

# (Dis?)Ability Online Course

## Lesson 1: Let's start from the basics



Welcome to the first lesson of the online course (Dis?)Ability, in which we will explore ways to increase accessibility in activism and event organising. In this first lesson you will work together with your group to create your own definitions of the following terms:

- Disability
- Ableism
- Disability movements

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## Transcription of the lesson

**Narrator:** Welcome.

This series will explore how we can make our activism and events more inclusive and accessible and how to act in solidarity with the struggles of people with disabilities. In this first video, we'll try to define some terms. Maybe you also have your own ideas and meanings for these terms.

So when the question comes up if you like you can pause the video and think about how you understand it. Then we'll hear some other perspectives.

### What is disability?



**Lian:** There's obviously plenty of definitions of disability, but I always like the simple ones.

So I found this one: It's any continuing condition that restricts everyday activities, and that includes physical and mental things.

A lot of times when people think

about disability they think of people who are using a wheelchair but actually most disabilities are not visible or not so obviously visible.

For example chronic illnesses are included in disability, and also mental illnesses like depression but also neurodivergence.

So it actually includes quite a lot of different conditions.



**SchwarzRund:** What does disability mean?

Disability is right now on the global scale the most used term when we talk about law, when we talk about the UN, when we talk about governments. And there's a good reason for that because capitalism, baby!

So it's less about our cultural and social identity, it's more about how much we can function in a capitalist society, how much we can produce, how much our value can be linked to our bodies and minds. And our bodies and

minds as disabled people aren't linked to producing goods in the same way as it is for abled bodies and abled minds.

**Lian:** What I find important to say is, please, especially if you are abled, don't say to a disabled person you should call yourself this and that, this is the correct term because I feel it's up to every disabled person to choose how they want to be labelled.

For example I choose the term "I'm disabled."

And sometimes people come to me and say: "Oh, but you should say you are a person with disability."

Like person first language. And I'm like, well I also don't say I'm a person with queerness so please don't tell me how I have to call myself. But at the same time, if a person with disabilities comes and says, "I want to be called a person with disability because I feel like often people don't see that I'm actually human, or people only see my disability and not all the other things I am."

So then of course I also say great that you want to be called that, I'm happy for you. But don't tell other people how they have to label themselves.

OK, so how people feel about their disability also varies quite a lot. I know some people who feel like actually their disability doesn't restrict them, but it's only the society that is not accessible that restricts them.

Like for example, a person using a wheelchair might be completely fine with using a wheelchair, but it just really sucks that there's so many barriers in the way.

But for me for example, my chronic illness, like, it just really sucks, so I would say 70% I am disabled by the illness, and then there's another 30% that I'm hindered or disabled by ableism or by inaccessibility of places.

So it's good to keep in mind that there it's also not the same for every disabled person.

It's important to believe disabled people if they say they are disabled and not ask for any state certificate or any conditions or names of conditions that they have because, like, it's not really easy to get those government certificates and it's also not the same way accessible for everyone, because the medical system is really classist, racist, sexist and so on and so on, so not everyone has the same access to get those certificates. It is really difficult.

So don't make people have to make themselves so vulnerable in front of you.

**SchwarzRund:** For me, I use disabled as an umbrella term if I don't want to say my diagnosis for example. But there are way more specific terms that are not needing to address an abled society or a neurotypical mindset. They're just what they are.

And if that is still too theoretical, for people who haven't got in contact with disabled communities, let me describe it like this: we have different hair colours in the world, like black, brown, red, blonde, white, grey, I don't know, I can't think of more, so the white norm would be for example like this brownish blonde mixture of hair, so it would be to address every other hair colour not as brown hair but as non-blonde hair, or blonde deficiency hair, or lacking of bloneness hair.

\*Laughs\*

So that's kind of how the term disabled is functioning, and of course, if you want to describe only blonde people can get jobs, and non-blonde people can't, that's a term that works, but it's kind of weird if you identify through that word the whole time, or it can be weird.

So, if you're asking yourself what is the right term, there is no right term, because the term is connected to the context.

## **What is ableism?**

**Lian:** Ableism is discrimination based on ability, physical or mental, or put in a different way, discrimination of people with physical or mental disabilities as well as people with chronic illnesses. And that happens on an individual and on a structural level meaning that it's reproduced in between people, but also that its built into the structures of society.

Throughout history disabled people have been oppressed. In the German context it's important to mention that 200,000 disabled people got murdered in the Nazi time. And in that time the thought that disabled people are burdens to society became very strong.

But it's still there today, disabled people are still oppressed, many are living very segregated from the mainstream society, many are exploited in "Werkstätten" (it's like where disabled people work for hardly any pay) and it's very hard to access support from the state, especially if you are marginalized in more than one way, and because of that a lot of disabled people are impoverished and many also end up on the streets or in the prisons.

**SchwarzRund:** Ableism is a term that describes, I think the German word is so much prettier actually, it's "Behindertenfeindlichkeit", which is like hatred against disabled people, which I think is for me more fitting because we have different levels, so we have social, cultural and on a state level, so all these levels are working also in our communities.

And ableism for example functions by giving power to the wrong people in movements, because we base our activism so much on showing up for --- showing up for the demonstration, showing up for that get-together, showing up for the festival, showing up for being taken by the police into a car and brought somewhere, showing up for painting posters on ten degrees of floor.

It's so much about showing up with your body and proving that you are willing to go through unpaid labour and pain so you're a good activist.

And I'm not a good activist when you measure my activism like that.

Also if you measure activism on on a very neurotypical level, of "activism shouldn't be fun, activism should be about being angry at each other and getting drunk afterwards", which is sad, you see, ableist society is a very sad sort of a life.

That's also not possible for me, because I'm socially awkward, and I prefer to meet other radical mindsets on a dancefloor, because I'm very good at communicating through my body, and not so good at communicating through my awkward self, how you call it, small talk self.

**Lian:** In our leftist bubble, we also reproduce ableism, like for example we value people more if they do a lot, or if they take a lot of risks in the actions that they take, and also like care work is not valued very much.

And often places are not very accessible and it's not a high priority to change that.

Often abled people are also uncomfortable interacting with people who are disabled.

**SchwarzRund:** To be like, "OK, people who can't clean themselves after going to the toilet maybe need assistance. How do we do that?"

And there we see one big point which I think we often don't want to address which is shame and being uncomfortable with disability, which is actually a very important huge point of structural violence. Because we don't see disabled bodies in our day to day life.

Disabled people most times can't go to regular schools. They later work in "Werkstätten" (workhouses) which is a very very very violent form of labour, unpaid form of labour I would even say.

Then later they can't enter our events, because they are like on the fifth floor without an elevator, and also it smells horrible and, was, be acting shitty.

So we never see disabled bodies until the point where one disabled body is making a point about wanting to enter. And then our shared shame in society, and I would include myself in that even though I'm disabled, about disabled bodies, is coming together with a moment of critique, and that's a very shitty combination.

### **What are disability movements?**

**SchwarzRund:** So I am from Germany, and this is produced in a German context, so I will also reference German disability movements. So for that let's start with the seventies, with the "Krüppelmovement" which was actually started in my hometown, which is Bremen. For good reasons, because Bremen sucks as a disabled person.

And they started a magazine which was called "Krüppelzeitung" and they tried to reclaim, or reclaimed, however you want to see history, this term, and this term could be translated to "crip" in English.

So since I think the nineties, we have the crip movement in the US. which is also trying to reclaim that term. And I use disabled, and there are pros and cons for that, but for me the broad direction is "crip" or "Krüppel" is something people use for themselves. I wouldn't use that as an abled person to address a disabled group or a disabled person if they don't tell you specifically to do so.

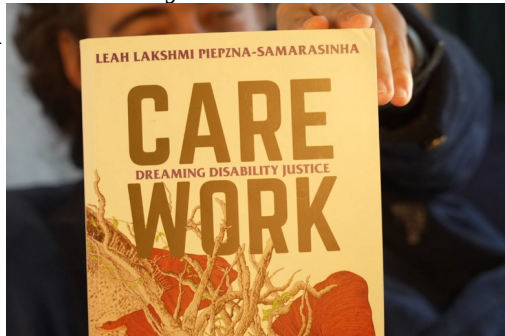
**Lian:** What is the disability rights movement? It's a worldwide movement where disabled people are fighting for their legal rights. It's important to stress that it's disabled people in the lead, because in previous movements that wasn't the case.

The disability rights movement has had some success with laws to make access a requirement and discrimination against disabled people illegal.

Yep, that's how it was. \*laughs\*

But what I find inspiring to read about is the disability justice movement. It's been started by QTIBIPoC\*(Queer Trans Inter Black Indigenous

People of Colour)\* disabled people in the US, and it looks at disability from more like an intersectional approach and an anticapitalist approach and an abolitionist approach... If you want to learn more about the disability justice movement, a good introductory text is the disability justice primer from Sins Invalids, and I also really like this book: It's called "Care Work" \*(by Leah Lakshmi Piepzna Samarasinha)\* and I really like it.



## Questions

You can compare your definitions with the ones provided by our experts. The following questions will help you in furthering the knowledge you learned in this lesson. They should be a good starting point for a discussion about the themes we have learned so far.

- Why is it important to acknowledge some flexibility to the definition of disability?
- Can you think of any example of how a particular definition of disability can change the actual situation/behavior or influence accessibility?

## Further reading recommendations:

Sunaura Taylor: "Beasts of Burden: Animal and Disability Liberation" Sins Invalids: "Skin, Tooth, and Bone: The Basis of Movement is Our People – Disability Justice Primer" –

<https://www.sinsinvalid.org/disability-justice-primer>

Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha: "Care work: Dreaming Disability Justice"

Video with Talila Lewis on racial and disability justice (in the prison system in the US): <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0Z-36OiQ1OA>

Funny video about the social model of disability pointed at in the video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9s3NZaLhcc4>

## **Auf Deutsch:**

<https://archiv-behindertenbewegung.org/>

Mika Murstein: “I’m a queerfeminist cyborg, that’s okay”

SchwarzRund und Simo Tier: “Rampe? Reicht!” Podcast:

<https://rampereicht.de/>

## **Credits:**

SchwarzRund – <https://schwarzrund.de/>

Lian – <https://radicalresilience.noblogs.org/>

Film Edit: Radical Resilience – <https://radicalresilience.noblogs.org/>

Graphics: Carolina Arciniegas – <https://carolina.arciniegas.de/>

Additional Images: @pikisuperstar and @freepik

Music: Delila –

<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCgPJsCNzTAhdDdU3Ye0ZVmw>



Definitions from the “Accessible and Inclusive Organizing” gathering organised by EYFA in 2021:

# Ableism

a working definition by Talila “TL” Lewis

A system that places value on people’s bodies and minds based on societally constructed ideas of normality, intelligence, excellence, desirability, and productivity.

These constructed ideas are deeply rooted in anti-Blackness, eugenics, misogyny, colonialism, imperialism, and capitalism.

This form of systemic oppression leads to people and society determining who is valuable and worthy based on a person’s language, appearance, religion and/or their ability to satisfactorily [re] produce, excel and “behave”.

You do not have to be disabled to experience ableism.

The topic explored collectively by the participants of gathering ‘Accessible and Inclusive Organizing: collaborative tools and tactics in practice’ by EYFA in 2021

# Accessibility

Being able to take part in what you would like with full comfort - how everyone feels inside a building. Destroying barriers that makes accessing a space difficult regarding physical, emotional, financial, dietary, bureaucratic needs.

Not just the space, but communication + decision making process involved.

The process of deconstructing power structures.

Based on identity race + class.

Equilibrium of experiences in decision making to facilitate learning and unlearning.

Positioning - who's in the room - it goes more than having representation in the room.

It's about adjusting your understanding of equity to give people what they are in need of.

Dismantling hierarchies of knowledge as well as social hierarchies, that can put one person in a position of power over another.

Sustainability.

The topic explored collectively by the participants of gathering 'Accessible and Inclusive Organizing: collaborative tools and tactics in practice' by EYFA in 2021