



Athena Reissis

Profile:

Athena was diagnosed with dyslexia at a young age and is currently awaiting an official ADHD diagnosis.

She is a PhD researcher at University College London (UCL), where she employs generative AI to develop disease progression prediction models for craniofacial syndromes.

In addition, Athena is a project lead for Project Impactive, a student-led volunteer initiative at UCL dedicated to designing and creating assistive devices that address the unmet needs of individuals with disabilities.

She enjoys travelling, dancing, and spending quality time with friends and family in her free time.

Transcript:

[00:00:00] So my name's Athena. What I'm currently doing is I'm doing a PhD at UCL in broadly speaking AI for medical imaging. Disability is dyslexia and non-diagnosed ADHD. But yeah.

(Voiceover) Why is it important to have diverse inputs in research?

[00:00:19] I think it's important to just be able to be firstly accessible to everybody. And not just like physical disabilities but also other disabilities as well, invisible disabilities. I think it's also important for not just people doing research, also people supporting research, so supervisors to kind of understand a bit better, to be able to support their students, be able to complete their research a bit more.

[00:00:46] I think that's one aspect of it. I think another aspect is just the kind of diversity you get in the kind of the outcomes of the research. I guess in my field, I'm looking at imaging quite a lot. And there's a lot of I guess, issues with data sets being very specific to one demographic. And then they kind of use these you know, results for multiple demographics.

[00:01:08] And it's not really exactly very representative of, I guess, a lot of different people. So that's why it's quite important.

(Voiceover) Have you been involved in contributing to co-design or as a research participant?

[00:01:30] Co-design I haven't been not just yet. What, I mean, maybe something I'm getting, getting involved in currently in my academic year right now is at UCL, we have a project called Project Impactive which I'm leading this year.

[00:01:36] And it's basically about creating assistive technology and devices for disabled people. And it's quite broad. We can kind of do what we want with that. So we try and hire some volunteers to be designers, engineers part of with looking to partner with GDI hub as well as some other industries and charities.

[00:01:51] So on that aspect, I'm hoping to be able to start doing some designing and other things to, you know, help with these kinds of issues. But I haven't really done much just yet, but hopefully beginning to.

(Voiceover) What advice would you recommend to early career researchers to create inclusive settings when co-creating or conducting research?

[00:02:11] I think it's important at the beginning of, at the very beginning stage to kind of discuss it is that is kind of going to be useful and impactful for the rest for your research really. I guess something that I've definitely struggled with is everyone's kind of maybe treated the same in a research group or even just in research in general.

[00:02:32] And not everyone works in the same kind of way. Not everyone can react to certain kind of ways of working. So I think it's very important to maybe at the beginning discuss with your group and the people who you'll be working with what it is that will be helpful for you and try and maybe change the setting, change your ways of working.

[00:02:50] So it's not kind of the same for each person. So I've just definitely something I probably still struggle with as well.

(Voiceover) In terms of your lived experience, what have you seen done well or what has worked well for you in the past?

[00:03:23] I guess what's worked for me in the past is, it's kind of maybe a bit of a hard question to answer because I don't think there's too much, because I feel like if some things have worked for me I would still be implementing them and I'm probably still struggling to find what is working for me.

[00:03:15] I think I probably haven't found what exactly works for me because the help I've been getting has been more broad and maybe not so specific to kind of what my needs are. But I think what has kind of helped me is, is certain kind of music to listen to as well. That does help me quite a lot to hone in and focus and kind of have some like noise cancelling.

[00:03:39] Even though I probably work better in an environment where I am with other people. I probably do need that thing to kind of help me hone and focus because I get very distracted very easily.

(Voiceover) Can you share any common mistakes that researchers should avoid?

[00:03:59] I guess probably just assuming that you can be general, really. Maybe generally it might be okay, but there's a lot of people that you kind of don't really focus on then. So I guess maybe assuming someone's okay with the way that they're working or the kind of like outcomes you're getting. I think sometimes the, the kind of language that people use sometimes could be, could be avoided.

[00:04:21] Cause I think, yeah, I mean, a lot of things that I struggle with, and then you probably hear some kind of negative feedback in a not very helpful way. And then you get this like big imposter syndrome, then kind of overcoming, and then you just kind of scared to then talk back about it and say, talk about your struggles and stuff.

[00:04:42] So I think, I think maybe avoiding some kind of negative feedback in a way, and then maybe use it as a bit more constructive feedback and ask more questions as opposed to like, I guess what I was saying before, like assuming that they work the same way as you. So yeah, maybe, yeah, maybe to ask questions as well to make sure they're ok.

(Voiceover) Is there anything else researchers should be mindful of when working with the disabled community?

[00:05:12] Yes, of course. I guess be mindful of a lot of things, but I think also it's important to constantly just ask them questions and make sure it's okay with them. And also learn yourself how to kind of what the best ways are to adapt to the working space or work like your approach with them compared to other people.

[00:05:32] I think talking to them and trying to understand their specific ways of working is a good way. Do what you can to adapt.

(Voiceover) Do you have any final tips or recommendations you would like to share?

[00:05:41] I think something that I've not been very good at is probably being quite open with the people you're working with.

[00:05:50] I think if, especially if you've got an invisible disability, it's just not something that people would really think to talk about. So I think definitely it's important to be honest and open from the beginning with the people you're working with about the things you struggle with. Otherwise they probably won't really understand that you're struggling through things.