

## About this issue

### *More beautiful for breaking*

This COVID-themed issue continues a global conversation about the experience of disability in unusual times. It begins with a shared editorial collectively created by the editorial team. Given the extraordinary nature of this moment, we felt an extraordinary form was the most appropriate response. It looks at how we may best leverage this challenging time and circumstances to be, as Kaya Ayers suggests, “more beautiful for breaking,” as we as communities reflect, invent and collaborate together.

A Global Perspectives editorial from Sona Kazemi and Hemachandran Karah launches the long-awaited multilingual initiative to ensure more global voices are part of this important conversation about disability in culture.

Cassandra Evans’ personal account “The Longest Blizzard” captures in narrative the impact of the pandemic on the author’s family, her students, and those with whom she works. It considers the pressures, the unique opportunities for learning and reflection, and the ever-present possibility of breakthrough.

Ananya Kapoor’s “Cinema on the Spectrum: Representation of Persons with Autism in Mainstream Filmography” offers a cross-cultural look at representation of autism in media and points to the role these images may play in this larger global conversation, especially with the unprecedented consumption of content during the pandemic.

Returning to the U.S., “Activism among college students with disabilities and the move beyond compliance to full inclusion,” by Brenda Smith-Logan, Jeff Sheen-Logan, and Keith Christensen-Logan provides examples of strategic student activism that has resulted in meaningful change. It uses these cases to offer a framework to inspire other activists.

We are also pleased to feature an invited work by Steve Brown, a founding editor of *Review of Disability Studies*, who for many international readers has helped articulate what ‘disability culture’ means. The excerpt from his upcoming book *Disability Culture 20/20* revisits the concept in the age of the pandemic. He also considers the work of activists using the current moment to push for meaningful change.

In our book reviews this issue, Shu Wan reviews Etieyibo and Omiegbe's *Disabilities in Nigeria: Attitudes, Reactions, and Remediation*, the first comprehensive monograph on issues of disability for contemporary Nigerian society. And Maria Teresa Houar's review of Petra Kuppers's latest work of new and recent poetry, *Gut Botany*, considers the ways in which Kuppers travels through borders between bodies and species to better understand her body and experience.

Finally, Global Perspectives brings together a host of international voices to broaden our understanding of disability as shared global experience. It also features original language contributions in various forms including Nibel Genc's "The Engraved Lighter" in Turkish, a personal narrative looking at the ways in which objects can remember brutal life- and body-changing conflicts. Zarana Maheshwary's "Against Social Isolation: Disability Metaphors and Personal Battles" considers the limits of the disability metaphors in frequent use during the pandemic, placing those in contrast with insights from the author's own embodied experience. And "two poems" in Polish, by Magda Szarota, speaks to the continuing power of art and personal expression to help us make sense of experience.

**Collective Editorial Response to This Global Moment:  
What can bringing a disability lens to this moment offer us?**

A protracted global pandemic. Widespread uprising and global cries for social justice. Together as an editorial board, we have struggled to think of the best way to respond to this moment in a meaningful way. We have collectively decided that our traditional editorial model is insufficient to fully address this extraordinary time.

Instead, what follows are a few immediate short thoughts. They may take different forms, informed by our unique vantage points as academics, activists, workers, parents, racialized immigrants, people with disabilities and non-disabled allies, but all are unified by our understanding that critical disability perspectives are more important than ever for understanding--and leveraging--this historic moment:

***Responses***

***Mary Jean Hande*** - The pandemic and global uprisings have underscored the fault lines and gaping social inequalities that structure our world today. We must chart a new world. The struggles of poor, BIPOC disability people teach us many of the necessary lessons on interdependence, mutual aid, and solidarity that we will need.

***Sona Kazemi*** - Inspired by a decade-long organizing with multiple global communities, seeking justice for mass atrocities and state-sponsored oppression (e.g., anti-immigrant sentiment, mass execution of political prisoners, mass incarceration, theocracy, religious-fundamentalism, violence against women, and punitive limb amputation), I personally take an optimistic approach to the pandemic's impact on our lives as a global community. I advise not to be so quick to take what existed before and attempt to recreate it for a post-pandemic world. This crossroads provides us a unique opportunity to consider what old ideas and normative way of thinking - without challenging the status quo, have overstayed their welcome in myriad industries that rule our world and what can be part of our new normal? Disabled/mad/traumatized people could be incredible public pedagogues, leading us ahead and enlightening our pathway with their invaluable insights and experiences with the malfunctioning old "normal," from poverty to

ableism, sexism, racism, and incarceration. Many of them have already developed survival tactics and strategies from mutual aid to community-building and story-telling, simply because they have already dealt with isolation, marginalization, imposed solitude, and systemic ableism and racism for most of their lives.

**Susan Levy** - The year of 2020 has led to tumultuous emotions, immeasurable challenges, enhanced and multiple divisions. It has also led to re-imagining how we understand and conceive of ‘normal’, what it means to do things differently. ‘There is a crack in everything, that's how the light gets in’, wrote Leonard Cohen (1992). One such ‘light’ to emerge from the darkness of COVID-19 is how digital technology is articulating new opportunities to communicate at a distance and in different formats, re-defining accessibility and how lives are lived. We need to identify and make visible the catalysts of change and ensure the voice of inclusion is embedded in all our futures.

**Jenifer L. Barclay** - As we reflect on the challenges, struggles, and triumphs of 2020, it is imperative that we also reflect on the ways in which different groups of people have experienced the COVID-19 pandemic differently. As one widely circulated social media post noted very early on, “we might all be in the same storm, but we’re not all in the same boat” (Tett, 2020). If ever there was a time to use the lens of intersectionality now is it since this perspective allows us to think critically about a global event that simultaneously connects and disconnects us. Numerous resources advocate the importance of intersectionality, but for a concise starting point I recommend: <https://blogs.bmj.com/bmj/2020/05/15/intersectionality-offers-a-radical-rethinking-of-covid-19/>

**Kara Ayers** - One of my favorite proverbs is the Japanese story of repairing broken pottery with gold. The crack in the pottery is highlighted as a unique piece of history. It is more beautiful for breaking. I hope I will someday look back on 2020 as a year of resilience and the initiation of meaningful change. For now, we are still surrounded by such brokenness and loss-including an entire disregard for disabled, black, brown, and immigrant lives-that it is difficult to imagine a time of rebuilding and regrowth to the extent we desperately need. I find hope in advocacy communities, who have never stopped fighting, and know I must do the same.

**Hemachandran Karah** - Myriad care infrastructures thrive so as to aid people in handling disasters, emergencies, and unknown structural impingements. We need to invent transdisciplinary approaches so that novel and yet hidden infrastructures of care begin to surface. Also, we may have to begin rethinking deeply entrenched academic habits that raise artificial barriers. A slavish devotion to jargonism, ableism, and ideology, for example, permit us to reach out only so far. They may never facilitate connection with human infrastructures that are shaped differently.

**Pat Morrissey** - The pandemic will reveal many things — disparities and inequities, unconditional kindness, and unparalleled resilience. My hope is that brings about sustainable fairness in our treatment of and interactions with each other.

**Raphael Raphael** - It's easy to forget. A global pandemic claiming 1 to 4 million souls. Unprecedented international attention to global justice. The year was 1968, and the world saw widespread protests against both the excesses of capitalism and authoritarian communism, all amidst the grim backdrop of the global spread of the Hong Kong Flu. As this moment echoes with history and, like 1968, invites us collectively to look towards best possible futures, how do we now best leverage the possibilities of our shared extraordinary moment? A crucial part of this is our continued critical exploration of what disability means and how together we can best create and nurture inclusive communities, something at least as important as it has ever been.

Together, we renew our commitment to bringing disability analyses of race, social inequality, gender, sexuality, and immigration that are critical and global in orientation.

*Dear RDS Readers: After reading our short responses, we invite you to join the conversation at <https://twitter.com/revofdisstud> or <https://www.facebook.com/rdsjournal/> to share your thoughts about what you think a disability lens can help bring to our understanding of this moment and whatever our individual and collective responsibilities may be.*

## References

Cohen, L. (1992). Anthem [Song.] On *The Future*. Columbia.

Tett, G. (2020, September 30). *Covid: we're in the same storm but not the same boat*. Financial Times. <https://www.ft.com/content/8691370f-f0b0-44cf-aa24-6cfd5d28676e>



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