



Episode 4, Part 1: Cultural Humility in Special Populations (Individuals with Disabilities)

Dr. Brian Watermeyer (Brian.Watermeyer@uct.ac.za) trained as a clinical psychologist at the University of Cape Town, before completing a doctorate in psychology, focusing on disability studies, at Stellenbosch University. He was first editor of South Africa's first major text in disability studies, titled "Disability and Social Change: A South African Agenda," published in 2006. His second book, "Towards a Contextual Psychology of Disablism," was published internationally by Routledge in 2013. His most recent book is *The Palgrave Handbook of Disability and Citizenship in the Global South*, edited by B. Watermeyer, J. McKenzie and L. Swartz. Dr. Watermeyer has an extensive list of international journal publications, book chapters, and media appearances as a disability scholar and activist. He teaches on postgraduate programmes in disability and clinical psychology, as well as guest lectures in medicine and rehabilitation science.

Before You Listen: *Self-reflect and/or journal about the following*

- What are your experiences with clients who have disabilities?
- What are some of your life experiences with people with disabilities?
- Complete the implicit association test regarding those with disabilities ([Disability IAT](#))

Episode Summary

- When we encounter people with disabilities, the experience elicits socialized emotions and thoughts from our past experiences that are unrelated to the people in front of us. We must confront these beliefs and existential anxieties in order to be able to truly listen to the client in front of us without projecting our feelings.
- A common misjudgment is that the person with disabilities does not want to discuss their disabilities. However, it's an integral part of one's identity. As a clinician, be open about it, and say something like, "You know, I don't know anything or very much about visual impairment at all. This is quite new to me. So I understand now that I'm going to ask questions and some of them might be silly questions. And I'm sorry about that but I want to learn from you. I want the opportunity to sort of make mistakes so that you can teach me. You can show me what your experience is."
- People with disabilities, and especially with congenital disabilities, may have experienced a lifetime of mirroring negative messages about one's disability and self. It is our work as clinicians to point out these invisible internalized assumptions about self.
- These oppressive messages can be sent from loved ones out of care and love. However, these are still oppressive, limiting and prejudiced ideas about disability.
- *Dr. Watermeyer shouts out to **Dr. Tom Shakespeare** (@TommyShakes | Tom.Shakespeare@lshtm.ac.uk). Dr. Shakespeare is a professor of disability research at the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine. He is a prominent social scientist and bioethicist whose research explores social and economic consequences of impairment and illness in people with disabilities, and bioethics pertaining to disabled people.*

After You Listen: *Self-reflect and/or journal about the following*

- In this episode, Dr. Watermeyer discussed that people have their own emotional reactions and worries about acquiring their own disability when they see or interact with someone with a disability.

What are some ways your own experiences or reactions agree or disagree with Dr. Watermeyer's conceptualization of disability? How is this related to your specific identities, privileges (or lack thereof), and/or positionality?

- In this episode, Dr. Watermeyer discussed how a therapist should be open about discussing their clients' disability and be vulnerable about not knowing their experiences.

Reflect on your past experiences with clients with disabilities. How did you handle the discussion on their disability? What would you do the same? What would you change?

- In this episode, Dr. Watermeyer discussed that our socialized assumptions and beliefs about people with disabilities may get in the way of really listening to and understanding the client's experiences.

What are some assumptions and beliefs that you hold regarding people with disabilities? How did those beliefs form in your life?

After You Listen: *Discuss the following with an accountability group and/or partner*

- What are common assumptions and beliefs about people with disabilities in our society?
- Consider your positionality and your identities and how that might influence your interaction with clients with disabilities.
- Dr. Watermeyer mentioned that sometimes harmful and limiting messages about disability can be well-intended comments from loved ones. How can you prevent yourself from bringing this into the therapy room?
- How can support from therapists look different for individuals with congenital and acquired disabilities?

Additional Resources and Further Reading

- [Guidelines for Assessment of and Intervention With Persons with Disabilities](#) (APA)
- Shakespeare, T. (2017). *Disability: the basics*. Routledge.
- Watermeyer, B. (2012). *Towards a contextual psychology of disablism*. Routledge.
- Shakespeare, T. (2013). *Disability rights and wrongs revisited*. Routledge.
- <http://www.disabilityevidence.org/> - website with disability information for policy-makers

Host Bios

Jiwon "Jennie" Min, M.S., is a cisgender heterosexual Korean Canadian. She is a 6th-year doctoral candidate in clinical psychology at Oklahoma State University. Her research focuses on the daily processes of personality pathology, mobile treatment of related maladaptive behaviors (e.g., nonsuicidal self-injury, substance use) and multi-method, multi-informant assessment of personality pathology. In her free time, she loves to play with her cats and sing. You can find her on Twitter @JiwonMin.

Gina Erato, M.S., is a cisgender heterosexual white American woman of Sicilian descent. She is a first-generation college student and 4th year Clinical Psychology doctoral student passionate about women's sexual and reproductive life events. During her free time, she likes to make Italian dinners at home, spend time with her dog, and watch the Great British Baking Show.