



Disabled AND competent: Professional Identity formation processes of healthcare students and clinicians with disabilities

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BACKGROUND: Students and clinicians with disabilities in the health professions face unique challenges when developing their professional identity alongside their continuously developing disability identity.

OBJECTIVE: Exploring the multifaceted professional identity formation processes of health professions students and clinicians with disabilities.

METHOD:

27 students



29 Clinicians



with different disabilities



from 5 healthcare professions
Up to 3 interviews each
Total = 126 interviews
Analysis Guided by grounded theory

RESULTS:

1. **“Disability as a liability”**: disability was perceived as incompetence, and therefore hindered professional identity formation.
2. Healthcare settings, which are **competitive and demanding**, contributed to the challenges of professional identity formation.
3. **Varying levels of incorporation** between disability identity and professional identity.



Implications:

How to support the Professional Identity formation of clinicians/students with disabilities?

- ✓ Create space to disclose.
- ✓ Create opportunities for sharing experiences.
- ✓ Raise awareness of stigmas.
- ✓ Accept different ways to care for clients.
- ✓ Acknowledge the diverse contributions of all of our colleagues.

Levels and patterns of incorporation of Disability Identity and Professional Identity:

Separation

It's not a big part of me:

Disability Identity Professional Identity

“I kind of told myself, I would just take the meds, do the things they told me... and it would go away....it wasn't really part of my identity”.
Tim (a clinician).

Incorporation

My disability experiences are part of my professional experiences:

Disability Identity Professional Identity

“I feel like people do respect what I do have to say especially when it comes to disability, because I feel like I am arguing always from a different point than anyone else, and I have another level of insight”.
Valerie (a student).

“And maybe (the disability) made me more rooted in the driving force for me becoming an occupational therapist is wanting to change the negative stereotypes that are perceived surrounding disability”.
Samira (a student).

Patterns of incorporation

My disability experiences benefit my clients:

Disability Identity Professional Identity

It could be used against you:

Disability Identity Professional Identity

