

STL Ep 9: Chrissy Mackey

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SPEAKERS

Chrissy Mackey, Amanda Reavey



Amanda Reavey 00:02

Hello, my name is Amanda Reavey. Welcome to The Stereotype Life, where we talk about mental health, disability, and access in higher education. We release new episodes every other Wednesday at 12pm Central. So please subscribe on iTunes or wherever you get your podcasts and visit www.stereotype.life for this episode's transcript and additional resources. Today, I'm excited to introduce Chrissy Mackey. Chrissy is a PhD candidate in Industrial and Organizational Psychology at Ashford University. Her research focuses on applied gaming, specifically tabletop role-playing games such as "Dungeons and Dragons." Games provide a completely safe world in which to explore a different aspect of life and culture. In particular, role-playing games provide instant feedback regarding one's choices. For more information on how she uses Dungeons and Dragons and other games for training and education, please visit her Instagram at [@improved_initiative](https://www.instagram.com/improved_initiative), or her website, plus5initiative.com. And the "five" is the number "5" and not spelled out. So hi, Chrissy, thanks for being here today.



Chrissy Mackey 01:16

Hey, thanks for having me.



Amanda Reavey 01:18

Would you share a little bit of your background? I know through emails we had talked about lupus, a chronic autoimmune disease. Could you explain more about what that is?



Chrissy Mackey 01:28

Sure. Lupus is a systemic disease that can affect every system of your body. It brings with it inflammation, and chronic pain, and chronic fatigue, and a bunch of other little odds and ends here and there. No two cases are alike. So it's actually really difficult to diagnose. And they like to call lupus "The Great Imitator" because it mimics so many other diseases. I was diagnosed by process of elimination, essentially. They didn't know what was wrong, and the last RA specialist that I went to said, "Well, I don't know what else to do. Your numbers, your inflammation numbers, are really high. Let me prescribe you this medication we give to people who have lupus and see how you respond." And I responded. So that was how I got my diagnosis.



Amanda Reavey 02:13

I imagine that really affects you as a student, and also, like, the stress of navigating that. I mean, I don't know if you were a student whilst trying to navigate what you had. But it sounds really stressful. How did it affect you to also navigate life as a student?



Chrissy Mackey 02:34

Well, it was really weird because all of the autoimmune disorders I have were triggered from a car accident that happened in 2013. And when I started noticing I was having problems. I started talking to our Disabilities Access Center. And I was like, "Look, I have problems but we don't know what they are. I've been to like all of these different specialists. We can't figure it out." And it was probably – I think it was four years before I finally had a diagnosis that I could send them and say, "This is what they say it is." So for four years, we were playing this game of, "We're just going to put down general disability," you know, kind of thing. Because they had to have something to write down. But without knowing, you know, you don't know. And I think that's probably one of the things that I don't know how to fix it. But that's one of the things I think really needs to be addressed in a higher education setting.



Amanda Reavey 03:25

Did you feel supported by the Resource Center, Accessibility Resource Center? How did – like, how do you know what accommodations and things to ask for? Or do they help you figure that out?

 Chrissy Mackey 03:39

They actually just gave me an accommodation. They gave me the accommodation for having an extra day and a half or so to turn in my work. So – and like our due dates for Tuesdays and Thursdays. So it's like – or Mondays and Thursdays. So instead of having my work due on Monday, it was due Tuesday, and instead of it being due Thursday, it was due Friday. So I had, like, the extra day to complete assignments and everything, which did actually help.



Amanda Reavey 04:05

That's cool. I actually get extra time as an accommodation as well. And sometimes there can be a stigma about that. Like, how do you explain that need to professors in a way that – or you just explain it and there you go. And, you know, because it's an accommodation they have to accommodate you.

 Chrissy Mackey 04:28

Correct. I know that with – I don't know how it is with other schools, but I know with Ashford they send an email because I am copied on it to the instructor for the course saying you have a student in your class that has this accommodation. And that's it, you know? And they just, they're like, "Okay, I received the email. I know that the student has this accommodation, and we're good." And we just go from there.



Amanda Reavey 04:51

Cool. I know for myself, sometimes I do approach the professor ahead of time, and I kind of have to self-advocate a little bit. So that's great that they're just like, "Okay, that's what we got to do. So let's do it." Is there anything that you wish professors did differently? Or how can we better support students who suffer from lupus or other kinds of chronic illnesses?

 Chrissy Mackey 05:17

Well, again, I can't speak for other institutions. My school is online. So they have

requirements that you log in to the student portal to the classroom every seven days and make a post. And right now, I'm in the doctoral phase, or the dissertation phase of my doctorate's degree, and I don't necessarily have something to post every week because I'm working on putting together this massive document and trying to get everything straightened out. However, they have this requirement that you post every seven days, even though my accommodation gives me an extra day on everything. So if I don't log in and post I get dinged for attendance. And part of me is thinking at this point, why am I even required for attendance if I'm completely self-sustaining in this particular avenue of trying to complete a dissertation? So I think, I mean, I understand that you need to have a certain number of hours logged for doing your dissertation. But at this point, I'm four years into my dissertation. It's obvious that I'm working on it. So I don't know because I don't know how the system is, but I just know that the attendance requirement doesn't match with the accommodation.



Amanda Reavey 06:41

That really highlights, like, the issues related to the perception of attendance, which I know we kind of talked about in emails as well. And I guess, what policies or things could we do as instructors? Maybe putting something in the syllabus so that we could show flexibility? Or how – other ways that we can engage in the coursework that not necessarily like, "Oh, you showed up here's your post" or things like that?



Chrissy Mackey 07:17

Yeah, see, I don't have any suggestions. I was trying to think I was like, "Well, you know, like a once a week check in is fine." But does it have to be, you know, every seven days you check in with this and all this other stuff. It's like, I know that my dissertation chair would like me to check in on Mondays to give him my schedule for the week, but I never know what my schedule for the week is because I could say, "These are the things I want to accomplish by the end of the week," and then get hit with a flare. And then it's like, well, I didn't get any of that done. And now I have anxiety about it because I didn't do what I said I was going to do. And I think that's actually more detrimental to even mental health because, now you're trying to make commitment. And, now you have to worry about your health. And, now you have to worry about the fact that you're not making these commitments. But you don't have a way to make the commitments because your health is, you know, tanked or whatever. And some people understand. And some people don't. And you just – and you kind of have to guess. Is this going to be the understanding one, or is this gonna be the one who's gonna be like, "Well, you've been making a lot of excuses this term." You know, it's just like, "Well, no, I'm not making excuses." I'm just, you know. I was in a flare for three months at the beginning of quarantine. So, you know, it's like, what

do you do? I was sick every day with something different. It wasn't like, "Oh, today I'm having like, you know, an inflammation flare and it's taking all my energy." It was just like, literally every day there was something different that was hurting or inflamed or whatever. And I got to the point where I'm like, "I can't live like this." You know, because you also have the stress of school. So.



Amanda Reavey 08:56

Sounds like, as instructors, we just need to have more patience and more compassion and empathy for students and what they may or may not be going through. Whether they share that experience with you or not is really none of their business or our business. So. Could you explain a little bit about what you're studying? What is industrial organizational psychology and how did you become interested in it?



Chrissy Mackey 09:25

Well, my standard answer for "What is Industrial and Organizational Psychology?" goes back to the movie "Office Space." And I just I usually ask people, "Have you seen office space?" "Yes." "The Bob." That is what I do. I am the Bob. "What is it you say, you do here," you know kind of thing. And it's just like – industrial and organizational psychology focuses on how to improve productivity and engagement from your employees without treating them like machines. You treat them like people. You treat them with respect and they will perform. You know, that's like the standard idea of what we're doing. So, it's gone through many, many changes. Like, theories and such like that have evolved over the 150 years that it's been in existence – 150+ years it's been in existence. And the one that seems to work the best is "employee as human." You know, treating an employee as a human who has needs, who has goals and desires, and if you focus on working with the employee to accomplish what the employee wants to accomplish, by doing that, it will help you to accomplish what your business wants to accomplish.



Amanda Reavey 10:46

That sounds like it could definitely apply to the classroom, too. Like respecting students and if you respect the students they will perform if you realize that they're human. They figure out what it is they want to learn. Then you facilitate a classroom where they can learn that and accomplish those things. That just seemed very – it should be universal, what you're saying.



Chrissy Mackey 11:14

Like common sense.



Amanda Reavey 11:15

Right? I know you also studied gaming. How does that apply to industrial and organizational psychology?



Chrissy Mackey 11:28

Well, the human brain is really interesting. And some of what I talk about with the gaming aspect applies to, like, neuropsychology and such like that, too. Um, one of the best study methods that I have seen in my research, especially just, like, a couple days ago when I was working on my lit review, was about using what they call a "2010 Study Method." Where you focus your study for 20 minutes on whatever it is you're studying. And then you get up, you walk away and go do something completely not related for 10 minutes. You come back and you focus your study for 20 minutes. And then you get up and walk away and do something unrelated for 10 minutes. And then you come back and go over everything that you just studied. And you'll find that it actually helps to establish long-term memory, and, you know, neural pathways and patterns and such for remembering what it is that you're working on. So it's better than cramming, really. Um, but that same thing applies to problem solving. You're sitting there working on a problem and you just can't figure it out. Get up and walk away from it for like 10 minutes or whatever. Go do something else. When you come back, you'll probably sit down look at the problem go, "Oh, I didn't see that before." And there's your answer. Because your brain is still processing that subconsciously while you're doing other things. And it gives your brain a chance to stop actively focusing on whatever it is it's focusing on and kind of mull it over and turn it around and such on its own.



Amanda Reavey 13:14

That sounds – oh, go ahead.



Chrissy Mackey 13:16

I was just gonna say – and gaming is one of those things where it's like, we're working on this problem. Okay, we can't figure this out. Let's go play a game. Because it's not anything related to what you're doing.



Amanda Reavey 13:26

Mmm, yeah. Gives give the brain a break. Sometimes I sit there for so long until the words look funny. And I'm like, "Why don't I just get up and go do something else and come back?" Because I don't even know if I'm reading English anymore.



Chrissy Mackey 13:42

I've been there. Sometimes I'm not reading English. I'm reading statistics.



Amanda Reavey 13:47

Oh, that's even worse.



Chrissy Mackey 13:48

I know, right?



Amanda Reavey 13:53

In your bio, you had mentioned Dungeons and Dragons. So I want to talk a little bit about how it can be used for training and education. But first – I mean, I know what D&D is. But for those who might not know what that is, could you kind of explain what it is?



Chrissy Mackey 14:12

Sure. Dungeons and Dragons is, at its core, a fantasy role-playing game. It involves imagination and creativity, creative writing, problem-solving, and a whole bunch of other skills all rolled into a two to four hour chunk of time that you get to spend with your friends, rolling dice and making choices based on those dice rolls.



Amanda Reavey 14:38

And how can that be used for training and education?



Chrissy Mackey 14:44

Thousands of ways. My dissertation study is actually focusing on skill transference. I'm doing a qualitative study in which I'm going to have – basically a qualitative case study in

which I'm going to have some people playing Dungeons and Dragons to work on specific skills that they want to work on. And we're going to journal about how they're able to take those skills and use them in their working life, or how they're not able to use them in their working life or whatever. So we're going to focus on their abilities – their perceived abilities to transfer those skills. Other ways that you can use Dungeons and Dragons for training is time management or resource management. If you want to be the kind of game master that makes the wizards and spellcasters count out every little reagent, that's a good way to teach about resource management because you only have a limited number of those reagents that you can use to cast your spells. I've yet to play with a game master who did that, but, you know, I know there are some out there. You can use it for collaborative problem-solving, because you've got at least four people sitting around the table who have the same goal. Their ultimate goal is to defeat whatever problem, essentially, they have, and how they work together is going to either help or hinder their ability to complete that problem. And that collaborative problem-solving also works things like social skills and your ability to interact and negotiate. Just, in general, people management because somebody has to emerge as the leader of the team in order to get things moving. And there's just, like, little things here and there that can be done that you can focus on as a way to train certain aspects of leadership. I can go on and on and on about this for hours.



Amanda Reavey 16:56

Well, no, that sounds great. Like, you could really get to know your employees or your students, what their learning styles and management styles are. And, not only that, but for students who may be on the quieter side, it would be a low risk way of them practicing how to be more assertive.



Chrissy Mackey 17:22

There's an excellent dissertation by Dr. Nick Yee. I believe it's from 2007 or 2008. The title of it is "Gaming the Quantified Self." And it actually uses World of Warcraft as its base. But essentially, that dissertation is a study on a person who was like a meek kind of a person, who was not very assertive when it came to leading meetings. And they played a character in World of Warcraft that was very assertive, very much a leader, and over, I think it was a six month period, they documented the change in that person's ability to get up and be assertive as a leader for meetings.



Amanda Reavey 18:03

That is so cool. What are some other benefits that maybe people wouldn't think of for using D&D and other games for that purpose?



Chrissy Mackey 18:17

Well, I'm thinking – so from an educational standpoint, if you start children – because the game, when Gary Gygax invented the game, his children were, like, six and eight at the time. And he used it for them, to teach them things like mathematics, creative writing, creative problem-solving, storytelling, things like that. These are all skills that we use, even as adults in our business life. Because, I mean, if you're a salesperson, you have to know how to spin a story in order for your sales pitch to be convincing to whomever you're talking to. You have to know improv. You have to know how to think fast and articulate what you need to get across to people. So, playing a game like this can actually work social skills, especially if that's specifically what you're training. Then you as the facilitator of the game, the game master, can tell people. You know, they say, "Well, I'm going to bluff my way out of this." Okay, great. What do you say? And you make them tell you whatever it is they're going to say. It can be the worst excuse ever or whatever, but when they roll the die, if it comes up as a 20, they obviously succeed because 20 is the highest you can get on the roll. So it's like they automatically succeed even if it was the worst thing ever. But the facilitator has the opportunity to sit there and go, "I don't know that wasn't really all that convincing but, man, I'm late for lunch, just go," you know kind of thing, and you can give them instant feedback on how well they handled the situation.



Amanda Reavey 20:01

I never thought of it that way. Like, you don't just say, "Oh, you rolled a 20. So you – that was a great excuse." It's like you can be honest about the kind of feedback that you get.



Chrissy Mackey 20:16

Yeah, I do it all the time. As a GM. Drives my players crazy sometimes, but you know.



Amanda Reavey 20:23

Honesty, best policies. Isn't that what they say?



Chrissy Mackey 20:27

Something like that.



Amanda Reavey 20:30

So for those who might want to implement games into their training or their classroom, what advice do you have? How would we do that?



Chrissy Mackey 20:41

The very first thing you need to do is sit down and decide what it is you want to get, you want the students or the employees or whatever to get from the experience. Are you wanting them to learn resource management? If that is the one and only goal, then you probably want to look at things like Settlers of Catan, or there's a DC deck building game that I love called DC Heroes. And it's just – you have to manage your resources in order to succeed in the game. If you're looking for something that all you're doing is collaborative problem-solving, then you probably want to play something like Pandemic, probably not right now, in a pandemic, but Pandemic is actually a really, really good way to use strategy – collaborative strategy, first of all, but also collaborative problem solving. Because you have to figure out how you're going to stop all these viruses from exploding everywhere and you're on a limited time to do it. So the first thing to do is sit down and write the goals for what you want to do. And then you start looking at games that you can play that will address those goals. And you really kind of have to break down what it is the game is doing in order to figure it out. So it's – it can be easy, but it can also be really difficult because you really, really, really have to get in there and think.



Amanda Reavey 22:21

I'm thinking of lesson planning. It's really like lesson planning. What is the objective? And then, what game are you doing? Or what assignment are you assigning and why? What do you want to do you hope or it's almost like, let's scaffold these games or figure out the game that scaffold it in a way to reach whatever your goal is.



Chrissy Mackey 22:46

Correct. I know that in the past I have offered people lesson plans based on the child's age and grade level from Minecraft because you can do a lot with Minecraft to teach different types of skills. Like you can teach mathematics, you can teach spatial relation and geometry. You can teach history, research, all that kind of stuff. Science, like circuitry, kind of science. Chemistry, to some extent.



Amanda Reavey 23:23

Is there anything you wish people understood about games and training (in using it for training or education). Is there anything we haven't really talked about? I know one thing that I sometimes – feedback I get is like, "Why would I do that? It's so nerdy."



Chrissy Mackey 23:43

Well when you break it down, everything, everything is nerdy.



Amanda Reavey 23:47

Yeah



Chrissy Mackey 23:47

Because everybody has their own individual passions, and those passions might not be somebody else's passion. And so that person will just sit there and look at you like, "You're such a nerd," or whatever, because that's your geek-out point. And that's completely fine. If we all had the same interests, life would be very boring. So, first of all, I would never tell somebody that they're a nerd just because they like something that is traditionally nerdy. When people say, "You're such a nerd for liking D&D," I'm like, "Yeah, tell that to Vin Diesel's face, why don't you?" Or call Urban or Dame Maggie's or Dame – [laughs] the other one that's not Maggie Smith.



Amanda Reavey 24:27

Not like, Judi Dench, or?



Chrissy Mackey 24:29

Yes, Dame Judi Dench. Tell it to Dame Judi Dench, because when they were working on Chronicles of Riddick, I think it was, Vin Diesel and Karl Urban were playing off to the side between takes. And Dame Judi Dench came by and she's like, "What are you guys doing?" And they were all like, "We're playing D&D," you know, kind of thing and she was like, "And you didn't invite me?" And they're like, "You know how to play?" She goes, "No, not at all, but teach me."



Amanda Reavey 24:55

That is so cool. I didn't know that story.



Chrissy Mackey 24:58

Yes, they played D&D with Dame Judi Dench, so. Basically, don't knock it till you try it. I mean, it's a great way – I have a series of articles that I wrote for LinkedIn on – they're on my website, too – on establishing the character of yourself. And it was one of the things that I learned in my undergrad speech course, just straight off the bat: develop the character of yourself. And that's the best way to get over stage fright. Because you're not you, you're the character of you. So all the anxiety that you have about people seeing you like this, suddenly, it's not you they're seeing like this. It's the character of you. And I go through step-by-step how to design the character of you, so that you have this persona that you can take on. And you can do all of these amazing things because this is your persona. And eventually what will happen is you will see that it's not just a persona, it really is who you are. And you will come into your own and you will be the amazing person that everybody else knows you can be.



Amanda Reavey 26:10

That's amazing. If people want to check out those articles, where should they go?



Chrissy Mackey 26:15

I do have them on my website, which is probably the easiest way to see them.



Amanda Reavey 26:20

Okay, great. And I will link it in the show notes as well, then. Thank you so much for joining me in this interview it was so much fun. I can't wait to get together with my friends and be like, "Hey, did you know about this about D&D? So thank you so much,



Chrissy Mackey 26:41

Sure, not a problem.



Amanda Reavey 26:44

Thank you for listening to this week's episode of Stereotype Life. If you enjoyed this episode, please leave a review on iTunes and consider supporting us at www.stereotype.life/donate. Lastly, this episode's transcript was created by Frankie Martinez and the music titled "Fresh Fallen Snow" was created by Chris Hogan. We are always looking for more team members. So if you're interested, please contact us via our website. Until next time, have a good one. Bye!