

# *Disability & Identity*

Identity & Literature (Summer 2013)

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# First-Person Perspectives

- ◉ Aimee Mullins on TEDTalks: “The Opportunity of Adversity”
- ◉ *How are some ways in which stereotypes of disability can negatively affect disabled individuals' identities?*
- ◉ *What might need to be done at the societal level to make it easier for disabled people to form positive identities?*
  - *Is it merely a matter of non-interference?*



# *Disability & Impairment*

- **Impairment:** “associated with a particular medical condition, which may (or may not) lead to a disability, with a disability being associated with various social and political restrictions” (Smith 18)
  - Can be associated with talents, benefits
- Union of the Physically Impaired Against Segregation:
  - “Disability is the loss or limitation of opportunities to take part in the normal life of community on an equal level with others due to physical and social barriers” (qtd. in Smith 19)
- World Health Organization
  - “an identifiable variation of human functions” with three dimensions: “impairments, activity limitations and participation restrictions” (qtd. in Ells 599)



# *Some Models of Disability\**

	Interpretation	Understanding of Disability/Disorder
Medical/Biological Models	full-essentialist individual deficiency interpretation (FEID)	Disability is caused by fixed medical characteristics that inevitably prelude a life of deficiency and ‘abnormality’.
	part-essentialist individual deficiency interpretation (PEID)	Whilst disability is caused by the above medical characteristics, these can be partially alleviated by changes in the social environment, so as to enable some degree of ‘normal living’.
Social Models	politics of disablement interpretation (POD)	Disability is caused by social practices that systematically exclude impaired people from the activities of ‘normal citizenship’.
	social construction of disablement interpretation (SCOD)	Disability is caused by the way impairments are defined and associated with characteristics that are necessarily assumed to have a negative impact on personal identity, development, and fulfillment.

\*Chart from Smith, pg. 22

# *Tom Shakespeare*



- ◉ Works in sociology, leading scholar in disability studies (also engages in disability art)
- ◉ Has achondroplasia, a form of short-limbed dwarfism
- ◉ Influential but somewhat controversial scholarship
- ◉ Watch him [here](#).

# *Interpreting Disability*

## ○ Biological determinism

- Impairment necessarily results in disability.
  - Disability is a) caused by biological mechanisms within the individual and b) inherently a negative experience that entails suffering or deficiency.
  - “denial of the common social experiences which unite disabled people, and a focus on medical dimensions of difference” (2)
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- ## ○ *Are there some similarities between biological determinism applied to disability and to gender? Are there limits to these analogies?*

# *Interpreting Disability*

## ◎ As a social process

- Disability as a direct result of social, economic, and political barriers
- Disability as a minority, oppressed group
- Disability as a social policy category
- Disability as a studied category of persons
- Disability as a cultural category informed by discursive practices

# *Narrative and Disability*

- ◉ Aim to open up types of narratives—more intelligible plot lines, characters, and trajectories
  - Not only able-bodied and able-minded narratives are meaningful and important
  - Should have these variant narratives supported, recognized, made possible
  - Overcome negative narratives
  - Do not need to fetishize difference as a medical tragedy, and do not need to essentialize disability.



# *Additional References*

- ◉ Smith, Steven R. "Social Justice and Disability: Competing Interpretations of the Medical and Social Models". *Arguing about Disability: Philosophical Perspectives*. Eds. Kristjana Kristiansen, Simo Vehmas, and Tom Shakespeare. New York: Routledge, 2009. 15~29.
  
- ◉ Ells, Carolyn. “Lessons about Autonomy from the Experience of Disability.” *Social Theory and Practice* 27.4 (October 2001): 599~615.

*Questions? Comments?*