



“Take a deep breath”: Re-imagining the disability research process



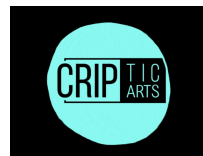
Centre for Disability Studies, University of Leeds, April 2026

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Web: Click here ([link](#)); and LinkedIn: Click here ([link](#))

Image credit: Josh Slack
with Louise Atkinson



The Art House **iHuman**

Dedications

Anita Ghai

jes sachse

Gemma Nash

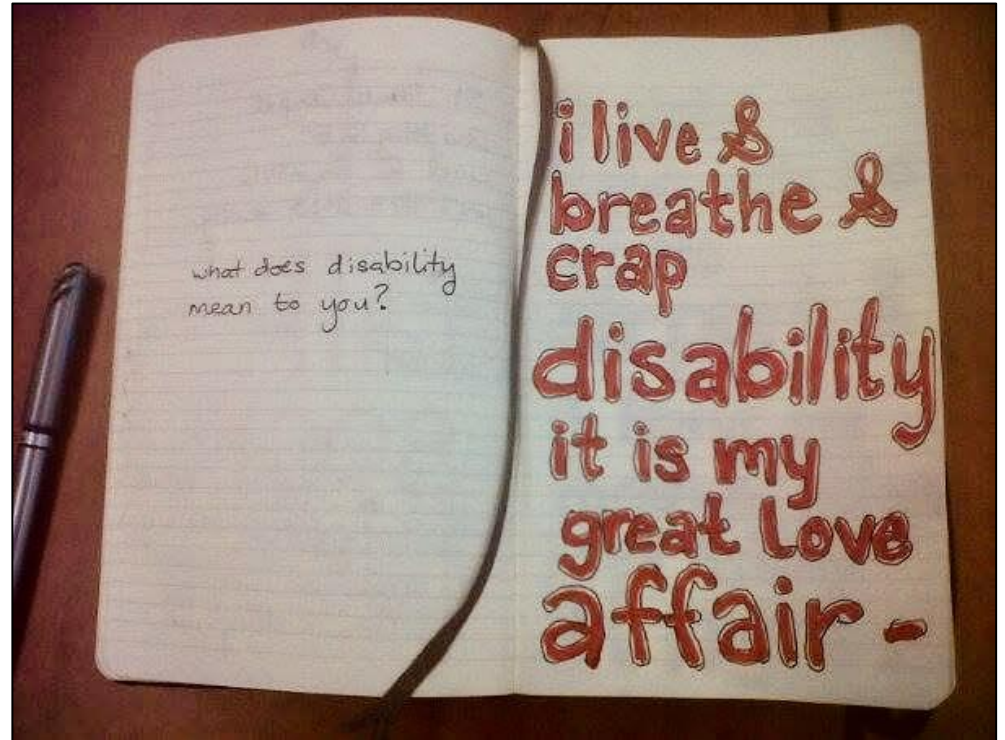
Patty Burne

Judy Heumann

Alice Wong

Lucy Watts MBE

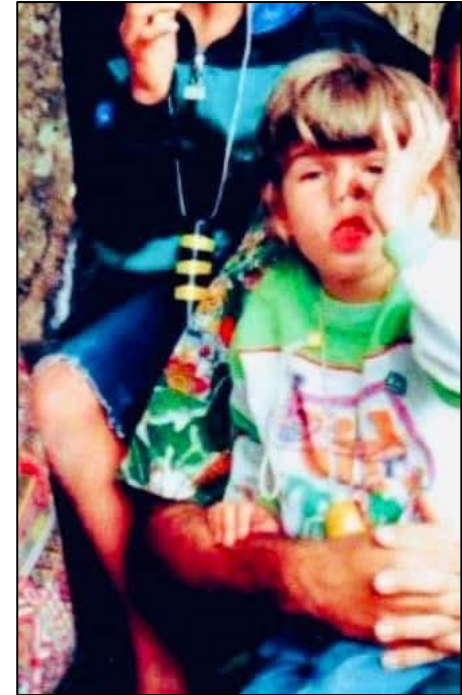
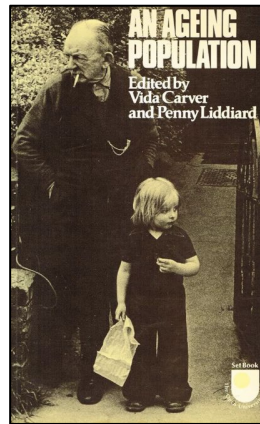
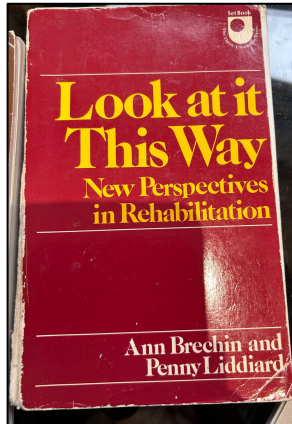
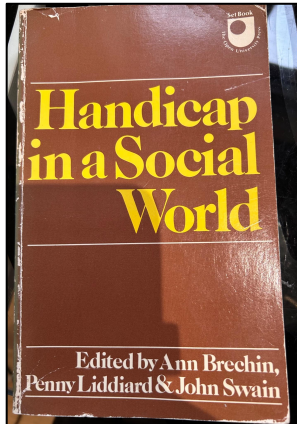
Sally Whitney-Mitchell



jes sachse, Toronto, 2012

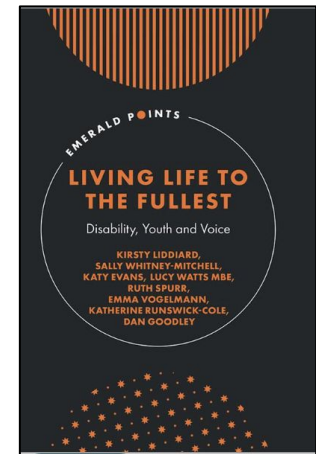
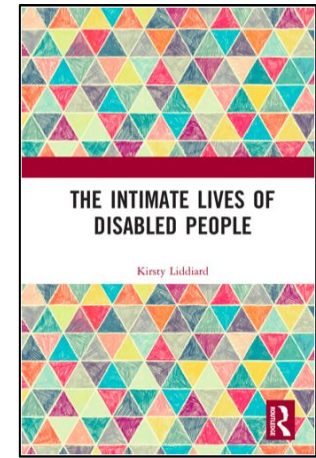
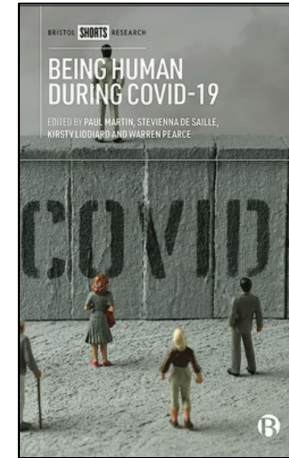
Situating myself

- For **Garland-Thompson (2005, p. 1557)** ‘feminist disability studies is academic cultural work with a sharp political edge and a vigorous critical punch.’
- Learning and reading disabled women’s own theorisations of the world (for example, see **Thomas 1999; Morris, 1996; Crow, 1996; Reeve 2008**) gave me the tools to centre lived experience, emotion and embodiment as core axes through which to understand the everyday lives of disabled people and their families.



Today

- To critically explore and question the power and potential of inclusive, co-produced and Crip research methodologies, focusing on intimacy, temporality (or time) and bureaucracy.
- How do we conceive, imagine, design and enact co-production in our current moment?
- Personal, reflexive, and emotive: helps to undermine the ‘buzz-wordification’ and vacuous use of co-production’ and instead provide ‘an open and honest reflection on the emotional side of academic life’ (**Hiemstra and Matthews, 2025: 542**).
- Consider how funding landscapes, our own institutions, precarity and academic ableism mediate and reshape what’s possible in our research.
- Speaking *through* research projects ‘to capture those moments of disruption, transformation and change offered by the presence of disability in the university via the research project’ (**Goodley et al 2025: 124**).
- Data: personal stories, photographs, memories, diary excerpts, and scribbles!



Access

- Visually quite simple, and I will aim to describe any substantive images I use on my slides.
- The images on the slide also contain embedded ALT text.
- A copy of my script is available if you'd like to follow it as I speak.
- Access more through QR codes or links.
- To describe my physical self, I'm a short, White-skinned woman in glasses, who is wearing [describe].
- Please consider my own access needs - thank you!
- Content warning: my talk today includes themes of death, grief and loss.

Part 1: Learning from Sally.



Living Life to the Fullest: Life, death, disability and the human

- *Living Life to the Fullest* was a three year ESRC-funded co-produced narrative and arts-informed research project which aimed to explore the lives, hopes, desires, and contributions of disabled children and young people living with life limiting and life-threatening impairments (hereby LL/LTIs).
- Short/er lives and life expectancies and serious illness are unique disability experiences that have been both theoretically and empirically overlooked (**see Runswick-Cole 2010**).
- Through the project, co-researchers' own analyses highlighted how disabled young people are living their lives to the fullest whilst not shying away from the many complexities involved in doing so in a world shaped by ableist norms which routinely devalue them (**Goodley 2014**).



Resource: [Why Can't We Dream?](#)
[A co-production toolkit](#)



Hey Kirsty, checked out the website and the list of research management people. They all have a LOT more experience than I have. I've tried university and medical school 3x and always ended up in hospital in intensive care. I used to be academic but I'm not so hot anymore. Anyway, I thought I'd give you the heads up. I'm more than happy to try and would definitely be keen to follow your direction and learn but just wanted you to know. And obviously, I still am quiet sick so sometimes I might not be able to do the amount of things required on time. If this hasn't put you off, I'm excited to start!

Making waves: self-belief, trust and value

- ‘The Co-Researcher Collective is a group of amazing, strong, young disabled women who are making waves in and outside the spheres of disability studies and activism. They have challenged me to believe in myself more, value and trust my own experience and allowed me the space to grow in the field of research. Not only that but they are bold, powerful women who have taught me that I am far more capable than I realise and inspired me to push the limits of my own and society’s expectations’ (**Sally Whitney-Mitchell, in Liddiard et al 2022: 10**).



Resource: [The Canine Care Project Report \(2020\)](#)



Love, intimacy, grief and loss, inside and outside of inquiry



- Access intimacy: ‘elusive, hard to describe feeling when someone else “gets” your access needs. The kind of eerie comfort that your disabled self feels with someone on a purely access level’ (Mingus, 2011: np.).
- ‘...the nuanced nature of love as both a binding force and a potent tool for resistance within academic research’ (Alves-Bryan 2025: 75).
- Taking a subjective and emotionally engaged approach that acknowledges co-production as an intimate practice.



Part 2: Thinking through Crip.

Coming to “Crip”?

- ...‘the non-compliant, anti-assimilationist position that disability is a desirable part of the world’ (**Hamraie and Fritsch 2019: 2**).
- Crip purposefully pushes boundaries, works the edges, and contests normativity.
- ‘...questions – or takes a sledgehammer to – that which has been concretised’ (**McRuer, 2006b: 35**).
- Ultimately Crip is transgressive with its repositioning of disability and disabled lives as vital, valuable and dynamic (**see Wilkerson, 2002**).
- Crip is also connected to ‘**Braidotti’s (2019a; 2019b)** concept of affirmative ethics: the philosophical, methodological and political project of affirming the possibility of a here and now that is liveable and sustainable’ (**Goodley et al 2025: 122**).

Introducing Betty...

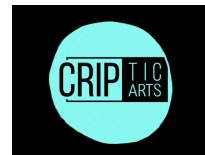
- *Crippling Breath: Towards a new cultural politics of respiration* is a Wellcome Discovery Award-funded project (2024-2028) that centres the lives of all people who have had their lives saved and/or sustained by ventilatory medical technologies.



Crippling Breath: towards a new cultural politics of respiration (2024-2028)



'...the planet that we all inhabit, is at a systematic level becoming a more difficult place to breathe' (Avelino, 2020: np)



Where are the accounts and perspectives of ventilated people?

- Artists-in-Residence, community researchers, academics, disability and arts organisations, and clinicians in Crippling Breath are working in collaboration to curate and coproduce new understandings of the experiences of ventilated people, across a host of identity positions, to interrogate the new cultural politics of respiration and ventilation in a continuing global pandemic, and as we imagine post-pandemic futures.
- Across the project, we make use of artistic, narrative, ethnographic and archival methodologies. These are embedded in partnerships with disabled people's organisations (DPOs), and arts, culture and heritage organisations, which centre certain kinds of knowledge within the academy in ways that can both trouble and transform theory, methodology and analysis (see Goodley et al. 2025).

Clinical ethnographies: We want to capture the social lives of ventilatory technologies, and ventilator users' myriad engagements with ventilation - how they live with, relate to and emotionally engage with forms of life saving and sustaining technology.



Speaker: Dr Julie Ellis, Research Associate, University of Sheffield



Sheffield Teaching Hospitals
NHS Foundation Trust



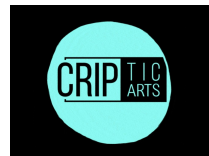
Arts-informed approaches: We have recruited artist and theatre collaborators with lived experience of ventilation who are co-curating artistic data via research-informed theatre and contemporary arts residencies about breath, breathing, ventilation in order to generate a diversity of stories.



Dr Louise Atkinson, Ceramic lungs, 2022



Jamie Hale, NOT DYING I should sleep rehearsals, 2022



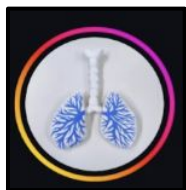


Narrative approaches: Led by our Community Researcher Co-op, we are employing virtual narrative methods (interviewing and photographic storytelling) to capture participants' stories of ventilation.



Speaker: Dr Jen Kettle, Research Associate, University of Sheffield

Archival approaches: which are digital and virtual, seek to rewrite medicalised histories of ventilatory technologies from the perspectives of marginalised people.



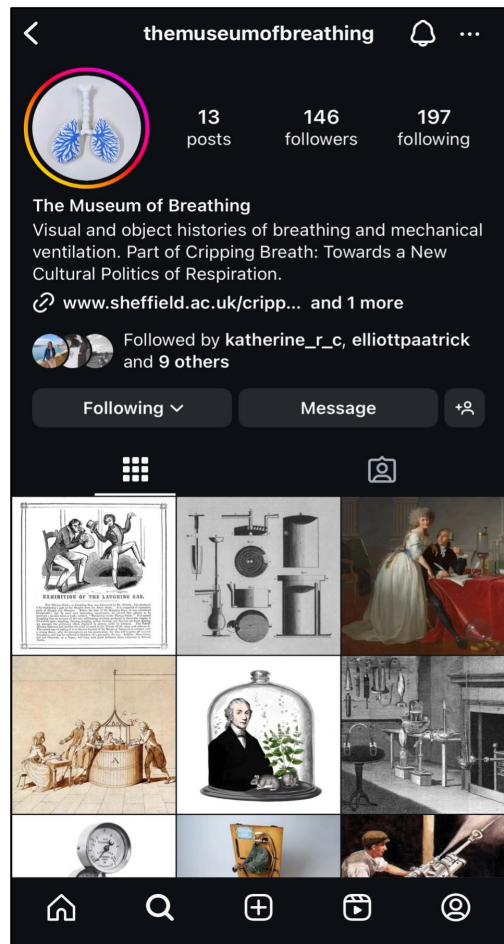
Resource:

[The Museum of Breathing](#)



“The Museum of Breathing treats social media as both exhibition space and research repository. The feed becomes a living collection shaped by visibility, access, platform governance and audience interaction, raising urgent questions about preservation and authorship in digital contexts. By “cripping” archival material, the Museum of Breathing proposes a more inclusive, process-led model of collecting, one that documents artistic research as archival practice and reframes collections as dynamic, politically charged and collectively negotiated sites of knowledge production.”

Speaker: Dr Louise Atkinson, Artist-in-Residence, Crippling Breath



Instagram: @themuseumofbreathing

Part 3: Crippling the temporalities of the research process.

Taking our time, slowing down, and speeding up

- Driven by the legacy of Sally Whitney Mitchell.
- ‘Crip time is flex time not just expanded but exploded; it requires reimagining our notions of what can and should happen on time, recognising how expectations of “how long things take” are based on very particular minds and bodies....’ **(Kafer 2013: 27)**.
- ‘...there is the day we lie in bed, the time of pain blooming in our bones, the end of the street impossibly far for limping legs, the meeting and its noise assault set against the reassuring tick of the wall clock at home’ **(Petra Koppers 2014: np)**.
- ...‘a flexibility and an expansion of time, both in response to bodily necessity and to societal barriers that make it so that more time may in fact be necessary’ **(White 2022: 5)**.
- ...‘the concept of crip and crippling time in relation to disabled academics opens up new ways of thinking, doing, and being that are not constrained by normative (clock) time that marginalises disabled subjects’ **(Rodgers et al. 2023: 1482)**.


THE POLYPHONY
CONVERSATIONS ACROSS THE MEDICAL HUMANITIES

Resource:
[Rethinking
Crip Time and
Embodiment
in Research
\(Polyphony\)](#)



Timescapes of co-design...

- Recognising co-production as a relational labour rooted in a feminist ethic of care, which involves reflection, empathy, affirmation and compassion.
- Slow(er) growth: Access to seed funding to pay partners and collaborators to support the co-authoring of the project application for the funder.
- A 5 year project (2024-2028): Transdisciplinarity within a large team means careful work, to listen to and appreciate one others' perspectives and enact access in considered ways.
- To recruit and establish our Community Researcher Cooperative, we enacted a purposefully slow process: inclusive approaches and accessible methods.

Our Community Researcher Cooperative



Haffizah Ali



Connor Thompson



Vicky Mozley



Amanda Jones



Mitch Coles



Libby Bligh



Sarah Waters



**Speaker: Dr Suzanne
Glover, Community
Researcher Lead and
Research Associate,
University of Sheffield**

Ruth Bridgens



Conor O'Kane



Jenny Negus



Flexibility, fluctuation and facilitation

- The Co-operative encourages flexible working patterns and aims to dismantle neoliberal-able (see [Goodley, 2014](#)) needs for consistency and routine.
- Instead, the Co-operative facilitates a space that enables fluctuating work patterns around other commitments, periods of ill-health and simply harnessing windows of “good health” to ‘live’.
- Practically this is implemented with online meetings, recordings, asynchronous working, one-to-one informal conversations, group messaging and short and discreet reflexive tasks - spaces not bound by specific means of contribution, but instead open to input in ways most comfortable to community researchers.

Depth Vs. Deadlines...

- The projectification of research: ‘It interests me that projects attempt to resolve research aims, questions, collaborating organizations, methods, and outputs before beginning their work. In this sense they are an organizational form antithetical to discovery research’ (**Viney, 2024: np**).
- ‘...In the economic life of the project human lives – contract workers, participants, ‘patients’ – are rendered as technical inputs and outputs, so the performance of projects can be measured, graded, and optimized’ (**Viney, 2024: np**).
- Crippling Breath seeks to ‘push the boundaries of what’s possible (or not) in the neoliberal academy to play with the temporalities of normative research processes which are typically fast-paced, metric and output-oriented, inaccessible to many (and thus exclusionary), and which are fixed to accelerated timelines and follow the temporal regimes of the neoliberal university’ (**Liddiard et al., 2024: 11**).



Clock by artist Dave Buonaguidi, AKA Real Hackney Dave.

The everyday realities of sickness, slowness and vulnerability

- ‘Living with forms of respiratory impairment and/or using ventilation can mean dealing with fatigue, breathlessness, limited energy (particularly over longer periods of time), and a sensitivity to minor illness, whereby something as simple as catching a cold can mean weeks of struggle and recovery’ (Atkinson et al., 2024: np)
- We are a project of vulnerable bodies - our own and others whom we care for.
- Actively making space for the team to rest, recuperate and recover: building in contingencies; organisational tech; and resisting the work-intensive temporalities of academia.



Death, loss, grief and legacy

- ‘...less attention has been paid to researcher vulnerability specifically and its methodological implications’ (**Borgstrom and Ellis 2020: 591**).
- ‘Crip time is grief time’ (**Samuels, 2017; np**).
- How do we inform our other community researchers, and what support could/should we offer when we do? How do we mark late community researchers’ contributions to the project? What, if anything, should we “say” as a project publicly? How can we send our love and best wishes to their partners, family members, and communities (**see Bowtell et al., 2013**)?
- More broadly, what happens when someone dies in the research process? How should we talk, think, and feel about death in a research project? What kinds of human, and humane, responses are needed? What forms of support do we have access to as researchers?
- Crip time is further relevant to these questions of legacy because of the ways it challenges normative ideas around time, bodies, and lifespans, and specifically, the finality of death (**see Ljuslinder et al., 2020**).

Part 4: Bending bureaucracy.

KIRSTY'S TO DO LIST

- 8AM - SPEND AN HOUR COMPOSING AN EMAIL TO DEPUTY VICE PRESIDENT FOR RESEARCH AND INNOVATION ABOUT LACK OF LIBRARY ACCESS FOR ARTISTS-IN-RESIDENTS AND ARTIST AND THEATRE COLLABORATORS...
- 9AM - MEET WITH THE CONTRACTS TEAM ABOUT AMENDING COLLABORATOR AGREEMENT AND IP ISSUE
- 10AM - LIAISE WITH FUNDER ABOUT WHY WE NEED TO TRANSFER FUNDS FROM UNIVERSITY TO THE PARTNER...
- 11.00AM - MEET WITH FINANCE TEAM ABOUT HOW WE PAY ACCESS SUPPORT WORKERS
- 12.00 - DO THE IR35 WITH NEW ARCHIVAL RESEARCHER ROLES
- 13.00 - MEET WITH RESEARCH ASSOCIATES TO DISCUSS UNIVERSITY RESTRUCTURING IMPLICATIONS FOR PROJECT...
- 14.00 - UNION MEETING (UCU) (EAT LUNCH HERE...!)

Unexpected bodies, diversification and the classification of work

- Such barriers reveal the university as ‘a pathological system where disabled colleagues are often not imagined to be present nor participating’ (**Goodley et al. 2025: 122**).
- ... and surface ‘the hidden labours that often get lost in the formal language of contract’ (**Goodley et al. 2025: 126**).
- Institutional memory? This also surfaces the unfolding economic crises in British universities - rolling waves of restructuring and redundancies, particularly within the professional services infrastructures that support our research.
- Risky “workarounds”



Do you want us here or not? By artist Finnegan Shannon

The bollocks of bureaucracy...is endless?

- ‘...political aspirations for and commitments to research have been blunted as we are pulled into labour associated with financial and institutional administration’ (**Goodley et al. 2025: 126**).
- University bureaucracy: ‘a grudging act ... activities in which we really would rather not participate but which we perform nonetheless’ (**Bottero 2023: 533**).
- ‘grudging acts are those we refer to as lip service, undertaken through gritted teeth, heart sinking, keeping our head down, going through the motions, holding our nose, rolling our eyes or shrugging our shoulders’ (**Bottero 2023: 533**).
- **Titchkosky’s (2020: 198)** encouragement for us ‘to explore disability’s bureaucratisation in our universities, precisely because this helps us to learn something about the organising force of bureaucracy in all our lives’ (see **Goodley et al 2025: 125**).

Drawing some conclusions...

- ‘...it is through sharing our stories that hope can live’ (Whitney 2018)
- Co-production is a deeply relational, intimate and artful practice.
- Where co-production is embedded in the politics of Crip, things like intimacy, care, compassion, community, connection, flexibility and radical care are made possible, and can even cultivate forms of Crip community and kinship.
- Disabled, ill, sick and slower bodies and minds can bend research design and shape methodologies in powerful ways, while resisting the very neoliberal-able temporalities within the current projectification of research and inquiry (see Viney 2024).
- We must make *visible* the bureaucracy, advocacy and labour that enacting such forms of relational inquiry takes in the context of the current hostile climates and endless crises within our universities, research councils and funding bodies.
- We must also question the *costs* of bureaucracy towards the relational dynamics of co-production which requires trust, empathy, belonging, equity, and care.

Related talks - please come!



University of
Sheffield



- **252 Crippling Breath: Co-production, community and complexity**
Jennifer Kettle, Suzanne Glover, Haffizah Ali, Libby Bligh, Ruth Bridgens, Mitch Coles, Amanda Jones, Vicky Mozley, Jenny Negus, Conor O'Kane, Connor Thompson, Sarah Waters, Kirsty Liddiard University of Sheffield, United Kingdom (**10:45am - 12:15pm Wednesday, 15th April, 2026**)
- **314 Crippling Breath through Text and Performance**
Grace Joseph¹, Jamie Hale^{1,2}, Louise Atkinson^{1,3}, Kirsty Liddiard ¹University of Sheffield, United Kingdom. ²CRIPtic Arts, United Kingdom. ³University of Leeds, United Kingdom (**2:45 - 3:45pm Wednesday, 15th April, 2026**)
- **28 Experimentations in Anti-Ableist Research Culture in the University**
Dan Goodley, Antonios Ktenidis, Lauren White, Kirsty Liddiard, Rebecca Lawthom, Elinor Noble, Liz Dew, Katherine Runswick-Cole, Élaina Gauthier-Mamaril, Armineh Soorenian, Sophie Phillips, Nikita Hayden, University of Sheffield, United Kingdom (**9:30 - 11:00am Thursday, 16th April, 2026**)

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Thank you so much!

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Centre for Disability Studies, University of Leeds, April 2026

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