

The Sociological Significance of Disability Sports and Peer Support: Boccia as a Social Practice for People with Brain Injury and Higher Brain Dysfunction

Miwako Hosoda

Institute of Medical Science, University of Tokyo, Japan

Abstract:

This abstract explores the sociological significance of disability sports and the effects of peer support through the example of boccia as enjoyed by people with brain injury and higher brain dysfunction. While disability sports are often framed within medical or rehabilitative discourses, a sociological perspective emphasizes their role as social practices that foster participation, identity reconstruction, and mutual support. Boccia, with its adaptable rules, assistive equipment, and emphasis on strategy rather than physical strength, provides an inclusive environment in which cognitive and neurological diversity is actively accommodated.

Participation in boccia offers individuals with brain injury or higher brain dysfunction opportunities to engage in meaningful social interaction and shared activities, which are often limited in their daily lives due to invisible or misunderstood impairments. From the perspective of the social model of disability, boccia illustrates how social arrangements and supportive environments can reduce disabling barriers and enable active participation. Moreover, peer support plays a central role in this process. Interactions among participants with similar experiences facilitate mutual understanding, emotional reassurance, and the sharing of coping strategies that cannot be easily provided by professionals alone.

Drawing on theories of peer support and symbolic interactionism, boccia can be understood as a space where participants co-construct meanings of competence, recovery, and belonging. Through encouragement, role modeling, and shared success or failure, peers contribute to the restoration of self-confidence and social identity often disrupted by brain injury. In addition, disability sports such as boccia challenge dominant social norms that value independence, efficiency, and physical performance, instead highlighting cooperation, interdependence, and diverse abilities. Thus, boccia demonstrates how disability sports and peer support together function as important sociological mechanisms for social inclusion, empowerment, and community building among people with cognitive and neurological disabilities.