Disability, Non-disability and the Politics of Mourning: Re-conceiving the 'we'

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Abstract

In December of 2007, the Globe and Mail, one of Canada’s national newspapers, published a series of articles written by columnist Ian Brown. In the three part-series entitled, “The Boy in the Moon,” Brown narrates his life with his cognitively disabled son. This paper explores Brown's articles in relation to Judith Butler's (2004) "Violence, Mourning, Politics," and conducts an analysis of how cognitive disability is being enacted as "not quite a life" (34). This paper demonstrates how Brown's articles tell the story of cognitive disability as a state of brokenness, something that requires fixing. Significantly, when disability defies and/or resists fixing, it is discursively re-framed as a tragic loss. By attending to the making of disability in Brown's articles, this paper is more broadly interested in how disabled and non-disabled bodies ('we') are being formed in and through social spaces.

Keywords

cognitive disability; non-disability; interpretive methods; cultural studies; disability studies; relationality; governmentality; mourning

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Reading the World report on disability, I find much of relevance to my own experience. I have benefitted from access to first class medical care. I rely on a team of personal assistants who make it possible for me to live and work in comfort and dignity. In fact we have a moral duty to remove the barriers to participation, and to invest sufficient fund-ing and expertise to unlock the vast potential of people with disabilities. Governments throughout the world can no longer overlook the hundreds of millions of people with disabilities who are denied access to health, rehabilitation, support, education and employment, and never get the chance to shine. The report makes recommendations for action at the local, national and international levels.