

The Body Project: Anatomy, Relationships, and Representation
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Identifying and Transforming Normalcy: Challenges to Compulsory Able-bodied Oppression in the Deaf Community

This paper integrates excerpts taken from a fieldwork-based, thesis-length project that examines the personal experience narratives of Deaf and Hearing mothers of Deaf children. Driven by the goal of joining folkloric interpretations of narrative with theoretical concepts that have emerged out of Disability Studies, this paper provides a point of intersection between the two disciplines that takes story structure, and the nature of memory, into account. Responding primarily to Alison Kafer's "compulsory able-bodiedness" and Tobin Sieber's notion of "disability as masquerade", this paper uses (rather than challenges) ethnographic practices to illustrate the transformative properties of narrative that can be seen and compared among specific Deaf and Hearing groups. Disability Studies has largely ignored folkloric approaches to personal experience narratives which have long been engaged understanding the nature of stories, memory, and the expression of social relationships within the matrix of the ordinary. This paper uses transcripts of interviews with mothers who define their own roles by contextualizing both deafness, and "normalcy", in order to cultivate structures of feeling; the presentation of the instability of the present combined with the stability of the past allows for role-defining to be transformative.

Regarding the role of the body, disability and narrative, this paper illustrates the interrelatedness of deafness as the "invisible disability" and ASL, a visual/physical language. The Deaf and Hearing mothers interviewed for this paper explore the implications of having "voice" in both a literal and figurative way, acknowledge the trade-offs involved in looking "normal" but being mute (disability as masquerade). From a folkloric standpoint, this paper allows the complexity of this trade-off, and others, to be seen; it examines, not only, multiple cultural viewpoints, but various narrative structures.