Ableism in Higher Education: A Participatory Investigation with Disabled Students Navigating Academia

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Introduction

Background

Traditional Research (TR): follows a positivistic epistemology in which the researcher claims to be the expert on the oppressed community, makes a causal hypothesis, and collects the data in a controlled environment (Lac & Fine, 2018).

TR does not allow those that possess the lived experiences and social knowledge to help in directing study (Fine, 2006).

Participatory Action Research (PAR): an epistemological framework that operates in cylical pattern and challenges the power hierarchy in research by giving participants a voice in determining the direction of the study (Galletta & Torre, 2019).

Critical Participatory Action Research (CPAR): directs action that addresses the oppression conditions of people by involving them throughout the research process (Fine & Torre, 2019).

Ableism: places value on able-bodiedness and able-mindedness as the ideal condition and disability as something of lower value, rather than positing disability as being negative directly—disability (Hutchison & Wolbring, 2012).

Hutchon and Wolbring (2012) deem the lack of disabled researchers in the field to be responsible for ableist oppression.

Problem

Seventy-two percent of disabled students in higher education do not receive accommodations due to them not having disclosed their disability with the institution (Newman et al., 2011).

Perceived Inequity in Academia

Participants

Utilize snowball sampling to recruit undergraduate students, graduate students, professors, staff, and administrators at California State University, Long Beach, to be participant co-researchers in the study.

Measures

Interview Protocol: designed to probe broad topic areas for understanding the lived experiences of disabled students in higher education.

Lived Experiences: qualitative data taken and implemented in act phase.

Procedure

Inform participants of the importance of collaboration in research process.

Conduct interviews primarily using Zoom—an online communication platform readily available to members of the university and elsewhere.

Instruments

Audio recorder and transcription software to interpret verbal interviews.

Study Aim

The proposed study utilizes a participatory action research design to inquire upon the obstructions and theoretical interventions to ableist oppression of higher education disabled students by investigating reciprocally developed topic areas.

Proposed Methods

Collect

Act

Semi-Structured Interview

Recruit disabled undergraduate students through the subject pool at California State University, Long Beach, and campuses with similar recruitment resources.

Ableist Oppression: implicit and explicit dispositional attributions against disabled students (e.g., microaggressions and policy).

Accommodation Seeking: indirect accessibility, paradox of choice available accommodations, and difficulty in attainment.

Disabled Student Services: complaints of disabled students not receiving equitable accommodation services, inhibitions of the power hierarchy, and lack of positive attitude expression media.

Topic Areas

Ableist Oppression: implicit and explicit dispositional attributions against disabled students (e.g., microaggressions and policy).

Accommodation Seeking: indirect accessibility, paradox of choice available accommodations, and difficulty in attainment.

Disabled Student Services: complaints of disabled students not receiving equitable accommodation services, inhibitions of the power hierarchy, and lack of positive attitude expression media.

Expected Results

Perceived Inequity in Academia

Receiving Accommodation

Discourse

Potential Implications

If the initial PAR collection phase of the study yields the highly valued information expected by the researchers, then following semi-structured interviews will provide keen insights into the disabled student experience by utilizing participatory knowledge.

Most importantly, the proposed study serves as a method for the largest unrecognized minority to focus the actions of research.

Future Directions

Development of new ally training approaches that incorporate the feedback of the affected student population, faculty, and program administrators. One theoretical approach is to include disabled students in ally training sessions for added context.

System-wide restructuring of "reasonable accommodations" that incorporates accommodations into the academic standard and modernizing instruction methods (Hutchson & Wolbring, 2012).

Discussion

System-wide restructuring of "reasonable accommodations" that incorporates accommodations into the academic standard and modernizing instruction methods (Hutchson & Wolbring, 2012).

References


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