

A.J. Withers - Definitions and Divisions: Disability, Anti-Psychiatry and Disableism

There is a rift, theoretically and politically, between the disability and psychiatric survivors movements. Many psychiatric survivors do not and will not identify as disabled; there are questions as to how, when and if psychiatric survivors fit into the disabled peoples' movement at the level of language and beyond. This paper examined the use of language to categorize and marginalize deviant minds and bodies, focusing on the history of the category of disability. It introduced radical disability theory which provides a framework of understanding disability as a social construct in ways not yet imagined by the social model of disability. Further, radical disability theory rejects the notion of 'impairment' and the impairment/disability dichotomy. Many psych survivors reject identifying as disabled as an extension of their rejection of medicalization. This paper outlined a theory that calls upon psych survivors to break down the rift between communities, reclaim "disabled" as an identity politic and join the broader struggle for justice and social change for all "disabled" people, using my own identity as a radical, physically disabled activist as a starting point.