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The Dis/ability Complex

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Abstract

Diversity studies have much to gain from the interdisciplinary field of critical disability studies. The dis/ability complex acknowledges the mutually inclusive socio-political practices associated with the conceptual co-constitution of disability and ability. Simultaneously, the dis/ability complex recognizes that in order for disablism to be reproduced it requires its hidden referent to be present; namely, ableism. Disability all to often appears in our cultural psyche as a problem of body or mind, as an object of rehabilitative or curative intervention. Ability, meanwhile, is posited as an idealized marker of successful citizenship. In this paper I foreground the dis/ability complex as a guiding subject through which to think a number of important individual and collective processes including labour, emotion, learning, technology, and the anthroposcene. I conclude that all of these intersectional sites of engagement significantly benefit from an engagement with the dis/ability complex.

Keywords

Disability, ability, ableism, disablism, theory, politics

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Introducing dis/ability studies

We might frame the contemporary climate, in which we study diversity, as one of working in an age of intersectionality. This term, popularized through the now classic work of Kimberlé Crenshaw (1991), demanded white feminists to engage more seriously and readily with the politics of blackness, race, and ethnicity. Intersectionality has been incredibly important, especially in the North American context, in plugging diversity studies into racialised politics that continue to dominate even today. In the same year as Crenshaw was admonishing white feminists for excluding women of colour, Jenny Morris (1991) was doing exactly the same to feminist and

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disability studies scholars for failing to represent the desires of disabled women. From the early 1990s a whole body of feminist disability studies literature has blossomed (e.g. Morris, 1992, 1996; Thomas, 1999; Garland-Thomson, 1997, 2002, 2005; Titchkosky, 2003), some of it connecting with the politics of race (e.g. Vernon, 1999; Erevelles, 2012; Dunhamn, et al., 2015; Mollow, 2017). This work has been important not only in decentring the implicit masculine and white values of disability studies but also in bringing to the fore the perspectives of disabled women of colour. These intersectional interventions have moved the field from plain old disability studies to *critical* disability studies (Meekosha & Shuttleworth, 2009). A critical disability studies scholar asks difficult questions about the possibilities of representation and accountability of scholarship and activism to all disabled people. And this newfound criticality seeks to challenge some of the starting assumptions of disability scholarship, founded at a time when some groups of disabled people were not present in deliberations as to its potential meaning. This paper is a small contribution to the growing criticality within disability studies, a criticality that has a lot to offer to studies of diversity (see Goodley, 2016 for an overview).

In my 2014 book *Dis/ability Studies: Theorising Disablism and Ableism* I sought to blend studies of disability and ability. It had occurred to me, in the early days of writing that book, that critical disability studies had given rise to a number of theoretical communities that were, at times, forking off in different investigative directions and failing to commune with one another. In 2016 I wrote the second edition of *Disability Studies: An Interdisciplinary Introduction* for Sage, in which I spent some time unpacking theoretical studies of ableism/ability and disablism/disability. I argued that traditionally disability theory had connected with the lives of disabled people, contested disablism, and challenged the socio-political genealogies of disability and impairment. Disability was, unsurprisingly, the main object of study for scholars of disability. We have since learnt much about the conditions of oppression that disabled people are subjected to and, just as significantly, disabled people are now often the subjects, authors, and researchers of disability. This work has paralleled and fed into the wider disabled people's movement, resulting in a stage of theoretical sophistication framed in terms of critical disability studies.

A hallmark of this growing theoretical maturity is the emergence of critical studies of ableism. The work of Fiona Kumari Campbell (2008a, 2008b, 2009) has been especially influential. Ableism denotes a broad cultural logic of autonomy, self-sufficiency, and independence. We would want to consider ability (and the craving of ability tied up within ableism) in similar ways. Neoliberal ableism is the elision of national economic independence with an individual and cultural celebration of autonomy (Goodley, 2014). This particular affect economy ties individual and national progress to self-determination and, by virtue of this, associates happiness with self-reliance. Ableism is felt psychologically, as the broader social processes of ableism shape our psyches. And, as we believe in the offerings of ableism, we contribute to, reproduce, and uphold the logics of ableism. Hence, while people with physical, sensory, and cognitive impairments risk experiencing disablism, all individuals of contemporary society are imperilled by the practices of ableism. Ableism and disablism feed off each other; they are coterminous. This is because disability cannot exist without ability. We would not be able to comprehend disability without its mirror image. Moreover, the ableist premise that we can (and should) ontologically and economically self-finance our everyday lives helps breed the disabling circumstances on which disabled people are seen as not embodying the autonomous assets necessary for everyday life. I find it helpful to think of us all living with the "dis/ability complex." This is a bifurcated reality where just as disability is diagnosed so ability is further expanded. And just as society holds more sway in the promises of self-sufficient, autonomous, and able citizens so those that fail to meet up to the ableist zeitgeist are rendered disabled. And there are winners and losers here as different values, social groupings, and individual human qualities are placed on either side of the dis/ability complex. In figure 1, I seek to briefly tease out some of the key elements of the dis/ability complex:

Figure 1: The dis/ability complex unpacked

Dis	Ability
Disabled	Abled
Emotional	Rational
Mad	Sane
Dependent	Autonomous
Intermeshed	Atomistic
Sitting	Standing
Collective packs	Lone wolves
Crip	Normal
Idle	Labouring
Entangled	Alone
Many Others	The Same

There are a number of potential reactions to this representation. Let me elucidate two. First, one might feel uncomfortable with the reliance on a binarisation of life when in many ways we might feel we live in the liminal space that exists between binary categories. Whilst recognizing that we will occupy different places on a continuum between, say, dependent and autonomous, it is important to acknowledge the deeply dividing practices of ableism and disablism. We need to spend more time revealing these contradictory though co-terminous repetitions. Therefore, I feel that the binary of dis/ability does some useful work in holding in tension the two phenomena. I am happy to keep the split term because of the analytical work it does in capturing the realities of contemporary life emboldened by the scholarship and activism of critical disability studies. Second, one might view either side of the dis/ability complex as extreme binaries of opposition. And while some might argue that we live in a time of post-binaries, the dis/ability complex attends to the very definite ways in which humanity works through and against preferred and othered, claimed and abandoned, majoritarian and minoritarian positions. Disabled people are conceptualized in those terms described on the left of figure 1, and reacted to by a non-disabled society as monstrous others (Shildrick, 2002). Able-bodied and -minded people tend to succeed in a world governed by and constructed for citizens with whom they share many similarities (the right column in figure 1). The dis/ability complex captures the global politics of diagnosis (in which more and more of us are likely to encounter a disability category) that is happening at exactly the same time when human survival and success is being ramped up in terms of individual autonomy and self-sufficiency, as the interventions of the state recede, austerity rolls across and through nations, and American and UK isolationism begins. And the dis/ability binarism also invites the grouping of people in terms of – to paraphrase Braidotti (2006) – “the same” and (on the other side) “many others.” So, while I am prepared to concede that the dis/ability complex is a representational figure of extremes, one could assert (with some justification) that we *are* living in extreme socio-political times, a point I develop later when I consider our Trump-Brexit condition.

The dis/ability complex provides a framing from which to connect with other human beings and non-humans. This frame has an intersectional quality. From this vantage point, I want to explore a number of levels of analysis that I think could benefit from a “dis/ability” studies analysis. A dis/ability studies centralizes the dis/ability complex and in so doing is sensitized to unpacking the often-complementary practices of disablism and ableism. This is not to water down disability politics or the activism of disabled people. Rather, while disability remains of primary interest, the simultaneous attention to ability asks us to grapple with a broad political landscape in which people – disabled and otherwise – are found lacking in the ableist imaginary. By adopting the dis/ability complex as a critical approach, I seek to connect with other political agendas, as I broaden the discussion to include a number of intersectional engagements that move beyond a concern with dis/ability. My intensions are not to replace race, feminist, class, trans, or queer studies with critical disability studies as the master narrative. Rather, I am interested in the potential of the dis/ability complex to add to what is already a well-populated transdisciplinary arena of intersectional theorising. Originating in the work of Crenshaw (1991) and other allies, intersectional theorizing seeks to make sense of the ways in which mutual processes of exclusion take place and the frictional impact this has on multiple identities. I concur with Moodley and Graham (2015) that disability might be one starting point for a consideration of intersectionality that, of course, will not end with disability but will pull in other identity categories and material conditions. I thus introduce dis/ability as an important category of consideration in order to help us account for “multiple grounds of identity when considering how the social world is constructed” (Crenshaw, 1991, p. 1245).

Labour

The dis/ability complex has the potential to allow us to think critically about the way we labour in life. Labour remains a key topic of analysis for a whole host of disciplines ranging from economic policy to social policy and sociology. Labour in the form of paid labour is a defining feature of identity in many global north countries across the globe. Employment status is an absolute marker of human success in these neoliberal-able times. Work is so embedded into the psyche of all of us that the prospect of unemployment conjures up not simply matters of financial survival but also questions of ontological stability. But what would it mean to contest this naturalized phenomenon of the valued labouring citizen? How might we offer an intersectional critique of labour? One productive elision is that of critical disability and queer studies.

Queer scholars have led a resistance against the neoliberalisation of the soul where human value equates with labour value. The work of Halberstam has been foundational to the queer celebration of "a way of refusing to acquiesce to dominant logics of power and discipline" and "a form of critique" (2011, p. 88). Carr beautifully described Halberstam's *The Queer Art of Failure* as

> an energetic and loving tribute to those of us who fail, lose, get lost, forget, get angry, become unruly, disrupt the normative order of things, and exist and behave in the world in ways that are considered antinormative, anticapitalist, and antidisciplinary. In this manifesto on failure, the author claims the possibility of failing well. She also looks at what it means to not win, to not buy into consumer culture, to not aspire to accumulate goods, or to challenge disciplinary boundaries (Carr, 2012, n.p.).

Halberstam comments that "under certain circumstances, failing, losing, forgetting, unmaking, undoing, unbecoming, not knowing may in fact offer more creative, more cooperative, more surprising ways of being in the world" (Halberstam, 2011, p. 2). This celebration of failure resonates wonderfully with the life worlds of those disabled persons who do not work. Occupying one side of the dis/ability complex, disabled people too often find themselves positioned as dependent idlers. Welfare claimants. Wards of the state. State dependents. Halberstam's work offers a reversal: rather than being cast as unproductive citizens, the unproductivity of (some) disabled (and queer) people might be reconceptualised as a moment of possibility. Not working "jams the smooth operations of the normal and the ordinary" (Halberstam, 2011, p. 70). It demands that we recreate alternative futures that are not so centred on labour. Disability as disruption is at heart of recent articulations of crip theory (McRuer, 2006, 2012; McRuer & Wilkerson, 2003). The term crip is reappropriated as a term of deference and disruption. When disabled people fail to work, then they crip the normative ideals attached to employment and encourage new ways of thinking that might, for example, promote alternative forms of community participation and contribution. Immaterial and unpaid relationships of support and care provide necessary building blocks of everyday community life. And these relational moments are a necessary antidote to the ableist emphasis on human value being tied to labour value. As Akemi Nishida (2017) demonstrates, it is through our emotional connections and assemblages that we can promote mutual relationships and, by virtue of this, our shared humanness.

At the same time, however, disabled activists and researchers desire employment. We know of the myriad ways in which disabled people are excluded from the world of work (e.g. Barnes & Roulstone, 2005). Failure in the labour market reveals the oppressive nature of employment regimes: conditions that many people (disabled and non-disabled) struggle to celebrate. This does not automatically denigrate queer/crip politics though it does raise questions about the place of normative desires for such things as the chance to work. Dis/ability studies provides a means of holding in tension crip and normative desires in relation to labour. I have built on this tension by developing a DisHuman perspective with my colleagues Rebecca Lawthom, Katherine Runswick Cole, and Kirsty Liddiard.[1] A DisHuman theory "simultaneously acknowledges the possibilities offered by disability to trouble, reshape and re-fashion the human (crip ambitions) while at the same time asserting disabled people's humanity (normative desires)" (Goodley & Runswick-Cole, 2016, p. 1). As we argue, DisHuman analysis allows us to "claim (normative) citizenship (associated with choice, a sense of autonomy, being part of a loving family, the chance to labour, love and consume) while simultaneously drawing on disability to trouble, reshape and re-fashion liberal citizenship" to invoke what we call DisCitizenship (to rethink how we choose, act, love, work, and shop). DisCitizenship keeps in sharp relief the deeply complex, contradictory, and tension-filled ways in which disabled people crip the relationships around them while simultaneously engaging in very normative modes of life. The dis/ability complex recognizes the push and pull of labour. Labour is an intersectional phenomenon that we might both be drawn to and also repulsed by.

Emotion

The renowned feminist social psychologist Margie Wetherell has recently argued that the humanities, psychological and social sciences are witnessing the emergence of various theories of affect and emotion that attend to the ways in "which bodies are pushed and pulled in contemporary social formations, in the 'engineering' of affective responses, and in how workers and citizens become emotionally engaged and affectively interpellated" (2015, p. 139). The study of emotion is a key area of studies of diversity. And my sense is that there is much potential in probing the intersections of critical disability studies, critical race, feminist, and queer theories.

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[1] Please visit https://dishuman.com/

In terms of critical disability studies, there has been a plethora of work associated with psycho-emotional disablism. This phenomenon permits insights into the micro-aggressions felt by disabled people when they undergo direct and indirect forms of discrimination. Much can be learnt from the feminist disability scholars who have developed this work to consider the ontological damage that risks being done as a consequence of disablism. I am thinking here of the work of British writers Carol Thomas (1999) and Donna Reeve (2005). When non-disabled people stare at disabled people, ask inappropriate questions about impairment, or respond with hostility, then there is a risk that disabled people are emotionally marginalised by these very political, micro-sociological encounters. And the psycho-emotional register not only reflects processes of disablism but is also informed by ableism. As Ben Whitburn and Lucinda McKnight (2017) acknowledge, it is paramount that we attend to the psychological impact of living in an ableist culture where the very language we use speaks of a wider symbolic order that is phallocentric and ableist. To speak of disability is to use the language of deficiency:

> Retarded development.
> Blind to the facts.
> The truth falling on deaf ears.
> We stand up for ourselves.
> Blind panic.

These are just some common examples that reveal an inherently ableist and disablist lexicon. This focus on psycho-emotional ableism is being developed in the work of Julia Daniels (2016). Her current groundbreaking doctoral research seeks to investigate the experiences of disabled people as they reflect back on their educational experiences. Schools are designed with a non-disabled learner in mind. And narrowing forms of assessment assume a particular kind of learner. Her unique angle on these experiences relates to the ways in which she asks informants to reflect on the presence of ableist thought in their educational memories. Early findings indicate the profound ontological impact of competitive individualized modes of achievement upon disabled people. Daniels' work assembles a new way of thinking about the ableism inherent within society that risks denigrating the psycho-emotional worlds of individuals who fail to match up to ableist imperatives. Failure might, as we have considered above, be a resource for intersectional politics. But, equally, failure hurts. Emotion is worked at the dis/ability complex.

This focus on the psycho-emotional register resonates with recent work about micro-aggression relating to race, gender, and sexuality (e.g. Sue, et al., 2007; Sue, 2010). This phenomenon correlates with the mundane everyday exchanges that communicate denigrating messages to some individuals because of their group membership. An intersectional moment of connection is found here in relation to the dis/ability complex where we consider the psychical impact of discrimination (such as disablism, homophobia, racism, sexism) *and* the cultural manufacturing of preferred kinds of personhood associated with dominant groups (able-bodied and -minded, straight, white, male). This play of denigration and predilection risks constituting a split cultural psyche. It is therefore crucial to work the split self in order to tease out the hegemonic forces at play. Such an activity fits well with a psycho-political analysis in which we consider the ways in which the psyche risks being injured through discrimination and oppression (Fanon, 1993; Hook, 2004). Without lapsing back into the usual individualized therapeutic discourses that colonise the affective register, a psycho-political intervention would uncover the social, cultural, and political circumstances that risk spoiling human subjectivity. A dis/ability complex provides a complementary framework for psycho-political work that builds on the critical race and black studies of Fanon. Indeed, in a recent book (Goodley, 2016) I argue that a pressing concern is to address the psychical injuries caused by racism and disablism that flourish in our cultural imaginaries biased towards ableism and whiteness. Disabled people often complain at "becoming the repositories of other's ontological anxieties" (Marks, 1999, p. 188). Just as black people are expected to be, in the words of Frantz Fanon "good niggers" [sic], disabled people are supposed to be "good cripples;" "eternal victims of an essence, of an appearance, for which they are not responsible" (1993, p. 34). Black studies and disability studies each respond to these subtle relational moments of racism and disablism and feed, most importantly, into the work of activist organisations that respond to the psychological impact of living in a disabling and racist society through politicisation and the arts as powerful forms of catharsis. Similarly, the self-advocacy movement of people with the label of intellectual disabilities has established supportive community spaces for the sharing of aspirations (Roets, et al., 2008), mad pride has subverted normative understandings of sanity (Chamberlin, 1990), and queer crips have celebrated their transgression (McRuer, 2006). And these transformative spaces necessarily challenge the subjective outcomes of disablism, racism, sanism, and heterosexism, performing a cultural act of what Frantz Fanon called socio-diagnosis: "waging war against discrimination on both levels of the socio-economic and the subjective" (Fanon, 1993, pp. 12-13).

Finally, unpacking the cultural production of dis/ability would feed into feminist and queer readings of affect economies, especially the constitution of happiness. Here I am thinking of the work of Sara Ahmed (2004, 2007/2008, 2010) whose influential analysis has problematized what might appear to be a benign desire for happiness. In contrast, she pulls away at the foundations of happiness to demonstrate that it is deeply intersectional phenomena servicing dominant groups and powerful discourses in society. Happiness is an ideological smoke screen: it obscures the deeply racist, sexist, and heteronormative conditions of contemporary society as we look away to consume joy, contentment, and affective fulfilment through a host of practices including consumption, therapy, and self-care. To be happy is to be fulfilled. In this sense the dis/ability complex invites us to consider who is allowed to be happy on either side of the complex. When we constitute happy subjects we also create unhappy others: what methods of individualization and tropes of psychopathology are drawn on to conceptualise the unhappy? When we make un/happy categories we pull emotion out of its cultural moorings and, instead, comprehend un/happiness as an individual attribute. The dis/ability complex can weigh in on these discussions about the cultural reproduction of emotion.

Learning

Drawing in the dis/ability complex encourages us to question the ideological apparatus of our places of learning. Clearly education is an intersectional concern. Ability and normativity tend to hunt together. Schools are striated in ways that lead groups of students down different ability pathways. Norming ability and finding disability are key dividing practices of our educational systems. Educational success, signified through individual achievement, threatens to break alliances between young people and sets them up as individualized entities competing with one another. Such individualization is apparent, too, in the university sector. In Britain the rather clumsily titled Early Career Researcher (ECR) is expected to adhere to a number of trajectories related to publication power, research bidding success, and administrative leadership. Little space is afforded for collegiality and collectivity when one is chasing the next grant or publication. This culture is not conducive to those researchers who are mutually interdependent on or with others. Disabled researchers and academics, those with caring responsibilities – many of whom are women – are already disadvantaged even before the success indicators are brought out for public consumption and institutional audit.[2] Educational spaces, across the board, work upon the dis/ability complex. Education needs ability as an outcome and also as an object of educational practice. And, just as importantly, let us not forget education's reliance on disability: the naming, diagnosis, and treatment of those whose abilities fail or fall at educational hurdles that are designed to sift and sort learners.

Slee (2017) argues that exclusionary educational practices are an ontological given: where we find learning we will find some learners who are included and others who hover on the peripheries of the classroom. Slee (2017) is inspired by the American musician, composer, activist, and filmmaker Frank Zappa when he argues that inclusive education is not dead, it just smells funny (a point Zappa had made about the state of Jazz music in the 1960s). His point is that the educational systems we bear witness to are the products of complex debates, politics, and policies in relation to education and inclusion. We have inherited a failed project of inclusive education in which we are (i) obsessed with individual achievement and attainment and (ii) infatuated with disability diagnoses. Whether or not inclusion ever occurred (though I find that unlikely) the point of significance is that we are currently witnessing a mismatch of competing discourses that are right at the heart of the dis/ability complex. This leaves spaces of learning in a questionable state. And we know schools struggle to respond to diversity in terms of race, gender, sexuality, and disability, with those at the normative centre responding the best.

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[2] For a useful discussion of the additional labours of disabled researchers, see Hannam-Swain, 2017.

Applying the dis/ability complex to education reminds us that children of colour and disabled learners continue to exist on the peripheral borders of our educational cultures. And as the ableism of education becomes ever more pronounced, we can only expect to find these learners shifting further and further away from the normative centre.

Politics

In a concurrent piece I am writing with Tanya Titchkosky, we argue that these Trump-Brexit times pose significant challenges for marginalised sections of society (Titchkosky & Goodley, in press). Both the Trump and Brexit campaigns referenced migrants, refugees, Mexicans, disabled people, and people of colour as threats to the normative homelands of the USA and the UK. These colonizing practices merely reiterate white colonial and supremacist views that deem the US or the UK as the centre of the world. This is a particular kind of centrism where the white British or American voter is re-sited as the citizen worthy of interest. Centralising white Brits/Americans feeds into an ableist ideology that positions the WENA (Western European and North American) individuals as *the* business of our wider politics. Disabled activists have been quick to point out the irony of this politicking that claims to address the ignored generation. The Trump and Brexit campaigns postured around a politics of inclusion, developing policies that addressed the hidden (white) urban and rural working classes, historically ignored by the political elites (Harnish, 2017). Trump's campaign emphasized the plight of the able-bodied, self-sufficient working class that needed only work rather than the state to release their potential. In making this argument we are left, yet again, with an ableist common sense: an unconscious, ideological position that emphasizes this well-work trope. According to this view, individual citizens are ready and able to work if only we would let them. Such a tacit model of the citizen ignores those that require the support of others (such as many people with impairments or illnesses) and, importantly, dismisses those communities that have at their heart a more collectivist and interdependent approach to everyday life (such as many of the diasporic and first nation communities found across the states of America).

A politics of intersectionality would organize around the principle that a life worth living is a life lived with others. This would involve working the edges of the dis/ability complex: to highlight the ways in which the seeming recognition of the working class actually recreates a politics of disablism. And the isolationist and misplaced autonomy appropriated by Trump and Brexit discourses must be opposed at every opportunity. Here an intersectional politics is not merely something we might desire but an essential kind of politics that responds to these challenging times. The dis/ability complex shines light on the able-bodied and able-minded character of a new austerity politics of self-sufficiency that can only be redressed through a collectivist, interdependent, and intersectional activism.

Technology

The blending of the wet ware of bodies with the hard ware of technology demands a cross-examination of the promises and ethics of technology. What is it about the limits of humanity that some of us find so unappealingly incomplete? When is technology brought in to refashion the human whose imaginations are being framed? The ethics of human enhancement and bio-psycho improvement encompass a huge range of ideas and possible interventions including genome editing, the use of prosthetics, the merging of organic and inorganic matter, artificial intelligence, and revised uses of drugs previously assigned for childhood labels such as ADHD. Enhancement also encompasses fraught bioethical debates such as the quality of life, the right to die and live, and the value of technological implants.

One way in which dis/ability studies can intercede is to provide an indispensable moment to pause and think. Let us take, as an example, the treatment of ADHD with Ritalin. Disability's detection invites a pharmacological response to make the user as able as possible and contain or eliminate difference. Disability is diagnosed at the same time as a trajectory of ability is produced. Many scholars and activists of disability studies are understandably suspicious about technological or medical intervention, especially when these treatments imply normative ambitions. The prescription of ADHD responds to a dis/ability diagnosis with the hope of emboldening the dis/ability element of newly diagnosed children (to get them back in line with other non-disabled people in the classroom). Dis/ability studies would want to unpack the normative desires at the heart of such psycho-pharmacological intervention.

At the same time, however, dis/ability studies must be attentive to the more non-normative approaches to biomedical and technological intervention (see, for example, Sparrow, 2013). One example relates to trans and gender nonconforming individuals who draw on technologies of the psyche and body. For those people who are engaged with gender transition we might understand the appropriations of technology as potentially more non-normative by design. Biomedical intervention, in this case, feeds into gender fluidity. The debates do not end there, of course, because others might view gender reassignment as the medical paradigm offering only strictly embodied, gendered binarised options.[3] I would suggest, however, that there is queer potential in technologies of trans. This draws in trans activists (and I would also add disabled people) as key contributors to bioethical deliberations (Powell & Foglia, 2014). Too often people from LGBTQ communities – like disabled people – are considered to be merely the objects rather than the subjects of medical intervention and bioethical debate. Trans perspectives on technologies of the body share much with the politics of disabled people who are working the dis/ability complex for more crip ways of living life. We want to explore how biomedical technologies – often the subject of crip critique – might be utilized in order to enhance

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[3] I would like to thank Kirsty Liddiard for some essential feedback on this section of the paper.

a body's trans potential. As Argüello (2016) makes clear, too often we hold normative ideas about the biomedical that already view medicalization as (often unnecessarily) intervening in life to eradicate ill health and pathology. This might explain why some disability studies scholars have recently contributed to twitter debates arguing against gender reassignment surgery undertaken by young trans people. Such surgery is viewed as a form of medicalization being unnecessarily adopted by unwitting, not-yet-adult and, therefore, naïve individuals. Yet, such a viewpoint fails to engage with more queer understandings of biomedical intervention. Here, again, the dis/ability complex invites a deep interrogation of technology, including trans/crip connections.

Anthropocene

Our discussion of technology inevitably takes us into a discussion of the anthropocene, i.e. our current times when the world has been deeply marked by the practices of human beings. Environmental politics and disability politics might be conceived of together as a critical response in these times of posthuman activism. The reason for this is that a wider exclusionary politics is at the heart of the dehumanization of disabled people, a politics that justifies the privileging of certain sections of the human population over other humans and non-humans. Indeed in their introduction to the 2018 *Posthuman Glossary*, Rosi Braidotti and Maria Hlavajova are clear that these posthuman times need to bring together animal, human, cosmological, technological, and ecological politics in order to address the damage being done to the globe and those who live on it.

Mindy Blaise's work with other colleagues draws attention to the importance of attending to the relationships between humans and non-humans.[4] In order to develop a truly inclusive human politics, Blaise (2017) argues that we need to attend to our relationships with non-humans and the wider environment. She puts forward a non-hierarchical model of difference in which we consider the complexities of human-animal relationships and resist the temptation of anthropocentrism. Instead, thinking through how we live with animals may develop a more complex, non-hierarchical, and contingent politics of everyday life. This approach picks up on the influential work of Rosi Braidotti and her analysis of the posthuman (2006, 2013). She calls for a posthuman politics that extends life beyond the species. As we argue in Goodley, Lawthom and Runswick-Cole (2014, p. 345),

> Braidotti takes to task the human species centering of our own perceived superiority: an anthropocentrism that puts humanist man (anthropos) before other species and the environment. Humanism situates anthropos as elite species, occupying a sovereign position. A posthuman turn contests such elitism, reminding itself that the superior human ideal is of

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[4] See http://commonworlds.net/

> course only that; a utopian ideal. Moreover, this is an organic entity that has been "technological mediated to unprecedented order" (Braidotti, 2013, p. 57) subjected to "the four horsemen of the posthuman apocalypse: nanotechnology, biotechnology, information technology and cognitive science" (59). The human species has been expanded upon through these experiments; thus challenging the centrality of anthropos and ensuring that "the boundaries between 'Man' and his others go tumbling down, in a cascade effect that opens up unexpected perspective … Relinquishing the demonic forces of the naturalised others" (66-67). These others include animals, insects, plants, environment and the cosmos as a whole.

For Braidotti, the posthuman urge to move beyond the species opens up solidarities with non-humans including animals and the wider natural environment. Post-anthropocentricism results from this posthuman response, a reaction that fits well with dis/ability studies. With this in mind, we can revisit the dis/ability complex:

Figure 2: The dis/ability complex revisited

Dis	Ability
Emotional	Rational
Mad	Sane
Sad	Happy
Dependent	Autonomous
Intermeshed	Atomistic
Sitting	Standing
Collective packs	Lone wolves
Cripping	Norming
Entangled	Alone
Many Others	The Same
Environment	Man
Nature	Civilised
Non-human	Human
Animal	Anthropos
Cosmology	Science
Sustainability	Growth
Bodies	Minds

The additional elements reflect the dis/ability complex's invitation to merge and engage with environmental, animal, and dis/ability studies. Sunaura Taylor's synthesis of animal and disability studies has been absolutely essential in probing "an oppressive value system that declares some bodies normal, some bodies broken, and some bodies food" (2011, p. 191). She declares, "as a freak, as a patient, I do not deny that I'm like an animal. Instead, I want to be aware of the mistreatment that those labelled 'animal' (human and nonhuman) experience. I am an animal" (Taylor, 2011, p. 194). In contemplating the ways in which animals are portrayed as burdensome, dependent, and natural, we connect with some key tropes associated with the historical maltreatment of disabled people. Taylor envisages a cross-pollination of ideas across animal and disability studies precisely because both animals and disabled people occupy similar devalued positions. This dialogue between animal studies and disability studies invites the engendering of a posthuman politics that contemplates human/non-human connections (see Taylor, 2017).[5]

Such connections seem to me to be at the foreground of contemporary engagements with intersectionality especially when we think more broadly about environmental politics. Deborah Fenney-Salkeld offers the following observation about the relationship between disability and environmental politics:

> Disability studies' concern with the environment has often only extended as far as its potential for accessibility is concerned – implying an anthropocentric viewpoint. Although it may be appropriate for disability studies to remain broadly anthropocentric, an explicit acknowledgement of the value of the environment beyond accessibility would enable engagement with sustainability debates. This might mean explicit recognition of the natural environment as sustaining life, and an understanding of the interdependence of humans and nature (2016, p. 460).

This argument fits well with a posthuman political project that seeks to respond to the anthropocene through a trans-amalgamation of animal, disability, and environmental studies.

Conclusions

> To say that a category such as race or gender is socially constructed is not to say that the category has no significance in our world. On the contrary, a large and continuing project for subordinated people – and indeed, one of the projects for which postmodern theories have been very helpful – is thinking about the way power has clustered around certain categories and is exercised against others. This project attempts to unveil the processes of subordination and the various ways these processes are experienced

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[5] See also the current research project at the University of Oslo being led by Jan Grue and Mike Lundblad: Biopolitics of Disability, Illness, and Animality (BIODIAL). This project explores how certain human and nonhuman lives are constructed as less valuable than others in cultural, literary, and social representations of disability, illness, animals, and animality. For more details, see: https://www.hf.uio.no/ilos/english/research/projects/biopolitics-of-disability-illness-and-animal/

> by people who are subordinated and people who are privileged by them. (Crenshaw, 1991, pp. 1296–1297)

I end this paper with this extended quotation from Crenshaw to remind us of the tension at the heart of intersectional theory: the simultaneous exposure of privilege and subordination. This fits in with the project of dis/ability studies to keep in play the oppositional work that takes place everyday between "dis" and "ability." The dis/ability complex functions as an intersectional cultural archetype: an event, process, model, moment, and instance. For intersectional theory, dis/ability offers what Garland-Thomson (2005) terms the chance to "rethink": to reflect on what we already have learnt from intersectional theory and to draw in new insights from dis/ability. Rather than replacing theoretical ideas, concepts or preferences, the dis/ability complex is an additional heuristic device that we might draw into our work.

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