Editor's Note: The following paper was written by two of the
doctoral students who attended the International Disability and
Diversity Studies Institute. It is based upon some of the papers
presented. We are very glad to publish it here.

Toward A Non-Dualistic Disability Paradigm:
Beyond Connectedness

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Introduction

Humans are highly self-directed individuals constantly
striving for self-actualization. Each individual is unique and
interprets and expresses thoughts through an understanding of
information and life experience which becomes the perspective,
the "color of glass," through which the world is viewed. Every
human has the free will to make choices in life and these choices
are mitigated by a personal world view. Although most humans have
wounds to heal in this life, it is the perspective from which
each person views the world that influences whether they will
emerge into a position of empowerment (energy/connectedness) or
victimization (judgment/dualism). Because the sense of self is so
intrinsically tied up with one's view of the world, it is
profoundly threatening when that view is in any way disturbed.
And yet this paper proposes to do just that.

Previous disability paradigms have an ontologic and
epistemologic basis that are dualistic. For instance, a number of
disability paradigms reflect a deficit model such as what
Pfeiffer (2002) terms the "Impairment Version." In this world
view of disability it is the impairment that differentiates
people with disability from others. The underlying epistemology
is that I am not disabled and you are. There is a dualistic
separation that forever creates the sense of other.

The purpose of this paper is to present the foundation for a
disability paradigm that is more inclusive and non-dualistic than
those currently found in the disability literature. This will be
referred as a monistic paradigm.

Historical Footprints

The fabric of our western world view as elucidated by

Platonic thought continues today as a major influence in our thinking. While the particulars of various philosophers' views differ there is a common underlying assumption that the self is a discrete, even powerful, entity that exists independently and separately in the world. Most Judeo-Christian thought is riddled with the dualistic predication that there is a separation of self and other with the other consisting of our own body, humans and animals, the environment, and God. The assumption is that the body, mind, environment, and God are outside ourselves and that it is incumbent upon all of us to find our place in this disconnected world. In this context, therefore, finding out who we are is really finding a way to co-exist safely and harmoniously with that world "out" there.

What if that is impossible? Everyone, at some moment of exclusion, has had the experience of incredulously saying (if only to oneself), "You and I obviously do not live in the same world!" Those with even mild disabilities know intimately what it is to be burdened with having to fit into someone else's world and then blamed for not being there from the beginning. When the world is viewed dualistically only the eternal other is seen and it is a very small step to say that some people just do not fit. Then, in a presumably well meaning attempt to get everyone to fit, objective and universal standards are formulated so that everyone knows what it takes to be a part of this world. So the onus is usually on me to change who I am, but who am I?

Descartes rendered this question of who we really are perhaps most succinctly in his "I think, therefore I am." While this has a certain simplicity and logical linearity to it that gives the illusion of going someplace with our thinking, it fails to satisfy. It is easy for linear thought to give the sense of going in a positive direction toward understanding. However, logic alone does not assure that a phenomenon is understood. You may receive careful and logical instructions about preparing a wonderful meal, but you will still be hungry at the end of the exercise. The fundamental question still remains, "At the root of it all, who am I and what is my place in this vast universe?" The sense of being off balance and not at ease persists. Sometimes this angst is fully up front and sometimes vaguely niggling in the background, but always present.

The existentialist philosophers at least dealt with angst squarely. They were still grounded in the same dualistic perspective and so applied linear logic to the amorphous and shifting sand of ontology. They saw that life sometimes seemed to be what Sartre (1943) called "a useless passion." There did not seem to be reason and order behind the chaos of daily life and Sartre spoke of the "anguish of man faced with the facticity of his own freedom." Paul Tillich (2000, 2nd ed) in The Courage to Be delves into the nature of existence in fascinating detail and comes out at the end with little more concrete than the need for courage in order to survive it all. Martin Buber (1974) in I and Thou goes further when he says, "we must learn to consider everything around us as 'You' speaking to 'me,' and requiring a response." For him the central commandment is to realize that we have relationships with people, trees, dogs, and god (an I-You relationship).

We do not experience the above mentioned as objects (an I-It relationship), but they have life that reciprocates our actions.

Buber explains our relationships and how we should go about interpreting them when he says, "animals and plants are a relationship beneath language, people are related to within language, and finally the eternal you (god) is above our function of language." He skirted around the edges of a monistic world where self and other are one and the same, but falls short when he creates worlds beneath and above.

Language

It must be said that there have been some Christian and Jewish mystics who have perhaps seen directly the monistic nature of existence, but their writings were often met with threats of excommunication or even death. Our view of the world is dearly held indeed. Angelus Silesius was a German mystic who lived and wrote in the mid 17th century. He was famous for writing sometimes enigmatic epigrams which followed a transformative experience he had as a youth of 24. Two examples follow:

>   The Blessed No-Thing
>   I am a blessed thing, could I a no-thing be,
>   Stranger to all this is, for nobody to see.
>   God
>   The Rose which here on earth is now perceived by me,
>   Has blossomed thus in God from all eternity.
>   (Shrody, 1986)

Another German mystic, Meister Eckhart, offers perhaps the most extreme example of heresy when he wrote, "The eyes through which I see God are the same eyes through which God sees me. Perchance should I die then so to would God die!" (Schurman, 2001). This was a direct expression of his experience of being one with everything in the universe.

Not surprisingly, church elders who had not experienced the interconnectedness of the world misunderstood what was being said. Even Jesus who said, "I am in my Father and you in me and I in you" (John 14:18-20) is perhaps positing a less dualistic view than the usual interpretations would have us believe.

The most highly developed and sophisticated writings on a monistic world view come from practitioners of Chan or Zen Buddhism which had its origins in China in the first century of the common era. China at this time was an extremely this-worldly and practical place. Confucianism was the dominant ethical and intellectual tradition and was completely secular. This tradition held that the ultimate destiny of the individual is inseparable from the attainments and responsibilities of human life. For Confucius the perfecting of the individual in society and of society through the cultivation of the individual results in something like Heaven-on-Earth.

Heaven is not an afterlife that exists in a separate plane of existence, but the exercise of the moral order in this world. This is certainly a system where the primacy and fulfillment of the individual is expressed in the "outer" world and visa versa. The lines between self and other while not transcended are certainly getting less distinct. In the Analects Confucius says, "If you want to cultivate yourself, cultivate duty. If you want to cultivate duty, cultivate yourself" (Ames & Rosemont, 1999).

The other stream of Chinese thought prevalent at that time was Taoism. While it also defined man largely in ethical and social terms, its purpose was more transcendent. For the Taoist there is an all-pervading Way (Tao) which was the ultimate purpose of life. From the view of the Tao there is only the Tao. Here, for the first time in China, inner and outer start to become one.

Still, there was little to deal with the difficulties of daily life. Both Confucianism and Taoism were here and now oriented with a very idealistic view of how one ought to live. Neither dealt directly with the pain and suffering so many in China experienced. This is the world that Buddhism entered.

While Indian Buddhism was indeed monistic during the first few hundred years after the death of Buddha, it was a more philosophical version that reached China six hundred years later. The practical Chinese took this philosophy and stripped it to its essential bones and emphasized the transcendental experience of the religion. This is a religion that deals directly with transforming pain and suffering and so was perceived in China at the time to have more depth than Taoism or Confucianism (Dumoulin, 1988).

Out of Chan then came a wealth of monistic experience. An old Zen Master, Chao Chou (778-897), when speaking of the seamless nature of existence said, "This unity is like salt in water, like color in dye. The slightest thing is not apart from self." This is a wholly different way to experience the world. A dualistic world view judges and categorizes, creating dichotomies where none exist such as: disabled vs. non-disabled, sick vs. healthy, victim vs. perpetrator, black vs. white. The Zen Buddhist eschews the false barriers categories create because they are born of delusion.

A Zen Master by the name of Hui Neng (638-713) remarked about blaming, "When I am wrong, I alone am to blame. When others are wrong, I alone am to blame." For Hui Neng, error extends to the ends of the earth for all of us. This is the experience that there is nothing that is not my responsibility. While there may be many things that cannot be changed, that does not separate us. From the point of view of oneness, there is nothing that is not me.

Related Literature

Connectedness

While there is no monistic paradigm in the disability literature, a search of related terms uncovers a number of articles in the nursing literature. These can be subsumed under the concept of connectedness. Because of the broad base of nursing literature, it often addresses issues that are important to disability research as disability is an aspect of humanity that is encompassed in the discipline of nursing.

Connectedness emerged as a central theme in a simultaneous concept analysis of spiritual perspective, hope, acceptance and self-transcendence by Haase, Brill, Coward, Leidy and Penn (1992). Connectedness was found to be threaded throughout these concepts. "It was found to be an antecedent of hope, a critical attribute of spiritual perspective, and a consequence of

acceptance and self-transcendence" (p.145). Connectedness was defined as "a significant, shared and meaningful personal relationship with another person, a spiritual being, nature or perhaps an aspect of one's inner self" (p.146). This suggests both an intra- and inter-personal relationship which heads in the direction of a monistic paradigm, but still falls short with inner and outer distinctions. Connectedness and relatedness are used interchangeably by Moch (1998) to describe one component of the conceptual definition of health-within-illness.

Health-within-illness is defined as "an opportunity that increases meaningfulness of life through connectedness or relatedness with the environment and/or awareness of self during a state of compromised well-being" (p.305). Here connectedness is viewed as an awareness that one is connected with the natural environment, with aspects within oneself, or with a spiritual source. Bellingham, Cohen, Jones, and Spaniol (1989) discuss connectedness and identify three key components. These components are: connectedness to self, connectedness to others, and connectedness to a greater sense of purpose and meaning in life. Again Moch is dividing the world into self and others and some spiritual source that is separate and apart.

In viewing the mind as psyche and spirit, Helminiak (1996) describes spirituality as a part of the universal dimension of the mind. The individual's connectedness to God is viewed as a combination of a theological and psychological conceptualization. Clark, Cross, Deane, and Lowry (1991) state, "Spiritual well being is the integrating aspect of human wholeness" (p. 68). This spiritual dimension is viewed as connecting and unifying the body, mind, and spirit. It is noted that, "Quality care must include a spirit-to-spirit encounter between caregiver and patient" (p. 68).

Meraviglia (1999) identifies connectedness as a defining attribute of spirituality. It is noted that, "spirituality is defined as the experiences and expressions of one's spirit in a unique and dynamic process reflecting faith in God or a supreme being; it is connectedness within oneself, others, nature or God; and an integration of the dimensions of body, mind, and spirit" (p. 24). While Helminiak and Meraviglia are trying to recognize connectedness as an important aspect of caregiving, in the process they are dividing the world into many disconnected parts. They are not seeing the possibility that body, mind, and spirit are precisely the same.

Energy

Martha Rogers (1970) comes closest to a monistic paradigm. She sees humans as people who exist as a unified body, mind and spirit that are part of a universal scheme. Although the body, mind and spirit can be addressed separately, they are in an ongoing relationship continuously affecting each other. She states that the person-environment are energy fields involved in an ongoing interaction with each other where boundaries extend beyond the physical mass of the human body. This interrelationship between person and environment make them "holistic". They are more than the sum of the parts.

Environment is the space where a person lives and functions. It is composed of diverse, dynamic physical, psychological and

socio-cultural factors. Environment is a critical interacting force shaping the individual. Rogers notes that environment is indistinguishable from the person except in concept. It influences the ability of the person to develop to an optimal potential. The environment can be altered to positively or negatively affect a person's health. Eden (1998) said that energy is the common medium of body, mind and spirit.

Attributes of Connectedness

In reviewing the literature, and extrapolating beyond it to a more non-dualistic vantage point, critical attributes of connectedness are identified. The most frequently occurring attributes relevant to connectedness are: 1) linkage; 2) integration of a unified body, mind and spirit; 3) meaningful relationships (Helminiak, 1996; Clark et al., 1991; Mock, 1998; Haase et al., 1992). An analysis and synthesis of the literature leads to the identification of primary antecedents and outcomes of connectedness.

Antecedents. Life experience is the first antecedent. This is the context and direction that leads to a connected blending of self and other. This leads to the second antecedent which is that connectedness is a fundamental human need. There is an innate tendency of humans to congregate and to connect. Without interpersonal connection life becomes too bleak to bear. When connectedness is particularly rich and vibrant it is accompanied by the third antecedent which is presence. Presence is the state of being completely in the here and now, flowing naturally. It may be so complete that there is a diminished or absent sense of self as a separate entity. The absence of a separate self is accompanied by the fourth antecedent which is openness and receptivity. Barriers erected by the self disappear and the usual boundaries of the five senses become porous, translucent and insubstantial.

Outcomes. The first outcome of connectedness is harmony and balance. Deep connectedness leads to an experience of harmony and balance where everything is just as it should be and is in its own perfect place in the universe regardless of circumstance. For instance, the distinction of disabled vs. non-disabled makes no sense here because we are inherently whole and complete just as we are.

The second outcome is an increased meaningfulness of life. If everything is harmonious and in balance then meaning is imparted not by concepts, ideas or accomplishments, but by the direct experience of this connected moment of presence. This leads naturally to the third outcome which is an enhanced sense of well-being. It is only natural to feel satisfied when this present moment is full of harmony, balance, and meaning.

Elements of Definition

A synthesized definition of connectedness is formulated here to provide an understanding of this concept as it relates to all ends of the disability spectrum. Connectedness, therefore, is defined as: a unification of the body, mind, and spirit in which a sense of the physical boundaries of one's body/mind extend to include other persons and the natural environment in an

unconditional oneness.

Connectedness is an individual's perspective. It is the lens through which the universe is experienced. This does not involve reciprocity because connectedness is experienced when living in the present moment and is unconditional. Neither a rock, a cloud or another person need to qualify for connectedness to be there.

Connectedness is the underlying "truth" principle. Connectedness as a spiritual unconditional oneness involves a unification between oneself, others and the natural environment. The underlying "truth" is to live in the midst of this seamless whole. This is reflected in the Einsteinian model of physical and etheric energies. Einstein's equation, $E=mc^2$, is the mathematical rendering of the fact (proved terribly at Hiroshima in 1945) that energy and matter are reciprocal and can be transformed from one to the other and back again. It provides the key insight toward understanding that energy and matter are one and the same thing (Gerber, 1996).

When one is truly connected all judgment and categories fall away. Black vs. white turns instead toward a softer shade of gray - a commonality, a oneness.

Monistic Disability Paradigm

What is offered here is the first rendering of a non-dualistic or monistic paradigm. Although presented under the rubric of a disability paradigm it is broader in view and intended to have the potential to cut across multiple disciplines.

Person

A human being is not a disembodied entity nor a mechanical aggregate. Persons are a totality that are constantly interchanging matter and energy with their environment, indeed the whole universe. This is an entity where body, mind, and environment are one and the same thing.

Each of us is a result. We are an effect at the end of a beginningless and endless stream of cause. The circumstances of every action in the universe from the beginning of time resulted in the coalescence at a particular time and place of what we call ourselves. This same process results in trees, clouds, stones and grasses and all other living creatures with whom we share the precious gift of consciousness. In fact we are of the same source because each and every thing is a particular expression of one seamless whole.

People are, therefore, born neither good nor bad, but rather as a particular expression of all the causes that result in this moment. Just as some trees are tall and some short, each of us has our own set of strengths and weakness. From the moment of conception each of us begins to leave a trail of cause in our wake. Each moment we really do make a difference in the world as this cause ripples out endlessly in all directions. This is the reason "good" and "bad" do not have as much meaning as direction. To be sure we can do evil in this world and we may tend in one direction or another, but the underlying principle is one of infinite possibility at each moment.

Spheres of Influence

     Existence is made up of energy fields that can be thought of
as spherical and extending in all directions to infinity. While
the energy remains constant, the influence diminishes in direct
proportion to the distance from its last perturbation. For any
particular energy field there is no fixed beginning, end or
location. It could be said to have a "quantum existence" that
defies fixation. Indeed, because the nature of the energy field
is one of constant and pervasive flux, when any part is fixed in
space or time its energy equals zero. An energy field with no
energy is dead. Fixed existence, then, is fundamentally illusory.
All interactions, all energy, all existence is always evolving
into a natural state of chaos. It is like the orderly, fixed
crystal of salt placed in water. Molecular chaos soon is
disperses the salt seamlessly throughout the water.

Interbeing

     Because spheres of influence are infinite, the distinction
between self and other is also illusory. This can be called
interbeing. Our nature is fundamentally interdependent and
intimately intertwined with everything around us, seen and
unseen. What is me and not me is a meaningless distinction and
can be said to be empty. Emptiness here does not mean void
blankness, but rather a state of no fixed position that is
absolutely pregnant with possibility. It is the continuous stream
of this moment before even a single thing arises which stands at
the center of everywhere at once.

Implications

     Interventions, whether medical, educational or otherwise are
usually an attempt to introduce some measure of equilibrium in an
out of balance energy interplay. This is always resisted by the
natural tendency toward chaos. As a result, interventions can
never be static or formulaic and outcomes are always
unpredictable. When our interventions do not result in the
outcomes we expect it is the expectation that is the problem, not
the person with a disability who is being "helped."
     It follows that it is not possible to simply influence or
intervene in order to effect an isolated change in somebody else.
Whether we know it or not there is no outward/inward dichotomy
and every intervention has as much influence over us as those we
try to influence. Anyone who is ignorant of this is doomed to
only see the eternal other and find blame. In a very real way we
are the sum total of our thoughts, words and actions. The truth
is that our "caring for" and "helping people" is not
characterized by the "intervention." In fact, we do not care for
people at all. We dance with them!

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