



Creating diverse coalitions for equality in neoliberal times: locating the emancipatory city

10:00 to 11:20: Presentation session 1, Disability, Research and the City

Presentation 1: Researching Disabled Lives in the Age of Austerity: Engaging with the 4 Rs – Research, Rights, Resistance and Reclamation

Bob Williams-Findlay MA, Co-founder Disabled People Against Cuts (DPAC)/ Being the Boss

I want to discuss, as a theorist and activist, what 'Disabled Lives in the Age of Austerity' means. Academics, researchers and activists will need to engage with the 4 Rs – Research, Rights, Resistance and Reclamation – each being a site of struggle within the context of the challenging question posed by James et al, (2017) What actually is a good city? How does it relate to Loretta Lees (2004) articulation of "an emancipatory city"?

My presentation would offer a brief critique of disability politics in Britain; including consideration of the 4 Rs. The critique would seek to address five identified questions relating to inclusion:

- Who defines what disability means and the methods of research?
- Is the term 'disability' outdated and do we need something else?
- What does inclusion mean in the city?
- Does inclusion mean participation co-production or emancipation?
- Who are allies and what does that mean?

As a Co-founder of Disabled People Against Cuts (DPAC) I have argued: "Government policies are reducing my public identity as a 'disabled person' and questioning the validity of how I've conducted my life. Disabled people are experiencing an increased ambiguity in terms of living a disabled life – the less the State regards them as 'disabled'; the more disabled they're likely to become. This is an experience many disabled people face right now across Britain." I will suggest Austerity takes us further away from inclusion, not towards it.

Presentation 2: “To display or not to display,” and in each case “to whom, how, when, and where”? A Preliminary Reflection on Passing, and Un/Covering, and their Implications on Social Settings

Dr. Alex Cockain, The Hong Kong Polytechnic University

This presentation dwells with efforts to “pass” as “normal”, especially but not exclusively how these relate to, albeit not necessarily performed and practiced by, a man positioned on the “low-functioning” end of the “autistic spectrum” with “severe learning difficulties” in his personal encounters in purportedly public places. Although much literature has eloquently illuminated upon how “passing” is experienced at a psychic level “inside” persons, this presentation is more concerned with exploring, and interpreting, the ways in which efforts to “pass”, even when these are unsuccessful, become manifest in social encounters, and places that not only reflect but also reproduce dis/ableist ideologies. This presentation also contemplates alternatives to “passing”, such as “un/covering”, namely when persons call attention to differences, although no attempt is made to prescribe, or reject, either of these tactics. Instead, this presentation seeks, if only provisionally, to unravel, and explore, the ontological and ethical complexities imbricated in both efforts to “pass” and “not pass”, or “un/cover”. Nevertheless, albeit perhaps inadvertently, I suggest that “un/covering” might, at least in my interpretation of circumstances involving the aforementioned man with “severe learning difficulties”, potentially not only break fictions but also create conditions conducive to the making of more “care-full places” and more dignified, and less denied, lives.

Presentation 3: My mental illness and the importance of space

Julian Harrison, Author of A Year in Melancholia

‘A Year in Melancholia’ is my journey through one year of living with depression and OCD. Of coping (and occasionally not) with mental illness. As a narrative, it is often savage and brutal, sometimes heartrending and passionate, occasionally light and humorous, but always honest and authentic. Beginning on 1st January and ending on 31st December 2016, ‘A Year in Melancholia’ is a no holds barred account of what I have to deal with and how – and crucially, whether – I do so.

As personal, lived experience, it perhaps goes where more academic and learned texts cannot.

Presentation 4: Neoliberal ideological bases of academia

Dr. Armineh Soorenian, Independent researcher

In my presentation, I will discuss how the neoliberal academia is structured in a way to marginalise disabled teaching staff and learners’ experiences and needs.

The violence of the neoliberal system which often takes the form of expected high productivity in compressed time frames, fading support structures and transparent career paths are felt more acutely by the disabled academic community. In this way, the disavowal and suppression of disabled staff and students’ voices is reinforcing the legitimisation of the complex webs of structural inequalities pervading academic institutions. Even the field of Disability Studies is replete with disabling barriers and is somewhat removed from employing or working with disabled academics, especially those with high support needs.

I will end the presentation by offering some insights that can work towards the creation of an inclusive academia for all disabled researchers and scholars.