

Book Review

Title: Implementing the Social Model of Disability: Theory and Research

Author: Colin Barnes and Geof Mercer, Eds.

Publisher: The Disability Press, 2004

Cost: \$30.00, paperback (20% discount for orders of four or more).

ISBN: 0952845083

Available from:

Centre for Disability Studies,
School of Sociology and Social Policy,
University of Leeds,

A CD ROM of the book may be requested at the time of book purchase and is supplied free of charge.

Reviewer: Liat Ben-Moshe

The title of this book is slightly misleading, if you are thinking of implementation in a policy or practice oriented way. The book should be called "Everything you ever wanted to know about the social model and its critiques." The book contains 13 chapters written mostly by theorists and researchers from the UK. Each chapter offers some critique of the social model and calls for changes, points out omissions in the theory, or tries to move beyond it while reflecting on its historic relevance.

The book provides, in a number of chapters, a comprehensive history of the creation of the social model (if you ever wanted to know what UPIAS, DIG and BCODP stand for, you'll have no problem finding it here). Some of it helps to explain arguments that underpin its usefulness. For instance, the fact that people with physical disabilities drove its inception, and it was later on generalized, inadequately, to include the experiences of people with various disabilities.

As a whole, there are some recurring critiques of the social model that resurface throughout the book: its essentialism (the disabled/non-disabled binary is real); it rejects accounts of personal experience; it insufficiently theorizes impairment; its assumed universality; and its exclusion of psycho-emotional aspects as well as structural/global aspects of disablement and impairment (best theorized by Carol Thomas in chapter 3 here).

I found most chapters to be thought-provoking and well written. This book should definitely generate interest among 'social modelists' (as Barnes and Mercer refer to them) and people interested in current research in Disability Studies (DS) in the UK, since most of the authors engage with theories of other authors in the book or other leading DS scholars that are UK-based. This book is of particular interest to activists and Disability Studies scholars who want to take the social model further and engage with new ways of thinking about the relations between people with disabilities, the environment, and their relation with each other as well as with non-disabled people.

The cover is very plain and the extra thin and relatively poor quality of paper adds to its low-tech feel, but also makes it a more affordable buy.

Liat Ben-Moshe is a Ph.D. student in Sociology, Women's Studies, and Disability Studies at Syracuse University, and a member of Beyond Compliance (BCCC), a student advocacy group at Syracuse University aimed at raising awareness around disability, as a form of diversity. The BCCC website is: http://soeweb.syr.edu/thechp/beyond_compliance.html. She can be contacted at: lbenmosh@maxwell.syr.edu