

Episode 36: "A Disabled Person is not Disabled..." on Ableism, Disability, Identity, and Intersectionality

Released on March 19, 2021

[00:00:00.21] ANTHONY SIS: The opinions expressed by the guests and contributors of this podcast are their own and do not necessarily reflect the views of Cornell University or its employees.

[00:00:08.90] [MUSIC PLAYING]

[00:00:11.48] On today's show, we have a conversation with Zebadiah Hall, director of Student Disability Services. During our conversation, we dive into the topic of ableism and its impact on the Cornell community. We also talk about why disability and intersectionality should be a key part of how we intentionally designed spaces and experiences here at Cornell. My name is Anthony Sis.

[00:00:36.49] TORAL PATEL: My name is Toral Patel.

[00:00:38.10] ANTHONY SIS: And you're listening to another episode of the Inclusive Excellence Podcast.

[00:00:42.36] [MUSIC PLAYING]

[00:00:59.21] Zebadiah, thank you so much for taking the time out of your busy schedule to join us on the show today. So before we start the show, before we start our conversation, as we always do with every episode, we ask our guests to share their name, their pronouns, where they work here at the university, if you want to share maybe how long you've been here. And then we'll take it from there.

[00:01:18.62] ZEBADIAH HALL: Zebadiah Hall, he/him pronouns. I'm the director of Student Disability Services. And I've been here a little bit over a year and a 1/2, going on two years-- somewhere in there.

[00:01:31.21] ANTHONY SIS: Well, congratulations. Toral and I are actually just marking our two years, as well, here at Cornell.

[00:01:37.08] TORAL PATEL: Yeah, two years in my current role. But I've been with the university for almost eight years.

[00:01:43.40] ANTHONY SIS: Wow, yeah, I did forget about that. Thanks for that, Toral. [LAUGHS] All right, so we start every show with a question of the day. And so the question of the day that I'm going to ask you is-- well, for all of us to answer.

[00:01:56.79] So Toral doesn't know this. It's always either me or Toral, and we keep it secret is how would you advocate for diversity, equity, and inclusion with colleagues or co-workers who don't understand its importance? So it's a heavy question. Take a minute to process that if you need to. I because I do the podcasts, I also oversee the Inclusive Excellence Network.

Episode 36: "A Disabled Person is not Disabled..." on Ableism, Disability, Identity, and Intersectionality

Released on March 19, 2021

[00:02:23.73] I would redirect them to Mary Opperman's episode that we did. We actually asked her this question. And I thought her response was really insightful and that she really talked about this collective piece and now here at Cornell as a collective of people who work here at the institution that use the core values, as well as the mission statement as kind of our guiding principle for why diversity, equity, and inclusion matters.

[00:02:47.10] So I would just redirect them to listen to that episode and/or read the transcript, because now, we also have transcripts for all of our episodes on the series. So talking about inclusivity, accessibility, yes, had to throw that in there.

[00:03:01.93] TORAL PATEL: So for me, I really take on in my position the role of like, I would say educating one person at a time, right? And so you might or might not be aware. But I receive and manage all of the bias reports that involve faculty and staff.

[00:03:15.84] And so it's one conversation at a time is the approach that I take. And as we go through the bias incidents, it's really breaking that down. We really talk a lot about intent versus impact. So I think it sets that one accountability conversation at a time is just how I approach it.

[00:03:31.64] ZEBADIAH HALL: I appreciate that. Now, mesh a little bit of both of you guys's answers together if that's OK.

[00:03:36.63] ANTHONY SIS: Of course.

[00:03:37.71] ZEBADIAH HALL: I hear a little bit on a case by case basis, which I think is always important because you need to meet everybody where they're at. I also heard a little bit about guiding principles and those kind of things. And when I think about the kind of work I think about it from a standpoint of the environmental context, I think about it from the standpoint that Cornell is a microcosm of society.

[00:03:58.71] If you're connecting it to the work that I do, I'm looking at the environment. I'm looking at the negative attitudes. I'm looking at the policies, the procedures, the process that deny people access and opportunity to participate fully.

[00:04:12.31] And so when you start to look at it from that standpoint, I think you're looking at it. And I'm starting to look at it from an access standpoint. And access comes in many forms is what I would say.

[00:04:21.30] TORAL PATEL: Yeah, it's actually a perfect segue into our first question, which is, can you tell us a little bit about yourself-- more details about what you do here at Cornell?

[00:04:30.96] ZEBADIAH HALL: Yeah, so we're charged with access and opportunity so our disabled community can participate fully so we can equal the playing field. When I

Episode 36: "A Disabled Person is not Disabled..." on Ableism, Disability, Identity, and Intersectionality

Released on March 19, 2021

think about the work, I think about it from the standpoint, when students have to come to my office to receive accommodations, I need to do a better job.

[00:04:48.72] That means the environment that I spoke about a little while ago is not getting it, because a student needs to come to my office to receive accommodations because they don't have access from the onset. And so it's a little bit of engaging on that case by case basis because there's going to be a certain level sometimes where there's some nuances where students might need accommodations even if we try our hardest to be as universal design-- universal design as learning as possible.

[00:05:13.11] So there's a level that you still might need some accommodations. But there are some things that you see repeatedly that starts to happen that you wonder sometimes, are there things we can put in place from a redesign standpoint that gives individual access an opportunity to participate without having to engage and say I have a disability and these are the accommodations I need so they can have access and opportunity to participate.

[00:05:36.15] TORAL PATEL: What sparked your interest in this type of work?

[00:05:39.57] ZEBADIAH HALL: Oppression. I think at the core of it as you keep hearing me engage, you're going to hear me say disabled people. It's owning the political, the environmental-- all of those kind of structures to be of oppression, like other marginalized identities, understanding that it affects all of us, understanding that COVID has made it so prevalent to bring to bear some of the disparities that we already know that's at play, and understanding my oppression as a black man, understand oppression of the disabled community.

[00:06:12.60] It keeps me highly connected. And it's about the oppression and how do you unpack that and deconstruct ableism. And then the intersectionality of ableisms with other identities make you start about packing in a very different way and understand health care disparities and all those other things that feed into some of these other aspects.

[00:06:31.10] ANTHONY SIS: Zebadiah, I love your answer. And I think you talked a lot about ableism intersectionality. These are all really core concepts we're talking about, not just disability work, but also diversity, equity, and inclusion across the board.

[00:06:44.77] So I just want to go back to something you mentioned about disabled people. And I've heard a lot of conversations around people-first language, which is leading with people first, not necessarily their ability or disability, rather. So I'm just curious. What's the most inclusive way to speak about the disabled community?

[00:07:03.27] ZEBADIAH HALL: What I would say is, first of all, not using euphemisms. So I think about isms, they might talk about the identities that we hold in this space right now. So the first thing is not using euphemisms and then owning, like I talked about a little bit, the political, the economic.

Episode 36: "A Disabled Person is not Disabled..." on Ableism, Disability, Identity, and Intersectionality

Released on March 19, 2021

[00:07:20.28] I think so much, we're taught to do person-first identity. I think about myself and preferences by saying it's not monolithic. But I say I'm a black male. So I'm not disconnecting myself as a male that happens to be black.

[00:07:36.54] When we're seeing people with disabilities, we're disconnect or separating a little bit. The reason we might do that is a little bit of that devaluing of disabled people - how they devalue my blackness sometimes depending on a social construct.

[00:07:51.49] And so it's really owning that and putting it back on the environment. And if the way that we do the work, we think about it that a disabled person is not disabled unless the environment produces barriers that deny them access and opportunity.

[00:08:05.05] And so it's owning that is the environment that disabled. So if I were to build a building right now and I had a second or third floor, no elevator, escalator, or stairs, we all became disabled to that space to access that opportunity. It has nothing to do with it.

[00:08:19.69] And so when we say disabled, well, it's making an environment on their role within the political landscape, economic landscape, and the social construct of that oppression.

[00:08:28.96] ANTHONY SIS: I love that. I'm learning something new. Thank you so much for that. And I also want to touch upon what you talked about around intersectionality. And what does that intersection look like with disability, disability work, disability justice, and diversity, equity, and inclusion? Because I do feel like it's one that people don't typically put together, especially doing this work. And it's something that I know for me, I continue to learn and grow from every day. Just wanting to get a little bit more of your insight on that intersection of what does that look like.

[00:08:58.02] ZEBADIAH HALL: How about I do some identity connecting and some real stories to see how it actually plays out at manifest? And then we'll go back and talk about it a little bit. I think about it sometimes when we're engaging at a predominately white institution. And we just talked about my blackness-- how uncertain social construct that could be looked at as negative and devalued.

[00:09:20.35] Then when we say that we have a disabled individual and they don't have access-- by not given access, we might be saying you're a second-class citizen. And so now those two things might be prevalent, OK? And so now you're operating with a disabled person that didn't have access.

[00:09:37.52] I'm now operating as a black person at a predominately white institution and now, also might be a woman. And so are we saying that there might be three strikes against me because I'm a woman, disabled, black, right? Because the social construct of the devaluing of all three of those identities. And now you connect those identities, not that disabled, not that woman, not that black.

Episode 36: "A Disabled Person is not Disabled..." on Ableism, Disability, Identity, and Intersectionality

Released on March 19, 2021

[00:10:01.93] None of those identities should be devalued. But since those things are devalued in certain spaces, when you have the intersectionality of that, it makes it tough. So the way that might manifest is it might be a woman of color that needs accommodations but not seeking them, because what are they going to think about me? Do I not cut the mustard at this Ivy League institution, those kind of things? And so those are always prevalent when we're talking about intersectionality.

[00:10:30.07] Let me give you another story of how intersectionality might play out. Take that same three identities. And you put that individual in the space where that individual professor might be a white male. What I first started to talk about was disable and disability.

[00:10:46.49] Say that I put a diagnosis of PTSD or something of the sort where the identity of that whiteness might connect back to something that happened to that individual in the past or why they have PTSD. That male in their whiteness might not be bad at the core.

[00:11:05.16] But that identity in the spaces that we're in as that being a authority figure as the faculty member and governance of this class might be a barrier for that individual because that's a white male that might have caused the PTSD within that black woman that might be disabled or have a diagnosis, prognosis of the sort. And that's how this can play out and manifest in so many different ways.

[00:11:31.60] And that's why it's so important to understand our identities because the only way we can truly unpack this is to understand who we are as people. I can tell you how it shows up sometimes for me. There are times where women who have eating disorders don't want to connect with me as Zebadiah, the male-- has nothing to do with my blackness as much as it has to do with my maleness, right?

[00:11:51.66] If I don't understand how my identity show up, I might not be able to service the community appropriately. And so the reason intersectionality is important is because it's my identities of who I am, not given access to the disabled community to the services they need, because I'm not recognizing my identities and what I bring for and the barriers that those might hold. I didn't talk specifically about intersection now. Well, I did. But I might not have answered in the way that you wanted. So I hope--

[00:12:19.05] ANTHONY SIS: No, no. I mean, when I ask these questions, it's however makes sense to you, because I also think it might make sense to other people the way exactly you just explained it. And I know the way you did it for me, like, it resonated with me because I definitely understand through real-life examples. And I even thought of like, specific people that could fit those identities that you mentioned. So for me, it made sense. So thank you. Thank you.

[00:12:41.42] TORAL PATEL: Yeah, I agree. Examples work better for me too. Zebadiah, earlier, you mentioned the word ableism, right? And so for our listeners that

Episode 36: "A Disabled Person is not Disabled..." on Ableism, Disability, Identity, and Intersectionality

Released on March 19, 2021

don't know what that means, would you be able to define that for us? And then really speak to how it shows up at Cornell.

[00:12:55.68] ZEBADIAH HALL: When I think about ableism, I think about disability oppression-- oppression of the disabled community. I think it's in favor of able-bodied people. I think even when we think about able-bodied, we're not even sometimes missing the concept of nonvisible. And I think that's also at play.

[00:13:13.89] When I think about ableism, I try to think about it from the impact that it has because the impact varies in so many different ways. And so I think about ableism from a microaggression standpoint, I think about the secondary gain sometimes people feel that they can get because they gave somebody access to something they should already had access to. And they want to pat themselves on the back, right?

[00:13:34.53] I think about the spread effect sometimes that shows up from our faculty members, because if I accommodate this one student like this, every student's going to want to, right? That's the spread effect.

[00:13:45.34] But COVID showed us a real spread effect. Like, let's clear on these kind of topics. And so it's those kind of things when I'm starting to think about ableism, I'm thinking about the denial of identity. If I have to say I have a disability to receive a accommodation, my identity must be revealed. Process that a little bit, right?

[00:14:06.11] As we're engaged and as we're doing this at a high level for our disabled community or we raising ableism at its highest, I think it's also important to know from a historical context, free slaves, prostitutes. I'm saying prostitutes. And that's what it was back in 1880 to be sex workers now. People that spoke English as a second language, which, newsflash, European brothers and sisters, your native tongue sometimes wasn't English. They labeled you as disabled.

[00:14:32.31] I think those things are really important and to see, not because disabled was bad, but that category back in 1880s was considered disabled because they considered those individuals to be bad and devaluing who those were, individuals. And so if we connect that back to our present day and the things that are going on, if we're not careful, relabeling people for the wrong reasons, not because it's that individual's fault, because our design itself.

[00:15:01.03] And so one way to think about ableism is to think about design. And there are times where you might go into a situation where because our geographical location and region within where we live with Ithaca, those kind of things, our campus with the heels, the waterfalls-- all of those kind of things that are also gorgeous and beautiful and all those things-- but also poses certain barriers.

[00:15:25.15] So when you go in certain buildings right now, and sometimes you just have older buildings, you might go into that building. You say what does it look like

Episode 36: "A Disabled Person is not Disabled..." on Ableism, Disability, Identity, and Intersectionality

Released on March 19, 2021

sometimes at Cornell? You go into that building. And that individual in the motorized scooter can't get up to a certain floor because it's only stairs.

[00:15:38.88] So an individual might say we give accommodation. So we go down, and we meet those individuals down below, which is fine. That is good. But you can redesign your process altogether. And by redesign your process altogether, you say we're going to meet everybody down in that space.

[00:15:54.69] So now you took care of that individual in the motorized scooter. And now they feels more equitable. Let me tell you what you actually did. The individual with asthma doesn't say I have asthma. Can you meet down here with me?

[00:16:06.78] The individual that has really bad anxiety and doesn't want to walk up that hallway to go up those stairs to go meet with that faculty member or that staff member-- they no longer have to say why. Those kind of things, now, you have also accommodated by redesigning your process because it was never the individual in the wheelchair. It was the design of the process itself.

[00:16:28.65] And if we can get people to start to think about those things, we can start that a little bit-- start to unpack it, was I don't want to oversell it, right? It's like any other. We're going to always be working on it.

[00:16:37.89] But that's a little bit of how I conceptualize ableism. And it's really putting the emphasis on the environment. And it will be the Cornell construct. It will be the negative attitudes-- those kind of things.

[00:16:48.03] ANTHONY SIS: And I hear you saying a lot too in what you talked about is just being intentional with our words, with our actions, and to actually think about serving the needs of everyone, regardless of their ability status in the intentionality and design, say, of like a session or of a building or something, right?

[00:17:06.03] And so I know for me, when I first became aware of ableism-- and really the impact of it was years ago, I was facilitating the Privilege Walk activity. And the walk itself, like somebody couldn't participate because they were legally blind. And I was like-- I was a student at the time to facilitating this. So I didn't necessarily know how to work around accommodating the session or this particular activity for this individual.

[00:17:31.04] And I realized like, how are we having a activity around privilege and calling it a walk for somebody who may not maybe necessarily be able to see and engage in this activity? Like, how are we being inclusive but, yet, this activity is supposed to be inclusive? Like, it just felt so contradictory to me.

[00:17:47.07] And so I definitely learned a lot and continued to learn since then about just the importance of being intentional with your words and with the action with the design process of anything that you do.

Episode 36: "A Disabled Person is not Disabled..." on Ableism, Disability, Identity, and Intersectionality

Released on March 19, 2021

[00:17:57.22] ZEBADIAH HALL: And when I think about that, even what you alluded to with the transcript earlier, the transcript now gives access to this podcast to individuals that can't hear. I think also what's important too is from an intentionality standpoint, what I do appreciate, there is times where it's people in your role, right?

[00:18:17.55] The two of you that talk about diversity and those kind of things but really don't ever bring ableist to the conversation. Even most our chief diversity officers in most spaces don't bring ableism to the conversation. And what does that actually mean? And how does that play out?

[00:18:33.42] TORAL PATEL: Why do you think that is?

[00:18:35.70] ZEBADIAH HALL: I think it might be-- it depends on the avenue in which people engage and connect with their personal experience, their mental models, their lived experience. I think sometimes when you turn to individuals that do diversity work, sometimes they have black and brown skin.

[00:18:55.21] There's a devaluing of the disabled community and the black and brown communities. And part of that devaluing comes from that historical context I told you about a little bit, also, understanding that the social construct of disabled community sometimes is devalued as a whole.

[00:19:14.05] And so that plays a factor. I think also, there's times where when individuals look like some of us in this space, black and brown, then they tend to diagnose in a certain way. And sometimes that tend to have a paper trail on others. And so those things are at play, not that we do anything like that here at Cornell. We're not sending no paper trail or anything like that.

[00:19:39.43] But I think all of those things are part of this context at play when we're talking about this. And so that's why the intersectionality is so important in that oppression. And keeping that isms on the back of things brings the conversation to the forefront.

[00:19:55.95] I'll just say this, and I probably know there is another question. But I have been thinking about ableism from a productivity standpoint talking about how does it play out like in our country and our world? It's all about productivity.

[00:20:07.41] We also fetishize students that take a lot of credit hours at once, leaders of the top organizations and those kind of things. And so when we're talking about ableism, how it plays out, connected, intersectionality, productivity, culture, Ivy League institution--

[00:20:25.11] ANTHONY SIS: Yeah, I was going to say that.

Episode 36: "A Disabled Person is not Disabled..." on Ableism, Disability, Identity, and Intersectionality

Released on March 19, 2021

[00:20:27.48] ZEBADIAH HALL: And so now, when all of that is together, the social construct that what I describe and with intersectionality, now that black woman that we talked about seems lazy, right? Right? You see how that plays out from intersect--

[00:20:42.54] Not understanding all these social constructs that are at play that might not be given this individual access and opportunity and stuff, because that individual doesn't want to stay in the lab to 2:00 in the morning and get back and go in the lab because the harassment or what might be going on in such a way and devaluing her with all of those three identities in her condition alone might not allow that individual to stay up that amount of time without taking the medication or without getting the appropriate rest to be able to do the things they can't do to be back in the lab the next day.

[00:21:17.54] So now, my productivity, right? That look, right? I don't cut the mustard. It's not this. It's not that which is really, really important. I'll say this too. Let's tag onto all that stuff that happened to the lab. And now you've got to show for a networking event.

[00:21:33.32] Think about what the disabled community is going through. And there's this thing called the spoon theory. And the spoon theory has you processing and saying, what if all three of us needed 10 spoons a day? And for me to shower and get to my 8:00 AM, it took me two spoons.

[00:21:48.33] It took one of you three spoons. And it took one of you eight spoons. And we all got to our 8:00 AM meeting. The person that it took eight spoons-- they only got two more spoons for the rest of the day. I might have eight more spoons for the rest of the day, not that I didn't show up to my 8:00 AM and I don't care. I only got two spoons for the rest of the day.

[00:22:06.95] And that's how you could think about that sometimes with anxiety, mental health. You can think about that with chronic illness, chronic pain-- those kind of things. That might be manifested from an ableist standpoint when you connect them to productivity networking.

[00:22:20.72] It might take a lot of energy for somebody to do this interview that we're doing now. And then if they get off and have to then go to another call and then have to be on, then go to networking, you might wonder why they're not showing up for that. It might be some reasons that we're never really looking at.

[00:22:34.69] But that whole process somewhat is a waste because you're devalued by not engaging from a productivity standpoint throughout all of that. Sorry for the long-winded answer. But it's just trying to really bring this to light and what it actually looks like from an engagement standpoint in these spaces around ableism.

[00:22:51.02] TORAL PATEL: And Zebadiah, are you able to talk about how that impacts people, all right? So when you mentioned being devalued, how does that impact them?

Episode 36: "A Disabled Person is not Disabled..." on Ableism, Disability, Identity, and Intersectionality

Released on March 19, 2021

[00:22:58.66] ZEBADIAH HALL: I'll answer from this standpoint. I won't tell those individuals to be resilient. I won't tell those individuals that have grit. I won't tell a disabled person who doesn't have access to have grit. I won't tell a woman to go back in this misogynistic environment and have grit.

[00:23:19.75] I will be honest about the environment so then they can learn how to navigate the space that they're actually in so they can have access and opportunity to participate fully. And that's how I would handle that is putting that emphasis back on the environment.

[00:23:34.63] There's going to be times where we put accommodations in place. And we're not going to know if those accommodations actually work if the student is coming back saying, this doesn't work. And so now when we talk about some of those stories that we alluded to earlier where intersectionality and those identities, it might be some of those things that are at play that's in that environmental context. And that's where I might need to be looking at to truly figure out how to accommodate this individual.

[00:24:00.52] And so when we talked about productivity a little bit, maybe if that individual condition is manifesting in such a way, they cannot be productive in the time that they need to in their lab. As an accommodation, do we find different times for that person to be able to engage in that lab in such a way where it mitigates some of those other barriers that might be at play because of the environment context excel?

[00:24:25.48] And that's where to your point, not going to tell them to be resilient, going to engage in such a way, and see what accommodations might be appropriate for that individual. But really trying to get to a place of trying to do the work from a civil rights standpoint. It's their right to have access. They just have to come to my office to receive it.

[00:24:43.92] So I want to make sure I'm not overly doing that process and making it bureaucratic for them to prove that they're disabled. We're not here to play that game, and we do it from a social justice standpoint. And that's why the environment context is so important.

[00:24:57.31] ANTHONY SIS: Zebadiah, another word that I just realized oftentimes comes with the negative connotation is the word accommodation. Like, if you have to make an accommodation for someone if somebody requests it of them, it's often seen with this sense of negativity, like, I have to go out of my way to accommodate to a person or to a group.

[00:25:15.94] So can we like, debunk that or just process that a little bit of accommodations, like, that's not necessarily the case, because if we're talking about intentionality and design and everything, then, yeah, I'll let you take over.

[00:25:28.52] ZEBADIAH HALL: I appreciate that. The first thing I would say, it might be the design itself. Or your design could be well-intentioned. And you still might need to

Episode 36: "A Disabled Person is not Disabled..." on Ableism, Disability, Identity, and Intersectionality

Released on March 19, 2021

find a reason to accommodate. When I think about what we're doing right now, COVID made Zoom accommodate us. Neither one of us say we're disabled. So we need to record this in a Zoom setting.

[00:25:48.85] If you go to a hotel right now, they're worried about how can they accommodate your needs. You need your cell phone. And I talked to you earlier today. If we're being frank, our cell phones accommodated us to have that conversation.

[00:26:01.94] It's not until you put disabled or somebody needs accommodation because of their disability that accommodations all of a sudden becomes bad. Everything that we do in our work, we're trying to accommodate people. So dispelling accommodation itself I think is highly important.

[00:26:19.10] I think when you're talking about in the context of the work that I do, we're the institution of higher ed. You should want students to have access and opportunity to showcase their talent, skill set, and participate in the educational experience.

[00:26:31.69] And so when I think about accommodation, I think about the value add. I think about the differences within people how we all have differences. If you were to play on the sports team, your coach will try to put you in the position where your best skillset shows and your talent.

[00:26:48.89] When you're working with your boss and your supervisor, they should put you in spaces to not necessary don't work on the things that you might need help on but things that you're really gifted and talented in and that showcase those things.

[00:27:00.67] I think it's very similar with the disabled community-- understand the value add. I know that I played college basketball, and I coached college basketball. One of our managers was autistic. And he had a photographic memory. And when we go to halftime and try to dissect the play, he knew exactly the play they ran and can tell us. And we'll go back and look at the film. And he can tell us verbatim.

[00:27:23.47] He had a photographic memory. It had nothing to do with coaching ability- - had to do with he could explain exactly what that play looked like. So in that moment as the coach, I was assistant coach. And that's our head coach. And the other coaches, they had to be willing, intentional.

[00:27:37.90] We know that that's a skill set because we see what he's doing and telling us every day in practice before we get to the film. Do I have enough courage as the leader to step aside and put that disabled individual in that space to shine, right?

[00:27:52.24] And I want to say this as we're having this conversation. I'm not saying autistic is disabled because some people don't look at that one in the same. So I want to unpack that as well. But just trying to be from my at large conversation.

Episode 36: "A Disabled Person is not Disabled..." on Ableism, Disability, Identity, and Intersectionality

Released on March 19, 2021

[00:28:03.45] How do we put people in positions to be able to utilize their ability to help advance what we are doing in our world? Similar to Einstein, they had to get out of his way so he can produce some of the things that we probably utilize today and inform what we do.

[00:28:18.55] So it's that kind of stuff that I think about when it comes to accommodations that it's never a bad thing until somebody starting to devalue it from a negative cultural attitude of disabled people or giving somebody access and opportunity. I think that also shows up to women sometimes. I think it shows up to our black and brown bodies at times. It's all about that oppression.

[00:28:39.08] TORAL PATEL: Then that naturally brings us to the next question, which is, how can staff and faculty serve as better advocates or practice allyship for our disability community here at Cornell?

[00:28:50.05] ZEBADIAH HALL: I think like other communities, allowing those individuals that identify within that community, we have space and time. Understand the value at when we're talking about individuals that we need in leadership to be problem solvers, right?

[00:29:08.53] Think about a disabled person that when they're showing up, most of the time, they don't have access. And they've got to figure out how to navigate and problem solve to engage with the community. The value add of giving disabled people the ability to lead, to problem-solve, to redesign, or rethink, to reconceptualize how we do our work.

[00:29:28.81] I think that for me is the value add for staff to be able to go out and understand what that means. I think I would also connect it back to the identities and understanding who we are as people, because if we don't understand who we are as people and how our identities are emerged in this microcosm of society within the social construct of Cornell and the hierarchy, I think we're going to fail to see opportunities or where we can engage to give access and how I talked about redesigning that process and allowing people to come down and meet with everybody. And now, other people have to raise their hand to say, I have this condition that I need to be accommodated down here.

[00:30:06.37] Until we can slow down enough to think about those things, it's going to tough. How we engage with each other from a microstandpoint in our department. Are we setting it up where individuals are not always put on the spot, but they have different ways to engage within the staff meeting? Or do you always have to speak out? Or can you send an email? How can we engage with this in a different kind of format.

[00:30:29.75] So then, nobody has to say I needed an accommodation, or I have anxiety, or I don't want to speak up in this vein, or I don't want to do this, that, and the third. How can we at the core of us think about how to give access and opportunity to

Episode 36: "A Disabled Person is not Disabled..." on Ableism, Disability, Identity, and Intersectionality

Released on March 19, 2021

individuals without them having to go to medical leaves to receive an accommodation or Student Disability Services to receive accommodations?

[00:30:50.26] ANTHONY SIS: So on that note, Zebadiah, I want to thank you for your time. I know you're super busy. And you're doing really great work. So I appreciate you as a colleague. And just want to give you an opportunity also to maybe share a little bit about some of the services you might provide through SDS.

[00:31:04.60] ZEBADIAH HALL: We give such a multitude of services. How about I pivot in answering this way? If I had an opportunity to engage with all of the Cornell community, I would start with engaging a community within their process of engagement, allowing disabled people to have opportunity to receive accommodations and access throughout the process.

[00:31:26.33] For example, if somebody needs to meet with one to you, how do they receive accommodations to meet with HR and go through that process? Not accommodations that they need to do their job-- accommodations to even engage with the HR office, right?

[00:31:41.14] And so how do the academic advising put up on their website or put up somewhere that if you need accommodations, they engage. Or the way that we're engaging doesn't give you access and opportunity, this is how you receive accommodations to even engage.

[00:31:54.25] I think about it from a simplistic standpoint, not that this is simplistic, so I don't want to talk out of turn. But take an individual that's deaf that needs an interpreter. If they don't know how to access an interpreter to engage with their advisor, they can't even engage with-- unless they find a different modality to do that.

[00:32:11.41] Now, they could without an interpreter-- maybe email back and forth. But it's that kind of stuff that you've got to think about on a front end. And so if I don't see that I can receive accommodations to engage with my academic advisor or accommodations to engage with anybody, whatever offices, processes, procedure, that's why the environment is so important.

[00:32:29.65] I think it does a disservice to people when I think that's where we got to start there that people we need or receive accommodations to engage with all of us-- any of us. And I think that's the start, because I think we get so caught up. And like in the classroom, accommodation, we forget that students need accommodation in the classroom to engage.

[00:32:47.99] They probably need accommodations if they engage in other aspects of the educational experience. And so that are talking about the service-- if we can push people to put a process in place for people to know that accommodations is welcome to even engage with their office, that will be a good start.

Episode 36: "A Disabled Person is not Disabled..." on Ableism, Disability, Identity, and Intersectionality

Released on March 19, 2021

[00:33:04.45] ANTHONY SIS: Zebadiah, as we wrap up this episode, is there anything else you want to share with our listeners regarding this particular topic that you feel would be beneficial and informative to the entire community?

[00:33:15.54] ZEBADIAH HALL: One of the things I would like to talk about a little bit is how we alluded to a little bit of how do you engage accommodations on the front end of the process and things like that? I think one of the things that's been really unique is how we've been engaged in our Title IX office with our neural diverse students.

[00:33:31.28] And when the hearings are a certain amount of time, how do you break it up? How do you get breaks? How do you actually have those meetings? How do you engage in those kind of things?

[00:33:39.32] When I think about the work that we're doing with Title IX, I think we're working and engaging a little bit with the JA office a little bit and other appeals and grievances process. When I think about that, I think about the transition to society and our community. And what does that mean for our black and brown disabled communities as they go through the court systems and the processes as they're trying to navigate those things, not only being black and brown, but also when you connect disabled to those situations and those kind of things?

[00:34:07.40] Or if you connect neurodiversity into those spaces, what does that actually mean for those individual? Could we base off the institution that we are, as a Cornell, start to incorporate some of the things that we're doing?

[00:34:19.55] I had the chance to sit with the chief of police here at Cornell CUPD to go over some things. And the way that I was able to engage with him, I'm wondering, how do we take some of those engagement-- some of those engagement around some of the other stuff that we're doing and maybe help our community partners with some of the work that we're doing to solve? So think about it from that vantage point.

[00:34:38.54] [MUSIC PLAYING]

[00:34:44.54] ANTHONY SIS: Toral, is it just me? Or do I feel like, I really took a lot of notes from this recording?

[00:34:51.61] TORAL PATEL: I did too. What an amazing conversation we just had.

[00:34:55.48] ANTHONY SIS: Yeah, honestly. I think there were so many gems in this particular conversation that we could probably talk way longer than in this recap alone. But I do want to acknowledge and say that, first and foremost, one of the things that I had been talking about in my inclusively trainings, particularly around inclusive language and inclusive communication, was around the use of people-first language.

[00:35:20.95] And so I'm glad that this came up during our conversation. And I'm sharing this in terms of being vulnerable but also to hold myself accountable in that I

Episode 36: "A Disabled Person is not Disabled..." on Ableism, Disability, Identity, and Intersectionality

Released on March 19, 2021

shared some incorrect information during that training about people-first language being inclusive. And what's really apparent in this conversation was when talking about the disabled community, saying people with disabilities may not be the most inclusive.

[00:35:44.63] And so just from an accountability perspective, I want to own that. And I want to name that. And so that way, I know for future sessions that I do particularly on inclusive communication, I'm able to particularly highlight the challenges around the use of people-first language. And instead of saying people with disabilities, actually using the disabled community specifically.

[00:36:03.10] So that was something that I really was brought me to a greater awareness and I want to name that specifically on the show. So thank you, Zebadiah, for that learning opportunity. And I just want to take that moment to acknowledge that.

[00:36:18.22] TORAL PATEL: Yeah, no. I think that's definitely a great point. For me when Zebadiah talked about that, I think it was really about the identity for individuals, right? And it's whatever identity they prefer for us to use. So that was the key takeaways for me.

[00:36:32.36] ANTHONY SIS: Yeah, I agree too. And I think that's something that in terms of my own individual research, I've heard a lot of people, particularly the disabled community use disabled people. Or they identify themselves as disabled and would prefer to be called that rather than a person with a disability.

[00:36:47.71] But the way Zebadiah broke it down for me made a lot of sense around this separation piece and wanting to really just acknowledge that if a person does have a disability and they want to be acknowledged for that disability, then respect that about their personal decision.

[00:37:02.52] TORAL PATEL: Right, exactly. A quote that I want to share that Zebadiah actually said that I really found very profound. And it really shifted how I view the rest of the conversation. He specifically said, "A disabled person is not disabled, unless their environment produces barriers that deny them opportunities."

[00:37:19.84] ANTHONY SIS: That's so true. That's so true, though.

[00:37:22.45] TORAL PATEL: Yeah, speaking about the identities, individuals might not consider themselves to be disabled. It's not about the individual. It's about the environment that's creating that for them.

[00:37:32.86] ANTHONY SIS: Exactly.

[00:37:33.13] TORAL PATEL: The environment is giving them that identity, not themselves.

Episode 36: "A Disabled Person is not Disabled..." on Ableism, Disability, Identity, and Intersectionality

Released on March 19, 2021

[00:37:36.90] ANTHONY SIS: Yeah, I've really thought heavily on this, particularly because of the work I do specifically with programs. And as we've talked about on the show, we now have transcripts for the show for this particular series. But how long did that take?

[00:37:52.70] And so the fact that I haven't even accounted for that in the initial production of this show, it's embarrassing. Honestly, personally, as somebody, as I said, who really champions inclusion and equity to not have thought about that beforehand, that's something that for me, that was consistent theme throughout this entire interview was, how do we intentionally think about these things before somebody requests them-- before somebody with a disability says, hey, I actually need this accommodation. And specifically what he said about accommodation for me really resonated strong.

[00:38:25.90] So there is another quote towards the end of the interview where he said, "Accommodations are never a bad thing until someone is starting to devalue it from a negative cultural attitude of disabled people or giving someone access and opportunity" which for me really ties back strongly to the question we asked him initially around why he does this work and why he's passionate about it. And it's because he just said oppression, right?

[00:38:50.51] Like the fact that there are systems of oppression that exists and that they impact not just disabled people, but also people with other historically marginalized identities is really powerful. And I think it just speaks so profoundly to the impact of his words personally, but also just the importance of this conversation and this topic around we need to talk about disability from a critical lens, but also from an intersectional one.

[00:39:12.94] TORAL PATEL: Yeah, and I agree. And to tying into that, it's this concept of being intentional, right? You just mentioned it. You said it at the beginning that we all have to be intentional. And then there's something else that he said that I know there was like, humorous, but it was also meaningful.

[00:39:25.84] And he said that it's this concept of giving access to something that people should already have had and then patting ourselves on the back for doing it, right? Like, oh, like, hey, I gave this person access to this event or whatever it is and then say I did a great job. When in reality, I should have created that event so everybody had equal access to begin with. So it's not something to pat myself on the back about. So I thought that was really powerful as well.

[00:39:47.68] ANTHONY SIS: Yeah, if you are doing this work already around diversity or inclusion or equity, that should just be a part of that process.

[00:39:53.25] TORAL PATEL: Correct. It's, again, speaking to the intentional piece.

[00:39:56.57] ANTHONY SIS: Right. So let me ask you this, Toral. As we finish this particular episode, what action? Is there an action that you feel like you are definitely

Episode 36: "A Disabled Person is not Disabled..." on Ableism, Disability, Identity, and Intersectionality

Released on March 19, 2021

going to take away from what Zebadiah has shared that you're going to implement in your everyday?

[00:40:10.90] TORAL PATEL: Yeah, I think for me is just being aware, right? And so it's just keeping that in the back of my mind. You've heard me say this multiple times in terms of all diversity and inclusion-related topics. But this should just be part of just who we are and what we do.

[00:40:25.10] And so it should just be a consideration, just like we would consider logistics or budget for a specific event or something that's happening. And so just the accessibility piece should just be a natural consideration for that. And the other part is that we're not going to get it right all the time. And that's OK.

[00:40:40.57] But the goal here is to make sure that we're doing the work ahead of time so that somebody doesn't have to reveal their identity or their disability to actually ask us for the accommodation. We should just be thinking of that ourselves. How about you, Anthony? What are you going to do differently in terms of your trainings?

[00:40:56.75] ANTHONY SIS: I think in terms of my trainings, I've already actually been thinking about a specific action. But one of the things that I haven't really incorporated into my trainings-- so I do most of my training-- well, all of my trainings actually are virtual.

[00:41:10.63] And within Zoom, we have the ability to add a live transcript. So when I'm speaking, there are automatically subtitles that come out. Now, granted, they're not 100% accurate. But I haven't actually utilized this feature to the maximum when it comes to facilitating conversations with different groups of different units.

[00:41:28.04] So one specific action I definitely plan on doing is to just simply add it even if nobody asks for it so that people can at least see what I'm exactly saying. Or if they can't understand a specific word that I'm saying-- I know I've been told I have a Chicago accent.

[00:41:42.04] And so for some people, they may not necessarily understand some of the things I say or if they speak another language. So before anyone even asked me, one of the things I'm going to start doing now specifically is to just add a live transcript feature before I even speak in a training. And so that's one action and one specific thing I'm going to commit to doing after this conversation.

[00:42:01.21] TORAL PATEL: There you are, being intentional. So I think that's a great start. It's the little things that we can all do.

[00:42:06.97] ANTHONY SIS: And I just want to pose that same question to all of our listeners too to really sit back and reflect on what specific action will you do after listening to today's episode?

Episode 36: "A Disabled Person is not Disabled..." on Ableism, Disability, Identity, and Intersectionality

Released on March 19, 2021

[00:42:15.97] [MUSIC PLAYING]

[00:42:18.35] Thanks for listening to today's show. Be sure to subscribe to us wherever you listen to podcasts and read and submit a review on Apple Podcasts. It helps new listeners find us and the show. For the latest updates on diversity, equity, and inclusion at Cornell, be sure to visit diversity.cornell.edu. My name is Anthony Sis.

[00:42:38.16] TORAL PATEL: My name is Toral Patel. Thank you for listening to another episode of the Inclusive Excellent Podcast.

[00:42:43.96] ANTHONY SIS: This podcast is a production of the Department of Inclusion and Workforce Diversity in collaboration with the Cornell Broadcast Studio.

[00:42:51.55] [MUSIC PLAYING]

[00:42:57.62] TORAL PATEL: We would like to thank our co-producer and sound engineer, Bert Odom-Reed, as always for making us sound wonderful each and every episode.

[00:43:05.97] BOTH: Thanks, Bert.