

Editorial

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EDITORIAL

Dis/abling gender in crisis times

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The ongoing COVID-19 pandemic has made explicit what many of us already knew and some of us are constantly made to feel: good health and the abilities of our bodies & minds¹ are fluid and uncertain. We can only ever hold them precariously (Butler, 2004; Scully, 2014). In the end, we are all vulnerable beings. And, yet, vulnerability, perhaps especially in times of crisis, can never be fully universalised, nor is it distributed equally: the value and definition of what our bodies & minds can do, what they mean, and how they are expected – and often pushed – to function, are intrinsically unstable, as they depend on the socio-cultural, political, and economic context. This is perfectly echoed by the title Rosi Braidotti (2020) gave to one of her recent articles on the ongoing COVID-19 crisis and the current posthuman predicament: “‘We’ Are in This Together, But We Are Not One and the Same’.

The received value and definitions of our bodies & minds are also intersectionally linked to lived identity categories such as gender, race/ethnicity, sexual orientation, and class (see Butler, 1990, 1993; Parker, 2015). This, of course, creates even more complex lived situations of vulnerability, precarity, and, consequently, precariousness while, at the same time, also opening up spaces for the potentia-filled resistance against the norms and systems operating behind these values, definitions, and labels. In this special issue, we aim to focus on those intersectionally fraught experiences of what it can mean to inhabit a particular type of body & mind, and we are

especially interested in how experiences, norms, discourses, and practices around able-bodiedness & able-mindedness and disability intersect with gender and gender identity labels.

This, too, is a precarious endeavour – a continuous conceptual balancing act – because neither of the categories used here are uncontested or stable. As readers of this journal know all too well, gender is an ever-changing conglomerate of practices, ontologies, discourses, performances, and affective and material experiences. Despite its notoriously ‘sticky’ (Ahmed, 2004) nature as a social straitjacket for many, gender has a nasty habit of slipping through scholars’ fingers when mobilised for analysis or systematic study.

Moreover, the field of gender studies itself is ever-changing, responding to new insights generated within its own diverse, interdisciplinary intellectual ecology as well as to societal, political, and environmental challenges. Likewise, what it means to be dis/able(d) has changed radically over time – and is still evolving. The policing influence of medical, legal, and political institutions enthralled to ‘normality’ (Foucault, 2003a, 2003b; Tremain, 2006; Chen, 2012) has largely superseded religious interpretations of (im)moral or blessed bodies.² Philosophical, historical (Stiker, 1999), and sociological (Thomas, 2007) models of dis/ability have been developed, and continue to evolve, and the field has expanded along the lines of posthumanist, new materialist, and affect theoretical thought (e.g. Hickey-Moody & Crowley, 2010; Roets & Braidotti, 2012; Goodley, Lawthom, & Runswick-Cole, 2014; Feely, 2016; Puar, 2017). Moreover, much like feminist and antiracist movements have labouriously worked towards justice, equality, and inclusion, grassroots intersectional disability justice activism (Mingus, 2011; Piepzna-Samarasinha, 2018; Disability Visibility Project, 2021) has inspired societal change as well as scholarly renewal within critical disability studies and theory, and critical pedagogical frameworks in particular.³

When gender & critical disability studies meet

There is, in other words, much that gender studies and critical disability studies have in common: a commitment to justice, equality, and inclusion; an ever-changing philosophical vocabulary; a consistently critical approach to what is defined as ‘normal’, ‘good’, and ‘(re)productive’;⁴ and a close connection between the work of activism and scholarship produced. Most of all, perhaps, both fields seem to be deeply invested in questioning modern frameworks of what is colloquially understood as natural and biological. Gender studies and

critical disability studies share an interest in examining medico-psychiatric – read: essentialising, abnormalising, and stigmatizing – modes of thinking about bodies, minds and their often-entangled state, and in dethroning such approaches as central, or even necessary, to our understandings of lived experience. One way in which both fields have started to decentre such (often normative) medico-psychiatric frameworks is by delving into the rich histories of gender and disability, which show just how fluid understandings and experiences of the human body & mind have been over time. It also reveals current obsessions with medico-psychiatric understandings of physical wellness and ‘normalcy’ (Cryle & Stephens, 2017).

Despite such shared interests and questions, however, gender studies and critical disability studies often use different theoretical toolboxes, appeal to different conceptualisations of justice, equality, and inclusion, and hail back to different modes of activism and research. Therefore, these fields could, potentially, learn much from one another. This special issue, then, does not only present an introduction to new research at the crossroads of both fields but also aims to instigate more dialogical thinking among the readership of *Tijdschrift voor Genderstudies*. This issue is a modest attempt to promote genuine two-way dialogues between gender scholars and critical disability studies scholars, between gender activists and disability justice activists, and also dialogues between scholarly and critical pedagogical modes of thinking. ‘Dis/Abling Gender’ therefore also joins previous iterations of the *Tijdschrift voor Genderstudies*’s attempts to innovate higher education via a mix of critical theoretical and pedagogical perspectives. Previous issues have called attention to the place of gender in the curriculum of higher education in the Low Countries (Roggeband, Bonjour, & Mugge, 2016); superdiversity & intersectionality (Geerts, Withaeckx, & Van den Brandt, 2018); and decolonising the (higher educational) classroom (De Jong, Icaza, Vázquez, & Withaeckx, 2017). With this special issue, we want to encourage making classrooms and scholarship more accessible to an even more diverse audience, and ‘Dis/Abling Gender’ includes numerous suggestions to do so, both practically and ethically. In addition to scholarly articles grappling with the intersections between gender and dis/ability, this issue therefore also contains a roundtable addressing dis/ability in the classroom, including practical suggestions towards more inclusion and diversity.

Why Dis/abling gender?

The scholarly community of gender studies is a diverse one, stretching out into various disciplines and sites of activism. It questions inequality, oppression, and privilege in various manifestations and intersections, and attends to bodies & minds in all their guises. The study of dis/ability, we suggest, is not only a rich, necessary, and equally diverse field in its own right, but also one of great importance to gender scholars and activists.

This is, of course, not a new insight (see e.g. Mohamed & Schafer, 2015). The multiple intersections of gender and dis/ability, for instance, appear in critical studies of (medical) science; in histories of work and family (Rembis, 2017); and in explorations of ontology, self, and body & mind (Hughes, 2007; Goodley et al., 2014; Feely, 2016). Most relevant to this issue is Bonnie Smith and Beth Hutchinson's edited collection entitled *Gendering Disability* (2004). This particular collection stresses the importance of studying disability and gender 'in tandem' rather than as additive categories, reminding us of Jennifer C. Nash's (2008, p. 6) call to constantly re-radicalise intersectional thinking as 'disrupt[ing] cumulative approaches to identity'. Smith and Hutchinson's volume addressed crucial intersections between both fields, such as a feminist ethics of care, conceptualisations of the body as the material face of a 'minority', and the difficult integration of queer theory and ethnicised experiences in both fields. Since the appearance of the aforementioned volume, many authors have further 'gendered' disability (see e.g. Hall, 2011), and critical disability studies scholars have, moreover, attuned themselves increasingly towards identity questions and categories, such as class (Turner & Blackie, 2018); coloniality (Nair, 2020; Hunt-Kennedy, 2020); liberty (Ben-Moshe, Champan, & Carey, 2014); race/ethnicity (Annamma, Connor, & Ferri, 2013; Samuels, 2011; Parker, 2015); sexuality (McRuer, 2011); age (Ladd-Taylor, 2017; Gallop, 2018); and the queering of various intersecting identity categories (Chen, 2012; Kafer, 2013; Puar, 2017).

With this issue, we aim to build on this work, and to continue expanding the field. Agreeing with Smith and Hutchinson's insistence that gender and dis/ability are not simply cumulative identity markers, to be piled up as additive modes of privilege and/or oppression, we aim towards a study of both not only in tandem but in dialogue with each other. And so, we are turning questions around, freely wondering how two connected but mostly still separate fields can not only work alongside each other but also; encourage mutual active intervention.

More concretely: what happens, this issue wonders, if we take the call for 'cripping' scholarship, policy, and practice seriously in gender studies and feminism? While the vocabulary and practice of 'cripping' (McRuer, 2006; Kafer, 2013; Van Ertvelde, Cornette,

Van Goidsenhoven, & Hadad, 2021) is contested – by Bone (2017), for example – a mindful intrusion of the critical perspective developed by critical disability studies scholars into feminist thinking and gender studies could, we believe, be generative and could even destabilise conventional modern approaches to bodily & mind autonomy, care, and (in)dependence. What happens if we were to think beyond exchange between fields, and purposefully stretch towards a theoretical framework and grounded practice of dis/abling gender studies?

How can the insights and methods of critical disability studies, with its radical turn towards vulnerability, diversity, and generative resilience,⁵ push gender studies towards new understandings of identity, of corporeal praxis, of narratives and practices of the mind, of labour, and of care? How can gender studies, and specifically novel approaches within contemporary feminist theory, assist critical disability studies with the intersectional conceptualisation of specific lived experiences, surveillance and (in)visibility regimes, and a more affirmative understanding of identities-in-flux and (reappropriated) labels? In short, can we ‘gender’ dis/ability while simultaneously ‘dis/abling’ gender?

Why dis/abling gender matters (in pandemic times)

Because of the ongoing COVID-19 crisis, the foregoing questions seem especially relevant. The pandemic has had a brutal impact on the world and its population, and specifically on those whose bodies were already constructed to matter less through the intertwined, negatively constructed binaries that uphold the exclusivist notion of the supposedly pure, neutral, and healthy human subject (see e.g. Wynter, 2003; Chen, 2012; Braidotti, 2013). As such, the pandemic has exposed numerous ableist tendencies in our society. Some commentators have argued that the duty to protect the vulnerable is unfair on people who are (or seem) healthy. It has been suggested, for example, that those belonging to risk groups should stay home and protect themselves rather than be protected by collective solidarity (for a critique of this view, see e.g. Archer, 2020). The call to focus on prevention through lifestyle changes, rather than, for example, vaccination or public health measures that prevent the spread of the virus, has an ableist ring to it as well. It assumes that, ultimately, health is a private affair, and a question of individual responsibility, rather than a joint caring effort. Assessing these arguments through the lens of dis/ability lays bare their ableist assumptions.

It instead opens up an opportunity to look at vulnerability as a shared characteristic of all living beings – and, hopefully, it can pave the way to a different, feminist type of ethics, one that values care and solidarity besides only focusing on individual duties and rights. Moments of crisis present us with exceptional chances to achieve such changes in perspective. The COVID-19 emergency, for example, has also demonstrated the porosity of seemingly oppositional boundaries. It has disrupted the boundaries drawn between the human, non-human, more-than-human, and the perpetually dehumanised, the personal/political, and the dis/abled: the SARS-CoV-2 virus and the patchwork of crises it has created (and reinforced) does not only point at human identity and subjectivity being more in flux and in conjunction with (more-than-human) others than the Cartesian self tells us, but it also demonstrates that the condition of vulnerability is an existentially shared one and therefore cannot be subsumed under one linear temporal framework.

In the end, long COVID – referring to a patchwork of debilitating post-viral infection-based symptoms – demonstrates how vulnerable we all are. It furthermore shows how the linear temporal framework backing up the dis/abledness narrative needs to be urgently queered and also placed in the context of longer histories of crisis, in which experiences of ill health, mutilation, and various dis/abilities have played an important role (Bourke, 1996; Nair, 2020). Another aspect that the pandemic crisis has underlined sharply is the fact that both the experience of – and the care for – dis/abled subjects has been constructed as an intrinsically gendered affair (Forestell, 2006). These experiences are, additionally, deeply bound up with equally gendered notions of labour, authority, and autonomy (Rose, 2017), a topic that has been central to the discipline of gender studies from the outset – and one that has brought the need to decolonise gender studies into sharp relief, as they intersect with the so often ignored ethnicised and racialised politics of labour and care. The ongoing pandemic additionally has – yet again – confronted dis/abled subjects with the flagrant injustices written into contemporary neoliberal extractivist capitalist system that upholds the aforementioned politics of labour and care: for many, it has been painful to witness how a system that has equated able-bodied and able-minded folks with (re)productivity for centuries, and has excluded dis/abled subjects for participatory reasons, all of a sudden was able to meet various accessibility needs created by the ‘new normal’. Working from home no longer appeared to be a productivity-undermining taboo, virtual accommodations all of a sudden proved to be quite implementable, and mental health issues became more publicly discussable.

The above examples demonstrate that the pandemic, in the end, requires us to, as Haraway (2016) has also put it so poetically, ‘stay with the trouble’. The authors in this issue present a number of possibilities to try and do just that: staying with the trouble by mobilising the innovative and diverse toolbox of critical disability studies, and to mix the tools of their trade experimentally, daringly, and sometimes joyfully, with those of gender studies. Like gender studies, critical disability studies owes much of its scholarly innovation and critical potential to its roots in activist movements and communities. Much of its early analytical practice was centred around questioning the authority of medical apparatuses and institutions in defining what disability is or who ‘counts’ as disabled. Identified initially as the ‘medical model’, this medico-legal framework has been thoroughly critiqued by scholars and activists alike, and engagement with it remains important to current scholarship. It also remains central to the development of alternative frames of analysis. While the distinction between medical models of disability (i.e. understandings that see themselves as objective modes of diagnosis) and social models of disability (i.e. understandings that consciously focus on the social, political, and cultural aspects of constructions of health and disability) is an important one in disability studies, the field has moved on significantly from the mere distinguishing of normative discourses, models of thought, and legalistic frameworks of disabled identities.

For the last two decades, scholars of dis/ability have steadily worked towards an intersectional understanding of representations, practices, performances, and ontologies of disability. They have destabilised the notion of disability itself by uncovering its multiplicity and studying its presence and representation in a variety of societies throughout history and throughout the world. And, they have not only studied the practices of labelling that led to the identification of various disabilities within medico-legal models but also the more subtle cultural discourses and practices that construct otherness and disability – the practice of staring, for example, which has become a powerful tool of social analysis and critiques of insidious inequality (Garland-Thomson, 2006).

The subfield of disability history, in particular, has proven to be a fertile ground for questions of difference and intersectionality. By delving deeper into the timeline of the development of the so-called medical model of disability (which arose around the end of the eighteenth century), and by also studying societies that preceded the rise of this model, historians of disability have presented powerful counternarratives to the seductive idea that physical

impairments, mental illnesses, or perceived abnormalities in behaviour ‘just are’, and can be diagnosed, isolated, and (sometimes) cured.

Rather, premodern and early-modern studies of experiences and discourses of disability show that such differences could be and were understood as other than biological or natural, that the non-normative bodies and minds we now see as ‘disabled’ do not overlap perfectly with those labelled as unconventional in the past, and that the identities and roles ascribed to people marked as different have changed significantly. Studies focusing on the period in which the modern medical apparatus came to the fore show its political and cultural roots, and the geographically, historically, and culturally specific beliefs that underpinned the Western modern modes of so-called objective observation. They also show the centrality of the statistical method (which was developed in the early nineteenth century) as a means of distinguishing between the average/normal/healthy body & mind, and the unique/abnormal/unhealthy one (McGuire, 2020) – and which therefore cemented the cultural connection between expectations based on averages and normative ideas about health and morality and would become foundational to eugenic movements and practices.

While disability studies, from its inception, was therefore a critical endeavour by nature, we have chosen in this issue to explicitly speak of critical disability studies and theory. Editors and contributors share an interest in questioning how systems of oppression and privilege operate. Following Minich (2016) and Schalk (2017), for the purpose of this special issue, we see critical disability studies and theory primarily as a methodological approach to question the latter norm-laden systems, and not only as a ‘subject-oriented area of study’ (Schalk, 2017). Critical disability studies and theory stand for a more disruptive discourse that is ever-evolving (see e.g. Meekosha & Shuttleworth, 2009). The investigations presented here thus receive an immediate intersectional and interdisciplinary dimension while fruitfully interacting with the longer history of disability studies.

Although we adopt different approaches individually, collectively we have decided to employ the concept of dis/ability in this special issue. Our choice is strategic and aims to engender debate. Following other critical disability studies scholars (e.g. Annamma et al., 2013; Goodley, 2014; Nolte, Frohne, Halle, & Kerth, 2017), we hope our use of the term encourages readers to question binary thinking and formulations of disability and ability. Similarly, we also intend it as an invitation to think about experiences and bodies & minds that do not fit neatly into conventional categories. By making room to include bodies & minds that find themselves

vacillating, on the fence, temporarily categorised, or simply uncertain of their relation with disability, we believe critical disability studies can strengthen its theoretical and empirical bases substantially. The questions posed by the field concern all bodies & minds, regardless of how they are experienced, categorised, or stared at. By writing dis/ability, by means of a forward slash, we would like to emphasise that disablism and ableism as structures only work (and occur) in relation, or, to put it in Baradian (2007) terms, intra-actively.

We ask readers to view our use of the forward slash – / – materially-semiotically, as a sign and a practice, as a request to pause with us and rethink the meanings of dis/ability and how they are constituted, for the forward slash does not scan smoothly or sound quite right when read out aloud by screen reading software (‘dis “slash” ability’ according to the read aloud function built into Adobe Reader, for example). As Anderson and Merrell (2001) suggest, dis/ability demands more ‘cognitive work’ from readers than plain old disability (p. 269). While making this extra effort, we have the opportunity to think again about what constitutes disability and how it comes into being. For those who choose to pursue this possibility, we hope the endeavour opens new vistas and encourages reflection on the culturally and historically contingent nature of dis/ability. As many historians of the premodern world have pointed out, the fact that modern concepts do not always map easily onto past perceptions and experiences of bodily and cognitive difference warrants some means of alerting modern readers to the dangers of anachronism when approaching the distant past (Nolte et. al., 2017; Kuuliala, 2020; Miettinen, 2020). Dis/ability, then, also acts as another sort of sign – one that proclaims: ‘proceed with caution’ when considering non-normative bodies & minds historically.

The same warning sign is also useful when approaching disability from a cross-cultural perspective. Many languages, after all, do not have terms that are exact equivalents to the English ‘disability’. By using such a cumbersome construction as dis/ability, we want to underscore the necessity for critical disability studies to be an international and multilingual endeavour. Concepts about non-normative bodies & minds are not the same everywhere, and this variability is most clearly revealed in language. The fact that dis/ability jars is a gentle reminder that ways of viewing, experiencing, and expressing ideas about non-normative bodies & minds are not universal, but culturally contingent.

Given the goals of critical disability studies, we acknowledge that dis/ability is not a perfect term. Goodley (2014) claims that the destabilizing work the forward slash in dis/ability studies does might make it easier for disability activists to form alliances with other marginalised

groups. This may work in theory, but it carries risks on a practical level. For many disability activists, disability is a powerful and empowering category of identity, a source of pride and community upon which disabled people’s political successes have been built.⁶ Destabilise the category too much and disability may lose some of its political potency, to the detriment of the disability rights movement. We take such misgivings seriously and stress that our motivation for using dis/ability is primarily analytical and based on our desire to spark genuine dialogue between critical disability studies and gender studies.

Approaching dis/ability semiotically entails accepting that multiple meanings are possible. While we would like readers to interpret the ‘/’ as an invitation to recognise the inherent fluidity and instability of disability, we know that our choice of sign may not achieve the purpose we intend. As Anderson and Merrell (2001) point out, it is perfectly possible and legitimate to read the sharp line between ‘dis’ and ‘ability’ as indicating a ‘flat, unambiguous “or”’ (p. 268), a binary choice between one thing or another. Although we realise this possibility, we take the risk for analytical reasons and to pique the interest of *Tijdschrift voor Genderstudies*’s readers. To borrow the words of Anne Waldschmidt (2018), the ‘introduction of the slash [to dis/ability] implies the idea that the transversal and intersectional should become the actual topic of research’ (p. 74). Waldschmidt seems to have in mind the intersection between ‘dis’ and ‘ability’ here, but her terminology is likely to prompt gender studies scholars to associate it with intersectionality theory. This is an association we wish to encourage with this special issue.

Disability scholars have employed intersectionality theory to explore the intersections of disability and gender for a long time now, but gender studies scholars, while attuned to the influence of other categories of difference, have generally shied away from embracing dis/ability as a category of analysis in their work. This means the application of intersectional theory regarding questions of disability and gender is currently very uneven. Dis/ability scholars frequently consider the gendered dimensions of experiences and perceptions of non-normative bodies & minds. Yet, gender studies scholars seem far less willing to consider the role dis/ability plays in gendering bodies & minds. With this special issue, we ask gender studies colleagues to help achieve some balance in this area. Engaging more fully with insights derived from critical disability studies will not only enrich gender studies; it will also provide a firm foundation for continued, mutually beneficial conversations between the two fields.

Those conversations are scholarly, of course, but will hopefully also create room for ethical considerations and reflections – and for a shared practice of holding ourselves and our peers to

account. We see an interesting overlap between approaches towards dis/ability and Barad’s (2001, 2007) idea of trans/disciplinarity: in Barad’s agential realist philosophy, the forward slash stands for the explicit demand to take up accountability and responsibility when establishing disciplinary cuts or boundaries as a scholar combining multiple disciplines, and thus, differently rooted paradigms.

By opting for dis/ability, we plead for more scholarly (self-)reflexivity and accountability when it comes to structures of oppression, power, and privilege that revolve around able-bodiedness & able-mindedness. We do so because, like everybody else, we have skin in the game: as scholars, as body-minds, and, particularly perhaps, as educators, dis/ability matters to us.

The contents of this issue therefore reflect the variety of ways and reasons why dis/ability can and should matter, and in which contexts it can and should be made to matter. Hailing from different disciplines, the contributors to this issue draw our attention to the ethics of care, to the construction of norms and ideas of ‘nature’, to the significant changes both ethics and norms have undergone throughout history, and to how norms and regulations are constantly made and remade through practice.

Combining critical disability studies and bioethical perspectives, Gert-Jan Vanaken’s ‘Crippling Vulnerability: A Disability Bioethics Approach to the Case of Early Autism Interventions’ touches upon many of the points mentioned in our editorial here. Noting the ambiguity of medico-clinical frameworks – as ab/normalising medico-clinical labels often have harmful outcomes, yet, at the same time, can be experienced by some as empowering, as diagnoses offer recognition and treatment possibilities – Vanaken carefully crafts a so-called ‘crippled account of vulnerability’. Specifically focusing on neurodivergent people, and early interventions on young autistic children in Western countries in particular, critical takeaways from dis/ability and neurodiversity studies are brought into dialogue with bioethical theory and its potential applications in healthcare settings. Crippling the concept of vulnerability, Vanaken not only succeeds at deconstructing the faulty opposition between ‘the vulnerable’ and ‘the invulnerable’ – an opposition that keeps rearing its head during the ongoing pandemic – but also demonstrates ‘crippled vulnerability’s’ practical usage.

“‘He Does Not Appear to Have Done Much Useful Work Since He Was Wounded’”: Age, Disability, and the History of Masculinity’, by Jessica Meyer, shifts the focus of attention to historical intersections of disability and gender. The article uses British disability pension records to examine the experiences of disabled ex-servicemen following the First World War.

Adopting a life-course approach that pays attention to veterans’ ability to achieve certain culturally recognised markers of manhood (such as paid employment, marriage, and fatherhood), it shows how the challenges disability posed to veterans’ masculine identities varied depending on what point of the lifecycle they found themselves. In doing so, Meyer’s work demonstrates the rich potential a disability lens holds for generating new insights in gender history.

In ‘The Incapacity to Work As Moving Target: Exploring the Possibilities of Praxiography for Analysing Realities of Disability in History’, Natanje Dijkstra uses praxiography to analyse disability as something that is being done in practice. Specifically, using the case of worker E. Sebus, Dijkstra analyses, in the context of the first disability benefit law in the Netherlands (the *Ongevallenwet 1901–1921*), how incapacity to work was never merely enacted as an outcome of adhering to the letter of the law. Incapacity to work was initially thought of as the focus on the ability to earn an income and to avert poverty. However, through the interaction between the law, the organisation of the Dutch National Insurance Bank (*Rijksverzekeringsbank*), medical practices, and the search to provide for a fair process of claim examination, incapacity to work became a percentage, matched with bodily injuries compared to other people with similar injuries. The praxiographic approach to incapacity to work thus allows for the analysis of disability as differing from person to person, from context to context. Using praxiology, it becomes apparent how context plays a role in how incapacity to work, and disability in general, is enacted. These scholarly interventions show how fruitful dialogues between gender studies and critical disability studies can be.

As a more immediate call to action to the readership of *Tijdschrift voor Genderstudies*, we also included a roundtable, asking three experts in the field to reflect upon dis/ability in the classroom. What does an ethical approach to dis/ability in the classroom mean? A common theme in the roundtable is that we should step away from an exceptionalist approach to dis/ability to approaching dis/ability as something that can impact all of us, at different stages in life, in different ways, visible and invisible. It is clear that we should step away from pedagogies aimed at the ‘normal’ student, which are then adapted to the student who can prove that they are different enough to deserve such an adaptation. There is a need to rethink the way we relate to students and learning in general, and it implies accepting that ‘disability is everywhere’. Such an approach includes and transcends Universal Design for Learning approaches. An ethics of

dis/ability is, by design, a relational ethics: it is about learning from each other and enabling an environment in which people feel heard and respected.

To round up our special issue, we also include engagements with current scholarly work on dis/ability and gender in the form of several reviews. Lieve Carette has written a review essay addressing many of the pertinent questions noted by philosopher Eva Feder Kittay and education studies scholar Nicole Brown. As Carette also shows, Kittay’s *Learning from My Daughter: The Value and Care of Disabled Minds* (2019) neatly complements Brown’s edited volume from 2021, titled *Lived Experiences of Ableism in Academia: Strategies for Inclusion in Higher Education*. Both books in fact underline the importance of taking into account lived experiences in relation to dis/ability, and also demonstrate that theorising about dis/ability cannot be decoupled from people’s lived experiences as such. Wim De Jong and Eline Pollaert provide a slightly different perspective on the collection *Lived Experiences of Ableism in Academia: Strategies for Inclusion in Higher Education* by Nicole Brown (2021). While De Jong and Pollaert evaluate the book as timely and urgent, they also point out some shortcomings and, above all, recommend further development of an analysis that involves experiential experts in each step of the process. Channele Delameillieure, finally, shows with her review of Jenni Kuuliala’s monograph *Saints, Infirmity, and Community in the Late Middle Ages* (2020) how new approaches in the discipline of history, and medievalism in particular, can enrich our thinking about gender, dis/ability, and a variety of intersectional identity categories while also pointing towards the ongoing need to integrate such perspectives more explicitly.

The insistent attention to lived experiences of dis/ability and ableism in scholarship and academia in much of the work reviewed and presented here also leads us to one final reflection: this issue – like so many things in the last two years – has been created during a time of crisis. The process that led us to this result has been both laborious and inspiring. It has also been marked by the same problems of normativity and exclusion this issue attempts to critique, as much as it has been by moments of care and grace. Given the current pandemic circumstances and the now more than ever felt pressures to adhere to a neoliberal academic – yet quite nonsensical – ‘business-as-usual’ narrative, we want to close this editorial by expressing extraordinary gratitude to all of the people that were involved in this special issue.

Notes

1. Explicitly written with an ampersand here to accentuate how bodies & minds interact with one another, or, to put it in Baradian (2007) agential realist terms, which expresses a more relational onto-epistemological worldview, intra-act in an entangled manner. Doing so allows us to immediately bring in much-needed conversations on neurotypicality and able-mindedness. This Baradian – and, more generally put, new materialist focus – is also heavily featured in this special issue’s roundtable, as the readers will shortly discover.
2. Following Belgian Foucauldian psychiatrist Dirk De Wachter (2012), we, too, question the ideas of ‘normality’ and ‘normalcy’, and not only on the basis of the problematic underlying dichotomised construction of the ab/normal. In his book, De Wachter sketches out how today’s neoliberal times enforce a hyper-individualist borderline subjectivity onto us, characterised by limitless consumption behaviour, competitiveness, relational (and collective) instability, and an obligation to constantly ‘bounce back’ (also see Bracke, 2016). This certainly rings a bell in these COVID-19 times, now that the ‘old normal’ is supposed to be replaced by the ‘new normal’, whatever that may entail to.
3. For an introduction to vocabularies and activism around such issues in Dutch, see, for example, *rekto:verso*’s ‘Crip’ dossier (Van Ertvelde et al., 2021).
4. Productivity – usually uttered in combination with reproductivity norms and standards – is yet another term that is linked to ab/normalcy, and consequently often employed to structurally decide which embodied-brained subjects come to matter more than others. Queer and queer crip theorists, such as Halberstam (2011), Kafer (2013), and Fritsch (2016), have all criticised neoliberal extractive capitalism’s hyperfocus on a ‘productive’ present and ‘reproductive’ future, and how that excludes, and sometimes even dispossesses, many.
5. Which greatly differs from the ‘resilience-preaching’ so central to contemporary neoliberal extractive capitalism and governmentality.

6. Particularly in English-speaking contexts, this has been expressed by preferences for what is called ‘identity-first language’, wherein identity is mentioned before the person (e.g. disabled person) (Ferrigon, 2019).

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