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## Editorial Comment

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## Editorial Comment: Special Issue on Disabilities



Guest editor John C. Bricout, PhD, comments on this special issue on disabilities.

### Editorial Comment

Social work practice and research are too often situated in an unexamined conceptual space whose fundamental assumptions go unquestioned. The values undergirding human rights and accessibility for persons with a disability may seem uncontroversial today—commonplace, if not universal. As is so often the case, however, easy virtue founders on the particulars—the ramp by the loading dock, the assistive learning technology in the wrong language, the reliably late paratransit bus. Accommodations are seemingly estranged from the principles upon which they are based. The three very disparate articles in this special issue share a common purpose—to reconcile the contradictions between our espoused and operant values toward the citizenship of persons with a disability in North American society. In broad terms, the articles collectively raise our sights and serve as a call to consciousness, supported by elegant reasoning, compelling arguments, and poignant examples. This special issue was a project of CSWE's Council on Disabilities and draws upon some of the latest thinking about values and ethics in social work practice and research.

Tasking our basic assumptions about parental genetic screening and the role of social workers as genetic counselors in health care settings is the focus of Ajandi's article. Drawing upon the research literature, social work placement field notes, and archival data from a community-based agency in Ontario, she triangulates on the lag between public debates on prenatal genetic screening and advanced diagnostic tools that raise a slew of unanswered ethical and rights issues in their wake.

Explanatory legitimacy theory is the basis for the analytical framework advanced by Depoy and Gilson, situating disability in the context of human variation, in a space of unqualified personhood, or better still, humanity, freed from the captivity of normality—other nomenclature and thought, as in “persons” qualified by “disability.” The authors provide an historic perspective on the philosophical and intellectual foundations of explanatory legitimacy theory as a pluralist and pro-human rights alternative to essentialist and deficit-focused lens for understanding the full spectrum of human variation.

The ethical dilemma presented by having recourse to self-defeating labels to the self-determination of persons with a disability is the focus of Hill and Lightfoot's article, the predicament borne of eschewing disability labels while simultaneously denying the need for adaptation that is the reality for persons with a disability—indeed all people. They explore the costs to self-knowledge, consumer self-determination, and service

efficacy resulting from the negative connotations, and limited practical utility of the available disability labels, using semi-structured interviews of program staff and participants at a transition program for youth in foster care.

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