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The Accomplishment and Future Study of Disability Identity Research in the Japanese Context: A Cross-Section of Psychology and Disability Studies

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Abstract

This study highlights the accomplishments of previous research on disability identity in the Japanese context. Disability identity is the belief that people with disabilities view disability as a positive and essential aspect of their sense of belonging to the disability community. Value-change theory in rehabilitation psychology implies the current disability identity, suggesting that people with disabilities have favorable attitudes toward themselves. However, this theory overlooks the uniqueness of their impairments. Disability identity emphasizes that disability has personal, collective, and political implications. Disability culture (e.g., "deaf" and anti-eugenic discourse) and disability policy encourage people with disabilities to narrate their disability-related experiences for themselves and the public. The lack of concrete regulations in Japan's Disability Discrimination Act enables them to create diverse narratives. Their involvement in disability-related activities changes depending on their social and political contexts. Online platforms can serve as venues where users can share their experiences. In future, the generativity concept can contribute to understanding how disability identity is shaped across generations, while respecting differences among generations in their sense of belonging to the disability community. Finally, disability identity should not be overemphasized, as it may risk negating other important aspects of the person.

Keywords: disability identity, disability studies, narrative, Japan

Introduction and Overview of Disability Identity

This study examines the accomplishments of previous research on disability identity as a narrative in psychology and related disciplines. It suggests several tasks for future studies in Japan as part of Asia. Most studies in this field have been conducted in the United States, although several have been conducted in Europe, Denmark, and Asia, including Malaysia and Japan (e.g., Tagaki, 2023a).

Psychosocial issues of people with disabilities and related topics have been studied in interdisciplinary areas such as rehabilitation psychology and disability studies. Disability studies is a specific discipline developed in the 1990s in the United Kingdom and the United States under the influence of sociology, anthropology, and cultural studies. Research in this field is currently being conducted in Europe, Asia, and Africa. In this paper, "disability research" refers to the general study of disability issues.

The current study provides a balanced view of the personal, social, and cultural aspects of disability (Tagaki, 2023b). Rehabilitation psychology and disability studies present opposing perspectives: Disability studies argues that rehabilitation psychology adheres to a medical or an individual model and aims to help people with disabilities recover from a "problematic status." Disability studies overlooks "psychological" or inner states, regarding them as the individualism of disability or attributing disability-related issues to personal factors only. Discussing disability identity in cultural psychology contributes to reducing the discipline's compartmentalization. Cultural psychology has dealt with the psychosocial issues of people with disabilities by employing diverse disability research. However, studies of the experiences of people with disabilities and their families in cultural psychology have just begun.

Although there is no precise definition of disability identity, it broadly denotes the belief held by people with disabilities that disability is a positive and essential aspect of themselves, along with the sense of solidarity they share with people with disabilities as a collective group or disability community (Dunn & Burcaw, 2013; Forber-Pratt et al., 2017). Disability identity is similar to ethnic and gender identity, wherein marginalized group membership becomes an internalized, integrated, and important aspect of oneself (Andrews, 2020; Darling, 2013).

The targets of this study were mobility, hearing, visual impairments, and other diseases. The current study covers a broad range of disability identities, such as disability culture, disability movement, and domestic or international disability policies, including the International Classification of Functioning (ICF; World Health Organization, 2013) and the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD; Department of Economic and Social Affairs, United Nations, 2006), because neighboring disciplines, such as psychology, sociology, and disability studies, are the basis of disability identity.

The paper presents the following sections: an examination of the development of rehabilitation psychology as the basis of disability research in psychology, the development of disability identity, disability policy as a narrative for disability identity, and the conclusion.

A Psychosocial Approach as a Basis for the Biopsychosocial Model

The author traced the beginning of the study of disability identity to the initial theories of rehabilitation psychology that were developed after World War II by Dembo, Levinton, and Wright (1956) and Wright (1960, 1983). Wright's (1983) psychosocial approach, which was an extension of her psychological approach (Wright, 1960), is noteworthy because it influenced the biopsychosocial model on which the International Classification of Functioning (ICF; World Health Organization, 2013) was based and current disability research in the general social sciences (Tagaki, 2023b). Wright (1983) made noteworthy remarks that contributed to the discussion of disability identity in interdisciplinary areas. She strongly valued the impact of the environment on a person's behavior (Wright, 2009), a view that was influenced by Kurt Lewin, her doctoral dissertation supervisor.

Acceptance of Disability Resulting from Value Change

The highlight of Wright's work is the acceptance of disability (Wright, 1960, 1983) based on value change. She suggested that accepting disability means that, while the disability may be considered an inconvenience and restrictive, one should not view disability as "devaluation," or a loss or deficiency in something of value.

Wright (1960) suggested the following value changes in disability acceptance: First, expansion of the scope of value meant that people with disabilities realized many existing values despite losing something important as a result of injury. This means that disability did not define all of a person's abilities or values, even though some were damaged. This also helped prevent people with disabilities from internalizing negative perceptions associated with their disability. Second, the transformation from comparative values to asset values meant that the individual focused on their own values without making comparisons with general standards or other people. These two value changes are open to various interpretations, but one example is that people with disabilities should value "inner" traits like kindness and honesty over activities based on physical health or physical beauty.

Perspectives of Insiders and Outsiders

Wright (1983, 1991) emphasized the difference in perspective between "insiders" and "outsiders." In disability research, the former refers to people with disabilities, and the latter to people without disabilities. She commented that people without disabilities, as outsiders, often overestimate the negative impact of disabilities on the lives of people with disabilities. Based on the two perspectives, she developed the "requirement of mourning" (1983) and expected people with disabilities to suffer or negate themselves. The current author argues that the difference should be reconciled for the value change. That is, the attitudes of people without disabilities' are important for the aforementioned value change in people with disabilities. Wright may intend that professionals in rehabilitation psychology should not focus on disability only.

Wright (1983) suggested the use of person-centered language (e.g., "person with disability") because she believed that this would help people with disabilities be perceived as less medicalized and more humanized (Andrews, 2020).

Personal Documents and Narratives of People with Disabilities

Wright's theories were based on her qualitative analysis of interviews with service members with visible disabilities, such as amputees, and autobiographies by people with disabilities, which followed methodological trends in early psychology (Wright, 1960, 1983).

Her methodology, which included autobiography and case studies, is favorably accepted not only as a data collection and analysis method but also as a way to empower people with disabilities (McCarthy, 2011). Wright's (1960, 1983) approach to the positive aspects of people with disabilities is connected to the current field of positive psychology, which seeks well-being or happiness (McCarthy, 2011).

Stigma (Goffman, 1963), a prominent theory in disability research, employed Wright's (1960) theoretical position on devaluation and qualitative episodes. According to Frank (1988), Wright (1960, 1983) remarked that Goffman (1963) overestimated the reluctant attitudes of people with disabilities when interacting with people without disabilities. For example, the term "passing," which means that people with disabilities conceal their disabilities from surrounding people, is based on the presumption that disability could be a social symbol that devalues people with disabilities. However, Wright's value-change theory states that people with disabilities can change their passive attitudes and gain empowerment. In addition, people with disabilities selectively disclose their disability-related status by considering their surrounding environment. They will disclose if they need assistance or want to reveal their status to others, but otherwise might choose not to do so, to avoid embarrassment. Passing should not inevitably be devalued; it is merely a part of everyday life for people with disabilities.

Implications for Disability Identity

Emphasizing Similarities between People with and without Disabilities

Although Wright's theory strongly influenced subsequent disability research in psychology, disciplines outside of psychology generally criticized rehabilitation psychology. For example, disability studies claimed that psychology overestimated inner moral or ethical traits rather than social and cultural factors and that it regarded disability as something that needed to be cured or relieved, leading to the generation of passivity among people with disabilities (Olkin & Pledger, 2003).

However, this criticism of psychology does not consider Wright's strong interest in the issues of women with disabilities. She was active in establishing the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) in the United States. The ADA has become an advanced model of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and other advanced anti-disability discrimination acts. Wright's person-environment and insider-outsider distinctions (Ehde et al., 2013) are generated through the relationship between people with disabilities and their surrounding society.

Tagaki (2023b) remarked that the discussion across disciplines was insufficient, even though Wright's works could remain at the intersection of these interdisciplinary studies. It is important to reconsider these discussions from the perspective of current interdisciplinary psychology, given that her theory has a long history since WW2 and thus is open to various interpretations.

Re-evaluating Implications for Disability Identity

An important discussion point is Wright's emphasis of similarities rather than differences between people with and without disabilities. Wright and Lopez (2002) were concerned that people are more likely to focus only on the collective attributes of minorities rather than on their behavior. Wright's remark was influenced by Gestalt psychology, on which she relied to explain stereotypes and negative biases toward social minorities. She joined the field of positive psychology and insisted that each individual's strengths should not be valued as a collective characteristic of people with disability (Dunn & Elliott, 2005).

Despite her emphasis on similarities, Wright attempted to oppose the dominant values of people without disabilities, such as those favoring physical strength and beauty. This value change (Wright, 1960) is contrary to current ableist thought in contemporary disability studies; Wright commented that people with disabilities should be careful of idolizing normal or ideal societal standards (McCarthy, 2011; Tagaki, 2023b). McCarthy (2011) presented examples of ableist thinking, such as considering a set of stairs at the entrance of a building as a given or walking independently as superior to using a cane or wheelchair.

However, the author argues that Wright did not elaborate on how people with disabilities actively manage the differences between themselves and people without disabilities, such as their counter-perspectives against people without disabilities (Goodley & Lawthom, 2006). Additionally, Wright observed the collectiveness of people with disabilities as a possible object of stereotyping but missed their empowering ability to generate a counter-movement for the outside-disability community. The author suggests that empowerment includes representing the lives of people with disabilities as regular or ordinary. People with disabilities are often objectified as targets of inspiration by those who perceive certain behaviors as requiring extraordinary effort, even though these behaviors are regular and routine for people with disabilities (Young, 2014). People with disabilities may be embarrassed in such situations and reject the objectification (Grue, 2016). Wright (1983, 1991) did not sufficiently discuss this perception of people with disabilities. Additionally, her person-centered language contributed to decreasing negative connotations of depersonalization in medical terms. However, she did not observe the pride in disability and its empowering aspects in the disability community.

A possible reason for this neglect is that value change theory is too idealistic and does not employ a long-term perspective, as it focuses on the short-term period after disability onset (Tagaki, 2016). Another possible reason is that Wright's value-laden theory has been used to develop several psychometric scales, such as the Acceptance of Disability Scale (Linkowski, 1971) and the Adaptation to Disability Scale-Revised (Groomes & Linkowski, 2007). Acceptance was replaced with adaptation, because Groomes and Linkowski (2007, p. 8) suggested that "a person does not need to choose to accept having a disability but does inherently adapt to living with disability given encounters challenge person-environment congruence." Nevertheless, qualitative inquiries were proven insufficient, and utilizing a psychometric scale could not enable understanding of the experiences of diverse people with disabilities (Gill, 2001). Tagaki (2016) indicated that people with spinal cord injuries gradually generate long-term disability-laden values.

In summary, although Wright (1983) regarded disability as a multifaceted phenomenon, contrary to ableism in current disability studies (McCarthy, 2011), she failed to understand the philosophies of disability activists and the position of people with disabilities as a group. One possible reason for this is that Wright's ideas have been used in psychology to develop psychometric tests only,

such as the Acceptance of Disability Scale (Linkowski, 1971), without referring to related areas and conducting sufficient qualitative inquiries (Gill, 2001). Therefore, there is a greater need to examine disability identity and culture in disability communities.

General Trends in Disability Identity Studies

The Development of Disability Identity Studies

According to Tagaki (2023b), disability identity refers to people with disabilities considering disability as a positive and essential aspect and having a sense of solidarity as a collective group or disability community. Tagaki (2023b) strengthened the notion of a sense of belonging to the disability community. This consideration differed from that of Wright's value-change theory, which did not regard disability as a core aspect of a person. Studies that address disability identity can be traced back to the late 1990s.

Gill (1997) emphasized the importance of people with disabilities developing a positive self-perception alongside fostering self-advocacy, self-determination, a sense of belonging within the disability community, and freedom from stigma. According to Nario-Redmond and Oleson (2015), the theoretical background was not Erikson's (1959) developmental theory, but rather social identity (Hogg & Abrams, 1998), in which groups of individuals with similar attributes regard themselves as members of the group by considering the attributes as favorable. People with disabilities develop a sense of solidarity with others who have disabilities, becoming members of a group of "people with disabilities." They then reject social prejudice and accept themselves as holding a favorable position.

Implications of the Disability Development Scale

Studies of the Disability Identity Development Scale (DIDS) provide the basis for a rich discussion of multiple aspects of disability identity. Forber-Pratt et al. (2022) reported that DIDS is a validated scale, but it is not a finalized tool and needs further study. The primary studies of the scale are Forber-Pratt et al. (2020, 2022) and Wu et al. (2024). Consideration of these papers reveals theoretical implications.

Forber-Pratt et al. (2020) suggested a tentative version of the DIDS. They described the initial factor exploration of disability identity and preliminary psychometric characteristics of the scale, and collected self-report data using the instrument from 566 people in adolescence or older with diverse disabilities. Their disabilities were visible and/or invisible, with widely varying kinds and degrees: physical, intellectual, learning, and mental illness. The measurement tool comprised 102 items, based on previous qualitative studies and comprehensive reviews (e.g., Forber-Pratt & Zape, 2017; Forber-Pratt et al., 2017). They analyzed the data using exploratory factor analysis and expert reviews.

They concluded that 37 items of the original 102 should remain, assessing four factors: 1) "Internal beliefs about one's own disability and the disability community," which refers to the participation of people with disabilities in related activities and the sharing of experiences with other people with disabilities. 2) "Anger and frustration with disability experiences." An example item is "If there were a 'magic pill' that would take away my disability with no side effects, I would take it." The item does not ask about repenting or mourning disability. Rather, it reflects negative aspects of disability, which include individual-level aspects such as pain and fatigue, and social and

environmental aspects such as poor accessibility of social activities and discriminatory attitudes. 3) "Adoption of disability community values," which strengthens a sense of connection among the disability community that combats ableism. Individuals with disabilities can actualize their values, such as other people with disabilities, in the case of discrimination. An example is "If I witness someone else facing discrimination on the basis of any disability, I do something about it." 4) "Contribution to the disability community," which denotes taking an active role in mentorship and fundraising. An example is "I organize events for the disability community (i.e., support group meetings, sporting events, advocacy events, or lectures).

Forber-Pratt et al. (2022) indicated that the DIDS should consist of 35 items, following a study conducted with the original 37 items with 1,126 adults (18 to 78 years old) with disabilities living in the United States. Their disabilities were diverse: physical, intellectual, mental, and chronic illness. The two items that were dropped from the original DIDS (Forber-Pratt et al., 2020) were "When I think about my disability, I get upset" because they considered that thoughts and feeling are difficult to measure using this single item, and "I donate to disability-related organizations" because this item was highly correlated with another item. They mentioned that the four components (Forber-Pratt et al., 2020) comprise disability identity. However, they added that "The DIDS cannot be divided up or administered partly."

Wu et al. (2024) used the original, 37-item DIDS to collect data from 210 students with disabilities to determine which items were valid, ultimately removing the item "When I think about my disability, I get upset" (Forber-Pratt et al., 2020). They supported the four-factor structure of the instrument; however, they noted that students with disabilities were often reluctant to discuss their contributions to the disability community, such as their involvement in political activities. One might wonder whether their personal experiences influenced their involvement in disability policy. However, Wu et al. suggested that students with disabilities might emphasize the appreciation they receive for their connections to non-disability-related activities, such as student life.

Based on the studies of DIDS, the adoption of disability community values and contribution to the disability community overlap. The former involves strengthening the decision-making of people with disabilities. The slogan "Nothing about us without us" was shared among disability movements in the 1990s, reflecting their desire to have the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. If a person with disability is involved in disability-related activities, their adoption of disability community values may generate a counter-discourse against the dominant discourses outside the disability community. This could include discourse against common conceptions of productivity and efficiency in the labor market or the meritocracies of academic achievements in the education ladder.

Moreover, contributions to the disability community should be elaborated upon because they have diverse meanings. Reher and Evans (2024) observed that people with disabilities who have a disability identity exhibit strongly favorable attitudes toward advocacy or political movements to address their daily difficulties, even though they agree that the disability community has rich diversity, such as in terms of impairment types, gender, and ethnicity. Reher and Evans emphasized that the sense of belonging to the disability community in people with disabilities is not personal but rather collective and political.

The author argues that the contribution of people with disability to these matters will depend on their decisions and interests and that they may value aspects that are not directly related to disability. Nevertheless, people with disabilities are generally concerned regarding whether

politicians and public officials represent the disability community (Reher & Evans, 2024). Targeted activities of such officials could involve participating in disability movements or policymaking conferences to advocate for people with disabilities who hesitate to express their opinions publicly. These behaviors benefit both the disability community and the individual.

Disability Culture as Narrative Resources

Disability Culture

If we assume that disability identity is a narrative rather than a personal trait, it is important to explore the resources that promote disability-related experiences. Relevant examples may be drawn from other people with disabilities, social attitudes toward people with disabilities (both positive and negative), and disability policies and laws. In Japan, as an indication of social attitudes in daily life, we can assume that people with disabilities will have difficulty accessing train stations and shops. People nearby will generally help, even though such help could be perceived as interfering in the lives of people with disabilities. By sharing their experiences with others, people with disabilities can generate specific stories about their disabilities. These resources could create a counter-narrative to aggressive discourse outside the community. Disability-related experiences can easily be shared among people with similar disabilities, such as regarding mobility impairment while in a wheelchair, visual and hearing impairments, or mental disorders. Among different disabilities, common experiences exist. For example, illegally parked cycles on the sidewalk represent obstacles to accessibility for people with mobility impairments or visual impairments. People with internal disabilities, such as kidney disease, need medical services, as do those who have mental disorders.

In cultural psychology, some collective resources supported in the disability community can be termed a "disability culture," which is similar to a subculture and counter-culture in which values, norms, behaviors, and beliefs are shared by people with disabilities (Jones, 2022). Culture refers to the beliefs, values, and thought patterns underlying behavior, and cultural psychology is "the exploration of how individuals' emotions, behaviors, and other psychological processes are shaped by their cultures" (Forber-Pratt, 2019, p. 242). Disability culture presents a challenge to ableism, or the general social norms regarding "normal" bodily function, communication, or social customs, which exist not only outside the disability community but also inside as a role model for people with disabilities. Additionally, many people with disabilities hesitate to stereotype themselves as those who inspire or have outstanding abilities as compared to people without disabilities. Such a discourse implies that people with disabilities are not "normal" but rather "super-normal."

Deaf Culture and Identity

Chaudhary et al. (2017) suggested that the ordinary lives of social minorities could consist of a series of resistances against the social majority, and that resistance was neither an extraordinary occurrence nor a counter-productive event, like a public demonstration. For example, Awad et al. (2017) presented resistance through graffiti as an example of an intersection of personal, interpersonal, collective, and social systems. Their remarks are relevant to the identity and culture of people with disabilities.

Deaf culture and its identity are typical examples of the resistance of disability identity and culture against general attitudes toward disability in daily life. Deaf culture and identity assume that being deaf represents being part of a linguistic minority. Hence, sign language is not merely an

alternative to regular verbal language, because it has a distinctive structure. This is a strong counter-discourse to the general view of hearing loss. This view can be observed in daily life, as deaf people chat with shop staff in sign language, which leads the staff to realize their deafness (Chapman, 2021). The use of sign language has multiple meanings in daily communication: signing indicates a language that belongs to deaf people, or represents the social oppression of sign language.

However, the relationships among deaf identity, deaf culture, and general hearing loss may be dynamic. Deaf people realize that medical treatment for hearing impairment revolves around the positioning of people with disabilities, as the use of cochlear implants depends on whether they are considered a linguistic minority or hearing impaired. Additionally, children of deaf adults (CODA) face a dilemma between their deaf parents and themselves because the children do not have hearing impairments (Heffernan & Nixon, 2023). Such parents could expect their children to be deaf like themselves or to act as sign language "interpreters." Children may be hesitant to ignore their parents' expectations, even though the children belong to the hearing community (Millar & Vione, 2024).

Additionally, municipal governments in Japan had instituted local ordinances on sign language before the enactment of The Act on Promotion of Measures Concerning Sign Language (Reiwa Law, no. 78) in June 2025. Most of the former ordinances state that sign language is an independent language used in the deaf community and explain the history of its users being oppressed and the requirement that its culture is respected. However, the Act does not refer to sign language as an independent language, nor does it delineate its associated difficulties. Enactment of the local ordinances and the current Act promotes deaf identity. Deaf identity is a typical example of the connection between personal lives, collective social identity, and disability policies.

We observed the reconstruction of the meaning of impairments in addition to deafness. For example, people with mobility impairments reconstructed politically incorrect words such as "cripple," using the words to express pride in the impairment and accompanying physical limitations (Botha & Harvey, 2024). This strategy changes the meaning of words used by the mainstream to label a certain minority group and overturns the premise of ableism. This is different from the aforementioned "supernormal" perceptions because the persons with mobility impairments refused to establish standards. Additionally, the author suggests that language reconstructed in this way promotes the realization that person-first language hides disability identity and the pride of being a member of the disability community, although it emphasizes commonality between people with disabilities and those without.

It is important to recognize that not all people with disabilities have a sense of belonging to the disability community through disability groups or movements (Reher & Evans, 2024). This is partly because some people with disabilities want to avoid involvement in disability groups, regarding disability as a stigma. However, other people with disabilities do not have opportunities to become involved in the disability community.

Moreover, the severity of an individual's impairment does not necessarily determine their access to the disability community. People with severe disabilities can participate in activities to advocate for their various needs even though they require travel assistance, time, and effort. Participation benefits not only the individuals themselves but also other people with disabilities. People with mild disabilities may have easier access to activities than people with severe disabilities, but the former may not feel compelled to promote their needs in the political arena; nevertheless want

people in the community to understand their difficulties, regardless of their severity (Tagaki, 2021b).

Anti-Eugenics as Shared Counter-Discourse Against Ableism

As disability culture has collective and political aspects, the anti-eugenics philosophy of the disability movement promoted a sense of belonging to the disability community among people with disabilities. Eugenics initially generated mass anti-humanitarian behaviors, such as genocide and systematic sterilization, to prevent people from having "inferior offspring"; the movement affected people with various disabilities. For example, forced sterilization under the former Eugenic Protection Act is the target of the Disability Movement. However, this issue is taboo and largely invisible because the surgery is conducted on a highly private body part, and many professionals are involved in sterilization activities.

Nevertheless, this movement attracted social interest because the Supreme Court determined that forced sterilization under the former Eugenic Protection Act was a violation of the Japanese Constitution, and the Japanese Government launched policies to support those who were forced to undergo sterilization surgeries. This means that anti-eugenics philosophy was considered socially reasonable. However, it is important to recognize that a series of political and judicial resolutions were needed to enable people with disabilities to speak of their experiences because reproductive issues have highly personal aspects.

A group of people with cerebral palsy (Yokotsuka, 1975) extended the meaning of anti-eugenic via the term "internalized illusion for being able-bodied" in 1970s Japan. This was a slogan of the disability movement but supported a well-elaborated view to revisit traditional perceptions of people with disabilities. The initial approach was to alert people without disabilities to have sympathy for a mother who had killed her child with a disability. The term revealed that people with disabilities were treated as vulnerable by family members, and sympathy denied the existence of people with disabilities. Japan has a strong cultural norm that people with disabilities should be cared for by their parents, including when the former are adults. Caring for older adults is traditionally assigned to women in East Asia (Tagaki, 2016).

Moreover, the aforementioned term started to have an anti-ableism message; the group gradually became involved in a campaign against the idea that people with disabilities wanted to be as close as possible to "healthy" (without disabilities) individuals (Morioka, 2009) and criticized the economic growth and productivity or physical beauty standard. The cerebral palsy action group urged people with disabilities to affirm themselves and their unique ways of seeing and thinking (Morioka, 2009). Yokotsuka's (1975) phrase opposes the notion that people with disabilities are expected to adhere to the expectations of general society (Botha & Harvey, 2024; Reher & Evans, 2024). Tagaki (2023a) stated that this philosophy is entirely different from that of Wright (1960, 1983), who stressed the similarities between people with disabilities and those without.

However, the author argues that the disability movement did not sufficiently suggest an alternative to "normal" physical appearance. Although Yokotsuka's (1975) phrase disapproved of the notion of "normal" physical appearance and functions that could not be fully expressed by people with disabilities, his remark is different from the inclusion of amputees or wheelchair-users as fashion models (Tagaki, 2023a), and from addressing the negative connotation of bodily impairments using prosthetics (e.g., Dolezal, 2017).

Disability Policy to Encourage Disability-Related Narratives

Disability Policy to Promote Narratives

Disability policy is a resource that promotes narratives because the Japanese Government has launched policies covering a wide range of disabilities and reflecting general attitudes since 2000. Although the content of the policies and laws was not concrete, their vagueness encouraged the narratives of people with disabilities. Content that is too specific may reduce flexibility and hinder the openness and future-oriented flexibility of narratives (Tagaki, 2021a).

A notable example is the Disability Discrimination Law, which addresses all aspects of the daily lives of people with disabilities, while the Act on Providing Comprehensive Support for the Daily Life and Life in Society of Persons with Disabilities (Heisei 17 Law, no. 123) covers only disability welfare services. The narratives inherent in these policies reflect the diversity and individuality of the experiences of people with disabilities, to reduce discriminatory issues. The Disability Discrimination Law asks both people with disabilities and entities such as schools and shops to have gentle dialogue, elaborating the narratives of both people with and without disabilities. The Japanese Disability Discrimination Act (Heisei 25 Law, no. 65) and is grounded in the social model of disability, which asserts that people with disabilities should be free from discriminatory exclusion and provided with reasonable accommodation. However, the highly individualized nature of this policy has led to disagreements between people with disabilities and employers. If a person with a disability requests legally mandated accommodation, it is not guaranteed, and their request may even be perceived as selfish. In such cases, the individual can contact central or local government entities to resolve conflicts. However, according to Tagaki (2025), many consultations with local governments concerning the Disability Discrimination Act involve cases in which people with disabilities received inappropriate treatment rather than cases of legal violations. The ambiguity of inappropriate treatment might promote specific narratives featuring people with disabilities. Such narratives are the basis of case studies by central and local governments. It might be argued that the Disability Discrimination Act is an important resource for disability identity.

Emphasizing Similarities between People with and without Disabilities in Japan

People with disabilities could have difficulty insisting that the norms of the disability community should be valued, even though disability policies encourage them to insist in this way. There is a strong discursive emphasis on the commonalities between people with and without disabilities in Japan. The concept of "living together in a harmonious society, people with and without disabilities" (Cabinet Office of Japan, 2023) connects the daily lives of people with disabilities, society (including able-bodied people), and policies. Other examples include universal design, barrier-free movement and transportation, and symbiotic societies, which are used as copies of various aspects of society. Railway companies have added "barrier-free" surcharges to fares to cover the cost of platform fences and elevators at stations.

Conclusion

Research on disability identity considers people with disabilities as a social minority group that values disability as an essential trait and their sense of belonging to disability communities. People with disabilities assume that a disability is an aspect that differentiates them from people without disabilities. Disability identity places the personal and daily lives of people with disabilities within political contexts as members of the disability community. The aforementioned position is different from that of rehabilitation psychology, which recognizes the empowering aspects of disability but overlooks the active meanings of the differences between people with and without disabilities.

A limitation of the current study is that it did not examine generativity (Erikson, 1959), which should be the subject of further research. Generativity contributes to how different generations consider disability identity, respecting differences among generations in their sense of belonging to the disability community, because the disability policies and social and cultural norms comprising the disability community change over generations. While Hahn and Belt (2004) remarked that members of the disability movement themselves would not transmit "cultural legacies" to combat prejudice against the next generation, one should not suppose that a given generation of people with disabilities does not care about the next generation. Andrews (2020) and Weeber (2004) introduced people with disabilities who devoted themselves to mentoring younger people with disabilities to maintain their resources. Andrews (2020) noted that the participants in Forber-Pratt and Zape's (2017) study were from the generation after the ADA was implemented, implying that the participants lived in an improved society owing to the ADA and had different interests, including non-disability matters.

The impact of the Disability Discrimination Act, which is equivalent to the ADA, has yet to be observed, as the former it was enacted in 2018. However, unlike at the time of the disability rights movement of the 1960s and 1970s, disability policies have been established. The current generation of people with disabilities may be less interested in the disability rights movement. Tagaki (2023a) indicated that middle-aged and older members of the disability movement were concerned about whether the younger generation would succeed in their activities. The government decreased the number of special schools and institutions to avoid segregation, but these social institutions acted as venues where people with disabilities established mutual solidarity and belonged to the disability community (Reher & Evans, 2024).

However, online disability communities using social network services could provide an important opportunity for individuals to share disability-related experiences (Botha & Harvey, 2024; Forber-Pratt et al., 2022); these have become more active after COVID-19. For people with disabilities, attending an online disability group is more convenient than an in-person group, in part because there are fewer accessibility concerns in the former case. Through online platforms, they can even refuse imposed labeling, which shows that empowering messages affect marketing to people with disabilities (Södergren & Vallström, 2023). People with disabilities living with well-developed disability policies may not be interested in "cultural legacies" and the disability movement for improving policies. However, they have concerns about their daily and social lives, such as social gatherings, traveling, and dating, besides education and employment. Contacting the Disability Discrimination Act section can benefit themselves and others with similar disabilities because the Act covers their entire lives.

Moreover, in the study of generativity and disability identity, very little attention has been paid to the perspectives of people with disabilities who are raising children. As mentioned above, CODA parents take pride in belonging to the deaf community and expect their children to do the same. However, their children find themselves caught between the hearing and deaf communities. Notably, Hankó et al. (2022) suggested that mothers with visual impairments had to cope with being labeled as vulnerable and incapable but established a unique way of raising their children, such as immersing them in activities that provide physical or verbal contact. Their work did not directly refer to belonging to disability communities but revealed unique modalities for the next generation of people with disabilities. However, further studies are required to confirm these observations.

Besides these limitations of this study, we should not overvalue disability identity. Brubaker and Cooper (2000) and Wagner et al (2009) refer to the danger of focusing on "identity" only, which leads to underestimating other multiple aspects of people, and dividing groups of people with and without the relevant identity. If members of a group share experiences and become more consistent, they become empowered and can raise objections to pressure from outside the group. However, the characteristics and attributes of a group have their subclassifications, and therefore, homogeneity cannot be assured. For example, members of a group of people with disabilities are diverse not only in terms of the type or degree of their disabilities, but also in terms of factors such as ethnicity, gender, and generation. As socially minority groups become more cohesive, the boundaries between them and socially dominant groups outside the group become stronger, which can lead to isolation. If the social minority has strong political goals, the boundaries may promote social division. To avoid this risk, there is a need for the concept of "living together in a harmonious society, people with and without disabilities."

This does not mean these difficulties and counter-activities should be ignored. Rather, the political meanings of the identity must be recognized. Chaudhary et al. (2017) showed that a social minority's counter-activities outside the community are not represented by large rallies but rather by daily behaviors, such as deaf people speaking in sign language in a coffee shop. The sense of belonging to the disability community should not always accompany political connotations.

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