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Introducing International Relations: Placing “Disability”

Comments

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Introducing International Relations: Placing “Disability”

Abstract: I base this paper primarily on my teaching of introductory international relations since 1979. Introductory international relations instructors need to give disability issues more attention. First, I look at participants in international relations: states and their leaders; global governance—particularly the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities; and transnational actors—particularly Disabled Peoples’ Organizations (DPOs). I then examine issues: rights, war and peace, and development. Second, I examine two approaches from the disability studies literature: disability as a deficit demographic category (based on a medical model), and disability as the basis for a social movement (based on a social model). Third, I examine the quantity and quality of discussion of disability issues. I present results from a cursory content analysis of three international relations periodicals and of three leading introductory international relations texts. The approaches have implications for international relations teaching. Fourth, I describe three futures: 1. A “realist” future in which states and blocs battle for hegemony; 2. A “neoliberal” future with winners and losers; and 3. A participatory, pluralistic rights-based future. In all three futures but especially the last, attention to disability issues is vital.

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Portions are from Blaser, forthcoming.

This paper is based primarily on my teaching of introductory international relations since 1979 (briefly at Augustana College [Sioux Falls, SD] and the University of Notre Dame [IN] and extensively at Chapman University, south of Los Angeles).
Secondarily, I have taught Disability Studies since 1995, now an academic minor at

Chapman. I argue that introductory international relations instructors need to give disability issues more attention.

More attention to disability issues is relevant to where many students are now, many more students will be in the future, and to where many of the world's people are or will be. Analysts increasingly treat disability as politically and socially significant, and of interest to students in business, film, and other fields rather than simply as a medical condition. Disability ties in with identification of important participants in international relations and with a wide-range of international relations issues. Authors generally ignore disability issues in leading international relations journals and texts where they need to provide nuanced treatment. This is partly a consequence of the prevalence of the first of two prominent approaches from the disability studies literature: disability as a deficit demographic category (based on a medical model), and disability as the basis for a social movement (based on a social model). These approaches have implications for how we teach international relations. Finally, I describe three futures and their implications for how we teach international relations: 1. A "realist" future in which states and blocs battle for hegemony; 2. A "neoliberal" future with winners and losers; and 3. A participatory, pluralistic rights-based future. I argue that in all three futures but especially the last one attention to disability issues is vital.

Participants in International Relations

A wide range of state and non-state actors is gradually coming to recognize disability issues from the local to the global. But, often the stimulus has come from non-governmental organizations [NGOs] and social movements (especially a Disability

Rights Movement [DRM]) affecting regional and international organizations some, and states a bit less. Inequalities in global politics are evident in DRM activities, with more participation among some of the world's people than others.

Non-governmental Organizations and Social Movements

A DRM and human rights NGOs, among them Disabled People's Organizations [DPOs] are prompting the uneven rise of disability issues. Disabled Peoples' International [DPI] and national and regional affiliates have been particularly influential. Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International, two very large NGOs particularly include disability rights as part of their mandates. Nevertheless, wide disability inequalities and deprivation continue around the globe (See e.g. WHO, 2011).

Primarily in the early 20th Century, (but often today as well) charitable organizations' appeals emphasized the hardships. Increasingly disabled people's participation has played a role in change, especially with the evolution of the disability rights movement in the late 20th Century. That movement's activists challenge analysts and policy-makers who assume that tragedy among disabled people is inevitable collateral damage of war and development. Some organizations and policy-makers now recognize important international disability-related dimensions of education, recreation, and transfer of technology. Analysts may once have perceived killings of Tanzania's albino population, discrimination against Chinese people with AIDS or US prison and police abuse of disabled people as purely internal matters, but they are not any longer.

(This section is from Blaser, Forthcoming)

International and Regional Organizations

Pressure groups in the global system work through international and regional organizations to increase attention to disability issues (See e.g. Janet Lord in Bob, 2009). For example, the United Nations established a Day of Disabled Persons (December 3), a Year of Disabled Persons (1982), and a Decade of Disabled Persons (1983-1993). The Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities [CRPD] was unprecedented in the involvement of NGO participants. The United Nations Sustainable Development Goals for 2015-2030 incorporate disability in five goals, among them education and employment.

The African Union [AU] and Organization of American States [OAS] now have disability rights standards and have made initial efforts to implement them. The European Union [EU] has developed standards publicized by British DRM activists in highlighting the consequences of the British withdrawal from the EU (Brexit; See e.g. European Network on Independent Living, 2016).

States

The first actions of the UN Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, particularly the reviews of state reports, highlight the strength and weaknesses of state institutions. NGO/DPO “shadow reports” have particularly addressed areas of inconsistency. NGO/DPO activists particularly questioned the commitment of non-parties including the United States. Particularly under the Obama Administration, the U.S. State Department’s Special Advisor on Disability Rights, Judy Heumann, promoted international disability rights. Thus far, the Donald Trump administration has

deemphasized international disability rights, despite the presence of the “International Disability Rights team” in the Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor’s Office of Multilateral and Global Affairs. (The position of Special Advisor on Disability Rights has been eliminated. See Tillerson, 2017.)

Issues in International Relations

Discussing “high politics” military and security issues has many consequences that are disability related, sometimes given acronyms such as TBI (traumatic brain injury) and PTSD (post-traumatic stress disorder). A widening to include human security issues brings disability in even more especially as consequences for civilians are addressed. So do formerly “low politics” economic issues. Human rights is intertwined with disability rights.

Human Rights

Since World War II, social movements, international organizations and states have promoted group rights, as well as individual rights. Through the United Nations, states adopted group rights conventions. Two of the early group rights conventions were against racial and sex discrimination; in 2008, the CRPD and its Optional Protocol entered into force.

Especially in the 21st Century, analysts, policy-makers, activists and the media conceptualize disability issues in terms of rights, not just aspiration or charity. The Independent Living Movement (ILM) has grown from a Center in Berkeley, California, to include hundreds of centers, many of them outside the United States. In 1983, ILM pioneers Ed Roberts, Judy Heumann, and Joan Leon cofounded the World Institute on

Disability. Many leaders in shaping the Americans with Disabilities Act were influenced by international experiences and principles (in Pelka, 2012). Examples include Justin Dart, Jr.'s work in Japan and Vietnam, John Lancaster's post-Vietnam war activism with Paralyzed Veterans of America, the National Council on Independent Living, and elsewhere.

War and Peace

Analysts have long recognized disabled people as victims during war. Policymakers and analysts identify a greater disability role in combat and in peacemaking. This is due to changes in warfare among other factors. Specifically, the Mine Ban Treaty and the non-governmental "Landmine Survivors Network" reflected a rise of disability politics (See especially Rutherford, 2011). The role of disability communities in rebuilding after armed conflict also reflects DRM activism.

From the Civil War onward, pressure and policy have unevenly addressed pensions following war, later also rehabilitation, education, and travel. Toward the end of the 20th Century, disability-related war and peace concern became global, as evidenced by the Landmine Survivors Network and the Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-Personnel Mines and on Their Destruction [Mine Ban Treaty] (Rutherford, 2011). Analysts and policy-makers' increasing reference to human security and peace building has a major civilian disability dimension which activists articulated.

Demography, Global Health, Rehabilitation, and Development

The 2011 *World Report on Disability* summarizes demographic trends. With better medical technology and an aging population, the globe's disabled population is growing and will continue to grow (World Health Organization and World Bank, 2011; Blaser, 1998). Social and economic changes combine for more planning for a high quality of life with a disability rather than Disability Free Life Years (DFLYs).

Humanitarians' charity approach inspired such events as the 1922 founding of the International Society for Crippled Children, today Rehabilitation International (Groce, 1992). The United Nations Sustainable Development Goals for 2015-2030 incorporate disability in five goals, among them education and employment. Development strategies such as tourism and export promotion will have mixed positive and negative effects on disabled people. Through consumption habits, through Agency for International Development funding, and through participation in the World Bank the U.S. influences development policy.

Approaches to Disability

Authors' failure to discuss disability issues is not a consequence of malice; rather it is testimony to the power of a medical – deficit model. This means that disabled people are chiefly a concern of medicine, and that politics and business in contrast involve non-disabled “normal” people. Disability studies scholars' alternative approaches, calling attention to social and political factors instead highlight of non-governmental organizations like Disabled Peoples' International and of governments either fostering disability or acting through international organs such as the United Nations to promote disability rights.

Socio-Political Approaches

The interdiscipline of Disability Studies examines the construction of “disability” in different times and places. The great global changes of the last decades and the rise of social movements such as the DRM reveal a movement from charity to rights, with alternative futures as discussed below.

Medical, Deficit Approaches

Disability Studies challenges still dominant medical, deficit approaches to disability issues. Consequences of dominant approaches include widespread denial of education, institutionalization, and war/peace policies of nondisabled victors and disabled victims. Now some leading scholars are following Tom Shakespeare’s lead (See e.g. 2018) in trying to reconcile the approaches.

International Relations Journals

Table One displays results of a cursory investigation of *International Studies Quarterly*, *Foreign Affairs*, and *Human Rights Quarterly*. Authors mentioned “disability” (including related terms like “disabled” and “trauma,” and terms that were once widely used like “handicapped”) in very few articles. When authors did mention disability, it was usually peripherally and as a deficit experienced by victims of international relations.

Table 1

Disability in International Studies Journals

Attributes	Journals		
	ISQ	FA	HRQ
Years	1992- Academic Search Premier on 8-22-2017.	1922- ; Academic Search Premier on 8-22-2017	1983- ; Project Muse on 8-22-2017
# of “Hits”	3	9	22
How Used	DFLYs as dependent variable; human misery	Criticism of CRPD	Most tangential; UN Conventions; Review bodies

Key: ISQ = International Studies Quarterly

FA = Foreign Affairs

HRQ = Human Rights Quarterly

Search conducted on Lexis, Chapman University

International Studies Quarterly

Two of the three articles used “disability free life years” lost to measure consequences of corruption and war. Life years with a disability explicitly do not count. Disability studies research questions often-presumed negative link between disability and the quality of life years. Education, employment, housing, and social interactions are often greatly unequal, but policy-makers can address disadvantages through public policy. With the rise of disability issues, scholars need to address the DRM as a social movement and to question ways in which disability is covered.

Foreign Affairs

Again in “Foreign Affairs,” authors seldom mentioned disability and then usually peripherally. Jon Kyl, Douglas Feith, and John Fonte’s “The War of Law” (2013) is an exception. The authors present a contrarian argument for U.S. abstention from disability rights discussions. No “Foreign Affairs” articles’ authors make the case for disability issues’ significance in international relations.

Human Rights Quarterly

“Human Rights Quarterly” had many more “hits” (34), but as in the other periodicals, authors mentioned disability only as related to the general focus. Authors of articles addressed humanitarian assistance, refugee rights, migrant rights, women’s rights, universal human rights, and education rights with mention of “disability” but usually little more. Authors also mentioned “disability” while analyzing the right situation in China, South Africa, Japan, Australia, and elsewhere. Jordan Paust’s “The Human Right to Die with Dignity” (1995) presents an argument at odds with the dominant DRM perspective that death-with-dignity laws conflict with disability rights.

A Policy-Oriented Essay

International Relations Texts

Table Two displays results of a cursory investigation of four recent introductory international relations texts: Blanton and Kegley’s *World Politics: Trend and Transformation* (2017), Lamy, Masker, Baylis, Smith, and Owens’s *Introduction to Global Politics* (2017), Mingst and Arreguín-Toft’s *Essentials of International Relations*, (2017), and Pevehouse and Goldstein’s *International Politics* (2017).

Table 2
Disability in International Relations Texts

Attributes	Texts			
	Blanton	Lamy	Mingst	Pevehouse
Edition, Year	16th, 2017	4 th , 2017	7 th , 2017	11 th , 2017
# of “Hits”	6	4	7	5
How Used	CRPD; Consequence of War; health/cause of death	Consequence of MNC action at Bhopal; Food Deprivation; war victims	CRPD, group rights; excluded voice	CRPD including key non- parties, ; Trauma from war

Blanton and Kegley

Shannon Blanton and Charles Kegley’s *World Politics* has a well-deserved reputation for its extensive attention to global issues. Blanton and Kegley’s text has long included information on climate change, group rights, human security, and similar topics. Occasionally but not frequently this includes attention to disability issues. Blanton and Kegley mention the UN’s CRPD along with other rights conventions. They mention disease and disability in addressing demographics. They follow text authors’ predominant approach in describing a basis for “protection” while not describing the social movements responsible for change: “the human rights protection of vulnerable

groups such as women, children, migrant workers, and disabled persons and for the collective rights of minorities and indigenous groups” (2017: 451).

Lamy et. al.

Steven Lamy and co-authors also incorporate extensive attention to global issue in their text. The rare mention of disability-related themes uses the predominant deficit view in mentioning the consequences of the Bhopal Union Carbide disaster, and of food deprivation. The mention of group rights protection mentions neither the CRPD nor the social movement that led to its creation. The authors address trauma in war (2017: especially chapter 7 on “Human Security”) and mention the deaths of disabled people during the Holocaust (391).

Mingst and Arreguín-Toft

Karen Mingst and Ivan Arreguín-Toft mention of group rights and the CRPD. In mentioning “post-modern” approaches, Mingst and Toft include disabled people as one possible source for an “other” point of view. They write: “Scholars in this tradition also probe how the voiceless dalit (or untouchables) have fought for rights in South Asia, how the disabled have found a voice in international forums, and how some, like children born of rape, have not found a voice” (2017: 17). So, there is some acknowledgement of a DRM, although not much.

Pevehouse and Goldstein

Like most text authors, Jon Pevehouse and Joshua Goldstein provide very little coverage disability issues. They do add a telling sentence in their discussion of the CRPD and other group rights treaties: “Equally important as these UN treaties themselves are the optional protocols that are attached to several of the treaties” (2017: 228).

Complaints brought under the optional protocols draw on the assistance of activist groups.

Alternative Futures for the International Relations – Disability Nexus

Very few analysts of international relations cling to the illusion that disability will be solved and disappear in the future. Instead, consistent with the argument I make here, alternative futures suggest different ways in which disability issues will be significant.

A “Realist” Future in Which States and Blocs Battle for Hegemony

Government hypocrisy on disability issues is not new. Analysts and non-governmental organizations holding them to account is. Increasingly holding government to account comes from reports of NGO’s including DPO’s (Disabled People’s Organizations). In cataloging Soviet dissent, Ludmilla Alexeyeva mentioned the role of the “Initiative Group for the Defense of Human Rights in the USSR” (1987). China’s 2016 special education reforms were criticized by Human Rights Watch (2017) and the Open Society Foundations (2017). The 2016 United States human rights report was thoroughly analyzed by the U.S. International Council on Disability (2017). The country reports submitted to the United Nations Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities are often countered with DPO reports (United Nations?)

A “Neoliberal” Future with Winners and Losers

States will unquestionably remain important actors in international relations, but powerful economic actors contribute to unequal globalization. Disabled people are infrequently beneficiaries, although some disabled people will benefit, sometimes as providers, but often as recipients of services. This has been noted by many observers such as David Mitchell and Sharon Snyder (2015) within the field of Disability Studies.

A Participatory, Pluralistic Rights-Based Future

In all three futures but especially the last one attention to disability issues is vital. Although this future may appear “utopian” it is a relevant utopia (for the distinction see especially Mendlovitz, 1975), consistent with global trends. Increasingly, analysts and policy-makers, later joined by activists and the wider public explicitly acknowledge disability’s part in international relations and its changing significance. At various times and in different circumstances they frame or perceive disability issues as tragedy, charity, social progress, rights, liberation, oppression, or a combination of these themes.

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