

Book Review

TITLE: Disability and Culture: Universalism and Diversity (ICIDH-2 Series)

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Overview

As advertised by the publisher, this book presents the background, results, and conclusions of a cross-cultural applicability study of the revised version of the WHO's International Classification of Functioning and Disability (ICIDH-2). In the opening chapter, the authors address the criticisms leveled at the ICIDH 1980—that it was too medical and did not include social models of disability. Although the revised ICIDH-2 supposedly addressed this issue, synthesizing the medical and social models, ICIDH-2 remains largely a medical model for understanding disability. Moreover, the authors' protests against the medical model to the contrary, *Disability and Culture: Universalism and Diversity* follows the medical model in discussing disabilities.

The authors state that, "disability is not an intrinsic or defining feature of a subset of human beings..., but is a universal condition of humanity itself." They further state that "it is inappropriate and scientifically inaccurate to characterize disability... in inherently negative and deprecatory terms." However, the authors did not always follow their own counsel—throughout the book the authors use the term "wheelchair-bound" to refer to persons who use wheelchairs.

Following the three introductory chapters, detailing the background, objectives, and applicability of the cross-cultural applicability research study, fifteen chapters describe the research process in specific countries, including both developed and developing third-world countries across Asia, the Middle East, Africa, and Europe. The authors intended that the research instrument would test the cultural relativity of the disability construct, and the psychometric requirements for the development of cross-cultural instruments. And while the research plan was ambitious, the book failed to convince this reader that a universalism approach is possible, given the diversity of populations. The inadequacy of "representative spokespersons" (often the most westernized of the population) to speak for the diversity of disabilities within any culture remains a troubling research methodology.

Targeted Audience

The publisher aimed the book toward public health professionals, health policy planners, social scientists, including cross-cultural psychologists, physicians and others involved in programs for the disabled. The publisher also considered the book as appropriate for higher level and undergraduate students. Considering the book's lack of "people-first language"—e.g., the authors refer to "disabled people" instead of "persons with disabilities"—and the stigmatizing language used by the publisher and authors (e.g., "wheelchair-bound"), hopefully these targeted individuals will not be reached.

Appropriate Audience

Ironically, the audience targeted by the publisher did not include persons with disabilities themselves. That oversight, however, may be fortunate, since this reader was told that several persons with disabilities described themselves as "screaming after reading the first three pages." Thus, from the standpoint of at least some persons with disabilities, this book has no appropriate audience.

Summary

Given the limitations of the research methodology, it is doubtful that this book contributes significantly to existing knowledge. As nighttime reading, this book would lead to early slumber. Only those willing to laboriously explore the topic will find the book of interest. Selling as a paperback for \$44.50 US, it is not considered worth the price.