



THE UNIVERSITY OF  
MELBOURNE

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A photograph of three people sitting on a wooden bench outdoors. On the left is a young man with glasses wearing a brown jacket and khaki pants. In the middle is a man with glasses wearing a dark jacket and dark pants. On the right is a woman with glasses wearing a brown jacket with a fur collar and dark pants. They are all looking towards the right. The background shows a park-like setting with trees and a building.

# RISK AND POSSIBILITY IN ENCOUNTER

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Editorial

Performance, purpose, and creation of encounter between people with and without intellectual disabilities >

Christine Bigby & Ilan Wiesel

Micro-recognition, invisibility and hesitation: Theorising the non-encounter in the social inclusion of people with intellectual and developmental disabilities >

Laurine Blonk

Struggling with sameness and strangeness: (Non)-encounters between people with and without intellectual disabilities in two Dutch neighbourhoods >

Femmianne Bredewold

Possibility and risk in encounter between people with and without intellectual disability >

Ilan Wiesel, Christine Bigby, Peter Kamstra & Jane Farmer

Beyond inclusion: Why research on encounter needs a feminist account of freedom >

Stacy Clifford Simplican

Creating opportunities for convivial encounters for people with intellectual disabilities: "It looks like an accident" >

Christine Bigby & Sian Anderson

Perspectives of adults with intellectual disabilities and key individuals on community participation in inclusive settings: A Canadian exploratory study >

Élise Milot, Romane Couvrette & Marie Grandisson

# encounter

*noun* [C]

UK  /ɪnˈkaʊn.tə/ US  /ɪnˈkaʊn.tə/



**a meeting, especially one that happens by chance:**

- *I had an alarming encounter **with** a wild pig.*



## encounter *noun*

: a chance meeting

// an accidental *encounter*

: a particular kind of meeting or experience with another person

// a romantic *encounter*



# THE POSSIBILITIES OF ENCOUNTER

- Momentary conviviality
- Beginning of long-last relationship

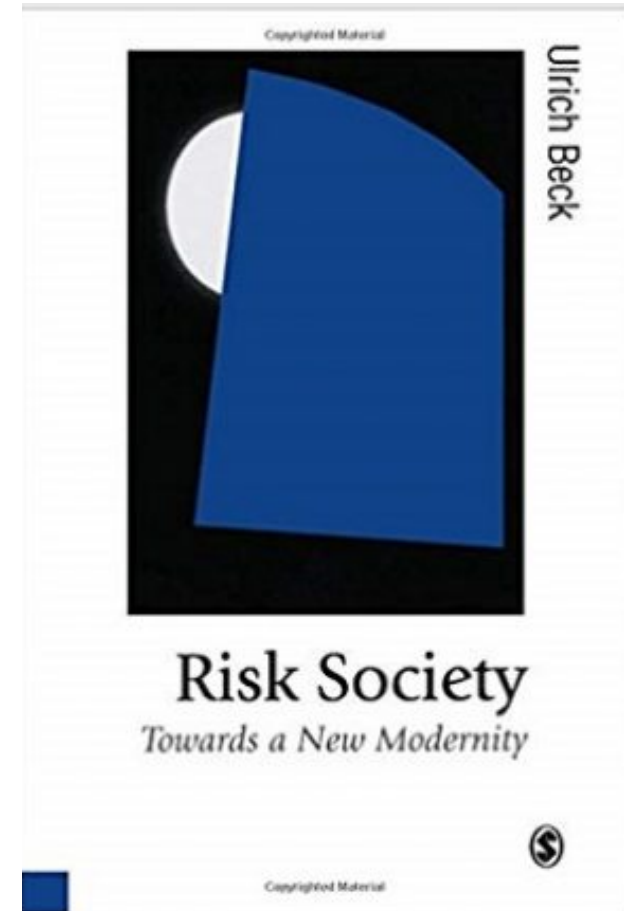


# THE RISKS OF ENCOUNTER

- Reproducing exclusion- being ignored, laughed at, frowned upon, misunderstood, abused

# WHAT IS 'RISK'?

- Uncertainty about future outcomes of choices and actions made at present
- Managing risk: making decisions by weighing possible rewards against possible harms.



# **RISK, VULNERABILITY AND INTELLECTUAL DISABILITY**

- Risk emerges from interaction between a person's exposure to hazard, and their 'vulnerability'
- Label of 'vulnerable' has been criticized as oppressive towards people with intellectual disability

# DIGNITY OF RISK

“Overprotection may appear on the surface to be kind, but it can be really evil. An oversupply can smother people emotionally, squeeze the life out of their hopes and expectations, and strip them of their dignity. Overprotection can keep people from becoming all they could become. Many of our best achievements came the hard way: We took risks, fell flat, suffered, picked ourselves up, and tried again. Sometimes we made it and sometimes we did not. Even so, we were given the chance to try ... In the past, we found clever ways to build avoidance of risk into the lives of persons living with disabilities. Now we must work equally hard to help find the proper amount of risk these people have the right to take. We have learned that there can be healthy development in risk taking and there can be crippling indignity in safety!”  
(Perske, [1972](#))



	Perceived risk	Perceived reward
<b>For support workers</b>	Professional liabilities	Interest and excitement
	Embarrassment	Satisfaction from supporting inclusion
	Disruption to plans	Getting to know another person
<b>For person without disability</b>	Embarrassment	Experiencing belonging and inclusion
	Becoming committed to another person	Getting to know another person
	Being harmed	Feeling good
<b>For person with intellectual disability</b>	Being abused, patronised, infantilised or mistreated	Experiencing belonging and inclusion
	Embarrassment	Getting to know another person
	Being scolded for inappropriate behaviour	Being recognised as a person beyond their disability

# RISK AVERSION

- Avoiding or preventing encounter due to perception that risks outweigh benefits
- Risk aversion by support workers, people with intellectual disability, people without intellectual disability
- Personal and institutional risk aversion



# RISK ENABLEMENT

- Initiating or responding to encounter despite perceived risks;
- Engaging in an encounter in ways that are 'risky', e.g. acknowledging differences and tensions
- At times with strategies to minimize possible harm, but often without



# RISK ENABLING SPACES

- “Knowable”, familiar and with built-in boundaries; but also open for exploration, and not too rigid
- Self-produced and co-produced spaces
- Environments where people are free to enter encounter with others, and also free to disengage
- Places where one can see and be seen by others

# CONCLUSION

- Encounters are shaped by conflicting perceptions of people with intellectual disability as vulnerable individuals to be protected from others, as “hazards” to other community members they encounter, or as self-determining persons with the right to take on risk for the possible rewards, and exercise the dignity of risk itself
- How do we shift from ‘risk aversion’ to ‘risk enablement’?





**THANK YOU!**

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