

Inclusion Was Never Optional, You Just Treated It Like Formatting

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Editorial

Inclusion has long been positioned as an adjunct to scholarship: a post-hoc consideration applied after intellectual work is complete. Within disability research in particular, accessibility has been framed as dissemination strategy rather than epistemic necessity.

This framing is untenable.

Recent scholarship on **Paired Inclusive Research Dissemination (PIRD)** and **Archive-Based Authorship** makes explicit what disabled scholars and participants have experienced for decades: knowledge production does not begin and end with the final academic paper. Authorship, contribution, and meaning are constituted across formats, systems, and time, and are inseparable from the modes through which they are expressed (McLoughlin, 2025).

The inclusive artefact is therefore not a translation of scholarship.
It is scholarship.

Disability research has historically relied on disabled people as *objects of study* rather than as epistemic agents. Lived experience has been mined for data, coded through non-disabled interpretive frameworks, and returned to institutions as findings—often stripped of context, authorship, and attribution. This has produced a persistent asymmetry: disabled people support the intellectual labour of non-disabled researchers, while their own contributions remain unrecognised or reframed as anecdotal.

This asymmetry has consequences.

One such consequence is the routine misinterpretation of embodied experiences. Sensory overload, pain responses, and communication differences are frequently relabelled as “behaviours of concern”, not due to evidentiary failure, but due to epistemic distance. When researchers lack access to the internal logic of disabled experience—and fail to recognise disabled people as legitimate interpreters of that logic—entire domains of insight are lost. What remains is classification without understanding.

Archive-Based Authorship frameworks expose this failure by demonstrating that contribution is not confined to conventional academic outputs. Authorship can be evidenced through archives of interaction: communication logs, assistive technology outputs, care documentation, longitudinal observation, and advocacy records. When these archives are ignored, what is dismissed as “lack of rigour” is often the absence of institutional literacy in disabled modes of knowing (McLoughlin, 2025).

PIRD extends this analysis by formalising the co-equality of scholarly and inclusive artefacts. Where knowledge is expressed in multiple forms, those forms are not hierarchically ordered. An academic article and an accessible companion artefact constitute a single intellectual contribution. To privilege one while marginalising the other is to truncate the work itself.

The Journal of Neurotypical Studies therefore takes the position that inclusion is not a matter of audience reach or ethical branding. It is a condition of intellectual completeness.

This position has implications. If research depends on disabled people’s time, bodies, histories, and interpretive labour, then disabled people cannot remain perpetual participants while others retain authorship, authority, and control. At minimum, it requires recognition of contribution. More fundamentally, it requires a redistribution of epistemic power.

If institutions seek disabled people’s insight, then disabled people must be supported to **design, lead, and govern the studies** that draw upon their lives.

Anything less is extraction.

Inclusion was never optional.
It was simply treated as formatting.

That era is now archived.

References

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