

## FORUM: PACIFIC RIM CONFERENCE STRAND - DISABILITY STUDIES ENVISIONING OUR FUTURE

### Guest Editors' Introduction

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We are particularly delighted to have been invited to guest edit this special issue of RDS. The issue represents an important milestone in the development of progressive, integrative thinking that is critical for disability studies to advance its value to higher education and to informing human rights in the complex global communities to which disability studies speaks.

Over the past 25 years, we have been passionate and committed to disability studies both as scholars and individuals with atypical bodies. Thus, watching this potent field shatter into fragments has been somewhat painful. In the early 1990s, we therefore set our own scholarly agenda to develop, test and teach theory, which had the potential of provoking meaningful and purposive dialog among thinkers and actors that at least on the surface seemed to contradict one another.

We began our theoretical journey by conceptualizing explanatory legitimacy theory, which was published in numerous articles and then in book format in 2004. Explanatory Legitimacy Theory remains useful in 2008 as it makes the distinctions among descriptive, explanatory, and the axiological or the legitimacy dimensions of the categorization of human diversity and identifies the relationships among these elements. Thus, using this lens, disability as a category is comprised of the three interactive elements: description, explanation, and legitimacy. And it is only at the point of legitimacy, where the judgment is made about who is disabled and what responses should be proffered for category members.

This theory allows for the presence of multiple explanations, thereby creating a fertile space in which diverse explanations for atypical human experience can mingle and serve many purposes.

When the planners of the 2008 PacRim conference made the commitment to a disability studies strand, this watershed event affirmed what we have been thinking over these past 25 years; that there is an important role for pluralistic views of disability and that these different views could only strengthen theory, research and practice to promote inclusive global communities and human rights. The articles in this issue illuminate the goal of the visionary PacRim planners, the importance of cross-fertilization and synthesis. Each of the articles takes on different aspects of disability and uses diverse theoretical lenses through which to do so.

Jarman's work discusses an approach to disability studies education through seminal ethical analytic models. Within this curriculum, students encounter and unpack the meaning of rights, personhood, respect, integration, dependence and interdependence. Moreover, Jarman embeds the study of disability within historical and current chronologies as she discusses how these contexts enrich student thinking.

Stevens' paper indicts policy and culture as influential in disability sexuality. She uses cultural policy thinking to analyze the diverse actions that have been undertaken by disabled individuals to express sexuality in the absence of this essential part of life in disability policy. She asserts that limited conversation about disability sexuality locates sexual practices in which disabled bodies engage in the realm of the deviant and challenges disability studies to be inclusive of sexuality.

Mitchell takes on disability and media. He discusses how undergraduate students use media to analyze and counter disability stereotype in multiple venues. In his article, he provides techniques and materials for this important area of teaching.

Finally, DePoy and Gilson conclude the special issue by examining the diverse traditions that had fractured the field, and provide an integrative explanatory model within explanatory legitimacy theory, juncture/disjuncture, through which disparate disciplines and purposes can increase the fit of environments and individuals. The article concludes with the call for locating disability within the larger discourses of diversity and social justice and illustrates their approach through systematic thinking and action techniques.

We anticipate that the model that the 2008 PacRim planners innovated will provide an example to other conference and scholarly venues to follow. Their model has the potential to become the genesis of new and productive collaboration among disparate disciplines and masters that will strengthen the field of disability studies and its effect on global inclusion.

\*\*\*Editor's Note: The Call for Papers for PacRim 2009 is now posted online at [www.pacrim.hawaii.edu](http://www.pacrim.hawaii.edu).