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## **”I’m not enough of a loser”: A crip interpretation of disability and charity in Iceland.**

**CRIP THEORY, AS** articulated by Robert McRuer, is essentially a conjunction of some key insights derived from critical disability studies and queer studies that problematise both able-bodiedness and heteronormativity and how these understandings are naturalised and ”embedded in complex economic, social and cultural relations” (McRuer 2006:2). There are numerous theoretical toolboxes, so to speak, which offer valuable insights into different forms of socio-economic marginalisation. But what makes Crip Theory so intriguing in my opinion is that it demands a consideration of the larger able-bodied, heteronormative framework, which charities, among others, reinforce through their discourses and practices. While the practices of charity can serve to conceal the underlying structural factors that produce and reproduce socio-economic inequalities, charities can also serve to distinguish the categories of people who are seen as deserving of social assistance from those who are to be disciplined into participating in the labour market. But those ”wor-

thy” of help are nevertheless portrayed as weak, helpless and incompetent, which renders such people the target of interventionist and rehabilitative forms of discipline as well as inheriting a devalued and disempowered status that has far-reaching implications. It has been argued that disability has played a central role in making such assessments within charitable and state assistance schemes (Stone 1984) but, following the insights offered by Crip Theory, I would contend that this role is instead performed by understandings of normativity.

Charities have for centuries, at least on the European mainland, placed an emphasis on assisting the “worthy” poor as delineated in the Judeo-Christian tradition, which traditionally included widows, orphans, people with impairments or illnesses, and the elderly. Much of this almsgiving was theologically motivated on the part of the donors and thus the “worthy” poor served to cleanse the sins of the donors through their acceptance of alms. Such approaches to charity persisted up to the Reformation (Clapton 1997; Lindberg 1993; Stiker 1999). But in many ways, elements of this kind of charitable thinking have extended into the present, whereby the clients of charities are often still described in media discourses in terms of descriptors that resonate well with donors and the public in general (Wagner 2000). Albeit somewhat altered for more modern contexts, the commonplace reference to “single mothers, disability pensioners, and senior citizens” still colour the discourses of charity in contemporary Iceland. Such discursive practices imply some kind of inherent or natural quality that accounts for their impoverishment in a self-explanatory way, and which draws attention away from the underlying structural factors that produce and reproduce contemporary urban poverty. This paper is, in a sense, a “crip” re-interpretation of my earlier research, which was an ethnographic study of the practices of charity in Reykjavik, Iceland (Rice 2007b),

in turn informed by a re-thinking of subsequent research carried out in 2010–2011 (Traustadóttir et al. 2011).

During my field work, the complex interconnections between gender and disability in the context of charity were quite apparent. I then interpreted them through the lens of intersectionality, which is often associated with the work of scholars who consider the complex interconnections between race, gender, and class (e.g. Crenshaw 1991; Collins 1998), but which could easily accommodate factors such as impairment or age. However, a crip perspective is suggestive of another important perspective to this issue – one that focuses on the larger unmarked, normative framework in which such understandings are embedded. There could be no disabled/impaired body without a normative, "able-bodied" standard. There could be no understanding of the so-called deviant or deficient forms of the family or marital relations without the unspoken, heteronormative standard from which all others are judged. As McRuer writes, heteronormativity and able-bodiedness still "masquerade [...] as a non-identity, as the natural order of things" (McRuer 2006:1). Charities have long perpetuated, and still do, such understandings through their discourses and practices. From a socio-structural point of view, the intersecting factors of impairment, gender, education and training, employment, income, social networks, and socio-cultural capital, among others, all indeed play a role in the circumstances which necessitate individuals and families turning to private charities for assistance. However, my earlier analysis could be enhanced through the insights offered by Crip Theory by arguing that it is the idea of normativity itself – here specifically the conjunction of able-bodiedness and heteronormativity – which plays an important role in disempowering the clients of charities and which reinforces the long-standing notion that it is normal or natural that disabled

people, the members of "broken" or "deficient" or "non-normative" households, or the elderly need to queue on a regular basis to receive handouts from others. It is in fact quite striking when one considers the inverse of the usual list of the contemporary charity clients. The "single parents, disabled, elderly, unemployed" are, by implication, contrasted with heteronormative, nuclear families headed by working-aged, employed, and non-impaired parents who presumably inhabit the role of "donors to" charity and are rarely the "clients of", Disabled women who were also single parents made up the bulk of the clientele of the charity where I worked; in the context of contemporary Iceland, such women are often socially and economically marginalised – the structural "losers" in a manner of speaking within the existing labour market and systematic redistribution of wealth. From a crip perspective, however, this is to suggest that normativity plays an important and largely unexplored role in the discursive work of charities and social welfare programmes that render who the "proper" recipients of such forms of assistance are and, perhaps, "should be". As such, the deviations from this framework of normativity can indeed have wide-ranging implications in a number of areas of socio-economic life, as these descriptors are laden with negative and stigmatised socio-cultural assumptions regarding dependency, helplessness and reduced competence.

### **Charities in contemporary wealthy societies**

I had previously analysed the role of material aid charities in contemporary, wealthy societies as redistributive agents that direct (meagre) surplus resources toward socio-economically marginalised people. These resources – a mix of private and corporate donations in addition to municipal and state funding – were popularly conceived of as a form of emergency assistance but in practice formed

one of a number of ongoing subsistence strategies on the part of those struggling with urban poverty. While these donations of food, clothing and various household goods did serve to mitigate the immediate effects of poverty to a degree, these efforts did very little to improve the long-term socio-economic situations of their clientele. To be fair to the hard-working and largely volunteer staff of such organisations, the same could be said of the borderline poverty-level state and municipal social assistance schemes – none of which allowed the recipients the ability to accrue the surplus resources needed to better their situations. Charities serve as important outlets for the goodwill of citizens who are indeed concerned with issues of poverty. Nevertheless, such practices direct energies away from the call for substantive changes to be made that are an essential part of true anti-poverty measures, but which are much more threatening to the established political-economic order (Rice 2007b).

I still stand by this analysis; however, it is not complete. The charity which came to be my primary fieldwork site for nearly two years – *Mæðrastyrksnefnd*, (The Mother's Support Committee) – has been involved in assisting single mothers, widows and their children in the capital city since 1928. Although I felt that class would probably form a key analytical focus, it was obvious to me that so would issues of gender, and I would quickly learn that so would issues of disability, marital status, age, and immigration to name a few. I was struck with how the staff of *Mæðrastyrksnefnd* often made reference to a complex array of structural factors when they offered their interpretations to me regarding the situations that their clients faced. The chair of the Committee during the early phase of my research held up three fingers on her hand and rhymed off what she felt to be the common factors among many of their clients: "low education, low paying jobs, and little or no ownership of property." Yet structural

explanations received much less attention in the public discourses of charities when they sought to explain their work and to solicit for donations. Much more common instead were descriptors of their clientele in terms of demographic groupings which often made reference to the charity "holy trinity" so to speak, of single mothers, disability pensioners, and senior citizens. These were the categories that tended to resonate well with donors and which also have easily recognisable antecedents in the history of European charity as well as the Judeo-Christian traditions.

Indeed, state agencies, clinics, bureaucracies, charities and other such bodies produced their subjects through their practices, following the line of inquiry often associated with the work of Michel Foucault (1980). While Foucault did not focus at length on charities, he described the emergence of ostensibly secular charities and benevolent societies in Europe in the nineteenth century as "agents of liaison" (Foucault 1980:62) who worked alongside the state and medical authorities. The discursive and logistical practices that produced such categories of people were also intimately linked to forms of governance that sought to regulate and normalise these very same "deviant" populations that they had a hand in creating. This is an important area of research in the context of charity and social welfare programmes, as is Foucault's notion of "subjectification" – the "way a human being turns him- or herself into a subject" (Dreyfus & Rabinow 1982:208) – which is argued to be an essential component of these normalising forms of power in contemporary societies.

In my previous work, I dedicated a significant amount of energies to analysing how charities played a role as agents of liaison alongside state social welfare schemes in producing "the disability pensioner" or the "welfare recipient", but I paid little attention to how these activities helped to produce and reinforce the larger, often

unspoken, framework of normativity. The practices and discourses through which the clients were sorted into specific demographic categories for the purposes of assessment, record keeping and the solicitation of donations obfuscated many of the reasons the clients needed such forms of assistance. There is of course nothing inherent or natural that clings to the status of single mother or disabled person that condemns one to a marginalised socio-economic existence. But these descriptors of the clients were presented, or implied, as self-evident of their need, rather than as a problematic aspect of urban poverty in need of further explication. In addition, these practices serve to perpetuate the view that people designated as such are the natural clients of charities and social assistance programmes and thus the normative poor. This has wide-reaching implications in a number of areas of social life, both in terms of how marginalised people are viewed by the wider society as well as how marginalised people may view themselves.

**”I’m not enough of a loser”**

One day in early May of 2004, I was helping to stock the goods from a large donation with a client-volunteer at *Mæðrastyrksnefnd*. Svanhvít (pseudonym) and I were discussing her role as a client-volunteer, as some clients felt strong urges to reciprocate through their labour for past assistance rendered by this agency (Rice 2007a). Svanhvít told me that she represented one of the ”holes” in the system in that she worked for four years before being let go, but apparently worked too much to qualify for a job training programme she was interested in. She also added that as a single mother she was limited by her employment opportunities to an extent. She commented that she was ”not enough of a loser” to qualify for the kind of assistance that would help her out of her situation. Even though

this was fairly early in my research, I was used to hearing the clients of charities in Iceland referred to as *aumingjar* (sg. *aumingi*) either in public discourses or even in reference to themselves. This was often done in a joking manner, but I sometimes detected an underlying hint of self-deprecation. Often glossed as "weakling" or "loser" or some sense of being "pathetic", an Icelandic anthropologist explained to me, the term *aumingi* is a quite complex word that could be extended to include people who were viewed as not being capable of managing their affairs or governing their lives properly, often as the result of mental health issues, substance abuse, disability, "poor upbringing" or exhibiting devalued forms of what the sociologist Pierre Bourdieu referred to as social and cultural capital (Bourdieu 1986). Svanhvít's comments echoed those of a young woman in a newspaper article I encountered around this time. This article documented a single mother's frustrations about the residency requirements for municipal social assistance (even for native-born Icelanders who moved into the city from the countryside) as well as the disability evaluation system. She described herself as only being "38 percent hearing impaired" and not having enough residency points accrued to be eligible for a housing benefit and commented: "I find the system hostile to single mothers because it is encouraging them to move from the capital out to the country. I am evaluated as *aumingi* but not enough of an *aumingi*" (*Fréttablaðið* 2004:8).

Some of these "loser" discourses captured the frustrations of those who were caught within the rather byzantine bureaucracies of the social welfare system, but they were also apparent among those who are fully eligible for such assistance. I interpreted these partly as tongue-in-cheek commentaries on the disability pension system, but also their devalued standing in the larger Icelandic society. For example, one interview participant told me that she often fielded



questions about what she did for a living: a very common question in Iceland but which produces a sort of an autobiographic void for disability pensioners in a society that places a great deal of emphasis upon one's occupation. One tactic was to refer to one's former occupation rather than discuss the inevitable (and often invasive and personal) questions that would follow if one were to say "disability pensioner". Another was to refer to one's involvement in rehabilitation in the quest to become "normal" again. But she told me that sometimes, when in a negative frame of mind, she would jokingly describe herself in another way: "I am a state-supported loser/weakling" (*Ég er ríkisstyrk aumingi*). This feeling was further intensified for those who were also the clients of charities. Being a client of a charity like *Mæðrastyrksnefnd* was often described to me as the lowest you can get in Icelandic society. For example, one person I interviewed described for me her feelings the first time she forced herself to seek help from a charity, "The first time I cried...You probably won't get any lower than me. I mean, I am a single mother on a disability pension".

While the status of being a disability pensioner played a significant role in their situations, and perhaps to a degree self-understanding – echoing the ideas of Foucault on subjectification (Foucault 1980) – most of the clients of charity I spoke with referred to their status as disabled in addition to a wide variety of other factors. But in the view of some scholars, disability is the key factor to consider in late capitalist societies. Political scientist Deborah Stone argued in *The disabled state* (1984) that all societies have at the very least two distributive systems: one based on work and the other based on need. While I find this somewhat dubious as a broad statement from an ethno-historical perspective, she continues that disability is called upon to act as the arbitrator in terms of this distributive dilemma in

regard to making the determination as to who is considered to be exempt from the work requirement and offered assistance, and who is to be disciplined into the labour market. In her view, "The very notion of disability is fundamental to the architecture of the welfare state" (Stone 1984:12). McRuer (2010) contends that Stone's other major contribution in the context of modern social welfare states is that "disability emerges discursively as a *privileged* identity, which is why there is so much anxiety and suspicion around the disabled 'category' and who gets to qualify for it" (McRuer 2010:111).

In Iceland, the disability pensioner is a highly stigmatised category. I have focused extensively on this theme in my research, drawing upon a number of factors offered by scholars such as the Icelandic cultural emphasis on the value and centrality of work, how economically non-productive people in pre-modern Iceland were seen as a burden upon the society and treated harshly, as well as the deeply entrenched stigmas associated with disability and the intolerance of human differences that are by no means limited to Iceland (Rice 2011, 2010, 2007b; see also Barnes and Mercer 2003; Durrenberger 1997; Gunnlaugsson 1988, 1993; Magnússon 1989; Stiker 1999). However, I had never considered disability to be a privileged identity. Such a view appeared to me to be counter-intuitive to all of my understandings of the socio-economic inequalities and disadvantages associated with disability. McRuer cautions that this privileged identity does not bestow material or social advantages upon disabled people in a literal sense; it merely absolves disabled people of the work requirement which, in itself, is still rooted in stigma. But Stone's insight nevertheless holds a good deal of explanatory power in understanding why disability pensioners are so maligned in Iceland, seen as dependent and treated with suspicion, as well as why the staff of charities in my experience spent so much

time hand-wringing about their clients who "did not look disabled". But Stone's thesis also holds a good deal of explanatory power as well in explicating those who are seen as the rightful and proper clients of charity and part of the normative poor.

### **Disability and the "worthy poor"**

Historian Robert Jütte (1994) describes developments in England in the sixteenth century that would be very familiar to scholars of later historical periods. Increasingly finer classificatory procedures were put into place that created vastly more complex categories beyond "widows" or "infirm" people in order to decide the appropriate responses on the part of the local charitable authorities. Here, the "infirm" is sub-divided into the "blind", "lame", and "diseased", as well as "poor by casualty" which included soldiers wounded in combat. "The poor", who were essentially the bulk of European societies at the time, was essentially a meaningless category from the point of view of charity workers and local authorities. As such, pseudo sociological/moral categories were also constructed in order to aid officials in making assessments about who was to be helped. While the elderly and orphans and disabled people seemed to retain their positions as "worthy", we see among the "unworthy" new designations such as "thriftless", "rogues" and "strumpets" (Jütte 1994:11).

While it would seem quite anachronistic to speak of rogues and strumpets in the context of contemporary charities, these sixteenth-century understandings that Jütte describes are less distant from the present than one may think. While *Mæðrastyrksnefnd* referred in external discourses to their work as helping single mothers, seniors and disabled people in need, internally there was always a form of moral arithmetic in place when assessing the clients, even those with so-called visible disabilities, in terms of their living situations and con-

duct to an extent that even sexual histories and child-rearing practices were not beyond the gossip mill. However, the historian and disability rights activist Paul Longmore (2003) argues that the "worthy" and "unworthy" distinctions may have had material consequences for the poor in the past, able-bodied and otherwise, when seeking help. But in terms of disabled people in general, it mattered little to their devalued positions in the larger society. Such distinctions of worthiness, Longmore argues, have been overemphasised by scholars of charity and social welfare. Even if one is "rightfully" a client of a charity or a social welfare programme: "All are morally flawed, all socially discredited. All are punished." Longmore continues, writing of support programmes and rehabilitative measures, that "in actual practice, programs have usually operated on the assumption that people with every sort of disability are incapable and irresponsible regarding management of their own lives" (Longmore 2003:242).

### **Heteronormative lives and able-bodies**

The social histories that revolve around the impaired body are illuminating in the context of charity and socio-economic marginalisation. However, I would suggest that a crip perspective would add an additional nuance to the analysis. Heteronormativity – which can be seen in terms of a range of factors, such as in the dominant perceptions of normative sexual conduct, normative marital arrangements, normative families and so forth – is in my experience impossible to disentangle from disability in the context of charity and urban poverty. The intersecting factors of able-bodiedness and heteronormativity provide a useful model with which to understand how marginalised people are situated and the lens of charity reveals a useful microcosm with which to view these processes. On the one hand, disability is intimately connected with productive

capabilities – in the current context meaning engagement with the labour market. McRuer argues that contemporary understandings of able-bodiedness, and thus disability, are strongly linked to the emergence of industrial capitalism and its demands: "it is here as well that we can begin to understand the compulsory nature of able-bodiedness" (McRuer 2006:8). I think the emphasis on "compulsory" is important, especially in the context of Iceland with its exaggerated emphasis upon work and a working identity. However, on the other hand, the usefulness of a crip perspective is its conjoined link to heteronormativity. Structural developments in forms of production also had a concomitant affect upon gender and familial relations. In pre-modern Iceland, when Iceland was predominantly an agriculturally-based peasant society, women were still largely responsible for child rearing, but men and women often worked together as a complementary unit, to varying degrees, in the acts of production. It took the opportunities afforded by the modernisation of the fisheries and the emergence of capitalist production to render men as the sole providers and relegate women largely to what is often referred to as the domestic sphere (Pálsson 1992:135). This had enormous implications for women historically, and particularly in the rapidly urbanising society, for those who were not part of such a normative domestic unit, such as widows, divorced, and those who never married in a context in which they could not vote, own property, employment prospects were limited or paid meagre wages, and with an almost total lack of a social welfare infrastructure. Women in such positions often had little choice but to submit to the indignity of reliance upon the meagre assistance provided by the local authorities or, in the late nineteenth century, turn to charities (Styrkársdóttir 1998; Kristmundsdóttir 1990). As such, gender relations and disability are critically important and often intimately

interconnected factors in regard to analysing socio-economic marginalisation in such societies.

Deborah Stone (1984) argued that disability is called upon to be the arbitrator in the "distributive dilemma" in regard to who is to be assisted and who is to be disciplined in late capitalist societies. I disagree. I would suggest that this role is instead performed by normativity rather than disability. Charities, and the parallel state social welfare programmes, clearly illuminate the categories of people who are deemed worthy of assistance (or interventionist actions by state agencies), and they are not limited to disability alone. They are primarily people who deviate from the normative understanding of the body, physical and intellectual functions or "work ability" (disability), age (children and the elderly) and the members of so-called non-normative, non-traditional, deviant or deficient families – in other words, any family that somehow deviates from the heteronormative, nuclear households which are free of serious illness, impairment and whose members are "productive" in terms of domestic labour, study, or employment.

### **Normals need not apply**

In the context of *Mæðrastyrksnefnd*, I often heard the iteration of the speech "This organisation is for women with children". This was usually invoked toward childless men. The presence of men was a continual source of anxiety on the part of some staff members who wished to retain *Mæðrastyrksnefnd*'s historical focus on needy women, although certain males (disabled, elderly or single parents – or otherwise "non-normative" males) were deemed to be acceptable (Rice 2009). Other charities did not have such an explicit gender focus, but they too often made references to the expected charitable categories. As I looked through some historical documents, how-

ever, it was clear to me that heteronormativity was long the basic unspoken assumption which governed their view of their clients and their situations. The first chair of *Mæðrastyrksnefnd* – Laufey Valdimarsdóttir (1890–1945) – was in her time quite radical. The daughter of Iceland's first prominent feminist, Laufey was primarily concerned with improving the socio-economic conditions of women and their children. This meant lobbying parliament for legal changes, hiring a lawyer for impoverished women who were fighting for child support, and staging letter writing campaigns. Material charitable assistance was almost an afterthought. After the passage of time, this radical edge became blunted as *Mæðrastyrksnefnd* became incorporated into the traditional social welfare infrastructure that did little to rupture the status quo of inequities. However, rarely were women, in the past and present, considered to be independent human beings in their own right without some reference to caregiving, be it a spouse, children or elderly parents. Despite the organisation's early radical leanings, women were still seen as adjuncts to males; nuclear families were the normative family – marriage (to a man) was an imperative, and any deviation from such was a tragedy. While in the 1920s and 1930s in Iceland the economic implications of being widowed or divorced were much more serious than in the present, this kind of normative thinking still persists. Women, at least those who deviate from the norm of working, married, able-bodied women, are overwhelmingly seen as the proper clients of charities. This extends to the state social welfare programmes as well, whereby homeless shelters, welfare and child assistance schemes and so forth are to an extent "feminised" and seen as the preserve of women, while men are turned to the street, or correctional services (Passaro 1996; Susser 2005). Iceland is in a way an interesting counter-example in that homeless shelters are

primarily geared towards men. However, this is still related to the situation in which the public social welfare system and private charities – in addition to other strategies – enable marginalised women greater options to avoid the street (Björnsdóttir 2004).

The following are some excerpts from a non-published logbook from *Mæðrastyrksnefnd* from the period of 1948–1950 (*Mæðrastyrksnefnd* 1950), with some potentially identifying details changed or omitted. This logbook was the record of the staff's notes about individual clients and which acted as a guide as to what form of aid would be rendered, or if it was to be rendered at all. Despite some of the anachronistic language and references, some of the issues would be very familiar to contemporary charity staff members and social workers. In certain cases, the absence of a male in the home in conjunction with health concerns were seen as key factors: "Single mother with 4 children, has only child support . . . and she is trying to make [fishing] nets at home but she is in very poor health. (She came herself, looks very poorly)" or "Has 2 young children, husband was buried yesterday. Has nothing and is in poor health." However, it was also quite common to see references to households where there was a male present but he seemed to be the primary reason the family unit was in dire circumstances: "Married to drunkard [*óreglumanni*], has 7 children"; "Lives with a drinker. 2 children, 4 and 7 years old – Big need for help. Has received help before"; "Married to a drunkard, 5 young children. A man who lives upstairs says that the situation is extremely bad." However, it is the latter descriptions of the "non-functioning" nuclear family that rarely figured in the external discourses of charities, either in the past or during the context of my research. To do so would broach the barriers of the public/private boundaries of the normative patriarchal home and family, which some scholars of Icelandic culture have argued is a key reason



why local authorities have long been reluctant to become involved in ”domestic issues”, even if they involve violence and abuse (Gurdin 1996). Social welfare programmes, charities and other rehabilitative agents have long targeted the ”abnormal”, whether in reference to families or individual bodies. This uncritically assumes difference to be the inherent problem with little attention paid to the ways in which normativity disempowers and marginalises people – normativity needs to be thoroughly interrogated as the socio-historical artefact of history and power that it is and the role that it plays in social welfare arrangements.

These understandings, though, are also in flux and changing in certain ways. During the time of my fieldwork, *Mæðrastyrksnefnd* altered their mission statement in favour of referring to single parents, rather than single mothers, but also included an emphasis on men as well: ”There is a constant increase in the numbers of those who seek the committee’s help. It is no longer just single mothers but also men, both single and men who have children to support” (*Mæðrastyrksnefnd* 2006). Yet this does little to dislodge the idea of the non-normative family or marital status as a causal factor with regard to poverty in and of itself. There are some indications that there are discourses that do challenge such normative understandings. One research participant corrected how she described herself in an interview. She initially introduced herself to me as a ”single mother” ( *einstæð móðir*) and disability pensioner, but smiled and quickly changed this to ”independent mother” (*sjálfstæð móðir*) – that is, a woman who may still be regarded in terms of parentage, but is an individual in her own right without consideration of a man, or anyone else for that matter. Similarly, a long-standing regressive policy within the Icelandic disability pension system has been recently altered. Pensioners’ income had been calculated in considera-

tion of spousal income, often resulting in serious pension reductions whether or not the individual benefited in any way from this spousal income. Such an arrangement kept many cohabitating pensioners in a state of poverty, dependent upon a spouse and reinforcing the age-old view that disabled people are incompetent, child-like deviants who are unproductive and in need of care, either from that of charity, a state aid agency, or a spouse or family member. Breaking this link restored a sense of dignity and of independence, with implications not only for economic factors but also social status in terms of seeing individual people as living in complex situations and not as labels or abstract categories.

## **Conclusion**

Charitable discourses and practices in many ways illuminate the distributive dilemma that Stone (1984) discusses. However, this dilemma is not adjudicated solely on the basis of disability but is heavily interconnected with the dominant understandings of able-bodiedness and heteronormativity and how these understandings are naturalised and "embedded in complex economic, social and cultural relations" (McRuer 2006:2). I would suggest, inspired by the work being done in Crip Theory, that normativity plays a key role in articulating whose bodies and lives are subject to governance, intervention and rehabilitation and whose are not. The continual reference to the topography of need that charities rely upon to explain their work and solicit for donations draws attention away from the underlying factors that produce and sustain urban poverty in advanced capitalist nations. But it also draws attention away from the normative framework of able-bodiedness and heteronormativity that also influences larger societal discourses and practice. These discourses and practices assume that non-normative bodies, fam-

ilies, or marital statuses are the causal factors in and of themselves regarding socio-economic marginalisation. Rather, consideration needs to be paid to the able-bodied/heteronormative framework which produces the value judgments, assumptions, and negative stereotypes about those whose lives or bodies do not conform to the dominant norms. These views play a large role as well in how people who deviate from these norms – the so-called ”losers” of the current socio-economic order – are perceived and treated in the wider society and how charities play a role in sustaining this regulatory framework despite their mandate of assisting those in need. Charities would do well to consider what they are doing through their discourses and practices in consideration of how these acts strengthen the larger normative framework that informs many of these views and which in turn marginalises and disempowers people in many aspects of their lives.

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## SAMMANFATTNING

Författaren tillämpar cripteori på ett tidigare forskningsprojekt som bestod av en etnografisk studie av en välgörenhetsorganisation i Reykjavík. I sin tidigare analys beskrev han välgörenhet i samtida, välbärgade samhällen som redistributiva agenter som riktar (magra) överskottsresurser mot socioekonomiskt marginaliserade individer. Sådana insatser hjälper på kort tid, men ändrar inte den långsiktiga socioekonomiska situationen för dem som mottar hjälpen. Dessutom kan välgörenhet dölja underliggande strukturella faktorer som skapar och reproducerar socioekonomisk ojämlikhet, och dra uppmärksamheten från underliggande strukturella faktorer som ger upphov till fattigdom i städerna. Den tidigare analysen baserades i första hand på marxistisk teori, men ytterligare forskning och teoristudier har lett författaren till att driva analysen längre utan att fördenskull överge sin ursprungliga historiematerialistiska ståndpunkt.

Välfärdsinrättningar har länge spelat en praktisk och diskursiv roll genom

att definiera olika kategorier av vilka som förtjänar bidrag, men de har också betydelse för hur personer med funktionsnedsättning och andra marginaliserade människor uppfattas och situeras. Historiskt har dessa kategorier bestått av änkor, föräldralösa, sjuka/handikappade och äldre. Under de senaste åren har benämningarna på välgörenhetskategorierna moderniserats men upprätthåller i sak samma funktion av att klassificera en del människor som utsatta, svaga, hjälplösa och förtjänta av understöd, medan andra snarare är lata och bör disciplineras, de s.k. ”oförtjänta fattiga”. Personer med funktionsnedsättningar, och i viss mån ensamstående mödrar, hör till de ”förtjänta fattiga”, ett synsätt som naturaliserar och bibehåller traditionellt nedvärderande och försvagande aspekter av fattigdom, funktionshinder och genusrelationer.

Det har hävdats att funktionsnedsättningar spelar en central roll för att avgöra vilka som bör erhålla välgörenhet och offentligt understöd, och vilka som bör disciplineras in på arbetsmarknaden. Författaren hävdar i denna artikel att denna uppdelning skapas av normativitet snarare än funktionshinder. Ur ett cripteoretiskt perspektiv illustrerar välgörenhet och statliga välfärdsprogram tydligt hur vissa människor kategoriseras som sådana som är värda assistans (eller ingripanden från myndigheterna), men de begränsas inte till enbart funktionshinder. De består av människor som avviker från en normativ förståelse av kroppens, psykets och intellektets funktioner, individens arbetsduglighet (funktionsnedsättning) eller ålder (barn och gamla). Dessutom omfattar kategorin medlemmar i ”ickenormativa”, ”avvikande” eller ”dysfunktionella” familjer. Socialtjänst, välgörenhetsinrättningar och andra agenter som griper in eller arbetar med rehabilitering har länge koncentrerat sig på det ”onormala”, vare sig det handlar om familjer eller individuella kroppar. De förutsätter okritiskt att ”skillnad” är ett inneboende problem, och ser inte hur normaliteten själv gör människor maktlösa och marginaliserade. Normativitet måste studeras som den sociohistoriska och maktfyllda artefakt som det är och vidare forskning måste till för att visa vilken roll den spelar i välfärdssystemen.