

An Invisible Fragment within an Invisible Movement:
Construction of Collective Identity in Disability Rights Politics and its Implications for
Individuals with Mental Disabilities.

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In today's postmodern world, is it possible for a group to effect social change without first establishing a collective identity? To address this question, this paper will look at the Disability Rights Movement in the United States. Western society uses the cultural term "disability" to describe a wide array of social, communicative, physical or mental variations. Individuals possessing these variations have formed separate interest-group organizations focused on their own particular goals and grievances. These groups also constitute a significant portion of the network known as the Disability Rights Movement. Due to such internal fragmentation, some scholars argue, the establishment of a collective identity within the movement is virtually impossible. Regardless, it has enjoyed much success in pushing forth their national agenda for equal rights. This paper will begin to analyze the Disability Rights Movement through both New Social Movement Theory and Critiques of Post-Modern Theory. Using past and present literature about the movement, I argue that the collective identity of the Disability Rights Movement is not defined by who they include, but who despite their inclusion are rendered invisible – individuals with mental disabilities. Despite post-modern tendencies, a collective identity is needed to produce effective societal results. Most likely, this identity does not exist in reality. It is merely a concept, symbolized by a person or group of persons, which lies between the realms of realism and idealism. For this reason, collective identities have both positive and negative consequences for the individuals of whom it is supposed to represent or of whom it fails to represent- those individuals with mental disabilities.