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# Editorial Introduction: Critical Theory is for Such a Time as This

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## Abstract

This introduction to the second issue of the *Journal of Critical Study of Communication and Disability* (JCSCD) begins with a dedication to Dr. Jon Henner, whose ground-breaking work with Octavian Robinson was published in the first issue of JCSCD. Following the dedication, an explanation of the contextual importance of critical theory is provided and then the five articles selected for this issue are described.

## Keywords

Critical theory; critical junctures; macro context; reimagined practices and policies.



This issue of the *Journal of Critical Study of Communication and Disability* (JCSCD) is dedicated to Dr. Jon Henner who served as the journal's Associate Editor from its founding until his death on August 14, 2023. Jon helped to define the journal and will continue to be an indelible influence on our work here just as he has left a lasting impact on linguistics, disability studies, and Deaf studies. The joy of the inaugural publication of JCSCD was elevated by the headlining of his and Octavian Robinson's co-authored article, "Unsettling Languages, Unruly Bodyminds: A Crip Linguistics Manifesto" (2023), a theoretical and abolitionist framework that proposed to:

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critique language and language scholarship through the lens of disability, include disabled perspectives, elevate disabled scholars, center disabled voices in conversations about disabled languaging, dismantle the use of disorder the deficit rhetorics, and finally, welcoming disabled languaging as a celebration of the infinite potential of the bodymind. (p. 8)

The travails of the article itself reinforced the need for the existence of a journal like JCSCD. Despite garnering more than 2500 downloads in its preprint form, for nearly six years the article could not find a publication outlet. Many prominent journals rejected it because disability was seen as tangential to linguistics and language studies. Since its publication just seven months ago, the Crip Linguistics Manifesto has been downloaded over two thousand times, demonstrating the tremendous need for and the significance of centering disability in the understanding of language and languaging practices. The JCSCD is bolstered and guided by Jon's enduring spirit of confronting injustice, questioning the status quo, and forging a divergent path. We celebrate Jon by putting forth the second issue of JCSCD in his honor.

We are living in strange yet familiar times. It is a time of unprecedented dehumanization. Although multiple "isms" operate at any given time (Liu et al., 2020), currently, this dehumanization is playing out on the world stage as Islamophobia, anti-Palestinian racism, and antisemitism, particularly since October 2023. This reality can be understood through the global context labeled by Alliez and Lazzarato (2016) as "total war" where colonialism and its remnants of war against populations play out through inequitable social structures – the political, economic, cultural, and intellectual – as well as among "traditions and mindsets" (p. 167–168). It is also a time when critical theory has had a

resurgence in some disciplines and an introduction in others. Critical theory is an essential tool for understanding how to identify and name the inequities and injustices in the world (or a discipline) and provides a process for how to engage in collective work to transform that world (or discipline) to be more equitable and just. These conflicts, wars, or struggles are important junctures for moving away from what no longer serves everyone well (e.g., positivism) to something that might serve more people better, such as critical theory.

One of the goals of JCSCD is to create a space where interdisciplinary, inter-regional, and international conversations about these junctures occur so that we can learn from each other and work together to dismantle the inequitable and unjust structures as we transition to collectively create something new that does not yet exist, with the goal of reimagining practices and policies. The articles that comprise this second issue of JCSCD represent scholarship that examines longstanding ideas and practices, those in the field of Communicative Sciences and Disorders (CSD) and beyond, under a critical light. Each of the articles in Issue 2 of JCSCD addresses a critical juncture: the transition away from unnamed colonial values, the marginalization of disabled perspectives, and the severing of practices from the globalized context, towards scholarship that is cognizant of sociopolitical history, that centers those most impacted, and that is situated in a macro context. Each proposes ways to move beyond current practices to develop those that strive to be more equitable and just.

In "Value-Full: A Theoretical Analysis of the Speech-Language Pathology Positionality," Hannah Brouse argues that colonial values are encompassed in the policy documents of CSD, resulting in practices that normalize some behaviors and pathologize others. Critical theory was used to examine the policy documents through the lens of colonial values. The author

found that the practices and policy documents in CSD are not neutral but laden with values that sometimes serve to exclude, exploit, and dominate groups. CSD educators, scholars, and practitioners must be intentional in recognizing and dismantling those colonial values. The paper raises questions about whether the CSD field can exist in refusal of these values, or necessarily perpetuates them. In either case, what is made clear is the need for action.

In the article “Defining Communication Disabilities in West Africa and the U. S. Midwest: Effects of Globalization,” Cluley et al. (2023) examine the role of globalization in speech-language-hearing sciences (SLHS). This work is interdisciplinary; that is, the authors are not only from SLHS, but also from the fields of education, African studies, and political economy. The authors use a critical theory approach and emphasize the importance of a macro-level perspective for understanding the ways that globalization affects definitions of and behaviors to support children with communication disabilities. They also employ ethnographic interviewing, an important process for learning about the meaning that people are making of their lives and for learning about complex historical, social, economic, political and ecological system effects on lives. In this study, participants were actively engaged in the interpretation of the data. This study highlights the ways in which the differences between educational professionals across schools in Senegal and the U.S reflect conceptualizations of disability and educational responsibility inseparable from their sociohistorical contexts. This study also revealed how majority world countries and minority world countries share similar barriers (e.g., colonial histories, limited resources) for inclusion of people with communication disabilities. This approach is useful in engaging in culturally responsive practices that are effective for collaborating with the people with whom we work.

The first and second articles by Hussain et al. (2023a; 2023b) are partnered manuscripts. We recommend reading the two articles in tandem even though each was written to stand independently. The reason for creating two standalone articles from this study is because both the methodology used and the research conducted through it make unique contributions to critical scholarship in CSD. The first article, “Confronting Pathology by Revealing a Critical Landscape in Communication Sciences and Disorders: A Scoping Review Protocol,” introduces a scoping review process for mapping critical scholarship. The protocol is based on the PRISMA-P (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis Protocols) (Shamseer et al., 2015), and describes a method for conducting systematic reviews and meta-analyses. Scoping reviews are important for identifying the ways a “topic is developing or advancing and to identify missing aspects of the examined literature, clarify concepts or investigate research conduct” (Munn et al., 2018, p. 1), which makes it ideal for identifying and examining how a body of critical literature might be germinating in a discipline.

In the second article, Hussain et al. utilize the PRISMA-P protocol to complete a scoping review of literature within the CSD field. In “Confronting Pathology by Revealing a Critical Landscape in Communication Sciences and Disorders: A Scoping Review,” the authors present one of the first scoping reviews examining whether and how the discipline calls out “systemic oppression.” The authors identify literature that applied a critical analysis, and findings show a presence of critical literature in CSD as early as 1998, 25 years ago. This critical literature included analyses of systems of oppression, hierarchy, power relations, marginalized social groups and disabilities, and recommendations for moving toward social justice. Duchan and Hewitt (2022) recently provided an examination of the history of CSD,

revealing the decisions made by the CSD's founding "fathers" that were often marginalizing, inequitable and unjust. This scoping review by Hussain et al. (2023b) underscores the necessity of embarking on a reflexive inquiry of our history to understand the inequities inherent in our practices and policies, and for making a change that is substantial and impactful.

In "Preferences for Person-First Language and Identity-First Language in Autistic Communities," Smith et al. (2023) examine the nuances within the tension between person-first language (PFL) and identity-first language (IFL) in reference to autism. While PFL has been the standard within clinical and educational discourse

for two decades, disability advocates contest the implication that disability is merely a manifestation of disease that the person should want to be distanced from and cured of. In their survey of autistic individuals and their parents, the authors found a divergence of preferences between the two groups that reflects degrees of desire for remediation of autism. The study echoes the theme that linguistic practices reflect deeper underlying values that beckon scrutiny, a reminder of the entrenchment of ableism in colonial frames of thinking.

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