Introduction to Disability Studies

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Disability Studies is an interdisciplinary field of study.

Traditionally **sociology** has rather neglected disability. But we can identify 3 main approaches to theorising disability:

1) Medical Sociology
2) Sociology of the Body
3) Disability Studies
Arose in connection to disability activism.

Although disability activism stems back to the 1800s, 1960s-1970s pivotal moment in the development of the Disabled People’s Movement UK.

In 1976, the Union of Physically Impaired Against Segregation (UPIAS) published the ‘Fundamental Principles of Disability’. According to this interpretation, society disables people who have impairments:

‘Disability is something imposed on top of our impairments, by the way we are unnecessarily isolated and excluded from full participation in society. Disabled people are therefore an oppressed group in society.’ (UPIAS 1976, 4)
Impairment is the functional limitation within the individual caused by physical, mental or sensory impairment.

Disablement is the loss or limitation of opportunities to take part in the normal life of the community on an equal level with others due to physical and social barriers. (Disabled People's International 1981 in Barnes 1991)
Seeing the social in the individual; the general in the particular. (Bauman 1990)
Models: represent ‘salient structural and/or functional features, properties, or characteristics of another object or process’.

Theories: provide explanation.

Perspectives: are a way of looking at something.
UK: Social Model of Disability – disabled people are an oppressed group

USA: Socio-political Model of Disability – disabled people are a minority group

And there are lots of others…!...

What these models ‘oppose’ is traditional ways of viewing disability….eg….
Medical and Charity Models

Medical Model

- special institutions
- welfare social services
- can't walk talk see decide
- patient case
- cure
- care
- medical professionals
- hospitals
- social workers
- therapists & specialists

Charity Model

- need to be looked after
- to be pitied
- brave courageous inspirational
- sad tragic passiv
- bitter twisted aggressive

UK Social Model

## Theoretical approaches to understanding disability

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>US Social Constructionist</th>
<th>UK Socio-Structural</th>
<th>‘Post-Conventional’</th>
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**Warning!** These are ‘fuzzy’ strands – in reality it is not always easy to locate approaches neatly into one of these.

- Critical Disability Studies
- Crip Theory
- Studies in Ableism
Studies in Ableism

Scrutinizes the psychological, social, economic, cultural and technological conditions that privilege normative ways of being, organize environments around normative citizens and feed into neoliberal and advanced capitalist forms of production.

Image from: http://www.stopableism.org/
Unveiling the non-disabled stance (Linton 1998)

Disrupting compulsory ablebodiedness (McRuer 2006)

Acknowledging vulnerabilities of the embodied self (Beckett 2006)

Rejecting compulsion to emulate the norm (Campbell 2008, para.4)

“Crippin’ the human”? Putting impairment back into the human? (Campbell, n.d. 5)

Questioning conditions that privilege ‘normative’ ways of being (Campbell n.d., 5)

Problematizing ‘the hegemony of ableist sensibilities’ (Hughes 2012, 67)

Transforming negative assessments of bodily 'impairment' to positive account

Making anomalous body a crucial site of positive resistance (Goodley and Lawthom 2013)
Research carried out ‘on disabled people’ in sociology and other disciplines is another arena where ableism can flourish.

1980s-90: development and advocacy of emancipatory research:

- Commitment to social model of disability.
- Partisan research approach to aid the political struggles of disabled people.
- Rejection of the traditional researcher-researched hierarchy.

Difficult to achieve and much contested! But remains aspirational for many.

Useful link: [http://www.lancaster.ac.uk/researchethics/4-6-defining.html](http://www.lancaster.ac.uk/researchethics/4-6-defining.html)
Disability Studies Comes of Age

Glasgow
Lancaster
Liverpool Hope
Leeds
Hertfordshire
Bristol

Just some of the Centres for Disability Studies in the UK
Well established in:

- Canada
- USA
- Australia
- Scandinavia

Across Europe, India, Japan, South Africa, Ghana….etc.etc.

Different histories and trajectories in different places.
Thank you for listening!

If anyone would like to know more about Disability Studies, then I recommend this introductory text:


Also, you might like to look at material on the Disability Archive at the University of Leeds: [http://disability-studies.leeds.ac.uk/library/](http://disability-studies.leeds.ac.uk/library/)
References in presentation


