

# The Psychology of Ableism

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# Outline

- What is disability?
- Ableism
- Disability language
- Pride and community
- Anti-ableist STEM pathways

# A forgotten minority

- *Disability* = Physical or mental impairments X social barriers (UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities)
- 16% of the world's population experiences significant disability (WHO, 2023)
- Intersects with all other identities
- Only identity you can be born into OR join at any time

# Types of disabilities

- Mobility
- Sensory
- Intellectual
- Cognitive/learning/neurodivergent
- Chronic health
- Communication
- Mental health
- Craniofacial/facial differences



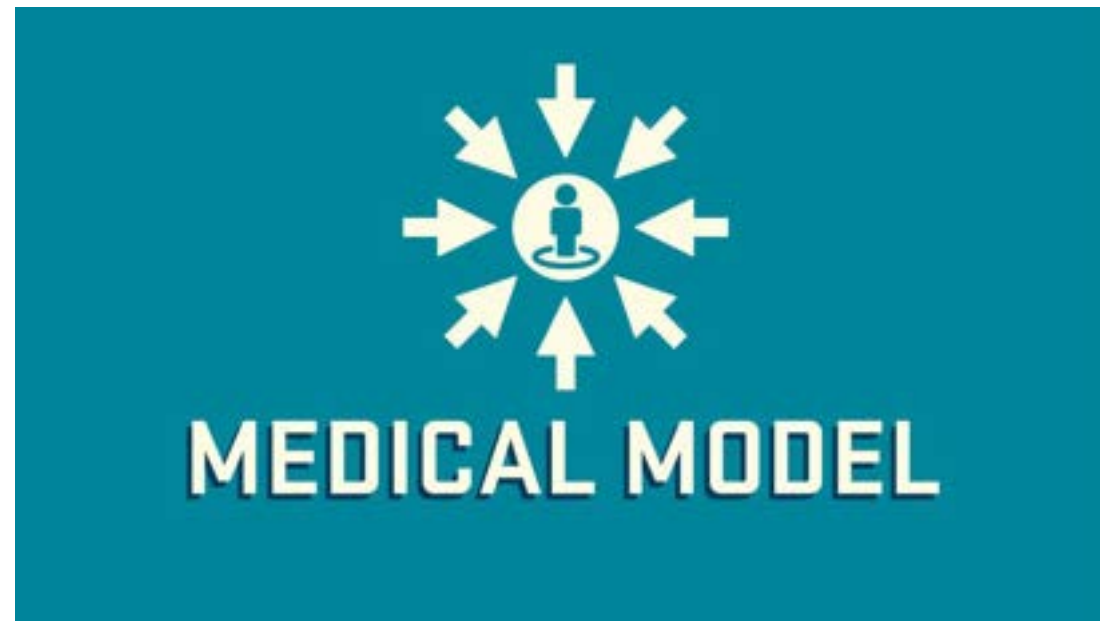
# Moral Model

- Thought to be a representation of, or punishment for, evil or sin



# Medical model

- Involves a dysfunction, abnormality, or pathology in the *individual*
- Responsibility of individuals, family, and healthcare professionals



# Social model

- Society causes disability, and the “problem” lies in society, not the individual
- Social and physical architecture built on the assumption that everyone can walk, hear, and see





- There is an impairment that 75% of the US population has, but we don't consider it a disability...
- What is it?



# Why isn't refractive error usually considered a disability?

- Nearly universal
- Corrective lenses invented in 13<sup>th</sup> century— why so early?
- We can do this for other impairments!!

# The psychology of bias

**ableism**    noun

able·ism | \ 'ā-bə-, li-zəm \

# Psychological terms for bias

- **Stereotyping**: *beliefs* that certain attributes are characteristic of members of particular groups
- **Prejudice**: negative *emotions* about members of a particular group
- **Discrimination**: *behavior* acting on stereotypes or prejudice (e.g. bullying)
- *Bias can be conscious and overt (explicit) or unconscious and subtle (implicit)*

# Disability spread

- Believing a disability affects unrelated domains
  - Speaking louder to a blind person
  - Assuming a person with a facial difference has an intellectual disability
- Diagnostic overshadowing
  - Failure to investigate or diagnose a co-occurring disorder and instead attributing symptoms to an existing disability

Disability language



# Disability language

- The language of disability can be tricky
  - Anxiety about saying the wrong thing

# Disability language

Avoid negatively-laden language

Zoe suffers from spina bifida

Marcus is wheelchair-bound

Use neutral, matter-of-fact language instead

Zoe has spina bifida

Marcus uses a wheelchair

# Disability language

- Differently-abled
- Special needs

# Euphemism

- “A mild or indirect word or expression substituted for one considered to be too harsh or blunt when referring to something unpleasant or embarrassing.”—*Oxford English dictionary*



Lawrence Carter-Long @LCarterLong · Jul 19

Preferences (& reasons for 'em) are important to discuss. Whether person-first or prefix first 'tis most important to [#SayTheWord](#) [#DISABLED](#)  
[twitter.com/GaelynnLea/sta...](https://twitter.com/GaelynnLea/status/1000000000000000000)

Lawrence Carter-Long is a disability rights activist who started the #SayTheWord campaign.



<https://disablespectator.com/saytheword-power-language-disability/>  
<https://twitter.com/hashtag/saytheword?lang=en>

**#DisabilityIsNotaBadThing**

# Disability language

- Person-first
  - Person with cerebral palsy
  - Describes what a person has, not what a person is
- Identity-first
  - Deaf person
  - Autistic person
  - “‘Autistic’ is another marker of identity. It is not inherently good, nor is it inherently bad.”—Lydia X. Z. Brown
- What should I say?
  - Ask!
  - If all else fails, default to person-first



# Disability pride and community

# Disability pride

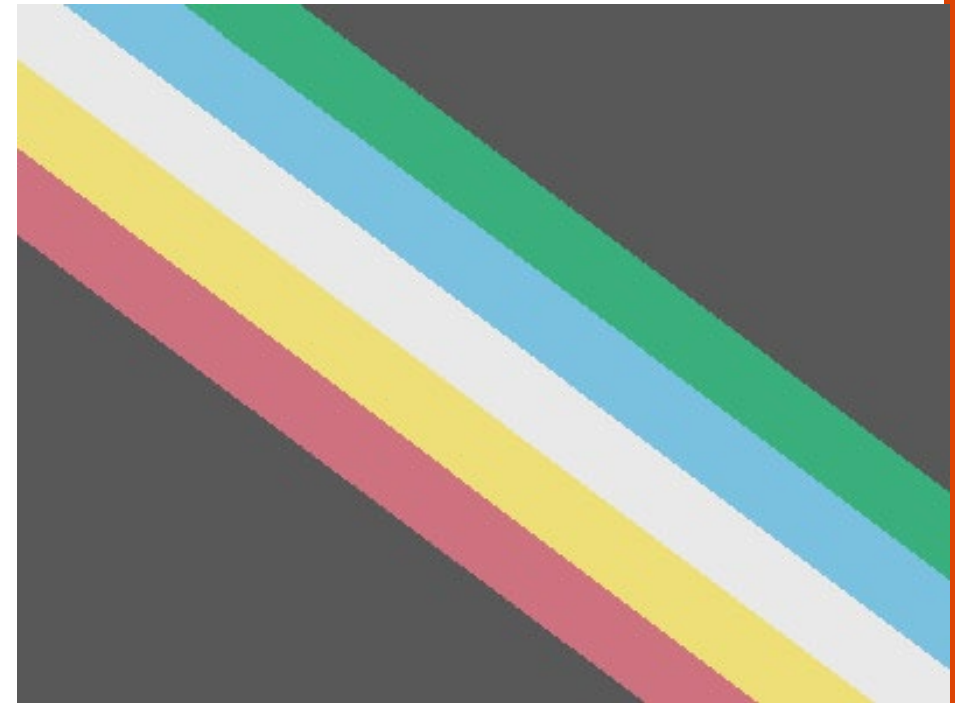
- Accepting disability as an important and valued part of the self
- Feeling solidarity with others who share the identity
- Disability pride parades held in many major U.S. cities





# Disability pride

- Associated with...
  - Less depression, anxiety (Bogart, 2015)
  - Satisfaction with life (Bogart, 2014)
  - Advocacy (Nario-Redmond, Noel, & Fern, 2013)



# Disability community

- More than half of disabled people do not have a friend with a disability
  - Having even one disabled friend increases well-being (Silverman, 2017)
    - Cross-disability friendships are beneficial, too!

Supporting children,  
parents, and families

# Model self-advocacy

- Be prepared to answer questions about disability
- Child will be noticed, give them tools to discuss
  - Otherwise, may invalidate their experience
- Include kids in discussions about their education and health as soon as is developmentally appropriate

# Disability peer mentoring

- Builds disability pride and community

# Building Anti-Ableist STEM Pathways

# Disability inclusion in STEM

## **Barriers**

- Solo status
- Most disabilities are invisible, and many choose not to disclose
- Leaky pipeline
  - Missing role models, lived experience expertise

## **Facilitators**

- Social model encourages cross-disability solidarity
- “Coming out”
  - Increases visibility, representation, social support
- Include disability in diversity initiatives

Do you or someone you know experience disability?

**YES**



**NO**





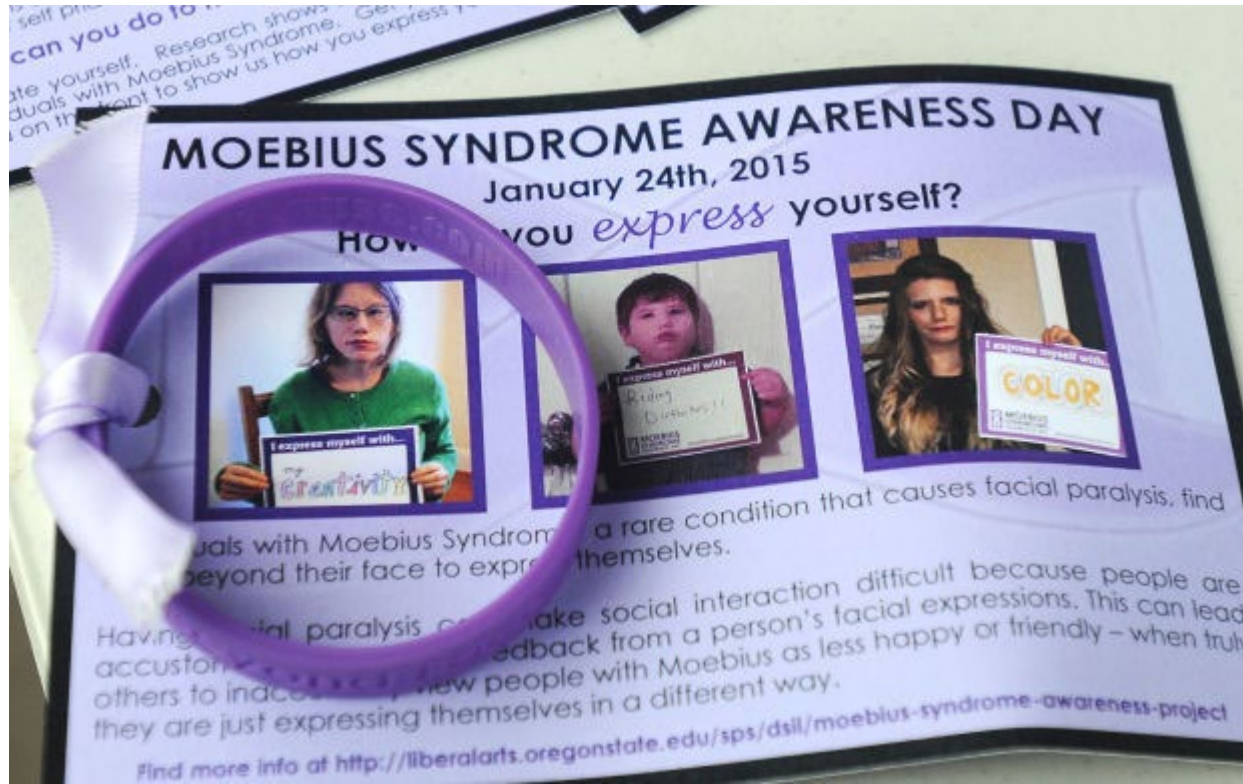
**I express myself with...**



**MOEBIUS  
SYNDROME  
AWARENESS DAY**

**#moebiusawareness**

# Activism through education



Oregon State psychology professor Kathleen Bogart talks to student James Galther on Friday afternoon at the Memorial Union quad during a campaign to educate people about Moebius Syndrome.

# Seeking expression

# Moebius Awareness Day



# Resources

- Disability Advocacy and Research Network (DARN)
  - A community for psychologists and students who have and/or specialize in disability
  - [Darndisability.org](http://Darndisability.org)



# Thanks!



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*Psychology Today* Blog  
Disability is Diversity



@kathleen\_bogart



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