

Social Theory of Disability and Experiential Knowledge

Subjects: **Sociology**

Contributor: Normand Boucher

In our contemporary societies, structured by unequal social relations of production, experiential knowledge remains in the shadow of expert or academic knowledge that provides legitimacy to any action that claims kinship. In the first part, this entry examines changes in the social theory of disability, characterized by the development of critical disability studies. The second part discusses forms of action in the disability field, specifically experiential knowledge, peer support, and their relationship to expert knowledge. Drawing upon a review of the literature, a synthesis of the evidence on the articulation of these three notions is produced. The results will illustrate the respective place and role of the different forms of knowledge derived from critical disability studies in the development of actions concerning disabilities. The information collected will make it possible to identify the links between these forms of knowledge and how they improve the ability of people with disabilities to obtain full citizenship.

critical disability studies

disability

sociology

experiential knowledge

peer support

identity

The development of knowledge in the humanities and social sciences, particularly in sociology, helps answer a key question: How have these fields fostered a comprehensive understanding of our disabling society? Synthesizing the knowledge regarding disability developed in this field helps identify the elements that facilitate determining the social practices that structure contemporary societies with regard to people with disabilities. This exercise will identify the main features of this process over the last few decades, with an emphasis on the emergence of a social movement that is overly critical of the practices inherited from the previous century concerning people with disabilities in post-Second World War societies. According to Chouinard, “an ableist society is, then, one that tends to devalue its non-able-bodied members; despite good intentions on the part of many of its citizens to treat these ‘others’ as equals” [1]. We will see how this movement contributed to the slow emergence of disability as an issue for sociological studies. This dynamic led to the creation of disability studies and subsequently critical disability studies. This coincided with a new phase in the way we interpreted the social phenomenon of disability, defining it as a socio-political construct. This differs significantly from what is done in medicine, mainly because of the increased autonomy of disability studies. The recognition of the “disability” experience as a source of change and the expression of subjectivity that carry affirmations of identity is mobilized in the struggle for citizenship, both in terms of knowledge and praxis.

Finally, “disability” experience is related to the emergence and recognition of knowledge forms. This knowledge challenges the practices surrounding research and services. A final conclusion will briefly describe this

phenomenon and its contribution to disability through the embodied utterance of social and identity dynamics, both individually and collectively.

References

1. Chouinard, V. Making space for disabling differences: Challenging ableist geographies. Guest editorials. *Environ. Plan. D Soc. Space* 1997, 15, 379–390.
-

Retrieved from <https://encyclopedia.pub/entry/history/show/131905>