

# Turning Limitations into Opportunities

An Evening with

## ALI STROKER

A Visions and Voices Signature Event

Monday, December 2, 2019  
Bing Theatre  
University of Southern California

**“[I’ve had to] be creative, think outside of the box, and solve problems my entire life”**

—Ali Stroker to *Teen Vogue*



### KNOW BEFORE YOU GO

- Ali Stroker is a Broadway and television star.
- She is currently starring as Ado Annie in the Broadway revival of *Oklahoma!*
- She has twice made Broadway history: as the first performer in a wheelchair to appear on a Broadway stage (in *Spring Awakening*, 2015), and then as the first to win a Tony (for her role in *Oklahoma!*, in 2019).
- Among many other things, she has raised awareness about the fact that while most Broadway theatres are accessible for audience members with disabilities, their backstage areas are often not, which is a barrier to performers with disabilities.
- Stroker’s television credits include *The Glee Project* and the Kyra Sedgwick ABC series *Ten Days in the Valley*.

### WHY REPRESENTATION MATTERS

“I remember being younger and just looking everywhere for someone who looked like me, and it didn’t exist . . . When you see somebody else who looks like you, who is in your similar position, you somehow are given confidence that you’re going to make it. That’s why representation is so important.”—Ali Stroker to *Teen Vogue*

### DIVERSITY ON BROADWAY

A study published in 2019 by the Asian American Performers Action Coalition found that Broadway today is more diverse than it has been historically, with 33 percent of all roles going to minority actors in the 2016-17 season. Yet minorities are still under-represented on the stage in relation to their actual numbers in society. And another recent study, this one by Actors’ Equity, found that women and minority actors and stage managers are still getting fewer and lower-paying jobs than white men. The fact that Ali Stroker was the first performer who uses a wheelchair to appear on Broadway, in 2015, speaks to vast under-representation of actors with disabilities.

### DISABILITY RIGHTS AND DISABILITY JUSTICE

The disability rights movement is a global movement to secure equal opportunities and equal rights for people with disabilities. This entails accessibility in architecture and transportation; equal opportunities in independent living, including in employment, education, and housing; and freedom from discrimination and abuse. The movement emerged as an organized movement in the 1960s, inspired by the examples of the civil rights movement and the women’s liberation movement.

The term disability justice was coined out of conversations among disabled queer women of color circa 2005 (including Patty Berne, Mia Mingus, and Stacey Milbern), who sought to build a more intersectional framework. The disability justice movement centers the needs and experiences of people experiencing intersectional oppression, including disabled people of color, queers with disabilities, immigrants with disabilities, and others, and explicitly links ableism to other forms of oppression such as sexism, racism, heteronormativity, and economic exploitation.

## BARRIERS TO ACCESS

Three main barriers to accessibility are:

**attitudinal** (e.g., prejudice, stereotypes, stigma), which lead to bullying, discrimination, harassment, and abuse

**environmental**, such as inaccessible buildings or sidewalks

**institutional**, such as laws that discriminate against or do not protect people with disabilities

## WHAT IS ABLEISM?

Leah Smith of the Center for Disability Rights defines ableism as “a set of beliefs or practices that devalue and discriminate against people with physical, intellectual, or psychiatric disabilities and often rests on the assumption that disabled people need to be ‘fixed’ in one form or the other.” The Oxford English Dictionary defines it as “discrimination in favor of able-bodied people.”

## FOR FURTHER REFLECTION

- What are some common forms of ableism you have experienced or noticed?
- Who would you most like to see represented on Broadway or on TV?
- The actor, playwright, and poet Neil Marcus has said, “Disability is an art—an ingenious way to live.” What do you think he meant by that?

## IF YOU LIKED THIS EVENT, YOU MIGHT WANT TO CHECK OUT:

- Ali Stroker online  
[alistroker.com](http://alistroker.com)
- Disability Services and Programs at USC  
[dsp.usc.edu](http://dsp.usc.edu)
- Everybody Los Angeles  
[everybodylosangeles.com](http://everybodylosangeles.com)
- Axis Dance Company  
[axisdance.org](http://axisdance.org)
- Sins Invalid  
[sinsinvalid.org](http://sinsinvalid.org)



Ali Stroker in *Spring Awakening*, 2015

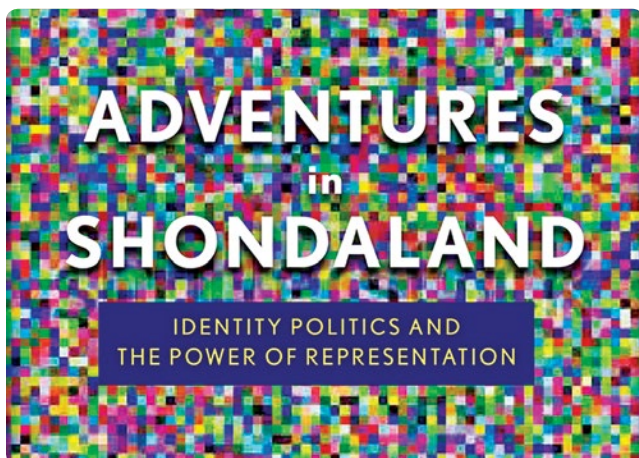
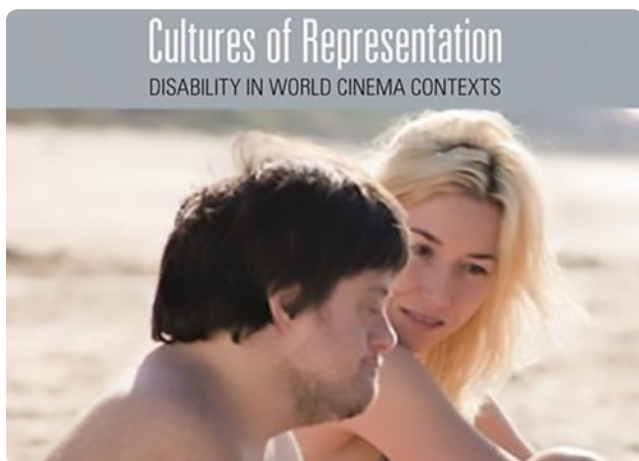
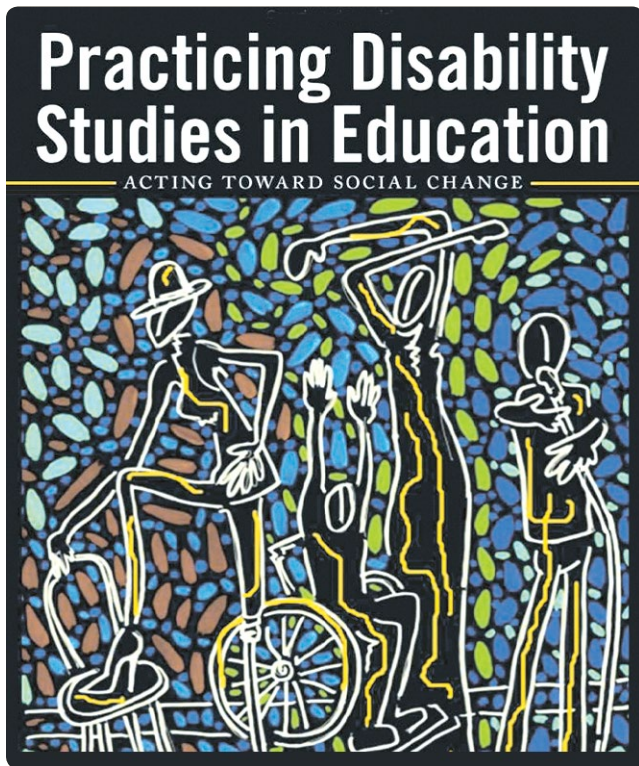


Ali Stroker wins a Tony at the 73rd Annual Tony Awards at Radio City Music Hall



Patty Berne and Stacey Milbern





- ◉ Alice Sheppard  
alicesheppard.com
- ◉ Leaving Evidence: A Blog by Mia Mingus  
leavingevidence.wordpress.com
- ◉ Krip Hop Nation  
kriphopnation.com

## DISCOVER MORE AT THE USC LIBRARIES

**KELSEY VUKIC** of the USC Libraries selected the following resources to help you learn more about this evening's event. Those with a call number (e.g., books) are physical items which you can find in our campus libraries. Those without a call number (e.g. e-books, journals, and databases) are electronic resources, which you can access through the search bar on the USC Libraries homepage at [libraries.usc.edu](http://libraries.usc.edu).

### BOOKS

- ◉ Connor, David J., Jan W. Valle, Chris Hale, and Julie Allan. *Practicing Disability Studies in Education: Acting Toward Social Change*. New York: Peter Lang, 2015.  
**AVAILABLE DIGITALLY VIA: USC DIGITAL LIBRARY**
- ◉ Fraser, Benjamin. *Cultures of Representation: Disability in World Cinema Contexts*. London: Wallflower Press, 2016.  
**CINEMATIC ARTS LIBRARY: PN1995.9.H34 C858 2016**
- ◉ Griffin, Rachel Alicia and Michaela D. E. Meyer. *Adventures in ShondaLand: Identity Politics and the Power of Representation*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2018.  
**CINEMATIC ARTS LIBRARY: PN1992.4.R515 A38 2018**
- ◉ Jaeger, Paul T. and Cynthia Ann Bowman. *Understanding Disability: Inclusion, Access, Diversity, and Civil Rights*. Westport, CT: Praeger, 2005.  
**DOHENY MEMORIAL LIBRARY: HV1553.J34 2005**

### DATABASES

Campbell Collaboration Online Library  
 Disability in the Modern World: History of a Social Movement  
 Arts & Humanities Full Text  
 ProQuest Research Library

### JOURNALS

*Equality, Diversity and Inclusion: An International Journal*

### DVDS

*Imaginary Circumstances*. Directed by Anthony Weeks. Stanford, CA: Anthony Weeks, 2010.  
**LEAVEY LIBRARY: LVYDVD 9302**