

## Thoughts of Privilege and the Social Model of Disability

Sensoy & DiAngelo (2017) present a story about how we as two-eyed people are treated in the three-eyed community. When we started the journey with excitement and curiosity, we never anticipated it would transform ourselves from “normal” to “abnormal”. It turns out what we believed could be altered by the majority’s discourse. I was shocked by the fictional story, not because of its wild imagination, but it reveals an ironic truth- as the majority, we are probably the three-eyed people in the real world. After reading this story, I had some reflective thinking about self-identity.

Indeed, the social model of disability arouses people’s attention and reflection. Society excludes the minority, on the one hand, due to limited structural construction, such as buildings without wheelchair access; on the other hand, because of the stereotypes as assuming non-abled people are not capable of doing somethings, but the truth is they can, just in the other way. Thus, the dominant group’s ideology is legitimated and the discourse deepens the hierarchical difference. Take Chinese society as an example, the social model is segregating disabled group from the bigger community. Specifically, the most disabled children in China are sent to special education schools rather than public schools by their parents. Even some policies support public schools to accept children with special needs. What prevents the minority from entering into the bigger community? According to the guideline that the ministry of education promulgated last month about promoting disabled children’s study and life in public school, the ideology of ableism is embodied in many principles. Firstly, it is not every disabled kid who is eligible to enter public school. They need to be assessed whether they are capable of keeping up with “normal” education. Then, those public schools that do accept disabled children need to prepare special classrooms, facilities, and faculty to assist these kids. The document also emphasizes that schools need to provide an inclusive and equal environment to empower the minority to achieve self-growth. However, when looking into the essence of the policy, I found it to be problematic. The entry assessment implies the sense of inequity, it is the non-disabled people that choose who can access to the bigger society. The internalized privilege of non-disabled people has penetrated the policy- they consider their norms as standards to regulate how the policy will work, who can be involved and who cannot. Therefore, non-disabled people and disabled children are placed at hierarchical status from the very beginning. Moreover, in terms of establishing special rooms, facilitating and providing aimed psychological assistance, the essence is treating disabled kids differently. To include these disabled kids is to make them feel safe and comfortable to be themselves rather than dragging them into the spotlight and underlining their speciality. All of these so-called kindnesses could hurt those kids who want to be ordinary individuals rather than outliers. I assume the ingrained hierarchical treatments form powerful discourses and push disabled groups away.

However, as Shakespeare (2016) identifies the weakness of the social model of disability, disabled people’s identity as the oppressed, and non-disabled people as the oppressor could simplify a lot of things. In my opinion, the overuse of the social model could strengthen abled people’s guilt and impair the cognition of their identities. For those who engage in including more people in their field, can people call them oppressors due to their non-disabled identity? As Watson (2002) states, “identity is constructed in relations of discourse and power” (p. 510), which means for most people, they may feel helpless to deny their identity that has existed forever. But people could “constantly reconfigure [themselves] through multiple identities” (Watson, 2002, p. 511), it is not fixed, rather, more unformed and unfixed. How we think who we are is more important than the social definition. Therefore, we can use the social model and concept privilege to scrutinize social exclusion, but not place labels on different groups. How to empower people to accept themselves and pursue a better being could be the priority.

**Reference**

- Sensoy, O., & DiAngelo, R. (2017). *Is everyone really equal?: An introduction to key concepts in social justice education / Özlem Sensoy and Robin DiAngelo*. (Second edition.). Teachers College Press.
- Davis, L. (2017). *The disability studies reader / Lennard J. Davis [electronic resource]* (Fifth edition.). Routledge.
- Watson, N. (2002). Well, I know this is going to sound very strange to you, but I don't see myself as a disabled person: identity and disability. *Disability & Society*, 17 (5), 509–527.