

SPECIAL ISSUE INTRODUCTION: COVID-19, Disability, and the Sociological Imagination.

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As the Covid-19 pandemic descended on the globe in late 2019 and early 2020, health suddenly became more salient for countless individuals. Fears of a novel virus and the permanent effects it could have on one's body drove people to extremes—shortages of every basic consumer product, people locking themselves in the safety of their home, and incredible infrastructural changes as many workplaces moved their operations remote (Christakis 2020). I vividly recall my friends talking about how difficult it was to be unable to go out whenever they wanted. I remember their fear, how they suddenly put thought into their health habits, and the difficulty they had living with constantly changing rules, circumstances, and recommendations.

Perhaps it is gauche to say as much, but I felt as much pity as I did anger in those early days of the pandemic. It only took my friends about a week to start cracking under staying at home 95% of the time, yet that is my constant reality. I cannot take myself to the store. I cannot take a walk outside alone. I cannot pull long days in the office. I live with severe Postural Orthostatic Tachycardia Syndrome (POTS), and I am constantly afraid of a new virus being the next thing to further cripple my damaged autonomic nervous system. As the Covid-19 pandemic changed life for my friends and family, it forced them to not just feel bad for me, but to live with the same kind of restrictions I did.

The Covid-19 pandemic has provided an incredible opportunity to stretch our collective sociological imaginations. The sociological imagination (Mills 1959) challenges individuals to tie the personal to the societal, situating individual experiences in their unique historic context. It also challenges us to adjust perspectives, see the world through different eyes, and recognize that there is more than one reality. As my friends lived under pandemic restrictions, it became easier for them to see the world (and its many harsh constraints) through my disabled eyes. As the Covid-19 pandemic has uniquely burdened individuals with disabilities (Shakespeare, Ndagire, and Seketi 2021), it has also brought the able-bodied into our world and expanded accommodations.

However, it is not only my eyes Covid-19 has encouraged us to see the world through. This pandemic has shined a harsh light on systemic inequalities that existed long before the novel pathogen. Engaging our sociological imagination helps us situate the Covid-19 pandemic in the global 2020s context it belongs. It has exacerbated and highlighted how other social statuses, such as class (e.g., Siu 2020; Witteveen 2020), race (e.g., Abedi et al. 2021; Kim and Bostwick 2020), gender (Czymara, Langenkamp, and Cano 2020; Oreffice and Quintana-Domeque 2021; Ribarovska et al. 2021), and more impact one's daily lives. As each of these statuses then intersects with health and ability, the complex web of social advantage and disadvantage becomes more fully realized.

As a consequence of the public stage the above changes played out on, our sociological imaginations can also be applied to social construction. The Covid-19 pandemic has been a period of flux, revealing how malleable our ideas of "normal" can be under abnormal circumstances. What does it mean to be healthy? Who is worth protecting, and how much will we sacrifice for them? Is remote schooling adequate? How much flexibility and safety should we expect from our employers? Covid-19 has inspired public debate, the "great resignation" (Hsu 2021), and many new laws and procedures. By investigating how our circumstances mold our definitions of "normal" and "acceptable", Covid-19 can provide a unique look into the social construction of our daily lives and macro social systems.

Finally, I would be remiss not to address why it is so pertinent we engage our sociological imaginations now in the first place. Beyond the general importance of understanding and supporting the more than one billion people with a disability worldwide (World Health Organization 2020), Covid-19 is leaving more individuals with a disability than ever before—approximately one third of individuals who have caught Covid-19 (Logue et al. 2021) are estimated to have lasting symptoms, many disabling.

In sum, the Covid-19 pandemic has given a perfect context to engage one's sociological imagination regarding disability and has made that conversation relevant to significantly more individuals. Now—especially now—is the time to question our society's relationship to the very concept of "ability."

This Issue

This special issue of *Sociation* tackles the intersections of Covid-19 and disability. We explore diverse topics, from how Covid-19 reframed the disabled identity and experience to how the shifting of institutional practices during Covid-19 has impacted those embedded within them. Each article tackles a different topic with a unique lens.

Beginning with a series of articles on Covid-19 and the education system, "Because Covid Ruined Everything': The Impact of Learning Modalities and Accommodations on Students with Disabilities during the Covid-19 Pandemic" by Shawna Bendeck explores how Covid-19 impacted special needs students in K-12 schools using in-depth interviews. This study highlights the challenges students with disabilities have faced and how expanded accommodations have served as a welcome change.

"The 'New Normal' for Disabled Students: Access, Inclusion, and COVID-19" by Paul C. Bones and Vanessa Ellison expands the conversation of Covid-19's impact in the education system by centering the interviewed voices of disabled college students. They show that pandemic experiences vary by school, highlight best practices, and make practical recommendations for effective accommodations in a post-Covid-19 university setting.

Continuing our dive into education, "Rejecting a pre-COVID 19 normal; An Autohistoria-Teoría exploring (dis)ability justice reform in higher education" by Chimine Arfuso weaves her intersectional experiences as a queer, disabled, Latina graduate student and faculty member during the Covid-19 pandemic with a holistic argument in favor of online education. Arfuso challenges the idea that online education is not sufficiently rigorous and highlights the benefits of its accessibility and potential for advancing the education of marginalized students.

With a broader lens, "When a Global Pandemic Makes Life More Accessible to Those with Invisible Disabilities" by Gretchen Peterson similarly utilizes autoethnographic methodology to explore how Covid-19 has increased accessibility for individuals with invisible disabilities. Peterson discusses how the move to virtual engagement in work, school, and socializing can make spaces and events more accessible to all and outlines why this will remain important post-quarantine.

Narrowing in on workplace impacts of Covid-19, "Older Black Workers' Resilience: Navigating Work and Health Risks with Chronic Conditions" by Kendra Jason dives into the unique challenges older black workers have faced during the Covid-19 pandemic and what supports can mitigate these challenges' effects. Pulling from qualitative interviews, Jason makes policy and practice recommendations to reduce inequalities faced by vulnerable workers.

Next, "Exploring the Differential Impacts of the COVID-19 Pandemic on Employees with Disabilities: A Call for Organizational Action" by Nicole L. Gullekson, Christa Kiersch, Christine Manno, Erica G. Srinivasan, and Jorg Vianden turns to focus on the experiences of employees with disabilities at a mid-sized university. Quantitative analyses of survey data show that employees with disabilities worked more and rested less than their able-bodied coworkers during the pandemic. However, employees with disabilities endorsed similar support policies as able-bodied employees; the authors accordingly make recommendations on how to support all workers throughout the remaining pandemic and in a post-pandemic university setting.

The issue then turns to exploring disability as an identity and construct. Tanya Cook's "It's a gift... and a curse:' How Covid Reframed our Understanding of Disability as an Intersectional Identity" engages a broad array of

literature to explore how Covid-19 has highlighted the intersectional nature of disabled identities. This intersectional analysis also examines how Covid-19 served as a boon and bane for individuals with disabilities.

Synthesizing disparate literatures, "The Invisibilities of Disability: Compiling Conversations" by Heather Dillaway, Allison Jendry James, and Amanda Horn then provides context and analysis of different perspectives on how disability is, in many respects, invisible. Beyond organizing prior literature, the authors build an intersectional framework for future work and highlight gaps in how the invisibilities of disability are currently understood.

"Hidden Bodies: Queer Variant Ability, Intimacy, & Covid-19" by Emily Stevens and Stella Tarnoff continues the exploration of intersectional disabled identities by focusing on the unique risks and challenges faced by queer variant ability populations during the Covid-19 pandemic. This article contributes a synthesis of prior literature and an application of that literature to the Covid-19 crisis, documenting the many social processes that have uniquely harmed queer variant ability populations during this pandemic.

Further exploring intersectional oppression, "Dys-Femicide: Conceptualizing the Femicides of Women and Girls with Disability" by Valérie Grand'Maison and Edelweiss Murillo Lafuente ties the Covid-19 pandemic to the systemic devaluation of women and girls with disabilities worldwide, arguing that this population's oppression and violent victimization remains invisible to the public eye. The authors conceptualize this "dys-femicide" by exploring how frameworks of care, precarity, and invisibility legitimize the disposability of disabled women and girls.

We end with an intimate look into how Covid-19 impacted interpersonal relationships and experiences. "Isolation, Fear, and Anger: The Impact of the Covid-19 Pandemic on Pregnancy and Childbirth" by Beth Cavalier and Pamela Regus utilizes in-depth qualitative interviews to explore the tension between midwifery and medicalized models of pregnancy during the Covid-19 pandemic. As health fears and policy shifted, medicalization dominated the pregnancy experiences of the women interviewed, leaving them with unique burdens.

Finally, "Hawai'i to Hospice: Terminal Illness During a Global Pandemic" by Sheila M. Katz and Daniel S. Haworth chronicles the authors' experiences living with—and dying from—ALS during the Covid-19 pandemic. Autoethnography is weaved with literatures on caregiving, the third shift, the social construction of time, and more, connecting the authors' personal experiences to broader sociological themes.

This special issue is also accompanied by a podcast. In this podcast, two editors (Marni Brown and Samantha Nousak) discuss the inspiration for this special issue, the under-discussed importance of including disability in sociology, how capitalism impacts our conversations around health, what Covid-19 has changed about disability and health in the public conscience, and the above articles.

Concluding Remarks

Creating a special issue centered on disability in the Covid-19 pandemic initially seemed like a bit of a pipe dream. As a disabled scholar, I am painfully aware of how little attention disability gets from mainstream sociology. When I began attempting to organize my thoughts on disability in the Covid-19 era, I quickly found myself overwhelmed by how much there was to say. It was impossible to fit it all into one paper or lecture, but I felt pressured to—who else would say it, and where would it all be published?

I owe immense thanks to my co-editors and the editor of *Sociation* for making this dream happen. Tiffany Taylor was the first to believe in the idea of an entire issue dedicated to disability and Covid-19, and Marni Brown was quick to jump on board. Without their guidance, none of this would have come together. I have learned much from them, and I hope to have been even half the inspiration to them as they were to me. Bringing in Cameron Lippard was another critical step to finding a home for this timely topic. It would have been much harder to get this project off the ground without his quick endorsement. Finally, I owe thanks to the authors who submitted their incredible work in response to our call for papers. Every piece brings new perspectives, issues, and literature to the table, and the special edition is richer for it.

We hope that these articles serve to further the scholarship of disability and inspire more sociologists to answer this call in general. There are rich theoretical insights, diverse methodologies, and encouraging social justice found

within these pages and this discipline. We invite you to begin your exploration here, but hope you jump headfirst down the same rabbit hole we did and make the sociology of disability one of your passions.

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Author Biography

Samantha Nousak is an ABD graduate student in sociology at Kent State University. Her time is filled with teaching, health promotion, her research on how social conditions impact health conceptualizations and outcomes, and mulling over the social constructions of productivity and moral worth. In-between all of that, she enjoys creating art, learning new instruments, and writing fiction.