

## Discussion Board Tips

### Examples of Good and Bad Discussion Board Posts/Replies

Each week you are required to post a total of four significant posts to your group's discussion board. I have defined what counts as a significant post in the syllabus. This hand-out serves to illustrate what significant posts/replies look like and what "failing" posts look like. You should strive to have each of your posts look the examples in "Effective Discussion Boards." *If any of your four required posts are underdeveloped, such as those examples in "Ineffective Discussion Boards," you will NOT earn a "pass" for the week.*

### Effective Discussion Board Exchange

*This discussion board offers an example of a student's initial response to a discussion thread, and two student's replies. Note that all three posts directly reference (either by quotations or summary) the reading and formulate an informed opinion that extends the reading. Also, note that the responses extend the subject matter introduced by the initial student post and/or answer a question posed by a classmate. These posts are models of effective discussion board posts that meet the requirement for a 'significant' post.*

#### **Discussion Question: Intersections of Sexuality and Dis/ability**

Bednarska writes "I am aware, as I tell this story, that it is easier to talk about the ill-fitting nature of categories in relation to my own sexuality than it is to talk about disability in relation to sex" (p. 286). How does she talk about both of these issues in her essay and how does she come to view them as intersecting?

#### **Student Post #1: RE: Intersections of Sexuality and Dis/ability**

Bednarska faces a difficult challenge every day of her life. As a handicapped lesbian who also finds herself attracted to men, she has a troubling number of cultural and societal issues to confront all the time.

In the quote above, Bednarska is referring to the difficulty she has discussing both her sexuality and the lack of vocabulary there is to define it as well as the logistics of her sexual relations as a result of her disability.

In talking about her sexuality, Bednarska explains the pigeonhole she is expected to fit within. As a declared lesbian, it is looked down upon for her to engage in sexual relations with men, even if they are homosexual or bisexual.

I let that butch dyke marching next to me think the hickey came from another woman. I won't pretend that this decision had nothing to do with the disdain so many lesbians feel toward queer women who express any kind of desire for men. (p. 282)

Her frustration with this expectation is apparent throughout the essay. Though Bednarska believes she has “no right to put someone in a different box than the one that they claim, even if the boxes seem to make a logical contradiction, (pg. 285)” she is constantly asked to redefine and explain herself, even to her male partner who became angry when she did not follow his lead and name herself bisexual after he defined himself as such. It’s as if others can’t trust Bednarska enough to know what it is she wants and how her desires should be defined. And why should they require definition anyway?

However, Bednarska is not faced with this challenge alone. In conjunction with the issue of her sexual preference is the issue of her sexual ability as a result of her disability.

Did I wait because of the stereotype that all disabled men are impotent or in some way lack the ability to satisfy sexually?...Perhaps I’ve waited because I fear that when people see me with a disabled partner they think that disability is the reason we are together...There was a point where dating an able-bodied person felt like the ultimate sign of normalcy and acceptance (pg. 286-287).

Although, speaking about her disability is easier in some ways because it is a physical and visible condition, it is harder in many other ways because of the misinterpretations most people fall victim to. The many stereotypes and assumptions Bednarska is faced with make even the task of living and loving unnecessarily complicated.

Bednarska’s sexuality and disability parallel each other, but also intersect as she faces the issues posed by both in conjunction with one another.

Having sex with someone who is both disabled and queer makes me feel freer, both from expectations around the body and around gender norms. My disabled queer lovers and I understand that the genitals are not the be-all and end-all of sexual pleasure. Sex is not centered around performing a prescribed set of acts, but around finding pleasure (pg. 288).

Despite the obstacles and complications Bednarska is faced with, it seems when her sexuality and disability intersect; it actually frees her from the social expectations of our culture. By engaging in the activities she chooses with whomever she chooses, Bednarska effectively breaks through all stereotypes and assumptions, though they may still be held. By living and loving, as she feels best, even as it changes every day, Bednarska finds independence.

### **Student #2 Reply: RE: Intersections of Sexuality and Dis/ability**

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[Student 1 Name], I agree with your last statement in regards to how Bednarska finds her independence. It seemed that all throughout her essay people were trying to put her into tightly defined boxes. Inwardly, she seemed to disapprove of all the labels that people would put on her. But outwardly, she seemed afraid to go against these cultural labels. The fact that she identifies herself as lesbian and she still puts herself into one of those social categories is very telling. She claims to go against societal norms by engaging in activities with whomever she chooses, yet she still chooses to classify herself in terms that society creates. She says, "My experience the night before had been my only sexual encounter with a man since I began to identify as a lesbian. I couldn't imagine it erasing that identity, but there was a small part of me

that felt fraudulent." So even though she is engaging in activities that demonstrate the fact that she is free, she still feels confined to boxes that culture creates.

I also felt that at some points, she couldn't choose which topic to discuss, her disability or her sexuality. She kept going back and forth, feeling the need to explain herself fully. I felt that she was embarrassed about aspects of both. She left out the fact that N was a "crip", as she put it, until nearly halfway through the essay, even though she brings him up in the very first paragraph. She is afraid that people will stereotype her. She says, "Perhaps I've waited because I fear that when people see me with a disabled partner they think that disability is the reason we are together." While I do not think that this is the sole reason that N and Badnarska were together, she even admits that was part of it. She says, "We had more flexibility about going home together because we both lived in accessible apartments. We both used accessible transportation. It made certain things easier." To me, it almost felt like she was with N out of convenience. She chose dealing with the issues surrounding disability over dealing with her sexuality.

So, I guess the question that I'm really asking is: Is Bednarska truly independent and free from these societal norms by the activities she engages in or does the act of defining herself by these norms in the first place (no matter how hard she tries to break free), in fact, make her as confined as the rest of us?

### **Student #3, Reply RE: Intersections of Sexuality and Dis/ability**

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[Student #2 Name], I found your question interesting and maybe without a concrete answer. Bednarska seems thoroughly confused by both intersecting aspects of her life, her disability and her sexuality. This is normal, and it is nearly impossible to avoid defining yourself by the norms that society has put forth. Even defining herself as crossing boundaries within these norms is still a definition. I think her embarrassment that you mentioned is not too hard to identify with. Most individuals in society spend a large amount of time trying to be similar to others and accepted by them. Not only did Bednarska have to deal with the visible difference of being disabled, she also had an added difficulty of going against the "norm" with her sexuality. In terms of relationships and sex, both of these components made her life more difficult than the "normal" person.

I also found it interesting that N was disabled similarly to herself. It seemed like she left this information out early on in the essay as a storytelling tool, but I still found it slightly surprising. I hadn't thought about it one way or the other until she mentioned it. No matter how hard we try to not stereotype people and to be accepting of differences that we don't understand, this is often not the case.

[Student #1 Name], I wonder if the intersection of her sexuality and disability free her from the social expectations of our culture since she still lives within its boundaries. Bednarska seems troubled by her situation and the whole essay shows this hesitation to say what she is telling the reader. The topics are both hard ones to encounter, and she does so but seems to go all over the place at the same time. The fact that she is a lesbian makes her feel uncomfortable that she slept with a gay man. This seems like mostly normal thought process and you could compare it to anyone of any sexuality sleeping with someone unexpected.

## Ineffective Discussion Board Exchange

*Just as the first example, this discussion board offers an example of a student's initial response to a discussion thread, and two student's replies. However, this exchange is an example of what NOT to do in your discussion boards.*

*Look at how the posts to the discussion question below are underdeveloped and only loosely address the reading and do nothing to further a critical discussion on the reading. If you find your posts are only 3-4 sentences, they are likely quite underdeveloped and do not meet the minimum standards for a 'passing' post.*

*Notice how the replies to the first post only offer tangential agreement, rather than extending the idea, instead the post just either repeats a similar (and undeveloped sentiment) or moves onto a new subject matters and does nothing to actually reply to the first post in a substantive manner.*

### **Discussion Question: Intersections of Sexuality and Dis/ability**

Bednarska writes "I am aware, as I tell this story, that it is easier to talk about the ill-fitting nature of categories in relation to my own sexuality than it is to talk about disability in relation to sex" (p. 286). How does she talk about both of these issues in her essay and how does she come to view them as intersecting?

### **Student Response #1: RE: Intersections of Sexuality and Dis/ability**

I thought Berdarska was really brave in writing this piece and I was impressed with how confident she was in herself. I had never thought of outing how she described it. I also admit that I feel pity when I see someone with a disability or maybe I don't even notice them at all, let alone think about them as people who have a sexual identity.

### **Student Resposne #2: RE: Intersections of Sexuality and Dis/ability**

[Student 1 Name], I too thought she was really brave in writing this piece. I hadn't thought about how people out themselves as disabled either – that was really interesting. I also will sometimes overlook someone in wheelchair, like you said, and never think about them as people who have sex.

### **Student Response #3: RE: Intersections of Sexuality and Dis/ability**

[Student 1 Name and Student 2 Name], I agree with you both, I also think she was a brave in writing this essay. What surprised me was how she said she was lesbian, but had a sexual relationship with a gay man. I just think she was feeling confused.