

# Inspiration Porn, Please Stop: Disability Services' Role in Promoting the Social Model of Disability

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STUDENT AFFAIRS

# Who am I?

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2nd Year M.S.  
Student Affairs in  
Higher Education  
~  
Anticipated  
Graduation  
May, 2017

Assistant Resident Director,  
Office of Residence Life  
  
Student Disability Services  
Practicum Student  
  
Disability Studies  
Co-Instructor

20 year long  
wheelchair user  
  
Spinal Muscular  
Atrophy II

# Why am I here?

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To inform on a topic I think is running rampant in our society

To initiate dialogue on the social model of disability in our field

To offer my my perspective as a disabled individual

# I am not here...

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Because I know  
everything about  
this topic

To say my opinion  
is the only valid  
one and correct  
one

To speak for all  
disabled people

# Learning Objectives

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1

Understand and describe what inspiration porn is in today's society

2

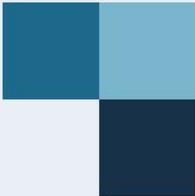
Articulate the difference between the medical and social model of disability

3

Develop ideas around stopping the growth and popularity of inspiration porn through the work of their office

4

Conceptualize role of promoting the social model of disability while working in a predominantly medical model focused field



# Your poll will show here

**1**

Install the app from  
[pollev.com/app](https://pollev.com/app)

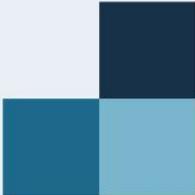
**2**

Make sure you are in  
Slide Show mode

Still not working? Get help at [pollev.com/app/help](https://pollev.com/app/help)

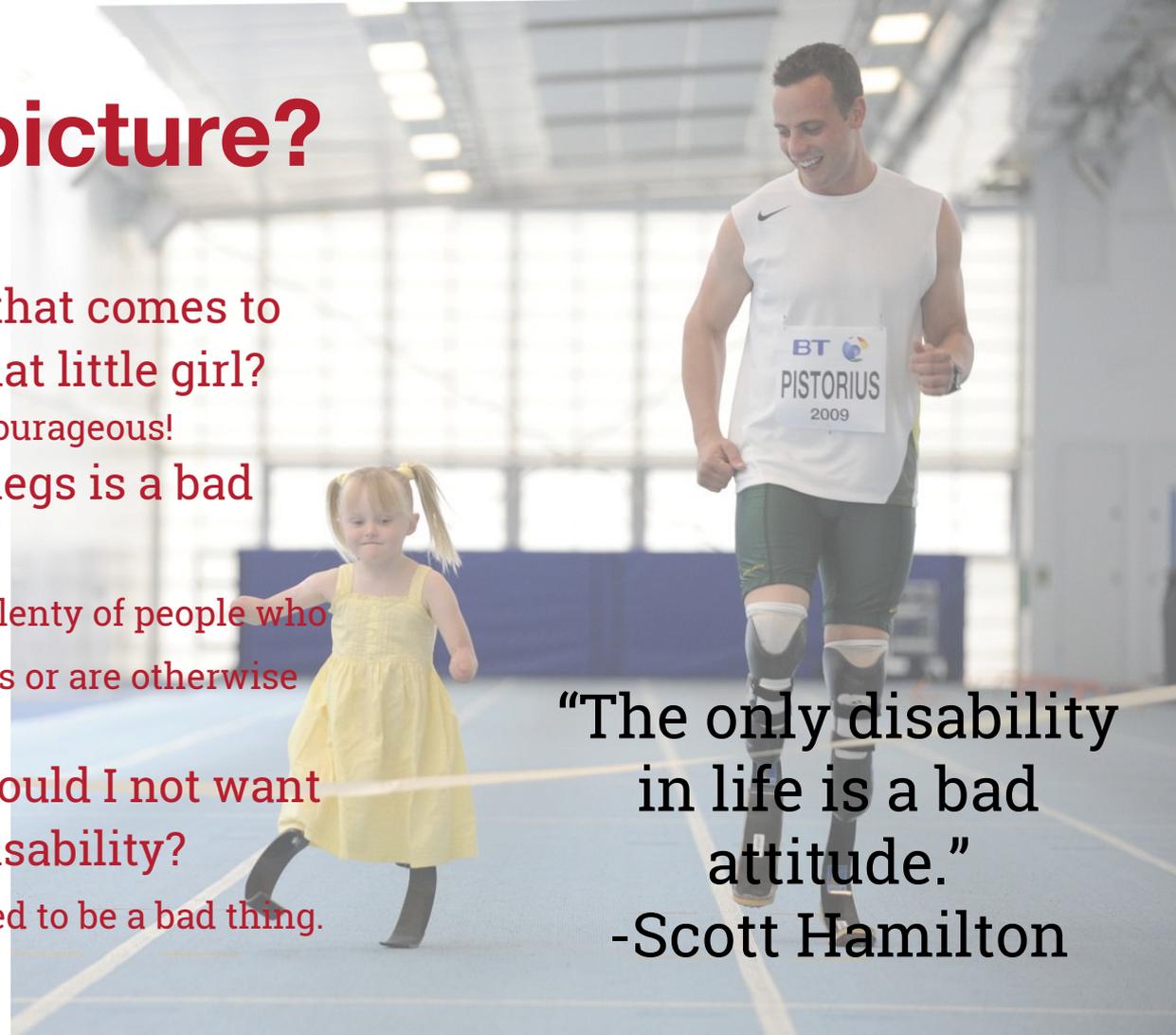
*or*

[Open poll in your web browser](#)



# What is this picture?

- What's the first word that comes to mind when you see that little girl?
  - ◆ Inspirational, happy, courageous!
- Obviously, having no legs is a bad thing. Right?
  - ◆ Not really. There are plenty of people who have no legs or no arms or are otherwise disabled.
- And why, precisely, would I not want to be defined by my disability?
  - ◆ Disability is constructed to be a bad thing.



**“The only disability  
in life is a bad  
attitude.”  
-Scott Hamilton**

## Setting the stage





# Stella Young

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- Passed away in December of 2014
- “I really want to live in a world where **disability is not the exception, but the norm.**”
- “It’s not a bad thing, and it **doesn’t make you exceptional.**”
- “I wasn’t doing anything that could be considered an achievement **if you took disability out of the equation.**”

# Inspiration Porn Defined

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## Porn Defined as



- Sensationalizing and objectifying a group of people

## Inspiration Porn



- Inspiration porn is when disabled people are called inspirational or brave for doing anything that able bodied people do.

# Based off the premise that

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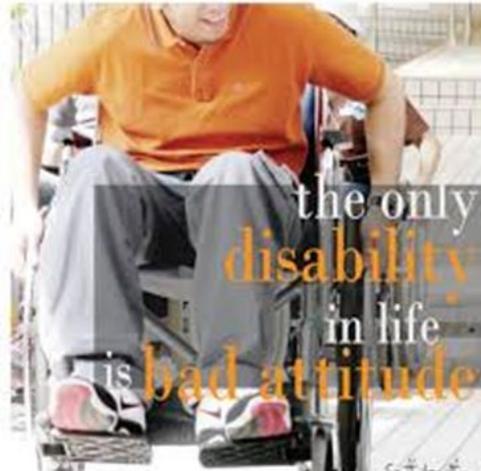
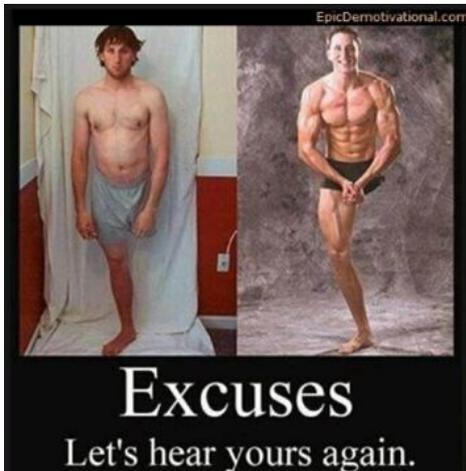
## Disabled people

- Must have it so much worse than the rest of society.
- “Well, if she can get up in the morning and do this without complaining, so can I!”
  - ◆ Underlying assumptions that complaining is occurring

# “You’re so inspiring!”

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- For just being you?
- What makes getting out of bed in the morning and going to the gym so inspiring? Nondisabled people do it.
- Inspires nondisabled people to feel good about their lives and makes them do something. Disabled people are **not** tools.



# Why is it so bad if someone with a disability motivates me to become a better person?

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They are not doing anything particularly motivating

~

No societal expectations

They don't exist to motivate you

Reducing a human being – and a stranger, at that – to “inspiring” or “brave” is problematic

# How we/society view(s) disability

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## Medical Model

- Deficiency
- Personal problem
- The goal is to cure or fix
- The cure requires professional intervention
- Professionals are the experts

## Social Model

- Neutral difference
- Interaction between the individual and environment
- Focus is on the environment/ attitudes
- Access facilitated by everyone (designer)

# Medical vs. Social Model of Disability

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Her **impairment** is the problem!  
They should cure her or give her prosthetics.

The *medical model* of disability



The **stairs** are the problem!  
They should build a ramp.

The *social model* of disability

INSPIRATION

**Inspiration Porn  
in our Society**

PEOPLE WITH

DISABILITIES



# **Me Before You (2016)**

**1. Have you seen this film?**

**2. What message does it send?**

**3. Why was it so popular?**

# Traditional Disability Stereotypes

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- Object of charity
- A fate to be feared
- A fate worse than death
- Our heroes

**And these come from...**

- Language
- Media
- Social construction

DON'T  
STEREOTYPE  
ME  
ME  
STEREOTYPE  
DON'T

# Jerika Bolen

- Cheering her on to die
- Where's the suicide prevention hotline?
- Better dead than disabled.
- What's the message this sends to other adolescents who want to die?
  - ◆ If only they had a disability they could have a parade.



# What's the message?

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# High school QB takes friend with Down syndrome to the prom

- A person with Down syndrome is given some award or nice treatment by their peers, and the coverage fixates on how that makes those peers feel great.
- The articles use the word “friendship,” even though there’s no indication that the two have an ongoing reciprocally rewarding relationship.
- Has he seen her since the fourth grade? Do they hang out together? What does Mary think?



# Couple with Down Syndrome go to Homecoming

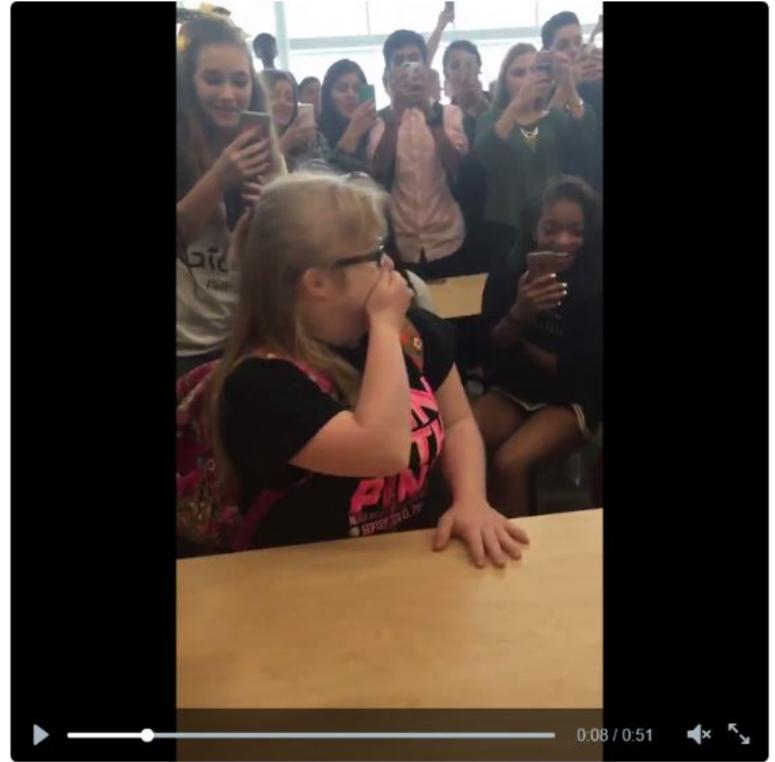
→ Would this be a newsworthy story if the teenagers were nondisabled? People of color? Members of the LGBTQA community?



stephanie zagurski™  
@StephanieZag

Follow

if anyones having a bad day, heres a video of jake asking emily to homecoming 😊🙏



RETWEETS  
33,490

LIKES  
59,678



10:55 AM - 23 Sep 2016

INSPIRATION

**Where do we  
go from here?**

PEOPLE WITH

DISABILITIES

## **Group Discussion:**

**What are 2 strategies to stop inspiration porn on your campus?**

# How do we stop inspiration porn?

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## → Educate

- ◆ Find venues to show Stella Young
- ◆ Pay attention to language we use
- ◆ Take time to educate oneself on ally behavior

## → Activism to eliminate physical barriers

- ◆ Goal being to not have distinction between disabled and nondisabled
- ◆ Insist on universal design on campuses
- ◆ Educate faculty on UDL in classroom
  - Workshops for faculty and staff

→ Challenge family/friends/colleagues on what they believe is “inspirational”

→ Stop reposting inspiration porn

→ Comment and educate on social media when visible

→ **LISTEN** to the disability community

LISTEN

# Disability Services Role

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- Decreased distinction between disabled and nondisabled by promoting UD and UDL
- Attention to language use in campus marketing/brochures
- Creating disability pride student organizations
  - ◆ Awareness/advocacy campaigns
- Creating an inclusive environment (safe space) where university community can explore disability rights
- Developing materials for dissemination about disability law and Disability Studies
- Educate about disability as human diversity not as deviance



***“Inspiration porn turns the disabled individual into an object for your (nondisabled) consumption.”***



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## Questions?

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