

# Language Matters | **Disability**

A workshop for journalists reporting  
on disability and disabled people





- 14.1 million disabled people in the UK
- 19% of working age adults are disabled
- More than 4.4 million disabled people are in work

Source: Scope

- 20% of newsroom staff are disabled

Source: Scope



# **Who is classed as disabled?**

# Frances Ryan

Vogue's 'New Suffragettes':  
where are the women with disabilities?

*The Guardian - 2018*

Disabled women are rarely featured in the media: even campaigns or content that are purposely striving to include marginalised women routinely miss out those with disabilities.

# Imani Barbarin

Death by a Thousand Words:  
COVID-19 and the Pandemic of Ableist Media  
*Refinery29 - 2021*

Though, in recent years, disabled people have increasingly been able to tell our own stories to the masses, disabled people still struggle to be believed as reliable narrators of our own experiences. News media still takes a paternalistic approach in covering disability stories and non-disabled people in close proximity to disabled people are more likely to be given platforms to speak about how our disabilities affect them rather than the disabled person in their lives.

# Rose Ayling-Ellis

Rose Ayling-Ellis's year in TV

*The Guardian* - 2022

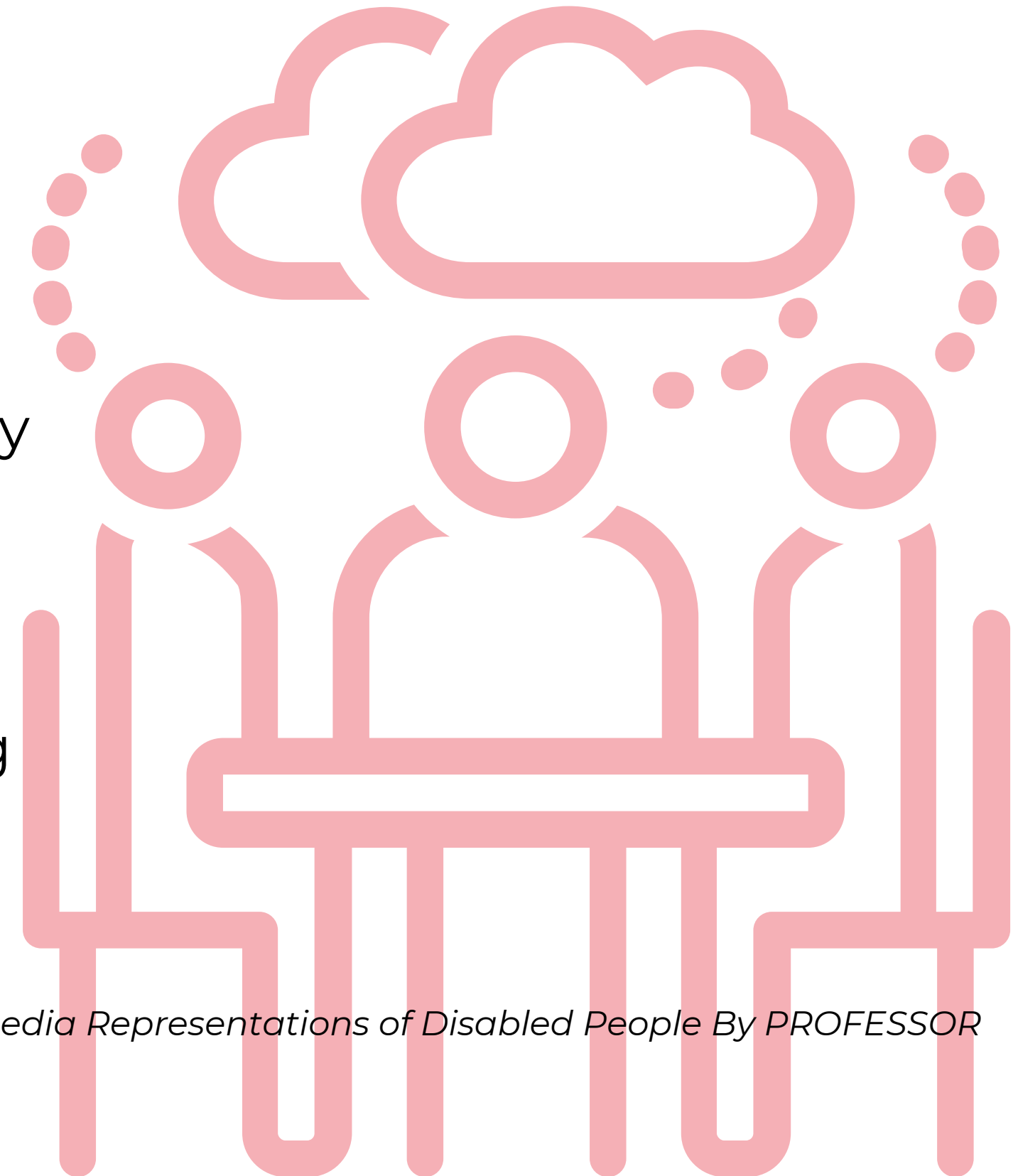
I felt really privileged, but it was also scary because they had never had anyone like me on the show – it would be a completely new experience for them and for me. But I'm so glad I said yes. I didn't know the reaction to Symphony would be that big. It was really nice for the deaf community to be portrayed in a positive, joyful light. People started to see things in a different way; I had people messaging me saying they wouldn't be upset if they had a deaf child, or if their child became deaf.

- 1 in 3 disabled people feel there's a lot of disability prejudice.
- 1 in 3 people see disabled people as being less productive than non-disabled people.
- In 2000, 37% of disabled people and 34% of non-disabled people felt that there was a lot of prejudice around disability. The gap trebled by 2017, with 32% of disabled people and 22% of non-disabled people feeling there is a lot of prejudice against disabled people.
- 87% of parents of disabled children up to the age of 5 have felt judged by members of the public when they go out with their disabled child.

*Source: Scope*

- The Disabled Person as Pitiabile and Pathetic
- The Disabled Person as an Object of Violence
- The Disabled Person as Sinister and Evil
- The Disabled Person as Atmosphere or Curio
- The Disabled Person as Super Cripple
- The Disabled Person as an Object of Ridicule
- The Disabled Person as Their Own Worst and Only Enemy
- The Disabled Person as Burden
- The Disabled Person as Sexually Abnormal
- The Disabled Person as Incapable of Participating Fully in Community Life
- The Disabled Person as Normal

*\*SOURCE: DISABLING IMAGERY AND THE MEDIA - An Exploration of the Principles for Media Representations of Disabled People By PROFESSOR Colin Barnes (1992)*

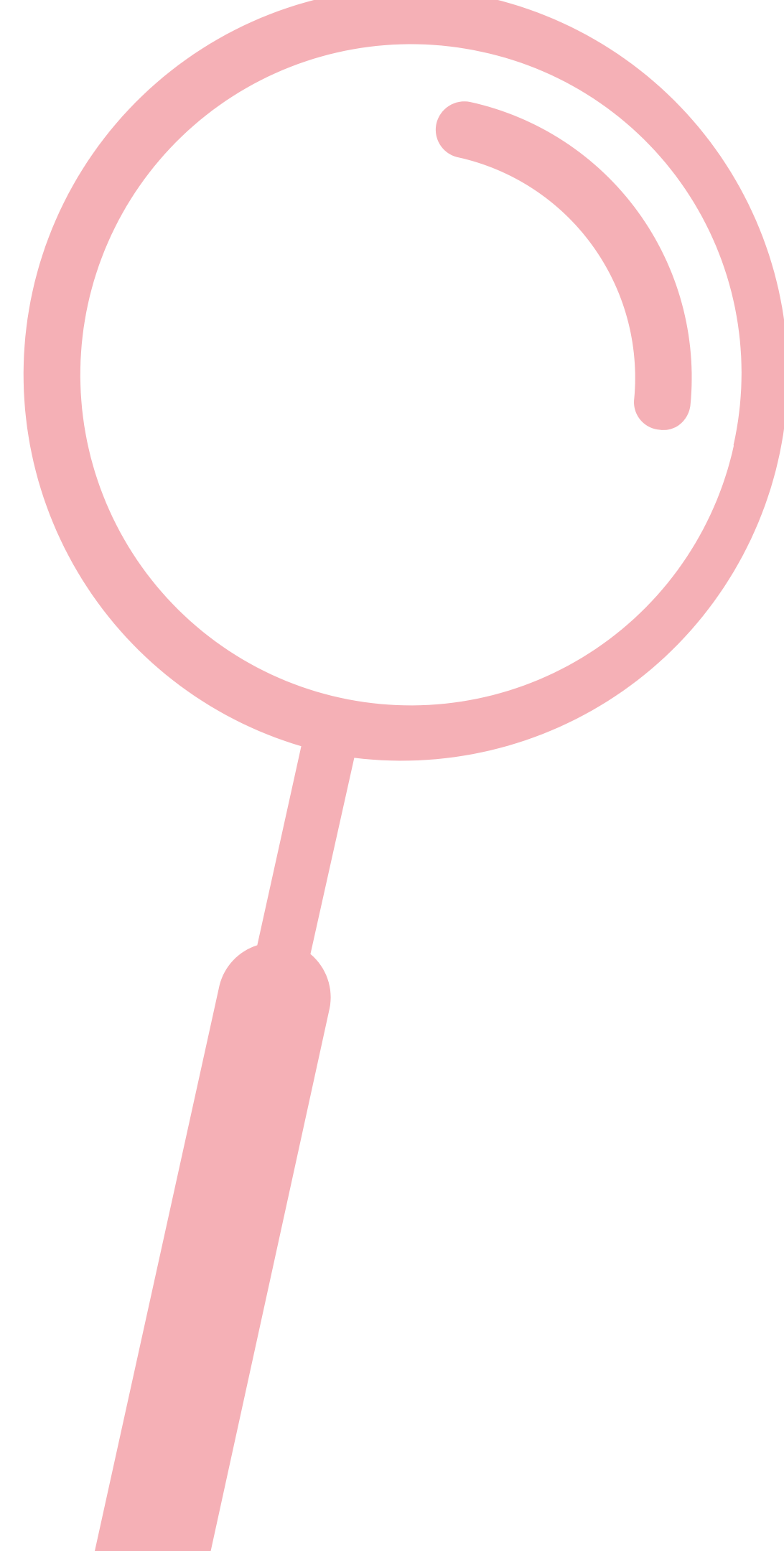




## **Inspiration Porn**

Where disabled people are classed as superheroes whilst being seen through the lens of pity. The story often centres around their disability as a point of trauma or inspiration, not usually as a disabled person living their life.

An example of inspiration porn might be photo of a child with a disability taking part in an ordinary activity, with captions targeted towards able-bodied people such as "your excuse is invalid", "before you quit, try" or "they didn't let their disability stop them



LANGUAGE MATTERS: DISABILITY



**Where is the line?**



[www.womeninjournalism.co.uk](http://www.womeninjournalism.co.uk)

**Council's Bank Holiday mask message falls on deaf ears at Lincolnshire coast**

**Police 'turn a blind eye to colleagues who break rules'**

**Hollywood goes crazy for Daisy Edgar-Jones as Brit hits the big time**

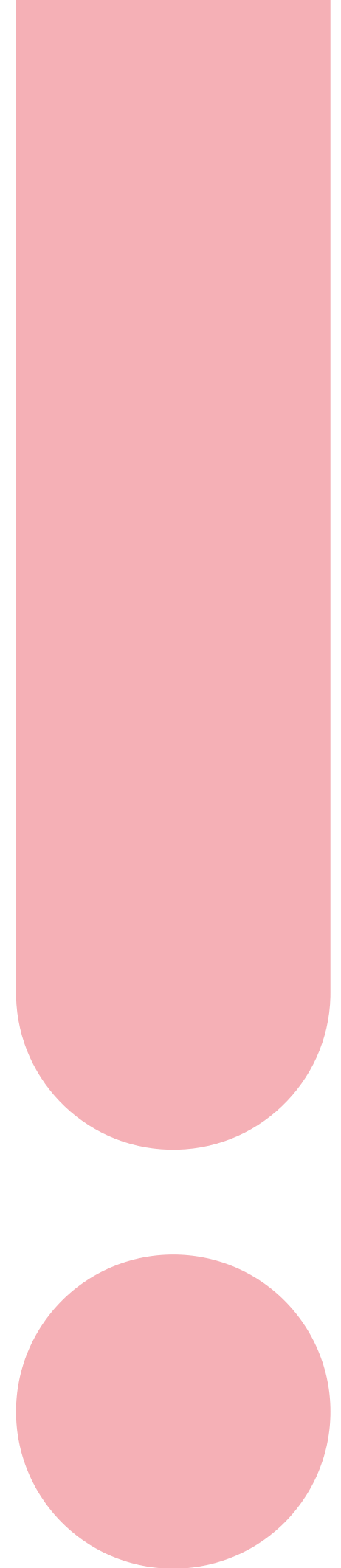


**Is it OK to say?**

# Do

- Signpost to disability organisations
- Getting more disabled staff on team - make it easier for staff to not always work in the newsroom
- Think about substituting ableist language
- Look at the lens through which we tell stories
- Ask are we embellishing inspiration? Are we being pitiful? Does it need to end in success?
- Acknowledge barriers on disabled people's terms
- Allow the person to read their story - unusual but ensures accuracy
- Use modern terms and check what they are, even if they make you feel uncomfortable
- Check how a disabled person self-identifies and use the terms people use in their own communities

- Changing culture takes time that doesn't mean we don't keep pushing for change.
- See if you can connect with a disabled journalist / charity who can help advise on stories with a light touch. If they are consulting please pay.
- Disabled people are best placed to tell their stories, next best are well informed journalists who address their own beliefs / biases and do their research.



# **KEEP IN TOUCH!**

(LINKS IN THE CHAT BOX)

**Rachel**

**Genelle**

**The Unwritten**

**Women in Journalism**

**Newsworks**



LANGUAGE MATTERS: DISABILITY

# Questions and Answers

[www.womeninjournalism.co.uk](http://www.womeninjournalism.co.uk)



ONLINE PANEL : May 25th at 1pm

---

# Exploring the 'invisible contract' between the Palace and the Press



SATURDAY 4TH June 2022

# Women in Journalism at Hay Festival

---

Is the publishing sector gender-based? Do men read more male than female writers? Do reviewers review more books by male writers? Are women currently getting more opportunities than male novelists? Join the debate with our leading panelists. #HayFestival2022



GENELLE  
ALDRED



KATE  
MOSSE



DOROTHY  
KOOMSON



MARY ANN  
SIEGHART



# FESTIVAL OF NEWS

9 June | British Library