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Growing Disability Studies - A Special Issue of Disability Studies Quarterly

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By Elizabeth Lewis

[Disability Studies Quarterly](#) (DSQ) recently published a special issue examining the present state and future possibilities of disability studies. In their introduction, "[Growing Disability Studies: Politics of Access, Politics of Collaboration](#)," guest editors [Michelle Jarman](#) and [Alison Kafer](#), explain:

How does one—how do we—grow a field? In developing this special issue, we invited contributors to share answers to that question; we asked them, in other words, to reflect upon, to grapple with, and to imagine possible futures of the field. As their responses attest, considering where and how the field may grow requires wrestling with the past, acknowledging the gaps, tensions, and possibilities of the present, and articulating critical questions for future field development. Part of that work is an acknowledgement that the field is, in fact, already growing: in recent years we have witnessed the development of new programs, an increased demand for courses at the undergraduate and graduate levels, an expansion in online offerings, a rapid proliferation of disability studies publications, and wider recognition of disability studies as a field.

What does it mean to grow disability studies, whether through interdisciplinary efforts to bring disability into classroom discussions and curricula or in the form of standalone research institutes and academic programs? What might the future hold in terms of theory, practice, collaborations, and institutional frameworks?

This issue of DSQ consists of three thematic areas: "Shifts," "Energies," and "Locations." "Shifts" centers on themes of gaps, ruptures, contestations, and openings in disability studies. It includes the following three articles, with original abstracts.

[On Being Transminded: Disabling Achievement, Enabling Exchange](#)

Anne Dalke and Clare Mullaney

We write collaboratively, as a recent graduate and long-time faculty member of a small women's liberal arts college, about the mental

health costs of adhering to a feminist narrative of achievement that insists upon independence and resiliency. As we explore the destabilizing potential of an alternative feminist project, one that invites different temporalities in which dis/ability emerges and may be addressed, we work with disability less as an identity than as a generative methodology, a form of relation and exchange. Mapping our own college as a specific, local site for the disabling tradition of “challenging women,” we move to larger disciplinary and undisciplining questions about the stigma of mental disabilities, traversing the tensions between institutionalizing disability studies and the field’s promise of destabilizing the constrictions of normativity.

[Thinking with Disability Studies](#)

Nirmala Erevelles

In this essay, I offer tentative ruminations about the possibilities/challenges of theory and praxis in the field of disability studies. I begin the essay by thinking through my own positionality as a non-disabled woman of color scholar/ally in the field. Cautiously situating myself in a location of outsider-within (Hill-Collins, 1998), I explore how disability studies is disruptive of any boundaries that claim to police distinctions between disabled/non-disabled subject positions. Noting the dangers of claiming that everyone is disabled at some historical moment, I propose instead a relational analysis to engage the materiality of disability at the intersections of race, class, gender, nation, and sexual identity within specific historical contexts and discuss the complicated impasses that continue to plague disability studies at these intersections. I conclude the essay by recognizing the labor of scholar/activists in the field who call for a committed politics of accountability and access via disability justice.

[Transnationalising Disability Studies: Rights, Justice and Impairment](#)

Karen Soldatic and Shaun Grech

In this paper we aim to explore the realm of impairment in terms of its politicization under transnational claims for justice. The realm of disability rights and justice has been a central theme in disability analytical inquiry and by disability movement actors engaged in struggles of disability affirmative politics. Within this frame, there has been an increasing amount of disability scholarship and activism at the transnational sphere. In fact, since the ratification of the UNCRPD (2006) greater transnational alliances have become

a central feature to advancing disability affirmative claims for rights and justice. While welcomed, we argue that within the transnational realm, the focus on disability alone critically marginalizes those groups engaging in repertoires of action within the *logos* of impairment as transnational claims for disability justice tend to naturalise impairment and negate the production of impairment under global structural processes of violence. To address this issue, we suggest that the growing scholarship on transnational theorizing and activism within disability needs to respond to these claims for justice and rights. To conclude we argue that transnational theorizing and praxis is in fact, a *double move* – an affirmative politics of disability rights and justice and a transformative politics of impairment.

The second section, “Energies,” is devoted to what the editors call a “radical politics of collaboration,” and includes the following pieces.

[Growing Rhizomatically: Disability Studies, the Art Gallery and the Consortium](#)

Kristin Anne Lindgren, Amanda Cachia, and Kelly C. George

In this essay, we propose that the Deleuzoguattarian rhizome offers a map and metaphor for the field of disability studies, especially as it develops outside the boundaries of a defined program or curriculum. As an example of rhizomatic growth, we discuss a series of events in the Philadelphia area in fall 2012 that focused on disability studies and disability arts and culture, including an art exhibition entitled *What Can A Body Do?* and a scholarly residency sponsored by the Greater Philadelphia Women’s Studies Consortium. We suggest that the art gallery offers a generative space for the growth of disability studies, disability aesthetics, and new models of access, and we emphasize the importance of cross-institutional collaboration in the development of disability studies not only as a field but as a *field of energy*.

[Collision and Collusion: Artists, Academics, and Activists in Dialogue with the University of California and Critical Disability Studies](#)

Catherine Kudlick and Susan Schweik

This essay recounts two interconnected collaborative disability studies projects. Because of every person’s complex relationship to their own embodiment and that of others, disability beckons us to a realm beyond abstraction, even as the field becomes ever

more theoretical. We describe how disability shaped what we did and how we did it; description is a key term here. Conversations such as the ones we had in 2010 and 2012 pave the way for new ideas by offering concrete examples of disability as a generative force. Through risk taking and creative practice, the best academics and artists challenge the status quo, maybe serving as translators for people not in the habit of giving disability or disabled people much thought. The more people come to associate disability with positive ideas, the more we can imagine changing those hardwired negative, pitying forces that dominate approaches to policy, practices, and encounters in daily life.

[Disability Is a Feminist Issue: Bringing Together Women's and Gender Studies and Disability Studies](#)

Alison Piepmeier, Amber Cantrell, and Ashley Maggio

This paper tracks a series of conversations between a women's and gender studies professor and two of her undergraduate students, all of whom are interested in disability studies. We explore the links between disability and feminism, and to think through the possibilities of having disability studies become part of the academy. Our primarily positive interactions with the academic institution and our interest in disability studies has led to our argument that disability is in fact a feminist issue. Disability studies has allowed each of us to re-conceptualize our own relationships to feminist theory, and shaped our ability to envision a better academic environment for all students.

["It'll Grow Organically and Naturally": The Reciprocal Relationship between Student Groups and Disability Studies on College Campuses](#)

Allegra Stout and Ariel Schwartz

Although few colleges and universities offer undergraduate disability studies curricula, our own experiences suggest that higher education settings provide opportunities for students to engage with and act upon disability studies theories and concepts. To learn more about the interactions between undergraduate student groups and disability studies, we interviewed students and faculty on three campuses. We found that students not only access disability studies theory through both formal and informal means, but that they also actively engage with it to develop their understandings of disability and interpret their experiences. Additionally, student groups educate their campus communities by advocating for the inclusion of disability studies in curricula, sharing

their perspectives in the classroom, and hosting events related to disability studies. Through these activities, often in collaboration with faculty and staff, students forge reciprocal relationships between their activism and the field of disability studies.

The final section of the special issue, "Locations," examines some of the diverse trajectories within disability studies thus far. It includes the following five articles, with abstracts.

[The Story of My Work: How I Became Disabled](#)

Rosemarie Garland-Thomson

Perhaps the best opening line in disability studies comes from Georgina Kleege: "Writing this book made me blind." Following this honorable tradition, I begin my explication of disability studies through my own experience with a similar starting point: "Feminism made me disabled." Honoring as well the tradition of making theory through narrative, I also follow Helen Keller, who like Kleege situates her knowledge in the local. From these exemplary works of feminist disability studies, I develop an explication of how I grew disability studies and how it grew me. Throughout, I consider the categories of *disabled* and *nondisabled* and the ways in which they have developed in disability studies literature broadly. I conclude by asserting the importance of both access and identity and community for disabled people.

[A Persian Alice in Disability Literature Wonderland: Disability Studies in Iran](#)

Negin H. Goodrich

Exploring major requisites to establish an Iranian disability studies, the aim of this study is to determine how a local literature of disability can be formed in Iran, as well as how the Iranian and global disability studies might interchange disability knowledge. In an analysis of the responses to a qualitative questionnaire, three themes emerged: rudimentary resources, disability literature, and political prerequisites. Accordingly, human and financial resources, a bank of Farsi and English literature on disability, as well as developing academic relations between Iranian and international disability scholars (as an outcome of improving the Iran-USA political affairs) are essential to form a local disability studies in Iran and to engage it in the global discussions of disability studies.

[Subversive Status: Disability Studies in Germany, Austria, and Switzerland](#)

Lisa Pfahl and Justin J.W. Powell

What activities facilitate the development of disability studies (DS)? What barriers hinder its (multi)disciplinary flourishing? We address these questions focusing on contemporary DS in Germany, Austria, and Switzerland—vibrant but challenging locales for DS. This multidisciplinary field engages intellectuals, activists, and stakeholders to subversively cross disciplinary, institutional, and political divides. Critical DS scholarship relies on collaboration among members of the disability (rights) movement, advocates, and academics to develop its subversive status. Within the academy, despite general barriers to transdisciplinary fields of study and persistent disability discrimination, more positions have been devoted to research and teaching in DS. Intersectionality debates thrive and further disciplines discover the richness that the complex subject of dis/ability offers. The field, recognizing its subversive status and engaging insights from DS worldwide—across language and disciplinary boundaries—could better focus and unfold its critical powers. The potential of DS in the German-speaking countries continues to grow, with diverse conferences, teaching, and publications bolstering the exchange of ideas.

[The Disability Studies in Education Annual Conference: Explorations of Working Within, and Against, Special Education](#)*David Connor*

This article focuses on the Disability Studies in Education (DSE) conference as an example of expanding disability studies (DS). First, the origins, purpose, and history of the DSE conference are described as a valid alternative discipline to special education. Second, the following three questions are posed in relation to DSE scholars: (1) To what degree can we transgress within existing structures of teacher education and doctoral programs without being provided lip-service, coopted, or dismissed as ideological versus practical? (2) To what degree can we engage (and critique) the field of special education within its journals and conferences—and provide a greater plurality of perspectives within them? And, (3) how can we strategize to widely circulate ideas within DSE throughout education and its related fields? Presentations from the 2012 DSE conference are analyzed, described, and used as a collective response to help answer these questions. Fourth, DSE scholars share post-conference thoughts on the future of DSE. Finally, the deep debt of DSE to DS is

acknowledged, along with speculation about possible ways in which DSE may help inform the growth of DS.

[The View from DSQ](#)

Elizabeth Brewer and Brenda Jo Brueggemann

Analysis of publications in *Disability Studies Quarterly* between 2000-2012. Data and discussion concerning: the number of articles published; the number of articles collaboratively (or individually) authored; the kind and range of fields/disciplines that *DSQ*-published authors work in; the kind and range of methodologies generating *DSQ*-published research; the key terms for *DSQ* publications during this 13-year period (focusing both on titles and keywords). Conclusion summarizes trends and key points from the analysis and suggests a few points of further engagement for the future of Disability Studies.

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