

# Unpacking the Social Model of Disability and disability rights

Jax Jacki Brown

# Acknowledgment of country

First Peoples Disability Network Australia





Disabled people are not wrong for the world we live in; the world is simply not yet right for us!

- Who are you?
- Name and Pronoun
- What you are hoping to get out of this session

1 in 5 Australians have a disability, 1 in 4 if including people with mental health issues.

We are all only temporally non-disabled. We will all age; our bodies & senses & minds will change.

90% of people will acquire an impairment.

# Media representations of disability

- 18-22% of Australians have a disability
- Seeing Ourselves: Reflections on diversity in Australian TV drama by Screen Australia (2016) found that only 4% of main characters had a disability and were played by people without disability.
- Disability is depicted in stereotypical ways, as either a terrible tragedy or triumph in the face of adversity, an inspiration.



- Tragic or inspirational
- Super-fit paralympian
- ‘Better of dead than disabled’



The villain in films often has some type of impairment as a symbol for evil-bitter and twisted

# The impacts of disability stereotypes

- Internalised ableism
- Difficulty imagining an alternative future
- Disability as 'other' which creates a distance from impairment
- Avoidance/rejection of the disability community
- What happens if you acquire a disability? How might these societal ideas impact you?



# Different ways of viewing disability

## Medical model of disability:

Impairment is the focus and cure, treatment or eradication is the approach



# The social model of disability

**Impairment:** the actual functional limitation within a person.



**Disability:** ‘the loss or limitation to take part in life on an equal level with others due to physical and social barriers’ (Disabled Persons International).

# The social model of disability

Disability is 'the interaction between persons with impairments & attitudinal & environmental barriers that hinders their full & effective participation in society on an equal basis with others' (UN General Assembly 2007)

- What's wrong with the SITUATION/environment
- Disability becomes about rights, not illness or capacity.

# Rethinking disability through a social model lens

The term **disability** becomes a **political term** which refers to disability disadvantage.

The Social Model asks us to **change the built environment** as well **challenge the stereotypes** of disability that arise by this lack of access.



# Defiant Lives



Content warning for sexual assault

Questions/comments?

# Structural Exclusion

The historical failure to take disability into account when designing buildings has resulted in **our structural exclusion from many public areas of life.**

In Victoria:

- Employment – half that of people without disability
- Education – completed VCE 24% compared to 46%
- Housing – 2x's more pwds live in public housing.
- Transport – 1.2 million pwds reported difficulty
- 7,000 young people in age-care nationally

These structural barriers shape the way disability is still perceived as 'in need of help'/pity and perpetuate stereotypes within people's minds.



# **Disability is a socio-political issue, not a personal problem**

Australia is one of the worst places in the world's developed nations to have a disability, ranking 21 out of 29 of the OECD countries.

45% of people with disabilities live on or below the poverty line

## Unpacking Ableism

Ableism is a set of assumptions (conscious or unconscious) and practices that promote the differential or unequal treatment of people because of actual or presumed disabilities (Campbell, 2001).

Ableism is ideas, practices, institutions and social relations that presume ablebodiedness, and by so doing, construct persons with disabilities as marginalised . . . and largely invisible “others” (Chouinard, 1997).

# The Disability Rights Movement: A gendered focus

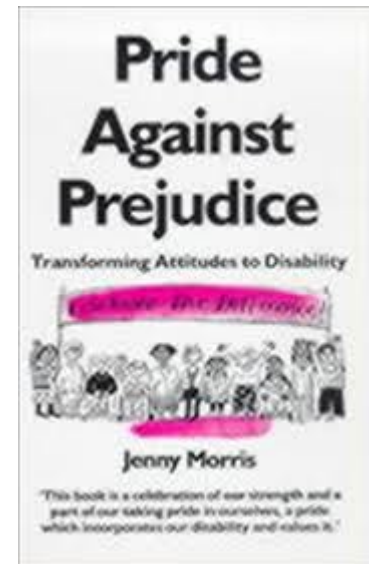
The focus of the movement was initially on getting people out of institutions and then later on barriers to employment, transport and buildings and accessible housing, those external barriers which were historically of concern to men

When women with disabilities raised issues of bodily autonomy, parenting and relationships they were told that these were private matters and not political issues

Mike Oliver: 'disability is wholly and exclusively social disablement has nothing to do with the body. Indeed, to dwell on impairment in Disability Studies, and in the disabled people's movement, was thought hazardous because it was in danger of giving credence to the medical preoccupation with bodily matters, deflecting attention away from what should be at the centre: disability as a form of social oppression'



‘Gender has been invisible and the experience of disabled men has been taken as representative of disabled experience in general’(Morris, 1993).



# Disability Feminist responses

‘Experiences of the body should have a place in Disability Studies and disability politics, their exclusion was tantamount to a patriarchal rejection of ‘personal’ experiences: there is a tendency within the social model of disability to deny the experience of our own bodies. Relationships are just as important in our lives as if we can get on a bus!’ (Jenny Morris)

## Disability feminism

‘One way to think about a feminist theory of disability is to say that it investigates how culture saturates the particular bodies with meanings and probes the consequences of those meanings. A feminist disability approach fosters complex understandings of the cultural history of the body and addresses such broad feminist concerns as the unity of the category *woman*, the status of the lived body, the politics of appearance, the medicalization of the body, the privilege of normalcy, multiculturalism, sexuality, the social construction of identity’

(Rosemarie Garland-Thomson)





# Key issues of disability feminism

- Disabled bodies are pathologised and medicalised
- The sterilisation of women and girls with disabilities
- Sexuality-environmental, interpersonal and educational barriers
- Disability is desirable-An object of pity vs an object of desire
- Decreased likelihood of hot encounters or long-term healthy relationships
- Mothering, the choice to have children-1/3 of our kids removed from our care, ten times higher than non-disabled women for women with intellectual disabilities
- Reproductive freedom must include the right *to* have children and be provided with support
- The selective abortion of disabled fetuses, genetic screening in Assistive Reproductive Technology.

# The significance of language

- Person first language- 'person with disability' is really common in Australia.
- In the UK identity first language 'disabled person' is the preferred term as it refers to the disability rights movement and the social model of disability.
- The issues with handicapable, differently abled, special needs. Can you think of others?

# Not special needs video

- <https://youtu.be/WPcCugPHHSI>

You get proud by practicing



**This is possibly the most important thing anyone will ever tell you.**

**The journey towards disability pride is long, and hard, and you have to practice every single day.**

‘You’ve got to declare yourself disabled and beautiful!’



~ Matt Frazer ~



jaxjackibrown



jaxjackibrown@gmail.com

Facebook: Introducing Studies in Ableism: The Place for Dynamic Courses!

Future Learn: 'Disability and a good life' courses

<https://www.futurelearn.com/courses/thinking-through-disability>

Sins Invalid: <https://youtu.be/WPcCugPHSI>