**Date: 3/7/2020  
Crip Chat Episode: 15**

**Topic: Inspiration Porn (IP)**

**Key Points:**

1. It perpetuates the idea that disability is something to be ‘overcome’
2. It undermines the social model of disability and places the blame on the person with the disability for the difficulties they face.
3. It interferes with our right to privacy, while inflating the egos of non-disabled people for providing assistance.
4. A portion of people with disabilities mistake inspiration porn for perceived positive attention.

**Introduction**As the late disability activist, Stella Young stated, “Inspiration porn is an image of a person with a disability, often a kid, doing something completely ordinary - like playing, or talking, or running, or drawing a picture, or hitting a tennis ball - carrying a caption like "your excuse is invalid" or "before you quit, try"” (Young, 2012). Increasingly, they feature the quote "The only disability in life is a bad attitude."

Images like this are problematic in the quest for equality as they reduce people with disabilities to objects of pity instead of individuals with varying abilities and personalities.   
  
Inspiration porn has a variety of negative impacts on the way people with disabilities are viewed and treated in society, in this episode we will explore these points.

**I'm not your inspiration, thank you very much | Stella Young https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8K9Gg164Bsw**

**It perpetuates the idea that disability is something to be ‘overcome’**Words like "inspiring" are a product of low expectations of disabled people (BBC Trending, 2015). Inspiration porn is rooted in the medical model of disability. A model which presents diagnosed conditions as barriers to be cured or overcome. This is problematic for people with disabilities because pity gets in the way of equality. When you pity a person, you are looking down on them, which means you don’t see them as equal and this is likely reflected in how the pitier treats people with disabilities.

IP brings with it the issue that people with disabilities are not worthy of attention or support unless they are achieving. Reinforcing the belief that people with disabilities aren’t trying hard enough is often used as grounds to exclude us. It contributes to the ableist notion that the environment is not the issue and that we are the cause of our own problems, because we’re too ‘lazy’ to overcome our impairments and make efforts to fit in.

As Stella Young stated, inspiration porn puts pressure on disabled people to think that they have to be an “inspiration” to matter. It’s not enough to live our lives and learn how to work with our disabilities; we also have to inspire millions of abled people to recognize how “lucky” they are to be abled.   
  
These negative views are barriers to an accessible and inclusive society.  
  
**It undermines the social model of disability. Blaming the person with the disability for the difficulties they face.**

“Pity gets in the way of our rights. When images of disabled people are accompanied by slogans such as, “what’s your excuse?” or “your excuse is invalid,” disabled people aren’t being lifted up or celebrated. We’re being used as a tool to guilt abled people into trying harder” (Young, 2012).

Inspiration porn also ignores the fact that there are various types of disabilities and perpetuates the assumption that people with disabilities should be able to do anything.

We are often called courageous or inspiring simply for existing. This is due to the media continuing the lie that our lives are unfathomably miserable. Articles and news stories are peppered with words and phrases such as ‘overcoming disability’, ‘suffering’, ‘inspiring’, ‘wheelchair-bound’, ‘courageous’ etc.

When someone tells a disabled person “you are so inspiring, I don’t know how you do it, I couldn’t live like that,” what they are telling us is we are inspiring just because we haven’t killed ourselves.

When we question these labels, we are labelled as "bitter" and "ungrateful" because we aren’t the inspiration that people expect us to be.

**It interferes with our right to privacy.**

Inspiration porn does more than reinforce low standards for people with disabilities. It can also violate our right to privacy. You’ve probably seen the ‘heart-warming’ story of a fast food employee taking the time to help feed a patron with a disability. Someone snapped a photo of the patron being fed without her permission, and then uploaded the photo to social media with a caption calling the employee a saint. The photo was shared thousands of times and picked up by many news outlets. In this instance, the patron with a disability was used as props to inflate the egos of non-disabled people.

How can we expect equal treatment if we are no more than an object of pity?

**Key point 4. Some disabled people mistake the pity for positive attention. And the focus isn’t always on disabled person**

You tend to see it more in folks who are new to life with a disability, receiving pity and praise for completing petty tasks such as grabbing something off a grocery store shelf for yourself probably feels good when you’re fresh out of rehab and have been working towards to goal of greater independence. For those of us who’ve lived with disability a bit longer though, it can be it can be a patronizing and demeaning experience to literally be pat on the back for grabbing a bag of chips all by yourself.

You wouldn’t shower a non-disabled person with praise for dressing themselves independently, so why do we receive that kind of response? It’s because inspiration porn tells the world that people with disabilities are pitiable and lesser, so the only kindness we "deserve" is charity. That is why IP harmful.  
  
Additionally, when we’re not being used as reminders that life ‘could be worse’ we are used as tools to inflate the egos of the non-disabled.

Posts of non-disabled people helping people with disabilities centre attention on the helper, not the recipient. In all cases, disabled humans get treated as props.

Another issue with IP, is that it can be used to shame others with disabilities. “If that person can do it, why can’t you?” Further perpetuating the stereotype that people with disabilities who aren’t constantly achieving are burdens on society.

**Summary (50 – 100 words)**inspiration porn can shame the viewer by showing a disabled person overcoming basic obstacles, implying that anyone less disabled has no excuse. You shouldn’t treat disabled people humanely just to be thought of as a hero; you should do it because people with disabilities are human beings with the same inherent value as every other being on this globe.

Inspiration porn demonstrates the need for a broader engagement with the social model of disability.

‘Disability doesn’t make you exceptional, but questioning what you think you know about it does’ Stella young

**References:**

BBC Trending. (2015). Is it OK to call disabled people 'inspirational'?. Retrieved from https://www.bbc.com/news/blogs-trending-31376653

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Tueller, C. (2020). Twitter. Retrieved from https://twitter.com/carson\_tueller/status/1278393320029519872

Young, S. (2012). We're not here for your inspiration. Retrieved from https://www.abc.net.au/news/2012-07-03/young-inspiration-porn/4107006

[Image Description: Black font on a white background reading “Ableism looks like calling disabled people “inspiring” for navigating a system that is designed for their exclusion, while doing nothing to hold the system accountable. #ableism #disabled #accesstolife”]

**A screenshot of a cell phone

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