Disability Identity Development Theory
Learning Outcomes

- Be able to articulate the spectrum of disability identity
- Understand the basic concepts of disability identity models
- Apply disability identity models practically to your work with students
Disability identity can be understood as a spectrum. Disability is a fluid identity which means that any person can become disabled at any point in time. You can also become temporarily disabled through injury and then return to being temporarily able-bodied after the injury heals. A person cannot be “able-bodied” because of the ability to transition into a “disabled” state.
Disability Identities

- Physical or mobility impairment
- Low vision, Blind, or another visual impairment
- d/Deaf or Hard of Hearing
- Hearing Impairment
- Learning disability
- Psychological or Behavioral disability
- Attention Deficit-Hyperactivity Disorder
- Autism Spectrum Disorder

This is not an exhaustive list, but provides examples of some disabilities that students may have. It is important to learn about different types of disabilities and how you can make the classroom more accessible for students.
Models of Disability

The following slides summarize several prominent disability theories. Faculty and staff working with students with disabilities most often use the following models:

- Social Model of Disability
- Minority Model
- Gibson’s Disability Identity Development Model
Medical Model of Disability

- Disability is an internal problem with the individual
- Disability should result in medical attention or curative treatment
- No recognition of societal factors creating a disabling culture
- No recognition of disability as an identity
Social Model of Disability

- Disability is a social limitation that is not a result of the state of the body, but a lack of fit between the body and the environment.
- Recognizes that society perpetuates disability.
- Recognizes disability as an identity.
Minority Model of Disability

- Disability as an external problem
- Environment, rather than individual, must accommodate the needs of individuals with disabilities
- Recognizes disability as an identity and group
Gibson’s Disability Identity Development Model

- **Stages of Identity Development**
  - **Passive Awareness**: students are unable to recognize their disability
  - **Realization**: students are trying to reconcile relationship with society
  - **Acceptance**: students will begin to
    - view themselves as equals to their peers
    - embrace their disability identity
    - develop a group disability identity
Representations of Gibson’s Model

View the following clips. See if you can identity how the characters in these clips exemplify different stages of Gibson’s Model.

- Parenthood Clip
- Big Bang Theory
- Switched at Birth
Gibson’s Disability Identity Development Model

- Recognizes disability as an identity
- Allows for fluidity between different stages
- Recognizes that society impacts disability identity
- Focuses on individual, and to some extent group identity


