

**The Medical Approach and the Social Approach to Disability:  
A Descriptive Analysis**

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## **DECLARATION**

I declare that this thesis is my own account of my research and contains as its main content work which has not previously been submitted for a degree at any tertiary education institution.

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Christian John Mauri

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## **ABSTRACT**

The thesis offers a descriptive analysis of how the “medical approach” to disability and the “social approach” to disability understand and analyse disability as an area of inquiry. The medical approach treats disability as a pathological, deviant state caused by biological and physiological dysfunctions. This approach is discussed in regard to medical sociology, which treats disability primarily as a form of social deviance, and the individual model, which uses medical language to categorise disability based on functional limitations. The social approach treats disability as a social issue, with social forces influencing experiences of disability. This approach is used within disability studies, which argues that disabled individuals represent an oppressed social group, and the social model, which distinguishes between “impairment” and “disability” in order to treat disability as a social entity characterised by a range of social and material conditions.

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