

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Indigenous Men With Disabilities at Work: Corpospatial Reconfigurations in/of a Changing Rural Mexico

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ABSTRACT

This article is part of the special issue *Laboring from Ex-Centric Sites: Disability, Chronicity and Work*, *Anthropology of Work Review* 46(1), July 2025, edited by Giorgio Brocco and Stefanie Mauksch. Over the last century, indigenous rurality in Mexico has undergone profound sociocultural and economic transformations. Peasant activities have declined, racialized forms of employment have emerged, and chronic conditions have skyrocketed, mirrored in the increasing numbers of people living with disabilities and for longer time spans. In such a context, disability and masculinity are simultaneously active shapers of spaces *and* embodiments of larger corpospatial transformations. Focusing on the work/disability experiences of three indigenous men of rural origin, we explore how being at work despite physical restrictions implies a rearrangement of how the body inhabits space and relates to working objects, including those which are culturally considered more “feminine.” By employing the concept “corpospatiality” we depict a set of dynamics that interlink gendered bodies, spaces, and objects in sociohistorically shaped fields. We understand these work/disability corpospatial (re)configurations as individual and collective responses to the conflict caused by shrinking environments due to disability. The intersection of disability and “work”—a mediating and transforming activity between humans and their surroundings—constitutes a privileged locus to think about changing masculinities.

1 | Introduction

It was a quiet sunny morning and Montesi sat indoors with Isaías,¹ a 65-year-old Zapotec textile artisan, and his wife Patricia who, minutes before, was busy gardening. Isaías had been living with diabetes for 14 years and recently had started experiencing walking problems and early signs of renal complications. He expressed sorrow for being unable to work at the foot-pedal loom: “I am an artisan; I weave and weave. I pull the rug. But right now, because of my aching feet, I can’t work anymore.” Patricia jumped into the conversation:

Before, more people worked as peasants. They walked to the field every day and on their way they met other fellows and chatted with them. This routine kept

them healthy. Today, we don’t walk anymore, and we catch diseases such as diabetes. Isaías has been only devoted to weaving here at home. Children would play around, fall, scream and fight, and make him angry and nervous. All of this [stress], the doctor said, was what led him to this disease.

Referring to her husband’s diabetes, Patricia provided an insight into how changing working patterns in their rural community are considered a cause of emergent diseases. The abandonment of agriculture in favor of indoors activities such as artisanal weaving aimed at the tourist market was linked with the embodiment of illness and disability. For Patricia, stress and diabetes were a sign of broader corpospatial reconfigurations in changing rural