

Digging While Impaired: Promoting the Accessibility of Archaeology as a Discipline  
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### Abstract

In this paper, we argue that the ethical practice of archaeology involves the active recruitment and inclusion of disabled people in archaeological fieldwork. While archaeology as a discipline is not reducible to fieldwork, fieldwork is nevertheless privileged and must be performed to earn undergraduate and graduate degrees in the field and be considered a “real archaeologist.” By discouraging or actively preventing disabled students from participating in field schools—that is, by gatekeeping these professionalizing experiences—we restrict their access to the discipline as a whole. We begin this article by establishing that disabled people are, indeed, discriminated against in archaeological fieldwork situations. We attribute this discrimination to a disciplinary embrace of the medical model of disability, which locates the problem within the body of the individual, as opposed to the social model of disability, which argues that it is structures, not people, that are the problem. We demonstrate how archaeologists already accommodate their nondisabled colleagues, thereby throwing into stark relief the discrimination disabled people experience. We then provide a blueprint for how we can expand our preexisting commitment to accommodation to our disabled students and colleagues. Far from being a prescriptive list of right and wrong behaviors, the key to this ethical code, we suggest, is open and honest dialogue that not only includes but is led by the disabled person, who has the best understanding of their body, their disabilities, and their abilities.

### Introduction

*I always experience slight trepidation whenever someone asks me what I do for a living. It is a scenario familiar to many archaeologists: you take your seat on a plane and begin small talk with your neighbor. They ask what you do, you say you are an archaeologist and brace yourself for the seemingly inevitable Indiana Jones joke or worse, “So what is your favorite type of dinosaur?” Yes, these responses are part of why I am often less than enthused to admit my occupation, but they do not account for the entirety of my apprehension. Because for me, before the quips about lost arks and paleontological confusion, the conversation goes like this: my neighbor asks what I do, I say I am an archaeologist, and then they confusedly look me up and down for a brief moment. Then, if they are polite, they ask shyly something to the effect of, “I hope this isn’t rude, but how exactly do you do archaeology?” or in the case of a comically boisterous interlocutor, “You? You do archaeology with everything you have going on?”<sup>1</sup>*

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<sup>1</sup> Unless otherwise attributed, personal narratives reflect the experiences, perspectives, and voice of Mason Shrader.

The diversity of modern researchers is critical for expanding our field of vision, and this is especially true of archaeology and anthropology, disciplines charged with illuminating the role of humans and humanity in the past. But the discipline has a problem with diversity: in a 2020 survey by the Society for American Archaeology (SAA), 83.5% of respondents identified as “White or Caucasian” (up from 77.7% in 2015), while only 0.5% identified as Black or African American (Association Research, Inc. 2020). William White and Catherine Draycott (2020) poignantly demonstrated that “a lack of diversity is especially problematic in archaeology because archaeologists help shape humanity’s understanding of the past. Who archaeologists are—our backgrounds, experiences, and mental models—can shape which questions we ask and how we interpret archaeological evidence.” Whitney Battle-Baptiste (2016: 21) personalized the call for diversity when she highlighted “that my identity often urges me to ask different questions, see from different perspectives, and maintain an ongoing and honest dialogue with my colleagues and various stakeholders.” These statements about the value of and need for diversity are relevant—for different reasons and with necessarily different implications—in the present context, as we call for the active recruitment and inclusion of disabled people in archaeology. We want to confront the oft-begged question of *who belongs* in archaeology.

Our argument, however, does not directly address the epistemic value of inclusion, that is, the increase in valuable insights that we gain from including disabled people in our research teams. We suspect that the readers of this volume are already convinced by the general and specific benefits of diversity and inclusion, at least in theory. Rather, we aim to lay bare the unethical structures that facilitate the exclusion of disabled people in archaeological fieldwork. We demonstrate that it is often not the embodied reality of disability that prevents interested individuals from pursuing archaeology vocationally or avocationally: not only are disabled people competent and capable of engaging in archaeological fieldwork (if they want to), but most necessary accommodations are *already* being selectively granted to nondisabled people. Disability accommodation is often framed as a positive right,

“an obligation by others to provide some benefit to the rights holder” (Foldvary 2011). Indeed, accommodation can be understood as a positive right, but, importantly, it is one that is already being exercised by nondisabled archaeologists on field projects. The exclusion of disabled people, then, represents not an inability to accommodate, but an erroneous adherence to ableist assumptions about disabled people. Furthermore, it reflects a lack of disability ethics in the organization and application of archaeological practice.

We begin our chapter by justifying our focus on fieldwork over other necessary components of the discipline, an odd choice for two authors who are often frustrated by the equation of archaeology with fieldwork. We then discuss the sources of the data we use to make our subsequent arguments: first, that disabled people are, in fact, excluded from fieldwork despite demonstrated competence and skill, and second, that the division between disabled and nondisabled is not quite as secure as many believe. We argue that discrimination against disabled people is the result of a disciplinary adherence to the medical model of disability and show how the framing of disability accommodations as unreasonable in fieldwork situations holds no water. Having established that accommodations already exist on projects, we argue that it is unethical to withhold the right to accommodation from one category of person, regardless of competence and skill. We move then to present a more ethical model for archaeological practice, one that prioritizes access over accommodation. There is no single answer to the question of how best to accomplish our goal of recruiting and including disabled archaeologists on our projects. Rather we emphasize, as others have, that “archaeological ethics are flexible rules, negotiated as part of daily practice, and largely dependent upon the context in which conflict and resolution reside” (Dissard, Rosenzweig, and Matney 2011: 60).

## Fieldwork as a Legitimizing Performance

Because archaeology is typically touted as physically and emotionally demanding, it is coded, from the start, in such a way to exclude people with physical and/or mental disabilities, echoing ways that the field has historically been coded “male” and “white” (White and Draycott 2020; Cobb and Croucher 2016; Battle-Baptiste 2016; Moser 2007; Woodall and Perricone 1981). The exclusion of disabled people from archaeology is clearly part of a larger cultural narrative that expects bodies to conform to a “standard model of human form and function that is called normal in medical-scientific discourses, average in consumer capitalism, and ordinary in colloquial parlance” (Garland-Thomson 2007: 114) and rejects any that do not. Legislation like the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) of 1990 and the United Kingdom’s Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) 1995 mandate inclusion in a variety of contexts, including higher education. Still, however, archaeology and other disciplines that incorporate fieldwork, such as geography, maintain their earned reputations for exclusion (Hall, Healey, and Harrison 2002).

We recognize, of course, that as a discipline, archaeology is not reducible to fieldwork and that, in fact, the false equation of archaeology with fieldwork presents problems for the discipline and its practitioners. At least one of us is not even convinced of the ethics of continued archaeological fieldwork at a time when projects and museums often do not have adequate funding for the storage and conservation of a wide range of inorganic and especially organic archaeological materials. What is more, we acknowledge that no aspect of the discipline is particularly inclusive and that we may have an easier case if we attempted to convince you that disabled people should be included in less physically demanding and travel-dependent projects in libraries, archives, or labs. Nevertheless, the explicit focus on fieldwork here is justified. Even leaving aside popular perceptions of archaeology-as-fieldwork (Brosman 2019; Johnson 2014; Holtorf 2007), archaeologists ourselves privilege fieldwork (i.e., data collection) over conservation and analysis. In many ways, fieldwork is a legitimizing performance,

something that *must be done* for one to be considered a valid practitioner of the discipline (see, e.g., Fraser 2007: 17-18; Moser 2007; Gero 1994). And, of course, undergraduate and graduate students at many colleges and universities are required to participate in fieldwork in order to complete archaeology degree programs (Colaninno et al. 2020; Phillips and Gilchrist 2005: 17-18). A recent profile of archaeologists in the United Kingdom revealed that 93% of practicing archaeologists had at least a bachelor's degree (Aitchison and Rocks-Macqueen 2013), demonstrating the necessity of completing this coursework, with its required fieldwork, to become employed in the field. Whether we personally like it or not, then, fieldwork remains a critical component of becoming and being an archaeologist. Fieldwork operates as a gate, and by controlling access to it—gatekeeping—we control access to the discipline as a whole.

On another level, it is the adventure of fieldwork that attracts many students to our projects, independent of any intention they have to complete a degree in archaeology or become professional archaeologists. We argue, too, that disabled people should be encouraged to pursue even single experiences with fieldwork, as these can confer practical and transferrable skills and instill lifelong interests in archaeology, history, and conservation (see, e.g., Colannino et al. 2020; Cartrette and Melroe-Lehrman 2012; Sheppard and Huckleberry 2010). It is not just exceptional disabled students who exhibit a preternatural aptitude for archaeology whom we should accommodate, but any disabled student who wishes to participate. That is, any investment in the accessibility of our discipline as a whole and on individual projects is worthwhile for all students with either a casual or dedicated interest in archaeology.

### **“Nothing About Us Without Us”**

Throughout this article, we make extensive use of the data collected by the Inclusive, Accessible, Archaeology (IAA) project (Phillips and Gilchrist 2015; Phillips et al. 2007; The IAA Project Team 2007a;

The IAA Project Team 2007b) and its successor, the Disability and the Archaeological Profession (DAP) project (Phillips and Creighton 2010). These projects worked to promote the “integration of disabled students into archaeological fieldwork and related activities” and were specifically organized with reference to disability legislation in the United Kingdom (Phillips and Gilchrist 2005: 5). Researchers conducted extensive surveys of both nondisabled and disabled archaeologists to quantify and qualify issues related to inclusion and exclusion in archaeology. Based on these surveys and their research, project members then provided a series of guidelines for how archaeology can adhere to the mandates for inclusion stipulated in the DDA (Phillips and Creighton 2010: 2). We engage, too, with the *Enabled Archaeology Guide 41* created by Theresa O’Mahony (2015) to provide examples of adjustments or accommodations that can easily be effected in a variety of archaeological contexts. In all these projects, the reproduction of survey responses in published reports, as well as the active and continuous involvement of disabled people reinforce the notion that disabled people must be key participants in our efforts if we want to be successful. This is true at the disciplinary level, as well as at the level of individual projects: the key is direct and open communication with disabled people.

At the end of this article, we provide our own suggestions to help guide archaeologists toward a more practical understanding of what resources are available and what inclusion requires of them. Throughout, we present an interdisciplinary argument for archaeologists that is nevertheless valid for any discipline that incorporates fieldwork. We want to show that “fieldwork which is accessible for all participants no matter their current physical or mental circumstances can be achieved with only a few minor adjustments and often at little or no financial cost to the organiser or contractor” (O’Mahony 2015: 2).

*Archaeologists of all ages—from undergraduate students to tenured professors—have experienced confusion in my presence, all due to a narrative of perceived conflict between my disability and archaeological fieldwork. It is a narrative stemming from a lack of education about the reality of disability and the possibilities of adaptive technology. It is a narrative stemming from a lack of imagination for creative solutions to accessibility issues in the field. Often, it is a narrative stemming from an abundance of*

*fear. The goal of this chapter, then, is to serve as a first step to educate. The goal is to inspire imagination and to dispel fears. The goal is to ensure that inclusive fieldwork for people with disabilities is the reality.*

A note is necessary regarding the structure of our contribution, as well as its authors. Debby Sneed is (at present) a nondisabled archaeologist. Her work is largely informed by Disability Studies, a field aimed at “replacing narrow and deficit-based understandings of disability with alternative knowledge claims grounded in disabled people’s subjective and situated experience” (Ferri 2011: 2271; see also Couser 2009). In the field of Disability Studies, memoirs are critical because disabled people “have been spoken about, or spoken for, but rarely listened to” (Sherry 2005: 165). For these reasons, we combine familiar research-based academic prose with the first-person narratives of Mason Shrader, a disabled archaeologist. As a student, Mason worked on two archaeological field projects and in his narratives, he reflects on his relationship with archaeology as both a discipline and a practice. These narratives “do cultural work. They frame our understandings of raw, unorganized experience, giving it coherent meaning and making it accessible to us through story” (Garland-Thomson 2007: 122). Mason’s narratives are an integral part of our chapter because they move our arguments beyond the theoretical, emphasize that the disability politic is embodied, and illuminate for readers one archaeologist’s reality of digging while impaired. Both authors are responsible for the final product of this entire article. Throughout, however, first-person pronouns in the narratives refer to Mason Shrader.

### **Disability as Excludable**

In responses provided to the IAA and the DAP, as well as in informal conversations with colleagues, two factors recur as justifications for the continued exclusion of disabled people from archaeological excavations: money and time. Field school directors and operators often cite (what they assume is) the prohibitively high cost of accommodation, especially for insurance and potential injury lawsuits, which seem impossible to manage on the shoestring budgets of many projects. One DAP

respondent said that they “suppose it’s fear of me getting damaged on site and them getting sued” (Phillips and Creighton 2010: 40). Additionally, project directors complain that they are too busy during a project to devote additional time—and with it, mental and emotional energies—to what they deem are the special needs of individual students. These justifications are what Tanya Titchkosky refers to as “say-able,” commonplace statements that “make inaccessibility sensible under contemporary conditions” (Titchkosky 2011: 74). Such justifications make exclusion “seem part of a rational project” and they rely on and sustain “the common-sense understanding of *disability as excludable*” (Titchkosky 2011: 77, emphasis original; see also Titchkosky 2003). These justifications allow those saying them to find comfort in their very sensibility and rationality.

The IAA survey reported “mixed reactions to the employment of disabled staff in archaeology” (Phillips and Gilchrist 2005: 90). Some employers responded positively to the idea of working with disabled people or reflected well on their experiences doing so. Unfortunately, however, many reactions were negative, and one respondent went so far as to say that the “concept of anyone who is physically or mentally impaired being involved with field archaeology, particularly excavation, is absurd” (Phillips and Gilchrist 2005: 86). Such discrimination exists in academic archaeology, as well. Theresa O’Mahony, a strong advocate for disabled archaeologists and founder of the Enabled Archaeology Foundation, recounted how when she was an undergraduate student of archaeology in London, she disclosed her disabilities in her applications to 38 field training schools, museums, and archives (O’Mahony 2018; see also Rocks-Macqueen 2019). She had previous field experience and high grades in her university field-training course, yet 36 (95%) of her applications were rejected.

*What I “have going on” is a reference to the fact that I have a neuromuscular condition known as Cerebral Palsy (CP). My CP presents itself in fairly apparent ways: my gait is substantially affected, causing me to ambulate primarily with cuff-arm crutches, and my voice is noticeably affected, as well. The oft-confused response I get from inquirers comes from them noting these identifiers and immediately assuming incompetence in my profession.*



The justifications of cost and time may be “say-able,” but they are not grounded in reality, as we will show. Rather, we argue that negative and ambivalent reactions to the very idea of disabled people as archaeologists seem to be rooted in two things: a failure to recognize the presence of disabled people in the field, as well as nondisabled archaeologists’ ignorance of the realities of digging while impaired. We will not address the first point in depth here, except to say that “people with experiences of (dis/)ability *already do archaeology*” (Fraser 2007: viii, emphasis original). It is not always possible to identify a disabled person: while some disabilities are visible, others are nonvisible (Disabled World 2019; Samuels 2013), including, for example, mental illness, chronic illness or pain, sleep disorders, asthma, celiac disease, and epilepsy. An IAA survey reported that as many as 14% of undergraduate archaeology students in the United Kingdom declared that they had a disability, with dyslexia disproportionately represented, and indeed the author of a popular and highly visible blog, “Doug’s Archaeology,” has dyslexia (Rocks-Macqueen 2014). Significantly, this statistic is likely too low because many disabilities “go undeclared, or even undiagnosed, especially unseen disabilities” (Phillips and Gilchrist 2005: 91).

In addition to those who enter the field with disabilities, it is generally true that every body is contingent and, as it were, only temporarily nondisabled. In a field like archaeology, workplace injury and the accumulated strain on bones and joints (Phillips and Creighton 2010: 16), drug and alcohol abuse (Colannino et al. 2020; Miller 2018; Rathbone 2013), illness and exposure (Flanagan 1995), and old age are all potentially disabling in either temporary or permanent ways. As Morag Cross (2007: 191) put it, “[S]ome archaeologists will become disabled; some disabled people are archaeologists. ‘The disabled’ are ‘us,’ not ‘them over there.’”

*A few months ago, I was having a chat over drinks with a friend in archaeology and our conversation eventually turned to the topic all archaeologist grad school conversations seem to reach: fieldwork. When we had satisfactorily discussed their field plans for the summer, they in turn asked me if I had any plans. After hearing mine, they, with the same shyness as those plane passengers, asked, “I hope you don’t mind me asking, but*

*how do you . . . you know, do field work?"*

Having established that, yes, there are disabled archaeologists, nondisabled archaeologists who will become disabled, and disabled people who want to become archaeologists, we focus on our second point, that the ignorance of nondisabled archaeologists about the embodied realities of disability contributes significantly to the continued exclusion of disabled people from the field. One revelation of the DAP survey was that the “biggest single difficulty that was cited as being experienced by archaeologists with a disability was a lack of understanding and awareness of the condition” (Philips and Creighton 2010: 34). Nondisabled and neurotypical archaeologists’ reticence to include visibly and openly disabled students seems rooted in their inability to imagine a variety of *how* questions: how can an archaeological excavation, with its deep trenches and concomitant hazards, be accessible to someone who uses a wheelchair? How can a blind student participate in a field school with a significant travel component? How can disabled people perform the tasks essential to archaeological fieldwork? As BBB’s colleague asked, how can they *do* archaeology?

### **Models of Disability: the Medical and the Social**

Fear, confusion, or reticence to include disabled students on our projects is at least partially explained by a common, but flawed, understanding of where the problem with disability is located. Two prominent views of disability are the medical model and the social model. The medical model of disability, sometimes referred to as the individual model, is underpinned by the idea of personal tragedy. In this model, disability is located in a person’s body, or simply *is* their body. The disabled person is therefore responsible for correcting the problem—*their* problem—and making their body conform to the established or accepted norm as far as possible (Cross 2007: 181). On the other hand, the social model of disability relocates the problem within disabling environments, barriers, and cultures (Oliver 1981; UPIAS 1976: 3). At its theoretical base, the social model distinguishes between impairment

and disability in much the same way that early feminist scholarship divided sex from gender: one is biological, the other social and cultural (Barnes 2012; Oliver 1981; UPIAS 1976: 14). Impairment, then, is “a form of biological, cognitive, sensory or psychiatric difference that is defined within a medical context, and disability is the negative social reaction to those differences” (Sherry 2007: 11). In this way, impairment is only assigned meaning, positive or negative, in a social context (Hevey 1993: 19). Of these two, the social model of disability is preferred among disabled people, Disability Studies scholars, and activists. The social model is not, however, free from critique (e.g., Levitt 2017; Shakespeare 2013; Oliver 2013), most notably because of its lack of engagement with the lived realities of impairment (O’Mahony 2016: 13). As Fraser (2007: 13) notes in her research on the barriers for disabled people in archaeology, the “social model’s division between mind/body and environment ultimately leaves interconnections between those experiences unacknowledged and unexplored.” Moreover, many scholars now prefer the more intersectional methodologies and modes of analysis provided by critical disability theory (Bell 2006; Minich 2016; Schalk 2017). Still, the distinction here between the medical and social models remains relevant.

### **Accommodating Practice**

While the medical model has been supplanted by the social model in many contexts, it nevertheless persists in others, including in archaeology. When discussing the subject of disability and archaeology with colleagues, the *how* questions abound. In one conversation, a colleague described why they could not accommodate disabled students: excavators had to take a boat to an island, but the boat could not be pulled to shore and everyone had to wade from the boat to the shore. “How,” he asked, “would a disabled person be able to do this?” Questions like this ignore the heterogeneity in the disability community, as well as spectrums of experience. More importantly, though, they reflect that, when pushed, archaeologists expect that in order for disabled students to be successful in archaeology

and not to hinder progress on an excavation, they must be able to fulfill all the demands of fieldwork with little or no accommodation (O'Mahony 2016: 43). The problem with this mindset is twofold. First, it fails to acknowledge the reality of fieldwork, which *already supports accommodation* on a regular basis. Second, it requires that disabled people must be able to perform archaeology in the same ways as their nondisabled colleagues, that is, to hold a trowel or process information identically.

*I wish I could say the hyper-able narrative of archaeology was weightless rhetoric and misrepresentation which did little to affect the opportunities of archaeologists with disabilities, but this has not held true in my experience. In fact, the very first time I attempted to do fieldwork, I was rejected on the basis of my disability. I was in my third year of college, and I had already spent the prior summer doing extensive lab work for my advisor's project in the Yucatán, Mexico. I decided I should apply to field schools that would provide me with the work in the field I was thus far lacking. I found a reputable project that suited my interests and sent in my application along with the requisite medical forms. I received an email back from the head of the project saying how my academic credentials were sufficient, but he had "concern" over the specifics of my medical forms and asked for my primary care physician's contact information. I was never contacted by the project again, and what happened after I only know because my primary care physician and advisor told me: the project head contacted my physician and expressed his worries about me being able to function in the field. After he had explained the specifics of what the field school would entail, my physician assured him that my ability level was, in fact, up to the task. The field director was still concerned about the "dangers" of me being on the project and so he contacted my advisor, who also tried to convince him of my capability. After this, neither my advisor nor my physician heard from the director again.*

The truth of the matter is that even in the most rigorous fieldwork situations, archaeologists make accommodations of all kinds, and accommodations are generally not difficult to enact. As one respondent to the DAP survey suggested, "[I]f we think in terms of the fact that we all work with disabilities, and that we adjust to some disabilities in other people without thinking, then it is easier to adjust to all disabilities because adjustment is part of life" (Phillips and Creighton 2010: 46). On every project that both authors of this chapter have worked on, active and passive accommodations were made for team members on a daily basis, without question or reservation. Each project hired local women and men to perform or assist with certain tasks, including (depending on the project) construction, big picking, heavy lifting, sifting, and pottery washing, that is, more physically demanding

tasks, as well as those less appealing to American university students. What work was performed by students and unpaid staff was not shared equally. Rather, tasks were assigned and performed according to individuals' demonstrated or professed abilities or even preferences. When team members could not push a full wheelbarrow or carry heavy buckets of soil, we reduced the size of loads and in some cases the weight was moved by others. On a project in Greece, one trench was accessible only by descending and ascending three aluminum ladders, weaving one's body through and around a maze of steel shoring supports. Soil, rocks, and archaeological materials were removed from the bottom by means of a pulley system, which required a certain amount of upper body mobility and strength for those at the bottom who raised the buckets, as well as for those at the top who transferred the buckets from the pulley to the wheelbarrow. Some team members were uncomfortable navigating the ladder or with the depth and closeness of the space. Some were unable to lift the buckets. Only those who were comfortable with the space and tasks worked in this trench.

*Since that first field application, I have experienced slightly improved variations on this story. Some directors prefer I only work in the lab and not in the field, while others have suggested that I do fieldwork on a "trial" basis, with the caveat that I would exclusively work in the lab if the director deemed me incapable of fieldwork. Regardless, all of these project directors considered their evaluations of my capability to be more trustworthy than my own. I understand the reasons these directors felt uncertain about my ability: for many, I am the first disabled archaeologist they have encountered, and their reticent attitude stems from a lack of education and fear of what they do not know. What they should have done, however, was trust me. I think it is safe to say that I am the one with the most hands-on experience being me. As such, I have the best grasp of what I am capable and not capable of. The phrase "nothing about us, without us" originated in disability activist circles to express the need to include those with disabilities in the legal and political conversation surrounding disability (Charlton 1998). The same principle applies to inclusive archaeological fieldwork. If the conversation around the participation of an individual with disabilities in fieldwork does not include that individual, it should not happen. True inclusivity means involvement at every level of the process.*

We have witnessed or ourselves benefitted from accommodations for nonphysical aspects of fieldwork, as well. On surveys, team members who had difficulty reading maps or keeping consistent and accurate artifact counts were assigned to other necessary tasks, like labeling or recording. Team members assisted those who could not easily or always distinguish soil colors or who requested help

translating live measurements to the appropriate scale for drawings. Trench edges and protruding rebar were flagged with bright tape to increase their visibility and team members concerned with balance worked away from edges. Shorter team members and those whose dexterity was affected by disability, injury, pain, or just cold weather shoveled away the previous day's spoil piles while others hung shade tarps high up by thin ropes.

Bodies are not identical, and this anecdotal survey should make it abundantly clear that we already create and support a wide range of accommodations on our projects. We are confident that readers can reflect on their own experiences and construct a long list of similar accommodations on their projects. We accommodate our nondisabled colleagues. We accommodate colleagues who were once young and hale but who experience changes in their mobility, dexterity, vision, or hearing because of long years in the field. We make temporary accommodations, too, for team members who become ill or injured during the excavation season. Disability is a devalued form of difference, and we only consider accommodation an inconvenience or insurmountable obstacle when the beneficiary identifies as disabled. But by insisting that disabled people cannot participate in fieldwork if they require accommodations—that is, by insisting that they overcome their bodies—we hold them to a standard that no archaeologist achieves. And by refusing to acknowledge the fact of accommodation on our projects, we perpetuate a false narrative that serves primarily, if not exclusively, to exclude disabled people.

### **Framework of Access**

The medical model of disability locates the “problem” within the bodies of disabled people and insists that these bodies be altered or adjusted so that they conform as closely as possible to the “norm” (Davis 2013). The implicit and explicit embrace of this model in archaeology is problematic (O’Mahony 2016: 23), not least because it is supported by an unreality in which all people share equally in all work

on our projects. Instead, we should shift our mode to something more akin to the social model of disability, recognizing that it is the field of archaeology itself, not disabled archaeologists, that should be the target of our modifications. To do this, we must embrace the accessibility that already characterizes archaeological excavation. Likewise, we must critically evaluate where and how archaeology can be modified to facilitate even greater inclusion (Phillips et al. 2007: 6).

*After my first rejection, I was accepted into the next field school I applied to. However, when I arrived at the project that summer, the director sized me up, saw the reality of my impairment, and began to express concern about me operating in the field. Despite my objections, he insisted that my time in the field had to be shortened and I would be bussed back early each day. I was incredibly frustrated. Not only would this imposition make me a less efficient contributor than my colleagues, implicitly affirming to them that people with disabilities contribute less, but it would also force someone else to contribute less because they had to drive me back early. I began to fear that my experience in the field would always be dictated by others' evaluation of my ability.*

*I am glad to say that this story does not end there. I was assigned to the site's necropolis, which was overseen not by the director, but by another archaeologist. This archaeologist pulled me aside and assured me that if I wanted to work the full time, I could do so and that he would talk to the director about it. He asked me which burial I thought would be the most accessible and assigned me to the one I selected. The burial was still difficult for me to reach, as I had to use my crutches and simultaneously haul my excavation equipment. Trowels and dental picks may not seem like much of a burden, but when one is trying to walk with crutches without falling into other burials, the little things becomes quite troublesome. Since we excavated each burial in teams, my partners carried my equipment each day while I made my way to our burial. Inside the burial, my partners and I lined the sides with foam mats (which many on the project already used for knee protection), which allowed me to lay down and excavate. This was how I excavated for the field season. The director occasionally tried to tell me to leave early, but the overseeing archaeologist and my team members advocated for my continued inclusion in the fieldwork. It was indeed a team effort, but then again, when is an excavation not one?*

We need to accept the reality of our workflow and admit that “the actual process of doing archaeology is flexible and lends itself to including people with disabilities” and that “you can accommodate almost anyone on an archaeological project” (Phillips and Creighton 2010: 46). This is a part of the ethical practice of archaeology. As a DAP respondent articulated, “you pick the most appropriate person for a particular job, whether it's drawing excavation, or whatever. It's all part of the job of running a site, getting the right people to do a particular job” (Phillips and Creighton 2010: 15). A

team is successful when we acknowledge and support everyone's strengths and "[J]ust as every excavation member makes a valuable contribution to a dig, disabled archaeologists/people are no different" (O'Mahony 2015: 2).

Nondisabled archaeologists assume that making field projects accessible will be costly, in terms of time and money. Even in cases where it is, we support our same argument for inclusion, believing as we do that the value of inclusion cannot be reduced to its costs. As it is, however, the process of accommodation is often relatively straightforward. A number of examples were listed above and included things like flagging hazards with bright tape for increased visibility, shifting duties among team members, and assisting team members with certain tasks. The DAP survey revealed that, the "most successful 'adjustment' cited by respondents was achieved simply by employers being flexible" (Phillips and Creighton 2010: 42). Significantly, "the only examples of using special equipment related to office work and recording, rather than anything specifically for the physical side of archaeology" (Phillips and Creighton 2010: 42). In BBB's case, he was able to work effectively alongside his colleagues using mats that others on the project were similarly using to accommodate their own bodies in different ways. A DAP survey respondent with restricted mobility recounted that their "Director would come to me and say, 'What are you doing it that way for? I'm intrigued.' So I would explain why. He would say as long as I was doing it right, it was fine" (Phillips and Creighton 2010: 42).

At the core of accessibility in archaeology are two related points. First, there should be an emphasis on ability. Second, accessibility—including any necessary adjustments and accommodations—must take the form of a dialogue *with the disabled person*. The reality is, "[D]isabled students have successfully participated in archaeological fieldwork training when there has been an understanding and knowledge of their potential abilities and possible limitations" (Phillips et al. 2007: 6). This "understanding and knowledge" must be developed with everyone regardless of the 'type' of their disability (Phillips and Creighton 2010: 17). What is more, this dialogue must be ongoing, as an



“individual’s abilities are not static, they change and develop with experience...Any method of self-evaluation must reflect this dynamic aspect and provide a means by which changes and developments can be tracked” (Phillips et al. 2007: 6). Additionally, nondisabled archaeologists must be flexible enough to recognize that tasks can be performed in different ways and still be done correctly. Familiarity and tradition are not acceptable reasons for persisting in modes or methods that exclude people who want to participate, including disabled people, when alternatives are readily available. Why, after all, would foam pads be restricted to providing relief only to knees?

*I recognize that my story here is not the perfect blueprint for complete inclusion of individuals with any disability on any project. The burial I was excavating did not represent the upper limit of physical activity in archaeology and I have just one example of one type of impairment. Still, the basics of what I have recounted here—the need for inclusion at every level and the interconnectivity of accessibility and teamwork—can, I think, serve as good starting points for just about any conversation surrounding inclusive field work.*

Disability is not the problem and successful inclusion can be achieved by embracing five main things (Phillips et al. 2007: 19):

- An attitude of acceptance and understanding
- Communication
- Flexibility
- Common sense
- Regular reviews or appraisals of the situation and of any adjustments

The social model of disability, which properly locates the problem outside of the body of the individual, provides a productive way forward, with the caveat that the body is not irrelevant. It is likely impossible “to provide environments or develop activities where everybody can do everything, and this will certainly be the case with some tasks undertaken in archaeology. People, both disabled and non-disabled, will have different levels of ability to undertake tasks” (Phillips et al. 2007: 6). In some cases, individuals, disabled and nondisabled alike, may be able to perform some tasks but unable to perform

others, regardless of accommodation. A respondent to the DAP cautioned that it is “no good pretending that you can do everything. You have to look at your capabilities and practical abilities and work with what you’ve got” (Phillips and Creighton 2010: 11). As above, however, it is critical that the disabled person be empowered to determine which tasks they can and cannot perform and that they are “enabled through being totally involved with all choices for their participation” (O’Mahony 2015: 2). This is, above all, because “[N]o one can discover their own potential ability and limitations better than the individual concerned” (Phillips et al. 2007: 6).

### **Blueprint for Inclusion?**

Nondisabled archaeologists may be open to the idea of accommodating disabled students but confused or uncertain about the realities. What does this kind of inclusion look like? Can I ask a student about their disability? There is no single blueprint. Every situation will be different, as no two projects or individuals are the same. Even two people with the same diagnosis will have different experiences of their disability. As we have emphasized throughout, the key is communication that is both open and ongoing. And, most importantly, the conversation must include and be led by the disabled person. BBB’s is not the only story of field school directors calling their nondisabled peers and physicians to ask about the capabilities of a disabled student without asking the disabled person themselves. In many cases, the disabled person will require no more accommodation than their nondisabled peers. In all cases, they will have a better understanding of their bodies—including their abilities and limitations—than literally anyone else.

The first and perhaps biggest obstacle for a disabled person considering whether to apply to work on a project is trying to anticipate if and what additional accommodations may be required. As is the case for anyone participating in a field school for the first time or working on a new project, there is a gap between expectation and reality. Fortunately, however, there are ways that everyone, including

disabled people, can anticipate where they may need accommodation. In advertisements and orientations for the project, the director and other experienced team members can present the realities of fieldwork on the site. This includes simple things like detailing typical daily schedules with breaks, weather, bathroom access, sleeping arrangements, and meal components. It should also include other details, such as what the terrain is like and whether excavators hike or drive to the site, how students typically spend their leisure time, what kinds of tools are used on site (e.g., trowels, hand picks, big picks, hand brooms, shovels), qualities of the earth and environs (e.g., clayey vs. sandy, wet vs. dry), potential outdoor allergens, proximity of pharmacies and hospitals, and so on. These details will benefit all students evaluating their potential participation on a project, disabled and nondisabled alike. This approach should not be aimed at discouraging disabled people, but at providing information that allows people to make useful comparisons between what they already know from their daily lives and what life will be like on the project. If necessary, schedule individual appointments with students so that they can ask questions and brainstorm what kinds of additional materials the project or student can pack to facilitate their participation. It is imperative that students know that disability and the need for accommodation are not, in and of themselves, disqualifying.

Fortunately, there is also a tool available to help all students anticipate their needs on field projects. In the last phase of the IAA, researchers developed the Archaeological Skills Self-Evaluation Tool kit (ASSET) (Phillips et al. 2007: 12; The IAA Project Team 2007a). This tool kit was designed to assist students with little or no experience with archaeological fieldwork. By taking a questionnaire, field school neophytes can forecast which typical tasks they would be able to complete without accommodation and which they may need adjustments or accommodations for by making analogies between everyday tasks and tasks performed on excavations. The tool kit was intended to enable students, not limit them, by allowing them to forecast their experience on an archaeological project while warning that, as always, the reality for many would be different than the projection. The IAA then

developed guidelines—not set rules—for making archaeological fieldwork inclusive (Phillips et al. 2007: 16-37). Their packet includes a discussion of “reasonable adjustments,” as well as information about and general guidelines for including students with a number of specific disabilities, such as dyslexia and other nonvisible disabilities, visual and hearing impairments, mobility impairments, mental health issues, and Autism. Examples of both minor and major adjustments help ground the guidelines in practical ways and a series of case studies online (The IAA Project Team 2007b) concretize their recommendations further. These guidelines and case studies can be used to help in brainstorming the kinds of accommodations and adjustments that might be useful, and it will be up to the disabled person to determine whether such adjustments would, in fact, benefit them.

The DAP, which succeeded the IAA, expanded on these first guidelines and published a pamphlet on “Employing People with Disabilities: Good Practice Guidance for Archaeologists” (Phillips and Creighton 2010). This pamphlet discusses the British legal perspective and provides not just general guidance, but also more targeted suggestions for employing people with specific disabilities. Examples of specific conditions and disabilities, the challenges that could arise therefrom, and potential adjustments (Phillips and Creighton 2010: 13), as well as action points and sources for more information related to specific disabilities help readers think through the realities of accommodation, while the inclusion of personal narratives grounds the necessity of inclusion in the lives of practicing archaeologists. The guidelines provided by the DAP emphasize that disability “is not just about theoretical frameworks, nor legislative definitions, it is fundamentally about people and sets of ‘attitudes’: how people with disabilities see themselves, and how others see them” (Phillips and Creighton 2010: 9).

The Enabled Archaeology Foundation also created a guide for increasing inclusivity in both the actual practice of fieldwork and in the advertisement in jobs or fieldwork vacancies, surveying, and recordkeeping (O’Mahony 2015). This guide provides examples of accommodations that can assist some

disabled people, from plans for a wheelchair-accessible trench and tips for using cushions as props, to links for easy-grip trowels with compatible support cuffs. With regard to specific tools and practices, Fraser (2007) discusses the specific ways that embracing Universal Design (UD) and Inclusive Design (ID) frameworks can remove barriers to inclusion in archaeology while simultaneously fulfilling the desired outcomes of fieldwork.

These kinds of guides and pamphlets exist because, as noted above, there are already disabled people doing archaeology. It is important to remember, however, that guidelines are not rules. Not everyone will benefit from the same adjustments or accommodations. Disabled people must be directly involved in determining what will and will not work for them. As one DAP respondent complaint, “[P]eople kept trying to persuade me to use a prosthetic arm, but I rejected it. I haven’t worn one, apart from driving...It was almost like a thing to protect me from heavy work” (Phillips and Creighton 2010: 44). It is inappropriate for anyone to make decisions for disabled people, from whether they participate in the first place to what accommodations or adjustments they need. Rather, the role of the director or other team members is to be open and flexible and, based on their experience in the field, to suggest potential adjustments. What is necessary, from the beginning, is for nondisabled archaeologists to embrace a different idea of what archaeology looks like and, more importantly, who is an archaeologist.

## **Conclusion**

Our call for inclusion is not about charity. Nor is it about the very real legal requirement to make reasonable accommodations for disabled people. Rather, it is about our responsibility to make archaeology, as a whole, available to disabled people *just as it is* for nondisabled people. We have an affirmative responsibility to act ethically by supporting people who are “skilled and qualified and capable of doing a job in archaeology, but for whom adjustments may have to be made in the way that job is done” (Phillips and Creighton 2010: 3). This includes not just disabled students who apply to work

on our projects, but also archaeologists who become disabled by injury, illness, or age. This is about providing disabled people with the same considerations that we give to nondisabled people on our projects, including the freedom to engage and contribute to the field in their own ways. The benefits of inclusion redound not just to the disabled person, but also to the discipline as a whole, as we all learn new methods, processes, and practices.

*A few years ago, I had the great fortune to go to Pompeii for the first time. I, of course, knew of the layout of the city and had seen the cobblestone laden streets in textbooks, but to walk on the stones myself was quite the stunning experience. One might think that I am referring to the awe enthusiasts of the ancient world often feel standing amidst its material remains, and while I certainly did feel such awe, the “stunning” I am referring to is much more physical than some nebulous gut feeling about the past. Indeed, as I took my very first step onto the ancient street, I found myself physically startled as the rubber tip of my crutch slid off the large cobblestone and into a crevasse, knocking my footing out of balance and threatening to send me to the ground. What followed was a clumsy ballet of me desperately trying to walk the streets of Pompeii without falling, each cobblestone seeming like some peak which I, the comically inexperienced climber, had to summit to proceed down the road.*

*At long last and with minimal falls, I reached the Forum. As I stood there, tired but too excited and proud to turn back, I heard various tour guides proclaiming how “strikingly modern” so many of the ancient amenities seemed to be. Their larger message was that, in ruins which often seem alien to modern viewers, much familiarity can be found if one knows where to look. This is a message that academics often champion as well, as is evidenced by the common quip used in anthropological circles of “making the strange familiar and the familiar strange.” In some sense, it is the duty of scholars of the past to make the strange past familiar by shedding light on those life experiences that can relate to present circumstances. As I, a person with a physical disability, stood exhausted in the ruins of Pompeii, I was struck with the thought that this was the type of physical space that a person with mobility impairments would have navigated constantly. For such a person, the careful precision I needed to navigate the cobblestones for only brief hours might very well have been the daily mindset required to simply walk down the street in their neighborhood. Suddenly and for the first time, the strangeness of the distant past seemed as though it could be very familiar to me personally.*

*I share this final story not as a plea for pity, but rather as an example which is symptomatic of the ableist notions of exclusion we have discussed above. My embodied experience in Pompeii gave me a newfound realization of the unique contribution my disabled perspective could bring to the study of the ancient past, and yet, that realization should not have been so novel. The novelty came from the fact that I had been continually told that I cannot contribute anything to archaeology. Thus, my experience was so transformative precisely because it was a direct contradiction to the ableist narrative which I had internalized. While such an overt message of discrimination may not be the intentions of those who exclude disabled archaeologists from their projects, make no mistake, this is the message that is communicated to us.*

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