

Diamond Alexander  
LIS 4700  
Reflection 2

## **Reflections on the Importance of Personal Stories & Narratives in Inclusive Library Collections**

I selected four resources from the list and gained several new insights and perspectives from each creator on the topics of disability as performance, representation, normalization, and identity. Zipporah Arielle's Medium article was impactful for me because it is rightly critical of society's perpetuation of Disability™, a predictable brand of what illness and impairment is supposed to look like that when deviated from, confuses and even enrages some. Arielle writes, "No matter what someone else thinks disabled 'looks like,' it doesn't change my reality of being disabled, and needing accessibility and medical care." This statement is at the heart of this mismatch between nondisabled people's concept of disability and the disabled community's lived experience. The author's praise for a selection of authentic representations of disabilities by celebrities, models, and other professionals was touching. Maayan Ziv's acceptance speech tied in well with Arielle's article because she also questions the lack of diverse disability representation (or disability representation at all) in culture. "Why don't we read about successful entrepreneurs who've IPO'd or scientists who've made major breakthroughs...with disabilities?" Ziv asks the audience. Her speech was also impactful to me because she reminds us all that accessibility is not just about a checking off a list or staying in compliance; it's a

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mindset and one that when authentically integrated into our actions & behaviors can help us create an inclusive world for everyone.

Wanting to read more about disability identity, I chose Erica Mones' article and her narrative stood out to me because of the candor and vulnerability with which she relayed her experiences. I appreciated that she was critical of those who pushed back against her choice to use identity-first language, revealing that they were primarily nondisabled people, and I resonated with her perspective that "because disability doesn't negate my personhood, there's no reason to emphasize that I am a person before my disability." It is evident that she is a person and since she doesn't view disability as an inherently negative attribute, there's no need to create a semantic separation between her personhood and her disability. That was incredibly poignant to me. I also read Cara Liebowitz' article on identity-first language and there were two key things that I took from her writing. First, I thought her negation of disability as an "accessory pack" to a person "standard action figure" was brilliant and framed it as an analogy that many people can understand. Second, I was struck by her explanation of the biosocial view of disability, stating that while impairments may limit disabled people, society is what actually enables or disables someone based on what is happening in the environment. This model of disability is more complex, in my

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opinion, than some of the others but I also think this nuance is crucial to helping us as a society develop into a more inclusive one much more rapidly.

From the readings and media I selected, a few important themes emerged - ones that I would love to see better reflected in library collections. For the purpose of this reflection, I am looking at these themes through the lens of public library collection development.

### **Theme 1: Authentic, diverse representation**

Many of the women in the resources I selected reflected upon the dissonance they experience when they reflect upon their own disability status or identity and see the dearth of corresponding, authentic representation in the world. To address this, I would seek out resources that highlight disabled people in less commonly represented fields or professions like CEOs or scientists, as Maayan Ziv mentions, as well as narratives from people who were born disabled in addition to those who became disabled at a later time in their life. I would also intentionally acquire materials for the collection that were created by disabled people in solidarity with the "Nothing About Us Without Us" movement.

### **Theme 2: Disability identity**

Another theme I took from the readings was the concept of disability identity. It is always a good reminder that different communities and individuals prefer different

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forms of identification, but one commonality is that many see their disability as an inextricable, non-negative part of who they are. To address this, I would source materials that feature both person-first and identity-first language with a critical eye toward materials that attempt to disparage either view. I would also want to have items that feature disabled people with a diversity of intersecting identities because as some of the authors I read state, they view their disability in concert with their other identities as a woman, as a person of faith, etc.

### **Theme 3: Normalization**

The last theme I want to discuss in this reflection is the theme of normalization. While not explicitly expressed using this term, many of the authors shared their negative experiences with people “policing” their actions as a disabled person, encountering pushback from educators when attempting to learn alongside nondisabled people, and sharing their vision of a truly inclusive world. This is a subtopic of disability awareness that I am personally interested in and would address this in a library collection by providing materials in a variety of formats by default (e.g. large print, braille, talking books, eBooks), diligently monitoring access to materials (e.g. awareness of shelving heights and spacing; ensuring headphones are available and playback devices are in working condition; advocating for WCAG accessibility compliance if it is lacking in vendor-sourced materials), and incorporating collection

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items created by disabled people that are specifically on topics *other* than disability. I would also work to provide materials that intentionally contrast the “pale, white, skinny woman in a wheelchair” image of disability to help normalize a variety of disability representation for my patrons.

### **Selected Item**

*Breathe and count back from ten* by Natalia Sylvester  
Published by Clarion Books, 2022  
YA fiction for ages 13-18  
346 pages  
ISBN: 9780358536864

I selected this book because I wanted to find a) a children’s or YA book with a disabled main character and b) a main character with intersecting identities and/or a non-stereotypical representation of disability. This book also incorporates all of the themes I outlined previously in this reflection. The main character, Verónica, is Peruvian-American and has a disability that is sometimes visible to others and sometimes not, causing tension between how she views herself/her disability, how others view her, and how well or not she “performs” disability when she pushes back against her physical limits.

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## **Resources**

Arielle, Zipporah (2019) "This is what disabled looks like": The sometimes hard-to-see line between visible and invisible disabilities. *Medium*.

Liebowitz, Cara (2015) I am disabled: On identity-first versus people-first language. *The Body is not an apology*

Mones, Erica (2021) I refer to myself as disabled, because my disability is central to who I am. PopSugar

Ziv, Maayan. (2019). Access now.