subject areas, including such topics as sports law and securities transactions—but not disability law. What does that say about the legal academy, and what message does that send to new legal scholars and faculty members?

The effect of the dearth of disabled legal scholars is manifold. First, legal scholarship on disability civil rights is being written and published primarily by able-bodied scholars. Again, substitute race and gender for disability in this context, and imagine if reactions would be different. Just as there is tremendous value in quality scholarship from women and people of color, the disability voice can also be unique and valuable. There is also a need for faculty members to educate, mentor, attract, and encourage young disabled students in order that they become part of the future generation of scholars.

Moreover, I am not sure that many on university faculties even recognize a problem. Rarely is the lack of a disability voice on a faculty recognized or disability acknowledged as a valuable part of diversity. In fact, one faculty member at a prominent law school told me I was not going to be interviewed or considered for an appointment because the faculty needed to focus on diversity issues in its hiring, and thus, this year they were only interested in African American women who could teach business law courses. I agree that such diversity is valuable. When I noted that there were no members of the faculty who identified themselves as disabled, he acknowledged that I was correct but that no one had ever recognized or prioritized the issue as a problem. Nonetheless, nothing changed.

Universities must continue to recognize and develop disability studies programs. These programs should be interdisciplinary in nature, drawing not just on the humanities but also on law, public policy, public health, and other disciplines. Universities must do so not because it is politically correct or because such programs are not prevalent enough. They must do so because it is what is right for our students, what is right for our teaching and curriculum, and what is right for scholarship, because it is the mission of universities to do so.

After Words

ALICE SHEPPARD
Pennsylvania State University, University Park

In the months since the Emory conference, my relation to disability studies has changed. I attended the conference as a spectator, eager to probe the shape and problems of the field. My PhD is in medieval studies, and I was beginning a project on historical representations of disability, deformity, and miraculous healing. Now, as a member of the MLA's Committee on Disability Issues in the Profession, I am involved in the post-conference evaluatory process and in other disability-related professional initiatives. Each stage of this journey has been informed by a growing awareness of what might in other contexts be articulated as a problem of field identity. When I read the conference title—Disability Studies and the University—and looked through the program, I found myself imagining conversations between the theme and the paper titles. That there was such a difference between what I envisioned and what I saw might be an index of my interpretive skills, but it might also indicate the challenges of defining and recognizing disability studies.

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Some of the papers in this special section explicitly interrogate the interactions of disability, disability studies, and the university. Others address the importance of locating and analyzing disability in more historically familiar fields; still others articulate new theoretical analytic lenses. The essayists address such issues as work, justice, the Americans with Disabilities Act, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (now amended by the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act), citizenship, self-representation, integration, identity, access, and accommodation. Disability studies, Deaf studies, cognitive disability, blindness, gender, culture, politics, queering, performing, freakery, spectacle, and staring. Access, the arts, aesthetics, autobiography, pedagogy, worship, theology, churches, universities, institutions, medicine, disease, literature, film, history, and historiography. The lists make interesting reading, but the ideas and materials they contain do not so much enclose disability studies as mark some possible terrain. Further, even as these essays define some contours of the field, they show that the field's identity does not only lie with disciplinary content and theoretical concepts.

Scholars of disability studies readily recognize the impossibility of a universal description of disability, but the relevance of that insight as a defining disciplinary principle has been underused. When read in succession, the individual contributions show that disability studies as a field shares some of the defining characteristics of its subject matter: disability studies, like disability itself, disturbs and disconcerts. When this idea is added to a relatively stable set of theoretical parameters and to an ever-changing body of content, it is possible to understand how a body of disability-focused work both describes and creates the coherent academic discipline in which it participates.

As an example of my claim, I turn to a performance given at the conference by the dancer and choreographer Homer Avila.[1] Avila asked audience members to read aloud a list of short, plainly constructed phrases from Bill Viola's *Slowly Turning Narrative*. As the voices spoke, one after another, Avila proceeded to dance. Each statement began with "The one who" and concluded with a verb in the present tense: "loves," for example. Each utterance allowed the audience to imagine a person with a disability performing the verb or as a positive object of the verb. So fundamental to the creation of human selves are the actions delineated by the verbs that, in a disability studies context at least, the short sentences constitute a list of activities of daily living. Avila's *The One Who Is* shows that disabled people have sexuality, inner lives, and a noticeable freedom from social stigma. The piece concludes with the devastatingly simple statement "The one who is."[2]

As a dancer with a disability, Avila deployed his own physicality; he literally embodied the text and danced its significance. He questioned the conventional reading of disability and people with disabilities as signs of or metaphors for something else.[3] And, in so doing, he stripped away the negative interpretations of disability, showing that people with disabilities have agency and that our subjectivity need not be seen as any more crippling than that of anyone else. Avila treated the nonspecificity of *is* as the climax of his work, a kind of screen on which the audience member, having made the emotional journey of the piece, was then free to imagine a boundless (boundary-less) disabled existence. A disabled person is one who is.

It would be easy to argue, analogically, that disability studies simply is what it is—that disability studies work can be known by its content and its approaches. And, to a certain extent, this is how the field has become known: its scholars have theorized disability, described the kinds of work that might be considered as participatory in disability studies discourse, and listed the kinds

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of questions disability studies might address. In the first disability studies manifesto, Simi Linton, after surveying the curriculum from the applied sciences to the humanities, demonstrates the importance of an epistemological understanding of disability as an analytic category and lays out some initial goals for disability studies as an area of intellectual inquiry (*Claiming* 120–31).[4]

In 2004 at its annual conference, the Society for Disability Studies articulated a set of guidelines for disability studies programs and, in effect, created a working description of disability studies. The most recent statement of these ideals suggests that programs of disability studies

> should be interdisciplinary/multidisciplinary . . . should challenge the view of disability as an individual deficit or defect that can be remedied solely through medical intervention or rehabilitation . . . should study national and international perspectives, policies, literature, culture, and history . . . should actively encourage participation by disabled students and faculty, and should ensure physical and intellectual access . . . should make it a priority to have leadership positions held by disabled people [and] at the same time . . . create an environment where contributions from anyone who shares the above goals are welcome.
>
> ("General Guidelines")

These texts suggest that disability studies is recognizable by the approaches it takes to its disability-related content. Much of the work that participates in disability studies discourse shares a set of assumptions and approaches that might be seen as a cluster of intellectual practices or, when articulated alongside the relations among them, as disability studies theory. These concepts—disability and impairment; social, medical, and moral models; and freakery, to name just a few—are evident in all the papers in this section. But the work gathered here does more than reiterate a set of stable ideas. The authors embrace outside influences and seek new material, questioning the alliances, affirmations, and rejections that constitute the field's foundational positions.[5] In other words, even as disability studies work aligns itself with disability studies discourse, it questions both the discourse and the nature of that alignment.

The link here implied between subject matter and field identity is clearly and meaningfully present in Avila's *The One Who Is*. The phrase "The one who is" firmly and declaratively ends Avila's performance, but this is no static statement. When I replace these words with the effectively similar sentence "People with disabilities are," the importance of the relation of field and subject matter suddenly becomes clear. In the new sentence, the verb stands, intransitively, without an object. It is grammatically and conceptually complete. But as David Mitchell and Sharon Snyder have shown, disability is intimately connected to "literary narratives that challenge normalizing prescriptive ideals" (*Narrative* 51). Further, as G. Thomas Couser suggests here in "Disability, Life Narrative, and Representation," the interpretive frameworks surrounding people with disabilities almost always require the person with a disability to accommodate the curiosity (or disgust) of others by explaining any visible difference. Why are you like that? How did you get to be like that? What is it like to be like that? The sentence "People with disabilities are" provokes similar questions. Who are people with disabilities? What are people with disabilities?[6]

The moment that *is* ceases to be a (conventionally) satisfying conclusion to the sentence—that is, the moment that forms of *to be* begin to link subject and predicate—the more incomplete the sentence becomes. This is a disability studies opportunity. For better or for worse, disability compels narrative; and narrative, particularly a disability studies narrative, can persuade, disturb, even spook its audience into reconsidering disability, the body, and the paradigms that

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shape our understanding of them. Once the analytic concept has been challenged, so, too, has the narrative of the discipline around it. As Lennard Davis explains in "Disability: The Next Wave or Twilight of the Gods?" in this issue, disability destabilizes what we already know of such categories as race, class, and gender. From this understanding of how disability works, Davis proceeds to describe a series of new directions for the field. Because disability destabilizes, so also will disability studies.[7] As disability studies becomes more visible in the academy—I dare not say institutionalized[8]—it will destabilize other disciplines.

Davis is not alone in recognizing the destabilizing effects of disability and disability studies. In "Compulsory Feral-ization," Mitchell and Snyder make this point effectively when they characterize the field as "a force of destabilization." Disability studies is a field so uncanny that it can relocate the negative critical gaze from the subject to the discipline, thereby asking scholars to question their own disciplinary paradigms.[9] If we allow new understandings of disability to show how social, cultural, and built environments can disable certain bodies, we also allow the same understandings of disability studies to show how environments, intellectual and institutional, can cripple. That Davis, Mitchell, and Snyder proceed to articulate different (and in places conflicting) projects for the next wave of disability studies is less important than the commonality of their approach. When imagining new directions, all three look beyond new theories and different content; instead, they envision a field that re-creates the effects of its subject matter and that interprets those effects as its academic purpose.

As if to acknowledge and exemplify this disability studies project, the conference attendees adopted a series of recommendations: to acknowledge and seek to understand disability as a fundamental form of human diversity; to apply the principles of universal access to teaching and technology in all academic environments; to incorporate a disability studies perspective into courses across the curriculum; to recruit faculty members, staff members, and students with disabilities; and to build library collections, including nonprint resources, on disability studies. The conference was sponsored by the MLA and Emory University, but the recommendations do not issue from these bodies; they come, rather, from the field's scholars, administrators, students, poets, and artists. And as these ideas are implemented in colleges and universities, they will unsettle—destabilize, even—the academic landscape as we know it.

The burden of field identity politics falls most heavily on the newer fields; their practitioners are constantly called on to explain the rigor and value of what they do and to demonstrate the importance of the new field as a whole. The variety of the essays in this issue does not indicate a loosely focused field; it shows instead a discipline with far-reaching intellectual potential. Studying disability in all its manifestations is what disability scholars do. And, given the performative nature of disability and the shared characteristics of subject and field, this is what disability studies does, and this is what disability studies is.

Notes

I thank Carol Gill for her suggestions about language.

[1] Homer Avila died on 26 April 2004. His performance at Emory was one of his last. After dancing that night, he lingered in the bar, talking passionately of music and dance and giving impromptu dancing lessons. On- and offstage, Homer was awesome.

[2] If Viola's text could serve as the definitive checklist for all ADA decisions, the lives of people with disabilities would be different indeed.

[3] In this regard, Avila's work speaks to "Disability and Narrative," Michael Bérubé's essay in this section.

[4] Linton's essay in this issue, "What Is Disability Studies?" updates this project by showing how a thought-provoking shift in emphasis could reopen some old and challenging questions and bring new perspectives to the field. Instead of advocating on behalf of disability studies as

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a kind of neglected child, Linton tackles the academic and cultural family structures that make such neglect possible.

[5] I see this aspect of disciplinarity as analogical to Homi K. Bhabha's discussion of national traditions (5).

[6] These questions repeat and build on those of Couser's work and align themselves with the questions Linton asks of the nondisabled in "What Is Disability Studies?"

[7] Some of Davis's arguments are heralded in his *Bending Over Backwards*.

[8] In this issue, Mitchell and Snyder's "Compulsory Feral-ization" highlights some of the perils of institutionalization.

[9] Linton also makes this point when she argues in "What Is Disability Studies?" that scholars should use disability studies perspectives and the field's "transformative potential" to ask the "big questions."

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