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Assessment 2: Written Essay

Do photographs show a positive change in the stereotypical portrayal of DISABLED PEOPLE in the past one-hundred years?

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Introduction

This essay explores how and why the stereotypical portrayal of disabled people in photographs has changed from the early 1900s to the present day. Analysis of images uncovers positive or negative aspects of semiotic signs of disability. Enumerating common stereotypes allows for comparison between time periods, and examination of the methods and agendas behind each. Signs must be studied in their historical context because the meaning of signs is created and changed over time. Events like the world wars and disabled rights movement may be responsible for changes in

imagery through the adoption of new stereotypes. The results may show a trend and suggest reasons for a change in imagery, and what this means for the future.

This essay is limited within these parameters: there are three time periods, each containing three images. Every period must contain at least one image of physical and one of mental impairment, for consideration of any differences between the portrayal of each.

What constitutes disability is constantly changing. The most recent consensus has provided a radical shift away from the traditional definition of an individual with an impairment. The World Health Organization (WHO) suggests that disability, unlike impairment, is the result of limitations placed upon impaired individuals by a society that does not provide the necessary adaptations to allow them to live unencumbered (World Health Organization, 2011). (Ciot & Van Hove, 2010) note that (Higgins, 1992) corroborates this: "as a society we *construct disability* through our language, the media and other visible and public ways, such as photography, art and literature". This is the *social model* of disability (University of Leicester, 2015). The *medical model* views disabled people as dependent on non-disabled people for care because they are incapable of looking after themselves (Barnes, 1992). This essay uses this new definition for the word *disability*, and *impairment* to describe medical conditions.

Stereotypes

A *stereotype* is a widely-held image of a person or thing that is neither inherently positive nor negative (Oxford University Press, 2018). Stereotypes may group things beyond a reasonable representation of reality, to help people understand their increasingly complex lives (HyperNormalisation, 2016). Professor Colin Barnes, a prolific researcher and author on disability (University of Leeds, 2018), produced a seminal report *Disabling Imagery and the Media* (Barnes, 1992). It offers eleven common stereotypes, which form the basis of the comparative analysis presented here. Barnes concludes that disabled people in the UK are perceived to live in poverty and depend heavily on others, and that almost all stereotypical media portrayal of disabled people is negative. This is contested by Joy Donaldson, when writing about television -- people with impairments are equally portrayed in positive and negative ways (Donaldson, 1981). Both agree overall media coverage has a negative impact on the impaired. However, most papers on the subject specifically relate to television and not the still image. It appears that very little work has been done to determine if the same is true of photographic media.

Semiotics is the study of signs and their meaning (Oxford University Press, 2018). Applied to images, a sign can be any visual element. It follows that stereotypes must be represented in photography through signs, and therefore, semiotic analysis is a good way to decipher meaning from images of disabled people.

Semiotics Theory

There are three types of signs: icons, indexes and symbols (Chandler, 2017). An icon stands for an object by resembling it, like a picture, diagram or map. An index makes a causal link; for example, smoke is an index of fire. A symbol signifies something by an abstract link according to culture, law, or tradition – the audience's experiences determine any meaning they may derive; for example, a green tie indicating a student's membership of a particular class only carries this meaning for those at the school. Some symbols have multiple unrelated meanings; for example, red can indicate danger but also love.

Semiotics as a discipline was created independently by Ferdinand de Saussure and Charles Sanders Peirce, whose models are distinct but similar. English photographer and disabled rights activist David Hevey examined semiotics in his book *The Creatures Time Forgot: Photography and Disability Imagery* (Hevey, 1992) to create a working model specifically for the interpretation of disability imagery. Hevey wanted to use evidence to 'prove' interpretations of signs. For example, news articles from the historic period when a sign was in use could suggest how the audience of the time would have interpreted them. Without this, the extra knowledge (or lack of knowledge) afforded to Hevey in the present day might prevent him interpreting images as the photographer intended. In creating his model, Hevey turned to the work of artist and writer Victor Burgin in *Thinking Photography* (Burgin, 1982).

Burgin suggested that meaning was found not just in images themselves, but in their context and discourse (Burgin, 1986). He discovered that signs have no automatic or inherent meaning, so there is no such thing as inherently positive or negative imagery. Any negativity, such as disablist perceptions, must be created from the individual experiences of the audience. People cannot be forced to interpret an image in a certain way, although captioning can guide them towards the artist's intended meaning. Hevey observes that unfortunately Burgin's work takes this so far that by its conclusion, images themselves are omitted from the equation; Burgin is resigned to the idea it is impossible to create any image with an absolute meaning (Hevey, 1992). Hevey combines Burgin's emphasis on context and discourse with traditional semiotics theory, assisted by the work of American photographer Allan Sekula who published an essay in his book *Photography Against the Grain* (Sekula, 1984), in which he describes the need to include the artist themselves within semiotic analysis. Sekula believed that images as a medium for the exchange of information do not exist in a vacuum. Instead, they set a direction for discussion which additionally considers the context of the artist. Hevey arrived at a model that reflects both the subjective and objective information in and around images, as well as the milieu of the photographer. This essay uses Hevey's adapted model.

Historical Context

At the turn of the twentieth century, affordable cameras like the original Kodak allowed for widespread public adoption (Eastman Kodak Company, 2018) and propelled photographs into everyday life. New printing techniques like offset lithography in 1904 (Encyclopaedia Britannica, 2018) and machinery like the mimeograph duplicator, based upon Thomas Edison's design from 1875 (Owen, 2004) prompted a dramatic surge in images in newspapers and magazines (Hacking, 2012). Mass image consumption had begun. To fuel this new consumer desire for imagery, photographers were increasingly using their medium to capture world events.

The rise of Marxist socialism in Europe prompted changes in society. The Labour Party, formed in 1906, echoed this in its 1918 constitution with a clause which, according to *The Independent*, promised 'common ownership of the means of production' (Kahn, 2015). Calls for equality led to women's suffrage and printing of images of the mistreatment of suffragists like Ada Wright, which appeared on the front of the *Daily Mirror* on November 19th, 1910, the day after Black Friday (Pankhurst, 1935). In Russia the Marxist revolution of 1917 changed the political landscape towards communism (Encyclopaedia Britannica, 2018). Photographers like Viktor Bulla captured scenes of conflict in iconic images such as *Government Troops Firing on Demonstrators, Corner of Nevsky Prospect and Sadovaya Street, St Petersburg, Russia.*

The homecoming of disabled servicemen after World War I challenged the common belief that disabled people were a burden (Historic England, 2018). Nearly two million people returned with impairments, and attitudes were forced to change. Medicine advanced to accommodate this new minority with prosthetics (Yale University, 2018) and plastic surgery (Royal Free London NHS Foundation Trust, 2018). Despite this advance in care for the physically disabled, those with mental impairments were still segregated from society in self-contained colonies working low-skilled jobs. This is demonstrated in photographs by Margaret Bourke-White from her time at the Letchworth Village colony in the USA in the 1930s.

Disabled people faced discrimination brought about by the authors of eugenics texts, and their supporters, some of whom were running facilities like Letchworth (Bogdan, et al., 2012) (see Figure 6). Bourke-White was employed by the owner of the colony to demonstrate how well their system was working, to encourage financial support. The sentiment shared by society was that the physically impaired needed help, but those with mental impairments needed isolating for everyone's benefit (BBC News, 1999).

Early Photographs

Image 1: Advertisement for Forster Artificial Limb Company, by Joel Wayne

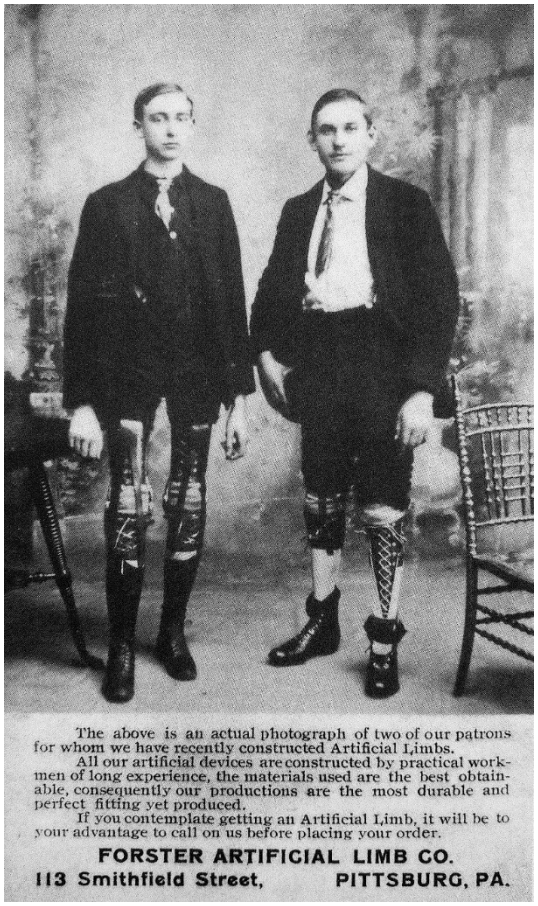

Figure 1 - Advertisement by Forster Artificial Limb Company. C. 1907 by Joel Wayne. Source: Picturing Disability by Robert Bogdan, page 106.

Figure 1, taken in 1907 in the United States, features in the book *Picturing Disability*. It is a full-length portrait of two men with artificial legs. They are dressed in suits, standing in front of a painted studio background. To the left is a table and to the right a chair.

A caption describes the men as 'customers' of an artificial limb company. Their exposed limbs are a sign of their ability to walk thanks to their prostheses. Their smart clothes are a cultural symbol of wealth, perhaps suggesting the target audience. The freestanding table and chair could simply be set dressing but could also draw attention to the fact that the men are standing without leaning on the furniture, in turn representing their newfound independence. The painted background is an index linked with photography of this era (Linderman, 2010), suggesting the commissioner specifically planned this picture; it is staged rather than candid, which is understandable as photography at the time was quite involved and thus usually very deliberate.

The image doesn't conform to any of Barnes' 11 stereotypes, though (Ciot & Van Hove, 2013) identified the *consumer model*, in which people with impairments are represented as a consumer group. The elements supporting this are the caption referring to the men as patrons; the painted background, which indicates the commercial setting; the low likelihood of a situation featuring two men with prosthetic legs arising by chance; their smart clothes, which may not be an everyday occurrence for them; and finally, that their artificial limbs are exposed. In the sense that commercial advertising is universal, this image does not stereotype the disabled. Most importantly, it is unique among those studied in that impaired people are not only the subject but also the intended audience.

Image 2: The "Armless Wonder", Photographer Unknown

Figure 2 - Frances O'Connor, 'armless wonder' c. 1932, Photo Postcard, Photographer Unknown. Source: Picturing Disability by Robert Bogdan, page 14.

Figure 2 also features in *Picturing Disability*, which identifies the subject as Frances O'Connor, 'the armless wonder' (Bogdan, et al., 2012). It was taken post-World War I in the United States. O'Connor is smiling and has contemporaneous dress and styled hair. A curtain is used as a backdrop. She is holding a teacup to her mouth with her right foot. The author categorises the image under *Freak Portraits* and states that its purpose

was financial (Bogdan, et al., 2012). Further research shows that it was published in the same year as the movie *Freaks*, which starred O'Connor (Freaks, 1932).

Smiling is a cultural symbol indicating happiness. However, it is customary to smile in photographs, so O'Connor might not actually be happy; the motivation behind her smile remains unclear. Bogdan describes O'Connor's presentation as 'a modern woman'. Fine clothing and groomed hair are often an indication of status, suggesting possible intent by the commissioner, photographer, or O'Connor herself to portray someone of middle-class status. The backdrop is an index of the photographic process, denoting the deliberate nature of the photograph, especially as it contrasts with O'Connor's dress, making her stand out. The cup is an index of tea-drinking and the formal affair of tea culture, and this one has a thin handle, perhaps to demonstrate O'Connor's dexterity with her feet. The cup also draws attention to her upper body, guiding the viewer through a realisation: first that O'Connor is holding it with a foot, and consequently, that she has no arms. The long, low bench allows the subject to steady herself with one leg while she drinks with the other. Since it isn't the kind of seat one would expect in a formal setting, it is likely an assistive apparatus and therefore an index of her impairment.

Bogdan mentions 'freak portraits' were a way of making money for the subjects (Bogdan, et al., 2012), much like autographs, and to advertise their appearance in shows. O'Connor is portrayed in an aggrandised way, yet the context of the freak show is a negative one. Barnes describes this stereotype as 'the disabled person as super-cripple', in which they are singled out in a way that appears positive at first (Barnes, 1992). Holding the cup is an example of O'Connor's ability to overcome her impairment, but she is still treated as a degenerate; her role is exclusive rather than inclusive, and the intent of the image's commissioner is ultimately exploitative. The theatre of the clothing, hair and setting reinforces this.

Image 3: "A Group of Mongolian Imbeciles", from *Applied Eugenics*

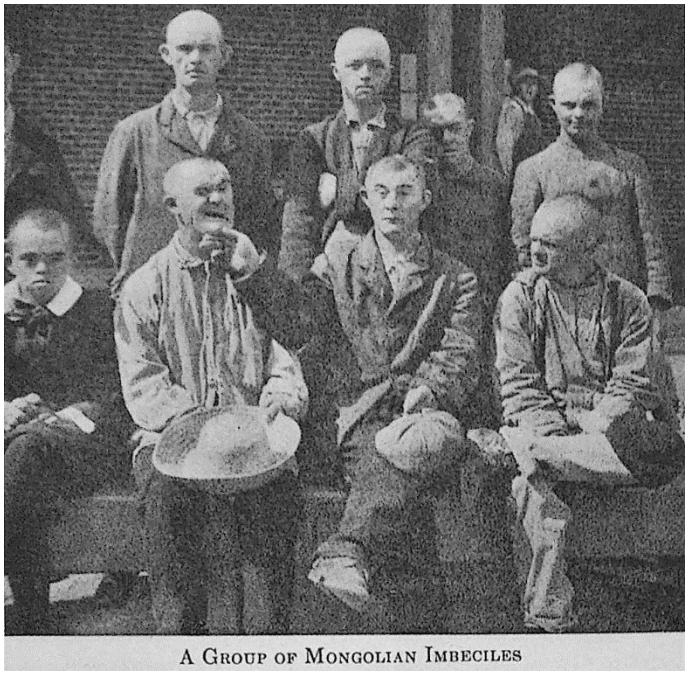

Figure 3 - "A Group of Mongolian Imbeciles" from Paul Poppenoe and Roswell Johnson's 1918 work titled Applied Eugenics. Source: Picturing Disability by Robert Bogdan, page 88.

Figure 3 is from *Applied Eugenics* (1918) and reproduced in *Picturing Disability* with its original caption. It features 10 people around a bench, some seated. They share similar clothing and shaved heads to the extent that it can be difficult to determine gender, but the crucial connection is that they all have Down Syndrome. Bogdan states that people with Down Syndrome were a favourite photographic subject of eugenicists because they have 'facial characteristics' (Bogdan, et al., 2012) that are easily recognised; in semiotics, these features are an index of the condition. What Bogdan doesn't mention is that the subjects are further made to look similar by the matched hairstyles and clothing, symbols of institutionalised life, as in prison or the military, implying that they are not allowed to make their own choices; this is also reflected in their regimented arrangement. An external force has grouped and excluded these people from society in line with eugenics practices.

The image engages Barnes' stereotype 'the disabled person as incapable of participating fully in community life.' Eugenicists created such photographs to further their agenda of cultivating a better human race by excluding less-desirable people through sterilisation and segregation, preying upon the public's fear that disabled people were a serious threat (Bogdan, et al., 2012) (Barnes, 1992). Placing so many people with Down Syndrome together almost suggests an epidemic, and Bogdan notes also that "one way to exaggerate a disability is to put several people with the same impairment together" (Bogdan, et al., 2012). The condonation of sterilisation and segregation falls under an additional stereotype, 'the disabled person as an object of violence' (Barnes, 1992).

Impact of the World Wars

Between 1939 and 1945 the Nazis in Germany murdered more than 275,000 disabled European citizens (A&E Television Networks, LLC, 2018). Propaganda described these people as 'life unworthy of life' (United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, 2018). When this was uncovered after World War II, eugenics practices fell suddenly out of favour (Historic England, 2018). This helped turn around the overtly negative sentiment towards disabled people that the public shared, by suggesting that eugenics practices were not an acceptable solution to problems presented by impairments. At the same time, veterans were returning with disabilities inflicted by the war, and public attention focused on how to help these people. For example, the British government created the 1944 Disabled Persons Employment Act, setting quotas for disabled people in companies, and reserving some jobs solely for disabled applicants with a preference for ex-servicemen (Crown Copyright, 1944). 1948 saw the founding of the National Health Service (Crown Copyright, 2018), funded through taxation and available to all, which was instrumental in the ongoing care of the 750,000 disabled veterans from World War I (Cohen, 2001) and the additional 1.5 million people (including civilians) from World War II (BBC News, 1999). Despite these positive changes, the UK government continued to lock away those with mental disorders (British Broadcasting Corporation, 1999).

In 1935, Kodak released the colour film 'Kodachrome' for general consumer use, leaving black-and-white photography an aesthetic option rather than a necessity (Eastman Kodak Company, 2018).

Post-War Imagery

Image 4: Pupils Watching Their Handicapped Schoolmates, by Ralph Morse

Figure 4 - Image by Ralph Morse captioned "Through one-way window normal Pupils Watching Their Handicapped schoolmates. Once accustomed to crippled children, they accept and help them." 1950. Published in Life Magazine, April 30, 1951, p. 89. Getty Images Source: Disability and Art History, page: 103.

Figure 4 appeared in *Life* magazine, an American publication known for its photojournalism which ran from 1932 to 1972 (Encyclopædia Britannica, 2018). It depicts a school classroom viewed from the corridor. The two women are probably teachers. In the foreground, one group of children look from the corridor through a one-way window at another group in the classroom; the audience shares this view. The caption clarifies the difference between the groups.

The desks and posters are symbols of an institution of learning, putting all the children in context as pupils. The corridor appears ordinary, but symbolically creates a barrier. Both the photographer and by extension the audience are on the same side of this barrier as the children described as 'normal', and the framing of the image becomes an icon for a cage, like that in a zoo, through which the children watch their disabled schoolmates with curiosity. The one-way glass reinforces this analogy and adds an element of voyeurism. The image appeared in the context of an article on cerebral palsy, which describes the disabled children as 'victims' (Life Magazine, 1951), 'shoved out of sight' by their families until the field of medicine identified cerebral palsy for the first time and, crucially, discovered that those with it possess 'normal' minds, at which time they were deemed worthy of aid.

As the article appears in a general interest magazine, its audience may or may not have encountered cerebral palsy before. The photograph appears designed to generate acceptance through sympathy, reinforced by the caption ('Once accustomed to crippled children, [the other children] accept and help them') (Life Magazine, 1951).

While the desire for *acceptance* is understandable, the suggestion that the pupils should *help* their disabled schoolmates might indicate a shortfall in the school's resources that pupils are asked to make up. Barnes refers to this as 'the disabled person as burden', a stereotype based upon the mistaken idea that their needs are so different from everyone else's that meeting them would represent a disproportionately vast drain of resources. It fails to recognise that with appropriate support, those like these children could lead normal lives (Barnes, 1992); instead, the article says that the children are told they may never live normal lives (Life Magazine, 1951).

Image 5: Elvis Presley with March of Dimes Poster Child, Photographer Unknown

Figure 5 - Elvis Presley with March of Dimes Poster Child, in publicity photograph supporting the organisation. 1957. News release. March of Dimes Foundation. Source: Picturing Disability by Robert Bogdan, page 50.

Figure 5 is a publicity photograph for March of Dimes, founded in 1938 to campaign to improve the health of mothers and babies in an effort to eradicate polio (March of Dimes, 2018). This photograph is from 1957, two years after the invention of the Salk vaccine with the help of funding from the charity (March of Dimes, 2018). It serves two purposes: encouraging further donations and encouraging parents to vaccinate their children. Bogdan notes that March of Dimes maintained close relationships with celebrities (Bogdan, et al., 2012), such as Elvis Presley seen here crouching to meet the eye level of the young girl in the white dress. The girl has crutches, indicating she is the disabled subject, which explains her association with the charity. Presley is holding a sign resembling a lollipop with the words 'Join March of Dimes', further revealing the intent of the image. The pair are harshly lit, suggesting a flash as would be expected of a news reporter.

The crutches are an index of the visible effects of polio and the girl's age shows it affects young children. Elvis is a symbol of music and celebrity culture; at the time he had just begun his acting career and was very popular. By holding the sign, Elvis is endorsing the cause. Crouching to meet the girl's eye level is a deliberate act suggesting Elvis is treating her as an important person and not merely incidental to the event. The sign is an icon resembling a lollipop, a symbol for the cultural association between sweets and children. This iconography informs the viewer that the cause is for children.

While Presley may have supported March of Dimes because he cared about it, Barnes would argue this kind of fundraising "encourages pity so the non-disabled can feel bountiful" (Barnes, 1992). This may hold true in this case, since the scene was perhaps constructed specifically to use a particularly small and sweet-looking girl – the white of her dress a symbol of innocence – rather than a taller child or a boy. The subjects are well-dressed and groomed, suggesting the careful staging of the event, with the girl looking as endearing as possible and making her disability more palatable for public consumption. The caption in *Picturing Disability*, while naming Presley, refers to the girl just as 'poster child' suggesting her name was not recorded, reducing her to more of an object. Barnes calls this stereotype 'the disabled person as pitiable and pathetic' (Barnes, 1992), as seen in Figure 4.

Image 6: End of the Day, by Margaret Bourke-White

Figure 6 - End of the Day. Letchworth Village, 1937. From the institution's annual report. Photograph by Margaret Bourke-White. Source: Picturing Disability by Robert Bogdan, page 71.

Figure 6 was taken by American photojournalist Margaret Bourke-White in 1937, commissioned by Letchworth Village as part of its annual report to demonstrate the productiveness of the colony (Watson, 2017). Letchworth was run by a supporter of the eugenics movement to house people with both mental and physical illnesses. The image features four boys carrying pickaxes, similarly dressed and walking in file with neutral expressions.

Pickaxes are a symbol and an index of hard labour carried out by unskilled workers. The fact that the pickaxes seem so big emphasises that they are carried by children

(Watson, 2017) and, perhaps to compensate for this, the photographer has taken the photo looking upwards at the boys, making them appear taller. This image shares with Figure 3 the implication of an institutionalised setting: the clothing and haircuts suggest the subjects are not there by choice. It would be in the interests of the commissioner to portray the children as well cared for, and Bogdan notes their clothes are clean, which does not fit with manual labour (Bogdan, et al., 2012). Perhaps he is suggesting the image was staged; indeed, its title 'End of the Day' denies the possibility that the commissioner intended to show the boys clean because they were just starting out in the morning.

A common sentiment in this period was that trying to educate the mentally ill was a waste of time and a drain on resources, the stereotype Barnes calls 'the disabled person as burden' (Barnes, 1992). Letchworth might have wanted to show that by engaging them in hard labour it had put these otherwise 'useless' people to positive use. This was the period immediately following the Great Depression, and Letchworth might have been under particular pressure to justify its costs. Yet while the intent was to portray a positive situation, the image stands as evidence that mentally ill children weren't treated the same as those without disabilities, who at this age would be in school. This fits the stereotype 'the disabled person as incapable of participating fully in community life' (Barnes, 1992). An implication is that the children's impairments are the problem, as opposed to their lack of access to appropriate care. Despite Bogdan's negative tone regarding the image, Keri Watson wrote in *Disability and Art History* on the Letchworth images, arguing these photographs had a positive impact because they opened up a discourse on the subject. (Watson, 2017)

The Impact of the Disabled Rights Movement

In the UK in response to advancements in psychopharmacology along with growing government concern over the care of those with disabilities, the Mental Health Act 1959 was introduced, reducing the divide between psychiatric hospitals and those for physical illnesses (BBC News, 1999). The term asylum was dropped, and while not all could close immediately because of existing patients, for new cases 'care in the community' was becoming commonplace. Enoch Powell's 'water tower speech' in 1961 outlined a vision for the coming 15 years (Powell, 1961). This was *deinstitutionalisation*.

The social as opposed to medical model of disability was promoted, and in 1990 the National Health Service and Community Care Act set in place the system we know today (BBC News, 1999). However, disabled people's rights were for a time underrepresented because charities benefitted financially from the simpler medial model which better fitted with public perception (Fletcher, 2015). The 1990s saw incidents of civil disobedience in protest at the discrimination of the disabled, culminating in the Disability Discrimination Act in 1995 (BBC News, 2015). It covers education, employment, buying of goods and services and access to facilities and public transport (Crown Copyright, 1995).

The Disability Discrimination Act was folded into the Equality Act 2010, but both the United Nations and the UK's Equality and Human Rights Commission have since published reports showing that changes like the reduction of benefit payments are leading to disabled people becoming increasingly isolated (United Nations, 2017) (Bulman, 2018). A great stigma remains attached to disability: analysing the report, *The Independent* found it "called attention to the scape-goating of people with disabilities who rely on government support, who are regularly portrayed as 'lazy', 'committing fraud as benefit claimants' and 'putting a burden on taxpayers who are paying "money for nothing"'" (Goulding, 2017).

Contemporary Images

Image 7: Sarah and Zoe, by Polly Braden

Figure 7 - Sarah and Zoe, Great Holm Coffee Shop, Milton Keynes. 2016 by Polly Braden. Source: Great Interactions, page 53.

Figure 7 was commissioned by MacIntyre, which provides services for people with learning difficulties, as part of its 50th anniversary book *Great Interactions* (Braden, 2016). It features two women, named as Sarah and Zoe, in a kitchen environment in a café. They appear absorbed in their cooking, paying no attention to the camera. Photographer Polly Braden took the picture from head height, and the subjects' purple uniforms contrast with the naturally monochromatic background.

The women are a symbol for workers or employees, reinforced by their uniforms, which are a symbol of the café for those familiar with it; for a wider audience, the kitchen environment provides the context. The utensils are an index for cooking. The only overt sign of disability is Sarah's facial expression, which might suggest Down Syndrome. The caption supports the signs and removes ambiguity by giving the location as a café, but does not draw attention to disability nor state that the café is a charity. Braden identifies these people by what they do, not their conditions; the latter is revealed only by context of the image in a MacIntyre book.

This photograph does not conjure any of Barnes' stereotypes except the final distinct one, 'the disabled person as normal', seen to have 'advantages for furthering

integration'. At the time of Barnes' report in 1992, he noted that many portrayals of this category were 'one dimensional' and 'did little to reflect the experience of disability' (Barnes, 1992). *Great Interactions* overcomes this to an extent by including a page of text giving context to each image. Unfortunately, in this case, this is written by the café manager who speaks mostly about the café itself rather than the women pictured. Allowing Sarah and Zoe to speak themselves would have further empowered them by echoing the positivity of the photograph in the accompanying text.

Image 8: If This Goes, Everything Else Goes With it, by Bruce Nichol

Figure 8 - If This Goes, Everything Else Goes With It. A Multiple Sclerosis Society poster from 1988, photographed by Bruce Nichol. Source: http://www.luerzersarchive.com/en/magazine/print-detail/multiple-sclerosis-society-24828.html

Figure 8 was one of a series of four images by Bruce Nichol for an advertising campaign by the Multiple Sclerosis Society in 1988 (Lürzer's Archive, 1988). The society is working to find a cure for Multiple Sclerosis (MS) while supporting those living with the disease (Multiple Sclerosis Society, n.d.). The image features a nude female body facing away from the camera against a black background. It is made to look like the poster has been torn down her spine. Beneath is a caption, logo and slogan.

The female form can be a symbol for many things including sex, gender, fitness, and art, but here the logo puts it in the context of health. The artful pose and black background are indexes of commercial photography, and Nichol was working for advertising agency Davidson Pearce at the time (Lürzer's Archive, 1988). The paper tear creates a void, suggesting an absence or deficiency in the spine; an index of the impairment. This is supported by the caption which alludes to the spine without naming it. The 'MS' logo is a symbol representing the cause. Barnes says choosing black and white despite colour being widely available was a means of conveying suffering (Barnes, 1992).

The slogan suggests those with MS must be cared for by society, without whose donations there will be no cure, thus placing responsibility for the future of those with MS in the hands of the audience; this is 'the disabled person as burden' (Barnes, 1992). The otherwise attractive female form being violently torn creates a juxtaposition between beauty and disability, perhaps inadvertently suggesting disabled people cannot be beautiful. The audience is invited to feel sorry for the subject – a beautiful woman was alright until her spine ceased to function – engaging 'the disabled person as pitiable and pathetic' (Barnes, 1992).

Image 9: Here I Am: Joe, by Rankin

Figure 9 - Here I Am: Joe. Mencap advertising campaign from 2016, photographed by Rankin. Source: https://www.mencap.org.uk/get-involved/campaign-mencap/here-i-am

Figure 9 is a portrait by Rankin (Waddell, 2016) commissioned by British charity Mencap, which supports people with learning disabilities, as part of its 'Here I Am' campaign (Mencap, 2016). It features a man named Joe making a specific facial expression and hand gesture against a plain, dark background.

The background denotes a studio, which matches Rankin's field of commercial portraiture. Like Figure 7 the image reveals little about its subject beyond what can be deduced from their appearance. Joe's facial structure is one commonly associated with Down Syndrome and thus an index of the condition. His expression appears confrontational, supported by his hand gestures and eye contact with the camera, a cultural symbol of aggression. Joe wants attention from the audience.

The caption 'Here I Am' removes any ambiguity: Joe is challenging the viewers through this pose. Perhaps this is Joe's response to Barnes' stereotype 'the disabled person as an object of violence', showing that he feels capable of defending himself. But really Mencap's intention is surely to 'confront' the audience in an emotional sense: bringing disabled people out from where society hides them; saying 'I exist' in an emphatic way. This is Barnes' final and contrasting stereotype: 'the disabled person as normal' (Barnes, 1992).

Comparison and Trends

This study examined nine images grouped into three time periods. In the first, from 1907, image 1 stands out as not conforming to any of Barnes' 11 stereotypes. This is because disabled people themselves are the target audience; the 'consumer model' identified by Ciot and Van Hove. It would be against the interest of the commissioner to use negative semiotic signs, which could alienate its customers. Image 2 appears to portray the subject as super-cripple. Like image 1, its context suggests it was created for commercial gain, but this time at the expense of the subject rather than for their benefit. Image 3 appears the most overtly negative in this set and triggers two stereotypes: first, that disabled people cannot participate fully in community life, and second that they should be treated with violence. It is no surprise that photos created by eugenicists would be wholly negative towards disabled people. Images 1 to 3 share loosely a theme of exploitation of the disabled.

After the world wars, the sentiment towards the physically disabled changes somewhat. At first glance, image 4 appears to depict disabled children more positively. However, the context of the accompanying article uses negative terms like 'victim' to encourage an emotional response of pity from the readership (of *Life*) making this portrayal overtly negative. Image 5 similarly triggers this stereotype. A contrast emerges when the two images of physical impairment (4 and 5) are compared with one depicting mental impairment (image 6). Although the children appear clean and healthy, the context and semiotic signs suggest the mentally impaired are seen as lesser than the physically impaired. Young children working on a farm is indicative of their unusual treatment; they are not being educated in school like those in image 4. Disabilities are now more clearly divided into physical and mental. The advances made in public understanding and acceptance of physical impairments have yet to be equalled for those with mental impairments.

In the final set, the only negative photograph is image 8, the earliest of the three. It was created for a charity, and according to anecdotal evidence from those fighting for disabled rights at the time, it was not yet in the interest of charities to encourage anti-discrimination legislation because they were subscribed to the medical model rather than the social model of disability. But during this period the atmosphere of discrimination against disabled people sees significant change, both in terms of public perception and law. This is seen in the attitudes reflected in images 7 and image 9

which engage the 'disabled person as normal' stereotype. Perhaps crucially, these were created after the passing of anti-discrimination legislation in the UK where the images were taken.

Link with Personal Professional Practice

I have a disability and find communication difficult. I decided to pursue a degree in photography to learn the syntax of visual language as an alternative to verbal communication, to more effectively disseminate my ideas. My intent is to help change disability portrayal through a similar method to Image 9, by confronting the public with imagery that sparks discussion. Professor Barnes recommended that disabled people become involved in the creation of representational media (Barnes, 1992), which directly relates to my final project and book *Autism: Life on the Spectrum*, which communicates in photographs my experience of living with autism (Ginn, 2018).

Conclusion

Disabled people have historically been depicted in photographs in ways that make their disability the subject rather than an incidental component of the composition. The meaning of such images was derived from stereotypical perceptions of impairment by the photographer or societal attitudes. Physical and mental impairments are only part of a disabled person's life, but when someone is photographed solely for their impairment, it can suggest they have nothing more to offer. Contemporary images are a reminder of how recently antidiscrimination legislation was passed in the UK. While events like World War One are fading from living memory, a significant number of disabled people alive today will have experienced first-hand the effects of their negative portrayal in their communities or even by charities supporting them.

A change in the portrayal of disabled people took place in two stages, which can be seen in photographs analysed in their historic context. First was understanding and support for the physically disabled following World War Two, and second, much more recently, new antidiscrimination laws began to protect the mentally disabled. It is now a matter for the courts if a disabled person is portrayed in any way other than 'normal person plus impairment'. However, it is almost impossible to simultaneously call attention to a person's impairment and claim they are 'normal'. Even positive discrimination singles them out, so perhaps there can never be a photograph of a disabled person that isn't negative in some way, unless their impairment is an incidental element. Equally, it is important to encourage discourse on the subject of disability equality, so the production of these images should continue.

The findings of this study suggest a positive trend in the portrayal of disabled people in photographic media over the last hundred years. However, it is important to note that the only nine images were randomly selected and analysed from a pool of hundreds of potential photographs, which is too small a sample size from which to draw

quantitative conclusions. A future study could use the same methodology of semiotic analysis and comparison to stereotypes to better substantiate claims of this trend.

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