

Critical Disability Studies Final: Unifying Disability Icons Write-Up

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For my final project, I created a drawing depicting various symbols for disabilities. Symbols are commonly used to indicate information in a simplistic, easily recognizable, style. Symbols can also be used to declare affiliation with a particular group. The use of disability symbols is essential in a practical sense because it informs disabled individuals that there is accessibility for them to show up in this space more comfortably. The primary purpose of this drawing is to represent these disability symbols together to convey the disability justice principle of commitment to cross disability solidarity. This piece is meant to represent that disability as a culture exists in community with one another. Through the joining of symbols, I wanted to represent that disability is diverse and so is access. Because of this, there must be continued effort to tend to accessibility of not just a singular disability, but for all the ways a person who is disabled experiences the world. The overall color palette was chosen based on the disability flag, which includes five overarching domains of disability.

In the center of the page lies an infinity symbol making a figure 8 in the color yellow. This symbol is the widely recognized symbol for neurodivergence, as it emphasizes diversity and how the lack of a singular experience being neurodivergent. The figure 8 is used as an updated symbol for autism and reflects a shift in perspective for people with autism. Previous symbols for autism represented it in colored puzzle pieces that have since been discarded. Puzzle pieces created division between neurotypical and autistic people by suggesting that people with autism are a confusing mystery to be navigated and solved. This perspective is reductive and fails to recognize the way individuals on the spectrum are not alien, but rather people that experience and navigate the world in diverse ways. The symbol of the figure 8 more properly encapsulates

how autism should not be understood as a mystery or in need of an objective solution, but instead be recognized as a wonderfully varied way of life with infinitely many possibilities.

Within the infinity symbol lies a pair of eyes in the color green with a line striking through. The color choice is in reference to the disability pride flag, specifically the green meant to symbolize sensory disabilities. This is meant to represent the symbol of blind and low vision individuals. In terms of its placement within the piece, I integrated the pair of eyes within the neurodivergence symbol so that it is also placed in the center to provide a more clear showing of the disability despite its comparatively subtle depiction in comparison to the other disability icons shown. Its placement is also meant to integrate with the wheelchair bound symbol, acting additionally as wheels to the wheel-chair to further emphasize the interconnectedness of disability culture.

Above the neurodivergence and blind symbol is the symbol for accessibility with an individual who is wheelchair bound. The icon is in red, referencing physical disability in the disability pride flag. The symbol is the updated symbol for accessibility, with the wheelchair bound individual's arms moved back to convey motion instead of the previous icon that positioned the individual's arms in the front in a resting position. This is in reference to the accessible icon project and to convey the disabled experience in a more active light as a means of empowerment for the disabled. It is also communicating a tonal shift in the disabled experience to challenge the narrative that disability is an objective disadvantage and illuminate disability as a way of actively living life.

Towards the sides of the page are hands that form the symbol for a sign language interpreter. The hands are in green to connect with sensory disabilities. The hands are a major component of communication for an individual who uses sign language as opposed to verbal speech. It provides the deaf and hard of hearing community with a rich and expressive form of interaction and processing information. The presence of an interpreter is critical for accessibility for deaf and hard of hearing individuals so they are able to engage. The positioning is such that the curve of the infinity symbol aligns roughly with the curve of the hand so that even if the hand is being partially covered, the sign is recognizable.

Shifting more towards the background, the image contains the two hemispheres of the brain in blue. This color is meant to represent psychological disabilities. The brain is a major component of how we think, with it containing a variety of areas that influence our perception of the world. Despite generally containing key areas for most people, the processing of the brain itself varies significantly across individuals. This variation can manifest in ways that are potentially disabling within an perceived able-minded society. In placing the brain towards the back, I wanted to be able to show it more fully without it dominating the image. The folds and creases of the brain are meant to add variety and texture to the image reminiscent of variety within the minds of the psychologically disabled.

Alternating to the top left and bottom right corner of the image behind the brain lay a sunflower. The color is white in reference to invisible disabilities. Sunflowers convey a sense of bright confidence and visibility. It can signal to others that disability is present and, as such, accommodations may be needed such as extra time. Individuals with invisible disabilities may

not be recognized considering it isn't as easily apparent, but it is still present and the sunflower can show this. The sunflower is meant to voluntarily make the invisible visible to create a greater sense of understanding and flexibility with navigating the world.

Framing the outline of the piece is an array of keys and dot combinations. The keys are referring to a mode of communication for non-verbal people. The accompanying dots are braille, a form of processing information through textile sensations. Both of these forms augment the concept of communication taking many different forms. The letters of the keys are paired with the letter representation in braille to further convey braille as a form of active communication, with 26 letters matched with 26 braille patterns for each letter of the alphabet. In incorporating all of the letters along the image in a nonlinear, slithering fashion, it is meant to allow the eye to trace the edges of the piece and explore.