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**Happiness and Disability**

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Have you ever thought to yourself: "I'd rather be dead than disabled?" It's not an unusual reflection. Disability, in everyday thought, is associated with failure, with dependency and with not being able to do things. But in fact we're wrong. It's sometimes called the "disability paradox". Surveys reveal people with disabilities consistently report a quality of life as good as, or sometimes even better than, that of non-disabled people.

Impairment usually makes little difference to quality of life. Research shows, for example, that overall levels of life satisfaction for people with spinal cord injury are not affected by their physical ability.

Even the clinical facts of whether their spinal lesion is high or low, complete or incomplete - all aspects that affect functioning - don't seem to make much difference. Human flourishing is possible even if you lack a major sense, like sight, or you can't walk, or you're totally physically dependent on others. So what's going on?

If you think about it for a moment, you realise that people born with an impairment have nothing to which they can compare their current existence. Someone lacking hearing or sight has never experienced music or birdsong, visual art or a sublime landscape. Someone with an intellectual disability may not consider themselves different at all. Someone born with restricted growth, has always been that way. Even if life is sometimes hard, we are used to being the way we are.

For people who become disabled, there's a typical trajectory. Immediately after the onset of injury or disease, one can feel profoundly depressed, and even contemplate suicide. Yet after a period of time, people adapt to their new situation, re-evaluate their attitude to the disability, and start making the most of it. Sometimes, they are driven to greater achievements than before.

Our appraisal of life with impairment may have less to do with reality than with fear and ignorance and prejudice. We wrongly assume that difficulties for people result in misery for people [1].

While sport has value in everyone's life, it is even more important in the life of a person with a disability. This is because of the rehabilitative influence sport can have not only on the physical body but also on rehabilitating people with a disability into society. Furthermore, sport teaches independence. Nowadays, people with a disability participate in high performance as well as in competitive and recreational sport.

Disabled sports, also adaptive sports or parasports, are sports played by persons with a disability, including physical and intellectual disabilities. As many disabled sports are based on existing able bodied sports, modified to meet the needs of persons with a disability, they are sometimes referred to as adapted sports. However, not all disabled sports are adapted; several sports that have been specifically created for persons with a disability have no equivalent in non-disabled sports. Disability exists in four categories: physical, mental, permanent and temporary.

From the late 1980s, organizations began to include athletes with disabilities in sporting events such as the Olympic Games and Commonwealth Games. However, many sports are practiced by persons with a disability outside the formal sports

movements, for example: Wheelchair basketball, Wheelchair dancing, Weightlifting, Swimming, and many other sporting activities you can join if you are mentally or physical disabled.

Studies show that adaptive sports provide numerous benefits including less stress, more independence, higher achievement in education and employment, reduced dependency on pain and depression medication, fewer secondary medical conditions (i.e., diabetes, hypertension) [2].

The arts can offer a unique opportunity for social and economic participation by people with disabilities, and the removal of architectural and attitudinal barriers to their participation should be regarded as a vital extension of the Civil Rights Movement. This section is written by Christine Leahey, a disability rights advocate whose area of scholarship is the confluence of art and blindness.

The fact that disability is no longer narrowly defined bodes well for artists with disabilities. As the above definition suggests, artists with disabilities have the prerogative to define their personal experience of disability, and to determine if and how it informs their artistic practice. One thing is certain: an artist should never feel obligated to disclose to a curator that she/he is disabled. This is especially true if the artist's primary objective is to have her/his work reviewed on its own merit. However, if disability is a prominent theme in the work, or if disability is integral to the artist's self-conception, it may be appropriate. A subtle mention can be made in a résumé or artist statement; a bold remark can be worked into a cover letter. Whatever the choice, it should be presented with confidence.

Yet, dealing with such honest, albeit naive, questions may be the single most effective way to increase public awareness about the nature of disability, and about one's artistic process [3].

It's also true that in general, disabled people usually have fewer choices than non-disabled people. Most societies still

have limited accessibility. Even in a barrier-free world, the disabled person is more likely to rely on mechanical devices that periodically malfunction, rendering the individual excluded or dependent. Most disabled people become inured to the frustrations of inaccessibility or breakdown, but it certainly makes life less predictable and less free than it is for the non-disabled.

But my point is that while disability is not simply an irrelevant difference, like the colour of your skin, neither need it be a tragedy.

And remember: Mere existence entails problems. Hamlet, listing reasons why death is to be preferred, highlights "the thousand natural shocks that flesh is heir to". To be born is to be vulnerable, to fall prey to disease and suffering, and ultimately to die. Sometimes, the part of life that is difficult brings other benefits, such as a sense of perspective or true value that people who lead easier lives can miss out on. If we always remembered this, perhaps we would turn out to be more accepting of disability and less prejudiced against disabled people [1].

#### References:

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