

The background of the cover is an abstract painting. It features a complex interplay of colors, including deep purples, blues, reds, and yellows. In the lower half of the image, there are two dark, silhouetted figures that appear to be standing or walking. The overall texture is rough and expressive, with visible brushstrokes and a sense of depth and movement.

ABSENT CITIZENS

Disability Politics and
Policy in Canada

MICHAEL J. PRINCE

ABSENT CITIZENS: DISABILITY POLITICS AND POLICY IN CANADA

Disability exists in the shadows of public awareness and at the periphery of policy making. People with disabilities are, in many respects, missing from the theories and practices of social rights, political participation, employment, and civic membership. *Absent Citizens* brings to light these chronic deficiencies in Canadian society and emphasizes the effects that these omissions have on the lives of citizens with disabilities.

Drawing together elements from feminist studies, political science, public administration, sociology, and urban studies, Michael J. Prince examines mechanisms of exclusion and inclusion, public attitudes on disability, and policy-making processes in the context of disability. *Absent Citizens* also considers social activism and civic engagements by people with disabilities and disability community organizations, highlighting presence rather than absence and advocating both inquiry and action to ameliorate the marginalization of an often overlooked segment of the Canadian population.

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Absent Citizens

Disability Politics and Policy in Canada

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Preface

Struggles over the meaning and practice of citizenship feature in contemporary societies and nowhere more so than for people with mental and physical disabilities. Equality and inclusion are principles evoked by individuals, families, community groups, social movement organizations, and coalitions to legitimate claims for human rights, social acceptance, public participation, and an array of material benefits. Overcoming the marginalization of persons with disabilities requires a politics of cultural recognition, a politics of economic redistribution, and a politics of political representation. All three are essential for advancing toward full citizenship for all members of society. This is the challenge and the promise of disability inquiry and political action.

As a field of inquiry in Canada, studying disability is coming of age. In universities there are now undergraduate and graduate programs in disability studies at Brock, Manitoba, Ryerson, and York, alongside older programs in rehabilitation studies at Calgary, Queen's, and University of British Columbia, among others. There are courses on disability in anthropology, child and family studies, education, geography, law, nursing, political science, sociology, social work, and women's studies. In 2004 the Disability Studies Association was formed by a network of Canadian researchers, advocates, academics, and policy officials. In government agencies at Aboriginal, federal, provincial, territorial, and municipal levels increasing interest in disability is apparent in strategies, organizational reforms, and program developments. As a movement, the disability community is working hard to encourage a new period of innovative social policy development for advancing the citizenship of persons with disabilities.

Disability issues, despite these developments and efforts, have a relatively low profile in Canadian political life. This is not to suggest that disability policy and practice lacks controversy or struggle. Court cases over autism treatments; heated debates over closing (and reopening) institutions of persons with developmental disabilities or mental health challenges; issues over euthanasia, mercy killing, and selective non-treatment; bio-medical techniques of genetic testing for predisposition to impairments; the murder of Tracy Latimer by her father Robert Latimer and his two trials and requests for parole, all illustrate the intense and crucial issues of disability at stake in Canada.¹ All too often, however, such issues are in the shadows of public awareness, on the margins of Canadian politics, and the periphery of policy making. And too often, persons with disabilities are treated as dependents and personal tragedies in schools and work-places or left out altogether from cultural and media representations. Persons with disabilities are, in many respects, missing from the theories and practices of social rights, political participation, employment, and civic membership. They are absent citizens.

A statement on terminology is in order. Kathryn Church and her colleagues (2007) cogently outline some basic conceptual choices and issues involved in this field of

inquiry and action:

People with disabilities? Or disabled people? There are ongoing and unresolved debates about ways to talk about disability. It is common practice to use what is called 'people first' language. This is the result of arguments made by some disability scholars/activists that 'we are people first, and disabled only incidentally.' The strategy here is to use language to dislodge bodily difference, 'impairment' and/or limitation as a 'master status' in defining how people are perceived and treated. We are comfortable with this terminology but we are also aware of arguments made recently by other scholars/activists that 'disability' is not only such a primary but such a valued aspect of identity (and also of social perception) that it is not possible or even advantageous to push it to the periphery. From this perspective 'disabled' does not signify 'damaged' identity. Instead, it is a differently legitimate form of personhood that can be fully incorporated into a valued self. (2)

Mostly I use the expression 'people with disabilities,' the phrase widely used within the Canadian disability movement, recognizing that some authors and advocates, in Canada and especially in the United Kingdom, prefer the term disabled people (Barnes and Mercer 2003; Devlin and Pothier 2006; Titchkosky 2001). Even this brief discussion on terminology indicates the significance of discourse to political activism and citizenship.

Absent Citizens extends the growing body of academic literature in Canada and internationally on disability. It develops from key texts such as Bickenbach (1993) on physical disability and social policy, Rioux and Bach's (1994) collection on new research paradigms on disability, and the analysis by Enns (1999) on the Tracy Latimer case and the general status of people with disabilities as 'voices unheard.' As well, the book builds on the case studies by Boyce and colleagues (2001) on the role of persons with disabilities and their organizations in Canadian policy making processes.

In this book, I also build upon analysis from works by Cameron and Valentine (2001) and Puttee (2002) on federalism, democracy, and disability policy in Canada and other countries, as well as by Enns and Neufeldt (2003) and by Stienstra and Wight-Felske (2003) on advocacy and the pursuit of equality by disability groups in Canada and abroad. Titchkosky (2003a, 2007) has written two significant books, blending theory and everyday experience that consider texts on disability, the embodied self, and society. Other important recent works are by McColl and Jongbloed (2006) on disability and Canadian social policy, Pothier and Devlin (2006) on critical disability theory and their notion of 'dis-citizenship,' Panitch (2007) on how and why mothers with children with disabilities became 'accidental activists' in fighting against exclusion and for human rights, Lord and Hutchison (2007) on pathways to creating an inclusive civil society, and Moss and Teghtsoonian (2008) on processes and practices of contesting illnesses. Many of these works are edited collections spanning a range of topics on disability law, philosophy, meanings of disablement, and issues of service provision.

Another stream of Canadian literature illustrates the narrative form in disability studies. This includes oral histories and stories of men and women's embodied experiences living with blindness, spinal cord injury and other impairments, chronic illness, disease, trauma, psychiatric hospitals and survivors, and community mental health intersecting with age, social class, race, language and place, among other social markers (Capponi 1992; Church 1995; Crooks 2007; Dale-Stone 2007; Doe 2003;

Dossa 2005, 2008; Driedger, Crooks, and Bennett 2004; Driedger and Owen 2008; Krause 2005; Matthews 1983; Michalko 1999, 2002; Moss and Dyck 2002; Overboe 2007; Raoul et al. 2007; Reaume 2000; Shimrat 1997; Titchkosky 2003a; Tremblay, Campbell, and Hudson 2005). In making sense of illness and identity, this body of work acknowledges human agency and gives voice to groups of people marginalized and forgotten. Employing biographical and other research methods, these works underline the capacity of people with disabilities in negotiating notions of self, building networks of support, and resisting governing health and social practices. At times, powerful and heart-wrenching stories of people with disabilities appear in public documents, such as the Senate report on mental health, mental illness, and addiction (Kirby 2006). All such stories, and accompanying analyses, are important in influencing public awareness and social theory, motivating disability movement activism at local and extra local levels, and affecting policy development.

An extensive international literature, particularly American and British, is useful for comparisons and theoretical insights, though not always a close fit with Canadian experiences. Political activism by the Canadian disability movement has garnered some academic attention, mostly from the disability studies field itself, with relatively little analysis from political science or policy studies.

In addition to the literature and documents cited, I draw on my own location and experiences within the Canadian disability community as an academic, consultant, and participant. In relation to the analysis and interpretation of events and issues in this book, I am at times an ‘outsider’ and at other times an ‘insider,’ roles that inevitably overlap creating insights as well as tensions. I am an ‘insider’ in the disability rights movement in that I work closely with key national disability organizations as well as frequently advise federal and provincial levels of Canadian government and Parliament on disability issues and other social policy topics. Since 2004, I have served as a board member of the British Columbia Association of Community Living, a province-wide federation that advocates for children, youth, and adults with developmental disabilities and their families to ensure justice, rights, and opportunities in all areas of their lives. And, I am an ‘outsider’ writing as an academic reflecting on the development and absences of policies and programs. For example, in [chapter 9](#), when discussing key reform ideas put forward by national disability organizations, I was involved in writing some of those action plans and generating some of the reform options.

I am, at present, a non-disabled person, working as an ally, colleague, and friend of people with disabilities and the movement. In that context, I am not a neutral observer. As an outsider, I perform a role as a ‘public intellectual,’ conducting research on policy and social issues of our times, conveying findings through the media and in presentations to community groups, legislative committees, and administrative officials. As an insider, I perhaps perform a role akin to a ‘movement intellectual’ (Haluzá-Delay 2003), an academic working collaboratively with social movement organizations in developing policy plans, designing reforms, and monitoring trends.

Absent Citizens adopts a broad understanding of politics and policy in the Canadian context. As a specialist in social policy, political science, and public administration, and as someone who participates in the Canadian disability movement, I write this book from a sociological and political perspective. Instead of taking a bio-medical or

worthy poor approach, the book focuses on several kinds of disability activism and engagements with the state. It relates disability policy issues and programs to theoretical issues of power, social inequalities, urbanization, and city life. It is perhaps the first book to apply a general political sociology approach to disability issues and disabling processes in Canada. The book offers a multi-dimensional analysis of citizenship, demonstrating in concrete terms what citizenship for people with disabilities can and does mean in practice, including its contested nature. I draw on ideas, theories, and lines of inquiry from feminist research, political science, public administration, social policy, sociology, and urban studies.

This book's contributions are in three areas. First, the book makes the case for greater attention to disability in social theory and research, and the need to link the politics of identity and difference with the politics of social stratification and inequality. As a dimension of social division, disability is usually overlooked in public policy studies and other social science fields. The book also looks at material and symbolic aspects of social stratification. Second, the book adopts a broad conception of citizenship, arguing that who belongs and who does not, on what terms and conditions entails multiple elements and levels: civil, legal, political, economic, and discursive elements of individual and group rights and responsibilities. Third, the book points out how the state constructs roles and orders social relationships through the design and provision of services, rules, and benefits, as well as through attitudinal and built environments in urban life.

My primary purpose in this book is to describe and understand the citizenship of persons with disabilities in contemporary Canada using a political and social policy analysis. Citizenship rights and duties are not above politics; they are embedded within and an expression of politics whether understood as competing claims, interpreting needs, allocating resources, reconciling diverse values, or people relating to one another.

Attention focuses on power relationships, societal trends and inequalities, as well as to viewing persons with disabilities as political actors and the disability community as a political entity in its own right. My focus is on experiences in the Canadian context since the 1980s when disability issues received international and national awareness as a social issue and recognition as a policy field in itself. My objective is to provide an introduction to vital policy issues and political questions of our age that concern the struggles of people living with disabilities.

A related purpose is to contribute to the up-and-coming field of disability studies, a field that is multi-disciplinary in its origins, methodologies, and perspectives. I am guided by socio-political ideas on disability, rather than by a charitable outlook or a bio-medical model of disability. From this perspective, disability is seen as a social issue not a personal trouble or an individual's defect. Disability as a public issue requires individual and community responsibility, social change, policy reforms, and cultural changes. Alongside historical tendencies of medical care, individual treatment, and professional assistance, I emphasize inclusion and self-determination. I further aim to present conceptual ideas and theoretical propositions pertaining to social inclusion, new policy techniques, and innovative approaches to service provision.

Disability studies is part of a larger movement in contemporary societies in which fundamental issues of identities and rights for several groups – Aboriginal peoples,

ethnic groups, women, and members of sexual minorities, among others – are actively debated and in some cases help effect new governance arrangements. In this book, I examine the organizational and political nature of Canada’s disability movement and its relations with the state and social policy. In our age of globalization, the authority of states remains essential to citizenship. Canadian disability groups look to federal and provincial governments, along with city governments, as defenders of human rights, providers of public services, and enablers of social inclusion. In this vein, chapters that follow examine policy and administrative practices, electoral system reforms, revitalized roles for governments, accessible urban public spaces, and a national act for persons with disabilities.

The main political outlook of the disability movement, I suggest, is a version of social liberalism and I outline key features of this perspective, comparing it to the ever-present discourse of neo-liberalism. Without doubt, these two perspectives collide, generating ideological sparks in disability policy making. I also conclude that the Canadian disability community, while a diverse social institution, has forged an agenda of national priorities and achieved some progress in furthering community inclusion.

Absent Citizens will appeal to students and instructors in disability courses and related courses examining identities and social change. Activists, self-advocates, and members of disability organizations and those in other social movements are another intended audience. A third group that should find this book of interest include policy analysts, decision makers, administrators, and practitioners in governments and other public sector bodies committed to tackling exclusion and advancing social inclusion. I share French social theorist Alain Touraine’s belief ‘in the possibility of a collective movement that can enhance the capacity for action on the part of social categories that are dominated but not completely alienated’ (2001: 4), and the vision of Canadian disability activist Jim Derksen that ‘we are helping to awaken humanity to the reality that all people are flawed and yet beautiful, and each one limited in his or her unique way and yet powerful’ (quoted in Driedger 1989: 115).

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Oak Bay

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ABSENT CITIZENS:
DISABILITY POLITICS AND POLICY IN CANADA

Introduction: Disability, Politics, and Citizenship

Approaching disability as a socially significant and politically contested domain, *Absent Citizens* examines citizenship, the state, federalism, and relationships between governments and communities. The general purpose of this book is to investigate the precarious status and practice of citizenship for persons with disabilities in Canadian society. To do so, I consider disability in connection to power relations in and around both state and social institutions. In addition to consideration of the functional limitations and capacities of individuals or their families, an adequate understanding of disability requires consideration of social structures. The major issues of disability are not merely problems of individual capacity or health condition, but rather questions of community commitments or neglects, in short, matters of power relations at many levels and segments of communities. Struggling for ‘full citizenship’ is the paradigmatic form of political action by groups representing persons with physical disabilities, intellectual disabilities, and mental health conditions.

The central argument of the book is that as a social group Canadians with disabilities are absent citizens. Compared to persons without disabilities, persons with disabilities experience significant cultural, material, and political disadvantages. This is evident in higher rates of poverty and unemployment, and inaccessible built environments in towns, suburbs, and cities. Persons with disabilities cope with public ambivalence, in the form of pride and prejudice, as to their needs for inclusive policy actions. They confront persistent barriers to participation in politics, education, the labour market, and other realms of community living. Citizenship is much more than a political concept and legal status, though these too are crucial dimensions. Citizenship entails cultural, economic, and social dimensions. In one or more of these dimensions, many Canadians with disabilities are effectively absent, lacking full enjoyment of liberty of the person, or freedom of expression and communication.

Frequently, Canadians with disabilities struggle to participate as voters, campaign workers, candidates, and elected representatives in democratic processes. Mainstream classrooms and other regular learning opportunities exclude large numbers of children and youth with disabilities. Adults with disabilities wishing to work are unemployed or discouraged altogether from pursuing gainful employment with decent wages in a supportive work setting; others labour in sheltered workshops. Issues around the living conditions of persons with disabilities and their families are recurrently absent from academic disciplines, social theories, and public attitudes. Access to a basic level of essential public services, including adequate income, is a problem for upwards of two million Canadians with disabilities across all age groups and types of impairments (Canada 2006; Statistics Canada 2002, 2007). As a consequence, most persons with disabilities in Canada do not experience full substantive citizenship (Bonnnett 2003; Lord and Hutchison 2007; Rioux and Valentine 2006); they do not, in the words of T.H. Marshall (1964: 74), ‘live the life of a civilised being according to the standards prevailing in the society.’

So, how does the general public understand disability? What are the attitudes of Canadians toward the adequacy of social programs and the distribution of responsibilities for meeting needs and advancing the inclusion of citizens with disabilities? How does existing theory and social science research treat disability as a dimension in Canadian urban society? Where is the Canadian state in the distribution of social inclusions and exclusions? How do public programs structure the status of people with disabilities? What kinds of politics do people with disabilities and organizations of the disability community practise? What does political representation and community engagement mean? What are the implications for citizenship of neo-liberalism and its main alternative in Canada, social liberalism? These are basic questions for understanding the uncertain status of persons with disabilities in this country. This introduction sets out the analytical foundation and main concepts of the book – disability and inclusion; political struggles for recognition, redistribution, and representation; and, enabling citizenship. Given the centrality of citizenship in theory and in politics, the introduction describes five elements of citizenship as they relate to disability.

Disability Perspectives: Contesting Identity and Inclusion

With many diagnoses, experiences, and meanings, disability is the subject of assorted perspectives, interests, and debates. [Table 1](#) lists no less than a dozen different ways of understanding disability, touching on attitudinal outlooks, personal and societal aspects, political dimensions, and policy perspectives. A functional view of disability, represented in personal and professional assessments of having difficulty with daily living activities or having a physical or mental condition or a health problem that reduces the kind of activity that an individual can do is a dominant perspective of disability. Such difficulties and limitations prevent or restrict a person's ability to participate fully in society. This is the conventional Canadian definition of who is a person with a disability and what makes him or her disabled. It is rooted in biological and medical ways of understanding disablements (Jennissen, Prince, and Schwartz 2000). The Canadian Human Rights Act, for example, defines disability as any previous or existing mental or physical disability and includes disfigurement. Previous or existing dependence on alcohol or a drug is also included in this statutory definition of disability. Other federal and provincial laws define disability in terms of a range of impairments: physical, sensory, neurological, learning, intellectual or developmental, psychiatric or mental disorder. In this context, disability is a thing – whether temporary or permanent, stable or episodic, mild or severe – that is located in the person.

A second perspective is the social rights or the socio-political model in the disability studies literature. Here, disability is part of the fabric of Canadian society, something that all individuals experience in one way or another and from which everyone can learn (Titchkosky 2003a). Attention focuses especially to attitudes, beliefs, body identities, and social values, as well as to issues of human rights, prejudice, and stigma. Moreover, disability is an assemblage of socio-economic, cultural, and

political disadvantages resulting from an individual's exclusion by society. Disability exists or occurs when a person with impairment encounters barriers to performing everyday activities of living, barriers to participating in the societal mainstream, and or barriers to exercising his or her human rights and fundamental freedoms. Here, disability is understood as a social process more than as some individual condition.

Work in recent decades by the World Health Organization conceptualizes disability as the relationship between body structures and functions, daily activities and social participation, and environmental factors. Today, most Canadian policy related disability research tends to interpret disability in this way. For instance, Catherine Frazee, Joan Gilmour, and Roxanne Mykitiuk (2006: 226) see disability as 'embracing both the politics of social and cultural disablement and the material reality of embodied impairment.' Whether at the level of the individual, family, group, or social movement, the nature of disability is neither a fixed nor a uniform phenomenon. This observation immediately admits realities of diversity, changes, and contradictions. Through different claims of experiences and different types of knowledge, disability is socially constructed, administratively negotiated, and politically contested. Far from being a monolithic entity, disability is a multi-dimensional set of differential life experiences ignored or responded to in various imperfect ways in particular contexts. Following those in the disability movement, I adopt a position that views disability as part of human diversity and the general human condition, and as an environmental outcome, a social consequence of actions and inactions, more than a personal condition (Enns and Neufeldt 2003).

Table 1

What is disability?

- Bio-medical conditions, functional restrictions, and individual impairments
- Personal misfortunes, bad luck, and tragedy
- Objects of pity and charity and/or fear and dread
- Phenomenon that many people believe affects only a small minority of a population
- Legal concepts in Canadian constitution, legislation, regulations, and court decisions
- Formal administrative categories in program design and delivery systems
- Historically layered and fragmented policy field of divergent programs and practices
- Research areas across various disciplines and professions
- Market sector for business activities and transactions
- Social construct of cultural, societal, and economic factors and relationships
- Issues of social oppression, power(lessness), and political will
- Community movement of actors, service groups, advocacy coalitions, and associations

A significant disjuncture exists between this socio-cultural perspective and much of Canadian public policy and service provision. Most programs and delivery systems embody aspects of other perspectives on disability: a bio-medical, charitable, and worthy poor welfare viewpoint (Lord and Hutchison 2007; Rioux and Prince 2002; Valentine and Vickers 1996). Traditionally, and still today, most public policy on

disability focuses on a person's functional limitations due to disease, injury, or chronic illness as the cause or a major explanation for relatively low levels of formal educational attainment, employment, and income. An image of people with disabilities still common is of a person who suffers from an affliction, accidental or biological, thus to be pitied or feared. 'There are times when nondisabled people "see us" and take this opportunity to "thank" God that they are not like us' (Michalko 2002: 165). Disability politics is about choices over whether the priority in policy and practice should relate to body structures and functions, daily activities and social activities, or environmental and cultural factors requiring adaptation and transformation.

Federal, provincial/territorial, and local governments are slowly reorienting their conceptions of disability and the place of people with disabilities in Canadian society. Everyday language, terminology in legislation, and the conceptual underpinnings of public policy receive considerable attention by disability advocates, their organizations, and government decision makers (Titchkosky 2007). Disability offices issue guidelines to educate the public and media on the use of terms about people with disabilities that are respectful and descriptive. As recently as 2007, provincial laws contained such terms as 'idiot' and 'moron' to describe people with mental health conditions. Law reforms can modernize language as well as legislation of concern to Canadians with disabilities. Such reforms represent a reordering of the symbolic fabric of citizenship.

As cultural scripts, policy documents communicate certain values, cast specific roles, and convey particular models of people and communities. Over the last generation, governmental and disability organization papers have adopted citizenship as the central organizing principle and benchmark in policy advocacy, analysis, and agreements. For example, federal, provincial, and territorial ministers responsible for social services released in 1998, a policy framework for disabilities. *In Unison: A Canadian Approach to Disability Issues* is the first substantial consensus among governments, except the government of Quebec, on a national vision for disability policy. The shared vision states:

Persons with disabilities participate as full citizens in all aspects of Canadian society. The full participation of persons with disabilities requires the commitment of all sectors of society. The realization of the vision will allow persons with disabilities to maximize their independence and enhance their well-being through access to required supports and the elimination of barriers that prevent their full participation. (Canada 1998: 1)

The vision embraces values of equality, inclusion, and independence, plus the principles of rights and responsibilities, empowerment, and participation. At a rhetorical level, these are the dominant ideas in disability policy and politics. These ideas concern individual liberty (self-determination and competence), stability in social relations (the critical issue of managing stable transitions across life stages), equality and inclusion (citizenship), as well as equity and fairness (reasonable accommodation, among other practices). [Table 2](#) shows the planned changes in approach to disability issues endorsed by Canadian governments.

These desired changes promise a notable shift for disability policy and practice. Within and across political jurisdictions, changes along these lines are in varying states of amendment and transformation. The most progress to date in policy directions is in

emphasizing the employability of working age persons with disabilities. Linked to that, is the intended shift in the portrayal of Canadians with disabilities as independent participants endowed with skills and experiences. Nonetheless, tensions between the old and new approaches remain a basic problematic in advancing progressive changes in disability policy and practice.

Contending understandings of inclusion are a key feature of contemporary disability politics and policy. The concept of ‘social inclusion’ is a rhetorical device of the movement to mobilize collective action; it is a desired state of community affairs suggesting the absence of barriers and discrimination, purportedly endorsed by governments; and it is an idea with which disability groups organize their mandates and represent their activities and tactics. For all these reasons, inclusion is an idea that merits critical reflection to illuminate assumptions and power relations.

Table 2
Canadian government planned changes in approaches to disability issues

Old	New
Recipients	Participants
Passive income support	Active measures to promote employment in addition to providing necessary income support
Dependence	Independence
Government responsibility	Shared responsibility
Labelled as unemployable	Work skills identified
Disincentives to leave income support	Incentives to seek employment and volunteer opportunities
Insufficient employment supports	Opportunities to develop skills and experience
Program-centred approach	Person-centred approach
Insufficient portability of benefits and services	Portable benefits and services
Multiple access requirements	Integrated access requirements

Source: Canada. (1998). *In Unison: A Canadian Approach to Disability Issues*. Report by the Federal/Provincial/Territorial Ministers Responsible for Social Services. Ottawa: Supply and Services Canada.

Marcia Rioux and Fraser Valentine (2006) argue that a basic contradiction exists between the vision of inclusion as held by governments and the vision understood by disability groups. Canadian governments, Rioux and Valentine suggest, downplay a rights-based approach to inclusion and citizenship; instead, governments emphasize selective services, discretionary programs, and, through social insurance contributions, earned benefits. For some time now, governments have stressed spending limitations, viewing public programs as expensive responses to social needs. Their preference is to promote social partnerships, which means other sectors of society are to play a significant role in tackling obstacles to participation. Most government activities and

programming emphasize bio-medical and functional approaches to disability. Whereas governments interpret inclusion in terms of equality of opportunity, Rioux and Valentine argue that most Canadian disability groups emphasize equality of treatment and a human rights approach.

Disability groups appreciate the importance of social partnerships, but look to governments to play a strong leadership role in tackling exclusions. Public expenditures in the form of general entitlements, the disability movement regards as essential investments in advancing access and equality. The preferred approach to disability, by the community, is to socio-political and environmental approaches. This difference between disability groups and governments in interpreting what inclusion means 'creates a circle of tension and confusion' (Rioux and Valentine 2006: 48), resulting in inconsistent messages, inadequate processes for dialogue, and an incoherent policy context.

Analytical Approach: Critical Policy and Institutional Studies

Critical policy studies (Orsini and Smith 2007a; Rioux and Prince 2002; Wharf 1992) and an institutional approach (Coleman and Skogstad 1990; Rice and Prince 2000) inform my methodological approach. *Absent Citizens* examines a non-traditional domain of policy and a set of issues not given a central place in political science or public administration studies. Further, the book is about a social group still largely excluded from the governance structures and processes of policy making in Canada. Critical policy studies is an informative perspective for disability studies because of the explicit connection between power, politics, and social life; the location of individuals, families, and groups within larger societal contexts; and a consideration of the interplay in agency and capacity between actors and structures. Unlike some works in political sociology that focus on elites and those with considerable authority and influence, I focus on the marginal and the forgotten, those with relatively little in society (Tyjewski 2006; Wilton 2006). Among other qualities, having a critical perspective 'means being able to see beyond the status quo, looking beyond symptoms and labels, seeing the reality of people's situations, and understanding how they are linked to attitudes, policies, and systems' (Lord and Hutchison 2007: 14). Accordingly, I endeavour to present some of the perspectives and concerns of persons with physical disabilities and mental disabilities, and to indicate how different social markers of identity intersect (Orsini and Smith 2007b).

Drawing on concepts from several academic disciplines, my analysis focuses on power relations in and between societal and state institutions as important factors in shaping policy and practice. In regard to the politicization of citizenship, I consider the role of neo-liberalism and its interplay with social liberalism, and in addressing the theme of citizens and democracy, I examine the issues of civic engagement by individuals; rights, litigation, and the courts; and modes of representation by organized interests in the disability community. On the themes of difference, discourse, and knowledge, I look at disability mainstreaming, the significance of public attitudes toward inclusion and access, and the production of policy related research. In *Absent*

Citizens, I examine the ‘official public sphere’ of politics as well as the ‘unofficial community sphere’ of politics to capture a wider range of citizenship practices and issues. Throughout, I take issue with key concepts such as citizenship, inclusion, and disability. In Canada, the state and society are institutions with contradictory effects for the status of persons with disabilities.

***Disability Politics in Canada:
Recognition, Redistribution, Representation***

Canadian disability politics plays out through struggles over absences and actions constituted by cultural, economic, and political structures. The main contours of disability activism concern the pursuit of respectful inclusion, adequate social security, and an authentic democratic voice. Contrary to some analyses, contemporary disability politics in Canada has not marked a shift from a politics of socio-economic redistribution toward a politics of cultural recognition to the point of actually displacing redistribution as the goal of political struggle (Fraser 1989, 2000). Other commentators, following on the work of Ronald Inglehart across several countries, describe a long-term shift in political values from materialist concerns of economic security and personal safety to post-materialist concerns of identity, belonging, esteem, and dignity. This proposition is too simplistic an interpretation of new social movements in Canadian politics (James 2006; Mulvale 2001).

While disability theorists and activists understand disability as an identity in group terms, they conceptualize disability as a social construction, a concept more nuanced in content and wider in scope than a cultural construction of identity. For understanding the matrix of oppressions and opportunities, the social construction approach by design forges close linkages to political and economic structures. As well, while disability theorists and activists are attentive to discursive aspects of disability, they emphasize material dimensions of struggles for justice and equality. Likewise, the framework on disability issues formulated by federal, provincial, and territorial governments, discussed earlier, highlights problems of employment, personal supports, and income benefits for Canadians with disabilities.

In contemporary Canada, issues of recognition and of redistribution are central features of activism by the disability movement and analysis by disability studies. Claims-making by the movement includes a politics of representation that encompasses traditional concerns of citizen participation and voting, and, more recently, the practices of deliberative democracy and community dialogue (Laforest and Phillips 2007). Overall, Canadian disability politics comprises three forms of struggle for social change and justice: the comparatively new politics of cultural recognition and identity interacting with the long-established politics of redistribution of material goods, and a politics of representation that combines conventional and alternative modes of decision making.

Analytically, these three forms of political struggle correspond to distinct institutional domains: the politics of recognition to the cultural order of society, the politics of redistribution to the market economy and welfare state, and the politics of