

## Editorial

### RDS Commitment to Honoring Diversity

Megan A. Conway, PhD  
RDS Editor-in-Chief

In March, 2017, I authored an RDS Editorial titled *Disabled Lives Matter*. The Editorial was inspired by a 2017 report released by the Southern Poverty Law Center on how the 2016 Presidential Election impacted school climate for marginalized people including people of color, religious minorities, women and LGBTQ people. The survey revealed that a shocking 90% of respondents saw a negative impact on school climate, but neglected to offer up “disability” as a possible reason for marginalization. The larger point of my editorial was to emphasize that disability – like race, religion, gender, and sexuality – is a critical category to consider when pondering such questions, yet it is often overlooked as the very framing of this survey revealed. However, when the editorial was recently re-released it received a slew of criticism on social media. Especially given the title of my editorial, critics argued that it seemed to rank these various social categories as if some mattered more than others and also seemed to ignore simultaneously experienced disability, race, gender, sexuality, etc. RDS Editorial Board member Jenifer Barclay summed up this criticism pointedly when she wrote:

“[It is] problematic to appropriate the phrase ‘Black Lives Matter,’ especially given the significant backlash and actual violence that people who use that phrase have experienced in recent years. For instance, people peacefully protesting against police violence who invoke the phrase ‘Black Lives Matter’ have been met with militarized police, SWAT forces, tear gas, and physical abuse (e.g. Ferguson, Baltimore). Others, like Colin Kaepernick, are blackballed from their professional livelihoods. Conservative news outlets and neo-Nazis/white supremacists alike routinely frame ‘Black Lives Matter activists’ as angry, lawless, irrational people of color who ‘hate’ white people. Given these realities, I can understand - and agree with - the frustration of those who criticized the editorial and interpreted the (mis)use and distortion of that phrase as insensitive.”

In the wake of criticism about the Editorial, I issued an apology for any offense that it may have caused some readers, including the following statement:

“These are very difficult times for all of us who are personally and professionally impacted by social justice issues. I as much as anybody understand the power of language to convey meaning, and the importance of maintaining the sanctity of the meaning that words convey. My goal as Editor of an academic disability studies journal is to further understandings of diversity.”

With these words in mind, I would like to take the time to reaffirm my commitment, and RDS’s commitment, to representing and respecting through the promotion of Disability Studies, the richly diverse community of individuals with disabilities and their allies.

First, a reminder about ways RDS has already demonstrated our commitment to diversity:

- RDS was founded in 2003 with a mission to “provide an international forum for people with disabilities, academics, professionals, artists and creators from all backgrounds and expertise to express ideas relevant to disability studies and people with disabilities.”
- The RDS Editorial Board, Manuscript Review Board and core staff hail from multiple countries and disciplines and have diverse cultural identities.
- RDS has published over 530 authors from 43 countries around the world.
- RDS publishes articles on a wide range of topics. Some examples of past titles around topics of diversity include *Unsettling the Resettled: An Intersectional Analysis of Autism in the Somali Diaspora* (v14i1), *Changing Disability Status of Immigrants in Australia - Three Cases* (v132), *Strategies to Create a Culturally Responsive Learning Environment* (v11i4), *Precarious Inclusions; Re-Imagining Disability, Race, Masculinity and Nation in My Name Is Khan* (v10i2), *Performing the Pain: Opening the (Crip) Body for (Queer) Pleasures* (v6i3) and *Physical Disability, Gender, and Marriage in Jordanian Society* (v10i1&2).

But of course, we can do better! Here are some of the ways RDS is seeking to remain on the cutting edge of Disability Studies by improving our commitment to diversity now and in the future

- The RDS Editorial Board is working on a permanent statement and revised author guidelines reaffirming our commitment to language that respects diverse identities, including gender neutral language, and established and evolving understandings of respectful language.
- Led by Forums Editor Jenifer Barclay and Research Editor Mary Jean Hande, RDS will publish 2 forums focused on intersections between disability, diversity and marginalization (target publication dates v15i3, Sept 2019, and v16i1, March 2020). One forum will be focused on these themes within academia and the other within social justice movements.
- RDS is launching a student internship program, to be pilot tested this summer, with a particular focus on recruiting a variety of individuals with disabilities who are interested in gaining experience in academic publishing.
- In order to ensure that work published in RDS is accessible to all, RDS will transition to entirely Open Access in September, 2018.

We look forward to your contributions to RDS as authors, reviewers, readers, and yes, critics. It is essential that those of us involved in Disability Studies think deeply about the complex relationship between power and injustice and embrace a diversity of experiences and perspectives even if they contradict our own. This will ensure that Disability Studies remains vibrant and relevant for years to come.