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Book Review of Disability in Local and Global Worlds

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Book Review

Title: *Disability in Local and Global Worlds*

Authors: Benedicte Ingstad & Susan Reynolds Whyte (Eds.)

Publisher: University of California Press, 2007

Paperback, ISBN: 978-0-520-24617-1, 324 pages

Cost: Paperback, \$21.95 USD

Reviewer: Michael Stein

Disability in Local and Global Worlds is the first co edited volume of essays from Benedicte Ingstad and Susan Reynolds Whyte since *Disability and Culture* in 1995. Like its predecessor, the book contains leading ethnographic research on disability.

Although it can be challenging to read ethnographic analyses when researchers use field-specific terminology, anthropological studies of disability are valuable for lending insight and context to the social construction of disability. The essays comprising *Disability in Local and Global Worlds* also are interesting because they provide a window into the lives of people with disabilities internationally.

The book contains eleven studies, a pair of which are by the authors, and is divided into two parts grouped around the processes of understanding bodily identity in, respectively, local and global contexts (“Locating Embodied Identities” and “Localizing Policy and Technology”). This organizational metaphor seems a bit unclear despite the introduction that explains how the book is divided by these subjects. Ultimately the strength of the book is in the worlds it opens to readers through the stories, both positive and painful, that it presents of the lives of persons with disabilities in diverse cultures.

Disability in Local and Global Worlds, as the title suggests, covers a wide array of subjects. Among the more interesting contributions from

the first part, is a study of how perceptions of bodily “wholeness” by women subjected to female genital excision varies depending on whether they are in Somalia or London; and a chapter on the self-perception of being disabled by infertile people living in populous Egypt. Two of the more powerful contributions from the second part describe the state-generated definition of disability in modern day China and how that determination organizes and affects individuals within the category, as well as an examination of the central role that tricycles play for mobilizing and empowering individuals with physical disabilities in Uganda. Other chapters present examinations from other parts of the globe, including Botswana, Brazil, Israel, Italy, and Japan.

Disability in Local and Global Worlds contains a wealth of information that will be embraced by anyone interested in varying social and cultural constructions of disability. However, the book is targeted to an academic rather than a general audience. Graduate students from several disciplines including anthropology, disability studies, medicine, psychology, and sociology will clearly benefit from the book’s contents, as will others willing to work through occasionally inaccessible jargon. Additional studies from Professors Ingstad and Reynolds Whyte, both as editors of collections of disability-based anthropology research and as leading scholars in the field, are most welcome.

Michael Stein, J.D., is a professor at the William & Mary School of Law and Executive Director of the Harvard Project on Disability.

Reference

Ingstad, B. & Reynolds Whyte, S. (Eds.).
(1995). *Disability and culture*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.