Disability Stigma, Discrimination, & Activism

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Tides of the Disability Rights Movement (DRM)

- Initial aims
  - Form group/class identity
  - Receive representation politically
  - Fight against employment discrimination
  - Have DRM viewed in similar terms as other successful activist movements

- Challenges
  - Misconceptions about the uselessness, expense, and burden of disabled persons
  - Significant (timely, costly) changes to infrastructure, systems, institutions needed
  - No discernible culture; shared experiences (initially) hard to identify
  - Layered social identities (e.g., gender, race, class) of disabled persons

Additional Challenges

- **Paternalistic attitudes** of those in positions of authority
  - Problem of *epistemic barrier*
  - Given that many disabled persons do require additional assistance or medical intervention, how can individuals or institutions prevent unwarranted paternalism?
    - What are the moral benefits of doing so?

- Unclear benchmarks for **independent living**
  - "Freedom, to an extent, is reliant upon its citizens having the independence to build better lives for themselves" (Bryan 327)
  - What might be morally problematic about having independence or normal citizenship as central goals of the DRM?

Acknowledging Difference

- **Tension:** Building a <u>unified movement</u> and set of core concerns *while* nonetheless acknowledging <u>key differences</u> among the lived experiences of disabled persons
  - Type of impairment
  - Degree of impairment
  - Timing of impairment (recent, past, congenital, gradual, sudden)
  - Other social identities

Differences in **priorities**, **circumstances**, **needs**, **vulnerabilities**, **layers of oppression**, **sense of community with disabled or nondisabled**

Common Assumptions about Disability

- **Located within biology**
  - "Disability is portrayed as the variable that predicts the outcome of social interaction when, in fact, social contexts shape the meaning of a disability in a person's life" (Fine & Asch 332)

- **Impairment is source of disabled person's problems**
  - Belittles or ignores role of human-created barriers to well-being

Common Assumptions about Disability

○ **Disabled people are victims of their impairments**

   ○ Coping with suffering through self-blame, construing positive meaning, or denial

   ○ "assumed a biological injustice" (ibid. 334)

○ **Totalizing identity—central to self-identification and social comparison**

   ○ "Because disability is clearly salient for the nondisabled, it is assumed that the marked person incorporates the mark as central to self-definition" (ibid.)

Common Assumptions about Disability

- **In constant need of help and social support**
  - Role of "helplessness, dependence, and passivity" (ibid. 335)
  - Push to be as close to "normal" functioning as possible

- What are the moral harms associated with each of these assumptions?
  - How might these assumptions contribute to oppressive practices and attitudes?

What's Needed

- **Expanding the realm of justice**
  - Requires fighting stigma, dehumanization

- **Shedding ableist ideals**
  - Myth of complete self-sufficiency
  - Certain norms of good citizenship, patriotism
  - Fear and ignorance of caregiving

- **Building relationships and ties amongst communities**
  - Giving disabled persons a voice, representation, visibility in various spheres

- What are some ways in which the DRM is **distinct** from other movements on behalf of oppressed persons?

Questions? Comments?