

A Day in the life of Mary: Segregated and Integrated Spaces Explained (Animated)

So, what's the deal with integration and segregation? How do you know which spaces, are which? To help us learn more about this, let's follow Mary throughout her day...

Mary is a young woman, passionate about inclusion for all people. She lives with her adorable fur baby, Mittens, in a cul-de-sac in her developing neighborhood. Mary also lives with three wonderful roommates, all of whom have an intellectual disability. Although, Mary lives in a neighborhood that is open to all, only people with disabilities can live in her home. This is a segregated space.

Mary takes public transit to work and she knows the bus routes well. She sees the same person, Alex, every morning on the bus and they wave hello to each other. Public Transit is available to most people. This is an integrated space.

Mary gets dropped off at a bus stop nearby the day service she attends. Mary loves her day service because this is where she can see her friends. Mary is known and appreciated to be the first one to brew a pot of coffee for everyone. Her favorite day of the week is Thursdays because she goes out on her own to deliver flyers to several businesses in the area. She finishes the work day having a double double at the local coffee shop. Mary dreams about what it would be like to have a job there. Although Mary delivers flyers independently within her community, only people with disabilities can attend this day service. This is a segregated space.

Over lunchbreak, Mary joins a self-advocacy group for people with disabilities. She loves to learn more about her rights and responsibilities. This is a safe space, where Mary feels trusted and connected to her community. Only people with disabilities can join this group. This is a segregated space.

Mary goes home to eat a quick dinner so she can get to bowling. Perogies and farmer sausage on the menu, her roommate's favorite. Mary used to belong to a bowling team that was only for people with disabilities. She wanted to get out of her comfort zone and try something new. Now she bowls with a team that is open

to all people. She is developing new relationships, and especially likes her teammate, Jo. [It's great to see you] Mary and Jo have a shared interest in coffee. Jo actually owns a Jim Horton's coffee shop, and they're hiring. Changing bowling leagues has opened the door to new possibilities. This is an integrated space.

You see it's not about segregated VERSUS integrated spaces. It's all about CHOICE.

When we think of the term segregated, we often think of the four-brick walls that are the institution. However, if we listen to the voices of lived experience of disability, institutions are not defined by their size but the practices and restrictions that people experience. To quote Shane Haddad, past president of People First of Canada: "We need to remind ourselves that we are no closer to being an institution free Canada than we were 30 years ago. The buildings are just harder to find now." We are just getting better at building mini-institutions hidden away in community.

Agencies recreate what is already available to all people in community. Why do they do that? Someone might like Zumba, so the agency creates a Zumba program for people supported when we could be exploring a Zumba class that is integrated and open to all. We have a long way to go. It has been people's experiences to be segregated without choice, and that's wrong. But segregated spaces themselves do not have to be inherently bad. We may choose to spend time with people with a similar experience of our own. Remember, Mary chose to be part of a self-advocacy group so she could build trust and solidarity with her community. We see this with other groups: you might live on campus as a student or you might join a retirement club as a senior. These spaces are designed for a certain demographic, and it can build community. But to make this choice, people need to have a lot of experience, education, and exposure to different spaces. Interacting with integrated spaces is a great first step. If we think about Mary, she built new networks and was presented with new job opportunities just because she joined an integrated bowling league. This likely would not have happened if she had not been exposed to new people.

We call this diversifying your social capital. It's not about what you know, but rather who you know. It doesn't stop at integration; the journey is towards inclusion. Simply sharing physical space and time is not enough. Integration does not automatically translate to inclusion unless everyone is on board – people,

community, family, organizations and even YOU. ***Inclusion is when people have a sense of belonging, and contribute to their communities in meaningful ways. This is when people are truly noticed, known and missed if they didn't show up. Inclusion means that society is rich in diversity, and everyone's unique gifts and contributions are celebrated.

Let's break this down one more time. Segregation is attending the agency's dance, integration is being invited to the club, inclusion is being asked to dance... and justice is creating the playlist. Which dance are you at?