? Are alternate formats to access the info or complete forms available?

Think about gatherings, retreats, and conferences you are expected to attend for your job. How much walking and standing do these events typically require? How often are you expected to walk from one place to another? Do the venues and sites generally have elevators? Do interactive activities take different kinds of bodies into consideration? Is consent requested before doing activities that require touch? Are there typically noisy, busy, or crowded areas to be navigated in order to participate?

How flexible is your workplace? Are you able to set or adjust your own work hours? Is working from home acceptable? If so, is it also acceptable to attend virtual meetings with your camera off? Would you be comfortable taking a work meeting while lying down? Would this be perceived as unprofessional behavior? How much time do you generally have to meet due dates?

Think about the pace of work at your job? Would you describe your work environment as “fast pace?” In your opinion, are goals and timelines realistic? In your opinion, are there enough people at your job to hold the goals you strive to achieve? When productivity and human needs present themselves at the same time, which is most often prioritized? Are there unspoken signals that applaud or set an expectation for people to work long hours or over the weekend to “get the job done” by any means necessary?

Think about your job and the health needs of its staff. Is there a quiet space at your job where you could go if you were feeling overstimulated, mentally fatigued, or like you need a break? If you needed to stim, sit down when others were standing, or stand up when others are sitting, how do you think you would be perceived? Is catered food labeled for allergens and does it include options to fill a variety of dietary needs? Are there items that can not be stored in the common fridge to avoid food allergy risks for any of your colleagues? Are there known COVID safety practices in place at your job? How do people respond to employees who wear masks as a COVID safety practice or take sick time off?

Lastly, let's think about other general ways disability might show up at your job. Are there people with disabilities in leadership roles or represented within programming you offer? Does the topic of disability and accessibility ever come up? When assessments and surveys are done, are issues related to access included? Is there a budget for accessibility? Do you notice words or jokes related to the way certain bodies and minds function used as a way to express negative opinions, stereotypes, and experiences? How often does disability justice or disability rights come up? Does anyone ever mention the disability rights movement? Do you sense an awareness of the past and present contributions of disabled, chronically ill, and neurodivergent people where you work?

Pause to Consider Access Barriers Activity

Sit with your thoughts for a while, especially those around:

- barriers you noticed
- ways you imagine someone might experience those barriers in your workplace
- ways conditioned messages we discussed came to mind in considering the barriers
- ideas for intervention that come easily, especially those you have power and position to put into action

Tips for Increasing Accessibility in the Workplace

- **Listen and Learn.** The needs, input, and wisdom of disabled, chronically ill, and neurodivergent people should always guide access. There is no one size fits all!
- **Choose and set up accessible venues and meeting space.**
 - Ask if there's an accessible entrance, if bathrooms meet ADA compliance, where ramps and elevators are.
 - Request room set ups that allow space for wheelchairs to navigate easily.
 - Assign someone to be present to help navigate the space. Reserve seating to support people's access needs.
 - Encourage people to keep spaces scent free and work with venues to swap scented bathroom products for unscented ones.

Tips for Increasing Accessibility in the Workplace

- **Be Upfront about Access.**

- Openly communicate your commitment to accessibility in work practices. This can be done by a formal or informal accessibility statement. Follow through with practices that make the commitment real.
- Provide information upfront about how to make an access request and include ways to do so confidentially. Designate a specific person to receive, respond to, and fill these requests.
- Share what forms of access will be available and expected in advance: ASL, CART, audio description, choose quiet location for virtual meetings, etc.
- Share details such as an agenda, presentation text, a heads up if people will be breaking out into small groups, COVID practices and expectations, a layout of spaces, etc.

Tips for Increasing Accessibility in the Workplace

- **Diversify Ways to Engage**

- Present info verbally as well as in text
- Provide alternate ways of communicating visual content, such as image descriptions, alt text, audio description, identifying one's self when speaking
- Ensure your website and documents have adequate contrast and font size.
- Make documents and forms available as a large print, screen reader formatted documents
- Provide contact info on forms and documents for requesting alternate formats or submission methods
- Accurately caption videos and/or provide access documents
- Use format settings for documents (Ex: headings, subheadings, etc) and use accessibility checker where that's possible.

Tips for Increasing Accessibility in the Workplace

- **Meeting Practices**

- Have meeting facilitators and leaders share expected access practices upfront and interrupt to course correct in support of access.
- Move at the pace of access with patience.
- One speaker at a time.
- Adjust when you notice a lot is happening at the same time.
- For virtual meetings:
 - Make auto-captioning available as standard practice in the absence of a captioner. Notice how well it works.
 - Signal it's okay to be on or off screen or communicate verbally or via chat
 - Have someone read chat messages sent to everyone out loud.
 - Have people identify themselves when speaking when that's supportive.
 - Consider making it acceptable to stim, sit, stand, eat, drink, be on screen or off screen, and even lie down

Tips for Increasing Accessibility in the Workplace

- **Work Pace**
 - Encourage and provide breaks.
 - Make it acceptable and encouraged for people to take time off, especially when sick.
 - Interrogate and interrupt celebrations of “push through” culture.
 - Where you have agency, provide flexibility and consult with those doing the work when setting timelines, due dates, and goals.

Tips for Increasing Accessibility in the Workplace

- **Prioritize Health Needs**

- Consider creating a quiet room or space where people can decompress.
- Take food allergies into consideration when catering and determining protocol for shared refrigerator use.
- Clearly label food
- Let people know if certain foods are off limits for safety's sake.
- Stay tuned in to COVID surges and be transparent about COVID practices. **Refer to People's CDC's recommendations.**

Tips for Increasing Accessibility in the Workplace

- **General Ways To Include Disability**

- Include a line item for accessibility in your budget to cover supports such as hiring ASL interpreters and CART writers (captioning), ramp rental, Braille versions of documents, video captioning, KN95 masks, and HEPA air purifiers.
- Seek out and include people from within the disability community for planning committees, leadership roles, special guest presentations, etc.
- Take time to learn about disability history, significant people, what disabled content creators have to say about current events related to your work, and issues of concern to the disability community. Focus on content directly from disabled people.
- Ask about accessibility on surveys.
- Include accessibility and disability-related issues in your training schedule.

**In closing, I'd like to share a poem I wrote in 2020
when the pandemic began.**

On Working Remotely & No Longer Commuting with Chronic Pain

By Camisha L. Jones

the train leaves the station without me / so does the bus / the sidewalks
stay empty of my steps – the rushed ones, the ones pierced with pain, the
its-too-late-at-night to still be walking ones / i keep my cash / it doesn't load
my metro card and then another card when the first one's lost / i don't
panic in the car about leaving late – least not as much / when winter
comes, i don't sit on the cold, cold bench waiting and waiting, clutching a
pair of my stockpiled hand warmers / i don't bundle myself up in oppressive
layers / or unravel in the late night, releasing the day's pressure like a
punctured balloon / instead i sit / and continue to sit / in this chair then that
one / look out the window to escape the screen's demands / wonder how i
ever had fuel for those past travels / i rest / and i rise / and listen to the
body that's carried me here as it whispers the way forward

Thank You For Coming!

Feel free to reach out:

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