

Mr. Evans

Eng 1023.11

26 April 2013

Disabilities and Discrimination

If a random person in America was asked to define the terms “handicapped,” “disabled,” and “impaired,” they might come up with a similar definition for all three. Americans have a general idea of what a disability is and understand that those who have disabilities have needs that most others do not have. However, the U.S. population as a whole does not understand what those needs are, and how people with disabilities want to be treated by others. It is this lack of understanding or knowledge on the issue that leads people to ignore or feel sympathetic without knowing how to act around those who are “not normal”. It might not be that noticeable, but there is a difference between the terms listed above, as well as a proper way to use them. However, a person would not know that unless he/she was educated on the subject and was taught the definition of those terms. Similarly, this paper is intended to give a better understanding on different types of disabilities and some of the daily struggles that go hand-in-hand with those disabilities in order to show the proper way to interact with people who have them; it is also intended to evaluate the topic of discrimination against people with disabilities.

To start off, it would probably be most beneficial if some of the terms related to the subject of disabilities were defined. There are three terms (mentioned above) that are most commonly used to define a person with a disability: 1) handicapped, 2) disabled, and 3) impaired. As mentioned before, these three terms are very different and should not be used synonymously. A **handicap** is defined as something that allows the disability to affect the person emotionally or socially in one or more of life’s activities such as self care, mobility, learning,

Jonathan Evans 5/19/13 9:42 PM

Comment [1]: Dear (NAME WITHELD),

Before I launch into my notes, I want to point out a few things about how I will be grading:

1. I will be looking at your formatting – have you followed the template, do you have all aspects your project should include (see the Description in the WA 4 Prompt). Have you met the requirements (8-10 pages in length).
2. Do you apply strong MLA formatting throughout your paper and have good quality in your research?
3. How well have you applied and blended the three genres?
4. How good is your content – have you made a good argument?

General Comment:

Work on your thesis, some cleaning up, and inclusion of a counter-argument, otherwise you are off to a really good start here.

For specific comments, please see my notes below.

If there are any questions or confusion, email me.

Mr. Evans

Jonathan Evans 5/19/13 9:41 PM

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Jonathan Evans 4/29/13 2:56 PM

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Jonathan Evans 4/29/13 2:57 PM

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self-direction, or independent living (Winnick 640). An example would be if someone lost both of their legs and was handicapped from driving. A person can get around their handicap sometimes though, such as a person who is blind using Braille to read a book. A disability is defined as an impairment that affects a person's ability to do tasks, skills or jobs (Winnick 640). Blindness, spinal chord injury, autism, and down syndrome are all examples of disabilities. Finally, an impairment is the result of something missing (physically, mentally, or sensationally) or not functioning properly (Winnick 640). Impairments are further broken down into being either temporary or permanent. An example of a permanent impairment would be an amputation, whereas a temporary impairment would be something like a speech disorder or coordination problem. As can be seen, these terms are somewhat interwoven, but each one has a different meaning. When in doubt of which term is appropriate, use the umbrella term "disability", which tends to encompass the other two terms.

There are twelve categories of disabilities that have been established in the *Adapted Physical Education Manual of Best Practices* in order to distinguish between which specific service is a better fit for each category. The twelve categories are: learning disabilities, speech impaired, intellectual disabilities, emotionally disturbed, hearing impaired, orthopedic impaired, autism spectrum disorder, visually impaired, traumatic brain injury, deaf-blind, multiple disabilities, and other-health impaired (Silliman-French and Buswell 39). It would take a significantly large amount of space to discuss each of these types of disabilities, therefore, only a handful of them will be explained. They will be described as thoroughly as possible, but the main focus will be to describe how to interact with and best serve a person who has that disability.

Perhaps the most commonly known type of disability would be the intellectual disability. According to the *Adapted Physical Education and Sport* book, it is defined as a significant sub-

average intellectual functioning that occurs at the same time as limitation in communication, self-care, home living, functional academics, leisure and work (Winnick 640). Also, in order for it to be categorized as an intellectual disability a person must have manifested it before turning 18. It is important to note that the people in this category used to be called “mentally retarded”, but that this has been seen as a belittling and even an inhumane title now since 1992 (Winnick 640). As a general rule of thumb, it is proper to always use something called “person-first” language when talking about those who have disabilities. An example would be saying “people who are intellectually disabled” instead of “intellectually disabled people”. Four important things to note about an intellectual disability are: 1) it is not a disease, but could be the result of such, 2) it does not automatically imply brain damage, 3) it does not equal “mentally handicapped”, and 4) the condition could change as reflected by a series of test scores (Winnick 640). In addition to using person-first language, it is also best to use simple words and phrases when talking to a person with an intellectual disability. Also, be ready to repeat something that was just said. Finally, know that people who have this disability are generally happy and friendly, and don’t be afraid to laugh and smile right along with them.

Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) is defined as a severe and pervasive impairment in several areas of development including social interaction and communication (Winnick 640). There is also a noticeable presence of stereotypical behavior, interests and activities that are commonly held by those who have this type of disability. Under this spectrum are five categories of disorders including: Autistic disorder, Asperger’s disorder, Rett’s disorder, childhood disintegrative disorder, and an “other” category with a lengthy title that is shortened to PDDNOS. Out of these the Autistic disorder is most common. It is most commonly characterized by developmental delays, comprehensive language disorders, abnormal and stereotypical

behavior, social isolation, and occasional mental slowness (Winnick 640). However, it is noted that people who have autism are beyond generalization since some are social butterflies, or have no problem with language usage, or are intellectually smart students who make excellent grades. When interacting with a person diagnosed with this type of disorder, it is best to just treat them like a friend and talk to them as if they did not have the disorder. They tend to be sensitive to special treatment, and usually want to be treated as “normal”.

The last disability that will be discussed is the category of orthopedic impairments. It is defined as a severe physical impairment that could be caused by genetic anomaly, disease, serious accident, or other causes (Garguilo). Some examples include clubfoot, amputation, cerebral palsy, and spina bifida. This usually requires the person diagnosed with the impairment to be wheelchair bound or use arm braces or other means of support for mobility. When interacting with a person diagnosed with this type of disability there are two basic things to keep in mind. First, is that the person might need help carrying books, going through a door, or having their wheelchair pushed up a ramp. Always try to anticipate this and offer to help them. Sometimes the person will not want help, but will want to become more independent and try to lead a more “normal” life. In this case, it is best to respect their wishes. Second is that the person might have a tendency to get fatigued after a short amount of time, which could include talking, standing, sitting in one position, etc. Just be mindful of this and offer a chair or have shorter conversations, depending on their impairment.

With this latter category of disability comes a discussion on usability and accessibility, and whether or not communities and organizations should have to improve sidewalks, change building structure, and eliminate other architectural barriers that might hinder a person in a wheelchair. This has been a heated topic in America for a couple of decades, especially when

discussed in conjunction with the term “discrimination”. If things are not changed to better accommodate people in wheelchairs, then isn’t society excluding or discriminating against people who are wheelchair-bound? On the other hand, is it right for communities and organizations, which are not disposed to believe that people in wheelchairs should be accommodated for, to be forced to use their own funding to make these changes without being recompensed?

This debate was resolved legally with the passage of the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990:

In enacting the ADA, Congress recognized that physical and mental disabilities in no way diminish a person’s right to fully participate in all aspects of society, but that people with physical or mental disabilities are frequently precluded from doing so because of prejudice, antiquated attitudes, or the failure to remove societal and institutional barriers...[Therefore], no covered entity shall discriminate against a qualified individual on the basis of disability...[such as] not making reasonable accommodations to the known physical or mental limitations of an otherwise qualified individual with a disability who is an applicant or employee, unless such covered entity can demonstrate that the accommodation would impose an undue hardship on the operation of the business of such covered entity. (“Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, as amended”)

As can be seen from this quote, Congress is saying that if a person with a disability is an applicant or employee of some business, residence, organization, etc., then that entity should provide accommodation to the person with a disability. The only exception is if proof could be given that shows it would harm the business of the entity to make accommodation.

To bring the subject matter “closer to home,” an evaluation of TWU’s policy on the issue will be examined both through its official statement and through my own personal experience. The official school policy that was available online was focused on providing proper accommodation for its employees rather than for its students. However, with more searching on the TWU website, another policy relating to the students could probably be found. The policy regarding employees states that reasonable accommodations can be made to the TWU campus upon request to adjust or make modifications to the work environment (“Texas Woman’s University Policy Manual”). The purpose should be to remove barriers that prevent a qualified individual with a disability from performing the essential functions, or prevent them from enjoying the benefits and privileges that go hand in hand with the job. TWU also retains the right to turn down a requested accommodation if it will cause an undue hardship on the school. There is an ADA officer that has been assigned to the TWU campus, and will act as the officiator for this type of dilemma. It must also be noted that no change will be made to the TWU campus unless it has been requested by a qualified individual with a disability and approved by the school (“Texas Woman’s University Policy Manual”). When one of these requests is processed, the employee with the disability will be asked periodically by the ADA officer whether the change being made is helpful in order to ensure that it will not be for waste. As can be seen from this policy, the process of accommodating a person with a disability is not simple, but it can be rewarding for the individual with the disability.

As a Kinesiology student at this university, one of the classes I am required to take is called Adapted Physical Education. Through this course, I performed a project with three other students to ride a wheelchair around campus to see if TWU is well suited for those in wheelchairs. We specifically wanted to know whether campus buildings and classrooms were

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accessible including the ACT (clock tower) building, ASB building, CFO building, Old Main, and Stoddard Hall. Through our search we found that TWU overall is not a very wheelchair friendly campus.

To start off, there are lots of good ramps around campus, but some of them have turns that curve too narrowly (such as the one by ACT) so that it is a tricky process to get the wheelchair around the curve. Other ramps, such as the one in front of the CFO building, were way too steep to be very manageable by someone in a wheelchair. Also, there was a ramp behind Stoddard that led up to some stairs at the backdoor entrance, which negated the very reason for the ramp being there. Though most of the main buildings had automatic double doors, there were still many others that did not have them, such as Stoddard, the back door to Old Main, and the CFO building. Elevator doors also tended to be a small problem. The ones in Old Main and the CFO building were narrow and difficult to navigate through. However, the elevator buttons were all at a good height for those in wheelchairs. After all of this information had been collected, our team concluded that even though some accommodations have been made in select places, it is not consistent throughout the campus. Improvements definitely needed to be made before the campus could be considered accessible or usable by people who are wheelchair bound.

In conclusion, there is a lot that the American society needs to learn about people who have disabilities, and there are changes that need to be made in order to better accommodate them. The passage of the Americans with Disabilities Act was a huge step in the right direction, but implementation is the next step, and it still needs to be conquered. Also, many people still do not know how to interact with those who have a disability. Since there are not very many people that are diagnosed with a disability, that is understandable, but it does not negate the fact that America still needs to be educated about this topic. The best way this could be accomplished is

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through personal study on the issue and by creating awareness for it. If it has not been noticed yet, that is exactly what this paper just accomplished.

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Jonathan Evans 4/29/13 2:58 PM

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