Paulo Freire, Disability, and Sociological Consciousness in a Southern Metropolis: The Knoxville Mayor's Council on Disability Issues

Matthew Randall West, M.A.
The University of Alabama, Birmingham

Abstract: This article examines attitudes and opinions among members of the Mayor's Council on Disability Issues (CODI) of Knoxville, Tennessee. Using focused interviews, respondent commentary is presented on topics such as the disability rights movement, employment and education, the nature of defining disability, and the functionality and relative importance of CODI as a whole. Paulo Freire's (1968) model of oppression is used as a frame of reference to examine CODI members' attitudinal assumptions of these issues.

Key Words: government, social change, Freire

Purpose and Overview

This study examines the disability-related power structure in a city government as a means for effecting social change in a local community. My case is the City of Knoxville's Mayor's Council on Disability Issues (CODI). CODI is a mayoral advisory and consultative group consisting of 21 individuals, who are committed to a community focused on the full integration of individuals with disabilities. The bylaws mandate that at least half of this body be individuals who are disabled. Members are lay experts in the community; some disabled themselves, while others have close relationships to people with disabilities.

This case study is purely exploratory. Its purpose is to gain insight and information, as well as to posit questions that may be worthy of more systematic and comparative study. What can we learn from this group of activists who, as CODI members, necessarily operate in an administrative context? The study explores the CODI's influence on public policy in the city of Knoxville. The exploration reveals new politics of disability in an era—our era—that lacks a significant national disability rights movement.

Of course, one of the most frequently debated issues among political activist organizations is whether to effect change from within or outside of the organization's own bureaucracy. CODI is unique in that it is both within the city government, purportedly having the ear of the mayor, but also outside of the government because the council members hold no real authority or power. It could be said that CODI exists as a liminal construct—it exists in a space between the city power structure and the oppressed, the disability community.

But what exactly constitutes "oppression?" Paulo Freire (1968) presents a useful analysis of oppression, which grows from and is meant to encourage liberating non-violent social change. From his perspective, an individual must become aware and desire *change*. This awareness of oppression and want of change is accomplished by an education that is not based on the teacher/student dichotomy (wherein students are empty “banks” waiting for teachers to “deposit” knowledge), but rather on an equal exchange of ideas. Once this consciousness is achieved, an individual may critique society in order to enact social change. Freire reiterates that one should never accept oppression.

Interview responses from CODI members are compared with Freire’s model of oppression, oftentimes mirroring similar, if not identical, themes in respondents’ own notions of *disability*-related oppression. Using this model, I posit that people who live with disabilities in American society are easily identified as an oppressed people. Specific examples of the respondents will provide illumination into Freire’s basic paradigm of oppression. One cannot simply receive disability awareness training like any other paternalistic “banking” pedagogy; rather, they must actively engage with individuals who have disabilities in order to achieve true “disability awareness education.” In addition, Freire’s framework of education for critical consciousness, explained below, translates well into respondents’ notion of integrating disability information into both public awareness projects and school-related curricula.

Study Design and Execution

This study utilizes a mixed-methods approach, based primarily on participant observation and focused interviews of an intentionally non-random group. In addition, a brief quantitative survey was administered for basic, descriptive statistics. The group studied was the 21 members of the Mayor’s Council of Disability Issues (CODI) in Knoxville, Tennessee. The goal was to produce a reasonably detailed description; including their knowledge about disability, their consciousness about CODI’s efficacy in influencing city policy regarding disability issues, their thoughts about whether CODI is taken seriously by the mayor and city council, and their views concerning whether the disability community is an “oppressed” and/or “disadvantaged” minority group.

Council members represent many different organizations in Knoxville, Tennessee. These include: SunTrust Bank, Elavon (a payment corporation which promotes a diverse workplace, including people with disabilities), the University of Tennessee, the Center on Disability and Employment, Disability Resource Center, Peninsula Hospital, Value Options (a counseling corporation), Breakthrough Corporation (a non-profit organization for adults with autism), Tennessee School for the Deaf, Goodwill Industries, Patricia Neal Rehabilitation Center, and the Disability Law and Advocacy Center. Some work in fields directly relating to disability, while others are employed either as university faculty/staff or as recruiters for private companies.

Although my hope was to elicit 100% participation, three CODI members were unable to participate in the study. An additional two were also omitted due to their prior knowledge of the project and their roles in its planning. These two individuals instead served as informants. These informants’ roles were multifaceted and included helping me to determine what questions would elicit the most fruitful responses in interviews, and appropriate and inappropriate means for approaching sensitive questions about one’s personal disability. These "informants" also reviewed and revised the survey instrument. Therefore, in the end, a total of 16 of 21 were interviewed, a response rate of 76%.

I adapted methods for valid and reliable interviewing from *Researching Social Life* (Gilbert, 1993; Gilbert, 2008), a guidebook ideal for any social science researcher, but especially for those just starting out at the undergraduate level because it utilizes a very clear, parsimonious, and stylistically accessible language for learning methodological techniques. Interviews lasted approximately 60-90 minutes. All interviews were recorded and partially transcribed to extract meaningful themes. Confidentiality was assured to every participant, although each gave permission to have his or her statements quoted. Interview questions were open-ended and centered on the following succession of interrogatives: What is your personal, individual experience with disability? Why are you on CODI? What do you think is the purpose of CODI? How does disability relate to oppression?

The first question was used as a determinant to gain insight into the respondent's perspective. From this question, respondents could be easily divided into two basic categories—those who themselves have a disability and those who do not but have a relationship to an individual(s) with a disability. Each conversation was pursued differently after the personal experience with disability question, with the ultimate goal being to encourage the respondent's full elucidation of their particular perspective and experience.

The interview was followed by a written survey that had questions using a Likert scale. The survey was composed of 19 questions, including basic demographic questions. The purpose of the questionnaire was to provide data for tentative generalizations about the group. Unfortunately, this instrument proved largely unreliable because respondents either: (1) left questions blank or (2) crossed out portions of the questions, reworded them, and then proceeded to answer their own question.

The demographic data, however, provides this result. All but one member of CODI are white, all are well-educated (with half possessing a Master's or Doctorate), and most are older than 35. This racial and socioeconomic composition does not reflect the greater disabled community locally in Knoxville, or in America as a whole. Indeed, it is common wisdom that racial minorities and those living in poverty are the more likely to be disabled, frequently living with co-morbidities (e.g. Oliver & Muntaner, 2005).

The demographic data suggests that CODI is not a representative group of the local or national disability community. It is certainly a self-selecting group, open only to those nominated by their predecessors. This process tends to discourage membership from those not already possessing significant ties in the community. The voice of the "average" person with disability concerns, lacking the social connections and education necessary to be nominated to CODI, is perhaps too often, therefore, denied access to membership—although anyone can attend meetings and participate. So though diversity of board members may be suspect, one might mistakenly assume that people with disabilities in the community attend meetings, speak publicly, and make a contribution.

Indeed, in the February, March, and April meetings, the room was empty except for the board members and me. The importance of active participation cannot be overemphasized, as Freire (1968) reiterates: “Attempting to liberate the oppressed without their reflective participation in the act of liberation is to treat them as objects which must be saved from a burning building; it is to lead them into the populist pitfall and transform them into masses which can be manipulated” (p. 52).

Responses

Disability Rights, the Disability Community, and Non-Profit Organizations

The Disability Rights Movement was a topic discussed by all respondents in their individual interviews. Most expressed that this movement’s progress culminated with the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, though respondents stated this provided only a minimum for accommodations. Nevertheless, they agreed that it was certainly a good starting point when it came to legislation. Some felt that the movement’s accomplishments paled in comparison to those of other minority groups that lobby for equal rights. One respondent believed that what makes people with disabilities so unique from other minorities is their inherent difficulty in being politically active. Whereas oppressed groups, such as people of color or GLBT individuals are able to physically protest their oppression, the disability community is often constrained from doing so. People with visual impairments may have difficulty reading relevant legislation and news articles. Individuals with hearing impairments may have difficulty listening to radio broadcasts, lectures, or town meetings related to disability. Wheelchair users, as well as the visually and hearing impaired, have difficulty attending and participating in city council meetings, political protests, or rallies. People who are homebound due to their disability are hard-pressed to do any of the aforementioned activism. While some interviewees speculated that this may change with the Internet, accessible technologies (e.g., computer programs with text-reading capabilities) remain expensive and, consequently, perhaps are not universally utilized by those who would benefit from this potential access to the public sphere.

Access to the system and the legislative process is inhibited, severely limiting the participation of those with disabilities even more so than those minorities who have no physical barriers to government. Freire’s notion of a “…‘culture of silence’ in which the oppressed or underprivileged are overwhelmed by the power of the dominant elite” (Sloop, 1987, p. 16), becomes especially useful when applied to this context. As mentioned in the interviews, people who have an “obvious and severe” disability have a particularly difficult time getting their voices heard in the vast “silence” that represents a supposedly democratic and transparent government. Existence, in the Freire sense, stems from political activism that arises from the knowledge that “...dehumanization through denial of political freedom is not just an ontological possibility but a tragic historical reality” (Collins, 1977, p. 64).

Going beyond *physical* disabilities, multiple respondents expressed dismay over people with intellectual or mental disabilities being completely kept out of decision-making affecting their own lives. One respondent reiterated an example:

> "In particular someone who has a severe intellectual disability, such as a tested IQ of 35 and who has a lot of adaptive behavior deficits. They may not be able to speak up and advocate for themselves as much as a blind person, for example…. Our society, unfortunately, has a tendency to dismiss that person, to discount what they have to say, regardless of what they have to say."

Another respondent said, "Nothing about us without us," with reference to adequate representation, along the same lines as "No taxation without representation."

The internal state of the disability rights movement also became a pervasive theme in the interviews. All respondents thought that the movement lacked any significant cohesion or even a common goal. Frequently cited was the African-American community that, despite division, has shown much cohesion with regard to equality of opportunity in this country. People of color have deep-rooted foundations of community in their churches, neighborhoods, families and even historically black colleges (Moore, 1991; Dominguez & Watkins, 2003; Rankin & Quane, 2000). Individuals with disabilities do not have their own churches or their own neighborhoods (aside from care facilities and hospitals). When it comes to a family or household unit, there is often only one member who is disabled, if even that. This lack of unifying social institutions among people with disabilities makes community social support difficult, even if oppression is common to all these individuals. Perhaps this is due to a lack of movement leadership which one respondent brought up. She stated that the lack of a concerted effort was caused by having no visible spokesperson or charismatic leader to get behind. Indeed, for people with disabilities, there is no Harvey Milk, no Susan B. Anthony, and no Martin Luther King, Jr.

The overwhelming number of Knoxville's disability-specific organizations and foundations were also thought by many respondents as being deterrents to a unified social movement. Some CODI members also serve on boards for the multitude of these local disability foundations. A few local organizations include: The Epilepsy Foundation, Muscular Dystrophy Association, A Silicon Bullet for Dyslexia, Hearing and Speech Foundation, and Sertoma Center (a residential care facility for individuals with intellectual disabilities). A cursory glance at these organizations' promotional materials shows that they have similar, if not identical, goals. Chief among these is promoting awareness for a specific disability, as well as placement services for people with disabilities seeking employment. Some organizations, such as the Epilepsy Foundation, provide employment placement services for not only individuals with Epilepsy, but anyone who requests the service. Therefore, one may be tempted to ask the questions: Why even have these multiple organizations if they all do the same thing? Would it not be easier to consolidate them into one "Knoxville Disability Center" rather than having multiple independent organizations, each with funded offices, staff, and overhead?

Respondents all agreed that in a perfect world this model would be ideal. In practicality, they stated, it would require the many executive directors and board members relinquish their control—an unlikely event.

Employment and Education

Several members of the Mayor's Council on Disability are involved in ensuring that people with disabilities can find gainful and accessible employment. Several respondents emphasized the importance of employment instead of government assistance; that to live on SSI benefits is detrimental to an individual's mental and physical health. Mentally, stated a former government beneficiary, the danger lies in falling into feelings of worthlessness and self-loathing; physically, the poor healthcare benefits are problematic, and financial payments often fall below the poverty line. Freire (1968) makes a similar assertion about oppressed people that perseveres to the present day and in numerous contexts of minority groups, "So often do they hear that they are good for nothing, know nothing, and are incapable of learning anything—that they are sick, lazy, and unproductive—that in the end they become convinced of their own unfitness" (p. 49). This notion was mentioned by several respondents with comments such as, "*Society* has established that disabled people should not work."

Some respondents believed that people with disabilities gained freedom through their equitable employment, rather than having few alternatives but to live on government stipends. They stated that while employment may be a significant aspect of independent living, much of an individual's quality of life comes from how they are perceived and their own self-perception. Freire agrees that "The oppressed are situated within an economic and social structure and tied to it not only by their labor but also by the conditions of their psychological being" (McLaren & Leonard, 1993, p. 17).

In contrast to the predominantly unitive opinions on employment, the topic of education generated a wide variety of comments. Some of the CODI members with a disability said that they experienced extreme discrimination in obtaining their degree(s), while others had little trouble. Interestingly enough, people on both sides of the argument graduated from the same local institutions, yet had vastly different experiences. Another concern mentioned by the participants related to the K-12 school system. There is no disability awareness in the local Knox County school curriculum, which seems to be the norm for many school systems nationally. I pose the question, then, as: Could disability awareness education from a young age bring forth a more disability-friendly tomorrow? The literature reflects the affirmative: "One of the most effective ways to shape people's knowledge, values, and attitudes is through instruction—formal schooling, adult programs, classes and workshops…schools are so crucial in the socialization process" (Curry, Jiobu, & Schwirian, 2008, p. 499).

Defining Disability

Another theme that emerged early on was the definition of disability. Respondents stated that everyone is disabled in one way or another. One individual went so far as to define that while everyone is disabled in doing any given thing, there are “obvious” disabilities such as blindness, deafness, cognitive dysfunction, and mobility problems. But, as one respondent stated, all disabilities are strictly relative. To use an example, one respondent stated that there is nothing inherently wrong with someone’s sight, except that they see less than everybody else sees. If we lived on a pitch-dark planet and had evolved from sight perception, it would be quite the norm to be blind. If an individual has a distinctly low IQ—low enough to inhibit daily communication, for example—then they are only less intelligent than everybody else. Normative value judgments play an enormous role in determining, upon first contact, who is a person with a disability and who is a so-called “normal” individual.

Many interviewees reiterated the fact that all of society is continually becoming more and more disabled. It is a rare instance for a fully functioning adult to die naturally with all five faculties intact, especially sight and hearing. As we age, our sight, hearing, mobility, and cognitive functioning oftentimes steadily decline as well. Thus, most of us will experience disability of some type during our lifetimes.

In defining disability, three participants brought up the concept of dependency. They posited that people with disabilities are seen as dependent on everybody else—their caregivers, the government, and society. The word *dependence* evoked resentment among a few members, favoring instead the word “interdependence” with its practical application in everyday society. Indeed, everyone is dependent on everybody else in order for any society to function on a daily basis. Even if one were to isolate him or herself from the world, they would still need others to produce their electricity, to bring them food, and to provide items they are incapable of making.

Membership in the Mayor’s Council on Disability Issues (CODI)

Francisco Weffort writes in Freire’s preface, “The awakening of critical consciousness leads the way to the expression of social discontents precisely because these discontents are real components of an oppressive situation” (Freire, 1968, p. 20). Critical consciousness, as mentioned in the introduction, means being aware of one’s society in a realistic sense, acknowledging its shortcomings and, perhaps, noting the irony of a system that purportedly works well, but in reality oftentimes, overlooks the overall picture. Metaphorically speaking, seeing the forest and not the trees, though if there were no trees, there would be no forest. To some degree, CODI was created with this in mind, especially when you take into account that half of CODI’s membership is mandated as people with disabilities, in this case, the oppressed or “social discontents.” Individuals who have lived in this society and experienced the dehumanization know firsthand and more intimately what needs to be changed. Therefore, CODI’s membership composition is ideal if one desires social change.

CODI members expressed several opinions about their own membership. Thoughts ranged from the negative and bitter to the positive and visionary, favoring the former over the latter. Respondents were all asked if they believed that the mayor and city council took them seriously. Some declined to comment, stating that they could not read other people's minds, while many expressed their concern that the city government took them seriously only retroactively, not proactively. That is, when a policy or legislative item comes up on the agenda, CODI primarily acts in protest rather than prevention. When asked if CODI members attended any of the city council meetings, the response was a unanimous "no." A handful admitted to going to public meetings of the city council when there was a hot issue that directly related to the disability community, but none saw it necessary to attend on a regular basis. One respondent made the suggestion that perhaps members of CODI could schedule a rotation such that at least one representative from the body could attend these meetings. Another believed that the body as a group should attend city council meetings, making their presence known. On the other hand, if a city council member were to attend a CODI meeting, then perhaps administrators would take the body more seriously. In the past three meetings that I have attended, I have been the only audience member in attendance.

Interestingly, the Council on Disability Issues inadvertently models itself on the Knoxville city government; it mimics the city government in *all* of its proceedings. CODI meets in the same physical chambers as does the city council and mayor, as well as utilizes parliamentary procedures, maintaining a bureaucratic infrastructure for discussion and record-keeping, and keeping a membership of individuals whom are all approved by the city council (as well as CODI incumbents). Freire (1968) writes that in any power structure, when the individuals who were once inferior are made superior, these individuals change. The once oppressed now become the oppressors, taking on the very role which they so despised in the first place. He calls this an "existential duality" wherein the oppressed are both themselves and "the oppressor whose image they have internalized" (p. 47). This explanation may shed light on loss of interest among CODI members, who perhaps initially joined the group with enthusiasm and the desire to affect social change, but after gaining official recognition, preferred to maintain good relations with the mayor and city council, rather than challenging the status quo. One might argue that CODI has become the very embodiment of bureaucracy and red tape which oppressed people with disabilities have come to despise.

Excessive board member absences seemed to be one attribute of CODI's inactivity. Two individuals were adamant about the importance of attending meetings regularly. "If you can't make the monthly meeting every 2nd Wednesday at 4:00, then why do you serve on the board?" A couple individuals suggested that people signed up more because of selfish, rather than selfless reasons. These included the "résumé value" or "pride factor" of people who are a part of an official mayoral body. At some point in CODI's history, excessive absence was so severe that for a period of 1-2 years not enough people would show up for the minimum quorum necessary to take a vote that would change the bylaws to allow for a smaller quorum. While absences related to work, family, and illness were understandable, it seems the same individuals skip meetings on a regular basis. This was a matter of frustration among those I interviewed who attended meetings religiously. Absenteeism also provides further evidence of Freire's existential duality, which is to say that once you get the recognition of being an official board member, the hard part is over.

This brought up another theme—visibility in the community. The overwhelming majority of interviewees stated that "nobody knows about us" or that this council is virtually "nonexistent" in the disability community of Knoxville. A few current council members even acknowledged that they had never heard of it and had no idea what it was until they were asked to serve on it. A need to develop this body's reputation as a household name among individuals with disabilities was reiterated repeatedly in interviews. "More visible all the time, not just an angry mob when something happens" was a sentiment expressed by one respondent and reiterated by others. Another person thought that perhaps when CODI has not done anything of significance in awhile, the city council and mayor forgets about them. When asked if CODI has done anything significant in the past year, several respondents hesitated for a moment, but did come up with 2 "big ticket" items that they had done or were doing at present. However, a few stated that while historically CODI did much, currently the council's activity had dwindled. One interviewee stated that the small 3-4 person committees within the body have done much in terms of activity in recent years and that having *more* designated committees to actually "do stuff" would allow the council to do more for the community, rather than trying to get the whole body to agree on specific items. This is especially evident in the tightly scheduled 60-minute monthly meetings at which motions are passed, guest speakers are heard, and complaints are voiced.

Many CODI members stressed the lack of visibility and disability awareness promotion as being major causes of continued discrimination and inequality among people who are disabled. Freire agrees that, beyond activist participation, consciousness-raising should be at the forefront of change. He states that it is "…the absolute necessity of the oppressed to take charge of their own liberation, including the revolutionary process which, in the first place, is educational" (as cited in McLaren, 1993, p. 16). Indeed, when asked what the purpose of CODI was, many respondents said that it was to bring awareness to those with power in the city, to help them see and understand the plight of the disabled community in Knoxville, and to make the community welcoming to people with disabilities. In regard to carrying out this purpose effectively in a well-governed body, the Executive Committee itself came up as a topic from a few individuals, themselves not executive committee members.

This group consists of the chairman, vice-chairwoman, secretary, and parliamentarian, but these roles seem unimportant and fluid. From the meetings I attended, the only role of any of these positions was the chairman (vice-chairwoman in his absence), who read the agenda and approved motions. Several members believed that certain duties fell upon a particular officer, such as the secretary taking the minutes or the chairperson writing the agenda. However, upon examination of these roles, it seems that all of the officer duties are carried out by the city liaison, who is not even an actual member of CODI. This individual is the one who takes the minutes, who types the agenda before meetings, and maintains parliamentary procedure at meetings. One would think that these duties should fall on the secretary, chairperson, and parliamentarian, respectively. In order for any city body to function effectively, its members must fully participate and labor above and beyond a simple consultative role. Its members must put forth effort in addition to only attending meetings and offering comments.

Should the executive committee be the example of attendance and participation? Out of the executive committee members, in the three meetings I attended, only one individual out of the executive committee was present and on-time consistently at all three meetings. The first principle of changing government agencies and organizations that Lauer (1991) mentions is that, "Changes are more effective when members participate in the organization at a high rate" (as cited in Curry, Jiobu, & Schwirian, 2008, p. 499). So from a sociological standpoint, the answer is an affirmative yes for CODI member participation in relationship to the body's overall efficacy.

The last stream of thought from the interviews was responses to the question, "Should CODI have some sort of authority or power? Is it satisfactory to be a purely 'advisory' council?" Many thought that actual power and the authority to effect change would be desirable, with the first step being to have some sort of budget allotment to "do stuff" with, as one respondent reiterated. Others believed that to wield influence was far superior to political power. All admitted that to give CODI statutory authority would change how the body is structured, such as making it an elected or a mayorally-appointed body. Currently, council members are nominated and elected by existing members, then confirmed by the mayor. If this change in structure were to come to fruition, some believed that CODI's purpose would have the potential for corruption if the individuals had to campaign for their seat or "know the mayor." Difficult as it may be to politically empower this group of individuals, many agreed that individuals would be much more invested in the purpose and goals of CODI if this presence of political power were to come through.

Conclusion: Social Movements and Change

"I believe CODI is on the cusp of change toward more power in Knoxville," said one respondent. How to effect this change? Respondents seemed to gravitate toward one of two schools of thought regarding change: bureaucracy or social movements; most consider themselves in between. Can one be an effective advocate for change and belong to both schools? Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., after all, was in both. At times he met with the presidents, while other times he marched in the streets and protested for change. Surely there is not just an "either/or" solution, but rather a "both/and" solution. Frustration with the inability to do more was a common sentiment among respondents, regardless of where they stood on modality for change and regardless of their lack of consistent participation. We found that people use their own power to negotiate ongoing change over time, wherever they may fit in.

CODI exists between the bureaucrats and revolutionaries. It is a case study of a larger problem in social change—that of organizations trying to find a niche in between these two modes of change while differing in opinion about which mode of change is best. There is action (radical) vs. structure (bureaucrat), without (people seeking to transform institutions from outside them) vs. within (inside legislative bodies). Motivation for change is another issue altogether. As many sociologists agree, "Many people accept their lot in life because they have been socialized to accept the legitimacy of existing institutions, and they do not question the status quo" (as cited in Curry, Jiobu, & Schwirian, 2008, p. 501).

It is my opinion that Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1968) is the best model for changing the lot of people with disabilities in America. He says that action is not only helpful, but absolutely necessary to initiate social change. Educating the opponents of such change in a clear but firm and purposeful manner remains essential to the goals which CODI and the greater disability movement purportedly have. According to CODI Bylaws, one such goal is "to promote coordination, communication, and cooperation in working toward common goals concerning persons with disabilities" (CODI, 2004, p. 1). As quoted previously, when government bodies create advisory councils on various issues, these councils have the potential to become strangers to the very people for whom they were chosen to advocate and protect; such estrangement must be avoided at all costs. In my opinion if this estrangement is carefully avoided and education is wholeheartedly pursued, social change cannot be far off. The critical illustrations below serve as a means for how Freire's model could be utilized more fully by CODI.

How would one go about changing CODI itself and should that be the desired goal? Angry protests in the street, consisting of individuals en masse with disabilities, would elicit ridicule, if such an unlikely unity even came to the fore; yet this may be what is necessary. Education in what may be termed "disability literacy" has been somewhat efficacious thus far. To help one understand another's plight is the basis for truly effective social change. This is notably embodied in the very successful efforts of charismatic leaders such as Martin Luther King, Jr. (civil rights), Mohandas Ghandi (civil rights, Indian independence) and John Paul II (ending communism).

How many of these leaders' successful efforts have the Council on Disability Issues carried out? While CODI efforts are laudable, there are still some ways that productive criticism might improve their efforts. To offer some critiques from my point of view, the Council has not initiated direct action and is not prepared to suffer any social (or otherwise) consequences, nor has it engaged in demonstrations, strikes, boycotts, or any sort of civil disobedience. They have not taken over any of the government's functions and, in fact, have no role in governance other than to give advice. They have not published large-scale propaganda or any sort of a Knoxville Disability Day awareness campaign; however, they have had moderate success with a once-yearly mentoring program where people with disabilities are paired with a disability-friendly employer mentor and do job shadowing. The most activism that they have done recently is to write a white paper to the mayor, which did have some impact in delaying construction of a transit facility that might otherwise have been inaccessible to people with a disability. At most, CODI has been successful in carrying out the first element of conflict resolution. One of nine (11%) is not exactly admirable.

Future research should examine similar bodies in other cities and in other regions of the country. What kind of cities have a Council on Disability issues—small towns, metropolises, cities? How are these councils similar to CODI in their civil authority, influence, and composition? It would be interesting to see what other bodies have done in terms of policy change and influence on real and actual city ordinances, such as going above the minimum ADA threshold for building accessible city structures.

Matthew West is a doctoral student in the Medical Sociology PhD program at the University of Alabama at Birmingham. His primary research interests focus on education, social change, and religion. He teaches undergraduate courses at the University of Alabama and Bevill State, including: Sociology of Religion, Contemporary Social Problems, and Introduction to Sociology. This paper was completed as part of his senior undergraduate research project.

Acknowledgements: I would like to thank my colleagues Steven Dandaneau, Sarah Helm, Tim Hale, and Patricia Drentea for their advice and reviews of various drafts, as well as members of the City of Knoxville's Mayor's Council on Disability Issues for taking the time to be interviewed and for their enthusiastic support of this project.

References

CODI—Mayor's Council on Disability Issues (Amended 2004). *Bylaws*. Knoxville, TN: City of Knoxville.

Collins, D. (1977). *Paulo Freire: His life, works and thought*. New York: Paulist Press.

Curry, T., Jiobu, R., & Schwirian, K. (2008). *Sociology for the twenty-first century*. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson Education, Inc.

Dominguez, S., & Watkins, C. (2003). Creating networks for survival and mobility: Social capital among African-American and Latin-American low-income mothers. *Social Problems, 50*(1), 111-135.

Freire, P. (1968). *Pedagogy of the oppressed* (M. B. Ramos, Trans.). New York: Seabury.

Gilbert, N. (1993). *Researching social life*. Newbury Park, CA: SAGE.

Gilbert, N. (2008). *Researching social life,* 3rd ed. Newbury Park, CA: SAGE.

McLaren, P., & Leonard, P. (1993). *Paulo Freire: A critical encounter*. New York: Routledge, Chapman and Hall.

Moore, T. (1991). The African-American Church: A source of empowerment, mutual help, and social change. *Journal of Prevention and Intervention in the Community*, *10*(1), 147-167.

Oliver, M. N., & Muntaner, C. (2005). Research health inequalities among African-Americans: The imperative to understand social change. *International Journal of Health Services, 35*(3), 485-498.

Rankin, B., & Quane, J. (2000). Neighborhood poverty and social isolation of inner-city African American families. *Social Forces, 79*(1), 139-164.

Sloop, J. (1987). *Education and critical consciousness: Freire, Freud and Hegel*. (Unpublished doctoral dissertation). University of North Carolina at Greensboro.