

## A Review on Disability Studies from 2000 To 2020

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### Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to review some research articles related to disability that have been published so far. These reviews aim at throwing light on the changes in the perspective of the society, in any, towards disability and disabled people. The selected articles do not restrict themselves to any particular type of disability; rather, it gives an overview of disability discourses that have been discussed off late in academia.

**Keywords:** disability, construct, prejudices, perspectives

### Introduction

Disability studies is a nascent field that focuses on the cultural, sociological, political, and historical perspectives of disability. How disability was perceived three decades earlier is totally different from how it is perceived now. Disability, for a long time, was seen as an inappropriate subject and had a lot of stereotyping and discrimination associated with it. It was habitually viewed under the medical concept that crippled the disabled people mentally and set them securely at the margin of society. The social model that was designed later was much more inclusive and, for the first time, introduced disability as a human-made or societal construct that erected barriers with their mindsets, ideas, or physical environments. It accentuated the failure of society to accommodate and accept people with differences. This model played a crucial role in shifting the community's attitude towards disability and disabled people and helping society evolve. This broader view of disability helped the government to develop policies and assistances to support disabled people and design a holistic community that was interdependent and respected and valued diversity. Until this domain gained momentum, disabled people were always delineated by the views of non-disabled people. The abled perspective of a disabled body can never be the ultimate truth, and more than often would be an unhealthy response to disability. The traditional abled voice always dismissed the disabled voice and never offered a chance to speak for themselves. We now have disabled people vindicating themselves, challenging the conventions that suppressed them and shoved down into the throats of the non- liberalists, the disabled person's prospect of disability, that was for a long time disbanded and unprecedented. With the inception of this phenomenal field of study, we have disability discourses that cherish disabled people and helps acknowledge that even appalling disability cannot hinder a happy and joyous life.

## Reviews

Merja Tarvainen's paper, published in 2020, investigates how loneliness is an inseparable part of a disabled person's life. The researcher analyzed the self-narratives of disabled people in Finland, that was collected over a year and interprets the social and emotional conditions intertwined with concepts of loneliness or 'unbelongingness' at each phase in their life. This study reveals that childhood loneliness was seen as a profound experience, and often was viewed as an 'emotional scar' that traumatized many for the remaining of their lives. He discusses the difficulty of 'sharing emotional space' and infers that only an intensively general condition and attitudinal changes can offer a long-sought remedy.

Benjamin N. Parks' paper published in 2019 acts like a sequel or informative article that enriches the understanding of Rosemarie Garland-Thomson's essay 'The Case for Conserving Disability.' He uses Christology or 'the body of Christ' to support Thomson on a potent standpoint of her essay, which is the inherent moral value of disabled people, making the essay complete. To strengthen her essay, he links the theology of Flannery O'Connor to Garland-Thomson and fixes the missing link. The wounded body of Christ is taken as an example to show the resourcefulness of a mutilated body with a universal reference to ground it.

In his research paper on Samuel Beckett's Cuchulain in 2019, Siobhan Purcell investigates the disability myth and compulsory able-bodiedness using biopolitics in the Irish nationalist literature. The researcher demonstrates the discomfort experienced by Beckett in the discriminatory portrayal of disability in the revivalist literature of the Irish Free State, with the help of the satires of the Irish legend Cuchulain, who is seen as a foundational figure of health and heroism. Thus, by rejecting him, he rejects the "disabling apparatus" of the state as well.

"Oh God! Why Did You Let Me Have This Disability?": Religion, Spirituality, and Disability in Three African Countries" is a research paper that emerged in 2019 as the result of the joint ventures of four sociology and disability experts from Uganda and London. This paper locates the role of spirituality and religion in the lives of disabled people in the selected African countries; they use The Bible and Quran to relate to the interviewees' stories. The majority of the candidates relied on religion and spirituality as a support system and dedicated their success stories to the empowerment that they believed was Divine Providence. They infer that religion and spirituality should be thoroughly explored to have an integral conception of disability studies as they are intricately knit with the lives of disabled people.

R.M Powell's paper "Role of family caregivers regarding sexual and reproductive health for women and girls with intellectual disability: A scoping review" (2019) studies that as Individuals troubled with intellectual disability (ID) undergo inequalities associated to sexual and reproductive health (SRH) services, very few facts are known about the role of the family

caregivers who help women and girls with ID. Various methods of research gave in thematic summaries of menstruation and menopause, supporting sexuality and healthy relationships, contraception, and sterilization. Concluding with the truth that this topic requires more extensive research with population-based data to compare women and girls with and without ID is needed, which would explain SRH for women and girls with ID, their family caregivers, and health-care providers.

Angela Ridinger-Dotterman, in 2018, wrote a paper on Kazuo Ishiguro's *Never Let Me Go*, where she inspects the novel from the perspective of disability studies. She remarks that it revolves around the question "what it means to be a human." She also records that it recreates how disability is eliminated and suppressed using individual traditional social apparatuses in the dystopian society that the novel portrays. However, it is not a disability or a disabled body, that is questioned but the shared experience of precarity. She concludes with the resolution of the novel's central question; The acceptance of precarity does not humanize a person. Instead, the marvelous connection that keeps people together even when so much is stolen from each person makes a world of difference in society.

In 2018, three researchers from Cape Town, South Africa, published a paper introducing the Biographic Narrative Interpretive Method (BNIM) approach to Disability Studies. They urged it would facilitate the subjugated voice of the disabled women, aiding them to move towards the centre of the knowledge structure. The result of this interviewing technique's effectiveness challenges the illusions in the society about the disabled people, especially disabled women. Consequently, the historical misinterpretation of disabled women in the society and the academia is dismantled, enabling to empower their unheard voices in the power-knowledge structure from which they were marginalized ever since.

Dan Goodley, Kirsty Liddiard, and Katherine Runswick-Cole publish a paper exploring the connections between affect studies and critical disability studies in the year 2017. The researchers study how the theories of affect studies correlate with disability studies based on a research project conducted on youngsters with life-limiting or life-threatening impairments. They make trailblazing connections that unravel the patronizing and pathologizing effects of traditional sciences in the disabled community. The lived life or productivity of a disabled person is always seen as an absent discourse because of the alienation they face by the ableist life standards. They conclude that the coalescence of **disability studies into affect studies** **Please indicate what you mean by affect in the beginning of this paragraph** can make turbulent changes in human affectation to give rise to a congenial society.

In 2017, Sarah Imhoff published a research paper on Disability and Religion, with a particular focus on Judaism. The researcher declines the former sense of disability as punishment or ennoblement and suggests that religion should be considered for a more exceptional

comprehension of the coping mechanisms of a majority of the disabled population, who view themselves under the lens of the medical model of disability. She thus reprobrates the complete denouncement of the medical model. She directs an amalgamation of the medical and the social model that would propose a surpassing cognizance of the disabled community and resolves that the assimilation of religion can ameliorate the insights on disability.

The church's massive role in addressing the needs of the disabled people came out as an extensive research paper in 2017 by P. White. It sheds light on the often-misinterpreted view of disability in the Bible and decodes it with evidence. It also advocates the inclusion of the disabled people into society and concludes that as the main agenda of the church. Equity and equality of all the people made in God's image are prioritized and deduces that the church has an essential position in making this distant reality attainable.

In the paper "Citizenship and Learning-Disabled People: The Mental Health Charity MIND's 1970s Campaign in Historical Context" (2017) Jonathan Toms states that the origin of current policies towards people with learning disabilities was constructed upon the deinstitutionalization processes, civil rights concerns and integrationist philosophies of the 1970s and 1980s. MIND was projecting the rights-based services for learning disabled people during this time in their campaigning, though it is rarely recognized. MIND looked for an extensive community-based service inclusive of general health and welfare services aiming at the rebuilding of citizenship rights for learning-disabled people. Nevertheless, the community service for mentally disabled people and their families suggested by MIND would have the same facilities to general medical services as other citizens involving the extension of work by the medical professionals and concluding with a questionable note on how the lives of people with learning disabilities and their families have been affected by this transformation in the policy.

In 2013, Simo Vehmas and Nick Watson's research paper on critical disability studies (CDS) created tension in the disability arena. Their paper critiques CDS and the ideas related to it and reviews it, based on the inadequacies in its ethical and political application. They justify that CDS emphasizes on eradicating disparities in the society, which they term is impossible, and thus it fails in its principles of deconstructing the normative attitudes. They conclude that CDS fails to address hegemonic evils and mental freedom, which creates a real difference to form a just society. In her paper titled "Anthropological Theories of Disability," Allison Ruby Reid-Cunningham (2009) intricately explores anthropology and enhances our understanding of human behaviour towards disability. She explains how social, cultural, and medical anthropological studies reveal how disability was perceived in a negative light in the past and how it is seen as 'otherness.' She addresses the concept of disability as a socially constructed one and explains it with examples of treatment of disability in different countries. The paper also elucidates how disability can be

perceived as a culture in itself and argues that it might lessen the stigma and prejudices of an abnormal body.

"Being Disabled: Towards a Critical Social Ontology for Disability Studies" is a research paper by Bill Hughes in 2007 which addresses the ontology of disability. Hughes strongly opposes the indifferent treatment of disabled people based on their pathologies and claims that as the primary reason for the misrepresentation of disabled people. He establishes frailty or impairment as a universal feature that all human beings possess, thus challenging the immune status of the non-disabled normative body.

In the paper "Presage of a paradigm shift? Beyond the social model of disability toward resistance theories of disability" published in 2004, by Susan Gabel and Susan Peters argue about the shift in the perspectives of the disabled community from the social model of disability to a more liberal and inclusive model of disability, using four paradigms used in disability theory.

This need for a holistic model arose after the emergence of feminism and post-modernism in disability studies during the 1990s. An extensive study on the paradigms suggests that disability integrates the other emerging theories and offers a more eclectic theory. This also puts forward the notion of disability theory as a form of resistance theory. It is a resistance against the ableism and oppression of disabled people and explains it with the example of the social model. They conclude that resistance helps in developing eclectic theories and can blur the paradigms, thus helping to approach disability.

In their paper titled "University Students with Disabilities: The Transition to Inclusion" (2003), Jennifer Gillies and Alison Pedlar state the process and results of a qualitative study carried out among disabled students about their transition into university life. It sheds light on how the services and facilities in a university can help disabled students easily cope with their surroundings and terms that as 'university community.' They note that social support plays an essential role in the integration and goal achievement of disabled students, concluding that inclusion is the key to achieving a holistic university life for all students.

Corbett Joan O'Toole from 'The Disabled Women's Alliance' published a paper titled 'Sex, Disability, and Motherhood: Access to Sexuality for Disabled Mother' in 2002. This paper explores the life of disabled mothers, with specific reference to their sexual life, as it is a seldom researched topic. Lack of resources and information is seen as the primary barrier to enjoying healthy motherhood in this paper. The researcher thoroughly examines the issues that disabled mothers face, and she suggests plausible ways to make their life better in all facets. She feels that future research on this topic would enable disabled mothers to achieve better parenting and break the myths that confine them mentally and physically.

Stephanie Tierney's paper on anorexia and disability published in 2001, aims at improving the basic understanding of both the medical condition and the branch of disability studies. Tierney grounds her findings based on interviews that she has taken from anorexic patients ostracized by the society, often associating the medical condition to "madness, hysteria, attention-seeking," etc. She thoroughly scans the idea of anorexia and exposes the schemes of media and culture in oppressing the people affected. Tierney boldly opposes the domineering nature of the "norm" and paves the way to design an inclusive society that does not fabricate people as "abnormal."

In their paper "Towards an Affirmation Model of Disability" (2000), John Swain and Sally French discuss the gradual development of a new disability model, which they term as the 'Affirmation Model.' This paper challenges the Tragedy model of disability and claims that as the reason for the development of negative attitudes towards disabled people because of its dominance in mass media and other platforms. The Affirmative model, on the other hand, builds upon the Social model, with the help of the Disability Arts movement, where disability is reconceptualized, thus confronting the age-old notion of a disabled person's problem lies with himself or the impairment. They argue that this model would ensure a holistic inclusion of the disabled people and their culture as it envisions a better society where differences are recognized and celebrated.

## Conclusion

It can be concluded that since 2000 to 2020, there is a sea of change in the perspective of the masses towards disability and disabled people. Many of the significant gaps that were present in disability literature at the beginning of the century have been addressed in the decades that followed. It is evident from the reviews that more often it is the attitude of the society that cripples them and not the disability itself. There has been a great shift in the attitudes of the people, and that has been observed as the seeming result of the social model.

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