

Book Review

Title: *Disability and diversity: A sociological approach*

Author: Mark Sherry

Publisher: NY: Nova Science Publishers, Inc., 2008

Paper: ISBN: 978-1-60456-914-8

Cost: \$89.10 from the publisher, 105 pages

Reviewer: Marjorie McGee

This introductory text is highly relevant to students and professionals in public health, sociology, and social work who aim to learn how disability intersects with race, ethnicity, gender, and socioeconomic status (SES) through a sociological lens. This book also challenges those in disability studies who may not be accustomed to looking at disability intersecting with other forms of diversity.

The first chapter provides an overview to those who may be new to thinking about disability. It includes such topics as problematizing disability, the medicalization of disability, disability identity, and people-first language. Sherry also discusses the relationship with geography and age in the context of disability. The idea of disability as a monolithic category is quickly dismantled, placing emphasis on varied lived experiences instead.

The next three chapters tackle the intersections of disability with ethnicity, gender, and socioeconomic status. Issues of power differentials are explored in these categories as they intersect with disability. Often disability is presented as an association or consequence of the power imbalances and social stratification associated with these categories, for instance, the prevalence and distribution of disability among people of color, by gender and socio-economic status. Occasionally other intersections of diversity are woven in the chapter, such as race and gender in the chapter on disability and socioeconomic status.

The author summarizes the complex intersections nicely: “Everyone is simultaneously gendered, sexualized, racialized, and so on.” (p. 73). Sherry then explains any one chapter on one aspect of difference must “be read in conjunction with the other chapters, in order to get a more comprehensive picture of the overlapping—and sometime contradictory—ways in which inequality manifests itself in the health and wellness of people in the U.S.” (p. 73)

There are some limitations to this text. The placement of disability status as an “upstream” variable affecting education and employment opportunities, and thus socioeconomic status, could be more prominent in the discussion. However, if you want an introduction to the intersection of disability with socioeconomic status, race and/or ethnicity, and gender, this is an excellent text. Sherry’s chapter on “Disability and Ethnicity” begins with an explanation for his preference for the term ‘ethnicity,’ arguing race is a social construction. However it was

disappointing that Sherry did not acknowledge how the race of a person “socially perceived” by dominant culture in the U.S. can result in different lived experiences, even among those sharing the same ethnic identity. For example, in the U.S. the lived experience as a white Latina versus a Latina who is not “socially perceived” to be white can be quite different. This omission of the differences between race and ethnicity (as social constructions) was puzzling, particularly as Sherry devotes a section in the chapter to address racism (and genomics), drawing from the works of Patricia Hill Collins, Eduardo Bonilla-Silva, and others.

Despite its limitations, this text is interesting and important, and the reader who is familiar with many of the issues in disability studies is cautioned not to skim. You may be surprised with the attention to issues not common in introductory texts, such as the gendered and racist discourse that seeks to separate disability from race or ethnicity, as well as issues of power relating to these intersections. It is short, brief and accessible. However, so short that \$89 for the thin hardback seems a very high price to pay, which may make it prohibitive to assign as a required text for students.

Marjorie McGee, M.S., L.P.C., is a doctoral student and instructor at the Graduate School of Social Work, Portland State University. She may be contacted at mcgee@pdx.edu