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Disability in Different Countries

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Disability in Different Countries

Writing Process

The assignment was to write anything under the theme of the class which is "Disability." I decided to write about disability itself. I picked that subject because I am from different country, Saudi Arabia. I felt like I have many things to talk about. First I looked online and I found a very good resource that talks about disability. I tried to focus more on how different cultures may affect how disabled people feel about themselves and how other people view them. We had the chance to revise this assignment. So I put my final touches on it and I submitted it to my professor. On the first draft I got 92. On the second and final revision I got 98. I really like this course and the theme. I am very proud of my score in that paper.

Course

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Yvonne Teems-Stephens

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Fatimah Hazzaa

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Disability in Different Countries

"I am afraid and I don't want to go outside. I don't want anyone to see me. I hate the words 'so sorry for you daughter.' I wish I could move freely like a normal person. I don't want to make my parents cry anymore. I am still a human." These were my friend's feelings put into a few sentences. Whenever I see her, she is living with these words etched on her face. She is twenty-one years old and her name is Lara. She is from Syria. When she was just fifteen, my friend Lara brutally lost both her left leg and left hand. Instantly, she became disabled – rather, she considers herself a disabled person just because she can't move. Every time she goes out, people stare and show pity. She hates the face of pity the most, and because of that reality, she does not even go out any more. My only question after hearing Lara's story is, what does disability truly mean? Just because she can't walk, the Syrian people consider her to be a disabled person. Why is that? I started thinking and finally came up with the idea that disability has different perceptions from different countries and cultures. If Lara were to have been born in my country, which is Saudi Arabia, people wouldn't call her disabled. However, they would see her as a person who needs special care. Disability is treated and perceived differently from one place to another and thus may affect how disabled people view themselves and how other people in society view them.

First of all, disability has diverse definitions from distinct countries. Thus, this may lead to different views and treatments. In Lars Grönvik's article "Defining Disability: Effects Of

Disability Concepts On Research Outcomes,” he was trying to show how different concepts of disability may affect how disabled people live and the results of some studies that focus on disabled people. He went to Sweden to find out how people see disability. In Grönvik’s research he compared disability using different variables, such as gender and age. He found out that people in Sweden let the state or the administrators decide if a person is disabled or not (3). In other words, people in Sweden see disability as a “legal or administrative definition” (Grönvik 3). For example, let’s say there is a person who has no legs or hands and for sure he can’t walk. However, he has a very great job and he works full time. People will not see him as disabled unless the government says otherwise. People in Sweden will treat him as a normal person until the state or the administrators say that he is a disabled. Grönvik also said that some people in Sweden might call themselves disabled (3). This definition in Sweden is called a “subjective definition.” In other words, some people may put themselves in the disabled category. For example, a person who is considered a normal person by everyone may call himself disabled due to the fact that he doesn’t have a job or wasn’t educated. However, people ultimately do not consider him as a disabled person. He himself feels like he is disabled just because he is a little different than other people around him. However, other people will still treat him as a normal person.

People in Japan also treat their disabled people different than in Sweden. In Carolyn Stevens’s article, “Debating Human Rights and Prenatal Testing in Japan,” she argues that disability is not simply connected with the ageing process. Stevens did her study because she has found that disability in Japan “Is often conflated with the problems of an ageing society” (319). In other words, she is saying that some people in Japan mix the concept of disability with ageing in the elderly. Japanese people may still consider an eighty-year-old man who lives in Japan, still

walking about and doing his job without getting assistance from other people, as disabled due to his age, despite the fact that he does not need any help from others. They will also treat him as a weakened person even though he can still help himself. After reading Stevens's article, I was intrigued to know more about the Japanese and how they think about disability. I asked my Japanese friends about ageing and how that was related to the concept of disability. They told me that in the past, people would really consider any old person as handicapped without considering if the person was independent or not. However, now, the number of people who would often associate the concept of disability with ageing has lessened, as Stevens argues.

In addition to how Sweden and Japan treat and see their disabled people, the United Kingdom has a different view of who is considered disabled in their country. In Sarah Fraser Butlin's article "The UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities: Does the Equality Act 2010 Measure up To UK International Commitments?" she asserts that according to the Equality Act 2010 in UK, "Persons with disabilities include those who have long-term physical, mental, intellectual, or sensory impairments" (431). Here, Fraser is saying that people who have conditions such as a physical, intellectual, or mental disease, would be considered disabled in the United Kingdom—according to the Equality Act 2010. On the British government's website, they assert that "The Equality Act 2010 legally protects people from discrimination in the workplace and in wider society" (Tell Us What You Think of GOV.UK). To clarify how people consider a person disabled in the United Kingdom, here is an example: If there is a man who is blind and can't do anything without others helping him, then people will treat him as a person with disability. Also, if he can see and has no intellectual problems but has a mental illness, then he will still be treated and considered a disabled person. In another example, if there were a woman who lost one of her legs in an accident and after that she started

using a wheelchair, British people would still see her as a disabled person. Even though she can do whatever she wants without getting help from other people and she is self-reliant, they won't view her as a normal woman.

Sweden, Japan, and the United Kingdom are different countries, thus they have different views of disability. If a ninety-year-old Japanese man wants to live in the United Kingdom, British people will see him as a normal person because he does not have any physical, mental, intellectual, or sensory impairments, despite the fact that he is considered disabled from some Japanese people's point of view. But if this old man lives in Sweden, the government may or may not consider him disabled because in Sweden, the government is the one who decides if this man is disabled.

The real question still remains, how do disabled people view themselves? Do they see themselves as normal beings? Or do they feel inferior? There are many different answers to these questions. On the one hand, some disabled people feel that they are normal and there is no difference between them and other people. On the other hand, some disabled people feel they are different than other people. In X. Hu, M. Wang, and X Fei's article "Family Quality Of Life of Chinese Families of Children with Intellectual Disabilities," they did research on "family quality of life (FQOL)" (Hu, Wang, and Fei 30). This research took place in China, specifically in Beijing. It talks about families that have a disabled person as a member of their family. They did a survey on disabled children who attended special education in the urban and suburban areas in Beijing. Hu, Wang, and Fei focused more on what kind of services these families need to help them serve their disabled child, how these families can receive these services, and then how these families will evaluate these services and their results. Based on these important points that they focused on, they found that these families are satisfied with services such as special

education classes for disabled children. Finally, they talked about how different conditions, such as having a small house and low income, may affect the satisfaction of disabled people regarding these services. Their finding was that housing condition in China might affect a disabled person's satisfaction (37). A person who has no legs, has a very low income, and lives in a house that is not very nice, might feel differently just because he cannot walk. He might be satisfied and feel normal if he could buy a wheelchair so that he could move just like a normal person. That person views himself as a disabled person just because he lives in a family that has low income and can't afford to buy a wheelchair for him.

Disabled people may feel differently about themselves. In Nidhi Singal, Feyza Bhatti, and Rabea Malik's article "Counting the Invisible: Understanding the Lives of Young People with Disabilities in Pakistan," they talk about how disabled people live in Pakistan. Singal, Bhatti, and Malik said that "Japan International Cooperation Agency states that 'persons with disabilities are mostly unseen, unheard and uncounted persons in Pakistan'" (908). They are saying here that people in Pakistan usually do not care about people with disabilities. They also do not consider the handicapped as members of their community. The community mostly ignores and disregards them. After reading their article, I realized that an individual with a disability who lives in Pakistan feels very differently about himself because no one see him as a human who has a right to have an opinion about anything in life. The Pakistani handicapped feel less human than 'normal' people. A being with a disability in Pakistan is seemingly deprived of humanity; in Pakistan, disability causes dehumanization.

A disabled person views himself as normal if he does the things that makes him feel happy. In Haigh et al's article "What Things Make People with a Learning Disability Happy and Satisfied with Their Lives: An Inclusive Research Project," they have collected data that show

things that makes disabled people feel happy. They focused on American people who had difficulties with learning. They went to different places where usually people with a disability go during the day, such as day services, an advocacy project, and a community-learning project. The researchers found that some disabled people feel happy if they can “have some independence from their parents or other caregivers and be able to make choices in their lives” (Haigh et al. 92). Occasionally, a person with a disability yearns to make decisions and opinions without assistance. He needs to feel that he is human, normal, and able to do things that make him happy. In addition to that finding they also talked about Harry, who is a disabled person that told them how he “felt brilliant about being the president of the student forum and how is important to do things you are good at because it makes you feel happy” (Haigh et al. 30). As we can note, many disabled Americans view themselves as normal people. They feel happy when they work or do things that they are good at it. For example, if I am not good at explaining things and do not like to teach, then it will not be good if I work in this field. As what Harry described, he felt very happy when he was a president of the student forum. That is because he likes that and he likes his job. Richard, who is a disabled person, told the researchers that he “could not go on holiday because staff could not take him. He said this makes him feel hurt, although he can understand that it is sometimes difficult for staff to take people” (Haigh et al. 30). Sometimes people with a disability feel hurt and miserable when they are unable to do things they like, such as going to holiday and hanging out with people. For instance, if there is a person who loves making friends and hanging out whenever they can and have time, the person will not be able to do that because he does not have hands that help him to ride his wheelchair. Surely he will need someone to help him do that and go out. If there is no one available for him, he will feel miserable and sad.

Disabled people need to feel that they are surrounded with people who love them, make them happy, and are available for them whenever they need help.

Another major factor that may affect disabled people is how others such as parents and the community view them. Nidhi Singal, Feyza Bhatti and Rabea Malik went to Pakistan to see how young people (ages 15–30 years) with disabilities are treated. They did a survey on urban and rural households, which were selected randomly. They focused on how these children are educated, what their status in their family is, and what their employment in the community is. They found out that “people who live in rural areas are left out from the education system and the same thing goes for people with disability” (Singal et al. 916). Disabled children in Pakistan have a lack of education because no one cares about them. In addition to that, disabled people in Pakistan can't marry (Singal et al. 918). For example, a disabled man who lives in Pakistan has little chance of getting married. Add to that, Singal, Bhatti, and Malik assert that “young people with disabilities are less likely to be economically active as compared to their able bodied peer” (918). The authors are saying here that disabled people who live in Pakistan most of the time will not have the opportunity to get a job. Singal, Bhatti, and Malik explain, “Most people with disabilities (mainly children) were not recorded as a member of the family while the roster was being filled” (920). Here, they mentioned that disabled children who live in Pakistan are not considered a family member; they actually kept them in the margins. However, these disabled people are still human, and they probably want others to see them as normal as they actually are.

Cultural beliefs and the type of education that disabled children receive in Japan and the United States may affect how these children and their families feel about disability issues. On one hand, Misa Kayama in her research “Parental Experiences of Children's Disabilities and Special Education in the United States and Japan,” talks about the experiences of children with

disability and their families in regard to cultural beliefs and special education. The experiment took place in Japan and the United States. Kayama started by talking about how Japanese families feel about their disabled children and their problems handling the disability because of culture. On the other hand, she talked about what American families feel about their disabled children. She focused on what special education these disabled children receive in Japan and the United States. She also talked about how the cultural difference can affect how these families feel about their children. After that, Kayama talked about how these parents feel about making a relationship with professional people who can teach their disabled children in school. Kayama ended up by stating that the cultural beliefs and the type of education that disabled children receive in Japan and the United States may affect how these children and their families feel about disability issues. In Kayama's research, she argues that the Japanese people tend to consider disabled people as something abnormal (118). For this reason, Japanese parents who have children with disabilities have problems with how others look at their children. So, if a parent wanted to go out with their disabled child, people around the parent would look at their child as something strange and abnormal. This may hurt the parent and their disabled child. Add to that "special education service is only provided for students with serious and low-incident disabilities" (Kayama 118). So, if the person is disabled and has no legs then, he might not receive special education. On the other hand, Kayama said that the United States believes in equal participation and opportunities, and they won't consider a disabled person to be abnormal (118). They also will receive a good education, and they will be "included in local public schools and receive support designed to meet their individual needs" (Kayama 118). So if a disabled person were to live in the United States, he would not be in the margin, and he would receive a perfect education just like a normal person.

In conclusion, different cultures and countries will affect how a disabled person is treated and represented. It will also affect how this person views himself around normal people and how these normal people will view them. Sweden, Japan, and the United Kingdom see and define disability in different points of view. In Sweden they would let the state decide if this person is considered disabled or not. Swedish people also see disability as a subjective definition. In other words, the person is the one to decide if he is disabled or not. However, in Japan they relate disability with age. So, they will consider old people as disabled. The United Kingdom sees disability as a physical, mental, intellectual, or sensory impairments problem. So they won't consider old people disabled. Different cultures' definitions of disability also affect how disabled people view themselves. In China, low income may affect how disabled persons feel about themselves. That is because a disabled person who has very low income will not be able to buy or do the things that a normal person would be doing. Thus, this may make him feel different and sad. However, in Pakistan they don't have a problem with income but their only problem is that those disabled people are considered unseen. People in Pakistan keep disabled persons in the margins and thus make disabled people feel that they are not human and they can't make any judgments regarding anything in life.

Disabled people feel happy when they do the things they like. In addition to how people view themselves, disabled people also care about how other people view them. They don't like to feel unseen, and they also hate the face of pity the most. They want to have an opinion. They also want others to see them as humans and treat them as if they are normal. People should always remember that disabled people are not the one who chose to be like that. They didn't choose to be disabled, and they can't change the fact that they are. They only need respect and to be treated as normal humans.

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