

# Disclosure of impairment in higher education

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# Purpose of this presentation

- To discuss how disclosure of impairment can appear as one aspect of the restrictions students can be confronted with in higher education

# Higher education

- Important strategy to increase participation
- Political agreements - equal right to higher education, and on the necessity of increasing accessibility
- Learning environment - principles of universal design
- Expectations on increased quality and effectivity
- A phase of education and friendship. Exploring and shaping oneself in interactions with others

# “Disability and higher education”

- - explore how students with impairment experience their everyday life.
- - examine what restrictions they meet, and the consequences this could imply for studies and for participation.

# Method

- Time geographic diary (Ellegård and Nordell 1997)
- In-depth interviewees
- Focus groups
  
- Data production and analysing inspired by grounded theory (Charmaz 2006)

# Participants

- 19 students (12 women, 7 men)
- Age 22 – 43
- Chronic diseases, hard of hearing, partially sighted, mobility restrictions

# Disclosure or not?

- Students with invisible impairment
- Discreditable – have to manage information about his or her failing
- Students prefer not to inform about impairment

# Possible negative consequences

- Loss of friendship
- Difficulties working in groupus
- Seen as stupid
- ...and not being seen as "the one I really am"

# Eli told her fellow students

- *After many years of struggling and tears I finally have managed to keep friends. I have friends who do not know that I have ADHD, who looks at me as a normal person. It was so important for me to be seen as the social student.....*

# Fear of redefining and exclusion

- *I want them to know me as ME, and not ADHD-me*
- *First you can be kept out. In addition other people assume they know a lot about you*

# Discredited – at risk of not being accepted

- *You don't want others to see that you are disabled. You don't want to be treated like that. Worst case is if someone feels pity for you. My experience is that most students move on in a certain speed, and they speak about their own success, and would most of all like to be together with other successful people. And I can't be a part of that if they see me as disabled. I will not be accepted, and then I will not have anyone to work with. And I think it's so important to have someone to cooperate with.*

# Handling restrictions in lectures

- *So I turned to him (the lecturer) and said that I had cerebral palsy, and had problems taking notes*
- *And then another student turned to the lecturer and said: "I have dyslexia, can I have a copy too?" And he said no to him. A classical example of stigmatising...*

# Objects can represent unwanted characteristics

- *It's more common to use it now. When I started I would probably not have used it, because that would have separated me from the others. You want to be one of the others in the crowd, be an ordinary student*

# Kamilla - dictation phone as a relief

- There are a common understanding in society of the value of objects. Objects are seen as an extension of the person and of what the person want to express by herself (Dittmar 1992).
- Technology has concequences of how one is treated by others (Lupton and Seymour 2000)

# Making the study situation accessible

- The necessity of drawing attention to the impairment
- The student want to place emphasise on other charecteristics – being a student like all others
- Ongoing negotiations of when, how and to whom should I tell

# Damned if you do and damned if you don't

- Presentations of impairment involve a risk of being rejected
- Not telling implies maintenance of restrictions
- Whether the students tell or not, they are of risk of being turned away