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Role Taking vs. Cultural Identity: Defining Disability in an Able-Bodied Environment

Elizabeth Holman

Illinois Wesleyan University

Njeri Mbugua, Faculty Advisor

Illinois Wesleyan University

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ROLE TAKING VS. CULTURAL IDENTITY: DEFINING DISABILITY IN AN ABLE-BODIED ENVIRONMENT

Elizabeth Holman and Njeri Mbugua*
Sociology Department, Illinois Wesleyan University

Through my own personal experience with a temporary disability, I examined the labels placed on people with disabilities, both by the disabled themselves and by society in general. While minority group membership has a variety of social, psychological, and legal advantages, it forces people to give up some individuality and gives the disability a more permanent connotation (Berbrier, 2004; Watson, 2002). Alternately, viewing disability as a role, and attaching the label "disabled" in certain circumstances, allows for a broader spectrum of individual choice. However, the label assumes someone who is disabled to be "less than able," thus carrying a strong stigma. It is my conclusion that the lived experiences of those with disabilities do not include people self-identifying as a member of the "disabled" community, but that they take on this label only when the environment fails to meet their needs. In effect, identification may become circular because often the only way to change the environment to meet their different needs is to join with others to fight for their common cause in social and political arenas as a minority group.