

The LUNA Project Lesson on Disablism, Plain Text

Disablism (aka **ableism**) can be defined as discriminatory, oppressive, abusive behaviour arising from the belief that disabled people are inferior to others. Disablism refers to prejudice, stereotyping, or "institutional discrimination" against disabled people.

Let's think about these terms (have a go at defining them yourself if you would like):

- **Discriminatory:** treating a person or group differently from and usually worse than other people, because of their skin colour, sex, sexuality etc.
 - An example would be refusing to be friends with someone who uses a walking stick because they use a walking stick.
- **Oppressive:** cruel and unfair treatment
 - An example would be a sports club at school refusing to allow someone in a wheelchair to participate.
- **Abusive:** using rude and offensive words or treating someone badly or cruelly, especially physically.
 - An example would be calling a person with a disability rude names (slurs) because of their disability.
- **Prejudice:** an unfair and unreasonable opinion or feeling, especially when formed without enough thought or knowledge
 - An example would be assuming that all disabled people require a carer.
- **Stereotyping:** to have a set idea about what a particular type of person is like, especially an idea that is wrong (Cambridge dictionary).
 - An example is that all disabled people want to be cured. Stereotypes can be used to justify disablism and reinforce discriminatory behaviours.
- **Institutional discrimination:** The idea that one group is better than another gets rooted in the institutions—the laws, legal system, police, education/schools, hiring, housing, media images, political power—so that they implement discriminatory or unequal practices.

- An example is that movies often show villains as having a disability. E.g. in 'Pirates of the Caribbean' the 'bad' pirates often have hooks for hands or wooden pegs for legs (therefore portrayed with a disability), whereas the 'good' pirates do not.
- Another example would be a lack of accessible entrances (e.g. ramps) to shops.

Examples of each have been provided, can you think of another example for at least 3 of the words?

Disablism can result in **bias** against people with disabilities. This means being prejudiced in favour of non-disabled people which means you are more likely to view disabled people negatively. Bias can be conscious (aka explicit bias) or unconscious (aka implicit bias).

- In conscious bias, people **intentionally** display negative behaviour against a group in society.
 - E.g. Rachel refuses to work with Abby, who has epilepsy, on a school project as Rachel thinks people with epilepsy will not work as hard.
- In unconscious bias, people can display negative behaviour against a group in society **without realising**.
 - E.g. Adam is partnered with Greg for a school project. Greg has arthritis so Adam offers to do all the work for Greg as Adam thinks Greg will be unable to do it himself.
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Look at this picture of Meesha and answer the statements below with **True** or **False**. Try and think about what makes you answer this way.



1. Meesha works in a coffee shop.
2. Meesha has two children.
3. Meesha went to university and studied Sports Science.
4. Meesha requires a carer to help her out at home.
5. Meesha cannot walk.
6. Meesha is applying for jobs to teach P.E.
7. Meesha is married.

Look at your answers, why did you answer the way you did? Was it easy or hard to think of an answer? Were some questions harder than others?

Exercises like these can help to show our unconscious bias as the answers for all of these should have been “**I don’t know!**”. Unconscious bias can cause us to make assumptions about people based on how they look or how they identify. Holding unconscious biases does not make you a bad person, we often hold them from a young age and they are influenced by many factors including our family’s beliefs, media, and historical beliefs. Unconscious biases can conflict with the values that we hold consciously. In fact, sometimes unconscious bias can make us do things that seem good but are actually harmful! For example, in the example above Adam thinks he is helping Greg out by doing his work for him, but Adam has assumed Greg cannot work due to his disability and failed to ask Greg how he could best help him.

It is important to try to recognise false beliefs we hold about people with disabilities so we can work to undo them. Here are some ways to try and reduce our unconscious bias, can you think of any more?

- Take the Implicit Association Test online.
- Speak up when you see actions that could be the result of unconscious bias.
- Next time you assume something about somebody due to how they look or identify, ask yourself why you think that and challenge your beliefs.
- Try to think about a recent interaction with someone who was 'different' from you, did you assume anything about them because of these differences?
 - Think of disability, race, religion, gender, sexuality etc.

Micro-aggressions an example of how unconscious bias can present. Microaggressions are small acts or remarks that makes someone feel insulted or treated badly because of their disability. Microaggressions can also apply to race, religion, sexuality etc. Often microaggressions are not intended to be harmful. An example would be commenting that someone is "too young to have a disability" or that they don't "look disabled". Can you think of any more examples?

Resources:

<https://www.coe.int/en/web/compass/disability-and-disablism#:~:text=Disablism%20can%20be%20defined%20as.institutional%20discrimination%22%20against%20disabled%20people.>

<https://diversity.ucsf.edu/resources/strategies-address-unconscious-bias>

<https://www.washington.edu/doit/how-does-unintended-or-unconscious-bias-affect-students-disabilities>

<https://medium.com/@sheribyrnehaber/disability-microaggressions-aka-ableist-things-people-say-89c3fffd11a1>