

Ableism: What It Is and Why It Matters To Everyone

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Outline

- Definition of ableism and its different forms
- How ableism contributes to issues impacting the disability community
- How to advocate for positive change on those areas impacting the disability community.

Thoughts on Language

- Language is a big debate in the disability community.
- Some people prefer Person-First Language- (ex: Person With A Disability). They feel their disability is a part of them, but doesn't define who they are.
- Some people prefer Identity First Language (ex: Disabled Person, Autistic). They take pride in having a disability and consider it part of their identity.
- I prefer Identity First language so that is what I'm going to use in the presentation.

Definition of Ableism

- Discrimination or prejudice against individuals with disabilities- noun (Merriam-Webster)
- First known use- 1981.
- Leads to disability being seen as *THE OTHER* and something to be overcome.
- Is it really that simple? Discrimination and prejudice against any group has many different forms and causes.

Where Does Ableism Come From?

- Disability history
- Lack of knowledge and understanding of the varied experience of disability
- Outdated stereotypes about what disabled people can achieve
- Pity and inspiration
- Official and unofficial practices and policies

Some (Very Brief!) Disability History

- 350 BC: Aristotle: "Those born deaf become senseless and incapable of reason."
- 1793: Mentally ill in Paris asylum unchained. Some had been chained for over 30 years. Similar things still occur in many countries today
- 1907: Indiana enacts a forced sterilization law for "confirmed idiots, imbeciles, and rapists." 24 states enact similar laws. Ruled constitutional in *Buck v. Bell*. Last known case happened in 1981.
- 1930s: Around 200,000 disabled people, "the unworthy," were killed in the Nazi T4 program.
- 1962: Ed Roberts fights for admission to UC Berkley. "Helpless Cripple Goes to College" was the newspaper headline. Originally placed in the infirmary. He helps start independent living movement.
- 1990: The Americans With Disabilities Act (ADA) is signed into law providing broad civil rights protection for disabled people.
- Source: National Consortium on Leadership and Disability for Youth (NCLD)

Lack of Knowledge and Understanding

- Disabled people are the world's largest minority group at about 1 billion people. (Around 15% of world population) (United Nations)
- 56 million Americans with disabilities. 12.5% of disabled people have a bachelor's degree or higher. (12.2% in Texas) 31.5% without a disability have a bachelor's degree. (28% in Texas) (American Community Survey)
- The overwhelming majority of disabilities are invisible.
- Approximately 43.7 million Americans, 1 in 5 (or 1 in 4), experience mental health conditions in a given year (National Alliance on Mental Illness, NAMI).
- Lack of knowledge about cost and ease of disability accommodations.
- Disabled people also desire a social life and are sexual beings.

Outdated Policies and Practices

- Buildings and technology that are inaccessible.
- Not reaching out to disabled people or considering disability as part of diversity.
- Subtle discrimination, not giving a person with a disability a chance at a job or including "essential functions" that really are not essential (ex- "Walking" when "Rolling" is just as effective).
- Not taking a holistic approach when it comes to disability (transportation, housing, social life).
- Can anyone think of any others?

The Social Model of Disability

- Disability is caused by the way society is organized rather than the person's diagnosis.
- Barriers can be negative attitudes or misconceptions of others.
- Barriers can also be architecture or technology
- Example: Adding captions to an online video.
- "You're not healthy. The doctor will tell you." at a bone marrow drive.

Hierarchy of Disability Stigma

- Societal attitudes (stigma increases for each disability):
- Blind/Visually Loss, Wheelchair users, Deaf/Hard of Hearing
- Invisible disabilities tend to be more stigmatized (particularly things that are seen as someone's fault) such as:
 - Chronic Illnesses
 - Intellectual disabilities
 - Mental illness
 - Addiction
- However, visible disabilities may be more stigmatized in employment situations like job interviews.
- Source: (Deal, 2010)

Disability and Privilege (Not an Exhaustive List)

- Things that disabled people (and caregivers) have to think about that people without disabilities might not:
- Will I be allowed to make my own decisions?
- Is a venue accessible?
- Will people respect what I have to say?
- Will people take the time to listen to how I communicate (if I don't communicate verbally)?
- Will my adaptive equipment survive a plane trip or be damaged by someone that is trying to help?
- Will my romantic partner care (or even give me a chance) if I have a disability or have to have my mom drive me to a date?
- Will an employer give me a chance?
- Will I be able to find accessible housing and transportation?
- What other examples can you think of?

Stereotypes and Forms of Ableism



Image description: A tan dog and a white dog looking at each other with the white dog sitting in grass on top of a ledge. The tan dog has an assistive device with for his back legs that are sticking straight out. The device has wheels for his back legs. Above the dogs is the text "The only disability in life is a bad attitude."

The Reality-Accessibility



Image description: A cartoon of a person using a wheelchair sitting at the bottom of stairs with a sign that says "Way in (with an arrow pointing to the top of the stairs), everyone welcome!"

More Reality- Accessibility Part 2



Image description: A blue curb cut with the wheelchair access sign leading to a crosswalk. The street has a curb blocking the crosswalk.

More Reality- Invisible Disabilities



Image description: The Condescending Wonka meme with text of, "I don't look sick? Tell me again what it feels like to have an invisible illness."

Types of Ableism: The SuperCrip

- THE SUPERCRIPT! ABLE TO OVERCOME EVERY OBSTACLE AND NEVER COMPLAINS ABOUT ANYTHING!
- THEY ALSO SERVE TO MAKE OTHERS FEEL GOOD ABOUT THEMSELVES!
- Plano West Student Helps Football Team Despite Cerebral Palsy- WFAA headline for a story on me.
- Image Description: A young white male with brown hair in a Plano West Letterman's jacket sitting in front of a computer. There is a News 8 logo in the bottom right hand corner



- Impact: Low expectations and pity, view of disability as a *BAD* thing

Types of Ableism: Helpless Victim Stereotype

- Their disability controls every aspect of their lives and dominates their thoughts.
- They cannot participate in activities or make decisions for themselves.
- Any difficulties they experience are due to personal characteristics rather than an inaccessible community
- They long for a cure for their disability.
- "Let me push you up this hill!"
- Examples: Artie on Glee, Tiny Tim, Forrest Gump
- Impacts include pity, loss of autonomy, lack of inclusion

Types of Ableism: Nonsexual Being

- Many disabled people are not seen as sexual beings or capable of being in a romantic relationship.
- "You would be really pretty if you didn't have those crutches!"
- Another stereotype is that disabled people only can (or want to) date other disabled people
- Media portrayals of sexuality and disability are non-existent or reinforce dangerous stereotypes
- Me Before You movie
- Impacts: People killing themselves after acquiring a disability, lack of inclusion and experience, target for abuse

Types of Ableism: Eternal Child Stereotype

- Disabled people are often seen as eternal children.
- This can lead to:
- The person not being able to make decisions for themselves
- Segregation
- Others not taking people's statements seriously



Image description: Picture of a father carrying his 16 year old son wearing a diaper (Source: NPR)

Types of Ableism: Outright Discrimination

- The other forms of ableism discussed thus far are mostly invisible and often well intentioned.
- However, disabled people are often outright discriminated against or abused.
- Children with disabilities are almost two times more likely to be physically or sexually abused. Abuse is also typically more severe and more likely to occur over a longer period of time. Sexual abuse is five times more likely for people with intellectual or mental health disabilities (US Department of Health and Human Services, Smith & Harrell, 2013)
- Descriptions like crazy, nuts, wacko.
- Questions during job interviews like, "Time for the white elephant in the room: Why do you walk like you do?"

Internalized Ableism

- “A practice where disabled people internalize the ideas and prejudices of society that see disability as ‘other’, as something undesirable, as tragic and as something to be shunned if not pitied. This in turn results in the disabled person loathing themselves...” (Autism Women’s Network, 2013).
- This can occur in any aspect of life and is often more damaging.
- This is a form of ableism that can creep up in unpredictable ways even around people you are comfortable with.
- Ex: Me using a bowling ramp with my girlfriend.
- Image description: A red bowling ball sitting on a black bowling ramp. The ramp is sitting in front of the bowling alley.



Issues The Disabled Community Continues To Face

- What are some issues the disability community faces that you feel could benefit from advocacy?

Work Left To Do

- While the Americans With Disabilities Act has accomplished a lot, there is still work to be done.
- Employment: Only 53% of disabled people with a BA or higher are working in the US. Nondisabled workers are 3 times more likely to be employed than disabled employees (2013 American Community Survey).
- Many are not given a chance even though studies show disabled people are more productive and have better attendance records than people without.
- Accommodations are also often cheap!
- 20% were free and 51% cost \$1-500. The average cost is \$200.
- Source: Job Accommodation Network (JAN)

Work Left to Do Part 2

- Transportation:
- Transportation is still a major issue for disabled people.
- Many do not have access at all (especially in rural areas) and paratransit is often unreliable or inaccessible.
- 1/3 of disabled people report lack of transportation as a major problem (National Organization on Disability survey).
- 2003 survey from the Department of Transportation: Over 1 million people are kept at home due to no transportation.
- People can't work or experience the community without transportation.

Work Left to Do Part 3

- Inclusion in the community:
- 1999: Supreme Court rules in *Olmstead* case that unnecessary institutionalization of disabled people is unconstitutional.
- Failure to find an integrated setting appropriate to each individual is discrimination.
- However, there are many people still confined to nursing homes.
- 1 out of 7 residents in nursing homes is under 65 (Centers for Medicare and Medicaid).
- A nursing home is often where people with severe spinal cord injuries and TBIs are placed.
- People with mental health conditions and invisible disabilities often have difficulty finding inclusion.
- Vast parts of the internet are often inaccessible to disabled people.

Now, What Can I do?

- Incorporate accessibility into your job and advocate:
- Add Image Descriptions to photos on social media.
- Note the accessibility of your office:
- Countertop height, clipboards for forms for wheelchair users, notepads for deaf/hard of hearing students, room for navigation.
- Become knowledgeable about laws and policies.
- Advocate for broader accessibility on campus and while planning programs and events.
- Never touch or disturb a service dog or someone else's assistive device.
- Never assume and wait for your offer to be accepted before offering assistance.

More Action Items

- Advocate and educate! This can be with friends, with children, at work, etc.
- Appreciate disabled people for their talents.
- Support retailers that support disabled people.
- Volunteer with organizations related to disability.
- Donate to organizations run by disabled people.
- Vote for candidates who support disabled people with their policies.
- What else?

Any Questions?



Image Description: A meme with a black and white cat standing on its back legs with a paw in the air. The meme has, "Um, yes...I have a question." in white letters above the cat.