

Baines, A. D. (2011). "I used to be autistic, but not anymore": Identity and disability across social contexts.

Abstract

Disability labels and social categories in school arise out of an educational system which attributes learning problems, perceived weaknesses, and academic failure to individual students. Instead, this cross-context ethnography investigates how learning problems are produced and reinforced through cultural practices. Using positioning theory as the central analytic approach, I examine the personal, interpersonal, and institutional storylines which make disability labels relevant in certain contexts and shape whether students can fully participate. I focus on one student as he moves across the contexts of school, debate team, and home. Over two years, this student demonstrates nuanced efforts to distance himself away from the "autistic" label, as he learns about how his social interactions shape others' perceptions. By studying youth identity, I aim to understand how his story unfolds and is influenced by his disability label and how his encounters across contexts continue to shape his life trajectory.