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MULTIPLE MINORITY GROUPS: A CASE STUDY OF PHYSICALLY DISABLED WOMEN

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Abstract

In general, disfranchised Americans are becoming increasingly aware
of their social restrictions and limitations on opportunities. As a result
there are now minority groups who have identified their shared problems
only within the last twenty years,and these groups are rapidly changing the
nature of minority relations. In particular, people with newly defined
multiple minority statuses are beginning to articulate their specialized
interests and establish new relations with both the dominant majority
and the minority groups to which they belong.

Physically disabled women are one such group. As women and as
disabled people, they are members of two separate minority groups. Their
relations to disabled males and able-bodied females shed light on the
theoretical complexities of this recent social phenomenon. They also
reveal how understanding their specific problems can lead to a redefini-
tion of how to generate a more liberated and liberating society.

INTRODUCTION

More and more individuals in modern society are aware of others like
themselves who are the victims of limited opportunities, hostility or
trivialization:

> At no time since the Civil War has American Society been so con-
> scious of the problems of minority groups. Not only has social
> action acquired a new impetus in the implementation of rights
> for the traditionally recognized minority groups, but ever widen-
> ing social categories are being posed as candidates for minority
> group status (Hacker, 1971: 65).

For example, individuals who are fat, female[1] physically disabled, gay,
or labelled mentally ill now define themselves as members of minority
groups while ten to wenty years ago they may not have done so.[2] As a
consequence, they are organizing for greater recognition of their prob-
lems and their right to define who they are and what they can do. More-
over, the number of people who recognize that they are predjudi-

cially treated is rapidly increasing. There are, therefore, three trends occurring concommitantly; (1) a new subjective awareness of objective discrimination, (2) a broadening of definitions of categories eligible for minority group identification and (3) a dramatic increase in the number of people included within these new groups.

Each of these trends has generated a new group phenomenon: the multiple minority group. This paper is addressed specifically to defining the latter group and analyzing their effect on majority and minority relations. This is done first by examining the theoretical concepts of "minority status," "minority group,", "the single minority group," "multiple minority statuses," "multiple minority group," and the "interaction effects of the multiple minority group". These concepts are then extended to an analysis of one specific multiple minority group: physically disabled women. For this case study, physically disabled women must be seen as separate from but related to their "single minority groups" of women and the physcially disabled. After defining these relationships theoretically, a brief review of the literature concerning physically disabled women is presented and their relationships to the single minority groups are examined.

From this completed analysis, the conclusion summarizes why this multiple minority group concept is central to our understanding of minority rights. This concept clarifies the number of people who are oppressed in this society, the process of continuing such massive discrimination, and the participants in this process of disenfranchisement by all members of this society. Therefore, we link theory and practice as interconnected units for action.

THE MULTIPLE MINORITY GROUP

Definition of Concepts

A minority group is any group of people who, because of their physical or cultural characteristics, are singled out from the others in the society in which they live for differential and unequal treatment, and who therefore regard themselves as objects of collective discrimination (Wirth, 1945: 347, emphasis added).

Using Wirth's definition of a minority group, it is clear that there are two conditions that must be met: an objective condition of differential or unequal treatment (a "minority status") and a subjective awareness of this group basis for discrimination. (Frequently, minority statuses exist for years without the emergence of a minority group.)

A minority group with one, subjective group identification is defined here as "single minority group." However, members of a single minority group can have a number of minority statuses, called here "multiple minority statuses." This latter term refers to the objective condition of differential and unequal treatment that arises from being singled out by others in a society as being a member of more than one minority group. The individuals or groups being singled out for this type of discriminatory treatment need not be aware of the multiple origin of the predjudicial responses.

A "multiple minority group", then, is any group of people who are singled out from the others in the society in which they live for differential and unequal treatment because they are defined as members of more than one minority group, and who therefore regard themselves as objects of this combination of collective discriminations.

With awareness of the multiple origins of discrimination there is a recognition that the emergent patterns of inequality are not identical to those imposed on any single minority group. Instead, there are "interaction effects of the multiple minority group." These are the unique patterns of differential and unequal treatment based upon the combined characteristics of the multiple minority group. These interaction effects generate two processes particular to the multiple minority group: (1) the differential and unequal treatment is usually more severely limiting for the multiple minority group compared to a single minority group, and (2) the groups of people discriminating against the multiple minority group may include members of both the "majority" and "single minority groups." Multiple minority groups, then, alter the relationships between the majority and "minorities" by generating new patterns of discrimination within minority groups.

Each of these concepts is dependent upon the original definition of a "minority group" generated by Wirth. "Minority status" is a component of this definition, and the "single minority group" is a specification of the awareness of one minority group identification. The concept of "multiple minority group" is dependent upon the existence of single minority groups, each of which is characterized by a specific minority status. The combination of single minority group characteristics results in "multiple minority statuses". When these objective conditions of restrictions are recognized as emerging from the collective treatment of more than one minority group, a new group results: the "multiple minority group."

Before proceeding to an analysis of a specific multiple minority group, physically disabled women, the concept defined here will be examined in greater detail.

Discussing the Concepts

As noted above, a person may have multiple minority statuses, and the number of devalued statuses could range from two to several. There is, in fact, a tendancy for one minority status to precitate entry into another. For example, a major indicator of a minority status is a limitation on rights to free entry and mobility in the marketplace (See Reich, Gordon and Edwards, 1973, for a discussion of "labor market segmentation"). Economic restrictions, however, are not a necessary condition for defining a minority group. Blacks and women for example, may be members of the middle or upper classes and yet still be subject to prejudicial treatment in their everyday lives.

Nonetheless, membership in a minority group is likely to generate other minority statuses, especially restrictions in economic resources. For example, women who are elderly tend to be of a limited and low income. They are likely to be widows and to develop physical disabilities and perhaps become so overwhelmed by their everyday limitations that they become depressed (Maryson and Hess,1980). Although the multiple problem family has long been noted in the literature on social welfare, the identification of multiple minority groups with unique multiple problems has not been emphasized.

Although the multiple minority identification is becoming more frequent, this does not mean that the individual with multiple minority statuses becomes a part of a multiple minority group. Instead, multiple minority groups tend to share only two or perhaps three minority statuses. This is due to a variety of reasons. (1) There may be an awareness of only one minority group status. As noted in Wirth's definition of a "minority group," there must be an awareness of collective discrimination. A person with multiple minority statuses may recognize only one of them as limiting. For example, there are a number of writings on black women or Chicanas as oppressed primarily as a function of their race or ethnicity respectively, but not by their status as females. (See discussion of these in Stone, 1975, and Cotera, 1980.) (2) The number of people who share more than one minority status is smaller than the number who comprise the minority groups in which they are members. For example, there are fewer black women than black men and women; or there are fewer disabled women in poverty than there are disabled people. As each additional minority status is added, there are fewer members within the sub-groups. (3) The larger the number of multiple minority statuses the more likely the members are to be

particularly disadvantaged. This latter is especially true with ref-
erence to social status and prestige; e.g., limited entry into the pro-
fessions, low income employment, and minimal educational opportunities.
For example, black lesbians have a smaller group of accepting and power-
ful peers who share their status than do heterosexual, white women.
(4) There is a limitation on how much time can be spent working with-
in groups organizing for social change. Activists in a minority cause
usually need to find time to work on these projects while having
obligations at home or in the marketplace which restrict their "extra"
resources for political organizing and community action. (5) Finally,
there is an interaction effect. Multiple minorities are the most
disenfranchised members of society. More difficult than defining and
defending a "new" minority is working with an established, legitimated
minority group. The multiple minority group can most easily battle
for their rights in more powerful groups, particularly powerful
minority groups in which they share membership. Because of each of the
above factors, multiple minority groups rarely share more than three
minority statuses.

It is important to note again the relative recentness of group
awareness for many minorities.[3] This subjective dimension appears to
be an emergent process derived from the increasing awareness of blacks
during the 1950's of their limited civil rights and their subsequent
battles as a minority group to eliminate these oppressions. This civil
rights work, in turn, led to the recognition by other groups of their
own minority statuses. During the 1960's, women became more articulate
in their demands for social recognition, and then the Gay Rights move-
ment became more out-spoken in reference to their restricted life
options (lesbians particularly organized out of their contacts with
women's groups). During the 1970's these trends for more and more
minority groups recognition became ground swells in reference to a
number of minority groups: the institutionalized; whether children,
mentally ill, mentally retarded, physically disabled, imprisoned, or
elderly began to demand more of their caretakers and of the community.

As each of these groups became more articulate and demanded more
from the social system and society, it became apparent that there were
multiple minority statuses with conflicting demands for recognition of
their problem as "the most important." Thus, inter-minority conflicts
emerged as a result. For example, "straight versus lesbian" feminists
and "white versus black" feminists. Within the black, Chicano/a and
American Indian Movements,some members protested that their leaders were
too "white-identified", or too far removed from the problems of the
"poorer", or "less educated" minority member. Many of these conflicts were
seen as both within and outside of these groups as problems within the

minority groups and sometimes as indicators of their unstable member-
ship or lack of organization. But other analyses are possible.
Here, these are interpreted as signs of minority versus multiple
minority relations. For example, a multiple minority group with two
minority statuses may be discriminated against by two major groups:
the dominant majority and the single identified minority group. For
illustration, poor blacks may be discriminated against or even econom-
ically exploited by wealthy blacks as well as by whites. In this
case, class interests may divide a group that is victimized by an
even more powerful group.[4]

The concept of a "multiple minority group", aids in interpreting
minority relations. The concept breaks down the rigidity of many
minority analyses which consider the minority as one group and the
majority as another. Unfortunately this latter thinking generates
strong hostility and barriers between "in-group" and "out-group."
Taking the "male" versus "female" argument as an illustration, it is un-
equivocally true that men receive far more structural benefits from
this society than do women. It first appears that approximately 51%
of the population (female) is oppressed by the other 49% (male). But
this latter percentage is quickly altered by including minority men;
whether black, American Indian, Puerto Rican, Chicanos, or Asian
American, as also victimized in this society. Some white men are
also limited in their rights to full participation: notably Appala-
chians, Jews, the physically handicapped, homosexuals, mentally ill,
incarcerated, and to some degree, the fat male.[5] In addition, there
are some specific, localized predjudices that are oppressive for white
men who are members of other ethnic group or religious minorities.

Instead of a simplistic "us" versus "them" argument, as the number
of minority groups increases the interactions of these groups become
increasingly complex. Simultaneously, as the number of people in
multiple minority groups increases, even more complex interaction
effects emerge. For example, perhaps the affluent black male has
significantly less unequal treatment than the impoverished white
woman. Perhaps the poor white woman receives significantly less
unequal treatment relative to the gay, white male from Appalachia.
Clearly, an answer to the question of interaction effects cannot be
given without extensive, empirical analysis. But even at this early
stage of analysis, it is possible to see that American society tends
to operate within a "dog-eat-dog" minority relations cycle. Instead
of the rising of the minority with the entry of a new minority group,
which was seen in the past with waves of immigration in the United
States (Park, 1926), perhaps we are beginning to show a multiple,
layered effect where portions of a minority group rise while other
segments remain the same level or sink relative to other minority

groups. A recent example of this is the rising status of black males. Economically, black and white females show greater similarity in income than do black females and males (See Almquist and Wehrle-Einhorn, 1978). Minority groups are becoming more complex and developing new relations to a numerically smaller "majority." Simultaneously, they need to cope with new tensions within their own minority groups. These new strains, moreover, may generate a minority within another minority group, a multiple minority group, so that the "outsider" becomes the "dominant" minority group as well as the "majority".

Concommitant with these multiple minority identifications, there is a potential for more integration in our society. As the members of one minority group begin to perceive the similarities of their status with another minority group, the definitions of "in-group" and "out-group" change. For example, if blacks and women perceived their similar, disadvantaged statuses they would form a large number of united Americans (These similarities are outlined by Hacker, 1951).

Despite this strong, positive potential for coalition politics, the strongest identifications tend to remain with one's own minority group. This is particularly true for the multiple minority groups who have a larger number of powerful groups restricting their freedoms. In addition, the multiple minority group does have separate problems from other groups. Although alliances can be made, the special interests of the multiple minority need to be articulated, defended, and addressed. Finally, the multiple minority group may have more serious problems than the single minority group, or it may develop new strengths as a result of its unique situation.

Although in general it is expected that the multiple minority also has multiple problems, there may also be the phenomenon of the "freedom" or "strength" of multiple problems which allow the individual to totally disregard the standards and evaluations of the majority because there is no hope of ever becoming a part of it. This phenomenon is not to be confused with the prejudicial "the (e.g., poor, fat, blacks) are happier" generalization. Instead this is a phenomenon based on the ability to break with the prejudicial limitations of others because they are revealed as too bizarre, too impossible of realization, or too discriminatory to be taken seriously. Clearly, this is a difficult individual recognition, but collectively it may emerge as a characteristic of a group under the same structural strains. Epstein, for example, finds that black women professionals are both so discriminated against and so strong, that because of their high "majority" achievement in education and occupations, they become particularly competent and successful (1973). Although this particular

study has been questioned (Stone, 1979), it does illustrate the possi-
bility of interaction effects with multiple minority groups that are
generally unexamined at this time.[6]

        In summary, we can now state that there are several characteristics
of multiple minority groups. They are a recent phenomenon emerging
primarily during the 1960's and increasingly common since then. Multiple
minorities have special interests which provide for their greatest
group idenitification with each other and resulting in a complex net-
work of relations to the dominant "majority" as well as to other
minority groups. Membership in more than one minority group generates
patterns of life that are dependent not only upon the minority statuses,
but also upon the interaction effects of these statuses. Each of these
characteristics can be examined in reference to specific multiple
minority groups and, in this way, more information and understanding
about this under-researched topic can be generated. It is this step
in our analysis which is examined more fully below.

Physically Disabled Women

        The literature on women and the physically heandicapped as dis-
advantaged groups in this society is extensive. (For the former see
deBeauvoir, 1970; Huber, 1973; Freeman, 1979 and Daly, 1978 and for
the latter see Safilios-Rothschild, 1970; Albrecht, 1975; Wright,
1960; and Barker, Wright et. al. 1955). No attempt is made to summarize
it here. Instead, the multiple minority status of physically disabled
women is the focus.

        This multiple minority group is an emergent of the recent upsurge of
interest in women's rights starting in the 1960's and the physically
handicapped movement of the mid 1970's. One indication of both the
neglect of the physically disabled women and their particularly opp-
ressed status is found in the amount of information available on them.
For example, a computer search of Psychological Abstracts revealed
over 7500 entries on the disabled and over 3300 entries on women, but
only 31 articles on disabled women. Within this small set, 19 concern-
ed women with cancer, predominantly breast cancer. Thus the research
conducted on disabled women is not only very scarce, but those disa-
bilities generating inequality in income are particularly underrepresent-
ed in the literature.

        With an estimated 36 million disabled people in the United States
(O'Toole and Weeks, 1978: 1), there are probably 18 million disabled
women. In fact, the figure may actually be significantly higher due
to two facts: (1) there are more elderly disabled women than elderly

disabled men, because women have greater longevity than men and the
elderly have a higher proportion of disabilities relative to other
age groups: and (2) there are slightly more women than men in the
general population. Even without adjusting the figure of 18 million
disabled women,there are millions of disabled women subjected to
discrimination in a variety of ways. It is sobering and upsetting
to realize that so little information is available concerning this
multiple minority group.

Physically Disabled and Able-Bodied Women: There Common and Separate
Interests

      Both of these groups suffer from discrimination in the market-
place, in self-limiting attitudes learned with sex role socialization,
in a lack of appreciation of the strength and nature of female
sexuality, and access and control to information concerning repro-
duction. In each of these areas, however, physically disabled women
have more restrictions placed upon them than do able-bodied women.
This greater restrictiveness can be illustrated by comparing the market
performance of the two groups.

      Approximately 60% of all women work and their wages are approxi-
mately 60% of that earned by men (Women's Labor Bureau, 1978). More-
over, their work is largely conducted in sex-segregated occupations and
in "pink-collar" ghettos (Howe, 1977). As dismal as this picture is,
however, that of disabled women is strikingly worse:

      The vast majority of disabled women in the United States are
 ·-   unskilled after 12 years of public education, able to identify few
      career options, and society as a whole remains unaware of their
      existence (O'Toole and Weeks, 1978:22).

Thus the interest of able-bodied and disabled women can be defined as
very similar, with the added proviso that disabled women are often
discriminated against even more severely than their able-bodied sisters.
Given this perspective of shared restrictions, both women's group have
a lot to gain from joining forces. Nonetheless, there are at least
three major barriers to joint identification: (1)discrimination
against feminists by disabled women, (2)discrimination against the
disabled by able-bodied women, and finally, (3) their counter-defini-
tions of problems.

The first two types of predjudice are products of sexism and able-bodism, and they can be understood in a straight-forward fashion.[7] However, it is important to remark that able-bodism is structurally more oppressive to disabled women, than sexism by disabled women is oppressive to able-bodied women. Able-bodied people have access to a far greater number of of needed resources to which they restrict access by the disabled, than the disabled restrict access to resources needed by able-bodied women.

The third barrier (conflicting definitions of problems confronting the two groups) is a more subtle and difficult barrier to positive inter-group identifications than those barriers raised by the two types of predjudice noted above. Therefore, this problem is discussed in greater depth here.

One of the few published papers addressing the issue of disabled women and feminism was written by Deborah Kent in 1977. In this article she articulates the problems of conflicting interests between a minority group and its multiple minority group members. She wrote that as a member of a woman's consciousness raising group she found that as a disabled woman she was indignant at the others' description and analysis of their problems.

But it was impossible for me to confess my own reaction to their tales of horror, which was a very real sense of envy. Society had provided a place for them as women, however, restricting that place might be, and they knew it. For myself and for other disabled women, sex discrimination is a secondary issue--in life and in the job market. (Kent, 1977:18).

Kent's argument is a clear statement of a common mistrust of able-bodied women and feminists by disabled women. Their description of able-bodied women's situations goes something like this "these women's lives are good and why don't they realize it? If they want to change things why don't they just do it and stop complaining about minor problems?" Thus, the common core of discrimination experienced by both groups is not expressed nor understood.

What Kent was responding to in her contacts with consciousness-raising groups is that she was being treated as an asexual object while the other women were discussing the problems of being treated as an sexual object. These problems in sexuality are devastating to one's personality and social status. Each problem can have vastly different results. For example, a philandering and insensitive husband can destroy a woman's self esteem while being considered as sexually uninterested and undesirable is equally painful but can result in the different status of never marrying.

However, both women's groups have the shared experience of being objectified. It is this aleination from self and sense of powerlessness over one's sexual expression and appreciation that is their common bond. There are, indeed, striking divergances between the two types of objectification, but both result in sexual alienation. Both are inhumane responses often generated by more powerful males in intimate relations. Able-bodied women often have the experience of believing that they are sexually "alive" and "respected" and "responded-to." When they discover, for a variety or reasons, that this is untrue then their sense of betrayal and frustration is quite deep. This experience may, in fact, be quite similar to that of being considered as one without feelings of attractiveness, although the origin of these beliefs are different. There is some truth to the old adage, "Tis better to have loved and lost than never to have loved at all" but this is not a viable solution to a group problem of sexual alienation and objectification.

This kind of misunderstanding in minority relations is only one example, but it does illustrate the kind of potential minority group conflicts that can occur. As minority members, both groups are subject to the discriminatory myths and images of the dominant groups and these internalized barriers must be discussed before any analysis can be undertaken.

Physically disabled women, may, in fact, have more in common with disabled men who are concerned with discrimination against the handicapped and their specialized problems in barrier-free environments and the limitations of the services and industries designed to serve their special interests. Simultaneously, sexism exhibited by disabled men is a problem to be considered. In our next section, we briefly examine this and other minority group relations between disabled men and women.

Physically Disabled Women and Men: Their Common and Separate Interests

One of the powers of minority group recognition is the ability to articulate common experiences and struggles. In this sense, disabled men and women have a deep and common bond. Sexism within this movement, however, is a problem arising from three main sources. One arises from the personnel in agencies interacting with them. Another arises from the lack of awareness of the reality of sexism. And the third arizes from the structure of minority group organizations. Documentation of discrimination by service provider is the most extensive (although even this documentation is limited) so it will become the focus of this discussion of inter-group conflicts.

Sexism by caretakers and institutions servicing the handicapped is extensive. This is particularly blatant in the area of sexuality and reporductive rights. As Elle Friedman Becker, a paraplegic, notes

> I can't help but cringe in my chair when the medical profession makes references to paraplegics' sexual "alternatives" as if by implication, we cannot enjoy normal sex (1978: xvi).

The literature on spinal cord injuries is concerned primarily with male problems of erection, orgasm and fertility while female sexuality is dismissed.

> The few articles that are available rarely deal with the physical aspects of sex. If they do, it is only to mention intercourse as the only means of sexual expression, and, of course, the woman is in the passive missionary position. Often they indicate a woman's sexuality is strictly related to menses, the sex act at childbirth, with no regard for women's feelings (Becker, 1978:xvi)

The sexism in this area is amply documented by Kolodny's (1972) outstanding study of long-term effects of diabetes on women sexuality. Noting the relatively extensive documentation on impairment of sexual functioning in diabetic males, he set out to discover if there were any attendant changes in sexual response for diabetic females. To remedy this gap in knowledge, he interviewed one hundred and twenty-five Caucasian females between the ages of 18 and 42 who had previously diagnosed diabetes millitus. A control group of 100 non-diabetic women were similarly interviewed. The findings were striking.

> Forty-four of 125 diabetic women (35.2%) reported complete absence or orgasmic response during the year preceding inquiry, whereas only 6 of 100 nondiabetic women (6.0%) reported nonorgasmic function during the same period (p. 104).

The implications of Kolodny's study are equally striking. Prior to this study,it was not even known that this link between diabetes and orgasm existed. How many diabetic women suffering from this disease-related impairment thought that their lack of response was a personality dysfunction, or lack of interest in their partners, or their lack of technique? Ignorance on such a vital dimension of human sexuality could have profound effects on intimate relationships.

Kolodyn's study ample illustrates two important theoretical issues:
that information on disabled women is scarce and that such a dearth of
knowledge could have immediate, direct impact upon the everyday lives
of this multiple minority group.

Although Becker and Kolodny point to discrimination in the area of
sexuality, it is also important to note that sexism extends into the
realm of economic opportunities and services: disabled men receive
more benefits from the rehabilitation system than women.   For example,
a Government report published in 1976 noted that:

   1)Disabled men were more likely to receive vocational school and/or
   on the job training.   2) A higher percentage of disabled men (93.1%)
   were rehabilitated into wage earning occupations (versus 68.5% of the
   disabled women).   3)The average weekly earnings for disabled men at
   rehabilitation closure was significantly higher.   Only 2.12% of the
   women, compared to 10.3% of the men, were earning $200 or more per
   week at closure.   4)The highest percentages of employed disabled men
   were located in a wider range of occupations; the highest percentages
   of employed disabled women clustered in fewer areas (i.e., services
   and clerical fields).   (Rehabilitation Services Administration, 1976
   cited in O'Toole and Weeks, 1978).

Physically disabled women are clearly discriminated against as women
by both public and private institutions. This inequity must be a concern
of both disabled sexes. In general, disabled men are not the cause of
this discriminatory treatment, but they cannot afford to ignore or toler-
ate this type of restriction or they imitate those who take away their
own rights. As disabled women become more vocal in their demands they
must not be told by those fighting able-bodism that to raise the issue
of sexism will only "cloud" the issues or detract from the support of
others outside of the group. Thus, there will be increasing, justified
demands placed on disabled men to acknowledge the multiple minority status
of disabled women and to refuse preferential treatment based on their
sex. With so recent a movement and almost no documentation of its member-
ship and leaders, it is difficult to know if sexism within the disabled
rights movement is occurring. However, an awareness of this potential
conflict of interest between disabled men and women may forestall the
establishment of a male-based minority movement which can be expected
in a sexist society.

Thus, there parallel problems for disabled women in reference
to their "dominant" minority groups. The sexism of the "helping"
professions and institutions can result in more benefits for disabled
men than for disabled women. Such differential treatment, however, is
often a function of powerful institutions which provide limited oppor-

tunities for all disabled people. Both disabled men and women need
to align for recognition of their basic rights, but disabled women
must also fight for their own special interests. These shared, par-
ticular disadvantages include not only battles against able-bodism
and sexism, but additionally a recognition of the interaction effects
of both minority statuses. These effects are examined mor fully below.

Physically Disabled Women and Interaction Effects

Negative Effects

As noted above, the problem of disabled women often run parallel
to those of disabled males and able-bodied females, but there are
additional interactive effects, unique to disabled women that must be
considered. One is the norm of passivity that is associated with both
minority groups, the disabled and women. For the disabled women these
attitudes interact, yielding exceedingly low expectations for achieve-
ment.

> Both groups are encouraged to be helpless, nonassertive, nonsexual,
> nonathletic, dependent, passive, grateful and aplogetic for a less
> than perfect body in a society where physical appearance is often
> the measure of a value. (Dailey, 1979:41).

Another, similar interacting effect is the concern for appearance
associated with women (Alta, 1973) and exacerbated by a physical mobili-
ty and strength of an already physically limited population.
1979:42). This difficulty, moreover, illustrates the tendency of one
minority status to generate another.

Another interacting effect occurs when disabled women are consid-
ered unfeminine. There are numerous reasons why such perceptions could
be generated. Because of their limited income they cannot afford to
dress expensively. In addition, their clothing choices may be limited
due to their physical limitations. This is especially a problem in
reference to high heels and sandals. Disabled women, too, may become
very assertive and demanding because their rights are often infringed
upon. Yet this self defense may cause their opponents to judge them
as not acting like "ladies". Women are more circumscribed in speech
and nonverbal communication than are men (Goffman, 1976,1977). In
reference to the former restriction in communication, women who speak
too loudly because of sensory or speech disabilities would be subject
to more extreme sanctions than disabled men with similar restrictions.
In reference to the latter restriction in communication, women who
are unable to sit "decorously" or in a "ladylike" position because of
physical limitations are subjected to more disapproval.

Positive Effects

Simultaneously, some positive interaction effects could emerge from the freedom to disregard the able-bodism as the restrictive and narrow perspective that it is. Thus, disabled women may concentrate on their work, or dress comfortably or be accepted as a friend when able-bodied women would be struggling with restrictive standards of appearance and beauty and having few career interests or lacking a sense of independence. Disabled women are less likely to be stigmatized for their physical limitations than the males and as a result, be more at ease with the able-bodied female sub-culture on this dimension. However, disabled males may suffer from the conflicts between the male sub-culture and their lack of ability to achieve status within it, especially with its emphasis on sports and physical strength.

In sum, women are rarely socially stigmatized for lack of participation in sports or muscle development while men are more likely to be pressured to achieve in these areas.

Being considered as "outside" of the sexual competition has painful and important restrictions on ones sexuality. Simultaneously, although not compensating for the discrimination and its injustice, disabled woman can sometimes find an acceptance with men and women that is often difficult to achieve for the "able-bodied" or "attractive". (This phenomenon is similar to that found with the elderly or overweight who feel that they can say what they please because they are free of the constraints of conformity.)

Physically disabled women may develop particularly strong family ties with parents and siblings in a world where such ties are becoming increasingly attenuated. They may also form unusually close friendships with each other because they live in an overtly hostile and unappreciative environment.

Finally, those disabled women who do achieve success in their lives (whether in the marketplace, the home or an institution) have fought a difficult battle and emerged triumphant. To generate a good life and against such extreme odds is a remarkable achievement and generates a strong sense of self and meaning. These disabled women, some of who have some majority group identifications and resources, are simultaneously part of majority populations and these statuses cannot be overlooked when a list of "problems" is generated. For example, some disabled women are wealthy, or highly educated, or even racist or homophobic. As a result they, may be members of some "majority groups" and engage in minority group conflicts that are quite different than those between themselves and handicapped males or able-bodied females. Becker has captured this type of

reality in the following words:

> We are first and foremost sensitive human beings with a terrific
> sense of accomplishment after all of the horrible, but challeng-
> ing, experiences we have been through (Becker, 1977: xvi).

Being disabled woman is particularly difficult. Nonetheless,
there are some interaction effects that allow her to build a world
of self-respect and meaning which a totally negative analysis would
overlook.

Physically Disabled Women and Minority Relations: The Conclusion

There are clearly direct parallels between being a disabled
woman on the one hand and being female and being disabled on the other.
However, there are some interesting theoretical issues that can be
raised concerning the phenomenon of a multiple minority status.
Perhaps comparisons on structural discrimination can be more fruitfully
made between disabled women and Hispanic, aged women (See for example
Stephens, Ostriker and Blau, 1980) or between disabled women and
lesbians, or between disabled women and black muslims. Almquist and
Wehrle-Einhorn's work is notable in this regard (1978). They compare
economic data on several groups of American minority women: blacks,
American Indians, and groups of the following origins: Fillipino,
Chinese, Japanese, Puerto Rican, Mexican and Cuban. By comparing
incomes and occupations between these minority females with their
respective minority males and then with women, they document that
the patterns of discrimination are more similar within the same sex
that within minority groups. Such an analysis could be extended to
include physically disabled women as well providing a statistical
mechanism to compare economic achievements for various female minorities
and for disabled men in reference to disabled women. Another example
illustrating the potential strengths of multiple minority comparisons
and analyses can be seen in Hacker's work. Showing the usefulness of
the minority perspective whether studying women (1951) or gay people
(1971), her insights could be developed further by analyzing the
multiple minority group. If such comparisons are made we will know more
about the phenomenon of multiple minority groups as well as begin to
analyze which minority statuses are the most restrictive. There is a
hierarchy of minority status and this is a factor which interacts with
the multiple minority status. In fact, those hierarchies may change
when interacting with more than one minority status.

Adding this kind of complexity to minority analysis is important
for understanding the process of discrimination and how to change it.
At the present, many in-group and out-group identifications are very
unidimensional. Also many people with some "majority" and "minority"
statuses fail to recognize their common interests in oppressing others.
The multiple minority group can become a mechanism for critiquing
one minority's role in restricting others. This is particularly
viable for multiple minorities critique of a related "single" minority
group, for the vested interests of a single minority group may be coun-
ter to those of the multiple minority members. An analysis of this
differential interest may aid in articulating both common and separate
concerns. Efforts to improve inter-group minority relations can also
facilitate understanding of how to improve relations between themselves
and other minority groups or the majority.

Information on multiple minority relations is needed to clarify
the differential interests and problems of the minority and multiple
minority. Emphasis on the general problems of competition and the
divisiveness of single issue approaches is needed. Acceptance of the
concepts of "winners" and "losers" forces minority groups to operate
by the "rules" of the majority. If these processual definitions of
how to gain one's rights are rejected, then the multiple minority
group can draw upon the resources of other minority groups to aid in
their struggles for recognition.

Out of this welter of identifications, it is possible that
minority groups may see how very large a numerical majority they are.
Then instead of defining society as a massive, united, and anonymous
force, a more accurate view of social power and structure can be
generated. Instead of defining each minority as oppressed and restrict-
ed in opportunities, the pattern of such discrimination can be
perceived as the product of a very small elite. This numerically tiny
group benefits from the competition between disadvantaged groups.
The dispossessed and second class citizens, because of their alienation
and sense of isolation, allow themselves to be defined as in opposi-
tion with other disenfranchised groups and often participate in each
other's exploitation, as well as passively support the control by the
few. Discrimination in the marketplace, socialization, sexuality,
and reporduction limits the lives of almost all members of our society.
Only a small number of affluent, "beautiful," young, able-bodied, heter-
osexual, white males are allowed to fully enact the opportunities and
dreams of this culture.

It is time for the minorities and multiple minorities to join
interests and share visions of a world in which they are the community
and they are the myth-makers.

FOOTNOTES

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[1]It must be noted that Hacker's insightful work on women as a minority group was not widely accepted until the past decade. Thus, the sexism of the profession and the significant change in social consciousness which have occured since 1951 are both revealed. See Hacker (1975) for a discussion of these phenomena.

[2]Sagrin's book precisely records the process of including more people within widening circles of self-reflective and disenfranchised group ident-ifications. (1975) Jordan's article on the physically handicapped, published in the Sagrin collection, refutes the thesis of this paper that the disabled are members of a minority group. He prefers to call them "disadvantaged" instead. His arguments are not accepted here because of the narrowness of his definition of the concept of "minority group". As noted above, Wirth and Hacker's definitions are used here. It is also worth noting that the literature on the disabled has been applying this concept of minority group to the disabled for a number of decades, although it has only become popularly accepted recently. See for example, Barker, (1948) and Wright)1960).

[3]To adequately examine why the increasing frequency of minority identification is occurring would require a separate paper. This would include an analysis of social movements, the relationships between social movements, changes in legislation, changing demands for human and civil rights, and altered awareness of unjust treatment. However, it is worth considering that there appears to be a "domino effect" with social rights movements. As one group challenges the system and protest injustice, other groups see the rightness or success of their demands and become aware of their own acceptance of group limits.

Another possible explanation for this "chain reaction" could be "relative deprivation" theory. As one group improves their status other groups become aware of their own disadvantaged status which may appear even lower after the granting of rights to another group .

[4]Wilson's book, On the Declining Significance of Race (1978),
documents the shifting class and race structure in the United States.
He states that we are in a period of transition from racial to class
inequalities with a large number of people who are poor and from
numerous racial and ethnic groups. It is also worth noting that a
significant portion of the members of this underclass are women and their
children.

[5]Discrimination by overweight is a much more severe problem for women
than for men. "Fat" is a sex-linked term, but truly obese men are subject
to discriminatory treatment, too (See Millman).

[6]The whole issue of a black matriarchy is now under question by black
feminists. In addition to Stone (1970), see Higginbotham's discussion
(1980).

[7]"Sexism" is a predjudicial belief that women are socially less
important, powerful, and desireable than men. "Able-bodism" is a prejudi-
cial belief that people with physiological disabilities are socially
less important, powerful and desireable than people with bodies viewed
as "normal". Both predjudicial beliefs are acted upon so that the struct-
ural opportunities and patterns of social interaction are systematically
limited throughout society. Both discriminations are also based on
myths associated with the body and in this way are philosophically linked.

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