# Ableism Definition

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## Academic Resources

### [The capability imperative: Theorizing ableism in medical education](https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/36413858/)

Defined ableism as a system: “a network of beliefs, processes and practices that produce a particular kind of self and body (the corporeal standard) that is projected as perfect, species-typical and therefore essential and fully human.”

### [Ableism and workplace discrimination among youth and young adults with disabilities: A Systematic Review](https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/35976480/)

“People with disabilities are considered one of the world’s largest minority groups who experience persistent disability-related discrimination (ie. Ableism), which refers to unwanted, exploitative or abusive conduct against disabled people that violates their dignity and security or creates intimidating or offensive environments”

“Ableism often results in psychological privileges for people without disabilities and can have disadvantages for people with disabilities”

### [Outsider privileges can lead to insider disadvantages: some psychosocial aspects of ableism](https://spssi-onlinelibrary-wiley-com.proxy.library.carleton.ca/doi/full/10.1111/josi.12331)

“Ableism entails biased ideas and assumptions, as well as prejudicial attitudes and discriminatory acts, aimed at people with disabilities”

“Ableism involves prejudicial attitudes and discriminatory behaviours directed at disabled persons by nondisabled individuals”

### [Ableism special issue introduction](https://spssi-onlinelibrary-wiley-com.proxy.library.carleton.ca/doi/10.1111/josi.12354)

“Ableism is the ideas, practices, institutions and social relations that presume able-bodiedness, and by doing so, construct persons with disabilities as marginalized and largely invisible ‘others’”

### [“You Look Fine!”: Ableist experiences by people with invisible disabilities](https://journals-sagepub-com.proxy.library.carleton.ca/doi/pdf/10.1177/0886109918778073)

“Ableism is the overarching act of prejudice and/or discrimination against disabled people and the devaluation of disability and corresponds with able-bodied/neurotypical privilege, the set of unearned privileges held by non-disabled individuals.”

“Ableism values physical, emotional and mental capital, following socially constructed expectations of ability.”

“Ableism results in a compulsory able-bodiedness, demanding that disabled individuals do whatever it takes to enact a nondisabled identity however possible.”

### [Navigating post-secondary institutions in Ontario with a learning disability: the pursuit of accommodations](https://cjds.uwaterloo.ca/index.php/cjds/article/view/186)

“Together, labels and attitudes create a sense of ‘otherness’ that becomes rationale for treating those with disabilities differently. This different treatment has been characterized as ableism, which refers to the pervasive existence in society of negative opinions and prejudice against people with disabilities. Ableism serves as a persistent source of injustice, excluding people with disabilities from meaningful education, employment and other opportunities. The power imbalances and inequalities, or prevailing ruling relations, underscore these problems as wider social norms.”

### [Infusing disability equity within rehabilitation education and practice: A qualitative study of lived experiences of ableism, allyship, and healthcare partnership](https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/36188899/)

Ableism is: “the normalized preference for certain abilities and sustained discrimination against and oppression of people with ways of being, functioning, and in some cases, simply appearing (such as individuals with facial scarring) that are viewed as non-typical by the sociocultural norms of a given society. Ableism thus encompasses prejudice, stereotypes, and bias against disability at the individual level as well as the institutionalization of systemic advantages and privileges granted to those whose bodies and minds conform to societal expectations, creating what some scholars have described as a ‘compulsory preference for non-disability.”

### [The Canada Disability Benefit: Battling Ableism in Design and Implementation by Jennifer Robson and Lindsay M. Tedds](C://Users/emilystone3/Downloads/SSRN-id4344082.pdf)

“Ableism starts by imagining a lack of disability as the normal or default state for members of society and permits, or even promotes, the unequal or inferior treatment of persons with disabilities. It is a form of prejudice and discrimination towards persons categorized as disabled. At the institutional level, it may manifest as discriminatory and harmful policy and programmatic decisions that reduce the inclusion and well-being of persons with disabilities.”

### [The Politics of Ableism by Gregor Wolbring](https://link.springer.com/article/10.1057/dev.2008.17)

“Ableism is a set of beliefs, processes and practices that produce – based on abilities one exhibits or values – a particular understanding of oneself, one’s body and one’s relationship with others of humanity, other species and the environment, and includes how one is judged by others. Ableism reflects the sentiment of certain social groups and social structures that value and promote certain abilities, for example, productivity and competitiveness, over others, such as empathy, compassion and kindness. This preference for certain abilities over others leads to a labelling of real or perceived deviations from or lack of ‘essential’ abilities as a diminished state of being, leading or contributing to justifying various other isms.”

### [Eliminating Ableism in Education by Thomas Hehir](https://meridian.allenpress.com/her/article-abstract/72/1/1/31802/Eliminating-Ableism-in-Education)

Thomas Hehir defines ableism as “the devaluation of disability that results in societal attitudes that uncritically assert that it is better for a child to walk than roll, speak than sign, read print than read Braille, spell independently than use spell-check, and hang out with nondisabled kids as opposed to other disabled kids.”

### [Ableism in the medical profession by Shane Neilson](https://www.cmaj.ca/content/192/15/E411.short)

“The term ableism can be defined as practices or policies that treat people with disabilities as if they were invisible, disposable and less than human, while taking for granted able-bodiedness as humanity’s default state.”

### [Exploring experiences of ableism in academia: a constructivist inquiry](https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s10734-021-00739-y)

“Ableism is a set of beliefs that guide cultural and institutional practices ascribing negative values to individuals with disabilities whilst deeming able-bodied and able-minded individuals as normal, therefore superior to their disabled counterparts. In this sense, ableism is an ‘umbrella ism for other isms’ with disability being cast as a diminished state of being human. Thus, bodies and minds must conform to dominant standards or become devalued and flawed.”

### [Grammars of ableism: dialogues in the folds between disability, gender, childhood, and adolescence](https://www.scielo.br/j/csc/a/pvR4YxRFZzcpNdPCZ6YCwLw/?lang=en)

Two ways of interpreting ableism:

“First, in the sense of ‘discrimination’ against disabled people, that is, ‘when a person does not see with their eyes, does not hear with their ears, and does not walk like a biped, they are read as ‘deficient’ and starts to be culturally perceived as ‘incapable.

Second, as a ‘structure’ of oppression marked by the imperative of the device of ‘compulsory able-bodiedness’, which naturalizes and hierarchizes capacities by the shape, appearance, and functioning of bodies for what is normal, healthy, beautiful, productive, useful, independent, and able.”

“We conceive ableism as ‘a bodily and behavioural normativity based on the premise of a total functionality of the individual in which the natural is to have a body without disabilities, diseases, or any other apparent ‘defects’’.”

## Government and For Profit/Non-Profit Organizations

### [Ontario Human Rights Commission](https://www.ohrc.on.ca/en/policy-ableism-and-discrimination-based-disability/2-what-disability)

“[Ableism] may be defined as a belief system, analogous to racism, sexism or ageism, that sees persons with disabilities as being less worthy of respect and consideration, less able to contribute and participate, or of less inherent value than others. Ableism may be conscious or unconscious and may be embedded in institutions, systems, or the broader culture of society. It can limit the opportunities of persons with disabilities and reduce their inclusion in the life of their communities.”

“An ableist belief system often underlies negative attitudes, stereotypes and stigma toward people with disabilities. Ableism refers to attitudes in society that devalue and limit the potential of persons with disability.”

### [The Center for Disability Rights](https://cdrnys.org/blog/uncategorized/ableism/)

“Ableism is a set of beliefs or practices that devalue and discriminate against people with physical, intellectual or psychiatric disabilities and often rests on the assumption that disabled people need to be ‘fixed’ in one form or the other. Ableism is intertwined in our culture, due to many limiting beliefs about what disability does or does not mean, how able-bodied people learn to treat people with disabilities and how we are often not included at the table for key decisions.”

### [Inclusion Canada](https://inclusioncanada.ca/this-is-ableism/#:~:text=Ableism%20is%20the%20belief%20that,on%20the%20basis%20of%20disability)

#ThisIsAbleism

“Ableism is the belief that it is ‘normal’ to not have a disability and that ‘normal’ is preferred. It’s discrimination on the basis of disability.”

### [Government of Canada: Inclusive Language Considerations](https://www.canada.ca/en/employment-social-development/programs/accessible-canada-regulations-guidance/consultation/inclusive-language.html#h2.2)

“Ableism is a view or attitude that treats people without disabilities as ‘normal’ and those with disabilities as ‘abnormal’, ‘inferior’, or ‘other’. Ableism can be both intentional and unintentional.”

### [Public Health Ontario: Creative Inclusive Communities for People Who Have a Developmental Disability](https://www.ontario.ca/page/creating-inclusive-communities-people-who-have-developmental-disability#section-1)

“Ableism refers to discrimination towards persons who have disabilities, including people who have developmental disabilities. It can be through actions as well as underlying beliefs and attitudes. Ableism involves systemic barriers as well as person-to-person interactions, stereotypes and negative attitudes that devalue and limit the potential of persons with disabilities. Ableism can be conscious or unconscious and is embedded in institutions, systems and the broader culture of society.”

### [Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act](https://www.aoda.ca/what-is-ableism/)

“Ableism is the belief that people with disabilities have less worth than people without disabilities. For instance, some people may hold the false belief that people with disabilities matter less than non-disabled people because they think:

* People with disabilities cannot contribute to society
* People with disabilities need help from non-disabled people, who are more important
* Certain movements, senses, or thought processes are needed for everyday activities”

### [American Psychology Association](https://www.apa.org/ed/precollege/psychology-teacher-network/introductory-psychology/ableism-negative-reactions-disability)

“Ableism – prejudice and discrimination aimed at disabled people, often with a patronizing desire to ‘cure’ their disability and make them ‘normal’”

“Ableism, either subtly or directly, portrays individuals who are being defined by their disabilities as inherently inferior to nondisabled people.”

### [Sense](https://www.sense.org.uk/information-and-advice/ableism-and-disablism/)

“Ableism is a word for unfairly favouring non-disabled people.”

“Ableism means prioritising the needs of non-disabled people. In an ableist society, it’s assumed that the ‘normal’ way to live is as a non-disabled person.”

“It is ableist to believe that non-disabled people are more valuable to society than disabled people.”

“Disablism is a word for negative opinions, behaviour or abuse against disabled people.”

### [York University: Ableism](https://www.yorku.ca/edu/unleading/ableism/)

“Ableism is the privileging of ability and results in the oppression of disabled people based upon real or perceived impairments. It ‘others’ disabilities, chronic illnesses, and neurological or mental illness.”

“Ableism is a network of beliefs, processes and practices that produces a particular kind of self and body (the corporeal standard) that is projected as perfect and species-typical, and therefore essential and fully human. Disability then is cast as a diminished state of being human.”

### [The Alberta Teachers’ Association](https://cmailcarletonca-my.sharepoint.com/personal/emilystone3_cmail_carleton_ca/Documents/Forms/Document/Ableism%20Definition.docx)

Ableism: “a largely unconscious acceptance of able-bodied privilege and sense of normal that does not need to be defined, normal is recognizable, and ‘we know it when we see it’. As a society, we have been conditioned to privilege those who are ‘normal’ – however, elusive the definition – and to pity, shun or overlook individuals who do not fall into that category.”

### [CIHR glossary of terms used in accessibility and systemic ableism](https://cihr-irsc.gc.ca/e/documents/asa_glossary_terms_accessibility_systemic-ableism-en.pdf)

“Ableism refers to prejudiced thoughts and discriminatory actions based on differences in physical, mental, and/or emotional ability; usually that of able-bodied/minded persons against people with illness, disabilities or less developed skills.”

### [National Center on Disability and Journalism: Disability Language Style Guide](https://ncdj.org/style-guide/)

Ableism: “Any statement or behaviour directed at a disabled person that denigrates or assumes a lesser status for the person because of their disability. Social habits, practices, regulations, laws, and institutions that operate under the assumption that disabled people are inherently less capable overall, less valuable in society, and/or should have less personal autonomy than is ordinarily granted to people of the same age.”

### [Canadian Hearing Society: Beyond Ableism and Audism: Achieving Human Rights For Deaf and Hard of Hearing Citizens](https://www.chs.ca/sites/default/files/uploads/beyond_ableism_and_audism_2013july.pdf)

“Ableism describes prejudicial attitudes and discriminatory behaviours toward persons with a disability. Definitions of ableism hinge on one’s understanding of normal ability and the rights and benefits afforded to persons deemed normal. Some persons believe it is ableism that prevents disabled people from participating in the social fabric of their communities, rather than impairments in physical, mental, or emotional ability. Ableism includes attitudes and behaviours emanating from individuals, communities, and institutions as well as from physical and social environments.”

### [Western University: Centre for Research and Education on Violence Against Women and Children](https://www.vawlearningnetwork.ca/our-work/issuebased_newsletters/issue-27/index.html)

“Ableism and ableist views are ideas/beliefs that are based on the assumption that the ‘able-body’ is favoured/preferred over the disabled body. Similar to the experience of racism, homophobia/transphobia and sexism, socially constructed characteristics of disability position people with disabilities as an ‘inferior’ group to non-disabled people.”

### [DisAbled Women’s Network of Canada: Girls Without Barriers](https://dawncanada.net/media/uploads/page_data/page-64/girls_without_barriers.pdf)

“Ableism: a system of oppression that discriminates against people with disabilities due to the fact that they do not correspond to social (Western) standards of physical, physiological, neurotypical capacities etc. Ableism can take the form of ideas and assumptions, stereotypes, attitudes, practices, physical barriers in the environment, or oppression on a broader scale.”

### [Access Living: Ableism 101](https://www.accessliving.org/newsroom/blog/ableism-101/)

“Ableism is the discrimination of and social prejudice against people with disabilities based on the belief that typical abilities are superior. At its heart, ableism is rooted in the assumption that disabled people require ‘fixing’ and defines people by their disability. Like racism and sexism, ableism classifies entire groups of people as ‘less than’ and includes harmful stereotypes, misconceptions, and generalizations of people with disabilities.”

## Media

### Books

#### [Taussig, Rebekah. Sitting Pretty: The View From My Ordinary Resilient Body. HarperOne; 2020.](https://rebekahtaussig.com/portfolio/sitting-pretty/)

“Ableism is the process of favouring, fetishizing and building the world around a mostly, imagined, idealized body while discriminating against those bodies perceived to move, see, hear, process, operate, look or need differently from that vision.”

### Videos

#### [Ted Talk: Purposeful Steps Away From Ableism by Alyson Seale](https://www.ted.com/talks/alyson_seale_purposeful_steps_away_from_ableism)

“Ableism is the superiority of able-bodied, able-minded people over people with bodies and minds that fall outside of the definition that we consider normal.”

#### [United Nations Human Rights: What is Ableism?](https://vimeo.com/492480733)

“Ableism is a form of discrimination based on a value system that considers certain body and mind characteristics as essential for living a fulfilling life and assumes that the quality of life of people with disabilities must be very low.”

#### [Move United: What is Ableism?](https://www.google.com/search?rlz=1C5CHFA_enCA846CA846&sxsrf=APwXEdeINRiZk7nBTJ6JjeEBH7EDqePV3w:1686838809052&q=ableism+explained&tbm=vid&sa=X&ved=2ahUKEwi6xIagvMX_AhVZKlkFHeXGBoQQ0pQJegQICxAB&biw=810&bih=692&dpr=2#fpstate=ive&vld=cid:5d766871,vid:DTwFFuCXyGk)

“Ableism is when an individual is excluded or treated differently because of a disability.”

### News Articles

#### [The Canadian Teacher: The Problem With Ableism](https://canadianteachermagazine.com/2022/09/26/11465/)

“Ableism is a form of discrimination against people with disabilities and is rooted in beliefs about ‘normal’, ‘typical’, and ‘average’ abilities. Based on practices of assessment and classification, the abilities of disabled people, whether physical, emotional, or cognitive, are ranked and often considered less favourable than the abilities of non-disabled people. Like racism and sexism, ableism leads to misconceptions and the justification of stereotypes that build barriers to the inclusion of disabled people.”

#### [Forbes: Words Matter, And It’s Time To Explore The Meaning Of “Ableism” by Andrew Pulrang](https://www.forbes.com/sites/andrewpulrang/2020/10/25/words-matter-and-its-time-to-explore-the-meaning-of-ableism/?sh=75008207162d)

“Ableism is any statement or behaviour directed at a disabled person that denigrates or assumes a lesser status for the person because of their disability.”

#### [Africa Renewal: ‘The Biggest Challenge Is Ableism, Not My Disability’ by Franck Kuwonu](https://www.un.org/africarenewal/magazine/august-2021/%E2%80%98-biggest-challenge-ableism-not-my-disability%E2%80%99)

Quote by Haben Girma: “Ableism is the systemic oppression of disabled people, the actions and beli*efs labelling them as inferior to other people.”*

### Infographics

#### [Western University: Intersecting Oppressions Shape Experiences of IPV Faced by Women with Disabilities](https://www.vawlearningnetwork.ca/our-work/infographics/intersecting_oppressions_shape_experiences_of_ipv_faced_by_women_with_disabilities/IPV-Infographic-LearningNetwork.pdf)

“Ableism is a set of discriminatory beliefs that positions individuals with disabilities as inferior. It can result in violence that occurs at multiple levels (e.g. individual, institutional, state).

### Twitter

#### Working Definition by TL Lewis (@TalilaLewis)

This definition was developed in community with disabled Black/negatively racialized folk, especially Dustin Gibson (@NotThreeFifths). Updated January 2022.

“Ableism is a system of assigned value to people’s bodies and minds based on socially 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 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.”

#### Definition by @DisabledAmerica

“Ableism is the discrimination and social prejudice against people with disabilities based on the belief that typical abilities are superior. At its heart, ableism is rooted in the assumption that disabled people require ‘fixing’ and defines people by their disability. Like racism and sexism, ableism classifies entire groups of people as ‘less than’ and includes harmful stereotypes, misconceptions and generalizations of people with disabilities.”

#### List of Popular Hashtags

#Accessibility

#Disability

#DisabilityC19

#ThisIsAbleism

#AbleTo

## Disablism

### [Ableism and disablism – how to spot them and how we can do better](https://theconversation.com/ableism-and-disablism-how-to-spot-them-and-how-we-can-all-do-better-204541)

* Ableism and disablism both refer to types of disability discrimination.
* Whereas ableism is discrimination that favours “able-bodied” people, disablism is the inherent belief that people with disability are inferior to those without disability. Disablism is discrimination against people with disability and is usually a more direct, conscious act of discrimination and abuse. Using disability slurs, ignoring someone, or speaking in a patronising way are common examples of disablism.

### [Dolmage, Jay Timothy. Academic Ableism. University of Michigan Press; 2017.](https://doi.org/10.3998/mpub.9708722)

Dolmage compares disablism to ableism:

“Disablism can be defined as a set of assumptions (conscious or unconscious) and practices that promote the differential or unequal treatment of people because of actual or presumed disabilities. Disablism negatively constructs disability. Disablism negatively constructs the values and the material circumstances around people with disabilities. Disablism says that there could be nothing worse than being disabled, and treats disabled people unfairly as a result of these values.”

“Ableism, on the other hand, instead of situating disability as bad and focusing on that stigma, positively values able-bodiedness. In fact, ableism makes able-bodiedness and able-mindedness compulsory. Disablism constructs disability as negative quite directly and literally. Ableism renders disability as abject, invisible, disposable, less than human, while able-bodiedness is represented as at once ideal, normal and the mean or default.”

### [Unveiling ableism and disablism in assessment: a critical analysis of disabled students’ experiences of assessment and assessment accommodations](https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC9077029/)

* Disablism is a set of practices that “promotes a differential or unequal treatment of people because of actual or presumed disabilities”
* Goodley (2014) argues that ableism provides the “temperature and nutrients for disablism to grow”
* Disablism themes in education:
  + Internalized ableism and stigmatization
  + Denying accommodations or not organizations them properly
  + Hassle and fight
  + Disclosure – again and again
  + Opting out and failing