

The Intersection of Gender and Disability: An International Perspective
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Dear Readers:

We would like to welcome you to this special issue of the Review of Disability Studies. This issue focuses upon the intersection of gender and disability within a global perspective. Existing research tells us that disability often presents challenges and barriers to integration and quality of life. The social model of disability (Corker & French, 1999; Shakespeare 2006) assumes that disability is not inherent in the person, but is constructed by society in its failure to provide people with access and treat them with the same respect afforded persons without disabilities.

We have somewhat limited research on the intersection of gender and disability. How does the intersection of these demographics impact the experience of individuals? Does the intersection of gender and disability serve to further marginalize individuals? What we do know is that gender often creates challenges and barriers to accessing health care, education, and employment services and supports, potentially impacting community integration (Gerschick, 2000; Nosek, Grabois, & Howland, 1992). In terms of employment, women with disabilities are less likely than men to be employed and more likely to earn less money than men when they are employed (O’Harrah, 2004; Traustadottir, 1990). Women are underrepresented in rehabilitation programs and women with disabilities experience inequality in education and health care, more poverty, and less social inclusion compared to their male and able-bodied counterparts, as well as being subjected to policies and practices that were not originally designed to meet their needs (Fine & Asch, 1985, 1988; Kutza, 1985; Mudrick, 1988).

Not only does the relationship between gender and disability produce unique barriers to social resources and institutions, but also gender and disability combine to shape the interpersonal experiences of women and men with disabilities. Because of the widespread discrimination they face in many social domains, women with disabilities experience multiple psychosocial challenges, lack of social support, low income or poverty, and abuse that impacts their quality of life (Berkman & Syme, 1979; Hart, Rintala, & Fuhrer, 1996; McGrath, Keita, Strickland, & Russo, 1990; Warren & McEachren, 1983; Brownridge, 2006; Nosek, Foley, Hughes, & Howland, 2001; Nosek & Hughes, 2003).

Rehabilitation research in the last 20 years has begun to explore the impact of the combined social locations and identities of gender and disability on quality of life, as well as health and well-being. According to Nosek and Hughes (2003): “We have little empirically based evidence suggesting that clinical practice is different in the psychosocial rehabilitation and community reintegration of women and men with disabilities...it is time to think and respond differently to femaleness and maleness in rehabilitation and research” (225).

Within this issue, several studies will address the intersection of gender and disability through an international perspective. In the United States, Armstrong et al., explore the

allegations of ADA Title 1 employment discrimination relevant to characteristics of charging parties including gender and disability. Koch et al. investigate allegations of employment discrimination relevant to characteristics of employers such as size, industry, and region.

Bagnato et al. investigate the health and disability status among people aged 14 and older living in high poverty urban areas of Uruguay's capital and surrounding areas, with a special focus on women. In Lo-Hui et al., rural Chinese migrant workers who experience work-related injuries are highlighted within a traditional cultural context including the perceived impact upon roles, relationships, social connectedness, and quality of life.

Each of these studies further contributes to the body of research relevant to gender and disability. Further research is warranted exploring this topic. However, we must also be more cognizant of our research impact these days. In our current phase of research development in the area of disability education and services, we have solid documentation that disability disparities due to gender as well as cultural orientation exist. Research to date has done a laudable job pinpointing that there is a problem and describing its nature. However, we need strategies that begin to achieve the research outcome of the elimination of the challenges related to gender and disability disparities. Research must embrace a stronger focus on interventions and solutions that tackle these challenges.

Given this, we urge each of you to accept the responsibility to help the field progress from mere documentation and description of the problem of disability disparities toward the research outcome of developing, identifying, and promoting strategies that will begin to effectively address, and eventually ameliorate these challenges. As change agents in our field, we charge each of you to use the take away lessons from the manuscripts in this special issue and advocate that they begin to influence everyday disability service practice in the spirit of knowledge translation. For we not only have a responsibility to produce the research and knowledge that is so derived from it, but equally important, we have a duty to ensure that what we learn in the name of research positively informs everyday practice.

We hope that this issue will provide a catalyst for you to consider either contributing to the existing body of research on this topic and/or to engage in addressing and creating solutions to enhance the inclusion and quality of life of women and men with disabilities.

Sincerely,

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