

Disabling Barriers to Community Participation in Everyday Environments from the Perspective of People with Disabilities

Authors : Leah Samples

Abstract : Barriers to participation persist for people with disabilities despite a long history of legislation designed to support equal opportunity for people with disabilities. Historically, the focus has been solely placed on structural barriers, but newer research highlights the importance of looking at social and informational barriers to participation. Collectively, these barriers prevent people with disabilities from fully engaging in community life and consequently from achieving full citizenship. Disability is crucial to understanding the meaning of citizenship. Drawing upon the influences of feminist, critical race and human rights theorists, citizenship can be defined as a set of rights and responsibilities that an individual has because they are a part of a community. However, when those rights are taken away or denied one's citizenship is in question. Employing this definition of citizenship allows one to examine how barriers to citizenship present themselves in societies that are built on an ideal of a non-disabled person. To understand at a deeper level how this notion of citizenship manifests itself, this study seeks to unearth commonly experienced barriers to participation in the lives of visually-impaired adults in everyday environments. The purpose of this qualitative study is to explore commonly-experienced barriers to participation in the lives of visually impaired adults in leisure settings (e.g. restaurants, stores, etc.). Thirty adults with visual impairments participated in semi-structured interviews, as well as participant observations. The results suggest that barriers to participation are still pervasive in everyday environments and subsequently have an adverse effect on participation and belonging for people with visual impairments. This study highlights the importance of exploring and acknowledging the daily tensions that persons with disabilities face in their communities. A full exploration of these tensions is necessary in order to develop solutions and tools to create more just communities for everyone.

Keywords : barriers, citizenship, belonging, everyday environments

Conference Title : ICDD 2016 : International Conference on Disability and Diversity

Conference Location : London, United Kingdom

Conference Dates : February 25-26, 2016