

Shit We Don't Talk About - Episode 59

Brijana Prooker - Invisible Disabilities

Mia Voss 00:04

Hey, welcome to episode 59 Of Shit We Don't Talk About powered by Helix Interactive. My guest is Brijana Prooker, a freelance journalist whose work has been featured in News Day, Elle, Good Housekeeping, Bitch Media and most recently Shondaland. She also has an autoimmune deficiency and today we'll be talking about invisible disabilities. As always, there's an accessibility transcript that can be found in the show notes at www.shitwedon'ttalkaboutpodcast.com. All right, strap in. It gets good. Here we go.

Mia Voss 00:43

Hi Brijana.

Brijana Prooker 00:44

Hi, Mia.

Mia Voss 00:49

I'm so excited to talk with you today. Yes, if you're watching on the video, when we eventually upload it, we all both have our rescue dogs with us. And I know that your rescue pup is part of your brand and your story as well. Which I love. I also love that you are the, what's the emotional support human for your dog.

Brijana Prooker 01:09

Awww...Oh, I try to be, that is all that I want in the world is to be support for my baby.

Mia Voss 01:15

Yes. I love it. Well, thank you for joining us today. I already did an intro for you at the beginning of the podcast. But this topic is something I haven't covered yet. And that is obviously things that are invisible illnesses and disabilities. And obviously we need to talk about it right.

Shit We Don't Talk About - Episode 59

Brijana Prooker - Invisible Disabilities

Brijana Prooker 01:34

Yeah, yeah, disability. I mean, it's there's so many disabilities, affects 25% of the population. Which is, yeah, which you don't realise because you don't see disability portrayed very much in the media. And if you do, it's often by someone who's not disabled, so doesn't know the experience. But disability has run the gamut of so many things, there is visible disabilities and there is invisible disabilities, I happen to have an invisible one.

Mia Voss 02:03

And I pulled this up actually, it fell down the rabbit hole on one of your articles. So I'm going to put all the links in the show notes by the way, go to www.shitwedonttalkaboutpodcast.com. Because you've written at least 38 or 39 articles for different pretty impressive avenues or different places that you've been posted. So Elle magazine was one and one of them I fell down the rabbit hole and it said the term invisible disability or invisible illness is used to describe any condition that stereotypically doesn't present in a physical way. It was previously used for chronic illnesses, but in recent years also been expanded to mental health, Gynecological conditions, we could talk forever about that one. And neurodiverse conditions so Lupus, Endometriosis, Osteoporosis, Rheumatoid Arthritis, Dyspraxia, Migraine, I could go on and on. But I just wanted to have that out there because I think the term gets bandied about, but a lot of people don't understand it.

Brijana Prooker 03:01

Yeah, and it's a little bit weird to that they say that it's an illness that doesn't present in a physical way. Because that's kind of how it started. Because there was hysteria back in ancient Greece and pretty much women who had any physical ailments that couldn't be easily explained. Women thought well they were hysterical, that they had hysteria, and that it was all in their head. And the explanation for any physical ailment that affected someone with a uterus was that oh, your uterus is wandering around your body. It's just a wandering womb syndrome.

Shit We Don't Talk About - Episode 59

Brijana Prooker - Invisible Disabilities

Mia Voss 03:43

Are you kidding me? Okay. I was this many years old when I just found out that bullshit. Yeah, like it's travelling around your body like a weird...[cross talk]

Brijana Prooker 03:49

Oh, yes, your womb is literally travelling around your body. Which why the hell does anyone think that if your womb is literally travelling, meandering around your body, that was what causes you physical pain, that it's just an emotional thing. If my womb is literally wandering around my body, I think that would be pretty damn painful.

Mia Voss 04:11

Yeah, like my womb is up here on my shoulder causing me like, some big pain. And it's interesting. I did read about that with hysteria and a book called Cassandra Speaks that I'm listening to on Audible, which I highly recommend as well. Basically, you know, Cassandra is the one who could predict the future knew what was going to happen but doomed for people to not listen. And I did learn that about or part of that about hysteria, but not the travelling wonb part. So Oh, my goodness, I can see where that's been around for millennia, if not more.

Brijana Prooker 04:43

Yeah, and well, I mean, Multiple Sclerosis, which is also an autoimmune disease, which is an invisible illness, so called invisible illness was thought to be a form of hysteria back in the day. So it was just that Oh, you're stressed out? It's like no, I have MS. My body's literally attacking myself. And it's not all in my head, I'm not crazy. What we now know to be an autoimmune disease and as was thought to be just oh, I'm really stressed out, my womb is wandering all around my body. And I just feel so weird, right? And I say so called invisible illness because it's not always that you can't see it. It's that, you know, for instance, I'm not using a cane, I'm not in a wheelchair. Oftentimes, it's been a couple of years since I've had to do this, but I used to have to carry memory foam pillows with me everywhere I went. And so that was the visible part of my disability. But I would take them with me to doctor's appointments because I have vasculitis, so it's an inflammation of the blood vessels. Pretty

Shit We Don't Talk About - Episode 59

Brijana Prooker - Invisible Disabilities

much my immune system attacks my blood vessels for all sorts of reasons. It happens when it's too hot out, it happens if I'm sitting in one position for too long. It happens if there's any pressure points. So pretty much when I have to go to a doctor appointment, where I'd have to sit on really uncomfortable hard chairs in a waiting room for a really long time, and not have my legs propped, because it's hard for my legs to dangle, because I can't get circulation back to my heart properly, that's really painful. So anyway, I would bring memory foam pillows to try to sit on the pillows and the least amount of pressure on my blood vessels as possible.

And I would literally have nurses, they're making fun of me like, oh, here comes the princess with her memory foam pillows. And it's like, you know, I don't have a cane but this is what I need to make your office accessible for me. So I shouldn't be treated as though I'm spoiled and have my memory foam this is literally one of the only ways I can survive my disability without pain. [Dog barking]

Mia Voss 06:58

Right, right. And that boy, if I ever wanted to punch a nurse, which is not often that would be one of those times because oh my gosh, it's just so thoughtless in that sense for one. And then two, you know, which I love one of the articles that you wrote was talking about not being you know, women speaking up and not being having to be a nice person. And I would think that that has to go in with it to have like, hey, no, you know what, pump your brakes, you don't know what's going on with me why don't you take a second to ask about that, which I have done a podcast on Medical Gaslighting, and I swear that's got to be in it as well, too. Because yours also is an invisible disability or illness that it doesn't, I've never heard of it before. Could you tell me the name of it again?

Brijana Prooker 07:47

I have Sjögren's syndrome, which is, it's crazy the lack of information that is out there because autoimmune diseases affect 50 million people, and 75% of them are women. So we have a huge gender bias there in terms of medical research, in terms of money going into researching these diseases that primarily affect women. 75% out of 50 million people is a huge number. That is it's just ridiculous when you think about it, because often I'm told

Shit We Don't Talk About - Episode 59

Brijana Prooker - Invisible Disabilities

that you know, you say you haven't heard of my disease. But I've been told since I was a kid I'm still told now how rare my disease is. And yes, it could be thought of as slightly rare. But if you actually look up the numbers, it's really not as rare as doctors are telling me it is. When I go to my support groups on Facebook of other people who have Sjögren's syndrome or have Vasculitis there are so many people who are experiencing all the things that I've experienced since I was a kid who doctors are telling me oh, that doesn't happen with what you have. That doesn't happen but there's like hundreds of thousands of people in my group so this is happening too. So one of the problems is that there's a gender bias. Autoimmune diseases primarily affects people with uteruses, women mostly and they're essentially it's not really so much that these diseases are rare is that they are completely underfunded and under research because of the gender that they primarily affect.

Mia Voss 09:31

And I think under diagnosed as well like you just said that you talk with people this would be interesting, you probably show up that you're talking with people Yes, maybe that specifically know the name of it, but probably more about the symptoms right when you're in the group since they, I can't imagine the number of people who are undiagnosed simply based on the fact that they're not believed.

Brijana Prooker 09:51

They're not believed and doctors don't know about it. I mean, you know, I'm seeing the top supposedly top team of Rheumatologists in Los Angeles right now. But you know, there are just like you said, you asked me if any of you have Lupus, I don't, but it's in the same category. And people nowadays are more likely to know what Lupus is, or maybe Multiple Sclerosis or Rheumatoid Arthritis. But Sjogren's Syndrome and Vasculitis even, you know, the supposedly top rheumatologist, you know, their focus is on the ones that people know about more nowadays, like Lupus like MS. And there's just such a lack of knowledge. And I mean, just saying, going back to the support groups on Facebook, just have so many doctors telling me like, no, your disease cannot cause this symptom and that symptom. No,

Shit We Don't Talk About - Episode 59

Brijana Prooker - Invisible Disabilities

it cannot be from that just to go to my groups, and like hundreds of thousands of people are having these exact same symptoms. You know, there's a problem there that you supposedly top professionals have no idea that Sjogren's Syndrome causes this, Vasculitis could cause this.

Mia Voss 11:01

And I always need to add this in when we talk about any kind of biases, take what we're talking about. And we are two white women. So then you multiply that as black and brown women and what they go through as well. And I've spoken about this many times on the podcast, and I speak about it frequently in conversations of just take that number and multiply it and it'll throw you the amount of people who are not believed. I was reading an article today it was a woman talking about losing weight. And she said, I kept getting told that the doctor, you just need to lose weight, you just need to lose weight. And so they would never talk to her specifically, or they would listen very briefly to what her symptoms were. And they just all put it on this body mass index, BMI in the weight thing. And so then she goes and lose 60 pounds, and they said, Okay, and so they automatically assumed that her symptoms would dissipate or disappear. And she's like, No, they're still here. And then it turns out that she had endometriosis.

She had a bunch of different stuff. She ended up losing her ovaries because she wasn't believed from a year before. And it was just so interesting. And it almost seems simplistic to me when I was reading it, but she said no, they literally would just not listen to anything until she lost the weight and so that gaslighting and that lack of belief is really tough. What do you feel like in your group are you all able to, and I want to hear some stories, too. You know what I told you when we were getting ready for this. And so just tell me all the dumb shit that people say. And I know me a couple of stories, because that is shit we don't talk about as well, too. And I think for those of us who don't have invisible disabilities, that's got to be part of it. One that everybody starts to bond together who are suffering from this and having conversations and encouraging one another, and then also getting people to help champion you as well.

Brijana Prooker 12:56

Shit We Don't Talk About - Episode 59

Brijana Prooker - Invisible Disabilities

Yeah, well, first of all, just thank you for bringing up that we are two white women because you're absolutely correct. So many of these autoimmune diseases, it's not just that it primarily affects women, it's often that it primarily affects black and brown women, certain of the autoimmune diseases are exponentially more people of color. And also, another thing is that I'm saying that so many of these doctors who are supposedly top in their field, they don't know what, they don't know much about my particular disease and what it looks like, and what can affect it. But what's crazy and even more messed up is that when they actually are in school, they're looking at these diseases, what they look like on white skin. So vasculitis on white skin, primarily like a...[cross talk]

Mia Voss 13:44

Yeah, you can't see my face if you're listening to it, but I was, oh my God. That's so true. That is so true.

Brijana Prooker 13:53

It's so messed up. Like if you look at vasculitis on Google, you'll probably see that it looks like red splotches or purple splotches. Because pretty much what happens is the blood vessels inflame, and then they inflame so much that they break and then it leaks blood underneath the skin. So it's pretty much splashes of blood under the skin. So it can look like bruises, it can look like bright red rashes. But if you look up what it looks like on black skin for instance, you don't see that extreme splash of like as though your legs were beaten or your arms were beaten or wherever you have the vasculitis. There's not this bright red or extreme purple look to it. You can see, like very it's very very very minor in terms of it doesn't have that disgusting like blood under the skin look. You see just like you can see it's very subtle. It's almost like there's like a little bit of white pattern on the skin. So underneath the skin, this is all going on like the blood vessels are breaking, and it's leaking blood under the skin and there's internal bleeding. But it looks shockingly different on black skin versus white skin. And so as hard as it was for me to get diagnosed, I started getting vasculitis outbreaks when I was seven years old, I wasn't properly diagnosed until I was 17. So it took 10 years of being disbelieved, but that's with my skin looking all kinds of crazy, like all red and blue and beaten and swollen, and sometimes my legs swell to like, triple their size but

Shit We Don't Talk About - Episode 59

Brijana Prooker - Invisible Disabilities

that's with the way it looks in white skin. So I want to appreciate the fact that you brought up how, as much as it's hard for white women to get properly diagnosed, we're not even looking at what these diseases look like on black women or brown women. **[Mia: Thank you for that.]** How it looks differently on different color skins and medicine there is gross negligence in our medical system.

Mia Voss 15:55

It really is, what I mean, that could be a whole entire show as well, because that is something that, and we don't only talk about representation. And I did see a post recently, and a friend had shared it of a photograph, a medical photograph of a, the kind of cross cut of a black woman, and it was a maternal photo of her pregnant and the woman was just so excited to see something that was a medical picture, a medical description of that. And when you bring that up to have like, just from the look of it, that it looks different. So, you know, we all need to be aware of that we can't all rise individually. So talking about that, and then helping people champion that and speak up and it's so hard to do. I just had my annual physical last week, and I just kept reminding myself of I had to keep going back in my head of the questions to ask because here I am snatched out with this paper gown on right. And trying to form a try to form a thought, while, I'll try to hold everything together. And it was really interesting to even be in that in a form of a healthy person. I feel good and feel that vulnerable.

Brijana Prooker 17:12

Yeah, it's such a vulnerable position to be in. And it's hard to advocate for yourself no matter what the situation is. I mean, you're just you know, at routine physical. And it's an incredibly vulnerable position in every sense of the word to be in. And especially if you're sick, if you're in pain, if you're not feeling well, it's very, very, very difficult to speak up for yourself. And to have a conviction to say, you know, this isn't all in my head. You know, doctors told me Oh, it's just a rash, you're just very allergic to your laundry detergent, or you're very allergic to bug bites. And so I would end up in the emergency room or urgent care over and over again. But I would be told, you know, no, that should just be itchy because it's a rash. And it shouldn't be painful. While it is painful. I'm telling you, it's painful,

Shit We Don't Talk About - Episode 59

Brijana Prooker - Invisible Disabilities

because literally, my blood vessels are bursting, and I'm getting an internal bleeding under my skin. And that's pretty damn painful. So don't tell me you know that it's just a rash and it should be itchy. And it's in my head that it's painful. But we can go back to people saying like, the shit that people tell you because, I mean, just to be told by doctors that you know, I'm not in pain when I am in pain. And this story I was gonna tell you this was, I was walking Ivy at the park, my dog Ivy and a neighbor that I recognized came up with her dog and you know, I thought oh, this is gonna be a nice little playdate. But she immediately sees that my legs are broken out of vasculitis. And so she's like, Oh, what's wrong over there? What's going on? Like, which is first of all a very rude way to begin a conversation. What's wrong? What's wrong with you? It looks so ugly.

Mia Voss 18:56

I know that people are a little off on their game with social being social, like social and socializing because of the pandemic but folks get your shit together. Oh my God.

Brijana Prooker 19:07

Seriously! Yes. Get your shit together. So anyway, well, this is another point too, because when I was in elementary school, throughout college through at least most of my 20s. My disease was pretty much invisible. I hid it under my clothes. Now I don't and that's why this woman was like, Oh my God, what's wrong with you? Because I would hide it under tight jeans tight, wearing anything tight constricts my blood vessels. It makes me break into vasculitis. So I can't wear any tight clothes, but I did because I didn't want anyone to see the purple and the red splotches and this swollenness under clothes. And so I hid it. It wasn't actually invisible. If you saw it, you'd might have that reaction but actually say it but have that kind of shock reaction that that woman had. But I hid it for a very long time, both with clothes and with just not telling anyone how much pain I was in. Because I didn't want to not be taken seriously. So, but everything I was doing to hide it was literally not just causing me pain in the moment but causing permanent blood vessel damage, because every time I get a vasculitis outbreak and I didn't know this at the time, because doctors don't, as much as doctors know now, back then, you know, 10 years ago, there's so much less they didn't know. So it wasn't like I was purposely hurting myself, I was just trying to not

Shit We Don't Talk About - Episode 59

Brijana Prooker - Invisible Disabilities

show the world what you know looks abnormal. But knowing now what I know, every time I get a vasculitis outbreak, my vessels break and so the walls of my blood vessels weakened, and it becomes easier and easier each time for me to get a vasculitis outbreak because they become so weak from all the breakage. So I was literally not just hiding it to you no appear possibly not disabled or I was also literally causing damage to myself. So you know, I turn I think just before I turned 30, but my late 20s I was just like, this is ridiculous. I'm going to take care of myself. My health above all else, I'm going to wear clothes that reveal my legs, I'm gonna wear shorts because getting hot is really bad for my vasculitis to trigger. Wearing anything tight is a trigger and will break my vessels. So pretty much I'm just like, I was done with it. I'm gonna expose my skin to the world. Because that is the least, that keeping my skin cool and exposed and wearing loose clothes is the best thing to do to not get a vasculitis outbreak. So anyway, that was that in the past of trying to hide it. But now you know, for quite a while I have stopped doing that. So yes, I go out and I have vasculitis outbreaks all the time. Mostly people don't mention this but this woman happened to mention it. So she asked what it was, I started to say, Oh, I have an autoimmune disease. I have Sjogren's Syndrome that causes vasculitis. Before I couldn't even explain what that was, oh, I can heal you. I can heal you.

Mia Voss 22:11

She did not tell you about essential oils, did she?

Brijana Prooker 22:16

Yes, she did. Essential oils and energy work. And the green juices and acupuncture is like literally someone who is in chronic pain, everyday pain that causes brain fog. And that affects your ability to think your ability to do any of the things you love, you're going to literally try anything out there from you know, traditional Western medicine to Eastern medicine. And I have tried all of the things you know. I've tried acupuncture and the Reiki and the green juices and the herbs and the tonics. And the thing is, is that there is value in many of these things. But some of them made it worse and some of them made it a little bit better. But same thing goes for Western medicine. And it's pretty much I have this disease, and we need to get rid of the mindset of healing me. There are things that I can do

Shit We Don't Talk About - Episode 59

Brijana Prooker - Invisible Disabilities

to cope, you know whether that's bringing memory foam pillows with me when I sit on a hard surface, whether it is drinking green juice, because it's gonna pull me in the moment and I need to say cool.

Mia Voss 23:21

Or CBD. That's another one.

Brijana Prooker 23:23

Yes, CBD Yeah, like all of these things have value. But even I mean like people telling me to get my dog CBD because I say how panic she gets with the fire attack, fire fireworks, fire literally attacking her. Her poor little system. Oh, her nervous system. It's just like, Yes, I give her CBD every day and it's very good for her and it helps keep her joints good but it does not do anything for her stress. That's another level of stress. And I mean some dogs maybe it helps with their stress for her it does it. There's just this I actually I interviewed the author of a book about chronic illness for Bitch media. Megan O'Rourke on the Invisible Kingdom and she has lived with invisible illness for so long. And she just says that because our own immune system is attacking ourselves with autoimmune disease. There's this thinking that oh, since it's our immune system, we must be able to reverse it ourselves. And then the blame is put on the sufferer as though like you know you're not trying hard enough you're not healing yourself you're not doing this and that.

Mia Voss 24:42

Just do this one thing and....[cross talk]

Brijana Prooker 24:45

Just one essential oil and it's always one more thing and then you try the thing and that doesn't work and then there's another thing and I just really think we need to get away of the thinking that you know we should heal ourselves because it's very maddening because it makes you feel like you are failing when it doesn't work. Why isn't this essential oil working for me? Why isn't acupuncture just getting rid of my disease?

Shit We Don't Talk About - Episode 59

Brijana Prooker - Invisible Disabilities

Mia Voss 25:06

I'm going to reference another one of my episodes that I did recently called The Universe Doesn't Have Your Back. And I know it's a funny title but it was based on a very similar conversation of people that have and it was with my, my friend Drew Lancelot, who's my Podcast Producer, and he also has a podcast called The Anxious Truth. And the point of that being that a lot of this manifest mindset, a lot of it is also rooted in racism, quite frankly, because it's like, Oh, if you just thought of this, you could just kind of you know, you're getting treated poorly, because you don't, you know, thoughts turn to things. That's one and then there's a lot of privilege that's baked into that. And then the other piece is same thing. Similar is talking to people that have anxiety, or OCD or things that are so hard to control. So telling them that they just, CBD, essential oils. And honestly, people just need to stay the fuck out everybody's business. I'm just gonna boil it down for you.

Brijana Prooker 26:08

Well, no, that is a perfect way to boil it down.

Mia Voss 26:09

It is. I mean, empathy is beautiful, and empathy and listening and holding space for someone. Tell me about that. And if you wanted to offer and say, you know, I've tried a lot of different things, but quite frankly, we really need to get away from that. Because then you have to spend your time explaining to that person and making them feel better about why. And let's face it, a lot of it is based in MLM bullshit. And so it's not based on helping you, it's based on making a fucking sale. Oh, girl, I forgot to tell you that this. Everybody knows to wear their headphones for a podcast. But I just want to get this emphatic for you on this point. It's the same thing of this automatic offering. It's offensive. And it's assuming that person has not taken control of their health. And that's not fair.

Brijana Prooker 26:58

Yeah, it's really not fair. And also, as you're saying, there's so much privilege in that. I mean, I literally, I could have bought a house with all of the money that I have spent over the decades, since I was a kid trying all of these things that people told me to try. I mean,

Shit We Don't Talk About - Episode 59

Brijana Prooker - Invisible Disabilities

acupuncture is incredibly expensive, all of these alternative treatments. I mean, that's something that the author of the book that I read that I mentioned, the Invisible Kingdom Megan O'Rourke, she talks about her extreme privilege, and being able to try all of these outlandish treatments and to go to all these expensive doctors.

Mia Voss 27:34

Go to Whole Foods. I mean, my God, you need to take out a mortgage, I just went yesterday was like, Holy shit, this is pricey. And there's wonderful things. But again, a lot of, here's the other piece too.

A lot of this isn't regulated. Right? So there's claims being made on very expensive things that yes, if you're in pain, you'll do anything to not be in pain.

Brijana Prooker 27:57

You really will, you really will. And there's also just such a stigma of being in pain. And whether you should just fight through the pain, or deal with it naturally. I mean, I went until I was 30 years old, and I was repeatedly in and out of the ER and hospitalized because I just thought that, oh, I'm going to tough through the pain. That's just what you do. And a doctor offered me morphine, and I was like, oh my god, this is what it's like to not experience a 10 level of pain every second of every day. Why was I pushing myself? Why was I torturing myself all this time. And it's because you know, doctors are telling me I'm not in pain when I'm telling them I am in pain. And there's this like vicious cycle of trying to prove Okay, well, you know, you don't think I'm in pain. So I'll try to do my things and just like fight through the pain to prove that I can do it. And it's just the same thing with women trying to be polite, because that's been ingrained on us to be polite. It's also been you've been socialized to be okay with being in pain, just like the article I wrote about period pain.

Mia Voss 29:08

Yes, I was just going to bring that up. Oh, my gosh, I love that you took on that topic.

Brijana Prooker 29:14

Shit We Don't Talk About - Episode 59

Brijana Prooker - Invisible Disabilities

Yeah. And it's crazy. It's crazy how controversial it is because so many feminists think the idea of taking time off for your period and being paid for that time off, is gonna make women look weak. And then there's these old school feminists who are like, you know, well, I suffered terribly for decades, and you should to basically. Look, if you go into the Facebook page and make good housekeeping article, it's ridiculous the amount of trolls just in terms of like, turfs, you know the answer that I use inclusive language because not everyone gets a period as a woman. There's non binary people that...

Mia Voss 29:58

Did that make people all butt head?

Brijana Prooker 30:01

Oh, yes, yes. Yeah, there's transphobic comments. And then there's just all these feminists who are just pretty much saying, I suffered horribly. And some of them go on to describe how debilitating their periods were, but they still think that it is so weak and we're just so sensitive nowadays. And I just feel like

Mia Voss 30:26

Just endure it...

Brijana Prooker 30:27

The argument that I suffered, therefore, you should too is just not the argument that we should be having. It should be why did I have to suffer? Why? Just like me? Why did I let myself be in pain and not accept pain medication for almost my you know, from 7 to age 30? Why did I do that to myself?

Mia Voss 30:47

And there's so much stigma around and I know it from being in the Cannabis and CBD world for a while not with an MLM thank goodness that I'm allergic to MLMs basically. But you know, in that world where everybody did kind of try to throw like, oh my god, get off

Shit We Don't Talk About - Episode 59

Brijana Prooker - Invisible Disabilities

your depression medication, like these really dangerous pieces of advice. And I'm going to read this real quick. I'm going to read you to you. Which is by you, some feminists argue that paid time off makes women look weak that will result in less women hired, other rising, I love that, menstruators. And taking us away from our true equality. If parody existed, the special treatment argument might have some validity. Hello. But in a world where inequality does not exist, where women are paid 82 cents on the dollar for every dollar earned by men, by the way, that's white women.

Brijana Prooker 31:37

Yes, exactly yes.

Mia Voss 31:39

Yeah. And we're working in tandem on this and I love it. Why should people who menstruate work through pain just because it's deemed the norm. So that's what I love to because I see what the problem is, the naysayers are like, we need to focus on bigger picture.

If I had to deal with that like you're not focusing on the right thing. But this last sentence to, why should people who menstruate work through pain just because it's deemed the norm? This is what I want to encourage people, this is what all of your writing does to, is to break out of that norm because it's not working. It's not getting us anything except feeling frustrated, because we've been Kow-towing to saying it the right way. Not hurting feelings, right, waiting for everyone to be on board. And you know, this the reason why I started this podcast is going through my menopause experience, and feeling completely ill prepared. And I still do it. It's been the six, seven years that I've been in perimenopause, and then now I'm in full menopause. But I still talk to people and have these conversations of how ill prepared we are and how unformed we are because doctors don't want to either deal with it, or they want to make it the norm. That's my soapbox. I'm sticking to it. Thanks for coming to my TED Talk. Everybody.

Brijana Prooker 32:52

Shit We Don't Talk About - Episode 59

Brijana Prooker - Invisible Disabilities

But you're absolutely correct. I don't know if you read an article in the Washington Post that Jennifer Weiss-Wolf and she had a co-author but it's all about menopause. And the lack of research is just so wrong. Like we just, you should read the article, if you haven't seen it.

Mia Voss 33:11

Oh, gosh, please send it to me. And yes, I'll post the links in all of these links that we're talking about, including the name of the book, including all of the articles that you have written. And I do want to touch on the recent article that you did with a young man who was fired from a job or fired from the play. Because of they didn't realise he was autistic. So I want to touch on that here in a second. But that is, I bet the articles has got it, probably made me all fired up because it's half the population. Yeah, good. Here we go. Or is gonna go through menopause.

Brijana Prooker 33:52

And she's writing a book. And she's a lawyer. So her focus is on the legislation of it.

Mia Voss 34:00

I need to talk to her.

Brijana Prooker 34:01

It's infuriating to read and blood boiling, just in terms of I don't know, the statistics to tell you off the top of my head, but just in terms of, that we just decided, you know, 10 years ago, 20 years ago to stop researching this or to stop giving hormonal replacements, and but why and it just goes into like, they were told it was gonna be so dangerous for us. But that's not actually true. But we haven't done anything to rectify the fact that people think it's dangerous. And it's just infuriating. So I just wanted to, you should read the article because it said, I didn't write it. So I don't have all the facts right in my head, but you need to read it. And it's just such an important topic because...

Mia Voss 34:38

Shit We Don't Talk About - Episode 59

Brijana Prooker - Invisible Disabilities

It really is because you're gonna go through it. I'm going through it and there's silos of silence I like to call it of, you know, this is what I'm going through. So I'm not going to talk about it. And I've been even having conversations with my mom who's 82 now, but her experience wasn't even what her experience was being a Catholic woman in the 60s And then being the oldest of nine children of a Catholic mother in the Midwest and you know what that's like to but definitely on the menopause piece, I think that is just such a thing to be discussed because there's a company I do hormone replacement therapy pellets. Now they're a company called Pellecome. I love them. Please message me if you want information there, Pellecome, I'm not paid to talk about but my hot flashes sure as fuck are because I don't have them anymore. Right. And it was amazing that they did talk about, that they did stop with the hormone replacement therapy under the guise of being safer for women, right? And then just yanked that away from a whole generation of women and gave them nothing. You know, we had a little small period of time then said, Oh, my gosh, no, it's causing cancer, didn't do any of the research.

Brijana Prooker 35:52

And it just stopped at whatever point that they stopped recommending the hormone replacement. All the research, all the funding just stopped. And there could have been so much knowledge that could have been accumulated between now and then that just hasn't been and it's just...

Mia Voss 36:06

It's crazy, and I'll post a link. Dr. Enrique Jacome is the gentleman that came up with this new, the Pellecome is a new way to actually do the insertion for the pellets. But he's a gynecologist and he does talk about that too, of like, yeah, how it just stops. So anyway, and as always, first of all, we're talking with Brijana Prooker. If you're just tuning in, rewind all the way to the beginning. And I also want to encourage if you do not have a uterus, and you do identify as just a white cis hetero male, don't fucking tune out, for God's sake, get in with us. Get in with us, I shouldn't have to tell you this. But you know, and love women. So get your shit together. Anywho.

Shit We Don't Talk About - Episode 59

Brijana Prooker - Invisible Disabilities

Brijana Prooker 36:50

Seriously!

Mia Voss 36:53

That is my PSA of the day. And then tell me about the article that you wrote recently with the young man the actor, let's talk about that. Because that was a bias that was, quite frankly, sounded illegal for him to be fired.

Brijana Prooker 37:10

Yeah, well, he was. He wasn't fired, he was not hired.

Mia Voss 37:15

Oh sorry that was you.

Brijana Prooker 37:20

Yeah, I was fired. Yes. So I used to be an actor and I was fired from a leading role in a play. People had already bought tickets specifically to see me, there was press coming. But I happened to tell the director that I have an invisible illness. And suddenly I wasn't a person, I was a liability. And casting call went out from my role that very night that I had told her that I have this invisible illness. So I was fired. Mickey Rowe, who is an autistic actor, he's legally blind autistic actor. He, what he got himself an audition for Broadway, to play an autistic character. He's autistic, he is legally blind. He didn't have an agent who lived in Seattle. But he googled the casting director, he sent an email, there's a whole long, really cute, charming story of how he got himself an audition to be the lead role in *The Curious Incident of the Dog of the Nighttime* on Broadway. He made it to the final round of casting. But he talked to me and he said that, you know, I was treated very differently than the couple other actors who were in the final running for this role. He said that the casting and producers, director talk to me as though as maybe in the make a wish foundation recipient that, you know, they wanted to give me an experience of auditioning for Broadway, rather than, no, I'm talented, I did the work. I'm here I'm in the final round of casting. He said that they would just pull him aside and talk to him as though he wasn't really in the running,

Shit We Don't Talk About - Episode 59

Brijana Prooker - Invisible Disabilities

even though he eventually he did get the part on Broadway. But he got the part, he got a glowing review in the New York Times for doing it. And he became the first autistic actor to play the statistic role. He didn't see **IQ stage**[unclear, 39:22] and the New York Times reviewed it and that glowing reviews. So obviously, he was talented enough to play the part. But he said that, he kept getting pulled aside and having all these very long exhaustive conversations, which for an autistic person is very draining to make small chat, to just be chattering rather than actually auditioning rather than doing the work that he can do, is talented at doing. But he said that it was like they were trying to make sure he was autistic, but not too autistic, which is very infuriating and very heartbreaking to hear him telling me that. **Mia:** that is heartbreaking]. I read his book and I just had to tell his story because it's just, it's almost like Broadway wanted to be seen as being inclusive as having auditioned an actually autistic person. And as long as they say, we auditioned him, he made the final callbacks, you know, yea us you know, we're checking that diversity box. You know, the show actually closed on Broadway before anything happened with that. But then he was asked to audition for the National Broadway tour. And again, he made the final auditions, but they were double casting the role. And none of the actors were actually autistic or actually disabled. So I wanted to tell his story, because it's infuriating. And Broadway really needs to be more inclusive generally, I mean, in terms of race, in terms of gender, in terms of all kinds of inclusivity but often we don't talk about disability when we talk about diversity and in conversation.

Mia Voss 41:10

Such a great point, Brijana. Yes, and because there's that, it's not a fine line, but they mistook pandering for diversity. Right? So they're wasting his time and what an interesting point you're right. As far as the process that he had to go through this aimless chatter, just to get it to verify if he is and that must have just been, I could just feel his energy must have been draining, and it must have been discouraging, that hurts my heart.

Brijana Prooker 41:38

Shit We Don't Talk About - Episode 59

Brijana Prooker - Invisible Disabilities

It really does. I mean, just you know, you and I have talked about being empathic, like how much energy it can take to have these kinds of conversations, and to take on other people's pain and it can be just very, very draining even as non-autistic person, but just to add all of everything that comes with being autistic onto that and how draining it is. And he just told me that it was almost like they wanted him to prove that he was so called high functioning autism, which is just a terrible label to begin with. It's just horrible. It's just that you're autistic or not autistic and let's stop putting these judgments on...

Mia Voss 42:18

Labels, category.

Brijana Prooker 42:19

Labels categorizing your disability or your just humaneness. It's just really, it's really heartbreaking to hear. And I wanted to write about it.

Mia Voss 42:30

Thank you for that reminder. Yes. And thank you for that reminder about that distinction, because I know and I am constantly learning, there are just labels that we put on things to soften or to pigeonhole people as well. And that's such a great reminder of like using things like that, oh, but they are XYZ, they are high functioning, oh, but you can't tell. I mean, the pressure of that kind of thing. I went to this event yesterday, it was beautiful presentation here in Colorado, and it was called the Mudra presentation, the family were all from India. So that was their dance company. And it was a very diverse, though, it was just beautiful. And the one thing I loved is there was a young man they brought on stage had to be about 14 or 15. And he had one of the instructors with him. And I believe that he could, that he visually impaired and just the way she held him and his feet were stomping and he was singing, and does that representation of this young man's beautiful voice and message that he had to be heard because I believe he, I don't believe that he actually spoke that much. But when he heard the singing, I just could not take my eyes off of seeing him be able to express his talent. And that they gave him that space and brought him out there. So that representation pieces is so incredibly important. So thank you for bringing that up

Shit We Don't Talk About - Episode 59

Brijana Prooker - Invisible Disabilities

about him. And we're going to start wrapping up but I wanted to bring up something that I kind of put together for you that I love. I saw in one of your, one of the things that you said because of chronic illness.

You said this in your interview and I want to post that with the two young ladies talking about the not being nice article that you wrote. Yeah. Oh, in Elle, I'm going to, you all have to read this every age because these young women are 30 years younger than me and we're all still learning a lot of the same shit that society is on their bullshit all the time, whether it was before social media or not. But I love that you stated because of chronic illness, you only write about the things that you care about because it takes too much energy out of you. And I just want to just tell you how much I appreciate that you've been able to parlay a lot of your pain and I'll post a link to that. I actually interviewed your mom. That's how we, I didn't realise that we knew each other. I used to read [cross talk] your mom's show about like 10 years ago. So shout out to your mom. And if you like we can mention her name or at least your experience. And you know, they made a Lifetime Movie Channel out of it. So in addition to what you're going through as a child, I see why it was put on the back burner to figure out about your pain.

Brijana Prooker 45:20

Yeah. Yeah. And yeah, as you say, I only have so much energy in a day, there's only so much writing I can do without being just in unbearable amount of pain. But, you know, I do have a voice and I want to use it for what matters to me. And what's most important, whether that's talking about domestic violence or chronic illness, chronic pain, disability, gender, obviously, when it's run the gamut today, yes, I write. There's quite a few things I'm passionate about. But yes, I only really want to, because I do devote so much time and energy to these things. It's not just an easy piece, I'm gonna write off quickly, I want to do all the research and talk to all the people and make sure that I'm talking to a diverse group of people. So it takes a lot of energy. I want to write about the things I care about. I pick and choose very carefully.

Mia Voss 46:15

Shit We Don't Talk About - Episode 59

Brijana Prooker - Invisible Disabilities

Yes, and I was working out and listening to that I literally like stopped to ran over to my computer and wrote down that this that really struck me and I just think that's so beautiful that you've like, it's parlayed that into using your voice and then using your voice carefully and when you do speak, you really mean it. And I love that you cover women in media, theatre arts, accessibility, gender bias in medicine, health, chronic pain, disability, feminism, domestic violence, gender, female leaders and politics. So we're gonna post some links to that. You just finished an article for Shondaland as well. I mean, you're in it.

Brijana Prooker 46:53

I did, it came out toda. I just never know when it's gonna come out and it came out today. So it's very exciting. I interviewed Broadway star Ali Stroker, who was the first person in a wheelchair to go on Broadway. And then she made history once again by becoming the first person in a wheelchair to win the Tony Award. And she won for playing Ito Annie in Oklahoma. And I talked to her for Shondaland about a children's book that she wrote called Ali and The Sea Stars and it's about a girl with a disability who puts on a play on the beach with their friends and so it's giving disability visibility in her book and then obviously by her being on stage it's giving disability visibility too. You know, people haven't seen themselves on stage or haven't seen themselves represented in a book.

Mia Voss 47:45

Which I love you giving Disability Visibility. That is fabulous. And by the way, thanks for the grace and I'll accept that story there a little bit ago. If you're like No, that was me that got fired.

Brijana Prooker 47:48

[laughs] I was the one who got fired. He didn't get hired. I was wondering.

Mia Voss 48:03

Awesome, sweetie, thank you so much. Where can we find you and again, I will post all the links in the podcast but tell us where you would like for us to go follow you.

Shit We Don't Talk About - Episode 59

Brijana Prooker - Invisible Disabilities

Brijana Prooker 48:10

You can follow me on Instagram @Briprooker because for some reason, Instagram said that my full name Brijana was in use, which it wasn't but I went with @Briprooker because that's all they would let me do. I'm also on Twitter @Briprooker. I'm on Facebook as my full name Brijana Prooker, LinkedIn, and just check me out on Brijana Prooker

Mia Voss 48:35

Yes, I love that Twitter's been great to follow you on that too. One last question. And we're gonna get out of here. Tell me what your favorite swear word or swear phrase is?

Brijana Prooker 48:46

Oh my goodness. I mean, I don't use swear phrases like very often so when I do it's like very serious. Just kind of the thing of like, I don't write very many articles a year but when I write about it, it's something important. So I would say probably fuck off. It would be my favorite.

Mia Voss 49:10

That's all you need to say. You really, really, really mean it.

Brijana Prooker 49:15

Yes, exactly.

Mia Voss 49:18

All right, honey, thank you for joining us today and sharing all your good info. I so appreciate you.

Brijana Prooker 49:23

Thank you. I so appreciate you too. I'm so grateful that we got to chat and discuss all these really important things.

Shit We Don't Talk About - Episode 59

Brijana Prooker - Invisible Disabilities

Mia Voss 49:28

I love serendipity. Thank you sweetie.

Brijana Prooker 49:32

Thank you very much Mia.

Mia Voss 49:34

Take care. You will definitely want to follow Brijana and check out her writing. All the links are in the show notes at www.shitwedon'ttalkaboutpodcast.com. If you liked this episode, please subscribe and leave a review especially if it's a good one. If you really liked the podcast and you want to show it head on over to www.shitwedon'ttalkaboutpodcast.com. Click on the patrons button and become a full time supporter of the podcast. And if you want your very own podcast and you don't know where to start, go to www.helix-interactive.com. Get yourself some and tell them that Mia sent you. Thanks for tuning in. We'll see you next time. Bye