

1-1-1999

The disability press: A wheel still in spin

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<http://dx.doi.org/10.25669/g7xz-k2ur>

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THE DISABILITY PRESS: A WHEEL STILL IN SPIN

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the

Master of Arts Degree
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August 1999

UMI Number: 1396411

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July 27, 1999

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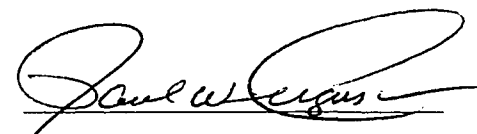
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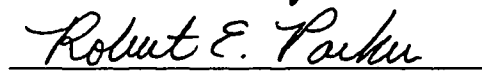
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ABSTRACT

The Disability Press: A Wheel Still in Spin

by

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This study, exploring the messages of the disability press, also utilizes Marxist theory to explain empowerment in the disability community. Although Marxism has significant value for explaining disability oppression, Marx's theory of internal relations, describing an interconnected web of organizational structure and the accompanying relationships, sheds light on the political nature of disability empowerment. A world view characterized by an economic base and social superstructure models an intrinsically enmeshed impairment base and social superstructure model of disability. The covers and cover stories of Mouth, Mainstream, Ragged Edge, and New Mobility magazines are catalogued and a representative sample is analyzed in order to demonstrate the political nature of the disability community's empowerment.

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Thanks to my examining committee, especially Dr. Richard Jensen

Thanks to my listeners

And my angels

To Dr. Richard Visone, who reminded me just to write while the rest of my world did
whatever

To Mishu

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The Disability Press And Empowerment

Alternative methods of communicating about disability have been necessary since the passage of the 1990 Americans With Disabilities Act (Mitchell & Snyder, 1996, p.12). Mainstream structures responsible for the portrayal of disability are slowly but surely changing (Clogston, 1992 & Haller, 1995). “(I)nterest in the social and political dimensions of disablement has intensified considerably both at the general level and in universities and academic institutions” (Barnes, 1997, p.1). Additionally, “with the rise in people’s consciousness, a disability culture, based on shared experience, has emerged” (Iwakuma, 1997). Stephen Brown names some of the many grass roots movements, the disability press, analytical academic organizations, and artistic endeavors as the tip of the Disability Culture Movement (Brown, 1998, p.1). Lathrop (1995) recognizes the role of the disability press:

Like other minority communities did in the past, the disability community has begun to build upon common ground through the written word—through publications such as Mouth, Mainstream , the Disability Rag, and New Mobility, as well as in the national and local levels—reporting news, providing role models, exploring important issues, and covering the concerns of the community (p.35).

Stereotypical images have served as the primary public locus for disability identification (Shapiro, 1995). While mainstream culture used negative images to define the subjects and circumstances of disability, individuals with disabilities internalized the images, invalidating their own human experiences (Charlton, 1998). Movie screen images and literary characters have taken predictable forms that comprise ableism (Nelson, 1997).

Ableism is that set of often contradictory stereotypes about people with disabilities that acts as a barrier to keep them from achieving their full potential as equal citizens in society. Among these are the beliefs that people with disabilities are inherently able to manage their own lives, that they are embittered and malevolent, and that they are, by reason of their disability, morally, intellectually, and spiritually inferior to temporarily able-bodied people, or, conversely, that people with disabilities are saintlike, ever cheerful, asexual, childlike, and unusually heroic. Ultimately, it is the belief that people with disabilities are different from “normal” people, and that their lives are inherently less worthwhile than those of people without disabilities. (Pelka, 1997, p.3)

Today, disabled journalists, poets, and story tellers are expanding the array of options from which to imagine the lives of people with disabilities. Such first person narratives provide readers with an alternative perspective on what it is to live with a disability. . . . Autobiographical narratives demand that the disabled subject develop a voice that privileges the agency of a bona fide perspective of disability (Mitchell & Snyder, 1997 p.10).

Chapter two details disability history, historical images, and autobiographical narrative.

Beginning with historical images of disability, this study addresses changes occurring in perceptions of the disability experience. The disability press and discourses of disability construction demonstrate how the disability community is transforming from an ignored and silent body to an empowered constituency. Then, drawing on Marxism as a foundation for understanding disability oppression and as the social structure for explaining its empowerment, an analysis of of Mouth, Ragged Edge, New Mobility, and Mainstream magazine article and cover pages provide clues to a subculture's definitions of reality. In some cases, foundational studies are included in the introduction, more are included in later chapters. This study builds on the dissertation of Ransom (1997). The abstract for Ransom's study states that

very few scholars have studied media produced by and for people with disabilities.

This dissertation is one of the first attempts to do so, and to analyze how these publications may help forge group identity. The study examines the tensions of liberal-pluralism and Marxist theories and their ability to explain the function of disability publications in American society. The researcher explored disability publication editors' perceptions about disability related issues, and examines how disability related publications are similar to feminist and African American publications (Ransom, 1997).

The Disability Press

The disability press, gaining popularity after the passage of the Americans with Disabilities Act in 1990, captures and perpetuates the sentiments of an entire community, proposes Douglas Lathrop, as he details founding philosophies of New Mobility, Mouth, Mainstream, and the Disability Rag. In "Challenging Perceptions," published in the

literary journal, The Quill, Lathrop (1995) recognizes the existence of shared commonalties and polarities within the community. He discusses the case of Ellen Stohl and Lucy Gwin, two women, both with disabilities, both dedicated to changing stereotypes, but with opposing views and tactics. Stohl, challenging the idea that disabled equals ugly, appeared in a Playboy pictorial with wheelchair flaunted. Gwin rages against the idea that people with disabilities must be sugar-coated and prettified before they experience media exposure (p. 36). Both express views that stray from popular images, even though they seem to conflict.

The magazines, all offering alternatives to prevailing images, are contextually and editorially diverse. Lathrop (1995) presents the commonality of people telling their own stories and coming to see themselves as part of a group with common civil-rights struggles as evidence that a community exists. He recognizes that all the intracommunity publications want to tell the real story—not the routinely used tear-jerker or inspirational parable. But each is singular in its philosophical mission. Lathrop points out that New Mobility magazine wants to present readers with images of disabled people leading independent and active lives. Lathrop reports New Mobility editor Barry Corbet's belief that by presenting images that are positive but not patronizing, the magazine increases the public profile of the disability community.

Lathrop (1995) goes on to say that conversely, Mouth magazine is committed to the coverage of the disability-rights movement with a militant, in-your-face attitude. It proclaims the disability movement as the most recent civil rights movement and demands that the nondisabled see past their pity. The Disability Rag, states its mission, Lathrop says, as analysis of the roots of discrimination and disenfranchisement. Maintaining a

dedication to civil rights, it shows the consumer's, the professional's and the radical's side of the experience. The author finally reports that Mainstream magazine is one of the community's moderate voices covering current issues and lifestyle/culture features.

The Social Model

In 1980, The World Health Organization (WHO) developed the International Classification of Impairments, Disabilities and Handicaps (ICIDH) which intended to provide a global frame of reference for understanding disability. In the ICIDH scheme, the word "impairment" describes functional deficits and the term "disability" refers to any interference with personal activities. The term "handicap" conceptualizes any hindrances imposed by society on the individual because of the impairment. The various models proposed to explain and classify disablements may be expressed in a dialectic of the "medical model" vs. the "social model". The medical model views the disablement phenomenon as a "personal" problem, "giving paramount importance to the physiological features of illness and impairment, including certain expectations of medical care" (Lonsdale, 1990. p. 34). Health care is viewed as the main issue and at the political level it is health care policy that is of primary importance. The social model of disablement, on the other hand, "regards disability as a complex of constraints that the able-bodied population imposes on the behavior of . . . impaired people" (Liachowitz, 1988, p. 1). Disablement is not an attribute of the person, but a complex collection of conditions, many of which are created by the societal environment. Hence the management of the problem requires social action and it is the collective responsibility of society to make the environmental modifications necessary for the full participation of people with disabilities into all areas of social life. The issue is, therefore, an attitudinal or ideological one which requires social

change, while at political level it is a question of human rights (World Health Organization, 1997). The social construction of disability assumes that barriers to full inclusion lie in society and not in the individual. The implications and repercussions of that consciousness shift have been addressed by many in various disciplines and formats.

Electronic communication provides information about community politics, philosophy, psychology, and fantasies. There are advocacy listservs like Justice For All and the one ADAPT disseminates. There are chat lines like the one hosted by New Mobility, with no moderation or registration process required. There are moderated lists hosting conversation threads about any and all subjects but with a focus on specific disability issues such as spinal cord injury, mobility, physical/sexual abuse, attendant care. Academic lists, like Disability-Dialogues and Disability-Research, both originating at the University of Leeds in the United Kingdom, but attended globally, provide an arena for a broad range of subjects. One recent discussion explored definitions of the disability community.

The debate rages as to the ethnicity of disability, who is included, the purposes of community and the relationship of the disabled community to mainstream culture. British scholar Ayesha Vernon explores the issue of commonality and difference in the disabled people's movement in the archived version of this Leeds conference presentation. She recognizes that the oppression of disability is complicated by additional "otherness" of gender, race, sexuality, class, and age but claims that the push for eradicating disability (the social stigma and political barriers of impairment) must be a war against all prejudicial action. She summarizes by questioning if the disability movement would be well served by forming an alliance with other groups fighting oppression (Vernon, 1997).

Marxism And Disability

James Charlton's Nothing About Us Without Us understands the dimensions of enforced oppression through Marxist principles of hegemony, false consciousness and alienation. He recognizes that “(t)he oppression of 500 million people with disabilities is rooted in the political-economic and cultural dimensions of everyday life” (1998, p.20). Calling his book “part descriptive, part conversational, part theoretical, and wholly argumentative” Charlton “synthesizes theories and opinions about oppression and exploitation, power and ideology, resistance and empowerment” (p.20). The author’s threefold mission challenges existing epistemologies and ontologies of disability. Charlton names Marxist theory as a basis for understanding existing practices and new foundations, structures and contexts in which to think about the relationships and conditions of oppression and resistance and to understand and support disability rights.

There are other volumes that include Marxist-Disability discussions. In the article “Work, Utopia and impairment”, [the author’s capitalization], appearing in Disability & Society: emerging issues and insights, Paul Abberly (1996) contends that “(i)n terms of the analysis of the oppression of disabled people in capitalist societies, Marxism has provided effective tools, but in relation to Marxist Utopian thought I think we encounter profound difficulties for impaired people” (p, 68). Michael Oliver (1996), in Understanding Disability: from theory to practice, suggests that Marxist theory is useful in approaching disability at an ontological level. He also refers to Marx in discussions of political economy and empowerment.

Colin Barnes (1997) writes that “to appreciate fully the extent and significance of the oppression of disabled people an understanding of history and its relationship to

western culture: the central value system around which western society is clustered, is vital” . The socio-political theory “rooted on the materialist analysis of history associated with Marx maintains that disability and dependence are the social creation of industrial capitalism” (1997). Citing Michael Oliver’s The Politics of Disablement, Barnes (1997) points out that the tragic theory of disability, one based on the rise of the institution as a means of both social provision and control under capitalism resulted in the emergence of the individual medical approach to disability. This personal tragedy theory of disablement has, he says, achieved ideological hegemony in that it has become translated into the emergence of capitalist society (1997).

Methodology

Although the oppression of disability may be understood through Marxist theories of economic, socio-political, and historical aspects, it is the complex relationship between those aspects that can be used to explain disability empowerment. Because “(s)ocial formations are a complex hierarchy of functionally organized institutions or instances whose entity can neither be ignored altogether nor reduced to a single closed system” (Resch, 1992, p.35) and because “the individual is held to be in some kind of union with his object; they are relationally contained in one another” (Ollman, 1976, p.28), then the collective impact of the ADA, the disability press, and empowering narrative is significant for community formation and empowerment.

The disability press is a useful representation of the disability experience. Marxism is a useful structure for explaining significant aspects of the disability experience. Therefore, it follows that Marxian analysis is an appropriate methodology for understanding the images and text of the disability press as interpretation of the disability

experience. Although orthodox Marxist theory is concerned with the economic and institutional analysis of media systems, studies after 1980 have examined media as an ideological practice. Such critical interpretations employ various analytic methods to determine the ways in which “a particular text or group of texts functions as part of ideological practice and offers a system of knowledge or a way of experiencing the world for a (reader). An ideological criticism of the text and images can “clarify how and why the medium carries the meanings and values it does for its audience” (White, 1987, p.142). This study parallels a 1996 essay from the feminist perspective by Sonia Foss. Like Foss, I focus on the “process by which (a minority group) comes to see their symbols rituals and regular practices—the content of their experiences that tends to be overlooked in the (dominant) world view (Foss, 1996, p. 205). Foss (1996) explains

A prerequisite to having their voices heard in a discursive formation or the dominant culture is that members of a submerged group must develop their own authentic voice. They must develop knowledge and discourse out of their own experiences and interpret and label these experiences in their own terms. Perhaps even more important, they must come to see their experiences as legitimate and valuable. Developing this authenticity and attributing power are difficult for a submerged group, however, because their experience has been interpreted for them for so long by others and devalued by those others. The submerged group has been trained to see itself as represented in the dominant discourse of the culture and has come to subordinate even its authentic and potentially powerful voice to that culture (Schulz, 1984). . . . But empowerment cannot happen without a strong sense of identity within the submerged group apart from the dominant culture.

Group members first must possess the “courage to be and to speak . . . the Courage to Blaspheme” (Daly, 1978) the definitions of themselves as powerless that have been established by the dominant discourse (1996, p. 206).

Mitchell & Snyder (1997) interpret the mechanisms of misrepresentation for the disability community:

In discussions of the ways in which disability has been historically represented . . . disability scholars have also begun to identify working catalogs of disability’s cultural meanings. Such a catalog reflects ableist projections onto disability, and consequently, a compilation of these restrictive narrative possibilities reveals the method by which disability has been colonized . . . (p. 20)..

Expecting to find an array of blasphemous expressions directed at oppressors, this study analyzes magazine messages for examples of group identity: self-defined contradictions to prevailing designations.

It is simplistic to explain the increased visibility of people with disabilities by crediting federally legislated change. The Americans with Disabilities Act created a network of rules governing the inclusion and access for people with disabilities into the culture. Legislation may not explain a community’s growing awareness of personal needs. In an attempt to more fully understand the phenomenon of disability empowerment, it makes sense to integrate current thinking about the social construction of disability into any explanation of that change. If one understands that a large part of the problem of impairment, the handicap, originates in social structure, then one naturally begins to search for keys to alleviation there.

This study examines the cover and cover stories from four popular magazines representing the disability press. Mouth, Mainstream, and the Disability Rag are cross-disability publications, Mainstream is written for those with mobility impairments. Mouth and Disability Rag are grass roots type issues, which are inexpensively printed in black and white on plain paper, they accept no advertising. Mainstream and Mainstream are glossy, full-color magazines with advertisements appropriate to the readership. The latter issues send complimentary copies to professional offices, the former are available by subscription only. Although the publications all address the disability experience from an insider's vantage point, this study anticipates finding as many differences as similarities between the issues that accept advertising and those that do not. The similarities may be analyzed to tell the story of a group's empowerment, publishing messages that contradict the dominant culture's excluding beliefs and practices.

Every attempt to study the disability community, from strength to weakness, and all in between, is an attempt to understand a feared, stigmatized, and ignored state of being. Mitchell and Snyder (1997) assert that a "visible increase in the number of scholars with disabilities would radically affect the ways in which we imagine this constituency's relationship within and to social institutions" (p. 2). Beyond that, it is an attempt to understand our culture and the human nature that drives it. Theresa Thompson, a pioneer in the field of disability communication, documents a 12 year journey to find a home for her research. Beginning in the early seventies, she found studies matching her own disability communications interests in psychology journals, special education studies, the field of sociology, especially the work of Erving Goffman, and health communications. Thompson refers to the first journal that exclusively covered disability issues, Disability

Studies Quarterly, which appeared in 1980, and filled a large gap in scholarly communications about disabilities studies. Thompson hails the creation of the Caucus on Communication and Disability, part of the National Communication Association, as an appropriate home for her research on communication and disability. Wanting to redefine how colleges and universities view people with disabilities, several scholars are dedicated to creating disability studies departments as separate entities.

When Barbara Walters interviewed Tom Hanks for the “Top 10 Interesting People of 1998”, she asked if he cared that he was considered as having no sex appeal. He told her that he knew that people said that, and he totally embraced that about himself. That made him kind of sexy, didn’t she think. As people with disabilities embrace their differences, the result is strength, empowerment and ability: the new images projected in the disability press.

CHAPTER II

A DISABILITY HISTORY

A History of Disability Oppression

Although recent social changes have had a positive effect for many in the disabled community, “(t)he vast majority of people with disabilities have always been poor, powerless, and degraded. Disability oppression is a product of both the past and the present . . . [it is a] remnant of ancien régimes of politics and economics, customs and beliefs” (Charlton, 1998, p.21). Capitalism, the primary system of social and economic exchange in the Western world , “emphasizes the strong economic reasons for the exclusion of disabled people. It is the embodiment of these social and economic relations under capitalism which has led directly to the exclusion of disabled people within capitalist societies” (Oliver. 1990, p. 21). Since contributing “conditions correspond at every stage to the simultaneous development of the productive forces, their history is at the same time the history of the evolving productive forces taken over by each generation, and is therefore the history of the development of the individuals themselves” (Marx & Engels, 1965, p.72). James Charlton, in Nothing About Us Without Us, presents disability oppression as a multidimensional characteristic of the disability experience. This chapter models his format. Disability empowerment, when viewed from a historical perspective,

appears not so much as a reaction of revolutionary structural shifts, but as an evolutionary process, a cumulative aggregate of subtle and immense changes.

Political and Economic History: Leading to the ADA

There is a tendency to name economic determinants as the primary cause of disability oppression. “On one level a political economy of disability is easy to establish. That people with disabilities are powerless and poor is incontestable. Every socioeconomic indicator says so. Since feudalism and even earlier, they have lived outside the economy and political process” (Charlton, 1998, p.37). The value of those lives lived outside normal boundaries has been debated through time. Movements to exterminate, manipulate, and hide people with disabilities have existed, in some cases simultaneously with programs to support and subsidize them.

Early twentieth century programs, like the Veterans Bureau and the Social Security Act, made taking care of the disabled a national responsibility. At the same time, eugenics, a movement proposing heredity improvement and threatening the existence of that same population, was receiving media attention. The American eugenics movement called for forced sterilization of the disabled: “while eugenics claimed to be purely objective,. . . subjective values, such as aesthetic standards of beauty and ugliness and moral attributes of responsibility, were central to eugenic constructions of hereditary disease and disability” (Pernick, 1997, p.90).

Beautiful children with disabilities were the tools of charity fund raising telethons like Jerry Lewis’ Labor Day Show. The use of poster child images capitalized on ableist sentiments, raising funds and soothing public consciousness. Telethons are recognized as

demeaning and paternalistic shows which celebrate and encourage pity. . . . Other problems are that they give the public the idea that everything is taken care of, that there's no need to worry about discrimination or civil rights or social services, because "those people" have "their charities" to take care of them (Pelka, 1997, p. 302).

In recent years, former poster kids and activist groups, including Evan Kemp, Jr. and Jerry's Orphans, have mobilized each year to picket the television stations airing the shows.

The Salk vaccine discovery in 1952 encouraged the public to believe disability and illness was curable and should be cured. "Disability . . . exceeds a culture's predictive capacities and effective interventions" (Mitchell & Snyder, 1997, p. 3). Guilt and shame, natural psychological consequences, are assaults to the ego.

Guilt is the attack of the superego, or conscience, and shame arises from the opprobrium of others. . . . The sociologist George Herbert Mead wrote that an individual's concept of his or her self is a reflection, or, more accurately, a refraction. As in a fun-house mirror, of the way he or she is treated by others. And if a person is treated with ridicule, contempt or aversion, then his own ego is diminished, his dignity and humanity are called into question. . . . Damage to the body, then, causes diminution of the self, which is further magnified by the debasement of others (Murphy, p. 92).

Ten years after Salk's discovery, James Meredith walked into the University of Mississippi in 1962, and Ed Roberts, the founder of the independent living movement, rolled into the University of California at Berkeley. Roberts had severe physical

limitations caused by the polio virus he had contracted when he was 14. He believed he should be able to attend the university despite his need for an iron lung. By 1967, he and his cohorts, the “12 Rolling Quads” were a power on the Berkeley campus. In 1970, the antidropout student program was being run primarily by and for physically disabled students. The program was funded by the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare (\$81,000) and the University of California (\$2000). The first Center for Independent Living opened in March 1972, serving San Francisco. It was nonstudent directed, supporting a growing population of area residents with disabilities. On the opposite coast, Judy Heumann, another polio survivor, won a discrimination suit against the New York School District and began a political action organization, ‘Disabled in Action’ (Shapiro, 1995).

That same year, a precursor to the ADA passed quietly. The Rehabilitation Act of 1972, section 504, “making it illegal for any federal agency, public university, defense or other federal contractor, or any other institution or activity that received federal funding to discriminate against anyone ‘solely by reason of . . . handicap’ ” (Shapiro, 1994, p. 65) passed into law.

1974 brought a newly devoted Justin Dart back to the U.S. and the disability rights cause. Dart, post-polio, having lived a privileged life, spent years in Japan studying Ghandi’s writing and rehabilitating his soul. He returned to wage a countrywide, politically educational campaign for people with disabilities. In 1981, Evan Kemp, Jr., presidential advisor and former poster child, attacked the Muscular Dystrophy Association for its pity based fund- raising tactics (Shapiro, 1995).

Active protest became part of the disability empowerment scene in 1978 with a small but powerful civil rights movement “The beginnings of Americans Disabled for Attendant Programs Today (ADAPT) can be traced to a small demonstration in Colorado” (Pelka, p.123). Using the nonviolent tactics of Martin Luther King’s civil rights demonstration, ADAPT (at that time signifying American Disabled for Accessible Public Transit) demanded the availability of accessible buses in Denver. Disabled demonstrators effectively halted bus service throughout the city by surrounding buses with wheelchairs, attempting to crawl into the vehicles and occupying administrative offices. Winning a victory in Denver (a city erected plaque commemorates the event), ADAPT focused on ensuring passage of civil rights legislation and finally to its current focus on affordable attendant care programs paid for by a reduction of nursing home funding.

Organized efforts to create support for a single all-inclusive law promising equal rights for persons with disabilities began as Dart issued a report asking Congress to “act forthwith to include persons with disabilities in the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and other civil and voting rights legislation and regulations” (Pelka, 1997, p. 18). Although that effort failed, the bill was redrafted by the staffs of Senators Edward Kennedy and Thomas Harkin, with input from a committee of disability rights attorneys, and representatives from the White House, Department of Justice and Senator Robert Dole. Efforts to gain support for the bill included organizational lobbying and individual grass roots campaigns. President George Bush signed the ADA into law on July 26, 1990.

Although passage of the law brought some disillusionment from those impatient to see an immediate change in societal behavior, the ADA “has made disability rights a part of the national agenda and has raised people with disabilities to full

citizenship under the law for the first time in American history” (Pelka, 1997, p. 22).

Cultural Views: Media Images and Narrative

Incomplete public images, misrepresenting and discounting disability are found in every arena of information dissemination. Ransom (1996) concludes that “a combination of liberal pluralism and Marxist explanations is a better option for explaining and predicting the role of media, than either alone” (p.246).

The liberal pluralism theory of media in American society informs us that media is a marketplace of competing ideas. . . . Liberal pluralists assume that all audience members/citizens have equal access to media. [They] also assume that our educational systems, government, and other public institutions are functioning in such a way that all citizens are equally motivated to express their ideas and aspirations in media (p. 241)

Marxist theory, contradictorily, describes mass media as the commonly inaccessible tools of an elite class who benefit from preserving the status quo.

The pages of children’s literature, comic books, classic literature and film, as well as mainstream media reporting often capture and perpetuate the cultural misunderstanding and fear of difference. Disability misrepresentations fall into seven categories, contend Bogdan and Bilkin, called “handicapist stereotypes” (Nelson, 4). Number one, the disabled person as pitiable and pathetic, exemplifies fund-raising marathons or telethons. Number two, the disabled person as supercrip, is the image of someone triumphing over disability and achieving uncommon success. The third plays on “subtle and deeply held fears” (Nelson, 1994 p. 6). It is the disabled person as evil, sinister, and criminal,

demonstrated by the villainous characters in Dr. No and Dr. Strangelove, or the one-armed killer from the Fugitive, (Nelson, 1994 p. 6). Number four, the “most frightening of images” recalls eugenics and Third Reich mentalities, is the image of the disabled person as better off dead. (Nelson, 1994). Media examples are found in three 1980’s dramas; the movie, Whose Life Is it, Anyway?, the made-for-television, “An Act of Love,” and the play Nevis Mountain Dew. All of the plots suggest assisted suicide as a potential alternative to a life with a disability. The fifth image is the disabled person as maladjusted-his/her own worst enemy. The common scenario is an able-bodied person redirecting the attitudes of a person with a disability towards success. One more image is the disabled person as a burden. This dehumanizing image often exists to demonstrate the virtue of the caregiver, as in Clara doe in Heidi or Tiny Tim in The Christmas Carol. Finally is the image of the disabled person as unable to live a successful life. People with disabilities are rarely seen in film unless they serve a dramatic purpose, unless it’s about them, it’s without them (Nelson, 1994).

“The Cripple in Literature” asks readers to consider how images of disease and disability “create society’s conception of the cripple and the cripple’s conception of himself” (Kriegal, 1987, p. 33) rather than the artist’s personal impressions of the experience of being wounded. He adds images of the survivor cripple, and the realistic cripple to the list of stereotypes. The realistic cripple refers to a character who has incorporated disability into an overall sense of self, like Laura in Tennessee Williams’ The Glass Menagerie. The survivor cripple triumphs not over misfortune but against it by outlasting the effects of his wound until they have been incorporated into his way of dealing with the world,” (p. 33) as in Saul Bellow’s poolroom entrepreneur, William

Einhorn. Others may cry “I am that I am,” but people with disabilities must submit to the will of others and whimper “I am what you tell me to be” (p. 34).

The search for role models in literature was the youthful quest and impetus for Deborah Kent’s chapter, “Disabled Women: Portraits in Fiction and Drama” (1987). She asks how women with disabilities are viewed by writers, why writers use disabled characters and suggests that an assessment of the disabled woman’s place in literature is a barometer and predictor of societal perceptions. Character analyses by Charles Dickens, James Joyce, Walter de la Mare, Tennessee Williams and others result in theories stating that the disabled woman is severely disadvantaged in creating and maintaining interpersonal relationships. Other women see her as different and incapable of sharing their own “overriding interest in men, and men, when not repulsed, are drawn to her to meet their unhealthy needs” (Kent, 1987, p. 62).

Comic books both shape and reflect popular opinion, say Tim Lees and Sue Ralph (1995) in the conference presentation, “Case Studies of Physical Disability in Marvel Comics, 1961-70.” The authors discuss two characters, Dr. Don Blake and Professor Xavier, a frail, cane-using character who transforms into his alter ego, Thor, by stamping his cane on the floor. Professor Xavier, the wheelchair-using mentor of the X-Men, calls to mind the images of mentally-advanced beings with tiny and feeble bodies. The authors point out that Xavier represents a mind/body dualism and embodies the stereotypical idea that if one has disability, he/she must compensate with super achievements in the mental realm. Both men were portrayed as having unnaturally strong moral characters. The authors question the portrayal of a good man in a wheelchair. They ask why he can’t have human flaws. They conclude that while the introduction of disabled characters into

comic books may have raised the profile of disabled people in a superficial sense, it also perpetrated many harmful stereotypes (p. 9).

Children's literature, a powerful tool for teaching and helping children to solve everyday problems, is another potential spot for damaging stereotypical and limiting images. Children directed messages often malign the disability experience (Saad, 1996). In "traditional fairy tales, there exists a polarization which equates slowness or unattractiveness with evil." Many times they are helpless and needy (Saad, 1996, p.4). Even in children's literature the characters must overcome disability through prayer or hard work: if a child cannot transcend his/her illness, the implication is that they are lacking in some way. If they cannot rid themselves of disabilities, the characters often gain acceptance by becoming heroes. Saad (1996) concludes that 'children's literature is a powerful medium affecting readers' attitudes," and so it is imperative that its images of people with disabilities be positive and realistic (p. 5).

The communication of the disability experience through mainstream entertainment, literature, and teaching tools is society's method for creating and regenerating faulty and profoundly limiting perceptions of disability. The influx of contradictory, reality based narrative into the existing data updates and shifts ways in which the experience is perceived and ultimately impacts the experiences of disability itself.

After too long a period of silence, "[t]hose who have been objects of others' reports are now telling their own stories. As they do so, they define the ethic of our times: an ethic of voice, affording each a right to speak her own truth, in her own words" (Frank, 1995, p. 9). Exploring the essence of disability from the first person vantage, asking the question, 'if I am not my body, then what am I?', becomes fodder for ethnographic

research. Scholars seeking answers have dissected the disability experience, revealing ways that the experience affects individuals, community and society.

The Body Silent chronicles one man's journey from having a fully functioning body to having a severely impaired one. Robert Murphy, an anthropology professor at Columbia University, remarks on the significance of the relationship between paralysis and the human condition. "The study of paralysis is a splendid arena for viewing this struggle of the individual against society, for the disabled are not a breed apart but a metaphor for the human condition" (Murphy, 1990, p. 5). In the pages of his journal, exploring euthanasia, isolation, the responsibility of wellness and the costs of illness, he repeatedly asks the question, "what constitutes living"? As Murphy treks into the unknown, he draws on his training as a researcher to uncover the secrets of a New World. He recounts positive feedback from an early edition of his book.

The Body Silent did something for the disabled: It told them that the avoidances and even outright hostility so often manifested toward them by the non-disabled are not the natural products of their own physical deficits but, rather, expressions of deficiencies of perspective and character of those who so behave—in short, it is their problem, not ours (Murphy, 1990, p.vi).

Feminist writers often include perspectives on embracing the rejected body. "Ideas of transcending the body have been rejected . . . because they are seen to originate from philosophies and/or religions that devalue the body (especially women's bodies) and bodily experience (Wendell, 1996, p. 165). The British scholar, Jenny Morris applauds the shift from a medical to a social construction of disability, but cautions that there is a

tendency within the social model of disability to deny the experience of our own bodies, insisting that our physical differences and restrictions are *entirely* socially created. While environmental barriers and social attitudes are a crucial part of our experience of disability – and do indeed disable us – to suggest that this is all there is to it is to deny the personal experience of physical or intellectual restrictions, of illness, of the fear of dying. A feminist perspective can help redress this, and in so doing give voice to the experience of both disabled men and disabled women (Morris, 1991, p. 10).

Women's accounts of disability often address limitations as the extent to which they are unable to serve others. Susan Wendell, a professor of women's studies in British Columbia, is not surprised that her "greatest psycho-ethical struggle is with guilt" (Wendell, 1996, p.5). Internalization of negative images is one way that poor self images are created. Lonsdale (1990) offers four more reasons why women (although men report similar fears) with disabilities have a difficult time in social situations. The first reason is her experience of negative reactions from the outside world. The second is her lack of control over "normal body functions. Next is her need to incorporate cold, hard, metallic appliances into a warm and soft feminine presence. The fourth reason given is fear of sexual and social rejection (p. 66).

The importance of understanding the disability experience, not merely on its own merits as a cultural diversity, but in terms of its relationship to and its effect on mainstream culture is emphasized by Cahill and Eggleston (1994) in "Managing Emotions in Public: The Case of Wheelchair Users". They contend that the wheelchair users' emotional management, both personal and other-directed, of public displays supports the

hypothesis that this aspect of hidden public interaction should be studied so that public life can be more fully understood. Another study by Braitwaithe (1991) also investigated disabled-ablebodied social interactions. She reports results about communication from people with disabilities when they perceive ablebodied persons are expecting or demanding disclosure about their disabilities. One of the important study findings questioned “the prescription that persons with disabilities should *always* disclose about their disability. While disclosure may make ablebodied people more comfortable, disclosure may not always be advantageous for the disabled person, either relationally or personally” (p. 267).

Michael Bérubé’s (1997) article in The Chronicle of Higher Education asks why disability is not seen as the potentially universal condition that it is. He claims that “understanding disability as an integral part of the human condition means imagining ourselves in their places—and that may be too much of a psychological burden for us to bear” (p. B5). The author, father to a child with Down syndrome, questions the images of disability and their relationship to real world situations. Bérubé suggests the inclusion of disabilities studies in college anthropology, history, and literature courses: “If we bring those perspectives to bear on the humanities, perhaps we will understand humanity. Perhaps, too, if we are fortunate, we can help to create a political climate in which all persons with disabilities are recognized and valued, even if they’re not as charming as Forrest Gump or as heroic as Billy Bob Thornton’s Karl (from the movie *Slingblade*)” (p. B5).

The discipline of Communication studies is another area of disability research. Thompson’s “The Way We Were,” (1997) asserts that “(d)isability is socially constructed

as a defining characteristic of an individual” (p. 8). She documents her search for a discipline that would fully support her own interest in disability studies through special education, symbolic-interaction sociology, and communication.

Haller (1997) notes that “in the 1990’s little research has focused how local media can more often and more accurately cover the disability community and disability issues” (p. 4). She reports that two possible positive media images for people with disabilities are (1) “the minority group model, in which the disability community is seen as deserving of civil rights and (2) the consumer model, in which equity in society for people with disabilities in society is seen as good economic sense” (p. 10). Affirming the power of the media in the social construction of disability, she implores communication scholars to focus on “assessing this potential change” (p. 12).

As a disability culture emerged, those living with “biological defects that cannot be cured and that inhibit, to some extent, their ability to perform certain functions” (Ingstad, 1995, p. ix) express their own views of society and of themselves. Their rage against political policies, societal misconceptions and medical model language, all defining, incorrectly, the disability experience, produced a result greater than each individual success.

Constructing and Deconstructing Disability: Medical and Social Models

The way that disability is understood is as central to the disability experience as is the nature of the contracted impairment. Recent years have seen shifts in consciousness surrounding the epistemological and ontological contexts of disability. Previously, disability was seen as an individual or medical problem focused on a body that worked (or didn’t) differently, more weakly, or chronically less able than expected.

The decision to assign medical meanings to *disability* has had many and varied consequences for disabled people. One clear benefit has been the medical treatments that have increased the well-being and vitality of many disabled people, indeed have saved many people's lives. . . . Yet, along with these benefits, there are enormous negative consequences. . . . Briefly, the medicalization of disability casts human variation as deviance from the norm, as pathological condition, as deficit, and, significantly, as an individual burden and personal tragedy. Society, in agreeing to assign medical meaning to *disability*, colludes to keep the issue within the purview of the medical establishment, to keep it a personal matter and "treat" the condition and the person with the condition rather than "treating" the social processes and policies that constrict disabled people's lives (Linton, 1998, p.11).

Currently, disability is recognized as a social or community problem, the environmental, social, and political barriers are seen essential determinants of handicap.

Without a conception of disability as a social construct, explanations of the results of modern "disability legislation" are incomplete. What is not accounted for is the fact that laws that deal with handicapped people reflect not only the political problems posed by conflicting interest groups, but also the views that biological deficiency confers social deficiency. . . . Useful legislative evaluations need to take into account the processes by which people who deviate from accepted physical norms are devaluated and segregated, and, as a result, disabled (Liachowitz, 1988, p.1).

The changes have been reflected in social and personal experience, in legislation, and in language use.

The present examination of disability has no need for the medical language of symptoms and diagnostic categories. Disability studies looks to different kinds of syndromes for its material. The elements of interest here are the linguistic conventions that structure the meaning assigned to disability and the patterns of response to disability that emanate from, or are attendant upon, those meanings There are various consequences of the chosen terminology and variation in the degree of control that the named group has over the labeling process (Linton, 1998, p. 8,10).

Recognizing a common community voice, Barton (1996) contends

Disabled people are increasingly involved in challenging stereotypes and developing an alternative dignified perspective, one which recognizes disability as a human rights issue. This involves the struggle for choice, social justice and participation. The voices of disabled people are unmistakably clear on these issues (p. 13).

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Without having much background information about the social and historical conditions of disability or without a lengthy discussion of Karl Marx's theories of historical materialism, it would still be easy to identify a comfortable match between disability oppression and Marxist theory. Because people with disabilities comprise an underprivileged class easily defined by their uneasy relationship to the economic relationships of society, the mode of production, and because Marx names social inequality as a class-bound, economic fact of society, Marxism places the origination of disability oppression in that economic dysfunction. The lumpenproletariat, an arguably suitable description for the class of people with disabilities, is Marx's name for a class even more disenfranchised than factory workers. This class of people exists outside socially acceptable modes of production. They are the gypsies, the beggars, and the unemployed. Of oppressed peoples, they are the most oppressed. To locate empowerment, though, not instead of, but evolving from, generations of persecution, one must consider the social implications suggested by Marx's theory of internal relations.

Marxist theory suggests a world view in which distinct organizations and the relationships supporting them function independently and interdependently simultaneously.

No process and no relationship exists prior to or independently from any other process or relationship. Each process exists, literally, as the site of all the other processes in society. Each process also contributes in part to the existence of all the other processes in society. This reciprocal, multisided, causality, or mutual constitution, is what Resnick and Wolff refer to as overdetermination. As each process is uniquely constituted by its particular determination, it moves in a complex and contradictory manner. That is to say, as one process changes, so too do all the others, and therefore any one process is in a constant, non-teleological flux, overdetermined time and again by the continual, contradictory movement of its conditions of existence (processes) (Wolff, 1996, pp. 145-6).

Accepting this irreducible aggregate as essential, Marx describes a present contained in the womb of the past, a society with factors as connected as the sections of any Rube Goldberg contraption. Empowerment grows from the ashes of Ed Roberts, Helen Keller, and Wade Blank; from the pens of John Callahan, Nancy Mairs, and Mary Johnson; from the legislative power of the ADA, the Fair Housing Act and ADAPT; and from the scholarly efforts of Simi Linton, David Pfeffer, and Paul Longmere.¹ This chapter not only explores previous literature describing the use of Marxism to understand the oppression of disability, but also looks more closely at Marx's application of the theory of internal relations (which can be traced to Hegel, Spinoza, and even Aristotle) and its implications

¹ All these people and organizations represent disability empowerment: Ed Roberts (1939-1995) is called the father of the independent living movement; Helen Keller (1880-1968) was deaf and blind, insisting on equality in a time when either condition guaranteed exclusion; Wade Blank (1940-1993) was an ADAPT founder who recognized a need after his experience as a nursing home attendant; John Callahan is a cartoonist who's s irreverent humor asks us to look past the expected; Nancy Mairs' book and essays are personal and poetic observations into the disability experience; Mary Johnson is the editor of The Ragged Edge; Linton, Pfeffer, and Longmere are writers and educators.

for the disability community. Additionally, it proposes the structure of disability empowerment and clarifies the purpose of disability press messages.

Oppression

Historically, oppression has been addressed by submerged groups seeking resolution. Women's struggles with economic, political and social inequality have provided insight to the newer civil rights battle of the disability community. Although some women found the match between Marxism and feminism unsatisfactory for its lack of gender specificity, "Marxism systematically explained people's oppression, provided a "scientific" understanding of historical change, and offered a vision of a truly just society in which equality, realization of human potential, and the true fulfillment of people's needs were ingredient" (Philipson & Hansen, 1990, p. 12). But, in spite of the lack of specific references to gender issues, there is room within Marxist theory to root out the oppression of women.

Job segregation . . . is the primary mechanism in capitalist society that maintains the superiority of men over women, because it enforces lower wages for women in the labor market. Low wages keep women dependent on men because they encourage women to marry. Married women must perform domestic chores for their husbands. Men benefit, then, from both higher wages and the domestic division of labor (Hartmann, 1976, p. 148).

Just as the women's movement did, the disability rights movement recognizes the value of utilizing Marxist theory as an appropriate structure for understanding conditions of inequality. Disability studies scholars, many of them British, have placed the underpinnings of disability oppression within a Marxian system of economic emphasis.

Barnes (1997) names two possible explanations for the phenomena of negative public attitudes towards people with disabilities.

The first, and the older of the two, suggests that cultural perceptions of impairment are shaped by deep rooted psychological fears of the abnormal and the unknown. The second, explains disabled people's oppression in term of material considerations such as the economy and the way that it is organised or what is sometimes termed the mode of production (p. 2).

Barnes identifies disability oppression as a product of industrial capitalism by recognizing how the politicization and medicalization of disability affects perceptions. Since people with disabilities are often excluded from systems of commodity production and distribution, they are incorporated into a second medically and politically based system based on perception of need. These systems are covertly designed to keep the underprivileged in an unemployed state so that others can maintain employment. Barnes (1997) cites a 1966 study which claims that "because of the centrality of work in western culture [people with disabilities] are viewed as useless since they are considered not able to contribute to the economic good of the community" (p. 5). Barnes concludes by suggesting that changes in the value systems within western society must precede the full inclusion of disabled people into mainstream society.

A related study explores the implications of the disabled person's nonproductivity. The findings show that

the ability to labour in some socially recognized sense still seems a requirement of full membership of a future good society based upon Marxist theory. . . . It is hard to see how despite all efforts by a benign social structure an albeit small group of

impaired people could achieve full social integration. Following Marxist theory . . . some impaired lives cannot . . . be truly social, since the individual is deprived of the possibility of those satisfactions and that social membership to which her humanity entitles her, and which only work can provide. . . . There is then for Marxism an identity of who you are with the work you do which transcends capitalism and socialism into the concrete utopia of the future to constitute key element of humanity, and a key need of human beings in all eras (Abberly, 1998, p. 187).

Oliver (1996) asserts that Marx can be essential to an ontological understanding of disability. He suggests the nature of the connection between work, work relationships and disability images. Since

all phenomena (including social categories) are produced by the economic and social forces of capitalism, the forms in which they are produced are ultimately dependent upon their relationship to the economy (Marx, 1913). Hence, the economy, through both the operation of the labour market, and the social organisation of work, plays a key role in determining societal responses . . . to disability. . . (p. 131, 132).

In an earlier work, The Politics of Disablement, Oliver (1990) devotes a chapter, “Disability and the Rise of Capitalism,” to a discussion of conditions and contributing economic factors of the disability experience. He claims that “a framework derived from historical materialism does. . . add to our understanding of what happened to disabled people with the coming of industrial society” (p.26). The author states that “historical

materialism is not just about placing social relationships within a historical setting. It also attempts to provide an evolutionary perspective on the whole of human history” (p.27).

Oliver turns his discussion to disability empowerment by referencing Marx’s views of society to support his own theory that man is a totally social being and without society he does not exist. He claims that empowerment is “a collective process on which the powerless embark as part of the struggle to resist the oppression of others, as part of their demands to be included, and/or to articulate their own views of the world” (1996, p.147).

Oliver names components of the empowerment transformation as

the rise in the number of organizations controlled by and for disabled people, the number of groups still emerging to represent the community, the challenge to mainstream social perceptions of disability as personal tragedy, and the affirmation of positive images of disability through the development of a politics of personal identity (p. 152).

Supporting his claim of Marx’s belief in the unity of human consciousness, the author offers the following quote from Marx:

Though man is a unique individual – and it is just his particularity which makes him an individual, a really individual social being – he is equally the whole, the subjective existence of society as thought and experienced. He exists in reality, as the representation and real mind of social existence, and as the sum of human manifestation of life (p. 155).

Taken in conjunction with the claim of unity among man, Marx’s concept of the interdependent nature of social institutions explains the rise in disability empowerment over the past ten years since the passage of the ADA. Marx’s theory of internal relations

suggests that no one system (family, law, education, ideological representation [mass media], or cultural phenomena) is independent of the rest. But, instead, each is nudged by the other's movement. If human progress and institutional change are intimately connected, then it follows that the separate, progressive movements combine to create something new in human consciousness. Increased awareness results from changes to legislation (the ADA), health care practices, (home care as a viable alternative to institutionalization), activist organizations (ADAPT and disability-managed Centers for Independent Living), educational mainstreaming and the legitimatization of disability studies programs. Increased awareness, enables, or perhaps, forces the existence of empowerment.

Internal Relations And Empowerment

Philosophers since the Greek Parmenides have suggested a theory of internal relations or holism to postulate the nature of existence. Its prominence in the modern period, though, can be attributed to Spinoza.

Spinoza's own version of this philosophy is constructed upon Aristotle's definition of "substance" as that which is capable of independent existence. Since only nature taken as a whole is capable of independent existence, it is, according to this view, the sole substance. It is such a unified nature which Spinoza labels 'God'. . . . Leibniz, on the other hand, puts his emphasis on the parts and devotes little attention to the whole he sees reflected in each. . . . Coming a century later, Hegel was perhaps the first to work through the main implications of the philosophy of internal relations and to construct in some detail the total system

which it implied. In this he was aided . . . by the character of the impasse bequeathed to him by his immediate predecessor, Kant (Ollman, p. 30-31).

Essentially, the theory explains an interconnection between apparently unrelated concepts and occurrences.

The problem of internal relations . . . may be put very simply. Let us say that A is related to B. If the absence of that relation would leave A as it was, the relation is external. If, when, the relation was absent, A would be different, or would cease to be, the relation is internal (Blanchard, 1989, p.3).

Blanchard goes on to name four characteristics of internal relations. He states first that each individual factor will “overlap with other members of the whole to which they belong. . . . Secondly, terms that are internally related must stand in a continuum” (p. 12). A continuum usually has a spatial relationship, but not necessarily in terms of an internal relations theory, so that even non touching daisies in a field of daisies could be considered to be internally related. Blanchard continues, “[t]hirdly, between the terms related in the continuum there must be difference of degree. . . [as are] the system of colors displayed in the spectrum . . . [and] [f]ourthly internal relations cannot be dealt with by formal logic” (p. 12-13).

Marx And Internal Relations

Understanding Marx’s use of this theory to explain an economic base and social superstructure as social praxis and not merely as an affirmation of a finance-driven universe, the implications of unity in seemingly unrelated events, social movements, and man’s behaviors is profound.

In other words, when Marx says “The mode of production of material life determines the social, political, and intellectual process in general,” we must try to understand this claim in a way that allows the latter group of factors to vitally affect the mode of production, and in a way that removes the automatic dependence of the social superstructure on the economic base. We must do this, because this is how Marx used his theories in practise (Ollman, 1976, p.9).

The way that each factor relates to the others is as an entity, which, even though independent, can not be considered in isolation.

The ties between [the social relations] are contingent rather than necessary; they could be something very different without affecting the vital character of the factors involved. . . such relations are internal to each factor (they are ontological relations), so that when an important one alters, the factor itself alters; it becomes something else (Ollman, 1976, p. 15)

Not only are different social factors intimately connected to each other, but factors are united through time. “To introduce the temporal dimension . . . we need only view each social factor as internally related to its own past and future forms, as well as to the past and future forms of surrounding factors Tomorrow is today extended (Ollman, 1976, p. 18). Marx claims that man

does not see how the sensuous world around him is, not a thing given direct from all eternity, ever the same, but the product of industry and of the state of society; and, indeed, in the sense that it is an historical product, the result of the activity if a whole succession of generations, each standing on the shoulders of the preceding

one, developing its industry and its intercourse, modifying its social organization according to the changed needs. (Marx & Engels, 1846, p.35)

The ethereal and ubiquitous character of internal relations exists to connect seemingly unrelated factors and events into something new. Legislation, ethnography, and the creation of human rights and service organizations exist together through time and individual intent: “Thus, the book before me expresses and therefore . . . relationally contains everything from the fact that there is a light on in my room to the social practice and institutions of my society that made this particular work possible” (Ollman, 1976, p27). These events, then, coexist to create community awareness. That awareness is the state of mind leading to revolution.

When people speak of ideas that revolutionize society, they do but express the fact, that within the old society, the elements of a new one have been created, and that the dissolution of the old ideas keeps even pace with the dissolution of conditions of existence. (Marx & Engels, 1847, p.174)

The awareness of imposed oppression inspires social and political change. “[O]nly when [man] has recognized and organized his own powers as *social* powers so that social force is no longer separated from him as *political* power, only then is human emancipation complete” (Marx, 1843, p. 21). This revolution is an ideological one. Empowerment equals knowledge of equality. As the wheelchair bumper sticker demands: “To go where everyone has gone before”.

Empowerment And The Disability Press

The images and rhetoric of the disability press characterize the disability experience as it is and not as it is believed to be through oppressive societal filters.

Clusters of concepts are identified by naming the major issues of the disability community: freedom, deinstitutionalization, and equality. These concepts tell the story of reaction to a pervasive oppression.

There are, Nelson (1996) claims, five primary needs of the disability community that are only satisfied by the internal press: (1) The press gives recognition to the salience of disability issues; (2) It sets the standard for sensitivity in covering disability issues; (3) It provides coverage that is easily received by the target group; (4) It can provide community members with a sense of identity; (5) It is a forum and a rallying point in support of civil action activities (p. 6).

Other oppressed minorities have used an internal press to spread their message and unite their members.

What allowed socialist-feminist ideas to spread across the country as they did was an underground circulation of papers, articles, and pamphlets that were mimeographed or printed at the author's expense or as a project of a socialist-feminist group or organization (Hansen & Philipson, 1990, p. 10).

Sometimes those messages are in the form of movement rhetoric, visual art, or from community-driven press. "These organs provided an identity to their movements and a core rallying point for their adherents" (Nelson, 1996, p. 7).

Two unrelated, yet relevant, studies set precedent for the way that the current exploration addresses media images in relationship to group empowerment. Foss (1996) studies women's empowerment by focusing on "the process by which women come to see their symbols, rituals, and regular practices—the content of their experiences that tends to be overlooked the [dominant] worldview—as legitimate" (p. 205). She examines visual

art for the “discursive and nondiscursive data of words, colors, lines, textures, and images—it may reveal strategies that would not be apparent in a work of discursive rhetoric alone (p. 206). By noticing the qualities of individual sections and general characteristics of a room-sized work of art, she recognizes the uniquely feminine perspective of the work. The author claims that

[a]nalysis of *The Dinner Party* (the artwork) reveals three primary strategies used in the work as a means to empower and legitimize women’s authentic voice: (a) The work is independent from male-created reality; (b) it creates new standards for evaluation of its own rhetoric; and (c) women are clearly labeled as agents (p.211).

The author claims that with the predomination of female imagery and the lack of reference to anything male the work “defines women’s culture as derived from women’s positive experiences rather than in opposition to men’s culture (Foss, 1996, p. 211). The artwork does for the women’s community what the disability press does for its community: it presents an alternative vision on its own terms. Foss (1996) recognizes another value of submerged groups discovering and legitimizing their voice. She claims they make possible the development of generative theory, displacing stereotype and asking the viewer to question accepted practices and beliefs. She suggests that “[w]hen we develop generative theory, as the study of submerged rhetoric encourages, we will have the satisfaction of knowing that we have not necessarily or unjustly constructed our inquiry by neglecting alternative views of understanding” (p. 219).

The rhetoric of minority communities can be analyzed for information about the stages of growth of the attendant social movement. The second study recognizes how dominant rhetorical concepts capture and direct internal sentiment. Darcey (1991) tracks

the emergence of gay pride as a social movement by defining catalytic events that divide his area of study into conceptually distinct eras. He also names the dominant value appeals from each of the rhetorical periods he examines. Unity, work, determination, and strength, achievement, truthfulness, justice, safety and security, and tolerance are the categories he names. The Defending Fragile Achievements era, the Fortifying Against a Conservative Tide era and finally the AIDS—Battling the Hydra era are examples of names he gives to the stages of the gay pride movement (Darcey, 1991).

Groups existing outside society's mainstream are, nonetheless, subject to pressures of the dominant group's images. Recognizing those images as conceived, rather than natural, is a step towards empowerment. The way that people with disabilities appear, to themselves and in their circles of existence is influenced by those imposed images. The dominating opinions generated by years of misrepresentation are absolutely unavoidable. "Hegemony is diffuse and appears everywhere as natural. It (re)enforces domination not only through the (armed) state but also throughout society. The impulses and impressions, beliefs and values, standards and manners are projected more like sunlight" (Charlton, 1998, p.31). A crucial concept of oppression, according to Marx (1846), is the way in which the ruling class controls the ideas of the times.

In every epoch the ideas of the ruling class are the ruling ideas, that is, the class that is the ruling *material* power of society is at the same time the ruling *intellectual* power. The ruling ideas are nothing more than the ideal expression of the dominant material relationships grasped as ideas, hence of the relationships which make the one class the ruling one and therefore the ideas of its domination (p. 89).

Berger (1982) claims that “[t]he ruling class, according to this theory, propagates an ideology that justifies its status and makes it difficult for the ordinary people to recognize that they are being exploited and victimized. . . . The ideas people have are the ideas the ruling class wants people to have” (p. 50).

The mass media broadcasts the images that serves the purpose of the dominant power , “it [mass media] still performs [the] job of distracting people from the realities of our society and of “clouding their minds” with ideas that the ruling class wishes them to have (p. 54). Alternatively, group media represents self-defined reality. Empowering images and rhetoric in the disability press exist as counter attacks to false images and mistaken identities.

Berger (1982) claims that “Marxist thought is one of the most powerful and suggestive ways available to the media analyst for analyzing society and its institutions” (p. 44). He suggests five areas of inspection for traditional Marxist analysis of the media. This study individualizes those areas and suggests three questions be addressed:

- (1) What social, political and economic arrangements characterize the disability community?
- (2) Who owns, controls, and operates the publications?
- (3) Which concepts and values are being forwarded by the press?

This study will look at the categories that define resistance to stereotypical images propagated about people with disabilities. These categories; unity, strength, independence and freedom and sexuality, defy the limiting images of people with disabilities as pitiable, childlike, helpless and asexual. By inspecting four covers and four cover stories each of Mainstream, New Mobility, Ragged Edge and Mouth Magazines it

can be determined what the messages of empowerment are. The effects of empowering messages can be seen in rising employment rates, increased earnings, and increased community involvement by people with disabilities. “[M]arxist media analysis [has] a great deal of appeal—especially to people with a strong sense of social justice and desires for a more egalitarian , more humane world” (Berger, 1982, p. 64). Using Marxism as a structure to understand oppression and as a canopy to explain empowerment, this paper’s methodology is appropriate for a community presenting humanitarian value and right action as the primary appeals for equality.

CHAPTER IV

ANALYSIS

Empowerment in The Disability Press

The Random House Webster's College Dictionary (1991) provides two definitions for the verb 'empower': 1. to give official or legal power or authority to. 2. to endow with an ability; enable (p. 438). Roget's Thesaurus (1992) lists four synonyms for the noun 'empowerment': enablement, investment, enfranchisement, and endowment (p. 19). Feminine scholarship recognizes that feminism or feminine empowerment

occurs as and when women, individually and together, hesitantly and rampantly, joyously and with deep sorrow, come to see our lives differently and to reject externally imposed frames of reference for understanding these lives, instead beginning the slow process of constructing our own ways of seeing them, understanding them, and living them. For us, the insistence on the deeply political nature of everyday life and on seeing political change as personal change, is quite simply, feminism (Stanley & Wise, 1983, p. 192).

Over a century ago, W. E. DuBois (1950) envisioned integration as the Black community's path to social equality. He believed that "unless a human being is going to have all human rights, including not only work, but friendship, and if mutually desired, marriage and children, unless these avenues are open and free, there can be no real equality and no cultural

integration” (p.220). The disability community is in the process of defining empowerment in its own terms. The messages in disability press may clarify how this sea change will materialize.

In order to analyze the messages of the disability press, this study targets four issues from each of four magazines. Selections are from the 1997-98 issues of Mouth (MO), Mainstream (MA), New Mobility (NM), and Ragged Edge (RE). In the case of Ragged Edge and Mouth, the four issues represent a full year’s volume. New Mobility and Mainstream are monthlies. The feature stories are classified as personal or political and then subdivided into one of three subcategories based on the most frequently appearing themes. Finally, selected stories and covers are individually analyzed.

Each of these publications, written by and for the people of the disability community, expresses the disability experience uniquely through the images they present and the accompanying rhetoric. Both Mouth and New Mobility Magazines began publishing the year that the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) passed in 1990. But by that time, The Disability Rag, precursor of the Ragged Edge, had been in print for ten years. The Disability Rag modified its rabble-rousing focus, changed names and transformed into The Ragged Edge in 1997. Mainstream began publishing in 1988 and released its last issue in December, 1998.

Presently, Mouth: Voice of the Disability Nation plays the role of community conscience, with an unrelenting, demanding and angry voice. The Ragged Edge: The Disability Experience in America has become an opinion journal, similar to Mouth, but features the fiction and poetry of writers with disabilities. Mainstream: Magazine of the Able-Disabled and New Mobility: Disability Culture and Lifestyle, cover news and current affairs, with an emphasis on lifestyle. While Ragged Edge and Mouth are available by subscription

only , have no ads and are printed on plain paper, Mainstream's and New Mobility's circulations number more than 20,000 including promotional subscriptions, advertisements and glossy, full color formats.

Advertising significantly affects each magazine's content. Two journals, New Mobility and Mainstream, capitalize on advertising income by producing mainstream quality products. They are attractively packaged, highly circulated, and represent a veritable but not angry awareness of disability. The other two, Ragged Edge and Mouth, present a dissatisfied, rousing, and in-your-face glimpse of the disability experience. Although each of the magazines offers both social and political views of oppression and inequality, the use of advertising by Mainstream and New Mobility necessarily softens the message and the hard, political edge offered by Ragged Edge and Mouth. According to Berger:

One thing that advertising does is to divert people's attention from social and political concerns into narcissistic and private concerns. The immediate mission is to sell goods; the long-range mission is to maintain the class system. In order to sell goods, advertising has to change attitudes, lifestyles, habits, customs, and preferences while at the same time maintaining the economic system that benefits from these changes. (1982, p. 58).

All four magazines of the disability press ask readers to think alternatively. Mouth and Ragged Edge make several statements by choosing alternative funding. These quarterlies "transform the rhetoric of revolution into the advocacy of [a] specific cause" (Heartney, 1996, p.7). They not only retain editorial freedom, but demonstrate community cohesion by soliciting funds from subscribers. Advertisements appearing in New Mobility and Mainstream

are relevant, respectful, and occasionally controversial¹ (NM 8/96, 10/96). Still, they sell a belief system along with the wheelchair. Using persuasion techniques, advertising's aim is intentional. Berger says, "advertising leads people to . . . separate themselves from one another, it imposes upon them a collective form of taste" (p.56). Ads may respect a disabled consumer's physical status, yet insult her feminist awareness.² Alternative, controversial, and diverse, the disability press exposes its readers to information that creates awareness, promoting empowerment.

The Messages

The messages of the press demand equality, independence, and suggest new concepts of disability. Equality of people with disabilities is a state existing, at times, only in the ideal and available only as glimpsed through unsuccessful attempts to claim what should be human rights. The stories report what is and describe what should be. The images are provoking and honest.

After identifying all the titles, two categories were immediately obvious: the personal (relating to self or group as individuals) and the political (relating to self or group as community). Each of these categories is further defined by three subdivisions that serve to clarify focal points. Political subcategories are ones containing articles that address fighting the system, social equality/ community challenge, and accessibility; personal ones are lifestyle, equipment, and personal triumph. Highlighting a need for systemic change and collective awareness, political messages are a call to action and are persuasive in nature. Personal stories

¹New Mobility has printed ads of a partially dressed pregnant woman in a wheelchair and a disabled man lying in a bed with an able bodied woman.

² New Mobility ran an ad that featured a man in a wheelchair cavorting with a stereotypically "sexy" woman. Although the point was that people in wheelchairs can have fun, expressing an alternative concept, the ad design employed anti feminist concepts..

offer informative, sometimes exemplary accounts about the experience of living with a disability. The following table sorts the feature stories of selected issues into these six categories.

Political

Fighting the System

Fighting the system is easily the category with the most entries. There are 28 entries appearing here, but only 15 titles in lifestyle, the next largest division. The stories describe existing unfairness and catalog attempts to change the institutions responsible for the inequality. The language used is confrontive as in the following titles from Mouth: the September, October, 1997 issue contained the stories “Disability Nation Declares Independence From Institutions”, “Nursing Home Operators Rush To Prevent Mass Escape From Their Prisons”, and “The Real War Has Begun-Enlist Here To Fight For Your Freedom”. The July/August, 1998 issue featured “Prisoners Of Medicaid Demand Freedom”. “Justice Denied By Workers’ Comp” appeared in the May/June, 1998 issue. The Ragged Edge also promotes the political: as in the May/June 1998 issue, “The National Association of Home Builders is our number-one enemy”(p. 13), “The Tactics of Survival” (p. 18), and from July/August, “Universal Design: Still fighting for respect”.

1. [RE] Living In The Past: The National Association Of Home Builders Takes On All Comers In Its Unrelenting Fight Against Building Homes All Of Us Can Enter
2. [RE] The department of justice and us
3. [RE] Some reflections on the ADA
4. [RE] Pro Se? Nothing to it—how to file your own lawsuit without a lawyer
5. [RE} Beyond Sticks ‘n’ Stones

6. [RE} Satyagraha And Disability Rights
7. [RE] A Billion Of Us By 2000
8. [Mo] Disability Nation Declares Independence From Institutions
9. [Mo] ADAPT Takes Nation's Capital By Storm
10. [Mo] Gingrich Introduces Mi CASA-The Medicaid Community Attendant

Services Act

11. [Mo] Clinton ADAPT Summit Scheduled For September 10 At The White House

12. [Mo] NCIL, Self-Advocates, Justice For All, N.O.W.-All Unite With ADAPT

13. [Mo] Nursing Home Operators Rush To Prevent Mass Escape From Their prisons

14. [Mo] The Real War Has Begun-Enlist Here To Fight For Your Freedom

15. [Mo] The Department: "there's A Street In Itta Bena Called Freedom. There's A Town In Mississippi Called Liberty. And There's A Department In Washington Called Justice."- a saying among civil rights workers in Mississippi, 1964

16. [Mo] De-Coding The DOJ's Documents

17. [Mo] Justice Denied By Workers' Comp

18. [Mo] Prisoners Of Medicaid Demand Freedom

19. [Mo] ADAPT Takes Memphis

20. [Mo] NCIL Adapts DC

21. [Mo] Cuomo Surrenders HUD

22. [Mo] A Mother Calls For IDEA Police

23. [Mo] Let them in: how parents can educate their neighborhood schools
24. [Mo] Let them skip school
25. [Mo] Docs Unmask Managed Care
26. [NM] Homeward Bound - attendant care and Medicaid
27. [NM] International Rights, Wrongs and Remedies
28. [Ma] The Litigators - disability rights

Social Equality/ Community Challenge

The social equality/ community challenge subdivision stories asks readers to pay attention to issues that have significant impact on the daily lives and possibilities for the disability community (Social equality division #s 2, 4, 7, 10). It is notable that Ma has only one entry in this subdivision. The issues reveal the community's value concerns: the moral (#'s 1, 2, 3), the legal (#8), the social (# 4, 5, 10, 11).

1. [RE] Not Dead Yet's Unique Message
2. [RE] The Bad Baby Blues: Reproductive Technology & The Threat To Diversity
3. [RE] Guinea pigs don't get to say no
4. [RE] Commission on civil rights raps media coverage of the ADA
5. [Mo] The Fire That Will Not Go Out : Hey, Everybody...This Movement Is Moving!
6. [Mo] Not Dead Yet Crashes Hemlock
7. [Mo] Preventing kids like us
8. [NM] Medical Marijuana
9. [NM] Crip Caste - the disability community's pecking order

10. [NM] The Ultimate Offense - language
11. [NM] Top 10 U.S. Cities

Accessibility

Accessibility is a primary concern for the disability community. This issue is examined from both political and personal viewpoints. This issue conceivably fits in either the systems (#2) or social (#1) subdivision, but stands alone in order to demonstrate the scope of the topic.

1. [Mo] Greyhound: We Will Ride!- Or Will We?
2. [RE] Design for the 21st century starts now

Personal

Lifestyle

These stories address the issues that impact the personal lives of people with disabilities as individuals. Issues like childhood experience (#11), employment (#1, 2), home design (#3, 10), body and relationship issues for men (#11) and for women (#4, 5) as well as options for recreation (#6, 7, 12), sports (#8) and practical information (#9). As expected NM had the largest percentage of entries in this subdivision, or 66%.

1. [NM] Self – Employed
2. [NM] Finding Work
3. [NM] Designing for Freedom redesign your home
4. [NM] Body Image, Self-Esteem, Relationships, Domestic Violence, Feminism
5. [NM] Women's Health - information from a disabled Ob/Gyn
6. [NM] The World Series of Poker
7. [NM] Soap Doc Mitch Longley

8. [NM] Skiing: Choices Slopes, Sweet Deals
9. [NM] Mac vs. Windows
10. [Ma] Accessible Housing
11. [Ma] Reimagining Manhood
12. [Ma] The gifted gardener

Health/ Equipment

Maneuvering the demands of an imperfectly functioning body is a requirement for empowerment. Knowing what equipment (#1,2,7) will facilitate comfort or expand personal effectiveness is essential. The information her ranges from necessary (#1,7, 8) to whimsical (#3)

1. [NM] Cushions
2. [NM] Leak Proofing - incontinence
3. [NM] Dogs on Wheels
4. [NM] Standing Chairs
5. [Ma] A question of balance - seating systems
6. [Ma] Cath Controversy
7. [Ma] Cover - woman in wheelchair saying "I'll make that call"
8. [Ma] Days of whine and noses - Braille wine bottles
9. [Ma] Talking communication - services and equipment

Personal Triumph

One of the offending stereotypical misconceptions of disability is that merely performing everyday tasks is somehow noteworthy because of perceived difficulty. In the

disability press, stories of personal triumph are told about those who make a difference, not only in their own lives, but in the lives of those around them (#2, 3, 5, 7).

1. [Mo] Meet Our Homegrown ADA Enforcers
2. [Mo] Billy Golfus Launches Telethon
3. [NM] Marilyn Hamilton
4. [RE} Fiction: Epilepsy Poster Child
5. [Ma] Edge wise guy John Hockenberry
6. [Ma] Missing Andy
7. [Ma] Transforming her world –Nancy Mairs
8. [Ma] Cover - man in wheelchair on beach - "Inspirational"

Summary

There were seventy stories offered by the four magazines. The breakdown is as follows:

Political stories	41	58.6%
Changing the system	28	
Social Equality	11	
Accessibility	2	
Personal stories	29	41.4%
Lifestyle	12	
Health/ equipment	9	
Personal Triumph	8	

Story Analysis

The articles listed in the political section, almost 59%, draw attention to common threads of experience that describe condition of disability. Many of the articles in the personal section also capture common threads, but omit the rhetoric that holds the system responsible for injustice. Mouth leads all the publications in the number of political articles printed. Unlike the other issues, there is no blend of personal and political perspectives. Their stories are exclusively political. Ragged Edge also recommends political thought to their readers: the November/December, 1998 issue claimed that “books that go beyond the personal into the political experience of disability are still harder to find than they ought to be” (p. 21). The stories are alarming as they report injustice and mistreatment. In Guinea pigs don’t get to say ‘no’, Ervin (1998) compares dangerous drug research involving “decisionally incapacitated” subjects to the 1930’s Tuskegee incident, involving black men and syphilis treatment. New Mobility’s articles are less political in tone and in number than personal and Mainstream’s are even less so. Barry Corbet, the editor of New Mobility, often includes a political theme in “Bully Pulpit”, the editor’s column. Mainstream published the last issue in December of 1998 before discontinuing publication.

“Lifting Liberty”, one of the pages included with political story # 8 “Disability Nation Declares Independence From Institutions,” is an example of the angry, confrontive style for which Mouth Magazine is known. Author, Lucy Gwin, analogizes nursing homes and the Berlin Wall. She writes about automatic Health Care Financial Administration expenditures, “Sometimes it takes a year or more to bring one hostage out and help her or help him to connect with life in the free world. Two million people with disabilities are hostages behind it. America pays the \$70 billion annual ransom without blinking” (Gwin, 1997, p. 14). The

subtitle of the story, “Enemies of our liberty are wealthy, powerful”, recognizes conflict and antagonism between a disabled “us” and an indoctrinated “them”. Each paragraph employs war terminology to state a case. Freedom, captivity, ‘handicaptivity’, exile, liberty, captors, underdogs, freedom, hostage, and fight are the words telling the story of the MiCasa home health care bill³. The accompanying photograph shows demonstrators climbing the Berlin Wall.

The tenor of the Mouth article sharply differs from story No. 8 in the social equality division, appearing in New Mobility Magazine. The subtitle is a question. “A miracle medication or an invitation to abuse?” The story supplies personal information about a marijuana user before it approaches policy change. The story presents two sides of the issue, even though it clearly defends marijuana use. The Ragged Edge entry, # 14 in the personal triumph section, “Epilepsy Poster Child”, is a personal recollection of diagnosis and personal

³The Medicaid Community Attendant Services and Supports Act of 1999, MiCASSA, is proposed legislation which, if signed into law, would allow for a national program of home- and community-based services (attendant services) and would encourage development of system change mechanisms for states to move from the institutional bias that now exists to a community based system.

Although programs providing attendant services currently exist in many states throughout the nation, funding for them is far less than what is needed. Many persons with disabilities merely requiring assistance with daily life tasks are wrongly institutionalized in nursing homes solely because they are unable to receive attendant services.

MiCASSA allows for choice. For the first time people who are eligible for nursing homes will be able to choose to use their Medicaid dollars for Qualified Community-Based Attendant Services, and live in their own home. Doing this will not only provide a better living environment and quality of life for many Americans, it will use less tax dollars, since the cost of providing a person with in-home attendant services is much less than the cost of a person occupying a bed in a nursing home. MiCASSA makes good sense. It will save money, and it will put an end to the needless admission of people with disabilities to nursing homes, allowing us to live where most people desire to live — at home(www.ca-index.html, 1999).

pain. It is the story of shame and family misunderstanding. Doctors, medicine, and illness are the “devils” Finally, story # 14 “Being Done” from the personal lifestyles division, printed in Mainstream Magazine, is an excerpt from Leonard Kriegal’s memoir Flying Solo. There are no expressions of anger, only the poetic constructions recalling wisdom gained through the pain of polio hot-bath treatments. Kriegal ponders his crippled body and its ability to transport him through a life where he must “be a man.” He writes, “If I could not admit that life as a cripple with demand courage of me, I was already doomed. . . . It was difficult, if not impossible, to know whether one was up to what disease had done to one’s life” (Kriegel, 1997, p28). Experience for the sake of wisdom gained, pain survived for the value of courage found, and insight won at the expense of humiliation and alienation are the life messages conveyed

Cover Analysis

The four covers, chosen because the content of each was consistent with the majority of covers from the issue it represents, are analyzed for the messages they send graphically. The June/July 1998 MA features a middle-aged woman, wearing glasses and a black T-shirt with the words ‘SHRINK RESISTANT’ printed in block capital letters. She is smiling at the camera. The title “Psychiatric Survivors” is to the left of her head and a no smoking sign is a blurred patch of red off her other shoulder. She stands in front of a white columned entrance of a red brick building. Featured story titles, “Wheelchairs and Batteries” and “Artist Frank Moore” are situated over the magazine banner. The boldness of the printing on her shirt might imply strength as her stance outside the formidable building might be seen as escape. The term ‘psychiatric survivor’ denotes victory, hard fought, as might her smile. The other stories are

equipment and personal triumph stories. This issue cover mixes in the political with emphasis on the personal.

The June 1998 issue of NM pictures a side, rear view of a man seated in a manual wheelchair, wearing a work shirt, between the foot of a prison cot, a closed. Commode and the wall shadowed with prison cell bars. His head is bowed, as though he is in thought or reading. The title to that story, “Disability behind bars: should the ADA. protect prisoners?”, and the other featured stories , “Affordable, Accessible travel”, “Chat Rooms: A cure for the blues” and “Basketball at 50: Shooting for the mainstream” hang at the head of the bed. The question offered by the title indicates softness on this political issue. The man’s posture suggests defeat or consideration. Other stories fit the lifestyle division.

The RE May/ June, 1998, issue features a drawing of a two story building, shaded in blue, with an attic window and white columns, porch and wide steps. The caption reads LIVING IN THE PAST, with a subtitle, The National Association of Home Builders takes on all comers in its unrelenting fight against building homes all of us can enter. In a sidebar, the featured stories are listed: Superman’s Telethon, Not Dead Yet’s Unique Message, and Fiction: Epilepsy Poster Child. RE’s bent is more political than either of the other publications considered. The cover story address system change as do MA’s and NM’s, but additionally the feature articles tend toward the political, too.

The MO cover, easily the most political of the four, bears a cover story titled “Disability Nation Declares Independence from Institutions”. The title hangs over a red and white striped flag with the ADAPT freedom symbol (the traditional handicapped icon with stick arms stretched overhead breaking free from restricting chains) in a red field usually filled with fifty stars. The title, the flag and a blurred picture of a woman in a wheelchair next to the

liberty bell all are superimposed on the Declaration of Independence. The automatic connection to national values of liberty and freedom reinforces the inciting language of the title. The message of freedom as an American privilege, hard won and covetously protected is inescapable. The title “Put Your Power behind H.R. 2020”, cuts across the top right corner of the page. All the feature articles are political; “ADAPT Takes Nation’s Capital By Storm”, “Gingrich Introduces Mi CASA-The Medicaid Community Attendant Services Act”, “Clinton ADAPT Summit Scheduled For September 10 At The White House”, “NCIL [National Council on Independent Living], Self-Advocates, Justice For All, N.O.W.-All Unite With ADAPT”, “Nursing Home Operators Rush To Prevent Mass Escape From Their Prisons”, and “The Real War Has Begun-Enlist Here To Fight For Your Freedom”.

Conclusion

Part of the process of empowerment for the disability community must necessarily be self-knowledge. Only after recognizing where the community has been, and where it is now, can a future be envisioned. The combination of content and rhetorical analysis presented here highlights the sometimes angry, sometimes frustrated, usually alternative positions of the vastly individual, yet intricately bonded community. Since “these organs provide an identity to the movement and a core rallying point for . . . adherents” (Nelson, 1996), it serves us to understand which are the essential issues. The press characterizes the community’s pain as being inflicted from misunderstanding, standard operating procedure and mainstream ignorance. The community’s triumph comes through unity, perseverance and wisdom gained through experience. Knowing that a majority of the messages are political ones, 68% of that majority a demand for systemic change, it comes as no surprise to discover that empowerment in the disability community focuses on changing systems, often through legislative procedures.

Whether changing existing systems precedes or replaces changes to social and material attitudes and practice is unclear.

CHAPTER V

Conclusions And Future Study

Political Awareness

The messages of the disability press paint a picture of the disability community. Although the messages are predominately political ones, covering community issues, there is ample coverage of the personal concerns of disability. The nature of the personal messages provides insight into the state of empowerment in the disability community. Community empowerment begins with the commonality of personal experience. The personal pieces provide poignant and necessary vantages to a wide range of emotional and practical glimpses of life challenges confronted and surmounted. The political ones build on the commonality discovered through personal revelation. Waging a war with words, the political articles arouse and incite, seeking to change the status quo. Political awareness is essential for a community seeking change, as Marx (1845), asserts in the “German Ideology”:

Furthermore, it follows that every class striving to gain control – even when such control means the transcendence of the entire old form of society and of control itself, as is the case with the proletariat – must first win political power in order to represent its interest in turn as the universal interest, something which the class is forced to do immediately (p.120).

The articles that recognize a systemic cause as the root of disability oppression echo charges of other oppressed groups that “the personal is the political”; women protesting patriarchy, dissenters decrying imperialism, Blacks rejecting white supremacy and Socialists fighting systemic causes of hunger and poverty. According to Z, a socialist magazine described as a community of people concerned about social change:

In each instance we uncovered that “the personal is political,” i.e., the experiences, feelings, and possibilities of our personal lives were not just a matter of personal preferences and choices but were limited, molded, and defined by the broader political and social setting. They feel personal, and their details are personal, but their broad texture and character, and especially the limits within which these evolve, are largely systemic. In this sense, the contribution of the New Left was to say that we suffer a “totality of oppressions,” systemically based, entwined, and all needing to be eliminated via a revolution” in existing institutions, and the creation of new liberating ones .

The “personal is political” therefore meant that our personal lives are in considerable part politically delimited and determined so that improving our personal experiences meant we must collectively address political relationships and structures (1997, p. 6-7).

The disability press portrays the community of persons with disabilities as a force collectively addressing political structures and relationships. Empowerment, for the community, is necessarily a political process.

The Disability Press and Political Action

There has been no significant change over the past ten years in employment or

income figures of persons with disabilities. But, in spite of these disappointing indicators, there is still reason to believe the claim of disability empowerment. There is evidence from the community press that people with disabilities are more political than ever before. Increased political awareness signals self-determination, a critical component of an empowered state. In a community where most standard benchmarks of success like financial wealth, suitable employment, and independence, may be grossly unattainable, alternative signposts emerge as substitutes. Individuals, awakening to the recognition that their personal injustice fits a pattern of injustice, are utilizing legislation, mass demonstration, and modification of academic curricula in order to seek equality.

Achieving self-determination:

requires not only that persons with disabilities develop inner resources, but also that society support and respond to them. Self – determination is a lifelong interplay between the individual and society, in which the individual accepts risk -- taking as a fact of life and in which society, in turn, bases an individual's worth on ability, not disability.

Persons with disabilities who want to achieve self – determination need to learn how they can trust and respect themselves. They also need to learn to identify their rights and needs and to find the most appropriate ways of communicating these privileges to others. Most important, people with disabilities must acquire a sense of political purpose and an understanding of their rights, responsibilities, and the democratic process (Ward, 1993, p. xvii).

Although reverting to legal action, as some articles suggest, in order to solve dilemmas can be judged as a drain on social resources and an evasion of responsibility, in

this case, the use of the legal system is a sign of increased political awareness and empowerment. Wallace Hendricks, economist from the University of Illinois, reports on the rise in private legal action:

I know of no time series analyses that would be able to measure before-after effects of the ADA. It is certainly true, however, that the ADA is associated with a huge increase in the number of law suits that are cited in the Daily Labor Report. Casual empiricism would suggest that suits involving disabilities have moved ahead of all other kinds of suits against firms. (Hendricks, 1999, p. 1).

Another indication of political awareness appearing in the press is mass demonstration. Recently, ADAPT supporters gathered in Washington, D.C. to rally for the “integration mandate” of the ADA. On May 12, 1999, “disability advocates and activists took their outrage to the steps of the Supreme Court. Marchers filed into the street to wheel and walk the four blocks, and a magnificent wave of people, 4000 strong according to Supreme Court police, gathered before the Supreme Court to send a message to the justices that will decide the fate of the ADA integration mandate (Thomas, 1999, p. 1).

One more demonstration of increased awareness, hence empowerment, for the community is increased attention to disabilities studies programs throughout the country. The press covers school systems, although there are none covering higher education. Linton (1998) recognizes the value of these programs:

It was, at one time, seamless. There were no disjunctures between the dominant cultural narrative of disability and the academic narrative. They supported and defended each other. But in the past twenty years, as the flaws in the civic response to disability have been exposed, as changing social structures and

legislative victories reassemble that narrative, the academic tale slips further behind.

Enter disabilities studies: a location and a means to think critically about disability, a juncture that can serve both academic discourse and social change. Disabilities studies provides the means to hold academics accountable for the veracity and the social consequences of their work, just as activism has served to hold community, the education system, and the legislature accountable for disabled people's compromised social position (p. 1-2).

All of the issues representing emerging empowerment are featured in the magazines representing the community's interests. Three of the targeted articles discussed in the previous chapter dealt with changing school (not university) systems, a majority of the remainder covered ADA legislation and group action protesting the system. One article instructed readers on methods for filing their own ADA lawsuits. Searching the pages of the magazines affords a glimpse of where the community has been, where it is, and its future vision.

Marxism and Empowerment

Marx's explanation of the relationship between man and money (including capital, mode of production and labor) illuminates possible causes of oppression for a number of alienated populations. His theory, simultaneously placing material considerations as both determinant and factor of a social superstructure, also has explanatory value for the disability experience. The inexact, but intrinsically enmeshed relationship between base and superstructure is mimicked by the relationships between the material, physical, and social limitations of disability. But, even though his vision of interconnection is an ideal

explanation for oppression, it also has value for a community beginning to break patterns, gain awareness, and shift its consciousness: the empowerment process.

The way that social class impacts persons with disabilities is best demonstrated through an exception to the rule of poverty. A successful, post-injury Christopher Reeve suggests that wealth is an effective anecdote to many of the oppressions of disability. Although Reeve has demonstrated that disability, wealth, and social prestige need not be exclusive, his financial capacity for the best equipment, medical support, and family responsibility may be a primary determinant of the best scenario results. Nonetheless, injury remains as physical oppression, no matter what the state of material affairs. For much of the disabled population, though, poverty aggravates and may be responsible for disability. Conversely, disability is often a primary determinant of poverty, whether through unemployment or astronomical expenses.

The interconnected nature of Marx's universe allows leaps in consciousness, resulting in awareness shifts resulting in empowerment. Charlton (1998) says

Marxism typically understood consciousness as metaphorical spirals of practice (experience) and theory (thought) intertwined. These spirals move incrementally, quantitatively. Consciousness, however, is not a linear progression. At points this quantitative buildup congeals into a "rupture," or a qualitative or transformational leap to another stage of consciousness where another spiral – like phenomenon begins. . . . Consciousness is an awareness of oneself and the world. Furthermore, consciousness has depth, and as one moves through this space one's perception of oneself and the world changes. . . . The point is that consciousness cannot be separated from the real world, from politics and culture (1998, p.28).

This change in consciousness is happening in the disability community. Ten years of telling personal experience, forming political organizations, passing powerful legislation, and recognizing disabled others as similar has forced such a non-incremental leap. Through personal practice, mass demonstration, and systemic change, people with disabilities are affirming their right to exist on an equal plane as others.

Whether or not Marx's idealized vision of a world where each is equally free to develop their talents has predictive value for the community is not known. It is possible that Marx's communism, the natural evolution of capitalism, would offer a greater place of equality for people with disabilities. There are certain aspects of communism that would benefit the class of people with disabilities. Simon (1994) discusses these factors:

Three important features of communist society, as Marx sketched it, also remain relevant: the rejection of the market as an organizing principal of social relations, the abolishment of private ownership of means of production, and the nature and meaning of egalitarianism. Although at the moment socialism appears to be receding from the political agenda in most places, the question of the market persists. Is there a viable alternative to the use of the market as an organizing principal of our economy and more generally, of society?

The idea of an egalitarian society remains relevant. Marx is often taken to be an enemy of individualism and individual freedom. This is far from the truth. His vision was of a society in which individuals could for the first time be free to develop their talents and abilities. But importantly, it was a society in which all individuals would be equally free to do this. . . . What Marx saw as the true value was not equality of result but equality of potential, not equality in tension with

freedom but equality that could only be realized along side of true freedom for all. Communism would not be a society of the equal result or equal achievement. But it would be a society in which differences in achievement would not be the cause of jealousy, envy, or of unnecessary and harmful barriers to individual achievement. This is, for sure, a heady and utopian vision. But properly understanding the sense in which Marx was an egalitarian does give us some purchase on the ways in which we are not (Simon, p. xxxiv-xxxv).

Future Studies

This study, suggesting proofs and methods of empowerment, also uncovers a shift in the epistemology of disability. An integrated model of disability incorporates body-centered (Medical Model) and other-created (Social Model) thinking to transcend both. Although, in this model, impairment is a defining factor of the disability experience, an entire spectrum of social structures, including economic ones, are inextricably connected to the impairment base. A new model of disability, while respecting past and current thinking, attempts to develop a broader base for the causes of disability oppression. Future research on the interconnected nature of disability, based on Marxist Theory may expand modern theories of disability.

The disability press captures from the community and passes on to the community a combination of personal experience and the community expression of sentiments and cries for equality. The disability press is the glue of the community. Future research questions may look at how the disability press impacts mainstream coverage of disability issues and even how the representations of the disability press are changing mainstream values. This study might have had additional information about each catalogued title and

specific categorizing details.

Changing the way people think about disability is more than a subtle shift in consciousness, like the ones made upon realization of the absence of an accessible escape route or an inaccessible ramp construction. Changing societal decisions about disability are as gentle as fault line shifts in San Andreas. Porter contends that “[t]he lesson . . . is clear: writing the disabled body will mean that our most basic conceptions of the body will need to be rewritten” (Porter, 1993, p. xiv). If we rewrite conceptions of the body, we are necessarily rewriting ourselves. It follows that with new conceptions of self, the society that holds the self in relation to millions of other selves will change.

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