Disability, Subculture (Culture of)

James W. Trent, Ph.D.
Southern Illinois University at Edwardsville, Edwardsville, IL.

written by scholars in the field

That all humans belong to cultures and subcultures is a truism, so much so that a distinction between the two blurs. Such is the case with the culture and subculture of disability. Here, culture is defined as the shape of a culture or a subculture. Can disability be both a culture and a subculture? The use of the singular in the context, disability, further complicates the question. Is there a culture of disability? Is there a subculture of disability? Can we speak of a disability culture, or must we talk about cultures and subcultures of disability?

DOMINANT CULTURES VIEW OF PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES

First, consider so-called able-bodied people have tended to regard disabled people as having neither a culture nor a subculture. In those unusual times when the academically disabled (usually anthropologists and sociologists) studied disabled people, they tended to regard the disabilities as examples of deviance (e.g., Edgerton 1967; Glasser 1976b; Norcross 1973). In these cases, disabled people were viewed as the embodiment of reactions to the dominant culture's perceived labels. What separated disabled deviants from nondisabled deviants was the nature of choice. Disabled people usually did not choose their deviance; nondisabled deviants made the choice to deviate from cultural norms. As a result, the culture of the disabled was typically described in terms of the social consequences of being disabled, the social stigma faced by disabled people, and the discrimination that they faced. The antithesis of the disabled was the able-bodied, and the world that they created for themselves was described as the real world.

From Helen Keller's early life story, the term disability has become more familiar and accessible to the public. The concept of disability has been redefined to include more than just physical disabilities. Disability is now understood as a social construct, which means that it is not inherent in the individual but is determined by society's attitudes and expectations.

The well-publicized Special Olympics, which the able-bodied also have become a controlled emotional response created by the dominant culture. The intellectually disabled person's "exceptional victories" become the dominant culture's sanctioned exercise. With the attitude, "Them, but not for the grace of God, go I," able-bodied people have created their own culture that is distinct from the dominant culture, but (Blyssam 1996; Brown 1997; Lisk 1989) under these terms, the images of the dominant culture have been created. The dominant culture's sanctioned exercise. With the attitude, "Them, but not for the grace of God, go I," able-bodied people have created their own culture that is distinct from the dominant culture, but (Blyssam 1996; Brown 1997; Lisk 1989)

VOCES FROM WITHIN THE CULTURE OF DISABILITY

It's obvious that people have tended to describe disability as deviance, a growing solidarity in disability communities has built upon deviance theory to include the multitudes of deviance aspects of disability's social fabric (Brown, Lisk 1989). In Western Europe and North America, this cultural interest began about 25 years ago with the passage of national disability and rights legislation. On both sides of the Atlantic, policies have been directed toward creating a more accessible environment for disabled people. These policies have included the creation of special facilities for disabled people, such as ramps and lifts, as well as the provision of sign-language interpreters and other accommodations.

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FEATURES OF THE DISABILITY CULTURE

Disabilities (Brown 1995a; Gill 1995) have noted several characteristic features of this unique cultural formation. It is first, a language and a community of people who share a common experience of disability. The social isolation and stigmatization experienced by disabled people lead to the development of a unique language and culture to express their experiences and to provide a sense of community and solidarity among disabled people.

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REFERENCES


Includes list of sources that you could consult for further information

Names of researchers in the field -- look for work in bibliography

Using Encyclopedias

To Start Your Research

Breaks larger topic into subtopics -- which may help you narrow the scope of your paper