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Critical Disability Studies

Course Reflection

5/17/19

At the beginning of this semester, I knew absolutely nothing about disability studies other than what I knew from growing up with my brother who has Asperger’s, and I honestly had never even heard about it. Little did I know the whirlwind of disability studies was coming at me, full speed. I remember being tossed into *Exile and Pride* as the first reading assignment for the class and had felt pretty defeated afterwards. I felt like I was out of my league because I had trouble relating to or even understanding what Eli Clare was trying to say, and thought I was doomed for the rest of the semester. Luckily, I watched Stella Young’s video, “I’m Not Your Inspiration,” next and that really clicked for me, and it was also the only topic out of the four assignments we had that I felt confident enough to write a response on Serendip.

As much as it pains me to say this because of how dreadfully cliché it is, I truly, honestly feel like I broadened my horizons by taking this class and by trying to lean into the discomfort, as recommended by Sonneborn. It’s quite clear that I became fixated on stimming early in the semester. I hope it wasn’t too redundant to hear about the same topic, but to me it always seems like a big victory when old science is proven wrong and new, more culturally competent science is integrated into the system (hopefully, as Xiwen has proposed), however slowly. My grandfather and both my parents are in the health profession and they are completely bewildered by “Critical Disability Studies” and don’t understand why I would ever take a class on it, and that makes it all the more rewarding. They don’t have to understand, because I know that when I’m in the health profession and I work with a Tim, or Aysia, or Jenna, that I will know how to give them better care because of this one of many classes on disability studies.

Moving forward, I’m not sure I’ll ever be able to walk around a public space without assessing the quality of signage, the accessibility icon, and accessible architecture of my environments, which is exciting and serves an easy indication for progressive spaces. I’ll never be able to walk by a motivational poster again without scanning it for narrative stripping, infantilization, or outright ableism. I also don’t think I’ll stop smiling when I catch myself or someone else in the act of stimming because I feel so strongly about its right to exist, unjudged and un-normalized. I hope that in my projects I’ve created and shared with the class I have at least stirred people’s consciousness about neurotypical and neurodivergent stimming behaviors, how they may differ, and why they may differ. I have certainly been inspired by my classmates’ projects, specifically Mali’s work in including a disability studies perspective in bio 200, Claire’s biography of her own struggle with her disabilities, and Xiwen’s ideas of weaving disability studies into public health so that it can be better integrated within the smaller systems within it.

Even though the course is over, I feel somewhat unsatisfied with the idea that people with disabilities are still institutionalized receiving sub-par care, that non-disabled actors are hired over a disabled-actor for a role of someone with that disability, Peter Singer’s “Taking Life” argument, the heavy emphasis of cure towards disability in the health profession (and the list goes on). Regardless, I’m happy to be leaving the semester with so many issues to care about and ties to a community that I didn’t even know existed until now.