

# “I’m Not Your Inspiration, Thank You Very Much”: Social Media Users’ Engagement with Stella Young’s TED Talk

Yoseph Mamo and Justin A. Haegele

Department of Human Movement Sciences, Old Dominion University, Norfolk, VA

The development of interactive social media platforms has expanded how disability is communicated or shared with the public. Despite the potential of social media to challenge and educate nondisabled people's understanding of disability, little empirical research has been conducted in this area. In this study, we analyzed comments from a YouTube video from a seminal TED Talk by the late Australian disability rights activist, educator, and comedian Stella Young. The video titled "I'm not your inspiration, thank you very much | Stella Young" had accumulated 1,374,878 views, 22,000 likes, and 975 interactions (comments and responses) at the time of the analysis. Our findings

suggest that most individuals who left public comments on the video viewed it favorably. They identified as being connected to, in agreement with, or being (un)ironically inspired by Young's talk. However, approximately 14% explicitly disagreed with Young's ideas during her TED Talk, and 7% directly criticized her ideas or appearance. Comments like these reproduce and perpetuate the same types of oppression and marginalization that occur in society.

*Keywords: disability, social media, public, sentiment, communication*

---

**I** am not here to inspire you. I am here to tell you that we have been lied to about disability. Yeah, we’ve been sold the lie that disability is a Bad Thing, capital B, capital T. It’s a bad thing, and to live with a disability makes you exceptional. It’s not a bad thing, and it doesn’t make you exceptional. (Young, 2014)

The aforementioned quote is derived from a seminal TED Talk from late Australian disability rights activist, educator, and comedian, Stella Young (2014). During her talk, Young challenged viewers’ understandings of disability and disabled people by outlining concepts associated with the social model of disability discourse, confronting the ‘disability as problem’ discourse and stereotypes about disability being a negative attribute, as well

as spotlighting ways in which nondisabled people objectify disabled people in daily life and through social media. This TED Talk has, since then, become a mainstay in conversations about disability among academics and within university courses focused on introducing concepts about disability and impairment. Now nearly 10 years later, Young's TED Talk has been cited nearly 200 times on Google Scholar and viewed over 4 million times on the official TED Talk website, as well as an additional 1.3 times on YouTube.com, as of May 2023.

While a number of salient concepts are discussed within Young's nine-minute speech, her TED Talk may be most well-known for the introduction of the concept of *inspiration porn*, a form of discrimination which may be represented as a meme, video, or feel-good article that sensationalizes disabled people for audiences of nondisabled people in order to inspire (Darrow & Hairston, 2016). Young (2014) challenged the use of disabled people, including herself, as inspiration, directly stating to her audience that "I'm not your inspiration, thank you very much." She also noted using the term 'porn' deliberately within this concept, because of how one group of people (disabled people) are objectified by another (nondisabled people) for the benefit of the former group. This is well aligned with a number of problems that have been associated with inspiration porn, such as that depicts disabled people in a way that objectifies them, devalues their experiences, and mystifies their place in the world for nondisabled people (Grue, 2016). As such, it is unsurprising that "posts and images that might be considered wondrous, inspirational, or focus on overcoming barriers have gained some negative attention from disability rights advocates and scholars" (Holland et al., 2023, p. 15). Since Young's TED talk in 2014, inspiration porn has taken a strong hold within disability and activist communities including being included in academic scholarship across various fields (Grue, 2016; Holland et al., 2023; Martin, 2019; Shelton & Waddell, 2021) and being discussed in an episode of a popular ABC sitcom, *Speechless*, in 2017 (Gagliardi, 2017; Schalk, 2021).

Based on the popularity of Stella Young's TED talk in university classes and the emergence of concepts from her speech in disability studies as well as pop culture, it appears clear that Young's TED talk may have contributed concepts and ideas to the field. Despite this, little is known about how the public, those outside of academia, has consumed, understood, or engaged with the concepts presented in Young's talk. Gaining

an understanding of how her talk has been received by the public may help provide another avenue for understanding the impact of her work, as well as the potential impact for similar work, particularly outside of the academic realm. As such, the central purpose of this research is to explore the public's views toward Stella Young's TED talk through social media engagement.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **Social Media and Disability**

The term social media refers to participative or interactive internet use that can include a group of internet-based applications, such Facebook, virtual worlds, video-hosting platforms, and YouTube, that allows for the creation and exchange of user generated content (Caton & Chapman, 2016). The use of social media has risen, and continued to rise, in comparison to other antiquated forms of print and television media (Hull & Lewis, 2014), and is now described as an inherent behavior within society (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2010). Part of the appeal of social media use is that it provides an opportunity for immediate interaction with the source of information and enables users to express their feelings in an uncensored and unfiltered way (French & Le Clair, 2018).

The development of interactive social media platforms has helped to dramatically expand the ways in which disability is communicated or shared with the public (Ginsburg, 2020). While social media platforms, in many ways, continue to perpetuate the same stereotypes, oppression, and marginalization seen in society in general, given that it is developed and implemented within the social world, some critical disability scholars have noted social media's potential for helping to reveal and spotlight the way in which the social world disables those with impairments (Coleman, 2010; Ellis & Kent, 2010; Ginsburg, 2020). With that, social media has provided disabled people, like the aforementioned Stella Young, a platform to put themselves in the public eye, challenge the ways in which nondisabled people think about disabled people, and invite nondisabled people to appreciate, understand, and accommodate for human variation (Garland-Thomson, 2009; Ginsburg, 2020). To do so, Garland-Thomson (2009) suggests that disabled people are leveraging social media more often to change the social narrative around disability by inviting nondisabled people to 'look at me', pivoting from a previously

ubiquitous ‘don’t stare’ mentality. This type of exposure, according to Ginsburg (2020), can help lead to an embrace of disability and disabled people in society.

Despite the potential some have communicated about the use of social media as a vehicle to challenge nondisabled people’s understandings of disability, little research has been conducted in this area of inquiry. That is, to date, most research exploring social media and disability appears to do so from one of two lens. First, there is considerable research that has explored the social media use rates by and benefits for disabled people (Brunner et al., 2015; Caton & Chapman, 2016; Lee & Cho, 2019). Among other findings, this line of inquiry has identified a digital divide in social media use, where social media may be less accessible, for reasons associated with technology availability and accessibility of web platforms to name a few, for some disabled people when compared to their nondisabled peers (Caton & Chapman, 2016; Lee & Cho, 2019). When social media is accessible to disabled people, some research has identified that disabled people tend to interact with a smaller, more intimate number of social contacts via social media (White & Forrester-Jones, 2020). Second, explorations of the portrayal of disabled people on social media has been a considerable area of inquiry (Garland-Thomson, 2002; Holland et al., 2023). Within social media, disabled people are often portrayed as either greater or lesser than human, and rarely depicted as equals to nondisabled people (Oliver & Barnes, 2012). In alignment with Stella Young’s ideas (2014), one common depiction of disabled people in social media, particularly sport-based social media, is as being an exception to human capability rather than the rule (Garland-Thomson, 2002), which is analogous to the concept of inspiration porn (Grue, 2016). In a more recent study by Holland and colleagues (2023), disabled people were reportedly sensationalized often in sport-based social media, in ways to create ‘feel-good’ content for nondisabled audiences. In these instance, it is clear that social media, driven by nondisabled people, is being leveraged to help dictate a vision for what is disability is and means, and what is considerable acceptable to illustrate about disabled people in society (Holland et al., 2023).

To date, most research exploring social media and disability has focused on examining disabled persons’ use of social media or social media representation from nondisabled people but has not yet explored the public’s engagement with content created by disabled people. Notably, while social media has been identified as a mechanism for

members of public to exert collective influence on organizational activities, scholars have also noted that opinions shared on social media may reflect a collective truth, or reflection of the public's opinion on particular topics (Holland et al., 2023). As such, Humphreys and Wang (2018) have identified social media as a unique platform to systematically analyze unstructured public perceptions and behaviors in practical and cost-effective ways that would be otherwise impossible through conventional data collection methods (e.g., interviews, surveys). In our context, social media can be used to both drive and help to understand the public's view toward what disability is and means (Silva & Howe, 2012). Our current study represents a step forward for this line of inquiry, where we are seeking to explore and understand the public's engagement with one particular piece of social media content, the Stella Young TED Talk video.

RQ1: What is the nature of public comments on the Stella Young TED Talk video?

RQ2: At what frequency do different coding categories emerge among public comments on the Stella Young TED Talk video?

RQ3: How does the commenter's relationship with disability influence their comments about the Stella Young TED Talk video?

## **METHODS**

### **Data Collection and Processing**

The data collection process was performed using the Google YouTube data API. To manage the data easily, we adopted the R and Python programming environments. YouTube is a popular video-sharing platform that enables users to upload, view, and share videos. The video titled "I'm not your inspiration, thank you very much | Stella Young" was selected for the purpose of this study. This video was posted on June 9, 2014, and at the time of data collection, it had accumulated 1,374,878 views on the YouTube platform, specifically. Furthermore, the video received 22,000 likes and garnered 975 interactions (comments and responses). It was uploaded on the TED official YouTube channel, which boasts a subscriber base of 22.8 million people. TED Talk is a daily video podcast featuring inspiring talks and performances from the TED Conference, showcases this video.

Original comments from the original YouTube video were collected, without including responses to those comments, as the original messages are likely to be more

explicit and show clear intentionality of the actor (Mamo, 2023; Saxton et al., 2019). For this analysis, the original comments represented direct feedback provided by members of the public without the influence of the opinions of others. After data processing, we obtained 459 YouTube comments. Of those, 14 were excluded because the language is not English. The final data set included 445 original comments.

### **Data Coding**

The original comments were coded using a three-step, inductive, content analysis approach (Hseih & Shannon, 2005; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). After the data were collected and processed the 445 comments were compiled into a spreadsheet and open coded by the second author, whom has knowledge and research background in the area of disability and education. During the first step of this process, the second author read and re-read each of the 445 tweets to gather a general sense of the data, and to initially develop potential coding categories. At this point, 11 coding categories were developed based on the data and the coder's interpretation of the data. Following, for each tweet, whether it included a few words or a few sentences, the second author attempted to grasp the major idea of the tweet and assigned it to one of the 11 coding categories. At this point, initial codes were shared with the first author, who acted in the role of critical friend to help to challenge the second author's interpretation of the data and the appropriateness of the codes. The first author read each of the tweets and codes, and both authors engaged in in-person dialogue about the richness, appropriateness, and completeness of the coding categories.

Following, the second author returned to the data, and reassembled codes by collapsing several categories together. The categories, now seven, were returned to the first author, who agreed with the final coding structure, and questioned the placement of some tweets within several categories. The first and second author worked collaboratively through the data until 100% agreement was reached on the construction of the categories and placement of the codes into the categories. The final coding structure included the following seven categories (a) (un)ironically inspired (tweets that explicitly described learning from powerful messages discussed by Stella Young), (b) connecting with Stella (comments that expressed connecting their existing knowledge with Stella Young's ideas and having personal stories that were similar to hers), (c) mocking Stella (comments that directly mocked what Stella Young said, including personal attacks and attacks on ideas),

(d) anti-Stella (comments where people clearly and explicitly disagreed with Stella Young's ideas, that were not aggressive in nature), (e) Rest in Peace (comments about Stella Young's passing), (f) superficial agreements (comments that were superficial in nature but positive), and (g) nonsense (comments that were disconnected or nonsensical generally).

In addition to coding the content of the comments, the second author also coded whether or not the tweeter identified as disabled, not disabled, or a family member of disabled people within the tweet. For these codes, only explicit identification of being disabled, not disabled, or a family member were recorded as such, and all other tweets were coded as 'not available'. For example, the following tweeter was coded as being disabled "wow, I think you are inspirational. I too am disabled and attending university", whereas another tweeter was coded as not disabled "And I totally agree with her, though I'm not disabled myself." Examples of someone being coded as a family member included "My brother has been paralyzed from the head down ever since he was 4" or "My partner has an autoimmune disorder that limits her movement." After this coding, a cross-tabulation analysis, also referred to as contingency table analysis, was conducted to explore the relationship between seven categories and the four groups.

### **Additional Comment Metric Analyses**

Following the content analysis, we analyzed the YouTube data to investigate various aspects of user engagement. Specifically, we focused on extracting information related to the word count of comments, the number of liked comments, and the number of replied comments. We utilized the base R function `nchar()` to obtain the character count and determine the length of words. Subsequently, we utilized the tidyverse package, specifically the `tidyr` and `dplyr` packages, to summarize and orderly the arrangement of the engagement metrics.

## **RESULTS**

In total, each of the 445 public comments were coded into one of seven categories constructed by the research team. See table 1 for coding category frequencies and percentages, as well as comment characteristics based on coding categories. As a result of our coding, the superficial agreement category had the highest frequency with 102 (23%)

occurrences, followed by the nonsense category and the connecting with Stella category, with 83 (19%) and 82 (18%) occurrences, respectively. Following, the anti-Stella category had 64 (14%) occurrences, (un)ironically inspired had 47 (11%) occurrences, and rest in peace had 36 (8%) occurrences. The final category, mocking Stella, had 31 (7%) occurrences. Examples of comments that were coded in each of these categories are displayed in Table 2.

Table 1  
*Coding categories and characteristics*

Category	Frequency	Percentage	Word Count	Like Count	Replies
(Un)ironically inspired	47	11%	17.9	61.1	1.2
Connecting with Stella	82	18%	85.6	60.6	2.2
Mocking Stella	31	7%	17.2	3.9	0.4
Anti-Stella	64	14%	12.8	0.6	2.4
Rest in peace	36	8%	76.7	41.3	0.6
Superficial agreements	102	23%	13.0	1.0	0.4
Nonsense	83	19%	9.4	1.1	.05

Note. Word count, like count, and replies are reported as means.

Comments coded in the connecting with Stella category had the highest mean word count (85.6 words), suggesting that comments in this category were highly detailed and long in nature. The rest in peace category also had expansive comments, with a mean word count of 76.7 words. Mean word counts for the categories of (un)ironically inspired (17.9), mocking Stella (17.2), superficial agreements (13), and anti-Stella (12.8) were relatively short. Given the nature of the nonsense category, it is unsurprising that the shortest comments were included here, with an average word count of just 9.4.

Table 2  
 Example comments by category

Category	Examples
(Un)ironically inspired	-I almost commented about 'if it was okay that she's now my inspiration', but then I realized that, yes, yes it is, because it's her humility and perspective on life and way of speaking that I find inspirational, not her disability. -I've never thought of it this way. More people should see this, it's amazing
Connecting with Stella	-Telling a person who has a disability that they're so brave for living their everyday life is like someone telling you that you're such an inspiration for eating cereal in the morning. It's just weird."
Mocking Stella	-Does this mean I can go back to ridiculing the cripples?"
Anti-Stella	-No lady, disability is a TERRIBLE thing. Nobody would choose to be disabled. -On one hand, I totally agree with her general statement that existing as a disabled person is not an achievement. On the other hand, I'm hesitant to support the idea that being disabled is not a bad thing. I am glad that I can walk, and if I couldn't walk, or see, or hear, I'd be pretty pissed.
Rest in peace	-So very sad to hear of Stella's death on Saturday at age 32 (6th Dec, 2014). I was lucky enough to meet her a couple of times & she was a lovely person. RIP Stella, you were one of a kind. -Unfortunately, she has passed on, but this is one of the best TED talks ever.
Superficial agreements	-Stella Young is so hilarious I love it
Nonsense	-Stella, Glad you feel this way, can I have your parking spot?

Among the coding categories, those coded in (un)ironically inspired had the highest mean like count (61.1), and those coded in connecting with Stella followed closely behind (60.6), indicating a high level of engagement with comments in these categories. Comments coded in the rest in peace category also had a relatively high engagement of 41.3 mean likes. Comments in each of the other categories had relatively low mean like averages, between 0.6 (Anti-Stella) and 3.9 (mocking Stella). Table 3 displays the top seven most liked comments and their categories.

Table 3  
Seven most liked comments and categories.

Rank	Comment	Likes	Category
1	So very sad to hear of Stella's death on Saturday at age 32 (6th Dec, 2014). I was lucky enough to meet her a couple of times & she was a lovely person. RIP Stella, you were one of a kind.	1014	Rest in Peace
2	Disabled people are more disabled by our societies than our body's and our diagnosis. Wow, that's so thought provoking and powerful! I almost feel bad, because I'm inspired.	988	(Un)ironically inspired
3	I hate that when I tell people i am disabled they usually say "you don't look disabled" I didn't know disabled people had to look a certain way.	818	Connecting with Stella
4	Telling a person who has a disability that they're so brave for living their everyday life is like someone telling you that you're such an inspiration for eating cereal in the morning. It's just weird.	749	Connecting with Stella
5	I almost commented about 'if it was okay that she's now my inspiration', but then I realised that, yes, yes it is, because it's her humility and perspective on life and way of speaking that I find inspirational, not her disability.	653	(Un)ironically inspired
6	It also heaps expectations onto disabled people that they can't meet. I'm not running wheelchair marathons. I'm not playing soccer with two pair of prosthetics. I'm in so much pain I'm lucky if I can get a shower. But. All of these "inspirational" pictures, articles etc... make me a target for disgust. Even with myself. Why can't I rise up above the pain ? Above the dysfunction ? What's wrong with me ?	406	Connecting with Stella
7	I've never thought of it this way. More people should see this, it's amazing	351	(Un)ironically inspired

Among the comments, those within the category anti-Stella had the highest mean reply count at 2.4. Those categorized into connecting with Stella were closely behind at 2.2, whereas those coded into (un)ironically inspired were at 1.2. Less than one reply on average was received from the comments coded into each of the other categories. Table 4 displays the five comments that received the most replies.

Table 4  
Five comments with most replies and their categories.

Rank	Comment	Replies	Category
1	No lady, disability is a TERRIBLE thing. Nobody would choose to be disabled.	60	Anti-Stella
2	I hate that when I tell people I am disabled they usually say "you don't look disabled" I didn't know disabled people had to look a certain way.	44	Connecting with Stella
3	Disability is a BAD THING. Just find me a person who wants to lose his/her legs, vision, or whatever voluntarily. She's just lucky to be born into a highly civilized society with good support system that she doesn't feel the disadvantage. In another time another society, she may be abandoned at birth. But I agree that she's NOT inspirational. Looking at her speech and other comedian material, it's ALL about her disability. She's just capitalizing on what she's born with, not unlike any of us. Nothing extraordinary here.	20	Anti-Stella
4	Disabled people are more disabled by our societies than our bodies and our diagnosis. Wow, that's so thought provoking and powerful! I almost feel bad, because I'm inspired.	19	(Un)ironically inspired
5	So very sad to hear of Stella's death on Saturday at age 32 (6th Dec, 2014). I was lucky enough to meet her a couple of times & she was a lovely person. RIP Stella, you were one of a kind.	17	Rest in Peace

Regarding the commenters' relationship with disability, 46 (10%) were created by people who explicitly identified as disabled within their comment, 24 (5%) explicitly identified as nondisabled, and eight (2%) identified as a family member of a disabled person. For most comments (367; 82%), the second author was unable to identify any disability-related identity, and we therefore did not include them in the cross-tabulation analysis. The cross-tabulation analysis revealed interesting patterns regarding the association between these variables. Of the 46 comments from disabled people, 34 (73.9%) were categorized in the connected with Stella group. In contrast, less than half of the non-disabled group's (45.8%) observations associated with the category connected with Stella. It is noteworthy that within this group, a nearly equal portion, specifically 37.5%, fell under the category of Anti-Stella.

## DISCUSSION

In this study, we endeavored to explore the public's engagement with Stella Young's TED Talk video posted on YouTube. In exploring the public's engagement, we learned that most individuals who left public comments on the video viewed it favorably, and identified as being connected to, in agreement with, or being (un)ironically inspired by Young's talk. That is, combining each of the three explicitly favorable categories (i.e., connecting with Stella, superficial agreements, (un)ironically inspired) accounted for about 52% of the comments, which is considerably more than the sum of the two explicitly negative categories (i.e., anti-Stella, mocking Stella) at 21%. The public's positive engagement in this study is further evidenced by the high mean like count for two explicitly positive categories (i.e., connecting with Stella, (un)ironically inspired), indicating high agreement and engagement with these comments. These are encouraging findings, as it provides some empirical support for assertions that social media platforms can act as a forum for disabled people to challenge ableist ideals and invite nondisabled people to appreciate, understand and embrace disability and disabled people in society (Garland-Thomson, 2009; Ginsburg, 2020). While we would be overreaching, we believe, to suggest that these findings suggest that one YouTube video can make substantial contributions toward dismantling ableism in society, we do believe that they may help to further encourage disabled people, as suggested by Garland-Thomson (2009) and Ginsburg (2020), to utilize social media to help change the social narrative around disability.

While most of the comments which we analyzed were deemed to be positive in nature, where commenters noted learning from or connecting with the video, this was not always the case. That is, among the 445 coded comments, 64 (about 14%) were coded as anti-Stella, where the commenter explicitly disagreed with the ideas that Young presented during her TED Talk. This included a considerable proportion of comments from those who explicitly identified as nondisabled. This suggests that while Young's (2014) talk may have provided an avenue to help most of our participants connect with and appreciate new ideas about disability and disabled people (Coleman, 2010; Ellis & Kent, 2010), others were unmoved by the presentation of these new ideas. It is reasonable to suggest that Young's talk, despite its popularity and influence in disability studies fields, may not be a powerful enough force to dislodge ableist views that are embedded in the bedrock of our

society, such as that disability is inherently negative and undesirable, and should be rehabilitated, cured, or eliminated (Campbell, 2008; Hodge & Runswick-Cole, 2013). These ableist views were clearly displayed in the coded comments, which explicitly disagreed with Young's assertions that disability is not 'a bad thing' by stating that "Disability is a BAD THING" or "No lady, disability is a TERRIBLE thing. Nobody would choose to be disabled." These views, which frame disability as a deficit (Mitra, 2006) and are generally rooted in the medical model of disability discourse (Haegele & Hodge, 2016), have helped create and sustain a historical foundation for how disability and disabled people have been viewed and treated in society since the emergence of science and medicine as cognitive authority (Humpage, 2007). As such, it is perhaps not surprising that one YouTube video may not challenge and dislodge these views that are this deeply rooted in society, and clearly, more comprehensive education and advocacy on disability and disabled people, which has been advocated for by disability studies advocates for decades (Campbell, 2008; Goodley, 2016), continues to be necessary to create more substantial changes in these perspectives.

Notably, whereas some comments clearly disagreed with Young's (2014) messages, others (about 31 comments) directly mocked what Young and her comments, including personal attacks and attacks on ideas. While these comments may represent just a small percentage of the overall coded comments (about 7%), we find the aggressive nature and tone of these comments (e.g., 'Don't worry Stella. None of my inspirations are freaks of nature) disturbing and therefore important to briefly discuss. Comments like these are disappointing because, as described by Coleman (2010) and Ginsburg (2020), they appear to reproduce and perpetuate the same types of oppression and marginalization that occur in society. While further work would be needed to understand the ways in which comments like this influence disabled people's use of social media, we can speculate that negative comments like these may demotivate them to use social media to help educate nondisabled others or to interact only with an intimate number of social contacts (White & Forrester-Jones, 2020). That is, unwelcoming forums like social media that exists in a public space where users and their comments are constantly visible (Hampton, 2016) may end up being unappealing or traumatic for disabled people, who then may elect to use closed spaces with a set community (e.g., Voxer groups) to share their beliefs and thoughts

(Carpenter & Harvey, 2019). The implications here are that disabled people may continue to be silenced in this forum of society, ableist views are likely to go unchallenged, and the vision of what disability is within society will likely continue to be illustrated by nondisabled Others (Holland et al., 2023).

### **Limitations and Future Research**

There are some clear strengths to this study, including using a novel research technique to explore the public's sentiment toward disability, as well as the collection and coding of a large number of naturally occurring viewer comments. However, there are also clear limitations. First, we were unable to ascertain about 82% of the commenters' relationship to disability based on the comments, and other demographic information was largely unavailable. As such, we know little about the commenters and their biases based on the current analysis, which makes generalizing our findings to any particular population challenging. Given the nature of this study, where we examined naturally occurring comments from members of the public, this is an expected limitation. Secondly, because of our cross-sectional research design, we are unable to determine the perspectives of individuals before and after watching the YouTube video, and therefore cannot make declarative statements about the impact of video viewership on perspectives toward disability or Stella Young's views. With that being said, future research may elect to employ experimental methods to explore the Stella Young video as a mechanism for attitudinal change for members of the public to further advance this area of inquiry.

### **Concluding Thoughts**

In this paper, we explored the public's interactions and engagement with Stella Young's TED Talk video about disability, the social model, and inspiration porn. Based on our results, it is clear that Young's TED Talk elicited strong reactions from commenters. Despite many apparently gaining new insights and challenging existing knowledge, it was evident that others, particularly nondisabled viewers, experienced tension with these words. These tensions, while uncomfortable at times, are needed and necessary in order to help to challenge ableist ideas and reduce norm-based comparisons, paternalization, and social subordination associated with them (Campbell, 2019). With this in mind, we conclude our paper with the words that Young (2014) concluded her TED Talk, where she

describes an ideal world where disabled people are not viewed as inspiration for existing, and that disability is not the exception, but the norm.

I really want to live in a world where disability is not the exception, but the norm. I want to live in a world where a 15-year-girl sitting in her bedroom watching 'Buffy the Vampire Slayer' isn't referred to as achieving anything because she's doing it sitting down. I want to live in a world where we don't have such low expectations of disabled people, that we are congratulated for getting out of bed and remembering our own names in the morning. I want to live in a world where we value genuine achievement for disabled people, and I want to live in a world where a kid in year 11 in a Melbourne high school is not on bit surprised that his new teacher is a wheelchair user. Disability doesn't make you exceptional, but questioning what you think you know about it does. Thank you (Young, 2014).

## References

- Brunner, M., Hemsley, B., Palmer, S., Dann, S., & Togher, L. (2015). Review of the literature on the use of social media by people with traumatic brain injury (TBI). *Disability & Rehabilitation*, *37*(17), 1511-1521.
- Campbell, F. (2008). Refusing able(ness): A preliminary conversation about ableism. *M/C Journal*, *11*(3), Article mcj.46. <https://doi.org/10.5204/mcj.46>
- Carpenter, J. P., & Harvey, S. (2019). "There's no referee on social media": Challenges in educator professional social media use. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, *86*, 102904.
- Caton, S., & Chapman, M. (2016). The use of social media and people with intellectual disability: A systematic review. *Journal of Intellectual & Developmental Disability*, *41*(2), 125-139.
- Coleman, G. (2010). Ethnographic approaches to digital media. *Annual Review of Anthropology*, *39*, 487-505.
- Darrow, A., & Hairston, M. (2016). Inspiration porn: A qualitative analysis of comments on musicians with disabilities found on international YouTube posts. *Proceedings of the 21<sup>st</sup> International Seminary of the ISME Commission on Special Music Education and Music Therapy*. International Society of Music Education.
- Ellis, K., & Kent, M. (2010). *Disability & New Media*. Routledge.
- French, L., & Le Clair, J. M. (2018). Game changer? Social media, representations of disability and the paralympic games. In I. Brittain, & A. Beacom (Eds), *The Palgrave handbook of Paralympic studies* (pp. 99–121). Palgrave Macmillan London.
- Gagliardi, K. (2017). Facebook captions: Kindness or Inspiration Porn? *M/C Journal*, *20*(3), <https://doi.org/10.5204/mcj.1258>

- Garland-Thomson, R. (2002). The politics of staring: Visual rhetorics of disability in popular photography. In S. L. Snyder, B. J. Brueggemann, & R. G. Thomson (Eds.), *Disability studies: Enabling the humanities* (pp. 56–75). Modern Language Association of America.
- Garland-Thomson, R. (2009). *Staring: How we look*. Oxford University Press.
- Ginsburg, F. (2020). Disability in the digital age. In H.A. Horst and D. Miller (Eds.), *Digital Anthropology* (pp. 101-126). Routledge.
- Goodley, D. (2016). *Disability studies: An interdisciplinary introduction*. Sage.
- Grue, J. (2016). The problem with inspiration porn: A tentative definition and a provisional critique. *Disability & Society*, 31(6), 838-849.
- Haegele, J.A., & Hodge, S.R. (2016) Disability discourse: Overview and critiques of the medical and social models. *Quest*, 68(2), 193-206.  
<https://doi.org/10.1080/00336297.2016.1143849>
- Hampton, K.N. (2016). Persistent and pervasive community: New communication technologies and the future of community. *American Behavioral Scientist*, 60(1), 101-124.
- Hennig-Thurau, T., Malhotra, E. C., Frieger, C., Gensler, S., Lobschat, L., Rangaswamy, A., & Skiera, B. (2010). The Impact of New Media on Customer Relationships. *Journal of Service Research*, 13(3), 311-330.  
<https://doi.org/10.1177/1094670510375460>
- Hodge, N., & Runswick-Cole, K. (2013). “They never pass me the ball”: Exposing ableism through the leisure experiences of disabled children, young people, and their families. *Children’s Geographies*, 11(3), 311-325.  
<https://doi.org/10.1080/14733285.2013.812275>
- Holland, K., Holland, S., & Haegele, J.A. (2023). Inspirational and worthy of charity: (Mis)representations of disability in sport media. *Communication & Sport*. Epub available ahead of print: <https://doi.org/10.1177/21674795231170542>
- Hsieh, H., & Shannon, S.E. (2005). Three approaches to qualitative content analysis. *Qualitative Health Research*, 15(9), 1277-1288.  
<https://doi.org/10.1177/1049732305276687>
- Hull, K., & Lewis, N. P. (2014). Why twitter displaces broadcast sports media: A model. *International Journal of Sport Communication*, 7(1), 16–33.
- Humphreys, A., & Wang, R. J. H. (2018). Automated text analysis for consumer research. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 44(6), 1274-1306.
- Lee, E.H., & Cho, J. (2019). Social media use and well-being in people with physical disabilities: Influences of SNS and online community uses on social support, depression, and psychological disposition. *Health Communication*, 34(9), 1043-1052.
- Mamo, Y. Z. (2023). Big Data and Innovative Research Methods. *International Journal of Sport Communication*, 1, 1-9.
- Martin, J.J. (2019). Mastery and belonging or inspiration porn and bullying: Special populations in youth sport. *Kinesiology Review*, 8(3), 195-203.
- Oliver, M., & Barnes, C. (2012). *The new politics of disablement*. Palgrave Macmillan.
- Saxton, G. D., Ren, C., & Guo, C. (2021). Responding to diffused stakeholders on social media: Connective power and firm reactions to CSR-related Twitter messages. *Journal of Business Ethics*, 172, 229-252.

- Schalk, S. (2021). Black disability gone viral: A critical race approach to inspiration porn. *CLA Journal*, 64(1), 100-120.
- Shelton, S.S., & Waddell, T.F. (2021). Does inspiration porn inspire? How disability and challenge impact attitudinal evaluations of advertising. *Journal of Current Issues & Research in Advertising*, 42(3), 258-276.
- Silva, C. F., & Howe, P. D. (2012). The (In)validity of Supercrip representation of Paralympian athletes. *Journal of Sport and Social Issues*, 36(2), 174–194.
- Strauss, A., & Corbin, J. (1998). *Basics of qualitative research: Techniques and procedures for developing grounded theory*. Sage.
- White, P., & Forrester-Jones, R. (2020). Valuing e-inclusion: Social media and the social networks of adolescents with intellectual disability. *Journal of Intellectual Disabilities*, 24(3), 381-397.
- Young, S. (June 9, 2014). I'm not your inspiration, thank you very much. Retrieved from [https://www.ted.com/talks/stella\\_young\\_i\\_m\\_not\\_your\\_inspiration\\_thank\\_you](https://www.ted.com/talks/stella_young_i_m_not_your_inspiration_thank_you)
- 

### **Funding and Acknowledgements**

The authors declare no funding sources or conflicts of interest.

### **Online Connections**

Justin Haegele: @Justin\_Haegele on X

Yoseph Mamo: @YosephZemedede on X