

Practice in Context, Dissertation Proposal. Accessibility, Choice & Justice

Proposed Question for independent enquiry:

Designing for the disabled - Why is discrimination such a prominent aspect in the design industry still in 2021?

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Accessibility, Choice & Justice

Dissertation Summary Proposal

A basic summary of this piece of writing is to mainly look further into the three keywords I have chosen to talk about. As well as several images and designers/ thinkers that relate to the issues brought to hand. The research I have undergone will allow me to connect all three of my keywords with a flowing nature. This is needed to form my final dissertation title based around how the design industry does still not cater enough for disabled individuals. Artists such as Marc Quinn and Sara Hendren design in the region where my points are clear, by referencing them I will be able to communicate my keywords perfectly. This co existing with the teachings of Kristen Shinohara, amongst other thinkers. The main thing I would like to talk about is how discrimination is still such a strong aspect of designing, my goal is to demolish this aspect and to focus on the keywords and making a huge decision. Discrimination in the design industry needs to change as it is creating another divide in the design community.

Accessibility:

The term accessibility is defined as being, 'How easy something is to reach, use, enter, see, etc' (Dictionary, 2021) However the alternative definition would be, 'How easy something is to reach, use, enter, see, etc for someone with a disability'. (Dictionary, 2021)

The term accessibility seems straight forward and basic however, when you think of the term many things come to mind. Ideally for me the term accessibility immediately relates to design and more specifically again designing for disabled individuals. This then led me to looking into the design thinker, K. Shinohara, her way of thinking has created a three-tenet theory that allows you to use it to have a specification for accessible design for the disabled. There is a three-part ideology formed by the thinker and professor, K. Shinohara. That basically refines designs for social accessibility, and their opinions on how they believe is the best way to combat the discrimination of disabled individuals in the design industry.

The three tenets all have a particular viewpoint, however there are other thinkers and designers that believe that designing for the disabled should be different to these three tenets. The three tenets include the following: Design for disability ought to incorporate users with and without disabilities, Design should be able to address function and social factors simultaneously as well as the third tenet being based around considering accessibility in the social features of the design. Even though this theory is based around purely technology design and its state as we now stand, I believe it is possible to also use this ideology and thinking and to relate it to the other areas inside the design industry.

Shinohara's theology of accessible design relates from the more social side to it and how there are issues that can be solved by using especially the third tenet; 'Design should include tools to spur consideration of social factors in design.' (K, 2018) This tenet brings forward the issue of accessible products for disabled individuals, and how we can combat the issues that disabled users struggle with daily. There is a solid breakdown of the three tenets, and they do bring forward the issues that as a professor K, Shinohara sees in the technological design industry. As a professor she sees firsthand the consequences of not having designs accessible for everyone which is another of her three-tenet theory,

Shinohara's complex term of accessibility is purely based around disabled individuals and how they are not catered for in the design industry on a whole. Disabled people are often overlooked in the design industry and need to start being cared for, why would fully able-bodied people expect it to be a standard given to have access to every product existing. But then when you have a disability you have no option to receive a product because a certain brand does not cater to their disability. The theory basis is based around the fact that brand needs to cater to everyone even if there is a disability present in the user.

Yet again to counter the point made about the three-tenet theory being that brands should cater to both the fully able and disabled. This is not seen as being a factor that should impact design. This is due to the success some artists have received even though they have a disability. Look at Van Gogh for example he, 'Van Gogh created his artwork at a very quick pace. He would churn out multiple works, then experience a time of depression. This vacillation led to the speculation that he most likely had bipolar disorder' (Team, 2021)



Fig.1

(Starry Night, Van Gogh,)

April 1889

The image above just shows that there is no need for there to be a special circumstance or option for the disabled. So, to differ from the view of Shinohara, the pure existence of someone like Van Gogh can make it clear that disabilities should not hold you back, but you should thrive with them, using them to your advantage. Accessibility is such an important factor to me because I personally believe that when a product is accessible to the majority as well as the minority then you are thriving yourself.

Choice:

Following on from the keyword of accessibility I have decided to write about another point that really resonates with me as a person and as a designer. Choice is another keyword that associates with my career path. My goal in life is to help others and I believe I could do this by simply allowing disabled users to have a choice in the world we live in for their everyday products. The clear lack of respect in the design industry for giving disabled individuals a choice, every product you pick up from a disabled user all seem to be one colour not adventurous at all, which to me is shocking as well as the opinion of other designers.

For example, there are many wild and wacky designs for cutlery out there, however, as soon as you go into the disabled person zone you see a huge decrease in the level of aesthetics. How is it okay for designers to sacrifice any aesthetical development just because they are only focusing on the function rather than the aesthetics of the product. To me many designers see disabled individuals as being a lost cause and something that is seen as an afterthought. When clearly there is a huge different between the standard of the products. For example, the image below is of a cutlery set from Medicare which is a design company that purely focuses on designing for the disabled so why would they let their work falter and not be fully accessible and have a choice.



Fig. 2
(Medicare)
2019

Is aesthetics to be cared for in a design process for the disabled?

We see thinkers such as J. Perry who believe that the aesthetics of a product are seen as an afterthought, which does not seem to be a rare feature. The famous quote, 'Form before Function' (Palmer, 2003)

This is such a medieval way of thinking where we are currently living in a time where aesthetics is everything, the image you let off around those around you is what makes you able to gain respect, where at the end of the day there is none. The lack of respect and the amount of uncalled for negative comments they receive because they are different really does unsettle them and the designers. How can a designer be happy with the product they have created knowing that they are making the users life difficult in other ways? Overall, designers need to start designing for everyone otherwise we are going to hit a time when we know nothing about anyone around us just coasting, where we need to prove because right now it seems as though discrimination is still a huge feature in the design industry especially for the disabled, their rights have not been catered for a long time.

Justice:

Finally, my third keyword, the word justice is defined as being 'The quality with just dealing or right action' (Dictionary, 2021)

Developing on from that definition the meaning of the word justice to me is more so about gaining back respect or something along those lines. However, this is a theory that really needs to be developed as it is very similar and closed minded to many other thousands of designers and thinkers. More justice for disabled individuals is needed all round, they do not receive the same privileges that others take for granted daily. It is a well-known fact that disabled people do not have the same privileges as fully able-bodied peoples do, 'Designing for the disabled becomes design for everyone' plus more money is spent 'segregating the disabled' (Massie, 1994) than there is spent on making them feel comfortable as they are.

This shows the huge issue remaining in the design industry with discriminating against the disabled and that they clearly are still not over the difference in the quality of product an able-bodied person would have, and a disabled person there really is no comparison. Whether you are forgetting to match the qualities, or you blatantly are ignoring the fact that everyone should be equal. Matthew Allen, thinker, and designer also has a theory that the current way of designing for the disabled is extremely outdated, as quoted below. 'A touchy subject with strewn with outdated terms' (Allen, 2021) which I totally agree with, his outlook on the design field is so accurate its painful to see the passion go to waste, because we need more than one person to make a difference.

A designer that shows pride in the disabled sculptures he creates reflects the positive outlook we should have on designing and creating a positive area. His name being Marc Quinn, the respect he has given from himself and other disabled people, he has benefitted the fight against discrimination in the design industry. The photo below shows some of his body confident work. However, it could also be just to make a staple not so much to reflect onto the positive representation of disabled people. Overall, disabled people are human beings too, Human beings need to learn how to do this.

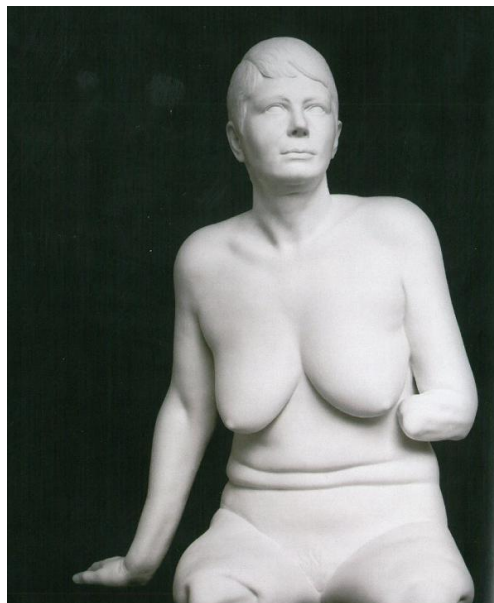


Fig.3

(Marc Quinn)

1984

From exploring deeper into these three keywords I have seen that contextualising these have allowed me to question more questions and other statements that relate to the words. I have also discovered that the bond between the three words is very clear as I can see a smooth transition from word to word.

Some questions I would like to look at in a deeper depth would probably be, why is discrimination such a prominent thing in design still to this day? Along with some others such as are we fulfilling our duties as designers? Is any existing theory effective in the terms of designing for the disabled? The concepts of the words Accessibility, Choice and Justice can all be very clearly linked together. For example, it is extremely evident that you can not have a fully redemption or justice without the other two keywords. You need all three to escape from the views of discrimination in design, because with accessibility and choice of their products, it humanizes the people more than when they felt alienated by old school designers. I plan to develop these three keywords into my final year in this university. These words allow me to express myself because as previously mentioned my only goal in life is to make other people's lives better, and by improving someone's life by giving them independence and humanizing their desires would allow me to do so. I will be taking these questions and words forward into my dissertation final next academic year. I fully believe that these keywords relate to me the thinkers previously mention along with the development stages of forming these words, I feel as though they will help me spread awareness on the factor that there is still a huge issue with discrimination in designing for the disabled.

Final Question:

Designing for the disabled - Why is discrimination such a prominent aspect in the design industry still in 2021?

Sub Question:

Are designers fulfilling their duties within the industry?

Is any existing theory effective in the terms of designing for the disabled?

Why are designers overlooking the aesthetics of a product rather than developing it fully?

Form versus the function, which aspect is the most important.?

Bibliography/ Reference List:

Figure 1. (Starry Night) (Vincent Van Gogh - 1889)

Figure 2. (Medicare) (2019)

Figure 3. (Marc Quinn) (1984)

'A touchy subject with strewn with outdated terms' (Allen, 2021)

'How easy something is to reach, use, enter, see, etc' (Dictionary, 2021)

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that he most likely had bipolar disorder' (Team, 2021)

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