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Fostering Health Disability Identity Development in College Students

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FOSTERING HEALTHY DISABILITY IDENTITY DEVELOPMENT AMONG COLLEGE STUDENTS

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Disability Identity Development

- Disability is both a functional difference and an important component of cultural identity
- Can occur at any point in an individual's life
- Shapes how an individual looks at the themselves and interacts with the world (Forber-Pratt & Zape, 2017)
- Related literature about healthy disability identity development on campuses is scarce but emergent



Importance of Intersectionality

- Originated from African American Feminist theory and became popular among LGBTQ and other minority populations (Crenshaw, 1991; Cho, Crenshaw, & McCall, 2013)
- Disability identity does not develop in isolation
- Outcome is much more complicated than the sum of its parts
- Looking at privilege and marginalization one label at a time does not allow us to see the complexities of identity development
- Understanding student identity development through intersectionality reflects meaning found at the intersection of multiple identities

Disability Models

Medical Model

- Disability is a negative characteristic, an impairment that needs a cure or assistance from professional intervention

Sociocultural Model of Disability

- Disability is neutral until society causes it to be a disadvantage

Postmodern Approach

- Consider how disabilities may become a positive aspect of an individual's life



Critical Disability Theory (CDT)

- Disability is not seen as a personal limitation, but analyzed as a cultural, historical, relative, social, and political phenomenon (Hall, 2019)
- Promotes activism and social justice
- “Anyone can enter at any time, and we will all join it if we live long enough” (Garland-Thomson, 2002, p. 20)



Ableism

- Defined as the privileging of able bodies and minds that renders others abnormal and less worthy (Linton, 1998)
- College students with disabilities faced ableism despite receiving appropriate accommodations under Americans with Disabilities Act
- Taking an intersectional approach to ableism allows higher education professions to see intersecting systems of oppression on campus (Peña, Stapleton, & Schaffer, 2016)
- Resistance to ableism can help their psychological health and foster healthy psychosocial and identity development (Forber-Pratt & Zape, 2017)



Healthy Identity Development

Student wellness perspective

- Contribute to a student's sense a well-being that shapes into an adult with disabilities' functioning and well-being (Erikson, 1994; Christiansen, 1999)

Academic perspective

- Contribute to self-understanding and ability to appreciate and contextualize strengths, challenges, and uniqueness (Marcia, 2002)

Constructivist campus life perspective

- Helps students more deeply understand the contextual meaning of disability related challenges in their college experiences



Model of Social & Psychosocial Disability Identity Development

(Forber-Pratt & Zape, 2017)

- Emerged from a qualitative study
- Contains four developmental statuses, they are not linear
- It is not necessary to move through the statuses at any given point, or ever
- Possible for an individual to simultaneously be in more than one status at a time
- Unlike racial identity, individuals may not have anyone in their family or community that shares their experience
- Meeting others with disabilities and forming relationships is important in the identity developing process

Four Developmental Statuses

Acceptance Status

- Become disabled and/or born with disability
- Person accepts own disability
- Close friends and family are accepting of the disability

Relationship Status

- Person meets others like herself/himself
- Engages in conversation with these individuals
- Learns about the ways of the group

Adoption Status

- Adopts the shared values of the group

Engagement Status

- Becomes a role model for others
- Help those who may be in other statuses
- Give back to the disability community

(Forber-Pratt & Zape, 2017)



Transition to College

- Millennial college students with disabilities may be used to having support from parents and the K-12 system
- Transitioning from K-12 system to college is a time of change and growth
- On campus, disability disclosure and use of accommodations is optional which may lead to students downplaying their disabilities or embracing the new freedom
- Students with disabilities are faced with additional layers of adjustment (Brinckerhoff, McGuire, & Shaw 2002; Janiga & Costenbader 2002; Milsom & Hartley 2005)



Importance in Higher Education

- Helpful for higher education professionals to understand where each student is in developing their disability identity when working with them (Forber-Pratt & Zape, 2017)
- Each individual may be deciding how much they identify with the disability community, so it is important to not push too hard
- Recognize that not every individual with a disability has accepted it

How to use in Higher Education

It is about embracing disability culture and identity, not just accessibility

Establish a disability culture center (Evans, Broido, Brown, & Wilkie, 2017)

Create opportunities of interaction on campus for students with and without disabilities

Create intersectional program with speakers, workshops, arts events (Jennrich & Kowalski-Braun, 2014)

Set up events or spaces with individuals with disabilities can come together and potentially build a network of support and comfort

Creating a community on campus can help students seek peer assistance with academics or advocacy (Forber-Pratt & Zape, 2017)

Create inclusivity with a universally designed campus (McGuire, Scott, & Shaw, 2004)

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