

This piece of text will attempt to critically discover the term 'Disablism' and what it means in present day society, it will also include key words surrounding the term. Furthermore, the essay will adapt a sociological lens to explore the term in-depth, such as, functionalism. Additionally, it will analyse the impact that Disablism has on an individual's well-being, for example, their physical, intellectual, emotional and social development, as well as measuring the individual's health. The following text will evaluate Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs (1954).

According to the Council of Europe (2017) they state that there is currently no universal definition of the term 'Disability', although, it has many definitions to ensure everyone's understanding of the word. (Council of Europe, 2017). The World Health Organisation (WHO) states that Disability is difficult to explain because it cannot be limited to a physical health issue. They highlight;

...reflecting the interaction between features of a person's body and features of the society in which he or she lives. Overcoming the difficulties faced by people with disabilities requires interventions to remove environmental and social barriers (World Health Organisation, 2019).

To simplify, Disability can be defined as; 'either a physical or mental impairment.' (Rowe. J. and Mitchell, A. 2013. p74). Furthermore, The World Health Organisation (WHO) defines disability in two parts; they state that an individual has an impairment, it refers to a decrease in their basic functions, mental and or physical health. Similarly, The World Health Organisation (2019) (WHO) describes disability as a limitation or lack of capacity to accomplish a task effectively, and in a timely manner, in contrast to an individual who has not got an impairment or a disability completing a day to day task (World Health Organisation, 2019).

The term Disablism can be defined as any oppressive behaviour, such as discrimination as well as physical and verbal abuse, shown towards any disabled party or person, in the belief that they are inferior to themselves and others (Council of Europe, 2017). Moreover, the term generally refers to the stereotyping and prejudice shown towards the disabled population. The major problem with Disablism is that it isn't an action that is easily recognised, in many cases it goes unnoticed and people are unaware that what they are saying can be construed as discriminatory or demeaning (Council of Europe, 2017). Disablism comes primarily from the mental space of each individual, and as people are a product of their own environment, depending on each individual's upbringing and personal attitude towards the world around

them, their conscious and unconscious mind can create thoughts that to some may be completely fine, but also can be completely devastating to others (Council of Europe, 2017). This is where it can become difficult because even though one can change the way they consciously think about disabled people they cannot easily change how their unconscious mind will react, and it is through these unconscious thoughts, these little slips in the cracks that can make or break on how the disabled population are treated. (Deal, M. 2006. p101-p103)

In the modern world the majority of the populace would say they do not hold any problems with the disabled population, and this may fall true, however the majority of people who lead an able life will not and cannot understand the struggles of those different to them, and this is the current fight for equal human rights (Council of Europe, 2017). Those who have always lived an able life will not understand the obstacles placed in the way of those who are disabled, physically and mentally. Mental disability can be a hard issue to understand as the population view those who are different than themselves as strange and dangerous, there are a lot of stigmas towards certain groups in today's society, primarily caused by a lack of education on certain areas of biology and mental chemistry (Reeve, D. 2015. p27). Most natural mental afflictions are caused by chemical, hormonal or even cellular differences in comparison to an able person, for example a downs individual has only one extra chromosome and can be one of the more difficult afflictions to face, as they are able to live lives, however some do need carers full time and people see this as a weakness, this is blatant Disablism. On an economic level, Disablism has become less and less of an issue as there are more companies hiring people with disabilities (Reeve, D. 2015. p27- p29). There are even more coverage and access to disabled sports, making it more of a mainstream ideology that it is in-fact okay to have a disability. Disable access is also a necessity for most companies and buildings in today's world as it would be discriminatory to not have wheelchair access into a venue, excluding those who cannot walk upstairs. This concept of excluding a group, consciously or unconsciously is discriminatory and in this instance can be called Disablism, as everyone should have the same rights, there should not be a ruling party in any instance (Council of Europe, 2017).

Discrimination

It is important to define and highlight the difference between direct, and indirect discrimination; Direct discrimination occurs to an individual that is purposely being treated differently because they hold a 'protected characteristic' (ACT Human Rights Commission, 2015). This refers to The Equality Act (2010) protected characteristics follow as; disability, age, gender reassignment, marriage or civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex, and sexual orientation (Citizens Advice, 2019). Furthermore, indirect

discrimination happens when an essential requirement within society has a 'equal' instruction. However, it does not take into account the needs of an individual who needs additional support in order to receive the same, equal opportunities. By creating the same rules for everyone, it indirectly discriminates individuals who have a protected characteristic (ACT Human Rights Commission, 2015).

Haralambos *et al* (2000) state that the concept of functionalism was first introduced in the nineteenth century. They highlight that the significant people in the development of functionalism were Durkheim (1917) and Parsons (1902) (Haralambos *et al*, 2000. p9). To simplify, they offer an example of functionalism through a biological viewpoint;

If biologists wanted to know how an organism such as the human body worked, they might begin by examining the various parts such as the brain, lungs, heart and liver...they would have to examine the parts in relation to each other, since they work together to maintain the organisation... they would analyse the relationship between the heart, lungs, brain... to understand how they operated and appreciate their importance (Haralambos *et al*, 2000. p9).

Similarly, functionalists' ideas share a similar viewpoint because society is the organism, as it comprises of small, yet essential pieces for example, the heart. It is revealed that society ultimately consists of social institutions which share a social order and value consensus such as; family, religion, education, economics, state and political systems. (Haralambos *et al*, 2000. p10-p11). However, it is important to note that parts of society also work on different levels, more important parts include the lower levels; including a mother, wife, husband, father, son, daughter, uncles, and aunties which follow norms. (Haralambos *et al*, 2000. p9).

If an individual with a disability or an impairment joined a functionalist society, they may struggle as they do not have the same culture, and life experiences as others within the society. If all parts are not effective and sharing norms, value consensus and basic social order the system it will fail to become effective or breakdown. Functionalists offer a theory entitled 'Functional Prerequisites'. Parsons (1902) said that in order to have a successful social system the term must have for functional prerequisites, they follow as; Adaption, Goal Attainment, Integration and Pattern Maintenance (Thompson, 2013). Firstly, adaption refers to how society needs basic requirements for individuals, it is very similar to Maslow's (1954) Hierarchy of Needs. Secondly, goal attainment happens when society motivates and sets goals for their members such as, attendance in higher education courses (Thompson, 2013). They will then

enable governments to fund resources for individuals using them. Thirdly, integration within the society is essential due to any arising conflict that may occur. (Thompson, 2013) However, it is important to note that the functionalist's perspective reveals that social order and norms among their members are vital (Haralambos *et al*, 2000. p9). Lastly, is pattern maintenance which is monitored by the institutions in society, for example education, political and ecological systems to restate group values. (Thompson, 2013)

The functionalist theory is a well-known, and discussed term, although it is important to note the advantages and yet advantages of the theory; an advantage of the functionalist's approach is how conflict is almost non-existent amongst its members due to having set values, norms, morals and value consensus; this minimizes any disfunction in the societal system and supports social stability (Haralambos *et al* 2000. p10-13). On the other hand, a critique of the functionalist's view point is that culture is introduced as a given product to every individual, Thought Co (2019) share that culture can be defined as an individual's sense of self, referring to their beliefs, language and communication. This can be limited to one person's experiences or it could have a collective group connection through their culture alone. However, it could cause conflict due to their similarities or upbringings that had an influence on their culture (Thought Co, 2019).

According to Oliver (1998) he highlights that from the functionalist's perspective, an individual's holistic health is monitored and if their health did decrease a key element in the theory is that the person will need to want to get back to their healthy state according to theorists (Oliver, 1998). He states that the perspective deems the disabled population as deviant and 'it simply reproduces discriminatory norms and values – instead of addressing the cultural and economic forces that precipitate them' (Oliver, 1998). Furthermore, he stresses the importance of good policy implementation within contemporary society for example, individuals who are disabled or have an impairment are difficult to reach, even more so when revealing other needs that need to be met by society as a whole for instance, gender, sexual orientation, age, religion, capacity to work, and economic status (Oliver, 1998).

Maslow (1954) has a long career history of a psychology, who presented a humanistic theory regarding a pyramid of human motivation or commonly known as the Hierarchy of Needs. The word humanistic perspective directly reflects empathy in human actions and consequences. In similar environments, the humanistic process refers to concentration on the individual's self-

actualization (Rowe, J. and Mitchell, A. 2013. p10-11). The pyramid is split into five sections, the bottom of the diagram refers to the individual's basic needs, as you read up the table the needs get more complex and more difficult to obtain effectively (Simply Psychology, 2018). Moreover, the first stage is entitled Physiological Needs; which covers an individual's access to food, shelter, sleep, clothing, reproduction and clothing (Simply Psychology, 2018). The second stage is entitled Safety Needs; this relates to an individual's personal security, employment, resources, health and property (Simply Psychology, 2018). The third stage is entitled Love and Belonging; this refers to an individual's approach to intimate relationships for example, friendships, family and spouses (Simply Psychology, 2018). The fourth stage is entitled Esteem; this is when an individual acquires self-respect, self-esteem, positive recognition, status and freedom (Simply Psychology, 2018). Lastly, the fifth stage is entitled Self-Actualisation; this occurs when an individual has obtained the previous four needs mentioned, the person will have the motivation and capacity to reach their full potential (Simply Psychology, 2018).

Branching off Maslow's (1954) Hierarchy of Needs, those in the disabled population may be negatively affected on multiple stages of his humanistic theory. For example, referring back to the first needs of the pyramid, psychological needs can be affected due to the political aspect within contemporary society. According to Disability Rights UK (2018) benefit funding relating to disability has been cut by approximately five billion over 10-year time period. (Disability Rights UK, 2018). Furthermore, they reveal that the disabled population face additional charges and costs each calendar month due their disability or condition; It has been estimated five hundred and seventy pounds extra (Disability Rights UK, 2018). This could have a direct, detrimental effect on an individual's physiological needs due to not being able to afford to provide shelter because of the high cost of rent, warmth and electric. Furthermore, on the second stage of Maslow's (1954) research it refers to a person's safety needs; an individual who is disabled or has an impairment may struggle feeling secure in their environment because they may not be able bodied or have fast enough reflexes. Additionally, security in employment may become an issue because of their capacity or illness. That can lead to stress for the individual and will affect their development on other stages. Moreover, next is the love and belonging tier, sometimes it has been reported that an individual with a disability has been taken into residential care because their family or guardians have not been able to cope emotionally with the situation. The next stage is entitled esteem needs, their needs maybe neglected when having confidence, and self-esteem if they do not know re-gain their

independence back after needing support and guidance. Lastly, a person with a disability or impairment may find it difficult to self – actualize effectively due to the issues with the below stages (physiological, safety, love and belonging and esteem).

To conclude, all the different viewpoints and theological ideas and understandings of what Disablism is and what it means to be disabled in today's society, I can confidently say that we are on the right track towards a better, more sustainable world in both a leisure and business sense. Compared to how the disabled population were treated near a century ago, the common disabled person today faces a significantly less amount of persecution and segregation. Even though there are still astigmatism towards certain areas of the disabled, over a whole population there is a certain positive change in the way the world can help them live both happily and freely as the rest of the populace. In regard to legal standings there are far more official laws, programmes and educational systems in accord with the disabled, this allowing them to flourish to a full potential regardless of biological make up and societal standing.

Haralambos *et al* (2000) way of thinking on the functionalists perspective, in the sense that we should function as a full system instead of just separate organs, we could thrive more if all systems interlinked instead of segregating themselves due to their differences, is starting to be more noticeable in the way that Disabled people are now thought of as a group instead of an anomaly within the able-bodied population. It's now regarding that being disabled is normal in the sense that it does happen and there are over a billion people worldwide who deal with their disabilities on a day to day basis. We as a population are becoming more considerate and understanding of those groups who are often cast aside are open to prejudice. Almost in the same way that today's population views trans and gender fluidity as normal, the world is expanding, and more segregated groups are being included within the mainstream of the culture.

In conclusion, I believe that Disablism is still a problem as long as the shadow of prejudice lingers over our sceptre isle. However within the last half a century the standard of the lives of those afflicted with disabilities have grown substantially and with the tools and legal standings of the modern world it isn't inconceivable to believe that over the next half a century, disabilities will not be deemed as an inconvenience, but just another way in which people are made, the same way people come from different races, have different hair colours and follow

different trends, there are many groups that are constantly growing and the disabled have always been one of them.

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