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CHAPTER 7

The Dialectics of Disability: a social model for the 21st Century?

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Introduction

This chapter will argue that the social model of disability has been a useful political tool for the mobilisation of a movement. It is, however, suggested that the social model is inadequate and that, unless it is modified, political action will continue to be based on an incomplete picture of disability. Central to this argument is the social model's rejection of experience. This runs the danger of continuing to exclude the experiences of various groups such as women, older people and people from different ethnic groupings.

The chapter starts by briefly exploring the social model as a concept and as an ideology/practice. It then moves on to explore the social model in research. The final section presents ideas towards a new political construction of disability based on the ideas of the German philosopher Axel Honneth.

The concept and ideology of the social model

The social model of disability has been highly influential in the development of disability politics and disability theory in the UK. Its effect has been powerful in both the actions of and the underlying philosophy of organisations of disabled people and in academic circles. Indeed, one

writer has gone so far as to proclaim it as ‘the big idea’ of the British disability movement (Hasler 1993). The social model was developed in the 1970’s by disabled activists from UPIAS. The core definition of the British social model comes in the document, *Fundamental Principles of Disability*, which states:

In our view, it is society which disables physically impaired people. Disability is something imposed on top of our impairments, by the way we are unnecessarily isolated and excluded from full participation in society. Disabled people are therefore an oppressed group in society.... To understand this it is necessary to grasp the distinction between the physical impairment and the social situation, called ‘disability’, of people with such impairment. Thus we define impairment as lacking part of or all of a limb, or having a defective limb, organism or mechanism of the body; and disability as the disadvantage or restriction of activity caused by a contemporary social organisation which takes little or no account of people who have physical impairments and thus excludes them from participation in the mainstream of social activities (UPIAS 1976: 3-4, 14).

The importance of the social model cannot be downplayed. It challenged understandings of disability and sought to dislodge the association of disability with mental or physical incapacity. It contains several key elements. Disabled people are an oppressed social group. It distinguishes between the impairments that people have, and the oppression which they experience. And most importantly, it defines ‘disability’ as the social oppression, not the form of impairment.

The work of Mike Oliver (1983, 1990, 1996) has been

among the most influential in the articulation and academic development of the social model. Under his influence, together with that of other theorists such as Vic Finkelstein (1980, 1981) and Colin Barnes (1991) the social model has become the mainstay of disability studies in the UK. The social model has become what Shakespeare and Watson (2001) have termed 'the litmus test of disability politics': if the work draws on the social model then it is seen as progressive, if it does not it is seen as deficient.

Writings and research in this paradigm focus on the disabling environment - the physical and social barriers which exclude disabled people and render them powerless and voiceless. It presents a materialist analysis. Colin Barnes in his book *Disabled People in Britain and Discrimination* (1991) provided, perhaps, the most comprehensive and cogent account till then of the discrimination faced by disabled people in the UK. He documents the barriers to equal participation and opportunity in education, health service provision, employment, housing, transport, the built environment, leisure and social activities. This work has been replicated in other studies. For example, employment (Hyde 1996), parenthood (Thomas 1997), education (Barton 1995), housing (Harris et al. 1997), and ageing (Zarb and Oliver 1993).

All of this work presents evidence of the systematic discrimination against disabled people. It is clear that disabled people are treated unequally in almost all aspects of their lives. This discrimination spans both the public and private spheres and challenges those who suggest that disability should be seen as an individual experience arising as a consequence of unfortunate personal circumstances; what Oliver terms 'the personal tragedy theory'. Their arguments are very compelling. It closely mirrors early second wave feminist arguments.

Thus when feminism distinguishes sex and gender, disability studies separates impairment and disability, the former physical and the latter social and cultural (Shakespeare and Watson 1995). There is, however, a key distinction to be made between the sex/gender and impairment/disablement analysis. The former does not assume oppression instead gender is a social role or identity.

The relatively straightforward reconstruction of disability, from the individual to the social, has proved to be a powerful tool in the mobilisation of a movement, and in political campaigns for change. At a political level, the social model has enabled the discussion of disability issues within a discourse of rights and citizenship, rather than one of personal inadequacy and professional competence. Put simply, it is no longer the individual that has the 'problem'. Further, this social re-location of disability reflected the numerous attempts to create more enabling environments and for a more concerted political assault on disabling barriers (Barnes 1991). Through the social model, organisations of disabled people and disability studies have challenged the medicalised division of disabled people into professionally controlled impairment groups and offered a new sense of commonality in the shared experience of resisting oppression (Oliver 1990)

There is no doubting the political potency of the social model. The strength of the Disabled People's Movement in the UK is testimony to this. It is also rhetorically appealing but its exposure to extended debate and academic scrutiny has placed it under strain. These critiques have come from both within the disabled people's movement and from outside. Critics have argued that the sense of political commonality often associated with the social model has been contested as an over-simplification of the complexity and diversity in disabled people's lived

experience. Bury (1996) and Pinder (1996) for example, accuse the social model of producing an 'over-socialised' conceptualisation of the processes involved in producing disability. It is, they argue, relativist and reductionist. By reifying disabling environments, the social model runs the danger of presenting only a partial picture of the experiences of disability. This partial picture is as potentially damaging as the focus on 'bodies-to-be rehabilitated' found in the medical model. The social model represents only a 'part of a much more complex multi-layered picture' (Pinder 1996:137). What is required, they suggest, is a working definition of disability linked to impairment.

Attention has also been drawn to the less than effective manner which the social model reconciles dimensions of gender (Morris 1991, 1993), 'race' and ethnicity (Stuart 1992; Vernon 1996), class (Williams 1983), generation (Shakespeare and Watson 2001), identity (Shakespeare 1996), and sexuality (Shakespeare et al. 1996), within or alongside disability. It could be argued, following Shakespeare (1994), that the bracketing of impairment, a central tenet of the ideology of the social model, is the cause of the inability of the social model to provide explanations in many of these examples. It could also be argued that the social model's emphasis on the material at the expense of the relational and consequent rejection of experience has been central to these deficiencies in social model theorising. It is to the place of experience in disability theory that this chapter now turns.

Research and the social model

The advent of the social model of disability has also challenged the methods employed in academic research on disability (Abberley 1987, 1992). Disability theorists have pointed out the divide that exists between those who are researched, 'the subjects', and those who research, the researchers, and the power imbalance that this

creates. Researchers are able to control the design, the implementation, the analysis and the dissemination of their work. Consequently disabled people have little control in the overall research process (Barnes and Mercer 1997). This serves to promote an epistemology that reasserts an essentialist divide between disabled and non-disabled people, between the researched and the researcher. Disability studies' claims echo those in feminist theory by, for example Haraway (1988), which argue that the researched are 'othered' or forced into a position of difference: 'are not allowed *not* to have a body' (p.575). Thus, Abberley (1987) shows how, throughout so much of the research, disabled people are presented as 'passive research subjects' (p.141).

In addition, the usefulness of research and the motives of academics have been questioned (Oliver 1992; Barnes and Mercer 1997). In a controversial and acerbic attack on research into disability, Oliver (1992) condemns previous mainstream research in the area as a 'rip off'. He argues that it has failed to address the social oppression faced by disabled people or to establish an alternative social policy that may bring about an improvement in the lives of disabled people. For Oliver:

Disability research should not be seen as a set of technical objective procedures carried out by 'experts' but part of the struggle by disabled people to challenge the oppression they currently experience in their lives (Oliver 1992:102).

Drawing on the evolving 'critical social research' paradigm of feminist writers such as Lather (1987) and Ribbens (1990) he argues against both positivist and interpretivist approaches that disability research should become emancipatory:

The development of such a paradigm stems from

the gradual rejection of the positivist view of social research as the pursuit of absolute knowledge through the scientific method and the gradual disillusionment with the interpretative view of such research as the generation of socially useful knowledge within particular historical and social contexts. The emancipatory paradigm, as the name implies, is about the facilitating of a politics of the possible by confronting social oppression at whatever level it occurs (Oliver 1992:110).

He contends that oppression cannot be addressed in an objective or scientific manner; it warrants an openly partisan and politically committed approach and following Becker (1963) should take the side of the oppressed. He calls for 'what has variously been called critical inquiry, praxis or emancipatory research' (1992:107). Research must confront disability and must be located in the social model of disability, rejecting impairment as the root cause of disabled people's problems.

Oliver (1997:25) has further argued that one cannot 'do' emancipatory research, but it is the role of that research that must be emancipatory. For social model theorists such as Finkelstein, Barnes and Oliver, Utopia, namely the removal of disability, can be created by changing consciousness, replacing individualistic models of disability with the social model. Theory, following Marx, becomes transformative: as disabled people adopt the social model, their understanding of themselves, of their position in society, of the institutions they access are altered; disabled people are thus transformed into political activists. Research must therefore seek to document discrimination, making disabled people aware that the problems they face are the outcome of the way that society is organised to exclude them. Barnes' *Disabled People in Britain and Discrimination* (1991) exemplifies this approach. The approach closely mirrors that of Freire,

the knowledge generated by research aims to redefine disabled people as subjects, allowing them to transform and recreate their world:

the 'pedagogy of the oppressed' [is] a pedagogy which must be forged *with*, not *for*, the oppressed (be they individuals or whole peoples) in the incessant struggle to regain their humanity. This pedagogy makes oppression and its causes objects of reflection by the oppressed, and from that reflection will come their necessary engagement in the struggle for their liberation (Freire 1972:25).

This is not to suggest that these writers have reached their position without documenting the experiences of disabled people. Indeed the work by Oliver et al (1988), Zarb and Oliver (1993), and Barnes (1990) explicitly draws on the experiences of disabled people. As Zarb and Oliver write in their report on ageing with a disability:

it is impossible to develop appropriate policies and support services without an awareness of, and a sensitivity to people's subjective experiences of ageing with a disability (1993: 32).

However, Oliver (1997), whilst acknowledging that research into disablement must provide a description of the experience of disablement, argues that this experience must be presented in a manner that,

redefines the problem of disability away from it being an individual or welfare one, transforming it into a political one (p. 21). By rejecting individual accounts of impairment, the focus is directed at political action:

If a person's physical pain is the reason they are unhappy then there is nothing the disability movement can do about it. All that BCODP can do

is facilitate the politicisation of people around these issues. Of course this politicisation is fairly difficult to make practical progress with - much easier to achieve anti-discrimination legislation than a total review of how society regards death and dying I imagine. This might explain why these subjects haven't been made a priority but their day will come (Vasey 1992: 43).

Research into disability must therefore be seen as part of an attempt to foster a critical attitude by disabled people towards a disabling society. The social model is a means to provide the theory of change, contributing to the transformation of a mass of disabled people into a politicised grouping whose personal discontents will be translated into a public struggle.

The danger of this strategy is that it leaves social model theorists open to the charge that if disability is already defined by the social model, then it assumes what it is intended to uncover. Disability Studies, with its reliance on a theory that was posited in the 1970's and its resistance to adaptation to the changing nature of society runs the risk of becoming a theoretical dogma, forsaking its critical purpose. It is attached to a fixed body of ideas and research is positioned in such a way as to reinforce that attachment rather than challenge it. The social model, if it is to be representative of the experiences of disabled people, must have a commitment to ongoing social change. Its claims to validity must be attached to the historical juncture in which it arose. If the aim of disability studies is to provide a critical theory then it must continually engage in the process of reconstruction and reformulation.

The social model, by its very nature, rests on a fairly unreflexive acceptance of the disabled/non-disabled distinction. There is an essentialist and totalising

understanding of disability as a category. The awareness that the current understanding of disability and disabled people are historically contingent appears to have few implications for the degree to which it is utilised in the social model, or for that matter in the interactionist accounts, as a stable descriptive classification. Disabled people are seen as those who identify as such (Oliver 1996) or who can be so identified. But Liggett argues:

From an interpretative point of view the minority group approach is double edged because it means enlarging the discursive practices which participate in the constitution of disability.... in order to participate in their own management disabled people have had to participate as disabled. Even among the politically active, the price of being heard is understanding that it is the disabled who are speaking (1988: 271ff).

Liggett is following those post-structuralist authors who point out the costs to identity politics. To be an activist - whether as a gay person, or a woman, or a disabled person - is to make the label into a badge, to make the ghetto into an oppositional culture. Yet what about those who wish to be ordinary, not different? Liggett is, in effect, arguing for a collapse of social classification, even though many disabled people do not self identify as disabled (Watson 2002).

The social model could not be described as ahistorical, but it does presuppose that disability is a bounded category with a singular intrinsic meaning. Whilst the issues surrounding disability might change, the crucial essence stays the same. Disability is allocated the status of a signifier so that research addresses the problem of disability. Disability is taken as a given. Disabled people and disability are positioned within well-worn dichotomies (such as impaired/ non-impaired, body/ society, therapy/

emancipation, resistance/ conformity, domination/ subordination). This is underpinned by an understanding of power as global, coercively subordinating disabled people. Thus a powerful ruling class, or capitalism as Oliver (1990, 1996) depicts it, is positioned as dominating powerless disabled people. Disabled people are unable to reach their full potential due to the repressive effects of a non-disabled society.

The social model has much to recommend it as the onus for change is placed on society rather than on disabled people. Disabled people cease to be the object of intervention and are repositioned as subjects in their own lives (Shakespeare 1994). Disability is conceptualised as a form of social oppression, and disabled people become a distinct social group, in a similar fashion to the way black people, lesbians and gays have claimed through respective political movements. Consequently, it is not useful to separate various impairment groups - people with visual impairment, with physical impairment, with learning difficulties - as has been the practice of charities, schools and other agencies and organisations. This is an important insight into the collectivity of the disability experience. Organisations of disabled people have challenged traditional approaches to disability and a new and active socio-political movement has emerged, transforming disability into a major area of political concern.

However, this notion of a collectivity can obscure differences between disabled people, which may be about gender, ethnicity, sexuality, class, generation and impairment. It can also deny the individuality of disabled people, presenting disabled people as a homogenous group and presenting a notion of an essential unity of disabled people. It tells little of the actual experience of living with an impairment or of the personal experience of disablement, or of how disabled people feel about

themselves. Consequently, a more structural, material analysis is favoured. There is little room to allow for the differences between disabled people, indeed to even acknowledge the presence of such differences could be seen as weakening the disability movement, which, in the UK, has its theoretical framework in the social model. There is a danger that disabled people cease to be seen as individuals, as the commonality of their experience is all-important.

These many strains on the social model suggest that a new approach is needed; one that incorporates the experience of disabled people but at the same time maintains a political element. Importantly, experience must not be limited to disablement, but must include some acknowledgement of impairment. The discussion now presents ideas on what such a model might look like.

Towards a new political construction of disability

What is needed is an analysis that provides an alternative to these customary views, one that rejects these simplistic dichotomies, rejecting the idea of disability or disabled people as a coherent 'fact in itself'. Mairian Corker's (1999) work has been among the first to apply such ideas to the field of disability. To achieve this shift, it is necessary to employ a more subtle and flexible understanding of power than is found in much of the social model theorising and to extricate disability from the binary oppositions in which it is usually located.

Corker (1999), drawing on Oliver's (1996: 52) assertion that the social model should not be seen as a social theory of disability but as one strand of it and that there is a danger in trying to take it further than it is meant to go, argues that what is needed is an approach rooted in discursive strategies to complement the structural analysis favoured by the social model. She writes that it is the relationship between 'the cultural/structural and the

material/discursive' (Corker 1999: 639) that should form the basis of theorising. This is seen as important because:

the addition of this paradigm would... open up political discourse to issues of language and difference and their relationship to the unequal distribution of knowledge. It would also allow us to address more fully the question of disabled people's social agency, and the sticky issue of attitudes and discriminatory language that cannot be explained within materialism alone (Corker 1999: 640).

Through such an analysis, disablement would emerge not as the collective experience of oppression, as in the social model, but through the relationship between impairment and oppression. It therefore follows that if either oppression or impairment is removed from the equation, then disablement itself goes. The notion of disability as a 'universality' is rejected, disabled people are not an homogenous group. It also allows for the inclusion of other types of oppression. If disablement alone is the focus of attention, all other kinds of oppression can become marginalised, hidden or repressed. So, in such an analysis the differences in disablement experienced between gender, ethnic groupings sexual preferences and age can emerge.

However, much post-modernism renders any application of the concept of social justice as problematic (Harvey 1993). If there are no universal truths, there is no concept of universal justice. There are no normative standards to distinguish between the progressive and the reactionary, indeed these latter two terms cannot be employed. Social justice is itself situated, contingent, the concept can be deconstructed. So Harvey writes:

There are only particular, competing, fragmented

and heterogeneous conceptions of and discourses about justice which arise out of the particular situations of those involved (1993: 98-99). There are no foundational appeals to the common good, as such concepts are no longer seen as carrying rhetorical authority.

The discursive turn as suggested by Corker (1999) denies, through its rejection of a universal disabling condition, an appeal to a universal social justice. Yet, at the same time, she is attempting to promote resistance to the cultural conditions which shape and cause disablement. These cultural conditions are, in the main, general and systematic. Disabled people all face discrimination, and if a strategy is to be developed to tackle this discrimination, then it can only be successful if a normative sense of justice using universally valid systems is employed (White 1991). Only through applying such a normative standard is it possible to develop and work towards a desired end, namely the removal of disabling barriers and attitudes. Post-modernist approaches cannot engage with the meta-narratives that dominate the lives of disabled people. The wider political and economic powers that are manifest throughout capitalist systems go unchanged. As the old joke goes 'How many post-modernists does it take to change a light bulb?' Post-modernism changes nothing.

Oppression still exists. It is a 'reality' for disabled people and is routinised in their lives (Watson *forthcoming*). To turn this into a political strategy, then, requires a means by which this hurt engendered by private experiences of injury are channelled into political actions that accord with the political aspirations of the disabled people's movement. A language needs to be developed which allows for the forming of a model of disablement through which these feelings of hurt can be seen not as individual assaults, but as part of a systematic attack which can be

shown to be typical for disabled people as a whole. The social model, with its denial of the importance of experience and its emphasis on material relations fails in this in many ways. Disablement is not, at an individual level, perceived to be an attack on material opportunities. Disabled people are not competing for scarce goods in a market place. Rather, disablement is felt as the outcome of the withholding of social and cultural recognition, and it is this that should form the basis of the social struggle.

The German philosopher Axel Honneth (1995) argues that it is important to reconcile the individual as well as the collective dimensions of political struggles. He argues that disrespect can be the starting point for politically motivated action, leading to what he terms a 'struggle for recognition'. Disrespect comprises humiliation, disenfranchisement, insult and physical abuse, all processes to which the informants report that they are subjected to, whilst recognition is seen as the ascription of a positive status. He continues:

the negative emotion accompanying the experience of disrespect could represent precisely the affective motivational basis in which the struggled for recognition is anchored (Honneth 1995: 135).

For him, self-confidence, self-respect and self-esteem provide the possibility of identity formation. This works at three levels; relationships, legal rights and solidarity. In the later term, Honneth is not referring merely to solidarity within groups, but, importantly, between groups. Through relationships, self-confidence emerges; through rights, a sense of personal dignity emerges; and through solidarity, self esteem. Denial of relationships can result in a loss of physical integrity, denial of self-respect, social integrity, and denial of self-esteem can damage honour and dignity. It is a need for recognition that drives minority

communities to mobilise for change and it is the negative emotional reactions that result from the experiences of being denied recognition that form the motivational basis for social struggle. He cites the work of the Marxist historian E. P. Thompson (1963) who suggests that social rebellion requires more than economic hardship. It requires a violation of the accepted moral consensus, a denial of what are felt to be the moral expectations of people within that community, that is recognition.

There is a material element to Honneth's work, in that he clearly recognises the need for legal protection and civil rights. However, rather than seeing this as an abstract, unconnected concept, Honneth shows how the impact of rights can have an interpersonal, subjective element:

Since possessing rights means being able to raise socially accepted claims, they provide one with a legitimate way of making clear to oneself that one is respected by everyone else (1995: 120).

Through such an approach he manages to present a rights-based discourse at a personal level. Further, his arguments on solidarity articulate why such an approach is important, again at an inter-subjective level:

The more successful social movements are at drawing the public's attention to the neglected significance of the traits and abilities which they collectively represent, the better their chances of raising the social worth, or indeed standing, of their members (1995: 127).

What is therefore needed then is a political activism that is founded on ethical rights and expectations. The disabled people's movement, at the same time as focussing on, for example, employment legislation and

environmental access, should be placing emphasis on interpersonal relations as it is through such relations that people experience recognition as active, capable social agents or find such recognition denied. By focussing solely on the material, a distance is created between disabled people's experiences of disablement, which occur at the interpersonal, and the political response. Through a focus on both legal and interpersonal relations the possibilities are opened up for an historically situated transformation of the social relations of disabled people.

What then would be the practical elements of such an approach? First, disablement should be challenged at an interpersonal level. Impairment and disablement are not dichotomous; one cannot be ascribed to the biological or personal and the other to the social. They are both experienced at a societal level and become apparent through interaction (Hughes and Patterson 1997; Watson 2000). These structures are experienced not as facts, but as an outcome. Social structures do not exist outside of the sociological imagination. So Lemert writes:

social structures are by their very nature reconstructions of reality *after the fact*. No one ever encounters the reality of structures as such – not markets, not states, not stratification systems. Real people, rather, encounter insufficient pay checks, impossibly excluding bureaucratic rules, and particular slights and injuries, but not the structures themselves. The reality of social structures is always, unavoidably, composed in the sociological imagination (1997:74).

Structures are perceived as the product of discourse, they occur in language, and through social interaction. Social structures are contingent and invented, they do not rest on a solid foundation, but are open to change, to local reading, to reinvention. To discuss social structures

without examining the language, the signs, the images through which structures emerge is to suggest that structures exist as some form of social reality, some tangible product that can be seen and felt. It is this interaction that should form the basis of any challenges to disablement. These relationships are constructed through impairment and disablement. In terms of impairment, the disabled people's movement should seek to challenge and overturn essentialist notions of normality. This is not a new idea (Zola 1989; Shakespeare and Watson 1995; Hughes and Patterson 1997), and also draws on the work of Sutherland:

A more radical approach is needed: we must demolish the false dividing line between 'normal' and 'disabled' [meaning impaired] and attack the whole concept of physical normality. We have to recognise that disablement [impairment] is not merely the physical state of a small minority of people. *It is the normal condition of humanity* (Sutherland 1981: 18, *original emphasis*).

Second, meta-narratives need not be forsworn. Disabling social relations are everywhere and, as Fraser and Nicholson (1990: 34) argue in relation to sexism, disablism is deeply embedded in contemporary society. Disabling societal macro-structures need to be analysed and challenged. However, these theoretical responses must be situated in specific social, cultural and historical contexts. There is no unitary notion of either disabled people or a disabled person. Impairment and disablement are but strands of a complexly constructed social identity. Age, gender, ethnicity, class and sexuality, among many others, are all of equal important and can create differences between disabled people. Whilst the acknowledgement of such differences could be seen as a threat to the internal solidarity of the disability movement, without it, there will be difficulties in building alliances with

other movements. Further, within this analysis, it is important to remember that there is no such thing as a barrier free environment; facilitating some people excludes others. Even in the absence of barriers, people with impairment may still be excluded. This material reality must be acknowledged if the relationship between impairment and disablement is to be fully explored (Abberley 1987).

Third, disability studies and the disabled people's movement should engage in more ethnographic and qualitative research so as to present a picture of the 'realities' of being a disabled person in the early 21st Century. That is, through stories and narratives of and by disabled people, disabled people will be enabled to express the heterogeneity of their lives, the fluid, situated and contextual nature of both disablement and impairment and the meaning of disability and impairment and through this to develop a value system that represents the diversity of the disability experience. Examples of this sort of approach include the work of Shakespeare et al. (1996) on sexuality and disability which documents, for the first time, disabled people's own views on sex and their sexuality; and studies of disabled children (Shakespeare and Watson 1998). This work, by presenting disabled children's perspective on their own stories, makes possible new forms of distinctive identities which are not based on essentialist characteristics. Work in the popular media also comes into this category, so for example the BBC television series *The Disabled Century*, and Peter White's Radio 4 series *No Triumph, No Tragedy* present new images of disabled people that challenge cultural stereotypes. This work, as well as challenging disabling images, establishes disabled people as active agents, as subjects rather than objects and allows disabled people to see themselves as a member of a social group who can accomplish things and whose worth is recognised by all members of society.

This focus on ethnography can create problems. As Connell (1997) argues in respect to ethnographic work on sexuality, there is a danger that emphasis can be placed on what distinguishes one group of people from another, in this case disabled people from non-disabled people, rather than what links them. This can be avoided provided similarities are highlighted and that disabled people are included in other ethnographic studies focussing on, for example, sexuality, ethnicity, age or gender.

Through this tripartite approach a more comprehensive and inclusive social theory of disability can emerge. This approach mirrors that of Zola (1994), who, just before his death, argued for a plurality of approaches in the study of disability. Further, the adequacy of current theory to support the actions of the disabled people's movement can be ascertained, for if these campaigns are to be effective they must work with rather than against disabled people's beliefs. By the use of studies giving primacy to the views and experiences of disabled people an understanding of commonly held ideas about the nature of disablement and the experiences of having an impairment that are historically situated can emerge. The question of whether research is or is not emancipatory becomes redundant. It is replaced with two questions: is this work based on the views and experiences of disabled people and has it come from a perspective that rejects normative values on the impact of impairment and disability on people's lives? If the answers are 'yes', then the work is emancipatory in that it will provide further evidence for the creation of solidarities both within and between groups. Through such an analysis an understanding of disability can evolve which is grounded in the social and cultural context of living with an impairment. Disability will be seen not as either the product of an individual trait, the impairment, nor as simply a social product, but as a fluid multiplicity that is subject to complex structural and

interactional factors.

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Disability should not be studied from either an exclusively political approach, as found in the social model, or an academic approach confined to anthropology and sociology. Both approaches are needed so as to allow an analysis of the oppression faced by disabled people and the social experiences of living with an impairment. What the proposal here is suggesting is just such a plurality, but importantly, one that is grounded in the experiences of disabled people and that disabled people can themselves connect with. It provides the possibility of moving beyond boundaries and reinventing disability politics as a democratic movement.

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