

Chapter 10

Why Can't I Follow My Dreams?

Inclusion of an Ability-Driven Individual

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ABSTRACT

Individuals with a disability are one of the largest minority groups today; however, their inclusion in our society is absent, systematically. As society progresses, the attempt to be inclusive becomes stronger; however, there is still a gap in growth to where society should be. For this reason, this chapter describes the benefit of utilizing the term ability rather than disability, while continuing to utilize person first terminology. This effort is a leap—meant to empower individuals with abilities and understand their potential as a member of the general population. Through this research, an individual will understand the stigma associated with the word disability, the effects of the stigma associated with the term disabled on our society as a system within education and the workforce, understand arguments against the use of the term ability, and future considerations future researchers should be investigated in further analysis.

INTRODUCTION

Why Can't I Follow my Dreams?

Today, disability is a term many do not understand or avoid. As society progresses, the attempt to be inclusive becomes stronger. We see inclusion as a topic deemed important to discuss when it comes to race, but little to no discussion around disability. Yet, the determination to fill the gap between disabled and able-bodied individuals continues to grow. For this reason, this chapter describes the benefit of utilizing the term ability rather than disability while continuing to utilize person first terminology. This effort is a leap—meant to empower individuals with abilities and understand their potential as a member of the general population. Through this research, an individual will understand the stigma associated with the word disability. The effects of the term disabled on our society as a system within education and the workforce, understand arguments against the use of the term ability, and future considerations future researchers should investigate in further analysis.

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LITERATURE REVIEW AND BACKGROUND

Even though society is constantly changing, systematic change is difficult. “People with disabilities are underrepresented in psychology, among trainees, health service providers, and academics” (Andrews et al., 2019, p. 113). Yet, this culture is one of the largest marginalized groups in society. “Currently, in the United States approximately 61.4 million (25.7%) adults, with mobility disability being the most prevalent type, affecting about 1 in 7 U.S. adults (Zhao et al., 2016, para.1). A staggering number, but this public is more than a number it is a population considered to be adjacent to the general public. Constantly, this culture is marginalized by associating terms like inadequate, not capable, and unable, however, these statements are more than just an individual’s judgements— they are an individual’s own prejudices. Prejudices occur when individuals are uneducated on a topic and make adjacent associations to language based on little to no knowledge. “Despite the evolution of terminology and advocacy efforts to avoid dehumanizing language, the general public and media continue to perpetuate negativistic vocabulary” (Andrews et al., 2019, p. 113). This vocabulary alienates the public and segregates disabled individuals from the general population. “Whether person-first or identity first language is used, the term disability is widely used and universally accepted” (Andrews et al., 2019, p. 113). Nevertheless, the term disabled activates misconceptions and stigma within the general population. The indicated labels also have an impact on the identity of disabled individuals (Gillman, Heyman & Swain, 2000, p. 389). This impact appears from the variety of denotative and connotative meanings the word disability has.

Every culture defines disability based on their norms of functioning—making disability a relative term. A relative term is a term that draws from two or more references. One definition to consider is:

Disability may be identified by appearance (‘ugliness’, albinism, the absence of a digit [even a functionally unimportant one]), while impairments (mild to moderate mental retardation, club foot) recognized as disabling in Western cultures are often not treated as disabling (George, 2011, p.97).

This definition is based on one reference. It is important to note that the denotative definition varies based on cultures and experiences. A consideration that very few make is that disability is not ‘within’ a person but is experienced by people when socially imposing barriers to doing and being, which prevent full inclusion, participation, and equity amongst social groups (Cologon and Thomas, 2014). For this reason, the focus of this chapter is to suggest the use of the word ability rather than disability. The purpose of this suggestion is to remove the stigma associated with this term, because experiencing stigma reduces one’s longevity in regard to employment, income, and social connection (Green et al., 2005; Cooney et al., 2006; Lundberg et al., 2008).

INCLUSION OF AN ABILITY DRIVEN INDIVIDUAL

Currently, disability is the largest marginalized group in the world and includes over 1 billion individuals worldwide (Swenor, 2021, p. 100584). Although this number is staggering, there is little to no representation in schools, the workforce, in research, and within the community. For example, when was the last time you experienced an individual in the workplace with a mobility disability. With disability historically being marginalized in the world an individual would think there would be more representation, less stigma, more education to individuals considered to be a part of the general population, and more

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