

## **Chapter 8 (In 'Disabled People in Britain and Discrimination : A case for anti-discrimination legislation', Colin Barnes (1991))**

Leisure and social life, and the influence of the media

This chapter considers the impact of institutional discrimination on the leisure and social activities of disabled people. It shows that disabled people's ability to participate in mainstream recreational pursuits and establish 'normal' social contacts and relationships is severely restricted as a result of the economic, environmental and social barriers discussed in previous chapters.

*Work and Leisure.* Contrary to popular belief, many disabled people have less leisure time than their non-disabled contemporaries. Also, their capacity to participate in recreational pursuits is greatly reduced if they are not in work.

Broadly, leisure is perceived as the opposite of paid work. It represents a period of free time and enjoyment when people can engage in activities of their own choice. This poses something of a problem for people who have no paid work with which to contrast leisure. Those most obviously affected are women at home and retired and unemployed people, but for them leisure is still defined as time over which they have control. For women at home, for example, leisure is contrasted with domestic work. This is also true for the other groups mentioned above, whose lives are largely organised around what working people regard as leisure (Abercrombie and Warde *et al.*, 1988).

Since the 1939-45 war there has been a general decrease in the amount of time people spend in paid work and a corresponding increase in leisure time. For industrial workers the working week has been reduced by about four hours, and now stands at around forty hours (HMSO, 1991). Non-manual workers tend to have a shorter working week, averaging something like thirty-seven hours (Abercrombie and Warde *et al.*, 1988).

Opportunities for leisure may have been created by the availability of free time, but some variation is available to different groups of people. For example, according to Government estimates, in 1989 retired men had the most leisure time with ninety-three hours per week, followed by unemployed men with eighty-eight hours. The corresponding figures for women were eighty-two and seventy-two hours. Men in full-time employment had forty-four hours of free time per week and similarly employed women eleven hours less (HMSO, 1991) because women's domestic workload is generally much greater than men's. There are no separate figures for free time available to disabled people but it is probably a similar variation among different groups. For example, disabled men, whether in work or not, are likely to have more leisure time than their disabled women counterparts.

Table 8.1. Time Use in a Typical Week, 1989

Hours spent on	Full-time employees		Economically inactive women	Retired
	male	female		
Employment and travel	48.9	43.6	0.4	0.7
Essential (domestic and personal activities)	25.9	42.2	65.3	30.8
Sleep	49.0	49.0	49.0	49.0
Free time	44.2	33.2	53.3	87.5
Free time per weekday	4.7	3.2	7.1	12.3
Free time per weekend day	10.4	8.5	9.0	13.1

*Note:* Comparable figures for unemployed disabled or non-disabled people or gender differences for retired people are not available.

*Source:* Adapted from Table 10.2 in HMSO, 1991, p. 170.

It is also probable that many disabled people, irrespective of gender, will have less free time than their non-disabled equivalents. Generally, essential domestic and personal activities take longer to complete as impairment increases, particularly for those who rely on personal and domestic assistants for routine daily functions. People with personal assistance needs who are in full-time employment often face problems in balancing time between personal needs, work and leisure pursuits. This is made worse when they do not have complete control of those services and have continually to negotiate with local authorities or other agencies to maintain and refine their personal assistance packages to suit their individual needs (Oliver *et al.*, 1988).

People's ability to enjoy leisure time is closely related to their employment status. In general, we are socialised into the belief that work is good and idleness reprehensible. Consequently, people who are excluded from the workplace often find it extremely difficult to organise their lives around leisure (see Fagin and Little, 1984; Parker, 1979; Willis, 1985). This is as true for disabled people as for non-disabled people. For example, research documenting the experience of people who had acquired spinal cord injuries found that employment was an important factor associated with expressed levels of satisfaction with leisure activities. The

majority of people who were not working felt that they had too much leisure time and insufficient meaningful and enjoyable activity to fill it. Moreover, those in part-time work reported less satisfaction with their leisure activities than those in full-time work (Oliver *et al.*, 1988). Although disabled people are able to obtain from statutory authorities such as the Department of Employment (DE) vital equipment like lightweight wheelchairs and reading aids to overcome disability in employment, there is no equivalent provision for leisure activity. Consequently, unemployed disabled people are denied access to technical aids unless they buy them themselves or go cap-in-hand to charities. Moreover, although disabled people with jobs are able to use any equipment supplied by the DE for recreational pursuits, this provision can be withdrawn once employment ceases (see Chapter 4).

*Income and Leisure.* Apart from access, which is discussed later, a major source of dissatisfaction among disabled people over leisure must almost certainly stem from their lack of financial resources. People's ability to enjoy recreation is closely related to the amount of money they can spend (Abercrombie and Warde *et al.*, 1988; Parker, 1979; Willis, 1985). As people have become more affluent, their spending on leisure has increased accordingly. Between 1966 and 1976, for example, consumer expenditure of all kinds rose by 21 per cent in real terms (Parker, 1979). In 1989 British households spent almost 16 per cent of their total weekly budget, £35.01, on a range of leisure-based activities and items such as alcohol consumed outside the home, eating out, books, television sets, video recorders, holidays, public entertainment (cinema and theatre admissions etc.) and sports goods, not including clothing (HMSO, 1991).

As we have seen in Chapter 5, the majority of disabled people do not have sufficient income to cover the full cost of impairment-related expenditure, let alone leisure activities. So in general their standard of living is judged to be much lower than that of non-disabled people, and there is a definite relationship between impairment and the inability to buy desired items, particularly among unmarried disabled people below retirement age (Martin and White, 1988).

*Home-Based Leisure Activities.* Although there is an enormous variety of leisure pursuits available, the greater part of most people's leisure activities take place at home. Watching television, visiting or entertaining friends, listening to the radio, listening to music and reading are generally the most popular (HMSO, 1991). The same is also true for disabled people (Barnes, 1990; Brimblecombe *et al.*; 1985; Oliver *et al.*, 1988), although their choice of home-based leisure pursuits is often reduced.

If one considers the most popular recreational activity in Britain, television (HMSO, 1991), although the content of many programmes is implicitly or explicitly 'disablist'\* and therefore offensive to many disabled people (see below), gaining access to them can be a problem for the deaf community. Apart from

programmes specifically for people with hearing impairments and disabled people generally, relatively few mainstream programmes are accessible to the non-hearing population. The proportion of programmes transmitted with subtitles for people with hearing impairments for all channels is currently about 12.5 of total output for pre-recorded programmes and 14.5 per cent if live broadcasts including the news are included (DBC, 1990).

There is also some variation from week to week depending on the type of programme being transmitted. To gain access to this service, people with hearing impairments must have a television equipped to receive Teletext, which is more expensive to buy than an ordinary set. Although the number of subtitled programmes is due to increase gradually over the next few years, it is unlikely to exceed more than 50 per cent of the total output. This is because subtitling is expensive and 50 per cent is the figure which TV companies must reach by 1998 under the Broadcasting Act 1990 (HMSO, 1990a). Finally, subtitled programmes are not always accessible to people with hearing impairments who use English as a second language. Consequently, to make television programmes fully accessible to all members of the non-hearing community there is a need for sign language to be transmitted at the same time as subtitling (RNID, 1990). For the present this is not on the political agenda.

Socialising with friends in a domestic environment is the second most popular leisure activity in Britain (HMSO, 1991), but it is often a problem for disabled people. As we have seen in Chapter 7, the majority of Britain's housing stock is not accessible to many disabled people and their opportunity to be entertained in someone else's home is therefore often out of the question. Moreover, since some disabled people live in houses which are only partly accessible, entertaining friends in their own homes is often difficult, particularly if they want to entertain in private away from other family members (Barnes 1990; Oliver *et al.*, 1988).

Reading is one of the most popular home-based leisure activities. Sixty-five per cent of the population read a daily newspaper, 72 per cent a Sunday newspaper, 3 per cent general magazines, 6 per cent magazines specifically for women and 81 per cent of the 26 per cent of the adult population who use public libraries borrow books (HMSO, 1991). Yet newspapers and magazines are rarely, if ever, published initially in an accessible form for people with visual impairments. Newspapers are not produced in Braille and only a few magazines are available in this medium. Voluntary agencies such as the Talking Newspaper Association will provide taped versions of these publications, but they are usually a summary or digest of the

\* The word 'disablist', while answering the obvious need for an equivalent to 'sexist' and 'racist', has not yet become common parlance like the other two words. This fact in itself has some bearing on our discussion.

original and are delivered weekly (RNIB, 1990a). Hence, users of the service are denied access to the entire publication and can only get it some time after it has been available to the non-disabled population. Such virtual censorship would not be acceptable to the non-disabled population and is unacceptable to many people with visual impairments (Press, 1991).

As for books, new publications are not in accessible forms and if disabled people with visual impairments wish to read them then they must apply to one of the voluntary agencies which provide this service. Examples include the Calibre Tape Library, Monument Tape Library or the Royal National Institute for the Blind's (RNIB) Talking Book service for fiction, or the Central Cassette Library at Peterborough for non-fiction (RNIB, 1990a). Although access to books is not impeded in the same way as for newspapers and magazines, people often have to wait some time to receive the book of their choice because of consumer demand. Many local libraries provide a selection of large print books and some carry taped versions, but these selections are usually extremely limited (Press, 1991). More-over, it is also important to remember that access to libraries is frequently a problem, not only for people with visual impairments, but for disabled people generally (see Chapter 7).

*Leisure Activities outside the Home.* As noted in the last chapter, disabled people's ability to enjoy leisure activities outside their homes is severely restricted because of an inaccessible physical environment, with a lack of accessible transport. and buildings. A succession of studies shows that all leisure and social activities are heavily weighted in favour of car-owners/drivers and those with ready access to the car of their family or a friend (Barnes, 1990; GLAD, 1988; Oliver *et al.*, 1988; Rowe, 1973). In the GLAD study, 58 per cent of the people interviewed used their own, their family's or a friend's car for social activities requiring transport, and only 15 per cent used public transport. Those dependent on specialised transport systems such as local authority transport 'participated in the fewest leisure activities outside the home' (GLAD, 1988, p. 3).

Because car use is so important for leisure and social activity, and because public transport is so difficult for disabled people to use, those who wish to go out but have no car because of the cost or because they cannot drive are forced to rely on family or friends to drive them about. Apart from the obvious 'dilution of independence' which follows, this means that social and leisure activities often have to be arranged around times when drivers are available. This restriction on both spontaneity and freedom of choice is a frequent source of frustration for all concerned (Oliver *et al.*, 1988).

Spontaneity and choice are also severely affected by the inaccessibility of public buildings. Many pubs and restaurants pose major problems for disabled people. Moreover, 'the majority of museums and galleries, cinemas, concert halls and theatres remain inaccessible, at any rate in some respects to wheelchair-users and

to many other people with disabilities' (Carnegie Council Review, 1988, p. 15). The same is true of most football grounds, race courses and other sporting stadia. To use these facilities, wheelchair-users and people with mobility-related impairments are frequently advised to 'phone in advance' for appropriate arrangements to be made (see *Crouch et al.*, 1989; McCart, 1991; Plumb, 1990). But many disabled people choose not to go where they cannot manage by themselves, and therefore tend not to venture into 'unknown territory' but rather to stick to tried and tested areas and places (Oliver *et al.*, 1988).

Transport and physical access are not the only hurdles which disabled people must confront before they can enjoy mainstream leisure pursuits away from home. Not only is there ignorance, but even apprehension is felt toward disabled people by many representatives of the mainstream leisure industry which cannot be explained simply by the problem of access. Moreover, although rarely discussed in print, there is a widely-held belief throughout the entertainment business that the presence of disabled people can discourage non-disabled customers.

At present this problem is made worse because there is no legislation ensuring that places of entertainment are made accessible to all sections of the community. The current safety and fire regulations simply state that 'in a society which values the rights and amenities available to all, fire regulations should not be used to place unnecessary restrictions on the ability of disabled persons, particularly those whose mobility is impaired, to use places of entertainment' (HMSO, 1990b, p. 20). However, these regulations only 'recommend' that licensing authorities 'encourage' the licensee to make suitable arrangements. Hence, local licensing authorities and leisure industry management are free to discriminate as they choose.

Examples can be found throughout the leisure industry. In theatres, for instance, the widely-acclaimed *Access in London: A Guide for Those who Have Problems Getting Around* (1989) shows that although attitudes among theatre staff are changing, discrimination is still detectable. The guide provides clear evidence of practical improvement and the survey team, which included disabled people, was often given a friendly welcome. However, in some places 'positive talk seemed to substitute for material change' and in others the researchers' enquiries were 'not welcomed' (Crouch *et al.*, 1989, p. 118). The guide gives evidence of widespread discrimination by concert hall, theatre and cinema managers. For example, some places do not allow wheelchair-users to visit them if they are not accompanied by an 'able-bodied companion'. Where disabled people are allowed to attend unaccompanied, they are often assigned a non-disabled steward to watch over them in case of emergency. This effectively means that disabled people are denied the opportunity to enjoy themselves without an escort. Indeed, some cinemas refuse to admit wheelchair-users at all (Crouch *et al.*, 1989, pp. 131-2). Similar examples can be found throughout Britain (see Plumb, 1990). Moreover, the management at the country's most popular tourist attraction, Madame Tussaud's in London,

discourage visitors who use wheelchairs at busy times and insist that fire regulations require that no more than three such visitors be allowed in the building at the same time. Wheelchair-users are urged to telephone first 'to be sure of getting in' (Crouch *et al.*, 1989, p. 109).

Institutional discrimination against disabled people is also prevalent throughout the hotel and catering trade. A recent report produced by the English Tourist Board, *Tourism for All* (Baker, 1989) draws attention to some of the relevant issues. Besides focusing on the need for better access to tourist attractions and the development of better travel facilities, it recommends that more hotel rooms be made accessible and calls for the application and extension of the building regulations (Baker, 1989). This report goes into some detail recommending the provision of holidays for low-income groups; many disabled people are unable to go on holiday because of lack of money (Martin, White and Meltzer, 1989). It points out that Britain now lags behind the rest of Europe in this and suggests that Government should cease to regard it as some kind of undeserved charity but rather as a fundamental right to be enjoyed by all. It also comments that successive governments have displayed an 'extraordinary meanness' in stopping the benefits of people on holiday, on the basis that they are not available for work during this time (Baker, 1989).

The report does not discuss in any detail attitudes toward disabled people within the hotel trade. One writer has recently commented that this is a serious omission. 'Much of it is born out of ignorance, and ignorance breeds fear and enmity. It is not so very long ago that someone said to me "You don't want to have those people in your hotel"' (Dillon, 1990, p.20).

Discrimination against disabled people within the leisure industry is sometimes quite blatant. It is not uncommon for them to be refused entry to places of entertainment simply because they have an impairment. The usual rationalisation is that their presence prevents non-disabled people from enjoying themselves. In 1990 a disabled skittles team was banned from a local pub because its members were perceived as 'mentally handicapped'. The landlord justified the decision on the grounds that he had received complaints from other customers and was worried about 'the level of supervision' (Harper, 1990, p. 14).

Some sections of the leisure industry claim that they are aware of these problems and are doing something about them, but more often than not this is mere rhetoric. For example, the Arts Council publicly acknowledged the extent of discrimination within the leisure industry in 1985 with the publication of the Carnegie Council's first report, *Arts and Disabled People*. This report made a number of specific recommendations for changes to existing Arts Council policy, including the recommendation that grant aid to arts organisations be made conditional on improvements for disabled people (Carnegie United Kingdom Trust, 1985). A

consultation paper followed, entitled *Access to the Arts*, and *A Code of Good Practice on Arts and Disability* was issued to all organisations receiving Arts Council grants. The *Code of Good Practice* obliges arts organisations not to discriminate in employment, to improve the accessibility of venues and to seek the active involvement of disabled people in future developments. The Council also set up an Arts and Disability Monitoring Committee consisting mainly of disabled people. Its main role is to advise on initiatives to improve the participation of disabled people in the arts (Carnegie Council Review, 1988).

The subsequent Carnegie Council Review *After Attenborough*, published in 1988, found that the main recommendations made by the first report were not being implemented and that, as a result, little progress had been made toward improved opportunities in the arts. In particular, very few recipients of Arts Council funds had made efforts toward improving access (Carnegie Council Review, 1988). In the same year the Arts Council was severely criticised by members of its own Arts and Disability Monitoring Committee for applying for an exemption certificate under the employment quota scheme, which meant that the Council would not be liable to prosecution for failing to meet the minimum of 3 per cent disabled staff (see Chapter 4). Also, the Council's headquarters in Piccadilly was inaccessible to disabled people (*Same Difference*, 1990b). Subsequent developments have included the relocation of the Arts Council's head office in new premises which are at the time of writing (February 1991) being made accessible, at least as far as possible since the new building is listed (see Chapter 7), and a new initiative on recruitment. However, the Council does not apparently anticipate meeting the 3 per cent quota in the foreseeable future because it has reapplied for an exemption permit from the Department of Employment (Harp, 1991). It is clear that if institutional discrimination against disabled people throughout the mainstream leisure industry is to disappear, then fine words are simply not enough.

*Segregated Leisure Activities.* There are a number of segregated recreational and social activities specifically for disabled and elderly people. These include day centres, adult training centres (ATCs), also known as 'social education centres', and social clubs (Martin, White and Meltzer, 1989).

The National Survey of Day Services (Carter, 1981) estimated that during the mid-1970s there were 2,600 day centres and ATCs of one form or another operating each week up and down the country. The number has since increased markedly, although it is not possible to obtain an accurate picture of this expansion because statistics are not collated in a coherent form by the various service-providing agencies (Tester, 1989). Day services are provided by local authorities and a variety of voluntary organisations for disabled and elderly people; agencies providing services specifically for elderly people 'tends to mean disabled elderly people' (Martin, White and Meltzer, 1989, p.62).



The OPCS surveys found that in the mid-1980s 5 per cent of all disabled adults attended day centres or ATCs. However, use of these facilities varies with age and severity of impairment. Indeed, attendance at all segregated facilities is highest among people with high levels of impairment and among the younger age-groups. Eight per cent of disabled adults aged under fifty attend day units, compared with 2 per cent aged fifty to sixty-four, 4 per cent aged sixty-five to seventy-four and 7 per cent aged 75 or over (Martin, White and Meltzer, 1989, pp. 62-3).

Since day centre attendance is not compulsory and is often regarded as one of the least desirable options for disabled people (HCIL, 1990; Oliver, 1983), particularly for those below retirement age (Barnes, 1990; Carter, 1981; Jowett, 1982; Kent *et al.*, 1984), it is important to note that many people are introduced to the idea of day centre use by staff and careers officers at special schools and colleges as an alternative to employment (see Chapter 3). Some younger disabled people look to day centres to escape the debilitating social isolation which often accompanies impairment (see below), and others are directed into them by medical professionals to assist in their 'rehabilitation' (Barnes, 1990; Carter, 1981).

Most day centres are outside city centres in suburbs and four out of every ten are in the grounds of residential institutions, usually hospitals or residential homes (Carter, 1981). The buildings normally used are one of two types: either large gymnasium-like structures or the modern purpose-built variety, both of which tend to make them stand out from the rest of the community (Barnes, 1990; Durrant, 1983). Many also have their own highly distinctive transport system which ferries disabled people from their own homes to the day centre and back again at night. Added to the fact that most day services cater exclusively for overtly disadvantaged minorities, this lends weight to the claim that they are highly segregative (Barnes, 1990; Oliver, 1983).

However, it may be argued that day centres provide a range of activities and services, both social and educative, which fulfil users' social needs and give them a level of autonomy and independence unavailable in the community at large. But mostly these facilities cannot give disabled people the confidence and skills to achieve these goals outside the centres. This is because most units are run by able-bodied people for disabled people, are inherently paternalistic and/or operate under predominantly voluntary principles. Thus users are generally freed of all obligations and responsibilities while in the centres. Elsewhere in society this is a situation normally reserved for either very young or very old people (see Barnes, 1990).

Moreover, because of the extent of institutional discrimination against disabled people in society generally, many users' experience of life outside the centres is limited to the family home. Thus partial institutionalisation, with users coming to accept that life outside their homes is limited and should preferably be lived within

an institutional setting, is likely to result. This has particular significance for disabled day centre users who often rely on ageing family members for personal assistance needs: partial institutionalisation is likely to lead to institutionalisation proper, with users coming to accept that for disabled people life inside an institution is both acceptable and inevitable (Barnes, 1990).

Day centres therefore go against the idea of an integrated society although they are presented by the carers lobby and many welfare professionals as an essential ingredient of the 'community care' programme. They serve as a segregated alternative to mainstream social and recreational facilities and so perpetuate dependence rather than alleviating it. Indeed many people use day centres as their only way of gaining access to the essential support services on which they depend (see Chapter 6). They are a significant drain on economic and human resources which could be put to far better use elsewhere (HCIL 1990).

Similar criticisms apply to special clubs for disabled people. According to the OPCS survey 6 per cent of disabled adults under fifty, 3 per cent of those aged between fifty and sixty-four, 3 per cent of those between sixty-five and seventy-four, and 2 per cent of those aged seventy-five and over use these clubs (Martin, White and Meltzer, 1989, p. 63). However, the OPCS researchers did not distinguish between segregated clubs for disabled people and voluntary associations of disabled people, and thus it is difficult to ascertain respective attendance figures. Consequently the OPCS figures should be treated with caution. We are concerned here with clubs for disabled people, not voluntary associations of disabled people, which are discussed in the following chapter.

Special clubs for disabled people are, like day centres, run by a variety of agencies including local authorities and voluntary organisations. Some special schools also run this type of club, but in general clubs linked to special schools differ from those in mainstream schools by being much more subject to adult control, in both membership and attendance (Anderson and Clarke, 1982). They are also often exclusive to people connected with the school in some way, and so are even more segregative than other clubs for disabled people. In addition, many are open only in term-time, so their users who depend on them for social contacts tend to be stuck for something to do in the holidays (Anderson and Clarke, 1982).

Many social clubs for disabled people are run by local authority social service departments and are often linked to day centres and other municipal facilities. Transport is usually provided, and users can be transported to and from the club in specially adapted local authority vehicles. These clubs are often used in the evening by the same people who visit the day centres during the day (Barnes, 1990). There is also a wide variety of national and local organisations for disabled people with specific leisure interests. Two examples are Sports for Young Disabled Women, which organises climbing and other outdoor activities, and Riding for the

Disabled, which arranges horse riding sessions for disabled people generally (*Forum*, 1990). Although such clubs fulfil a very real social need, their existence does little to break down the barriers between disabled and non-disabled people in the leisure industry as a whole. Indeed, because they provide an alternative to mainstream recreation they might be said to perpetuate these divisions. Moreover, as with other segregated facilities, many disabled people are directed toward these clubs by social workers and other professionals (Barnes, 1990).

There is one national organisation which claims to bring together the disabled and non-disabled sections of the community specifically for leisure and social activity. It runs a national network of so-called Physically Handicapped and Able-Bodied (PHAB) clubs. There is relatively little empirical data on the activities of these clubs nationally, but one recent study suggests that some of them are organised in conjunction with special schools and local authorities and that, despite their name, most members are disabled people. The only non-disabled people involved are helpers or relatives of users. Moreover, the age-span of members ranges from small disabled children to elderly disabled people and the clubs close at 9.30 p.m., far earlier than most social clubs used by the general public. Finally, the study also shows that many of the disabled people using these facilities do so because they have access to nothing else (Barnes, 1990).

Social Relations and Disabled People. From studies of the experience of disability it appears that in general disabled people express only marginal dissatisfaction with their social lives. Those with acquired impairments often find that satisfaction in this area only comes after some time, with a change in expectations and the development of new interests (Morris, 1989, Oliver *et al.*, 1988). In general, dissatisfaction is greatest among the younger people (Martin, White and Meltzer, 1989), because young people generally are far more concerned with peer group relationships than family ones and rely more on activities outside the home for social contacts (McRobbie, 1989). Older disabled people tend to be less dissatisfied with their social contacts, which are usually well established and centre around family and neighbours rather than outside activities such as pubs or clubs. An important fact is that people who acquire impairments often find that the number of their non-disabled friends diminishes after the onset of disability (Barnes, 1990; Morris, 1989, Oliver *et al.*, 1988).

Although a number of studies report high levels of social isolation among young disabled people (see for example Barnes, 1990; Thomas *et al.*, 1989), there are relatively few which contrast their social lives with those of their non-disabled peers. Two which did are Anderson and Clarke's *Disability and Adolescence* (1982) and Brimblecombe's *The Needs of Handicapped Young Adults* (1985). Both studies found the social lives of disabled young people and their non-disabled equivalents to be significantly different.

Anderson and Clarke compared the leisure and social activities of thirty-three non-disabled young people and 119 young disabled people aged between 14 and 18. Sixty-three of the latter were or had been in mainstream schools and the rest in special education. They found that most young people with impairments spent more time engaged in solitary leisure activities such as watching television or listening to music than their non-disabled peers. One-third said they never saw friends outside school, compared to only 10 per cent of the non-disabled young people. They were also more likely to go out with siblings or parents than were the latter. Nearly 75 per cent of the sample with impairments normally went out with one or more members of their family, while the non-disabled young people nearly always went out with their peers. The researchers concluded that the level of social contact the young people had was closely linked to their difficulties with mobility. Those who had the most problems in getting about were also more isolated socially (Anderson and Clarke, 1982). Similar findings have been recorded by other studies of the social lives of disabled people generally (Martin, White and Meltzer 1989; Oliver *et al.*, 1988; Thomas *et al.*, 1989).

Anderson and Clarke also reported that social isolation was higher among disabled young people who attended special schools, of whom 60 per cent never socialised with friends outside school, over half had never been to a friend's home, and only a quarter had made such a visit in the previous month. The majority of this group only had friends who were themselves young people with impairments. Consequently on both sides of the relationship there were difficulties in making social contact. As noted in Chapter 3, these problems are compounded because special schools generally have a larger catchment area than mainstream schools, and therefore pupils attending them often live a long way from each other. By contrast, young people, with and without impairments, attending mainstream schools had friends living within walking or wheeling distance from home (Anderson and Clarke, 1982).

The Brimblecombe analysis compared the lifestyles of 385 disabled young adults aged 16-25 with those of their non-disabled equivalents. The study demonstrated that in this particular age- group non-disabled people are three times more likely to be living independently from their parents and to be employed and married than their disabled contemporaries, among whom they also found social isolation to be widespread. Three times more disabled than non-disabled people never went out socially in an average week, and almost double the number of cases, 52 per cent as opposed to 28 per cent, went out on two days or less. Only 3 per cent of the non-disabled young people never went out with friends. The disabled young adults were less likely to be involved in 'normal' social activities, such as going to the pub, generally associated with people in this age-group. As a result many felt there was a 'shortfall' in their social lives. When compared to the non-disabled people interviewed, twice as many of the disabled people said that they often felt 'lonely,

miserable or that life was not worth living, three times as many of them were not able to say they often felt happy' (Brimblecombe *et al.*, 1985, p. 63).

Apart from the problems of gaining access to mainstream leisure activities, there is a number of reasons why establishing and maintaining social relationships is more difficult for disabled than for non-disabled people. Those who need personal assistants (PAs) are at a particular disadvantage because most do not have complete control over them. Going out to visit friends, for example, needs careful planning. Consequently, as with leisure activities, spontaneity and choice are greatly reduced. People who are forced to rely on friends and relatives for such services find that this reliance can be a big constraint on an active social life (Oliver *et al.*, 1988), as well as causing tension between them and those acting as unpaid PAs (HCIL, 1990).

The importance of employment for social contact is well known (Fagin and Little, 1984), particularly for older people (Abercrombie and Warde *et al.*, 1988). Moreover, studies of the experience of disability show that disabled people ill work are more satisfied with their social life than those without work (Morris, 1989; Oliver *et al.*, 1988). Indeed, one of the main reasons many disabled people want to work is to gain access to a 'normal' pattern of social activity (Barnes, 1990), even though when they work they may not have time to meet friends outside working hours (Oliver *et al.*, 1988).

Studies of the social experiences of disabled people also suggest that many see their effect on others as limiting their social lives (Barnes, 1990; Martin, White and Meltzer, 1989; Oliver *et al.*, 1988). The Oliver study reported that a few individuals believed they were a burden to their friends, which held them back from 'normal activities, and from being able to engage in social activities in a carefree and spontaneous manner' (Oliver *et al.*, 1988, p.63). Some disabled people have reported that while friends are happy to see them in their own homes they are clearly unhappy to be out with them in public. The public image of disability, which disabled people have to come to terms with every day of their lives, is sometimes said to be 'hard for friends to confront' (Morris, 1989, p. 105).

A significant aspect of social life for many disabled people, which is also directly affected by public perceptions of disability, is that of personal and, particularly, sexual relationships. This vital area of life is one which many disabled people find hedged around with numerous restrictions, and this is naturally a cause of great concern (Barnes, 1990; Hurst, 1984; Morris, 1989) and dissatisfaction (Oliver *et al.*, 1988).

Although the lack of spontaneity and choice in leisure activity generally does much to inhibit disabled people's ability to participate in this form of social interaction, cultural factors are significant here. Although economic and environmental factors

make initial encounters more problematic for disabled people than for non-disabled people, many disabled individuals see themselves as an unattractive proposition for potential sexual partners. The institutionalised animosity against their having children (see Chapter 2), society's obsession with the 'body beautiful' (Morris, 1989) and the widespread belief that sexual activity is limited to specific actions, namely completed coitus and multiple orgasm (a view only now being seriously questioned because of the AIDS epidemic) make these relationships particularly difficult for many disabled people. In short, they are widely perceived as 'sexually dead' (Hooper, 1990). This affects their ability to establish not only short-term sexual relationships but long-term ones as well (Barnes, 1990; Oliver *et al.*, 1988; Morris, 1989).

### *The Media*

Much of the above can be attributed to the persistence of traditional misconceptions about disability and disabled people. Indeed, 'the pre-conceived attitudes towards, assumptions about and expectations of disabled people are one of the biggest barriers to equal opportunities' (Reiser and Mason, 1990, p.98). As we saw in Chapter 2, stereotyped assumptions about disabled people are based on superstitions, myths and beliefs inherited from earlier times. They are inherent to our culture, and part of the reason why they persist is that they are continually reproduced through television, radio, films, advertising, books and both local and national newspapers.

The way disability-related issues are presented in the media not only offends many disabled people but is also a major barrier to integration. Just as racist or sexist attitudes, whether explicit or implicit, are acquired through the 'normal' learning process, so there is evidence that 'disablism' is learned in this way too. On the basis of a photograph study, children have been found not to react badly to 'abnormal' looks until they are at least eleven years old, and thus 'discrimination against funny-looking people' is not some innate result of evolutionary forces, but is a socially learned phenomenon (*New Society*, 1985).

While the communications media alone cannot be held responsible for this, their impact cannot be overlooked. In 1988/9, for example, 98 per cent of British households had a television set and between 1985 and 1989 British people spent an average of 24.75 hours a week watching it and 9.75 hours listening to the radio. Nearly 14 million households have at least 1 video recorder and the British Videograph Association estimated that in 1989 378 million people rented videotapes while video sales were in the region of 38 million (HMSO, 1991). Although there is some dispute over the level of influence of the mass media on our perceptions of society, there are few who argue that it does not have any (see for example Broadcasting Standards Council, 1989). Moreover, in 1977 Biklen and Bogdana identified ten commonly recurring negative stereotypes of disabled

people in the mass media. These included the disabled person as pitiable and pathetic, as an object of curiosity or violence, as sinister or evil, as the super cripple, as laughable, as her/his own worst enemy, as a burden, as non-sexual and as being unable to participate in daily life (Biklen and Bogdana, 1977). These stereo- types are particularly evident on television, in the newspapers and in the advertising industry.

*Television.* Although misrepresentation of disability is prevalent throughout the media as a whole, it is particularly so on British television. Research by the Broadcasting Research Unit (BRU) shows that although disabled people are under represented on television, when they are depicted it is usually within the context of one of the above stereotypes (BRU, 1990).

The BRU researchers analysed the peak-time television programmes broadcast by all four British television channels over a six- week period during 1988. They found that disabled people appeared in only 16 per cent of all the factual or current affairs programmes analysed. This proportion rose to 24 per cent when news programmes were included. The most common feature of factual reporting on disabled people concerned medical treatment. This was the theme in 16 per cent of such broadcasts analysed. In 11 per cent the focus was on the special achievements of the disabled person and in 9 per cent on the cure for the particular impairment displayed. The emphasis on medical treatment was even greater -22 per cent -when news programmes alone were examined. Not one of the forty-four game shows observed contained a disabled person (BRU, 1990). The general absence of disabled people from mainstream television programmes, along with the traditional association between disability and medicine, reinforces the idea that they are incapable of participating fully in everyday life, while at the same time feeding the notion that they should be shut away and segregated (Reiser and Mason, 1990).

The BRU study found that disabled people were portrayed in fictional programmes but they represented a mere 0.5 per cent of all the characters portrayed. When only speaking characters are considered the percentage rises to 1.4. This contrasts strongly with the number of disabled people in the population as a whole, which according to the OPCS survey stands at 14 per cent (Martin, Meltzer and Elliot, 1988). Only 8 per cent of soap opera episodes and 9 per cent of situation comedies contained someone with an impairment. The BRU researchers did not analyse the way in which disabled people are perceived as objects of humour on British television. The widespread practice of ridiculing people with impairments finds expression in cartoon characters such as Mr Magoo, an elderly man with a visual impairment which causes him much misfortune, as well as the comedy routines of a host of contemporary television comedians (Reiser and Mason, 1990). Also, the portrayal of disabled people on British television is not representative of the disabled population as a whole. For example, 65 per cent of the disabled people on television are male, 95 per cent are white and over 50 per cent are aged 25-40

(BRU, 1990). In reality, the majority of disabled people are women, more than 5 per cent are not white and the likelihood of impairment increases with age (see BRU 1990; Martin, Meltzer and Elliot, 1988).

The genre most likely to include disabled characters on British television is that of crime and thriller films. In contrast to drama programmes, feature films are more than twice as likely to include disabled people. Of 134 feature films examined, seventy-two proved to contain disabled characters, of whom fifty-three were in major or minor speaking parts, and twenty-five made the circumstances of disability an important issue. In more than half of the latter, thirteen films, it was judged to be 'sentimental'. In only eight was the issue of prejudice and discrimination raised (BRU, 1990).

The most commonly used stereotypes are the disabled person as a criminal, as barely human and as powerless and pathetic. Disabled people appeared as criminals in six of the seventy-two films studied, as subhuman in five and as pathetic in seven. Disabled characters are also brought into films 'to enhance the atmosphere of a film when it needs to be one of deprivation, mystery or menace'. In short, they are introduced not because they are ordinary and like others but to suggest precisely the opposite, 'that they are not ordinary people' (BRU, 1990, unpagged).

When the portrayal of disabled characters is compared and contrasted with that of able-bodied characters, it is 'immediately' apparent that the former are of lower status. They are less likely to be in white-collar or professional employment and more likely to be unemployed. The attitudes displayed toward disabled characters are also markedly different from those toward non-disabled characters. Disabled characters are much more likely to evoke sympathy, pity, sadness, fear or a patronising attitude (BRU, 1990). Non-disabled characters are more likely to evoke respect or attraction. As to the relationships portrayed, disabled characters are far less likely to be involved in sexual relationships with other characters and more likely to be loners, and indeed are usually presented as incapable of sexual activity. Battye (1966) referred to this as 'the Chatterley syndrome' following D. H. Lawrence's novel *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, which recounts a sexual liaison between a member of the landed gentry and a lowly gamekeeper. Lady Chatterley takes an able-bodied lover mainly because her husband acquired his impairment from war injuries and is therefore, as perceived by Lawrence, sexually inactive (Battye, 1966).

In addition, disabled characters are portrayed as difficult to get on with, moody and introverted; they are their 'own worst enemy'. They are also far more likely than non-disabled characters to be the victims of violence and to be dead by the end of the programme, reinforcing the view that disabled people are helpless and dependent (Reiser and Mason, 1990). Most important, 'seldom was any suggestion



made in these films that society, social arrangements or social attitudes and values had any bearing upon the fate of these people' (BRU, 1990, unpagged).

The BRU research also showed that, where dramatic fiction is concerned, American programmes are more likely than their British equivalents to portray disabled people as 'sociable, extrovert, moral and non-aggressive and less likely to be dependent, sad, moody or difficult to get on with'. Additionally, the attitudes evoked by the American disabled characters display more respect and less aggression than in the British productions. Disabled people in American programmes are much more likely to have an emotional relationship (62 per cent) than were similar characters in British productions (26 per cent) and those in British productions are more likely to have no relationship at all (23 per cent as opposed to 12 per cent) (BRU, 1990).

Surprisingly, around the end of the 1980s this misrepresentation of disability and disabled people on television was acknowledged officially. For example, the Government-appointed Broadcasting Standards Council stated in its Code of Practice that there is a need for programmes and advertising (see below) which give a 'fair reflection of the parts played in the everyday life of the nation by disabled people' (Broadcasting Standards Council, 1989, p. 45). This would mean, first, a shift away from the presentation of disabled people in factual programmes in a way which gives non-disabled viewers 'a sense of the superiority of their condition, or the emotional enjoyment of their generous sympathy', and, secondly, a concerted effort by writers and producers to include more disabled characters, preferably played by disabled actors, in fictional programmes. Also, these characters should be part of 'the drama of life' and not used 'in either a sinister or a sentimental fashion' (BRU, 1990, unpagged). Whether the television companies will be prepared to do this remains to be seen.

*Newspapers.* The British press can be separated into at least two distinct groups, namely the 'quality' broadsheets such as *The Times* and the tabloids like the *Sun* and the *Daily Mirror*. While the first group has a reputation for accurate in-depth reporting, the latter is often short on news but high on sensationalism. The treatment of disabled people often brings out the worst in the newspapers 'not only from the tabloids, but also from the so-called "quality press" as well' (*Same Difference*, 1990c, p. 3).

The use of 'disablist' language is common in the British press. For example, terms like 'the disabled' and 'the handicapped' still often appear despite campaigns to raise the awareness of journalists. The term 'cripple' is also freely used, particularly in stories of the 'brave cripple' variety where disability is used in a sentimental and pitiful guise. Reports in all sections of the press generally misrepresent the experience of disability mainly because they are printed for their sensation value rather than their accuracy. Common examples include items about the sexual

impotence of recently disabled men, disabled individuals who 'bravely manage' to achieve despite their 'handicap', and the celebrity who understands the 'plight' of disabled people, or who is willing to make unprecedented personal sacrifices to help a disabled friend or a particular group of disabled people (*Same Difference*, 1990c). It is also common for journalists to heap excessive praise on disabled individuals, particularly children, for carrying out a perfectly normal act (Reiser and Mason, 1990).

Although some sections of the British press are prepared to sink lower than others in their portrayal of disabled people, abuses of language and image are common throughout the whole range of newspapers. Disabled people are seen as legitimate 'fodder' by a sensation-hungry press eager for an easy story and unwilling to consider the harm that may be done to the public image of disabled people' (*Same Difference*, 1990c, p.4).

However, in 1990 the editors of the major national newspapers agreed on a voluntary Code of Practice on representation, to ensure that people are 'fairly represented' in the press and not exploited for their news potential. This is widely regarded as little more than a public relations exercise. A further development following the creation of the Code has been the appointment to all the major newspapers of a 'readers' representative' or Ombudsman to deal with complaints and exert pressure for change when readers point out problems, but offensive material has to be actually published before action can be taken. The umbrella organisation for dealing with complaints about the British press is the Press Complaints Commission, which has hitherto been notoriously slow to deal with complaints and appeared reluctant to exercise its limited powers (*Same Difference*, 1990c).

*The Advertising Industry.* In general, there are two ways in which the advertising industry contributes to the discriminatory process. First, disabled people are excluded and sometimes deliberately ignored by advertising agencies (Levy, 1990). Secondly, some advertisers, notably charities, present a particularly distorted view of disability and disabled people in order to achieve their stated aims (Campbell, 1990a). Either way, disabled people are the losers.

As for the exclusion of disabled people from mainstream advertising, apart from concealing disability and disabled people from the community as a whole, this is a clear denial of the role of disabled people as consumers. Although this could be understandable on the grounds that on the whole disabled people have less spending power than the rest of society, they still buy things no matter how little money they have. It is a situation which many disabled people find offensive (Levy, 1990).

The omission of disabled people from mainstream advertising campaigns is not limited to the private sector. For example, the Government, fast becoming one of Britain's biggest advertisers, with its programme having reached £88 million, is one of the worst offenders in this respect. A Government spokesman recently stated that the Department of Social Security's (DSS) own commercials do not address disabled people or include them as actors. Moreover, even if they were included, in the present circumstances they would have no influence on how they are portrayed (Levy, 1990)

On the few occasions when aspects of disability are used in mainstream advertisements, they are usually of a kind that deeply offends disabled people. A notable example was an 'epilepsy' advertisement for Yorkshire Television devised and created by the advertising agency Young and Rubican. It consisted of a picture of wavy lines accompanied by the caption 'Some people will have a fit when they see this'. It was withdrawn only after a number of complaints by viewers to the Advertising Standards Authority (Levy, 1990). While this might be seen as a vindication of the present system of regulation, the damage had already been done before the advertisement was removed. Considering the widespread ignorance surrounding epilepsy and the discrimination experienced by people who have this type of impairment (see Sutherland, 1981), such a situation should have been avoided in the first place.

The portrayal of disabled people in charity advertising is a major bone of contention for many disabled people and their organisations. Indeed, the depth of feeling against the cynical exploitation of stereotypes by charities has resulted in the formation of the Campaign to Stop Patronage, an organisation of disabled people dedicated to the abolition of this particular form of discrimination. It gained widespread publicity after a well-attended demonstration against the 1990 Telethon, an annual television event in which charities appeal for public funds on behalf of disabled people and other disadvantaged groups (*Disability Now*, 1990). The use of disablist imagery by charities was not discussed by the BRU research in any great detail because these organisations were not allowed to advertise on television at the time of that study. Since then, however, the situation has changed with the lifting of restrictions on charity advertising on independent television and radio by the Independent Broadcasting Authority in 1989, following Home Office approval.

Reiser and Mason (1990) have noted that the disabled person as pitiable and pathetic is probably the stereotype most commonly used by charities. They point out that for many years one of these organisations allowed their campaign to use the absurd sight of little girls wearing calipers sitting outside shops begging. They also note that although many charities are responsible for public misinformation surrounding disability and disabled people, they receive much of their financial support from Government sources (Reiser and Mason, 1990).

However, although still widely used, the disabled person as pitiable and pathetic is not the only negative image extensively used by charities. Campbell (1990a) has identified three distinct phases in the evolution of disablist imagery as promoted by the more progressive elements in the charity industry. These are the 'philanthropic' phase, the 'courageous and the exceptional' phase and the 'ability not disability' phase. The 'philanthropic' phase refers mainly to the more traditional fund-raising activities of the socially well placed who concerned themselves with the care and protection of the 'poor unfortunates'. Disabled people were presented as objects of pity who were rarely seen since most of them were shut away in institutions (Campbell, 1990a).

As many of these establishments began to close during the 1970s, causing disabled people to become more visible in the community, some of the more 'enlightened' charities adopted a different approach. They focused on the 'courage and bravery' of individual 'super-cripples' in their efforts to enlist public support for their activities. The majority of 'ordinary' disabled people were ignored and remained as socially isolated as ever (Campbell, 1990a). However, the growing strength of the disability movement in the 1980s precipitated a further shift in these organisations' exploitation of disabled people. Now, after largely superficial consultations with specific representatives of the disabled community, the 'negative' elements of disability, namely individual impairments, are to be ignored and the more 'positive' aspects emphasised and celebrated, in particular the 'normal' or 'able-bodied' abilities of individual disabled people (Campbell, 1990a).

While this development might be seen as something of an improvement on earlier disabling imagery, it will do relatively little to remove institutional discrimination against disabled people. There is a number of reasons for this. First, the emphasis on 'ability not disability' is an attempt to suppress difference; it is a denial of the status of the disabled person and disabled culture. Secondly, the new 'positive images' of disabled people fail to reflect the racial, sexual and cultural divisions within the disabled community as a whole. In the current economic and social climate, disabled people do not fit neatly into able-bodied perceptions of normality (Campbell, 1990a).

Thirdly, the use of the concept 'normality' tends to obscure the need for change. Logic dictates that if disabled people are perceived as 'normal', then there is little need for the introduction of policies to facilitate their integration into 'normal' society. Fourthly, there is an inherent contradiction in the assertion that disabled people are basically 'normal' but at the same time have to get others, notably non-disabled people, to beg on their behalf for the basic necessities of life. This makes the claim to normality untenable because 'normal' people are rarely dependent for their livelihood on the benevolence of others. Finally, and most important, the focus of this 'new' approach remains squarely on disabled people rather than on the

'disabling society in which we all live' (Campbell, 1990a, unpagged). Consequently this shift in emphasis can be seen as little more than a cynical marketing exercise by charities to conceal the fact that they themselves are a fundamental part of the disabling process.

The main problem with these and other media images of disabled people is that they have been devised and produced by non-disabled people. Indeed, it is only very recently that disabled people have had any say in how they are presented on television or in the press. To rectify this the British Council of Organizations of Disabled People (BCODP) is working on the production of a code of ethics to enable advertisers and others in the media industry to avoid disablist imagery (BCODP, 1991). In addition, groups of disabled people have produced two examples of advertisements for television which present a more positive image of disabled people; both focused on the need for equal rights for disabled people and both were featured on the BBC's *Comic Relief* programme on 15 March 1991.

*Reducing Discrimination in the Media.* It is clear that if disablist imagery in the media is to be reduced then major changes are needed. Apart from the developments mentioned, representatives of the disability movement have suggested a number of ways this might be achieved. First, there should be heightened involvement of all personnel throughout the media, including broadcasting companies, newspapers and advertising agencies, in comprehensive disability awareness courses designed and presented by disabled people. This is particularly important for those who are actually responsible for programme production, newspaper content and major advertising campaigns (Campbell, 1990b).

Secondly, there should be a greater effort to recruit and train more disabled people to work in the media industry. Corporate awareness of disability-related issues is likely to be less of a problem if disabled people are integrated at all levels into media organisations. A few tentative moves in this direction have been made by the main television companies, but in the media generally there is still a long way to go. Channel 4 has set up a media training course for disabled people at the North East Media Centre in Gateshead (Davies, 1990) and the BBC has a trainee assistant producer scheme for its programme *One in Four* (Campbell, 1990b).

Thirdly, there is a need for an overriding framework or policy statement for both the broadcasting and print media, as well as the advertising industry. Such a document should be drawn up by a representative group of disabled people working in conjunction with representatives from each of the areas concerned, namely, the Broadcasting Standards Council, the Press Council and the Advertising Standards Council. These bodies would then take the role of monitoring committees to monitor output. If these committees are to be

'empowering' and not simply 'tokenistic' (Campbell, 1990b), they would also need to be given authority to impose sanctions on those who disregard the agreed policy.

This authority must come from the Government. It is notable that some of the countries which have anti-discrimination legislation also have strict guide-lines for the presentation of disability in the media. In Ontario, Canada, there are stringent regulations for the portrayal of disabled people on television which stipulate that they should be integrated into mainstream programmes and advertisements, and not simply used only when a specific disabled person is needed (Government of Ontario Communications, 1989). Given the prevalence of disablist imagery in the British media, particularly when compared to some other countries, and the extent of institutional discrimination against disabled people throughout British society, similar measures must surely be needed in Britain too.

### *Conclusion*

As we have seen in this chapter, disabled people's opportunities for participating in leisure activities and establishing 'normal' social relationships are much inferior to those of non-disabled people. Although there is some variation in the amount of leisure time available to different sections of the community, disabled people, particularly those dependent on personal and domestic services, have less than their non-disabled equivalents. At the same time those who have the most leisure generally enjoy it least.

There are several reasons for this. Because of the centrality of work to our culture, most unemployed people find it difficult to fill their time; this is true particularly of disabled people because some of the technical aids on which many depend are only provided for those with jobs. An important but related factor is disabled people's lack of financial resources; this applies to those with and without jobs because they all tend to have less disposable income than their non-disabled contemporaries. This is especially significant when it is remembered that over the last few years the link between people's ability to enjoy recreation and the amount of money they have to spend has become of ever-greater importance. It is also evident that the choice of leisure activities available to disabled people, both inside and outside the home, is less than that available to the general population. Among home-based leisure activities, examples include the absence of television programmes accessible to the deaf community and the lack of reading materials for people with visual impairments. Outside the home an inaccessible physical environment is a major barrier to leisure activities. Transport and access difficulties cannot be over-emphasised here, because both contribute so greatly to disabled people's dependence on others for access to leisure. This reliance means that spontaneity and choice are further reduced.

Although physical access to mainstream recreational facilities is itself a major problem for disabled people, it is suggested that there is also a degree of antagonism toward them among staff who work in the entertainment industry. This finds expression in such ways as the interpretation of fire regulations by local licensing authorities and entertainment managers, who implicitly or explicitly dissuade disabled people from using mainstream leisure venues, the reluctance of hotel and catering personnel to make their premises accessible to disabled customers, and occasional overt expressions of prejudice by leisure industry workers. Institutional discrimination against disabled people within the leisure industry has been acknowledged in official circles for some time, but a number of voluntary measures that have developed to combat it are so far largely ineffective. In addition, there are segregated social and recreational activities specifically for elderly and disabled people, which provide relief from the social isolation of some sections of the disabled community, but these cannot be considered an acceptable substitute for accessible mainstream facilities. However, there is plentiful evidence that use of these organisations induces rather than diminishes dependence, and that their very existence acts as a barrier to facilities that are provided for the general public.

This situation inevitably affects the social lives of disabled people, who generally experience a reduction in social contacts after the onset of impairment. Social isolation is highest among younger people, who generally rely far more on external sources for social contacts than their older counterparts. Hence, institutional discrimination in the leisure industry has marginally more impact on younger disabled individuals. Overall, however, public perceptions of disability add to the difficulties all disabled people find when making social contacts, especially in personal and sexual relationships. Cultural factors are important here. Much of the responsibility for the persistence of disablist imagery clearly lies with the media, notably television, newspapers and the advertising industry, especially in charity advertising. On the whole the British media present a distorted view of disabled people to the general public, which not only undervalues their role in society but keeps alive the ancient prejudices and fears which surround impairment. The practices of television and the advertising industry in Britain appear to be less enlightened than those in other countries. Once again, those in authority are aware of the true state of affairs and have made commitments to do something about it, but rhetoric has outstripped results. The initiative from the disability movement might go some way to resolve this problem but to be effective it needs Government support.