

# 4

## Ableist Colonizations

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### *Reframing Disability Studies in Multicultural Studies*

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A “Whites Only” sign over a public bathroom door today would elicit outrage and a possible lawsuit, yet everywhere there are signs that read, “Ablebodied People Only.” They may not actually be there—if you consider yourself ablebodied, it’s quite likely that you do not see them—but that is due to the situational blindness that comes from being temporarily ablebodied.<sup>1</sup> However, if you use a scooter or a wheelchair, if you rely on a service dog to get around, if you are sight impaired and there is no Braille signage outside the restroom door, if you are a little person and want a place to hang your bag, then you have just been segregated as effectively as if that sign were there. Many so-called “handicap accessible” bathrooms are anything but—too cramped for people to transfer out of wheelchairs, too narrow to accommodate scooters, too small to accommodate a human or canine aide, too difficult to use for people with amputations. More than 20 years after the passage of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), accessibility is still largely an ideal for many people with disabilities; there are an overwhelming number of public places in which spatial segregation occurs with disheartening regularity, and this is worth considering, since place has ideological implications.

Rejecting empiricism and rationalism, early 20th-century philosophers like Edmund Husserl and Martin Heidegger gave both place and embodiment a new focus with the development of phenomenology, which considers the intersections of phenomena, perception, intentionality, and an awareness of the body. Three decades later, in *Phenomenology of Perception* (published in French in 1945 and translated into English in 1962), Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1962) more fully and explicitly theorized the role of the body in terms both of perception and intentionality, arguing that “it is the body which ‘understands’” (p. 144). In other words, it is only through one’s body that one is definitely in contact with reality. Therefore, it is through one’s bodily relationship with the world that meaning is, for the most part, established. For Merleau-Ponty, then, embodiment structures our understanding and experience of and in the world in concrete and literal ways; disembodied perception would literally be unthinkable for him.

Building upon earlier phenomenological theories and especially on Merleau-Ponty’s focus on how the body structures knowledge and perception, Edward Casey (1993) has developed, in *Getting Back Into Place*, the concept of what he calls “implacement” to emphasize not time or space but *place* in our capacity to perceive the world around us and, further, the ways in which place contributes to the development of community and to patterns for inclusion (and, by extension, though he does not develop this in his work, patterns for exclusion). Implacement means “being concretely placed” in a particular place, and this particularity “determines not only *where* I am . . . but *how* I am together with others . . . and even *who* we shall become together” (Casey, 1993, p. 23). Casey (1993) argues that “There is no knowing or sensing a place except by being in that place” (p. 18) and, further, that “built places return us, immeasurably enriched, to the same implacement. . . . All of these [homes, gardens, cities] are distinctive world places that offer ways into a continually enriched implacement” (pp. 78–81). Though his work has faced various critiques,<sup>2</sup> his arguments are nonetheless compelling and, I believe, persuasive, and if place in fact has such far-reaching psychological, phenomenological, and cultural consequences, then it means that exclusion from place(s) can diminish our lives in profound ways.<sup>3</sup>

This is true for all of us and not just for people with disabilities. Referencing Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick’s work in queer theory, Rosemary Garland Thomson (1997) argues that we need to use a universalizing rather than minoritizing view of difference in understanding disability, one in which disability “would then be recognized as structuring a wide range of thought, language, and perception that might not be explicitly articulated as ‘disability’” (p. 22) instead of seeing disability primarily as affecting only a

minority of people. Disability informs and is informed by cultural notions of success, of independence, of time, of productivity—and of place. In her essay “Out of Line: The Sexy Femmegimp Politics of Flaunting It,” Loree Erickson (2010) recalls a situation when a fellow bus rider grumbles about her “taking up too much space” while they’re waiting for a bus, shooting angry looks at her wheelchair. As she observes, “the idea that people take up ‘too much space’ underscores the notion that some people are worthy of occupying space and others are not—and is reminiscent of other sociohistorical practices of isolation and segregation” (p. 136).

In multicultural studies, where we work so hard to consider how race, ethnicity, age, gender, sexual orientation, and religion might shape one’s place in the world—one’s opportunities to speak and be heard, to be present in communities, to be respected and be equal—it is imperative that disability be considered and integrated into our work. Otherwise, we arguably participate in a kind of ableist colonization of people with disabilities by excluding or negating their voices, concerns, and contributions. Clearly, we cannot truly be inclusive if our built environment excludes a critical part of our population. Yet, as Michael Davidson (2006) points out, though universal design offers one means by which to make buildings more accessible, the very concept of universal design itself “remains largely a first world concept rather than a global reality” (p. 126); if in the United States the ADA has failed to create the kind of access we once dreamed of, that is even more true in developing countries, in poor regions in the United States, and for certain underserved populations facing different kinds of discrimination.<sup>4</sup> That’s one reason why multicultural studies needs to take an interest in built environment issues, in place and access or lack of access to places. Place is imbued with cultural values about who matters and who does not, about how we do and don’t value voices, about how we define diversity and accept or reject perceived differences.

Clearly, then, one objective in multicultural studies might be to foster awareness of the ways in which built environments create, reinforce, and potentially challenge broader cultural values. But we also need to consider the curricular *position* of disability studies in multicultural studies. Though most current multicultural studies textbooks address intersectional identities, considering class, race, religion, ethnicity, age, sexual orientation—and though more are beginning to include disability as one such identity category—disability is still too often the poor cousin consigned to the curricular corner. One or two essays that reference disability studies or one short stand-alone chapter in a textbook are not enough. We need to try to consider disability in every aspect in all of our discussions about embodiment, colonization, sexuality, and access to power.

A foundational argument in disability studies is that disability is a cultural construct and that “knowledge about disability is socially produced” (Linton, 1998, p. 4). In the early 1990s, when the field was beginning to take shape, many scholars (the majority of whom were at that point in the humanities) began with analyses of disability in literature and film to better understand how depictions of disability frame a wide variety of cultural concerns while inscribing disability itself in particular, often negatively stigmatized ways so that having a disability was (and still unfortunately often is) colored by shame and an experience of self as deficient. Joan Tollifson (1997) tells the story of reclaiming selfhood by embracing her disability and rejecting the internalized prejudices that encouraged her to equate disability with lack, but she also concedes that “Being disabled is a deep wound, a source of pain. . . . Life is the way it is, not the way we wish it was, and disability is a constant embodiment of this basic truth” (p. 110). Coming at this from a different perspective, Virginia Blum (2003), in *Flesh Wounds: The Culture of Cosmetic Surgery*, analyzes how a cultural imperative of physical beauty has been fostered by the cosmetic surgery industry and cites one craniofacial surgeon who says of a “disfigured” infant that surgery may not make a “bizarre” or “hideous” child cute but may make it “more normal in appearance” (p. 121). Another surgeon she interviews is more brutal: “You turn monsters into very ugly. Is it worth it? Sometimes I think a bump on the head at birth may be the answer.” This surgeon’s comment reminds us that a eugenics based on ableism has deep historical roots in the United States, where even today, so-called selective abortion based on the perceived disabilities of fetuses is accepted by many—often even those who identify as “pro-life.”<sup>5</sup>

Though all identity categories carry ideological meanings, “disability bears the onus of a permanent biological condition such as race and gender from which the individual cannot extricate him- or herself. . . . This equation of . . . disability with social identity creates a tautological link between biology and self (imagined or real) that cannot be unmoored” (Mitchell & Snyder, 1997, p. 3). Analyzing and, in some cases, revising or rejecting that tautological link and deconstructing an ablebodied/disabled binary became the focus for many in disability studies as we began to rethink the dichotomous nature of that binary in terms of an array of issues: autonomy, competence, wholeness, dependence, health, physical appearance, and notions of progress and perfection. Seeking to complicate the intersections of identity politics and embodiment, we have borrowed from feminist, queer, postcolonial, and race theories. At the center of the field is a belief that the cultural and ideological work of disability is pervasive; though it may seem marginal, even invisible as in the example of public restrooms with which I open this essay, disability has historically done the important cultural work of defining

a “norm,” situating and stigmatizing disabled bodies metaphorically and literally as markers of sin, criminality, and moral deviance.<sup>6</sup> More recently, in the 20th and 21st centuries, disability has been understood within a medical paradigm—seen as a “problem” to be fixed or cured through medical, surgical, or pharmaceutical intervention. Disability has been and continues to be equated with social identity and is used as a mechanism to organize *both* personal and public experience. As Tobin Siebers (2008) notes, “The politics of identity . . . are not about narrow personal claims, resentment, or narcissistic feelings. Rather, they are based on insights about how communities are organized” (p. 83). Disability studies demands that we take into account the truths behind the idea that “the personal is the political” while not simply individuating experiences of disabilities. In sum, disability has a cultural, discursive, sociopolitical, and literary context, and in failing to consider that context in multicultural studies, we fall short in our important work of understanding ourselves and others.

I want to turn from the general to the more particular here by way of something that occurred on my campus. Many of us working in disability studies realize that on university campuses (and perhaps in society more generally), “disability” is still strongly linked in the collective imagination to special education, physical therapy, medicine, and nursing. On my campus, we added a President’s Commission on Disability Issues to a trinity of other commissions (on the status of women; on race and ethnicity; on LGBTQI issues) 2 years ago; its mission is to “create a campus environment and climate that is free of barriers and discrimination to empower people with disabilities to be full participants in all facets of university life [and to work] toward an understanding and appreciation of disability within and among our administration, faculty, staff and students” (President’s Commission on Disability Issues, 2009). During the fall 2010 semester, the President’s Commission on Disability Issues<sup>7</sup> considered showing *Sound and Fury—Six Years Later* (Aronson, 2000), a documentary about a Deaf girl in a Deaf family<sup>8</sup> whose parents succumb to familial pressure to get their daughter a cochlear implant, as the inaugural event that would introduce the campus community to the newly organized commission and begin educating people on disability issues by asking them to recognize and begin “unpacking” their own potential ableist biases. However, the film uncomplicatedly celebrates cochlear implants without at all considering how a medical paradigm for “fixing” deafness reinforces ableist biases (an example of understanding disability within a medical paradigm). Yet this was one of the films the commission considered showing. Discussions among commission members about the movie’s ableist biases were evocative and interesting, and we ultimately made a different choice, but that those biases were largely invisible,

even for members of a commission dedicated to education and advocacy on disability issues, speaks volumes about how difficult it can be to even discern, much less deconstruct, the functions and “invisibility” of ableism.

One way to understand how cultural values can be so widely held yet still somehow invisible is to turn to the theories of Marxist theorist Louis Althusser (1971). Althusser complicates Marx’s concept of false consciousness (though Marx himself never used this phrase), in which the bourgeoisie misrepresent the reality that the workers are exploited, a theory Marx used to explain how and why oppressed populations do not rebel against their oppressors.<sup>9</sup> Essentially rejecting the idea that we are incapable of recognizing our own exploitation and disempowerment, Althusser argued instead that ideology is not “voluntary but the result of structural factors in society” (Leitch, 2001), structural factors he calls ideological state apparatuses (ISAs). These include education (for Althusser, the central ISA in the 20th century), the church, the family, and other informal structures that typically reinforce dominant cultural values and make those values feel “obvious,” “natural,” and “true,” both because we are raised with them and because they are pervasive. (Consider current North American notions that define “success” in monetary, material terms. There is nothing “natural” about this definition outside of a capitalist, materialist, and competitive culture; in a Buddhist or Amish community, such a definition of success might be alien and unnatural.) An array of ISAs construct cultural notions of both normalcy and disability, and they so saturate our society that asking a person on the street about how she or he might react to having paralysis or blindness or a developmental disability would typically evoke a response along the lines of, “Oh my god—I can’t imagine” or “I’d rather be dead.” That is how easy and how “natural” it feels to stigmatize disability. One powerful ISA (alluded to in my reference to Blum’s (2003) book on cosmetic surgery) is the appearance industry, which makes millions annually by marketing exaggerated ideals of physical beauty and handsomeness and cultural norms for fitness, youth, and Whiteness.<sup>10</sup>

But another, equally powerful ISA is the ADA. More than any other legislation, the ADA articulated and “normalized” a particular understanding of disability in terms that then shaped public discussions of place, access, and, more broadly speaking, of how and why we define disability as we do. The ADA website ([www.ada.gov](http://www.ada.gov)) defines it as “a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more of the major life activities”; as an individual who has a “record of such impairment or someone being regarded as having such an impairment” (<http://www.ada.gov/pubs/adastatute08.htm#12102>). The EEOC Compliance Manual Section 902: Definition of the Term “Disability” includes these further qualifications:

These parts of the definition reflect a recognition by Congress that stereotyped assumptions about what constitutes a disability and unfounded concerns about the limitations of individuals with disabilities form major discriminatory barriers, not only to those persons permanently disabled, but also to those persons either previously disabled, misclassified as previously disabled, or mistakenly perceived to be disabled. (<http://www.eeoc.gov/policy/docs/902cm.html> 902.1 Introduction and Summary)

The federal power of the ADA, like the federal power of *Roe V. Wade*, has largely been gutted by state challenges and by losses in Supreme Court cases. As Eli Clare (1999) notes, “The movement has made headway—disabled children are more likely to go to integrated schools alongside their nondisabled peers, the ADA . . . is providing a certain level of civil rights protection, and barrier-free access is a growing reality—but not enough” (p. 121). Despite the diminishment of its powers, I am still grateful for its existence. Discrimination is extensive and damaging, and the ADA offers some recourse, but it has unfortunately done little to challenge the stigma of disability. So one very basic question to consider is, “What are some of the ways we might challenge ableist biases?”

Both theories of abjection and theories of the carnivalesque body provide useful touchstones here. In *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of Concepts of Pollution and Taboo*, an anthropological analysis of how pollution and purity are both culturally determined concepts, Mary Douglas begins with the dictum that “dirt is matter out of place” and suggests that “matter” which cannot be neatly categorized and arranged “is conceived as threatening to the social order and hence as dangerous and polluting” (Douglas, 2003). She considers various ways in which communities deal with dirt (expulsion, segregation, annihilation, acceptance), and her argument that transitional moments in society are dangerous *because* of their liminality has echoes in Julia Kristeva’s theories of bodily abjection, in which transitions between the inside and outside of bodies—vomit, feces, urine, menstrual blood, and semen—are traumatic because they mark the body as unstable and remind us that the notion of a cohesive body is illusory. In an interview, Kristeva described abjection as

an extremely strong feeling . . . which is above all a revolt of the person against an external menace from which one wants to keep oneself at a distance, but of which one has the impression that it is not only an external menace but that it may menace from the inside. So it is a desire for separation. (Weiss, 1999, p. 93)

For Kristeva, abjection constitutes an inability to maintain even a pretense of regulated and clear-cut boundaries between inside and outside, and this

failure, by extension, undermines a host of other binaries we use to try to create order in our lives. One such binary in an ableist world, as I've suggested, is that which contrasts ablebodiedness and disability. A person with a "disability" is seen as a "shocking, terrifying, horrific abject," to borrow from Sigmund Freud's "Fetishism" (Freud, 1981, p. 354), which threatens the ableist world and, therefore, such a person must be radically excluded from such a world and deposited on the other side of the border that separates the ableist world from that which threatens such a world.

Scholars like Francette Pacteau (1994) in *The Symptom of Beauty* and Le'a Kent (2003) in "Fighting Abjection: Representing Fat Women," among others, have argued that deviant bodies "function as the abject" (p. 135), that we displace anxieties about abjection onto people with disabilities as a means of coping with our own corporeal fears and anxieties, however ineffectively. An us/them distinction between ablebodied people and people with disabilities is tenuous—a fall down the stairs, an illness, an automobile accident could collapse that distinction in seconds. In fact, if we live long enough, we will all become disabled. Sensing the vulnerability and artificiality of this division, temporarily ablebodied people arguably endow it with excessive meaning, even in the face of the realization that that distinction is fluid, variable, sometimes even imperceptible (and that imperceptibility can make it even more frightening. I believe that many resist hearing aids because they do not want to claim "deafness" as an identity category, for example, yet the line between hearing and hearing impaired is often difficult to discern, which may be why so many furiously insist that "there's nothing wrong with my hearing"—what they are really saying is, "I do not have a disability"—when clearly, there is an impairment). To cope with the anxiety that this produces, ablebodied people displace it onto people with disabilities. Their bodies become the (ideological and culturally constructed) markers that define in opposition our own "normalcy," theirs the abject bodies with messy boundaries from which we recoil in pity, discomfort, hatred.<sup>11</sup>

However, we could well ask why *other* bodies might not serve the same function for the displacement of our embodied disquietude. Why not babies' bodies? After all, babies' bodies—leaky, poopy, barfy, tearful—remind us forcefully of our own abjection. And yet the typical reaction to a baby is not horror or recoil but instead a softly intoned "ahhh!" Or—to go to a different extreme—why not the hypermuscular, gladiatorial bodies of NFL athletes? Any fans of professional football are reminded all the time that their bodies are liminal and leaky: they bleed, they break, they develop tears and strains. Bones splinter and muscles bend. Faces sweat, noses are broken, and bodies violently collide, often resulting in a tangled heap in which it is difficult to tell where one body begins and another ends. These are truly often bodies



out of control. Yet these bodies are heralded and socially celebrated while disabled bodies are scorned, stigmatized, segregated. Why? I'm suggesting that there *is* no inherent or intuitive reason why we might displace abject anxieties onto *disabled* bodies rather than onto infant or hyperathletic bodies. Rather, there are cultural and ideological processes behind such a move that we need to interrogate in multicultural studies.

Along that line, Mikhail Bakhtin (1984) offers us one way to reconfigure ableist attitudes toward disability that merits attention. I'm not the first and will not be the last disability studies scholar to turn to Bakhtin in an effort to revise cultural stereotypes about deviant bodies.<sup>12</sup> In the context of the carnival, the grotesque body—transgressive, disruptive, excessive—has all sorts of political potential to subvert structures of power. It's why so many of our students (and many of us) sport tattoos, facial and body piercings, funky haircuts, and weird clothes. These aren't just means of dissing parents or thumbing our noses at the administration: They are often political statements, means by which we challenge dominant ISAs that inform us about what a professor is "supposed" to act like or what a business major is "supposed" to wear. But for many, these acts typically constitute relatively minor challenges to the status quo. We can hide tattoos, take out nose rings, cover the purple hair that we dyed in a moment of wild resistance to a culture of blandness in our academic hallways. Nonetheless, we perform such acts of rebellion because of a deep understanding that embodiment can pose a potent challenge to the status quo. If this is the case, consider the potential of deviant bodies that challenge cultural notions of what "sexy" looks like, that reject the equation of dependence with weakness, that revise ideological assumptions about power, success, autonomy, mobility, and human worth and dignity. Loree Erickson (2010) (the woman whose wheelchair took up "too much" space at the bus stop), depressed by the absence of women with disabilities in lesbian pornography, decided to write, produce, and star in her own film, titled *want*. In it, she is sexy, desirable, and hot. Rejecting ableist values that asexualize or fetishize disability, Erickson simultaneously reclaims her sexuality and reconfigures disability, and in doing so she arguably challenges the sexism and ableism of the porn industry as well. There is something subversive and carnivalesque about doing so. If the challenges and changes wrought in and by the carnivalesque are often minimal and temporary, I would argue that they are nonetheless important and can do critical cultural work.

To that end, I want to close with a small and admittedly limited linguistic and ideological act of carnival. I am still discussing disability within a very specific paradigm that understands "disability" in physical or cognitive/mental terms, terms legitimated by the ADA. But it's worth

considering why we delimit understandings of “disability” to physical and cognitive difference and how refusing to do so might constitute an act of resistance.

I’m going to ask that we think about this by way of an example that is, in my opinion, both ridiculously simple and amazingly profound. Years ago, in a college writing I class, I taught Nancy Mairs’s wonderful essay, “On Being a Cripple” (2005). Mairs, who has multiple sclerosis, writes in thoughtful and provocative ways not only about living in an abelist society that equates her and her disease with “lack” but also with the power of language in conceiving of and appropriating power. It’s a great introduction for undergraduates to disability studies. But in this particular classroom, I had a student with cerebral palsy, and I worried that he might feel self-conscious during class discussions, so we talked before class, and contrary to my expectations, he was jazzed about reading and discussing it. However, during discussion, it became clear that other students were anxious about offending James,<sup>13</sup> hypercareful not to say anything derogatory, terrified to voice their belief that having MS or any other disability might just be worse than death.

Finally, James spoke up. He said, “I know that most of you look at me and don’t know how to react. You see my limp and my spasms and probably feel sorry for me, probably feel like I’m a ‘trooper’ for being so upbeat and funny. But here’s something to think about. I am a really good artist and a really nice person. I’m in a fraternity and have a job and a girlfriend. Back home, I live next to a man who is a racist asshole and who treats his wife and kids like crap. And you know what? When people look at me, they see a disability. But when people look at my neighbor, they see Mr. Jones. So here’s my question to you: why aren’t racism or mean-spiritedness considered disabilities?”

I thought then and continue to think that this is a superb question, one that compels us to contemplate the historical, economic, legal, and political implications of our shared understandings of “disability.” Scholars like Michael Oliver (1990) and Deborah Stone (1984) have argued that 19th-century notions of work and productivity, fed by the industrial revolution, the political and population theories of men like Adam Smith and Thomas Malthus, and the development of public policies that included the workhouse and questions about the responsibilities of the state, shaped public concepts of disability in myriad ways, many of which continue to inform public policies. Such policies ultimately encouraged 19th-century America to link pauperism with laziness, and given that many paupers were people with disabilities, this led many to equate disability with welfare, dependency, and poverty.<sup>14</sup>

In an analysis of *current* notions of care and dependency, Carol Thomas (2007) considers how a successful businessman might rely on his secretary to schedule his meetings, his travel agent to schedule his flights and hotel reservations, and his wife to prepare his dinner and host business parties in their home. Yet we do not see that as “need”; rather, we see that as power. As she notes, despite this businessman’s dependence on others,

our culture attributes “neediness” and “dependency”—devalued, sometimes stigmatized, states of being—to the person with impairment, and celebrates the businessman’s “self-sufficiency” and “independence.” . . . Underlying both evaluations, of course, is the question of pecuniary give and take—credit and debit. In an economic and social system governed by commodity exchange values, judgements [sic] of individuals’ social worth rest fundamentally on their waged or non-waged status. (p. 88)

This is indeed a problem when only 20.6% of people with disabilities are in the labor force, while, “By comparison, the percentage of persons with no disability in the labor force was 69.6” in 2010 (Office of Disability Employment Policy, 2011). Rates of unemployment for people with disabilities in the United States remain almost unchanged in the last 20 years, and prejudices continue to stack the odds against the job seeker with a disability. Clearly, ableism has measurable, often profound consequences for people with disabilities.

There is thus abundant evidence that we are not ready to reject the ADA definition of “disability.” It is too deeply ingrained in our cultural and collective psyche by myriad ISAs. For the same reasons that we do not live in a postfeminist or postracial world, we cannot simply discard cultural understandings of disability, because to do so would be to allow discrimination to thrive. But I will conclude by asking that we at least begin to contemplate a world in which “disability” is unmoored from embodiment and cognition, in which “normalcy” exists along a continuum that includes character traits like generosity and bigotry and aesthetics, a continuum we understand as liminal and in which we work to become comfortable with that liminality, perhaps even to celebrate it rather than attempting to regulate and “manage” difference.

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## Notes

1. I will use the terms *ablebodied* and *temporarily ablebodied* throughout this chapter, though many in disability studies prefer the term *nondisabled* to draw attention to the cultural and linguistic construction of the categories. My preference is *temporarily ablebodied* because it reminds us both that ablebodiedness is temporary and that many might label themselves *ablebodied* despite wearing glasses, using hearing aids, or taking medications for obsessive compulsive disorder. In other words, we configure “ability” and “disability” in ways that are arguably arbitrary, particular, and transient.

2. Casey’s work has been critiqued for being antimodernist and, in places, contradictory; see especially Thomas Brockelman’s “Getting Back Into No Place: On Casey, Deconstruction and the Architecture of Modernity” (1996) and “Lost in Place? On the Virtues and Vices of Edward Casey’s Anti-Modernism” (2003).

3. Sharon Snyder and David Mitchell (2001), leading scholars in disability studies, turn their attention to the problem of an emphasis in the field on disability primarily or solely as a social construct when they question what is lost when we negate too entirely “the embodied experience of disabled people” (p. 374). Though it was initially useful (in theoretical, political, and pedagogical terms) to concentrate on the cultural constructs of disability in our efforts to argue that disability is not an essential or fixed category but is cultural, historical, geographically bound, and therefore liminal, such a focus too often negated or minimized lived experiences. Thus, like many in the field, Snyder and Mitchell (2001) conclude that it is important that disability studies “reinvest the disabled body with a phenomenology predicated upon more than the rejection of stigmatizing assumptions” (p. 386). This explains, in part, a measurable increase in the field of autobiography and memoir in the last 10 years.

4. In “Meditations on a Bullet: Violently Injured Men Discuss Masculinity, Disability and Blame,” Noel Ostrander (2008) uses ethnographic research to

understand how living in an inner-city environment affects young African-American men after they have paralysis resulting from violence; one man, compelled to live in public housing without an elevator because he can't afford accessible housing, relies upon his friends to carry him up and down the stairs and is stuck outside the housing development if they leave him there. Sharply cognizant of his increased vulnerability on the streets due to his inability to return to the relative safety of his home if a rival gang member were to show up, he experiences access issues differently than an individual living in a wealthy community and residing in a fully accessible home. Race, class, education, and gender inform disability and the experience of disability in many ways.

5. For a fuller discussion of abortion within disability studies, see Ruth Hubbard's (2006) "Abortion and Disability: Who Should and Who Should Not Inhabit the World?" and Marsha Saxton's (2006) "Disability Rights and Selective Abortions," both published in the second edition of *The Disability Studies Reader* (Ed. Lennard Davis). On eugenics and disability, see Chapter III in Nancy Ordovery's *American Eugenics: Race, Queer Anatomy, and the Science of Nationalism* (2003); Matthew Thomas's "Disability, Psychiatry, and Eugenics" in *The Oxford Handbook of The History of Eugenics* (2010); Tom Shakespeare's *Disability Rights and Wrongs* (2006); and David Pfeiffer's "Eugenics and Disability Discrimination" in *The Psychological and Social Impact of Disability* (1999).

6. In "Enforcing Normalcy: The Bell Curve, the Novel, and the Invention of the Disabled Body in the Nineteenth Century," Lennard Davis (2006) argues that statistics and the bell curve shaped cultural notions of "normalcy" and "norms" in the 19th century. In fact, he points out that "The word 'normal' as 'constituting, conforming to, not deviating or different from, the common type or standard, regular, usual' only enters the English language around 1840" (p. 3). Referencing Francis Galton (often referred to as the father of eugenics) and Alexander Graham Bell's dystopic view of deaf people and the need to eliminate them, Davis suggests that in the place of a bodily ideal comes the "imperative of the norm," one which punishes those whose bodies or psyches via a politics of elimination.

7. As a member of this commission, I served on the committee to organize an inaugural event that might begin to challenge ableist perceptions.

8. The use of capital (D) Deaf indicates cultural Deafness and is associated with a shared language, history, and literary traditions; the use of lower-case (d) deaf indicates biological deafness and is associated with a pathological understanding of deafness as a medical/audiological condition.

9. Also, see Fanon, F. (1963). *The wretched of the earth*. Trans. Constance Farrington, New York: Grove; and Freire, P. (2000). *Pedagogy of the oppressed*. Trans. Myra Bergman Ramos. New York: Continuum.

10. As Gail Dines, antiporn scholar and activist and author of *Pornland: How Porn Has Hijacked Our Sexuality*, points out in her campus presentations, the cosmetic industry would disappear if it didn't induce self-hatred in its customers. It is difficult to imagine a world in which we might be encouraged to love ourselves and to accept our embodiments—though it is lovely to try.

11. I am including myself in the *we* and *ours* not because I consider myself able-bodied but because I want to position myself as one of the many in our society who might be uncomfortable with or frightened by the thought of acquiring or having a disability.

12. See specifically Mary Russo's *The Female Grotesque: Risk, Excess and Modernity* (1994) and Joanna Frueh's "Monster/Beauty: Building the Body of Love" (1999) for examples of applications of Bakhtin's theories of the carnivalesque to embodiment and deviance. By using the term *deviant bodies*, I am intentionally referencing the terminology of Michel Foucault. Disability studies scholars have turned to Foucault's theories about the production of docile bodies, developed in *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (1995), in thoughtful and often provocative ways to explore how "deviance" is pathologized, staged, and managed.

13. I am using a pseudonym here.

14. Historically, by attributing "disability" to women and Blacks, "disability" was used to justify discrimination against these groups. Please see Paul Longmore and Lauri Umansky, *The New Disability History: American Perspectives* (2001).