



MODELS OF DISABILITY

Throughout history, different “models of disability” have been used to explain and sometimes justify the treatment (or mistreatment) of people with disabilities. These models, while serving as society’s coping mechanism for what to do with people with disabilities, often if not always portrayed an unrealistic or inaccurate portrayal of the disability experience. People with disabilities deserved to be pitied, seen as helpless and in need of care. The flipside of this perception is referred to as the “supercrip” mentality, that of a person with a disability rising above their physical or mental limitations to do the extraordinary. The striking common point of these two different attitudes is the expectations piece. The pity lens sets the bar below human while the supercrip lens stretches beyond it.

As times and attitudes have changed, the model of disability being employed has changed accordingly. With the rise of the Disability Rights movement and the passage of the Americans with Disabilities Act, the perception of disability has moved from a focus on the disability being sinful and the individual with a disability needing to be “fixed,” to a more inclusive view that embraces disability as a part of diversity. As a result, there has been the additional push for society, mainstream culture, and government to ensure the full participation of people with disabilities in everyday life.

The table below illustrates the various models of disability, defines them, and gives examples cited from the media, society, and pop culture.

TABLE III

Model	Definition	Example(s)
Moral Model	People with disabilities are afflicted by the devil, or their disability is the result of a sin or punishment for wrongdoing by them or their family.	-Captain Hook -Quasimodo
Medical Model	People with disabilities are broken and need to be fixed. For example, people who were unable to walk were often forced to wear heavy braces or undergo experiments and radical treatments to make them "normal" again.	- <u>One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest</u> -Helen Keller
Charity Model	People with disabilities are tragic and deserve pity and protection from the demands of society. This is where the term "handicap" came about, as a result of people with disabilities being given "caps in hand" to go into the streets and beg for money.	-"Laura" in <u>The Glass Menagerie</u> -Pollyanna -Tiny Tim from <u>A Christmas Carol</u> -Poster Children
Cultural/Minority Model	The cultural/minority model emphasizes the need to appreciate the	-"Linda" from Sesame Street

	differences that come out of being a person with a disability, as one would appreciate differences in ethnicity, race, or religion. Out of this model came the assertion that people should embrace the idea of a “disability culture” and be “Disabled and Proud!”	
Social/Civil Rights Model	Society needs to change the systems, laws, policies, and relationships that continue to keep people with disabilities isolated from society. This model is best characterized through the terms such as “inclusion” “full participation” “self-sufficiency” and “independent living.”	-David Rappaport in “The Wizard” (1980s t.v. show) -Daniel Day Lewis in “My Left Foot” -Paul Wellstone -Ed Roberts

Film references used in the above table come from:
<http://www.disabilityfilms.co.uk>

For additional information on the shift in disability policy, please refer to *Emerging Disability Policy Framework: A Guidepost for Analyzing Public Policy* by Robert Silverstein and the Center for the Study and Advancement of Disability Policy, 85 IOWA L. REV. 1691 (2000).

For a more in-depth history of the Disability Rights Movement and Disability Culture, mentors may find No Pity People with Disabilities Forging a New Civil Rights Movement by Joseph Shapiro.