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Ableism in the Academy

A Series About Disability Oppression and Resistance in Higher Education

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Abstract

This special series offers the readers of Critical Education groundbreaking work by scholars who explore a myriad of issues related to how ableism manifests and is resisted in higher education. Ableism is defined as the idea that able-bodiedness/mindedness is a preferred way of being in society. In this series introduction we, the editors, recount our own orientations to the themes that are brought forth in the special issue. Subsequently, we synthesize the innovative themes that have emerged in the eight manuscripts that are a part of this special issue, including: 1) Asking: from whose perspective should we learn about disability experiences in higher education?; 2) Describing the critically-oriented theoretical perspective employed across the manuscripts, all of which align to a disability studies perspective; 3) Questioning who is invited to participate and thrive in the academy; and 4) Exploring tactics used to create change and breakdown ableist structures that persist in the academy. Ultimately, we feel the implications of the work undertaken by the authors in this special issue are far-reaching and encourage the increased citizenry of disabled people, elevate the social positioning of disabled people in higher education settings, and ultimately reframe what it means to be labeled as disabled.



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Series Forward

This special series titled *Ableism in the academy: A series about disability oppression and resistance in higher education* offers the readers of *Critical Education* groundbreaking work by scholars who explore a myriad of issues related to how ableism manifests and is resisted in higher education. Generally, ableism is defined as the idea that able-bodiedness/mindedness is a preferred way of being in society (Campbell, 2009). Distinct from, but related to ableism, disableism describes the acts of oppression and discrimination enacted against disabled people simply for being disabled (Goodley, 2017). Dolmage (2017) explains the co-constructed nature of ableism and disableism within higher education-- whereas disableism negatively constructs disability and the circumstances of disabled people, ableism positively values able-bodiedness/mindedness. He continues to explain that disableism and ableism create the idea that disability is “abject, invisible, disposable, less than human, while able-bodiedness/mindedness is represented as at once ideal, normal, and the mean default... [further], academia powerfully mandates able-bodiedness and able-mindedness... in fact, few cultural institutions do a better or more comprehensive job of promoting ableism” (Dolmage, 2017, p. 7). Dolmage importantly cites Lydia Brown who claims that “ableism is not some arbitrary list of ‘bad words,’ as much as language is a tool of oppression. Ableism is violence and it kills.” (As cited in Dolmage, 2017. p.7). Disabled activists promoting disability justice¹, such as Brown, implore that as we examine ableist ideologies and structures, we must also pay attention to intersectional experiences, that require us as academics to understand the ways that multiply-marginalized people are subject to interlocking oppressive systems of, for instance ableism, White Supremacy, and heteropatriarchy (Sins Invalid, 2015). This special series thus maintains the assumption that disableism, ableism, and interrelated systems of oppression are pervasive problems that work in tandem to maintain privilege for the able-bodied in the academy, despite modern examples of progress, such as protections put in place by the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990.

We feel it also pertinent to acknowledge that we are finalizing this special issue amid the coronavirus pandemic. Already we have been confronted with issues of ableism in the academy as we collectively scramble to respond to circumstances of the virus-- for instance, accessibility concerns abound as we convert our classes, conferences, meetings, and other forms of business operations online. Many disabled and multiply marginalized students are not able to maintain access to stable housing, food, mental health services, let alone have the ability to equally participate in remote learning required to thrive in higher education. Further, we watch in dread wondering about who amongst our community is most vulnerable to the disease and how healthcare infrastructures worldwide are being exposed as classist, ableist and generally inadequate to meet all of our needs. These circumstances illustrate Brown’s warning that the ideologies associated with ableism can literally be deadly (Brown, as cited in Dolmage, 2017). Yet, we also must offer hope amidst the dire circumstances we are in-- we are seeing how communities are coming together, supporting one another, uplifting one another, and resisting the harmful effects from this pandemic, collectively and from the ground up. A communal ideology

¹ For more information on the powerful framework of disability justice, spearheaded by multiply-marginalized disabled people, see the blog Sins Invalid <https://www.sinsinvalid.org/blog/10-principles-of-disability-justice>

that prioritizes sacrifice for the greater good, over an individualistic one that champions individual rights, is being proven as necessary for all to adopt, in order to persevere in our current times.

Although these articles in this special series are not directly related to the pandemic, the themes pursued deepen our understanding of the pernicious impact of ableism across sectors of the academy. In this special series, the multifaceted ways in which ableism persists and is both experienced and resisted by members of the academy is explored from a range of perspectives and through innovative methodologies. We believe the words of the scholars featured in this special series will help us better mitigate ableism in the academy during uncertain times.

Steve's Orientation to this Special Series

As a Deaf professor who is Mad and has working memory and language processing learning disabilities, there have been numerous times that I have experienced ableism in higher education, both in my professional career and as a student in preparation for it. To name just a few, these experiences range from being denied ASL interpreters at academic conferences, to faculty advisors and colleagues using my mental illnesses against me to discourage me from completing my academic program, to the glaringly overt strictures of my writing not aligning with norms of written English. What concerns me more is how ableist ideology and the ableist acts about which I am unaware have affected or will affect me. How do they affect my relationships with students, my potential for promotion, and access to various opportunities like research funds and scholarly travel? In part, I chose a career studying the positioning of disability in society, so that I could feel like I am able to command some kind of control over the narratives written about me and thus mitigate the consequences of those narratives. Included in this decision was choosing to work in the academy where I anticipated I would be more insulated from explicit acts of ableism, both because public institutions of higher education receive governmental funds, which requires them to adhere to the Americans with Disabilities Act and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation of 1973 and because I would be surrounded by like-minded and highly educated individuals. Despite the injustices I have experienced, I sincerely believe that I fare better in the academy than I would in many other employment sectors.

Nevertheless, I understand that because the academy is a product of the people and because ableist ideology is so entrenched in the fabric of society, that the academy is, in fact, an institution fundamentally constructed for the able-bodied and able-minded by the able-bodied and able-minded. These structures may not always result in blatant affronts to disabled people. Harlan Lane's (1999) book, aptly named *The Mask of Benevolence*, discussed how well-meaning institutions of education harmed Deaf people. This may well be the case for all disabled individuals. Masked in tradition, righteousness, the pursuit of knowledge, academic standards, and bureaucracy are the barriers that construct disability as a deficit and as a mismatch for these hallowed halls.

Each semester I don my cap and robe with pride, holding my head up high as I look over the student body. I do love the academy. As a faculty member in a teacher education program, just as I hang up my regalia until commencement, I pull out my disposition rubrics that rate how my teacher candidates behave, my APA style guide, my college policy manual, and my gradebook. I worry about what internal impairment-related struggles I will encounter (e.g. depression or memory lapses) and what institutional barriers I will have to negotiate rather than focus on the meaningful parts of my professorship. I struggle with how I have internalized all the messages I

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have received about disability over the fifteen years I have been learning and working in the academy. However, I worry more about the students. I spent most of my adult life penniless, ill, and powerless. While I am not immune to ableism, I am keenly aware of the privileges I enjoy as a professional with adequate station, income, and stability, especially when I reflect on my state of affairs even ten years ago. I think about my disabled students and I imagine a vision of my previous Self next to them. I consider their subjugated positions as students, how at times they are viewed as pariahs, and all of the other potential ways they may be disempowered. I think about how the academic tools listed above (e.g. APA, policies, and rubrics) that I use to manage students, reinforce able-bodied hegemony and I wonder if there is anything I can do to alter course.

Too often I feel that I have done too little, which frightens me, because I know there are those who do not step up to combat ableism, or worse actively reproduce ableist structures. For these reasons, the study of ableism in the academy is crucial, not to point fingers, but to begin opening pathways for the success of disabled students and professionals. With higher degrees of success for this population will come higher degrees of power, public presence, and increased social stature. In doing so, we may begin to unhinge the damaging grip that ableist ideology holds over all of us. In this special series about ableism in the academy, I hope that the scholarship included draws needed attention to the largely unbridled ableism I have witnessed in the academy. With this attention, may come incremental, positive change.

Jessica's Orientation to this Special Series

I identify as a White, lesbian, able-bodied woman who has committed my career to combatting ableist prejudices in schools, society, and the academy. In writing this, I acknowledge the ethical quandary of co-editing a special issue on disability in higher education, when I do not identify myself as a disabled person. Thus, grounding my position amongst the scholarship and perspectives that this special issue covers is essential.

As a college undergraduate in my early 20's I began my foray into understanding disability by working at a summer camp as a counselor that served adults with intellectual disability labels, many who had been or were still institutionalized. I was studying sociology and education, and also beginning to understand my own experience coming out as a gay woman. The academic content I was learning in my sociology classes was not directly related to disability, yet the theories helped me to see connections between the prejudices I felt as I was coming out, and the ways that disabled people were treated in society. I was also keenly aware that many of the lives of the people, who I learned to know deeply at the summer camp, appeared incredibly oppressed in comparison to my own life. For many of these adults, every aspect of their lives was controlled and constructed by the fact that they were labeled as intellectually disabled. As I became more comfortable claiming my status as a lesbian, I noticed people who came to camp were denied any option to express their sexuality, whether it be gay, straight or another sexuality. The sociological theories I was learning in the academy sparked my desire to pursue disability studies in graduate school, so that I could understand disability prejudice more deeply. The academy, I felt, offered me the tools to engage in the work advocating for people with disabilities to have better lives.

When I entered graduate school, I began to notice the ways that the structures of the academy were not built for all bodies. Pursuing a doctoral degree is not an easy task for any "body" – but yet, it was also evident that non-disabled students had an easier time excelling in the academy. Currently, as a professor of inclusive education at a public institution, I continue to see

the pernicious ways that ableism creeps through all parts of the academy. I listen regularly to my students, many of whom identify as disabled, struggling with getting through degree programs that do a poor job of accounting for their needs. I sometimes feel that for some students, the many rigid structures and challenging expectations, effectively disables students and exacerbates mental health issues that some students experience. The academy upholds neoliberal conceptions of individualism, competition, and independence, which makes the experiences of faculty and students who do not conform to able-bodied and able-minded norms very challenging. Students and faculty who present themselves in non-normative ways are often pressured to assimilate and hide their disabilities or differences.

But at the same time, I find hope in young people. I have watched how teaching disability studies to my students has altered their ways of being, thinking, and acting. It has even altered how they treat each other. I have watched students come together to take on activist projects that resist oppressive structures in the academy and make incredible strides in building a more fair, kind, and inclusive academy. I think that the articles in this special series provide new ways of understanding ableism, and disability studies theory, that will allow for new openings and opportunities to work together to build better institutions of higher education.

Jessica's and Steve's Conscientization of Resisting Ableism

Both of us attended Syracuse University for our doctoral studies and both of us studied disability studies. Albeit at different times, we also both participated in a student run disability advocacy organization called the Beyond Compliance Coordinating Committee. Our participation in this organization allowed us to connect the academic content we were learning to the everyday work of tackling ableist structures that were inherent to the University. The organization attempted to build a positive disability culture on campus, while also responding to events that negatively impacted disabled students on campus and disabled people in the surrounding community. We struggled to navigate the complexities of organizing with and alongside students who identified as both disabled and non-disabled. One thing that we learned through the challenges of becoming politicized, attempting to create change, and building culture on campus was the importance of listening to each other and forming a community. We continued to learn that disability was more than a political movement and more than counternarrative--it was humanhood. Disabled people exist in their own rite, not merely in discordance with the world in which they live. However, this aspect of humanhood requisitely remains political and must push back against the tremendous weight of a largely able-bodied academy and society in order to secure an equitable position. Having to incessantly resist ableism and suffer the consequences of disableism undermines disabled people's statuses as unique and whole humans.

We learned that through difficult and collaborative work, we could change the academy for the better, even if just slightly. In that work, we came to understand that we were not powerless and that we held tools to redress the disability injustices we had experienced or observed prior to and during our studies. We also learned that the academy is stringent and that affecting change is an exhausting and slow process. There were and are times we wish to throw our hands in the air and give up, but our philosophical positions about disability remind us of the importance of building a space that is meant for and welcomes all bodyminds (Price, 2014). When we struggled, we regrouped and rallied to fight another day. We also learned that we could not do the important work of disability advocacy if we didn't truly listen to one another, particularly the most marginalized of us. The stories, the telling of experiences, and the voices of those feeling

marginalized and oppressed by the ableist structures of the academy were what guided and drove our work. It simultaneously inspired our scholarship and expanded our understanding of the complexities of institutional behavior and the experiences of disabled people in the academy.

Similar to our experiences of becoming conscientized and politicized (Freire, 1970) through learning and listening to each other during our doctoral studies and our careers as professors, we feel that our collaboration and coming together from disabled and abled identity standpoints, have helped us identify and support the publication of articles in this special issue that do similar work. We, the editors, want to not only challenge and shed light onto the problems of the ableist academy, but similar to our experiences in graduate school, we want to show that there is beauty in building community, and employing resistance against the forces that relegate disabled members of the academy to its margins. Despite its clear harms, ableism can also enable disabled people to create skills, new relationships, and new ways to interpret their worlds, which we have just begun to excavate. Our objective with this series is to move forward in the growing campaign for the academy to recognize the value of the disabled population and toward the deconstruction of the barriers that prevent that recognition.

Foundational Theoretical Framings for this Special Series

Both of us have been trained to understand how disabled people are treated and understood within the structures of the academy through a disability studies in education (DSE) perspective. DSE is a multidisciplinary field of study that uses cultural, political, and social perspectives to understand how disability is responded to in educational institutions (Gabel, 2005). As described by Bacon and Lalvani (2019), a hallmark of DSE is that it rejects medical notions about disability as universal and biologically fixed categories, or as embodied deficits. Instead, DSE scholars see disability as a naturally occurring aspect of human variation, and seek to understand the experience of disability in relation to ways that societies represent and respond to it. Growing out of the larger field of disability studies, DSE is commonly associated with adopting a social model perspective (Oliver, 1990) where disability is distinguished from, rather than equated with impairment. The concept “impairment” refers to particular physical or sensory experiences (e.g. blindness or absence of motor function), whereas disability and disablement refer to political, economic, social, and cultural oppression that people experience (Oliver, 1990). Although social model perspectives have been politically productive, feminist and critical disability studies scholars, such as Tremain (2002) and Goodley (2013), argue that the impairment/disability dichotomy is overly simplistic because it minimizes the embodied experience of impairment. Goodley (2017) suggests that impairment should instead be thought of as “culturally constructed, because bodies/minds have histories and are experienced, performed and institutionally located” (p. 36). DSE scholars also interrogate ways educational institutions, such as higher education, influence how disability and normalcy are co-constructed and reinforced through intractable, bureaucratic structures that do not easily allow for all bodies to be valued.

Another key commitment of DSE scholars is that disabled lives and perspectives should be centered within research and scholarship. DSE scholars critique how traditional disability-related fields such as special education and higher education have been built up through the adoption of deficit-oriented perspectives, which typically ignore the experiences of people with disabilities themselves. DSE scholars assert that disabled perspectives and complex narrations about disability must be central to research and inquiry (Lester & Nusbaum, 2018; Linton, 2006). This can also be applied to the importance of integrating these experiences into teaching. When thinking about

including the nascent perspectives of disabled people into the curriculum, Mitchell, Snyder and Ware (2014) promote the integration of and honoring of crip/queer ways of knowing into the curriculum, or honoring what the authors refer to as “curricular cripistemologies.”

Overall, DSE scholarship commits itself to pursuing equity and justice within educational settings. As a field of study that is multi and interdisciplinary, DSE encompasses scholarship and academic work that deepens our understanding of the disabled experience, through a mutual commitment to enhancing the pursuit of equity and justice for those labeled or understood as disabled. A deep understanding, from various perspectives about the perniciousness of ableism within the academy furthers the knowledge about how ability and disability operate within institutions of higher education. Although the breadth of theories employed across these articles in this special issue is wide, and not all claim themselves to use DSE theory outright, each of the manuscripts uphold the goals and values of the field, and simultaneously have the potential to push the field forward into new arenas and disciplinary perspectives.

Overview of the Series

The manuscripts published in this special series offer readers innovative scholarship that emerges from different methodological perspectives and through varying theoretical frameworks, ultimately pushing the boundaries of who is invited into the academy, and asking how change within the academy can be made. This series overview will explore the themes that emerge across and within the manuscripts that will be published in the coming months.

From whose perspective should we learn about disability experiences in higher education?

One way that the articles in this special series uphold the goals and values of DSE is that the perspectives that allow us to understand the experience of ableism in the academy come from disabled people, whether it be through first-person perspectives from the authors or through more traditional qualitative methods that mine the experiences of disabled people. The articles in this special issue use both approaches to center an understanding of the academy through the perspectives and experiences of disabled members who work and learn in higher education settings.

Several manuscripts use unique methodologies that drew directly on the experiences of the disabled authors. For instance, Koren and Dawkins-Law use Black Feminism in Qualitative Inquiry and duoethnographic methods to describe their experiences in higher education as differently racialized graduate students with disabilities. Similarly, Woodfield, Vroman, Seybert, Kurup, Burke, Dickens and Ashby center the experiences of the article’s co-authors who are disabled college students/graduates that type to communicate. The experiences about neurodivergent communicative experiences were mined through a group inquiry that highlighted collaborative research methods. Skyer and Cochell leveraged their own situated positionalities when analyzing the video-publication titled “Seizing Academic Power.”

Other authors used more traditional qualitative research methods, but did so by gathering data from participants with disabilities. For instance, Eisenman used narrative interviews of nine adults with intellectual disabilities who participated in an inclusive college program to uncover their experiences of microaggressions and microaffirmations. Similarly, Kamperman interviewed five students with intellectual disabilities who participated in an inclusive college program to consider the perceptions that students had about self-advocacy expectations.

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Miller conducted a qualitative study with 25 multiply-marginalized students that identified as both part of the LGBTQ+ community and as disabled. Miller's work uncovered the temporal experiences of these students within the academy, by showing that the ways they navigated academic demands did not always align with norms of the academy. Siuty and Beneke used a unique visual methodology (critical conversation journal mapping) with disabled students who are studying to become teachers, in order to uncover how students experienced ableism throughout their academic careers. Finally, Freedman, Dotger and Song observed students who participated in a simulated faculty meeting about accommodations, which was then followed up by focus group interviews to further understand the experiences of students who are attempting to access accommodations.

The decisions made in higher education are typically made by able-bodied individuals who do not deeply understand the experience of disability. Further, it is rare that academic work in higher education and disability centers the experiences of the disabled. But, as Wendell (1992) described when discussing the knowledge-center of the medical field "If disabled people were truly heard, an explosion of knowledge of the human body and psyche would take place" (p. 77). Similarly, if disabled people were truly heard throughout the academy, higher education could transform itself and its knowledge base-- towards increased richness in our understandings and responses to the bodymind. The articles in this special issue offer a forum for disabled voices to be heard, opening the possibility for change.

Theories Explored in this Special Series

To frame and analyze their findings, authors approached their work using various theoretical lenses. All authors claimed some association with disability studies or DSE scholarship, and each sought to highlight issues of ableism, disableism, with a goal towards increased equity for disabled people within higher education. The range of theories, disciplines, and perspectives employed in this special issue highlight the interdisciplinary nature of these fields of study, which is a key feature of disability studies work (Ferguson & Nusbaum, 2012).

Woodfield et al. used a broad DSE lens of analysis to push back against normative communication expectations in higher education and contextualize the significance of documenting the experiences of college students who type to communicate. Meanwhile Freedman et al. approached their study about negotiating academic accommodations by using a disability studies framework, which focused on a critique of the biomedical approach that dominates the disability accommodation framework in higher education.

Critical disability studies, another theoretical lens under the disability studies umbrella examines, among other things, the ways ableism is enacted in relation to money and power. Siuty and Beneke use critical disability studies by employing Goodley's (2017) notion of desiring disability alongside sociocultural theory (Roggoff, et. al, 2002) to interrogate how disabled teacher candidates may be viewed as liabilities in the educational system. As Siuty and Beneke show, disabled teacher candidates could instead be positioned as crucial resources for students, but this positioning would disrupt the status quo.

Several studies employed intersectional theoretical framings that look at how disability and other marginalized positions operate in tandem. For instance, DisCrit takes critical disability studies further by unpacking power dynamics at the intersection of disability and race, which Koren and Dawkins-Law use to critique laissez faire ableism as a vehicle for able-bodied, White

ideology to maintain its power in the academy. In another article, Miller employed both disability studies and queer theory in order to critically analyze how notions of normalized temporality are upheld in the academy.

Other distinct theoretical framings were used, all nevertheless aligned to the goals of DSE. Though Deaf studies is a distinct discipline separate from disability studies, both focus on the ways that able-bodied hegemony disempower Deaf or disabled people and the socioemotional importance of cultural development. Skyer and Cochell apply a Deaf studies theoretical framework to discuss the significance of creating culturally sustaining pedagogy. Kamperman relied on rhetorical criticism in order to interrogate how experiences with self-advocacy were constructed through dominant ableist discourses about master, in/visibility and autonomy. Eisenman et. al analyzed their data through theories about microaggressions and microaffirmations in order to analyze the experiences of students with Intellectual and/or Developmental Disability (IDD) labels as feeling either respected or disrespected as part of the campus community.

While the authors selected various lenses through which they analyzed their scholarship, all aligned with the tenets of disability studies. The series call for papers did not dictate that submissions must apply this approach. However, that this collection of articles universally does suggests that there exists a need to examine the academy at a foundational level. Authors prioritized how the academy constructs disability and the various disciplines that contribute toward the understanding of that construction.

Pushing the Boundaries About Who is Invited into the Academy

Authors in this special issue highlight a gap about who is welcomed into the academy. Generally speaking, the academy is most accessible to the normate, a concept described by Garland-Thomson (2017) as the visualization of minds and bodies that represent the idealized form of those in the ruling majority. In contrast, those who look, behave, think, communicate, and interpret their worlds in divergent ways are both explicitly and implicitly excluded or pushed out of the academy (Evans et al., 2017). Many authors featured in this series provided a stage on which the narratives and experiences of the marginalized could be brought to the fore.

Some of the authors evidenced both how students who didn't fit the normate mold experienced exclusion or struggles to succeed and stories of how affirming the postsecondary experience was for them. For instance, Woodfield et al. and Kamperman's article include stories of how students' interpersonal relationships, advocacy efforts (self and on their behalf), and an increased sense of agency led to these participants with IDD labels or who were neurodivergent to feel that they were accepted in the academy. However, these participants clearly communicated that these successes existed against a backdrop of incessant ableism. Participants struggled to negotiate claiming difference, an identity-based notion, and did not wish to be viewed as different or stigmatized. While they balanced coursework and social development, they also felt they needed to control narratives about themselves.

Buttressing the experiences of students in these studies, Eisenman et al. and Kamperman describe how college students with IDD existed in ways that diverged so drastically from normative understandings of the characteristics of scholars, that it was unimaginable that they could be contributing members of the higher education community. Because of this flawed imaginary, Koren and Dawkins-Law and Miller discussed that there was a limit on scope of influence that multiply-marginalized disabled people had on their acceptance into the academy

since the system created an inherent mismatch between the epistemes or divergent forms of functioning of these individuals and their success in or satisfaction with their academic programs. There existed a dissonance between stringent expectations related to time (e.g. progress in programs and assignments) or the academy's perceived responsibility to support disabled students and the needs of these students. These mismatches were not only relevant to participants' statuses as disabled people, but also additional marginalized identifications and their connected epistemes that emphasized their incongruence with the normative expectations upon which the academy is built. Similarly, Siuty and Beneke showed how experiencing ableist structures throughout their schooling careers impacted disabled teacher education students, but how those experiences also opened the opportunity to create a "third space" where possibilities for themselves and their future students could be reimaged. Overall, the scholarship in this special series pushes its readers to rethink who belongs in the academy. Ultimately as disability diversity in the academy grows and shifts with regard to students and employees, the academy too must change in order to meet the opportunities and challenges of increased diversity.

Affecting Change

Authors and participants alike look toward a future of dismantling ableism by re-visioning the academy. They believe this can be done by creating better programs for disabled students so that they are prepared to be agents of change. Disabled students benefit from strong and positive mentorship while in postsecondary programs. Developing pipelines to promote these types of relationships could prove to be a critical step forward for both student success and shifts in campus climate.

While it is important to expose the ableist structures embedded in the academy, it is also important to discuss what Deaf and disabled people are doing to affect change and carve out spaces in the academy that value these populations. Change is often incremental and can occur both by purposeful effort and by negotiating one's own success in the academy. Through their own success, disabled students may create pathways toward a similar success for disabled students who follow them as they garner positions in society that have increased socioeconomic status. In these positions, they may be empowered to affect an even greater change. Still, the onus and labor required to create change cannot only be expected to be undertaken by those who experience ableism. Those who already enjoy positions of privilege must interrogate their practices to simultaneously affect change.

Articles in this series show the ways that disabled students and instructors are working to create an equitable academy that values the cultures, needs, and presence of disabled people. Freedman et al. and Kamperman studied the important role of self-advocacy and the complexity of how disabled students enact this advocacy. It was not simply a matter of communicating and demanding appropriate academic accommodations and respect in various contexts in the academy. Instead, these studies showed how disabled students negotiated cost/benefit analyses of placating those in power, deciding how and when to disclose disability, and the consequences of explicit attempts to self-advocate. Sometimes, advocacy meant resistance, as Kamperman and Miller discuss. These authors show that resistance can result in ostracism and the creation of additional barriers to inclusion, which can seem counterproductive, though often necessary. Instructors can help dismantle barriers toward inclusion and embolden systematic change by practicing critical pedagogy that confronts ableism. Similarly, Siuty and Beneke showed how disabled teacher candidates could use their experiences with ableism as a cultural resource for their students and in

doing so, shift the paradigm that being able-bodied is necessarily better than being disabled. Finally, Skyer and Cochell examined how teachers' conception of marginalized populations affected Deaf students' critical consciousness. Deaf educators have an ethical charge to help shape Deaf students who understand power dynamics in the United States and the nature of their position as a sociolinguistic minority, so that they can become empowered citizens and subvert the structures that limit Deaf people.

Woodfield, et. al, as well as Koren and Dawkins-Law center their own experiences as disabled authors within the academy. Although in these powerful narratives it is clear that the authors struggled with the oppressive context they often found themselves, they also were able to find hope and support within the communities that they create with each other. The hope, community, and friendships that can be developed through resistance activity should not be underestimated. As all educational constituents (e.g. disabled and able-bodied students, faculty members, and staff members) become more informed, they can better resist negative assumptions and empower disabled individuals to claim agency over how they are represented in the academy and the society-at-large. We, the editors, share in the optimism of the authors and participants about continuing to create a more inclusive academy. But, as they suggest and we concur, there is much work to be done.

Concluding Thoughts

The university is an institution that has the potential to drive progress toward increased equity and greater good for all global citizens. Indeed, in many ways the scholarship and practices developed within the academy have been a key driving force toward such greater goods. At the same time, the university was built up on many elitist and archaic views that privileged certain groups of people access to it. Current neoliberal trends within the academy, such as enhanced focus on rigor and eliteness, a rise in for-profit colleges, expanded standardized learning and assessing threaten to keep access to the University primarily for the privileged. Or worse, threaten to burden the underprivileged with mounting debt for low-quality education, or for an education that does not provide the support needed for many marginalized groups to thrive in higher education. Despite these concerns, we feel progress has been made to include an ever-more diverse constituency in the academy from the staff, to faculty, to students. We also feel that there are many more examples of college campuses beginning to view disability from a "beyond compliance" perspective-- where disability is seen and embraced as a positive identity category and culture that adds value and diversity to the academy.

Thus, we think that continuing to use scholarship and theory, a platform valued by the academy, to drive the knowledge base about ableism in higher education is an ideal model to communicate the messages and themes that you will read about in this special series. At the same time, we are proud that authors in this special series buck some of the traditions of the typical research journal through the use of language and structures that honor and align to disability culture and ways of being. The implications of the work undertaken by the authors in this special issue are far-reaching and include the increased citizenry of disabled people, elevation of their social position, and reframing what it means to be disabled. We hope that this special series contributes toward these important objectives.

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