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**Stars are not born: an interpretive approach to the politics of disability**

*Helen Liggett*

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## **INTRODUCTION**

Familiar ways of thinking about disability treat disability as one or more of any number of conditions which limit the participation of individuals in the normal activities of society. This kind of definition is based on the unexamined presupposition that disabilities are various forms of impairment which exist in individuals. Philanthropic versions of this way of thinking include the notion that enlightened societies have an obligation to facilitate the lives of disabled citizens. Public policy responses to this way of viewing disability vary; including among other activities, income maintenance and rehabilitation programs, legislation requiring physical accessibility, and the inclusion of classes on designing accessible environments in the curriculum of architecture schools.

Definitional issues play a major role in both theoretical and policy-oriented studies of disability. For example, historical accounts are often concerned with how the meaning of disability has changed over time (Blaxter, 1976; Stone, 1983). Policy studies typically focus on measuring disability and developing coherent criteria for relating types of disability to eligibility requirements and benefit schedules (Berkowitz, 1979b; Howards et al., 1980). Even the literature of the helping professions is organized to a certain extent by discussion of how disability should be determined and administered.

The purpose of this paper is to show how such discussions are politically relevant. A Foucaultian analysis is presented which links the politics of disability to discursive practices in which disability is constituted. I argue below that the politics of disability entails the production and administration of the notion of disability. Becoming conscious of the institutionalized practices in terms of which disability is constituted broadens the arenas within which political strategies can be promoted and legitimated.

## I. FOUCAULT'S CONTRIBUTION TO THE POLITICS OF INTERPRETATION

... if interpretation is the violent or surreptitious appropriation of a system of rules, which in itself has no essential meaning, in order to impose a direction, to bend it to a new will, to force its participation in a different game, and to subject it to secondary rules, then the development of humanity is a series of interpretations.

In the statement reproduced above Foucault links interpretation and truth to politics. Foucault's interpretative approach is part of a larger movement within contemporary thought in which meaning is connected to systems of interpretation which organize human experience. An exposition of the variations within the interpretative perspective is a project beyond the scope of this paper. Generally, however, proponents of the interpretative point of view see meaning and truth as social productions connected to particular language games or discursive practices within the human community. The interpretative position on the role of language in the production of meaning differs from the view of other epistemological perspectives which have currency in contemporary social thought.

In positivism truth claims are based on observations which connect concepts to objects. The positivist view explicitly neglects interpretation because, among other things, it regards objects as isolated 'facts' existing independently of systems of interpretation. Research based on methodologies derived from this view is organized around verifying relations among concepts which are first defined theoretically and then operationalized so they can be observed. That is concepts translated into indicators, which are used to measure objects and the relations among them. For positivism, disability presents itself as a problem of definition. The issue becomes one of indicating the relevant physical impairment. A disabled individual is one who has some 'medically' observable impairment; and medical science is not considered to be an interpretative system, but a value free mode of measuring physical impairment (Nagi, 1979; Mashaw, 1979).

Phenomenologically derived methodologies differ from positivist approaches because they emphasise the process by which objects are constituted. Two better known forms are symbolic interactionism and ethnomethodology, both practiced in sociology. Instead of investigating the relationships between pre-existing objects, symbolic interactionists focus on the process by which subjects define objects. For example, symbolic interaction approaches to

disability study the experience of disability from the viewpoint social welfare agencies (Blaxter, 1976; Scott, 1969)? Because symbolic of disabled people. Typical questions include: How do individuals come to see themselves as disabled? How do disabled people handle their relations with interactionists and ethnomethodologists ask about "definitions of the situation" from the viewpoint of individual actors, they share with positivists the disinclination to problematize interpretative contexts.

Those who use interpretative approaches do problematize interpretative contexts. These epistemological positions differ from both positivist views which connect truth to objects outside of language and also from phenomenological derived views which connect truth to the consciousness of individual knowers because truth is connected to language use, i.e. to meanings produced in the course of human affairs. Subjects and objects are seen as 'object-effects' of institutionalized social practices. Instead of being prior to language the existence of subjects and objects are inseparable from language use. The truth of objects is assumed to be more or less in flux (depending on the situation) because truth is embedded in the commerce of everyday life. Researchers working within an interpretative approach trace the appearance and disappearance of disability as an available identity within particular societal conditions (Stone, 1983).

For Michael Foucault these kinds of questions relating to how we know and of interest to political theorists because knowledge, and the constitution of available identities, are connected to the operation of power in society.

Interpretations do not exist separately from the practices of social life. Instead they are embedded in systems of meaning which *are* our social life. Because definitions are part of constitutive practices, definitions do more than just 'label' people. They constitute identities and in so doing, participate in the maintenance of relations of dominance.

In Foucault's thinking the traditional distinction between the 'individual' and 'society' is misguided because it assumes that 'individuals' have natural or pure identities which are separable from the possibilities constituted by society. Foucault and others who adopt such a view see no individuality separate from systems of meaning.

Foucault has developed two metaphors to describe the production and control of subjects in modern life. They are "the carceral network", which he develops in *Discipline and Punish* (1977a) and "the normalizing society" which he emphasizes in *The History of Sexuality* (1978). He uses both to characterize

the processes by which identities (he uses the word 'subjects') are constituted by modern society.

In *Discipline and Punish* (1977a), Foucault connects notions of crime, of what criminals are, and of appropriate forms of treatment with the development and ascendancy of modern discursive practices which manage criminality. The locus of authority for dealing with criminality is now lodged in specialized practices in which bases of legitimacy are tied to science. Other modes of thinking, those tied to morality, for example, are still present, but in altered forms. Criminality is a project (in a sense) of the shifting forces which competed to constitute the criminal justice system. Religious and secular courts; Protestant, Catholic, and free thinking reformers; various scientific disciplines and helping professions have all had a hand in producing criminality. Foucault's genealogy of criminality records its emergence during the course of particular disputes over jurisdiction, struggles to institutionalize reform, and the development of new mechanisms of administration. There has been a shift from inflicting punishment externally (e.g. public execution and torture) to administering criminality by first separating the criminal from the normal population and then trying to rehabilitate him.

Modern rehabilitation practices begin by separating 'the criminal' from members of normal society and then watching over or 'disciplining' all aspects of the prisoner's life. The monitoring of criminality involves and goes beyond crude forms of control such as the ability to physically watch every prisoner. It includes the contemporary equivalent of watching over and transforming each prisoner's soul. The work of rehabilitation is to teach delinquents to discipline themselves. This work is successful when the monitoring function has been internalized so that the burden of producing a normal identity is carried by the prisoners themselves. Rehabilitated delinquents are no longer delinquent; assuming the expectations of normal life, they become ... normal.

In talking about 'the normalizing society', Foucault means to emphasize that disciplinary practices qualify identities both inside and outside of the individuals. He uses the phrases "instruments of perpetual assessment" and "the carceral network" to describe our society. This is his way of talking about universal participation in discipline. "Perpetual assessment", i.e. the various expectations according to which subjects produce themselves and others, is legitimized and provoked by the authority of scientific truth which is attributed to the various 'social science' disciplines, professions and practices involved. Criminology is only one example. Demography, educational psychology, and social work are others. The inescapable terms of everyday life, in this model of society, are organized in terms of various distinctions between normal and deviant identities.

In *The History of Sexuality* (1978) Foucault develops these ideas further and shows how discipline and the formulation of identities work as relations of control even in areas of life we think of as natural, such as sexuality, or motherhood. He also shows how inescapable the normalizing society is. The so-called normal identities are just as much products of discipline as are deviant identities. Subjects that rule are as thoroughly disciplined as any graduates of prison rehabilitation programs. The normalizing society is a structure of dominance that involves all its members.

In *Discipline and Punish* (1977a) Foucault reproduces a dialogue between a judge and a juvenile delinquent that illustrates the normalizing society in action.

*Judge:* One must sleep at home.

*Be'asse:* Have I got a home?

*J:* You live in perpetual vagabondage.

*B:* I work to earn my living.

*J:* What is your station in life?

*B:* My station: to begin with, I'm 36 at least; I don't work for anybody. I've worked for myself for a long time now. I have my day station and my night station. In the day, for instance, I hand out leaflets free of charge to all the passers-by; I run after the stage coaches when they arrive and carry luggage for the passengers. I turn cartwheels on the avenue de Neuilly; at night there are the shows; I open coach doors; I sell pass-out tickets; I've plenty to do.

*J:* It would be better for you to be put into a good house as an apprentice and learn a trade.

*B:* Oh, a good house, an apprenticeship, it's too much trouble. And anyway the bourgeois ... always grumbling, no freedom.

(1977a, pp. 290-291 )

One response to this exchange would be to point out that it represents a romanticized, short-term, childish, etc. view of life, or to say that Be'asse's cheekiness is annoying. Foucault emphasizes the force of the latter, namely the challenge to codes of normal behavior that Be'asse presents. Be'asse challenges the whole system which opposes normal to deviant by cheerfully describing his life in positive terms. In modern life this is a privilege usually restricted to literature. Otherwise,

One must live in a home, have a station in life, . . . a recognizable identity.... In short one should have a master, be caught up and

situated within a hierarchy; one exists only when fixed in definite relations of domination.  
(1977a, pp. 290-291)

Foucault suggests that Be'asse was delinquent because of 'indiscipline', not because of criminal activity. (Be'asse was sentenced to two years in a reformatory. His response: "Two years, that's never more than 24 months. Let's be off, then".)

Where some social theorists use an organic or systems model to talk about social order, Foucault's model is based on relations of force. He does not present society as a normatively integrated or mutual-benefit system in the same way a structural-functionalist theorist might. The normalizing society is a structure of dominance.

The carceral functions of the normalizing society are not mechanisms of oppression, as vulgar Marxism might have it. Foucault ties surveillance to productivity, but in a broad sense. In the *History of Sexuality* (1978) Foucault connects the deployment of sexuality within discursive practices such as psychoanalysis to the emergence of the bourgeois as a new ruling class. ". . . they first tried it on themselves" (1978, p. 122). "The primary concern was not repression of the classes to be exploited, but rather the body, vigor, longevity, progeniture, and descent of the classes that 'ruled'" (p. 123).

If the opposition between normal and delinquent or deviant operates as a system of control, what does all this have to do with what we usually assume is a natural distinction between the able-bodied and the disabled? In other words, how does the opposition between disabled and able-bodied function in our society of perpetual assessment? Can Foucault's interpretative perspective provide a useful discussion of what disability is and how it is produced as part of the contemporary political order?

## II. AN INTERPRETATIVE ANALYSIS OF DISABILITY

The problem of living with a stroke is not a new one, but there has been a very significant change in emphasis in recent years in relation to the management of such patients. People with this condition should not be allowed to wait for recovery. They should be encouraged to live the fullest life possible, consistent with their disability.

(J.C. Somerville, Medical Director  
London and Farnham Park Rehabilitation Centre)

"People with this condition" are different kinds of people, different, for example, from men like Somerville who try to rehabilitate them and different from the rest of normal society, which is identified implicitly with a 'full life'. If a patient remarked that she had a very full life dealing with the aftermath of her stroke she would have more in common with Be'asse than with the respectful and compassionate voices that struggle to manage disability.

Similarly, we can imagine an interaction between a disabled or unemployed person and the civil servant assigned to her. It would be unusual, as the system is currently organized, to hear the case worker called "My good man" by his client and then be asked about the health of the wife and kids. As a society we have decided to insure our members against certain extenuating circumstances, yet we are conventionally institutionally ill-mannered when it's time to pay up. The explanation of this behavior may have something to do with how disability (and unemployment) are produced and managed. If the practices which constitute disability are part of the carceral network that Foucault talks about, then they operate as relations of domination, in the very act of what we otherwise might only think of as dispersing agreed upon payments.

The discussion below interprets current public policy literature on disability in order to address these issues. This literature is interrogated as a data source for understanding the production and maintenance of disability, as we know it.

There is widespread agreement in the social science literature on disability that disability isn't managed as well as it should be.

(1) In some studies the American political system is seen as the source of the current crisis. According to this view, interest group politics is the wrong tool for the job of formulating a rational disability policy. For example, Social Security Disability Insurance is presented as the result of discontinuous and incremental processes extending over fifty years. Current policy is said to reflect the varying and sometimes competing interests of the many groups which have been involved in formulating it. These include, among others, the Chamber of Commerce, the insurance industry, the American Medical Association, organized labor, the Department of Commerce, Congress, and private organizations for blind people. From the point of view of this criticism, "the reality of interest politics" over "inner bureaucratic logic" is regrettable (Berkowitz, 1979a, p. 10). Current policy represents "the sum of all that accumulated rather than a rational or comprehensive policy".

The solution to the irrationality of the disability system which is suggested most often in the literature is to make the system which administers it more

rational. A typical suggestion is to improve the determination of disability by institutionalizing more scientific definitions. Nagi (1979), for example, considers impairment an 'objective' condition which medical science can measure while disability has been determined more 'subjectively'. If disability is defined as "reduced ability to perform competitive employment or other significant individual roles" (p. 11), determining whether or not disability exists depends on the context. Nagi recommends developing operational definitions of disability which would have the exactness of measures of impairment but which would also take working conditions into account. "Specific norms and mechanisms in decision making structures" are needed for more exact specification of disability.

Howards, Brehm & Nagi (1980) study of Social Security Disability Insurance is an example of a comprehensive rational remedies approach to the management of disability. They ask whether the problem with disability isn't that it is plagued by a lack of correspondence between "underlying social problems", "social policy", and "social programs". Their conclusion is that this is indeed the case; the relative importance of "the ability to work" and the "medical impairment" components of disability insurance have become reversed. Whereas the original legislative intent was that citizens who are unable to work because of physical impairment should receive financial support. SSDI is administered in such a way that clients are assessed in terms of their need first, and then in terms of their disability. Furthermore, applicants self-select themselves on the basis of whether they do actually hold jobs. The number of applicants increases during bad times and in sections of the country which are economically depressed. In addition, strong economic incentives exist for continuing to receive disability insurance once enrolled and substantial penalties are connected with re-enrolment especially for those with regular medical expenses. In other words, participation in and the overall costs of disability programs are closely related to prevalent economic trends (Hahn, 1983, p. 8).

Howards, Brehm & Nagi (1980) suggest rationalizing the system by bringing the three segments of disability in line with each other. Functional definitions of "the ability to work" would make "social policy" correspond with "the social problem". Adjustments to the earning test component would bring "the social problem" on line with "social policy". In addition, they recommend changing eligibility and re-enrolment criteria so that beneficiaries would no longer be encouraged to become permanently dependent on Disability Insurance. SSDI would function "as originally intended", i.e. as insurance which meets the problem of the inability to work caused by disability (instead of functioning as welfare) (Howards *et al.*, 1980).

The Howards and Nagi studies and others like them (Mashaw, 1979; Berkowitz, 1979a,b) make disability into a scientific problem. For example, the force of Nagi's argument is to bring the contextual elements of disability under the mantle of science. He is saying, in effect, that because disability is a complex phenomenon tied to shifting employment conditions, it is all the more important that we tie it down. In epistemological terms, he is interested in devising ways of knowing disability for the object it really is. The effect of structuring investigations in terms of "lack of correspondence" (Howards *et al.*, 1980) and "operational definitions" (Nagi, 1979) is to produce disability within scientific discourse. Solutions of the problem of disability which call for bringing the problem under control with more precise information follow from a scientific perspective. This type of solution, in turn, leads to recommendations for reform based on increased monitoring of disabled people.

Calling for more detailed qualifications from applicants authorizes further<sup>1</sup> discursive involvement in determining and administering disabled identities. From a Foucaultian point of view, the relational remedies approach reinforces surveillance in the disciplinary society.

Concern with the cost of disability programs is typical in studies which present disability as a management and control problem. There are references throughout the literature to the danger of malingerers, of creating dependency, of the coming fiscal crisis. The rising cost of disability programs is often presented as the rationale for recommending further control. The cost of the proliferation of mechanisms of control is rarely discussed.

(2) There are studies of disability which do not see the problem of disability as a problem of cost resulting from the irrationalities of interest group politics. These studies are concerned with how disabled people are treated and they tend to see politics as a solution, rather than as the problem. But as discussed below, studies of disability which attempt to reproduce the experience of disability and appear to use a different perspective to understand the problem of disability also contribute solutions which reinforce the disciplinary society.

Studies which are concerned with the experience of disability are usually written from symbolic interaction or ethnomethodological perspectives. Disability is not interpreted as a static operationalizable condition: instead it is seen as a process involving a change of consciousness (Blaxter, 1976; Edgerton, 1974; Scott, 1969). Where researchers working within a behavioral

view talk about the problem of controlling and managing disability, symbolic interactionist studies talk about the problems connected with learning to manage one's own identity as disabled. Blaxter treats disability as a 'career', rather than as a 'category'. Scott takes the more radical position that 'blind men' are produced as the result of relations with blindness agencies.

The authors of these studies sometimes speak as if the formulation of identities only occurred inside individuals' heads. Some seem to implicitly accept the idea that disability is a real condition (Blaxter, 1976; Edgerton, 1974). Nevertheless, the evidence they present also supports the interpretative view which privileges discursive practices. For example, there is widespread evidence that the smoother the adoption of a disabled identity, the smoother the processes of dealing with the agents of rehabilitation (Blaxter, 1976; Boswell and Wingrove, 1974; Scott, 1969).

Blaxter (1976), found that her subjects tended "to rewrite their own medical history in the light of subsequent events" (p. 11). Subsequent events included relations with normals both inside and outside of social agencies who treated subjects as disabled. The treatment could either be benign (helping people to qualify for benefits) or pernicious (denying people employment). Scott shows how social roles and behavior patterns which are appropriate to interactions with sighted people are assumed in the context of agencies authorized to administer blindness. Even Howards et al. (1980) show how disability programs are active producers of disability. Widows who do not meet the specified criteria of the Social Security Administration are "for practical purposes 'non-widows'" (p. x). What they don't say and what symbolic interactionist studies record is that women who do meet the qualifications are encouraged by their engagement with the system to constitute themselves as widows in its terms.

Remedies to the problem of disability as it is formulated by symbolic interactionists are based on empowering the disabled. Disabled people, in this view, would be encouraged to participate in their own administration. Hahn (1983) is representative of those who recommend "new social-political definitions of disability". This means that the disabled should get into decision-making processes on the basis of their claims to be a special group. Proponents of this minority group strategy argue that it gives the disabled a basis upon which to make claims for certain adjustments in the environment (e.g. access to public buildings) instead of always accepting adjustments of the individual to the environment. The Rehabilitation Act of 1973 is a victory of those who see disability as a minority group status entailing certain rights. The minority group approach basically argues that disabled people should be brought into the American political system as another interest group. The

structure of decision making isn't attacked. Instead the idea is to improve the odds that the disabled will be recognized as having legitimate demands.

The minority groups approach is not satisfactory from a management view because it introduces complexities which cannot be controlled and which are often expensive. Hearings and appeals are opposed on the grounds that they favor the tenacious rather than the worthy (Rock, 1976). A 'litigious atmosphere' is considered undesirable, because it introduces irrationality. It also challenges the current power relations.

From the viewpoint of those concerned with how disabled people are treated, challenging the current power relations appears to be desirable. The minority group approach to disability gives disabled people a legitimate voice within the American political system. As disabled people become an established interest group they can change some of the agents of dominance which manage and administer them.

(3) From an interpretative view the minority group approach is doubleedged because it means enlarging the discursive practices which participate in the constitution of disability. In other words, the price of becoming politically active on their own behalf is accepting the consequences of defining disability within new perspectives, which have their own priorities and needs. The new perspectives then become involved in disciplining disability. For example, disability as a problem of legal rights exists within the ways of thinking and prejudices that constitute legal discourse.

The interest groups politics critique, the rational remedies approach, the symbolic interaction critique, and the minority groups strategy all operate on the basis of their own kind of distinctions between disabled and not disabled people. In that way they participate in and reinforce a disciplinary society. The oppositions that Foucault sees in the normalizing society among normal and various forms of deviance remain intact.

A detailed genealogy of disability would investigate how various shifting social practices constitute and administer disability in the normalizing society. The system as we know it is a legacy of shifting relations among these practices. A detailed genealogy would show exact instances of struggle and transformation. That work would help answer the question of why this age produces disability as we know it.

That project is beyond the scope of this paper, but there is some evidence in the existing literature about how the current opposition between normal and disabled identities operates. The opposition between normal and disabled

people in this society differentiates between those who carry on the work of society and those who deserve to receive the charity of society (Blaxter, 1976). Stone (1983) argues that this distinction has important implications for capitalism. The primary distributive system in capitalist societies is work-based. At the same time there are exceptions: i.e. certain classes of people deserve support for other reasons. For example, after wars industrialized nations are faced with the problem of disabled veterans. Disabled veterans are considered to be deserving of some share in the wealth of society, but they are unable to work (Blaxter, 1976; Berkowitz, 1979). Stone (1983) suggests that the creation of 'disability' helps to solve this problem by maintaining boundaries between work and need. The needy deserving should be provided for. But the just plain needy should work for their money, i.e. participate in the primary work-based distribution system. The institutionalization of medical criteria for disability provided clear-cut ways of determining who the deserving needy were (Stone, 1983).

At the present time medical practices contribute to the current crisis in disability. The disinterestedness of the medical profession in boundary maintenance and the recent cycles of recession in industrial nations have produced a situation where disability programs handle and disguise unemployment. Because doctors don't have the same fiscal concerns as disability administrators, new ways of determining and managing disability need to be devised (Stone, 1983).

Even though Stone's analysis is marred by her unjustified assumption that disability is a management problem, she does show what interpretative analysis that treats disability as a production of prevalent discursive practices is like. A more extensive discursive analysis of disability would deal with the question of how the constitution of disability fits with Foucault's notion that disciplinary power produces subjects by operating "directly on bodies".

Scott suggests that blindness agencies remove blind people from the sight of normals. This makes the disabled body an invisible body. A politically oriented study might begin by asking how invisible bodies can participate in society. The disabled body has also traditionally been a non-reproducing body. In a seeming contradiction to this tradition, social science has recently 'discovered' the sexuality of disabled people and a whole literature has emerged on 'the problem' of the sexuality of disabled people. Further study might focus on asking about the relation of this literature to the emergence of the truth of sex as a control mechanism. Further investigation could ask how the distinction between disabled and normal continues to participate in maintaining the normalizing society. How does the normal/disabled difference

help produce subjects who exercise responsibility and control as a matter of course, as well as those who are acted upon as a matter of course?

### III. VICTIMS WITHOUT CRIMES

Positivist, phenomenological and interpretative perspectives constitute disability differently. These different notions of disability have different possibilities for politics built into them.

The positivist definitions of disability operate as part of a set of established practices which entail some disabling commitments. Even the phenomenological views, which often align themselves with the disabled reinforce distinctions between normal and disabled people. The interpretative approach has the advantage of distancing the researcher from the conventional categories.

The interpretative approach has been used by Foucault to show how deviant identities work as relations of dominance. His model, first developed in the context of investigations into criminality, is relevant to disability because it focuses on practices which operate by producing and managing identities. In the criminality example, some administer justice and some have justice administered to them. Similarly, the disabled as well as the nondisabled participate in the system that binds them to their respective identities.

The politics of disability need to take into account the findings of the interpretative perspective. One way to do this is to investigate further how the perpetuation of disabled identities helps insure that the disabled participate in the normalizing society as victims without crimes. Foucault recently centered his own work around the question, "At what cost can subjects speak the truth about themselves?" The evidence presented above is that in order to participate in their own management disabled people have had to participate as disabled. Even among the politically active, the price of being heard is understanding that it is the disabled who are speaking.

What other kinds of politics are there? If participation in the disciplinary society is inescapable, what else is possible?

Again, this raises issues which are beyond the scope of this paper, particularly in so far as political strategies are tied to specific social formations and need to be assessed in terms of local practices (Liggett, 1988). Political action should be a reflective undertaking in which both the costs and benefits of accepting disabled identities and the available strategies in a given political system are weighted in each situation. Sometimes political action operates within

established practices and sometimes it challenges those practices. For example, in some issues, such as physical access, the identity as disabled has been used to good advantage to remove disabling distinctions between those who can move around and those who cannot.

A central contribution of discursive analysis is to recognize a broader scope for political action at the secondary level. Because language practices work to produce disabled identities, the politics of disability entail choosing instances to challenge those practices to work in different ways. Since individual identities are group projects, politics involves questioning the constitutive activities of those groups.

In so far as disabled people exist in society as an excluded category, the struggle will necessarily be arduous and often subversive. When Foucault says that bodies are a battlefield, I do not think he's speaking in hyperbole. He's saying something about how intimately we are involved in conventional social practices. If certain identities are to be permanently disabled this means direct challenge by those who are willing to bear the costs of transgressing their own customary identities. For example, introducing women into university faculties has resulted in various unpleasanties (in the best of circumstances) because academic identities based on sexism are unavoidably threatened. Similarly, a therapist who sits in a wheelchair must deal daily with reactions to his or her upsetting conventional notions of fitness.

These activities should be valorized as political action on the individual level. Individual counter-politics to accepting denigrated identities means paying attention to the kinds of practices we allow to go on. Relentless refusals to go along with what appears to come naturally are front-line battles in the politics of disability.

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