

UNIT 4: Critical Disability Studies

Disability and Human Rights
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Disablism

Disablism: Originally as “handicapism,” which was likened to racism and sexism, defined as “a set of assumptions and practices that promote the differential and unequal treatment of people because of apparent or assumed physical, mental, or behavioural differences”.

Disablism: the identification and treatment of people on the grounds of disability. it has three components:

- prejudice
- stereotype
- discrimination

Prejudice

- Common Prejudices: Disabled people are:
 - (i) inferior (ii) are totally impaired (iii) less intelligent (iv) need charity, and (v) prefer company of others with disabilities [Henderson and Bryan (1997)]
- Two components of prejudice are (Allport 1958) :
 - Attitude
 - Belief

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Common Attitudinal Prejudices

- Seeing a person in a wheelchair upsets me.
 - I wouldn't want a person with mental retardation living in my neighbourhood
 - Watching a severely disabled person eat upsets me.
 - Dwarfs makes me laugh.
 - Thank God I'm not mentally retarded or physically disabled.
 - I'd rather die than become blind or deaf.
 - I can't help but adore children with Down syndrome.
 - People with disabilities make me ill at ease.
 - I fear people with mental illness.
 - Stuttering is funny.
- [A selection from Shapiro (1999: 103)]

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Common Prejudicial Beliefs

- Persons with physical disabilities feel resentment and envy toward the able bodied.
- People in wheelchairs are sick and chronically ill.
- People with disabilities are naturally inferior.
- People with disabilities are different in kind, not degree.
- People with disabilities are more comfortable with “their own kind.”
- People with disabilities have a distinct type of personality.
- People with blindness are sad and acquire a sixth sense.
- People with deafness are perpetually suspicious of others.
- People with disabilities are brave and courageous.
- All persons with deafness can read lips.
- People who stutter think like they talk.

[A selection from Shapiro (1999: 103-104)]

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Stereotype

- “When prejudice takes on the form of a specific belief regarding a particular group, it is a stereotype” (Bogdan & Knoll, 1988:467).
- One common stereotype: all persons with blindness have outstanding musical talent: “The blind are simple, spiritual, musical; they have a special sixth sense; their other senses are more acute -- in short, they are different and apart from the rest of society” (Jernigan, 1983: 58–59)
- Wolfensberger, Nirje, Olshansky, Perske and Roos (1975):
 - The object of pity
 - The sub-human organism
 - Sinister or evil
 - The unspeakable object of dread
 - The holy innocent (special children of God)
 - The object of comedy, ridicule and curiosity
 - The burden

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Discrimination

- “the unjustifiable negative behaviour toward a group and its members” (Meyers, 1987: 484).
- Prejudice and stereotyping are the cause of disablism, discrimination is the effect.
- Prejudice is a thought; discrimination is an act.
- “Prejudice is negative attitude; discrimination is negative behaviour” (Meyers, 1987)
- Five of the most common forms (Shapiro, 1999: 126):
 - UNEQUAL RECOGNITION BEFORE THE LAW
 - UNEQUAL EDUCATION
 - UNEQUAL EMPLOYMENT
 - UNEQUAL FREEDOM OF MOVEMENT
 - LACK OF TRANSPORTATION