What's so 'critical' about critical disability studies?

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This article self-reflexively turns the focus on disability studies to consider why critical disability studies (CDS) is emerging as the preferred nomenclature and whether this constitutes a radical paradigm shift, or simply signifies a maturing of the discipline. We first trace the emergence of disability studies as part of the disability rights movement, which harboured a primarily materialist critique against the normative status quo. The diversification of critical social theory that has occurred in recent years has opened up new modes of critical enquiry. Yet there are nevertheless several principles that we feel it is important to maintain and we briefly outline these: (1) the irreducibility of social life to objective facts; (2) the requirement of linking theory with praxis in the struggle for an autonomous and participatory society; (3) the necessity that a discipline or field of study be aware of its own historicity and critically reflect on its conceptual framework; and (4) the need to engage in a dialogue with other cultures on the issues and concepts of current significance. We subsequently trace some of the areas where critical theory has been employed in the study of disability. Critical social thought, grounded in the principles we discuss and developing innovative lines of enquiry, has the potential to render a wide range of issues and discourses heretofore obscured visible in the study of disability.

Introduction

> *As with any new discourse, disability studies must claim space in a contested area, trace its continuities and discontinuities, argue for its existence, and justify its assertions*
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> — Lennard Davis (1997, xv)

The politics of knowledge creation is a critical dimension in the success of any social movement. The creation of knowledge and meaning is also implicated in maintaining

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structures of control and exclusion. In tracing the emergence of disability studies as part of the disability rights movement, this article will be mindful of these sometimes paradoxical dimensions in the politics of knowledge creation. In any academic offshoot of a social movement, the terms of engagement and debate must adapt to newly perceived articulations of oppressive structures, even if some of those structures are discerned within the movement itself.

This article self-reflexively turns the focus on disability studies to consider the question of why critical disability studies (CDS) is emerging as the preferred nomenclature by many scholars, and whether this constitutes a radical paradigm shift or simply signifies a maturing of the discipline. While the influence of critical theory in disability studies has often been assumed because of its critique of the status quo in the study of disability, the influence of critical theorists is not always acknowledged. We seek to unpack this complexity in the formulation of CDS.

The diversification of critical social theory that has occurred in recent years has opened up new modes of critical enquiry. Yet there are nevertheless several principles that we feel it is important to maintain and we briefly examine these. We then review where critical theory has been used in disability research. CDS is still in its infancy, so a review of the literature, as such, is not appropriate, but we intend to draw out instances of scholarly work that we consider reflect some of the major developments in critical theory. Emancipation is a cornerstone of critical theory, so it is inevitable that CDS also encapsulates questions of human rights such as those identified in the recent UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities that came into force in 2008. This article is selective and is intended to stimulate debate on the meanings and interpretations of CDS, not to provide definitive answers.

Evolution of critical disability studies

Disability studies emerged as a growing area of academic research and professional education across much of the Western world in the 1970s and has continued to expand into the 21st century. The International Year of Disabled People in 1981 raised disability as a human rights issues in the global public discourse. The rise of the contemporary disability movement in the latter decades of the 20th century, and the vocal demand for relevant curricula by disabled people and their allies, lent weight to the legitimacy of the new discipline.

The growing presence of disabled people in society, in particular their presence in the community following centuries of institutionalisation, has further contributed to an awareness of the responsibilities of educational institutions to disabled citizens. At the same time, the limitations of medical and individual pathology models of

disability, in both explaining the situation of disabled people and enabling their full citizenship, have resulted in the flowering of new explanatory paradigms — particularly in the humanities and social sciences. While the dominant discourse is still framed within the concerns of the global north, writers from the global south and the majority world are adding their voices to the expanding discipline (Ariotti 1999; Ghai 2002; Soldatic and Biyanwila 2006; Watermeyer et al 2006; Ingstad and Reynolds Whyte 2007; Meekosha 2008).

Disability studies has made an impact on the research agendas of many other disciplines. Starting with the social sciences and the humanities, disability studies has also been increasingly taken on board by the applied sciences such as architecture, design, engineering and, more recently, medicine and pure science. The Society for Disability Studies, in its working guidelines, argues that disability studies is interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary and that programs in disability studies should engage with various disciplinary perspectives (SDS 2009). Thus, disability studies can be thought of as a critique of specific approaches to disability; a project to evolve an interdisciplinary frame that can be incorporated into multiple disciplines; and a new sphere of scholarly work that has a similar legitimacy to women's studies, black studies and queer studies (Linton 1998; Meekosha 2004). Disability studies, as a discipline in its own right (Lorenzo, Mzolisika and Priestley 2006, 179), boasts a discrete body of knowledge and research and specialist journals devoted to the subject, such as *Disability Studies Quarterly* and *Disability and Society*. Yet a troubling trend concerns the cooption of some of the language of disability studies that is also taking place. More traditional rehabilitation and special education departments are re-badging themselves as disability studies, but without going far enough in rewriting the script. This is evidenced by courses within universities whose primary allegiance is to medical models, while only weakly acknowledging the sociopolitical analysis of disability (Longmore 2003; Meekosha and Green 2004).

The term 'critical disability studies' has been increasingly employed in scholarly work over the last decade (Tremain 2005; Erevelles 2005; Meekosha 2006; Pothier and Devlin 2006; Shildrick 2007a; Gustafson 2007; Roets and Goodley 2008; Hosking 2008; Campbell 2008), and York University in Canada now offers a postgraduate research program in CDS. CDS has accompanied a social, political and intellectual re-evaluation of explanatory paradigms used to understand the lived experience of disabled people and potential ways forward for social, political and economic change. Shildrick (2007a, 233) notes that CDS:

> … is broadly aligned with a postconventional theoretical approach. It seeks to extend and productively critique the achievements of working through more modernist paradigms of disability, such as the social constructionist model.

There are a number of factors influencing this re-evaluation that has led to the development of CDS. First, the social model of disability argued for a conceptual distinction between 'impairment' as a functional limitation and 'disability' as a socially generated system of discrimination. This binary way of thinking about disability has undergone a number of critiques from feminists, cultural studies scholars and postmodernists, which has led to tensions and splits within the disability studies community, particularly in Britain (for example, Hughes and Paterson 1997; Corker 1999; Shakespeare and Watson 2001; Shakespeare 2006). Using the term 'CDS' is a move away from the preoccupation with binary understandings — social v medical model, British v American disability studies, disability v impairment.

While critical legal studies emerged in opposition to North American liberalism and individualism (Pothier and Devlin 2006), CDS partly emerged as an outcome of the tensions that surfaced as a reaction to the more authoritarian Marxism and economic determinism associated with the social model. Paradoxically, the social model drew directly from critical theory, examining as it did the interrelations between the capitalist system of production, class and disability, as well as arguing for an emancipatory perspective within disability studies. Hosking (2008), in his formulation of critical disability theory, argues that it includes the social model of disability. We believe that it is not a question of including the social model as one of a number of separate tools in our analysis, but rather of incorporating a more complex conceptual understanding of disability oppression in our work that nevertheless still employs key ideas about disability that saw the light of day with the ascendance of the social model.

Second, the influx of humanities and cultural studies scholars with their postmodern leanings and decentring of subjectivity during the 1990s, especially in the US, enabled a more self-conscious focus on critical theorising to take hold in disability studies. Use of CDS signifies an implicit understanding that the terms of engagement in disability studies have changed; that the struggle for social justice and diversity continues but on another plane of development — one that is not simply social, economic and political, but also psychological, cultural, discursive and carnal. Evidence for these new terms of engagement can be seen in the recent openness to perspectives, such as psychological and psychoanalytic, that would have been stigmatised in the past as reinforcing an individual model of disability (for example, Goodley and Lawthom 2005; Shildrick 2007b).

A third factor for the divergence of CDS from disability studies concerns the cooption of the language of disability studies by the institutions of government, along with the professional areas of rehabilitation and special education taught within higher educational institutions (Meekosha and Dowse 2007). These traditional human

service professions, for the most part, 'conceive, discuss and treat disability within a diagnostic perspective that emphasises individual deficiency' (above, 172). The normalisation and quality of life paradigms, even if subsumed under the rubric of disability studies, still carry regulatory and controlling undertones. We would call these applied disciplines to task to more fully integrate a critique of disabling structures into their approaches.[1] Thus, CDS represents a distancing from those who have coopted disability studies for simply normalising ends.

Identification with critical race theory, critical legal theory, and the newly emerging critical criminology and critical queer studies sets up the fourth factor. Critical legal theory, which separated politics and law as separate discourses, drew on the Frankfurt School and post-structuralism in its critique of the dominant ideologies in legal studies. Critical race theory followed critical legal theory with an emphasis on examining racism, discrimination and race as a socially constructed concept. Critical race theory recognises the historical context, is interdisciplinary and works towards eliminating oppression (Dixson and Rousseau 2006, 4). Thus, both critical legal theory and critical race theory have set theoretical, conceptual and methodological examples for CDS to follow.

What is critical social theory?

Critical social theory, as a group of approaches to the study of society, has its origins in the critical theory of the Frankfurt School in the 1930s. The Frankfurt theorists perceived the historical convergence of capitalism, bureaucracy and science as progressively restricting the development of critical consciousness and an autonomous society. They moved well beyond the typical Marxian model of social analysis to take up issues such as the ascendence of instrumental reason, the rise of authoritarianism, and the emergence of the culture industry. These cultural trends were viewed as evidence of a crisis for critical reason (Horkheimer and Adorno 1972; Horkheimer 1974; 1986; Held 1980).

The current purview of critical social theory appears much wider than that envisioned by the first-generation Frankfurt theorists, who were constrained by the pressing issues of their day. The current sociopolitical climate demands that attention be paid to other crucial issues as well — that is, the crisis of representation, the rise of new social movements and identity politics, globalisation, and the fragmentation and compartmentalisation of everyday life. Additionally, new conceptualisations of what it means to render a critique have further opened up the critical vista. Post-Marxists,

1 On this account, see the article by Susan Magasi on integrating a disability studies perspective into rehabilitation practice (2008).

post-structuralists, postmodernists, post-positive and critical realists problematise these issues, among others, and apply diverse methods of critique. While some retain a faith in the emancipatory project and the struggle for autonomy, others are more skeptical of this project's possibility of success (Torney and Townshend 2006). A healthy scepticism, of course, has its place in critical thinking, but must nevertheless maintain its applicability to emancipatory political practice. In our view, it is important to incorporate the following four principles in the current conceptualisation of CDS.

Critical social theory is irreducible to facts

Critical social theory rejects a vision of the social sciences modelled on the natural sciences. While critical social theory is not averse to strategically employing quantitative approaches, it views the working of society and culture as much more dynamic than what can be captured quantitatively. Undergoing continual historical and sociocultural transformation, society cannot be described adequately without reference to changing social relations and cultural meanings.

A challenge to the very way the status quo is construed permeated the Frankfurt theorists' writings from the beginning. Their early criticism of appearances — that is, the raw facts of a case and exaltation of the underlying social relations obscured by a focus on their facticity — while conceptually connected to Marx's analysis of ideology and the economic infrastructure (Marcuse 1965), more importantly opens out to a wholesale condemnation of scientistic practice — that is, belief in an atheoretical, context-free science. Indeed, the Frankfurt theorists, and especially Horkheimer (1974; 1986) in his sustained critique of empiricism and positivism as naively viewing as 'real' that which is constituted by a narrowly construed reason, bequeathed to critical theorists one of their major principles. Their critique is aimed squarely at maintaining a space for the application of critical reason in the struggle for autonomy and a more participatory and egalitarian society.

Critical social theory links theory with praxis in the struggle for an autonomous and participatory society

While the cultural specificity of notions such as civil rights and equality cannot be denied, it is our belief that they have their roots in a more general understanding of human protest of suffering, and human need for both autonomy and social participation. Analysis of the social processes and cultural meanings that impinge on social actors and restrict their ability to reflexively choose a more participatory society has been a primary focus of critical social theory. Moreover, autonomy, as conceived by critical theorists, has always been a more complex notion than the idea of independent living which dominated much of the discourse on disability

during the 1970s through to the 1990s in the US. Critical theorists themselves continue to argue about what precisely constitutes autonomy and its relation to social participation (Kalyvas 2001). The defining feature of autonomy that interweaves throughout critical theory's history is its meaning as emancipation from hegemonic and hierarchical ideologies that structure personal consciousness, representations, social relations and practices in everyday life. Critical social thought is aimed squarely at revealing the power relational dynamics within societies as manifested and reinforced via these seemingly innocuous means, at both the individual and the societal levels. Furthermore, this critical analysis of appearances is specifically meant to provide insight for the goal of social change towards a society in which individuals can discuss and debate the future of their institutions without the constraints imposed by power-relational mystifications. Indeed, critical social theories, whether more traditional or postmodern, posit certain hierarchies and structures, processes or discourses as constraining people's conceptions and experience (such as false consciousness, reification, hegemony, metaphysics of presence, govermentality) (Agger 1998). Current schools of critical social theory differ in their approaches to critique and by the ways in which they elucidate the restrictions on autonomy.[2]

Critical social theory is self-aware of its historicity

Since critical social theory recognises the inherent historicity of society — that it is susceptible to change — the concepts critical social theory employs are always an investment in bringing about social change. However, critical theory also recognises its own situatedness within a particular historical moment. Thus, it is obliged to maintain a critical self-reflexivity toward its own theories and praxis. It is not as if an unmasking of the oppressive dynamics within a particular society or concerning a particular social group can be theorised and acted upon definitively. The ever-changing social relations, cultural meanings and thus self-understandings necessitate a hyper-vigilance towards the possibility of changed terms of engagement. In hindsight, theories that were once thought to adequately elucidate inequalities and oppressive circumstances and practices are often flawed in some way. This is exemplified early on in the history of the Frankfurt School as it broke from a traditional Marxist materialism, viewing it as deterministic and inadequate to comprehend the full extent of modern structures of hierarchy and domination. It is this commitment to critical self-reflexivity that has sustained critical social theory

2 Castoriadis (1987) provides an illustrative example. Like the Frankfurt School, he criticises Western society's overvaluing of instrumental rationality, but posits that the West's obsession with instrumentalism ironically indicates a cultural imaginary that has been divested of a raison d'être. Function thus simply stands for itself and rationality loses its relation to critique, which obscures our relation to autonomy — that is, our ability to perceive ourselves as self-instituting beings and society.

throughout the waxing and waning of many other theoretical perspectives (such as functionalism, structuralism and existentialism) and that can be considered the hallmark of a mature field of study committed to social transformation. Thus, the upswell of critique within disability studies during the past decade of its 'big idea', the socially constructed exclusions inherent in materialist and political structures, may signify the maturation of disability enquiry.

Critical social theory engages in dialogue among cultures

Calhoun states that critical theory is 'a theory that is self-conscious about its historicity, its place in dialogue among cultures, its irreducibility to facts, and its engagement in the practical world' (Calhoun 1995, 11). While we would agree with him on three of these counts, we beg to differ regarding critical theory's engagement in dialogue among cultures. Calhoun is likely projecting an international ideal here. Critical theory, it can be argued, conceived in Western Europe and North America, has traditionally not taken on board the perspectives of non-Western cultures. As Held argues, 'the importance of non-European societies in world politics … [is not] adequately recognised by the critical theorists' (1980, 400). More recent social theorists, such as Foucault, also focus on a critical analysis of the emergence of Western institutions and their discourses (for example, Foucault 1978, Burchell Gordon and Miller 1991) — or, as in the case of Castoriadis, explicitly locate the origins of critical self-reflection of our instituted traditions, the politics of autonomy and the impetus for social change in that fulcrum of Western society, ancient Greece (1997). However, the relevance to non-Western societies of this history and concepts derived from the study of Western societies is an issue that demands more attention than it has received.[3] While critical theory that elides engaging with non-Western scholarship is not without its significance, we would call for an explicit dialogue with human rights and emancipatory thinking from the diversity of cultures. This is crucial for CDS when the global majority of disabled people are excluded from the dominant disability discourse.

These then are what we consider key principles to incorporate in the application of critical social theory to the struggle for emancipation of marginalised groups, including disabled people. What follows is a discussion of some topical areas in CDS in which critical social thought has been and is being brought to bear.

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3 For example, Herdt and Stoller (1990) criticise Foucault's claim that sexuality becomes central to self-constitution in Western society with cross-cultural evidence that 'sex talk' relating to the self occurs in many societies.

Critical social theory and disability studies

The trials and tribulations of emancipatory research

A critical, emancipatory orientation lies at the core of disability studies' raison d'être (Mercer 2004). A social transformative perspective underlies the search for knowledge in this field of study. As Pfeiffer (2003, 104) notes, an implication of 'the disability studies paradigm' is progressive social change. However, the influence of critical theory, especially in the UK, was early on narrowly construed within certain Marxist parameters. The Frankfurt School's broader vision for critical theory was largely ignored in favour of a heavily materialist-oriented understanding of disabled people's social situation in modern society. Indeed, in the 1980s and early 1990s, even though disability studies was not primarily about class struggle, blame for disabled people's oppression was laid clearly at the feet of economic relations in capitalistic society, with allusions to an agrarian past in which disabled people were, if not idyllically, at least pragmatically integrated into the family system (Finkelstein 1980; Oliver 1990).

The 1980s and 1990s saw the ascendance of participatory research approaches, which were influenced by Habermas's (1973) differentiation of knowledge constitutive interests — positivistic, interpretative and emancipatory. In the UK, disability studies developed a radicalised interpretation of participatory research, a so-called emancipatory approach (Oliver 1992; Stone and Priestley 1996), which while democratising the research process diminished the conceptual contribution of the researcher. The researcher's methodological and theoretical expertise were considered technical skills in the rearrangement of commonsense precepts, not critical-interpretive skills, in the analysis of interaction and meaning and in the unmasking of ideologies and hierarchies. Further, a naive opposing of emancipatory research to positivistic and interpretive research downplayed the significance of the latter kinds of approaches in a broader understanding of autonomy (the importance of disability statistics and politically informed interpretations of disabled people's embodied lived experience). One assumption in this emancipatory discourse was that disabled people could reach a consensus on what constituted emancipation (Davis 2000). The result was over a decade of dogmatic policing of disciplinary, researcher, theoretical and practice boundaries. Those who argued for a widening of the disability studies agenda, both empirically and theoretically, were perceived as heretical to the materialist truths that constituted disabled people's social situation (for example, Morris 1991; Shakespeare 1994; Corker 1998; 1999; Meekosha 1998).

In hindsight, this view of emancipation appears simplistic. In fact, the sheer diversity of disabled people — that is, the variety and degrees of their impairments and their

intersection with other relevant social categories of experience — demands a much broader and contextual interrogation of their restrictions. To that effect, CDS draws from a much more eclectic mix of critical theories than earlier work in disability studies.

Dichotomising disability

In CDS the question has become how to conceptualise a diversity within a radical agenda to restructure cultural meanings, social processes and a carnally relevant politics. Mairian Corker, a British sociolinguist, feminist, deaf disability studies scholar, was at the forefront of the turn from a strictly narrowly conceived materialist approach to this broader conception of disability studies — one that included interrogation of discourses and cultural meanings and theorisation of diversity. During the late 1990s, she began employing a post-structural critique to challenge dichotomous and binary modes of thinking and models of disability (see, for example, Corker 1998; 1999). Using the post-structural notions of Jacques Derrida, among other postmodern theorists, she deconstructs the dichotomous, modernist assumptions underlying the social model of disability — that is, individual/society, impairment/disability — and notes their hierarchical ordering and instability. Recognising that 'the social model of disability' has been hugely pragmatic for disabled people within certain political parameters, Corker contended that it nevertheless could not easily articulate an understanding of the complexity of postmodern culture with its social flux, the contextual fluidity of identity formations and transformations, and changing micro-macro social relations and cultural meanings. Corker argued for a dialogic relation between impairment and disability, not an analytical privileging of one over the other, in a broader approach that adds to the preoccupation with structure a discursive theory of communication.

One of Corker's aims was to open up the productive space between modernist dichotomies of individual–society and impairment–disability for exploration, in order to reveal the issues and agency of disabled people who were overlooked by modernist sociopolitical models of disability (Shuttleworth 2006). Corker's thinking demonstrates a disciplinary self-reflexivity that is a hallmark of critical social theory and her incisive critique of the 'social model' was ahead of its time (see, for example, Corker 1998; 1999). While according the social model its historical and pragmatic due, she argued for a critical re-evaluation of the very model that had garnered personal and political power for disabled people. Of course, there were others in the late 1990s who were also arguing for a reassessment of disability binaries, including Meekosha (1998) and Hughes and Paterson (1997; Paterson and Hughes 1999), and this stance is almost de rigueur in CDS today.

Power and the politics of resistance

Foucault's innovative understanding of power/knowledge continues to grow exponentially in influence across the humanities and social sciences. It is also becoming an important critical perspective, as disability studies transforms into CDS (for example, Corker 1998; Garland-Thomson 1997; Allan 1996; Tremain 2005; Sullivan 2005). What makes Foucault' ideas so useful to CDS is that they perform a radical de-familiarisation of modern institutions and practices as caring and benevolent and reveal technologies and procedures that classify, normalise, manage and control anomalous body-subjects (Foucault 1978; Burchell, Gordon and Miller 1991). While certainly disability studies was partially founded on its critique of institutional perspectives on disability (such as medicine and economics), the terms of critique had remained for the most part materialistic and adversarial. Disability studies in Foucauldian terms was operating with a juridical conception of power. Foucault (1978), however, posits a much more encompassing view of power relations in modernity — that is, the emergence of bio-power as a set of procedures and practices that objectivise and attempt to measure, predict and manage phenomena and processes having to do with the life of the human species (such as reproduction and death) and its individual variances in terms of a norm. Rapid spread of these normalising procedures and practices throughout modern institutions was enabled by governmentality, which is 'any form of activity that aims to shape, guide or affect … conduct [in terms of] one's relation to oneself, interpersonal relations that involve some form of control or guidance, and relations within social institutions and communities' (Tremain 2005, 8). The important point to remember is that this understanding includes not only legitimate and overt forms of control, but also a micropolitics of power in which modern human beings are complicit with their subjection.

Beginning in the late 1990s, disability theorists began incorporating Foucault's thinking into analsyses of institutional management of disabled people's lives (Allan 1996; 1999; Shildrick 1997; Levinson 2005). The publication of Tremain's (2005) edited volume has provided additional impetus for employing Foucauldian critiques of institutions that administer to disabled people. We think it is important to maintain a self-critical view with the employment of any critical notion, but especially with those terms that Foucault (re)formulated. It needs to be acknowledged that the very institutions and practices on the receiving end of his critique have often enabled disabled people to survive serious trauma and to re-enter society. Nevertheless, the extent to which these institutional discourses pervade social structures and cultural meanings to constitute the disabled subject is worthy of continual critique. As Sullivan (2005, 30) notes with respect to the rehabilitation of spinal cord injured persons:

> If the paralysed body were not invested with specific techniques and knowledge, it would quickly deteriorate and die. If, however, Foucault is correct, … then it would be reasonable

> to expect that, during the process of rehabilitation, the body of the spinal-cord-injured individual would be objectivised as paralysed, the individual would be subjectivised as paraplegic, and the subject would come to know itself in these terms. Others would also come to 'know' the spinal-cord individual in these terms.

Foucault's work also includes a complex conceptualisation of resistance that is still being interpreted in diverse ways. In fact, Gabel and Peters (2004), acknowledging the influence of Foucault, argue that disability studies is increasingly moving towards resistance theories of disability (for example, Allan 1999; Kafer 2003; Gabel 2006). These authors perceive the concept of resistance as 'offering a way to understand the complex relationships and negotiations between divergent ideas like discourse, the material body, socio-political systems and processes, power relations, cultural contexts of disability, impairment, and so on' (586). Gabel and Peters' focus on resistance is ultimately employed for critical and praxis purposes: 'While the "strong social model" has not recognised individual agency, resistance theory recognises agency in the sense that individual resistance operates across the individual and collective levels and is enacted through critical self-reflection coupled with action' (93–94). While, to a large extent, Foucault viewed resistance as entrapped within the same logic as power, some interpreters perceive his later move (1997) from resistance to a focus on practices of the self as a possible space for personal and social transformation (for example, Rabinow 1997), and this notion has also been picked up by several disability scholars (Shuttleworth 2000; 2002; Reeve 2002; Allan 2005).

Feminism and the gendered world of disability

Feminism has been extremely important in the development of critical theory. Feminists, in particular, maintain critical self-reflexivity about their praxis, as evidenced by the number of theoretical 'waves'. A broad feminist critique of disability studies emerged in the 1980s. Many disabled feminist activists in the northern hemisphere had been active in the women's movement and were sensitive both to the construction of a male agenda in disability studies and to male control of the disability movement. Disabled women wanted to find their voice in the emerging discipline and in the movement. They identified their socio-economic status as lower than that of disabled men. In every sphere of contemporary and social life, disabled women were faring worse, thus leading to the concept of 'multiple disadvantage', a term not really adequate to understand the complex layering of meanings involved in the disability and gendered experience. These 'competing' identities and lack of theoretical sophistication in analysing multiple disadvantage led to the development of the concept of intersectionality (see below).

Disability studies engaged with feminism at a time when distinct groups were being marginalised on account of their race, class or sexuality. The 'essential' woman of the second wave was exposed as a myth. Women in more powerful and oppressive positions over less powerful women became an issue in feminist discourse, especially in issues of race. For disabled women, this was significant and brought to the fore issues such as care and abuse, and the right to reproduce and parent. It became clear that, for disabled women, issues about control of the agenda by disabled men constituted only part of the picture.

Women in their various roles as carers, parents and professionals were making major decisions about the lives of disabled women and men and were often guilty of, and responsible for, abuse and neglect. Moreover, disabled women took exception to an analysis of care as 'women's burden' (Morris 1991). A further and important critique of the social model of disability emerged from feminists who considered that the impaired body had been neglected (Crow 1996; Meekosha 1998; Thomas 2004). Feminist disability studies addressed questions of representation and difference and engaged with issues of identity, subjectivity, the body, sexuality and language. For example, stereotypical representation of disabled women in public imagery and the media contributes to their second-class status. Moreover, the social relations of disability are often experienced as endangering the psycho-emotional wellbeing of the individual (Reeve 2002; Thomas 1999; Soldatic 2007).

Garland Thomson argued that feminist disability studies engages with critical theory in a number of ways: representation structures reality, the margins define the centre, gender (or disability) is a way of signifying relationships of power, human identity is multiple and unstable, and analysis and evaluation have political implications (2002, 6). These engagements accord with some of the principles outlined earlier, but do not acknowledge that feminist disability studies should engage with dialogue among cultures. This failure, as we will elucidate later, is the most salient area that has been absent from what we term CDS.

Critical theory insists on revealing power dynamics. Disabled feminist scholars similarly insist on examining the power dynamics and hierarchical social relations of gendered disability. For example, being both a feminist and a disability activist can cause tensions and confrontations with disabled men and non-disabled feminists. These confrontations often emerge from a lack of understanding of the female disability experience. Disabled women have a different experience and understanding of issues such as prenatal testing, reproductive rights, sterilisation, abortion and the right to parent. Thus, the body can no longer be understood as simply biological or bounded, it embodies oppressive social relations (Hughes and Paterson 1997; Corker and Shakespeare 2002; Wendell 1996; Meekosha 1998; Michalko 1998). Donna

Haraway's 'Cyborg Manifesto' (1990) enables us to examine the social relations of technology and disability in a transgressive way, where the boundaries between body and machine are blurred, thus further problematising the dichotomous relationship between disability/ability and normal/abnormal. The possibility that we could reconstitute our bodies, both as mechanical and as organic, with the aid of prostheses and other mechanical devices means that we can embrace new technologies with positive identities rather than feeling victims of inadequate functioning.

In addition, Judith Butler's work on the body, on 'abjected bodies' and 'performativity' (Butler 1990; 1993), has remarkable applicability to disability studies, although as Samuels (2002) points out, Butler's work had largely been ignored by disability scholars. One of the reasons for ignoring Butler may well have been because she neglects to include any debate on disability, especially in *Bodies that Matter.* Yet Samuels (2002, 72) cautions against adopting Butler's work uncritically, and suggests that:

> … merely inserting disability into the mix without thoroughly examining the meaning and implications of the new ideas we create is not only inaccurate, but falls short of pushing Butler's work the necessary next step to fully account for the not-always-able-body.

Recent disability studies scholarship is beginning to critically apply Butler's ideas (for example, McRuer 2006; Shildrick 2007b).

The challenge of feminism to the nature/culture and gender/sex divide has helped challenge the impairment/disability binary and has opened up the debate on the viability of the concepts of disability and ability and of a unified disability politics. Postmodern feminism has pointed to the importance of subjectivity and embodied lives within disability. Feminism is committed to improving the lives of women, so too is CDS. The integration between feminism and CDS remains a work in progress.

Considering and reconsidering identity

As Anthias (2006, 20) states: 'It is increasingly important to think of a sense of belonging in terms of preconditions for quality of life, and not purely in terms of cultural initiation or cultural identity.' A significant outcome of feminism, critical race theory, queer theory and postmodern thought in general has been an increasing problematisation of static and singular conceptions of identity and a turn to a more fluid and contextual understanding. One of the ways forward has been the introduction of the concept of intersectionality (see below). Rejecting simple us/them dichotomies and recognising intra-group differences, these perspectives have questioned the usefulness of identity and have argued that identity politics may reinforce oppressive structures in society. Much has been discussed about disability identity, but the concept remains under-

theorised. A sense of collective identity brought about by exclusion and discrimination is not necessarily the route to change — it may increase victimhood. Similarly, while identity because of shared pride in achievements by disabled people improves self-esteem, it may also be problematic, as there is always a tendency to produce heroes. Many disabled people would prefer to find a 'cure' and do *not* want to belong to this identity group. They might prefer to 'pass' in an able-bodied world or live without the pain and frustration that impairment may bring. Or they might even, as do the US amputees in Kurzman's (2003) research, choose the identity of impaired but not disabled. Then again, it is often necessary for them to belong in order to access benefits and services provided by the state.

While there is much to be gained from conceiving of impairment-disability identities as contextual, fluid, multiple and intersecting, this conceptual move should not mean a carte blanche to dilute the processes and structures of oppression that stigmatise and devalue people with certain kinds of impairments — that in fact constitute disabling responses. Implying that everyone has, or will acquire with age, some kind of impairment or is disabled, as some scholars do (see, for example, Davis 2003; Shakespeare and Watson 2001), can often obscure hierarchies of difference and oppressive social processes and social relations (Shuttleworth 2006; Hughes 2007). Indeed, post-positive realism has made us aware of the continuing significance of social location in social analysis (Moya and Hames-Garcia 2000), and thus the continuing relevance of the social model of disability in the lived experience of disabled people. It also seems fruitful, as Corker suggests (1999) to hold in 'dialogic relation' the terms 'impairment' and 'disability', rather than universalise or dissolve one or both of them.

Intersectionality and matrices of domination

Intersectionality emerged out of the writings of black feminists in the US attempting to work out how the structures of race and gender intersect, and as an attempt to move beyond the notion of a single or multiple identity — the approach that adds the experiences of racial oppression to gender oppression (Collins 1990; Crenshaw 1991). Intersectionality has been important in critiquing these rather simplistic approaches to identity, and politically it assists in the process of building coalitions. The framework — as a normative concept, as a method in research (Hancock 2007, 63) and to describe social process — has become adopted in contemporary feminism theory, human rights debates, and critical race theory. It is often used along with metaphors of intermeshing, crossroads and matrices of domination (Collins 2000, 21).[4]

4 Patricia Hill Collins in *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment* (2009) uses the concept of 'matrices of domination' to describe interconnections of oppression.

In disability theory, the multiplier/additive model has been used to attempt to understand and describe the racialised, gendered or aged disability experience (for example, Deegan and Brooks 1985; Stuart 1992). More recently, intersectional perspectives have been adopted by some scholars in CDS (for example, Erevelles 2000; Moser 2006; Dossa and Fraser 2007; Meekosha 2006). Nirmala Erevelles examines the intersectionality of race, class, gender and disability, and argues that disability has been used in a much wider sense to allow the capitalist classes to accumulate wealth. Here disability has been used to 'support separate regular and special education programs that assign students oppressively marked by race and class and gender to lower tracks within the educational matrix' (2000, 43).

One result of this increasing focus on intersectionality is the articulation of theoretical and/or political alliances between CDS and other emancipatory discourses, such as feminism and critical race theory. Robert McRuer's (2006) recent work exemplifies this trend in his engagement of CDS and queer theory. In his work, McRuer employs the critical self-reflexivity that is a hallmark of critical social theory. An implication of his argument for a 'crip' theory that would crip disability studies, similar to the way queer theory queers gay and lesbian studies, is a critique of the normalising tendency that underpins the structural critique of society espoused by previous socio-political models of disability. Similar to the post-structural approach of Judith Butler and the critical social theorist Margrit Shildrick, McRuer perceives a normalising orientation as necessarily entailing a demarcation of boundaries, of inclusion–exclusion and of 'othering'. McRuer clearly articulates the ways in which crip theory and queer theory implicate each other and can thus inform each other. While he is for the most part careful not to show priority to either crip theory or queer theory, there is always the danger that in application to the micro-politics of everyday life, this kind of approach may subordinate one to the other.

The question remains as to whether intersectionality will become a useful tool for CDS and whether it will contribute to in fact overcoming much of the marginalisation and discrimination of disabled people. Perhaps even more concerning is whether intersectionality scholars remain attached to conventional mantra of race, gender, sexuality and class and continue to exclude other groups, such as disability and age.

The global majority: colonialism, post-colonialism and globalisation

A significant development in critical theory emerged from scholars writing from the perspective of the colonised. Their work connects most directly with our fourth principle of critical theory, that it should engage in dialogue among cultures. Most notably, Franz Fanon dealt with the dehumanisation by colonialism of both the colonisers and the colonised and, in particular, described how the colonised

internalised their oppression (1970). Central to maintaining colonised peoples in a subordinate role has been the process whereby hegemonic ideologies of the dominant groups are transferred and internalised by the dominated.[5] Fanon's work speaks particularly to the disability experience in terms of internalised oppression. Disabled people experience alienation from their own bodies, from their sexuality and from others in society (Charlton 2000, 74).

Post-colonialist theorists have been concerned with the cultural impact of colonialism. The deconstruction of Western literature, film and philosophy from a standpoint of race and colonialism has revealed the ethnocentric foundations of the Western canon. From a disability standpoint, scholars in the humanities have similarly examined media and literature. Rosemary Garland Thomson's work on imagery and the disabled body is one such example. She uses the concept of the 'normate' for those who can present themselves as definitive or superior human beings. She argues that the normate can assume authority and wield power because of their bodily configuration and cultural capital (Garland-Thomson 1997, 8).

Another leading post-colonial theorist, Edward Said, has argued in his seminal work *Orientalism* that Western society depends on the construction of the Arab and the peoples of the 'Orient' as different and threatening (Said 1978). In a similar vein, Lennard Davis has argued that the construction of what is normal relies on the existence of the disabled body for its legitimacy (1995, 158):

> … the notion of normalcy … makes the idea of disability as well as the ideas of race, class and gender possible … I have been trying to show how deeply tied to the normalised body are the assumptions we make about art, language, literature and culture in general … Normalcy continues its hegemony even in progressive areas such as cultural studies.

Said argues that the West romanticised people of the Orient at the same time as 'Orientalism' carried negative connotations. As is evident through studies in film and literature, disabled people's lives are also romanticised as well as being negatively construed. Here, romanticisation often consists of the able-bodied hero 'curing' the disabled person (Mitchell and Snyder 2001; Norden 1994).

Yet, despite the use of post-colonial approaches in disability literary, art and film, we have not witnessed an extension, beyond the deconstruction of the text, to

5 This is not to suggest that colonised peoples cannot be agents in their own right, in the same way as disabled people are also active subjects. Neither can we easily and meaningfully distinguish between the colonisers and the colonised.

an investigation of the production of disability by the colonial enterprise and the exploitative and damaging effects embedded in the economic and material relations between the metropolis and the periphery. Although living in a world where race, racism, nationalism and globalisation are dominant forces, disability studies largely avoids these issues (see, however, McRuer 2006). Disability theory remains ethnocentric, with the global north dominating the agenda. CDS, on the other hand, can be self-conscious about its historicity by revealing the impact of colonialism and post-colonialism on those outside the metropolis who become disabled through invasion, dispossession, war and the hegemonic processes of normalcy (Sherry 2007; Meekosha 2008).

Disabled people in the majority world have been marginalised often as a result of colonisation, colonial rule and post-colonialism; these cases constitute 80 per cent of the 650 million disabled people in the world. The UN reports that for every child killed in warfare, three are injured and permanently disabled (UN 2006). Invasion, war, nuclear testing, mining, the export of pollution and the militarisation of the globe have all contributed to the increasing number of disabled people in the global south. The leading suppliers of arms remain the US and UK companies, with China and Russia also becoming major players, with the consequence of massive increase in the number of amputees and disabled people in the global south. There is much discussion on the rights of disabled people with the new UN convention, but little on the responsibilities of those profiting out of the production of disability.

Employing the critical attitude in disability studies

Thompson (2003), in a penetrating discussion of Foucault's genealogy of the critical attitude, adeptly shows the transformations that occurred in his thinking of what constitutes critique. The critical attitude will, of course, always remain a utopian stance taken towards the current social organisation of a society. But the lesson of Foucault's shifts in critical thinking for CDS, beyond the notion that the terms of engagement in a society change over time, is a reminder that our understanding of what constitutes the modes of critical analyses we employ is not set in stone. In this sense, CDS must continuously re-evaluate our analyses as both process and product. Autonomy and social participation can serve as beacons, but the contours of these concepts must remain flexible and amenable to the vicissitudes of history and critical thought itself. This radical reflexivity must of necessity also remain receptive to new theoretical perspectives to shed light on the changing structures and meanings that define and restrict emancipation. The task is always to balance the activist's cry for accessible conceptualisation with the scholar's understanding of the complex, interwoven but continually changing fabric of human societies.

We claim that knowledge is power and theory development is integral to power. While being the latest marginalised group with a political agenda to connect with critical social theory in its present form, CDS intends to build an alternative body of work that will of necessity be subversive. As argued in this article, a combination of factors has led to the emergence of CDS. While there is some work on disability that is employing the principles and ideas from the range of current critical social theories, we hope that by making this development explicit we can once again bring some of the challenges faced by disabled people to the forefront of public discourse. The disability movement's struggle was not just about ramps: human rights issues — such as forced sterilisation of minors, violence and abuse, poverty, unemployment, citizenship, the disabling effects of war and sexual exclusion, and the myriad issues of disabled people in the global south — must be included in the new CDS.

By making strategies of critique applied to disability issues explicit, CDS can also contribute important conceptual and empirical scholarship to critical theory's development. How societies divide 'normal' and 'abnormal' bodies is central to the production and sustenance of what it means to be human in society. It defines access to nations and communities. It determines choice and participation in civic life. It determines what constitutes 'rational' men and women and who should have the right to be part of society and who should not.

Conclusion

CDS is guided by unique interdisciplinarities and productive debates on a range of issues and solutions. What unites CDS theorists is an agreement that disabled people are undervalued and discriminated against and this cannot be changed simply through liberal or neo-liberal legislation and policy.

CDS will necessarily be eclectic and will continue to include materialist analyses, such as the political economy of disability. It will inevitably build on the work of the early pioneers in disability studies and continue to employ relevant aspects of social models of disability. The politics inherent in disabled people's lived experience and the multiple socio-cultural factors that can constrain their agency, so difficult to theorise in terms of a strict materialism, constitute a central area for CDS. Likewise, the conceptual interface between chronic illness, impairment and disability is no more understood now than it was during the heyday of the social model, despite Thomas's (2007) recent attempt to show the usefulness of the sociology of health and illness to disability studies (and vice versa). Then again, in terms of the social model, conditions that did not easily fit within its narrow conceptual framework, such as chronic illness and learning disability, were usually deemed anomalous or simply ignored. If CDS wants to contribute to theory and politics on a global level, we

certainly need to listen to theories of emancipation and social participation emerging from the global south. It is hoped that with the acknowledgement that disabling social relations and cultural meanings can be critiqued from diverse theoretical perspectives, a wide range of issues and discourses will become more visible.

At the beginning of this article, we asked the question of whether the growing tendency of disability scholars to employ the term 'CDS' represents a paradigm shift or a maturing of the discipline. Mairian Corker perhaps provided the best answer to our question 10 years ago, before the current nomenclature began to emerge. Corker envisioned a mature disability studies opening up to diverse theoretical strands of enquiry, but with the social model as a part of its historical development. Investigating difficult problems that disability studies tended to shy away from and opening up new lines of critical enquiry to elucidate these issues will be beneficial to the study of disability and contribute to an expanded understanding of disabled people's place in the world. ●

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