
Schur, Kruse and Blanck provide, in this volume, an excellent overview of the many ways in which people with disabilities have historically been excluded from full participation in community and economic life, as well as ways in which this can be effectively addressed going forward. The authors articulate the broad purpose of the book, as ‘to provide an overview of the economic, political, and social conditions of people with disabilities around the world and to discuss the barriers to and opportunities for greater inclusion that they face.’ Drawing from literature across the social sciences, including economics, political science, psychology, disability studies, law and sociology, the book will be of interest to scholars and students from many disciplines, and can readily serve as a text for courses in disability studies, employment and disability policy, human rights, and others. In addition, it can be a useful reference for policy makers and disability advocates, as well as having relevance for people with disabilities themselves and their family members. The text might be of lesser relevance to vocational rehabilitation and other disability direct service practitioner audiences.

The authors’ main focus is on how people with disabilities have been marginalized in many ways throughout history, and the book traces how perceptions about people with disabilities have evolved over time. Different models used to characterize people with disabilities are described, including the medical perspective (with its focus on functional impairments and health conditions), the social perspective (which views disability as caused by society) and the universalist view (sees impairment as a continuum, and does not separate the population into people with and without disabilities). In the reviewer’s opinion, the latter is a more progressive approach, and offers a valuable distinction that needs the increased visibility afforded here. Inherent in this conceptualization of disability is the challenge of definitions. The authors present a sound analysis of the issues encountered in measuring disability, and they aptly describe the importance of, but also the issues involved in, providing valid estimates of the numbers of people with disabilities from data collection on a country-by-country basis throughout the world.

One significant area where exclusion for people with disabilities occurs is in employment, and the authors devote two chapters to this topic. Income and poverty levels, as well as employment participation rates for people with disabilities, are reported across 29 countries from OECD data, further confirming continuing economic disparities. These data are often cited, and what is distinct and most useful in these chapters is that the authors include information exploring why the employment rates are lower and what the prospects are for higher employment levels. The commentary regarding the projected growth of jobs, as well as the impact of the increasing sophistication of technology and employers’ enhanced appreciation of workplace diversity, is encouraging and a welcome addition to what is often a most pessimistic outlook on employment for this population. The second chapter focused on employment offers a more ‘in the workplace’ perspective, which offers a nuanced understanding of the possibilities that alternative work arrangements may afford people with disabilities for increased employment participation, but also explores how workplace culture can present barriers to full inclusion. The importance of accommodations is also discussed, and the authors address an often neglected topic by effectively documenting the cost of accommodations from a number of sources.
Moving beyond economic disparities, political and social exclusion also receive substantive focus in this book. The authors present a compelling argument for the importance of political engagement and activism by people with disabilities, providing quantitative evidence from the United States about the low levels of disability activism of this group to date. A perspective on these rights is provided not only by description of the United States-specific Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, but also by the globally applicable UN Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities, which was adopted in 2006, and provides protections for people with disabilities globally in the areas of equal access to the physical environment, living/residential situation, education, employment, cultural, public and political life. Moving beyond disability activism, this book discusses the political participation of people with disabilities in general, with illumination on the impediments to voting access, such as lower resource levels, few recruitment opportunities, a weaker sense of political efficacy, and the barriers presented by inaccessible public buildings and transportation.

The trilogy of rights is rounded out with a discussion of social exclusion. The authors describe the ‘social stigma’ around people with disabilities that permeates our culture, from simple forms like avoidance to more overt outright discrimination and at times even violence. Here, the authors bring the impact of social exclusion sharply into focus through a discussion of institutional versus community-based living, living arrangements and marriage, ability to make social connections, transportation, access to technology, education, and the potential benefits presented by use of a universal design approach in our environments globally.

Issues of exclusion for people with disabilities may be further complicated by gender, race and other characteristics, and the authors devote a chapter to the intersectionality of these and how they interact with and contribute to social inequality. The prevalence of disability by gender, and within racial and ethnic groups is presented, examining how these subgroups compare in terms of economic, political and social inclusion.

The crowning contribution of this book is presented in the final chapter, which consists of interviews with 21 leading disability advocates and scholars from the United States and United Kingdom. Perspectives are provided on the topics of access to the built environment, technology, attitudes, education, culture and sports, and employment.

In summary, the topics chosen and the meticulous documentation of sources and references provided across so many disciplines make this volume distinct from other treatments of the state of economic and social exclusion for people with disabilities. These authors collectively represent the disciplines of economics, law, sociology, political science and social psychology, and it is this breadth of perspective and scholarly expertise that gives this book its richness and distinctiveness.

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