

Choose a group in society and consider how they have to engage with the 'politics of recognition' in order to seek greater equity in the last 50 years

Understanding the social and political recognition of those groups in society that are marginalised, can become a complicated matter. In relation to this, Charles Taylor's 'politics of recognition' has become an increasingly popular way of thinking, in terms of contemporary societal issues, and understanding the struggle in which these marginalised groups must endure in order to achieve social justice and acceptance (Meer *et al*, 2012, p. 1). Taylor (1994, p. 26) argues that recognition is a 'vital human need' and therefore, should not be considered as something which a group must earn, or an owed courtesy. Conveying that it is simply, crucial to the ability of individuals or groups becoming fully functional and included members of society; and in contrast suggesting that in the absence of recognition, it becomes less probable that one will thrive and prosper (Meer *et al*. 2012, p.1). Following on from this Abraham Maslow's (1943) hierarchy of needs theory may critique this idea, suggesting that respect and recognition from others is not as vital a need as water or food, and one can achieve without it, however stating without recognition one may have a very low sense of self, and that psychological impact may put up barriers to becoming a self-actualised individual.

Defining disability throughout sociology has been complex, models have been created to convey different trains of thought in relation to understanding disability. The social model of disability (SMOD) proposes that the attitudes and perceptions of a disability by society, is what makes a person disabled, or feel disabled, not the medical condition (The Mental Health Foundation, N/D). In contrast, the medical model of disability suggests that an individual is disabled by their medical conditions, implying that if an illness or condition is cured, the individual is no longer disabled (University of Leicester, 2015) these ideas will be critically analysed throughout this essay in more detail, with particular consideration of the foundations of the ideas, and the changes in which were ignited because of the ideas, along with attention to their utility.

In understanding engaging with the politics of recognition, one must first come to understand the difference between equality and equity. Equality is a term used often to represent fairness, equality would occur when two groups have the same in society, giving everyone the same starting point. Equity however, occurs when individuals or groups in society are given what they need in order to play an equal role in society, in an attempt to eliminate disadvantage

(World Health Organisation, N/D). an example of a group in society, that may need to achieve equity rather than equality, due to their differing of needs would be people with disabilities.

PWD, often feel as if they are marginalised within society, due to the negative perception they are faced with in society (Thomas Pocklington Trust, 2017). Even though throughout the last fifty years it can be said that a plethora of positive legislation changes have been made in order to overcome adversity and isolation for disabled people, a stigma still exists. Due to this, many PWD may still feel as if they have not yet reached complete recognition in society (Coco, 2018; Thomas Pocklington Trust, 2017). this essay will explore how people with disabilities (PWD) have had to engage with the politics of recognition throughout the past fifty years, focussing on: the social model of disability, and how its introduction created a remarkable paradigm shift concerning the treatment of PWD; the British campaigners that took to the street in a radical attempt to mobilise change, and the impact in which they had and the modernisation of activism for PWD, and how the media and social media can play a crucial role influencing perception of disabilities, considering theory, policy and practice through the three key themes. The focus will be within the UK, however for contextual use, examples and research from around the world will be included.

Understanding the SMOD, is key in understanding a plethora of social and legislative changes which have occurred in recent history, and the positive impact in which they have made for the lives and inclusion of people living with both learning and physical disabilities. Throughout history, disability has often been something which oppresses and excludes a person (Driedger, 1989; Campbell and Oliver, 1996; Charlton, 1998 *cited in* Barnes, 2010).

This kind of oppression in the latter part of the twentieth century, particularly in the 1970's and 1980's, generated a mobilization for change. On a Macro scale (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) throughout this period in Europe and North America, organisations such as Union of the Physically Impaired Against Segregation (UPIAS) along with disabled activists, were beginning to highlight these issues. Drawing attention to the discrimination and oppression in which they were faced with due to societies failures in addressing and accommodating to the differing needs and requirements associated with disabilities (Oliver, 1983; Zola, 1983, p 49-59). The UPIAS distinguished the difference between an impairment and disability, defining an impairment as a full or partial lack of limb or use of vital organ; and a disability as the disadvantage posed on a person by society or organization, which furthermore leads to exclusion from mainstream participation (UPIAS, 1976, P. 14). The aim during this period was

ensuring bridges were being built to ensure a better sense of inclusion for PWD le was established. Woolcock (2001) identifies, that prior to a bridging experience occurring, trust between two groups is often poor and through effective bridging links inclusion can be established.

Although by many, the introduction of SMOD has been considered a real catalyst for change, many argue the concept does have negative underpinning connotations. For example, some argue that assuming disability completely in terms of structural exclusion, therefore the concern of curing medical conditions may be considered particularly suspicious. Additionally, the concern and consideration of PWD as individuals becomes a complex matter, because the imperative of social change is focused on the reduction of oppression and inclusion of PWD as a whole, rather than meeting specific individual needs (Shakespeare, 2006).

Although it must also be taken into consideration however, much of the information addressing the successes of the UPIAS, has been taken from accounts written by a relative of Paul hunt, disabled movement activist, and therefore may portray significant biases because of this. It is notable that the UPIAS's establishment was crucial on a social level, in developing theoretical and political foundations that would generate a shift in paradigm in concern of treating PWD in an individualistic matter. Furthermore, resulting plethora of legislative changes. On an individual level, the SMOD worked to tackle the social oppression in which PWD were often faced with, allowing them the opportunity to reach a higher sense of social capital. Meaning, due to the links being formed with society as a whole, better accessibility to networks within the society becomes achievable (Bourdieu, 1992 *cited in* Giddens, 2006, p.322). This additionally, gives PWD a better chance of becoming recognised and receiving a greater standard of equity, through their engagement with the politics of recognition (Hunt, 2019).

The SMOD, and those who advocated in its favour, regardless of critiques, has indeed played a crucial role on a Macro scale (Bronfenbrenner, 1979), in changing ways of thinking and therefore on a Meso scale (Bronfenbrenner, 1979), has had influence in legislation and policy changes in the UK, particularly legislation that restricted viewing PWD as individuals. For example, the white paper setting out the *Better Services for the Mentally handicapped* white paper was implemented by the Department of health. The paper highlighted, that there was no longer a need for all people with learning difficulties to be cared for within institutions. The paper set out, that alternatively care under local and community provisions would be more appropriate. this meant that people with learning disabilities, began to be cared for with a social

and individualistic approach, rather than being perceived as a medical condition, which is unfit for public inclusion, accentuating a positive shift in paradigm concerning perception and treatment of people with learning disabilities (Walmsley, 2008, p. 234).

Although the early experiences of deinstitutionalisation has been critiqued, with Walker and Walker (1998) claiming, the relocation of people with learning disabilities from hospitals to communities, could not necessarily guarantee inclusion; It can be said in practice, it offered the opportunity for normalization and a better sense of community presence (O'Brien, 1987 *cited in* Barnes and Mercer, 2010, p. 137) which in turn creates opportunity for a better sense of both human and social capital (Becker, 1964 *cited in* Dillion, 2010, p. 248; Bourdieu, 1992 *cited in* Giddens, 2006, p.322). Thus proving, how the groups engagement with the politics of recognition resulted in a better sense of equity.

Throughout the UK in the 1980's and 1990's, activists can indeed, be considered to have engaged with the politics of recognition, in order to seek greater equity. Activism in this period, focussed on advocacy and protest for legislation which protected the rights of PWD in relation to welfare, education and employment (Pearson and Trevisan, 2015). This period saw disabled citizens shouting, chanting, chaining themselves to public transport and demanding for their message to be heard (Rose, 2015). A significant protest, was in 1992, when, the stereotypical, discriminatory and prejudice depiction of PWD in ITV's 28-hour fundraiser, ignited anger among disabled activists who claimed; Britain was 'willing to grant charity handouts to disabled people but not equality' (Ryan, 2015).

Some sources used to collect research concerning British activism for this essay have come from newspaper articles, which can be considered as biased and unjust. It must be noted that they have been used as a result of the limited resources available in the public domain concerning such a topic. The work of disabled British activists has been considered a 'hidden history' in comparison to activist groups such as the suffragettes or black people in their fight for civil rights. Notably, much of the research which is available in the public domain is also only available, as the issue was highlighted in 2015, as a result of the twentieth anniversary of the *Disability Discrimination Act (1995)* (Ryan, 2015). It must also be considered, that Frances Ryan (2015) is a disabled journalist, which suggests her articles may contain significant biases in favour of disability rights and treatment.

This period however, can be considered as one of radicalisation, but also a period of politicization, while literature such as Colin Barnes' (1991) *Disabled people in Britain and*

Discrimination: A case for Anti-Discrimination Legislation - sponsored by organisations like the British Council of Disabled People (BCODP) – highlighted factual, statistical, quantitative evidence which brought light to the oppression and unequal treatment that PWD were being faced with in areas such as welfare, education, health and social care (Oliver and Barnes, 1998, p. 90 *cited in* Barnes and Mercer, 2010). In conjunction with this, voluntary organisations such as the Voluntary organization for Anti-Discrimination Legislation Committee, were set up, they campaigned to highlight the injustice and suffering in which PWD were being faced with as a marginalised group, and as individuals by society. The alliance between activism in the streets, and evidence presented in favour of Anti-Discriminatory legislation; significantly increased awareness, and had furthermore become recognised by all major political parties and consequently in (1995) *The Disability Discrimination Act* was implemented (Barnes, 2010).

The *Disability Discrimination Act (1995)* introduced a fresh policy dimension which criminalised discriminating against a person on the grounds of them having a disability (Gooding, 1995 *cited in* Barnes and Mercer, 2010). The act can however be considered pessimistically, as, as long the employer could prove a good enough reason to discriminate against the disabled person, such as accessibility or health and safety risk, they still had the right to not employ them on these grounds, and for small business equipping the workplace with suitable and accessible measures proved exceedingly costly (Gooding, 1995). Despite its critiques however, the act can be considered to form the framework and underpinning theory for the anti-discriminatory legislation implemented in the future (Pearson and Trevisan, 2015).

.In the present day, the *Equality Act (2010)*, combines a multifarious of laws including the *Disability Discriminations Act (1995)*, the *Race Relations Act (1965)* and the *Sex Discriminations Act (1975)*, the aim of the act is to criminalize the discrimination and unfair treatment in areas, such as employment and education, for protected characteristics such as a disability, race or gender. Despite this, in practice today, in 2019, 52.6 percent of the disabled population of Britain are in employment (Houses of Commons, 2019), which does convey substantial improvement from in 1999, when, 46.7 percent of PWD were employed (Barnes, 2010), suggesting the *Equality Act (2010)* is displaying areas of improvement for activity and participation of people with disability within the work force has improved. However, the fact that in 2019, almost half of the disabled population are unemployed, suggesting room for considerable further improvement.

Isabella Valentine, is an example of disability discrimination still existing in employment; as, her disability resulted in her dismissal from work, after being employed for just four days. She expressed that securing employment as a disabled person, distinctively, a disabled woman, as a difficult process (Hill, 2019). Conclusively suggesting, although the protection of PWD and supporting legislation has displayed notable improvements for the lives of PWD (Pearson and Trevisan, 2015), oppression and exclusion still exists (Hill, 2019), and despite their engagement with the politics of recognition, total equity has not yet been achieved.

In the past couple decades, technology, the internet and social media have become extremely influential platforms for expressing opinion, and mobilizing change (Ellis and Kent; Johnson and Moxon, 1998 *cited in* Pearson and Trevisan, 2015). The disabled community have subsequently become more active users of such platforms. It is to be considered that the internet does pose particular barriers for individual disabilities and impairments, for example, the blind community. Despite this, the internet has been considered to have become an increasingly useful platform to influence positive change in civic participation for PWD. It has also been suggested the platform has a significant potential in including the disabled community in policy making, and policy influence, through creation of online organizations (Thoreau, 2006; Goggin and Noonan, 2007 *cited in* Pearson and Trevisan, 2015). An example of this, is what went on to be named the #Spartacus campaign on twitter

Platforms such as twitter, blogs and became increasingly more prominent and important tools following the austerity programme introduced in 2010. The online disabled community used twitter as a platform to draw attention to the manipulation and deviation of the government outlining the lies proposed in regard to the disability living allowance, and the local government cuts which targeting PWD (Flanagin, Stohl, and Bimber, 2006 *cited in* Trevisan, 2013). The campaign, through particular social cohesion of the disabled community, caught attention of celebrities, which raised public interest. The Department for Work and Pensions took to twitter in justification of their reforms using the ‘#iamsparticus’, therefore, in attempt to admit their mistakes. In short, the online presence of small disability campaign groups, resulted in securing three defeats of the Welfare Reform Bill (Butler, 2012). This example highlights the significance and influence of online activism, and how through the medium of social media, PWD have engaged with the politics of recognition. The media has also drawn attention to disability, in terms of sport, for example the Paralympics, although the first Paralympic games was in 1960, it has become exceedingly recognised in the past fifty years (Kirakosyan and Seabra, 2014).

It is notable that the media plays an increasingly important role in the Paralympic games, as through higher media coverage, it becomes more probable that disability will become more recognised and normalized, therefore creating better opportunity for social inclusion for PWD (MARQUES et al., 2014 *cited in* Kirakosyan and Seabra, 2014). Although, deep seeded societal perspectives and attitudes are often difficult to alter, through media engagement, the opportunity for a better understanding and reaction to disability and PWD is created (Kirakosyan and Seabra, 2014). In contrary however, it has been noted that the Paralympic games, by painting a picture of disabled athletes being heroes and role models, fails to address the 'regular' PWD. Additionally, the heroic perception created by the media, created an underpinning negative attitude towards non-athletic disabled people, by some, and an unrealistic expectation of all PWD to participate in extra-ordinary activities claims Jones (2012).

On a macro level (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) in contrast, revolutionary changes were implemented in China, following the 2008 Paralympic games held in Beijing. Prior to the games, accessibility and hospitality for PWD was limited and unprioritized. Leading up to the games, accessibility legislation was implemented and more than \$150 million was invested in creating more assessable infostructure, for disabled. Subsequently, wheelchairs, ramps and elevators were to built along sections of the Great Wall of China. Additionally, China signed the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (Craven, 2016). In practice due to the bridges built (Woolcock, 2001), these improvements created the opportunity for Chinese disabled citizens to, become more socially included, and maintain a higher sense of social and human capital (Becker, 1964 *cited in* Dillion, 2010, p. 248; Bourdieu, 1992 *cited in* Giddens, 2006, p.322).

On a meso scale (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) although, on a political level, there wasn't remarkable legislative changes as a result of the media's coverage of the Paralympic games, it can be seen to have had effect changing attitudes and imbedded societal views concerning people with disabilities (MARQUES et al., 2014 *cited in* Kirakosyan and Seabra, 2014).

To conclude, throughout the past fifty years, PWD have engaged with the politics of recognition, in a majority of ways.

Influential groups and thinkers have, through campaigning introduced revolutionary ways of thinking, such as the SMOD, this in effect, can be seen as one of the most influential changes in recent disability history, as it introduced the idea of treating PWD in a more humane manner,

and underpinned a plethora of legislative introductions, which PWD benefited greatly because of, such as deinstitutionalization (Shakespeare, 2006)..

The introduction of the *Disability Discrimination Act (1995)* and the *Equality Act (2010)* for the first time, criminalised discrimination of a person on the basis of their disability; this can be considered as a result of how disabled activists engaged with the politics of recognition. Thus, creating better opportunity to prosper and maintain a higher sense of human capital (Bourdieu, 1992 *cited in* Giddens, 2006, p.322). Though, it must be noted discrimination in the work place has not been eliminated, therefore suggesting total equity and recognition has not yet been resulted (Pearson and Trevisan, 2015).

The media and social media have been particularly useful, in creating opportunity for PWD to engage with the politics of recognition (Taylor 1994, p. 26), from the comfort of their own homes, thus creating high social networks, and social cohesion with disabled people alike. Television and media's influence have also been successful to a certain extent in creating opportunity for better social inclusion. However, it can be criticised as it has also created unrealistic expectations of PWD among some (Craven, 2016; (MARQUES et al., 2014 *cited in* Kirakosyan and Seabra, 2014).

For the purpose of this essay it can be concluded, through engagement with the politics of recognition (Taylor, 1994, p. 26), full equity for PWD has not yet been achieved, but notable changes have been achieved, and the societal paradigm shift creates opportunity for even more advancements for PWD in the future.

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