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Bodily Phenomenology in Cultural Analysis

The focus of this abstract is a cultural analysis that applies a phenomenology framework which gaining strength from ethnographic fieldwork. On the bases of this ethnographic fieldwork it is possible to study and develop the body as a Being-in-the-World, by focusing on the ‘experiencer’ and the every-day life of bodily experiencing (1, 2, 3). However, in a culture analysis it is also important to focus on cultural belonging (4). In this abstract I will emphasize that the body should be analysed, through the ‘experiencer’, as both an experience and a cultural belonging.

I start with an ethnographic example from an ongoing fieldwork studying wheelchair training for adolescents in a city environment. A group of adolescents are given an assignment in which they shall manage to open the door in to a McDonalds’ restaurant. Before they started the training they had not the technique for opening heavy doors, mostly relying on help from their parents or their personal assistants. This example describes the second training session, and Per, who is 15 years old, is the first one to start. He rolls-up towards the entrance of the restaurant and is getting ready to open the door when a group of young girls appear. As they open the door in order to enter the restaurant, one of the girls holds up the door for Per, but instead of acknowledging the help he tells her to close the door. This has the effect that the girl gets surprised and asks him: “Shall we not help you?” Per answers no and the girl closes the door. He can now proceed with the assignment.

The key symbol for a cultural analysis in this ethnographic story is the body. This is a body that creates a cultural belonging of the disabled body in the need of help. Maybe, this is the reason why the adolescents have not learnt to open doors before? At the same time this is a

body that quickly adopts new techniques, which changes the Being-in-the-World for the individual adolescent. Moreover, this example gives us an insight in how the health care system constructs the abilities and cultural belonging of adolescents. How can cultural analysis in this way inform the project of bodily phenomenology? I would like to emphasize that cultural analysis, based on ethnographic fieldwork, gives us the opportunity and ability to discover various sorts of micro-perspectives, which can be used to expand and connect bodily experiencing-perspective with theories of cultural belonging.

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