

Talking about autism with 'disability language'

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9 November 2024

Talking about autism in the context of 'disability language'

- To understand how we talk about autism using the disability language it is important to be rooted in how such language developed in the context of the British disability movement.
- It is important to note the contrasts between the British disability movement and the US disability movement.

How 'disability language' developed within the disability movement 1

Paul Hunt's letter to the Guardian September 20 1972

Paul Hunt (1937-1979), who had been involved in the Disability Income Group in the 1960s, was heavily influenced by the American civil rights movement and wrote to the Guardian in response to Guardian journalist Ann Shearer's work with the Campaign for the Mentally Handicapped (CMH) argued that the 'severely physically handicapped' were often situated in institutions 'where their views are ignored, and they are subject to authoritarian and often cruel regimes.'



How 'disability language' developed within the disability movement 1 Continued

- Paul Hunt's letter to the Guardian September 20 - long-term
- Paul Hunt, who had experienced both long-term hospitalization and life in a residential institution, then made a proposal.
- The proposal was that, 'the formation of a consumer group to put forward nationally the views of actual and potential residents of these successors to the workhouse. We hope, in particular, to formulate and publicise plans for alternative kinds of care.'

How 'disability language' developed within the disability movement 2

- The Creation of Union of the Physically Impaired Against Segregation (UPIAS)
- UPIAS was created in response to the Paul Hunt's letter to the Guardian.
- The aims of UPIAS were 'to have all segregated facilities for physically impaired people replaced by arrangements for us to participate fully in society. These arrangements must include the necessary financial, medical, technical, educational and other help required from the State to enable us to gain the maximum possible independence in daily living activities, to achieve mobility, to undertake productive work, and to live where and how we choose with full control over our lives.'
- Union of the Physically Impaired Against Segregation: Policy Statement

How 'disability language' developed within the disability movement 3

- Fundamental Principles of Disability
- The Fundamental Principles of Disability was published in 1976 by UPIAS and the Disability Alliance
- The understanding of disability shown in the document was shaped by Vic Finkelstein (1938-2011) who was both a disability activist and a tutor in Disability Studies at the Open University.

How 'disability language' developed within the disability movement 3 Continued

- Fundamental Principles of Disability
- 'In our view, it is society which disables physically impaired people. Disability is something imposed on top of our impairments, by the way we are unnecessarily isolated and excluded from full participation in society. Disabled people are therefore an oppressed group in society.'
- Fundamental Principles of Disability pp.3-4

Mike Oliver and the Social Model of Disability

- Mike Oliver (1945-2019), the world's first professor of Disability Studies and disability activist, coined the term social model of disability in the book 'Social Work with Disabled People'
- Oliver preferred to place the social model of disability in contrast to an individual model of disability.
- Oliver: "This was no amazing new insight on my part dreamed up in some ivory tower but was really an attempt to enable me to make sense of the world for my social work students and other professionals whom I taught." (taken from the 'Individual and Social Models of Disability')



The Social Model: a definition

- “The Social Model frames disability as something that is socially constructed. Disability is created by physical, organisational and attitudinal barriers and these can be changed and eliminated. This gives us a dynamic and positive model that tells us what the problem is and how to fix it. It takes us away from the position of "blaming" the individual for their shortcoming. It states that impairment is, and always will be, present in every known society, and therefore the only logical position to take, is to plan and organise society in a way that includes, rather than excludes, Disabled people.”
- Barbara Lisicki



Differences between UK and US perspectives

- There is some overlap between UK and US perspectives on disability, however there are also differences.
- The disability movements of both countries at roughly the same time – the late 1960s and early 1970s.
- In both the USA and the UK both reflected the impact of Civil Rights movement and the impact of anti-Vietnam demonstrations.
- In the USA were impacted by the experience of disability amongst veterans, the rise of students protesting of lack of provision for students and the development of centres for independent living.

Differences between UK and US perspectives 2

- UK movement reflects the experience of the failings of the Disabled Income Group. It also reflects the rejection of long-term of hospital and residential care. The rejection of rehabilitation systems and the influence of organisations for disabled people.
- Centres for Independent Living present but to a lesser extent.
- Focus on developing organisations of disabled people.

The Social Model - a materialist model

- The social model of disability in the UK was a model developed from a materialist perspective.
- 'a theory that physical matter is the only or fundamental reality and that all being and processes and phenomena can be explained as manifestations or results of matter.'
- - Merriam-Webster Dictionary
- This is not so strongly seen in the development in the USA

Social Creationist vs Social Constructionist Model

- The UK has favoured social creationist models whilst the US have favoured social constructionist models.
- ‘The essential difference between a social constructionist and a social creationist view of disability centres on where the 'problem' is actually located. Both views have begun to move away from the core ideology of individualism. The social constructionist view sees the problem as being located within the minds of able-bodied people, Whether individually (prejudice) or collectively, through the manifestation of hostile social attitudes and the enactment of social policies based upon a tragic view of disability. The social creationist view, however, sees the problem as located within the institutionalised practices of society.’
- Mike Oliver – The Politics of Disablement pp.82-83

Disability Studies

- In the USA Disability Studies has developed with a multi-disciplinary academic background.
- In the UK Disability Studies has developed mainly within the area of sociology.

Identity First vs. Person First language

- In the USA person first language is preferred – person with a disability.
- In the UK identity first language is preferred – disabled person. The disabled person is disabled by society.

Autism and disability language 1

It is important to note that the earliest voices of placing autistic experience within a social model of disability arose mainly from the perspective of American autistic writers arising in the 1980s. Jim Sinclair is a pioneer in this regard. Sinclair sets up Autism Network International (ANI) with Kathy Grant and Donna Williams (1963-2017) in 1992.



Identity First Language and Person First Language in relation to autism

- Jim Sinclair played a significant role in adopting identity first language and rejecting person first language.
- The use of autistic person has been associated with accepting the reality and complexity of autism in the life of the person.
- The use of person with autism has been associated with general pattern within the professional world of the emphasis of putting the person first

Questions

- Is the social model of disability a helpful model for understanding autism?
- Do you identify as an autistic person or a person with autism?
- Does the language we use cause division amongst us?
- Is there a gap between the language used in the secular world and that of the church?