

Dis Ability Studies: Theorising Disablism and Ableism

Dis ability studies is an academic field that examines the ways in which people with disabilities are excluded from full participation in society. It seeks to understand the social, political, economic, and cultural factors that create barriers for people with disabilities, and to develop strategies for overcoming these barriers.

Disablism and Ableism

Two key concepts in dis ability studies are **disablism** and **ableism**. Disablism is a form of discrimination or oppression that is based on a person's disability. It can manifest in a variety of ways, including:



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by Dan Goodley

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- Prejudice and discrimination against people with disabilities
- Exclusion of people with disabilities from mainstream society

- Denial of equal opportunities to people with disabilities

Ableism is a system of beliefs and practices that values people who are not disabled over people who are disabled. It can manifest in a variety of ways, including:

- The belief that people with disabilities are inferior to people without disabilities
- The assumption that people with disabilities are incapable of living full and productive lives
- The discrimination against people with disabilities in employment, education, and other areas of life

The Social Model of Disability

One of the most important concepts in disability studies is the social model of disability. This model argues that disability is not a medical condition, but rather a social construct. It is created by the barriers that society places in front of people with disabilities, rather than by their own physical or mental impairments.

The social model of disability has been influential in shaping disability policy and legislation. It has helped to shift the focus from individual deficits to societal barriers, and has led to a greater recognition of the rights of people with disabilities.

Theoretical Perspectives in Disability Studies

There are a variety of theoretical perspectives that have been used to understand disablism and ableism. These perspectives include:

- **Feminism:** Feminist theory has been used to examine the ways in which disablism and ableism intersect with sexism and other forms of oppression. Feminist disability studies scholars have argued that disablism is a form of gender oppression, and that women with disabilities are particularly marginalized and oppressed.
- **Critical race theory:** Critical race theory has been used to examine the ways in which disablism and ableism intersect with racism and other forms of oppression. Critical race theorists have argued that disablism is a form of racial oppression, and that people of color with disabilities are particularly marginalized and oppressed.
- **Queer theory:** Queer theory has been used to examine the ways in which disablism and ableism intersect with homophobia, transphobia, and other forms of oppression. Queer disability studies scholars have argued that disablism is a form of heteronormativity, and that LGBTQIA+ people with disabilities are particularly marginalized and oppressed.

Dis Ability Studies in Action

Dis ability studies has been used to inform a wide range of policy and practice initiatives. These initiatives include:

- **Disability rights legislation:** Dis ability studies scholars have played a key role in the development and implementation of disability rights legislation. This legislation has helped to protect the rights of people with disabilities and to promote their full participation in society.
- **Assistive technology:** Dis ability studies scholars have helped to develop and promote the use of assistive technology. Assistive

technology is any device or service that helps people with disabilities to live more independently and to participate more fully in society.

- **Universal design:** Disability studies scholars have helped to promote the concept of universal design. Universal design is the design of products, environments, and services that can be used by people with a wide range of abilities.

Disability studies is a vibrant and growing field of academic inquiry. It has helped to raise awareness of the challenges faced by people with disabilities, and has led to the development of new strategies for promoting their full participation in society.



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