

**QUESTION 5** - From the series of thinking making research strands lectures, choose a theme, movement, or selection of artists or designers that relate to your practice or interests, and construct a 2,500 – word essay. Critically assess primary themes, key writers, and relevant practitioners.

**Student Number:** 1900686

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**Word Count:** 2421

**Lecturers Name:** Julia Lockheart

## **Disabled Design -**

For years I have been totally obsessed with the idea of helping others, whether it came from my mother's job as a career for the less able bodied or from something else, I have always been intrigued the question of what makes someone successful? My response to this being when you are proud of what you have done and the people around you are also proud of you for that. I have always been intrigued with the concept that by helping people you will find what really matters in life and from this I can see that it is true. By designing for the disabled I feel more able to meet my goals in life, because by only helping someone else and making their life better you can fully reach success in your life. So as one could imagine when I came across the gap in the market for the less able bodied, I was shocked and disgusted for the ways that the disabled are treated in design and need to bring attention to the issues.

Designing for the disabled is not very commonly talked about. This is a sort of taboo subject amongst many people, the effects of this greatly impact the design industry for those specialised products. The products are lacking in the same touch that the standard designs have, that are seen as standard for fully abled people. Many designs do not supply a choice for the user this is a major problem I will be addressing in this essay. I will also be talking about how designing for the disabled is often overlooked and isn't taken as serious as needed. Another topic of choice I will be talking about inside this essay will be the fact that many designs for the physically disabled are usually not as aesthetically pleasing as standard designs are.

The first major issue I will be writing about will be the issue of there not being much choice in the design industry for different types or colour options for the user to choose from. The issue with this is it strips the user and individual of having any option of personal decision or preference, because of this disabled people are usually lumped with the concept of,

'lump it, or leave it'. - 'Hell, hath no fury like a liberal art major scorned'

King, K (1991) Lump it or leave it

This would impact the user's dignity greatly and would leave the user to feel inadequate to a certain level. The choice in this world is what makes it easy for

everyone to get on and enjoy their lives, why are disabled people having less of a standard of life to anyone else, any more than they already do? Are fully abled bodied people more important than those with disabilities? In my opinion they are not, there is not one person's life that is more important than the other, no matter the circumstances, especially if it is down to the ability of their body, I find it disgusting and disappointing as a designer to find that there is such a large gap in the market for the less able bodied, however I will take this as my time to help others.

The industry of design focuses mainly on the needs of disabled people rather than the wishes and hopes of disabled people. I understand that disabled people have safety requirements that need to be reached, but where is the problem in giving them an option of pattern or colour much like what fully able-bodied people receive under pretty much every single product on the market. Selwyn Goldsmith talks about seven different aspects of designing for the disabled, not one of them focuses on the side of making the product appealing for the user, it mainly states that the product must be safe, comfortable and sizing. The publication talks of the ways that design is used for the disabled and how it is focused around,

*'The merits of normality and independence for the disabled'*

Goldsmith, S (2017) Designing for the disabled

This shows us that there is a lot to think about while designing for the disabled, however there is nothing stopping the designers from taking a step back and designing a range of options for the user, not just the sizing and the pricing of the product as a range. The need for options would greatly increase the happiness of the user to make them feel as though they are no different to those with no disability.

The psychological effects of the designing not being the same as standard designs for fully abled people adds to the stress of those who are disabled, this is a huge problem as by being disabled you face issues on a daily basis but to know that someone is trying to make you feel the same as others by giving you options would allow the user to be happier in themselves. One article described the psychological issues attached with being disabled as being a constant,

*'Flurry of emotions'*

WIP, (2017) Emotional effects of disability

This would not be best to be added with the lack of care and respect that able bodied people have in their everyday lives. The fact that many disabled people feel less than able people make them feel inadequate, however I believe the only way to make yourself inadequate is by not achieving your own goals and not reaching happiness. One philosophical way of looking at happiness would be much like the manner of complete happiness and you could only reach complete fulfilment by doing the following things, all based from a Christian background.

Descartes uses pillars to reflect complete happiness or as he refers to as enlightenment. This is to portray the different things in life that will make you fully happy. Beauty in the world is one of these and is actually one of the most important aspects to make a person happy. So, to bring back to how designing for the disabled is failing the users of the products this is one of the most important reasons.

This is because by giving someone choice it allows them to feel equal to others and at the end of the day being equal to fully able-bodied people is a goal of many disabled people, they deal with the discrimination for their illnesses etc, but have no perks other than being made to feel different. This is not acceptable especially in 2020 where the world has changed so much in what seems like so little time. Choice allows everyone to have some dignity to themselves and give them back a little bit of normality in a world destined to bring down the disabled by the looks of things. The designing for the disabled is by every means disabled itself, it should be seen as being called disabled design. This is something not many people are willing to talk about, just like the issues of racism in the world, but if 2020 has shown us anything positive it has been the rise in feminism and also the BLM movement which have both been very impactful this year, and I ponder why are disabled people any different to anyone why do they not receive the same values we expect on an everyday basis. As designers by making simple changes to our designs we can improve so many lives just by thinking, what would I like to have if I was designing for myself. This is something that not many people consider when designing, as too many designers design for the majority or to save the world, however, I believe that by just by focusing on a minority group you can make their worlds is much better and can improve the lives and mental health of many different people.

Another major issue when designing for the disabled is that when the designs of everyday items have been modified to reach the needs of the disabled person

the design quickly shifts in its appealing aspect, almost as if it is obvious it is for a disabled person, which again singles them out to make them feel different to others, which plays a large negative impact on people's mental health. This is something often overlooked by designers as not many people actually consider that disabled people do not in general wish to be views as being disabled and when a product that looks different to the standard product is visually less appealing it brings a sense of negativity into that person's life and also it creates a sense of being different to others and it would make it easier to be pointed out in public as being physically disabled.

Designers need to do better for disabled people as they are no different to any other person, this is something I am very passionate about and is something very close to my heart. Design should be about bringing beauty into the world not about creating negativity or bringing attention to people's insecurities, we as designers should be improving people's lives not making them worse. We need to do better all of us and help those who need and deserve out help to make them feel a part of one community.

Designing products for the disabled should not be looked at differently in terms of the design aesthetics struggling because of the requirements of the product needing to be reached for varied reasons to do with health. Many companies only actually include things such as

‘inclusive design’

Cassim (2002) Critical users in design innovation

Which is very negative however, it does have its perks such as when there is nothing much else on the market like it, even though the designs have been changes and modified the product still exists which is more than what could be said for other people. Me personally, I am working on a project now where I focus on bringing back some form of independence and some dignity back to the users of the products, I feel like equality should be one of the main goals we fight for in everyone's lives, this is something that would be me helping others where I possibly can do so. This is a very important issue that remains in society and needs to be addressed so it can be developed and helped.

I believe that we do not talk about problems in our society today because people are scared of change this is something that is evident in the findings of the following article

*' In many ways fear of change stops us from taking action'*

Connelly, M (2008) Exposing fear of change

This is a direct quote from an online article that talks about the issues inside designing, people are too scared to take that jump into the abyss, however, in my opinion how can you make your point without diving in headfirst. You need to be confident, and as designers we should be this is a very common issue worldwide, many designers do not try out what they are working towards because of fear this is an issue in the real world as the world would not function without change, and now the world is basically begging us to change, and this is my manner of doing so.

However, designs for the disabled are weaker and less appealing as they have other things to focus on, I pledge to never reduce the aesthetics of a product due to the person I am designing for. This is something all designers should have to do and I am shocked that no one actually has written much on this topic beforehand, because personally I feel as though this is one of the biggest problems in the design industry today. Design is all related to beauty and beauty is that to happiness and I believe that without one you cannot fully have the other, in a time where our mental health is baffling society we need to come together and make a change against the toxic ideals of designing for the disabled, we should be designing for people who has special requirements, this should not mean the appeal should suffer. Why do designers feel the need to make it obvious that a design is cheap or is a certain thing, products will and can never be fully universal, however we should start designing to get as close to that as possible, but in the meantime maybe we should just be trying to fill the holes in the market for products for specialised people, but by making them similar to normal products.

To conclude, I must say that if 2020 has shown us anything it is the need and desire to not settle. This comes under all circumstances including design for the disabled. Designing is never easy but it can be fun and part of that fun is simply based from the aesthetics of the product, in today's modern age we should not still be using pre-existing shapes and models, but we should be making them as new as we can. This is much like the advances that are made in everyday products made for the majority rather than the minorities. This is the same for the options that should be available for absolutely everyone, people cannot say that they are 100% more equality and then see no issue in the products for the disabled. This is a major issue that I see within my area of study and I believe it

needs to be redesigned thoroughly otherwise what are we doing as designers. Are we making a positive change? We need to do better as an industry as a whole. I personally believe we should help as many people as possible, I used to think that the best way to do this was by becoming a lawyer I later decided that this was not the most effective way to make a positive change in the world. I saw that designing was in a part of everyone's lives, this is a huge dynamic that seemed to me a way to improve as many lives as possible even in the slightest, and if I did this, I would find myself to be extremely happy and would have reached complete happiness and success as a designer.

So, I second the concept yet again of us not doing enough and needing to change as designers to help others, which is truly the only role as a designer that counts. We need to start following the ways of others in the equality movements, this should not be any different in design as many different people fight for what they believe in, for me I believe that design for the disabled is disabled in itself and needs to be redesigned.

| Reference                                                                                    | Who                                               |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------|
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| <i>'The merits of normality and<br/>independence for the disabled'</i>                       | Goldsmith, S (2017) Designing for the disabled    |
| <i>'Flurry of emotions'</i>                                                                  | WIP, (2017) Emotional effects of disability       |
| <i>'inclusive design'</i>                                                                    | Cassim (2002) Critical users in design innovation |
| <i>' In many ways fear of change stops<br/>us from taking action'</i>                        | Connelly, M (2008) Exposing fear of change        |