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CHAPTER 9

Learning more from the Social Model: linking experience, participation and knowledge production

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Introduction

This chapter suggests there is more to be learnt from the social model of disability through recognition of the context of its development, and that such a focus can be useful to the disabled people’s movement and inform disability research.

The social model has often been used and viewed in a way that does not acknowledge its context of origin in, and continuing link to, disabled people’s reflections on their experience of disability. I call this using a decontextualised social model. I will discuss the part played by this decontextualised social model in selected recent debates. I then examine the links that can be made between experience, knowledge production and participation by emphasising the process of the development of the social model, and suggest potentially useful directions for disability research.

The decontextualised social model

Many of us consider we know the social model rather than know about it. The recognition of our experience within the social model has been a transformative process for many disabled people and this recognition has often led to people becoming active within the movement. The social model has powerful resonance with disabled people's lived experience.

The written down social model also can and does stand alone as a piece of academic knowledge. The written down social model is a succinct communication and has been used, and continues to be discussed, as a tool (Oliver 2003). I suggest that the usefulness of the social model as a tool to communicate ideas has also been its major drawback; because it has become a 'thing' it is prone to being divorced from the context of the disabled people's movement's demands for the removal of disabling barriers. This is demonstrated in the almost unbelievable penetration of the language of the social model into institutional and organisational literature, often concurrently with continuing oppressive practice. This separation from the demands of the disabled people's movement can be seen as a neutralisation (Finkelstein 1999), or neutering, of the social model, and is arguably counterproductive for the emancipation of disabled people. Social model terminology can be adopted by anybody; but this adoption does not always involve a recognition of, or commitment to a relationship with, the social model's family of origin; the disabled people's movement. Proclamations of adherence to the social model of disability are now commonplace in mission statements of social services departments; traditional disability charities are queuing up to adopt it and it is *de rigueur* in the introduction to many research reports.

The context of the development of the social model

The defining of the social model by Mike Oliver (1990) was a late stage in its development. The earlier theorising, beginning with Paul Hunt (1966), largely took place within a group of disabled people in the Union of the Physically Impaired Against Segregation (UPIAS), who developed what was then called the social oppression theory of disability. UPIAS was passionately committed to a group-based (although not face-to-face) discussion, which was an analysis starting with experience but developing to theorising. The link with the disabled members' experience of disability was imperative, although within discussions that always moved on from any dwelling on descriptions of experience. UPIAS was not a support group; the discussions were intellectual and heated. However the connection with experiences of the members was retained, in fact it was required that the members were active in the community in order that they could reflect on their experiences in the real world in relation to the developing theory (Davis and Davis 2003; Finkelstein 2003). In this way the circular relationship between theorising and acting was emphasised, enabling the theorising to inform action and vice-versa. The group-based nature of the communication was important, while recognition of the shared aspects to experience supported the identification of the location of disability as external to the self.

Oliver's (1990) powerful definition of the social model is undoubtedly a major landmark in disability history; the ongoing theorising from the UPIAS was developed from work-in-progress to a model. The situation in the disability movement at the time was also significant: with the development of British Council of Organisations of Disabled People (BCODP) and Disabled People's International (DPI) the time was right for a clear exposition of the recent thinking under which to gather and the social model was perfect. The production of a piece of decontextualised knowledge was not Oliver's intention when he named the social model (1996b, 1996c) but it became viewed as such and has been used in this way. However I suggest that the work-in-progress character was and is a continuing vital part of what became the social model, the defining of the content of theorising as a model can suggest a completed task. The delineation of a social model from the discussions did affect the status of the knowledge; there was a jump from realising the validity of the theorising within UPIAS to assumptions about the best way to use this theorising. The presentation of the content of the social model raises issues of the mechanisms through which knowledge supports emancipation.

Effects on debates

The use of a decontextualised social model has had an effect in recent debates in the field of disability. For example, the seeming completeness of the social model has meant that well intentioned ongoing theorising bumps into the edges of the defined social model, and thus appear as accusations and attacks (Crow 1996). This is a particular problem when apparent infighting plays into the hands of opponents of disabled people's emancipation who would like to see the social model discredited (Light 2001). Another example is how the social model, when seen as academic theorising separate from disabled people, entices academic attention and comparison with other academic theory. Whilst this can be interesting, as are most academic debates, the world is full of interesting things that can fill books and careers, and is 'interesting' enough? This is pertinent for disabled people, who have long been subjected to the gaze of the interested. A focus on the way the social model developed would support ongoing reflection on experience to develop theory and the importance of maintaining the link between theory and action. I will not develop these observations further in this chapter but will now concentrate on particular debates concerning the place of experience and the development of the emancipatory disability research paradigm.

Experience

The social model has been accused of rejecting experience (Watson 2003) or of not including enough about experience (Morris 1996; Crow 1996) and there are ongoing debates on the appropriate use of experience in disability research (Finkelstein 1996; Oliver 1996a; Barnes 2003).

In disability research a focus on studying experience or structural barriers has been presented as oppositional. The part played by the use of a decontextualised social model is that the lack of acknowledgement that experience of disability was the starting point for the recognition of structural barriers means that any discussion of structure seemed unconnected to experience. During the development of the social model the opposite was the case, theory developed through a discussion grounded in experience of disability. The importance of the experience connection in the social model was emphasised (Oliver 1996b, 1996c), as was the need for research based on discussions of shared experience (Finkelstein 1992), although unfortunately these arguments were not clearly separated from fierce debates that included conflation of the experience of disability and impairment and the rejection of both in the attempt to reject one (Oliver 1996a; Finkelstein 1996). There was and continues to be confusion on all sides (Thomas 1999), including the misunderstanding of the concept of the personal as political, or social (Oliver 1996a; Sheldon 1999) and issues of negotiating discussion of emancipation within the postmodern (Shakespeare 1997).

Whilst every disabled person has unique experiences, if disability is oppression (as all the above writers agree), there are mechanisms through which it operates that can be usefully explored through examining experience. I am unable to engage with the wider debate over the way experience is conceptualised and treated in research generally (Scott 1992; Maynard 1994; Humphries 1997), and am not suggesting that experience is an unproblematic representation of reality. However, situated experience includes ‘a way in’ to discussion of social reality. Recognising and valuing subjectivity does not preclude talking about shared experience or social processes or structure. People can explain their experiences and situated knowledge to a large degree (Dockery 2000). ‘You can’t feel what it’s like to be me but I can tell you’. Crucially, the problems inherent in sticking at the level of relating experience should not lead to ignoring the place of experience in the development of thinking and theory. I disagree with Barnes, Oliver and Barton (2002) that the ‘inside out’ way of developing knowledge necessarily reduces things to the individual level. The large amount of research on experience that does lead to individualist explanations of experience (Oliver 1992; Goodley 1996; Oakley 2000) does not mean it is impossible to do it differently. The development of what became the social model illustrate that discussions that identify shared experience, especially group discussions, can indeed support the recognition of structural barriers, including attitudes, within discussion including analysis and theorising (Beresford and Turner 1997; Cunningham-Burley et al. 1999; Bailey 2002). The question of *who* interprets is important, in order to retain authorship and authenticity in the knowledge. Whilst oppressive analysis, much in the disability field, has been rightly deplored (Hunt 1981; Barnes and Mercer 1997; Humphries 1997), the problems associated with other people interpreting narratives should not lead to a wholesale rejection of interpretation, or meta-narrative. In fact, allowing people to tell only stories of equal worth with all other stories is disempowering when people are oppressed and share aspects of experience. The discussions in UPIAS show that people can build from a first line narrative of their own experience to produce shareable knowledge that retains a resonance with experience.

The particular power of resonant knowledge or theory lies in what the recognition does to people. The effects of recognition of structural barriers, discrimination or inequality in our experience should not be underestimated as a motivator for action. ‘Experience draws you into a struggle’ (Finkelstein 2003), and the recognition of social injustice in our experience is the motivator for action and a life of activism (Davis and Davis 2003).

Emancipatory disability research

The development of emancipatory disability research holds the social model centrally. I suggest that the use of a decontextualised social model has affected at least two aspects of the development of emancipatory disability research.

1 Knowledge production. Focusing on the content as the way in which the social model is powerful is paralleled in the continuing emphasis on formal research knowledge products as the mechanism through which research contributes to social change.

2 Methodology. The process of the development of the social model has not informed methodology; thus far methodology for emancipatory research in disability has not been developed in clear relation to the ontological and epistemological positions. This has contributed to practical problems in putting the emancipatory research paradigm into practice.

Knowledge and emancipation: the place of research.

Although the early debate about emancipatory disability research included discussion of the wider role of knowledge in emancipation (Oliver 1992) this has been insufficiently explored and at times a simple relationship between knowledge and social change has been relied upon, conflating knowledge with research knowledge and assuming the effectiveness of traditional mechanisms by which academic research persuades people, including persuading disabled people. The traditional option is to aim research findings at powerful decision-makers, which can be effective at times, or not (Mercer 2002). The valuing of knowledge for its own sake is related to the emancipatory aims of enlightenment scientists, who believed that knowledge would be enough to produce change for the better (Humphries 1997). Without denying the positive policy responses to many advances in natural and social science; knowledge about society, including knowledge of oppression, has not proved enough to change the social conditions that produce and support oppression (Oliver 1992, 2003). In present times, emancipation is recognised as something that has to be done by oppressed people, not for them (Friere 1970; Lather 1991).

Definitions of emancipatory disability research and guidelines for practice emphasise control over the research process (Oliver 1992; Stone and Priestley 1996). However, an emphasis on the importance of the research product and lack of emphasis on the process of research can result in disabled people controlling research through commissioning traditional researcher-led research; buying in expertise, rather than controlling the process from within:

> critically formulated research (that with an emancipatory, political agenda) which adopts an expert model approach is paradoxically seeking change at one level (society), whilst at the same time reproducing unequal social relationships at another (within the research process) (Kitchen 2000: 26).

A common phrase is ‘knowledge and skills at the disposal of disabled people’, however changing the social relations of research to promote emancipation requires more than reversing control over a commodified research process (Stone and Priestley 1996).

The commissioning of professional research to support emancipatory aims is an option for organised groups of disabled people, however the concerns of unorganised disabled individuals or loose groups are rarely engaged with at their instigation. Demands for emancipation require a recognition of oppression. The process of the development of the social model illustrates that the discussion has to come first before experience of life with an impairment can be recognised as experience of disability/ oppression. Disabled people with a vague dissatisfaction (or burning anger) may not recognise this as a need for emancipation but research could still be a forum in which to explore issues and identify direction for action.

Another potential problem with following the expressed ‘most pressing problem’ of groups of disabled people is that the identified issues are often bound up with the complexities of current policy implementation, rather than calling for reappraisal of the whole system (Finkelstein 1999). For example, Oliver rejects, as inappropriate, research to ‘develop bad policies’ (2003: 4). Whilst commissioning has produced some excellent research (Priestley 1999; Barnes et al. 2000), the most pressing problems are so caught up in the mechanisms of oppression that discussing them can avert focus from more basic problems, even seeing the issues as appropriate can inadvertently support the oppressive structures. This is the difference between what Friere (1970) calls ‘problematizing’, rather than ‘problem solving’.

Emancipation requires action and is informed by knowledge. Useful knowledge for emancipation can include that produced by formal and informal research; however it is imperative that professional or expert researchers do not inhabit or claim the role of the only knowledge producers. Research means finding out about and understanding something and involvement of nonprofessional researchers in doing informal or formal research can bring benefits in terms of the quality of knowledge and the effects of the process of involvement. Demystifying the research process can assist in making overt how grassroots organisations and the disability movement have always used knowledge and can encourage viewing research as part of the ordinary process of deliberate action towards emancipation. This research can be about providing a forum for discussing the direction of a group and the social issues with which the group is concerned, making overt and developing the knowledge already in the group, identifying other research requirements and doing the fieldwork and analysis and theorising to produce useful knowledge and communicating it. However research can seem daunting, partly because it has been professionalised, and there arguably remains a role for those who know about and value research in encouraging research. Facilitating or supporting the doing of emancipatory research requires different skills to traditional social research and is unsatisfying for researchers who would rather be doing their own research or who have substantive agendas. Academic or professional researchers have to negotiate the practical concerns of academic esteem and/or making a living, which in many ways conflict with emancipatory aims.

Methodology

Although the choice of methods was not seen as the main issue in developing emancipatory disability research (Mercer 2002), the lack of emphasis on participation within the research process is surprising, considering the apparent influence of the writing of Freire (1970), Reason and Rowan (1981) among others and the use of concepts of praxis and critical enquiry (Oliver 1992; Cocks and Cockram 1995). More acknowledgement of the context of the development of the social model would support this emphasis on the significance of knowledge produced through disabled people’s thinking. When Oliver drew on Friere’s work he missed the central importance of participatory methods, especially the theorising of ordinary oppressed people. There was a lack of engagement with the mechanisms by which participatory research sought to achieve its emancipatory aims (Reason and Rowan 1981; Park 1999). Emancipatory disability research has not embraced participatory methodology or method (Oliver 1992, 1997) in the context of a general lack of attention to method:

> early elaboration of emancipatory disability research tended to conflate methods with methodology and treat both as ancillary, technical matters (Mercer 2002: 242).

Participatory methods continue to be rejected by some disability writers (Oliver 2003) although views vary (Zarb 1997; Barnes 2003).

> Participatory Research is an emancipatory approach which has already been developed, although it has been rarely used with the participation of persons with a disability (CILT 1995: 49).

The presentation paper by Finkelstein (1992), eloquently emphasising the importance of participation in research, especially the analysis stage, as more essential than the knowledge produced has unfortunately had less influence in the academic discussions about the development of emancipatory disability research. Debates in other areas including feminism have emphasised the importance of linking emancipation and participation (Humphries 1997; Lather 1986, 1991).

Problems in practice, interpreting data

The call for emancipatory disability research emphasises a social model explanation as the suggested interpretive theory (Stone and Priestley 1996). This again identifies the content of the social model as the only important part. The requirement for a social model interpretation is viewed by some researchers as inappropriate (Shakespeare 1997). The practical problems in fitting a social model interpretation to people’s experience are discussed, especially when the disabled people may not recognise the social model (Stone and Priestley 1996). The social model, especially in an academic version, can seem alien to disabled people especially when the model is exported to other cultures (Stone 1997), and there are disabled people who disagree with a social model analysis. This is obviously a problem with any theory, as by definition theory concerns that which is not readily observable. The imposition of any external theory on people’s experience can be oppressive and inappropriate, however liberating the theory (Lather 1991). Again an acknowledgement of the context of the development of the social model would remind us that the journey from experience to theory required a process of reflection. The social model can inform practice and methodology without imposing an interpretation. It can also be used to encourage disabled people to interpret their own experience. This use of research which embraces the social model to guide practice rather than impose theory is also more open to use in a cross cultural context.

Collectivising data

An identified method problem is the collectivising of data (Stone and Priestley 1996; Barnes 2003), and the maintenance of a social context when discussing experience (Vernon 1997; Barnes et al. 2002). The individualising tendency of specific methods including interviews was clearly described some time ago (Oliver 1992). Unfortunately, it was then used as an argument to reject interview methods and a focus on experience rather than being seen as an artefact of individual methods that could be improved by using group methods. The problem of collectivising data is lessened if data is not individualised in the first place.

Congruent methodology and methods in disability research

Whilst not all social research has emancipatory aims the use of the social model demands an emancipatory focus; the oppression of disabled people has not been theorised for descriptive purposes alone. There are increasing calls for social researchers to be clear about the connection between their choice of methods and methodology; and ontological, axiological and epistemological positions (Lather 1991). This means that researchers need to be choosing methods for a purpose and ensuring that their approach to a research subject fits with the way they view the social world, including their value system, and how they think the social world can be known. The content of the social model asserts an ontological position and acknowledgement of the significance of the process of the development of the social model requires consideration of epistemology, including the place of reflecting on experiencing in knowing about the social world.

In a context of the valuing of multiple methods, assertion of the suitability and unsuitability of methods for disability research is unfashionable. However, if disability is a social phenomenon then data should be looked for in a way that encourages a focus on social processes. Measurement of individual characteristics, whilst still common in medical research, has been rejected in social disability research (Abberley 1992; Zarb 1997). More controversially, I consider that despite being the ‘gold standard’ of qualitative research, the individual interview alone is often inappropriate for research, especially emancipatory research, because the one-to-one interaction supports explanation of experience on an individual level, and inhibits the recognition of social and structural factors, especially with a non-disabled interviewer (Vernon 1997). Group methods bring advantages at the level of the quality of data produced from ‘bouncing ideas off each other and developing ideas’ (Beresford and Turner 1997; Barbour and Kitzinger 1999; Cunningham-Burley et al. 1999). Group methods of data generation encourage a focus on the social context through the opportunity to recognise shared experience, with the accompanying challenge to initial perceptions and individualised explanations. Social processes in the small group can mirror those in wider society within an environment potentially safe enough for participants to discuss experience in the here-and-now (Mies 1983; Brydon-Miller 1995; Hill 1997; Bailey 2002). I am not suggesting that group discussions are unproblematic or that data from other sources is not useful but retaining some use of group discussion is fruitful and can be combined with other methods (Mies 1983; Aranda and Street 2001).

Potential of participatory research: linking experience, participation and knowledge production

Wholly (or paradigmatic) participatory research includes an overt aim of supporting emancipation (Reason and Rowan 1981; Park 1999). The difference (to emancipatory disability research) is that the process of the research aims to be emancipatory as well as the traditional knowledge product. This approach owes much to Friere's work on conscientization through critical reflection on social structure (1970). The acting towards emancipation or liberation requires power; a major part of Friere’s argument is that critical reflection on the realities of life is accompanied by a recognition of power, albeit power unwielded up to that point. Recognising power is different to empowerment; for example, there are research projects using participatory methods that identify a main, or even the primary, aim as ‘empowerment’ of the participants, especially in practitioner research (Truman and Raine 2001; Gray et al. 2000). However as many researchers remind us (Lather 1991; Drake 1999; Dockery 2000), like emancipation,

> Empowerment is not something that can be given, but something
> that people must take for themselves (Zarb 1992: 128).

In order for a group in society to become empowered others must relinquish power. Humphries (1997) comments that the discourse on empowerment is located largely within the existing socially powerful groups. For research to produce an environment that supports empowerment or emancipation the researcher must share power, that is, give some up. Paradoxically, this is sometimes particularly difficult for passionate ‘emancipatory’ researchers, who already know what needs to be changed in the world, and requires a leap of faith in terms of faith in the participants’ ability to know what is good for them too.

The ongoing problems of changing the social relations of disability research are assisted by using participatory methods. The call for emancipatory research can usefully link the use of social model content with a commitment to congruent participatory methods; this acts as a protection against the adoption of the jargon without changing the social relations of research. Researchers can adopt the terminology and methods of participatory research (in a way similar to the adoption of the terminology of the social model) without an ontological and epistemological position commensurate with participation, a major weakness of participatory research is what is done in its name (Hagey 1997). However an advantage of a participatory project is that participation, especially in the planning and analysis stages, cannot proceed successfully without the power shifting. There is a built-in check, doing participatory research with disabled people really unsettles researchers without the stomach for relinquishing power, and unresolved issues of participation and power show in the finished product.

I highlight the stage of analysis as particularly important. What happens in analysis and theorising in traditional social research is rarely opened up to scrutiny, even within an increasingly reflexive literature (Kelly et al. 1994; Truman and Raine 2001). The ‘hygiene’ in research has often bleached out the evidence of an oppressive analysis. Lack of transparency in traditional research was part of the motivation for the development of participatory research (Hagey 1997). Unfortunately this can be paralleled in the scarce attention to describing participation in the analysis, interpreting and theorising stages of research, (Stubbs 1999) even within otherwise participatory projects (Clear and Horsfall 1997):

> many have little to say about the process of data analysis, in particular
> the way in which a narrative emerged from the interview data
> (Riddel et al. 1998: 85).

Useful participation in the discussion stage has included the presentation of initial findings (albeit selected by the researcher) to groups or seminars including the participants and sometimes the wider disabled population (Rodgers 1999; Barnes, Mercer and Morgan 2002). The interest in these discussions suggests more potential to use the methods in analysis. Participation in analysis and concluding stages of research requires careful method choices, many studies have found that offers to check or comment on researcher analyses are insufficient to promote participation and are not taken up (Barnes and Mercer 1997; Beresford and Turner 1997). However, this is not the same as a real lack of interest, and should not be used as an excuse for not pursuing participation.

A notable exception is the work of the Citizens' Commission on the future of the Welfare State, in which:

> There was an important collaborative dimension to collation
> and analysis in the Commission. As far as we know this is the
> first time this has been done (Beresford and Turner 1997: 34).

Some useful strategies for participation in analysis and writing up are being developed (Brydon-Miller 1995; March et al. 1997; Bailey and Cowen 2003).

There is a great potential for analysis that is more participatory, to produce knowledge that retains a connection with participants' experience; that is resonant. Participation in the thinking stages of research are particularly important, for example in wholly participatory research, where participants' reflections on their experience of disability, in a group setting, can produce useful research products and also benefits from the effects supporting agency.

> Taking part in the research process is more important than ensuring
> a particular outcome will emerge. It is the involvement in the
> process of research, participating as a researcher, that can
> transform passive, dependent people into thinking decision-makers,
> whether or not 'good' solutions emerge (Finkelstein 1992: 3).

Researchers can learn from the process of the development of the social model by considering using group discussions, without requiring the content of the social model to be imposed on data. This practice represents a confidence in both the theorising abilities of disabled people and the potential of group discussion to support identifying structural barriers. Whatever my hunches about the likelihood of groups theorising social oppression this method does not require a social oppression or social model interpretation to arise and should not attempt to surreptitiously produce one. The validity of the process can support different and new theorising on disability that will retain a connection to the experience of disability; this knowledge will be likely to be resonant and useful to disabled people and the disability movement.

I do urge for the emancipatory aims of disability research to be achieved through participatory methods. I am not calling for only group discussion based participatory research projects, although I encourage this method. Participatory research has traditionally combined group discussion in planning with using a range of methods for data generation, including quantitative methods (Park 1999), which can be unbeatable in measuring disabling barriers (Stone and Priestley 1996; Oakley 2000). Participatory method in the thinking stages also benefits research projects that are not wholly participatory, for example in the planning of research questions and/or analysis stages (for example, Priestley 1999; Fisher 2002). A reflection on experience can usefully be used to produce research questions; this avoids the limitations of using only issues that have emerged and allows disabled people outside the disabled people's movement to be involved in directing research. The use of reference or advisory groups can be expanded in the analysis and discussion stages, including using and developing methods that encourage more active contribution.

Conclusion

The unplanned emergence of a decontextualised version of the social model has complicated discussions in the field of disability politics and research. I have attempted to indicate some of these complexities and suggest the importance of acknowledging the context of the development of what became the social model within group based discussion and theorising with a focus on the relationship between theory and action and a starting point grounded in the experience of disability.

This chapter has discussed disability research that engages with the social model, and therefore emancipation. It is important to be aware of the mass of social science and medical research produced about disabled people or about impairment in the fields of medicine, biological science, nursing and psychology and numerous practitioner groups as well as governmental research. Disability research of all kinds will continue to be carried out whether or not disabled people see it as useful, although the option of refusing participation in oppressive research is available to assert control over empirical research (Oliver 1992). I think there should be some involvement of disabled people in at least considering the appropriateness of disability research, and there are attempts to encourage this (for example, Aspis 2002). This is a timely debate for the disabled people's movement and other organisations concerned with ethics and quality in social research. Disability research can have a place in emancipation, when researchers are committed to social change and when the 'purpose is to understand (disabled people's) oppression in order that we might end it' (borrowing from Kelly et al. 1994). Truly emancipatory research cannot be separated from the disabled people's movement and researchers supporting emancipation need to be in a close relationship with disabled people and the disabled people's movement, and committed to debate beyond the confines of subscription journals.

Emancipatory disability research has suffered in its relating to a social model that validates the content rather than the process of critical reflection on experience, and this has contributed to a lack of recognition of the potential and centrality of participatory methods in research that aims to support emancipation. It is valuable to retain a link between knowledge and the experience of disabled people (without engaging in the apolitical practice of presenting only descriptions of experience). Good quality participatory research can produce knowledge with resonance.

The social model has been elevated into a thing in its own right, to be cherished, worshipped or vilified, and projected with the ability to empower or exclude. The social model, as an exposition of disabled people's oppression, has been important in the disabled people's movement in being a tangible banner, something to agree on and show people. It is amazing to see your realisations in print, but the power is not out there in the words. The power of the social model is its resonance as a naming of disabled people’s experience of oppression, and as such it is transformative knowledge. Perhaps the clarity of a decontextualised social model, as words, has inhibited the ongoing process of recognising oppression; it can seem like repeating someone else’s discovery to talk about how you have made sense of particular experiences, and ordinary disabled people cannot hope to describe it more eloquently. This belies the nature of the naming of oppression; each time the connection is made by an individual or group and they come to recognise aspects of their experience as oppression something happens, repeating the process is the whole idea. The social model is a naming of oppression; any disabled person can do this and thus create the same knowledge that is written down in the social model.

The disabled people’s movement needs to ensure that people outside the movement, including academics, know that the social model is inextricably linked to disabled people’s ongoing demands for the removal of barriers. We must act collectively to challenge those who appropriate social model language to come up with the necessary action and engage in an ongoing relationship with the disability movement. Disabled people and the disabled people’s movement do and should feel they own the social model.

I hope to stimulate discussion within the disabled people’s movement, including researchers committed to supporting emancipation. Mike Oliver (2003) was right to bemoan the amount of talk about the social model and call for more social change, but we cannot stop talking about the subject of the social model, our oppression, because the recognition of this is the motivation for action. The biggest resource for our emancipation is the ability of disabled people to get together and have ideas, including big ones, and act on them. The social model is brilliant, and there's more where that came from.

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