

# THE IMPACT HOUR

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# THIS WEEK AT UP

As the the second round of our Research Bootcamp reached its end, the Research team conducted yet another successful Research Conclave.

This Christmas, we conducted a Secret Santa Donation Drive.

A week prior to Christmas, we put uP a post on our Instagram page. For every share on that post, we donated Christmas presents to a child at our sites in Delhi. With over 150 shares on the post, we were able to make as many children smile wide.

# ABOUT THIS VOLUME

The Volume Three of The Impact Hour Newsletter attempts to delve into the intricacies of disability. The first issue narrates the different facets of physical and mental disability. The newsletter also introduces why disability is a spectrum, along with linguistic and societal barriers that stereotype people with disabilities. The second issue tackles the evils of ableism, leading to identity degeneration, stereotype dissemination, derogatory speech, and internalised ableism. The newsletter will also cover the need for destigmatisation and how to normalise language and reduce stigma around disability. The third issue will narrate the need to inculcate disability studies in educational spheres and usher forth awareness through a shift in policy to improve the lives of people with disabilities. The issues also include books recommendations for a better insight into the lives of people with disabilities. The following issues will consist of film and podcast recommendations. Readers can also suggest more media forms to make the newsletter's oncoming editions about disability more inclusive and interactive.

# What is Ableism?

by Hema Georgina Biswas

## INTRODUCTION

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Ableism is conscious or unconscious discrimination against the disabled community in favour of people without disabilities. Ableism consists of harmful stereotypes, misconceptions, and generalisations of people with disabilities. These are rooted in the assumption that disabled people require 'fixing'. Like other forms of discrimination, ableism classifies a set of people as "less-than" and/or different than the "normal". The division runs deep in our social consciousness and seems natural to people on both ends of the ability spectrum.

### *What does ableism look like?*

- Lack of execution and compliance with disability rights laws.
- Lack of accessibility in buildings and public services such as braille on elevator buttons, ramps on buses, reserved space in metros, etc.

- Assumption that people with disabilities want or need to be 'fixed'.
- Making jokes at the expense of disability or people with disabilities.
- Treating people with disabilities as an outcast or a "problem to be dealt with".
- Framing disability as only either tragic or inspirational.
- Asking invasive questions about their disability.
- Taking 'at them', 'about them', and infantilising their existence.
- Casting non-disabled actors to play a disabled character in media forms.
- Media forms and websites without audio description or closed captioning.

### *Ableist microaggressions*

- Micro-aggressions are everyday verbal or behavioural expressions that communicate a negative slight or insult concerning someone's gender identity, race, sex, disability, etc. "She's lame."
- "That dude is retarded."
- "He's acting crazy lunatic."

- “He’s acting crazy lunatic.”
- “You’re acting so bipolar today.”
- “Are you off meds?”
- “She’s such a psycho.”
- “I’m super OCD about how I tidy my room.”
- “You don’t look disabled.”

## HISTORY OF DISABILITY

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History has been far from kind to people with disabilities. The eugenics movement of the early 1900s and the mass murder of disabled people in Nazi Germany are one of the few examples that sought to decimate the community through innumerable ways. The need to reduce “less-superior” communities juxtaposed with the lack of a utilitarian value, condemned people with disabilities to atrocities still unknown.

### *Disability Rights Movement*

The **Disability Rights Movement** is a global social movement to secure equal opportunities and equal rights for all people with

disabilities. The movement comprises of organisations of disability activists, disability advocates, around the world working together with similar goals and demands, such as accessibility and safety in architecture, transportation, and the physical environment; equal opportunities in independent living, employment equity, education, and housing; and freedom from discrimination, abuse, neglect, and from other rights violations.

### *Social Model of Disability*

The social model of disability suggests disability is caused by how society is organised, rather than by a person's impairment. This model suggests barriers in society are created by ableism. When barriers are removed, people with disabilities can be independent and equal in society. The three main types of barriers are:

1. **Attitudinal barriers:** Created by people who see people with disabilities in relation to only their disability. These attitudinal barriers can be witnessed through bullying, discrimination, and fear.
2. **Environmental barriers:** inaccessible environments, natural

or built, create disability by creating barriers to inclusion.

**3. Institutional barriers:** include many laws, policies, practices, or strategies that discriminate against people with disabilities. Restrictive laws exist in some countries, mainly affecting people with intellectual or psychosocial disabilities. Other barriers include internalised barriers, inadequate data and statistics, lack of participation and consultation with disabled people.

## MEDIA REPRESENTATION

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Media representations play an essential role in the stigmatisation of people with disabilities. The media generally depicts people with disabilities as only either inspiring when successful and pity-worthy when not. They are portrayed through common stereotypes which disability advocates often call the "pity/heroism trap" or "pity/heroism dichotomy". Disability rights activist Stella Young's "inspiration porn", describes people with disabilities as inspirational solely or based on their disability. Researchers note that information is prioritised for people with disabilities, with communication as a

hard distinct second and entertainment as a luxury. Negative reporting resorts to the "plight of the disabled" and relies on the pity or medical model of disability; often blatantly insinuating people with disability as a burden on society. The "super-crip" model portrays people with disabilities as heroically overcoming their afflictions. Disabled media representation also depends largely on the characters' need to be "fixed" and invariably look for solutions to their disability by rendering shame as an exhibit to society. Some disability tropes that have been identified over the years in popular culture are:

- "Single episode disability" - This is where a regular character on a television series obtains a temporary disability, learns a moral lesson, and makes a rapid, full recovery.
- Disability superpower - This is where fate removes one ability; it enhances another so that a disabled character has one superpower.
- Object of pity
- Sinister or evil
- Eternal innocence
- Victim of violence

- Asexual, undesirable, or incapable of sexual or romantic interactions
- In-need of a non-disabled saviour

## DISABILITY STIGMA

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Used as a synonym for “inability” since time immemorial, people without disabilities knowingly or unknowingly, contribute to stereotype dissemination, identity degeneration and internalised ableism among disabled people. Societal dogma instilled into our upbringing affects one's worldview; hence a vicious ableist cycle ensues and continues. People with disabilities have been associated with curses, disease, dependence, and helplessness. Disability stigma might lead to:

- Social Avoidance – People with disabilities are usually left out of social activities.
- Stereotyping – People with disabilities are presumed to be helpless, indecisive, and unable to care for themselves.
- Discrimination – People with disabilities are denied jobs, housing, or other opportunities due to false assumptions or

stereotypes about disabilities.

- **Condescension** – People with disabilities are coddled owing to perceptions of their helplessness.
- **Blame** – People are blamed for their disability or accused of using their disability to gain benefits.
- **Internalisation** – Derogatory speech and beliefs leading to identity degeneration make people with disabilities adopt negative thoughts and shame about their disability.

## DESTIGMATISATION

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People with disabilities now own up to the fact that they are disabled; that this is a part of their lives, this is who they are, that they are not always limited to and by it, that there is no shame in having a disability. While a considerable portion of people with disabilities have reclaimed terms such as “crip”, “disabled” and “disability”, the historically ableist stigma still makes its presence felt through linguistic and structural inadequacies that place white cis-heteronormative people without disabilities on top of the hierarchy.

## *Ways to Reduce Stigma around Disability*

- **Avoid infantilising disabled people** and sympathising with their “condition”. Don’t be intrusive and act coy in front of them. Don’t use “baby talk” or reduce your vocabulary when speaking to a person with autism or another type of disability.
- **Stop treating them as second class members of society.** Remove the stigma that people with disabilities do not contribute to society. These individuals travel, get married, hang out with friends and family, own property, have jobs, face challenges, and contribute to the economy and society in the same way that people without a disability do.
- **Respect privacy and bodily autonomy.** Make people with disabilities feel comfortable where they don't need to minimise their needs, and yet provide ample space to communicate their desires. Trust their opinion and their way of life. Strike a balance between caring and giving them independence. Avoid boxing them with incessant supervision or strict jurisdiction.

- **Authentic disability representation** can play an essential role in destigmatising disability. Let disabled people control their representation and speak their experiences instead of people without disabilities raking up pity/heroism narratives that stand incongruent to real-life experiences.
- **Don't reduce their existence to their disability.** Shortcomings and accomplishments are a part of daily life; hence it is hardly any different for people with disabilities. The repercussions of a simple “you are such a talented painter for someone without a hand” places a capitalist and utilitarian value on individuals to earn respect/admiration. Similarly, people with disabilities feel an inherent need to overachieve and compensate for their disability. Do away with the pity party and inspiration porn to recognise individuals for their work instead of their disability.
- **Incorporate accessibility into event planning.** Build houses, hospitals, buildings and venues with ramps and braille systems in place. Be respectful to those with allergies and environmental sensitivities, employ captioning, assistive listening devices, an advance copy of slides, large prints,

diet restrictions, and more to make your space more inclusive and disabled-friendly.

- **Language** – There is no one “correct” way for disabled people to identify themselves as disabled people recognise themselves in various forms such as:
  - Person with a Disability (PwD)
  - Disabled Person
  - As a specific diagnosis/disability (e.g. blind, deaf, autistic)
  - Neurodivergent or Neuroatypical
  - Chronically ill, Chronic pain.
  - Spoonie
  - Crip or Cripple
  - (Dis)ability Dis/ability

Use of the terms "handicapped," "able-bodied," "physically-challenged," and "differently-abled" is discouraged. When referring to people with disabilities, people should use language that focuses on their abilities rather than disabilities. Given below are some points mentioned that we can and should take care of to avoid ableist language:

- **Don't use** the article "the" to describe people with disability. Use people-first language such as: "a person who is deaf/blind"; NOT "the deaf/blind person".
- **Don't imply** subjective descriptors such as pitiful, unfortunate, sad; or portray their accomplishments as superhuman or having "special traits".
- **Don't use** "normal" to refer to people without disability. Use: "non-disabled"
- **Don't use** terms that define a person's disability as a limitation. **Use**: "wheelchair user" or "a person with visual impairment/low vision"; NOT "confined to a wheelchair" or "blind person".
- **Don't use** terms such as "victim of", "afflicted with", "suffering from", or "troubled with" when referring to people with disabilities. **Use**: "person with/who has HIV/AIDS", "people without speech", NOT "person suffering from AIDS" or "mute/dumb people".
- **Avoid using** euphemistic language such as "differently-abled" or "diverse-ability". **Use**: "people with disability" or the reclaimed, "disabled person/individuals".

Autism Reminder: While the majority of autistic adults (along with friends, family, and parents) prefer using "autistic" to describe themselves, professionals chose to use "person with autism".

- **Listen to people with disabilities.** While the points mentioned above reflect opinions (albeit mixed) of a vast majority, it is always advisable to never assume. Take cues about the kind of language people use to refer to themselves and avoid using emotional or sympathetic tone/terminology while conversing with them.

## FOR THE READERS

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### *Movie Recommendations!*

- **The Untouchables**; dir: Olivier Nakache, Éric Toledano
- **Margarita with a Straw**; dir: Shonali Bose
- **One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest**; dir: Milos Freeman
- **Hale**; dir: Brad Bailey
- **Don't Worry, He Won't Get Far on Foot**; dir: Gus Van Sant
- **Inside I'm Dancing**; dir: Damien O'Donnell
- **Crip Camp: A Disability Revolution**; dir: Nicole Newnham, James LeBrecht
- **The Sessions**; dir: Ben Lewin

# ABOUT THE NEWSLETTER

The Impact Hour Newsletter is a comprehensive written edition of the weekly live sessions hosted by Project uP on Instagram. The Impact Hour lives started as a talkshow with a mission to spread awareness about various social issues and create an impact on its viewers. Its success paved a path for further expansion with the creation of the newsletter, which aims at covering the most significant issues under an umbrella topic in each volume. Its aim is to create an impact in the reader's mind by providing a deeper insight to the topic.