Ability Privilege

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Ableism

Privilege

Conclusion

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Ability Studies: Investigates the cultural
dynamic of
Ability expectation (want)
and Ableism (need)
• The term ableism evolved from the disability rights movements in the United States and Britain during the 1960s and 1970s.

• As used within the disability rights movement and disability studies, it questions the expectation of ‘species-typical body-linked abilities’ while labelling ‘sub species-typical abilities’ as deficient, as impaired and undesirable often with the accompanying disablism (Miller, Parker, and Gillinson 2004), the lack of accommodation enthusiasm for the needs of people and other biological structures who are seen to not have certain abilities; the unwillingness to adapt to the needs of ‘others’.

• However, ableism goes beyond body ability expectations.

• Ableism also as such is not negative; it just highlights that one favours certain abilities and sees them as essential.
Ableism is one of the most societal entrenched and accepted isms and one of the biggest enabler for other isms

- Sexism
- Racism/Ethnicism/
- Caste-ism
- Age-ism
- Ableism driven Speciesism
- Gross domestic product (GDP)-ism
- Consumerism
- Productivity-ism
- Competitiveness-ism
• Ability expectations are one aspect of culture used by social entities to relate to each other; for example, in the case of individuals they lead to an ability-based and ability-justified understanding of oneself, one’s body and one’s relationship with others of one’s species, other species and one’s environment.

• In the case of countries various measures highlight whether a country has certain abilities (e.g., provision of good education or high employment) and countries compare each other on such metrics.
A given ability expectation can positively reinforce another ability expectation; it can be in conflict with another ability expectation and it can be impact neutral related to another ability expectation.
- Wolbring, G., Ecohealth through an ability studies and disability studies lens.
• The introductory article of the March 2012 issue of the ‘Journal of Social Issues’ which was dedicate to the field of privilege studies [1] stated that “privilege is defined in relational terms and in reference to social groups, and involves unearned benefits afforded to powerful social groups” [1].

• During premodernity Europe privilege was linked to an exclusive and advantageous social status and acquired the meaning of ascribed status [1].

• White [2-6], male [7;8] heterosexual [9] and race privilege [10;11] are discussed as concepts for some time having their supporters and detractors [12].
Ability privilege describes the advantages enjoyed by those who exhibit certain abilities and the unwillingness of these individuals to relinquish the advantage linked to the ability especially with the reason that these are earned or birth given advantages.

Ability privilege manifests itself through structural and governmentally perpetuated ability privilege (systemic (conscious), along with individual or interpersonal forms of ability-privilege (psychological unconscious).

Similarly which ability privilege is classified as earned or unearned constantly changes and is not only culturally constructed, but exhibition and acceptance or rejection of different ability privileges also are one aspect that shapes a culture.
• Ableism related to the disability community using privilege language:

• questions the ability privileges (i.e. ability to work, to gain education, to be part of society, to have an identity, to be seen as citizen) that come with a species-typical body
• In respect to disabled people at least four forms of privileges (systemic (conscious), psychological unconscious, earned and unearned) discussed in the literature are evident.

• Structural and governmentally perpetuated ability privileges (systemic, conscious) are evident in the use of legal terms, such as ‘reasonable accommodation’ and ‘undue hardship’, that suggest that powerful social groups including governments, employers and educational institutions are only willing to give up ability privileges they see as reasonable.

• In this it mirrors "Reasonableness" which is seen for example to preserve male privilege in law[38] against women.
• However there is also the issue that many do not see themselves as still having the privilege that they felt in need of being solved.
Cole and others talk about “how arguments based on claims about what is natural, privilege some relationships while stigmatizing others and justifying discriminatory policies toward sexual minorities”[48]. The same dynamic can be seen in regards to disabled people.

Disabled people still fight to be seen as natural, because to be less able than normal is seen as unnatural.

As to the discussion around what is an earned or unearned privilege disabled, people constantly question what others see as earned privilege. Privileges linked to be born with certain abilities are seen as earned or natural (birth given) by many.
• Ability privileges can play themselves out between traditionally defined social groups (e.g. race, gender, social class).

• However at the same time social groups are also formed based on ability privileges whereby the social group/entity is defined by whether its members have or don’t have a given ability (the ability-have and the ability-non-have social groups) which allows to investigate human-animal and human-nature relationships.
“certain forms of consumption, such as buying local, driving a hybrid, or even voluntary simplicity, are often conferred moral weight, despite the fact that the ability to make such choices relies on the systemic unearned privileges that go with being white and middle-class in the U.S” [Mengel, 2012].

„So-called “green consumption,” as a response to ecological concerns, is similarly bound up with race and class privilege” [Mengel, 2012].
Different cultural understanding of the relationship between humans and nature (e.g. anthropocentric versus bio or eco-centric) comes with privileging different ability expectations and the exhibition of different forms of ableism (Wolbring, 2011).
Do Humans exhibit Ability Privileges toward animals or Nature?

Article 71 of the Ecuadorian constitution can be interpreted as giving rights to the ‘entity’ nature. However article 74 retains anthropocentric reasoning: “Persons, people, communities and nationalities will have the right to benefit from the environment and form natural wealth that will allow wellbeing”.

Shallow ecology movement = increase ability to increase the health and affluence of people in developed countries (Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, 2008).

Deep ecology movement = ability to promote “biospheric egalitarianism, the view that all living things are alike in having value in their own right, independent of their usefulness to others” (Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, 2008).

Eco-feminism = expectation of the ability to care, the promotion of the idea of interconnectedness, and a rejection of dualistic hierarchical world-views that divide humans and nature.

In other words, ecological feminism is rejecting the ability expectation of “dominance, competition, materialism, and technoscientific exploitation inherent in modernist, competition-based social systems” (Besthorn & McMillen, 2002, p. 226) and nourishing the ability expectation of “caring and compassion and the creation and nurturing of life” (Besthorn & McMillen, 2002, p. 226). (from my Ecohealth publication)
As to human-animal relationships arguments are evident that defend an anthropocentric or biocentric view of human-animal relationships (Taylor, 1983; Watson, 1983; Taylor, 1991; Attfield, 1993; Jacob, 1994; Dobson, 1995; Michael, 1996; Ingensiep, 1997b; Singer, 1997; Ingensiep, 1997a; Sterba, 1998; Taylor, 2008; Watson, 2008; Attfield, 2009; Sterba, 2011; Tuohey et al., 1992; Cavalieri and Singer, 1995; Taylor, 1996; O'Neill, 1997; Bekoff, 1997; Recarte Vicente-Arche, 2001). Furthermore various arguments humans use in regards to animals generate ability privileges (e.g. based on level of cognition; ability to experience pain or be self-aware) for some animals over other animals and in some cases for some animals over some humans (e.g. as severely cognitive impaired labeled people).
• **Conversation between Alex D and Paul Denton**

- **Paul Denton**: If you want to even out the social order, you have to change the nature of power itself. Right? And what creates power? Wealth, physical strength, legislation — maybe — but none of those is the root principle of power.

- **Alex D**: I’m listening.

- **Paul Denton**: Ability is the ideal that drives the modern state. It's a synonym for one's worth, one's social reach, one's "election," in the Biblical sense, and it's the ideal that needs to be changed if people are to begin living as equals.

- **Alex D**: And you think you can equalise humanity with biomodification?

- **Paul Denton**: The commodification of ability — tuition, of course, but, increasingly, genetic treatments, cybernetic protocols, now biomods — has had the side effect of creating a self-perpetuating aristocracy in all advanced societies. When ability becomes a public resource, what will distinguish people will be what they do with it. Intention. Dedication. Integrity. The qualities we would choose as the bedrock of the social order. (*Deus Ex: Invisible War*)
• Ethics theories are applied to problems humans face.
• They are envisioned to give members of society guidance as to how to act and how to relate to each other.
• Privileging abilities is entangled with ethics codes, theories and principles
• Privileging certain ability expectations were and are one trigger for the development of ethics theories, codes and principles;
• Ethics theories are linked intricately to abilities needed to make them operational
• The privileging of a given ability expectations often makes one to adopt a given ethics theory.
• Ability expectations and Ableism privileging define various ethics discourses.
• A given ethics theory, code or principle privileges certain abilities and as such its uptake correlates with the privileging certain ability expectations.
Your turn
Any questions?