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The Dimensions of Disability Oppression

An Overview

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The vast majority of people with disabilities have always been poor, powerless, and degraded. Disability oppression is a product of both the past and the present. Some aspects of disability oppression are remnants of ancien régimes of politics and economics, customs and beliefs, and others can be traced to more recent developments. To understand the consequences and implications for people with disabilities an analysis is called for which considers how the overarching structures of society influence this trend. This is especially relevant in light of the United Nations' contention that their condition is worsening: "Handicapped people remain *outcasts* around the world, living in shame and squalor among populations lacking not only in resources to help them but also in understanding. And with their numbers growing rapidly, their plight is getting worse.... The normal perception is that nothing can be done for disabled children. This has to do with prejudice and old-fashioned thinking that this punishment comes from God, some evil spirits or magic.... We have a catastrophic human rights situation.... They [disabled persons] are a group without power."[1]

There is a great deal to say about disability oppression, not only because it is complex and multifaceted but also because we have so little experience conceptualizing its phenomenology and logic. Until very recently most analyses of why people with disabilities have been and continue to be poor, powerless, and degraded have been mired in an anachronistic academic tradition that understands the "status" of people with disabilities in terms of deviance and stigma. This has been compounded by the lack of participation by people with disabilities in these analyses. Fortunately, this has begun to change. Disability rights activists have recently undertaken important and fruitful efforts to frame disability oppression. These projects, however insightful, have been limited by their scope and inability to account for the systemic nature of disability oppression. For example, in the article "Malcolm Teaches Us, Too," in the *Disability Rag,* Marta Russell writes,

> Malcolm's most important message was to love blackness, to love black culture. Malcolm insisted that loving blackness itself was an act of resistance in a white dominated society. By exposing the internalized racial self-hatred that deeply penetrated the psyches of U.S. colonized black people, Malcolm taught that blacks could decolonize their minds by coming to blackness to be spiritually renewed, transformed. He believed that, only then, could blacks unite to gain the equality they rightfully deserved.... It is equally important for disabled persons to recognize what it means to live as a disabled person in a physicalist society—that is, one which places its value on physical agility. When our bodies do not work like able-bodied person's bodies, we're disvalued. Our oppression by able-bodied persons is rife with the message: There is something wrong, something "defective" with us—because we have a disability.... We must identify with ourselves and others like us. Like Malcolm sought for his race, disabled persons must build a culture which will unify us and enable us to gain our human rights. (1994:11–12)

There is much of value for the DRM in what Russell says. She is patently correct, for instance, to point people with disabilities toward Malcolm X in terms of recognition and identity, self-hatred and self-respect. But she, like Malcolm X, is wrong on the question of where the basis of oppression

lies. Both identify oppression with the Other, a view that is quite prevalent among disability rights activists. For Russell, the Other is able-bodied people; for Malcolm, it was white people (although he began to change this view shortly before his assassination). Both situate oppression in the realm of the ideas of others and not in systems or structures that marginalize people for political-economic and sociocultural reasons. As the great Mexican novelist Julio Cortazar writes in *Hopscotch,* "Nothing can be denounced if the denouncing is done within the system that belongs to the thing denounced" ([1966]1987: chap. 99). My project then is as much a polemic directed at the disability rights movement as at a more general public. My point to other activists is that the logic of disability oppression closely parallels the oppression of other groups. It is a logic bound up with political-economic needs and belief systems of domination. From these priorities and values has evolved a world system dominated by the laws of capital and profit and the ethos of individualism and image worship. This point is just as important as my call to the general public, especially the international community, to recognize and respond to an extraordinary human rights tragedy, what former UN Secretary General Javier Perez de Cuellar once called "the silent emergency."

Political Economy and the World System

Political economy is crucial in constructing a theory of disability oppression because poverty and powerlessness are cornerstones of the dependency people with disabilities experience. As the social science of how politics and economics influence and limit everyday life, political economy is primarily concerned with issues of class because class positions groups of people in relation to economic production and exchange, political power and privilege. Today, class not only structures the political and economic relationships between the worker, peasant, farmer, intellectual, small-scale entrepreneur, government bureaucrat, army general, banker, and industrialist, it mediates family and community life insofar as relationships exist in these which affect people's economic viability.[2] In political-economic terms, everyday life is informed by where and how individuals, families, and communities are incorporated into a world system dominated by the few who control the means of production and force. This has been the case for a long time. The logic of this system regulates and explains who survives and prospers, who controls and who is controlled, and, not simply metaphorically, who is on the inside and who is on the outside (of power).

Perhaps the most fitting characterization of the socioeconomic condition of people with disabilities is that they are outcasts. This is how they are portrayed in the UN report cited at the beginning of this chapter. It was also repeated by many of the disability rights activists I interviewed. It seems reasonable to ask, why is this depiction so common? The answer is two-sided, sociocultural and political-economic. On one side are the panoply of reactionary and iconoclastic attitudes about disability. These are addressed briefly in the next section and in depth in chapter 4. On the other side stands a political-economic formation that does not need and in fact cannot accommodate a vast group of people in its production, exchange, and reproduction. Put differently, people with disabilities, like many others, are preponderantly part of a worldwide phenomenon that James O'Connor called "surplus population" (1973:161)[3] and Istvan Meszaros called "superfluous people" (1995:702).

The extent and implications of this phenomenon are experienced differently. For example, it is readily apparent that people, even those with disabilities, living in the more economically developed regions of the world have higher "standards of living" than their counterparts in the Third World. The United States and Europe have safety nets that catch "outcasts" before their very livelihoods are called into question. This is not necessarily the case in the Third World.

The 300 million to 400 million people with disabilities who live in the periphery, like the vast majority of people in those regions, exist in abject poverty, but I would go further and argue that, for social and cultural reasons, their lives are even more difficult. These are the poorest and most powerless people on earth.

As the global economy developed, it created more than just the wandering gypsies of southern Europe and the *posseiros* (squatters) of South America. It created an enormous number of outcasts who must be set apart from what Karl Marx called the "reserve army of labor"—a resource to be tapped in times of economic expansion (although Marx uses them interchangeably in *Grundrisse* [1973:491]). For hundreds of millions of outcasts—beggars and others who depend on charity for survival; prostitutes, drug dealers, and others who survive through criminal activities; the homeless, refugees, and others forced to live somewhere besides their home or homeland;[4] and many others—will seldom, if ever, under ordinary circumstances be used in the production, exchange, and distribution of political and economic goods and services. They are essentially declassed. So many people fall into this category that U.S. economists have created the category "underclass" to refer to them. The UN has even created the preposterous category "admissible levels of poverty" to describe the condition of the best-off among these people.

People with disabilities, at least as a group, may have been the first to join the ranks of the underclass. Since feudalism and even earlier, they have lived outside the economy and political process.[5] It should be noted, of course, that few people with physical disabilities survived for very long in precapitalist economies.

The emergence and development of capitalism had an extraordinarily profound and positive impact on people with disabilities. For the first time, probably in the mid-1700s in parts of Europe, people living outside the spheres of production and exchange, the "surplus people," could rely on others to survive. Family members and friends who could accumulate more than the barest minimum necessary for survival had the "luxury" of being able to care for others. A century later the political-economic conditions were such that charities, which supported a large number of people, were established. Those who were cared for by these charities most often were the mentally ill, the blind, the alcoholic, the chronically ill. My analysis throughout this book centers on the political-economic and sociocultural relationships born out of these times and how they have developed differently in different economic zones and in different cultures. Essentially, I will argue, as Audre Lorde does in *Sister Outsider,* that these formations now not only stand as barriers to progress but also are the basis for peoples' oppression: "Institutionalized rejection of *difference* is an absolute necessity in a profit economy which needs outsiders as surplus people. As members of such an economy, we have *all* been programmed to respond to the human differences between us with fear and loathing and to handle that difference in one of three ways: ignore it, and if that is not possible, copy it if we think it is dominant, or destroy it if we think it is subordinate. But we have no patterns for relating across our human differences as equals. As a result, those differences have been misnamed and misused in the service of separation and confusion" (1984:77).

Culture(s) and Belief Systems

The modern world is composed of thousands of cultures, each with its own ways of thinking about other people, nature, family and community, social phenomena, and so on. Culture is sustained through customs, rituals, mythology, signs and symbols, and institutions such as religion and the mass media. Each of these informs the beliefs and attitudes that contribute to disability oppression. These attitudes are almost universally pejorative. They hold that people with disabilities are pitiful and that disability itself is abnormal. This is one of the social norms used to separate people with disabilities through classification systems that encompass education, housing, transportation, health care, and family life.

For early anthropologists, "culture" meant how values were attached to belief systems (Kroeber and Kluckhorn 1952:180–182). Since then the meaning of the term "culture" has become so contested that some have argued for its abandonment. Others consider it simply a "lived experience" or "lived antagonistic experiences." For Clifford Geertz, one of anthropology's preeminent theorists, the "culture

concept . . . denotes a historically transmitted pattern of meanings embodied in symbols, a system of inherited conceptions expressed in symbolic forms by means of which men communicate, perpetuate, and develop their knowledge and attitudes toward life" (1973:89). Geertz's theory has many adherents, but it has also garnered its share of criticism, most commonly that it neglects the influence of politics and power. In *Ideology and Modern Culture,* John Thompson postulates a more reasonable position. Thompson's formulation is that the study of symbols as a way to interpret cultures must be done contextually, by recognizing that power relations order the experiences of everyday life in which these signs and symbols are produced, transmitted, and received:

> The symbolic conception is a suitable starting point for the development of a constructive approach to the study of cultural phenomena. But the weakness of this conception—in the form it appears, for instance, in the writings of Geertz—is that it gives insufficient attention to the structured social relations within which symbols and symbolic actions are always embedded. Hence, I formulate what I call the structural conception of culture. Cultural phenomena, according to this conception, may be understood as symbolic forms in structured contexts, and cultural analysis may be construed as the study of the meaningful constitution and social contextualization of symbolic forms. (1990:123)

My notion of culture(s) is similar to Thompson's. Contrary to many traditions in anthropology, cultures are not independent or static formations. They interface and interact in the everyday world with history, politics and power, economic conditions and institutions, and nature. To neglect these important influences seems to miss important interstices where culture happens, is expressed, and, most important, is experienced. The point is not that one culture makes people do or think this and another that but that ideas and beliefs are informed by and in cultures and that cultures are partial expressions of a world in which the dualities of domination/subordination, superiority/inferiority, normality/abnormality are relentlessly reinforced and legitimized. Anthropologists may be able to find obscure cultures in which these dualities are not determinant, but this does not minimize their overarching influence.

The essential problem of recent anthropological work on culture and disability is that it perpetuates outmoded beliefs and continues to distance research from lived oppression. Contributors to Benedicte Ingstad and Susan Reynolds Whyte's *Disability and Culture* seem to be oblivious to the extraordinary poverty and degradation of people with disabilities. The book does add to our understanding of how the conceptualization and symbolization of disability takes place, but its language and perspective are still lodged in the past. In the first forty pages alone we find the words *suffering, lameness, interest group, incapacitated, handicapped, deformities.* Notions of oppression, dominant culture, justice, human rights, political movement, and self-determination are conspicuously absent. We can read hundreds of pages without even contemplating degradation. Unlike these anthropologists and of course many others, my thesis is that backward attitudes about disability are not the basis for disability oppression, disability oppression is the basis for backward attitudes.

(False) Consciousness and Alienation

The third component of disability oppression is its psychological internalization. This creates a (false) consciousness and alienation that divides people and isolates individuals. Most people with disabilities actually come to believe they are less normal, less capable than others. Self-pity, self-hate, shame, and other manifestations of this process are devastating for they prevent people with disabilities from knowing their real selves, their real needs, and their real capabilities and from recognizing the options they in fact have. False consciousness and alienation also obscure the source of their oppression. They cannot recognize that their self-perceived pitiful lives are simply a perverse mirroring of a pitiful world order. In this regard people with disabilities have much in common with others who also have internalized their own oppression. Marx called this "the self-annihilation of the worker"

and Frantz Fanon "the psychic alienation of the colonized." In *Femininity and Domination,* Sandra Lee Bartky exposes the roles of alienation, narcissism, and shame in the oppression of women. Each of these examples highlights the centrality of consciousness to any discussion of oppression. Consciousness, like culture, means different things to different people. Carl Jung said it is "everything that is not unconscious." Sartre said "consciousness is being" or "being-in-itself." For the Egyptian novelist Naguib Moufouz, it is "an awareness of the concealed side." Recently there have been attempts to develop a neurobiological theory of consciousness, the best known of which is Gerald Edelman's *The Remembered Present* (1989).

Whole philosophical systems and schools of psychology are built on the concept of consciousness. Appropriately, most postulate stages or types, even archetypes of consciousness. For Jung, everything important was interior, was "thought." The highest consciousness was individuation, or self-realization (the "summit"). This required gaining command of all four thought functions: sensation, feeling, thinking, and intuition. When one arrives at the intersection of these functions, "one opens one's eyes" (Campbell 1988:xxvi–xxx).

Marxism typically understood consciousness as metaphorical spirals of practice (experience) and theory (thought) intertwined. These spirals move incrementally, quantitatively. Consciousness, however, is not a linear progression. At points this quantitative buildup congeals into a "rupture," or a qualitative or transformational leap to another stage of consciousness where another spiral-like phenomenon begins. Consciousness can leap from being-in-itself (existence as is) to being-for-itself (consciously desiring change), Marx's equivalent of a leap in self-realization. While Jung's and, before him, Freud's great contribution to modern psychology was the discovery of the importance of the unconscious, their systems excluded political and social conditions. They were asocial and apolitical. This is where idealism (e.g., Jung, Hegel) and materialism (e.g., Marx, Sartre) split most dramatically. Sartre's withering critique of psychology began with this difference. According to Sartre, "the Ego is not in consciousness, which is utterly translucent, but in the world" (Sartre [1943] 1957:xii). For Sartre, consciousness has three stages, being-in-itself, being-for-itself, and being-for-others, which reflects a growing awareness. He argues that consciousness is intentional, it has a direction. In his attack on traditional psychology, Sartre is saying one must step back and ponder reality (there is a "power of withdrawal") because reality has a thoroughgoing impact on consciousness.

Consciousness is an awareness of oneself and the world. Furthermore, consciousness has depth, and as one moves through this space one's perception of oneself and the world changes. This does not automatically entail greater self-clarity. Movement through this "space-depth" is contingent on factors such as intelligence, curiosity, character, personality, experience, and chance; political-economic and cultural structures (class, race, gender, disability, age, sexual preference); and social institutions.

Evolution of consciousness depends on how one perceives and what questions one asks. What one concludes from the thousands of impulses and impressions one receives throughout life depends on, following Albert Einstein, where the observer is and how he or she observes. Take sunsets as an example. We "see" sunsets. But how we see a sunset depends on the weather (e.g., clouds), who we are with and our state of mind at the time, the vantage point (boat, beach, high-rise building), and so on. How we see a sunset is dependent on what we think a sunset is. For many, it is the descent of the sun below the perceived horizon. I can confirm this personally, having watched tourists jump into their tour bus immediately after the sun disappears. For others, the sunset continues until the sun's rays shine back against the darkening sky and produce a sublime radiance.

The point is that consciousness cannot be separated from the real world, from politics and culture. There is an important relationship between being and consciousness.[6] Social being informs consciousness, and consciousness informs being. There is a mutual interplay. Consciousness is not a container that ideas and experiences are poured into. Consciousness is a process of awareness that is influenced by social conditions, chance, and innate cognition.

People are sometimes described as not having consciousness. This is not so. Everyone has consciousness; it is just that for some, probably most, that consciousness is partially false. From childhood,

people are constantly bombarded with the values of the dominant culture. These values reflect the "naturalness" of superiority and inferiority, dominance and subordination.

Power and Ideology

The greatest challenge in conceptualizing oppression of any kind is understanding how it is organized and how it is reproduced. It is relatively easy to outline general characteristics such as poverty, degradation, exclusion, and so on. But to answer these questions, we must examine the diffuse circuitry of power and ideology. This exercise is particularly difficult because power and ideology not only organize the way in which individuals experience politics, economics, and culture, they contradictorily obscure or illuminate why and how the dimensions of (disability) oppression are reproduced.

Oppression is a phenomenon of power in which relations between people and between groups are experienced in terms of domination and subordination, superiority and inferiority. At the center of this phenomenon is control. Those with power control; those without power lack control. Power presupposes political, economic, and social hierarchies, structured relations of groups of people, and a system or regime of power. This system, the existing power structure, encompasses the thousands of ways some groups and individuals impose control over others.

Power is diffuse, ambiguous, and complicated: "Power is more general and operates in a wider space than force; it includes much more, but is less dynamic. It is more ceremonious and even has a certain measure of patience.... [S]pace, hope, watchfulness and destructive intent, can be called the actual body of power, or, more simply, power itself" (Canetti [1962] 1984:281). It is not simply a system of oppressors and oppressed. There are many kinds and experiences of power: employer/employee, men/women, dominant race/subordinated race, parent/child, principal/teacher, teacher/student, doctor/patient, to name some. Power more accurately should be considered power(s). These power relations are irreducible products of history. These histories of power(s) collectively make up the regime of power informing the manner and method of governing.

Power should not be confused with rule, however. A ruling class, historically forged by political and economic factors, governs. But other privileged groups and individuals have and exercise power. In the obscure vernacular of French philosophy, the relationship of power between those who are privileged and those who are not is *overdetermined* by class rule.[7]

There are many ways for significantly empowered classes and groups to exercise and maintain power. All regimes, regardless of political philosophy, have ruled through a combination of force and coercion, legitimation and consent. In the Western democracies and parts of the Third World, consent is prevalent and force seldom used. In many parts of the Third World, though, state-sponsored repression is common. The repressive practices of Third World dictatorships are well known and documented. In these countries there exists a pathology between military control and consent. People fear the government and the military because these institutions promote fear through constant harassment and repression.

The primary method through which power relations are reproduced is not physical—military force and state coercion—but metaphysical—people's consent to the existing power structure. This is certainly the case for the hundreds of millions of people with disabilities throughout the world. In chapter 5, I analyze the passive acquiescence of people with disabilities, individually and collectively, in the face of extraordinary lived oppression.

The passive acquiescence to oppression is partially based in what the British cultural historian Raymond Williams has called the "spiritual character" of power: "In particular, ideology needs to be studied to find out how it justifies and boosts the economic activities of particular classes; that is, the study of ideology enables us to study the intention of the articulate classes and the spiritual character of a particular class's rule" (1973:6). Williams is suggesting that the dominant classes and culture constantly and everywhere impress on people the naturalness or normality of their power and

privilege. Williams, following Antonio Gramsci, called this process *hegemony.*[8] Hegemony is projected multidimensionally and multidirectionally. It is not projected like a motion picture projects images. The impulses and impressions, beliefs and values, standards and manners are projected more like sunlight. Hegemony is diffuse and appears everywhere as natural. It (re)enforces domination not only through the (armed) state but also throughout society: in families, churches, schools, the workplace, legal institutions, bureaucracy, and culture.

Schooling is a particularly notable example of this process because it cuts across so many boundaries and affects so many, including people with disabilities. If, as we are led to believe, the mission of schooling is teaching and learning, then the logical questions are, who gets to teach? what is taught? how do students learn? and, most important, why? First, let me suggest that schooling has two principal "political" functions. Its narrow purpose is to teach acquiescence to power structures operating in the educational arena. Its broad purpose is to teach acquiescence to the larger status quo, especially the discipline of its workforce.

How does this work? First teachers are trained. Then their training (knowledge) is certified and licensed. Education is "professionalized." Teachers become educational experts. Students sit in rows, all pointing toward this repository of knowledge. The teacher pours his or her knowledge into the students' "empty" heads didactically. There is little sharing of knowledge between the teacher and the student,[9] for the teacher has learned that the process is unidirectional. The curriculum itself is standardized and licensed by state education officials, often the same body that licenses teachers. Moreover, administrators are far removed from the classroom, their only regular contact with students being discipline. They allow little innovation and flexibility. Many administrators continue the same rules and programs for decades. Power comes from above. Everyone and everything in the schooling process is authorized. Students are, in Jürgen Habermas's term, *steered.* Numerous studies have shown that girls are treated differently from boys regardless of the teacher's gender. Students from some families are encouraged and others discouraged. Some, for example, students with disabilities, are segregated in different schools or classrooms.[10]

The latter point is particularly important for understanding the fundamental connections between ideology and power as they relate to disability. Students with disabilities, as soon as their disability is recognized by school officials, are placed on a separate track. They are immediately labeled by authorized (credentialed) professionals (who never themselves have experienced these labels) as LD, ED EMH, and so on. The meaning and definition of the labels differ, but they all signify inferiority on their face. Furthermore, these students are constantly told what they can (potentially/expect to) do and what they cannot do from the very date of their labeling. This happens as a natural matter of course in the classroom.

All activists I interviewed who had a disability in grade school or high school told similar kinds of horror stories—detention and retention, threats and insults, physical and emotional abuse. In Chicago, I have colleagues and friends who were told they could not become teachers because they used wheelchairs; colleagues and friends who are deaf and went through twelve years of school without a single teacher who was proficient in sign language (they were told it was good for them because they should learn to read lips). I have visited segregated schools that required its personnel to wear white lab coats (to impress on the disabled students that they were first and foremost sickly). I know of a student art exhibition that was canceled because some drawings portrayed the students growing up to be doctors and other "unrealistic vocations."

It is possible to identify numerous ways that students with disabilities are controlled and taught their place: (1) labeling; (2) symbols (e.g., white lab coats, "Handicapped Room" signs); (3) structure (pull-out programs, segregated classrooms, "special" schools, inaccessible areas); (4) curricula especially designed for students with disabilities (behavior modification for emotionally disturbed kids, training skills without knowledge instruction for significantly mentally retarded students and students with autistic behavior) or having significant implications for these students; (5) testing and evaluation biased toward the functional needs of the dominant culture (Stanford-Binet and Wexler

tests); (6) body language and disposition of school culture (teachers almost never look into the eyes of students with disabilities and practice even greater patterns of superiority and paternalism than they do with other students); and (7) discipline (physical restraints, isolation/time-out rooms with locked doors, use of Haldol and other sedatives).[11]

Special Education, like so many other reforms won by the popular struggle, has been transformed from a way to increase the probability that students with disabilities will get some kind of an education into a badge of inferiority and a rule-bound, bureaucratic process of separating and then warehousing millions of young people that the dominant culture has no need for. While this process is uneven, with a minority benefiting from true inclusionary practices, the overarching influences of race and class preclude any significant and meaningful equalization of educational opportunities.[12]

The sociopolitical implications of this process are clear to many disability rights activists.

> *Danilo Delfin:* "Disability rights advocacy in Southeast Asia is very hard. Children are taught never to argue with their teacher. It is a long socialization process."

The Chicago educators and disability rights activists Carol Gill and Larry Voss interviewed twenty-one people who went through Special Education. Their survey respondents indicated that they believed that Special Education made them more passive and convinced them of their lot in life.[13]

We can begin to see the similarities between power and hegemony. Power, as Elias Canetti reminds us, is "more general and operates in a wider space than force," and hegemony, according to Raymond Williams, is "a whole body of practices and expectations, over the whole of living: our senses and assignments of energy, our shaping perceptions of ourselves and our world. It is a lived system of meaning and values . . . but a culture which has also to be seen as the lived dominance and subordination of particular classes" (Eagleton 1989:110). The meanings and values of society are defined by the powerful. Hegemony is omnipresent. It is embedded in the social fabric of life.

One of the ironies of hegemony is that the dominant culture's success in inculcating its contrived value system is contingent on the extent to which that worldview makes sense. On one level, and I will consider this in greater detail later, the legitimation of the dominant culture, marked by acquiescence and consent, is founded on real-world experiences. This is what Ellen Meiksins Wood means when she writes in *The Retreat from Class,*

> What gives this political form its peculiar hegemonic power . . . is that the consent it commands from the dominated classes does not simply rest on their submission to an acknowledged ruling class or their acceptance of its right to rule. The parliamentary democratic state is a unique form of class rule because it casts doubt on the very existence of a ruling class. It does not achieve this by pure mystification. As always hegemony has two sides. It is not possible unless it is plausible. (1986:149)

We can recognize this clearly when it comes to disability. People with disabilities are usually seen as sick and pitiful, and in fact many became disabled through disease and most live in pitiful conditions. Furthermore, most people with disabilities are only noticed when they are being lifted up steps, or walk into an obstacle, or are being assisted across a street. Historically, most people with disabilities live apart from the rest of society. Most people do not regularly interact with people with disabilities in the classroom, at work, at the movies, and so on. Instead of curing the social conditions that cause disease and desperation, or removing the steps that necessitate assistance, the dominant culture explains the pitiful conditions people are forced to live in by creating a stratum or group of "naturally" pitiful individuals to conceal its pitiful status quo. The dominant culture turns reality on its head.

Today the mass media play the greatest role in what Noam Chomsky and Edward Herman (1988) called "manufacturing consent" through the use of filters that select and shape information. Indeed, its role in creating and promoting images has grown exponentially in recent times as its capacity to project images has grown. The philosopher Roger Gottlieb links the mass media's role in maintaining order to creating an "authorized reality." He echoes Wood's earlier point that this created truth must actually reflect certain aspects of reality:

> In this complex sense, the media, like the state and the doctor, serve as authority figures. Their authority is derived from the compelling power of the images they produce—just as the authority of the medieval church derived from the size of its cathedrals. . . . And it is not foolishness or stupidity that leads us to take these images so seriously. It is the fact that real needs are manipulated into false hopes. Our needs for sexuality, love, community, an interesting life, family respect, and self-respect are transformed by the ubiquitous images of an unattainable reality into the sense that our sexuality, family, and personal lives are unreal. And it is this mechanism that sustains social authorities no longer believed to be legitimate. (1987:156, 159)

What images of disability are most prevalent in the mass media? Television shows depicting the helpless and angry cripple as a counterpoint to a poignant story about love or redemption. Tragic news stories about how drugs or violence have "ruined" someone's life by causing him or her to become disabled, or even worse, stories of the heroic person with a disability who has "miraculously," against all odds, become a successful person (whatever that means) and actually inched very close to being "normal" or at least to living a "normal" life. Most despicable are the telethons "for" *crippled* people, especially, poor, pathetic, crippled children. These telethons parade young children in front of the camera while celebrities like Jerry Lewis pander to people's goodwill and pity to get their money. In the United States surveys have shown that more people form attitudes about disabilities from telethons than from any other source.[14]

These images merge nicely with the language used to describe people with disabilities.[15] Consider, for example, "cripple," "invalid," "retard." In Zimbabwe, the term is *chirema,* which literally translates as "useless." In Brazil, the term is *pena,* which is slang for an affliction that comes as punishment. These terms are evidence of how people with disabilities are dehumanized. The process of assigning "meaning" through language, signs, and symbols is relentless and takes place most significantly in families, religious institutions, communities, and schools.

The dehumanization of people with disabilities through language (as just one obvious example) has a profound influence on consciousness. They, like other oppressed peoples, are constantly told by the dominant culture what they cannot do and what their place is in society. The fact that most oppressed people accept their place (read: oppression) is not hard to comprehend when we consider all the ideological powers at work. Their false consciousness has little to do with intelligence. It does have to do with two interactive and mutually dependent sources. The first is the capacity of ruling regimes to instill its values in the mass of people through double-speak, misdirection (blame the victim), naturalized inferiority, and legitimated authority. This is *hegemony.* The second is the psychological devastation people experience which creates self-pity and self-annihilation and makes self-awareness, awareness of peers, and awareness of their own humanity extremely difficult. This is *alienation.* Hegemony and alienation are two sides of the same phenomenon—ideological domination.[16]

In the case of disability, domination is organized and reproduced principally by a circuitry of power and ideology that constantly amplifies the normality of domination and compresses difference into classification norms (through symbols and categories) of superiority and normality against inferiority and abnormality.

Notes

1. Einar Helander, at a press conference on the release of the United Nations Report *Human Rights and Disabled Persons* (*Chicago Tribune*, December 5, 1993). Herlander has written a number of reports for the UN, including Prejudice and Dignity and, with Padmani Mendis, Gunnel Nelson, and Ann Goerdt, Training in the Disabled Community.
2. For example, unpaid domestic labor contributes to the socially necessary sustenance and nurturance of paid nondomestic labor, and the people, prominently women, involved in this work should be considered part of the laboring class. See Ferguson 1989.
3. O'Connor does not mean to imply that people defined as surplus are unnecessary. He means they are irrelevant to the present political-economic system. The notion of surplus people was explicitly developed to account for the treatment of people with mental retardation in Farber 1968.

4. To a great extent, exiles have avoided this "declassing." They have, at least in many cases, become incorporated into new economic milieus subsequent to their forced expulsion from their homeland.
5. Much has been written about precapitalist economic formations. There have been a number of efforts to refine the classification of their primitive, feudal, or semifeudal characteristics: "archaic" (Polanyi 1944); "tributary" (Amin 1990); "precapitalist" (Dobb 1946). Many have simply used the term "traditional."
6. This is in sharp distinction not only to psychology, as discussed earlier, but also to the German idealist philosophy of Kant, Hegel, and Schopenhauer. For these people separated society and being from consciousness and thought. For example, in *The Phenomenology of Mind* Hegel extinguishes any social relationship to truth or any civil or state (government) relationship to justice. Later, in *The Science of Logic*, he merged the two. Thought *is* being, and there is a distinction between reality and actuality.
7. Overdetermination is a theory associated primarily with Louis Althusser. Trying to avoid orthodox Marxism's theory that economic relations determine all social relations, he conceived the notion that the "superstructures" (language, law, custom, religion, etc.) have their own "specific effectivity." But Althusser argues that these distinct realities are subject to the "determination in the last instance by the [economic] mode of production," although there is "the relative autonomy of the superstructures and their specific effectivity" (1964: 111). This is overdetermination. While I do not subscribe to Althusser's idea that superstructures (his structuralism), I do believe that overdetermination is an insightful way of thinking about relationships. In this case, while powers have their own specific effectivity, they are ordered by class rule. Once the ensemble of power relationships is configured or ordered, these relationships evolve primarily from their internal dynamics.
8. The theory of hegemony is one of the great contributions of the Italian communist Antonio Gramsci, who insisted that the principal way power was projected by the capitalist ruling class (Italy in the 1920s) was through hegemony or ideological domination. In his *The Two Revolutions* Carl Boggs argues that Gramsci's theory of hegemony penetrated the realm of power where ideology (most notably culture) and political economy met: "For Gramsci ideas, beliefs, cultural preferences, and even myths and superstitions possessed a certain material reality of their own since in their power to inspire people towards action, they interact with economic conditions, which other wise would be nothing more than empty abstractions" (1984: 158).
9. See Paulo Friere's "banking theory" in *The Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1973)
10. Freire is probably the best-known theorist of hegemonic practices of schooling. He has been influential in developing counterhegemonic education. He is associated with literacy campaigns in Cuba, Guinea-Bissau, Nicaragua, and Brazil. In *Ideology, Culture, and the Process of Schooling*, the critical theorist and educator Henry Giroux writes, "According to Freire, it is the cultural institutions of the dominant elite that play a major role in inculcating the oppressed with myths and beliefs that later become anchored in their psyches and character structure. To the degree that repressive institutions are successful in universalizing the belief system of the oppressor class, people will consent to their own exploitation and powerlessness" (1988: 134).

    Samuel Bowles and Herbert Gintis (1976), Michael Apple (1979), Henry Giroux (1988), Paulo Freire (1968, 1973, 1987), and Michel Focault (1980) successfully demonstrate the role of schooling in the production of a monoculture and the reproduction of existing power relations. It is ironic that while the literature theorizing the hegemonic practices of schooling has burgeoned in recent years, the voices of radical educators, especially those critical theorists who have promoted such views, have been silent on disability, inclusion, and special education, where the oppression and control of students has been the greatest. While this omission of radical pedagogy does not compare to the common outrageous treatment of students with disabilities, it is just as telling of the status of students with disabilities.
11. Joseph Tropea's article, "Bureaucratic Order and Special Children," is useful because3 of its focus on the historical socioeconomic necessities that framed early attempts to warehouse "incorrigible, backward and otherwise defective pupils" (1987:32)
12. The same regulations that are being used to provide students with access are also being implemented in such a way that many students are being inappropriately removed from regular education, resulting in questionable educational benefit and possible harm (Gartner and Lipsky 1987). This is particularly true in the area of high-incidence mild disabilities, the so-called educable mentally handicapped, learning disabled, and behaviorally/emotionally disordered. Special education is increasingly used to segregate students labeled "mildly handicapped"—students whom schools have difficulty serving or whom they choose not to serve. These programs often have a disproportionate enrollment of racial minority students. For instance, though African-American students make up 16 percent of the public school population, they represent 35 percent of those labeled educable mentally handicapped.
13. An unpublished paper that Gill and Voss developed at the Chicago Institute of Disability Research: "Inclusion Beyond the Classroom: Asking Persons with Disabilities About Education."
14. In 1993 the magazine Vanity Fair ran a series on telethons. Most of the commentary centered on the "worth" of a life with disability. This brought Paul Longmore's work to the fore. Longmore, a leading disability rights academic then at Stanford University, had decisively shown elsewhere that telethons promoting charities are the principal ideological mediums transmitting and inculcating attitudes about disability in the United States. Longmore writes that the four major telethons—Easter Seals, Arthritis Foundation, United Cerebral Palsy, and Muscular Dystrophy Association—reach a combined audience of 250 million people and their message "is hegemonic in creating attitudes and ideas about disability" (Longmore, quoted in Bennets 1993:2

15. For the purposes of this book, I use the term "language" as it is commonly understood. I recognize that Ferdinand de Saussure in his Course in General Linguistics distinguished "language" from "speech" to argue that language is unable to be transformed, that it is an unconscious code. Emile Durkheim argued that this "split" was the basis of society. In this sense I am most often exploring speech, although I make the point numerous times that language, as it is used, is interiorized and its meaning inculcated.
16. Some people argue that ideology is partisan in that it is inherently at the service of the dominant culture; others argue that it is neutral and a contested terrain of ideas. Just before he died, Sartre defined ideology in the former terms: ""Ideology . . . is an ensemble of ideas which underlies alienated acts and reflects them . . . .Ideologies represent powers and are active. Philosophies are formed in opposition to ideologies, although they reflect them to a certain extent while at the same time criticizing them and going beyond them" (Schilpp 1991:20). Sartre sees ideology as always partisan. Slavoj Zizek, editor of *Mapping Ideology*, thinks ideology is more limited and more neutral: "Ideology either exerts an influence that is crucial but constrained to some narrow social stratum, or its role in social reproduction is marginal" (1994: 14). For the purposes of this book it is most useful to think of ideology as a system of ideas and beliefs that are projected.

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