

# Chapter 18

## Disability and Dominant Leadership Models Over Time

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### ABSTRACT

*This chapter is grounded in scholarly sources and personal narrative, and it concludes with recommended best practices about fostering more socially just higher education environments for college students. Specifically, the author focuses on the development of more equitable inclusion of students with disabilities in curricular and co-curricular leadership development programs. This chapter provides a context of major models of disability over time, a chronological scaffold of dominant student leadership models, and recommendations for educators inside and outside of classroom spaces. The intersection of models of disability and leadership models has not been explored. This chapter fills that gap in the literature.*

### INTRODUCTION

As Peña (2014) noted in the oft-cited article, disability as the subject of college student identity or an area of study within higher education lacks in breadth and scope. Beyond occasional notes around demographic information for participants, few empirical studies interrogate disability identities with the experience of college student leaders (Kimball, Troiano, Moore, Vaccaro, & Newman, 2016). Thus, very little effort has been made to interrupt dominant narratives of traditional student leadership development paradigms and models through the lens of disability. Dugan (2017) began to interrogate and disrupt the traditional, dominant student leadership development canon in his volume *Leadership Theory: Cultivating Critical Perspectives*, yet he devoted minimal time to address (dis)ability or ableism as a structure to deconstruct. Most higher education spaces, such as student leadership development programs, were not specifically created for those who identify as having a disability or other marginalized identities (Jones, 2016). Much of leadership theory evolved explicitly from white, cis-gender men in the post-industrial era in the United States of America (Komives, Dugan, Owen, Slack, & Wagner, 2011). Dugan (2017) noted the need to understand sociohistorical canons regarding leadership development in order to more

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fully comprehend the logics of oppression at play as dominant leadership paradigms were employed. In fact, most leadership programs and opportunities “contribute to silencing and marginalizing, even if unknowingly, by not attending to the intersections of privileged and oppressed social identities” (Jones, 2016, pg. 31). In an effort to create more socially just leadership opportunities, programs, and educational experiences, this chapter explores scholarship related to the intersections of disability and leadership models. This chapter also outlines ways in which principles of Universal Design (UD), as one possible method, that could be incorporated to foster more socially just leadership spaces and experiences. As a leadership educator, my practice and scholarship are dedicated to creating, assessing, and writing about ways to create more inclusive and equitable leadership development. Throughout this semi-personal narrative chapter, I combine my experiences as a leadership educator with scholarship and best practice literature to explicate examples of how leadership education can be more socially just, specifically for college students with disabilities.

In this chapter, I model prominent models of disability and then explore what is known about some of the dominant leadership models used in leadership development programs. Then, I outline historical trends of major models of disability and how college student leadership might manifest within each. For example, in the medical model of disability, a leader might only be considered as one not identifying with a disability, and the traits and characteristics of a “good” leader might not include a student with a disability (Ashmore & Kasnitz, 2014). Further, an example from the social model of disability might indicate that a campus community has excluded (or included) those who identify as having a disability (Ashmore & Kasnitz, 2014; Burgstahler, 2015b). Therefore, because that campus has adopted and practiced the belief that disability is constructed, the campus likely adheres to the philosophy of the social model of disability. As such, each member of that community holds the power to have constructed notions of normalcy and othering (Evans, Broido, Brown, & Wilke, 2017; Sylvester, 2018). Thus, it is possible for a campus to operate from a space of equity and inclusion if its individuals value and prioritize such a lens (Smart, Ethington, Riggs, & Thompson, 2002). This chapter also provides ways in which dominant leadership models, such as the Servant Leadership Model (Greenleaf, 2002), the Relational Leadership Model (Komives, Lucas, & McMahon, 2009), and the Social Change Model of Leadership (Komives, et al., 2011; Komives, Wagner, & Associates, 2009), could be adapted for more wide-ranging inclusion and equity of experience.

Throughout this chapter I suggest a shift toward the incorporation of principles of Universal Design UD (Burgstahler, 2015a) as one possible method for consideration and adoption of a social model of disability by leadership educators. To consider and adopt would signal a commitment to increase access and inclusion in leadership programs for a wide range of students, specifically those identifying with a disability. To begin the conversation about the incorporation of principles of UD is simply the start toward larger discourse around the fact that college students with disabilities are students first and should be considered in course and co-curricular designs. The recommendations in this chapter provide scholars and practitioners tangible strategies for universally designed curricular and co-curricular student leadership development programs. Some examples for promising practices include: using inclusive language on recruitment materials or websites, considering space accessibility and learning styles for leadership meetings and workshops, and applying leadership theory beyond the traditional (i.e., non-disabled) college student. The use of the principles of UD is one way to support the increase of access to more equitable experiences, for all students (Burgstahler, 2015a). Other methods to support the increase of more equitable experiences include spaces and programs designed with distributive justice principles

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