



Making place for encounter

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"Relationships are the most important thing in life."

TRUE or FALSE?

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Overview

1. It's all about relations!
2. Encounters are the fundamental unit of analysis for studying relations
3. What makes 'good' encounters? Conviviality and beyond
4. What's next? Expanding the application of encounter thinking

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1. It's all about
relations




Relational thinking

Things can only be understood in terms of their relation to other things; Thus relations between people (and other things) are placed at the centre of analysis.



Relational thinking in disability studies

The social model of disability takes a relational understanding of disability as an *interaction* between bodies (with impairments) and social and physical environments; Disability is the product of oppressive social *relations*



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Relational thinking in disability studies

A relational approach places at the centre of analysis people with intellectual disabilities' relations with others: eg informal carers, support workers, other people with disability, the 'community' (neighbours, strangers, service providers)

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Relational thinking in disability studies

Whether we're interested in 'needs', 'behaviours', 'support', 'norms', 'rights', 'law', 'policy', 'institutional structures', 'funding', 'employment', 'housing' -- we're ultimately looking at relations

2. Encounters are the
fundamental unit of
analysis for any relation

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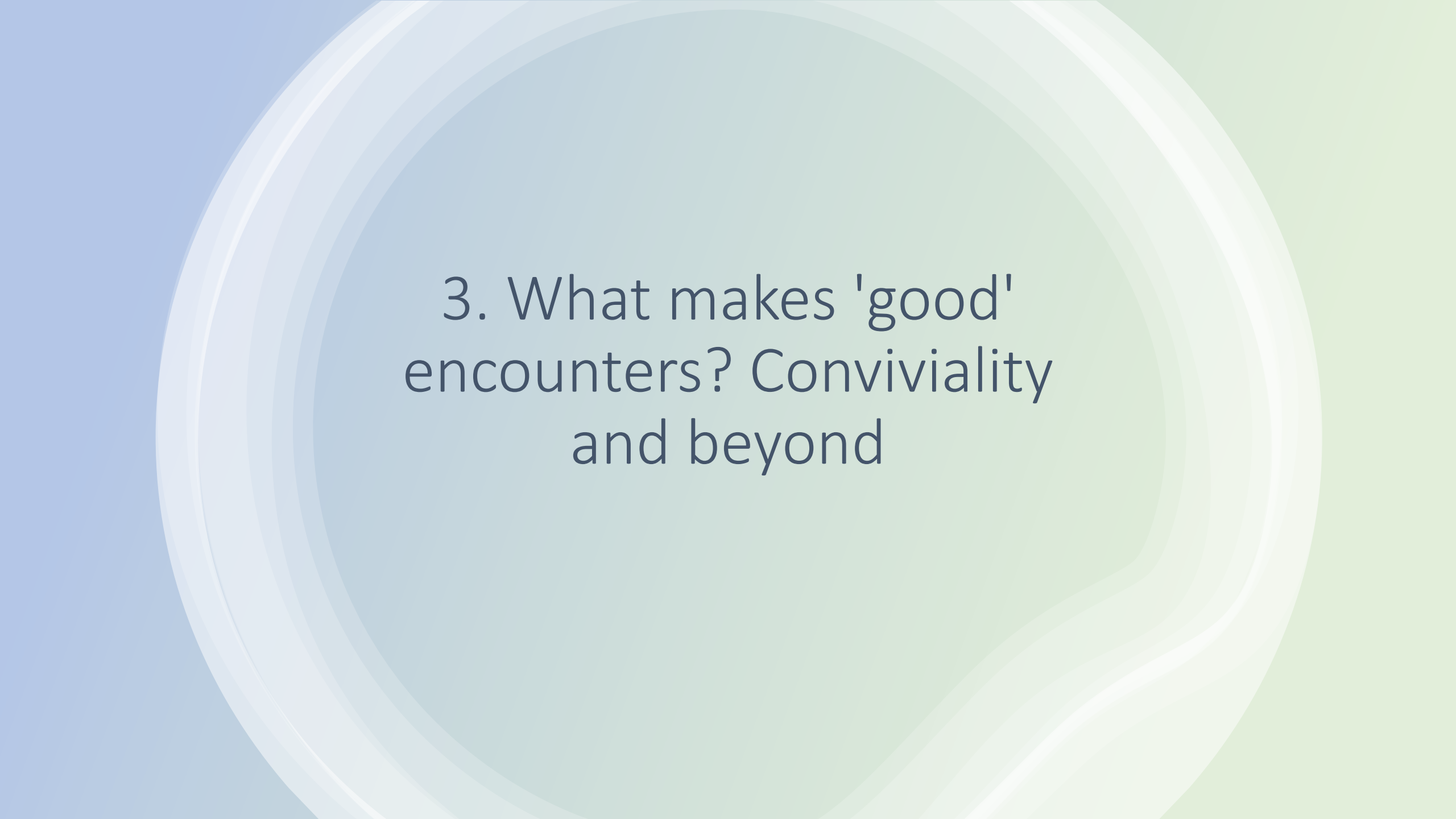
What are encounters?

Encounters are moments of direct interaction between two or more people (or other subjects and objects). They can be fleeting or sustained, physical or virtual, conscious or inattentive.



What are encounters?

A relation can exist between two or more people even when they do not directly encounter one another; but it is direct encounters where relations are formed and reshaped.

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3. What makes 'good'
encounters? Conviviality
and beyond

Dimensions of 'good' encounters

Momentary pleasure (Hedonia)

- Positive emotions

Personal growth and flourishing (Eudaimonia)

- Making friends and acquaintances
- Building social skills
- Participating in social life

Social change (Koinonia)

- *Inclusion*: Building social connections for people with intellectual disability as a 'group'; countering stigma; political visibility;
- *Conviviality*: building a convivial culture

Convivial encounters


“Conviviality is a social pattern in which different metropolitan groups dwell in close proximity, but where their racial, linguistic and religious particularities do not ... add up to discontinuities of experience or insuperable problems of communication [... as the logic of ethnic absolutism suggests they must...]. In these conditions, **a degree of differentiation can be combined with a large measure of overlapping.**” (Gilroy, 2006, p. 40)

Convivial encounters

“In this convivial culture, racial and ethnic differences have been rendered **unremarkable...they have been able to become ‘ordinary’**. Instead of adding to the premium of race as political ontology and economic fate, people discover that the things which really divide them are much more profound: taste, lifestyle, leisure preferences. By making racial differences appear ordinary and banal, even boring, convivial interaction ...has disseminated everyday virtues that enrich our cities, drive our cultural industries and enhance our struggling democracy so that it resists pressure to operate in segregated and colour-coded forms.” (Gilroy, 2006, p. 40)

Determinants of 'good' encounters

- **Environment:** safety; accessibility; boundaries; (Bredewold et al., 2020; Meininger, 2013)
- **Activity:** shared purpose; degree of competitiveness (Wiesel & Bigby, 2019)
- **Support:** planning; initiating; mediating; (Bigby & Anderson, 2021; Bigby & Wiesel, 2015)

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4. What's next? Expanding
the application of
encounter thinking

Encounter in other research contexts

- Encounters with health professionals (Iacono et al., 2014; Weiss et al., 2016)
- Encounters with law enforcement officials (Gulati et al., 2020; Henshaw & Thomas, 2012)
- Workplace encounters (Wiesel et al., 2021; Butcher & Wilton, 2008)



Applying relational thinking and encounter in new contexts

The framework:

- What kinds of encounters are occurring in each setting
- What are 'good' encounters in this context?
- How can we promote more good encounters?

Access to mainstream literature

Inclusive services in existing literature:

- mainstream services staff awareness and skills
- accessible information
- funding
- disability inclusion strategies and action plans
- involvement of people with intellectual disability in service management and governance
- legislation

Abbot and McConkey (2006)

Donner et al. (2010)

French (2013)

Gunnink et al.'s (2017)

Fraser-Barbour et al. (2018)

Merrells et al.'s (2018)

Terras et al. (2021)

Access to mainstream services

Encounters between mainstream service staff and users with intellectual disability

- **Respectful** engagement by staff
- **Warm, welcoming** engagement by staff
- Staff **listening** to service users
- Staff show **flexibility** in their engagement with service users
- Staff **proactively** offer assistance



Access to mainstream services

Encounters between diverse service users

- **Safe**
- **Convivial**
- **Mediated**

Access to mainstream services

Encounters between mainstream service staff and disability support workers or informal carers:

- **Collaboration and shared responsibility** for inclusion of service user with disability

Conclusions

- The world is a constellation of relations
- Relations are forged and reshaped through encounter
- In the last decade or so we have learned a lot about the encounters people with intellectual disability actually experience; the encounters that might benefit them most; and the conditions that might enable such encounters.
- The application of encounter thinking can be expanded further as a frame to consider other disability policy questions, such as employment, access to mainstream services, justice, and healthcare for people with intellectual disability – these too are all about relations!
- I invite you to explore encounters in your data, on whichever topic it is you're now working on!

Thank you! :)

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