

Ableism: Accepted Prejudice

Throughout history people have fought to end social injustice (Racism, sexism, etc.). Some courageous people have seen the injustices afforded other people groups and have struggled to change society so that these people groups could be seen as people deserving of full rights within American society. However, one group that has historically been looked over, even by those groups that are seeking social justice, have been disabled people. The greatest injustices of ableism is that it is often not even seen as a form of prejudice.

Ableism is a pervasive problem in America. However, many people don't even see it as prejudice. When someone is diagnosed with a disability society automatically lumps this person into the "damaged goods" category. From then on they are often not seen as a valid member of society and are seen instead as a societal leech someone who takes up resources but never contributes anything to society. Disabled people are often not even given the chance to show that they can contribute and be productive in society. Instead society attempts to sweep them all away into special education classes and specific areas where they can be with "people like themselves." These ideas stem from the simple devaluation of people based on the idea that if one person does something for another that other person must then fully reciprocate. It stems from selfishness and an unwillingness to help people and to believe that there are different ways to contribute to society than the means that society traditionally thinks of.

The idea that I found most intriguing within this section of reading was the idea proposed by the author that disability is socially constructed (Handout pp 85-92).

This theory stems from the idea that different societies value different physical and mental abilities. These abilities are cultivated in these various societies, but are not necessarily valued or cultivated in another society. Thus, a person could grow up in one society with a disability, by that society's standards, and be labeled as disabled. However, this person may not be labeled as such if they had grown up in another society that did not value the ability that this person was challenged in. one example of this would be a student with ADHD in a country that values mathematics. The child would most likely struggle with mathematics due to their disability affecting their attention span. However, if this person had grown up in a society in which what is valued is the ability to hunt, fish or trap food the student would have little immediate need to master mathematics and would most likely not be seen as disabled.

I agree that disability is largely socially constructed. What is a vice in one culture could even become an advantage in another. It all depends upon what that society puts value into. The application for teachers is to remember not to create lower standards for disabled students. Instead, teachers should understand that disabled students sometimes require different avenues to reach success. Society often provides only one way to attain success and if you cannot come by this avenue then you are disabled in some way. Teachers must look beyond society's norms and help all students to attain a proper education by the means that is most conducive to each individual students learning style. This idea is most important to remember when educating a disabled student: there is more than one way to attain success.

This social injustice is personal to me because of a relationship that has been in my life for a long time.