



# Fractured by Categories

Exploring Disability and Ethnicity in the Danish Welfare State



PhD Dissertation 2019 · Thomas Scott Hughes

DEPARTMENT OF ANTHROPOLOGY  
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THOMAS SCOTT HUGHES

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Welfare State**

*Painting at the Disability Service Center in Copenhagen*

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PhD Dissertation  
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## **Abstract**

This dissertation presents and analyzes a particular case study of human experience - life as an ethnic other with physical disability in Denmark. Based on ethnographic fieldwork with ethnic minorities and refugees with physical disabilities in Denmark, this dissertation addresses the particular life conditions, strategies, and corresponding subjectivities of individuals and families facing multiple dimensions of social exclusion. Phenomenological approaches developed in medical anthropology are employed to allow a vantage point through these subjectivities to macro-structural political mechanisms, which frame these social dilemmas and processes. This investigation of life as an ethnic minority/migrant/refugee (or otherwise ethnic “other”) with disability in the Danish welfare state presents a poignant anthropological case study of a particular form of intersectional marginality: What does it mean to be a “multi-minority” in present-day Denmark? How do these agents navigate this social and psychological maze of marginalization? What modes of living and subjectivities are produced in these specific social conditions? This particular intersection provides a look into the mechanics of the social human’s fundamentally multiple nature - we are many things, but in this intersection involving disability and minority ethnicities certain selves are often socially problematic. Furthermore, looking at the lived experience of my interlocutors through the three lenses of “marginalization,” intersectionality, and categorization is useful in that it both connects the material to larger global trends/universal social dynamics, as well as allowing for an analysis that can account for the extreme variety of socio-cultural profiles and somatic conditions that are contained in the category “ethnic minorities with disability.”



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