

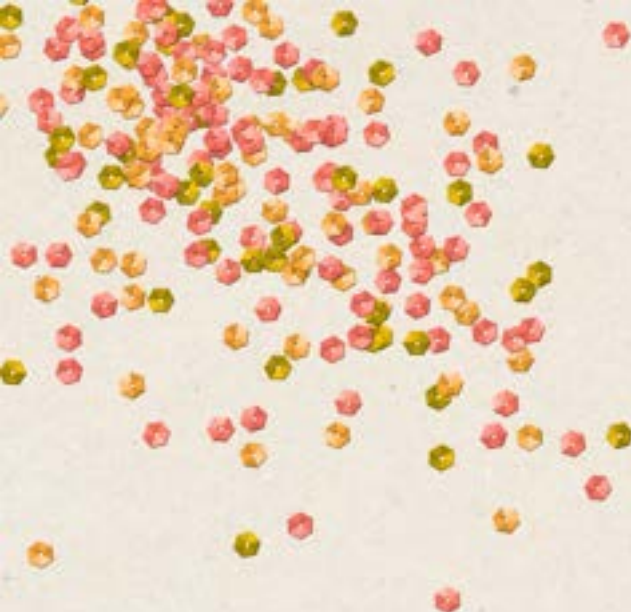
# Letters to Critical Disability Studies

## Our Community Collective

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Kular for her facilitation

<https://www.dalkular.com/>




Letters to Critical Disability Studies has been  
curated by Lauren White



# An introduction...

Liz Dew and Dan Goodley



Dan, Liz and Dal worked closely to develop plans for the day that created the submissions that are to follow.

They wanted to push things: to come together as a critical disability studies community to ask some questions about ourselves but also to offer some responses.

Facilitated by Dal, we had to imagine this bigger space - perhaps called critical disability studies - and to play with this imagination.

In playing with this imagined space we of course found ourselves within it.

And we recognise that we are critical disability studies.

*Please Keep Reading...*

# An introduction...

Liz Dew and Dan Goodley



We really wanted to offer a space for our community to gather as we are, with all of the complexity that we each bring.

Our hope was that Dal's creative prompts would help us not only share our work and scholarship, but also connect on a deeper level...

...affirming our experiences and collective power...

as a critical disability studies community.



Dear Critical Disability Studies at the  
University of Sheffield,

This is a love letter. There is not a  
single acronym that could actually  
capture the thoughts and feelings and  
affects felt as a result of each and  
every one of you in this virtual  
room.

I often think about writing this  
letter. So much of our time is spent  
navigating bureaucracy. Navigating  
tension. Navigating conflict.

Where is the love?

Do we tell each other?





Like bell hooks, love here is not romantic,  
but rather a practice,  
doing,  
being,  
turning up, showing up.  
staying. persisting. patience.  
growing and learning together.

It's always been there.

I can recount moments so many of my  
colleagues here today. Moments of solidarity.  
Reminders of my right to belong in the  
academy. Access intimacy in the working  
practices. Calls. Whatsapps. Conferences that  
really felt like holidays with friends. Ice  
cream. Food together.

In times of crisis, let's not lose the love.  
It never left us...

With love, care, joy, solidarity and  
glitter,

Lauren

xoxo

JOY



# Shopping List

To buy list

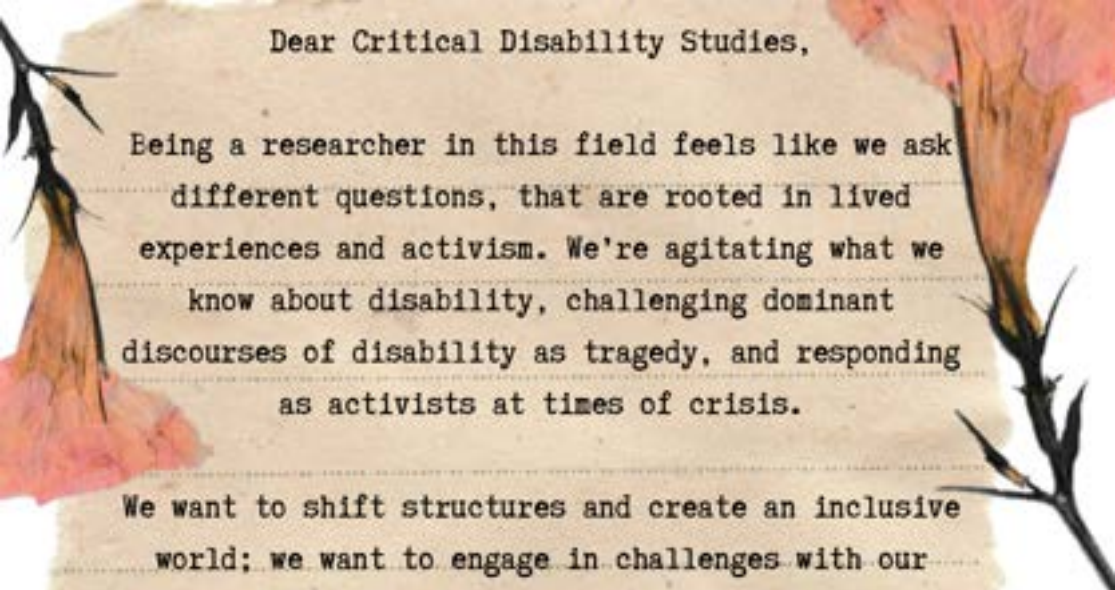
Can you get us the following items for our research and scholarship please?

- ✓ The potential to be unsettling, to trouble, to agitate and feel uncomfortable.
- ✓ Something accessible, adaptable and responsive.
- ✓ We need openness and tolerance, and an expansive portion of generosity.
- ✓ We need collaboration, reciprocity, lots of relational stuff and don't forget honesty.
- ✓ We need innovation and creativity.
- ✓ Boldness and bravery.
- ✓ We need imperfection, we need humility and forgiveness, definitely forgiveness.
- ✓ Finally, please make sure you get some vulnerability and a far bit of messiness.

Oh, and can you get to the shops quickly please - forgiveness is on buy-one-get- one-free today!

DON'T FORGET






Dear Critical Disability Studies,

Being a researcher in this field feels like we ask different questions, that are rooted in lived experiences and activism. We're agitating what we know about disability, challenging dominant discourses of disability as tragedy, and responding as activists at times of crisis.

We want to shift structures and create an inclusive world; we want to engage in challenges with our participants as activist scholars. We want social and cultural change.

But are we in danger of thinking too optimistically, not thinking about everyday practical difficulties. Theoretically, we can talk about human rights, but not find an accessible space in which to do so. Ontologically, conversations with participants shift from the social to the medical model.

And yet, we can ask those different questions, centre lived experience, trouble assumptions. And what we might take for granted, but is striking to others coming from the outside, is how we embody an ethic of care, recognising it matters in a world where disability is routinely overlooked.






Dear Ankita,

It's me - Critical Disability Studies. And I need to tell you something.

I've been quietly upholding whiteness, Eurocentrism, and coloniality to some degree. I confess: I've been complicit. I acknowledge that colonialism, imperialism, and slavery have shaped the world's understanding of "normalcy," "ability," and "humanity." But acknowledgement is not enough. It's imperative now that you- and others like you - stop being euphemistic on my behalf.

As part of this community, Go Name whiteness. Unsettle it. Unmask my whiteness not just in who is cited or which authors fill my syllabi, but in whose pain I have centred so far and whose lives I deemed "teachable."

It's time to end the model of "North-South partnerships" that still smell like dependency and dress up saviourism as solidarity. Too often, the geopolitical South has been villainised or seen with pity - Painted as perpetually behind, in crisis, in need of rescue while hoarding legitimacy in the hands of whitestream western scholars.







What we need is not charity – but co-resistance.  
Resistance to capitalism.  
Resistance to carcerality.  
Resistance to patriarchy.  
Resistance to ableism and racialised borders that tell some  
of us: you belong here and others: you don't.

Cite. Fund. Follow. Learn from. Disabled scholars and  
activists of colour from the South, not just when it's  
fashionable but as daily practice.  
Embrace plural epistemologies.  
Spiritual. Relational. Embodied. Ecological.

Let the method shift like tides, like grief.  
Value creativity. Value affect. Value art, rage, silence,  
love and unfinished thoughts that resist colonial  
extractivism.

Honour emergence over expertise.  
Dialogue over dominance.  
Don't just include, be transformed!  
Commit to solidarity not as representation, not as  
inclusion, but as mutual transformation.

In solidarity and care,  
Critical Disability Studies





# We are more than rigour.

We believe that the kinds of research and scholarship are not great at getting into other spaces. Ruffle some feathers. What shall we say to health economics? What about quantitative methods? Are we working with these enough? Decisions on people's lives are made from these numbers. Numbers and lives. Stop doing what you're doing. More methods. Critique more.

Let's clash. Let's ruffle. Let's be chaotic. Let's be creative. Let's be collaborative. Creativity is important. Being bold. Challenging. What's acceptable? What's the critical? Let's move beyond the critical to sound academic and clever. Let's be critical by refusing and not complying. Paper and practice. More practice. It's not clever. Critique with purpose. Critique with action. Activism and advocacy. There's something about being present. Turn up. Show up. Before, during, after. What about aftercare? Let's not move on. Turn up, show up, always.

There is no end date.

Page  
continued...



# We are more than rigour.

Disabled people as people. Be together, stand together, communities together. Spaces of persuasion. It's terrifying what people might say. Rethink academic. Firm boundaries between academic and non-academic. Lived experiences produced from academia with specific intentions. Get close to, with, disabled people. Care. What truly matters? Produce, share. Who is a researcher? Breaking free from prisms. Publish or perish. Rigour. WHATEVER. Research as kinship. Scholarship as healing. Can we have a bit of love, rage and glitter? Let's crip, create, dream. We write about crip time, but we are still not pacing our working weeks. Publishing to deadlines. Slowness as care? Are we really practicing it with academic metrics? We need scholarship and research that sits with one another. Independency. Write from our community. Government moves quickly, we can't be slow. Knocks on. We need things quickly, academia is slow to do it for us. We can't dismantle ableism in a day. Let's imagine. Aspire methods that hold the non-linear. That hold fluctuating energy. Interdependence as infrastructure. Space for pain. Space for rest. Space for naps. Space for voice notes. Poems as voice notes. Where are the values? Institutional constraints antithetical to values, creativity and co-production. So much time, energy.

We are EXHAUSTED.



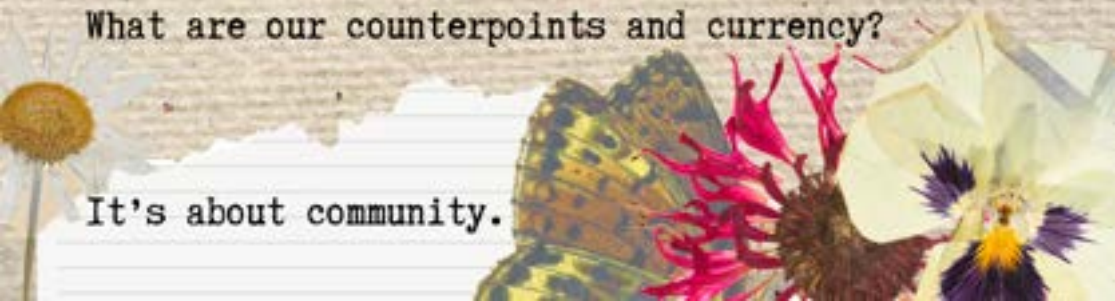


# "WHAT ARE YOU DOING ON THE TELE?"



We could think of a thousand things. Welfare reforms are so significant. It's opened space for discrimination against disabled people. We are really upset about that. We are a bit cross with disability studies, arguing about theory when all of this is happening. Theory helps. The social model is useful but who knows about it? Ableism is a helpful idea. How do we make this better understood just like sexism and racism? Who are we attacking? We are using our energy in the wrong space. Fragmentation. Impairment groups versus impairment groups. Perceptions of disabled people. Affects us on a daily basis in our lives. It hurts confidence. We internalise these perceptions. What does solidarity look like in this context? What are our counterpoints and currency?

It's about community.





A hand holding a sign that reads "WHAT ARE YOU DOING ON THE TELE?". The sign is rectangular with a black border and a black handle. The background is a textured, light brown surface with a zebra-striped pattern in the top left corner.

"WHAT ARE YOU  
DOING ON THE  
TELE?"

Frances Ryan - a disabled journalist - tweets about welfare reforms. It is clear that disabled people should lead. MPs who care about women's rights should get on board. This is about you too. There is a tension here. Disabled people need to lead but we need everyone to get on board and to work in alliance together.

Fundamentally, this is about being human. This is about dying early, dying through suicidality, dying through poverty. And you should care about this. And you should advocate. Our allies are important. Give up space. WHAT ARE YOU DOING ON THE TELE? Give up your power to amplify someone else's. We are just pissed off. We can do interdependency. We can do co-production. We are powerful.

This is a letter to critical disability studies, but Katherine would like to write a letter to Paul Hunt and say sorry. Allyship across identities. Across disciplines. Why are we siloed or packaged up? Who's in critical disability studies and why does it feel like an exclusive club? Competition for resources. Affects not categories. How do we organise research as affective and not categorised? Let's commission research on impairment affects and not categories of impairments. What would happen if we did this? Could this build allyship? COMPLICATED. Hierarchies.

Shall we re-draft?

# raant

We know you can do better than  
simply theory - let this be the  
moment that you can be relational  
and embody the values that you  
theorise.

This is a raant or a punch in the  
gut - we want to embody what we  
value.

Challenges. Social. Cultural.  
Relational. Economic.

Austerity, poverty, precarity- PIP  
Cuts in benefits  
Welfare conditionality  
Inaccessible to access  
Access to Work  
Disability performativity





# TRANSN

Challenges. Social. Cultural. Relational.  
Economic.

Hierarchy within the community  
Who is disabled? Who can claim the identity?  
Neurodivergent Chronically ill Deaf  
Intersectional invisibility  
Intentional erasure

Challenges. Social. Cultural. Relational.  
Economic.

Assisted Dying  
Quality of life  
Whose discourses?  
Psychoemotional disablism  
Where is the space for affect while we reflect  
and write on the crisis of care?



# Trans equality

Challenges. Social. Cultural. Relational. Economic.

White paper Green paper

Disability Migration Trans rights Black lives Women LGBTQIA+  
folks

Who would engage with the human?

How do we do that humanising work?

Challenges. Social. Cultural. Relational. Economic.

How do we practice love and solidarity?

An ethics of reciprocity and relationality

Responsibility and Accountability

How do we go beyond theorising grief, romanticising madness  
and fetishising fatigue!

Where is our joy?





# RAAnt

Challenges. Social. Cultural. Relational. Economic.

We need care that doesn't need to be theorised first.

We aspire for communities that don't collapse under institutional timelines.

We are more than 'impacts' and 'outputs'.

We are not asking for polished theories or frameworks.

We want practices that redistribute power

We want scholarship that honours rest, rage, refusal and revelation.

We want space for pause, for dreams and for hope.

We believe you can hold rage, grief, love, survival and care.

With glitter, solidarity and joy.

Always, joy.



XoXo







# IMPORTANT!

We have some questions for you...

WHAT  
DO YOU  
THINK?

What does disabled joy look like and mean?

How can you help us to speak up against divisive rhetoric and negative representations of disabled people?

We need your help with this now more than ever.

# JOY

How can you keep us grounded in the embodied and material realities of disabled people's lives?

We like your theories but let's not get too lost in abstraction, there's so much to do.





# IMPORTANT!



How do you feel about talking about death and loss?

Is that hard for you as you so often have to fight for recognition of the value of disabled lives?

Could you say more here?



Who gets to be a researcher and how can we help other disciplines be more inclusive?

WHAT  
DO YOU  
THINK?



# Concluding reflections...



We have some work to do..

Reflecting upon what we do, what we aren't doing...

Appreciating each other...

Galvanising with creativity...

Caring more about action...

Caring less about expectation...

Asking different questions...

Providing different answers...

but always, always, always...

Centring disability as the driving  
force of inquiry







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what it means to be human.

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