

The Personal and Politics of Disability

With Imani Barbarin



This session will focus on how perceptions and ideas that surround disability impact identity, interpersonal relationships and how our historical outlook on politics both nationally and internationally.

Imani Barbarin

My name is Imani Barbarin and I am the creator behind CrutchesAndSpice.com as well as several viral online moments featuring the disability community including #AbledsAreWeird, #ThingsDisabledPeopleKnow, #DisabledCompliments among many others.

I have traditionally used online spaces to speak about disability, build community and advocate for inclusion.

Workshop Considerations

- In modeling accessibility and inclusion for this workshop, regardless if any one participant needs it or not, we will be modeling several accommodations:
 - Please raise hand to speak.
 - When in discussion, as you begin relaying your thoughts say who you are.
 - Please do not interrupt others causing an overlap of speech.
 - If at any point you do not understand what is being said, please raise your hand and I will break the point down.

Question for the room: what do we know about disability and its intersections?

How does it show up in your life?



What is a disability?

- According to the Americans with Disabilities Act, “To be protected by the ADA, one must have a disability, which is defined by the ADA as a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities, a person who has a history or record of such an impairment, or a person who is perceived by others as having such an impairment.”
- What sticks out about this definition?



**Keep in mind:
Disability is also
political and cultural
through the lens of
supremacy culture,
patriarchy and
heteronormativity.**

What is Ableism?

- Ableism is the interpersonal, institutional and societal discrimination against disabled people.
- “A system of assigning value to people's bodies and minds based on societally constructed ideas of normalcy, productivity, desirability, intelligence, excellence, and fitness. These constructed ideas are deeply rooted in eugenics, anti-Blackness, misogyny, colonialism, imperialism, and capitalism. This systemic oppression that leads to people and society determining people's value based on their culture, age, language, appearance, religion, birth or living place, ‘health/wellness,’ and/or their ability to satisfactorily re/produce, ‘excel’ and ‘behave.’ You do not have to be disabled to experience ableism.”
- Working definition by @TalilaLewis, updated January 2022, developed in community with disabled Black/negatively racialized folk, especially @NotThreeFifths. Read more: bit.ly/ableism2022

Ableism in Action

Lack of representation in the media

Lifting requirements for job applications

Inaccessible subway systems

Subminimum wages

Forced institutionalization

Forced abortions/sterilization

Anti-vaccination activism

High rates of filicide

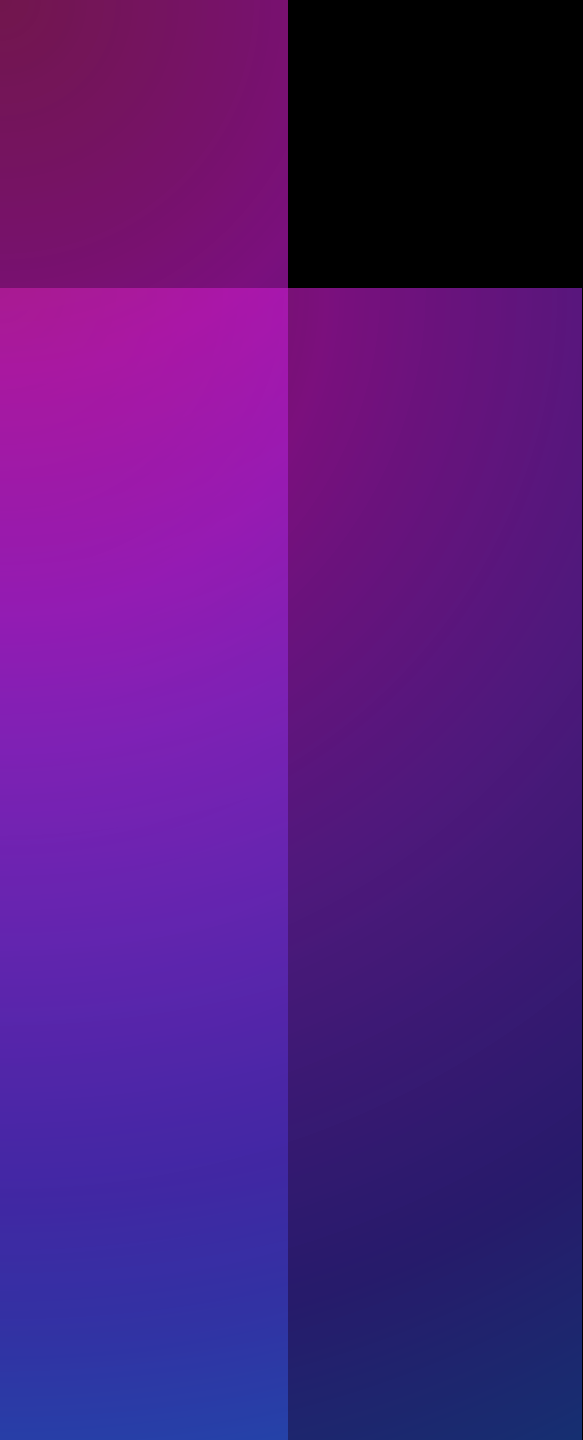
70% of polling places inaccessible

Disablement and Debility as a tool of ethnic cleansing and genocide

**Disability is Always Political
and ableism has always
been a tool in systems of
oppression that manifest in
interpersonal interactions.**

How does disability impact the multiply marginalized?

- Every marginalization leads to disability in some way. What does that look like?
 - Food deserts that impact an individual's ability to access fresh food and vegetables.
 - Black and brown neighborhoods situated next to pollutants or without clean water.
 - Negligence regarding climate change.
 - Legislating that medical professionals do not have to treat queer individuals based off of their religious beliefs.
 - Legislating trans folks' ability to access gender affirming care.
 - The overturning of Roe V. Wade.



**What are the numbers
behind disability and
other marginalized
identities?**

Disability and the LGBTQ community:

AN ESTIMATED 3-5 MILLION LGBT PEOPLE HAVE DISABILITIES



2 in 5
transgender adults¹

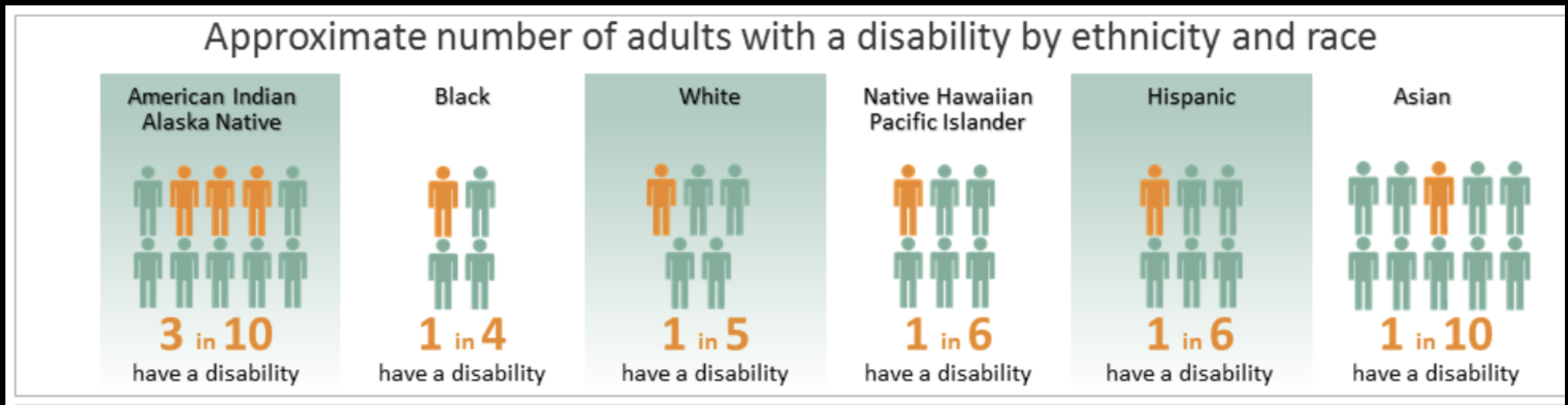
1 in 4
LGB adults²
in California

40% of bisexual men
36% of lesbian women
36% of bisexual women
26% of gay men³
in Washington
reported having a disability

...compared to **27.2%**
of the general population⁴

<https://www.lgbtmap.org/file/LGBT-People-With-Disabilities.pdf>

Disability in communities of color:



Women and Disability:

1 in 4

women have
a disability



Disability is also social.

Anyone can experience ableism regardless of diagnosis.

Systems of power often use disability to medicalize features or actions of the marginalized:

“Runaway Slave Syndrome”

“Hysteria”

“Queerness is a mental illness”

This then makes these communities susceptible to the systemic ableism that disabled people are known to face.

In many ways, they also become complicit in oppression of the “other” to demonstrate value of the self.



How does desirability play a role?

In her book, *Feminist, Queer, Crip*, Alison Kafer discusses that disability is never seen by society as a permanent existence but something to be overcome over time. “[Disability is not] permitted to exist as part of a desired present or desirable future.”

This is even more true for those who exist at multiple intersections and have been historically been victims of state systems violence because of it.

This has meant a reluctance to be identified with disability and often hiding disabilities within themselves, families and communities.

We police our association with disability both in ourselves and one another:

- Being disability is often seen and approached as a weakness or deficiency that society needs to cast out by any means necessary – therefore marginalized folks are very careful not to be stereotyped as such.
- This can manifest as:
 - Hustle culture
 - Obsession with fit bodies
 - Trying to overcome or outperform disability
 - Thinking of rest as laziness.
 - Not associating with disabled people outside of a charitable or infantilizing dynamic
 - Not including disabled folks
 - Thinking harm simply befalls disabled people due to having a disability



In the fight for inclusion, ableism within marginalized communities, even out of a lack of knowledge, can have consequences.

- Advocating for abortion rights solely on the basis one would want to abort a disabled fetus alienates disabled advocates.
- In the fight for a higher minimum wage people often forget disabled people are allowed to be paid below the minimum wage in most states.
- Police violence and the prison industrial complex disproportionately impacts disabled folk.
- Trans rights can be supported by the Americans with Disabilities Act, its protections and advocates.
- Institutions like conservatorships and guardianships can be weaponized against marginalized people at any time.
- Disabling people in conflict zones knowing evacuation processes often do not include disabled people.

What do the disability, queer, liberation and racial justice movements have in common?

- Each recognizes the roles systems play in enacting state violence on marginalized communities.
- Each understands both the capacity for any individual to be a victim and perpetrator of violence.
- Each desires to platform and take direction from the most marginalized in any community.
- Each hopes for a liberated future in which community care and equity exist free of these systems of violence.
- Each understands the importance of cross-movement solidarity in achieving this end goal.

What is advocacy?



ADVOCACY IS THE SUPPORT
FOR A PARTICULAR CAUSE OR
POLICY.



WHAT ARE SOME FORM OF
ADVOCACY THAT YOU ENGAGE
IN?

Advocacy must be approached through an intersectional lens.

- All marginalizations or oppressed identities are disproportionately impacted by disability in some way.
- Exercise: Pick a current issue in need of advocacy and design an intersectional communication advocacy plan around it.

Self Advocacy

- It's cliché, but you cannot pour from an empty cup and you cannot have a seat at the table if it's not accessible.
- In order to be effective, you need to practice self care in the same disciplined way as Audre Lorde. Consistently check in with your needs and pay attention when your access requirements change.
- Speak up for your needs in the spaces you inhabit and surround yourself with people familiar with the accommodations required for you to participate and take up space. Rely on others for community and provide accessibility support where possible.

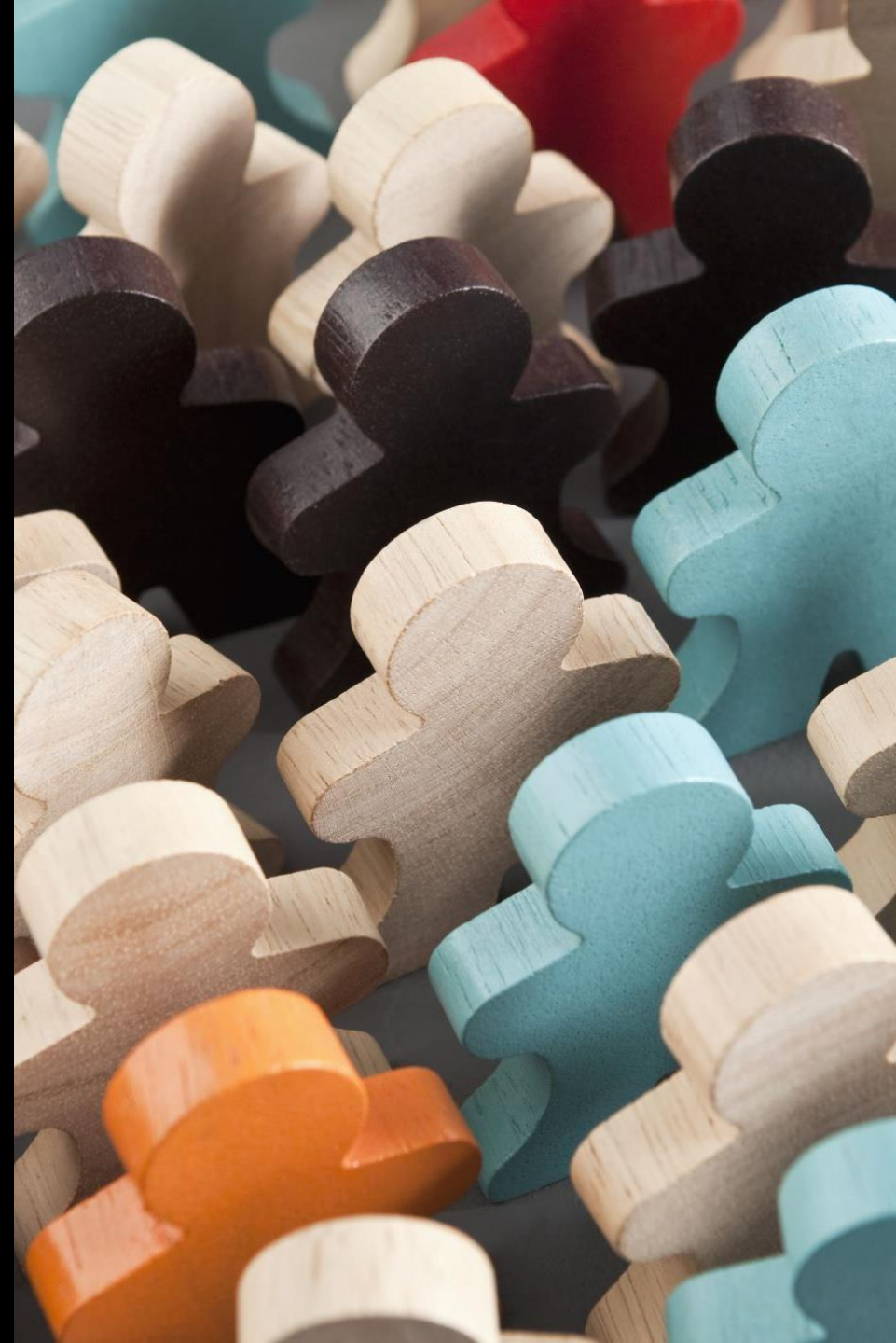


Internal Community Advocacy

- Providing space to others with disabilities requires the death of assumptions. Anyone has the capacity to lead, and anyone has the capacity to follow. Do not make assumptions of intelligence, drive, or commitment to a cause. Communicate accessibly with community members to determine the roles people can have in the work.
- If you are advocating in a work environment, create initiatives dedicated to discussing disability inclusion and accessibility at work. The more discussion had, the more people may be comfortable coming forward with their own accessibility needs as well as will share knowledge that aids in identifying how disability plays a role in your work with the communities you serve.

External Community Advocacy

- When interacting with community members or communities you serve, hold back on disability specific language until it is indicated as necessary to do so. Most marginalized people have had disability and ableism weaponized against them either implicitly or explicitly and may be wary of those who use that language to address them. Instead, focus on getting them to resources and should disability related services arise, emphasize that they may qualify, give them the correct language to use to enroll but do not emphasize personal identification until they seem comfortable.
- When working with different cultural backgrounds, be aware of how cultural translation plays a role in understanding disability. The concepts of disability understood in the United States and the west may not be received in the same way because of cultural background or experience.



Storytelling for Advocacy

01

Connect to people with a story told through an individual lens.

02

Broaden the subject to the community the individual's story represents.

03

Give action items for people now that they're emotionally invested to act.

Online Advocacy and Accessibility



Add Image descriptions to your photos (if using a scheduler, add them in text).



Create transcripts of podcasts and videos.



Add audio descriptions and captions to videos.



Avoid strobing or flashing lights in videos.



The Role of Plain Language in Advocacy

- Not utilizing plain language, or language that can be read at a 5th grade level, is like playing whisper down the lane.
- Complicated language requires intermediaries to rely on their own understanding of your message to pass it along to others for them to understand.
- Plain language is the most direct path possible between your message and your audience.



Questions and answers?