Stefan Sunandan Honisch - Feb 1 2020

**SPEAKERS**

Molly Joyce, Stefan Sunandan Honisch

**Molly Joyce** 00:00

Start recording aif that's okay.

**Stefan Sunandan Honisch** 00:02

Sure.

**Molly Joyce** 00:03

And again, I think, as I say, like no pressure, you know, I'll be editing doesn't need to be, oh, you know, the perfectly crafted answer.

**Stefan Sunandan Honisch** 00:12

Sorry, something happened with the line.

**Molly Joyce** 00:17

Oh, I just said around definitely going to be, you know, as I said, like editing some of the answers or picking and choosing. So don't worry about this, you know, perfectly crafted answer

**Stefan Sunandan Honisch** 00:27

Sure, right.

**Molly Joyce** 00:28

So it's more and I think I, I've probably said this before I don't like to send the questions before also because I want to get the more candid kind of spontaneous answers in a way like what really comes to mind.

**Stefan Sunandan Honisch** 00:41

Okay.

**Molly Joyce** 00:42

So yeah, okay, so the first question, what is access for you?

**Stefan Sunandan Honisch** 00:47

So I think, what access and accessibility mean, to me are process and conversation or perhaps, process and dialogue rather than static concepts. And I mean by that is because access needs and accessibility practices encompass or should encompass such a diverse range have ways of being in the world I think that moving away from thinking about access and accessibility in terms of readily available definitions, if productive, because then we're thinking about- we're thinking about access and accessibility with a certain humility, and a certain mindfulness that despite best efforts and good intentions, there may be aspects of accessibility and access that are not adequately planned for in advance, and in some cases can't be fully anticipated. And I think that thinking about access and accessibility in terms of both process and dialogue, shifts the focus away from one size fits all definition, and more towards ongoing self reflection. So for example, at the level of institution, so institutions of higher education for example, or, or public spaces, there's the importance of both self reflection on the part of institutions around what they need to be doing to ensure maximum access, coupled with the recognition that there will be important supports that they can actually provide for individuals. So that given, let's say, a basic adherence to government legislation around access and accessibility, so for example, the American with Disabilities Act or, or bar equivalent government legislation in other parts of the world, all of which require ramps, let's say, or Braille or access practices for deaf and hearing impaired individuals. There also needs to be room and space for an ongoing process so that individuals who have specific access needs and accessibility needs can work with an institution in whatever ways they see fit and would work for them. And for us, let's say speaking, more collectively, so that we feel comfortable coming forward and specifying what we might need that hasn't been anticipated or that can't necessarily be planned for. So in the case of issues related to fatigue or, or other health issues that that can't necessarily always be planned, but that depend very much on how one is feeling sort of moment to moment. Ensuring that supports are in place. So that once a certain basic set of accessibility requirements, let's say they've been met, that the process and the dialogue doesn't stop there. Yeah.

**Molly Joyce** 05:32

No, that's great. To add to I'm gonna try to be like silence during the answers here, I don't mean to like not, you know, have conversation with you, but just for the recording purposes.

**Stefan Sunandan Honisch** 05:43

For sure.

**Molly Joyce** 05:44

Great. So, the next one is what is care to you?

**Stefan Sunandan Honisch** 05:52

Hey, I think that I would frame care in somewhat similar terms, moving away from attempt to define it in an encompassing kind of way, and instead of thinking about care, as in terms of interaction, in terms of mutual respect, and support, a recognition of each other's complex humanity. Um, and as some of my recent reading, and engagement with postings by the the Autistic Self Advocacy Network, for example, the importance of presuming competence on the part of an individual who, who has particular care needs, and support needs, so that we move, we in some sort of abstract sense, but collectively, we begin to move away from hierarchical approaches which frame care in terms of sort of dualism, you know, between those who provide care and those who need care, and really recognizing that somebody who has particular care needs, is presumed to be competent, and how to have agency and all of this, I think, should ideally move us away from thinking about care in bureaucratic and institutional and hierarchical kinds of ways. And instead, really foregrounding that care is about interaction and relationship between between individuals, between individuals and communities, between people and institutions. So that, again, like we were talking about with access and accessibility, that care doesn't sort of harden into a kind of checklist approach. Taking off a bunch of boxes to ensure that a certain basic set of requirements prescribed bureaucratically are met and then that's where stops right now.

**Molly Joyce** 08:59

Like I'm like, so excited, like underscores, what is control for you?

**Stefan Sunandan Honisch** 09:05

I think, in in a positive sense, in a generative sense control speaks to the needs, individually and collectively to recognize, again, going back to what we were talking about earlier in terms of presuming competence on the part of people, for example, with access needs, with care and support needs. Control is recognizing that somebody who with care and access needs is a- has agency is capable- has specific ways of communicating their needs. All of these need to be respected and included. And there needs to be there needs to be maximum attention and care, really ensuring that a person's ability to control the ways in which their needs are supported. That that is always recognized. In its negative sense, of course control. I think this is been one of the this remains one of the important issues within critical disability studies, in disability self advocacy in Disability Justice. Suppose that there has been control taken away from disabled people to determine our needs, our support needs, our access needs. And so, placing the positive and tentative aspects of control that we were just talking about, as what we need the work that we need to do to move away from the lack of control that disabled people have, historically, and in so many ways continue to, to experience this lack of control in determining what best meets our need, needs when it comes to living in the community, living at home, living and working and being in community with others in ways that meet our needs, rather than control taken away from us, so that governments or institutions determine that disabled people should be placed in institutional settings. Just because that's like determined to be expedient or cost effective or so far without any kind of respect, or care shown towards disabled people as complex human beings.

**Molly Joyce** 12:43

Thank you. What is weakness to you?

**Stefan Sunandan Honisch** 12:50

That's a good question. It is a weakness. or thinking about weakness in terms of these dualisms. You know, I've talked about vulnerability before. And I think I've mentioned some of my own work tries to challenge these ideas of vulnerability as weakness and incentive think about vulnerability in terms of a positive reverse or as a particular way of interacting, that is not about weakness and strength, or power and lack of power, but instead, a particular set of ethical demands, aesthetic demands, that I think encourage us all in, in different ways. to question any kind of simplistic opposition between strength and weakness. And in so many ways, of course, we've been associated with disability and framed in individual terms as something that individual bodies or individual minds or individual sensory apparatuses, experience thereby sort of actually absolving Society of its responsibility to recognize the many different ways of being strong in the world that disabled people bring.

**Molly Joyce** 14:51

What is strength for you?

**Stefan Sunandan Honisch** 14:55

Again, I think similar to ideas about weakness, it seems to me too often strength is reduced to nominate the idea is about able bodied ness for example, or able mindedness. And I would argue that that kind of framing is deeply problematic, and has very negative consequences for individual people. And it has harmful consequences for society as a whole for for entire communities. And it seems to me that any, that's an important critical task is to continually challenge these these automatic linkages between strength and ability, for example, that seem to be that are making seem inevitable or sort of common sense or obvious. And wherever we find those kinds of seemingly common sense, associations or linkages, that's where the, the, the critical work really begins to think about the various ways in which strength is limited to very historically and culturally and socially specific ways of thinking about thinking about ability and disability. And I'm also mindful, or I try to be mindful of the ways in which things like intelligence are very much ablest concepts that reflect deeply ablest ways of developing educational practices, or developing musical practices, and artistic practices. By linking intelligence and strength and ability in babies, the automatic linkages between intelligence and strength and ability on one side and positioning everything that doesn't meet those very narrow and very problematic and offensive ideas about intelligence and ability and science as not only the opposite of intelligence, in fact, but then also as obviously, and inevitably and in, deceptively, quote unquote, common sense ways as negative.

**Molly Joyce** 18:04

Yeah. It's kind of a controversial question, but what is cure to you?

**Stefan Sunandan Honisch** 18:29

Hold on.

**Molly Joyce** 18:34

Yeah, sorry, cut out. Yeah, sorry. It's most likely my internet communication.

**Stefan Sunandan Honisch** 18:40

Oh, my mind is the same thing too. I was still able to hear me but, um, so to answer the question, at least initially, in a way, I would say that cure is a fiction. And it's a fiction that has been granted a certain kind of scientific and medical and technological legitimacy. Again, notions of cure and narratives a cure for, you know, historical origins. Um, so I think that the notion of curing anybody is on one level of fiction, but then it also has these historical realities and consequences. Where disabled ways of being in the world have been as high as possible for cocaine or delegitimize. All in the name of this fictitious notion of cure. Um, and so I would argue that perhaps that we need to there's two things, we need to unpack the ways in which cure operates as a kind of fiction with healing, scientific and medical legitimacy behind it, while also working to understand the ways in which these fictitious notions of cure that represent particular historical ways of thinking and so forth are carried forward into the present and thinking need to have very damaging consequences for for people who are people whose whose ways of being in the world are then taken to require some some for cure. And then that's the point. That's the point in which this this section then becomes quite harmful and dangerous. To the extent that autistic people for example, are subjected to applied behavioral analysis, for example. And various disabled ways of being in the world are become the target of these medicalized and we don't have to, even too far back in history to understand the consequences of cure in terms of eugenic practices, for example. So I, I think that the initial response of framing cure as a kind of fiction, still, or perhaps serves as a way then, of pushing us forward, to understand more deeply and more fully and to resist the operation of cure narrative or the narratives into actual practices that try to control or contain disabled ways of being in the world.

**Molly Joyce** 22:34

No, I love I love curious fiction or like, I want to like title a piece that. I'll give you credit. Have you I don't mean to be a cyber...Have you read Eli Claire's "Brilliant imperfection?"

**Stefan Sunandan Honisch** 22:59

Eli?

**Molly Joyce** 23:00

I think Claire, it's like C L A R E.

**Stefan Sunandan Honisch** 23:04

Okay. And it's called brilliant. No perfection.

**Molly Joyce** 23:08

Sorry, brilliant imperfection.

**Stefan Sunandan Honisch** 23:11

Oh, brilliant imperfection. I haven't read it, but I am very much interested in it. Is E L i

**Molly Joyce** 23:20

Yeah.

**Stefan Sunandan Honisch** 23:21

Okay. Yeah. Oh, yeah.

**Molly Joyce** 23:27

No, I'm just curious. Yeah. He's all against cure. It's really great. And it's just like a lot of different essays. It's just interesting.

**Stefan Sunandan Honisch** 23:36

Okay.

**Molly Joyce** 23:37

Anyway, my lecture But

**Stefan Sunandan Honisch** 23:40

no, no, no.

**Molly Joyce** 23:43

Okay, second to last Also, if you want to take a break or we can,

**Stefan Sunandan Honisch** 23:46

oh, yeah.

**Molly Joyce** 23:48

Okay. What is what is interdependence for you?

**Stefan Sunandan Honisch** 23:57

Interdependence. For me, interdependence is a promising way of thinking about how human beings relate to each other. Um, and I think that I did best and it's most promising The, the practice of interdependence, I'm trying to get away as much as possible from thinking in terms of static contexts and sort of reifying something like dependents and then to think about it in terms of possibility and in terms of practice. So I would argue that interdependence at its most promising then can be set of practices through which we find inclusive and respectful and deeply engaged ways of connecting with each other. And we also get away then from these dualistic ideas about strength and weakness and control and lack of control agency and lack of agency that you and I were talking about in relation to previous in relation to some of the previous topics, um, and instead to think about the ways in which, for example, the ways in which institutions are designed or public spaces are designed, do actually provide supports, and they provide for access needs, that are the support and access needs of non disabled people. But those supports and access needs, which are there aren't considered support and access needs, they're just considered as this is just the default way of designing a building a default way of organizing a public space, it just makes sense to do it this way. And so then anybody who, for whom those forms of support and access don't work, is then positioned as dependent on the good graces of a set of bureaucratic practices, you know, that then strive to include them after the fact. Um, I think thinking in terms of interdependence, perhaps, among other things, and can sort of highlight the ways in which I'm sort of hesitating here, in part because I want to, I really want to avoid this whole business of this, this really problematic cliche of an uncritical assertion that we're all disabled, because that, quite clearly is not the case. Um, but I, so I think that actually the the thinking about injured dependents in terms of practice can help us get away from thinking from lapsing into some sort of critical into some sort of uncritical, claim that we're all disabled. And instead to think about the, the sort of intangible ways that access and support are already built into these systems, which accommodate non disabled people or people who identify as non disabled, um, and then think about the ways in which access and inclusion and lack of access and exclusion are interdependent, in some sense on each other, in the sense that intangible access and support for non disabled people then create a set of circumstances which prevent access and prevent inclusion of other people have disabled people. Um, and that seems to me at one level of dependence as practice and then the other part or one of the other possible parts, I think, is to think about independence as a relationship between people and finding and having recognized the, the sort of structural and systemic dependence of access for non disabled people and lack of access for disabled people. to frame it in somewhat binary terms, then that recognition brings with it greater possibility and larger spaces for finding more respectful and inclusive ways for people and communities to relate to each other.

**Molly Joyce** 29:35

Yeah. And last one, what is assumption to assumptions?

**Stefan Sunandan Honisch** 29:42

These are great questions. They're difficult questions. So I think assumptions That's it, hopefully to do the same, I'm probably frame my response in two parts. So and think about both what it means to hold certain assumptions and assumptions both in a more positive stance in a more negative sense. That's a little bit dualistic. But just for the sake of some degree of clarity, I think it's maybe a helpful way to start but um, so, in the positive sense or negative sense, let's say assumptions can lead to specific forms of discrimination, prejudice, intolerance, I want to get away from the word intolerance. So because that that discourse of intolerance in turn has a whole set of problematic assumptions back embedded within it. Um, but in the negative sense, I think that assumptions serve as the they serve to inaugurate specific forms of discrimination and prejudice, bigotry, and they can affect certain assumptions can legitimize the lack of access and lack of inclusion. In the, in a more positive vein, I think that for any kind of communication and interaction to occur, a certain set of shared assumptions are necessary in order for that communication or inter subjective understanding, to be possible. So for example, if this philosophers, icons here, he talks about equality in terms of not not as a goal, or a or as a destination, but rather as the starting point. That equality, he says that he says something like equality is either everything or it's nothing. So we start from presumption that every being is equal to every other being. And then what do you think of in terms of politics, and what he calls the political lavake? Is the verification of that you call it that perhaps wrote an article, maybe, but I'm going back to what we were talking about earlier, for example, in relation to the presumption of competence when it comes to support and care and access. And I think that it seems to me that, in the positive sense, the presumption of competence is, is a crucial factor. When it comes to ensuring our maximizing accessibility and inclusion. If we don't start with that presumption of competence, then I think that we end up with something very much like the status quo in which people intellectual and cognitive disabilities, for example, too often, are presumed not to be competent and not presumed to have agency and subjectivity and complexity as a human being. And it seems to me that one example in which shared assumptions as long as it's not one person, or one sort of dominant group, determining what those operating assumptions are going to be, but those functions also have to be negotiated and navigated and agreed on, but once in place, and are perhaps are being offered or ever hacked, but just non negotiable. So for example, um, I think when it comes to activism around racial justice, for example, um, One of the core principles of Einstein is that there's never any right to call into question somebody humanity. And unless that is held firmly in place, as a guiding assumption, and practice and principle, the work of justice and solidarity and inclusion and respect will always be hindered and blocked.

**Molly Joyce** 35:40

That's great. Thank you so much.