



Disability Studies Quarterly
the first journal in the field of disability studies

**An open letter to White disability studies and ableist
institutions of higher education**

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Dear White disability studies and ableist institutions of higher education;
cc: racist, misogynist, cis-heteronormative and other interacting systems of
oppression

We believe that in order for disability studies (DS) to be most relevant, it must
accurately address the interests of the full range of people with disabilities.
Likewise, for institutions of higher education to be relevant to disability

communities, it needs fundamental transformation led by the expertise of disabled people of different backgrounds. Hence, we are advocating for a critical *intersectional* disability studies that centers the needs, perspectives, and interests of marginalized people with disabilities and enables the advancement of disability justice. Disability should not be an afterthought; rather carefully considered as an intersectional and integral part of all university operations, visioning and planning.

Specifically, we want White DS and ableist institutions to:

- Recognize that ableism is a socially constructed complex system of disempowerment which intersects with, and is just as pervasive as, other systems of oppression.
- Support and create research, policy, and social justice agendas which center the interests and contributions of disabled people of color and other marginalized people with disabilities.
- Acknowledge the racial as well as gender-, class-, and other injustice-based disparities that exist within the disabled population in the U.S. and globally.
- Recognize that disability is many things, including a social identity, and not solely the outcome of racist and other violence or inequality.
- Commit to cross-community solidarity.
- Not appropriate the cultural, intellectual or other contributions of marginalized groups or tokenize individuals.
- Acknowledge the ways we all are embedded in—thus perpetuate and internalize—systems of oppressions and work collectively to dismantle them.
- Practice disability politics and not just objectively research and write about it (e.g., hold institutions accountable for their ableist and oppressive practices, including the institutions of higher education in which we are a part).
- Not structurally situate labor of meeting disabled people's accommodation and care needs disproportionately onto the backs of women of color and

other marginalized people.

- Operate from a perspective of culture of access, instead of making accommodations the sole responsibility of disabled people.

We want a critical intersectional disability studies which:

- Builds crip wisdom from how disabled people—particularly those who are marginalized within disability communities and studies—experience and envision disability and practice creative ways to navigate and thrive in an unjust society.
- Strives for social change.
- Informs and empowers marginalized people with disabilities about DS, (e.g. builds a more diverse pool of DS scholars through mentoring and institutional supports targeted towards disabled students, advocates and scholars of color).
- Defines the measure of the field's success on how much it contributes to the improvement to the quality of *all* disabled people's lives.

Signed,

Radical Disabled Women of Color United:

Drs. Angel Love Miles, Akemi Nishida, and Anjali J. Forber-Pratt

[Return to Top of Page](#)

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