

# PEACE, JUSTICE & CONFLICT STUDIES

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## FACULTY SPOTLIGHT



Originally from Rome, Italy, Luca Badetti graduated with a PhD in Disability Studies from the University of Illinois at Chicago, with previous interdisciplinary studies in psychology, theology and philosophy. Luca teaches in DePaul University's Peace, Justice and Conflict Studies program and is a Psychoanalytic Fellow at The Chicago Institute for Psychoanalysis. He is also the Director of Community Life at L'Arche Chicago, a community of shared life between persons with and without intellectual disabilities. He has recently spoken at TEDx on the power of (in) ability and has a column on The Huffington Post UK.

How does disability bring to the forefront relevant social and cultural issues? What does disability say not only about a specific population but also about us all? And, ultimately, how might it pinpoint to a road of peace and justice in today's world? Having completed a PhD in Disability Studies at UIC, I have analyzed how society and structures marginalize people with disabilities as "not normal." At the same time, having lived and worked with persons with intellectual disabilities in L'Arche, inclusive communities in which people with and without disabilities share life together in a spirit of belonging and friendship, I have touched firsthand how persons with disabilities can lead us to accept our universal abled-and-disabled humanity and grow in peace together. Truly, in breaking down the walls between "disabled" and "non-disabled" we can transform society into a more humane and peaceful one.

I am looking forward, next quarter, to examine in more depth these issues in the introductory Disability Studies course class I will teach in DePaul University's Peace, Justice and Conflict Studies program. As this will be the first class of its kind, in creating the course syllabus I sought to include a thorough overview of Disability Stud

ies, a look at theoretical and real-life aspects of disability, and the various connections between disability and the road to peace. The course will cover models/understandings of disability, disability history (including institutionalization/de-institutionalization and the self-advocacy rights movement), disability ethics, practices of inclusion, disability across the life spectrum, what disability culture entails and other relevant themes. What is Disability Studies in the first place? Disability Studies is an interdisciplinary field that is grounded in the disability civil rights movement that begun in the 1960s in the

United Kingdom and the United States, when persons with disabilities began to advocate for equality. Disability Studies frames disability not merely as an individual medical phenomenon, but as a social construct in which socio-cultural, structural and political influences label, marginalize and disable people with impairments. In other words, it understands disability not merely as something a person has, but as something the social environment creates. Think about a person on a wheelchair that cannot enter a building because there is no ramp: the person might have a walking impairment, but it is the environment that is actually disabling him/

her from accessing the building; if the building had a ramp, in fact, this person would be able to access it without problems. Does the person on the wheelchair have the disability or it is his/her environment that creates it?

Focusing on disability in its socio-environmental aspect helps frame disability as something that all of us are touched by and are involved in. It can also be of crucial help in creating a more just and peaceful world for all. In breaking down the barriers between persons "with" and "without" disabilities not only can society become more inclusive and less marginalizing, but it can also question its over-emphasis on ability. In speaking about the intersectionality between Peace Studies and Disability Studies, Wolbring believes that most conflicts in society are actually based on the expectation of ability, for example in the expectation people or groups have to be able to dominate others (Peace Studies Journal, 6(4), 2013). Disability Studies problematizes ableist normalcy. In analyzing the discipline and exploring its intersectionality with Peace, Justice and Conflict Studies, we might actually find new ways to live together inclusively, whatever our abilities or inabilities might be. You are invited to be part of the journey.