

Representation and Agency in the Life Writings of Taiwanese Disabled Women

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Abstract : In recent years, we have witnessed the growing scholarship on transnational theorizing and activism within disability. In particular, the universalizing discourses of disability formulated in the Global North seem inadequate in engaging the vast diversity of discourses of disability that emerge in global and local policies as well as the everyday experiences of disabled people in the Global South. This study will further consider the future possibilities of how Taiwanese and global disability studies might interchange disability knowledge. First, this study will determine how a local literature of disability can be formed in Taiwan by examining life writings written by Taiwanese disabled women. Both the texts and the personal experiences are treated as social products which can, through their discourses, offer insight into the socio-cultural practices and norms of disability and womanhood in Taiwan. This paper argues that more than by the impairment in itself, the experiences of disabled women are shaped by the social and cultural discourses and practices that define disability and womanhood as well as the normative roles, places, and contexts associated with them. Simultaneous analysis of disability and womanhood exemplifies the way in which disability operates in a complex interaction with the socio-cultural discourses and practices of womanhood, thus producing gender-differentiated disabling obstacles for disabled women. Another purpose of this study is to gain an understanding of the transformative experience of women with disabilities and their perceptions of the self. Designed to provide positive, realistic pictures of the lives of women with disabilities and the social, economic, and political issues they face, their life writings demonstrate how they as disabled women simultaneously struggle with writing a new identity and creating an ethical narrative. These strong and articulate women construct narratives that attempt to recount the remarkable journey that transformed them from dependent women to community activists and writers who speak forcefully about the needs of people with disabilities. More than a story of one woman's struggle for independence, their writing, then, is a testimony to the importance of community building and organizing to enable local people with disabilities to live fulfilling lives.

Keywords : gender, disability, representation, agency

Conference Title : ICDD 2017 : International Conference on Disability and Diversity

Conference Location : Rome, Italy

Conference Dates : May 04-05, 2017