

July 1 Breakouts & Asynch students

Instructions for synchronous participation:

- Choose a room - please have 3 or 4 people per room. Facilitators can go to a room with your question. Do Round 1 only now - 15 minutes - aim to wrap up at 3:35pm. After that, your whole group will move to a different Room for Round 2.
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- Choose a **scribe** for your group in each Round of breakout discussion - the scribe will write brief notes about your group's answers in this document.
- Round 1: **choose 2 of the questions** for your Room & discuss
- Round 2:
 - **choose 1 of the already answered questions** for your Room, read the previous answers that are posted there, & respond to those answers plus discuss your additional answers to the question.;
 - then **choose 1 of the not-yet answered questions** & discuss

Asynchronous students do both of these things:

- 1. Please view the [recording of the class meeting today](#)
Write something brief in this discussion board in response to a comment/idea/question that was raised during the synchronous class today - it was a lively discussion - please share your thoughts to build on it!
- 2. On this google doc:
 - 1. write your NAME in the parts of the document where you decide to answer questions, so that we can find you!
 - 2. Choose any TWO (2) **of the already answered questions in any room**, read the previous answers that are posted there, & respond to those answers.
 - 3. Also write your own answers to those questions (again, make sure you put your name on your writing).

ROOM 1

- A. What boundaries (context, person) do we use to determine what is assistive technology?
To quote Tom Shakespeare, “planes are assistive technology for those who can’t fly”.
(Mia)

Shaelynn: I appreciated the conversation about context shaping whether or not something is seen as assistive tech. I agree with the point that it depends on how it's used, and for who. A sports wheelchair might be assistive on a sidewalk, but become sporting equipment on a court. It reminded me of when someone used the example of high heels, for some, it's a fashion choice, for others, it's a height aid that changes accessibility. These examples show how the label "assistive" often depends on cultural and medical ideas about "normal" ability, rather than the user's own experience.

[Paula] in response to Shaelynn: The examples you listed were very insightful for me, as illustrations of your response to the question. Previously, my thinking was that assistive technology is for something that is missing or lacking. That has been my understanding in the past, and I suppose that might be true in some cases, but now I know I must remember all of the cultural implications associated if I think this way. If assistive technology makes up for something, in many ways this kind of thinking gives way to hierarchical implications for power dynamics. That's why those examples you gave were so interesting because of how clear it shows that context and framing are everything. Framing has so much power, and this question is a great way to consider that. Just like how any tool exists to enable possibility, assistive technology is also another tool meant for possibility.

- B. Ott's depiction of the relationship between object and person in cases of polio asserts that iron lungs and the Milwaukee torso brace improved the ability to emphasize humanity: “People come back into the story when attention is given to objects” (pg. 129). How do you think a focus on material things could also be a challenge to the personhood of disabled people? (Ali)
- C. In what ways do the material artifacts Ott describes, the legal milestones Williamson outlines, and the mutual aid strategies Mingus (Disability Justice) recommends each reveal different layers of power and agency in disability history? (Maymun)

Round 1 names of students in Room 1: Names: Mia, Ayman, Ali

Select a first question & write notes about your group's answers

Names: Mia, Ayman, Ali

A: What is assistive technology?

- Assistive technology depends on the user
- Are high heels assistive technology?
 - If heels are worn by someone who is 5 ft, they are not assistive technology. If heels are worn by someone with dwarfism, they are assistive technology.
- If you need special shoes or a cane - we would consider that person disabled, and hence consider it as assistive technology.
- Assistive technology is a format of otherizing.
- What about the situation of flexible disabilities? Where someone only needs a piece of assistive technology situationally?
- Context: How about the case of a mixed ability wheelchair basketball team? Is the sports wheelchair an assistive technology or is it a sporting good?
 - Context might matter, not just the user

(Katherine)- This is a great question - As others have already noted, what makes something *assistive* is not the technology itself, but the purpose, context of use, and the user's relationship to it, especially when it compensates for a functional limitation relative to socially constructed norms of ability. I can't help but compare the word "assistive" to ideas around what constitutes "normative".

Shaelynn- response to Katherine - I really like your comparison of "assistive" with "normative", it reminds me of the medical model, where everything is about fixing or compensating. Your point helps me think about how tools should be reframed as *extensions* of people, rather than corrections. Thank you!

Select a second question & write notes about your group's answers

Question B: How do you think a focus on material things could also be a challenge to the personhood of disabled people?

- Assistive technology is corporeal, and expands and limits and changes how we interact with the world
 - AAC limits or expands communication – depending on what form it is in
 - An iron lung, might restrict movement, but extend life
- Expanding personhood behind just the assistive device - not just "person using a wheelchair"- Round 2 agrees!
- Does just looking at artifacts limit our view of disability? Does the inclusion of other sources expand it?
 - It makes us think of how people were previously described 'only' by their disability (e.g., ableist slurs). Another example is historical films, and that victors are authors of history. Materialism may reduce a disabled person's personhood if materials become the primary source of inclusivity. Inclusion of other sources can expand our view of disability, however also runs the risk of hyperfocus on e.g., more on physical/visible disabilities rather than 'invisible' - chronic illness etc

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Shaelynn: There's a risk when the technology becomes the story instead of the person. Like, if we only talk about wheelchairs or iron lungs, we can forget the actual lives people lived. As a nurse, I've seen how people can become reduced to their diagnosis or equipment, it's dehumanizing. Instead, we need a holistic view, recognizing that tech can help but doesn't define a person. The Ott reading made me think about how museums display devices without always sharing the stories behind them, that really matters.

Paula: Focusing on material things challenges the personhood of disabled people by how it creates a flattening of perspective. It's not even a focus on the person themselves, but rather seeing a tool that the person uses, and defining the person by the tool.

Round 2 names of students in Room 1: Cassie, Kari, Mubina, Robert

Select one of the questions that was answered above by the prior group & write notes about your group's responses to those answers plus your group's additional answers

How do you think a focus on material things could also be a challenge to the personhood of disabled people?

Focusing on material things risks technochauvinism, i.e., that technology/devices can "solve" a disability, including further risking that non-disabled people will continue to make/develop/push items onto disabled people

(Katherine)- yes, definitely reinforcing the medical model of disability, and reducing people to parts rather than whole, complex being.

Shaelynn- **Response to Cassie, Kari, Mubina, Robert:** I agree that this over-focus on tech reinforces techno chauvinism and the medical model. Thank you for pointing that out. Your mention of AAC is so real, it's such a great example of how design can expand or limit identity and agency.

Select one of the questions that was not yet answered & write notes about your group's answers

ROOM 2

- A. How does the understanding of corporeality shift for disabled folks when material culture is emphasized over the usage or application of language to understand the history of the disabled movement? (Ava)
- B. Williamson (2019) mentioned that the term “design” is challenging to define due to its complexity across various disciplinary fields. Why would this statement matter in terms of viewing disability history? (Michelle)
- C. What roles have aesthetic choices (including architectural/style trends) played in overlooking or shaping accessibility? (Cassie)

Shaelynn: I think it’s powerful that the material shows what people used, wore, or relied on, but it also has limits. Some folks didn’t leave material behind, especially people with invisible disabilities. That means their experiences can get erased from history. Language, like first-person narratives or community storytelling, can fill that gap. We need both to really understand disabled lives.

[Paula] in response to Shaelynn: This reminds me of the cultural erasure of indigeneous communities across the world. Oral-storytelling as a cultural tradition cannot continue if the language is erased. This means all the knowledge, history, and culture also begins to fade away. Institutionalization and governmental efforts to assimilate and oppress have the foundational goal for cultural erasure. In this case for disability history, your note on community storytelling is an important and necessary way for disabled and other marginalized communities to tell their own histories and stories. Incorporating multi-modal methods, and underlining creativity. Stories can be told in an infinite amount of ways, and especially through art: movement, sound, etc.

Round 1 names of students in Room 2: Ava, Michelle, Miranda, Shariphine

Select a first question & write notes about your group’s answers

A.

- material culture is emphasized, while the figurative can take away from the disabled experience
 - EX. objects of gender (femininity) and other systems of oppression
- material culture is relational
 - things happen in conjunction with each other rather than in isolation
- medical model of disability vs social model of disability
 - the problem should be placed on the system instead of the person
 - we should strive for inclusion and beyond

- non-speaking autistic students in SPS
 - rotational classroom layout so students could get what they need
 - learning targets stay the same, but the pedagogy has changed
 - access needs are being met
- responsive pedagogy and philosophy create accessible spaces

Select a second question & write notes about your group's answers

B.

- definitions of design are so varied, which makes it hard to come to one conclusion or product of design
 - as a society that prioritizes standardization, this may not be the ideal (or perhaps it is, depending on context) situation
- need wait and processing time variations for different disability
 - creates a different classroom using
 - can be challenging
- trying to figure out what the disabled community needs requires necessary thought
- needs vary across different individuals
 - may not be as perfect as we expect, but we can strive towards it
- "design" element still feels new to the disability and education field
 - more research and exploration can help
- documents have historically been used to segregate disabled students, but should be used as a resource

Shaelynn- Response to Ava, Michelle, Miranda, Shariphine: I liked what you said about how material culture is relational, it helped me think about how tools don't exist in a vacuum, they're tied to values, identities, and systems. Great point about responsive pedagogy too, it made me think about how design connects to education.

Round 2 names of students in Room 2: Ali, Ayman, Mia

Select one of the questions that was answered above by the prior group & write notes about your group's responses to those answers plus your group's additional answers: How does the understanding of corporeality shift for disabled folks when material culture is emphasized over the usage or application of language to understand the history of the disabled movement? (Ava)

- Excludes a portion of the experience of using a space
- Considering artifacts vs the entire disability experience
- Verballizing for those who aren't in power and maybe don't have firsthand accounts
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Select one of the questions that was not yet answered & write notes about your group's answers: What roles have aesthetic choices (including architectural/style trends) played in overlooking or shaping accessibility?

- Ramps and elevators hidden out of site, or on the peripheries - to hide disability
- Gender neutral bathrooms, visibility of accessibility - who is welcome and prioritized
- Places that prioritize accessibility
 - Signing Starbucks on H Street in Washington DC
 - Places that prioritize accessibility in most highly populated areas
 - Having "sensory kits" advertised at the front desk for people to see
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Katherine - Architecture and design have always favored visual appeal. For example, trends favoring sleek staircases, narrow hallways, or touchscreens may overlook the needs of those with mobility, sensory, or cognitive disabilities. But when design is intentionally inclusive, they can help normalize accessibility features (like glass elevators at the front and center rather than hidden in the back).

Shaelynn: Design trends have always sent signals about who belongs. Staircases in the center and ramps in the back are one example. I've also seen touchscreen kiosks that exclude people with vision impairments, or open office plans that overwhelm people with sensory processing disorders. But when accessibility is baked into the visual core, like central glass elevators or sensory kits at the front desk, it normalizes access.

Paula: Aesthetics are important in design. But if the design is unuseable in favor of visual appeal, was the object made just to look at? Katherine and Shaelynn's point about touchscreens resonates with me because touch interfaces are a trend in technology design that remains strong across industries. Perhaps it's a cabinet that has no handle, and is opened by pushing on the cabinet door. Or it's a kitchen appliance with a digital screen for 20 options. Or it's a touch screen thermostat. These styling trends that deter from tactile buttons seem to aim for minimalism, elegance, and technological forwardness. However, these designs are often not accessible in many ways, though they are appliances "of the future". Smart appliances for instance, where you can control everything with a smartphone. Yes, there is much opportunity there, but at the same time these "futuristic" designs seem counterintuitive with the problems and barriers they form for access. Futuristic for who? Who's future?

ROOM 3

- A. How does Williamson's history of accessible design challenge the idea that disability is a personal problem rather than a social or political issue? What can everyday objects like crutches, hearing aids, or prosthetics tell us about how society has viewed disabled people throughout history? (Robert)
- B. How does including people with disabilities in the design of medical or assistive technologies change the function and meaning of those objects (what are some real or imagined examples where this inclusion could lead to better outcomes, not only technically, but socially and emotionally)? (Olina)
- C. How does the relationship between disability and technology shape our understanding of independence in daily life? Our understanding of the Disability Justice principle of interdependence? (Chad)
- D. How were non-visible disabilities, such as cognitive, emotional, or communication impairments, understood, misinterpreted, or overlooked in history, especially in the absence of physical objects to represent them? (Shariphine)
- E. How do you think things would change if more people with disabilities were involved in designing medical tools or devices for individuals with disabilities (any examples where that kind of input might make the product more helpful or just feel better to use)? (Olina)

Round 1 names of students in Room 3: **Chad, Landon, Olina, Shannon (notetaker)**

Select a first question & write notes about your group's answers

Question A-

How disability ties into antiquity, Greek and Roman, how history will tell us how the lives of those with disabilities during that time was affected by political and societal norms

The political aspect is based on how evolutionary we are, in the past there were less formed tools about assisting those with disabilities

How will current strategies (curb cuts) be viewed further in the future when they become the artifacts of our push towards inclusion

It's individualized which is good on one hand but isolates from society as it's not meant to integrate

Question- what will the future look like in terms of inclusion and accessibility?
One response was that it could depend on how the future prioritizes medical cures versus societal acceptance, not that one is better than the other

How accessible design is about not making things usable, but it's about power and rights and who gets to be seen in public life

Select a second question & write notes about your group's answers

Shaelynn- Response to Chad, Landon, Olin, Shannon: I love that you linked it to social media and how postcards shaped what people wanted others to see. The connection to hiding violence and glorifying certain aesthetics really hit me, I hadn't thought about lynching postcards in that context, but it definitely deepens the conversation around design and erasure.

Round 2 names of students in Room 3: Ava, Michelle, Miranda, Shariphine

Select one of the questions that was answered above by the prior group & write notes about your group's responses to those answers plus your group's additional answers

A.

- non-disabled people are often having the final say in design
 - considerations of intersectionality can disrupt that; however, design can still be interrupted by the dominant group
 - paternalism - speaking for someone with a disability
- the mere inclusion of including disabled people performatively does not negate or cancel the oppression of ableism
 - even if they are in the room of conversation, there must be an open space to welcome them
- we have to change the structure of oppression, not just including them (Mingus, 2011).

Select one of the questions that was not yet answered & write notes about your group's answers

C.

- history of artifacts that shows disability design has been gone or erased
- after WWII, there has been assistive technology catered towards physical disabilities, but there was a lack of representation for cognitive tools
- there's an absence of historical artifacts for those who have invisible disabilities, which is unfortunate
 - always been forms of resistance in how they've tried to engage
 - EX. group homes for intellectually disabled people

ROOM 4: Round 1: Mubina, Kari, Robert, Cassie

- A. Consider the image of the postcard in Ott's chapter (see below). Ott asserts that when this postcard was circulated in the early 20th century, "Asylums were tourist attractions, alongside natural stone arches, covered bridges, and the county courthouse. Visual acceptability and familiarity [via printing and circulating a postcard] made whatever happened inside equally acceptable." (pg. 130) What alternative interpretations of this material artifact (postcard) might be suggested today, especially through the lenses of disability studies and disability history? For instance, was the postcard used as a way of painting over the realities of what people were facing inside? (Ali)**
- a. Round 1: Postcards are typically considered a souvenir or trivial item, which affirms Ott's claims on how asylums were perceived as tourist destinations.
 - b. Reminiscent of modern day "teen ranches" or conversion camps, minimizing abuses that take place there and highlighting conformist ideals. If the child is assumed to be rebellious or problematic, their concerns are not taken seriously- same way disability is treated
 - c. Another example is a boarding school in Korea for girls with disabilities, which has since been exposed for chronic sexual abuse ongoing for 20 years by most members of staff
- B. How does the history of accessible design challenge traditional ideas of who gets to shape public space, and in what ways might the DIY innovations and activism of disabled people offer a more inclusive vision of design? (Olina)**
- C. Thinking about the double-edged nature of technology in the lives of people with disabilities: I feel it's empowering and a way of providing accommodation to disabled people, but on the other hand, it can reduce people to their devices in the eyes of others. Where do we draw the line between the benefits of assistive technology and the labelling and objectification that can come with its usage? (Shariphine)**
- a. Round 1: It is inevitable for universally designed assistive technology to be abused in a society that values ableism. Not technically considered "technology" but I think about how straws are really helpful for disabled people, but have become so convenient for the general public that access to the item has inevitably hurt the environment. We also think of walking sticks for visual support, AAC...and how these technologies have limits of their own (e.g., AAC that has no options for any languages besides English)

- b. I think once assistive technology- like straws, closed captioning, curb cuts etc become a normalized part of our lived environment, we can hopefully overcome the objectification
- c.
- D. How do the frameworks presented in the Ott (2014) and Williamson (2019) chapters differ from and how do they align with the Disability Justice perspective that Mingus (2011) presents? (Michelle)**
 - a.

Round 2 names of students in Room 4: **Chad, Landon, Olina, Shannon**

Select one of the questions that was answered above by the prior group & write notes about your group's responses to those answers plus your group's additional answers

Note about the postcard question: we should focus on this as an object - a postcard. What were its functions and values behind that, right? What does it say to you nowadays that this postcard existed and was circulated?

How postcards were a part of marketing and sharing your travels with others, was their intention in the same vein of social media, at a time when others weren't able to see different parts of the world

Comment on part b- as how people wanted to promote different parts of what was viewed as the good in society without holding space for the issue present and not honoring the struggles of those not depicted, in the same vein *trigger word following in gray* lynchings were put on postcards during Jim Crow era

Select one of the questions that was not yet answered & write notes about your group's answers

Room 4 image for Question A. In this postcard that demonstrates early twentieth-century civic pride, a group of medical staff members gather under the portico of a six-story building at the State Hospital for the Insane in Jacksonville, Illinois. Courtesy of Division of Medicine and Science, National Museum of American History, Smithsonian institution. (from K. Ott article)

