This article advocates for art curriculum to be guided by the goal of challenging the discrimination, stigmatization, marginalization, and medicalization of disabled people. The Disability Arts Movement provides an important site through which to engage students in exploring the sociopolitical issue of ableism in art curriculum. The pedagogical strategies of disability performance artists Carrie Sandahl, Mary Duffy, and Petra Kuppers are examined for the purposes of establishing an affirmative model that focuses upon the cultural contributions of disabled people rather than an orientation that focuses upon individual functional limitations. It is suggested that the strategies of critical appropriation and autobiography used by these artists offer ways through which to conceptualize disability as a sociopolitical issue in art curriculum. In its conclusions, this article suggests that an integration of the sociopolitical orientation and affirmative model of disability in the classroom be employed guided by the important work of the Disability Arts Movement in order to challenge ableist ideologies.

As part of the political engagement with the social and cultural construction of disability inherent to the Disability People’s Movement, the current Disability Arts Movement emphasizes “the potential of disability arts as a progressive, emancipatory force at both the individual and social levels” (Barnes & Mercer, 2001, p. 529). Disability culture reflects a diverse group of people with physical or mental conditions that result in a common cultural experience of discrimination, stigmatization, segregation, and medicalization (Sandahl, 1999). Therefore, central to the Disability Arts Movement is a critical interrogation of the cultural construction of disability through the “growing politicization of disabled people” (Barnes & Mercer, 2001, p. 529).

This article aims to extend the discourse of disability within art education to include an engagement with the sociopolitical issue of ableism in art curriculum. Literature regarding disability in art education has focused upon issues related to teaching students with disabilities articulated with a language of inclusion, accommodation, mainstreaming, and therapy (Anderson, 1992, 1994; Anderson & Barnfield, 1974, 1978; Anderson, Colchado & McAnally, 1979; Carrigan, 1994; Clements & Clements, 1984; Copeland, 1984; Guay, 1993, 1994; Morreau & Anderson, 1984; Sherill, 1979; Uhlin & DeChiara, 1984). The dominant discourse of disability in art education particularly in the years preceding the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) of 1990 has historically reflected what Blandy (1991) calls a functional-limitations

1 The Disability People's Movement, also called the Disability Rights Movement, began in the 1970s. The primary goals of this movement were the attainment of full citizenship for disabled peoples through the improvement of quality of life, accessibility, access to education and employment, and the right to an independent life. The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) of 1990 serves as a major civil rights document that strives to end discrimination and reduce barriers to employment and education.

2 The American Disabilities Act of
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orientation in which disability is defined in terms of a person’s limitations. Such an orientation is linked with the medical model in which “disabilities are perceived as potentially curable through treatment” (p. 180).

In the years following the ADA, Blandy (1991, 1994) argued for an important shift from a functional limitations orientation to a sociopolitical orientation in art education. One of the key premises of the sociopolitical orientation is that the perceived limitations of a person with a disability result from “the failure of social systems to accommodate the ‘needs and aspirations’ of all citizens” (Blandy, 1994, p. 180). Rather than viewing disability as an individual limitation, a sociopolitical orientation to disability engages disability and the very concept of limitation as social constructions by emphasizing how such discourses serve to oppress those with disabilities (Blandy, 1991). A sociopolitical orientation to disability frames disability as the result of human-made environments rather than personal limitations. “Such environments are informally and formally shaped and defined by programs, policies, curricula, architectural plans, and other assorted practices” (Blandy, 1994, p. 131).

In order to actualize a sociopolitical orientation to disability within art education, Blandy recognized the need for changes to occur in preservice teacher education. His recommendations emerged from the underlying idea that providing preservice teachers opportunities to work with disabled people would support an overall shift toward preparing future teachers from a socially reconstructivist point of view. His recommendations included increasing preservice teachers’ knowledge about students with disabilities, federal and state laws, disability literature, and alternative systems of language, including sign language. Likewise, Blandy recognized the need for preservice teachers to have opportunities to interact with people with disabilities in their fieldwork (Blandy, 1994).

In this article, I build upon these important recommendations while extending the sociopolitical orientation described by Blandy (1991) in order to advocate for the inclusion of ableism alongside other important sociopolitical issues such as sexism, racism, and homophobia in art curriculum. Ableism, like other sociopolitical issues, references a combination of discrimination, power, and prejudice related to the cultural privileging of able-bodied people. This shift toward engaging ableism as a sociopolitical issue in the art curriculum extends the sociopolitical orientation to include a newer affirmative model described by Swain and French (2000). The affirmative model

Directly challenges presumptions of personal tragedy and the determination of identity through the value-laden presumptions of non-disabled people. Whereas the social model is generated by disabled people’s experiences within a disabling society, the
affirmative model is borne of disabled people’s experiences as valid individuals, as determining their own lifestyles, culture, and identity…. [The] affirmative model is held by disabled people about disabled people. Its theoretical significance can also only be developed by disabled people who are ‘proud, angry, and strong’ in resisting the tyranny of the personal tragedy model of disability and impairment. (pp. 578-581)

The affirmative model suggests that disability encompasses “positive social identities, both individual and collective, for disabled people” (p. 569). The affirmative model challenges tragedy-based discourses arguing instead that disabled peoples are “proud, angry, and strong” (p. 569). While the sociopolitical orientation advocated by Blandy (1991) argued to enhance preservice teachers’ experiences with disabled students and their understanding of policy, the affirmative model emerges from within rather than outside the disability community and emphasizes the cultural contributions of disabled artists as important voices through which to challenge cultural oppression. The integration of the sociopolitical and affirmative models serve as an important way to encourage students to critically reflect upon their own cultural understanding of disability through the Disability Arts Movement.

The conceptual understanding of artists in the Disability Arts Movement marks a significant shift from prior discourses of disability. Within the Disability Arts Movement a critical distinction is made between disabled people doing art and disability artists (Barnes & Mercer, 2001). The inclusion of disabled people doing art in art curriculum places an emphasis upon the representation of difference through a curriculum of admiration and appreciation in which individual artists are admired for their ability to create work similar to other able-bodied artists. In contrast, the discourse of the disability artist engages in a critical process of questioning the sociopolitical construction of disability and related ableist ideologies. Such work can include the expression of admiration and appreciation inherent to the construct of disabled people doing art while also introducing critical questions about the formation, maintenance, and possible disruption of ableist ideologies. As Sutherland (1997) describes:

It’s what makes a disability artist different from an artist with a disability. We don’t see our disabilities as obstacles that we have to overcome before we try to make our way in the non-disabled cultural world. Our politics teach us that we are oppressed, not inferior. (p. 159)

Similarly, performance artist Mary Duffy advocates for the term disabled people rather than people with disabilities. “Describing ourselves as disabled people is a more unifying thing rather than tagging disabilities
on afterwords and pretending we’re just trying to be normal” (Mitchell & Snyder, 1997).

The disability performance artists discussed in this article, critically engage the sociopolitical issue of ableism through a personal and critical examination of the cultural inscription of their bodies as disabled people. Challenging the tendency to equate normality and beauty in Western aesthetics, Mary Duffy’s autobiographical work explores her body as a contradictory site in which she is culturally constructed as simultaneously beautiful, erotic, hideous, and repulsive. Carrie Sandhal similarly engages the cultural inscription of her body, focusing particularly on the interconnection of the medical and popular objectification of her body experienced through the stare. Likewise, Petra Kuppers’ community-based performance work, Traces, aims to call out the cultural expectation that the bodies of people with mental illnesses should perform a form of visual violence as represented in the majority of portrayals of people with mental illnesses in popular media. Each of these artists pursues what Barnes and Mercer (2001) describe as a feminist politics of signification in which “subversive representations or performances illuminate and confront discriminatory barriers and attitudes” (p. 529). These disability performance artists create work that actively calls out the stigmatization of the disabled body, thereby revealing the normative function of ableism.

These artists’ work represents a rethinking of the discourse of disability in art from one solely framed within a language of accommodating individual limitations, to a discourse that emphasizes the critical role of art in troubling the social and political issue of ableism. Within an issues-oriented art education curriculum, ableism emerges as an important cultural issue among others. An affirmative model of disability positions disability cultures and the resulting cultural issue of ableism “in similarly complex ways to the way race, class, and gender have been theorized” (Davis, 1997, p. 1). As Swain and French (2000) state, “Policies, provision, and practice, whether in community living or education, can only be inclusive through full recognition of disability culture and the affirmative model generated from the experiences of disabled people” (p. 580). Therefore, disability in the art classroom is not only about inclusion, defined as appropriately accommodating students with disabilities, but is also about the exploration of disability culture and the sociopolitical issue of ableism in arts curriculum.

**Just Looking: The Sideshow Pedagogy**

Throughout history the disabled body has been a site of public spectacle. Whether presented as part of the circus sideshow from the mid-19th-century to the 1970s made infamous by American entrepreneur P. T. Barnum, represented in contemporary popular culture, or experi-
enced in the everyday interaction between *disabled* and *able* bodies, the disabled body has repeatedly been situated within a cultural discourse of *enfreakment* (Thomson, 1997). Such a discourse constructs a situation in which,

The body becomes pure text, a freak has been produced from a physically disabled human being. Such accumulation and exaggeration of bodily details distinguishes the freak from the unmarked and remarked ordinary body that claims through its very obscurity to be universal and normative. (pp. 59-60)

Within the sideshow, the audience is assembled before a person made “specimen” to be analyzed and as a “curiosity” to entertain through the powerful and dehumanizing stare of the audience. The sideshow is marked by numerous characteristics including the unquestioned maintenance of normal/abnormal binaries, an untroubled objectifying gaze, and the cultural construction of disability as property. These characteristics collectively rely on an unquestioned and privileged process of *just looking* in which the act of looking is presumed to be neutral and normative. In his discussion of a 19th-century medical image of a eunuch, Elkins (1996) raises important questions regarding the impossibility of just looking:

This is the violent side of seeing, where the mere act of looking—an act that can also be the gentlest, least invasive way to make contact with the world—becomes so forceful that it turns a human being into a naked, shivering example of a medical condition. However nourishing and eloquent the eunuch’s intimate thoughts might have been, whatever qualities his life might have had, they are lost forever. In their place we inherit this document: part of it a clipped medical narrative and part a wordless photograph. This is seeing is aggressive: it distorts what it looks at, and it turns a person into an object in order to let us stare at it without feeling ashamed. Here seeing is not only possessing… seeing is also controlling and objectifying and denigrating. In short, it is an act of violence and it creates pain. (p. 27)

*Just looking* transforms people with disabilities into a kind of property, something to be attended to, and “a ‘case’ upon which power is exercised” (Thomson, 1997, p. 40). This discursive construction of property emerges as the positioning of the disabled body as both an object of curiosity and as a specimen. As workers within cultural institutions, art educators must critically engage how practices of looking impact the construction of disability and what these constructs explicitly and implicitly imply about disability.
The Disability Arts Movement offers an opportunity within current art curriculum to challenge and disrupt this problematic process of just looking. The critique of the sociopolitical construction of disability emerges from the cultural contributions of disability artists. In what follows, I examine how the performance art pedagogy of the Disability Arts Movement challenges the mechanism of just looking through a critical appropriation of the stare. The performance artists examined in this article disrupt the historical discourse of the sideshow in order to challenge the ableist ideologies that serve as its foundation. The confrontational quality of these performance artworks aims to make the viewer, whether able-bodied or disabled, aware of his/her process of looking. Likewise, such performances make viewers conscious that they are also the objects of the performer’s stare. This multi-directional looking raises questions about dominant cultural constructions of disability. Such a performance art pedagogy is not simply inclusive of disability art, but challenges the normative discourses surrounding disability in “schooled culture” which is the location of “ideologies of learning” (Garoian, 1999, p. 39). Through a performance art pedagogy characterized by an affirmative model of disability, the oppressive constructions and practices surrounding disability can be challenged.

**Staring Back: Disability Performance Art**

Disability performance artists raise important questions regarding the social construction of normal/abnormal dichotomies through an examination of the cultural inscription of their own bodies. These artists construct sites of critical intervention, testimony, and questioning by situating their own bodies in the very spaces that serve as sources of their objectification. As Petra Kuppers (2003) describes:

> Performance makes a new cityscape. It both erects and celebrates new knowledges, orders them for public consumption, makes them accessible in ways that mere language cannot (yet). The new city is not quite tangible, it is emergent in the live-ness of time progressing. The city street is in advance of the textbook. Knowledge has arrived into power structures when it translates itself from its living form into public discourse. (p. 3)

Through their critical appropriation of the sideshow, these artists each challenge viewers to re-examine dominant cultural discourses surrounding disability. It is these artists’ pedagogical strategy of raising questions that can serve as a powerful example for orienting art education toward an affirmation model of disability. As described here, Carrie Sandahl, Mary Duffy, and Petra Kuppers each represent an appropriation of a sideshow pedagogy for the purposes of transforming the objectifying stares of the viewers into moments of personal agency through the performative act of staring back.
Carrie Sandahl

Performance artist Carrie Sandahl presents her body as a consumed and inscribed text in the art-life piece titled *The Reciprocal Gaze* (Sandahl, 1999, p. 25). In this performance, Sandahl walks outside while wearing a lab coat and white pants completely covered in red text as well as drawings of a spinal cord and hipbones (Thomson, 2005). As she encounters people’s stares, she hands them a piece of paper that details her medical history. The text on her clothing includes common comments and questions that she experiences in her everyday life, such as, *Are you contagious? I bet the Easter Seals could help you. Do you ever dream that you’re normal?* Along with these questions, she includes drawings of her scars drawn to size and in the exact location of the scars on her body. Adjacent to the scars, are the names of the doctors that performed the surgeries. As she describes it, “the doctors who that scar belong to” (Mitchell & Snyder, 1997). In her pelvic region, she includes the statement that she can have sex and bear children. In addition, throughout the collage of text and drawing, Sandahl includes references to psychoanalytic theory in regards to how we define ourselves through the Other.

Sandahl investigates her subjectivity within a medical discourse. Presenting herself as if covered with the wandering script of a medical chart, Sandahl invites her viewers into the most intimate of spaces, the doctor’s office. She invites her audience to examine and read her medical history, and in so doing questions the cultural positioning of her own body as a medical specimen (Thomson, 2005). Amidst the medical-ization of her own body, Sandahl equally attends to the outsiders’ comments that merge and blend with the other texts of her life, represented here literally and metaphorically as a body to be read.

In *Lessons of Lookin’ and Seein’,* Sandahl again confronts the viewer’s stare, but this time through a direct reference to the sideshow. As viewers enter the museum-like exhibition created by Sandahl, a carnival barker carrying a camera escorts them through the remainder of the exhibit. Various everyday objects are placed on pedestals, including a pair of eyeglasses, a picture frame, and a camera, and each item is labeled in French. The final object in the exhibit is a carnival booth with a window through which the spectator can see Sandahl sitting in a pink dress, patent leather shoes, and bobby socks, with a burlap sack over her head. In her white-gloved hands she holds a mirror toward the audience so that the viewers’ reflections appear in place of her own face. During this entire experience, another carnival barker records the audience’s reactions on video (Sandahl, 1999).

In Sandahl’s performances she appropriates the sideshow as a site within which to present her body as a public spectacle. In both works, she interrupts the stares extended toward her body through varying...
devices. Whether it is the text and the flyer from *The Reciprocal Gaze* or the use of the carnival barker and mirror in *Lessons of Lookin’ and Seein’*, Sandahl recognizes, interrogates, and intervenes in the process of just looking. Transforming her body into a literal textual map and the object of exhibition, Sandahl challenges historical and contemporary discourses of enfreakment through the positioning of her body as a sideshow. However, in Sandahl’s sideshow, the objectifying practice of just looking becomes destabilized, calling the very mechanisms of the stare into question.

**Mary Duffy**

Duffy’s work centers on a critical investigation of cultural contradictions. Duffy’s performance works identify the tension between the dominant cultural history of the disabled body as *deeroticized* and the eroticization of her own body. Duffy, who was born without arms, explores her resemblance to the Venus de Milo. Through this exploration she critiques Western aesthetics’ construction of beauty through the articulation of disability aesthetics. Siebers (2006) describes the goals of disability aesthetics as establishing “disability as a critical framework that questions the presuppositions underlying definitions of aesthetic production and appreciation” and as asserting “disability as a significant value in itself worthy of future development” (p. 64). Duffy presents her nude body to the audience as she performs the following monologue:

*You have words to describe me that I find frightening.*
*Every time I hear them they are whispered or screamed.*
*Silently, wordlessly, from the front to the middle-spreads of newspapers*  
*Only you dare to speak them out loud.*
*I look for them in a dictionary, and I only find some.*
*The words you use to describe me are*  
*Congenital malformation.*
*In my child’s dictionary I learn that the fist part means “born with.”*  
*How many times have I answered that question?*  
*Were you born like that? Or did your mother take them dreadful tablets?*  
*How come I always felt ashamed when answering those big staring eyes and gaping mouths?*  
*Did you have an accident? Or did your mother take them dreadful tablets?*  
*With those big words, those doctors used, they didn’t have any that fitted me properly.*  
*I felt even in the face of such opposition that my body was the way it was supposed to be.*  
*That it was right for me*
As well as being whole, complete, and functional (…) Today, I’m winning battles everyday against my own monster—my inner critic Who has internalized all my childhood oppressions The oppression of constantly trying to be fixed, to be changed, to be made more whole. (Mitchell & Snyder, 1997)

Duffy references the positioning of her body as a sideshow spectacle in juxtaposition to the reading of her body as a Western icon of beauty. As Thomson (2005) describes,

This is not the medicalized body stripped naked for diagnosis before the clinical gaze, nor is this the tawdry sideshow or dime museum tableau … [T]his is a radical tableau vivant, a living, in-your-face Venus ready to challenge dominant notions of how we look. (p. 36)

Thomson (2000) theorizes Duffy’s performance as a manipulation of the “stare-and-tell ritual” (p. 335). Rather, than standing as a silent object, Duffy speaks to the stares and in so doing disrupts her viewers’ sense of “the order of things” (p. 336). Duffy both repels and attracts the gaze of her viewers. She is both repulsive and erotic. Her poised white body against a dark background resembles the marble of the Venus de Milo, a cultural icon of beauty, while simultaneously her disabled body represents what Wendell (1996) calls a “rejected body” (p. 85). The multiplicity of references cited by Duffy’s performance constructs a kind of multi-directional viewing that challenges the very debilitating and objectifying act of just looking (Elkins, 1996).

Traces with Petra Kuppers

In Traces (1997-2000), Petra Kuppers worked with mental health system users both inside and outside of mental health settings including those that chose to critique the mental health system through their identification as “mental health system survivors” (Kuppers, 2003, p. 22). Mental illness emerges within a visual culture of stigmatization. From the medical image of 19th-century hysterics, art history, movies, and television, the visual image has repeatedly served to mark those with mental illnesses as abnormal bodies. Foucault (1965) describes in Madness and Civilization a history of the exhibition of people with mental illnesses for the purposes of entertaining the “normal” viewer. In the Middle Ages at the Narrtürmer in Germany, barred windows were installed so that those outside of the asylum could observe the madmen chained within (p. 68). This practice continued to the start of the 19th century when the hospital of Bethlehem exhibited lunatics for a penny every Sunday (p. 68). As Foucault describes: “Madness had become a thing to look at: no longer a monster inside oneself, but an animal with strange mechanisms, a bestiality from which man had long since been suppressed”
(p. 70). In addition to the troubling history of this form of exhibition, those with mental illnesses also lack forms of self-representation particularly when the images they create are defined as outsider art or therapy. As Kuppers (2003) comments:

Within our culture, people with severe mental health problems are excluded from self-representation. The cultural histories of hysteria, depression, and schizophrenia are histories of silencing, muting the ‘other.’ The artwork of people institutionalized within mental health systems has often been perceived within the framework of ‘therapy.’ This therapeutic frame has meant that this work may be read as a way ‘into the patient’—as a way to understand her experiences, often as a more or less transparent tool in the diagnostic process. A representation of self outside the clinical categories is made impossible. (p. 124)

Recognizing the ways in which those with mental illnesses have had their very bodies colonized within contemporary popular and medical visual culture, Kuppers and her company, The Olimpias Performance Research Projects, sought to create a community-based performance project that was about the process of experiencing the body rather than its exhibition. Through this emphasis on the process rather than the end product, Kuppers and her company explored the following question: “[H]ow can changes in perception help shape a performance aesthetic that can be useful for people whose bodies have been violently read for clues to their ‘abnormal’ minds?” (Kuppers, 2003, p. 123).

The final video installation included two large monitors and one video projector placed in a small intimate room with comfortable cushions. The videos included shots of the performers’ still bodies, eyes closed in a form of meditation as they concentrated on a “visually absent experience” (Kuppers, 2003, p. 132). As such, the space created through Traces was as much about the spectators awareness of their own bodies as it was about their presence of the bodies projected on the screen. Kuppers compares the conceptual basis of Traces to John Cage’s 4’33” in which he sat at the piano in silence. Such a silence makes one aware of oneself and the spaces of our viewing and listening. The self-reflection encouraged through the piece would give the viewer a sense that there would appear to be nothing to see here. Perhaps, there could be no better performance than silence for a group of people like those with mental illnesses who are so antagonized by the medical, social, and cultural history of being literally exhibited as well as being (mis)represented in contemporary popular culture. The looks extended to the person with a mental illness reflect people’s desperate search to find a tangible, visual sign of the inner turmoil they so fear could also happen to them. If mental illness can be dissected into a series of visual signs, the “normal” people can better assert their separation from the “abnormal.”
In her discussion of the final outcome of this 4-year collaboration, Kuppers (2003) discusses how the “performers’ physical experiences seemed to mirror their representational silencing or distortion in the media” (p. 125). Their bodies represented years of experiencing such things as being excluded from living alone, being in constant contact with the medical community, being subjected to repetitive regimens of prescription drugs and ECT (electroconvulsive therapy), and being hospitalized sometimes against their will. Kuppers identified that this lack of physical and mental privacy affected these individuals’ very sense of embodiment. Rather than a theatrical performance, *Traces* literally traces the experience of this community’s process of locating, reclaiming, and asserting their own sense of their bodies through meditative exercises.

The embodiment of mental illness captured in *Traces* challenges the visual culture of stigmatization associated with the imaging of mental illness. These are not the dramatic and violent images of art, popular culture, and medical images. These bodies lie silently making the viewer aware of their own expectations of how a mentally ill body should perform. A search for visual signs of mental illness are futile when presented with these still, calm, and meditative bodies. Simultaneously, viewers become aware of their own bodies as both viewers and as objects of the gaze. *Traces*, like the performances of Carrie Sandahl, and Mary Duffy, appropriates the history of sideshow representation, yet disrupts its function as spectacle. In what follows, the implications of the work of disability artists for art curriculum will be explored.

**Critical Appropriation and Autobiography**

The performance work of Sandahl, Duffy, and Kuppers employs the interrelated strategies of critical appropriation and autobiography. First, their work represents a critical appropriation of the sideshow. Positioning their bodies as sideshows, each artist, through varied means, challenges the gaze extended to the disabled body that privileges the “normal.” As Mary Duffy (1997) comments:

> My only defense is that I have been stared at all my life, and that by standing there stark naked and vulnerable, it feels like I am holding up a mirror to your voyeurism and saying, ‘So you want to look, do you? I’ll give you something to look at.’ (p. 182)

Sandahl also appropriates the construction of the sideshow and disrupts the gaze extended to her displayed body through the use of a mirror and video camera. While Duffy’s performance disrupts the practices of looking through the presentation of her body as a cultural contradiction, Sandahl’s use of lenses and mirrors confronts viewers with their own stares. In *Traces*, Kuppers creates an intimate space that “displays” the bodies of the members of the mental health community.
with which she worked, yet these bodies disrupt the very expectation of how the mentally ill body is assumed to perform.

As Judith Butler (1993) describes, such a form of performativity turns “power against itself to produce alternative modalities of power” (p. 241). Such a citational practice, as is evident in Duffy’s, Sandahl’s, and Kuppers’ performances, represents how oppression is formed from the repetition of particular discourses over and over again. Such repetitions include the linking of disability to limitation and the individual rather than affirming disability as a culture and a minority group. Through the practice of critical appropriation, these artists cite these limiting discourses and repeat them in a different way that opens pathways for critical intervention.

These artists also utilize the strategy of autobiography as a way through which to disrupt the gaze extended to the disabled body. Both Sandahl and Duffy share their personal narratives while including the questions and comments that they receive from people they encounter daily. Thomson (2000) explores how Duffy’s performance text includes an appropriation of the words used to define and denigrate her as well as her own autobiography. By appropriating the words others use to describe her body, she upsets the dynamic of the stare, repeating in a kind of testimony the words of her starers while forcing the audience to look at a classic image of female beauty bearing witness to its own enfreakment by those words…. Her soliloquy moves from exorcising the oppressive language that defines her to voicing her own version of herself as “being whole, complete and functional.” (p. 337)

In addition to reclaiming one’s narrative from the starer, Duffy, Sandahl, and Kuppers reclaim their bodies and autobiographies from medical discourse. Within the context of medical discourse, the question “How are you?” requires that personal testimony be contextualized within a secondhand medical report” (Frank, 1995, p. 6). The body becomes an *analyzed* body, a condition, and one’s own subjectivity and autobiography become denigrated to sub-texts in the master narrative of medical discourse. As Frank argues such a dominant discourse represents a form of colonialism, “Just as the political and economic colonialism took over geographic areas, modernist medicine claimed the body of its patient as its territory, at least for the duration of the treatment” (p. 10).

The postcolonial narrative of disability performance artists is captured in Kuppers’ community based performance piece, *Traces*. Kuppers identified how the bodies of the mental health community with which she worked were colonized by their popular representation and by the medical discourse that situated their bodies as a location and sign of
pathology. The patient’s personal narrative is made absent through the use of his/her narrative to analyze the body as pathology. Kuppers employs a kind of autobiographical silence, an absence of an overt narrative that brings our attention to the stillness of the body. Attempts to examine and locate a particular pathology from what is seen become deflected by the quiet meditative bodies portrayed on the screen. The screen becomes a metaphor for all of the other screens used to represent the mentally ill body, the MRI screen, the television screen, or the movie screen. All are captured in a deafening silence that makes one more aware of the desire to see something that would enable the label of abnormality and thus would protect the presumed borders of normality. Therefore, such a desire to locate the person with a mental illness as “Other” in turn serves to protect dominant discourses of normality.

The pedagogical strategies of critical appropriation and autobiography inherent to the work of Sandahl, Duffy, and Kuppers represent a critical pedagogy informed by the destabilization of the viewers’ prior knowledge about disability. Such a critical pedagogy begins with the goal of interrogating disability as a complex social, political, and cultural construction. Disability performance artists emphasize the use of their own bodies and voices as texts through which to challenge dominant and limiting narratives surrounding disability. The affirmative model of disability performance art challenges students and teachers to engage in a critical process of deconstructing the practice of just looking and opens opportunities to critically explore issues of ableism in art curriculum.

Curriculum

An affirmative model of disability in the classroom extends the important recognition of the sociopolitical construction of disability by emphasizing that disability be conceived as a culture rather than as a personal limitation. The cultural contributions of those with disabilities become important texts to be included in the art curriculum. Curriculum based on such an inclusive practice challenges oppressive dominant narratives that situate disability as a personal limitation rather than as a culture and minority group.

These artists’ works utilize strategies that raise questions about disability issues that are useful in conceptualizing an issues-based curriculum. The first strategy, critical appropriation, references the different forms of appropriation used by these artists with the sideshow being common to all three. Critical appropriation raises questions and constructs a critique through its excavation of both historical and contemporary examples of the cultural stigmatization and marginalization of disabled people. Within the curriculum, critical appropriation calls for an increased knowledge of the cultural history of disability. However, critical appropriation is not simply about sharing historical examples. Rather, the historical is juxta-
posed against the contemporary creating connections that initiate ques-
tions about how past events and ideas inform current disability issues, 
and about the prevalence of ableist ideologies.

The second strategy is autobiography. These performance artists include 
verbal testimony in relation to their physical bodies. Autobiography chal-
lenges the homogenization of disability culture. While connections can 
be found to be in common between multiple autobiographical narratives, 
autobiographies represent difference and insert individual stories where 
there previously existed only silence. The strategy of autobiography high-
lights the curricular goal of questioning the representation of disabled 
people in art curriculum and actively engages the diversity of disability 
culture.

A curriculum informed by affirmative models of disability takes as its 
focus an interrogation of the students’ own assumptions and ideas about 
disability rather than solely fostering a form of disability art appreci-
ation. Of particular importance is the initiation of these questions from 
an engagement with the cultural contributions of disability artists who 
actively critique ableist ideologies through their work. Through such 
an affirmative model, the Disability Arts Movement can inform the 
inclusion of disability artists and the sociopolitical issue of ableism in 
the curriculum.

Summary

A focused and critical investigation of issues related to disability 
culture and representation has been largely marginalized in explorations 
of sociopolitical issues related to class, gender, race, and sexuality in art 
education. A reorientation of disability discourse in art education toward 
the integration of both sociopolitical and affirmative models, promotes 
the art classroom as a site through which to critically engage issues of 
ableism. The art classroom can then become a place through which to 
challenge the discrimination, stigmatization, and marginalization of 
disabled people.

Disability artists offer art educators opportunities through which to 
critically engage students in an important process of reflecting upon 
their own and others’ preexisting understandings of disability. It is 
through not only the possible inclusion of such artists in art curriculum, 
but also through an exploration of the strategies of critical appropriation 
and autobiography utilized in their artwork that art educators can gain 
further insight into the development of such an issues-oriented approach 
to disability in art curriculum. Such an inclusive curriculum can chal-
lenge the objectifying and limiting practice of just looking.
References


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