The Puzzling Place of Disability in Political Science

Jennifer L. Erkulwater

Department of Political Science
University of Richmond

jerkulwa@richmond.edu
(804) 287-6457

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Disability studies emerged in the 1980s as part of a cluster of politicized identity-based interdisciplinary fields of study in race, ethnicity, and gender that theorized and sought to actualize greater inclusion in academia and society writ large. Political science, however, has been slow to incorporate critical studies of identity. As recently as 2004, Rogers Smith, past APSA president, pondered "the puzzling place of race in political science." And while the discipline has experienced a flourishing of new scholarship on race and ethnic politics, aside for some work in the subfields on political theory and political behavior, the same energy cannot be found in the discipline's critical or empirical approaches to disability. At a moment when the COVID-19 pandemic has raised public awareness of issues related to disability, in sectors as varied as health care access, remote workplaces, and the vulnerabilities of the immunocompromised, political science, as a discipline, has had little to say. This paper seeks to fill this disciplinary lacunae. The paper begins with an overview of the place of disability in the political science literature with an eye toward highlighting key areas in which critical study of disability has been neglected. I draw from recent theorizing within disability studies and political science to develop a framework for examining how disability structures politics and, in turn, how politics structures disability. I then illustrate the ways in which engagement between disability studies and political science can appropriately center disability within politics and deepen our understanding of political conflict in the United States.

At first glance, this featured themed panel on disability is no surprise. This particular conference of the American Political Science Association (APSA) urges us to "rethink, restructure, and reconnect" so that we might find our way "towards a post-pandemic political science," and for the last three years, commentary on the pandemic has drawn attention to the multifaceted connections between COVID-19 and disability. The aged, the immuno-compromised, and people living in nursing homes were prone to contracting the disease and suffering severe illness and death. The virus left disability in its wake – through the mysterious long COVID, the anxiety of an unseen threat, a mental health crisis among children and adolescents, the burnout that has settled on adults. COVID-19 created disabling settings, as it ripped through health care facilities, congregate care, meat-packing plants, and essential service sector workplaces. Even as it made caregiving in the home more essential, it brutalized the mental, physical, and financial wherewithal of people who give care. Around the nation, political leaders balanced the tradeoffs between economic growth and public health measures, while in regions where health care resources and manpower were stretched to the breaking point, providers made grim calculations to ration care – concrete reminders the diminished value of disabled lives. One simply cannot talk about COVID-19 without talking about disability. But the pandemic alone did not create the hardship that became frontpage news; in many ways, it merely revealed and exacerbated what already existed. Unemployment, economic insecurity, social isolation, requests for workplace accommodations – experiences commonplace among people with disabilities suddenly became commonplace for most (though not all) Americans. The pandemic gave rise to disability but also it revealed the prior mechanisms by which disability is created, managed, and maintained. Given the links between disability and unequal power and worth, it is surprising then that disability is not a more regular feature of APSA conferences.

While it is fitting to situate disability within a politics of pandemic moments and their immediate aftermath, I would like for us to consider what place disability has in the politics of "normal" times (pun intended). What might the politics of disability look like if disability were not so medicalized? If it did not come to the fore only in the context of a global pandemic of unprecedent scale? And what might it look like for political scientists to make disability central to our analysis of this "new normal" we find ourselves in, now that it is clear that COVID-19 is here to stay? We are challenged to consider what an everyday politics of disability might look like.

The purpose of this paper is to make a start at tackling that challenge and to broach at least a partial answer to the questions I have just posed. In this paper, I sketch a way of analyzing how disability structures and is structured by political institutions and processes. In this endeavor, I find it imperative we, as political scientists, engage with the interdisciplinary field of Disability Studies. Scholars affiliated with Disability Studies have done much to build the critical study of disability, at least within the humanities, pushing beyond merely increasing the representation of people with disabilities in scholarly studies to break down siloed theories of identity in order to understand how disability plays out alongside claims of race, gender, nationality, class, and sexuality. Their aim has been to understand how power plays out in the real-world multicity of people's lives. But political scientists, if they discuss disability at all, remain stuck in representation mode, generally confining themselves to the study of people with recognizable disabilities or the programs and policies for people with those recognizable disabilities — and their work remains distressingly detached from both Disability Studies and their own discipline's larger theories of politics.

By naming these silences, I hope to bridge the gap between political science and Disability Studies. Interdisciplinary scholars aligned with feminist, queer, crip, and critical race theories have interrogated disability in expansive ways. Their work offers political scientists much to grapple with. Given my own scholarly interests, here I focus on the study of disability within the subfields of U.S. politics, American Political Development (APD), and policy history. These are, by no means, the only ways in which political scientists might probe disability more rigorously, and I do not suggest that only the United States is worth studying. I simply draw from my own well of experience and expertise in making my foray into Disability Studies.

This paper proceeds in three parts. First, I review the thinness of the literature on disability within the discipline of political science. This is not to say that there are not and have not been excellent works of political science scholarship that take on disability, but not only are these works too few and far better, but very little of this work speaks with concurrent scholarship in Disability Studies. In many ways, our discipline's silence on disability is reminiscent of its neglect of race until only the last decade or so. In the second part of this paper, I examine prior efforts to bring Disability Studies into political science, largely spearheaded by Harlan Hahn in the 1980s and 1990s. A scholar of urban politics and a wheelchair user, Hahn strove to develop within his discipline a critical and activist approach to the study of disability, one that drew from the social and minority models of disability. The purpose of this section is to show that both political science and Disability Studies floundered when it came to intersectionality; neither scholars nor activists of disability knew how to deal with the challenges posed by the diversity of people with disabilities, leading some scholars within Disability Studies to embark upon what is now called Critical Disability Studies, or DisCrit. DisCrit scholars problematize the representational politics of disability and, in so doing, open up contested political spaces. They have called out the pervasive Whiteness of popular histories and academic studies of disability and challenged the U.S. disability rights movement's pursuit of right-based assimilation. A third and final section of this paper suggests how political science might draw from, engage with, and contribute to DisCrit and DisCrit to political science. The hope is that integration of disability will deepen political science's empirical analysis of politics and that political science, in turn, can enrich efforts to theorize power within Disability Studies.

The Thinness of Disability within Political Science

At first glance, one would expect the topic of disability to hold a more prominent place in research agendas of political scientists. Two iconic figures in the postwar disability rights movement were involved in the academic study of politics. Edward V. Roberts, considered the father of the independence living movement, majored in political science while an undergraduate and then a graduate student at the University of California at Berkeley between 1962-1969. Aaron Wildavsky, himself the father of a child with cognitive disabilities, empathized with Roberts' desire to enter graduate school and, along with Nelson Polsby, took him on as a teaching assistant. "The more education I got," said Roberts many years later, "the more open things were… I knew I wanted to teach politics. Later I gave that up to do it [politics]" (Roberts 1994, 53-54).

Roberts' time at Berkeley overlapped with the tenure of blind activist and renowned law professor Jacobus tenBroek, who taught in the university's Department of Political Science between 1963-1968. TenBroek's writings on law and public speeches are infused with his understanding of group representation and democratic equality. There is no indication that Roberts and tenBroek ever met, but the fact that Roberts encountered a highly vocal and organized community of blind activists in the 1970s when he was forming his first Center for Independent Living is a credit to tenBroek's life's work. In addition to his academic duties, tenBroek served on the California State Social Welfare Board, presided over the National Federation of the Blind, and coordinated welfare rights litigation across the country. He was a prolific scholar. His book *The Antislavery Origins of the Fourteenth Amendment* informed Thurgood Marshall's legal argument in *Brown v. Board of Education*. A second book critical of the U.S. government's internment of Japanese Americans, *War, Prejudice, and the Constitution: Causes and Consequences of the Evacuation of the Japanese Americans in World War II*, received the Woodrow Wilson Award from the American Political Science Association in 1955. His 1966 law review article "The Right to Live in the World: The Disabled and the Law of Torts" is considered a foundational articulation of disability rights. When tenBroek passed away in 1968, Wildavsky eulogized him in the pages of *PS: Political Science and Politics* (Wildavsky 1968).

For Roberts and tenBroek, the activist practice and the academic study of politics went hand in hand. The rise of identity-based studies in the 1970s and 1980s suggested that many fellow scholars agreed: Knowledge could – in fact, should – serve as an instrument of social justice. The interdisciplinary field of Disability Studies came together with the explicit purpose of incorporating people with disabilities into society and academia (Linton 1998). While there were plenty of scholarly publications on disability, Simi Linton distinguished true Disability Studies from “not disability studies” by the shared normative objectives and praxis that guided scholars of Disability Studies. According to Linton, works of Disability Studies rejected or critically analyzed the medical underpinnings of disability. They sought to feature the subjectivity, voices, experiences, and agency of people with disabilities so that they became more than mere specimens of research but were instead presented as full and complex human beings. Scholars of Disability Studies intentionally viewed knowledge production as a means for advancing the inclusion of people with disabilities as full and equal members of American society. To that end, they often broke down the wall of detatchment between researcher and subject, declaring in their scholarly works whether they identified as a person with a disability so as to make visible their own position of power vis-à-vis the people with disabilities they studied (Linton 1998). In the United Kingdom, Disability Studies became rooted in the social sciences, but in the United States, humanistic disciplines most firmly embraced the critical study of disability (Heyer 2007, 265; Davis 1999, 508-509).

American political science, however, has generally met disability with long-standing silence. Despite a tumult of the 1960s and 1970s, only a handful of political scientists published book-length monographs in the late 1970s and early 1980s on disability rights protests or President Ronald Reagan’s controversial efforts to cull Social Security disability benefits (see, for instance, Percy 1989; Mezey 1988; Katzmann 1986; Tanenbaum 1986; Olson 1984; Stone 1984; Mashaw 1983). But these were sporadic forays. Between 1970-1989, *American Political Science Review* did not publish a single article on disability (excluding articles in which "disability," "disabled," or "handicapped" are used as a pun or metaphor to describe limitation, disadvantage, or flaws). The journals of the main regional associations were not much better. Collectively, the *American Journal of Political Science*, *Journal of Politics*, *Political Research Quarterly*, and *Polity* published six articles on disability during the time period (Albritton 1979; Blank 1987; Cook 1983; Baer 1982; Howards and Brehm 1978; Green and Klein 1980). Interdisciplinary journals, such as the *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* or *Politics and the Life Sciences*, and subfield journals, such as *Presidential Studies Quarterly* or *Public Opinion Quarterly*, fared better, publishing studies of policies for children with disabilities, constitutional rules of succession when presidents were unable to executive the duties of their office, and sampling biases in surveys that included people with disabilities.

The enactment of the Americans with Disabilities in 1990, a major civil rights law by any measure, barely registered in political science. As late as 1993, Harlan Hahn – a scholar of urban politics, tenured professor at University of Southern California, and wheelchair user – observed that, while APSA featured organizational sections studying race and ethnic politics, women's politics, LGBTQ politics, aging, and health, no such section existed for disability, and panels on topics related to disability were rarely featured on conference programs. There was no affinity group for scholars who identified as disabled, as there were for women or people of color (Hahn 1993, 743).

Since 2000, there has been more attention to the politics of disability. The discipline features a small but rich body of empirical work on disability and political behavior and attitudes (Reher 2021; Johnson and Powell 2020; Evans and Reher 2020; Reher 2020; Schneider and Bos 2019; Schur, Shields, and Schriner 2005a; Schur, Shields, and Schriner 2005b; Engel and Munger 2003; Schur et al. 2002; Batavia and Schriner 2001; Schriner, Ochs, and Shields 1997).

Political theorists have begun to grapple with the challenges that disability poses for liberal democratic theory (Arneil and Hirchmann 2016; Simplican 2015). And additional empirical work has used disability as a case study for understanding the politics of policymaking, the workings of political institutions (Burke and Barnes 2018; Barnes and Burke 2015; Heyer 2015; Prince 2010; Prince 2009; Barnes and Burke 2006; Mezey 2005; O'Brien 2004; Switzer 2003; O'Brien 2001). Yet Hahn's assessment of organized political science remains largely the same. There still is no section devoted to disability within APSA, and panels devoted to disability remain infrequent. Today when political scientists survey the literature on disability-related topics within political science, they invariably note its thinness (Heffernan 2021; Stone 2016; Kimberlin 2009; Heyer 2007).

The disciplinary silence on disability is similar to the lacunae that Rogers Smith observed with respect to race in 2004 (Smith 2004). When puzzling why political scientists had failed to substantively engage with questions of race, Smith observed the penchant for political scientists to focus on the behaviors and attitudes of majorities and elites (who are mostly White – and able-bodied). Smith guessed that race was less amenable to study by political scientists than by historians or sociologists, who examine society from the bottom up. But he ultimately concluded that the discipline's neglect of race was more far-reaching. Political scientists, he argued, tended to view racial hierarchy as constituted by psychological discomfort with racial difference or the demands of capitalists for cheap, exploitable labor, thereby ignoring the extent to which politics contributed to racial formation. Race might be an ascriptive identity, helping to explain the ideological leanings or political behavior of individuals, but it was not itself a product of political contestation, law, or policy. Because political scientists viewed racial identities as prior to or outside of politics, it therefore made little sense for them to question or seek to alter racial categories or their outcomes. By adopting a top-down approach to the study of politics, political scientists took for granted the assumptions and assertions of the (White) elites and majorities they studied, rather than viewing their racial interests, arguments, and privileges as fundamentally connected to their exercise of power. In this regard, political science served to "legitimate what were in fact always profoundly political constructions of status and identity" (Smith 2004, 45). Harlan Hahn reached a similar conclusion with respect to disability, observing in 1993, that political science reflected the concerns of the dominant rather than the disaffected groups in society (Hahn 1993).

Smith's assessment of the place of race within political science can help us to understand the discipline's neglect of other forms of identity, including disability, but the estrangement between political science and Disability Studies, I believe, cuts to the very heart of political science as an intellectual enterprise. Two fault lines, in particular, come to mind. First, by seeking to more firmly ground itself on the "science" of politics, by committing itself so strongly to empiricism, political science has kept the liberatory ethos of Disability Studies at arm's length. Simi Linton argued that "the dominance of empiricism" explains why most scholarship on disability can be classified as "not disability studies" (Linton 1998). To the extent that political scientists framed disability as an ascriptive (and empirically or medically knowable) characteristic of individuals, they demarcate the actions and experiences of, the programs and policies for, people with disabilities from the rest of "us." Such work, Linton argues, continues the "objectification of disabled people in scholarship" (Linton 1998, 526). For Roberts and tenBroek, political activism and the academic study of politics went hand in hand. I would venture that few political scientists today feel the same way.

Second, the dominant schools of political science have struggled to incorporate ideas as an explanatory variable in politics, and yet it is practically impossible to account for the enormous change in disability politics without attending to ideas: namely, the power of the social and minority models in policymaking and activist circles. Take, for instance, the emphasis on utility maximization in rational choice theory. Self-interested behavior cannot explain the actions of protesters affiliated with the disability rights organization ADAPT, who rejected reforms that would have created a separate system of public buses for people with disabilities. The separate bus line would have improved transportation for people with disabilities at less cost than integrated buses. But ADAPT activists rejected paratransit, arguing that "separate but equal was inherently unequal" (Roberts 1978). This is not to say that activists did not think of paratransit in terms of their interests, but rather that how they understood their interests had been reframed in the wake of discourses spawned by the Black freedom struggle and the independent living movement. It was not enough to simply get from one point to another; they evaluated transit in the context of their access to public spaces and jobs. With their vocal and confrontational protests against "separate but equal," activists hoped to bring about new political understandings of disability, rather than maximize individual utility (Hahn 1985b; Katzmann 1986).

Likewise, disability rights activism confounded historical institutionalists, who turn to rules and path dependency to explain political outcomes. Stable rules and self-reinforcing processes explain why politics exists in a condition of equilibrium, disrupted only occasionally at critical junctures, the origins of which remain unclear. But to the extent it underscores stasis, historical institutionalism is at a loss to account for the agency and upheaval that characterized disability policy and politics between 1960-1990 (Hahn 1985b). Across American political development, disability has defined the borders of the American nation-state, the contours of emerging state power, and the composition of the American people and their rights (Witt 2009; Sterett 2003; Tichnor 2002; Skocpol 1995a). Yet a full acknowledgement of disability's uncertain and contested nature in debates over immigration, social welfare policy, and the power of the national government necessitates moving from political science to the humanities (Baynton 2005; Rose 2017). Little wonder than that leading political theorists Barbara Arneil and Nancy J. Hischmann recently concluded that "political science has actually fallen behind other disciplines in analyzing disability in society" (Arneil and Hirchmann 2016, 1; Frederick and Shifrer 2019 note a similar lacunae in sociology).

Critical Frameworks of Disability

Hoping to move political science along, in a series of articles written in the late 1980s and early 1990s, Harlan Hahn sketched out a research agenda that drew heavily from the social and minority models; his efforts ran headlong into the limits of these models (Hahn 1988a; Hahn 1985a; Hahn 1985b). His fits and starts parallel the struggles of Disability Studies scholars as they tried to incorporate the rich diversity of bodily difference, including differences of ascribed skin color and sexual anatomy, and the human experiences that grow out of those differences. I call attention to these fits and starts, not to cast aspersions on them, but to make clear why scholars of Disability Studies found representational approaches to disability inadequate and began the search for critical and intersectional frameworks of disability.

Hahn urged political scientists – and social scientists, more broadly – to examine how an exclusionary built environment and the social attitudes that supported it came to be. These were fundamentally political questions. "[D]isability is whatever policy says it is," Hahn argued, and yet policy was marked by "the failure to consider the interests and needs of disabled citizens" so as to produce "an environment designed and constructed almost exclusively for the nondisabled"

(Hahn 1985a, 294, 295; Hahn 1985b, 13). What were the consequences of this exclusion, and how might it be rectified? While physicians, educators, and rehabilitations were in the best position to lead the therapeutic interventions called for by the medical model, the social model opened up new possibilities for political scientists, who seemed ideally suited to document, even develop, the unfolding demands for inclusion and the policies designed to meet those demands.

The exclusion of people with disabilities, Hahn further argued, made disability a minority identity similar to race. While the ostracism and oppression of people of color was rooted in the social devaluation of their skin color, for people with disabilities, Hahn proposed, discrimination rested on aesthetic anxiety, the fear of people with "unattractive or different" physical characteristics. What made the bodily differences labeled as a "disability" unattractive, as opposed to merely different, was that they created existential anxiety – that is, the fear that the able-bodied feel when they contemplate the loss of their physical abilities (Hahn 1993, 741; Hahn 1987; Hahn 1988b; Hahn 1989). The able-bodied then codified their social rejection of bodily difference into the authoritative epistemology of medicine, law and public policy, social practice, and the built environment. Differential treatment of the disabled, Hahn asserted, "cannot be attributed solely to happenstance or coincidence." It was "an integral part of a social fabric" (Hahn 1985b, 741). By legitimizing disability as a minority identity and the built environment as a form of oppression, Hahn hoped to carve out for disability a place in political science in the same way that the study of women's politics and Black politics had gained traction within the discipline (Hahn 1985b).

Yet Hahn sensed that the social model might have limited utility for political science. Models of politics, he argued, presume conflict over opposing ideas or insufficient resources. But disability policymaking lacked acrimony (Hahn 1993). Congressional debate over vocational rehabilitation, Section 504 of the 1973 amendments to the Rehabilitation Act, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), and the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) featured lawmakers taking pity on the plight of the disabled, limited negotiations between a handful of lawmakers and committees, and legislation passing on a largely bipartisan basis (Hahn 1993; Shapiro 1993; Scotch 1984). Once political scientists had documented the incorporation of the social model into rehabilitation and civil rights policy, it was not clear where to go next, for the social model offered little purchase from which to theorize about the rolling back of rights (see for instance critiques of Mezey 2005, in Hays 2006 and Schur 2006). To be sure, disability benefits policy was rife with conflict, but it was not clear how to integrate scholarship on civil rights and rehabilitation with a much older vein of research on the welfare state. In fact, Hahn was skeptical of forays into social welfare politics, including Deborah Stone's well-received book *Disabled State*, one of the discipline's first efforts to examine disability as a socially and politically constructed phenomenon (Stone 1984). In a review of the book, Hahn bristled at Stone's thesis that a finding of disability led to "special treatment," shielding people with disabilities from social opprobrium and opening access to social supports not available to other poor people who were unemployed. According to Hahn, Stone had neglected to mention that "disabled people as a group comprise an oppressed minority in societies throughout the world," and as a result the book did "serious harm" to people with disabilities (Hahn 1985c).[*] The acrimony perhaps discouraged cross-fertilization between scholars of the U.S. welfare state and scholars of disability rights politics. Since then, when political scientists have written about the IDEA or ADA, they have sought to use these policies

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[*] Aaron Wildavsky defended the rigor of Stone's analysis, arguing that Hahn attacked the book simply because it did not "comport with his values." Hahn shot back that "similar public criticism probably would not be directed at African Americans or women in political science" (Hahn 1985c, 879; Wildavsky 1986, 374; Hahn 1993, 743).

to shed light on larger institutional patterns in politics (for example, social regulation, adversarial legalism, or statutory interpretation) rather than provide insights into disability itself (Heyer 2015; Howard 2007; Burke 1997; Melnick 1994). Disability, in short, served as a case study of politics, rather than a force that structures politics in its own right.

Even as Hahn wrote, though, scholars of Disability Studies had begun reconsidering the social and minority models. Feminist social theorists argued that disability was more than a social construct; impairments, including chronic disease and pain, did in fact exact a toll people's lives, even absent discriminatory architecture and barriers. The face of disability politics, the young wheelchair user, feminist disability theorists argued, was overly masculine and failed to capture the full struggles of many people with disabilities (Crow 1996; Hughes and Patterson 1997; Shakespeare 2001). Analogizing disability to race also posed problems both for activists committed to coalition building and for academics who sought to theorize about the lived experience of the disabled. The analogy collapsed two forms of oppression that are quite different from each other. While one is met with pity, the other elicits hatred. Claiming, as some activists have, that disability is "universal" because anyone can become disabled at any moment underscores the ways in which disability is very much unlike race: People generally do not suddenly become a different race (Ferri 2010). Hahn's own writing suggested that race was not the same as disability. If people with disabilities constitute a minority group and yet disability politics is largely consensual, then the politics of disability would seem to offer limited insight into the politics of other non-majoritarian groups; no one would claim that race politics was without conflict.

Furthermore, analogistic reasoning erased people, including people with disabilities, who are multiply marginalized and encouraged oppression-ranking. For instance, seeking to underscore the seriousness of discrimination against people with disabilities, Hahn argued that while the disabled confronted "many of the same forms of discrimination and segregation that have confronted other minority groups," inaccessible public spaces and transportation excluded people with disabilities "more effectively than the most virulent Jim Crow laws of the past" (Hahn 1983, 38, emphasis added; Hahn 1985b). Hahn was not the only one to fall into this trap. The ADAPT saying, "The blacks had to ride in the back of the bus, but we can't even get on the bus," was another example of oppression-ranking and the erasure of people of color with disabilities (Roberts 1978). Race became an additive or comparative category of difference in relation to disability, rather than a form of difference experienced simultaneously with disability. African Americans with disabilities in the segregationist South were excluded both by inaccessible buildings and buses and by virulent Jim Crow laws; theirs was not an either/or oppression (Hamraie 2017). As such, representational approaches risked obscuring the ways that people of color might experience disability differently from Whites or the ways in which race and disability work together to reinforce marginalization (Bailey and Mobley 2019, 35).

By pointing out these exclusions and elisions, I do not mean to diminish moments of interracial solidarity brought about by and within the disability rights movement as well as the serious discussions within Disability Studies about the field's racial lenses. Rather, I wish to underscore the tensions between disability and race. Just because Disability Studies and race and ethnic studies share commitments to social justice and the lived experiences of marginalized peoples does not mean that they work in sustain dialogue with one another. Just because disability rights activists traced their struggle to the Black civil rights movement does not mean White and Black activists are easy allies. Cooperation must be forged, intellectually and politically. Marginalized peoples could just as easily compete with and undermine one another in political conflict over resources and rights (Ferri 2010).

Critical Disability Studies has shown, however, that tensions can be generative. DisCrit asserts that disability is not just about persons labeled as disabled or the policies, laws, therapies, and technologies applied to them. Feminist disability theorist Rosemarie Garland-Thomson cites as her inspiration Toni Morrison's view that Blackness is more than a person's skin color but instead "an idea that permeates American culture." Likewise, Garland-Thomson argues that the binary concepts of ability and disability are "a pervasive, often unarticulated, ideology informing our cultural notions of self and other." Disability "pervades all aspects of culture: its structuring institutions, social identities cultural practices, political positions, historical communities, and the shared human experience of embodiment" (Garland-Thomson 2002, 4). Not all work in this vein uses the moniker of Critical Disability Studies, but what distinguishes scholars of DisCrit from traditional Disability Studies is their commitment to two intellectual projects.

First, according to its adherents, DisCrit scholarship is notable for "its mode of analysis rather than its objects of study" (Minich 2017, online). Drawing from critical race theory, queer studies, crip theory, and feminist and feminist of color theories, DisCrit investigates the ability/disability binary "as a social system" and the ideology of "disability as a relationship to power that intersects with and is mutually constituted by race, gender, class, and sexuality" (Schalk and Kim 2020, 39). The purpose of DisCrit is to examine, not the bodily or mental impairments that typify disability, but rather then social, cultural, and political conditions or modes of thought that stigmatize particular bodily attributes or groups of people (Schalk 2017; for an excellent review of the field, see Hall 2019; Annamma, Ferri, and Connor 2018). Scholars seek to understand the way in which the ascribed label of "disabled" (or "not disabled") determines an individual's place within the social hierarchy. More than an identity claimed or a ascriptive label, disability serves as a lens for theorizing about power and exclusion (Schalk and Kim 2020; Bailey 2011; Garland-Thomson 2002).

Second, DisCrit takes seriously Christopher Bell's claim that Whiteness is the "constitutive underpinning" of Disability Studies and, as a remedy, intentionally braids into its theorizing Kimberle Crenshaw's call for "intersectional analysis" (Bell 2006, 275; Miles, Nishida, and Forber-Pratt 2017; Crenshaw 1989). DisCrit scholars tackle the estrangement between race and disability in fruitful ways, often building on the works of feminist scholars of color. Leaning on the scholarship of theorists who critiqued the simultaneous exclusion of women from Disability Studies and women with disabilities from feminist theory, they seek to bring the perspectives and lived experiences of people of color with disabilities, especially women of color, to the forefront of disability scholarship (Schalk and Kim 2020; Garland-Thomson 2002; Wendell 1989; Crenshaw 1989; Hull, Scott, and Smith 1982). Critical frameworks analyze the ways in which ableism, xenophobia, patriarchy, heteronormativity, capitalism, and White supremacy work in concert to form interlocking systems that mark some humans as Other and then rationalize their subordination (Schalk and Kim 2020, 37-39; Cohen 1997, 442; Minich 2016). As such, DisCrit theorists argue, the disability/ability binary cannot be understood apart from other systems of categorical difference, which in turn contribute to disability's social meaning and material consequences (Reynolds 2022; Bailey and Mobley 2019; Ferri 2010; Erevelles and Minear 2010).

Given these intellectual commitments, DisCrit scholarship takes an expansive view of disability, directing its inquiry to conditions that do not fit the label of disability as it has been traditionally understood. For instance, while studies of disability rights tend to focus largely on mobility impairments, blindness, and deafness, feminist theorists have urged greater attention to women's experiences with chronic pain and terminal cancer (Wendell 2001; Wendell 1989). Other scholars have extended the gaze of Disability Studies to encompass obesity, HIV/AIDS, asthma, and diabetes as legitimate objects of study (Schalk and Kim 2020, 37-38; Frederick and Shifrer 2019; Mollow 2017; Garland-Thomson 2002).

In fact, when it comes to analyzing the ways in which disability is fostered and sustained, DisCrit scholarship might not even feature actual people with disabilities, focusing instead on social or governing systems, cultural artifacts, and ideologies (Schalk and Kim 2020; Goodley et al. 2019).[*] Scholars, for example, have interrogated the ways that race and class determined what are considered appropriate topics of disability. Take Charles Murray and Richard Herrnstein's polarizing 1994 book, *The Bell Curve*, criticized as a racist tome because it associated cognitive ability with IQ test scores, which, Murray and Hernnstein point out, are lower among Blacks and Latinos than they are among Whites. Yet, Chelsea Chamberlain argues, *The Bell Curve* could just as easily have been received as a book about disability, for even though it does not discuss recognizably disabled people, it makes assertions about (racialized) ability (Chamberlain 2020; Murray and Herrnstein 1994). In a similar fashion, by centering the experiences of African-Americans with physical and cognitive impairments, DisCrit scholars have presented police violence and capital punishment as legitimate disability issues, every bit as much as rehabilitation and job discrimination. In this racialized reimagining, injustice toward people with disabilities is not simply the physically built environment of stair steps and narrow hallways but

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[*] Because DisCrit scholars, like Disability Studies scholars in general, believe that a guiding purpose of their scholarship is to improve the lives of marginalized peoples, in particular people with disabilities, decentering the representation of people with disabilities, as traditionally understood, is not without its intellectual provocations, begging the question of, for instance, to whom exactly DisCrit is accountable (see Erevelles 2014; Kafer 2013; Devlin and Pothier 2006).

also the politically erected barriers of concentrated poverty, dilapidated housing, and the environmental contamination of low-income communities (Schalk and Kim 2020). Critical frameworks, therefore, explicate the ways in which disability has different social and material consequences that are determined as much by race, class, and gender as they care by diagnosis.

Putting DisCrit and Political Science into Conversation

How might political science make use of critical frameworks from Disability Studies to deepen and enrich its understanding of not just disability politics, but of politics in general? In this next section, I draw from the corners of political science that I know best – namely, American Political Development and U.S. social welfare policy and politics – to suggest ways in which the discipline can flesh out the Disability Studies argument that, beyond a mere "legible identity to which one can lay claim," disability is "a relationship to power that intersects with and is mutually constituted by race, gender, class, and sexuality" (Schalk and Kim 2020, 38, 39). The am is to fill in Disability Studies' discussions of "systems" and "ideologies" with concrete institutions and processes as well as to problematize assumptions political scientists make about group identities and interests. I focus on three approaches that political scientists have explicated: the concept of the racial political order, the method of discursive institutionalism, and policy feedback theory. In these suggestions, I speak especially to the interface of disability with race and poverty so as to illustrate the ways in which conversations between political science and Disability Studies open up unexplored connections that are present in the multiplicity of people's lives. Analyzing disability, race, and poverty through institutionalist approaches are by no means an exhaustive list of the ways that political science can engage with Disability Studies, simply the ones that I am most familiar with because they inform my own thinking and writing about disability and American politics. I then apply these approaches to three sets of questions that lie at the heart of an "everyday" politics of disability: Who is a person with a disability? Who speaks for people with disabilities? And are the interests of people with disabilities? While political scientists often take these aspects of disability politics for granted, bringing Disability Studies into view cautions us to be more critical.

Disability as a Political Order: Who Is a Person with a Disability?

The concept of political order further gives form to identity-based systems of representation. A political order is a durable arrangement of interconnecting institutions, policies, and discourses that structure political life by channeling political interests, understandings, and behavior (Lieberman 2002). While political orders can take many forms, I find that recent theorizing within political science about race helps flesh out intersecting identity-based systems of power relations. In particular, Desmond King and Rogers Smith's theory of racial political orders captures the ways in which socially constructed categories of difference reach beyond the individual to structure political interactions and outcomes. Racial political orders are coalitions of political institutions, organizations, and actors that are held together by shared beliefs about race and common aims with respect to race relations. Political leaders maintain their coalitions by pursuing governing agendas that distribute authority, resources, and prestige along racial lines. They deploy discourses that articulate their racial aims. They concretize their aims through the enactment of public policies, rules, processes, and other arrangements that maintain political power and manage shifts in the exercise of that power. Through the conflict and competition between racial orders, social valuations of skin color are given material form and attached to processes of the state. According to King and Smith, in the United States, two contending coalition, one dedicated to White supremacy and the other to racial egalitarianism, are powerful and durable enough organize U.S. politics across time and levels of government. They have informed the nation's conflicts over other forms of hierarchy, including economic inequality, and profoundly shaped terms of civic membership in the United States across time, not only for Blacks and Whites, but also for men and women, native-born citizens and immigrants, even urban versus rural residents (King and Smith 2005).

Conceiving of identity as the crux of a political order rather than simply demography or group affinity allows us to comprehend the ways in which it organizes politics in consequential ways. The racial political order takes a concept that seems given, such as race, and sheds light on the ways that political actors, organizations, and public policies do more than simply reflect or proclaim racial identities that just happen to exist out there in society. Instead, they bring these identities into being through discourses and imbue them with authoritative meaning through policy. Moreover, political actors with racial aims did not confine their actions to areas that one might define as race-related, but rather brought their racial aims to other decisions they made, including decisions that, on their face, had little to do with race. One simply cannot write about education, urban, criminal justice, or social welfare policies without attending to questions of race. Moreover, historians and APD scholars have revealed that concerns about race were central to the structuring of power with respect to U.S. relations with other sovereign nations, the internal organization and rules of Congress, and the balance of power of local and state government vis-à-vis the national government (Smith 2004).

While King and Smith primarily focus on racial orders, other scholars have noted the existence of similar political coalitions united around aims pertaining to class, gender, sexuality, disability, and other forms of identity. These set the terms by which citizens and non-citizens alike experience civic membership (Canaday 2009; Ritter 2008; Baynton 2001). As an institutionalized form of political identity, civic membership organizes the privileges, obligations, and civic standing of all individuals within the purview of American government (Ritter 2008). But a particular individual's civic status is never unidimensional. Rather, an individual's status is constituted by multiple identities that locate them within a complex system of power relations, fashioned by overlapping coalitions that defend their privileged position (Kurtz 2002). Taken together, simultaneously existing identity-based political orders create an edifice of interlocking institutions, each organized around a distinct axis of inequality, mutually constituting one another into what Patricia Hill Collins calls a "matrix of domination" (Collins 2014).

DisCrit begs for a multiplicity of analysis that challenges the compulsion within political science to isolate the effects of variables and single out the one with the most explanatory power. It means, Sami Schalk and Jina Kim argue, "thinking beyond the politics of recognition, representation, and identity that characterized early disability studies" – and political science, for that matter – "and instead framing disability studies as a method" (Schalk and Kim 2020, 37). Rather than seeking the single most powerful explanatory variable, scholarship informed by DisCrit interrogates disability so as to clarify how identity-based institutions operate. The point is not to isolate the effects of disability, but to reveal how disability works in tandem with multiple political orders to constitute power. Taken together, race, disability, gender, and other identity-based orders intertwine to "together, yet distinctly" to enforce a norm and "grant power, privilege, and status to that norm" (Garland Thomson 2002, 4). So, for example, just as Rogers Smith argues that Daniel Tichnor's excellent study of immigration politics and policy would have been strengthen by an explication of racial aims, so too might engaging with Douglas Baynton's work on the prohibition on "defective people" from immigrating to the United States clarify how constructs of disability were simultaneously deployed through public policy and administrative action to create a White America. Simultaneously, at the apex of race science, eugenics, and imperialism, White America came to see itself as progressive, healthy, and robust, fit to rule over the weaker, degenerate peoples of color, both at home and abroad (Smith 2004; Tichenor 2002; Baynton 2001).

Or take Theda Skocpol's pathbreaking work on the early U.S. welfare state. Written and published around the same time that Hahn wrote of the estrangement between political science and Disability Studies, *Protecting Soldiers and Mothers* claims that pensions for Civil War veterans formed an early and precocious welfare state, accounting for nearly half of the federal government's expenditures at its peak. This precocious welfare state was erected to compensate veterans with disabilities and confront concerns about fraudulent claims, which, Skocpol argues, provided a lesson to social reformers in how not to design a social program (Skocpol 1995a). The story is told through the eyes of bureaucrats and Progressive social reformers, and disability is treated as an object of discussion and disputation, in which actual people with disabilities rarely figure prominently as significant political actors in their own right. To the extent that people with disabilities are present, they are analyzed as veterans and workers rather than as people whose encounters with disability shaped them in politically consequential ways. How veterans perceived their disabilities, how they deployed disability strategically to secure public resources, and how they negotiated their claims of disability with program administrators remains obscured (Blanck and Millender 2000). Also unclear are the motivations of social reformers who sought to limit the explosive potential of disability and thereby contain the precocious welfare state. Skocpol accepts that these Progressive reformers were repelled by the corruption and patronage politics of veterans pensions. They might also, however, been animated by a desire to bring people with disabilities under the supervisory power of rehabilitative and social work professionals, whose occupational status and identity was just coming into being at this historical moment (Linker 2011). Problematizing disability, in other words, leads us to further interrogate the terms on which state power is expanded and the motivations of purported reformers.

Moreover, just as consideration of disability deepens Skocpol's gendered analysis of Civil War pensions, so might the additional lens of race. In later work, Skocpol made the claim that the social welfare benefits of African-Americans are more politically resilient when they are delivered within universal programs versus when they are provided through targeted programs. The example offered is the contrast between Civil War pensions and Aid to Families with Dependent Children, now Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) (Skocpol 1995b). Yet after World War II, the G.I. Bill, a supposedly universal program for veterans, effectively excluded African-Americans through discriminatory administrative rules and practices (Katznelson 2005). In a similar manner, veterans with disabilities were shunted into vocational work positions rather than higher education (Rose 2012). Institutionalists tend to look to program structures to explain political outcomes, but how might examination of the overlapping layers of identity-based systems further enrich our understanding of institutional processes? Applying the concept of identity-based political orders to disability provides a window into the possibilities.

Conceiving of politics as structured by overlapping, sometimes mutually constitutive but also sometimes competing, identity-based political orders, allows for a more nuanced interrogation of representation. In the case of disability politics, it is worth asking: Who claims a disability or has it imposed upon them, when, and why? If scholars reject the determinism of the medical model, then rather than simply assuming that the term "people with disabilities" is clear, it is worth interrogating the politics of who gets counted as a person with a disability and who is excluded. What, moreover, are the consequences of these inclusions and omissions? Adopting a constructivist approach to disability reveals that institutionalized valuations of disability channel the political activity of citizens, who sometimes embrace the label of disability but rejecting it at other times. The Deaf rejected the label of disability at various historical points in time, sometimes claiming to be a linguistic minority rather than individuals with medical deficits in hearing (Burch and Sutherland 2006, 141-142). In the 1970s and 1980s, LGBTQ activists fought inclusion in DSM-III, the psychiatric diagnostic manual, and therefore disassociated themselves with disability. But a few years later, with the AIDS/HIV pandemic at its peak, they allied with disability activists to get AIDS and HIV included as disabilities under the ADA (Brown 2019). Similarly, given the lack of maternity and medical leave in the United States, pregnant workers have had to argue that they are disabled in order to secure paid and unpaid leave and other workplace accommodations for what is an expected and predictable life event for many humans (Cox 2012; Gardin and Richwald 1986). Disability rights activists were themselves unclear, sometimes asserting that disability was the identity of an oppositional minority, but also asserting that disability was a universal characteristic because of the ubiquity of injury, illness, and old age in the human life cycle. At other times, activists disassociated themselves from the frailties of the aged and sick. By claiming the vigor and rebelliousness of youth, they rejected medical authority over their bodies but also simultaneously refused solidarity with the visceral suffering that protracted pain, chronic conditions, and terminal illness caused to other people's bodies (Erkulwater 2019; Wendell 2001; Wendell 1989).

Likewise, the imbrications of disability with race offer much to consider. Organizations of people with disabilities have distinguished race from disability by arguing that disability-based discrimination is directed toward people with sensory, physical, and cognitive impairments as opposed to skin color (Oliver and Barnes 2012). Yet it is not entirely clear why skin color should be set aside from other forms of bodily difference. Indeed, philosopher Joel Michael Reynolds describes a Black man in the United States as “always already disabled (in the social model’s sense) via the racialized epidermalization of his body” (Reynolds 2022, 52). Historically, Whites have regarded people of color as inherently physically and mentally inferior, leading Reynolds to argue that disability in a person of color is socially unrecognizable because society must first recognize a human being as having equal worth and ability before it can see their body as “disabled” (Reynolds 2022). Disability Studies scholar Susan Schweik makes a similar observation when she likens disability and other forms of debility, uncleanliness, and menace to “white trashing,” in which “bad Whiteness” is contrasted with “the nice body of good whiteness” (Schweik 2010, 185; see also Molina 2010; Stubblefield 2007; Shah 2006). Disability denotes a White body unable to reach its full worth, but the body itself is not inherently worthless because it is not raced.

While the distinction might seem obvious today, it is one that had to be articulated and reinforced through politics over time. Politics gives disability a racialized form by structuring the aggregation of individuals for the purpose of collective identity. Architectural barriers and the segregation of people by genders, races, and socioeconomic class are political methods of organizing social and physical spaces. This organizing of space privileges some forms of identity formation and political mobilization over others. Political scientist Sharon Groch argues that because disability is horizontal identity, occurring across families rather than within them, as race might, shared oppositional space has been a precondition for a politicized identity around disability (Groch 2001). These spaces grew up around some, but not all, disabilities. State residential schools for blind and deaf children created in the 19th century were some of the earliest oppositional spaces created for people with disabilities, giving rise to politically active chapters of organizations for the blind and the deaf long before they existed for other impairments (Kudlick 2001; Ferguson 2001; Longmore 2000; Buchanan 1999; Koestler 1976;). In the postwar era, crip camps nurtured the political consciousness and social networks of the young people who join the ranks of the independent living movement and the disability rights movement in the 1970s and 1980s (Patterson 2012). These were segregated spaces. Residential schools, rehabilitation facilities, and camps were reserved for White children, provided inferior resources to African-Americans, and, when integrated, discouraged interracial friendships and romances (Obasogie 2014; Linsenmeier and Moyer 2006). Not surprisingly, early 20th century organizations for people with physical disabilities and deafness were also racial segregated (Wright 2019; Jennings 2016). So complete was the separation that deaf African Americans were not taught and therefore could not sign American Sign Language (ASL), leaving them cut off not only from hearing African Americans but from deaf White Americans as well (Burch and Sutherland 2006).

State-sanctioned segregation of social and physical space suggests a racialized patterning of disability organizations. The state segregated Whites from people of color and, among Whites, directed people with disabilities for education, rehabilitative care, and benefit programs separate and apart from people without disabilities. Given the organization of space and distribution of resources, political awareness and mobilization occurred first among White people with blindness, deafness, and mobility impairments before the emergence of the modern disability rights movement in the late 20th century. Even with the end of formal racial segregation, social and political patterns of separation persist. Given the long association of racialized minorities with inferiority, people of color, racial justice movements, and critical race theorists have generally been reluctant to embrace disability (Frederick and Shifrer 2019; Bailey and Mobley 2019; Patterson 2012). Meanwhile, Disability Studies and activist movements for people with disabilities have historically been White spaces (Ferri 2010; Blanchett 2006; Erevelles, Kanga, and Middleton 2006; Bell 2006).

Reflecting on the advances Disability Studies had made in the humanities in 2006, Susan Burch and Ian Sutherland surveyed the rich histories of people with disabilities that had been written since the 1980s and asked: “Who’s Not Yet Here?” (Burch and Sutherland 2006). A useful corollary to that query for political scientists might be: “Why not?” What political and institutional resources determine who gets to organize, who speaks, who gets an audience with elected officials? Whose disability is recognized, and to what end? Given the political and institutional estrangement between race and disability, Disability Studies scholar Jasbir Puar asks whether the label of disability is a form of privilege, one that people of color cannot access irrespective of the state of their bodies. Arguing that the disability/ability binary is White, Puar coins the term “debilitation” to describe the position of nonwhite and non-Western and poor people who are denied the legitimacy, resources, and rights given to people who are recognized as “disabled.” Disabled, abled, and debilitated are forms of triangulation, for even though people of color are not legitimately disabled, neither are they regarded as “able” (Puar 2017). Sami Schalk’s concept of the degenerate but hyperabled Black body, unfit for either free labor or political freedom, speaks to debilitation (Schalk and Kim 2020). According to Moya Bailey and Izetta Autumn Mobley, so too does the social trope of strong Black women, which does little to lend social authority to Black women but instead depoliticizes their trauma and pain (Moya and Mobley 2019). Political science can bring into focus how the state, political actors, and political processes contribute to the distinctions between disability, ability, and debility.

Disability as a Discursive System: Who Speaks for People with Disabilities?

As Harlan Hahn pointed out in the 1980s, one cannot capture the politics of disability without attending to human agency, dynamic policy change, and the centrality of ideas as engines of individual action. Discursive institutionalism, likewise, insists on the explanatory power of ideas as a needed corrective to the overly structural and overly determinative view of politics found among historical and rational choice institutionalists. Because they are focused on explaining why institutions existing in a state of perpetual equilibrium most of the time, these institutionalists find they must reach outside their standard toolbox of path-dependent processes or fixed preferences when they must explain agency and political change (Schmidt 2008). Discursive institutionalists strive to make peace between ideas and structures by insisting on placing institutions alongside discourse, discursive institutionalism situates ideas within a political edifice. They are not just untethered words or texts. They are conveyed by specific political actors, within a specific political context, and for specific political ends. According to Vivian Schmidt, who coined the term discursive institutionalism, analysis requires attention to "what is said" (ideas or texts); "where, when, how, and why it is said" (context); "what is said, or where and how" (structure); and "who said what to whom" (agency) (Schmidt 2008, 305).

Discourse operates on three levels of politics. At the broadest level, public philosophies are the organizing ideas, values, and principles that channel public debates about important issues of the day. Rarely questioned except in time of crises, the critical junctures that institutionalist see as disruptions of statis, these worldviews – the United States as a nation of immigrants and the land of the free, our commitment to individualism, the "self-evident" truth that "all men are created equal" – form the underlying assumptions of public policy and political action. These public philosophies do not describe the United States as it is, but rather serve as the goals to which we aspire. Political actors, in turn, translate public philosophies into paradigms – the problem definitions, narrative frames, metaphors, and programmatic beliefs that orient specific policy decisions. If public philosophies set our normative policy goals, paradigms map for us the problems we should tackle and the solutions that are appropriate for that task. Unlike public philosophies, paradigms are frequently in contest. The social and medical models of disability, for example, are two dominant and competing paradigms in disability policy. Last but not least are the specific programs, laws, or rules that policymakers propose, debate, enact, and administer. They translate public philosophies and paradigms into the actions that distribute authority, resources, and status (Schmidt 2008, 306-309).

Garland-Thomson, whose work was foundational to feminist disability theory, argued that, properly done, identity studies "interrogates how subjects are multiply interpellated: in other words, how representational systems of [by] gender, race, ethnicity, ability, sexuality, and class mutually construct, inflect, and contradict one another" and come together in a person to flesh out an individual's "ascribed, achieved, and acquired identities" (Garland-Thomson 2002, 3). It is not so clear, however, what these representational systems are and how they operate, never mind how disability interacts with other identity-based representational systems. By weaving ideas into a political structure, discursive institutionalism moves us forward.

We can begin to imagine these intertwined representational systems if we think of identities as part of overlapping discourses on race, disability, gender, sexuality, class, nationality, and so forth. Discourse about identities occurs at the level of paradigms, connected to larger public philosophies, brought into action by public policy. We say we are a nation of immigrants, but we disagree about what that means for a host of issues from family reunification, to the Dreamers, to border security. At the same time, discourses about immigrants cannot be separated from intersecting discourses about gender ("anchor babies"), socioeconomic class and disability ("public charge"), and race and nationality ("shithole countries").

We can also see that the juxtaposition of these identities to one another is what gives them substantive meaning. According to Evelyn Nagano Glenn, identities are dichotomous, relational oppositions, in which a category of identity is often defined as much by what it is as by what it is not. White-Black, masculine-feminine, heteronormative-queer, abled-disabled – These oppositions clarify the meaning of the dominant group and justify its hold on power through the construction of its relational opposite. Men became "manly" to the extent they were not "feminine," however that is defined at any particular place and time (Glenn 2002). Likewise, discourses of one identity are often used to clarify and substantiate another identity category. Aristotle used metaphors of disability to describe women as incomplete or deformed men (Freeland 1994). Antebellum discourse cast Blacks as both too degenerate to deserve freedom and citizenship, destined for extinction without White paternalism, and yet so hyperabled as to be sufficiently fit for manual labor that was much too brutish for Whites (Schalk and Kim 2020; Tyler 2017; Schweik 2009). Additionally, while the subordinated Other is named and often described in great detail to make clear its distinctiveness from the majority, the dominant group's attributes – its Whiteness, maleness, heterosexuality, and able-bodiedness – remain unspecified and appear "natural" or "normal," thus obscuring the ways in which perceived differences between groups are not only systematically related but also expressive of power relations (Glenn 2002). Under a system of White supremacy, Whites are "normal," their normality constructed through notions of Black deviance and inferiority. Racial difference makes African Americans "inherently disabled, fundamentally other" (Bailey and Mobley 2019, 24). In other discursive realms, Whiteness encompasses “everyone,” an unspecified and purportedly universal position that erases the marginalization of unnamed Others (Hamraie 2017).

Discursive institutionalism calls on political scientists to interrogate the political structures that situate interlocking discourses of disability and race. Julie Avril Minich, for example, argues that metaphors of bodily integrity and health are used to frame discussions of citizenship rights and border politics. Nativists present the nation as a “whole, nondisabled body” that must be “ protected from external pollutants” and illegal infiltration. These discourses supported the enactment of restrictive immigration laws as well as the internal regulation of immigrants and people of color believed to be immigrants. Similarly, metaphors of low-income communities as blighted, diseased, and rife with “broken windows” justified the “urban renewal” of afflicted neighborhoods and the over-policing of people of color (Minich 2014, 2). Throughout American history, metaphors about race and disability justified the expansion of federal power over state governments to oversee the nation’s borders and regulate its communities (Gottschalk 2015; Law 2104).

Additionally, discursive institutionalism interjects agency into institutionalism’s otherwise static model of politics. Schmidt distinguishes two arenas of discourse. The first is the coordinative discourse that takes place among government policymakers, experts, lobbyists, and activists, while the second is the communicative discourses between political actors and the wider public of citizens, voters, and the mass media (Schmidt 2008, 310-311). Because they are located at the nexus of these two discursive realms, advocacy organizations serve as pivotal agents of political change. Formed around politicized identities and enrolling individual citizens as members, these organizations include, among many others, groups such as the NAACP, UnidosUS, the National Organization of Women (NOW), PFLAG, the Human Rights Campaign, the National Federation of the Blind, and the American Association of People with Disabilities. Within coordinating discourse, citizen advocacy groups connect with governing institutions, political processes, and public policies, where they speak on behalf of their constituents to governing officials, cultivate coalitional partners, and introduce emerging cultural and social ideas into political debate. At the level of communicative discourse, they link the state to the public. They educate their constituents about government, signal to them which issues are salient, and provide a conduit for constituents to speak to elected representatives (Strolovitch and Forrest 2010).

As the lynchpin between coordinating and communicative discourses, citizen advocacy organizations mediate the flow of ideas between society and the state. They mobilize identity in strategic ways in order to translate what individuals would otherwise see as personal problems into broader political demands. If it is the case that individuals hold multiple identities, these organizations tell them which of these identities are relevant to politics and in which instances they are relevant. They invoke shared histories and experiences to strengthen group coherence and draw boundaries between "us" and "them." They can also challenge prevailing constructions of identity by knitting together existing repertories, reinterpreting cultural frames, then moving them across contexts in order to mobilize new constituents or channel their engagement in different ways (Scully and Creed 2005). For instance, the assertion "My name is Rosa Parks" allowed White ADAPT protesters in the 1980s to build on claims of the Black freedom struggle to demand their inclusion into White, middle-class America (Katzmann 1986; Roberts 1978). By bringing new actors into the political process and heightening the political salience around issues, citizen advocacy organizations construct and clarify group identity for the purposes of destabilize settled political dynamics and reordering existing power relationships.

Grounding discourse within institutions and political processes requires that we identify specific political actors and remain critical about representation: Who gets to speak for people with disabilities? Who gets to claim the label and articulate what "people with disabilities" want or need? Insofar as disability, like any social category, contains individuals of intersecting identities and positions in a social system, people labeled with disability have a "shared (though not uniform) location in hierarchical power relations" (Collins 1998, 224). Just as the racial political order is united around racial aims, we must consider what aims – racial, economic, or otherwise – animate the discourse of those who claim to speak for others not present. Public policies are institutionalized discourses that parse the disabled from the not disabled, legitimizing some individuals to speak on behalf of the group while marginalizing others. Likewise, among activists, the diversity within any group must be managed and sometimes suppressed in order for a group to achieve its political goals. To achieve political ends, some coalitions are nurtured, others shunned. In communicative discourses, activists give form to fellow citizens who are disabled and what their interests are, while in moments of coordinating discourses, they make strategic choices about which aspects of the group's experiences, privations, and desires to push forward and which ones to hold back on.

Thus, even disability organizations' much-celebrated alliance with LGBTQ groups in the late 1980s was carefully managed by civil rights supporters. Having recently embraced disability rights and gay rights as civil rights causes, the Leadership Conference on Civil Rights (LCCR), the nation's premier civil rights umbrella coalition, was determined to secure anti-discrimination protections for people with HIV/AIDS under the ADA. Although the LCCR and disability activists valiantly fended off efforts by Christian conservatives to distinguish HIV/AIDS from disability, the LCCR also suppressed radical expressions of queer identity in order to maintain political respectability (Brown 2019). Similarly, Jessica Hughes criticizes the National Council on Disability, the government agency that drafted the original text of the ADA, for emphasizing unity among people with disabilities and sidelining underrepresented groups and discordant voices among disability activists (Hughes 2016). My own work on the racial politics of the independent living movement notes the struggle of White activists to recruit more people of color into the movement and yet contain assertions of racial justice that might weaken unity among the disabled (Erkulwater 2018).

In the 1970s, disability activists, like Edward V. Roberts, made a discursive turn that permitted the formation of a pan-impairment disability movement. Whereas people with disabilities in the past had organized along their discrete impairments, independent living and disability rights activists claimed that, regardless of their specific diagnoses, the disabled shared common experiences with societal discrimination and oppression. Today activists and historians have labored to preserve the rich history of this pan-impairment movement. Appealing to shared histories and experiences is a fraught move, however. According to Sami Schalk and Jina Kim, histories of disability rights present the ADA as the apex of a widespread social justice movement, its most recent episodes being the 2017 ADAPT occupation of Congress when Republicans planned to gut the Affordable Care Act (Davis 2015; O'Brien 2004; Switzer 2003; Shapiro 1993). This narrative, they argue, perpetuates the Whiteness of disability rights activism in the United States. It largely chronicles the achievements of White men and, to a lesser extent, women seeking to assimilate into White, middle-class America in order to fully enjoy the rights and privileges of Whiteness. Meanwhile, activism by disabled people of color have largely gone unrecognized in the historiography of disability rights (Erkulwater 2018; Boris and Klein 2012; Schweik 2011). Shedding light on the activism of people of color with disabilities, Schalk and

Kim argue, would mean decentering legislative battles and focusing instead on grassroots organizing, public statements of solidarity and coalition-building. They call attention to the exchanges between Black Lives Matters organizations and the Harriet Tubman Collective following the racial protests of the summer of 2020, as well as activists conversations around the viral hashtag #DisabilityTooWhite (Schalk and Kim 2020, 48, 49; Spade 2013; Mulderink 2020; Thompson 2016). More importantly, asserting a shared experience with oppression erases many vectors of difference and social hierarchy. "How does one compare the drunk-driving induced paralysis of a white high school quarterback to the job-acquired carpal tunnel of immigrant women assembly line workers?" Moya Bailey and Izetta Autumn Mobley ask. Creating a coherent and recognizable disability identity is inherently political work worthy of political science theorizing.

Disability as a Feedback Effect of Public Policy: What is in the Interests of People with Disabilities?

While discursive institutionalism as a method and theories of political order ground ideas and connect them to the state, theories of policy feedback contribute to our understanding of how an individual's political identity and subjectivity come into being. Just as the social model asserts that disability is not an objective medical fact, policy feedback suggests that the ways in which people with disabilities see themselves, their allies, and their interests are likewise politically constructed. Identity is not simply formed through words and metaphors. Feedback theorists insist on the construction of an individual's subjectivity within an institutional setting. They argue that public policies are key institutions in shaping public attitudes and mass political behavior (for a review of the literature, see Mettler and Soss 2004).

Public policies influence identity formation in several ways. At the most basic level, they create categories of difference through statutory law, judicial opinions, and administrative rules and process, and then these official texts and the discourses surrounding them give these categories social and political meaning. They tell us who falls into the category of "welfare mother" – the income of the family, the earnings of the mother, the ages of one's children, the circumstances of their conception and birth, and so forth – as well as what to think about persons who fall into these categories (Soss and Schram 2007; Schneider and Ingram 2005; Schram 2000). Political scientists, furthermore, argue that policies exert both material and subjective effects on individuals. Programs, such as Social Security, Medicare, student loans, agricultural subsidies, welfare, and family or medical leave, give tangible resources to individuals: education, cash, customers, in-kind benefits, and time. Laws regulating public space put people into proximity with one another or segregate them and determine whom they will aggregate with, thereby influencing their social context, social networks, and access to opportunities, such as jobs, high-quality schooling and housing, safety, and clean air and water. Policies also exert subjective effects. An individual's degree of political trust, political interest, and political knowledge is shaped by their experiences with their government and their assessment of how resources are distributed and decisions made (Weaver and Leman 2010; Bruch, Ferree, and Soss 2010; Mettler 2005; Campbell 2003). JoNel Newman, for example, argues that the process of applying for Social Security disability benefits leads claimants to view themselves as disempowered. Yet by reframing their experiences with disability and unemployment, anti-poverty lawyers are able to counter the debilitating frames embedded in the application process for disability benefits (Newman 2015). By dividing Americans into statutory and administrative categories and infusing those categories with material consequences and subjective meaning, policies facilitate – or stymie – political involvement, rights-claiming, group mobilization, and coalition-building between potential organizational allies.

Insights from policy feedback concretize the DisCrit assertion that disability is a "pervasive, often unarticulated, ideology" and "a relationship to power" (Garland-Thomson 2002, 4; Schalk and Kim 2020, 39). Because disability is not objective, its coherence as a social and political category must be created, cultivated, and maintained over time. Public policies, both as institutional rules and as discursive sites, serve as a crucial aspect of identity formation. Blindness, for instance, seems as clearcut an impairment-related identity category as one can find, yet its meaning is not so fixed. During the 1920s-1930s, the disagreement about the scope of public assistance programs compelled clarifying the contours of blindness. Prior to the New Deal, many states paid blind pensions to individuals who could show "economic blindness" – they had compromised vision and did not work for wages – and the vast majority of pensioners were aged widows and widowers. The Social Security Act of 1935, however, banned states from enrolling pensioners in both Old Age Assistance (OAA) and Aid to the Blind, the two matching-grant public assistance programs created by the New Deal. States moved their aged pensioners to OAA, leaving Aid to the Blind a program for working-aged adults. Suddenly, the blind became young. The Social Security Board followed shortly thereafter, issuing rules that did away with economic blindness and insisting that blindness be verified by a medical exam showing vision no better than 20/200: so called "medical blindness." The youthification and medicalization of Aid to the Blind had a profound impact on the political subjectivity of organized blind activists, who argued that because recipients of Aid to the Blind were working-aged, a liberal definition of blindness (economic blindness rather than medical blindness) and a graduated series of earnings disregards were more appropriate for the needs of the blind than the Board's approach, which was to provide compensation only to the most severely disabled under the assumption that they could not find employment. Blind activists, in other words, argued that they had little in common with the senior citizens on OAA or mothers and children on Aid to Dependent Children, neither of whom sought waged work, despite the fact that all recipients of public assistance were poor. They came to see themselves as potential workers rather than as poor people with needs, first and foremost. Policy influenced their political identity and their perceptions of their political interests (Erkulwater 2019).

This juxtaposition of poor people and people with disabilities raises important questions about interests. Just as policy sets up authoritative identity-based categories, so too does it frame interests for actors involved in the policymaking process. Take, for instance, the political activity of White activists, many of whom were poor, as it related to income support and social services programs for people who were poor. Between 1950-1990, White activists fought efforts to define low-income people of color as "socially handicapped," which would have opened rehabilitation funds to them, and they urged members of Congress to compel rehabilitation agencies to take on people with severe disabilities. The agencies had been reluctant to because they viewed people with severe disabilities as having little prospect of obtaining a remunerative job (Patterson 2012). White activists lobbied for work incentives in Supplemental Security Income (SSI) and access to rehabilitation, but not for higher benefit levels, more generous asset disregards, or a looser programmatic definition of disability that would have extended eligibility to more of the "socially handicapped." In other words, activists argued for the targeting of public resources on people with severe disabilities who wanted to work rather than on impoverished people, many with less severe disabilities, many of whom were people of color who, if they were employed, worked in the underground economy or for substandard wages. To claim uncritically, however, that these were what people with disabilities wanted or what was in their interests depoliticizes an inherently political choice about how to allocate scarce societal resources. The safety net for poor people, including those with disabilities was attenuated, as the Nixon and then Reagan administrations in the 1970s and 1980s moved to root out fraud and abuse and limit SSI and AFDC to the "deserving" and "truly disadvantaged." In this retelling of disability politics, it is not clear that what was most in the interests of people with disabilities was access to public spaces and jobs. Significantly, in their effort to obtain access to public spaces and jobs, (White) advocates for disability rights position themselves against poor (Black) mothers on welfare, asserting that anti-discrimination rights would end their "dependency" and turn them into "productive" workers and taxpayers (Kim 2021; Bagenstos 2002). While supporters of ADA disavowed dependency, by 1995, conservatives had successfully framed "welfare dependency" among Black women as a pathology in need of therapeutic intervention, which came in the form of waged work, no matter how pitiable the wages or working conditions. The goal of public assistance became behavior modification, not income redistribution (Schram 2000).

Putting disability into conversation with race, gender, and class politics helps us to see the ways in which our accepted categorizations of identity erase from view interplays of power. To assert something as a "disability issue" or "in the interest of people with disabilities" is a claim of political powering. The triumphant narrative of the ADA obscures the ways in which rights-based politics, in an effort to promote equality between groups, has perpetuated inequality within groups by benefiting the most privileged and encouraging assimilation into a social system that was increasingly tenuous for poor people of color (Spade 2013; Russell 2002). While conventional wisdom on disability rights politics frames the state as a site of justice and protection, by contrast, DisCrit scholars and advocates of disability justice view state institutions

– prisons, police forces, schools, and welfare – as well as state divestment from public goods, as in the Flint water crisis, as “instruments of mass disablement” in low-income communities of color (Schalk and Kim 2020, 43). While Whites activists resisted professional control and the medicalization of disability, people of color and sexual minorities (with and without disabilities) fought to access to high-quality of care delivered free of discrimination (Bailey and Mobley 2019). While White activists rejected the “patient role” and framed themselves as consumers of health care and attendant services in order to empower people with disabilities, their efforts to institute consumer-directed services, in which they would control the hiring and conditions of work for attendants, complicated unionization and kept women of color at the bottom rungs of the service economy (Schalk and Kim 2020; Boris and Klein 2012). Police violence, mass incarceration, crumbing public infrastructure, and environmental contamination have not traditionally been considered disability issues, revealing perhaps just how blinkered and racialized our understanding of disability is. Now that critical disability theories have brought these issues into our purview, political scientists can begin to uncover the how state and political processes obscured them in the first place.

Conclusion

That COVID-19 would prompt us to think and write more deeply and frequently about disability is obvious. But disability shows up over and over again in Americans politics as a metric by which to value lives, a metaphor that justifies the marginalization of the non-normative, and a summons for state power – or an argument against deploying it. By reaching beyond studies of disability as an object, an identity, or a label and instead probing it as a method for theorizing about power relations, critical frameworks in Disability Studies have advanced our understanding of how discourses of disease, debility, and deformity – and their converse of purity, wholeness, and vigor – are central to the formation of social inequality and oppression. It is a conversation from which political science can benefit and to which it can contribute. Theories of discursive institutions, political orders, and policy feedback allow us to ground metaphors and discourses of disability with political structures and processes. They open up for us questions that once seemed self-evident and "natural": Who is disabled? Who speaks for people with disabilities? What is in their interests? They reveal the fundamentally political work of identity formation, representation, and claims making, and they bring to the fore the political agents and institutions that actively shape our social understanding of disablement. They open for us new ways of seeing politics. Historian Douglas Baynton once wrote, "Disability is everywhere in history, once you begin looking for it, but conspicuously absent in the histories we write" (Baynton 2001, 52). Critical Disability Studies reminds us that disability is also everywhere in our politics, yet still largely missing from our analysis of the political world. Through engagement with Disability Studies and its critical interventions with other identity-based studies, political science can begin to fill those absences and make for a richer, more meaningful post-pandemic discipline.

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