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Defining Disability\_Glossary\_Entry\_Access

The word “access” is derived from the Middle French word “acces” which means arrival, from the Latin word “accessus,” meaning “an approach,” and also from the Latin word “accedere,” which means “to approach”  (vocabulary.com). In modern English, people most commonly use the word as a noun to describe the entrance to something, some place, or somebody, or as a verb meaning “to obtain, acquire or to get hold of.” When someone “has access to” something, the phrase simply means he or she has the opportunity to interact with someone or something (urban dictionary.com).

However, rather than simply meaning “availability,” when used in a more sensitive context like political or social issues, “access” could also imply “the right or opportunity to benefit from or use a system or service,”  (Oxford English Dictionary) like a social welfare system, voting rights, public worship, education or employment.  For instance, the leaders of the Civil Rights Movement advocated that all men should have the same access to public resources as “all men are created equal” and should have equal rights and opportunities（the Declaration of Independence, Thomas Jefferson).

It is true that when we refer to the “access” of people with disabilities, we may simply mean their physical access to public resources and areas, like bathrooms, elevators, armchairs, etc. We may also go beyond the public facilities and think about something intangible, like their potential of receiving higher education and being employed.

To examine whether the “access of people with disabilities” has received proper attention, I use the statistical method and analyse the frequency at which the word is used. From both the [Corpus](http://corpus.byu.edu/) and the Google Ngram website, we could see that the usage of the word “access” remained at a relatively low level from the 1800s to 1960s but increased sharply at that turning point and even surpassed that of the word “opportunity,” which was always a frequently used word, in the late 1980s. However, considering the fact that the Civil Rights Movement and the Disability Rights Movement began in the mid-1950s, which made people think more about equal rights and access to public resources, we could not simply deduce that society has paid more attention to the access of disabled people. Nonetheless, when attaching the collocates as ‘disabled’ or ‘handicapped’ to search, I discovered that the word “access” has been frequently used in news reports and literary works since the 1980s, which may lead us to the conclusion that society and writers did focus more on disabled people and their rights.

The “access of people with disabilities” is not only important because these people are equal members in our society and should have the same rights to the resources, but also because; as Professor Wendell pointed out in her book The Rejected Body, “a well-accessible society could best ‘deconstruct’ disability” (Wendell, 62). Though the biomedical limitations of people with disability might not be curable, if everything is made accessible to them (simply physically), they are no longer disabled as they have the same access to reach their potential just as normal people do. (Wendell, 67)

Thus, to ensure access for people with disability, the American government carried out the American with Disability Act. The ADA benefited people with disability by guaranteeing them not only physical accessibility in public areas but also equal opportunity for education and employment. However, there are also debates over whether the ADA is really beneficial to people with disability. On an online debate about the ADA, someone who is against the law argued that employment among people with disability dropped 10.9%, 5 years after the ADA went into effect. He pointed out that people with disability could get the job due to their capability. Nonetheless, when the ADA was carried out, an employer would probably think he would be sued for discrimination if he did not accommodate that person, putting the employer in a difficult moral dilemma. (debate.org)The interesting point he made reminded me of when my professor talked about the Demand Theory in an Economics class. He said that the government’s control over the price of a house might not benefit the buyers since people are less willing to sell their house due to the low price and the possibility of a supply shortage.

While there is a common agreement that we should create more access for people with disability, it is still unclear how we could achieve the goal and examine which laws are truly beneficial. But, with all our combined effort, the overall condition of people with disability is undoubtedly improving.

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