

Section 4: From disability to disabilities

Disability and society

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Learning objectives/key points

- Develop a reflex of thinking about disability in terms of a diversity of experiences
- Two main sources of diversity and inequalities within the experience of disability:
 - Internal : type and extent of impairment
 - External: intersectionality → inscription of disability within other systems of inequality (notably based on class, race and gender)
- Connection between the two: specific impairments may be subject to racialized and/or gendered constructions

1) Diversities and hierarchies of impairments

Diversity of impairments

- Type of impairment (mobility, sensory, intellectual, cognitive, psychiatric, digestive ...)
- Degree/extent of impairment (ex. partial visual impairment vs blindness)
- Visible/invisible
- Early onset/disability acquired later in life
- Stable/evolving conditions
- Pain and medical supervision → cf Wendell's (2001) distinction healthy/unhealthy disabled

Diversities and hierarchies of impairments

Hierarchies between impairment groups

- Salience within the disability movement
- Specific forms of stigma, often infused with racialized and gendered stereotypes, with consequences in terms of diagnosis, healthcare, socio-economic outcomes, welfare compensation, policy recognition. Ex
 - Lives with Down's syndrome seen as « not worth living » (see discussion of prenatal diagnosis in Alderson, 2001)
 - Criminalization of mental health issues (→ inequality in access to healthcare) (Dilts, 2012)
 - Lack of diagnosis and welfare compensation of chronic illnesses that predominantly affect women (ex. fibromyalgia, cf Pryma, 2017)
- Issues of self/collective (non-)identification with disability: ex.
 - Deaf culture (cf Lane, 1995)
 - Neurodiversity

Diversities and hierarchies of impairments

Internal hierarchies within a given impairment group

Examples taken from a recent research on the reception of disability policy in France (Revillard, 2017):

- **Inequalities in access to resources:** being « not disabled enough » to receive needed disability compensation (Judy : « I can walk, but it is complicated for me to go over the edge of the bathtub »)

+ inequality in policy response depending on the origin of the impairment : see history of disability policy in France, section 5 (workplace accidents/veterans/civilians)

- **Symbolic inequalities :** Leila's experience in a special education institution for mobility-impaired children:

« Over there, you realize that the more you are disabled, the less people pay attention to you. There is a sort of... disability rating. What I have noticed is, the less disabled you are, the more respected you are. So for example, paraplegics were more respected than quadriplegics, whom no one paid much attention to. I came to realize it because over the course of those three years [in this institution] my impairment [muscular dystrophy] evolved a lot, and you could clearly see the distinction which was made. [...] It is striking. They don't pay attention to you. You ask for help and [the personnel] says 'I don't have the time' »

Presentation 4.1: Is deafness a disability? [Lane, 1995]

Lane, Harlan. 1995. "Constructions of Deafness." *Disability & Society* 10(2): 171–90.

2) Thinking intersectionally

- A complex view of social stratification
- Class, race, gender, disability: interwoven systems of inequality
- Not just additive (one is a woman AND disabled) and intersectional (men too are at the intersection of gender and disability), but also mutually constitutive:
 - Social representations/expectations associated to a given impairment vary according to race/class/gender
 - Some impairment categories are themselves shaped by race, class and gender (→ connection to 1))
 - Gender/race/class shapes one's experience of disability and vice-versa
 - Individuals can play one system against the other when they navigate those interlinked systems of inequality

Gendering disability

Disabled women and normative femininity

« Disabled women are, of course, a marked and excluded – albeit quite varied – group within the larger class of women. [...] Cultural stereotypes imagine disabled women as asexual, unfit to reproduce, overly dependent, unattractive – as generally removed from the sphere of true womanhood and feminine beauty. Women with disabilities often must struggle to have their sexuality and rights to bear children recognized » (Garland-Thomson, 2004, p.89)

→ consequence: the strategic investment of these traditional roles (seduction, motherhood) can make sense for disabled women to counter gendered stereotypes of disability

Gendering disability

Disabled masculinities (Morris, 1991; Shakespeare, 2013; Robertson & Smith, 2013)

- Initial conflict between disability and traditional hegemonic masculinity (based on strength, autonomy) → physical disability as emasculation
- Yet reliance on masculine norms can play a role in negotiation of disabled identity (« being a man », « overcoming » disability, not showing weakness)

Presentation 4.2: Race, gender and disability

Pryma, Jane. 2017. “‘Even My Sister Says I’m Acting like a Crazy to Get a Check’: Race, Gender, and Moral Boundary-Work in Women’s Claims of Disabling Chronic Pain.” *Social Science & Medicine* (181): 66–73.

Racializing disability

Source of this reflection : The mobilization of ethnic/racial minorities within the disability movement (Hussain, 2013)

(// emergence of the reflection on intersectionality within the feminist movement)

- In the 1990s in the UK: criticism of the social model for failing to account for the simultaneous oppression undergone by black DP
- Specific issues that white DP failed to address in their disability activism (obstacles of citizenship and language, stereotyping of ethnic minorities by professionals)

Racializing disability

Racial inequalities in the presence and effects of impairments: US data (Sienstra, 2012):

- Earlier onset of disability among African Americans
- Quicker decline in functioning

> Inequalities in access to healthcare and socio-economic status

Racial inequalities in access to services (ex. vocational rehabilitation) and employment

Racializing disability

The racialization of special education (Moore & Slee, 2012):

- Context of escalation of diagnosis (ADHD, 'special needs')
- Over-representation of Caribbean boys in the UK, African-American boys in the US, in special education
- « an attenuated experience of schooling »

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