

FRANKLY SPEAKING

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FREE, AS IN BEER

Disability Isn't ...

Caz N.
Contributor

An Open Letter From
Your Friendly Local Incon-
venience

*This article is written
with the knowledge and en-
dorsement of the author of
"Disability Is..."*

Last month, Frankly Speaking ran an article about disability that made me, and a few other disabled people at Olin, uncomfortable and angry. A lot of that discomfort stems from what I see as the flawed premise: it is an article, written by an abled person after a one-semester class about redefining perceptions of disability and normality, that seeks to define "disability." (I'm extremely wary of a class that lets students leave with opinions like this, and I would like to encourage students to be critical of class pedagogies and materials, especially those dealing with such sensitive subjects!) The article reads like a personal reflection, and indeed that is what the class assignment was—something much more appropriate to share in private than in public, because of the naïve and potentially harmful views

it seems to espouse. How is the content of this article harmful to disabled people? For me, at least, it is easy to read it and feel like an object of curiosity, a metaphor for other people's consumption rather than a fully formed being. For me, it is easy to read it and feel that as a disabled person I am the only one who doesn't feel safe sharing my perspectives on what disability is. For me, this article is another reminder that I live in a world that seldom considers or tries to understand my perspective.

There were a few things I liked about the article; I appreciated the emphasis on the social construction model of disability. This model tells us that *impairments* are physical, neurological, or psychological conditions that make some functions more difficult; and that *disability* is a condition inflicted on us by a society that designs public systems for a specific set of needs that we don't share, or that are directly contradictory to our needs. The second paragraph of the article is a solid representation of this model, and I was happy to see a public acknowledgement of it. The paragraph that directly follows it is

more bewildering because the conclusion doesn't seem to follow at all from what came before. It does not read as a well-considered train of thought. I understand very well what it's like to be so excited about a new concept that you just *have* to share it—but when that concept is the lives of a historically oppressed group of people, you really want to take the time to make sure you've got it right.

"Disability is the reminder that we are all fragile, temporary beings on this planet..." the third paragraph begins. The author's intention was to depict not the "truth" but the perspective of someone uncomfortable with disability, an intention which was not at all clear to me reading it. Directly following a textbook explanation of the social construction model, I read what sounded like the author's own strongly-held opinion, and my reply is: the concept of disability was not created to remind abled people that this could happen to them at any time. It was created to give a name and cohesion to a group of people with impairments who suffer, directly or indirectly, because

continued on next page

of them. The reason society makes things difficult for those with minds and bodies considered abnormal is *not* to remind abled people about the fleeting nature of their lives. It is because we are seen as inconvenient. More convenient alternatives to designing with our needs in mind include ignoring us, trying to breed us out of the population, imprisoning us in abusive care systems, and straight-up murdering us. This was the understanding I had when I read the paragraph about the social construction model; to jump immediately to what reads to me as both an insult and inspiration porn felt like a slap in the face.

Before I get to *inspiration porn*, a term with which some readers may not be familiar, I want to talk about the insult. “The sight of a disabled person creates an unease... I believe that one source of this discomfort is the inability to ignore the fragility of the human body ...the inevitability of breakdown, death, and decay...” First, it’s a reminder I didn’t need; I am aware, almost at all times, that my existence makes people uneasy. I know from experience that I need to wear a heavy disguise to appear in public. Some people do not have the luxury of wearing a disguise, and is to these people that the author refers: those with visually apparent physical disabilities. To reduce their experience to their physical appearance, viewed *through the eyes of abled people* as an object of disgust, is mean-

spirited. It was also certainly not the author’s intent, but again both word choice and choice of concepts needs to be considered carefully in order to avoid hurting the people you’re talking about. What I, very personally, would like to ask is empathy. This article is clearly

"For me, it is easy to read it and feel that, as a disabled person, I am the only one who doesn't feel safe sharing my perspectives on what disability is."

written from the perspective of an abled person looking at disabled people, without the firsthand context of their experiences. When I see physically disabled people, I don’t suddenly remember my own mortality or how easily I could be injured and permanently impaired. I think about the incredible amount of inconvenience they probably have to go through in order to go about their daily business. I worry for their safety and mental health in a culture that devalues their emotions and personhood. The actionable result of this thought process is that I take care to amplify their voices when I can, to listen carefully to them, and to help them

when they need help. It’s the same thing I would appreciate people to do for me.

Inspiration porn is another important concept in any discourse about disability, coined by Stella Young, a disability rights activist, in 2012. I took the following definition from Catherine Soper’s excellently succinct article on the subject [1]. “Inspiration porn is a term used to describe society’s tendency to reduce people with disabilities to objects of inspiration. You’ve all seen the memes... [such as] a picture of a small child running on prosthetic legs accompanied by the caption ‘what’s your excuse?’ These images make the people viewing them feel great, but often they take images of people with disabilities simply living their daily lives and make them extraordinary.” Another article by Elizabeth Heideman [2] adds, “Inspiration porn turns people with disabilities into mere objects, placing their physical differences on display and reassuring the viewer that ‘If these people can live with just one leg,’ for example, ‘I can do so much more without a disability.’” The idea of defining disability in terms of abled people’s reaction to it leaves a bad taste in my mouth. Disabled people do not exist as an inspiration to try harder, a reminder of any kind, or the impetus for a philosophical realization. We exist as nothing more or less than people.

I would love to create a culture at Olin that supports disabled people and ampli-

fies our voices. I would love to create a culture at Olin where I'm not afraid to mention the specifics of my disability, for fear of spending half an hour trying to explain my point of view, heart pounding, growing more upset until I have to end the conversation abruptly. I want to feel safe at Olin, and I want to feel like people are willing to respect me, and others like me, as more than design challenges or edge cases. I want to make this school safe for everyone who comes after me, and I want your help. Challenge your own assumptions about what *disability is*. Think crit-

ically about the perspectives you are given. Do research. *Listen to the voices of marginalized people, and don't speak for us.* What we want is what you want: the support to do what's worth doing, and what we love.

Thank you for all your help.

Editor's Note: Frankly Speaking would like to apologize to any member of the Olin Community that was negatively affected by "Disability Is..." While we strongly believe in Freedom of Speech, we also believe that every Oliner has a right

to feel safe and accepted here. Thank you to both Caz and Charlie for opening the discussion on disability. If anyone else would like to share what this topic means to them or how it pertains to Olin, feel free to submit your thoughts.

Sources

- [1] <https://themighty.com/2016/08/how-to-avoid-inspiration-porn-when-talking-about-disability/>
[2] http://www.salon.com/2015/02/02/inspiration_porn_is_not_okay_disability_activists_are_not_impressed_with_feel_good_super_bowl_ads/

Mother's Little Helper

Jayce Chow

Editor

*"Things are different today, I hear every mother say
Cooking fresh food for a husband's just a drag.*

So she buys an instant cake and she burns her frozen steak,

And goes running for the shelter of a mother's little helper"

("Mother's Little Helper," The Rolling Stones)

Now, I'm not a mother myself, but I feel that I've met enough of them in my life to feel justified in saying that mothers feeling unappreciated and overworked is dece. Over half a century ago, (because this has been going on for that long and longer), Betty Friedan wrote

a little book addressing these very issues, called *The Feminine Mystique*, which is largely credited with sparking the second wave feminism movement. Good for Friedan and her book.

"God forbid we be inclusive."

The Feminine Mystique has been critiqued for, among other things, how narrow its subject and intended audience is. There is absolutely nothing wrong with making something for a small audience or writing about a very uncommon subject. You can write an advice guide for former US Presidents on what they should do after the Oval Office. That's an audi-

ence of five right now. You can craft an encyclopedia on Northern White Rhinos, of which there are ten still living. There's nothing wrong with a small subject pool or a select audience. And while I won't argue that Friedan was wrong in her choice to exclude anyone not straight, white, affluent, and female from her message, that cannot be the sole reason we decry the book.

That Damn Donna Reed

Through a somewhat roundabout series of events, I ended up starting to watch *Gilmore Girls* (and I couldn't really stick with it). One episode that sticks out to me is the one where Rory, her mother Lorelai, and her boyfriend Dean watch *The Donna Reed Show* for

their movie night. Lorelai and Rory provide constant, witty, sarcastic dubbing for the viewing, mocking how devoted Donna Reed and her TV daughter are to keeping the house cleaning and baking “an endless string of perfect casseroles” (*Gilmore Girls*, season 1 episode 14). When Dean comments that he thinks it’s a nice family concept, Rory uses the second half of the episode to show Dean how strange a 50’s nuclear dinner is, except that they both enjoy the evening and Rory learns that the real Donna Reed was actually quite revolutionary in the world of television.

Why do I mention Donna Reed?

For starters, *The Donna Reed Show* is a very clear example of both what a good deal of 1950’s home life was like *and* how we want to remember it having been. More to my point of not liking the book’s message, just because you think that how someone is living their life is wrong doesn’t mean that they have to join you in your sentiment, and you saying that your view is the correct one because you believe it to be that way is childish. Is *The Donna Reed Show* dated? Yes (it’s literally set in the 1950’s-60’s). Should we condemn how different women live their lives? No (society expects women to be *everything* all at once, so maybe we should focus on that). It’s good to go to college, it’s good to cook dinner for your family, it’s good to have a career, and it’s good to be a stay at home parent.

A better book to *The Feminine Mystique* would have been *Give Women a Choice in Their Lives*.

On the Origins of Non-Straight People

On to the main event. I imagine that if you were to sum up every person that was part of any marginalized group, they would outnumber non-marginalized people several times over. And because we’re a species that has divided itself into fabricated groups, we feel the need to compete to be on top, we accept as an ingrained concept that not everyone can rise to the top together, we fight for ourselves and maybe our children or friends if we’re feeling generous.

To this point, Friedan, decides to spend a good portion of one of her later chapters “analyzing” and condemning homosexuality. I.e. she devotes a large portion of text to oppress a marginalized group while talking about how bad it is to be part of a marginalized group. “Homosexuals often lack the maturity to finish school and make sustained professional commitments” (Friedan, 229). She then goes on to explain that the Kinsey report found that homosexuality was least prevalent in college graduates and most prevalent in male students with a college diploma or less. And not only are gay men less mature and afraid of commitment, but they are discussed in the chapter entitled “The Sex Seekers,” a chapter in which Friedan

discusses how women under the feminine mystique attempt to use sex as a way to feel fulfilled in their daily lives, but that it just manifest to hurt them, their marriages, and their relationships with their children. In fact, did you know that homosexuality is actually caused by an overbearing mother “who lives through her son, whose femininity is used in virtual seduction of her son, who attaches her son to her with such dependence that he can never grow to love a woman,” (229)?

Basically, homosexuals are a byproduct of female oppression, so when women are finally liberated, the evil that is homosexuality will be over. Awesome.

We Can’t All Have Freedom. Duh.

I’m not saying that it’s ever ok to marginalize anyone, but if it was just Friedan having her opinion, that would be one thing. It’s quite another to publish your opinion and then have that work become a central tenant of an entire social movement. Whether it’s cis white gay guys acting like they’re the only members of import under the LGBTQ+ banner or white middle to upper class women who can’t see how single women of color have issues that need to be addressed as part of feminism, Friedan’s work has helped to influence a culture where people only want to fight for people who look and live exactly like they do.

God forbid we be inclusive.

Evolution and Creationism

Luke Morris

Contributor

A "Change the World" analysis for Six Books that Changed the World (Prof. Rob Martello)

When Charles Darwin published *Origin of the Species* in 1859, he anticipated backlash from the religious community. His theories were at direct odds with religious teachings of creationism, the belief that humans were created by a higher power. His contemporaries had learned to jive with religion of the era, with the church even funding research demonstrating the glory of God's design. Plate tectonics did not directly contradict specific religious teachings. *Origin* presented an entirely different ideological barrier.

Darwin's primary argument was "descent with modification": species and subspecies formed and diverged over long periods of time due to selective pressures placed on them by their environments resulting in evolution. As far as Darwin was concerned, humans had evolved in exactly the same manner. There were several problems with this theory that hindered its adoption. First, evolution stood in direct opposition to literal interpretation of the bible. In the Book of Genesis, the first book of the Old Testament, God directly creates the world and creates man. A literal interpretation of Gen-

esis is known as Creationism, and was the dominant belief in the western world in 1859. Opposing the religious majority proved difficult for Darwin and he was met with religious rebuke. Second, the theory of evolution implied that humans were simply a descended species no different from other animals, creating a psychological barrier

"Humans have a 'continuing psychological need to see ourselves as separate and superior.'"

to acceptance. As Stephen Jay Gould points out in *The Human Difference*, humans have a "continuing psychological need to see ourselves as separate and superior." This psychological barrier might explain why Darwin was met with such criticism from the scientific community as well, spurning his work for being deductive. Darwin's other works, which utilized a similar evidence based construction, were never as hotly contested. Finally, Darwin's theory suggested that the universe operated in a cutthroat manner without divine intervention that rewarded good and punished evil. The idea that the world was random and violent created an existential

barrier that was difficult to overcome, and many were not willing to accept this as the way of the world.

You might ask yourself: *Do Darwin's contemporaries' reactions to Origin of the Species have any importance today?* The answer is yes, because a large number of people still believe in Creationism despite the majority of world religions declaring that the Theory of Evolution and their religion can coexist. A 2014 Gallup poll found that 42% of Americans believe "God created humans in their present form 10,000 years ago".

Why is acceptance of evolution important? The Theory of Evolution combined with Mendelian genetics—together known as Neo-Darwinism—is perhaps the central tenet of biology. It is important for the general public to understand these concepts for a multitude of reasons ranging from public health and the rise of antibiotic resistant bacteria to sociology and race relations in the United States.

How has creationism persisted in the United States? This question is a political and legal quagmire that has persisted for more than six decades and is due to the Young Earth Creationist movement.

Young Earth Creationists believe that the earth is only a few thousand years old. The most conservative of the Young Earth Creationists are also Flat Earthers, genu-

inely believing that the earth is flat and rejecting modern science. Henry Morris is the founder of the Institute for Creation Research (ICR) and “arguably the most influential creationist of the late twentieth century”

"The most conservative of the Young Earth Creationists are also Flat Earthers, genuinely believing that the Earth is flat and rejecting modern science."

(Scott, *Antievolution and Creationism in the United States*). Morris, along with John C. Whitcomb, published *The Genesis Flood* in 1963 which attempted to form a scientific argument for a literal interpretation of Genesis. While it was rejected outright by the scientific community, it was read by hundreds of thousands of people (Gordin, *The PseudoScience Wars*). The ICR was responsible for drafting bills at the state level for “equal time” representation of evolution and creationism in public school biology; these bills ultimately made their way into law in the early 1980s in Arkansas and Louisiana. By 1982 the Arkansas law had been de-

clared unconstitutional but the Louisiana law bounced its way around the court system until 1987, when the “equal time” approach was deemed unconstitutional by the Supreme Court. The serious consideration given to these theories and laws sowed the misinformation deep and is still dogmatically followed to this day. The most recent approach from Young Earth Creationists on the legal stage is to force evolution to be taught as a “theory,” leveraging the day-to-day interpretation of the word against the scientific term. A scientific theory is a system of ideas supported with data, analysis, and peer review. A day-to-day theory is one used to explain the world around us, independent of serious outside verification. This misinformation campaign has persisted to this day in states such as Alabama, Arkansas, California, Florida, Georgia, Louisiana, Texas, and Wisconsin among others (Scott).

The great irony of continued American belief in Creationist theory is that by the numbers, the percentage of people still believing young earth creationism is greater than the percentage of people belonging to religions that preach a literal interpretation of Genesis (Matsumura, *What Do Christians Really Believe about Evolution?*). The four largest denominations of Christianity in the U.S., along with several others, have all formally acknowledged the validity of evolution and its importance in the classroom, stat-

ing that an unfair treatment of the subject in biology class undermines a student’s education in the sciences.

"The ICR was responsible for drafting bills at the state level for 'equal time' representation of evolution and creationism in public school biology."

As engineers and scientists at Olin, almost all of us accept the Theory of Evolution independent of our religious beliefs. We are able to do this without much internal conflict. Outside of our community though, there are many people who still believe in Creationism. Given evolution’s biological importance not only to medical advances, but also public health, it is important that we make an effort to change people’s stance on the matter. We can do this without compromising religious belief and improving the knowledge of the general public.

Sources:

<http://theflatearthsociety.org/home/>
<http://www.gallup.com/poll/170822/believe-creationist-view-human-origins.aspx>

Horoscopes by Drunk Editors

Pisces (Feb. 19 – March 20): At one in the morning on a Tuesday this month you will suddenly remember that P-set that is due at the beginning of class. You will frantically rush to start working on it only to trip over an up-turned chair in the lounge. Spending the night in the ER is excuse for an extension, right?

Aries (March 21 – April 19): 2 PM on the 22nd your two best friends will break up. Costco now sells that fancy super low calorie ice cream by the pint. It would appear that it's time for a trip off campus.

Taurus (April 20 – May 20): Third past three you will awaken when your neighbor's "fish" starts whinnying and stomping its... "fins." Lord only knows how they managed to haul that fish bowl up the stairs.

Gemini (May 21 – June 20): There will be a sudden downpour at 4:44 on the 17th. Now, whether that's a sudden downpour of money, rain, or four leaved clovers, now that really depends on how well you do on your mid terms. Oh wait, we don't have mid terms... Dealer's choice.

Cancer (June 21 – July 22): Buffalo buffalo Buffalo buffalo buffalo buffalo Buffalo buffalo.

Leo (July 23 – Aug. 22): While this publication neither promotes nor discourages devil worship, I dare you to take 666 steps (in any direction or path you choose) and see how miserable of a location you find yourself in. Or how tired your legs are because you haven't climbed any more stairs than it takes to get from the lower level of the Campus Center to the Dining Hall in ages.

Virgo (Aug. 23 – Sept. 22): Things that rhyme with seven: eleven, heaven, leavened, Kevin, Devynn, Evan. If any of these words relates to you, you have a one in (guess the number, c'mon) chance on passing your hardest class with a 77%. But if you aren't that lucky person, sorry. It's offered again next fall, if that helps.

Libra (Sept. 23 – Oct. 22): Turn this number sideways, it means forever. Turn you sideways, it could mean anything from, "sh, they're sleeping," to "they passed out on the Passionate Pursuit toothpick project I spent

the last 88 consecutive hours working on!" I suggest some extra caffeine. The Dining Hall generally has coffee.

Scorpio (Oct. 23 – Nov. 21): Getting up for 9 AM's can be tough. It has been rumored that going to bed at a reasonable hour can help one to be ready to get out of bed early in the morning. Ha, reasonable bedtimes are for babies.

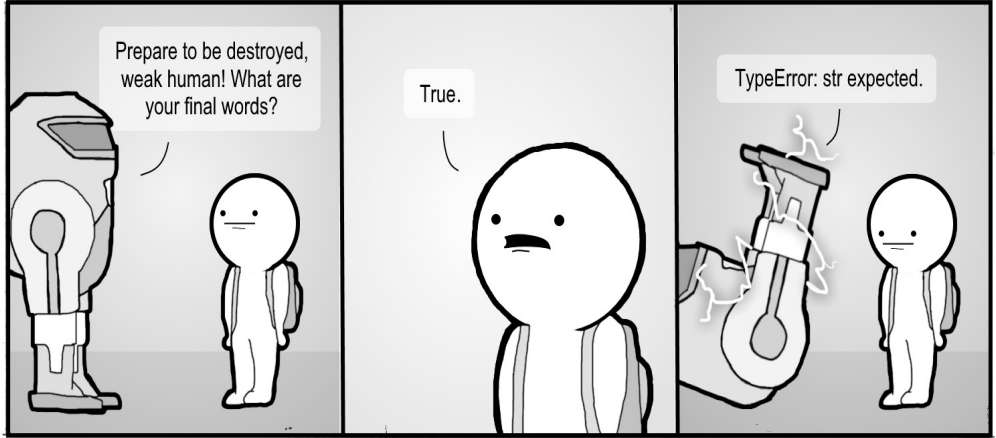
Sagittarius (Nov. 22 – Dec. 21): There are 10 kinds of people. Those who understand binary, and those who don't.

Capricorn (Dec. 22 – Jan. 19): Did you know that 11% of people are left handed? Yeah, and $111,111,111 \times 111,111,111 = 12,345,678,987,654,321$. True story.

Aquarius (Jan. 20 – Feb. 18): XII. You know what that is written backwards? (well, in Roman numerals it's IIX, which is complete gibberish. The number that I was looking for is XXI, but that's obviously not XII written backwards. I was trying to be clever with the Roman numerals and then it kinda just backfired and, yeah... Um, what were we talking about?)

"Imposter Syndrome"

Jeremy Ryan
Contributor



Help Us Create a Student Social Media Team at Olin!

If you're interested in social media and spreading the word about how great Olin is, please join the Marketing and Admission teams for a brainstorming session about how to best structure a student social media team at Olin. We're looking for all your ideas about what structure might work best, how many students would be best, what materials/events should be reported on, etc. Any and all ideas are welcome. If you are interested and able to join us on Friday, March 10 at 12:30 pm please complete this Google form (<https://goo.gl/forms/EA11vMmzJTijYh6O2>). We'll order take out (Thai or Indian food) and come prepared to listen!

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