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Societies Disabled: A Look at How the Disabled Are Seen

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SOCIETIES DISABLED
A LOOK AT HOW THE DISABLED ARE SEEN

A Thought from Savannah Scott

What does society think being disabled is? Sociology Now defines the word disabled as "a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities", yet I have personally experienced how society "sees" a disabled individual (Sociology Now pg 531). Let's investigate how people from different parts of society see and treat those labeled disabled.

What Does It Mean to be "Disabled"?

Being disabled is technically known as having an impairment that keeps you from doing activities of daily livings, ADLs. Living in today's society I can see that people don't see people who are unable to complete certain activities alone as disabled, but as people who are "feeble-minded, idiotic, imbecile, totally dependent, custodial, and mentally retarded". According to the Student Manual for Developmental Disabilities Special Training, terms such as those listed above have "taken on very negative meanings and images. Like most negative labels, they demean people, unfairly stereotype them, and stress differences rather than abilities" (Developmental Disabilities, 2011). Being disabled isn't all about what you can and cannot do, it's about what you make of the situation and how you overcome the possibility of needing a little extra help.

The Workplace for the Disabled

In today's society, it is impossible to live without having money and/or a job, unless you are the child of a billionaire. With this said, the disabled can work with programs, such as Goodwill, so that these individuals have a chance to become part of the community and reach their high potential. In Developmental Disabilities Specialty Training, you are taught that this is normalization, "[the entitlement] to live as much as possible like everybody else in ways that enhance their status" (Walling,2017). Goodwill's program provides training and employment to millions of people, giving those who are disabled the possibility of receiving a job coach and an individualized employment plan.

Discrimination Against Disabled

What is discrimination? Discrimination is the maltreatment of an individual because they may do something or act differently. But what does it mean to discriminate against an individual in the work place and has a disability. According to the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, "disability discrimination occurs when an employer or other entity covered by the Americans with Disabilities Act. . .treats a qualified employee or applicant unfavorable because [he/]she has a disability" (EOCC). After reading this, do you think that society commonly discriminates against those who are "different"? This could mean that individual have specific labels, have trouble getting employment, or don't have the same ability to have private housing. When I look at how todays society treats our disabled, I see how things have improved, yet I also see how things have not changed, such as the labeling. I also see that many of disabled individuals have the drive to learn how to be productive in society, leading them to living as normal of a life as possible.

Interview with Chris Jose, LPN

What do you consider to be disabled?

I would say those who have disabilities live with health condition that limits their ability to go about daily life independently. There are multiple stages, meaning that there are disabilities that are not visible and can be cared for without much assistant.

How do you think individuals with disabilities are treated differently?

It depends how severe the disability is. Most people are discriminated against without intention. I think that they are treated very differently, and don't know what is expected of them or how to act around them. This leads to avoidance or remarks that can seem rude. I think that this is because they don't know how to act around those who are different from themselves.

Interview with Samantha Macoubrie, CNA

Do you think that individuals with disabilities have less of an education?

That's hard to say. There are different levels of being disabled and it honestly depends on how well the individual can understand and retain. I also look at the work I do and the amount of time the kids have to take out of school to attend their doctors and specialists' appointments. So, I guess I would have to say the kids who have to see more specialists and miss more school could be educated less; however, they have the ability to catch up and review material after school, at home, with the help of family and friends.

How do you think the disabled are treated differently?

I can say that they could be treated differently in the way that people aren't sure how to approach and work with them. Again this really depends on how severe the disability is and how it presents itself within the person.

Americans with Disabilities Act, ADA

Enacted in 1990, the Americans with Disabilities Act "prohibits discrimination against individuals with disabilities in all areas of public life, including jobs, schools, transportation, and all public and private places that are open to the general public" (ADA National Network). This act was designed as a civil rights law that offers protection, similar to civil rights enacted on basis of race, color, sex, national origin, age, and religion. The ADA also stands as a basis for equal opportunities with accommodations in public, the work place, means of transportation, state and federal programs, and telecommunications. As with other bills that are promoted to laws, the ADA is broken into five sections, all representing a different aspect of life.

Title 1: Employment

This was implemented to allow the disabled to have the same employment opportunities and benefits.

Title 2: State and Local Government

This title was implemented to prohibit discrimination against those with disabilities who are qualified from participating in any programs.

Title 3: Public Accommodations

This title states that private places cannot discriminate against those with disabilities.

Title 4: Telecommunications

Title 4 requires that there be telephone and internet companies to provide a "nationwide system of interstate and intrastate telecommunication relay services that allow individuals with hearing and speech disabilities to communicate" (ADA National Network).

Title 5: Miscellaneous Provisions

This title gives a list of prohibitions that cannot necessarily be used against someone who is disabled, as well as a list of conditions that aren't considered disabilities.

Statistics

- Nearly 20% of all Americans have one or more disabilities
- 7% of boys and 4% of girls ages 5 to 15 have disabilities
- 43% of women and 40% of men age 65 and older have disabilities
- 2.7 million people are in wheelchairs in America
- 9.1 million use a cane, crutches, or a walker
- 1.8 million are unable to see
- 1 million have difficulty hearing a normal conversation

(All the statistics listed above are from Sociology Now pg 532)

Have Attitudes Changed?

The University of Florida has put together a list of how attitudes may have changed since the 1960s and 1970s towards the disabled. Some of these changes include (all examples are directly from the University of Florida Health):

- President Kennedy passed the Mental Retardation Facilities and Community Mental Health Centers Construction Act of 1963. This fostered the establishment of University of Affiliated Facilities which provided care to people with disabilities.
- Medicaid and Medicare were established in the mid-1960's, making it possible for many developmentally disabled persons and their families to secure medical and other long-term care in their communities.
- Finally, the Americans with Disabilities Act was passed on July 26, 1990. Essentially, this law is civil rights legislation for persons with disabilities. The ADA attempts to guarantee the rights of full inclusion into the mainstream of American life for all persons with disabilities.
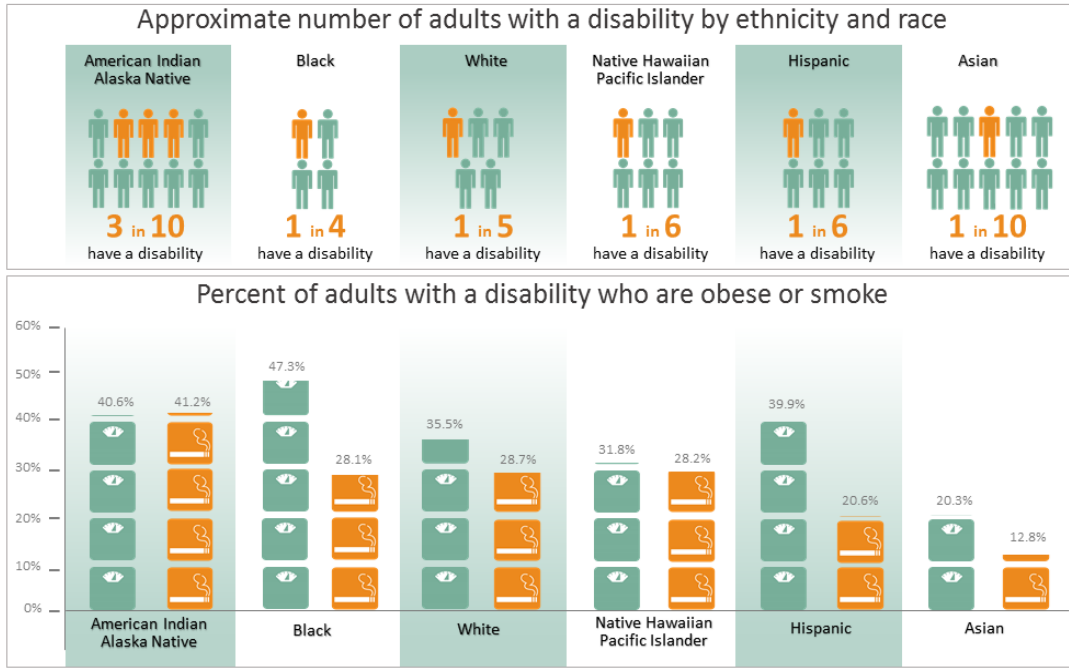
With these changes, some large institutions were closed or significantly downsized, allowing for more chance of one-on-one care. A poll by Lou Harris revealed that most individuals believed that everybody should be allowed the opportunity to participate in each part of society. (Paul Burtner, University of Florida Health)

Disabilities in Different Races and Ethnicities

Adults with Disabilities: Ethnicity and Race
When it comes to the health of people with disabilities, it's important to know the health differences among racial and ethnic groups

Approximate number of adults with a disability by ethnicity and race

American Indian Alaska Native	Black	White	Native Hawaiian Pacific Islander	Hispanic	Asian
3 in 10 have a disability	1 in 4 have a disability	1 in 5 have a disability	1 in 6 have a disability	1 in 6 have a disability	1 in 10 have a disability

Percent of adults with a disability who are obese or smoke

American Indian Alaska Native	Black	White	Native Hawaiian Pacific Islander	Hispanic	Asian
40.6% / 41.2%	47.3% / 28.1%	35.5% / 28.7%	31.8% / 28.2%	39.9% / 20.6%	20.3% / 12.8%

The picture above gives information about different groups and the statistics on how many people have or will have a disability. There is also an area that divides the disabled into subcategories of obesity and/ or their habit to smoke, contributing to a lower quality of life.

Research conducted by Portland State University states that "relatively little is known empirically about" individuals of different races and ethnicities. Although little is known about this subject, it is found to be true that people of different races and ethnicities have a harder time receiving social support. In this scholarly article states that "disclosure of their disability may continue to isolate them from their ethnic/racial group", meaning that they may or may not be accepted by their culture openly because they are considered different (McDonald, Keys, Balcazar 2007). With this in mind, I can say that segregation is not only found in society, but within cultures and subcultures. For example, in the early 1900s, individuals who cared for a family member with a disability were encouraged to send them to an institution, that they would not become a functional part of society because they were limited in what they could do. This was found in the American culture, but who is to say that it couldn't happen within the Japanese-American, African American, and German-American subcultures.

Are Disabled Ignored by Those Who Study Sociology?

Authors Colin Barnes and Mike Oliver wrote a scholarly article describing the importance and unimportance of sociological study of the disabled. In functionality, the authors argue that most of the sociological writing and research was conducted by Parsons. Due to Parsons research, the "Parsonian paradigm has been principally responsible for two distinct, but interdependent, approaches which have implicitly or explicitly influenced all subsequent analyses" (Barnes and Oliver 1993). Then does this mean that Parsons is responsible for bringing views of the disabled to the sociological table? Continuing on through the section it is revealed that Parsons was researching the role of illness in relation to disability, defying social norms of what we consider to be healthy. In Parsons' research, his model tells his readers and followers that "the onset of illness 'sick' people should adopt the sick role", this assuming that illnesses and diseases impede an individuals physiological and psychological abilities (Barnes and Oliver 1993). His model goes onto say that these individuals are not to recover, and in order to regain their social status, are thought to invest in help from medical experts. Although some of his model may be correct, as in seeking medical intervention, he is wrong by assuming that social and economical factors will behave the same, leaving out the thought that individuals could not be able to get help for themselves or afford the interventions needed to have a good quality of life.

Disability is next looked through social deviance, "the freedom from social obligations and responsibilities explicit in the sick role construct and subsequent derivative in the negative view of impairment prevalent in industrial and post industrial societies" (Barnes and Oliver 1993). In English, this means that those were considered "sick" had no social duties or contributed to societies that were either industrial or post industrial. In 1962, a sociologist by the name of Lemert discovered primary and secondary deviance; the former having only marginal implications for the individual concerned and the latter relating to the ascription by others of a socially devalued status and identity" (Barnes and Oliver 1993). Those who are disabled would fall into secondary social deviance, something that devalued their social status and therefor their social identity.

The question is, are those who are disabled ignored by sociology? After conducting the research, it is clear they have not been ignored; however, they could be looked into more, giving a deeper look into how they contribute to their society.
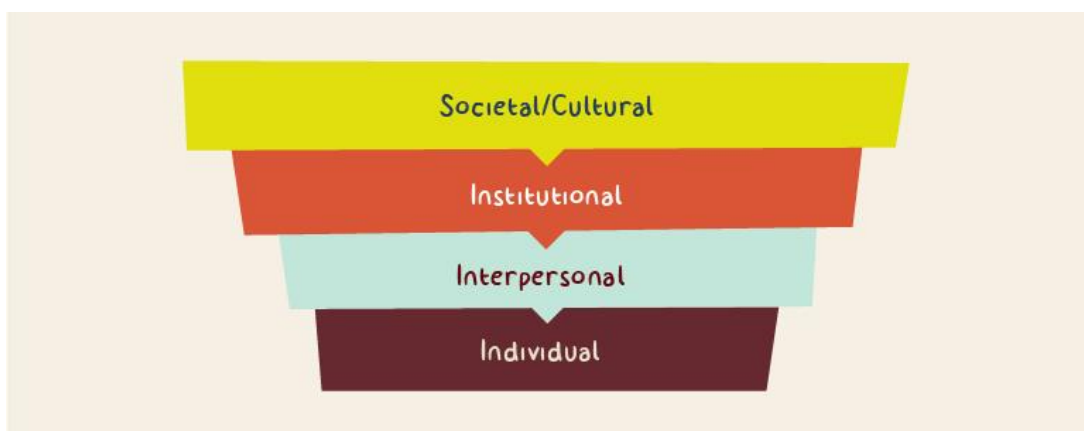
Positions in the United Kingdom about the Disabled

Author Neil Heslop from the Huffington Post, begins talking about his movement to gain more employment opportunities for the disable, one million opportunities to be exact. He argues that the disabled are set up to fail from a young age. This argument supported by a survey that revealed "around half (47%) of young people surveyed felt they were not encouraged to go on to a course or pursue their chosen career. . . more than half of those who took part in our research also said that their teachers

national **T**rends **I**n **D**isability **E**mployment:
Comparison of People With and Without Disabilities
(June 2013 and June 2014)

JUNE 2014	Labor Force Participation Rate		Employment-Population Ratio		Percent Looking	
	June '13	June '14	June '13	June '14	June '13	June '14
PWD	31.4	29.9	26.4	25.6	5.0	4.3
	% change ⬇ 4.8		% change ⬇ 3.0		% change ⬇ 14.0	
PWOD	77.1	76.9	71.2	72.2	5.9	4.7
	% change ⬇ 0.3		% change ⬆ 1.4		% change ⬇ 20.1	

Source: Kessler Foundation/University of New Hampshire Institute on Disability   * PWD – People with disabilities; PWOD – People without disabilities

may have had lower expectations of them because of their disability" (Heslop 2017). With this study completed, stereotypes that are common in the United States are also common across the world, bring stigmas that the disabled are unable to learn and do as well as their able-bodied classmates or coworkers. With these stigmas in mind, our disabled populations are "four times more likely to be unemployed than non-disabled people", and failing to receive work and/or volunteering opportunities that can improve confidence and the skills needed to become independent. The solution to this? Society needs to understand those who are disabled, challenging stereotypes and changing how disabled people are seen when being considered in a classroom or a job.

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