

# DISsing the social GRRRAACCEESSS

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## Introduction

- Who we are - conversations across disciplines
- Overview of social GRRRAACCEESSS – how 'disability' became 'ability'
- What is gained (and lost) by using 'ability' instead of 'disability'?
- Introduction to psycho-emotional disablism
- Explore returning the 'dis' to the social GRRRAACCEESSS
- Concluding comments

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## Conversations across disciplines

- Met as allies in a balloon debate on a course
- Donna
  - Disabled woman
  - Not a family therapist (trained counsellor, introduction to family therapy)
  - 15 years disability studies (social science)
    - Psycho-emotional disablism
- Victoria
  - Feminist
  - Family therapist
  - 25 years working for women and men with learning disabilities

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## History of the social GRRRAACCEESSS

- Developed by John Burnham & Alison Roper-Hall
- Mnemonic for aspects of difference
- From 'DISGRRACCE' to 'Social GRRRAACCEESSS'
- Personal vs. social GRRRAACCEESSS
- (In)visible/(un)voiced matrix
- Developed as tool, not theory

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## Social GRRRAACCEESSS

- Gender
- Geography
- Race
- Religion
- Age
- **Ability**
- Appearance
- Class
- Culture
- Ethnicity
- Education
- Employment
- Sexuality
- Sexual orientation
- Spirituality

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## Stella Young: I'm not your inspiration, thank you very much

Stella Young is a comedian and journalist who happens to go about her day in a wheelchair — a fact that doesn't, she'd like to make clear, automatically turn her into a noble inspiration to all humanity. In this very funny talk, Young breaks down society's habit of turning disabled people into "inspiration porn."

[http://www.ted.com/talks/stella\\_young\\_i\\_m\\_not\\_your\\_inspiration\\_thank\\_you\\_very\\_much](http://www.ted.com/talks/stella_young_i_m_not_your_inspiration_thank_you_very_much)

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## Models of disability

- Impairment = medical condition, marker of difference
- Disability has different meanings
- Everyday meaning:
  - 'Her disability is that she is blind'
  - Disability = impairment
- Individual/medical model:
  - 'She cannot teach because she is blind'
  - Impairment causes disability
  - Disability as tragedy/loss

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## Models of disability (cont'd)

- Social model:
  - Disability caused by society which takes no/little account of the needs of people with impairments and so excludes them
  - 'Her disability is caused by the university who failed to provide teaching information in Braille or on tape'
  - Breaks causal link between impairment and disability
  - Form of social oppression
- Affirmative model:
  - Disability as a form of social oppression
  - Identity incorporates impairment

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## Social model of disability (Crippen)



<http://www.crippencartoons.co.uk/2014/08/the-social-model-understanding-of-disability/>

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## Curiosity Exercise

- Large group
- What are you curious about when asked to consider:
  - Ethnicity?
  - sexual orientation?

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## Curiosity Exercise (cont'd)

- 3 Small groups
- What are you curious about when asked to consider:
  - 'ability',
  - 'disability'
  - 'impairment'?

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## Extended social relational definition of disability

- 'Disablism is a form of social oppression involving the *social imposition of restrictions of activity* on people with impairments and the *socially engendered undermining of their psycho-emotional well-being.*' (Thomas, 2007: 73, my emphasis)
- Disablism has structural and psycho-emotional dimensions

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## Indirect psycho-emotional disablism

- As a consequence of structural disablism i.e. emotional response to exclusion or 'reasonable adjustments'
- "A lot of people see you want to go in, and they just walk past you. Or you ask them to hold the door and they just go on straight into the premises. You know, you just [pauses] how can I put it? Just feel like you're not wanted. They just look, everybody just looks down [their] nose at you." (Robert in Reeve, 2008: 183)

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## Direct psycho-emotional disablism

- Arises from relationships with other people/self
- Acts of invalidation from (often thoughtless) actions/words of other people
- Anxiety caused by not knowing how the next person will react to you (or not)
- Influenced by cultural representations of disability e.g. in newspapers, TV
  - Media reporting of welfare reform linked to rise in disability hate crime

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## Acts of invalidation

- "They look at you and it's, 'Oh keep away from him' – you know, it's like we've got the plague, you know. And that really gets me, that do." (Robert in Reeve, 2008: 140)
- "Then like a guy walking past me on the street, saying, 'I'd rather be dead than be in one of those' - Well, where do these people get off?" (Laura, in Reeve, 2008: 146)

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## Internalised oppression

- Direct psycho-emotional disablism – relationship of disabled person with *themselves*
- Common to all marginalised groups - internalise the prejudices held by dominant group about them
- Has direct effect on who people can **be** e.g. may assume cannot be a parent
- Operates at level of unconscious so difficult to challenge

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## Believing 'I'm no good'

- "All my life, call it insecurity, or whatever you like to put on it, right, is that, 'What's the difference with me then? Why was I given up so early?' I hadn't had any chance to prove myself in any form and yet somebody in authority could say I was useless. [cut] I've got the tendency of going too negative-wards, I have, because 'I'm no good', going back to being a kid again. 'Nothing is going to become of this gentleman'." (Rhodri, in Reeve, 2008: 162-163)

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## Key points of psycho-emotional disablism

- Impacts on emotional well-being, self-esteem – is akin to emotional abuse
- Cumulative – past disablism impacts on current
- Intertwined with impairment, psycho-emotional dimensions of impairment, structural disablism and other aspects of diversity
- Can exclude as effectively as a flight of steps
- Fuelled by negative messages and images of disability in society
- More difficult to challenge/change than structural disablism

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## From Disability Studies we learn:

- Ability is not the opposite of disability/disablism
- Ability does not incorporate the lived experience of disability/disablism
- Ability shuts down curiosity about disability/disablism
- Ability does not incorporate the lived experience of impairment

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## Exercise: Social DISGRRAAACCEESS

- Small groups
- Consider adding **D**isability/disablism and **I**mpairment back into the social GRRAAACCEESS
- Retain **A**bility
- What new understandings would these terms bring to people you've worked/trained with?
- Consider the visible-invisible and voiced-unvoiced framework (Burnham, 2012)

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## Our conversations...

- How might considering oneself Temporarily Able-Bodied (TAB) affect curiosity?
- Taboos and (in)appropriate curiosity?
- Relevance of the (in)visible/(un)voiced matrix?
  - Temporal dimension needed?
- Impairment – personal and/or social grace?
- GRACES to **DISGRACIES** or **DISGRACE**?

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## Concluding thoughts on DISSing the social GRRAACCEESS

- Adding back Disability:
  - Encourages curiosity about possible structural disablism and psycho-emotional disablism/internalised oppression
- Adding in Impairment:
  - Invites curiosity about lived experience of impairment e.g. pain, fatigue and the psycho-emotional effects of impairment e.g. anxiety, depression
- Retaining Ability:
  - Invites curiosity about (in)ability

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“Disability doesn't make you exceptional, but questioning what you think you know about it does.”

(Stella Young)

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