Disability is a pivotal concept in the health and rehabilitation fields, and thus we—health care professionals—are seen as experts. But how well do we understand how social practices construct disability in our society? It is precisely this question—or lack of knowledge in this area—that draws heavy critique from disability theorists and critical disability studies. To help explain why and what we can do about it, this edited collection includes the voices of leading disability studies scholars, family members, service providers, and people with disabilities.

Focusing on the Canadian context, this book adopts a critical approach to interpreting disability demographics, statistics—“facts”—often entrenched in medicalized approaches that view disability as a problem. In particular, the voices of Canada’s Indigenous communities make a powerful contribution to this book. In addition to language and identity politics, the book highlights Canada’s oppressive histories that shaped and continue to perpetuate perceptions and treatment of disabled Canadians. Some of these chapters are difficult to read, but they offer an important discussion of human rights and the disability rights movements across the decades.

If you are new to disability studies, this book will help you explore how normalcy in our society creates misunderstanding, neglect and abuse, and patronizing and pathologized perspectives on disability. Each chapter offers excellent discussion questions to force us as practitioners to consider the uncomfortable; asking, for example, “how has the history of colonialism and oppression had an impact on Indigenous people with disabilities today?” (p. 185). Or, “think of your own experiences of oppression and privilege. What identities do you claim, and what barriers have you had to address? How do your own experiences inform what it might be like living with a disability in an ableist world? Finally, how do your own experiences inform your [occupational therapy] practice?” (p. 158).

A critical disability studies perspective offers us an important framework to approach disability from a sociopolitical, cultural, and economic analysis. By adopting this perspective, we as health care professionals can better understand (a) the lived experiences of disability, (b) why disability theorists are critical of our perpetual approaches to medicalizing disability, and (c) what we can do about it.

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