

Searching for the Absent Citizen: Enabling and (Dis)abling Discourses of Social Citizenship

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Theories of citizenship have traditionally been predicated upon notions of the universal subject – a subject which presupposes a white, able, male body, engaged in market participation. Citizenship discourses appear to offer very little to people with disabilities either theoretically or practically as disability has been absent from most all key citizenship debates. Dominant theories of liberal citizenship highlight individualism and rights. Civic republicanism and communitarianism stress obligations, participation and community. These hegemonic ideologies of citizenship have offered a dichotomy of rights versus participation with space only for the able bodied subject engaged in market participation. In response, feminist theories have presented a variety of alternatives informed through themes of private versus public, inclusion versus exclusion and have expanded the range of participation from the market to care-giving and attempted to offer the subject as embodied. However, even in the most radical of reconstructions, dichotomies remain a central tenet and the continuous reference point is always that of the able body, leaving no space for disabled subjectivity. Helen Meekosha and Leanne Dowse (1997:67) pose the important question, “How do we begin to rewrite the story of what it means to be a disabled citizen?” Given the inherent problems with current notions of citizenship, an enabling discourse cannot be concerned with participation versus rights, private versus public or inclusion versus exclusion as a person with a disability is a oxymoron within these bifurcated models. The disabled citizen cannot become a subject unto his/her own if trapped at the intersection of existing binary oppositions. The question therefore can be posed, how do we reconstruct a story of what it means to be a disabled citizen if we are presupposing that the citizen remains an unproblematic subject? To understand how disability and citizenship intersect, a deconstruction of dominant citizenship discourses highlighting the

absence of disability is necessary before a reconstruction of citizenship inclusive of a differently abled subject can be achieved.

Contemporary theories of liberal citizenship often begin with an analysis of T. H. Marshall's post-war conception of citizenship which focuses on according people a number of citizenship rights. While it is beyond the scope of this paper to engage in a comprehensive debate on Marshall's theory, his influential theory will be briefly outlined to demonstrate how the subject within contemporary liberal citizenship requires a deconstruction beyond what has been achieved in the literature thus far.

According to Marshall, citizenship is a matter of ensuring that everyone is treated as a full and equal member of society (Kymlicka and Norman 1994: 354). Marshall offers a tripartite view of citizenship, dividing it along the lines of civil, political and social, and is concerned with notions of liberty and equality, achievable through civil and political rights which grant full and equal membership. Citizenship is defined as:

A status bestowed to those who are full members of a community. All who possess the status are equal with respect to the rights and duties with which the status is endowed. There is no universal principle that determines what those rights and duties shall be, but societies in which citizenship is a developing institution create an image of an ideal citizen against which achievement can be measured and towards which aspiration can be directed (Marshall 1963:87).

For Marshall, the fullest expression of citizenship requires a liberal-democratic welfare state so civil, political and social rights can be guaranteed to all. The welfare state in Marshall's view ensures that every member of society feels like a full member and is able to participate in and enjoy common life (Kymlicka and Norman 1994:354). When any of these rights are withheld or violated, people will be marginalised and unable to participate. This model has often been referred to as 'passive citizenship' due to the absence of any obligation to participate in public life (Kymlicka and Norman 1994:354-5). While Marshall did not specifically engage with disability, he believed that social rights enabled what he termed the 'the disadvantaged' to enter the mainstreams of society and effectively exercise their civil and political rights. Social rights for Marshall range from

the right to a modicum of economic welfare and security to the right to share to the full in the social heritage and to live the life of a civilised being according to the standards prevailing in the society (Marshall 1963:74).

The liberal view of the citizen is inherently problematic for people with disabilities on a number of complex levels. The key site of rendering the disabled subject invisible is that the universal notion of citizenship as a 'status' and as a set of 'rights' confers the subject as equal outside of societal structures. This poses a series of problems for people with disabilities as it is often the societal structures which render them oppressed. An individual cannot achieve full participation if the means to achieve such participation are contributing to the very exclusion they wish to overcome. In other words, if we use Marshall's notion that to *withhold* rights renders the individual unequal and unable to participate as a citizen (therefore no longer possessing the necessary full status), this assumes that equality *precedes* the rights universally granted, and only by removing such given rights does a person become marginalised. Furthermore, it is underpinned by assumptions that once such rights are granted, the status itself is free of both socio-cultural and political-economic inequalities. This is problematic for the individual who is unable to participate in any citizenship realm due to their citizen 'status' being inherently bound in socio-cultural and political-economic injustices. What of the individual who is further marginalised by attempts to grant them full participation? To enable a person to be granted full and equal rights, what ever is being granted must be value free. People with disabilities within a liberal framework cannot achieve such value free justice, nor full equality, nor can they ever achieve the status of 'citizen', for the reference point remains an unproblematised abled bodied individual with capacities assumed to be equal. Within such a framework, the implication of granting social rights (thereby assuming ability to equally participate in civil and political rights) is in itself problematic and requires further deconstruction, as such rights overlook the fact that it is societal structures themselves which are a site for injustices. In the example of social security – which is a social right according to Marshall and a means for achieving access to the political and civil realms – the ability to access and obtain social security benefits does not remove the multiple and complex barriers which a person with a disability faces. Social rights therefore do not in themselves enable the disabled subject to compete equally in civil and political society.

An alternative view to liberalism is civic republicanism (or communitarianism) and there has been a revival of these ideologies in response to the rights based notions found in liberalism. These discourses view citizenship as an activity or as practise, not just a status. Central to the civic

republicanism notion of citizen is a conception of individuals as not being logically prior to society (Oldfield 1994:191). In civic republican discourse it is believed that a citizen should undertake certain duties and responsibilities and be loyal to the state rather than to individual interests. Communitarians object to the asocial concept of the self in liberalism as the self is seen as both socially constructed and embedded in a cultural context (Delanty 2002:163). Civic republicanism has focussed on the need to create a political community and a common bond between citizens which closes the differences of class, religion and culture (Siim 2000:25). This discourse purports that identity is shared within a political community and this identity is seen as stemming partly from self-determination and partly from a common history (Oldfield 1990:7).

Such a view has been critiqued by Meekosha and Dowse (1997:53) who argue that notions of active citizenship require people to take their responsibilities seriously as well as claiming their rights and this poses problems for people who have different or competing communities, such as people with disabilities. Modern states are not socially and culturally homogenous, and as the idea of civic virtue was founded upon the twin premises of a tightly knit community and politically active citizens it is clearly problematic today (Oliver and Heater 1994: 129).

Civic republicanism is not a rights based manner of thinking and therefore, according to Adrian Oldfield (1990:156) the discourse tends to assume that “citizens possess the knowledge and skills, the level of wellbeing, amount of time, and the freedoms of speech and association that are all necessary for the practice of citizenship”. This statement is reflective of how a person with a disability would find it difficult to achieve citizen subjectivity as the tenets within this discourse are founded upon the unproblematised subject. This is further highlighted through the way in which civic republicanism stresses a rough economic equality among citizens (Oldfield 1990:156). As people with disabilities experience a range of injustices at both the socio-cultural and political-economic levels, this discourse of citizenship will find it difficult to create a space for disability or a person with a disability, as the genesis of the ‘citizen’ is an undifferentiated individual. Using the example of current labour market structures, it would be questionable whether alleged common employment history or common bonds experienced within the workplace are similar for both a person with a disability and an able-bodied worker.

In response to both liberal and civic republicanism views of citizenship, feminist literature has made valuable contributions to citizenship discourses and created embodied spaces in which to deconstruct the universalist, male notions of citizenship. While the range of feminist work on

citizenship is quite varied and complex (see for example Voet [1998] for a comprehensive literature review on feminism and citizenship), this paper will now examine several key feminist alternatives in order to demonstrate how they remain incomplete for people with disabilities, and in particular, for women with disabilities.

Carol Pateman in her explanation of patriarchal institutions offers a radical critique of the concept of universal citizenship in classical political theory and has been widely influential in enabling spaces within citizenship discourses to be inclusive of women. Pateman (1992) suggests that women are excluded from politics as a result of the private/public divide being based upon a male norm. She believes that a sexually differentiated citizenship which distinguishes between men and women as different but equal individuals is ideal. Pateman (1992) maintains that women should be included as citizens based upon their caring work and that women should be incorporated into citizenship discourses as 'women' - rather than having a gender-neutral citizenship. Citizenship needs to be rethought from the viewpoint of the female citizen. Pateman argues (1992:28) that if both sexes are to be full citizens "the meaning of sexual difference has to cease to be the difference between freedom and subordination". Citizenship in this view needs to include women and once it does so, Pateman believes that the concept of citizen would change. This theory, while worthy of far more attention than can be given here, is problematic for people with disabilities - and in particular for women with disabilities as it presumes that women are a homogenous category firstly capable of 'caring' tasks, and secondly willing to do such work.

This point has been taken up by Mary Dietz (1992) who states that as long as feminists only focus on social and economic concerns around children, family, schools, work or wages etc, they will not articulate a truly political vision or address the problem of citizenship. Citizenship cannot be reformulated to 'fit women', but rather should be deconstructed from the dichotomies upon which it is constructed. A gendered discourse of citizenship is problematic for women who do not fit into the normalised gender, such as women with disabilities. The double oppression which disabled women face has been well noted (see for example Asch and Fine 1988, 1997 or Garland-Thomson 1997) and subsequently such a gendered theory of citizenship contributes further to the injustices which people with disabilities face. Meekosha and Dowse (1997:56) argue that feminist analysis which separated the private from the public has not incorporated an examination of people with disabilities. Women with disabilities often inhabit a unique space somewhere between the private and the public, while seen as remaining a 'burden' in both. People with disabilities are conceived as having neither familial responsibility or public presence and are not constituted in traditional

‘masculine’ terms or embraced by feminist critique which equates care-giving with responsibility as a form of citizenship.

An alternative view of citizenship has been offered by Ruth Lister (2003) whose view is premised upon her claim that citizenship is a process, not just an outcome, where the struggle for rights is equally as important as the rights obtained. This perspective Lister (2003:6) argues, enables citizens to be active participants in political and welfare institutions rather than passive holders of rights. Lister (2003:13) maintains that the balance between rights and obligations and the nature of each is at the heart of mainstream debates on citizenship. She argues that whilst citizenship rights are represented as essentially abstract and universal, it is possible to incorporate notions of diversity and difference into the conceptualisation without sacrificing the principle of common and equal rights which in itself is necessary for the accommodation of difference.

Lister (2003:14) proposes that a reconception of citizenship should be formulated through synthesising the rights and participatory traditions via the notion of human agency. Lister feels that by embracing elements of the two main historical citizenship traditions, citizenship can emerge as a dynamic concept in which “process and outcome stand in a dialectical relationship to each other” (p37). Lister suggests that the idea of human agency as citizenship is conceived as both a status involving a wider range of rights, and as a practice involving political participation. To be a full citizen means to be able to enjoy the rights of citizenship necessary for agency and social and political participation, and to act as a citizen involves fulfilling the full potential of the status (Lister 2003:43).

This theory is certainly beneficial for people with disabilities as it begins to address how it is not just the outcome of rights that is important (as in the case of liberal and civil republican views) but also the means through which full citizenship is achieved. The disability movement is engaged in a constant struggle to obtain and to reaffirm rights and the means for participation. Lister also avoids a gendering of citizenship through her notion of human agency which can overcome the current exclusionary dichotomies found in many citizenship discourses. However, the notion of human agency for people with disabilities within Lister’s framework is problematic as Lister appears to imply human agency is a given, and that it is the *means* for attainment of full citizenship, where as in fact for people with disabilities, the ability to exercise human agency itself is at the core of the struggle for full citizenship and therefore a deconstruction of it is necessary *preceding* its use to attain citizenship. Furthermore, the concepts of ‘status’ and ‘participation’ which Lister utilises

have not been sufficiently deconstructed from their original flawed meanings within the liberal and civic republicanism traditions. It is questionable whether the socio-cultural and political-economic injustices which underpin such concepts can be overcome through binding them with human agency. It is also debatable as to whether the synthesis of two historically problematic theories will actually create one *unproblematic* theory. For people with disabilities who have been excluded from the very definitions of status and participation, and whose human agency is challenged and constrained on a range of complexities, more than a synthesis of existing citizenship discourses is required to enable a space for their own subjectivity.

It is the structural conditions that contribute to rendering people with disabilities as less than full citizens and this is an area which is not been given sufficient attention by many feminist theories. Models of citizenship which privilege 'female tasks' such as private caring, or privilege an unproblematised notion of human agency remain homogenised towards an able body and exclude important group differences. The exclusion from key citizenship debates of the historical and social circumstances of individuals has been taken up by Iris Marion Young who offers a radically alternative view of citizenship. In Young's (1998) view, citizenship requires the development of a theory based not on the assumption of an undifferentiated humanity but rather on the assumption that there *are* group differences and some groups are actually or potentially disadvantaged. Young (1998:264) believes that the best way to realise the inclusion and participation of everyone in full citizenship is by the concept of differentiated citizenship. This approach to citizenship has been widely acclaimed by other feminists (see for example Fraser 1997; Siim 2000; Lister 2003) as it offers a rearticulation of citizenship which is inclusive of diversity and difference. Young's theory can be useful as it attempts to be inclusive of not just women, but of other oppressed groups – namely people with disabilities.

Young (1998) importantly raises the point that rights and rules which are universally formulated are blind to differences of race, culture, gender, age or disability and thereby perpetuate rather than undermine oppression. This is the evident problem in both liberal and civil republican discourses of citizenship. Young believes that the universal notions found in contemporary theories of citizenship are problematic as they place citizenship above particular group and individual differences. In Young's (1998:263-4) view, there are two key meanings attached to universal citizenship. Firstly, universality is defined according to what citizens have in common as opposed to how they differ. Secondly, universality presupposes the laws and rules apply to everyone equally and is therefore

blind to individual and group differences. As previously noted, for particular groups such as those with a disability, it is the norms and laws which perpetuate rather than eliminate injustices.

The inclusion and participation of everyone in social and political institutions, Young suggests, requires the articulation of special rights which attend to group differences. In seeking a differential theory of citizenship, Young is aware of a contradictory problem which can occur which she refers to 'the dilemma of difference'. Young (1998:281) notes how for oppressed and disadvantaged groups seeking full inclusion and participation, they must continue to deny that there are any essential differences so that there is no justifications where such groups can be denied the equal opportunities to participate in the socio-cultural and political-economy realm. Conversely, Young (1998:281) further notes how such groups have found it necessary to affirm that there *are* often group-based differences which make the application of a strict principle of equal treatment, especially in competition for positions, unfair because such differences put those groups at a disadvantage. Young (1998:284) gives the example of how there has been some success in winning special rights for people with physical and mental disabilities in the past twenty years and suggests this is a clear case of where promoting equality in participation and inclusion requires attending to the particular needs of different groups.

While Young's differentiated citizenship theory has much to offer oppressed groups and individuals - and in particular for people with disabilities, it offers a substantial base for obtaining subjectivity - some key problems persist. Nancy Fraser (1997) has been critical of Young for having an essentialist notion of the groups and for privileging cultural groups. While Young's group differentiated theory may be suitable for Native Americans or Jewish Americans, it is less applicable for other groups such as people with disabilities, gays and lesbians, women or African Americans. Young's definition of a social group also attempts to cover both cultural and political-economic phenomena which is problematic. Fraser (1997) maintains a single conception which encompasses several disparate modes of collectivity (such as gender, race, ethnic groups, sexualities and social classes) may result in the loss of important conceptual distinctions. For a person with a disability, the assumption of homogeneity overlooks differences within disability. Often disability is wrongly viewed as an overarching category, however there are significant variations in the type, degree and experiences of disability and these distinctions are underpinned by difference in gender, class, race and/or sexuality. Fraser (1997) suggests that a group differentiation perspective can lead to one of the modes of collectivity being implicitly dominant where its characteristics will be projected as the characteristics of all social groups. This latter point is crucial for a person with a

disability as often it is the disability which is seen first and foremost and other characteristics, such as gender, sexuality or class are subsumed. An inclusive theory of citizenship for people with disabilities cannot reside upon simply 'group differentiation' and so while Young offers us a hopeful theory, it is only the first step and remains incomplete.

Nancy Fraser's (1998) work on redistribution and recognition attempts to fill some of the absent spaces that can be found with the above citizenship discourses. Fraser overlooks disability in her work, however her theory of justice can nonetheless be drawn on and utilised by people with disabilities in developing an embodied theory of citizenship.

Fraser (1998:432-33) proposes two broadly conceived, analytically distinct, understandings of justice. The first is socioeconomic which stems from the political-economic structures of society. Examples are exploitation, economic marginalisation and deprivation. For people with disabilities a key area of injustice is access to the labour market. Furthermore, for those who choose or are forced to live outside the labour market, a person with a disability is marginalised and deprived in the structure of the social security system. The second type of injustice Fraser notes is cultural or symbolic which stems from social patterns of representation, interpretation and communication. Examples include cultural domination, non-recognition and disrespect. Although Fraser (1998:433) maintains there are various differences between socioeconomic injustice and cultural injustice, both are pervasive in contemporary societies and both are inherently bound in processes and practices that systematically disadvantage some groups of people. While Fraser does not include people with disabilities in the groups discussed, it can be argued that people with disabilities are clearly and most obviously systematically disadvantaged through the twin processes of socio-cultural and political-economic practices. Importantly, Fraser (1998) notes how her distinction between economic injustice and cultural injustice is an analytical one, as in practice the two are intertwined.

It is Fraser's (1998) view that the remedy for economic injustice is political-economic restructuring which could involve redistributing income, reorganising the division of labour or transforming other basic economic structures. Collectively these are referred to as 'redistribution'. For people with disabilities, the achievement of full and inclusive citizenship cannot be realised without labour market and social security issues being addressed, as these form the twin pillars of disability policy, thereby forming the heart of justice and citizenship for people with disabilities. Fraser (1998) believes that the remedy for cultural injustice is cultural or symbolic change, which could involve revaluing disrespected identities or recognising and valorising cultural diversity. Collectively these

are referred to as 'recognition'. For people with disabilities, the stigma, ignorance and fear of disability requires redressing. While the disability movement has made invaluable contributions to promoting differently abled views, it is unfortunate that (as of yet) these have not translated into a full and equal recognition of disability.

Fraser (1998) states that recognition claims often take the form of calling attention to the specificity of some groups and thus tend to promote group differentiation. While in contrast, redistribution claims often call for abolishing economic arrangements which underpin group specificity and thus tend to promote group de-differentiation. This means the politics of recognition and redistribution have mutually contradictory aims as the former promotes group differentiation whereas the latter undermines it. Fraser (1998:435) rightly notes how the two kinds of claims thus stand in tension with each other and can interfere or even work against one another. While the following issue will be more fully explicated in forthcoming work, it is critical to draw attention here to how the contradictory aims of redistribution and recognition mirrors the tensions found in employment programs and social security benefits for people with disabilities. The OECD (2003:3) refer to these as "twin but contradictory goals" and state that "how to reconcile these twin goals has yet to be resolved". This inherent problem, while not targeted to disability, is also realised by Fraser (1998:451) who states:

The redistribution-recognition dilemma is real. There is no neat theoretical move by which it can be wholly dissolved or resolved. The best we can do is try to soften the dilemma by finding approaches that minimise conflicts between redistribution and recognition in cases where both must be pursued simultaneously.

Along with redistribution and recognition remedies, Fraser (1996:207) argues that we also need to develop an alternative version of anti-essentialism, one which permits the link between a cultural politics of identity and difference with a social politics of justice and equality. This is what is inherently missing from other citizenship discourses delineated within this paper. For people with disabilities, full and equal citizenship cannot be attained until the very structures of injustices which stem concurrently from socio-cultural and political-economic realms are deconstructed to be inclusive of the disabled body. As Meekosha and Dowse (1997:50) rightly note, major citizenship debates are influenced by race, ethnicity, class or gender identity but all neglect disability and people with disabilities. Therefore, citizenship discourses which focus on dichotomies of rights versus participation, or private versus public, or inclusion versus exclusion are inherently flawed for

a person with a disability. The reference point within such bifurcated models rests upon normative judgements of the abled bodied subject. It is the fundamental source of subjectivity which must be interrogated for full and equal citizenship to be realised, and for people with disabilities, it is the normative vision of the able bodied citizen which must be unbound from its inherent socio-cultural and political-economic injustices. To refer back to the original question posed of how do we begin to rewrite the story of what it means to be a disabled citizen? We begin this story through making the *able*-bodied citizen absent, and only then can the disabled subject be realised.

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