

**DISABLISM AND ITS CONSEQUENCES IN KATE CHOPIN'S
THE BLIND MAN**

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Abstract

Studi ini mengkaji disablisme dan dampaknya dalam cerita pendek karya Kate Chopin yang berjudul *The Blind Man*. Chopin secara lugas menulis bahwa pria buta, sebagai tokoh utama, didiskriminasi karena disabilitasnya. Hal itu disebut disablisme; ketika orang memiliki pandangan negatif, meremehkan seseorang dengan disabilitas, kemudian menimbulkan kerugian dan memperpanjang kebencian terhadap mereka. Melalui teori disablisme dan metode analisis kualitatif, makalah ini mengeksplorasi lebih lanjut tentang disablisme dan dampaknya dalam kehidupan nyata dan dalam sastra. Cerita pendek Chopin membuktikan bahwa disablisme menunjukkan bahwa perlakuan apa pun terhadap manusia tidak pernah netral, tetapi terkait dengan identitas. Sementara itu, penyandang disabilitas harus dianggap sebagai manusia, bukan melalui disabilitas mereka. Kesimpulannya, cerita Chopin membuka mata orang untuk memanusiakan orang lain, terutama mereka yang memiliki keterbatasan fisik.

Kata kunci: Disablisme, *Kate Chopin*, *The Blind Man*.

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Abstract. This study investigates disablism and its impacts in Kate Chopin's flash fiction entitled *The Blind Man*. Chopin straightforwardly writes that the blind man, as the main character, is discriminated against because of his disability. This is called disablism; it occurs when people have a negative viewpoint, undermine someone with a disability, and bring harm or prolonged hatred to them. Through the theory of disablism and qualitative analysis, this research explores disablism and its impacts in both real life and literature. Chopin's flash fiction proves that treatment toward human beings is never neutral, but always identity-related. Meanwhile, disabled people should be regarded as human beings, not through their disabilities. In conclusion, Chopin's story opens people's eyes to humanize others, especially those with physical limitations.

Keywords: Disablism, Kate Chopin, *The Blind Man*.

Introduction

The Blind Man is one of Kate Chopin's flash fictions, written in 755 words and published in 1897 (Chopin, 2015). This narrative illustrates how society treats the main character, the blind man. It reveals a significant gap between being normal and disabled. The differences are not presented as a simple duality, but as a rigid identity hierarchy or dualism. This structure establishes a higher hierarchy where one side is considered superior and more humane than the other (Goodley, 2014; Burch, 2023; Pratiwi et al., 2025). Consequently, those considered "normal" consistently tend to undermine those with disabilities. Chopin directly opposes this dehumanizing hierarchy through this flash fiction.

Discriminatory treatment toward people with disabilities results in significant negative impacts. Crucially, the consequences extend beyond mere discrimination to include deep-seated hateful feelings (Apriyandi, 2023; Burch, 2023; Riza et al., 2026). These effects are closely related to how individuals are treated in public places. Few facilities adequately meet the needs of the disabled. Public spaces often expose societal discrimination and reflect deeper stigma embedded in everyday life. Absent ramps, failing elevators, and uneven sidewalks create constant obstacles. Such barriers exclude independence while reinforcing assumptions that disabled people are fragile or dependent. Their resilience remains unseen as limitations are imposed by both infrastructure and perception. Instead of being considered from the start, they are treated as an afterthought and separated from full participation. This paper investigates how disablism systematically results in such ideas of mistreatment.

The novelty of this study involves the analysis of flash fiction, a genre rarely discussed in literary analysis. Short stories and flash fiction often lack a constant spotlight due to their brevity and simplicity (Galef, 2016; Riza et al., 2026; Wahyudi, 2023). Readers often favor novels or films for their extensive word counts. However, flash fictions offer profound meanings that widen the audience's imagination. Additionally, the disablism concept remains under-discussed in literary studies. It is currently less popular than the psychological aspects of literature. Nevertheless, disablism opens wider perspectives regarding marginalized human experiences (Apriyandi, 2023; Pratiwi et al., 2025; Temple, et al., 2018). Social aspects of

literature must touch those who are undermined, forgotten, or demonized. Literature should pay closer attention to those who are peripheral in society.

Method

This research employs a qualitative method to analyze specific concepts and written data. Online and offline scripts are utilized through descriptive analysis to explain the correlation between *The Blind Man* and the concept of disablism. These scripts are derived from various books and journals. The data analysis process includes obtaining sources, reading them carefully, comparing them with related issues, and quoting them in this paper. Each source is read and broken down into its particular elements. The plots and settings of the short story are analyzed to highlight significant conditions related to disablism, discrimination, and its consequences. Ultimately, data analysis is conducted by finding reliable sources, understanding the context, and describing them properly within this scientific journal.

Results and Discussion

The Imageries of a Disabled Person in *The Blind Man*

Kate Chopin's flash fiction *The Blind Man* remains uniquely relevant today. The narrative centers on the main character, who functions as both a literal figure and a symbolic image. Both perspectives reveal discrimination from "normal" people toward the disabled (Goodley, 2014; Burch, 2023; Pratiwi et al., 2025). Chopin illustrates how blindness, while a personal attribute, often transforms the individual into an object for others. Blindness acts as a perception that triggers further discriminatory treatment (DePauw, 2022; Khawam & Akerkar, 2023). Data regarding these imageries is indicated below:

“His old straw hat and faded garments looked as if the rain had often beaten upon them, and the sun had as many times dried them upon his person” (Chopin, 2015).

The author depicts a character wearing faded, worn-out clothes and an old straw hat. This imagery implies constant exposure to the elements. Such a depiction suggests a life defined by the cycles of sunlight and rain (Demir-Atay, 2016; Wirnoto, et al., 2023) . These details paint a vivid picture of the character's daily struggle.

The man's poor condition is reflected in his simple attire . His straw hat, beaten by rain and sun, symbolizes a lack of wealth. He exists through what he wears (Demir-Atay, 2016; Wirnoto, et al., 2023). Readers can clearly suspect a difficult life. He lacks alternative clothing to protect himself from severe weather.

“He was not old, but he seemed feeble; and he walked in the sun, along the blistering asphalt pavement. On the opposite side of the street there were trees that threw a thick and pleasant shade: people were all walking on that side. But the man did not know, for he was blind, and moreover he was stupid” (Chopin, 2015) .

This quote depicts a thin man walking under a scorching sun. He faces immense difficulty on the blistering asphalt pavement due to blindness. His disability prevents him from seeing more comfortable, shaded routes (Demir-Atay, 2016; Wirnoto, et al., 2023). He continues forward while others choose the shade. These situational elements highlight the heart-touching reality of his existence.

Several aspects emerge from this scene. First, the city lacks adequate facilities for disabled persons. The man must walk on hot asphalt without tactile signs for his stick. Second, societal indifference is evident. He endangers himself while others remain unconcerned (Demir-Atay, 2016; Akbar, et al., 2023). Third, Chopin uses vivid imagery to emphasize the harsh weather. The image of a blind man walking intentionally yet unnoticed is powerful (Khawam & Akerkar, 2023; Oktavia, et al., 2023). His presence appears normal to bystanders who ignore his actions.

“In the red box were lead pencils, which he was endeavoring to sell. He carried no stick, but guided himself by trailing his foot along the stone copings or his hand along the iron railings. When he came to the steps of a house he would mount them” (Chopin, 2015) .

The narrator describes a character selling lead pencils from a red box. Lacking a stick, he guides himself using iron railings or stone paths (Demir-Atay, 2016; Oktavia, et al., 2023). He skillfully climbs house steps when necessary. This depiction showcases the character's inventiveness and tenacity despite a lack of conventional support.

The text emphasizes the man's simple yet tough nature . He refuses to beg, preferring to earn money through sales. Chopin presents this as a significant contrast (Chopin, 2015; Demir-Atay, 2016). Blindness does not equate to laziness; he struggles hard to survive. He is limited but resilient, doing what he can to earn a living.

“At times he succeeded in finding the electric button: but the man or maid who answered the bell needed no pencil, nor could they be

induced to disturb the mistress of the house about such a small thing” (Chopin, 2015).

The protagonist seeks potential customers by pressing electric buttons. He hopes for a positive response and a sale. However, the household staff responds with indifference (Chopin, 2015; Demir-Atay, 2016). They refuse to trouble the mistress for such a trivial matter.

Despite these ineffective responses, the character continues his efforts. He keeps struggling to sell his goods (Chopin, 2015; Demir-Atay, 2016). This behavior reflects an eagerness to live rather than mere stubbornness. He maintains faith that someone will eventually need a pencil.

“That morning someone who had finally grown tired of having him hanging around had equipped him with this box of pencils, and sent him out to make his living. Hunger, with sharp fangs, was gnawing at his stomach and a consuming thirst parched his mouth and tortured him” (Chopin, 2015).

The blind man was sent into the world to earn a living. Chopin paints a realistic picture of his physical suffering (Chopin, 2015; Demir-Atay, 2016). Hunger and thirst relentlessly torment him. The pencil box serves as both a business opportunity and an illustration of his survival struggle. Chopin’s ability to depict such suffering in a single sentence is remarkable.

“The man drifted into a side street, where there was a group of noisy, excited children at play. The color of the box which he carried attracted them and they wanted to know what was in it. One of them attempted to take it away from him. With the instinct to protect his own and his only means of sustenance, he resisted, shouted at the children and called them names” (Chopin, 2015).

The story shifts as the man encounters a group of cheerful children. Attracted by the red box, one child attempts to take it (Chopin, 2015; Demir-Atay, 2016). The man instinctively defends his only source of sustenance by yelling and pushing. This scene illustrates his difficulty in keeping possessions safe in a curious environment.

While some readers might find the man emotional, his response is reasonable . Fatigue, thirst, and hunger drive his bad temper (Demir-Atay, 2016; Oktafiani, et al., 2023). He struggles to keep his goods intact to ensure his survival .

“A policeman coming round the corner and seeing that he was the center of a disturbance, jerked him violently around by the collar; but upon perceiving that he was blind, considerably refrained from clubbing him and sent him on his way. He walked on in the sun” (Chopin, 2015).

A policeman assumes the blind man is the center of a commotion. He reacts vigorously by grabbing the man’s collar. However, the officer refrains from using force after realizing the man is blind. The blind man continues through the sunlight (Demir-Atay, 2016; Oktafiani, et al., 2023; Riza et al., 2026). This encounter highlights the complexities of navigating public spaces and interacting with law enforcement for the visually impaired.

“Then something happened, something horrible happened that made the women faint and the strongest men who saw it grow sick and dizzy. The motorman’s lips were as gray as his face, and that was ashen gray; and he shook and staggered from the superhuman effort he had put forth to stop his car” (Chopin, 2015) .

A disturbing incident occurs as the blind man is hit by a car. The scene is frightening; the man bleeds while the driver struggles to stop. The driver traveled at a fast pace and failed to see the man (Demir-Atay, 2016; Oktafiani, et al., 2023). As a wealthy man with a good car, he drove carelessly. The blind man becomes a victim of callousness from those with greater health and wealth.

“The blind man did not know what the commotion was all about. He had crossed the street, and there he was, stumbling on in the sun, trailing his foot along the coping” (Chopin, 2015).

This passage highlights the man's total innocence. His limitations prevent him from seeing the surrounding danger. Chopin emphasizes that he is a victim of societal indifference (Demir-Atay, 2016; Oktafiani, et al., 2023; Riza et al., 2026). The audience must question who is truly blind: the pencil seller or the callous driver . This story raises moral questions about unjust conditions in everyday life.

Disablism and Its Impactful Perceptions in Everyday Life

Disability is the lack of ability to perform normal human activities due to impairments or barriers, whether psychological, physiological, or body structure and function (Alya, 2019; Burch, 2023). The experience of disability is influenced by the nature of a person's impairment, where gender, age, ethnicity, and culture can have a profound and compounding effect. Environmental barriers and attitudes that prevent full participation are primary causes of disability. From this understanding, the concept of disablism emerges as the belief that people with disabilities are less valuable, leading to discrimination, oppression, and harassment. The main issue is the attitude of society, which refers to both conscious and indirect discrimination (Alya, 2019; Burch, 2023; Riza et al., 2026). Many argue they have nothing against individuals with impairments, yet they fail to see disabled people as equals or understand the social barriers that prevent normal lives.

Disabled people often live lives of unjust dependency, exclusion, and isolation (Crawley, 2020; Runcan, 2022). Barriers include attitudinal, economic, environmental, and institutional obstacles (Alya, 2019; Burch, 2023). These barriers create thick borders between normal and disabled people. Disablism is caused by structural environmental barriers and psycho-emotional sociocultural barriers that affect well-being (DePauw, 2022; Panikkar, 2020; Riza et al., 2026). Social structures often fail to escape a dualism where certain groups are considered higher in value than others (Khawam & Akerkar, 2023).

Ignorance is a primary background of disablism, defining how the non-disabled treat the disabled (Alya, 2019; Sanmiquel-Molinero & Pujol-Tarrés, 2020). Differentiated values prolong the marginalization of disabled people. While ignorance can sometimes be neutral, it becomes harmful when it views the disabled as incomplete (Reku et al., 2026; Sanmiquel-Molinero & Pujol-Tarrés, 2020). Ignorance is categorized into invincible and vincible perspectives. Invincible ignorance is incidental and lacks ethical intent (Goodley, 2014; Sanmiquel-Molinero & Pujol-Tarrés, 2020).

In contrast, vincible ignorance is intentional and rational. It often becomes a habit planted in people's minds that leads to indifference or disgust. When experienced collectively, this becomes a socially constructed structure (Sanmiquel-Molinero & Pujol-Tarrés, 2020; Reku et al., 2026; Temple, et al., 2018). These persistent undermining values restrict the freedom of disabled individuals. As long as these labels are maintained, the systemic marginalization of disabled persons remains unchanged (Goodley, 2014; Wolbring, 2021).

Disablism and Its Continuance on Ignorance in The Blind Man

This study explores the theme of disablism and its consequences as illustrated in Kate Chopin's flash fiction, *The Blind Man*. The primary objective is to identify the manifest

consequences of disability in real life as reflected through this narrative. Visually impaired individuals often face labor market precariousness and significantly poor employment outcomes (Chhabra, 2020; Wolbring, 2021). In the story, the blind man's impoverished condition is evident through his worn clothing. This situation reflects his status as both a disabled individual and someone unable to secure decent employment due to his impairment.

Discrimination involves unequal treatment based on characteristics such as impairment, gender, and race (Chhabra, 2020). In the story, the blind man walks on the scorching side of the street while others enjoy the shade, yet no one offers to help him. This avoidance characterizes vincible ignorance, representing a profound loss of empathy and humanity (Goodley, 2014; Gappmayer, 2021; Reku et al., 2026). Society assumes nothing is wrong because they have lost the capacity for sympathy. Institutional disablism further leads to systematic exclusion through societal structures (Chhabra, 2020; Wolbring, 2021). Public facilities in the narrative are unfriendly to the visually impaired, forcing the man to rely on iron fences to navigate and sell pencils. Such facilities consistently fail to address the needs of disabled persons (Crawley, 2020).

Every human deserves respect regardless of physical deficiencies (Sinaga, 2017; Gappmayer, 2021). However, the household servants in the story disrespect the man simply because he sells trivial items. As service workers, they should possess empathy, yet they fail to humanize him. Individual-level disablism also involves personal negative beliefs (Chhabra, 2020; Peers, et al., 2022). This is seen when a character, tired of the man's presence, equips him with pencils and sends him out to suffer. True assistance would involve hiring him for a proper, sightless-compatible job (Apriyandi, 2023; Gappmayer, 2021; Maulidiah et al., 2026).

The role of adults in teaching disability rights is crucial to prevent deviant attitudes in children. In the story, children interfere with the man's box, reflecting indirect discrimination. This behavior occurs because parents fail as primary educators, involving vincible ignorance (Peers, et al., 2022). Furthermore, disablism involves the ill-treatment of disabled individuals (Gappmayer, 2021; Lynda & Princess, 2021). Although police should protect the community (DePauw, 2022; Maulidiah et al., 2026; Peers, et al., 2022), the officer violently jerks the man and only stops after realizing he is blind.

Structural disablism creates blockades through social infrastructure (DePauw, 2022; Lynda & Princess, 2021). The lack of disability-friendly crossings leads to accidents, caused by vehicle users and a society that ignores disabilities. Disabled people are viewed through an alien lens, leading to invisibility (DePauw, 2022; Lynda & Princess, 2021; Maulidiah et al., 2026). The man is hit because he was not considered by the community. Society's failure to guide him reflects a loss of empathy and vincible ignorance (Aisyah, 2021; Gappmayer, 2021).

Conclusion

Kate Chopin's flash fiction, *The Blind Man*, effectively portrays the issue of disablism and its consequences for people with disabilities. The narrative depicts a blind individual who struggles to adjust to his physical environment while encountering societal indifference, ridicule, and demeaning treatment. These challenges are significantly exacerbated when individuals with disabilities encounter a lack of empathy and support from society. This research aligns the literary perspective of discrimination with the real-world obstacles faced by the disabled community.

The consequences of disability depicted in the story extend beyond individual encounters. They impact the ability of the visually impaired to earn a living, access public spaces, and be treated with dignity. These narrative events serve as a critical lesson regarding the need for public awareness and a shift in societal attitudes. Ultimately, the analysis calls for collective efforts to eliminate disablism and promote inclusivity. It emphasizes the importance of education, empathy, and advocacy in creating environments where people with disabilities can lead fulfilling lives. By understanding these consequences, society can work toward a more just and compassionate world for all individuals, regardless of their abilities.

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