General Studies 420: Disability & Society

Spring 2019

**Assignment #4**

1. **Introduction:** The straw ban is a nation-wide conversation that has a lot of support throughout the United States by several environmentalist. However, the desire to help the environment can unconsciously discriminate on individuals that heavily rely on plastic straws to facilitate their day to day actions. This topic has become a highly disputed issue because on behalf of the disability community, this ban is inconsiderate to the needs of individuals with disabilities. On the other hand, many environmentalists believe that the plastic issue needs to be addressed sooner rather than later. They believe if the human race does not take actionable steps towards exponentially decreasing the consumption of plastic, it will put everyone at risk.

**Resources:**

* **(a)** <https://hiehelpcenter.org/2018/08/22/straw-ban-balancing-environmental-concerns-disability-rights/>
* **(b)** <https://www.npr.org/sections/thesalt/2018/07/11/627773979/why-people-with-disabilities-want-bans-on-plastic-straws-to-be-more-flexible>
* **(c)** <http://cdrnys.org/blog/disability-dialogue/grasping-at-straws-the-ableism-of-the-straw-ban/>

1. **Summaries:**
   1. The first online article that I read was from a website called HIE Help Center. One thing that I noticed in this article, compared to the two other articles I read, was that this article initially addressed both sides of the argument. Beginning by addressing the overall issue to the reader, in order to bring them into the conversation, was an effective strategy used by the author to avoid any miscommunication when eventually addressing the side of the disability community. This article does a great job at addressing the different arguments as to why the ban is in place, why it discriminates against individuals with disabilities and how this issue can be resolved by accommodating to everyone’s needs.
   2. The second article that I read was by Maria Godoy on the National Public Radio (NPR). She began the article by introducing an anecdote that demonstrates the primary issue that arises with the straw ban on the disability community. The fact that Jason Carlson’s day at the zoo was sadly shorten by the lack of straws in this public place arises a concerning issue that affects thousandths of individuals with disabilities and will continue to do so as the straw ban expands without accommodations. The main side this article takes is the side of the disability community, it argues how straws are a “gateway plastic” that does not amass to most of the plastic that is contaminating our oceans. Furthermore, the author also addresses the risks and flaws of the alternative options environmentalists have been advocating as replacements to these one-time use straws. Lastly, Maria Godoy offers alternatives that can accommodate to both the environmentalist and disability communities so that this straw ban can promote inclusiveness.
   3. The last article that I read was from a website called The Center for Disability Rights written by Erin Vallely, who is a part of the disability community herself. She addresses the general issue, how it is affecting the disability community and the different solutions we can do as a society as well as an individual. Her stance in regards to the straw ban, is bias in a sense. However, I liked how she still incorporated the other side of the conversation to fully support her perspective and build her credibility. By listing the different kinds of risks that individuals with disabilities are exposed to with the alternative options of straws, Erin Vallely is bringing awareness to the seriousness of this issue within the disability community and is promoting an open-mindedness that many people lack in terms of speaking on this issue.
2. **Class Connection:** One fundamental area that this topic encompasses is ableism. The fact that this straw ban has started to be enforced without the consideration of the negative impact it can have on certain people in our community, is extremely demeaning. The discrimination in favor of able-bodied individuals emphasizes the stigma that continues to live within society. This idea leads into the second fundamental area the straw ban emphasizes which is the idea of accommodations. According to most of the articles that I read, the laws that have been in place in accordance to the straw ban have had written exemptions for companies to continue to have some straws in hand for those individuals that may need it for physical or medicinal reasons. However, although this “accommodation” policy may exist, it does not necessarily guarantee that these companies will comply which further encourages the discrimination upon the disability community.
3. **Reflection:** I was not fully educated on the specific details of the straw ban, however, I have watched the viral turtle video, as many other have. With this being said, I use to fully support this movement because I did not see any negative impacts it could have on society. Nevertheless, after coming to the realization that people do actually need plastic straws to live their day to day lives was when I changed my mind on this topic. The lack of knowledge and education on this issue was what morphed my original perception of this movement, however, there is more to this issue than I previously anticipated. I agree with all of the articles that I read, that we as a society can and must come up with an alternative solution to the environmental issue that meets everyone’s need appropriately.
4. **Closing:** I believe that disability is being used as a means for innovation because it is posing an issue—that is important to many—that has yet to be solved. Innovators feed off these problems and create new ideas to resolve issues, such as this one, to make the lives of others easier. The disability representation, at least now a days, is a bit stronger but, not necessarily to its fullest potential. Without the advocacy of the disability community that raised these concerns to the government, the lack of straws in public facilities could have cost the lives of several individuals.