**Marginalization, privilege and intersectionality in post-secondary students with disabilities: Assistive technology**

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**About the project**

Between 18% and 34% of Canadian college and university students have a disability. It is therefore important to understand how their use of assistive technologies (AT) could help them succeed in their studies and, ultimately, in their lives. This is because university and college degrees significantly influence the employability and type of employment that people with disabilities can obtain.

According to the Canadian Human Rights Commission (2017), only 15% of Canadians with disabilities have a post-secondary education, and the Council of Canadians with Disabilities reports that Canadians with disabilities are twice as likely to live in poverty. As we study the performance of these virtual tools and their utility for students with disabilities, we must be aware not only of how these technologies support students but also how they bring new challenges to students' identity and, in some cases, how they may exacerbate feelings of marginalization if not properly designed.

In addition, technology development is often initiated by non-disabled practitioners with epistemic privilege and without much input from the intended users. Further, developers may fail to account for how other identity factors among users may intersect with their disability and impact their choice or selection of AT. This project was undertaken to investigate how practitioners can mitigate marginalization and privilege related to accessibility and intersectionality for students with disabilities with diverse backgrounds, increasing accessibility and countering systemic ableism.

**Key findings**

* AT can reinforce and magnify feelings of marginalization. However, carefully implemented it can be liberating and provide more independence. In navigating this delicate balance, the careful integration of AT into various aspects of daily life becomes crucial, emphasizing its capacity to enhance the overall well-being of those it aims to assist.
* The challenges posed by a disability can be specific, but other intersecting factors can create more challenging contexts for individual users. These unique contexts underscore the importance of recognizing and addressing the diverse layers of adversity that individuals with disabilities may face.
* Understanding the intersectionality of factors such as socioeconomic status, cultural background and geographical location is pivotal in developing comprehensive support systems. By acknowledging and navigating these complex dynamics, society can work towards creating inclusive environments that cater to the specific needs of diverse individuals with disabilities, fostering a more equitable and accessible world for everyone.
* First-generation immigrant populations, and the additional challenge of cultural acceptance within the community not only of the disability itself but of the AT emerged as a theme. This recognition is vital for developing targeted interventions that address both cultural and disability-related barriers, ultimately fostering a more inclusive environment.
* Trends in digital design emphasized that socially constructed features from the analog world are migrated to the digital environment.
* There is a paucity of reported development of tools involving students with disabilities in the design of AT.
* Few publications discussing the intersection of disability with other identity factors were focused on how it impacts use or choice of AT for post-secondary students, evincing a significant gap in the literature to be addressed.
* With regards to the type of AT addressed in the literature, text-to-speech tools were most frequently mentioned. However, no specific type dominated the literature. Indeed, most articles discussed AT broadly and with various examples without focusing on any technology.
* Likewise, most publications discussed disability as a broad category rather than focusing on students with a specific disability. Visual disabilities were the most frequently addressed, followed closely by mobility impairments and learning disabilities.

**Policy implications**

* Developers of specific AT tools, as well as university accessibility specialists should keep in mind that students from different cultural and socio-economic backgrounds may face unique challenges and obstacles.
* A continued shift towards Universal Design in online education and AT development should be prioritized to ensure equitable access to higher education for all students.
* There is a distinct lack of participatory action research in this area. In addition, students with disabilities should be consulted more regularly and included in the development team when AT is developed for their use.
* There is a lack of research into the impact of the intersection of disability with other identity factors on the use of AT. This should be addressed.

**Further information**

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