

ACKNOWLEDGING AND EXPANDING BOUNDARIES IN CRITICAL APPROACHES TO DISABILITY

Larissa Antonella Azevedo^{1 2}, Orcid: <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-4015-8561>

Igor Schutz dos Santos¹, Orcid: <http://orcid.org/0000-0001-9000-4934>

Adriano Henrique Nuernberg¹, Orcid: <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-7875-8490>

Demonstrations known as the Occupy movement took over Europe in late 2011. Originated in the countries of the North African continent, the mobilizations involved significant numbers of the population, proposing a massive presence in public spaces, occupying them physically and exposing some of the most relevant problems of modern society (Harvey et al., 2012). In different places, the protests highlighted themes such as democratization in countries under dictatorship regimes, the right to popular participation, decent access to employment and education, and modern economic organization.

The North American version, with emphasis in media, Occupy Wall Street, has shed light on social inequality, the misallocation of wealth and power, and the lack of guarantee of the rights for a large portion of the population. It is no coincidence that the impact of the global economy on citizens' daily lives has become a fertile field of questioning also of the forces that sustain – and possible or conceivable solutions to overcome – the invisibility of certain groups of the population in all their heterogeneity. Thus, the reference to 'occupation' gains a new set of studies from a work launched in 2016, whose authors address the themes present in the Occupy movement, their meanings and relations in understanding the phenomenon of disability.

The book *Occupying disability: critical approaches to community, justice and decolonizing disability*, organized by Pamela Block, Devva Kasnitz, Akemi Nishida, and Nick Pollard is an international work on disability that brings together texts from thirty-nine authors from different areas, with a diversity of critical perspectives on disability.

The collaborating authors come from different spaces of professional, academic and activism activities. Thus, their perspectives include the theory, practice and experience of disability. The main themes of the work include: variations in the concept of occupying; disability activism and the work of decolonization; marginalization and minoritization; technology; struggle, creativity and change. Its objectives converge to consider disability not as pathology or impairment, but as a series of identities and unique social experiences. These experiences are configured from a spectrum of differences, linked to sociocultural values, representations about disability and environmental barriers.

The work is divided into three parts: 1) Decolonizing disability; 2) Disability and community; 3) Struggle, creativity and change. Although not intentional, an order of temporality is preserved between the parties – respectively past, present and future.

¹ Universidade Federal de Santa Catarina (UFSC), Florianópolis-SC, Brazil.

² E-mail: larifloripa@gmail.com



The **first part**, 'Decolonizing disability', focuses on the social structures of oppressive power that create and recreate disability from difference as a form of control. In order to confront this reality, the idea of proactive decolonization is sustained, in which it is necessary the recognition of being colonized and of its crossings in the mechanisms of ableism.

On the above mentioned concepts, ableism refers to prejudice and discrimination against persons with disabilities. In this conception, the disabled person is perceived as lacking, deficient, suggesting to be less human, capable, productive and intelligent (Gabel & Connor, 2009). In summary, Valle and Connor (2014) define the ableism as the belief that physically able people are superior to people with disabilities. In turn, colonialism, as approached, is not part of a mere metaphor. It is a phenomenon characteristic of a historical moment, in which the colonizers dictated orders to those colonized. This form of relation is corresponding to the medical order, which currently establishes labels through the diagnoses and medicalizes the disability. Therefore, the book's proposal is to break with the colonization of the disability, since it has become increasingly medicalized and medicine becoming more and more capacitating.

The **second part** is called 'Disability and community'. Consisting of eight chapters, it is argued that disability can be a basis for the community. This seemingly simple concept, that of community, is explored in the book from the social identities and occupational activities of its components. From a structuralist point of view, the community has different characteristics: it can be real or imaginary; defined internally or having no definition; be physical or virtual. In this sense, examples are cited of communities that combine, in a singular way, geographical and communicational aspects.

Some of the chapters address the conflicts identified in the relationship between community and occupation - here taken in the sense of work or what one does to live. In this understanding, the professional exercise of the occupational therapist offered to people with disabilities is an object of discussion, as it affects the experience of the recipients of such services, especially in the construction of autonomy. From that point on, questions are raised about the possibilities for groups of clients/patients to constitute a community as a form of movement and true social participation.

In this part of the book, other contexts of work supply relationships are discussed, such as joint educational planning between educators and families of children with disabilities, as well as other forms of community formation.

The **third part**, 'Struggle, creativity and change', adds nine chapters that include different formats of writing, like poems, dialogues and images. As the title demonstrates, one of the main issues addressed here is the struggle. Whether in the relationship between economy and access to technology, or in the way a deaf/blind author analyzes his/her routine related to caregivers, chapters present aspects of human life that require attention. Among these, seemingly simple but crucial phenomena such as communication. It is not a matter of being heard, of having a voice; there is a need for communication to take place according to the singularities of the different groups and, in this way, they feel represented. Since metaphors frequently prioritize any of the senses to the detriment of others, since words are not neutral, striving brings to light what different groups feel as necessary in their everyday experiences.

The book's organizers intentionally place it in what they call the 'discomfortzone'. This is the terrain in which they recognize and respect the limits, the boundaries, between the different discourses of activists, researchers and professionals related to disability. At the same time, they extend such boundaries by pushing them and creating intersections, overlaps, even tensions between different perspectives about disability.

Understanding the book itself requires the experience of the 'discomfortzone'. A unified conception of the book would be only partial, considering that the anarchic character present in the writing, coming from the different backgrounds of the authors, translates the multiplicity necessary to compose this zone. Through it, occupying the deficiency corresponds to a sense that allows to aggregate even divergent ideas, in a way that they are not excluding.

The expression of such ideals varies according to the authors' historical and cultural contexts, the limits of the professions, the academic areas of knowledge and the means of activism in which they originate. This implies challenges for both those who produce knowledge and the potential recipients. Some authors, identified as disabled activists, communicate through a politically charged language. On the other hand, scholars of the academic world express the knowledge produced according to the premises of this context, following the scientific language. As noted, the editors of the present work avoid excessive binary polarization to understand disability.

If the occupation also includes a sense of professional practice, expressed in the book from the studies and experiences of occupational therapists, physicians, anthropologists and artists, the importance of this compilation of studies to Psychology has to be considered. The national production highly centralized in the knowledge of the health sciences, starting from the assumption of the biomedical model of disability, summons this area of knowledge to debate and produce knowledge coherent with the social model of disability. Whether through the questioning of professional practice, academic formation or scientific production, passing through the 'discomfortzone' represents a fertile exercise - if not essential - to Psychology.

References

- Block, P., Kasnitz, D., Nishida, A., & Pollard, N. (Orgs.). (2016). *Occupying disability: critical approaches to community, justice and decolonizing disability*. Dordrecht, HO: Springer.
- Gabel, S. L., & Connor, D. J. (2009). Theorizing disability: implications and applications for social justice in education. In W. Ayes, T. Quinn & D. Stovall (Eds.), *Handbook of social justice in education* (p. 377-399). New York, NY: Routledge.
- Harvey, D., Teles, E., Sader, E., Alves, G., Carneiro, H. S., Wallerstein, I., . . . Safatle, V. (2012). *Occupy: movimentos de protesto que tomaram as ruas*. São Paulo, SP: Boitempo.
- Valle, J. W., & Connor, D. J. (2014). *Ressignificando a deficiência: da abordagem social às práticas inclusivas na escola* (F. de S. Rodrigues, trad.). Porto Alegre, RS: AMGH.

Received: Jun. 02, 2017

Approved: 23, 2017

Larissa Antonella Azevedo: Master's Degree Program in Psychology, Universidade Federal de Santa Catarina (UFSC), Area of concentration: Health and Psychological Development, Research Line: Health and Psychological Development Contexts. Member of the Center for Studies on Disability at UFSC. Graduated in Psychology from the Universidade Federal de Santa Catarina (UFSC). Specialist in Psychopedagogy at Universidade Gama Filho.

Igor Schutz dos Santos: Master's degree in the Graduate Program in Psychology of the Universidade Federal de Santa Catarina (UFSC), Area of concentration: Health and Psychological Development. Psychologist in the Management Corporate University of Catarinense Company of Water and Sanitation.

Adriano Henrique Nuernberg: Retired Professor, Department of Psychology, Universidade Federal de Santa Catarina (UFSC), linked to the Center for Studies on Disability at UFSC.