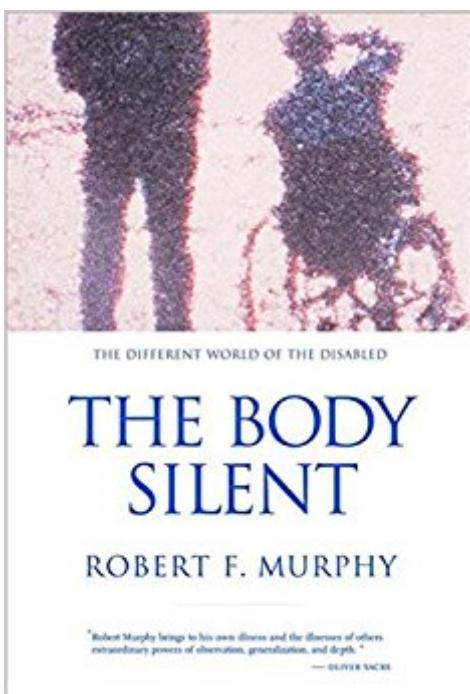


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# The Body Silent: The Different World Of The Disabled



## Synopsis

"The most powerful book of its kind I've ever read.... Extraordinary powers of observation, generalization, and depth." — Oliver Sacks, author of *The Man Who Mistook His Wife For a Hat* Winner of the Columbia University Lionel Trilling Award. Robert Murphy was in the prime of his career as an anthropologist when he felt the first symptom of a malady that would ultimately take him on an odyssey stranger than any field trip to the : a tumor of the spinal cord that progressed slowly and irreversibly into quadriplegia. In this gripping account, Murphy explores society's fears, myths, and misunderstandings about disability, and the damage they inflict. He reports how paralysis — like all disabilities — assaults people's identity, social standing, and ties with others, while at the same time making the love of life burn even more fiercely.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

The author, a well-known cultural and field anthropologist at Columbia University, was diagnosed as having an incurable spinal cord tumor in 1976 at age 52. He is now essentially paralyzed from the neck down. Within this framework in which his physical self of locomotion and effect loses all function he relates his own odyssey into "selfhood and sentiment." Far more than a bittersweet first-person account of chronic illness, this is a masterfully written examination of the role of the disabled in society. The author draws upon the relevant literature, history, sociology, anthropology, and psychology as a basis for his views and his means of coping. This powerful and eye-opening commentary is highly recommended for social scientists, health care personnel, and informed and

interested laypersons. Mark L. Dembert, M.D., Navy Environmental Health Ctr., Norfolk, Va. Copyright 1987 Reed Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

The most powerful book of its kind I've ever read.... Extraordinary powers of observation, generalization, and depth. -- Oliver Sacks, author of *The Man Who Mistook His Wife For a Hat* Will keep the reader riveted.... Rigorous, haunting, and true. -- Kirkus Reviews [Murphy's] contributions to the popular literature of the disabled will surely rank among the highest to date. -- L. Daniel Myers, American Anthropologist

Robert Murphy, a cultural anthropologist wrote his own ethnography on his disability and how the once familiar world rejected him. In his book, Murphy gives a detailed account of how his illness began and how the disease overall consumed his life. However, his book does not just primarily focus on the medical aspect of his disease, he also focuses on how the disease took away his social standing. It explains how his social standing disappeared in the way his coworkers treated him, and how friends treated him. The book provides insight into the discrimination of those who have a disability, and Murphy makes sure this is displayed in his own experiences. He also incorporates the stories of other individuals he encountered on his journey of becoming a quadriplegic, and used their stories to help argue his point. By adding these stories, he just further proved the point of how much disabled individuals are shunned and sheltered away from society. This book is a must read for everyone. Murphy's story could help evolve a nation, and the way disabled individuals are looked upon. This book focuses on the major struggles that Murphy faced as he began to accept his disease. He covers several major topics, which are pertinent to American culture that is the roles of a man, the ideal beauty that Americans wish to possess, and how something unknown is written off as taboo in society. This topic is taboo because it scares Americans because they are ignorant to the topic. Murphy does something unique with his book however, he allows the reader to experience everything that he went through, through his strong phrasing, and immense detail. However when reading Murphy's book, it can be a bit dry in places and the reader should push through to get to the meaty part of the book. This is where the reader can get emerged, and fully grasp just how dramatic the changes were in his life. For someone that is not used to books being mainly intellectual, should take their time with this book so they can fully grasp the content in the book. The main point that Murphy is trying to illustrate is how much the disabled must face in order to be incorporated into society, and how much society

looks down on them; regardless if they are capable of doing everyday tasks that people without disabilities can. Although, the book is dry in few places, it overall conveys a message that all people should learn. This lesson is that even though Americans are frightened of the things that are unknown, disabled individuals should not be regarded as something that frightens people. The book teaches the readers how to accept individuals with disabilities, and allows people to comprehend to the fully extent of what these individuals endure in attempt to live a normal life. Murphy uses his story to educate those who are unaware of the trials disabled individuals go through in hopes that this will cause a change.

This is one of my books that I bought and put aside to read later. I don't remember how long ago I bought it but I am certainly glad that I gave it a second chance to read it before discarding it. I am now not planning to sell this book, as it is too important a volume on disability in society, and it certainly applies to the bioethical and eduethical work I do on the side of my 'regular' job of teaching and writing. Murphy is unlike me in that he came upon his disability later in life, while I was born basically deaf and remained that way for the first 13 years of my life before getting a hearing aid at the age of 13. Murphy had to deal with a slow-growing tumor that entwined itself into his spinal cord. Unlike many tumors that can be excised with surgery, his was such that the possibility of removing it also came with the possibility of losing everything else, including his life or the ability to continue to do his important work. Like many of us who have chosen not to take the risk of surgery and who don't believe that to be disabled is worse than to be dead, Murphy worked with and around his progressive disabling and was able to give the world another 15 years of his wisdom in cultural anthropology. This book is a must-read for any person with a disability, no matter when they became disabled. Murphy had the background of an academic anthropologist, with many years of successful teaching and writing for major journals in anthropology and culture. He had also written major books, one of which continues to be used in most universities on women and gender in primitive societies. So in coming into the genre of disability studies, he brought to the field a first-rate mind and ability to write so others can understand difficult concepts. Murphy's book is not the usual autobiography that one usually expects, but rather explores disability (specifically his, but he introduces others and also the culture) without a single shard of either self-pity or 'hey, look at me' attitude that is so often written about in media (where the media puts someone with a disability on a pedestal that is unrealistic of the very real problems that those of us with disabilities face daily). He writes presenting his disablement as a fait-accompli, dealing with the problems as they arose...and in some cases, he ignored his health situation to the point of putting him at risk for infection from

bedsores because he was too busy teaching. Like Murphy states, that wasn't courage as often as it was just not wanting to take the time to have his physical body get in the way of what he was trying to do. In treating his disablement with this attitude, he did become the courageous person that he presented to the public...and I wish so badly I had had the opportunity to meet him and hear him speak. Like so many others such as Michael Fox and Christopher Reeve, Murphy was a non-disabled person whose close encounters with his own disablement led him to become a voice in a minority that has long been voiceless. He died much too soon, but in giving his last fifteen years of work to physical disabilities in society, he has provided us with an ongoing voice. I certainly intend to use his words and his writing in my work in hopes that it will inspire others as it has inspired me. Karen Sadler

Insightful anthropological/personal look into the experience of becoming/being disabled

Purchased for a class and the book was not that bad, would have read it on my own. Good book.

Valuable insights into the world of the disabled from many angles by a respected professor with progressive spinal cord disease. Highly recommended to persons with disabilities and to the general public who often encounter them.

Just awful. I'd give it zero stars if I could. Had to read it for a medical anthropology class. It's actually slightly hilarious. Guy acts like his decline into handicappedness is just the worst tragedy in the history of the world. No one can relate to his troubles, blah, blah, blah....

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