

*Week 12, Semester 2, 2022 / First printed 2018*

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# DISABLED HONI

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FROM THE UNIVERSITY OF SYDNEY DISABILITIES COLLECTIVE



**studio A**



## ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COUNTRY



Disabled Honi is published on the stolen land of the Gadigal People of the Eora Nation. Sovereignty was never ceded; the invasion of this land was, and still is, a process of immense violence, destruction, and theft.

It is important to recognise that First Nations people have, since 1788, resisted and survived colonial violence. This edition needs to platform the voices of this ongoing resistance, truly valuing and heeding Indigenous knowledge and perspectives.

The Editors of Disabled Honi acknowledge the suffering caused by ongoing colonial

structures and commit to confronting the political, economic, legal and social systems which continue to oppress First Nations people, especially Indigenous individuals with a disability.

As a collective, we acknowledge that we are each living, writing, creating art and working on stolen Gadigal, Cammeraygal, Dharawal, and Darug land.

As an autonomous edition which operates and distributes within such an institution, we have a duty to remain conscious of, and actively combat,

complicity in colonisation.

In 2023, the Final Report of the Disability Royal Commission will be published following many years of advocacy, storytelling and activism. For First Nations people with a disability, the Interim Report, released in 2020, details the toll that discrimination have on these individuals. The barriers to self-determination for disabled Indigenous people must be addressed by the University, local, state and federal governments in order to attain genuine and enduring changes.

Honi has stood on stolen land since its inception 93 years ago; embedded in the history of this paper is the tireless resistance to oppressive, colonial structures within society by First Nations writers, contributors and editors — it is our duty to uphold their legacy, champion their voices, and continue to fight for First Nations justice.

We pay our deepest respect to Elders both past and present, and extend that respect to all First Nations students, staff, and readers of Disabled Honi.

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## EDITORIAL

By Sarah Korte and Khanh Tran.

On the cover of this edition are the words: “First printed 2018”. The University of Sydney Students’ Representative Council (SRC) Disabilities Collective was founded in 2012 and until 2018 we were the only identity-based collective that did not produce an annual edition of Honi. Today, one of the editors had to call campus security in order to just access the SRC offices — a perfect example of the deeply inaccessible nature of our campus. All of this despite past Disabilities Officers’ efforts and the University’s years of broken promises over providing accessible buildings.

The number of disabled academics and professional staff in our university remains woefully low, with only 129 out of over 8100 staff identifying as disabled. Disabled people make up about 20 per cent of the general population and likely a larger proportion of university students due to the frequency of mental health conditions. The high prevalence of invisible disability means that much of our community often

goes unnoticed, not only to the community, but to themselves. Numbers alone, however, do not convey the lack of accommodation, physical and attitudinal, that USyd students and staff have to navigate.

As always this is both a solemn and joyous edition. We are celebrating finally getting funding for a Disability Room after over a five-year long fight (check out the back of the edition if you would like to help us name the room!). Jack Scanlan offers a satirical ‘guide’ to navigating a deeply inaccessible world (p. 6) and Gemma Lucy Smart and Professor Shane Clifton explore how considering the disabled perspective can influence your ethical perspectives (pp. 4-5).

As we continue to navigate a pandemic that the rest of the world wants to pretend is over, the words of Ellie Taylor’s beautiful disability rights poem (p. 7) are truer than ever, “There is still a long road ahead... but we are stronger together.”

## Thank you to Studio A

The front cover artwork is entitled ‘Zig Zag Railway’ and was created by Studio A artist Katrina Brennan. The Disabilities Collective is proud to support such a talented emerging artist and the work of Studio A. Studio A is a supported studio based in Sydney, Australia that tackles the barriers artists with intellectual disability face in accessing conventional education, professional development pathways and opportunities needed to be successful and renowned visual artists.

The enterprise paves professional pathways for such artists so that they can achieve their artistic and economic aspirations. Explaining her artistic process, Katrina said: “When I am feeling stressed, I imagine my art process. I think about the grid. I think about the squares and my pen filling them in. I find it so relaxing. It’s like melting in my head, and then I’m not stressed anymore.”

The Disabilities Collective would like to extend our warmest thanks to Katrina Brennan and Studio A for providing such excellent artwork for the cover of the fifth edition of Disabled Honi.

# studio A

## The Disabilities Collective & Caregivers Network

### The Disabilities Collective & Caregivers Network

The Disabilities Collective is an autonomous collective for disabled undergraduate students, defined by the UN Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities as “long-term physical, mental, intellectual or sensory impairments which in interaction with various barriers may hinder their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others.” This includes people who may not personally identify as disabled, or prefer other designators, for example people who are Deaf or hard of hearing, Mad, neurodivergent, mentally ill, otherwise ill, and so on.

The Caregivers Network is an initiative for students who provide substantial informal caregiving support to friends or family members who are disabled.

If you’d like to get involved in activism, social events, editing this beloved nightmare of a newspaper, and more, get in touch! You can find our public Facebook page at facebook.com/USYDdis/ and our Twitter at @USYDdis. Contact the OBs at disabilities.officers@src.usyd.edu.au to be added to either of our Facebook groups, or to be added to our mailing list. You do not have to disclose any details about your disability or caregiving

responsibilities to get involved.

### Inclusion & Disability Services

Disability Services is the main point of contact for accessing disability accommodations during your study. Some of the accommodations they can arrange include:

- assessment and exam adjustments, including extra time, smaller exam rooms, use of a computer.

- timetable adjustments, including making sure that your lectures are close together, close to bus stops, or held in buildings that are wheelchair accessible or have hearing loop equipment.

- alternative formatting
- access to assistive technology
- lecture support
- library services

### Contact Disability Services:

Phone: +61 2 8627 5067

Email: [disability.services@sydney.edu.au](mailto:disability.services@sydney.edu.au)

Fax: + 61 2 8627 8482

### SRC Caseworkers & Legal Service

The SRC operates Casework Service, Legal Service and other support for students. Call 9660 5222 to book an appointment with a

Caseworker or a Solicitor. If you have a hearing or speech impairment, you can call them via the National Relay Service: <https://relayservice.gov.au/>

Caseworkers can answer questions and concerns via email ([help@src.usyd.edu.au](mailto:help@src.usyd.edu.au)). Please attach relevant documents.

### Your rights as a disabled student

The Disability Discrimination Act (1992) and the Disability Standards for Education (2005) enshrine in law the right of disabled students to access education and training “on the same basis” as non-disabled students. You have the right to:

- use an assistive device or mobility aid.
- be accompanied by a carer, interpreter, reader, or assistant.

- be accompanied by a guide or hearing dog or other trained assistant animal.

- access reasonable adjustments for lectures, tutorials, and assessments so that you are not disadvantaged by your disability.

- access lecture materials in a format that you can understand.

- seek redress for abuse or harassment on the basis of disability.

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# In Conversation: Gemma Lucy Smart and Shane Clifton

## Gemma Lucy Smart

### Professor Shane Clifton

#### Gemma:

Thank you so much, Shane, for having this conversation with me. I wanted to start by just explaining how we know each other. We know each other from teaching medical ethics in the Faculty of Health and Medicine (FMH). I ended up there because I'm from History and Philosophy of Science, and I teach a lot of ethics. How did you end up there?

#### Shane:

I've got a background as well in ethics, and I have a disability. So that combination of the lived experience of disability, in my case, spinal cord injury, and the background in ethics got me the invite.

#### Gemma:

What about disability that brought you to ethics? Were you interested in ethics prior?

#### Shane:

No, I've been teaching Christian Ethics at a theological institution for a decade prior to my experience of spinal cord injury and disability. It's the richest field. It's an examination of life, why we do things, and whether we should do them. All the key issues of life are ethical. I was most passionate about justice issues in the church, especially LGBTQI+ inclusion. The church's ethics are terrible when it comes to queer justice. And I have a philosophical interest in virtue ethics - philosophers such as Aristotle and Aquinas and some contemporary virtue ethicists such as Alistair McIntyre.

#### Gemma:

Let's return to that in a moment. I think we share that background of not beginning in disability ethics. While I do other research, I got into academia because of ethics. I did my first year of Philosophy with Peter Singer and I did Environmental Science after that, so environmental ethics was my number one love. My second was animal ethics and animal rights, animal liberation. And I feel like those are justice issues, too. And so really, what I was interested in was justice. I feel like that's similar to your story. And interesting, isn't it?

#### Shane:

Yes. With my theological background, Peter Singer was the enemy - a utilitarian, anti-theist. He came to conclusions that in Christian ethics are incredibly problematic, such as his positions on abortion. I later discovered that in disability, Singer was even more reviled for his utilitarian views on late-term abortion of the disabled foetus, even post-birth killing of the disabled newborn. Although weirdly, over time, I've become more aligned with Singer's ethics than I once was, even if I disagree with many of his conclusions.

#### Gemma:

That's so interesting, because I feel like I really started as a utilitarian. Utilitarianism is basically the greatest good for the greatest number, and you define your good as wellbeing or happiness or what have you. It's about consequences. And that really defined how I established myself as an ethicist. But now, after engaging with Singer's work on disability, especially in the last few years as he has published defences of eugenics, I can't say that utilitarianism is necessarily my one great love anymore. And I have a soft spot for virtue ethics.

#### Shane:

Yeah, so look, I guess my background, in terms of ethical theory, had two different sources. Rather than focus on utility, consequences and the greatest good, the first was based on theological principles. Christian ethics draws on theological ideas such as the inherent value of humanity, made in the image of God, the goodness of the created world, and the problem of sin and injustice. It's driven by principles rather than consequences.

The second was virtue ethics, which is about the person, the individual performing the ethical act. Virtue ethics is about character and principles of virtue. When I had my spinal cord injury in 2010, I used virtue ethics to help me through the crisis. The underlying logic of virtue ethics is that happiness, the good life, is achieved by living virtuously and exercising character traits; such as love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, compassion, and various other virtues.

I'd experienced this life-changing horror, where I'd lost my sense of

happiness. Spinal cord injury was hard to live with, especially early on, and I was desperately unhappy. Virtue ethics became my way of thinking about happiness, about how to thrive or live well through pain and suffering.

#### Gemma:

When I developed Meniere's Disease, the idea of maximising the good and only allowing or promoting happiness, or wellbeing or flourishing - above all - well that no longer really satisfied my need for complexity in ethics. I feel like now I'm a pluralist.

#### Shane:

When I said I've moved toward utility, I should clarify what I mean by that. Spinal cord injury and some problems with the Church led me to a crisis of faith. Many of the old theological principles driving Christian ethics became extremely problematic to me. I was, you know, just extremely frustrated with ethics driven by rules and regulations. Biblical legalism (any form of legalism) gets my blood boiling, because it locks ethics into rigid boundaries. And even virtue ethics can be problematic. It can get tied up with the positivity myth, with 'overcoming' disability.

Sometimes there's a reason we can't exercise virtue, because injustice damages us. The vices - such as anger, frustration, impatience - may be a product of the social situation we live in. And sometimes we should be angry, even if we pay a psychological price. So I could see a bunch of critiques of virtue, ethics, and then I guess, even, you know, the disability experience and the queer experience got me thinking about consequences. And so I don't buy into utilitarianism, the greatest good for the greatest number, because you cannot evaluate that. It's an impossibility and it ends up with nonsense results.

#### Gemma:

Yes.

#### Shane:

But to me, I think a combined sense of virtue ethics and utility is where I'm probably at, which is "do no harm", so consequences can help a person to flourish. It's about what decisions can I make that reduce harm and that enable flourishing? Virtue and character can be part of that. So that's not really Peter

Singer, but at least aligns with his focus on consequences.

#### Gemma:

You're right that's not quite Peter Singer, but it's very close to what I think as well, actually. And that development of moral character virtue ethics is really important. So on that, what do you think is the most pressing issue in disability ethics today? I'm spending this week at a mental health conference. And I think one of the most pressing issues is, in fact, how to integrate the full spectrum of disability and related kinds of disorders, and the complexity and the diversity of the disability experience into our understanding of disability, but also service provision within disability. I think it's one of the things we don't do very well at all, and mental distress and ill health often gets left behind.

#### Shane:

I agree, I think we assume we know what people with disability think, and that there is one disabled view on ethical issues, such as disabled people are against euthanasia, worried about the pressure to end disabled lives. Yet, diversity of impairment is the essence of the disability experience. And that diverse impairment should lead to diverse perspectives and diverse ways of thinking. Many people with disability support euthanasia. The celebration of difference shouldn't be just the celebration of impaired difference. It should open us to appreciating ethical diversity.

#### Gemma:

Yes. And my next question for me follows on from that - what would be your best piece of advice for disability advocates and activists coming into that sphere today? My advice would be that over time, what I've realised is that, whilst I can be sure of my own ethical position - although I grow less sure of it over time - and whilst I can feel like I know what's right, that's not going to be the same for everyone. And if I want to convince someone of anything, of the importance of anything, what I should look for is shared values. But I wonder what advice you would give to emerging disability advocates or activists?

#### Shane:

Ethics is a reminder of how complex and grey the world is and how little we know, and it's important for advocates to be open to diversity even when fighting for a cause. When I was a theological ethicist, I was surrounded by religious people who

were so sure about what is right and wrong and very judgemental of people who disagreed with them. At its best, theology and ethics are a deconstruction of our certainties as we encounter different ideas and people whose experiences and outlooks are radically different to our own. At its worst, theology and ethics are narrow, legalistic, self-righteous and terrifying.

For a good reason, advocates are passionate about their causes. But passion sometimes leads to dogmatism and certainty that mirrors religion. So in the advocacy space, we need to find a balance between commitment to the rightness of our fight and awareness that there are different ways of looking at things. Our way is not the only way, and it might not even be the right way!

The other thing I'd say to advocates is to learn from groups outside your own fold. Disability advocacy has so much to learn from feminism and queer advocacy. People who have experienced exclusion should work together and fight for a world where everyone is welcome.

#### Gemma:

Yes. In diverse, colourful, different wild ways.

#### Shane:

I love it. Wild ethics.

#### Gemma:

Wild ethics rather than constrained by logic is, you know, just wild like the world is. Now we're sounding pagan.

#### Shane:

I'm delighted to sound pagan.

#### Gemma:

I'll just finish up by asking you one last question. What do you think is the most important thing happening at Sydney University in terms of disability ethics right now?

#### Shane:

Oh, that's a tricky question because I feel a little disconnected to Sydney University at the moment, as all my headspace has been in the Disability Royal commission. But let me sell the brilliance of the Centre for Disability Research and Policy, which I've been connected to for a decade.

I love the Centre. I love the director, Jennifer Smith-Merry, and all the faculty and staff, who are committed to learning from people with disabilities and shaping inclusive policy.

The Centre is meant to gather

people from across the University, but I don't think it gets the attention or the participation it deserves. Disability is a marginal topic, but it shouldn't be. Disability is about the human condition. It's about our vulnerabilities and dependencies, our social experiences and constraints. Disability can help us think differently about ourselves and the world around us. I'm biased, but I think disability should be a foundational study for all disciplines. How different would medical science be if doctors studied disability not as something to be fixed or cured, but as an essential and wonderful aspect of human life? What could engineers learn from disability concepts such as universal design and the social model of disability?

#### Gemma:

Yeah, absolutely. I teach plenty of medical science students, and engineering students occasionally, disability ethics for the first time, and it's often right at the end of their degrees. And I find it incredible that they haven't encountered at any point, any critical view. When it comes to disability, they haven't engaged with questions like what kind of people there should be in the world, they just assume that we don't want disability and illness. We just want to fix it and cure it.

#### Shane:

That's true in all professions. The Disability Royal Commission exists because of ableism in every profession; negative, paternalistic and dehumanising attitudes to people with disability that lead to violence, abuse, neglect and exploitation. People are not deliberately antagonistic toward people with disabilities. They just don't know much about disability, that disabled people can flourish, and that disability makes a rich contribution to our world. Since Sydney University educates future Australian leaders and policymakers, it must take disability seriously. After all, we are all either disabled, or heading toward disablement of one kind or another.

#### Gemma:

Okay, thank you so much for this chat. It was illuminating, and I hope it will be interesting to everyone who's reading it.

**Professor Shane Clifton** is Professor of Theology and Ethics. Shane lives with quadriplegia.

**Gemma Lucy Smart** is a PhD researcher in the School of History and Philosophy of Science at Sydney University. She lives with complex dynamic disability.

# How to mask your disability, a step-by-step guide

Jack Scanlan gives a rundown on how to appear like a 'normal' one.

Many people with a disability are looking for the day where they can walk down the street confidently, talk to people, and live a normal life. Well you're in luck, I bring to you today a step-by-step guide on how to mask your disability, because no one wants to see that or know that. Follow this guide and you will have everyone saying: "Oh I didn't know you had [insert disability]".

**"You have scraped, moulded, and shaped yourself into an acceptable you: you now fit into the door society gives you."**

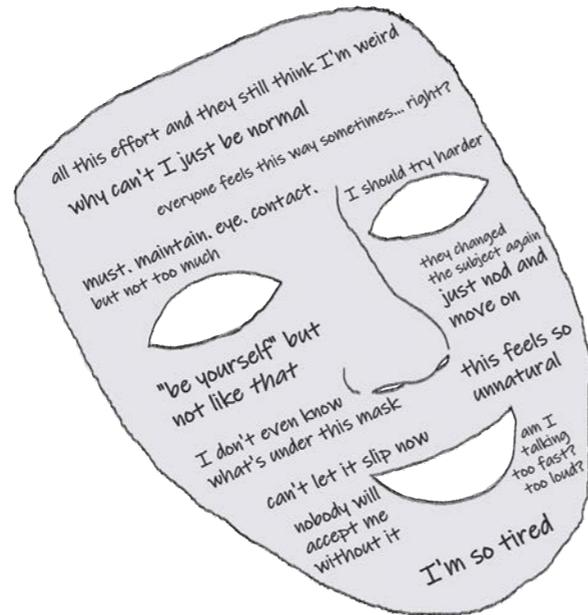
Please note that before you start that you should have a socio-psychological disability, as you can hide that lickity split, if you have a physical one then enjoy being stared at for the rest of your life, as well as the unwanted 'sympathy' and jokes.

**"People will just tell you to be yourself, but you know they mean be the non-disabled you."**

This guide will help you hide your autism, ADHD, or any other mental disability you may have, because if an able-bodied person can't see your disability then you must not have one. Masking is almost as good as removing your disability entirely.

## 1. Be yourself

Just remember to be yourself, you shouldn't have to change yourself to fit into society's boxes. Your disability is just a label and it shouldn't define who you are or what you can do. You can do anything you want to.



## 2. Learn you are wrong

So you've started to act like yourself, you have said and moved how you felt and expressed who you are, but you shouldn't have done that one particular action. Maybe when you were young these actions caused others to yell at you, or even when you were older you didn't understand the hint to shut up or speak. You now know that.

## 3. Take the advice

You take the advice that has been given to you, and start to cut away those weird habits. You stop fidgeting, you shut up and stop socialising to avoid the stigma. Sometimes you'll forget you're not meant to speak, and you only realise when people have started staring at you. So you start to take the advice and you start to change yourself, cutting and

caring for your own statue so you can be presentable in the museum of socialising.

## 4. Question everything

You start to question everything about you, how you talk, how you laugh, and even how you walk. You have to change everything about you, testing the waters more and more until people start to accept you. If you slip up and forget how you should be laughing or walking people will

notice, at best you will get side eyes, at worst they will open their mouths.

## 5. Forget who you are

Now that you don't know if you are right, your ego is gone and confidence destroyed. You have developed new habits and have hidden who you are, you have hidden yourself so hard you forget who you are.

## 6. Be yourself

Don't forget that now you have changed everything about you, you need to be yourself. People will just tell you to be yourself, but you know they mean be the non-disabled you. They will still tell you to be yourself. So just be yourself.

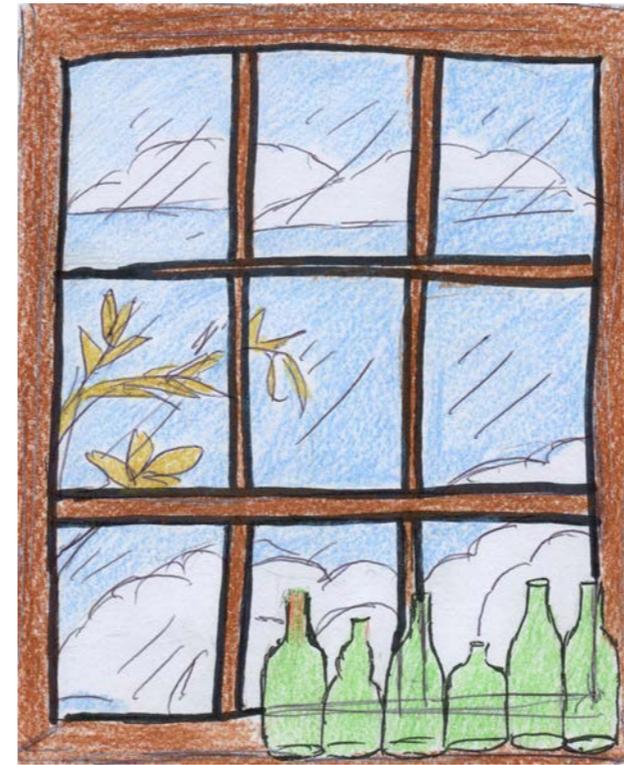
**"Your disability is just a label and it shouldn't define who you are or what you can do."**

## 7. You're one of the normal ones

Now with all of this work, you should feel proud. Everyone will start saying: "You are one of the normal ones". You have scraped, moulded, and shaped yourself into an acceptable you: you now fit into the door society gives you.

Congratulations, you have successfully masked away everything. You are now normal, you are now acceptable, but you still aren't perfect. People like you, but not the disabled you. You don't let anyone see you unmasked.

ART BY GWEN



## Disability Rights

Ellie Taylor

Can people with a disability play sports?

Yes, I have played a few

There is still a long road ahead for people with disability

Everyone thinks that those of us with a disability are not important

And how we feel doesn't matter

And our heart and soul are defined by our disability

But we are stronger together and we should embrace our abilities

Who we are and our identity

It is important to have allies

And I am glad to have some amazing allies

We could contribute to society in different ways

Follow the light into a community

For a life with justice

And this is coming from a girl who has a intellectual disability

So act right.

## Body

Gemma Lucy Smart

There is no shame where i am going  
the fleshy parts of my body  
odd shaped full of fire  
furnished with pain and tears  
lumped under my doona

there is no shame where i am going  
zebras are beautiful of course  
but i no longer want to be one  
collecting labels like old bottles  
line them up under a window

there is no shame where i am going  
bare feet breathe in the garden  
melting on damp soil  
if you try hard enough you can avoid it  
arrange yourself correctly

there is no shame where i am going  
turn off the computer  
leave the tabs open  
sit with it and it always eases  
let me be still here.



ART BY KHANH TRAN

# Help Us Name the Disability Space!

After an over 5 years fight, we are looking forward to finally having an autonomous Disability Space. A collaboration between the SRC, SUPRA and the USU, the space will offer the opportunity for much needed respite and connection for both undergraduate and postgraduate disabled students and be as inclusive as possible for all types of disability.

Many people who fit the UN definition of disability still understandably feel uncomfortable adopting or being associated with the term 'disabled', so we want a name for the space that is welcoming and makes everyone feel included and comfortable using the space.

Use the QR Code below to give suggestions on what you would like the Space to be named. Otherwise, contact us via our Facebook page or the Disabilities Officers at: [disabilities.officers@src.usyd.edu.au](mailto:disabilities.officers@src.usyd.edu.au).

