
Language Aspects In The Opportunity Of Adversity Novel

The Language of Disability

The language used to describe disabilities throughout all societies has controlled how disability and the people who live with it are viewed by today's world. The way people speak, the words they say, and what the words mean all come into play in terms of describing how language controls today's view of disability. In "The Opportunity of Adversity" Aimee Mullins explains that "our language isn't allowing us to evolve into the reality that we all want." This even further drives home the idea that language in terms of disability is just as limiting to the individual if not more so than the disability itself.

Many people feel that they need to be politically correct when they speak about disability and it's this urge to not offend anyone that has caused a sort of dehumanized view of the disabled. Society uses certain words like disabled, handicapped, crippled, etc. to define those with disabilities but all the words used only depict that disabled people are lesser or somehow not as whole as say a person who has complete functionality of their entire body and/or mind. Nancy Mairs expresses her distaste for these words in "On Being A Cripple" by stating, "These words seem to me to be moving away from my condition, to be widening the gap between word and reality." Throughout history the growing need of equality has created a language that no longer supports the idea, but instead segregates those described into their own group of people: The Disabled.

Society constantly changes though, so how does our view not change? The answer to that question is hidden in the way the meaning of disability is learned. In "Aimee Mullins: My 12 Pair of Legs" she tells a story of how young children who are normally taught that disability is a touchy subject and not to directly show interest in it are prevented from being taught to think that way and are infinitely more interested in learning as much as they can about disability and the things you can do with and without it. So instead of these children learning that disability must be treated with care and almost a degrading amount of sensitivity they learn that those who are described by the word disabled aren't any lesser than they are but are instead human and just like everybody else. This type of mindset has much more potential to not only understand disability but to prevent the limitations of those that are disabled.

The language surrounding disabilities is limiting and preventative of progress in those who are disabled, as they are taught that they are different and not in a necessarily good way. Disability is an idea about the lack of something someone has and focuses on the "missing piece" that makes disabled persons not whole. Our language has set the foundation for that thinking and constantly supports the idea that disability is a setback and something to be worked through. In "My 12 Pairs of Legs" Aimee Mullins disagrees by stating, "It's not a conversation about overcoming deficiency, it's a conversation about augmentation, it's a conversation about potential." This statement opens a door for a new idea on how disability should be looked at, and that it is not at all a struggle to make up for a missing piece but instead a driving force behind using the disadvantage to create an advantage.

There is a pattern when it comes to the words used to describe and define disability and it is

one of negativity, with no room to change. Mullins explains that language is what is limiting people from creating and evolving into the reality everyone craves and desires to have. This statement perfectly supports that language is preventing the transition into the world everyone wants and wishes to exist. The change needed is in the language that is used instead of what the language is being used to describe. This negativity around disability in language is only furthering the practice of dehumanization and lack of progress on the frontier of how disabilities are dealt with and thought of. Just as disabled people can change their deficiency into potential, the language itself needs to adapt and change to fit those it is used to describe.

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