

Student Name

Jennifer Janecek

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Consequences of the Medical Model of Disability

Elizabeth Moon's *The Speed of Dark* harshly critiques the medical model of disability, demonstrating how the model hinders disabled individuals' fight for identity and continues the mindset of able-bodied superiority. In *Disability Theory* Siebers defines the medical model of disability as "an individual defect lodged in the person, a defect that must be cured or eliminated if the person is to achieve full capacity as a human being" (3). Whether it be seen through a physical or mental disability, the medical model of disability gives disabled individuals a feeling of inferiority when comparing themselves to the more able-bodied members of society. Disabled individuals not only feel as though they are not "whole", but also obligated to take whatever steps necessary to be accepted by the able-bodied members of society. In *The Speed of Dark*, Lou struggles as he tries to assimilate to the able-bodied culture, stating, "Even as hard as I try [to be normal], the real people still want me to change, to be like them. They do not know how hard it is. They do not care. They want me to change" (Moon 179). Through his attempts to act "normal", what he perceives as ideal, Lou displays his ostracized mindset. Furthermore, the use of the phrase "real people" truly signifies Lou's feeling of inferiority (Moon 179). Seeing his disability as what the medical model of disability would describe as a "defect that must be cured", Lou makes a clear distinction between disabled and able-bodied individuals and demonstrates how he feels like a second-class human when compared to the able-bodied, "real

people” (Siebers 3) (Moon 178). Conversely, Linda accepts that her disability is simply a part of who she is. When advised by Crenshaw to take the experimental treatment, Linda responds, “I don’t want it...I do not need the treatment; I am fine the way I am” (Moon 178). Linda understands that her disability is part of her identity. However, identifying as disabled and refusing to assimilate to able-bodied culture leaves her susceptible to abuse and exclusion from able-bodied individuals who view her disability in a negative light. Siebers comments on this situation, stating that “the preference for able-bodiedness makes it extremely difficult to embrace disabled people and to recognize their unnecessary and violent exclusion from society” (6). With the medical model of disability so deeply rooted in Crenshaw’s mind, he cannot understand disability as anything but a defect. When Linda accepts her identity as a disabled individual, “Crenshaw turns red” as he cannot fathom why someone would not want to be “normal” (Moon 179). Furthermore, his detailing in his letter that “[i]ndividuals actively taking part in research protocols are exempt from consideration for termination,” symbolizes society’s refusal to accept individuals, like Linda, who identify as disabled (Moon 179). By allowing the medical model of disability to dictate societal views towards disability, disabled individuals are excluded and treated as inferior to the able-bodied members of society.