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‘A Study into The Discrimination of Disabled Design’

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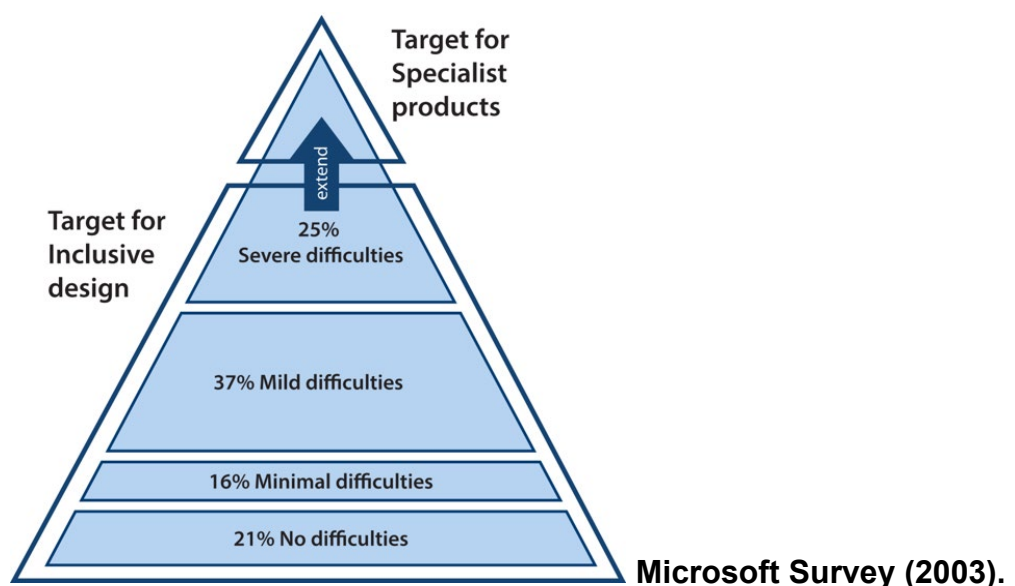
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Abstract

Within this paper I will be continuously referencing disabled individuals, by this wording I am referring to those both physically and mentally disadvantaged in whatever manner, including reduced mobility. This is extremely important to understand my opinion on what a disabled person is, as it can be a very broad field of ideas with the terms disabled/disability. This paper will outline the subject matters surrounding designing for disability, more specifically the technicalities of the design processes for different design sectors.

This paper will lead onto arguing whether this is an effective representation of design today, and whether inclusive products are being designed as it is stated. This paper will read into the technicalities behind designing for disability and whether any discrimination comes into the design process on a high level.

Inclusive design is, 'The design of mainstream products and/or services that are accessible to, and usable by, as many people as reasonably possible... without the need for special adaptation or specialised design' (BSI, 2005). The British Standards Institute stated this in 2005, Due to this I feel as though this definition is outdated and therefore unusable in today's modern society, due to the definition nearing on being two decades old and seeing how much society has developed should have modified this definition. Below there is a graphic that reflects the target group for inclusivity,



Inclusive design does not actually suggest that all products can and should be universally used by all, this is a key aspect of inclusive design. It creates yet another boundary between being fully abled and disabled, leading onto the questioning of discrimination. Discrimination is defined as, 'Treating one or more members of a specified group unfairly as compared with other people' (Harvard, 1985). This is essentially what inclusive design on a whole does. The factors of not designing for everyone leads onto the fact that one group of individuals are not being designed for to the same standard as others, therefore creating a mist of discrimination over inclusive design. This paper will read into the ins and outs of discriminating against disabled individuals and will reflect the effects of it upon those specifically.

Introduction

Discrimination is a very common feature that we see on great level in our everyday lives, there is racism, sexism, and ableism, just to name a few. There have recently been great events to protest racism and sexism and homophobia, however yet again disabled individuals have not been receiving the same justice. Discrimination against disabled people is usually seen as more like 'bullying' which is a correct term for it, however it is not going to the lengths of describing the entire effect it has upon a person's mental health.

Why are there not any major events that fight the ever-growing stigma behind disability? Are disabled people still not seen as equals? Just the same as how homosexuals, Ethnic minorities and women were placed into psychiatric care only a few decades ago for factors that can't be changed. Disabled individuals were not only included in this but are still being placed into these boundaries, as they are still not fully socially accepted. Unlike many of the previous groups mentioned disabled individuals are still having the greatly negative view placed upon them today. Which to me is highly shocking due to the amazing things we see from the disabled community every four years with the Paralympics amongst other amazing things they do, proving the worth of those individuals as being equal to fully able-bodied people, the resilience of disabled people is like no other. Disabled people have constantly been discriminated against for decades, and we are now seeing signs of

discrimination within the design industry. They are constantly being pushed down and are as being of a lower standard in the social hierarchy we live in today.

Chapter One

Design is meant to brighten someone's life; it's a form of art and it shouldn't be seen as a way of dampening someone's life. Design is widely known to improve the lives of others and now we see disabled individuals being punished for something out of their control. Design shows the beauty in the world and allows people to express themselves throughout many ways. Expression should not be limited to people due to their physical or mental abilities.

Similarly, within The Expression Theory proposed by Leo Tolstoy, it was suggested that it was an artist's, 'duty to express their emotions to their viewers' (Oxford University Press, 2001). This is a great viewpoint and is something that is greatly overlooked by many designers. We should be designing for the beauty in the world to express emotions and the opinions we have.

Expression throughout art is a necessity in life for me and many others, this is since art allows people to express themselves in ways that they would not necessarily be able to due in an everyday life. Every person is entitled to their own way of expression, this should not be something that people are limited to be experiencing. No matter the persons mental or physical ability, this itself reflects the discrimination within design. Yet we see designers favouring fully abled people over those with disabilities in many ways, such as aesthetics and choices in options for example.

To elaborate, those with disabilities do not have as many options on a whole as fully abled people, this could be argued however that it is not actually discrimination due to statistics. The number of disabled people compared to fully able-bodied people is a lot smaller compared to them. This leads onto describing why there are not as many options and choices as there would be if they were fully able people, it is all down to numbers and ratios. The ratios that already exist state that there is not as many people that are physically or mentally disabled compared to those fully able bodied. To elaborate upon this, I would like to state that this point is extremely

controversial and is down to preference on the answer you form from this statement. The manner of designing is down to mainly two aspects, them being market push and technology pull, these two aspects both impact the product created and designed.

This obviously leads onto impacting the products created, without the market pull the product would not be desired, and without the technology pull the market would not require new products or even be interested in the newer products and would stick to what they know and already have. Market pull being a main feature in designing overall, not just specifically in designing for the disabled. The market pull creates a demand for a product and suggests clearly that a product is created purely from both the demand of the product along with the technology push. Technology push is also an extremely important feature that is relevant when designing and has been outreached especially within the disabled design community.

Below see two screen captures from a simple internet search into a generic product, this is to reflect the differences between the two types of products, them being for disability and those that are not for disability. The numbers could be seen as reflecting either discrimination or down to the demand behind the products. Firstly, the chairs for fully abled products have over six million search results and then the search for chairs for disabled people being only seven hundred thousand. The comparison of the two is great and there is huge difference between the two.

Designing for disability requires an extreme level of safety when finalising the product, the products are usually well designed in terms of function, however not as well designed for form and aesthetics.

There is reported that there is over 11,000,000 people in the United Kingdom alone that are disabled, 'There are over 11 million people with disability in the UK' (Disability Sports, 2014). There is a total of 67 million people currently living in the United Kingdom. 'The latest ONS mid-year estimates suggest the UK population has reached 67 million for the first time' (Pereira, 2021). This would then create a ratio of 11:67, this would suggest that there is approximately a sixth of the United Kingdom that are disabled in comparison to those who are fully able bodied. Based off these statistics there should be an equal ration of products for disability and those fully able bodied. This meaning that the search results should be parallel with these statistics, however they there is a 7:60 ratio which would be close to the previous ratio meaning there is a connection between the two.

This would suggest that there is only designing for demand not for discrimination. In this case there is no evidence of discrimination in the design industry, However, there are some ways that could be seen as prejudice when in the design industry especially with designing for disability. Those being related to the options disabled individuals have in comparison to fully able-bodied people, even though there are a correct amount of product results from the generic search according to statistics. If you read into some of the products themselves, you will see that there is a wider range of choices such as colour schemes and aesthetical points in comparison to those that are designed especially for disabled people.

Chapter Two

For many years there has been a great debate over the function and form arguments within design. This is especially important when designing for the disabled. The function over form debate has been a majority vote from this argument, this is due to the basis of if a product doesn't work then what is the point in it existing. Especially in designing for the disabled this case would correlate, however, there are ways to which aesthetics and form should come into the design

process for designing for those less able. This is not as frequently covered with designing for less able-bodied individuals due to safety being a necessity in design. However, I do not believe that aesthetics should be sacrificed for any product no matter the fact of needing to add more detailing and more features into the safety development of a product.

There is no excuse for the lack of attention going into design styling, as designers we are to succeed and improve the lives of others by any means necessary. We as designers are to make the world a better place and make life more enjoyable for others, and how can this be achieved when we are not designing for specific types of people, but we are designing for the majority instead but sacrificing time to ensure a product is safe for the user. I am not denying the importance of designing around safety as being a main objective in the design process, and especially within designing for those with disabilities but there are no obstacles behind designing with an aesthetic viewpoint in mind also. Design is a form of art and subsequently should be reflected inside the products we design. Why does the aesthetics styling of a product become sacrificed based off on the target market we are designing for?

There are some circumstances where there is a design styling placed upon specific disability products, much like every type of design. However, these design stylings however are very subjective can be seen as a dumbed down version of a more popular design. For example, there are many products you can tell are designed for disabled individuals over those who are fully able, this is due to the very clinical and sterile design placed upon them. Most products for disabled people are extremely plain and are by no means 'fun'. This is sacrificing the aesthetical viewpoint of designing, which is always such an important feature when doing so. There are many examples in design of this point being present, not only in the disability design industry but with also within certain other sectors of design, such as eco design.

Most products design to being environmentally friendly are like disability design also, this is evident by the visual impact the products have. For example, there are certain products you can associate with certain things, such as environmentally friendly products being related to the colour green and being curved off, in very few circumstances they are blocky and structured, they are normally a curved and ballooned shape. To elaborate upon this the Toyota Prius for example has a very

recognisable shape and design. This is due to the shaping and styling of the motor vehicle. There are distinctive design features that make the car look like something associated with being environmentally friendly. There are aesthetical boundaries within certain design sectors. Environmentally friendly cars especially relate to disability products, due to mainly the aesthetical boundaries placed upon them.

The image below is the Toyota Yaris, this car shows the rounded off styling placed upon it, this is like many designs that stem from designing for disability. There are common characteristics between these two design sectors, these being the clean, tubular, rounded, soft looking styling. This product especially is in correspondence with the distinctive aesthetics of eco design. It is designed to be a smooth design to look more welcoming a less threatening unlike the many other cars produced that year that were designed based off not only technology pull but the aesthetical styling also.



(Toyota, 2014).

However, this design styling has been developed within the sector of environmentally friendly design, the newer design has now been named design of the year for cars within 2021, and the customers can see a visible difference within the styling. This is a great move within this design sector, and is something I can but only hope for within the designing for disability sector of the design industry we are currently in.



Great car better design than the older Yaris hybrid.

M Appleton – Thursday, October 28,
2021

(Toyota, 2021).

This is a customer review of the newer version of the Toyota Yaris, this is a great example of movement within design. This is something that the disability design sector is crying out for. It needs change and development just like this type of design.

Designing within the disability sector has not changed for as long as many designers can remember, there is only occasionally modified products that designs are considered in terms of aesthetics and form. This is not acceptable, why should this design sector remain where it is when there is development being made within every other field of design. This can clearly be seen as being a way of discriminating against disabled individuals and again adding to the stereotypical view many people have on them. There are a few companies however, that design for disabled people, and they are considering trends along with design styling. This on the other hand is extremely rare and does not happen on a large enough scale to make a difference. This is shocking but not unbelievable due to the many different times that discrimination has been placed upon disabled people. This is just another form of injustice and prejudice that less fully able people must experience on a regular basis as well as accept with no arguments.

This paper is reaching into the basis of disabled design and will tear it apart to ensure that it is made clear that the design industry is failing to be fully inclusive, like they claim. This is a ridiculous example of why disabled individuals feel pushed to the side-lines in life, like they will never achieve what they want and will never been

seen as equal to those who happen to be fully able bodied. Why is it allowed for people to make other people feel less worthy of excellence within design, this is by no means acceptable and makes a joke of designers worldwide who specialise in designing for disability.

There are many different products that have not changed greatly in decades and that to me seems fundamentally shocking. Some might find this normal due to the design being technically sound, however I see this as being a form of laziness upon the designer's side. Why is discrimination being overlooked for settling with standard products, it is clear designers go above and beyond when designing many products, it is crazy to me that that this is being overlooked by most of the design community daily. We need to optimise the positives of designing within every design sector. This should be a necessity in design, there is no need for the constant lack of care going into the design processes in terms of aesthetics.

Chapter Three

Every human being is entitled to a choice the very minimum of choice and no discrimination. For example, there are many different basic human rights, there are basic human rights that are being obstructed within designing for disability. Those being, 'all human beings are free and equal' (United Nations Assembly, 1948). this is obstructed by the fact that disabled people are not seen as equals to those who are fully able bodied. The being free section is not actually limited with the products being produced by designers, However the equality section is still a major part of the issue that we face today. The fact that people are not being fully catered for could be seen as being unfavourable on certain people, those with disabilities.

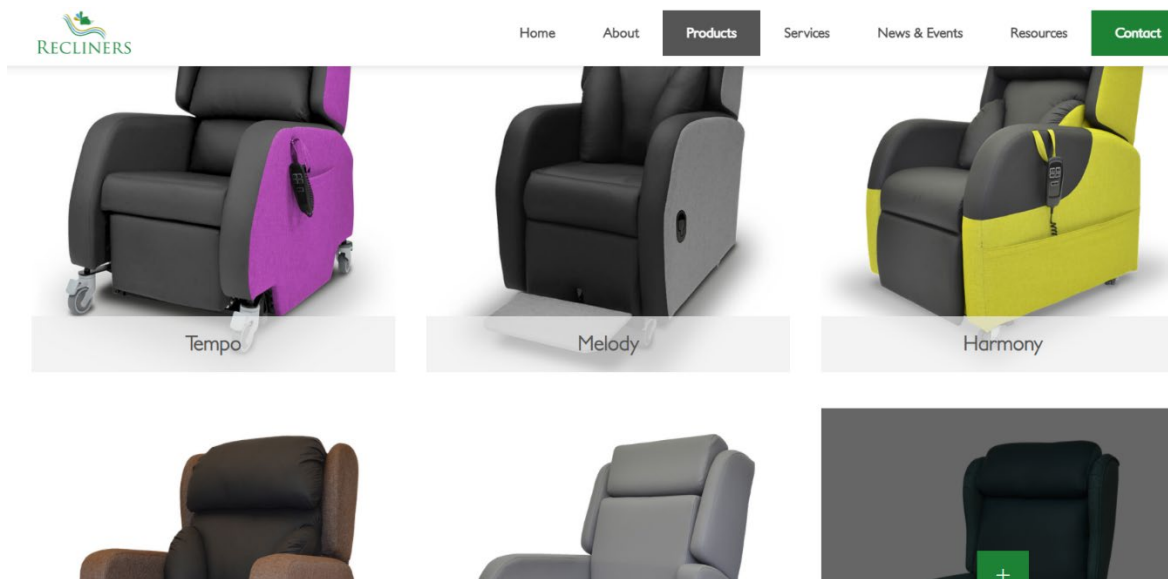
The basic human rights act fights for affirming people's basic rights that are required by all, and especially are associated with an individual's rights. This should never be obstructed no matter the person, an individual is always entitled to their basic human rights no matter the case. To elaborate even criminals and those in prison for whatever reason are still entitled to all these basic human rights. This legislation was formed in Paris on the 10th of December 1948. This is legislation that applies to all;

however, they are subtly being overlooked in the design process for designing for disability.

The declaration itself consists of thirty basic human right articles that affirm an individual's rights in life. This should never be hindered by any manner, despite who the individual is. Another basic human right that is clearly being looked over would be the 'No Discrimination' (United Nations Assembly, 1948). right, which in my opinion is blatantly being blocked for disabled people. This is due to multiple points I have referenced throughout this paper. The lack of choice or options provided by designers is an abomination to the rights. It is stated that, 'Everyone born in this world have human rights that must be protected by the law' this is evident and should never be compromised by any means.

As previously mentioned, there are designers that are catering for disability, and are including choices into the design styling processes. There are not as many as there should be for the quantity of designs created.

Recliners, a seating company that focuses on designing for those with disabilities along with those who require additional comfort. The designs are very similar and there is not a wide enough range of colour options provided for them. There is, however, some options unlike many other companies, the standard range usually comes as it is. There are other colour options however, the designs are super like the other seating products they provide. Below is a screenshot from the website, which shows their range of products with the single colour option for each of the designs.



(Recliners, 2021).

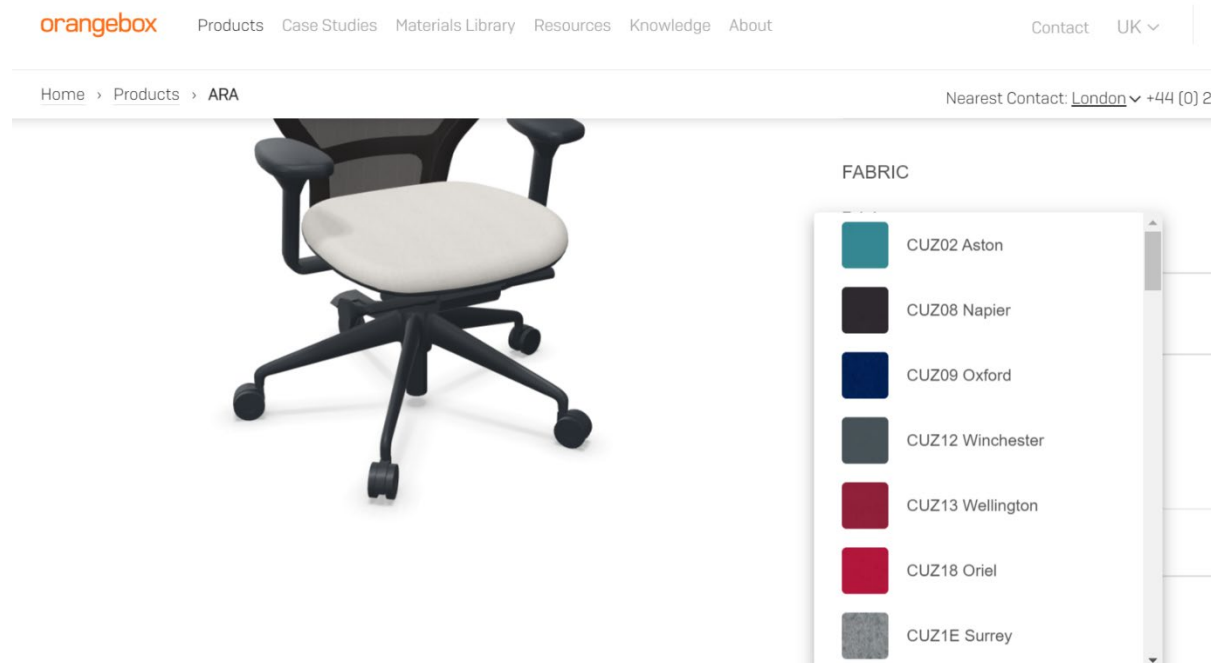
This company is a company that designs for everyone and embraces inclusive design. However, there are some products designed especially for the disabled users. The colour options are not there so again there is no choice in terms of colour schemes unless you want to choose a different designed chair.

There are other companies that follow this philosophy of designing inclusive products, although I believe fully inclusive design is not reachable in our lifetimes or maybe even ever. This is something that will probably never be embraced and used by all, which is saddening as a designer myself. This again creates more of a diverse range of designs, again creating those boundaries within each design sector.

There are many companies that give more options for those who are fully able, maybe this is due to the factor that there is not as much safety consideration going into the designing of fully able-bodied products or not. The philosophy of time is money comes into play here yet again, however, most disabled products cost a lot more than those who are for fully able-bodied people. However, the product costs more then there should then still be the more care put into the aesthetics and styling of the products.

Orangebox on the other hand is a company that designs mainly for most of the population, again a seating and furniture company. They provide many choices for the customers unlike many companies that design for disability. There are many more options of colours for example, all within the same product, unlike many other

companies that specialise in designing for disability. The colours are vast compared to the measly two-colour options offered by companies like recliners. The colour scheme options are so large you physically must scroll multiple times until you get to the end of the list of them. The below image shows just a handful of the fifty other options they are providing.



(Orangebox, 2021).

The fact that there are fifty colour options for just this one specific product is shocking as there is only a maximum of two-colour options for the other design sector. This is ridiculous and reflects just another side to a form of discrimination within this design sector. There is no need for the aesthetics of the designs to be limited as well as the options provided in products especially for disabled individuals. The cost of the product is higher, which goes along with the higher workload required for the development stage in the safety aspect of the products, as well as the materials used. However, if you are paying for a product you expect to have a choice in what you are purchasing to go along with your styling as person and your identity as a human being. Design and art reflect who we are as people and this is limited based off your additional needs as people, again placing disabled people into the stereotypical viewpoint on disabled people on a whole. Which is extremely degrading an upsetting if you yourself are disabled as you are being stereotyped into a category that takes away your individuality as a person. This just adds to the ever-

growing stigma around disability, branding all disabled people with the same brush, taking away basic rights and dignity within themselves. The tainted view society has upon certain people is toxic and will never change, unfortunately maybe ever, this is not something that will be a quick fix and has been something that people have been experiencing for years on end. There will be no end to the stigma and discrimination placed upon certain people because of how they look, act, or are as people.

Conclusion

This paper has demonstrated and explained the negative side of designing for disability. It has showed a new viewpoint upon discrimination in designing for disability. It has become clear that inclusive design is extremely rare when completed correctly, and even when it is done it creates more problems than good. There is a constant stigma around disability, and who people are when they are disabled, they are stereotyped into categories that make them be seen as not individuals but the same as others with disabilities.

There has always been a negative stigma around disability, and it will always exist, not matter what we do, just the same as no matter what we do there will never be a case where fully inclusive design exists.

There are too many factors that create this blanket of discrimination over disability, this is a shocking fact but will never change because humans are selfish and think of money over the quality of life someone is receiving. The society we live in today disabled individuals are seen as being lesser than fully able-bodied people, and this is not acceptable, however, it still happens.

No person should have their basic human rights taken away from them by law, and within the design industry it is subtly taking away at the very minimum two basic human rights away. The main one being equality, we live in a world where no one will ever be seen as equal to another there are too many opinions of people and stereotypes, we place on top of people. Equality is something we will never achieve as a society let alone within the design industry. No matter how hard people try to ensure that there is equality throughout their work it will never be enough as there is

always going to be something that will not be considered. In most cases within designing for disability it is the aesthetical styling of the products.

The point is still clear that is a discriminative offence not to allow people to have choices in life, it is a basic human requirement and desire to have a choice to add to a person's individuality. We will always have things in the way when designing but it is normally associated with lack of thought upon others and pure selfishness as designers.

We need to think of the bigger picture and see that everyone is their own person that requires choice, their own opinions and dignity. Something that every person is entitled to, design makes us who we are and will help us reflect who we are as people. It gives us our own identities and the fact that many disabled people do not have the option to relate a product to themselves is disgusting, but unfortunately will never change.

No matter who you are, your looks, your social ranking or whether you are classed as being disabled, this should not impact the products made available to people on a whole. The cost alone shows us that these people are having to pay more for basic products they require in an everyday life, to me this is another shocking feature.

In design we are people who use our creativity as outlets to improve the world we live in; this is something that is required in many ways when considering discrimination. Discrimination is a negative idea that will always exist if we continue going the way we are as society today, unfortunately there will still be people who will not be able to have the same opportunities as those fully able due to the stigma placed around disability today and for the foreseeable future.

Inclusivity while not being meant to be designed for all is still something that will never work out, there is always going to be these stereotypes placed upon people and it will never stop. This adds to the fact that some people are not being catered for and are being discarded off onto another sector of the design industry.

Despite what you or disabled people do there will always be this negative stereotype placed upon people with disabilities for no other reason than them being technically different either physically or mentally than fully able-bodied people. The

discrimination will always be there for disabled people in all areas of life, not just in the design industry.

However, this paper has clearly shown multiple ways to which discrimination is a huge feature within design and always will be due to greediness and lack of care for others. Again, referring to the definition of discrimination, 'Treating one or more members of a specified group unfairly as compared with other people.' is just proving my points of discrimination still being a huge problem in life especially within design. People with disabilities are treated as different within the design industry and always will be, with the subtle yet still life changing small features to design that strip people with disabilities of all individuality which everyone is entitled to as well as the dignity taken away from them over the lack of choice and care provided to them.

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