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Critical Disability Studies

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End of Semester Reflection

My understanding of disability has been exponentially expanded by this course. I had no knowledge of the Disability Studies framework before taking this class, but this branch of scholarship has quickly become for me a place of both academic and personal interest. The Disability Studies lens is a powerful one that has challenged me to question myself and the way I see the world. It has helped me to reframe many of my experiences—including the work I did in high school with young adults with disabilities. The readings we did for this class were central to my learning. I gained so much from each one and really loved engaging with them. Writings in Disability Studies are quite different from most of the other academic texts that I have worked with before; they are more creative, exploratory, personal, and holistic. This was a welcome change, and I often felt genuinely moved and strengthened by these readings. *Good Kinds, Bad Kings* was an especially important book for me that opened up new landscapes of disability justice as it intersects with race, class, gender, and incarceration. I also gained so much from our partnership with CCW. I strongly believe that field work is a core component of academic work, and my time at CCW served as a vital source of learning and community building.

Although I did learn and grow in many ways throughout this course, there were also some areas in which I wish I had pushed myself further. For one thing, I really appreciated Serendip as a forum for engaging with ideas in a non-verbal way, yet I did not take advantage of this resource nearly as much as I could/should have. Indeed, I posted only when required and did not go out of my way to add additional comments or post outside articles. This would have been one relatively low-stakes way for me to challenge myself to communicate and engage more fully with my peers, and I wish I had made far more use of that avenue for dialogue. I also do regret not pushing myself to speak up more in class. This is repeatedly one of my ‘worst’ aspects of academic performance and is something that is often a problem for me in discussion-oriented spaces. I did try to get myself to say at least one thing each class, but I certainly could have done more to step outside of my comfort zone in this capacity.

I am going to take with me so much of the learning, ideas, and frameworks that I developed through this course. The Disability Studies perspective will continue helping me to question normative standards and structures in powerful and disruptive ways. The discipline has been a point of entry for me into a larger conversation about oppression and institutional violence that I plan to keep engaging with throughout my life. The knowledge I gained from this course is also helping me do the work of pushing back on value/ranking systems that I situate myself within and am often pained by. These hierarchal structures include rankings of beauty, smartness, and friendliness. Another mindset that I will take with me from this course is Disability Studies’ emphasis on community and collective strength in contrast to the individualistic mantra of American capitalist-inspired thought. Similarly, I have also been thinking a lot more about the problems of using productivity as a standard by which to judge worth and success. These are ways of thinking that I have begun to recognize and challenge within myself. Finally, this course, more so than any other I have taken, has opened up for me opportunities for a holistic process of internal growth. Exploring Disability Studies has begun changing (for the better) some of the ways in which I see myself and frame my experiences. The values and teachings of Disability Studies scholars have helped me to treat myself more gently and to hold my own complexities and contradictions with more compassion. It has been a beautiful process to see how academic learning can have both such political and personal effects.