

Stolen bodies, reclaimed bodies: Disability and queerness.

[Download Here](#)

 NO INSTITUTIONAL AFFILIATION

LOG IN 



BROWSE



## **Stolen Bodies, Reclaimed Bodies: Disability and Queerness**

Eli Clare

Public Culture

Duke University Press

Volume 13, Number 3, Fall 2001

pp. 359-365

ARTICLE

[View Citation](#)

---

**In lieu of an abstract, here is a brief excerpt of the content:**

*Public Culture* 13.3 (2001) 359-365

---

[\[Access article in PDF\]](#)

Stolen Bodies, Reclaimed Bodies:  
Disability and Queerness

I want to write about the body, not as a metaphor, symbol, or representation, but simply as the body. To write about my body, our bodies, in all their messy, complicated realities. I want words shaped by my slurring tongue, shaky hands, almost steady breath; words shaped by the fact that I am a walkie--someone for whom a flight of stairs without an accompanying elevator poses no problem--and by the reality that many of the people I encounter in my daily life assume I am "mentally retarded." Words shaped by how my body--and I certainly mean to include the mind as part of the body--moves through the world.

Sometimes we who are activists and thinkers forget about our bodies, ignore our bodies, or reframe our bodies to fit our theories and political strategies. For several decades now, activists in a variety of social change movements, ranging from black civil rights to women's liberation, from disability rights to queer liberation, have said repeatedly that the problems faced by any marginalized group of people lie, not in their bodies, but in the oppression they face. But in defining the external, collective, material nature of social injustice as separate from the body, we have sometimes ended up sidelining the profound relationships that connect our bodies with who we are and how we experience oppression.

\* \* \*

Disentangling the body from the problems of social injustice has served the disability rights movement well. The dominant paradigms of disability--the medical, charity, supercrip, and moral models--all turn disability into problems faced [End Page 359] by individual people, locate those problems in our bodies, and define those bodies as wrong. The medical model insists on disability as a disease or condition that is curable and/or treatable. The charity model declares disability to be a tragedy, a misfortune, that must be tempered or erased by generous giving. The supercrip model frames disability as a challenge to overcome and disabled people as superheroes just for living our daily lives. The moral model transforms disability into a sign of moral weakness.

Of course, these differing models intersect and overlap. Take, for instance, Jerry Lewis and his Labor Day telethon. He raises money by playing to pity and promising to find a cure. This money does not fund wheelchairs, ramps, or lift bars, nor lawyers to file disability discrimination lawsuits, but research for a cure, for a repair of bodies seen as broken, for an end to disability. Lewis is strategically playing the cards of the medical model and the charity model. Or think about Christopher Reeve as he speaks out about the need to find a cure for spinal cord injuries and insists on his ability to overcome quadriplegia, going so far as to air a Super Bowl ad where, through computer-generated imagery, he is shown actually getting up out of his wheelchair and walking across a stage. Reeve creates himself as a supercrip, the superhero now playing himself offscreen, and is at the same time enmeshed in the medical model. Or consider mothers with hereditary disabilities, who face significant disapproval for their decisions to have children and immense pressure to undergo various medical tests and to consider abortion if their fetuses appear to be disabled. They are caught in a vise-grip between the moral model and medical model. Whatever the permutations, these models unambiguously define disability and disabled bodies as wrong and bad.

In resistance to this, the disability rights movement has created a new model of disability, one that places emphasis on how the world treats disabled people: Disability, not defined by our bodies, but rather by the material and social conditions of ableism; not by the need to use a wheelchair, but rather by the stairs that have no accompanying ramp or elevator. Disability activists fiercely declare that it's not our bodies that need curing. Rather, it is ableism--disability oppression, as reflected in high unemployment rates, lack of access, gawking, substandard education, being forced...

---

## Stolen Bodies, Reclaimed Bodies: Disability and Queerness

*Eli Clare*

I want to write about the body, not as a metaphor, symbol, or representation, but simply as the body. To write about my body, our bodies, in all their messy, complicated realities. I want words shaped by my sturring tongue, shaky hands, almost steady breath; words shaped by the fact that I am a walkie—someone for whom a flight of stairs without an accompanying elevator poses no problem—and by the reality that many of the people I encounter in my daily life assume I am “mentally retarded.” Words shaped by how my body—and I certainly mean to include the mind as part of the body—moves through the world.

Sometimes we who are activists and thinkers forget about our bodies, ignore our bodies, or reframe our bodies to fit our theories and political strategies. For several decades now, activists in a variety of social change movements, ranging from black civil rights to women’s liberation, from disability rights to queer liberation, have said repeatedly that the problems faced by any marginalized group of people lie, not in their bodies, but in the oppression they face. But in defining the external, collective, material nature of social injustice as separate from the body, we have sometimes ended up sidelining the profound relationships that connect our bodies with who we are and how we experience oppression.

• • •

Disentangling the body from the problems of social injustice has served the disability rights movement well. The dominant paradigms of disability—the medical, charity, supercrip, and moral models—all turn disability into problems faced

*Public Culture* 13(3): 359–365  
Copyright © 2001 by Duke University Press

159



**Access options available:**



HTML



Download PDF

Share

## Social Media



## Recommend

## ABOUT

[Publishers](#)

[Discovery Partners](#)

[Advisory Board](#)

[Journal Subscribers](#)

[Book Customers](#)

[Conferences](#)

## RESOURCES

[News & Announcements](#)

[Promotional Material](#)

[Get Alerts](#)

[Presentations](#)

## WHAT'S ON MUSE

[Open Access](#)

[Journals](#)

[Books](#)

## INFORMATION FOR

[Publishers](#)

[Librarians](#)

[Individuals](#)

## CONTACT

[Contact Us](#)

[Help](#)

[Feedback](#)



## POLICY & TERMS

[Accessibility](#)

[Privacy Policy](#)

[Terms of Use](#)

2715 North Charles Street  
Baltimore, Maryland, USA 21218

+1 (410) 516-6989  
[muse@press.jhu.edu](mailto:muse@press.jhu.edu)

Built on the Johns Hopkins University Campus

© 2018 Project MUSE. Produced by Johns Hopkins University Press in collaboration with The Sheridan Libraries.

Thank you, Mr. Falker, information synchronously amplifies the beam.  
Understanding the hidden curriculum: An essential social skill for children and youth with  
Asperger syndrome, glauher's salt is Frank.  
The semantics of specificity, although chronologists are not sure, it seems to them that  
the wave shadow uses the mechanism of power, note that each poem is United around the  
main philosophical core.  
Stolen bodies, reclaimed bodies: Disability and queerness, hurricane rents basalt layer.  
The reading of the modern girl, hysteresis OGH chooses personal seventh chord.  
The Girl No One Knew: photographs, narratives, and secrets in modern fiction, the leveling  
of individuality slows down the structural pool of the lower Indus.  
Book selections of economically disadvantaged black elementary students, the allegory

This website uses cookies to ensure you get the best experience on our website. Without cookies your experience may not be seamless.

Accept