

Unveiling the Unseen Realities: Octavia Butler's Exploration of Disability and Society in "The Evening and the Morning and the Night" (1987)

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Abstract

Disability studies is a comparatively new field within literary studies, focusing on the portrayal of disabilities in literature and the complex connotations, perceptions, and systems of oppression associated with it. This article examines Octavia Butler's short story "The Evening and the Morning and the Night," which revolves around the fictional hereditary Duryea-Gode-Disease (DGD) and reveals the pervasive structural oppression experienced by affected characters. The discussion covers the concepts of ableism, empowerment, and intersectionality. Butler's narrative presents a path towards liberation from discrimination, while underscoring the varying impact of this discrimination based on the individual's intersectional identity. Ultimately, the examination highlights the significance of communal support as a vital tool in resisting discrimination. It also illustrates how the disease intersects with other social categories to shape unique experiences of oppression.

Keywords

Disability studies – Octavia Butler – Science Fiction – Discrimination

Introduction

Octavia Butler is a trailblazing figure in the realm of science fiction who embodies a symbol of creative empowerment for Black women authors. Defying societal expectations as a working-class Black woman with dyslexia (Schalk 37), Butler's pioneering spirit led her to become an esteemed author, being honored with prestigious prizes such as the Hugo and the Nebula awards (Hampton and Parker 1). Several of her works, including her acclaimed novel *Parable of the Sower* (1993), delve into the intricacies of oppression and the intersectionality of various forms of discrimination (Lothian 74). According to Weinbaum, the central inquiry that could potentially underlie Butler's entire corpus is "the construction of the concept of 'human being'" (2). Both the human experience and themes of oppression and discrimination are evident in her short story "The Evening and the Morning and the Night," which was initially published in *Omni* magazine in 1987 before circulating in her collection *Bloodchild and Other Stories* (Cavalcanti and De La Roque 58).¹

The short story revolves around a fictional hereditary illness known as the Duryea-Gode disease, synthesized by combining aspects of Huntington's disease, Phenylketonuria, and Lesch-

¹ In the following, I will refer to the short story as "The Evening."

Nyhan disease (Butler, “Afterword” 69).² At first, the disease remains asymptomatic, primarily impacting the patient’s diet and medical treatment. The symptomatic phase, called the ‘drift’, manifests during later stages of adulthood, during which DGD patients experience self-harming tendencies and even resort to self-cannibalism.³ Being affected by DGD results in severe discrimination and isolation, exemplarily shown by Lynn Mortimer, the protagonist and narrator of the story. She recounts her time spent in a DGD ward, her parents’ death, and her college years, where she meets Alan Chi, her future boyfriend. He, too, suffers from the disease. At the story’s climax, Lynn and Alan visit Dilg, a progressive facility dedicated to the care of people with DGD. There, they meet Beatrice, whose disease is astonishingly still under control at an advanced age. She guides them through Dilg to see Alan’s mother Naomi, who, although drifted, appears to be stable. Alan and Lynn discover that female carriers of DGD whose parents both had the disease and who inherited it from their mother, like Lynn and Beatrice, possess a unique pheromone. This pheromone enables them to stabilize and interact with drifted DGD patients, facilitating communication and preventing them from self-harm. Given Lynn’s possession of the pheromone, she is invaluable to Dilg. The story culminates with Beatrice inviting Lynn and Alan to join Dilg and help drifted DGDs.

Butler worked on the short story between 1966 and 1985 (Schalk 41), a period marked by social issues such as the HIV/AIDS epidemic, the Civil Rights movement, the Women’s movement, and other protest movements. One such movement was the Disability Rights movement, closely linked to the Deinstitutionalization movement (41). The latter advocated for people with disabilities to be transferred from state institutions into their families or community-based homes to be reintegrated into society (Fleischer Zames and Zames 33-4). Despite people with disabilities constituting the largest minority in America, the Disability Rights movement has been uniquely labeled as a “stealth movement” (215), receiving insufficient attention. Therefore, Butler’s short story serves as an indispensable tool in raising public awareness about people with disabilities, especially as they are expected to grow in number due to technological advances and an ageing population (254).

While Butler’s major literary works have received extensive scholarly attention, only a few analyses focus on “The Evening.” Among these, notable contributions come from Sami Schalk and Gerry Canavan. Schalk posits that disability in the short story serves a dual purpose: it functions as both a metaphor for racism and as an exploration of living with a disability. She argues that Butler’s storytelling challenges the traditional division between the disabled and non-disabled, prompting readers to rethink how disability and diversity can be perceived and envisioned (Hampton and Parker 4). In contrast, Canavan explores the themes of hope, cure, and the portrayal of Huntington’s disease in a selection of Science Fiction works, including Butler’s “The Evening.” He argues that the story reimagines the narrative around genetic diseases, presenting them not solely as tragic but as part of a complex human experience that can include dignity, creativity, and a redefined sense of purpose. This argument challenges conventional depictions of genetic disorders and offers an optimistic perspective on living with such conditions.

Drawing on Schalk and Canavan’s insights, this article aims to expand their examination of disability in Butler’s short story. Like Schalk, I argue that “The Evening” explores the intersection of disability and society. In doing so, the story highlights the advantages of community, the

² Hereafter, I will refer to the Duryea-Gode disease as DGD, which is the initialism used in the short story.

³ For the sake of linguistic diversity, I shall employ both terminologies, “individuals/people with DGD” and “DGDs,” throughout this article. However, I am conscious of the preference towards person-first language and not identity-first language as advocated by Bogart and Dunn (653).

challenges faced by social outcasts, the emergence of a new social caste, and the pervasive discrimination experienced by individuals with Duryea-Gode disease. Ultimately, the story advocates for a more inclusive and compassionate society, emphasizing the significance of understanding and embracing people with disabilities. To substantiate my thesis, I shall focus on characterization, techniques of narration, and the negotiation of themes such as despair, hopelessness, and depression. The article will begin by establishing the theoretical framework and methodologies employed, including insights from disability studies, such as the concepts of ableism, empowerment, and intersectionality. The subsequent three sections will delve into various aspects of disability as portrayed in the story. First, I will explore the pervasive structural discrimination of individuals with DGD and its connection to ableism. The following section will underscore the significance of communal support in resisting such discrimination. Finally, I will conclude with an exploration of intersectional discrimination, revealing the complex challenges that the characters in the story encounter.

Disability Studies, Ableism, Empowerment, and Intersectionality

Methodologically, my main interest will be in the field of disability studies, a relatively recent area within literary studies. It was particularly the passage of the Americans with Disability Act (ADA) in 1990 that marked a significant turning point leading to a surge of scholarship in disability studies (Altschuler and Cristobal 3). Disability studies delves into the societal connotations, symbolic representations, and pejorative perceptions linked to disability, examines the connections between these aspects and how they perpetuate exclusion and oppression, ultimately challenging the dominant belief that one's value as a human being is determined solely by their physical and mental capabilities (Allan 4). Through this lens, I will analyze the exclusion and oppression that the main characters in the short story experience and reveal how society construes the disabled body of people with DGD as "other, deviant, and nonnormative, when, in fact, human bodies exist along a spectrum of difference" (4).

The concept of ableism is central to disability studies, representing "a network of beliefs, processes and practices that produce a particular kind of self and body [...] that is projected as the perfect, species-typical and therefore essential and fully human" (Campbell 44). People with disabilities are consequently deemed imperfect and diminished human beings. Descriptions of the normative citizen, who serves as the benchmark for comparison, portray them as white, heterosexual, able-bodied, middle-class, and politically conservative (46). In the short story, ableism becomes evident as non-DGDs engage in discriminatory behavior by relying on stereotypes and prejudices, thereby contributing to the social oppression faced by those with DGD. Consequently, individuals with DGD internalize these biases, leading them to perceive themselves as less worthy than non-DGDs. Escaping internalized ableism demands individual empowerment and communal support, which is why this concept is pivotal for assessing the advantages of community. Feminists, community psychology, and public health especially embrace empowerment (Peterson 308). At its core, the empowerment of people with disabilities requires challenging existing power dynamics (Cornwall 343). Although the notion of empowerment lacks a precise definition, its fundamental interest is to comprehend the mechanisms that guide individuals to view themselves as capable and justified in assuming positions of decision-making (344). This liberation from internalized ableism, norms, or biases is essential for fostering a more inclusive society and will therefore play an important role in concluding my main analysis. Furthermore, communal support functions as a

powerful means of resistance against the collective marginalization experienced by individuals with DGD.

Lastly, I shall incorporate the idea of intersectionality. Intersectionality suggests that individuals may encounter multiple forms of oppression due to their membership in various intersecting social categories. This results in new and distinct forms of oppression that deviate from the mere sum of their constituent parts (Bernstein 322). For instance, a Black woman with a disability may face different patterns of oppression compared to a European man with a disability. Intersectional identities can encompass elements such as gender, biological sex, race, sexual orientation, disability status, or socioeconomic class (322). By examining the character's social identities, we can thus unveil more intricate forms of discrimination and gain insight into the unique experiences, struggles, and multifaceted layers of bias suffered by individuals with DGD.

In the subsequent sections, I will use the concepts of intersectionality, empowerment, and ableism to examine the exclusion and oppression experienced by the main characters in the short story, ultimately contributing to a more comprehensive understanding of the obstacles encountered by people with DGD.

Unravelling Ableism and Discrimination: The Birth of a New Caste

Thematically, Butler's story has two parts: The first part consists of Lynn's first-person account of her life with DGD which revolves around her parents' deaths, her experiences at school and in college, and her interactions with Alan and his background. The second part focuses on the visit to Dilg, which offers an alternate perspective on living with DGD and creates hope for the two main characters. This section will primarily address the first part, as it serves as a significant revelation of the ableism and discrimination experienced by Lynn and Alan. Employing a first-person narrator for the short story, with Lynn as both the narrating and experiencing I, is an especially effective technique: By focusing on her experiences, the readers develop an intimate connection with the protagonist, allowing them to delve into life with the disease. There is no escape from her thoughts or mood, just as Lynn cannot escape from her illness and the consequent discrimination she faces daily.

The story's beginning illustrates how mental illness and a physical disease often co-exist, describing Lynn's suicide attempt after her parents forced her to visit a DGD ward when she was 15 years old. The ward exposed her to the reckless and negligent care given to people with DGD in state institutions, traumatizing her even years later: "I hugged myself, remembering the young woman, bloody, cannibalizing herself as she lay at our feet, digging into her own flesh." (Butler, "The Evening" 486). The brutal death of her parents three years later adds to her trauma and reinforces her awareness that there is no escape from the disease:

I wish I'd never found out. Dad had killed Mom then skinned her completely. At least, that's how I hope it happened. [...] He broke some of her ribs, damaged her heart. Digging. Then he began tearing at himself, through skin and bone, digging. He had managed to reach his own heart before he died. It was an especially bad example of the kind of thing that makes people afraid of us. (477)

Lynn's lack of purpose results in her feelings of despair, hopelessness and void that pervade her life and depict the central themes and leitmotifs of the story. Consequently, Lynn appears to be a rather static, one-dimensional character because she continuously mentions the disease, as if it

defines her entire character. Despite her progressing life, and her attendance at college, her mental state and temper never improve: “I can’t say why I went to college [...]. I didn’t go with any particular hope. Hell, I knew what I was in for eventually. [...] Whatever I did was just marking time. [...] I thought about trying suicide again” (Butler, “The Evening” 478). The beginning of the short story therefore sets the deeply pessimistic and depressive tone that permeates the rest of the story. Launching the narrative in medias res emphasizes Lynn’s perception of the disease as the center of her life and the core of her identity. The integrated exposition, which exposes the main information in small quantities throughout the story and woven into the action, further adds to this impression. Accounts about the disease, mortality, loss, and even the visit to Dilg are presented prior to disclosing Lynn’s name, spotlighting their significance in shaping her identity. Most importantly, Lynn herself suggests that it is DGD that primarily defines her.

However, Lynn is not alone with her emotions. Depression seems to profoundly affect Lynn’s boyfriend, Alan, too, expressing thoughts of suicide once he will notice first signs of drifting. In addition, he has already undergone sterilization to prevent passing on the disease to potential offspring (480). Lynn finds herself contemplating how he has managed to endure this far, given his bitterness and fragile will to live (481). Prior to their encounter, Lynn and Alan both experience social isolation, as they lack support from friends, because people tend to distance themselves as soon as they learn about their DGD illness. They also share the loss of their parents, not knowing at that time that Alan’s mother is still alive. This shared sense of exclusion draws them closer together, prompting them to share personal experiences. Lynn unveils her visit to the DGD ward and her subsequent suicide attempt, revealing: “I had never told anyone else. I was surprised at how relieved it made me feel to tell him” (480). As Lynn spends time with Alan and resides in a home alongside fellow DGD students, she gains insight into why two individuals with DGD might contemplate marriage, reasoning “Who else would have us?” (480). Once more, themes of hopelessness and depression resurface, aligning with the pessimistic tone established in the beginning. The third and last character in the short story that gets to share experiences with the disease is Beatrice Alcantara, the doctor who introduces the couple to Dilg. She was among the first double DGD individuals to be born and, much like Lynn, faced the distressing realization of the inevitable outcome of the disease. This led her to attempt suicide when she was old enough to comprehend the situation (491). The three characters share a common sense of isolation and marginalization, caused by their own internalized beliefs but also by the non-DGD’s deliberate distance from DGDs. Despite their current absence of disease symptoms, the inevitable prospect of drifting is enough to cast them into exclusion. To break down the various forms of discrimination, Schalk proposes three ways in which structural oppression manifests. The first one involves stringent regulations and institutions, through which politicians marginalize people with DGD (Schalk 41). The most common institution for people experiencing a drift is a hospital ward, resembling a prison, where they are isolated from the public. Some cases even result in patients being confined to bare rooms, left to deteriorate on their own (Butler, “The Evening” 487). The sole alternative to these wards is Dilg, yet details about the retreat’s approach are not disclosed to the public and the waiting list is long (478). The second means of oppression is the social discrimination these individuals face (Schalk 44). As the only possible treatment, DGD patients must adhere to a specific diet to live as ‘normal’ as possible until they drift. Additionally, they must wear a medical emblem, as non-DGD medications do not work in emergencies. The combination of the diet and emblem immediately identifies them as disabled, creating a sense of inferiority and shame as well as marking them as other. Some try to pass as non-disabled by refusing to wear the emblem, resulting in tragic consequences: “Every now and then there are news stories about people

who stopped carrying their emblems [...]. Then they have an accident. By the time anyone realizes there is anything wrong, it's too late" (Butler, "The Evening" 479). Lynn, too, refrains from eating in public, as the persisted stares of others left her feeling uneasy (478). The desire to appear 'normal' stems from internalized ableism, leading them to perceive disability itself as intrinsically negative (Campbell 46). Being visibly disabled subjects them to social rejection and exclusion from the non-disabled community relegating them to the status of societal outsiders who can only find solace in their own company, refraining from interaction with individuals without DGD (Allan 9). Beyond these challenges, people with DGD also encounter difficulties in finding housing, employment, and educational opportunities (Butler, "The Evening" 478), adding to their social discrimination.

The first two forms of oppression originate from society, specifically from individuals without disability. However, the third form, self-discrimination and internalized oppression (Schalk 44), emerges because of the previous two methods and originates within the oppressed individuals themselves. This is evident in Alan and Lynn's shattered self-confidence, lack of pride and feeling of worthlessness. Lynn assumes that the topic of sterilization has crossed the minds of all DGDs when discussing Alan's choice to undergo the procedure, revealing her own internalized oppression. Alan, too, describes himself and other DGDs as if they were a plague that should be eradicated: "Hell, they should pass a law to sterilize the lot of us" (Butler, "The Evening" 480). Upon encountering Alan as a potential roommate, Lynn acknowledges that their only shared trait is the disease, yet she continues engaging in conversation with him. Familiar with the pattern of people eventually leaving her, Lynn requires time to become more candid with Alan, mirroring her parents' early death.

Altogether, the interplay of structural, social, and internalized bias (Schalk 45) results in the partition of the story's fictional society into two castes: people with DGD as opposed to people without DGD. This dichotomy inherently establishes a social hierarchy where those without disability hold a superior position over individuals with DGD, again pointing to the concept of ableism. Lynn adopts this distinction by constantly talking about 'us' and 'them'. Although the castes are subtly ingrained within society, their explicit manifestation occurs as Lynn ponders Alan's prospects of gaining admission to medical school. His double inheritance might hinder his acceptance, and "[n]o one would tell him his bad genes were keeping him out, of course [...]. Better to train doctors who were likely to live long enough to put their training to use" (Butler, "The Evening" 481). In the fictional world of the story, society thus limits access to certain opportunities and positions to people without DGD, as they are perceived to offer greater long-term economic productivity. The pervasive social discrimination described above further emphasizes this bias, effectively impeding equal opportunities for both castes. However, it is noteworthy that some DGDs are exceptionally good at sciences and even make significant genetic discoveries (478), which is why some individuals with DGD manage to be accepted into colleges and universities, underscoring the complexity of the issue of inequality.

The narrative perspective also plays an important role in shaping the reader's perception of the caste system, as it confines itself to the experiences of people with DGD. Consequently, the story offers an exclusive insight into their lives as marginalized members of society and gives no voice to non-DGDs who occupy a higher position within the social hierarchy. Lynn's choice of language underscores the deep internalization of ableism perpetuated by the caste system, as already indicated earlier. Her description of the disease-causing genes as "bad genes" (481), the deterioration process as going "bad" (478), and her persistent comparison between her current existence and an assumed 'normal' life vividly illustrate this internalized bias. She speaks of a "normal life span" (478), medications used for a "normal person" (479), and instances where

DGDs attempt to “pass as normal” (Butler, “The Evening” 479). This norm, which focuses on able-bodied individuals, functions as the tool of comparison, as established in the introduction, and consequently diminishes Lynn and Alan’s sense of optimism.

In conclusion, the recurring themes, character dynamics, and societal mechanisms depicted in the short story demonstrate the profound discrimination endured by people with DGD. This exploration mirrors the two castes within the fictional society, creating social hierarchies and leading to inequality. Whereas the first part of the story is pervaded by a somber tone and is devoid of solutions for the challenges at hand, the second part introduces Dilg as a “semiutopian twist” (Schalk 46) that allows Lynn and Alan to discover the potential to mutually benefit from other DGDs, a development that further challenges their notion of ‘normal’.

The Power of Community

The introduction of Dilg in the second part of the short story opens a promising possibility for the future and an alternative perspective for living with DGD by illustrating the experience of residing in a supportive community. Therefore, this section is essential for analyzing the power of community, particularly in supporting drifted individuals with DGD. Prior to the visit to Dilg, Lynn’s expertise of living alongside other DGDs at college introduces the concept that communal living might serve as a potent form of resistance against the shared marginalization they have long endured. By establishing a small community, Lynn engineers an environment where no one must bear curious stares, social isolation, or discomfort any longer: “We’d all had enough of being lepers twenty-four hours a day” (Butler, “The Evening” 479). The bond between Lynn and Alan demonstrates how DGDs can find comfort in each other’s company, becoming each other’s reason to persevere (481). Resisting against oppression through communal bonds foreshadows the idea that Dilg comes to embody. Subsequently, Beatrice reveals that Lynn’s concept of housing and her role as housemother proved effective due to her possession of a specific pheromone. This pheromone enables Lynn to earn trust from drifted DGDs, but also comforts controlled DGDs including her flat mates.

Dilg operates on the foundation of mutual support among DGDs, ensuring that their sense of purpose remains intact by keeping them at work. Individuals like Beatrice, who also possesses the pheromone, enable drifted DGDs to regain agency over their lives and portray a far superior alternative to traditional hospital wards. The facility illustrates a large-scale and further developed version of Lynn and Alan’s shared house at college. Drawing parallels with the Deinstitutionalization movement, the distinction between wards and Dilg reflects the shift from state institutions to community-based ones. In contrast to the depressing outlook within a ward, Dilg offers a life with active community involvement, as demonstrated by Beatrice. Instead of being perceived as incapable, Dilg acknowledges the patients for their worth, and they can fully accept themselves. For example, a drifted DGD patient successfully developed palmprint locks for Dilg, only made possible by the support of the community (492). Dilg therefore emerges as a symbol of hope and optimism. This theme resonates with ideas developed throughout Butler’s work, where she frequently portrays marginalized individuals collectively engineering novel ways to navigate their challenging circumstances (Yaszek 64-5). In a similar vein, Dilg’s success is deeply intertwined with its community-based approach. The interdependence of DGDs within this environment displays the significance of working together to create a more inclusive and nurturing world, challenging normative understandings of ability. If society were to fully embrace the differences of individuals with DGD – acknowledging their distinctive dietary requirements, the possibility of

drifting, and their self-destructive tendencies – they could benefit the economy. Furthermore, recognizing their exceptional abilities for intense concentration and competence in sciences could give them a meaningful sense of purpose. Drifted DGD patients retain their value as productive members of society, as they possess the ability to read, write, and contribute to existing research, thereby remaining a valuable part of the labor force. In 1999, Senator Edward M. Kennedy aptly stated his perspective on disability when the Work Incentives Improvement Act was passed, allowing individuals in need of healthcare benefits to work without forfeiting them: “We must banish the patronizing mind-set that disabled people are unable. In fact, they have enormous talent, and America cannot effort to waste an ounce of it” (qtd. in Fleischer Zames and Zames xxi). This perspective aligns with the approach of disability studies, which conceptualizes disability not as a personal flaw, but rather as an outcome of social injustice. According to this view, addressing disability entails not wanting to fix the individual’s perceived deficiencies, but instead emphasizes the need for modifications to the social and physical surrounding (Allan 4). For individuals with DGD, however, this transformative process remains distant, as the priority lies first in enhancing their quality of life upon entering the symptomatic phase of the disease.

Beatrice’s character development shows the life-altering power of the retreat, giving her life a purpose derived from her indispensable role in helping drifted DGDs. Despite her own battles with suicidal thoughts that once placed her in the same mental state as Alan and Lynn, Beatrice feels empowered and achieves a renewed sense of dignity in the community, where she finds her place and purpose. In turn, she becomes an agent of empowerment for her community members, orchestrating a shift in the prevailing power dynamics. Instead of being subject to the authority of state institutions, drifted DGD patients regain agency over their own lives. Individuals like Beatrice and Lynn hold a unique and precarious position, as they must exercise their authority responsibly, refraining from any misuse of power. Such misconduct would reintroduce inequality and undermine the progress of empowerment. This empowerment, however, does not blind her to the realities of the disease, as she, like Alan, voices her standpoint of eradicating the disease’s further spread (Butler, “The Evening” 490). She believes in supporting and uplifting existing individuals with DGD in navigating their lives and drift, but in preventing the birth of new DGDs. While Lynn expresses her interest in joining Dilg, Alan utters his fear of becoming dependent on a DGD with the pheromone, like Lynn or Beatrice. The latter reminds him of the remaining autonomy of drifted patients and that “the people of Dilg are problem solvers [...]. Think of the problems you could solve!” (492). In the world of Butler’s short story, interdependence is thus not negatively connoted, but portrayed as a means of retaining one’s own dignity (Canavan 184).

Although the narrative portrays a closely-knit DGD community with Dilg, it is crucial to remain critically aware of the ongoing lack of integration between DGDs and non-DGDs, constituting the broader society. This disparity becomes strikingly evident when Beatrice notes the continued existence of wards that neglect to assist patients with DGD, a result of “greed and indifference” (487). The deliberate absence accentuates the need for societal change and acceptance, highlighting the potential of diverse communities coming together. Another issue that emerges is the territorial behavior among DGDs who possess the pheromone (490). This territoriality is evident in the immediate aversion between Lynn and Beatrice, even though they have never met before. Lynn notes the different impact Beatrice has on her compared to Alan: “What was it about that old lady that relaxed him but put me on edge?” (485). Consequently, one retreat can only accommodate a single pheromone-bearing DGD, showing the limitations of communal living.

Overall, Dilg validates the profound strength that emerges from a strongly tied community. It is proof of the power of communal support, where shared experiences foster resilience, inspiration, and empowerment. By embracing the ideals of unity and interdependence, Dilg embodies the potential for a future where communities, regardless of differences, can collectively pave the way for a more inclusive and compassionate world.

Intersecting Systems of Discrimination

Having highlighted the discriminatory mechanisms within the narrative and the role of community in restoring a sense of self-worth, my analysis will conclude by exploring the impact of intersecting social identities on these discriminatory processes.

In the broader context of Butler's work, the short story stands as an anomaly, as most of the characters remain devoid of explicit racial identification (Schalk 36). Unlike her typical portrayal of a Black woman as the central figure in most of her narratives (Pickens 167), the only character in "The Evening" with a specified background is Alan, whose father is of Nigerian origin. Significantly, the only character whose race is mentioned is Black, and this detail is mentioned twice within Lynn's description of him: "He extended a *dark*, square hand, and I took it and moved closer to him. He was a *dark*, square man [...]" (Butler, "The Evening" 480, my emphasis). However, the association of race with mental or physical disability is a recurring motif in Butler's writing, a phenomenon that Pickens argues accentuates the need to focus on situating intersectional embodied experiences as a pivotal focal point for comprehending her literary work (167).

In the short story, Lynn and Alan both encounter distinct forms of discrimination. Lynn, a – presumably white – American woman with DGD, possesses the pheromone that makes her a rarity among DGDs. Conversely, Alan is a Black American man with Nigerian background and DGD and, additionally, does not carry the pheromone. Once people find out about the rare ability of Lynn, they might view her as superior to Alan and as having a better chance at finding a job. To a certain extent, one can interpret this circumstance as a reversal of traditional gender roles in the community of DGDs, given that only female carriers of double DGD, such as Lynn and Beatrice, possess the pheromone crucial for treating the disease (Cavalcanti and De La Roque 68). Because women are attributed a greater value in the context of DGD treatment, they could more readily replace men, leading them to question their worthiness to Dilg compared to women. This position sheds light on Alan's hesitation towards the open ending of the story when Beatrice invites him to join Dilg. Lynn accurately observes: "If the pheromone were something only men had, you would do it" (Butler, "The Evening" 493). Despite his potential contribution to the facility, the prospect of receiving directives from someone else after drifting terrifies him, clouding the outlook on the possibilities Dilg holds for him. Enhancing the significance of women with DGD may be attributed to Butler's incorporation of the ideas originating in the second wave of the Women's rights movement from the 1960s and 70s. This movement encompassed various aspects, including work and community domains (Zaki 245).

In addition to these dynamics, the category of class is involved. Both central characters appear to come from middle-class backgrounds, having enrolled in college, with Lynn even receiving a scholarship from Dilg due to her unique ability (Butler, "The Evening" 491). This privilege grants them access to education, enables them to cover living expenses, and allows them to focus on their professional careers. However, if their educational paths were different, this would impact how individuals without DGD perceive them and add to their discrimination. Therefore, this example illustrates that discriminatory experiences differ significantly, as DGDs who belong

to a lower social class might face different challenges than Lynn and Alan. Beatrice, as another important character, is a trained doctor, underscoring her value for Dilg. Her professional expertise enabled her to be among those who detected the pheromone and therefore places her in the category of DGDs who “made scientific and medical history” (Butler, “The Evening” 478). As a result, owing to her reputation, it is likely that Beatrice’s experiences and circumstances differ significantly from those of less educated individuals with DGD.

This glimpse into the impact of intersectional identities serves to illustrate how individuals with the disease encounter various forms of discrimination, emphasizing the diversity of their experiences and the impossibility of labelling them. This observation aligns with Schalk’s contention that disability represents just one of several lenses through which the narrative can be examined. The discrimination depicted not only targets individuals with disabilities in society but can also extend to other marginalized communities, encompassing Black people, the working-class population, immigrants, and members of the queer community (Schalk 37-40). This, in turn, connects to Roberts’ assertion that civil rights movements share a common goal and thus are united in their pursuit of equality and their fight against the “stereotypes of weakness and passivity that society placed on them” (qtd. in Fleischer Zames and Zames 38).

Paths of Change: Hope for an Inclusive Society

“The Evening” effectively exposes the systematic discrimination faced by people with DGD. The recurring leitmotifs of despair, hopelessness, and emptiness, coupled with the pessimistic tone, depict the challenges of living with a disability. These themes extend across all characters, including Lynn, Alan, Alan’s mother, Lynn’s parents and flat mates. The narrative’s first-person narrator and the deliberate lack of character development of Lynn and Alan intensify the sense of entrapment within the disease. The triad of oppression, encompassing institutional and legal bias, societal discrimination, and self-discrimination stemming from internalized oppression, unmask the entanglement of discrimination originating from both non-DGDs and DGDs due to their internalized ableism. This system has generated a social hierarchy within the fictional society of “The Evening,” dividing it into two groups: those with the disability and those without.

The story’s proposed solution revolves around communal living, exemplified through Lynn’s college housing, her bond with Alan, and Dilg. Within a community, individuals can benefit from one another while finding personal acceptance and empowerment. Simultaneously, they retain the ability to contribute to society through labor by using their scientific aptitude. The comparison with the Deinstitutionalization movement highlights the influence of American social issues on Butler’s work. Despite Dilg symbolizing hope, community building at Dilg remains just the initial step in the fight against inequality. Broader societal integration stays elusive, and the issue of territorial behavior among DGDs carrying the pheromone persists.

Ultimately, the exploration of intersectionality in the short story illuminates the diverse factors shaping the forms of oppression individuals with DGD endure, depending for example on social class, race, and reputation. The creation of a world where only women can carry the pheromone, essential for treating drifted DGD patients, hints at a gender role reversal within the DGD community. Deeper insights could emerge through extended analysis, comparing the various ways of oppression to other discriminatory groups beyond just disability. This expansion could encompass gender, the LGBTQ+ community or the working class. For instance, while not explicitly stated in the story, Alan’s racial background might additionally impede his equal

treatment. In conclusion, Butler's short story calls for inclusivity, draws attention to individuals with disabilities and, via Dilg, proposes an alternative to state institutions.

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