



MEME

Me and the Media

**Me and the Media: Fostering Social Media Literacy Competences through
Interactive Learning Sets for Adults with Disabilities**

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Intellectual Output 1

Study on Digital and social media usage and the representation of people with disabilities:

“Are we Heroes?”

Date	24/03/2020
Author (s)	Dr. Paolo Martinelli, prof. Claudio Paolucci (UNIBO)
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ARE WE HEROES?

1. Disability stereotypes and disability media studies

The paper investigates Persons with Disabilities' stereotypes (PWD) spread by social networks considered as a place where public, social, political and advertising communication intertwine.

Data collected arise from research carried out by organisations, Universities and associations settled in four European countries (Lithuania, Portugal, Austria and Italy). However the data examined goes well beyond the national borders as the contents are deployed by the marketing sectors of international networking services and agencies as well as by participatory cultural practices enabled by social media.

From the semiotics studies point of view every culture is "participatory". Within the current framework we relate to this word in the way it is used by Henry Jenkins (2010) and later by Katie Ellis and Gerard Gogging (2015) within the relationship between *media studies* and *disability studies*. Our attempt will be focusing on the difference between the *use* of the media to enjoy cultural products before the social networks and the popular culture produced *with* the media within the set of practices of sharing and re-usage in the social networks' era.

The most important feature we encounter first over the *participatory culture* identified by Jenkins, and capable of a paradigm shift, relates with the removal of the access barriers:

For now, we define participatory culture as a culture with:

- Relatively low barriers for artistic expression and civic commitment;
 - A strong support for the creation of contents and for sharing creations with others;
 - A kind of informal tutorship through which experienced participants share knowledge with other participants;
 - A collection of individuals, believing that every contribution is important, and
 - A collection of individuals that feel some social link connecting each other
- (Jenkins, 2010: 67).

From an historical perspective, the way social networks enabled cultural participation provided the possibility to join a process of collective enunciation. The most important outcome of *participatory culture turn*, in our opinion, is the opportunity for Persons with Disabilities to contribute with narratives about disability, following a *bottom-up model* (Blau 2005). This

process allows to produce new representations not belonging to social marketing campaigns or to political communication strategies and nonetheless it is capable to be widely spread and obtain digital communities involvement and contribution.¹

The *Manifesto for the Future of Critical Disability Studies* defines a digital community as:

a community that interacts entirely, or primarily, online. They are a community, not by the borders they inhabit, but their sense of comradeship, their shared sense of identity, mission and, in some ways, values and lexicon. They use various modes of social media to congregate, collaborate and disseminate information that may be used to support or supplement their ideologies and mission. (Ellis, Garland-Thomson, Kent and Robertson, 2019)

A digital community displays the same shape of an assembly where heterogeneous entries gather with an equal opportunity to have a say. The heterogeneity guarantees the wealth of the community and, at the same time, its limit and danger since every entry leads its story at the very moment it melts and gathers with the other ones.

In turn, this kind of enunciation is not free from stereotypes or false representations. Instead, stereotypes about disability are the cultural leftovers that make every new discourse and representation about Persons with Disabilities possible.

Equally, another cliché to distance ourselves from is the idea that the Internet is a “flat” and hierarchies-free space (see Deleuze and Guattari 1980). In this regard, Bartezzaghi (2019) argues that the idea of social networks as a place where the accessibility, hence the cultural participation, is completely realised is an *horizontal illusion*². Internet and social networks bring their structure and the entries’ history boosting the possibility, if anything, to reset your own identity and start over, a sort of “representation’s virginity” in the eyes of others.

Indeed, in the *Disability Media Study* field, many researchers defend the opposite thesis. When assistive technologies and compensative software are not native, i.e. designed together with web applications and media devices that enable the enjoyment and the revision of cultural contents, they lead to frustrated experiences.

¹ The *community mobilizer officer* is a professional figure born in parallel with participatory culture, in which the aim is to manage these – often global – civil action phenomena “from below”. For instance, think about the great following obtained by Greta Thumberg's *Friday for future movement*.

² “(...) although unable to realise a real horizontality among the users, social networks are keen on evading the feeling of hierarchy more than the hierarchy itself” (our translation) Bartezzaghi 2019 p.33

Several examples concerning “architectural barriers” can often occur over online practices: from the recurrent *caption fail* of Youtube’s subtitles, hindering webinars’ comprehension for deaf people, up to the lack of an appropriate HTML code for visually impaired people³. The radical hypothesis expressed by Ellcessor in a recent work – *Restricted Access. Media, Disability and the Politics of Participation* (2016) – argues that *new media technologies*, far from supporting the different types of disabilities, are able to establish new ones through the creation of impracticable programs of action⁴. The issue is highly relevant for the topic under consideration as the User Experience designers ground their projects on stereotypes, on a *user model*⁵. The expectation relies on the application of basic laws of pragmatics and communication theory, starting from the one outlined by Eco in *Lector in Fabula*: “the receiver’s competence is not necessarily the one of the sender” (1979: p.53). The logic supported by Eco - according to which texts do not just foresee the reader’s competence but, instead, they are able to set it up - leads to consider the improper design of interfaces as a contextual disabling operation. This sort of “disability supply” is in line with the core-idea of the “social model of disability”, namely the idea that impairments become disabilities only when the cultural context constitutes them as such⁶.

However, defining what disability entails walking on a slippery ground. The risk is, in turn, sticking to stereotypes.

³ On this topic, see Ellcessor 2016: 3.

⁴ Ibidem

⁵ Eco 1979;

⁶ Whereas Disability Studies proposed “social models”, Critical Disability Studies have criticised this model, although they recognized their effectiveness for the description of the physical impaired people’s condition. This denial is due to the difficulty for the adaptation of the model to other types of impairments. For a historical excursus about the dialogue between disability studies and critical disability studies, see Boxall (2018) in Ellis, Katie. (2018) Manifestos for the Future of Critical Disability Studies: Volume 1. 10.4324/9781351053341. p.202.

2. Classical stereotypes about Disability

The **social model of disability** is the first classical stereotype the reader can encounter in the literacy studies.

The word “classical” has to be interpreted in its chronological sense. We will consider the interpretative models coined before the *Participatory Culture Turn* under this domain, where for “turn” – more cultural than technological – we refer to the *New Media Studies*’ approaches occurred over the first decade of XXI century perceived as a paradigm shift by many essays belonging to the *Disability Studies* research field.

Classic stereotypes on disability did not vanish into thin air but they have been adapted to the new cultural practices.

An insight will be dedicated on how such categories are still circulating in the current debate about PWD⁷ and we’ll be deepening how clichés’ and stereotypes’ dynamics shape our subjectivity (Paolucci 2017, p357).

From one side the “the social model for representing disability identity” as developed by Robert McRuer and Michael Berube (2006) aims to drawn a line between *impairment* and *disability*:

(...) we define impairment as lacking part or all of a limb, or having a defective limb organism or mechanism of the body; and disability as the disadvantage or restriction of activity caused by a contemporary social organisation which takes no account of people who have physical impairments and thus excludes them from participation in the main stream of social activities (UPIAS, 1976, p. 14).

On the other hand the pamphlet signed by UPIAS (Union of Physically Impaired Against Segregation) recommends the “social model” in opposition to other classical stereotypes.

The *medical model* is built on the conception of Persons with Disability as victims of a disease or of a diagnosable physical condition to be healed. Rhoda Olkin (1999) highlights that the treatment or the partial rehabilitation are the aims of the medicalization. The “sick role” of the patient is expected to be played by PWD while an healing power is conferred to the stereotype

⁷ See paragraph 5.1.

of the doctor. Words like ‘invalid’, ‘cripple’, ‘spastic’, ‘handicapped’ and ‘retarded’ come from the medical model (Creamer 2009, p. 22)⁸. The UPIAS pamphlet states several times that getting out of clichés is necessary.

(...) But the imposition of medical authority, and of a medical definition of our problems of living in society, have to be resisted strongly. First and foremost, we are people, not patients, cases, spastics, the deaf, the blind, wheelchairs or the sick. (ibidem)

A similar argument applies for the *charity model* that represents Persons with Disabilities as victims suffering for their impairments, most of them depressed, and in need to be assisted by able-bodied people in every possible way (Duyan 2007, p. 71)⁹.

(...) We also reject the whole idea of experts and professionals holding forth on how we should accept our disabilities, or giving learned lectures about the psychology of disablement. We already know what it feels like to be poor, isolated, segregated, done good to, stared at, and talked down to - far better than any able-bodied expert. We as a Union are not interested in descriptions of how awful it is to be disabled. (ibidem)

A fourth classical model of disability must be mentioned. It is described by Ellcessor (2016) as “the individual embodied tragedy model” representing disability as a personal and familiar tragedy, in opposition with the social model, and where controversial themes such as sterilization or euthanasia often find rooms (Carlson 2010)¹⁰.

The four stereotypes mentioned so far do not cover all the classical stereotypes of disability¹¹. However, our aim is to show, above all, how the construction of the ‘social model’ is the outcome of a collective enunciation shaped by the establishment of a differential relationship with other stereotypes underpinning his formation. A norm emerged from several adoptions and clichés, a sort of canon open to its possible variation

⁸ Creamer, D., 2009, *Disability and Christian theology: Embodied limits and constructive possibilities*, Oxford University Press, Oxford.

⁹ Duyan, V. 2007. ‘The community effects of disabled sports’, in *Centre of Excellence Defence Against Terrorism* (ed.), *Amputee sports for victims of terrorism*, pp. 70-77, IOS Press, Amsterdam.

¹⁰ Carlson, L., 2010, *The faces of intellectual disability*, Indiana University Press, Bloomington, IN.

¹¹ See for instance Retief, M. & Letšosa, R., 2018, ‘Models of disability: A brief overview’, *HTS Theologese Studies/ Theological Studies* 74(1), a4738. <https://doi.org/10.4102/hts.v74i1.4738>

3. Semiotic of Stereotypes

According to common sense, a negative value is attributed to stereotype, figures of speech better to escape from. It happens to charge speakers using stereotypes as people lacking originality and critical thinking. In this sense, the stereotype refers to the categorisation of rigid semantic patterns that show specific boundaries in which some elements are valorised euphorically (as the role of the doctor in the c model) or dysphorically (stressing the physical impairment). Stereotype gets a recursive feature. As stressed by Bartezzaghi “the effort to avoid schemes let you in another scheme.”¹²

In order to understand the evolution of stereotypes representing Persons with Disability and to provide the necessary tools to describe the spread and the values that stereotypes assume in the participatory culture within new media, it is necessary to change and flip the perspective. The key is to conceive types and forms established by a stereotype as devices allowing to divert from a standard manner and to make them work with a new item. In fact, when someone tries to leave a habit behind, they actually enter into another one. It’s not about getting out from stereotypes but building others more acceptable and inhabiting them with adaptability, whenever feasible.

Indeed, from an interpretative semiotic point of view (see Paolucci 2020), the individual and subjective aspect of language that people express producing utterances – cultural products such as texts, journal articles, Facebook posts, photos, artworks – constitutively depends from its shared and social aspect, namely the background of stereotypes each subjective act engage and relate with. Here below a double dimension belonging to stereotypes emerges over the process of sense-making:

- i) Stereotypes virtually pulse under the blank page before the act of enunciation;
- ii) Stereotypes take place concretely within utterances where every form generated from clichés is in turn capable of generating clichés. It deals with the encyclopaedic nature of stereotypes (see Paolucci 2010), which plays a fundamental semiotic role within the theory of enunciation.

¹² Bartezzaghi, S. 2019 p.42

As for point (i), it is worth noting that the construction of the ‘social model’ in the UPIAS pamphlet, analysed in the previous paragraph, represents exactly the attempt to clean the page from the encyclopaedic stereotypes that dwell it. The social model was already there, in the virtual encyclopaedia of culture. In order to actualize the social model, however, it was necessary to “add the subtractions” of the medical model, of the charity model, and of the model of personal tragedy. This operation allowed the creation of a virtual encyclopaedia, which in turn is not an immutable reality but constitutes a stereotype, meaning the condition of possibility for any new narration on disability, even when an utterance seeks to deviate from the set of patterns, norms and uses that represent the background of each singular act producing utterances.

These new conditions of possibility lead to point (ii). The ‘social model’ is generated from clichés that it seeks to neutralise but, in turn, starting from the 70s, it has been establishing a stereotype against which certain communities of Persons With Disabilities have struggled¹³. In the same way, the ‘medical model’ and the ‘charity model’ had found an origin in the anachronistic “moral or religious model” that in many traditions, including the Judeo-Christian one, conceived disability as an act of God, as a divine punishment for committing a sin or a test of faith, to be performed through a path of passion and pain¹⁴. From this point of view, both the medical and the charity model assume a completely different emotional valorisation compared to the anachronism of the religious model, and the temptation to identify an historical progression of these models takes hold as they become gradually more inclusive in our culture. In this regard, *Screening Stereotypes* (1985) by Paul K. Longmore recommends adopting an historical and cultural perspective when implementing a research on stereotypes in order to connect the topics of the *disability studies* and the *media studies*. Similarly, *Crip Theory* (2006) by Robert McRuer and Michael Berube - while evaluating the taxonomy of stereotypes that Garland-Thomson proposed in *Seeing the disabled* (2001), the first real work on the representation of disability in the media – warns about how globalisation can affect cultural practices able, in turn, to create stereotypes of PWDs.

¹³ “From the outset, social model ideas were widely endorsed by wheelchair users and people with physical impairments, but were less enthusiastically received by people with other impairments, some of whose experiences were missing from early social model discussion. In recent years, discussion has been expanded to include people with a wider range of impairments and some of these more inclusive and nuanced discussions are now situated under a banner of critical disability studies.” (Katie Ellis, Rosemarie Garland-Thomson, Mike Kent, Rachel Robertson, 2019 p.199)

¹⁴ Retief, M. & Letšosa, R., 2018, ‘Models of disability: A brief overview’, HTS Theologies Studies/Theological Studies 74(1), a4738. <https://doi.org/10.4102/hts.v74i1.4738>

It is worth reminding that contributions mentioned so far were published before the advent of social media and Facebook.

Allow us to share a hypothesis. If a linear evolution of those stereotypes was pretty predictable before the *participatory turn* – ruled by publishers, advertising agencies, public, social, and political communication from institutions – the advent of social media shuffled the cards. On one side the *turn* led to the development of forms of engagement and activism, on the other side it empowered the rising of old cultural stereotypes, a further confirmation of the idea that social media cannot be interpreted with a positive/negative approach. They simply open up new possibilities able to re-setting practices and utterances keen on inhabiting them. If from one side they enhanced new practices of gathering, boosting collective chains of enunciation, from the other side they gave clichés the chance to come back just when they seemed out of stock.

4. Images and stereotypes about disability

At the beginning of a fundamental essay about disability studies, Rosemarie Garland Thomson (2001) quotes two important authors from semiotic tradition in order to describe the role of photographic images in the spread of stereotypes on disability. On the one hand, the author goes back to Foucault's idea of 'medical gaze' to explain the visual stereotype that drives the perception of disability and she charges medical photos to be one of the causes of the entrenchment of the medical model in the twentieth century.

Secondly, she introduces a new visual taxonomy for the representation of Persons with Disabilities by exploiting a reflection by Roland Barthes (Garland-Thomson 2001, p. 337). The step is essential as it enables us to witness the construction of contents that will shape cultural practices related to *social networks* over the dawn of participatory *culture*.

As Roland Barthes claims despairingly in his meditation on photography, "One of the marks of our world is [that] we live according to a generalised image repertoire."

One of the fundamental features of utterances and cultural products which live and circulate on social networks is the fact that they are largely conveyed by images. The taxonomy conceived by Garland-Thomson (2001) represents thus an archaeology of stereotypes, through which it is possible to track how the classic models of disability have been reshaped by the '*ocularcentric modernity*' (Garland-Thomson 2001, p. 337).

The first stereotype-image of disability that we are about to analyse is the so-called "the wondrous". The rhetoric of the "prodigy" constitutes a small drama in the spatial relationship established by the perspective of the photographic image. The audience is set on the ordinary side where you can look in awe at the different, the prodigy (Galrand-Thomson 2001: p. 337). The evolution of this rhetorical model can be reconstructed starting from Classical Ancient times where deformed creatures were used to predict the future and inspire awe, passing through modernity secularising the broken body of Christ or the monstrous figure of the devil through the figure of disabled persons, to arrive at the contemporary "super-creep" the Person with Disability who despite his impairment is able to achieve an unlikely goal, such as climbing a mountain in a wheelchair (Garland-Thompson 2001, p. 341).



The second stereotype-image is the emotional one – the sentimental. The occurrences of this type present an inverse spatial rhetoric in comparison with the previous example, setting the Person With Disability under the spectator “in the position of a victim to empathise with or an helpless to give heal or protection to” (Garland-Thomson 2001, p. 341). This rhetoric arises in the context of the paternalist model (charity model) of the bourgeoisie of the nineteenth century. This type of images, mostly used for fundraising in the social and health field, stages “the spectacle of suffering” through the photographic image of PWDs’ bodies (Garland-Thompson 2001, p. 341). A body far enough to avoid engagement but close enough to feel empathy and provide financial support to.

The same stereotype, at the end of the 90s, was iterated in the advertising communication of retail. Oliviero Toscani’s campaigns for Benetton are the best examples: children with Down syndrome are photographed smiling and wearing high fashion garments in order to promote an image of a humanitarian and not just profit-oriented company. The image of the Person with Disabilities is staged as a familiar and comforting presence (Garland-Thomson 2001, p. 356).



The third stereotype-image is the ethnographic one – the exotic. With this rhetorical device, the Person with Disabilities is presented as “extraneous, sensationalised, eroticized, or ridiculous in his way of being different” (Garland-Thomson 2001, p. 343). The exotic rhetoric transforms the viewer into an ethnographer or a curious spectator who keeps herself at a safe distance from the diversity exposed by the clear impairments. This photographic stereotype was born in the context of 19th century imperialism, and it is possible to see how it modulates itself “in a new, acceptable albeit controversial way” (Garland-Thomson 2001, p. 358) through the introduction of disabled models in commercial advertisements and on catwalks of fashion designers.



The fourth and last stereotype-image is the realistic one. Unlike the other models, this type of stereotype seeks to normalise disability's features. The spatial rhetoric of the realistic image must "minimise the distances and the differences between the viewer and the person portrayed" (Garland-Thomson 2001, p. 344). The word "realistic" does not mean that this type of photographic image is capable of reproducing reality in its "elusive and complex substance", but it is able to generate an effect of meaning, an "illusion of reality", constructed and conventional like the other stereotype-images. Spatial organisation devices in this case do not encourage hierarchical relationship between the body of the viewer and the subject of the photograph. The signs of the disabled body are not hidden but neither emphasised. The realistic stereotype-image leads to an effect of meaning through a narrative that narcotised the signs of disability. The stories emerging concern people facing personal goals, trials and penalties not related with disability.



As explained so far "the structure of stereotypes involves the same categorisation of reality connecting one to the others, it is not possible to question it with a principle, an *epochè* or a method" (Paolucci 2017: p. 355) as it stands to our thoughts as the placenta for the baby.

"The stereotype cannot be understood at all neither as the unauthentic form of existence, nor as a sound image to get rid of, but as the product of the inter-subjectivity defining the background of our perception of the world (Paolucci 2017, p. 355).

However, it is worth reporting how the studies on the relationship between disability and mass media is possible to find a first positive judgement of the realistic stereotype-image as a way to represent Persons with Disabilities:

Such routinization of disability imagery not only brings disability as a common human experience out of the closet but enables people with disabilities - especially those who acquire impairments as adults - to imagine themselves as a part of the ordinary world, rather than as a special class of untouchables and unviewable. (ibidem p. 368)

5. Social Network and stereotypes about disability

Here below is a synoptic table of classic models and stereotype-images of disability provided to give an account of the way they merged, iterated and entered into variation over the participatory culture of social networks and the practice of sharing in the new media.

Modulation	Classic Models on Disability	Stereotype-Images about Disability	New Participative culture's categories	Complex Categories
Emphasis on the condition of disability	Personal Tragedy Model	The Wondrous	HEROES (to act)	→ Hero + Normalization → Activist
	Medical Model	The Exotic	ANTAGONIST (to hinder)	
	Charity Mode	The Sentimental	VICTIM (to suffer)	
Narcotization of the condition of disability	Social Model	The Realistic	NORMALIZATIO N	→ Inclusion
			DENIAL	
			PROFITEER (to take advantage)	

Over the next analysis it would be possible to notice how the polarisation between Emphasis and Narcotization of disability's features is able to produce complex categories and to represent disability as a typical form of human experience.

Let's provide a brief description of the new categories:

Primarily, PWD's representations have to be split in two macro-categories:

1. Emphasising disability: representations shedding light on disability and stressing the PWD's condition.
2. Narcotization of disability: representations trying to hide or to deny disability.

These 2 macro-categories occur in some different ways:

Empathization of disability:

- [HEROES] (to act): the narration emphasises the traits of disability, to arouse acceptance and come to consider the disabled person as an example of struggle and demonstration of strength against adversities and difficulties that disability entails.
- [VICTIM] (to suffer): In this kind of narration disability is emphasised to promote empathy, and through pathos, encourage the reader to understand issues that PWDs face.
- [ANTAGONIST] (to hinder): in this stereotype persons with disabilities are seen as an obstacle to social practices. At school, at work and in the most varied contexts of daily life, narrations that follow this model represent people with disabilities as an impediment to the goals that "others" must be able to achieve.
- [PROFITEER] (to take advantage): In this kind of narration PWDs are described as profiteers who want to take advantage of their condition and disability is emphasised by narrations to highlight favouritism.

Narcotization of disability:

- [NORMALISATION] (to make normal): Here, narrations hide (or don't highlight) disability and try to normalise PWD's condition.

In these representations we can find customised prostheses, concealment of disadvantage, and masking in favour of social integration.

- [DENIAL] (to refuse): In these narrations the condition of disability is narcotized. For a particular group or type of disability it is declared that integration has already taken place, there is no need for greater social integration. The disability is denied, this means a lack of self-awareness also in PWD and about their own condition in daily life.
- [POSTCARD] [Ableism and piety]: Persons with Disability are set in the background. Like in a postcard the subject is an able-bodied person using a PWD activist advertisement for a presumably political or economic profit. The tale about disability is flat and monochromatic, built over the common sense on “what is usually known about them”.

In addition to these stereotypes, we have to list some other categories that don't fit with the previous.

- Hero + Normalisation → ACTIVIST: The complex category deriving from the combination of the Hero stereotype with the Normalisation stereotype describes a representation in which the impairment characteristics are first emphasised and then narcotized to build a narrative that configures PWDs as heroes for the community of reference, without however underlining their disabilities.
- Victim + Normalisation → ACTIVIST: The person with disability is represented as a victim. However he's not complaining about his condition but carries personal battles aimed to improve the accessibility and policy's changeover.
- INCLUSION: In this perspective, disability is not represented either as a problem or as a characteristic against which to struggle in today's society. Instead, it is addressed as a necessity, and the solutions to the challenges of full integration are aimed at building roles and spaces suitable for persons with disabilities, which aim at the inclusion of people with disabilities each according to his or her possibilities.

5.1. Emphasis on the condition of disability

[HEROES] (to act, to be): the narration emphasises the traits of disability, to arouse acceptance and come to consider the disabled person as an example of struggle and demonstration of strength against adversities and difficulties that disability entails.

1- The make-up should not cover imperfections.

<https://www.facebook.com/BeatriceVioOfficialPage/posts/2511193252283898>



“These scars tell my stories. They are part of me, and they represent my will to keep fighting. For this reason, I chose the L’Oreal Paris Accord Parfait foundation, which reflects the colour of my skin without hiding its imperfections... they are perfect to me!”

In this post the paralympic athlete, wheelchair fencer, Bebe Vio is testimonial for a well-known cosmetics company (L’Oreal Paris). When Bebe Vio was 11 years old, she was affected by a severe meningitis that caused her an infection and then the amputation of both

her legs from the knee, and both her arms from the forearms.

L’Oreal, the well-known cosmetics company, chose Bebe Vio to promote a different image of beauty. Bebe doesn’t feel uncomfortable with her body. What strikes is the kind of picture: in cosmetics campaigns we are used to seeing models with perfect skins.

Imperfection and scars are supposed to be hidden, but in this case they are magnified like an element of fascination and despite all, beauty.

The advertisement's complex narrative shows how an unusual image-stereotype of disability can be built upon prior models it couples with and hindering, at the same time, their own fulfilment.

Taking into account that the athlete has been already the protagonist of TV-shows and reportages, the reader would be keen on decreeing the representation as a “wondrous”, as Garland Thomson is used to define the tales focused on PWD able to realise extraordinary ventures notwithstanding their impairments.

However, motor impairments and limbs-prosthesis are not revealed over the advertisement. Our expectations are disregarded. The focus is on the face, the scars “tell the story” of Bebe. It’s necessary to stress that the spot is advertising make-up which “doesn’t cover imperfections”. The “realistic” rhetoric emerges¹⁵, bringing us back to the Breast Cancer Fund¹⁶ advertisement where the Victoria’s Secrets and Calvin Klein parody was realised by exploiting models after mastectomy or like when Oliviero Toscani used to set children with Down syndrome for Benetton campaigns.

Despite the analogies, in Bebe there is something more in the relationship with the prior models of disability, or better there is something less or missing. First of all the sensationalism strategy (by exploiting for example realistic images) is totally vacant plus the “origin” of the spot is not an agency or a no-profit organisation; the subject of enunciation it’s Bebe herself from her personal Facebook account.

It’s worth observing how the post is accompanied by few autobiographical lines expressed in first person and linked to a photo representing her in the foreground.

The name of the agency is tagged together with three further *hashtags*. Just those elements are the evidence that the image is actually an advertisement.

¹⁵ Garland Thomson p. 367

¹⁶ *Ibidem*

That is how a new representation can emerge from the heritage and comparison with two consolidated images-stereotypes of PWD plus a variation realised by subtracting elements.

It is possible to state that the advertisement can be considered as a first example of a new stereotype as further will come and be presented after that. The exploitation of personal accounts on social networks represents the contextual condition for the realisation of this new narration, extremely hard to imagine before the *participatory turn* (see the first paragraph).

5.2 - Instagram profile of a famous supermodel with Down Syndrome and a linked first-person narration

<https://www.awarenessties.us/madlinestuart.html>

https://www.instagram.com/madlinesmodelling_/?hl=it



World's 1st Supermodel with D.S Acc featured and followed by @instagram.

NO.1 game changer FORBES.

Walked 7 seasons NYFW PFW LFW.

Run by Team Maddy

“I am very proud to be the person representing people with Down Syndrome for Awareness Ties, for a long time there has been so many stigmas attached to disabilities

and so much incorrect information being available around the world. I am here to show people that just because I have down syndrome does not mean I am not successful, worthy and most of all capable of giving back to the community. Everyone on this planet needs to feel wanted and to be included. So, with your help let's raise funds to help change the lives of so many beautiful, capable people. Remember, only through total inclusion can we find the true meaning of humanity."

The short presentation comes from the "bio" section of Madeline Stuart's Instagram profile. Here it is possible to see how the sense emerges from the pattern that the text establishes with a series of unrealised classical stereotypes. The reader encounters first a fundraising linked to the PWD image, extremely different from the examples previously analysed (see paragraph 4). Over sentimental images and advertising communication the rhetoric usually used to raise funds was focused on the representation of the PWD as a victim the reader can feel empathy with or an helpless person in need of assistance and protection¹⁷.

Let's try to analyse how the paternalistic-charitable background can be overcome in a fundraising context by exploiting the image of a girl with Down syndrome.

The "bio" section of Madeline Stuart's Instagram page provides three main informations: (i) she is a "SuperModel"; (ii) she ranks first in the "Game Changer" chart realised by Forbes, (iii) she is been parading for eight seasons on behalf of remarkable modelling agencies.

The set of information constitutes a first variation of the "Sentimental" rhetoric.

PWD position is not lower at all in comparison with the reader in particular if social media popularity is taken into account as parameter.

The figurative elements of "pathetic" usually belonging to the fund-raising fully disappear through the representation of Madeline parading on the red carpet, doing fitness in an expensive gym or shopping in Time Square.

Madeline declares to hundreds of thousands of followers - by using quotation marks - that her aim is to change the perception the world feels towards disability. Taking the floor directly and specifying the campaign's objective is a further crucial element of variation in comparison with the prior models. The reader of other fundraising campaigns using PWD often runs into the presence of a charity, a no-profit organisation or a firm that establishes

¹⁷ See Shakespeare, Tom. (1994). Cultural Representation of Disabled People: Dustbins for Disavowal?. *Disability & Society - DISABIL SOC.* 9. 283-299. 10.1080/09687599466780341. p.222. "Charities operate by presenting extremely demeaning images of disabled people, intended to engender pity and sympathy in 'normal' people, who are then motivated to donate money."

itself as the receiver of the potential donation, the suffering state the reader can “adjust” with an economic contribution.

In this case, the PWD takes the floor on behalf of the charity fostering the fundraising campaign (Awareness Tie). Madeline is an ambassador, a completely different role, carried out often by V.I.P. promoting a cause. The message is still Down syndrome, the ambassador is a person with Down syndrome, but the aim of the advertisement here is promoting a new stereotype in opposition with the old-fashioned one where it actually comes to life from. It also marks a difference with the prodigious image – “The wondrous” – as the heroic features of PWD doesn’t no longer relate with the overcoming of a disadvantageous situation. The hero now is the one who gained a paradigm shift, a brand-new and unprecedented perception of the disability condition. Someone could argue about the posh world supermodel Madeline Stuart lives in (luxury hotels, exotic beaches, private jets) or her half-naked portraits during the shower or over medical examinations Never mind, the analysis should consider insignificant also the actual success of the fundraising campaign. What it is worth mentioning is the fact that from now on a PWD can be represented as a supermodel through the establishment of a point of view in first person by subtracting elements belonging to old stereotypes not forgetting that the latter (charity, paternalistic, wondrous) work as encyclopaedic background allowing the setting up of new vision ready to take part of the common sense.

5.3 The villain scrounger. A PWD’s model snaking among social networks comments.

The risk to attribute ethical values to the stereotype functioning machine and adhere to the common sense of the “stereotype” has been stressed over the previous chapters¹⁸.

It is true, in general terms, that an ethical side persists in our analysis too and shaped the project this paper develops from, however the aim is to highlight how stereotypes emerge, enter into service, be partially manageable by users, activists’ communities, policy makers, educators and not to indicate which ones are more or less suitable to represent PWD.

It is a remarkable distinction since the mechanism of stigmatisation – globally known as *hate speech* and fostered by the participatory turn and social media. - is now the centre of the analysis. The European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI) directly mentions

¹⁸ See paragraph 3.

the use of negative stereotypes related to disability:

Considering that hate speech is to be understood for the purpose of the present General Policy Recommendation as the advocacy, promotion or incitement, in any form, of the denigration, hatred or vilification of a person or group of persons, as well as any harassment, insult, negative stereotyping, stigmatization or threat in respect of such a person or group of persons and the justification of all the preceding types of expression, on the ground of "race",¹ colour, descent, national or ethnic origin, age, disability, language, religion or belief, sex, gender, gender identity, sexual orientation and other personal characteristics or status.¹⁹

Mark Sherry, Terje Olsen, Janikke Solstad Vedeler and John Eriksen in *Disability Hate Speech: Social, Cultural and Political Contexts* (2019) state that invoke the wills of the enunciator to draw a line between hate speech and freedom of speech is a wrong argumentation. The essay stresses how much hate speech is on the contrary a socially-based and reflects specific features in a given culture²⁰. Tom Shakespeare shares the same opinion when he outlines that people with impairments “are disabled, not just by material discrimination, but also by prejudice. This prejudice is not just interpersonal, it is also implicit in cultural representation, in language and in socialisation.”²¹

Adhering to a vocabulary able to bully and hurt is not related to intentions but to culture. Some words are used in social networks not to offend someone but just because they belong to the common sense in a given culture. For example in Italy the word “deficiente” (a person which is less than fully human) or “mongoloide” (often used in the AngloSaxon world); “*retarded*”, “*tard*” (like “*tard truck*” used to indicate a school bus reserved to people with motor disability), “*moron*”, “*idiot*”, “*imbecile*”, “*spastic*” (related to the medical model), or some abbreviations like “*schizo*” for schizophrenia or “*triso*” for trisomy 21 (Down syndrome)²².

Words like these belong to common sense, they are exploited in social networks mostly without the intention to denigrate (not directly at least) but they contribute to fostering “hateful” stereotypes.

In line with the premises, *disability hate speeches* expressed to bully or hurt won't be displayed here, notwithstanding it is worth remembering that is a dangerous and booming phenomenon.

¹⁹ [ECRI General Policy Recommendation N°15](#)

²⁰ Sherry, Olsen, Solstad Vedeler, Eriksen (2019) p.224.

²¹ “The Social Model needs to be reconceptualized: people with impairment are disabled, not just by material discrimination, but also by prejudice. This prejudice is not just interpersonal, it is also implicit in cultural representation, in language and in socialisation.” Shakespeare, Tom. (1994). Cultural Representation of Disabled People: Dustbins for Disavowal?. *Disability & Society - DISABIL SOC.* 9. 283-299. 10.1080/09687599466780341. p.230.

²² Vedi Sherry, Olsen, Solstad Vedeler, Eriksen (2019) p. 634 -636.

Direct hate speeches towards PWD in social networks are often censored by media networks owners and users are charged by courts.²³

Instead, we will be focusing on the insidious “*free speaking*” realised over the comments’ section available on social media to express reactions to articles. The following one looks exemplary.

Article in a private TV web portal linked on Facebook: “VU Student got frozen when read about her practice assessment’ mark reduced because of disability”

<https://www.facebook.com/rimvydas.lauzikas/posts/3102712093077049>



Vilnius University position about the case in VU FB page:

RL: “This day in VU Faculty of Communication started solving a very unpleasant problem. Our different abilities to move can not be considered as a limitation to study or to work as a journalist. Therefore it is important to understand the situations and to take decisions not only for this case, but as well those which would prevent occurring similar situations in the future. We are working on it.”

A Vilnius University Professor belonging to the Department of Communication comments on a local TV news by sharing it on his Facebook account. A student with mobility disability belonging to the same department carries on a traineeship in a local press agency. The final

²³ See Mark Sherry, Terje Olsen, Janikke Solstad Vedeler, John Eriksen (2019) chapter 1.

vote certifying the traineeship accomplishment is 9/10 followed by the editor's comment: "bigger opportunities were limited because of the mobility disability". The post supports the student's opinion: the student's work evaluation should not be an expression of her impairment. Here below some of the comments the Professor received:

- we are not surprised about anything anymore, look at what is going on in schools...
- I see discrimination of the healthy students. If the editor would drive students with no disabilities, if she would make such a high assessment mark for the average article?
- Pardon me, but I don't understand what this editor did wrong and why the student makes a noise here. She was as good as she could be, but the assessment mark is defined when all together - disabled and not disabled - are compared. Certainly, if she had difficulties moving and couldn't go everywhere, she couldn't do the reportages and articles about everything. It is really difficult. So where are the roots? Does she should be assessed more carefully and artificially better because of it? In my opinion, the healthy person wouldn't get 10 points if the editor would need to drive him and he couldn't do certain tasks.
- It seems that it is more painful for her to accept that she is not healthy, and she doesn't help herself by writing such articles, interesting to which employers she will find a job later?
- Such event is called discrimination because of disability, terrible to read, go ahead directly to the court, Lithuania is rich country to pay millions. But it has to be presented in a way, that those millions were paid by public servants, not tax payers - and the mess will end.
- And don't look for the discrimination where is not. If the editor thinks differently, then he could go himself to the practice with a student in the village and be her driver or organise the taxi. The newspaper editor has enough duties. Why should she sacrifice her work time? Instead of "thanks" - extra complaints? When the student will start to work in the newspaper permanently, will the editor be obligated to drive her as well? It is a nonsense in and rising scandal in "flat land".
- Terrible when the mark is reduced because of disability. It is obvious discrimination.

It is easy to note the heritage of the most abused stereotype about PWD we encountered before. Three different users use the term "healthy" to define *the others*, the students without impairments. It is the medical model²⁴ reverberating over the participatory culture and through which the status of sick person to PWD shapes. As for the previous examples, the old stereotype did not occur intact and unconditional but through the actualisation of a new interpretation. Here below we can see how subtracting mercy is an available operation in the medical model:

"It seems that it is more painful for her to accept that she is not like others."

"I see discrimination of the healthy students".

"Why should she [the newspaper editor] sacrifice her work time? Instead of "thanks" - extra complaints?"

²⁴ See Paragraph 2.

Paying attention on these opinions, the student looks having difficulties to accept her no-healthy condition in comparison with the able students (condition outlined in “the individual medical tragedy theory”²⁵) and it’s assessable first among the causes expressed by the “healthy” students as it represents an obstacle for the professional life of her employer.

Notably the image of a PWD incorrectly receiving a privilege emerges over the last two comments, furthermore potentially ungrateful considering the expressions used over the interview.

The interpretation of PWD in the role of the opportunist hindering the “healthy people” life is able to keep together the medical model with the stereotype of the PWD as scrounger.

The disability condition is never challenged (moreover it is interpreted as an incontrovertible condition of sickness) and the mercy element has disappeared from the original model, suggesting a suspect over the PWD intention to profit on her condition.

A research released by the scientific journal “Disability & Society” showed how institutional communication about austerity politics of UK government addressed to cut welfare expenditures had contributed to foster the idea of PWD as scrounger and “Folk Devils” over media (Brian, Watson e Philo; 2013)²⁶. Researchers like the latter track circular paths of a stereotype. Slime and detritus of old models (medical model) shift in new contests (social network, hate speech) boosted and fostered by institutional communication.

Many cases reported in annex allow us to read other comments empowering this stereotype and how they testify the success of this hateful point of view.

Two particular exploitations of this stereotype are exposed here below taken from the comments section of social networks. Especially the reader can remark how such stereotypes are conveyed also by PWD.

5.4 [ANTAGONIST] (to hinder): in this stereotype people with disabilities are seen as an obstacle to social practices. At school, at work and in the most varied contexts of daily life narrations that follow this model represent people with disabilities as an impediment to the

²⁵ Shakespeare, Tom. (1994). Cultural Representation of Disabled People: Dustbins for Disavowal?. *Disability & Society - DISABIL SOC.* 9. 283-299. 10.1080/09687599466780341. p.218.

²⁶ Briant, Emma & Watson, Nicholas & Philo, Gregory. (2013). Reporting disability in the age of austerity: the changing face of media representation of disability and disabled people in the United Kingdom and the creation of new ‘folk devils’. *Disability & Society.* 28. 874-889. 10.1080/09687599.2013.813837.

goals that “others” must be able to achieve.

1- Article on educational impairments

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/161225471317178/permalink/632636474176073/>



The article is about inclusive education. For the moment in Lithuania it's still possible to reject pupils with disabilities if schools don't have enough knowledge or resources. The article is about a change in the law that the ministry of education is planning to prohibit to reject pupils with disabilities from schools.

This article was published in one of the main Lithuanian news portals and shared in the FB disabilities groups “Movement for the rights of people with disabilities”. In the comments we can find People With Disabilities discussing it. Some of them agree with the proposal, but others say that it's too early and claim that people with intellectual disabilities cannot be included. We present here the English translation of some comments to the article

- That's good idea
- Its should be like this, some of private schools accepts pupils with disability with others
- But what do we do if bullying starts?
- Everyone should know his place in this world
- I don't think that it's a good decision, everything ok when children has
psychical disability, but much more problems come with intellectual/emotional disability. It
will bring more problems for us. We need to check all individual cases before accepting all in
one school.
- Do you forget the not so old story when other parents protest against children with disabilities
in their class?

It is worth noting how the dialogue within the group “Movement for the rights of people with disabilities” suggests again a theme already faced over the presentation of the Social Model (paragraph 2).

People with physical disabilities assume that their target group can rightfully be part of a class-group in a public school but *the others*, those with mental disability, have to be evaluated case by case. The latter marks another border among Social Model arguments. Indeed, in 1976 the social model theory of disability was widely supported by people on wheelchairs and by persons with physical impairments, less by people with other disabilities which felt forgotten by the *disability studies* first version.

Over the comments examined, once established and stored such distinction²⁷, the long dialogue has been focusing on architectural barriers, eclipsing the integration of students with disabilities at school. The stereotype of the “antagonist” is still active. PWD are considered to be an obstacle in classes for non-disabled people, and a number of comments consider that it would be better to set up classes entirely composed of PWD. On this occasion, PWD are considered with mental impairments, while physical impairments are considered as having the same learning abilities as non-disabled people.

1- Video about how it is to be in wheelchair in Switzerland

²⁷ Boxall (2018) in Ellis, Katie. (2018) Manifestos for the Future of Critical Disability Studies: Volume 1. 10.4324/9781351053341. p.202.

<https://www.facebook.com/izzymagazine/videos/1320635514708567/>



English translation:

Title of the video:

This is how hard it is for wheelchair users in Switzerland.

Stairs and other obstacles everywhere...

Hitzi from Basel describes how Switzerland is not very barrier-free.

From tram stops to cafes, bars, restaurants, shopping centres and grocery stores to pharmacy entrances and cobblestones on most squares, accessibility or access seems to be no issue.

There are many places Hitzi can't visit and he says: "If I ever find a club, there's usually no functioning disabled toilet".

This is a video which deals with barriers and obstacles for wheelchair users in Switzerland.

And it is very authentic how Hitzi, who is in a wheelchair himself, does it.

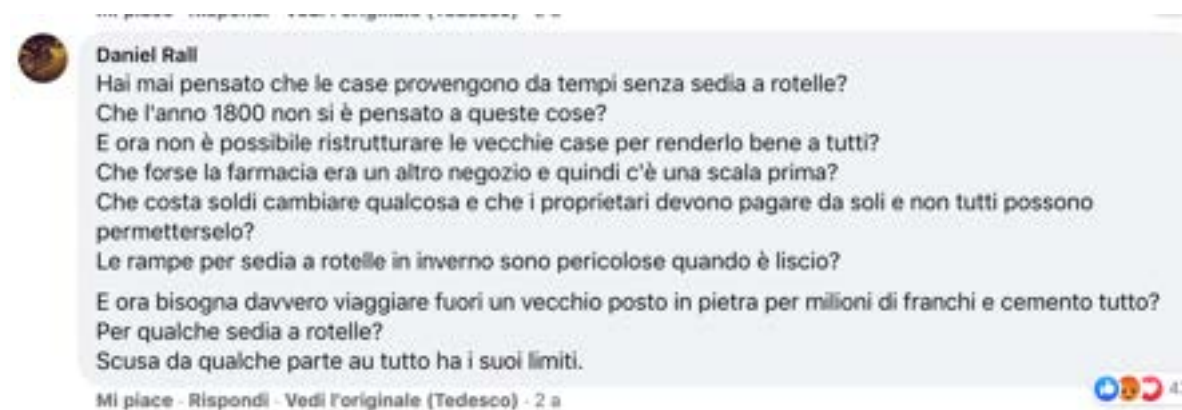
He and the IZZY Magazine get an incredible high coverage with over 5000 Likes and almost 500 comments.

In this case it is exciting because some comments are against the video. These opponents are also wheelchair users themselves and complain that they can't hear any more whining wheelchair users and that with a little training you can easily climb the steps or that cobblestones or old door sills are often listed as historical monuments. However, the majority

of the comments seem to be positive and thank Hitzi for the great video. Furthermore, many comments support the statement that accessibility is still far too little enforced in Switzerland until it is almost non-existent.

Here, the representation of people with disabilities is related to architectural barriers. Indeed, the fact is that, while some PWD argues about how it could be difficult for people in wheelchairs to live a normal life with barriers, others say that it is not a serious argument, because with some training it is possible for example to climb steps.

The arguments outspoken and the direct participation of PWD into the debate on online disability image protection should not foster the idea that the scrounger stereotype could be reduced to these brief friendly conversations. Many comments come from people without disability, mainly intolerant and grabbing, sadly, wide consent. As the one here below:



The users with disability disappointment focuses on the fact that Izzy suggests the image of PWD as a victim. The “tale of the victim” turns meaningfully whether expressed in first person

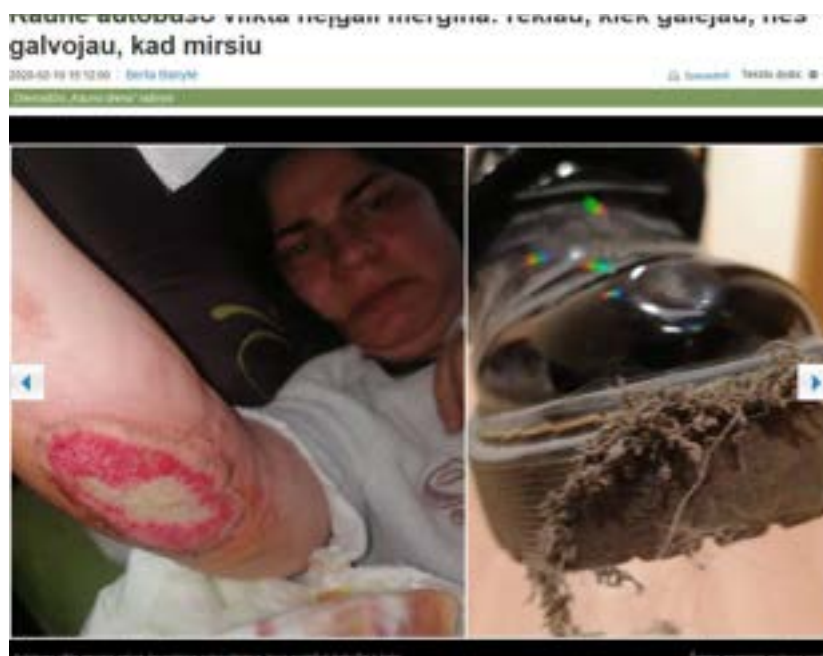
as a personal story or in third person as a political statement. According to Shakespeare (1984) one of the strategies adopted by the media to neutralise the political efforts for PWD is “always taking an individualised perspective, focusing on disability as personal misfortune.”²⁸ Let’s see the Victim stereotype closer.

[VICTIM] (to be hopeless and ugly): Over this type of narration the disability is emphasised. PWD is represented as hopeless suffering victims because of their impairment. No empathy is promoted, repulsion elements are stressed.

2- Article about an accident on a bus with PWD involved

“IN KAUNAS A DISABLED TOWED BY A BUS: I SCREAMED AS FAR AS I COULD, I TOUGHT I AM GOING TO DIE”

Link all’articolo: shorturl.at/ghRY2



²⁸ Shakespeare, Tom. (1994). Cultural Representation of Disabled People: Dustbins for Disavowal?. Disability & Society - DISABIL SOC. 9. 283-299. 10.1080/09687599466780341. p.218.

The journalists describe an accident which happened in the public bus – when the woman with walking difficulties was towed by the bus, as it started to go before she managed to go out. The article is supported by many big size pictures of injuries and women in the hospital.

English translation of some comments:

→ **Drivers:** Caused because the turnaround time on the route was shortened. Drivers are required to stop, disembark, pick up passengers, pass obstacles, traffic lights, traffic lights and sell tickets within ONE MINUTE. The fact that today it is possible to do this without flying, so the drivers themselves are forced to be under constant stress, a couple of weeks ago showed that the same situation in Vilnius public transport, drivers complain that they have to sacrifice their breaks and do not even have dinner how to compress graphs. Don't even have to go to the toilet. Persistent tensions lead to many illnesses, even deaths of drivers due to such working conditions, but to public transport companies or municipalities. Like the safety of passengers. For them, fast transport is the key. Drivers would be happy to follow the KET and not hurry and pick up and disembark passengers, but conditions do not allow it.

→ **Customer:** Is it not time to install video cameras and it is still possible to locate the door closing alarm for the driver when the door is partially closed or jammed, the driver would receive a signal. It does not cost a cow, but it would provide people with some safety.

→ **Opinion:** There is no humanity left in us, people are indifferent to everything, it is important that he is not hung up and he walks, and when someone happens, he sins for not seeing him. Maybe it's good in some cases, because when the drug addict and talking to the angels all turn away from him, even though he is very young, he can see that he has no regular drug addiction and has not bought a ticket. I noticed that the driver was paying attention to her, but she didn't say anything because she was afraid of stopping the other passenger and disembarking, because it was not her job as a controller to disembark, but those would probably not be in conflict with her. Drivers get low salaries, although travelling in Kaunas is very expensive and they do not get a salary, others work in companies that pay normal wages and for the minimum they do not drive either a bus or a trolley bus.

→ **Opinion:** I imagine how much a disabled girl has suffered. And neither the driver nor the fleet managers even apologised. (Three days later, the spokeswoman made an apology.) Not only should the injured party be denied compensation for her injuries, but the guilty person or her workplace should buy a new outfit for the girl.

Absolut seeking for a shocking and scandal reaction. The accident indeed raises many questions about public bus regulations, their ability to consider people with disabilities and assistance in

public transportation in general. However, the article seems aimed just to raise some emotions and anger, which actually succeeded. The comments are angry – on the bus driver, on the system, on the bus company, salaries, pension, PWD left without attention and similar. The article just put a person with disabilities in a hopeless victim position, quoting only one sentence from the person itself – “I screamed like I’m going to die“. If we take some information from this article about people with disabilities – they are irresponsible (using the public transport where they appear in dangerous situations), easy to manipulate (exhibiting their injuries) and not very intelligent. All this information doesn't give any clear idea about how the service/assistance/ will be improved or what conclusions will be made for all parts of this accident.

Here, the Person with Disabilities is completely represented as a victim. The story however doesn't elicit empathy in the reader in respect of the woman's condition and experience. Indeed the majority of users comments' majority relates to public transport policies or drivers' working conditions. The instrument supporting the images is the most representative feature of the PWD's stereotype emerging from the narration and it is witnessed by the only anonymous comment:

“**Anonymous:** Disaster happened. The company, I think, will make every effort to solve the problem. For me, this is an incomprehensible whisper of the editorial staff of Kaunas Day on the companies of Kaunas and Kaunas city! Some mosaics - it's fun to put their fingers in the wound and enjoy the ugliness of others.”

The “victim” we are dealing with is not the subject we are keen on empathising with. She's represented as “ugly”, wounded, helpless and completely at the mercy of events.

If the charity model was used to represent PWDs as suffering victims ready to be assisted (Duyan 2007:71)²⁹, now the elision of empathy takes over.

2- Journal article written by two young PwD about the comparison between Italy and England in terms of PwD inclusion.

https://www.facebook.com/WittyWheels/posts/2389563477976120?_tn_ =K-R

²⁹ Duyan, V., 2007, 'The community effects of disabled sports', in Centre of Excellence Defence Against Terrorism (ed.), Amputee sports for victims of terrorism, pp. 70–77, IOS Press, Amsterdam.



Mi piace Segui Condividi

Witty Wheels
 17 dicembre 2019

L'attivismo (e la vita) in Inghilterra vs in Italia

Neanche a dirlo, il giusto contesto influenza molte cose. In Inghilterra facevo l'università, e la grandissima parte del mio attivismo riguardava appunto quella. Per quanto suoni incredibile, per contare la quantità di problemi - soprattutto di accessibilità ma non solo - che ho incontrato all'università servono tutte le dita delle mani e anche qualcuna dei piedi. Erano così tanti che a un certo punto ho deciso che se volevo continuare a studiare dovevo necessariamente abbozzare su alcuni.

Qui in Italia il mio problema martellante è l'insufficienza dei fondi per l'assistenza personale. È inutile pensare ai livelli successivi, quando sai che fare piani a lungo termine è infaticabile dato che la tua Regione decreta che sei a posto con una trentina di ore di assistenza a settimana.

Se poi penso ai peggiori episodi di discriminazione mai vissuti, sono successi abbastanza indifferentemente sia in Italia che in Inghilterra. Eppure una differenza fondamentale tra Italia e Inghilterra c'è, ed è la concezione di discriminazione. Certo, la disabilità rimane comunque spesso tra i fanalini di coda delle priorità di chi si dice attivo nelle questioni di giustizia sociale, ma in generale la discriminazione in Inghilterra è una cosa seria. Negli uffici pubblici ci sono cartelli sul fatto che la discriminazione non è tollerata. Nelle università ci sono studenti eletti che rappresentano i vari gruppi marginalizzati, persone disabili comprese ovviamente. E quando denunci qualcosa di discriminatorio scatta, come dire, un allarme. Magari la persona che rappresenta l'istituzione a cui ti stai rivolgendo non ha neanche mai associato la parola discriminazione alla disabilità, ma sicuramente l'ha sentita in relazione alle altre identità sociali. E quindi ci fa più che un pensiero prima di continuare col comportamento discriminatorio.

Le ultime due volte che in Italia in circostanze diverse ho usato la parola "discriminazione" in relazione alla disabilità mi sono state dette queste due cose: "Eh no, eh no, non chiamarla discriminazione, non è corretto, lo dici per attaccarti a qualcosa. Se dici così me ne vado" e "Ah, lo sapevo che volevi arrivare qui. Non è discriminazione". In breve, qui se sentono la parola discriminazione poco ci manca che ti ridono in faccia. In Inghilterra gli si stringono giustamente le chiappine. Quindi, nella mia esperienza, fare attivismo in Inghilterra è in generale più facile proprio per la maggiore cultura di giustizia sociale.

Ho avuto anche una sorta di situazione privilegiata perché ero nel dipartimento di scienze politiche, e quindi quando le cose all'università si impuntavano e i responsabili erano riottosi scrivevo una bella mail sui diritti delle minoranze bla bla bla, mettevo pigramente in copia tutti i miei insegnanti e il problema come per magia si sbloccava.

Poi, a me piacciono quei climi inglesi umidi e striscianti dove tutto è grigio e l'erba è così verde che sembra che si droga; e mi piace anche l'inverno in generale, col vento pungente sulla faccia. Ma l'inverno italiano fa schifo. Fa schifo perché d'inverno ovviamente tutto si svolge all'interno, e ogni volta che vado in un posto nuovo devo controllare che sia accessibile, e spesso non lo è. A quel punto - se mi va di accollarmi lo sbattimento - devo decidere il modo per far spostare l'evento da un'altra parte attraverso vari metodi di persuasione. Per non parlare della miriade di negozi e locali inaccessibili: una cosa orribile di per sé, ma che d'inverno si fa sentire anche di più perché non puoi neanche entrare da qualche parte a scaldarti. A Londra la normalità è che gran parte dei negozi/locali e ovviamente tutti gli uffici pubblici siano accessibili. Gli esercizi commerciali che non lo sono sanno di essere in difetto.

E poi la gente in giro. A Londra è raro che la gente mi fissi, al massimo qualcuno commenta che ho una carrozzina figa. In Italia... come dire... mi sento osservata. Una cosa che mi fa incazzare è che a volte la gente è così impegnata a fissarmi che rallenta un po' e non mi fa passare. Succede anche che ogni tanto la gente che lavora al pubblico a Londra mi si rivolga in modo strano, o parli a qualunque persona non disabile sia vicina a me. In Italia la triste e dura realtà è che mi stupisco quando questo NON succede: quando un commesso fa il suo lavoro come si deve senza mostrare pregiudizi abilisti ci faccio caso.

Tutto questo per dire che il contesto è fondamentale. Lo sapevamo già, ok, ma è sempre bene ricordarlo. In un ambiente così ostile come quello italiano non è una sorpresa se l'attivismo a volte non riesce a essere efficace. Tutto intorno a te ti ricorda costantemente che sei un cittadino di serie B e ovviamente non possiamo fingere che questo non abbia conseguenze. Ma tutti i giorni sono contenta di avere ben presente una realtà in cui le cose sono migliori, e che voglio tendere a quello e anche di più.

[Elena]

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Commenti: 18 Condivisioni: 19

Some comments:

X: Absolutely, I agree that fighting united is the only way, but I guess it is too reductive charging, so to speak, the discrimination's targets as "forced to" undertake the activism mode.

Often you have to choose between activism or focusing on surviving. Many times the doubt over the validity of your activism in comparison with other social justice fights is holding you back.

Other times is the collaboration with other PWDs to make you frightened because within our society you've been told that it's easier to engage with able people.

Y: That's the point...discrimination is the master key governing all the issues related to disability.

It's not a case that it is mentioned all over the articles belonging to the UN Convention. The discrimination enacted by the Italian government, by its laws and its satellite-Institutions, allows society to incorporate it and turn it into "normality". Within a discriminating contest it goes without saying that PWDs and their parents are not able to realise they are discriminated.

Discrimination is like a comfort zone, you can collect the evidences when someone tells you that

you have to raise the awareness of the interlocutor anytime in charge.

The authors of the post describe the differences in terms of quality of life for people with disability in Italy compared with England. They are two young journalists with disabilities and they underline some consideration on what is important for persons with disability in order to live a significant and independent life, to their empowerment and as stated on the UNCRPD on art.19, to have equal right to live in the community. It's interesting how they analyse the impact of the different cultures on the possibility to influence the policies at different levels. Comments are mostly in line with the motivations of the post. One is however remarkable: it underlines how sometimes also people with disability are themselves a barrier for the achievement of results in terms of rights and resources: nice point of view followed.

Victim + Normalisation → ACTIVIST: This type of narration offers the PWD as victim but with a different strategy in comparison with the previous chapter. The subject is not helpless or wounded, the main feature here is resilience. He's not a victim complaining about his condition but performs battles and stands for an enhancement of policies and accessibility. It is worth noting how for the first time a concept as "ableism", raised among the disability studies, comes into service to shape the representation.

Ableism (...): systems of oppression consisting of beliefs, values and practices that create and reinforce youthfulness and able-bodiedness/able-mindedness as ideals, thereby casting old age and disability as devalued states of being. (Ellis 2018 p.XIX)

The shift between the victim irreversibly condemned by the impairments to the victim condemned by the cultural prejudices but able to have a say, stand up and play the role of activist is enabled by the idea of ableism.

5.2. Narcotization of the condition of disability

2- Facebook post from the President of Lithuanian Republic about "First pancake" local restaurant, held by people with mild mental and physical disabilities

<https://www.facebook.com/nausedagitanas/posts/1045051869209505>

The post is released by PR of the Lithuanian President. The team visited a social enterprise located in Vilnius centre, a pancake restaurant where PwD are working as the waiters. The message by the President team was to show the attention to the local business employing people with disabilities. To make them proud and visible.



English translation:

With the colleagues we had a lunch at the restaurant *Pirmas Blynas* (aka *First Pancakes*) - it is a social initiative restaurant where waiters are only people with mild mental and physical disability, the owner is a young man from Netherlands), which in the free market environment is taking care about integration of the people with disabilities into labour market, and by this ensures for them to live fulfilled life. It is an excellent example of the socially responsible business in Lithuania, which I support a lot and hope that there will be more as such in the future. The first pancake didn't burn at all (reference to a Lithuanian proverb of the first pancake - as the first attempt does something, and which in many cases can have some fails).

Some Comments translated:

→ It would be so nice if such businesses would appear more and in the smaller cities.

→ It should not be emphasised that children with disabilities work, but the fact that children and adults with disabilities are full members of communities. It is still difficult for us to get over our beliefs that such people feel, communicate, learn, work. A little patience, tolerance and more such cool sites. The service and the pancakes are awesome there! Cool guys!

→ But what about people with walking or general mobility disabilities who sit in apartment blocks with unadapted staircases and can't just go to events, but can't even go to the outpatient clinics?

While the post is making stress on socially responsible business and seeks to encourage more similar establishments, the majority of comments worship the President as the saver. There are little discussions and not so much content, so there are few tendencies over all comments – let the God help you in the good actions, let somebody do it (President? Mystery local business?), and less comments – not so many good things are elaborated for the PwD.

Still all the comments are very proficient – good/not good, thanks, congratulations. No real discussion or hints about what the others could do, what are practical steps, who can assist, any feedback from the owner, etc... And not any word about the people with disabilities – what is their role, what could be advantages, who would like to do the same, etc..

It gives the impression of the sensitive ‘post card’, with no further direction or any link to more in depth exploitation of this topic.

The narration builds a popular stereotype over the corpus analysed. A person usually performing an institutional role (a politician in this case) plays as ambassador for a solidarity venture for PWDs. However the theme for PWDs’ integration is not faced in depth, it stands on the background of a postcard while the able people stand in the frontline. As Tom Shakespeare fairly outlines:

Disabled people enable able-bodied people to feel good about themselves: by demeaning disabled people, non-disabled people can feel both powerful, and generous. Disabled people, on the other hand, are viewed as passive and incapable people, objects of pity and of aid. (Shakespeare 1994 p.60)

According to Garland-Thompson (1997, p.8), the product of the narration is able to provide the idea of normate, a symbol in the abilism culture that:

'names the veiled subject position of cultural self, the figure outlined by the array of deviant others whose marked bodies shore up the normate's boundaries ... Normate, then, is the constructed identity of those who, by way of the bodily configurations and cultural capital they assume, can step into a position of authority and wield the power it grants them.'

The Postcard Model: The "able-people" narration exploits PWD to build an image of benefactor. PWDs are treated as the background of a postcard; the article looks like focusing on disability but actually any detail or insight is missing. They are mostly viewed as passive and incapable people.

[NORMALISATION]: to act, acceptance with masking.

In these representations we can find customised prostheses, concealment of disadvantage, and masking in favour of social integration.

1- Advertising campaign with PwD - Parfait (North America)

<https://www.uol.com.br/universa/noticias/redacao/2020/02/24/a-marca-de-lingerie-que-inclui-todos-os-corpos-apagou-dor-da-minha-vida.htm>

English translation:

The lingerie brand that includes all bodies: "Erased pain from my life"



A brand that claims to have "lingerie for all women and all bodies", and includes models with disabilities in its campaigns has been collecting testimonials of overcoming in the networks. This is Parfait, created in 2010 and offers pieces that go up to 4XL (extra wide). Followers even say that the pieces have changed their lives.

The North American lingerie brand already has about 700 stores in the USA, UK, Hong Kong and Canada. In its website, the company claims to design its collection to embrace different bodies with elegance.

Famosas como Sofia Vergara, Sharon Stone e Nicki Minaj já fizeram campanha com uma das peças da marca.

In Instagram, followers thank the brand for the inclusion policy: "I love you Parfait. In India, it was torture and a struggle for me to find a bra my size, but you erased that pain from my life. Your page is very positive," wrote one client.

And he even had a Brazilian asking for the products around here. "This is the kind of campaign I want to see here in Brazil," wrote one follower.

The products are aimed at all women and all bodies, and the campaign also includes models with disabilities. The women who wear this lingerie brand say that these products have changed their lives and ended with the sadness they often felt.

This news shows that, regardless of body or physical condition, there is a brand of lingerie that treats women equally, allowing them to feel safe from themselves and removing from their minds the difference and some eventual sadness.

All women can be elegant, regardless of whether they have a physical disability.

This advertising campaign for women's lingerie includes PwD, in addition to women with all forms and kinds of bodies. In this view, PwD are compared to other kinds of body singularities: indeed, the brand makes lingerie for all-size women. Physical impairments are considered as a particular aspect of the body. This is a process of normalisation, in which people with disabilities are not represented in their impairments, but as people who have special bodily requests for clothes.

Hero + Normalization →

The complex category that derives from the combination of the Hero stereotype with the Normalisation stereotype describes a representation in which the impairment characteristics are first emphasised and then narcotized to build a narration that configures PwDs as heroes for the community of reference, without however underlining their disabilities.

1- Article posted on Facebook about a guy wD working for his economic independence

Title: Povile with Cerebral Palsy works at a restaurant: "I saved money for dolphin therapy"

Subtitle: Despite disability, women is very vivid, all the time trying to smile and communicate

<https://www.facebook.com/15min/posts/10157316095553860>



A young woman with Cerebral Palsy works as a waitress in a social enterprise - pancake bar. The interview depicts her optimistic view of life and how she is enjoying being employed. She also reveals where she spends her salary savings - on dolphin therapy (considering that it is 300 km away from living place, it has to be planned quite in advance).

That's an example of a person with disabilities living a 'normal' life with a job, dreams and expenditures. The other side of this article - it looks like one more 'hero' example, especially taking into account the subtitle of the article... And it even so as it is an exceptional case when young person with disabilities have a job, have a positive attitude towards different usual daily life cases (eg. some visitors of the bar look at strangers and don't like to communicate) and share life passions and plans.

It gave the impression that such cases are so rare, that it mostly represents what society is not rather than it is. All the comments are very supportive, encouraging, and positive. We are really happy for the girl, even though it makes us think that most likely she is the only one like that in Lithuania.

On this occasion, PwD is represented as having a normal life despite her impairments. Indeed, the girl is said to have a job, dreams, and expenditures, but at the same time she passes off as a heroine due to her exceptional effort to live a normal life, with no facilitations or assistences. This combination, if on the one hand is to be seen as a virtuous example of integration, on the other lead to narcotize some difficulties the person has in her daily life.

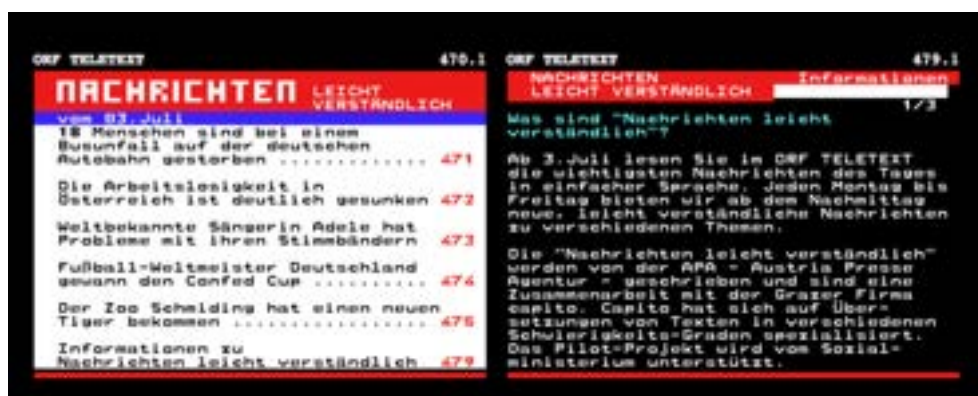
→ Inclusion

In this perspective, disability is not represented either as a problem or as a characteristic against which to struggle in today's society. Instead, it is addressed as a necessity, and the solutions to the challenges of full integration are aimed at building spaces suitable for people with disabilities, which aim at the inclusion of people with disabilities each according to his or her possibilities.

1- Big story in Austria about easy to read in tv (teletext)

<https://www.facebook.com/atempo.at/posts/10155678763806042>

<https://www.bizeps.or.at/lieber-herr-dorfer-gute-satire-gelingt-nicht-immer/>



Alfred Dorfer is an Austrian comedian, writer, and actor. He is one of the most well-known cabaret artists and comedians in Austria.

"On July 17, 2017, Alfred Dorfer tried his hand as a columnist for the German newspaper DIE ZEIT. Under the title 'Leicht verständlich' (Easy to read) he examined the new Easy Reading Service of ORF Teletext as follows:

'In old, dirty, incorrect language one could also speak of a service for the intellectually disabled. This is positive, so good. Because that helps. A lot. Yes, it does. But totally, totally. Because language is difficult. Always. Especially these nouns. Or those dashes that always interrupt sentences so annoyingly. ...'

In this key he swaggers along and ends with:

"Fie, everything is so hard to understand, and that's why this new offer from the how-we-ORF is doubly important.

Making fun as a DIE ZEIT Columnist

A detailed - and worth reading - reaction also comes from Klaus Candussi, managing director of atempo Betriebsgesellschaft m.b.H., which was significantly involved in this new offer. He has sent this reaction to BIZEPS and we would be happy to provide it in full:

'Dear Alfred Dorfer,

Of course, good satire does not always work. It's summer slump, it's hot, and hitting on the 'intellectually handicapped' will surely bring some cheap laughs.

The paradox of 'easy to read news' is that it's damn difficult to formulate it well. And yes, trying to formulate complex content in such a way that it can be read and understood even by people with little understanding of the language, non-native speakers of German or with learning difficulties can sometimes produce cheerful hoppalas. But these were not your topic. You preferred to leave it at the reflexive merrymaking from the high horse as a columnist of DIE ZEIT.

On closer inspection - or a little less intellectual arrogance - one could see that this form of news is precisely about not leaving the above-mentioned groups to the often not just linguistically simplified information of certain boulevard media.

The effort to make serious news accessible to these target groups (according to the LEO study of the University of Hamburg, more than 50 % of the population understand up to language level B1), we find in any case socio-politically more meaningful than wondering after elections how many voted as the only media accessible to them suggested.

Perhaps it would be good for DIE ZEIT to devote space to this side of the issue, not just to shallow polemics. We are happy to help!

Klaus Candussi
Management
atempo operating company m.b.H.!

Alfred Dorfer reacts

My statement with the title "Easy to understand" was interpreted as discriminating against people with reading difficulties. Unfortunately this ... must have been completely misunderstood.I am truly sorry.

Alfred Dorfer

Comments and reactions came directly on BIZEPS and DIE ZEIT.

What Alfred Dorfer does in his column is outdated and anything but funny. It presents people with learning difficulties as losers and many people, like managing director at Atempo Klaus Candussi, have intervened and once again defended the area of easy language.

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