

Oppression of the Intellectually Disabled



OPPRESSION & JUSTICE (FALL 2013)
LAURA GUIDRY-GRIMES

Oppressive Systems, Practices



- **Attitudes**
 - Less than human, denied full personhood
 - ✦ Fewer rights, lower social standing
 - Dangerous to gene pool
 - ✦ Sterilization, genetic counseling, eugenics programs
 - Pitied, stereotyped
 - ✦ Paternalism, exclusion from participation, denied a political voice
 - Defective
 - ✦ High levels of medical interference in living arrangements, prescribed care

Oppressive Systems, Practices



- **Social “handling”**
 - Segregated via institutions; removed from mainstream education
 - ✦ → reinforced “otherness”, broke up families, given low quality treatment, “given up on” as irreparably defective
 - Deinstitutionalization, integration
 - ✦ → less professionalized attention, push towards “normal” living, questions about limits of welfare programs, anti-discrimination hurdles
 - Diversity recognition?



CERTAINLY OUT OF THE HOUSE,
OUT OF THE NEIGHBORHOOD,

Willowbrook

Cultivating Humanity



- **Martha Nussbaum:**
 - Examine oneself, culture, and tradition critically
 - Think outside the bounds of one's locality, regional situatedness
 - Narrative imagination—"we must try to identify with the lives as they are lived by people with an intellectual disability" (Parmenter 268)
- **How could the above moral goals be translated into concrete moral responsibilities in relation to combating the oppression of intellectually disabled individuals?**

Otherness



- **Backdrop**: What is seen as most valuable for a flourishing society? What is seen as most valuable for a flourishing individual?
 - Society: productivity, participatory citizenship, economic power
 - Individual: self-sufficiency, independence, autonomy, maximal reasoning
- **Necessary to be a citizen, person, human?**
 - Post-Enlightenment elevation of reason as the best, most important, most divine faculty of humanity – what separates humans from beasts
 - ✦ So not a rights-bearer? Not respect-worthy?

Normalization Principle



- **Nirje's**
 - “you act right when making available to all persons with intellectual or other impairments or disabilities pattern of life and conditions of every day living which are as close as possible to or **indeed the same** as the regular circumstances and ways of life of their communities” (qtd. in Parmenter 277)
- **Wolfensberger's**
 - Stressed importance of the “appearance of conformity and passing and the need for people to hide their deviancy” (Parmenter 277)
 - **Theory of social role valorization:** importance of taking on valued social roles in order to overcome/hide deviance
- **Is one of these approaches morally preferable to the other?**

Moving Forward



- **Evolution in thought and policy:**
 - Intellectual disabled persons as **doomed** →
 - Need to **reverse ID** as much as possible for “normal” living →
 - Recognize and respect diversity of the human condition?
- **Limitations of rights focus**
 - Philosophical barriers re: who counts as a rights-bearer, what dignity consists in
 - Moral concern should expand beyond civil and human rights
 - ✦ **Duties of care, mutual obligation** – focus on **interdependence needs**
- **Building an ethical community**
 - Recognize mutuality of need, reciprocity of vulnerability
 - Fundamental moral equality of all humans
 - Social capability—sound social relations supporting many forms of functionality

Discussion



- Provide a moral evaluation of each of the following:
 - A mother learns through amniocentesis that her child, if born, will have a moderate ID. She will require continual care and multiple hospital visits throughout her life, but she could have a life worth living if given adequate care. The mother decides to terminate because she does not think her family can financially and emotionally handle this challenge.
 - [*in the future*] Through advances in the Human Genome Project and genetic manipulation, doctors can offer families the option to screen embryos for any kind of “genetic deficiency.” This technology, if pervasive enough, could eliminate a number of IDs from the gene pool. One doctor is unsure whether advising this kind of technology is in the best interests of parents, future children, and the future of humanity. He is unsure whether to tell the parents in front of them the genetic make up of the embryos in front of them.

Questions?



COMMENTS?