

Disabled Women: At the Intersection of Disability and Sex

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Disabled women struggle with both the experience of being women in male-dominated societies and being disabled in societies governed and managed by non-disabled people (Wendell, 2006).

Overview

- Definitions of disability and disabled women
- The marginalisation of disabled women by other minority groups
- Intersectionality theory
- The concept of simultaneous oppression
- Three themes:
 - Body image and sexuality
 - Domestic violence and rape
 - Childbearing and motherhood
- Concluding thoughts

Definitions

- *Impairment* means the functional limitation within the individual caused by physical, mental or sensory impairment, and
- *Disability* means the loss or limitation of opportunities to take part in the normal life of the community on an equal level with others due to physical and social barriers.
- Disabled women vs women with disabilities.
- The explicit distinction between *sex* and *gender*.
 - The definition of 'sex' specifically refers to the biological and physiological characteristics that distinguish women and men (Siann, 1994).

Marginalised by the Disabled People's Movement and by the Women's Rights Movement



Intersectionality Theory

[c]onsider an analogy to traffic in an intersection, coming and going in all four directions. Discrimination, like traffic through an intersection, may flow in one direction, and it may flow in another. If an accident happens in an intersection, it can be caused by cars travelling from any number of directions and, sometimes, from all of them. Similarly, if a Black woman [or in this case a disabled woman] is harmed because she is in an intersection, her injury could result from sex discrimination or [disability] discrimination [...] But it is not always easy to reconstruct an accident: Sometimes the skid marks and the injuries simply indicate that they occurred simultaneously, frustrating efforts to determine which driver caused the harm (Crenshaw, 1989, p. 149).



Simultaneous Oppression

...one cannot simply separate one identity from another, such as that of being a woman from that of being disabled (Begum, 1992).

This is because individuals hardly ever fall into one neat category, and ideologies of gender, race, disability, age, sexuality and class, interact in complex and varied ways, so to separate one from the other is very close to impossible.



Body Image and Sexuality



Domestic Violence and Rape



Childbearing and Motherhood



Conclusion

- The intersectional framework provides important insights into the ways in which disability intersects with other identities, contributing to unique experiences.
- By applying the theory of intersectionality to research we can rectify the common misconceptions and misperceptions about disabled people.
- This approach can also challenge the discourse about “us” and “them” with the aim of all disabled people having a right to full and equal participation in society.



References

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