



## Eliana Rosas-Aguilar

### Profile:

Eliana Rosas-Aguilar is a researcher at Loughborough University specialising in disability-inclusive research, focusing on employment, gender, and intersectionality.

Her work, which explores disability stigma in Peru, emphasises the importance of diverse voices in research. Eliana advocates for participatory and co-creation approaches, where disabled individuals actively shape the research process.

## Transcript:

[00:00:00] My name is Eliana Rosas Aguilar my field of expertise is disability inclusive research, particularly in the areas of employment, participation, gender and intersectionality. I'm a doctoral researcher at Loughborough University in London, and I'm carrying out my research about disability stigma in Peru.

(Voiceover) Can you share why you think it is important for your research to have diverse inputs?

[00:00:25] I think diversity really enhances research, I think is inevitable to think about research at the same time that bring a different perspective about the same issue. I think working throughout disability research in my life has really increased not only my capacity to see the problems differently from empathising with different angles to the same problem, but to incorporate different voices to my research and also understand society differently.

[00:00:59] And I think it's vital to bring to the table as many disabled voices as one can think about the problem of research of interest. But also I think it's important to bring non-disabled voices to the table. Sometimes one has taken for granted that disability research might be only with disabled people, but it's also with families of persons with disabilities, carers, siblings.

[00:01:26] Also institutions working with disabled people, companies employing disabled people educators, public officers, people providing services to disabled people. All of them have interesting points to bring to the table when it comes to disability research. Disability research is not only about bringing only one voice.

[00:01:49] Even within the disability community there is a different voice polyphony of voices within the disability community I think is very important to remember.

(Voiceover) How have you used diverse participants or co design in your research?

[00:02:04] I think in the past year in my professional work I have mostly approached disability research through participatory lenses. At this point in my doctoral research I'm going one step further by co-creating disability research. Their approaches are different, whereas in participatory research, one can bring as many voices as possible to the table, but in a way, participatory research brings people when the problem is already out there, when the questions are already asked.

[00:02:44] Whereas co-creation requires to actually question everything with disabled people and bringing disabled participation from the very early stage of the research. Meaning the power and responsibility of the resear

ch is shared with disabled people and in an emancipatory fashion way would allow also disabled people to participate in academia differently, not only as participants, but rather as creating knowledge as well.

[00:03:19] And that is a practice of reversing power dynamics, in which normally disabled people act as participants and some information is extracted from them to then provide some piece of research and recommendation. It's different when the research itself brings the voices of disabled people to the table.

[00:03:45] To set out the questions that need to be asked, to decide about the budget, to decide about how the tools are going to be created, what kind of tools for research are appropriate or not, to design the study itself. And I think there is an important difference there because it brings power back to disabled people.

[00:04:03] And that's important. That's the emancipatory research approach, which now I am engaging with and it's not an easy one, but I think it's necessary always to keep in the loop whether or not we can accomplish this. It would be always a process of constantly questioning and trying to shift the power between disabled people, not just as informants or participants, but rather as creating knowledge with the research.

(Voiceover) Can you share something you have learnt in terms of best practice when working alongside a diverse range of contributors?

[00:04:42] I think one of the pieces that was really life-changing was related to the barriers that disabled people experience to access employment and the gendered barriers. I think I was not expecting to find in the stories of disabled people the difference between male experiences and female experiences, not only from the voices of disabled people themselves, but also incorporating their families their communities.

[00:05:21] People involved in public service, in policy making, but also providing employment services directly to disabled people, identifying key issues. And I think it was the capacity to pull all of these actors together to evaluate, to analyse the data that was coming out of this piece of research that would allow us to understand how women experience barriers to employment completely different than men.

[00:05:47] And how the policymaking would require also to take differentiated action to make policy that was inclusive of this problem. And I think that experience gave me the capacity to think after about bringing different actors to the same problem. It was also crucial to understand the companies that were employing disabled people and also the companies that were not employing disabled people.

[00:06:16] To understand how those barriers were either created, reproduced, or maybe just barriers that the companies were completely unaware of, and how they can actually improve their channels to access disabled women as also disabled men in there. I think it's crucial to make your research as accessible as possible.

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

[00:06:41] I think it's crucial to make your research as accessible as possible. Accessible in terms of universal design, yes, as probably something aspirational, but not necessarily completely finished. I think it's very important to have this binary between accessibility to the maximum of your possibilities of your research possibilities at the same time to the capacity to adjust.

[00:07:10] And in the capacity to adjust, I think it's very important to anticipate as much as possible to create some sort of flexibility within your research that would allow you to give different solutions to the accessibility needs of persons with disabilities. A couple of things that have been very important for me was to have different formats of communication for providing information, but also to have sign language interpreters-

[00:07:45] And also have captions at the same time. The sign language interpreters, when there were deaf people that were not literate enough to have access to captions or vice versa, or we're not signing deaf people. And so I think as much as possible, having an atmosphere where actually everything can be as much as possible adjusted.

[00:08:06] And also, I guess the capacity and the disposition to adjust, I think it's something that is very much welcoming. I think it's very important also to make explicit this capacity to adjust. In most of my pieces of research, I would anticipate just adding an extra line saying if this is not accessible or if there is something specific you require, contact me.

[00:08:36] Do not prevent yourself from contact for a different format or anything. I think that explicitly message is also important for people to trust to ask for something different.

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

[00:08:52] Yes, I guess in the same line than trying to optimise as much as possible accessibility and universal design. I think it's necessarily to be optimally unprepared. One needs to be prepared, but not to a point in which like everything is very rigid that cannot be changed. So I think a common mistake is probably one can put so much energy into trying to make everything as much as fully accessible at the universal design kind of standard.

[00:09:25] But I think it is also important to be aware that there are barriers still. And We're not solving all of the accessibility barriers in one piece of research. So I think it's very important to be kind to oneself who's conducting the research, to be also allowing to make mistakes, and to have the capacity to understand that even though one can be as much prepared as possible, there might be mistakes. And that's an opportunity to learn from those.

(Voiceover) Is there anything else researchers should be mindful of when working with diverse audiences?

[00:10:04] Yes, I think another element of my experience interviewing caring focus groups with disabled peoples, I think it's very important to be prepared for something that you will not have anticipated as much as you could have tried to anticipate.

[00:10:27] I've encountered deaf people who were unable to sign when I came to the interview with a sign interpreter. So that means you actually need to be ready to be able to solve the problem or accessibility problem on the spot. In that case, for example, I lean on a family member of this person who was their personal interpreter.

[00:10:55] Because this person was not a signing deaf person. And so instead of paying the sign language interpreter, I'd rather pay to, for example, this family member as an interpreter in that case. So I think, yeah, I think definitely working in disability brings a lot of creativity to the research in itself.

[00:11:20] So I think yeah, I think it's just to be prepared to be surprised and as creative as possible. Yes.