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On Approval: The Geography of Disabled Women and Work

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Setting the Stage

Physicality is a highly valued commodity in Western society. Speech, agility, mobility, sight, hearing and intellect are assumed to be part of the natural order, and those who fail to meet the socially imposed standard are viewed as a class apart (Chouinard, 1997). Power and social control are reflected in environmental design, keeping disruptive elements in their place (Moss and Dyck, 1996). Restrictive environments control access to social spaces, determining in a very real sense who does and who does not 'belong'. Equating disability with illness has had a significant impact on modern thinking. Western society views illness as a private problem to be resolved outside of the public domain (Rioux, 1985). This individualised approach to disability has created little incentive to accommodate the needs of disabled persons in mainstream society (Rioux, 1985). Failure to recognise the potential (economic or otherwise) of disabled persons within the labour market has left this segment of the population with few alternatives for gaining access to essential goods and services. That is, disabled people are perceived as ineffective workers unable to contribute meaningfully to mainstream society. Peripheral access (wheelchair accessible toilets, ramps and lowered telephones) is granted according to able-bodied parameters, thereby satisfying the concept of universality without compromising or disrupting the day to day activities of non-disabled citizens (Chouinard, 1997).

As a rule, disabled persons have not been allowed to be actively involved in the process, rather they have been acted upon. With few exceptions the majority of public buildings, housing, educational facilities and transportation systems have developed without consultation or consideration of the needs of disabled people. In many ways, disabled people are 'type-cast' into playing certain roles. Disabled women face additional isolation and role complexity owing to assumed private domestic and parenting duties, coupled with public gender role expectations (Lonsdale, 1990; Vernon, 1996).

Disabled people must labour under the assumptions imposed upon them by their non-disabled counterparts, even though it may not reflect the way that they see themselves. As a result, this population group inhabits a parallel residual universe of segregated schooling, transport, housing and employment, with standards rarely comparable to those in the mainstream. Socialisation with one's non-disabled peers is severely restricted and regulated. More importantly perhaps, non-disabled people retain the perception of disability as an anomaly as opposed to a reflection of the diversity of humanity. As a society we have yet to develop a comfort level associated with impairment, pain or fatigue that ventures much beyond avoidance (Wendell, 1996). The disability/abnormality/pathology continuum is firmly entrenched (Young, 1997). Science objectifies and dominates much of the discussion about disability (Young, 1997), and assumptions regarding the static nature of disability and impairment permeates the discourse (McDowell, 1999). Myths, fear and apprehension remain intact due to lack of exposure to or knowledge of disability, and the absence of everyday encounters between

the able-bodied mainstream and its disabled 'outsiders' merely perpetuate the ignorance of the former and their fears.

Reshaping the normal workplace (or not): technological fixes and more modest solutions

From institutionalisation to correction: normalising rehabilitation

...the human being is perceived as flexible and alterable while the physical and social environments are assumed to be fixed and unalterable This is clearly unrealistic since historically humans have always moulded the environment to suit their needs rather than the other way round ... People with impairments become objects to be treated, changed, improved and made normal. (Barnes, 1991: 24)

... it is assumed that disabled people must adapt to a hostile environment. Those who succeed are sanctified and held up as exemplars of individual will and effort, while the majority who do not are referred to as passive, apathetic or worse. (Barnes, 1991: 25)

Rehabilitation and training programmes still do not examine the deeper nature and philosophy of employment, nor address the realities of the everyday workplace environment (Drake, 1998). An important caveat is that job training does not mandate paid employment. Workplace culture itself remains grounded in the deficit perspective of disability. That is, the focus of disabled person's employment initiatives continues to be getting the individual disabled person to 'fit' into existing work settings or environments. There is little thought here about reshaping the workplaces into which such people may possibly (if they are lucky) to be admitted: the work environment itself is often perceived as being sacrosanct. Where thought is given to reshaping, all too quickly technology is held out as the

ultimate solution, often to the detriment of considering more modest solutions addressing questions of time, space and social attitudes. So long as this perspective and its underlying structures are unaltered, substantive improvement in the employment status of disabled people will continue to be incremental.

The technological fix

New technology is changing the nature of the workplace and work itself (Roulstone, 1998). Software innovations ensure physicality and dexterity are no longer paramount. Finkelstein is positive in his assessment of the technical age, believing that it will provide the mechanism to challenge the 'professional' control experienced by many disabled people:

The most important stimulation for this development ... has been the new electronic technology for automating the production-line. This technology enables the most severely physically impaired people to operate environmental controls which enable them to live relatively independently in the community. (Finkelstein, 1980: 11)

In many ways the determinist view of technology and disability reflects elements of the medical model, as it holds out a technological 'fix' as the latest panacea to integrate disabled people into mainstream society (Sheldon, 1998). Oliver is guarded in his assessment of the benefits of technology as a means to positive change for disabled people, criticising such views:

They are over simplistic in that they assume a simple relationship between the mode of production and perceptions and experiences of disability, without considering a range of other influential factors ... (Oliver, 1990: 29)

If then, the disability movement is central to ensuring that technology is used to liberate rather than further oppress disabled people, then a clear understanding of this double-edged nature

needs to be developed within the movement. (Oliver, 1990: 126-27)

Employers may hold the misinformed view that expensive technology effectively eliminates impairment, whereas simple adaptation or assistance may be far more useful (French, 1994). Furthermore, the technology may actually place greater pressures on the disabled individual to produce more work at greater speed (Roulstone, 1998). Although technology can hold great potential for disabled people, technology is not social destiny, it works in conjunction with a multiplicity of other factors (Sheldon, 1998). The technology itself may act as a barrier to integration, in effect 'de-humanising' people with disabilities in the workplace. However, this element is not presented here as an argument against its introduction, only that technology be introduced in a thoughtful manner. Technology cannot be introduced in order to *avoid* addressing many other basic workplace culture and attitude issues. Often simple but hard truths can be obscured by the trendiness of technology.

Serious gaps still exist concerning disabled employment policy and its relationship to daily activity in the workplace (Lunt and Thornton, 1994). Employers are reluctant to alter traditional hiring and recruitment testing methods or job descriptions for fear of being perceived as giving undue advantage to disabled people. Change to established practice is often uncomfortable, especially when the need or reason for it may not be accepted or understood. Employers' wage allocation subsidies and awards underscore the dominant notion that disabled people are inferior workers (Lunt and Thornton, 1994). Consequently, disabled employees may feel pressured to work at an exceptional level order to gain approval and to counter misconceptions. Accommodation may be viewed as

disruptive to the work environment rather than as a required component enabling the employee to work effectively (French, 1994; Pinder, 1996). There is limited understanding of the disabled person's organisation of time and speed factors associated with disability or impairment so as to function effectively in daily life. There is hence a pressing need to acknowledge the embodied time and space needs of disabled employees in the quest for 'equality', and this will be addressed again in the qualitative part of the thesis. Little if any thought has been given to possible defects inherent in the regular work environment that may require correction (Imrie, 1996). Attention to the location of toilets, the presence of stairs and adapting shelving height are mundane but necessary elements. The popularity of 'managing diversity' courses does not necessarily lead to a knowledgeable employer-base, as many are unaware of employer assistance programmes addressing disability issues in the workplace (Barnes *et al*, 1998); and so the possibilities for engineering more modest – but probably much more useful solutions remain largely unknown

The Body

Whether or not group membership is valued can have profound social and personal consequences. Throughout history various racial, social and religious groups have been singled out as unacceptable (Young, 1997). The disabled body, and within that context the disabled female body are not seen as a 'natural' part of the community (Asch and Fine, 1997). Open 'public' spaces with little or no seating, many stairs and poor signage mark subjective expectations of physicality (Chouinard and Grant, 1997). Systems of segregated housing, education, transportation

and employment keep those who do not fit the mould in their place (Baird, 1992). According to Thomson (1997), public and private environments are designed for the non-disabled privileged body. Fear of difference is arguably the underlying rationale, although it is rarely articulated as such (Baird, 1992; Young, 1997). In many ways disability has been a pivotal factor in defining cultural norms of the body, but this matter has not been taken up by the mainstream feminist movement (Dorn, 1998). Disabled women are viewed as somewhat removed from the 'normal' (Thomson, 1997a), and here the disability/abnormality/pathology continuum is firmly entrenched (Young, 1997). Science objectifies and dominates much of the discussion about disability (Young, 1997), while assumptions about the static nature of disability and impairment permeates the discourse (McDowell, 1999). Disabled women's experience and history is largely absent, lost, owing to perceived invalidity or lack of worth (Barton, 1996). However, it is not enough simply to rework the material concerns of feminist theorists with experiences of disability; there is a further need to engage in critical analysis seriously challenging existing constructs in feminist and mainstream 'knowledge'. There is a need to move away from traditional value-laden fixed physical constructs of the body and the ideology of independence (Wendell, 1996; Meekosha, 1998), and as a culture we have to examine and challenge all current value systems. State funded carers or attendants are only to be used in the 'home' environment yet, many disabled women would be able to function in the workplace with the provision of similar kinds of personal assistance in the workplace as well (Fawcett, 1996). Lack of flexibility in the public/private sphere effectively keeps disabled women in their place, on the periphery of mainstream society.

True inclusion requires that dominant groups move beyond just making incremental changes to existing terms of reference (hooks, 1982). In this way disabled women can move from the periphery to the centre of feminist discourse. It is time to listen, really to hear disabled women at the centre of the discussion.

Education

Education authorities have assumed a primary gate-keeping facility, incorporating the mechanistic philosophies of the larger social order by protecting the status of common physicality. Thus, entry of the individual into the education process is perhaps the earliest exposure to the effects of this embodied materialism; that is, recognising the dominant form of physicality as social capital (Gleeson, 1999). In the process, one is not only reduced to one's physicality, but also defined by it. Non-disabled people, women and members of racial minorities have all experienced this displacement at various points in history, and here the physicality link with intellect remains firmly and deeply entrenched. Non-disabled people perceive access to education as a natural rite of passage into the adult world. However, education for disabled people is not viewed as a usual element, but rather as a privilege granted to these individuals on a highly contingent basis. Indeed, the very presence of disabled people in educational space is often perceived as unnatural and disruptive. Access points to education are therefore limited, strictly regulated, tentative, peripheral, often medicalised, always on approval and subject to withdrawal. As a result, it has been customary practice to educate disabled people, even more notably disabled women, separately from

their non-disabled counterparts. Often the space itself is residual, and devoid of intellectual stimulation, reflecting a lack of expectation.

The mainstream primary education experience of these women can best be described as an interesting dichotomy. Although they felt fortunate to have avoided or limited their exposure to segregated school, at the same time they were often painfully aware that their presence in the regular school environment was perceived as a source of tension and conflict. Indeed, the necessity to provide adaptation is frequently perceived as disruptive, and seemingly compromises the education standards of non-disabled students. Difference is often emphasised by education authorities in a negative fashion, a sign of intellectual limitation rather than a failure on their part to provide effective accommodation. Consequently, most of the women rarely felt welcome in these spaces, although they believed that they had the right to be there. The women also identified the need to struggle against 'common knowledge' or negative social perceptions of difference in disability. In their efforts to gain approval, many of the women identified an internalised feeling of personal inadequacy taking root during this period in school at the primary level. In order to 'fit in', much physical and academic effort was spent trying to pass as non-disabled, or to blend in with their non-disabled counterparts, often at great personal cost and minimising their own needs. There was a necessity to prove their right to be in the 'regular' space, particularly since in childhood there is limited awareness of a larger social or environmental inflexibility, yet at no time did the women ever express the wish to be non-disabled as a means of dealing with their physical reality. What can also be added is that from a very early age essential lessons were here being learned about navigating in an essentially hostile environment, concerning the realities of making space and using time in

‘public’ places, minimising difference in order to gain approval or acceptance.

The women that I interviewed felt the need constantly to ‘work’ on several levels at the same time simply to be present in the academic environment. Many women spoke of having to maintain an exceptional academic standard in order to be perceived as competent. This situation was of course coupled with the need to ‘pass’ or minimise one’s disability according to non-disabled perceptions of physicality or aesthetics. There is a type of reflexivity here that is rarely discussed: the energy used to be present both within and outwith the academic environment. Established boundaries or comfort zones are constantly challenged by the ‘outsiders’ having a tentative presence on the ‘inside’ of academia. Such efforts use large amounts of physical and emotional energy for a population where energy is often at a premium. The question remains what could be accomplished if we as a society could move beyond such a grudging acceptance of disability in our mainstream educational spaces; what talent and contributions could be released if people, especially women with disabilities could ‘move’ through the educational system more easily, without all the hassles of securing access to both closed classrooms and closed minds that have been faced by most of the women who I interviewed.

Community Spaces

Community membership space, or the state of belonging or not to communities, may be determined, in part, by socially defined identifiers of acceptable physicality. Socially ascribed markers determine degrees or

levels of inclusion, and the presence of disability seems to challenge the accepted markers of humanity or normalcy. Social assumptions, including reactions to perceived differences, appear to hark back to ancient belief systems ingrained deep within the collective social consciousness, ones arguably rooted in fear and limited knowledge. Often, everyday social interactions experienced by people with disabilities in what are conventionally regarded as the public spaces of ordinary communities, the likes of shops, pubs, clubs and taxis, seem to be profoundly marked by residual fear and ignorance on the part of the non-disabled (Butler and Bowlby, 1997). This can lead to practices of exclusion. On the other hand, encounters with strangers, certain caring professionals (social and health workers) and other service providers (taxi drivers, shop assistants, and food servers) often cross the public/private divide, apparently fuelled by ‘primitive’ curiosity and out-dated beliefs, such that non-disabled curiosity about people with disabilities - these ‘aliens’ in the scene – can lead to disabled people being treated in an oddly intimate fashion. This may result in the ‘private’ issues for people concerned becoming strangely available for public consumption, a dubious form of inclusion. In this chapter, I wish to explore such matters to do with disability, community spaces and private places. I will gradually focus down from the wider community (a public space) to that of the more intimate household, kith and kin relations (a private space): in practice, though, what is happening at these two scales blurs irretrievably together.

Making space or taking space: a matter of perspective

Whereas non-disabled people claim space in ‘public’ places as a matter of course, the presence of people with disabilities in these spaces is

commonly perceived as exceptional rather than expected (Butler and Bowlby, 1997). The appearance of disability outside of socially 'designated' areas such as day centres or protected workplaces known as workshops is often seen as disruptive to the natural or established social order. People with disabilities are often viewed as being out of place in public spaces. Elements of fear, ignorance and social titillation are bound together to reinforce, but also on occasion to scramble, boundaries. The positive mental attitude that some women with disabilities develop is impressive, allowing them, as it were, to rethink themselves (in their most intimate, bodily, family moments) as a basis for striking back out into the wider community/public spaces to claim these, to make space for themselves.

On approval: a matter of inconvenience

Gradually people with disabilities are making inroads into the non-disabled mainstream community. Wheelchair ramps, accessible toilets, lifts, Braille signage and mini-coms (telephones accessible to deaf people) serve as the visible markers of disability's growing place within the wider *able-bodied* community. The importance of these necessary accommodations in facilitating the physical access of disabled people into wider *public* spaces and places cannot be underestimated. However, what remains largely unrecognised is that the terms of reference and means of access have, as a rule, not been determined by people with disabilities but rather by the non-disabled. The level of access provided often remains tentative and superficial, so long as established patterns are not disrupted to any great degree. The approach to disability within the larger community seems to be as an add-on or an afterthought rather than as a *natural or automatic* part of the process. The presence of disabled people

appears very much a matter of convenience not *inconveniencing* the non-disabled occupants of public space – and it is usually allowed, it is felt, only on approval. As a result, many people with disabilities feel as if they are in effect out of place, and are often left having to explain or even to justify their presence under the most mundane circumstances. There is also the deep fear that the non-disabled's 'approval' may suddenly be removed: that people with disabilities will be effectively told to 'go home.'

Employment and disability: reflections of a bygone era

Obtaining paid work is often seen as the socially prescribed expression of achieving full adulthood within Western industrialised society (Barnes, 1991). Gainful employment is usually taken to be the public demonstration of individual social usefulness. As discussed in Chapter One, disability and employment are frequently viewed as cultural opposites, that is, disability and employment are often considered mutually exclusive. Current assumptions about the nature of employment are often at odds with social perceptions of the incapacity that is commonly associated with disability, yet in many ways these can be argued to be nothing but doctrinal relics of an earlier industrial age associating socially ascribed markers of physical fitness with the ability to work. The globalising connection with the body as a 'working' machine is a fixture buried deep within the collective social consciousness. Unemployment is not an innate consequence of disability, therefore, but rather the product of long held beliefs grounded in ancient times linking imputed fitness with utility and ability. An adaptation of this approach is often used in established studies of employment as it

relates to people with disabilities. As a rule, these studies are concerned with physical bodily mechanics. Agility, mobility, dexterity, speed and spatial relations are usually considered solely in the context of the individual and his or her disability type. Traditionally, individual physicality and work activity is looked at solely within the structural confines of the 'public' work environment. Factors which are usually considered include: availability of wheelchair accessible toilets, ramped building access, adapted work-stations and technological devices. While these elements do play an significant role in day to day working life, they should not be viewed in isolation from other equally important considerations.

Passing in the workplace: covering up disability

Fear of job loss or misperceptions of inability stemming from negative social attitudes and stereotypes lead many women to minimise or to conceal the reality of their disability in the workplace. Consequently, these individuals take great pains to 'fit' into the non-disabled workplace framework with as little disruption as possible. This is often with great personal effort, leading some women to feel the need to justify the right to be present in the working environment in the first place. The attitudes and perceptions recounted lead many disabled women to modify their appearance or demeanour, if possible responding to stereotypical prejudices to gain 'approval' and thus being able to 'pass' according to socially accepted parameters of 'normality' in order to manage within the 'non-disabled workplace.

Super woman: the burden of proof

Many of the women interviewed felt that they had to prove their worth as employees by performing at an exceptional level in order to justify their presence in the workplace to their supervisors and other workers. It appeared to them that their acceptance was conditional and tentative. They felt that they were always 'on approval', and because of that having to work to a much higher standard than the 'average' non-disabled worker to be perceived as competent. There appears to be an ever-present fear of being seen as not quite good enough. A number of women related how a supportive management structure and workplace environment can go a long way in enabling employees with disabilities to work to the fullest satisfying degree. Having an 'accessible' physical and social environment allows restricted energy levels to be used as *the women* feel it would be used most effectively rather than having to use energy *coping* in a hostile workplace

Coping with stereotypes at work

A limited exposure to and knowledge of disability, coupled with a lack of public education about disability issues, has meant that long-held stereotypes concerning disability remain intact. Consequently, dealing with these notions is often a part of the daily work activity for disabled workers. Comments that are meant to be well-intentioned may underscore an unease or an inherent lack of expectation regarding the ability of disabled employees on the part of some supervisors, probably indicating a need for disability awareness or equality training.

Building a comfort level in the workplace: from hostile to humane workplace, support and accommodation

The presence of disabled people in the workplace is not yet commonplace. Disabled women employed in the workplace are often viewed with scepticism as of a rare and exceptional practice. As a result, the work environment may present interesting challenges that may not necessarily be accepting or accommodating of the disabled employee. Again, many women spent their energies trying to create and to maintain their physical 'space' in the workplace. These women work hard at trying to accommodate their disabilities in addition to meeting the requirements of their position. Indeed, these requirements need to be addressed before they are able to really engage with the requirements specific to the job. Lack of creativity and inflexibility on the part of some employers and an inability to explore beyond the conventional has resulted in a restricted or closed working environment for many disabled women. Any environmental and related accommodations that are made by employers are often done grudgingly and not in a spirit of co-operation, and disabled employees can be made to feel that their need for adaptation is disruptive to the natural functioning and order of the working environment. High levels of stress and anxiety resulting from a lack of accommodation is thus a common issue discussed by many of the women who I interviewed. One is left to wonder, for individuals whose energy levels are compromised, how much of this precious commodity is expended trying to function in a hostile work environment. Moving from the physical environment of the workplace to the social environment of work, many of the women I interviewed spoke of coping mechanisms that they had developed in order to increase the 'comfort level' for their non-disabled colleagues regarding disability issues in the workplace. The 'workings' of the workplace entail much more than just doing the job

itself. The social-cultural intricacies of the workplace are often very complex, involving far more than the physical environmental adaptation. There are a host of micro-social relationships and encounters, some of which bear directly on the successful conduct of the job, bonuses promotions, and the like. Accessing these elements can be particularly difficult for employees with disabilities because of suspicion and fear on the part of non-disabled people reluctant to socialise with those who are 'different'. Again, it is usually left to the disabled employee to address the situation. When a disability-positive supportive workplace environment is created both physically and socially, the employee's emotional and physical energies can be directed to the job at hand. In many instances this holistic approach to the workplace has been instrumental in building self-esteem and a positive self-image for these women

The Timings and Spacings of Work

Time use is a pivotal factor for individuals with restricted levels of mobility, agility, dexterity and energy. Maintaining time, speed and personal energy levels is a constant, delicate balancing exercise for people with disabilities living in an able-bodied world. This level of time management is largely unknown to people who are non-disabled. These 'hidden geographies' are experienced by disabled women using and battling with space and environments just to present themselves as competent workers. Whereas, time-space demands are an integral part of the job for *any* employee, there are those which apply specifically to people with disabilities managing their own time and space to allow them

to be seen as competent employees *before*, as it were, any of the specific requirements of the job are taken into consideration.

Domestic time and work space

Traditionally, the 'public' environment of workplace has been viewed as separate or distinct from the 'private' environment of the home. This approach can be understood to a certain degree in the context of socially ascribed lines of demarcation. Convention holds that 'private' home or domestic activity does not impact on the 'public' domain of the workplace. The 'private' domestic or home environment has a profound impact on a disabled women's ability to access the workplace.

Time, energy and fatigue are indeed all too often realities in the daily life of physically disabled people. People with physical frequently have to sustain a difficult balance between fixed amounts of time and limited or restricted personal energy levels (Fawcett, 1996). Depending on the nature and severity of the disability or condition, it may take longer for a person with a disability to complete personal care or domestic tasks. Many people with disabilities do not have assistance with these activities. There is hence a whole complex 'science' of timings, spacings and organisational skills being used here to enable these women to manage in a non-disabled world, and to be seen as competent women and workers and gain the 'approval' of colleagues and of society in general. However, it is as if these private activities just happen, taking place in a vacuum remote, isolated and unconnected from other activities of daily life. No wider account is ever taken of the time and energy consumed in relation to completion of these mundane yet necessary tasks of daily living.

Nonetheless, it is often these 'taken for granted' and 'private' activities that have the greatest individual and social impact, yet these activities are so deeply engrained within our collective consciousness, so obvious as to be 'unseen' unless something goes wrong. Parallels can be drawn between housework or refuse collection. These essential tasks are often done on 'auto-pilot'. That is, there may be little conscious awareness of the time, effort or importance involved in completing them even though it may well be significant. Therefore, limited public reporting of these activities should not be interpreted as a lack of personal or employment-related importance to the individual or society as a whole.

Disabled women are disproportionately affected as they are often primary caregivers, domestic labourers and are perceived as secondary labour market participants (Fawcett, 1996). Non-disabled women have voiced similar concerns around employment, childcare and housework (West, 1996). Indeed, parallel claims have been made by non-disabled women about the failure of statistics to recognise traditional women's unpaid domestic labour inside the home. Women are left largely invisible in much of the labour market analysis and policy recommendations. The majority of social and economic analysis is based solely on the value of paid employment, paid work is the singular evidence of 'productive' or socially valued labour (Rose, 1989). As a result, the key contributions of 'housewives' [sic] to socio-economic life are obscured. Culturally embedded conventions about disability coupled with gender expectations then intertwine in a complex manner. The majority of disabled lone parents are women (HALS, 1994), but disabled women are far less likely than disabled men to receive domestic assistance (Fawcett, 1996). Cultural beliefs concerning the secondary nature of women's employment, as compared to that of men, is consequently reflected by the

heavy concentration of disabled women at the lower end of the income scale as compared to disabled men.

Particularly for persons with disabilities, the domestic and workplace spheres share connections which can barely be discerned in statistical surveys. Depending on the nature and severity of the disability or condition, it may take longer for a person with a physical disability to complete personal care or domestic tasks. Elements of personal care such as bathing, washing, dressing, eating and housework activities, for example meal preparation, have been studied in terms of the individual isolated mechanics of physicality and agility.

A clearer picture: the reality of time, a table is worth 1000 words

Knowing whether a person with a disability requires assistance with a task or is able to complete it unaided provides an incomplete picture. At present, there is a basic statistical outline coming available, but the detail remains to be filled in. A clearer picture of the impact of disability or impairment in daily life can be shown through the measurement of time an issue that has become increasingly obvious to me as a highly significant one from my interviews with disabled women. Failure to consider the finite reality of time in a disabled person's daily life again reflects an innate arrogance concerning the nature of personal bodily mechanics and the supposed 'fixed' nature of the environment and the manner in which the individual moves within it.

The table of basic household and personal tasks below drawn up by myself initially as a thought experiment provides a simple but graphic

illustration of the time use differential between a person with a disability and a non-disabled or able-bodied person. Both individuals are the same age, sex and of similar physical stature, with the exception of the disability.

Task	Person With Disability	Able-bodied or Non-Disabled Person
	Time to Complete Task (Approximate)	Time to Complete Task (Approximate)
Washing/Drying Hair	45 minutes	15 minutes
Bathing	40 minutes	5 minutes
Dressing	30 minutes	5 minutes
Preparing Breakfast	30 minutes	10 minutes
Changing the Bed	1 hour	10 minutes
Taking Out Rubbish	15 minutes	5 minutes
Doing a Load of Laundry	1 hour	10 minutes
Loading/Unloading Dishwasher	40 minutes	10 minutes
Using Stairs 1 Flight (Short)	4 minutes	10 seconds

It provides a quantitative measure of the effects of disability in the nitty-gritty of a person's life.

Conclusion

It is clear the labour required to engage in work (paid or unpaid) begins long before women with disabilities cross the office threshold. The work in the illusory private/domestic and personal spaces is for the most part, unrecognised. There is no easy course, but the journey may be made

marginally easier (but ultimately easier for who?), if one stays out of the way and takes one's place in the so called 'disability appropriate' residual time filling spaces (day centres and institutional settings) that have been established from a residue of fear, ignorance and a lack of expectation. The amount of 'work' required in order for many women with disabilities to 'go to work' in 'regular' workplace is staggering. Constantly, working against physical, social and emotional barriers exacts a heavy personal toll. Nonetheless, these women have embraced their unique embodied geographies and devised complex and creative methods to work within and around the able-bodied parameters to make their own way in the world. Imagine if the non-disabled majority would think beyond established boundaries and recognise the potential of women with disabilities on their terms, the possibilities are endless.

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