

Disability History Association Podcast
Interview with Dr. Sami Schalk
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Emma Wathen: Hello, and welcome to another episode of the Disability History Association Podcast. My name is Emma Wathen, and I will be guest hosting this episode. I'm here today with Dr. Sami Schalk, an Associate Professor in the Gender and Women Studies Department at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. She published her first book, *Bodyminds Reimagined* in 2018, and has just come out with her second book, *Black Disability Politics*, which will be the focus of our discussion today. Additionally, Dr. Schalk is a board member of Freedom, Inc., and she once twerked on stage with Lizzo. Thank you so much for being here with me today, Dr. Schalk.

Sami Schalk: Yeah, thanks for having me.

Emma Wathen: I wanted to start off by asking you, how did you first become interested in this topic of Black disability politics? So, when did you begin conceiving of Black disability politics, the concept, and then *Black Disability Politics*, the book?

Sami Schalk: Yeah, I've been working in the field of disability studies for a pretty long time. I was really lucky that I went to an undergraduate institution that had a disability studies minor. So, I've been taking classes in disability studies since I was nineteen, and even then, one of the things that I was noticing is the fact that disability studies—the things that I was reading, the folks that were being published—was very White, was focusing on very White texts. And then I would be taking my women's studies classes, in particular I was taking a Black feminist theory class, and I would see disability showing up, but no one was talking about it in this critical way. So, I started thinking about and wondering why this difference was there for a long time. And I started to explore that in my first book by looking at the work of Black women writers and thinking about how they were using the genre of speculative fiction. I got more specifically to the work of this book by accident, you know, by the happy circumstances that often happen with reading and doing research. I was reading Alondra Nelson's book, *Body and Soul*, and there was a citation of Irving Zola in it, and Irving Zola recognizes very early disability studies, and it just suddenly made this click in my head. I was like, "Oh, this health activism could be disability work." Like, it's not always critical disability work, anti-ableist work, but it can be, and what I was reading in Alondra Nelson's book really indicated that for me for the Panthers. So that started me down that path of starting in 2017 to look at the archives, the digitized archives, of the Black Panther Party for their newspaper, and then I also went out to Stanford to look at their actual physical archive later on. So, it started there with really just seeing what was in it. I thought initially I was going to work on their sickle cell anemia campaign, which Alondra Nelson covers, and I thought I could kind of bring a critical disability lens to that, and that ended up not being in the book at all. [laughs] It ended up not being in the book at all! I found all these other things, and so it just it made me realize that there was—and likely was more—archives of Black organizations, Black activists, Black movement work that had disability, but because the field of disability studies was so White, the folks who were going into these Black archives didn't necessarily have the critical lens to see disability and read disability in the way that we do. And so it made me think that I wanted to write something that gave people a framework and a lens to be able to do this work who are already situated in critical race or Black studies but have more of this specifically Black disability political lens to it so that we could do more of that bridging and translation work.

Emma Wathen: Since we're on the topic, what is black disability politics? How would you define it?

Sami Schalk: Yeah, so very broadly defined, disability politics I borrow from Alison Kafer's work, where she talks about disability politics being the political, social, cultural engagement with disability as a political social issue rather than as a medical individual issue. Right? Resisting that medicalized lens. And so Black disability politics is just the way that Black folks have done this, and trying to pick up how does this work look potentially differently because of the way that disability can show up and be treated differently within Black communities. So, I look at, in the book, the Black Panther Party, the National Black Woman's Health Project, and then I also have interviewed a couple of contemporary disabled activists, particularly the Harriet Tubman Collective, and just talked to and looked through to see, "how does disability show up, how is it approached in this political way that might be different, might come from a different angle?" And so, the book breaks down a couple of qualities that I saw across the different things that I was looking at in the hopes that it initiates a conversation where folks can then see if this is useful elsewhere for them.

So, I found that Black disability politics were always intersectional, paying attention to multiple issues, but typically focus on race more than disability or use the language of race primarily as the main analytic even if they were talking about disability. And that's often because we're talking about racialized violence, state neglect, so we're talking about folks of color, or Black people, and then how they are becoming disabled because of these larger systems of oppression. So, it's intersectional but race-centered. It also doesn't necessarily use the same language as the mainstream disability rights movement, which means there are a lot of times that the word disability doesn't show up at all. And that might mean—and I think other folks who do historical work in disability know this—we can't always just look for the one word, we might have to look for older words, older ways that we talked about disability, or specific conditions, specific disabilities, the names of those things rather than the word disability itself. So, we don't necessarily see the word disability, disability identity, disability pride showing up in it, although it shows up more in the more contemporary work. It's also historicized and contextualized. That's really important, because again we're often talking about state violence, racialized violence, state neglect. So, it has to be put into this larger contextualized history of racial violence and of white supremacy more broadly. And then it's also holistic and broad, and this, for me, is where it really ties into the work of contemporary disability justice work because it includes Black disability political work as not necessarily focused on disability in the way that the medical establishment or the state, for like who gets resources, who gets accommodations. It's not defined in that really narrow way in the same way that disability justice is inclusive of folks with chronic pain and illnesses and things that might not be defined as disability under the ADA or provided social security disability supplementary income. So, it's really broad in the topics and holistic, as well. It's inclusive of mental disability, which I think, historically, has been left out of a lot of disability history and disability rights movements in particular—it's been really focused on folks with sensory and physical disability, same thing in the field. So what I just talked about is the topic, the focus, the content, but I also use holistic and broad to talk about the approaches and the tactics, so that they're not just focused on the individual, not just focused on rights and legislation, for example, which often is how disability rights is. It's focused on a lot of different tactics, a lot of different approaches, macro and micro level. So, that was a long-winded answer, but it gives you that detail of, loosely, it's just how Black people engage with disability politically. That's the quick elevator answer. But then in the book I try to build out, "here are some of these qualities that I see and here's how it then shapes what the work looks like."

Emma Wathen: I'd like to dig more into one of those qualities, the aspect of contextualization and historicization. You know, since this is the Disability History Association Podcast, I'd be remiss not to ask you some questions specifically about history, so I'd love to hear more about the role of history within Black disability politics, and about this book's relationship with history.

Sami Schalk: Yeah, I make a point in the introduction to say, "This is not a history of Black disability politics," and the reason I say that is because my area of expertise is really late twentieth century to now; I'm not trained as a historian. My background is really in literature and gender studies and theory, and so I wanted to make clear this is not me trying to say, "Here's everything or here's where it starts." It's not that kind of linear narrative. Instead, I'm trying to identify, in particular, times where the disability rights movement was already in existence, where Black movements, Black liberation work, could be in conversation, could be interacting with, but is doing something a little bit different, isn't just directly borrowing. We know from the work of lots of other folks that we can trace Black disability politics much, much earlier on. I'm thinking of the work of Dennis Tyler, Jess Waggoner, Ellen Samuels, Susan Burch, Todd Carmody—they're doing this kind of work that's looking way before 1970. So, it's not a history in that sense. It's also not a history in the sense that I'm trying to even say that this is everything about disability that the Black Panthers have done. I didn't go and do a bunch of oral histories with living Panthers to find out more information. There is more to be done. This book is really trying to establish that there is some historical precedent for this, there is some lineage, and to really build the framework. To be like, "This is how I think we can approach this," and then really invite folks into this conversation. So, I want more historians to do this work and take this angle, particularly historians of Black history. I want more folks to be doing the work with me, so that we can see if this thing that I've come up with is actually going to be useful beyond the specific sites that I'm looking at.

Emma Wathen: Well, as a historian, I certainly think it will be, and hopefully some other listeners will take up the call as well. Let's talk a little bit about the Black Panther Party. In your book, you focus on the Black Panthers' approach to disability politics, especially during the period from the early 1970s through the official end of the Black Panther Party in 1982, which previous scholars have described as being less revolutionary. Why has this period of the Black Panther Party's activism been so overlooked and underappreciated in both Black studies and disability studies?

Sami Schalk: I think that it's been overlooked for a couple of reasons. In the book, I say straight-out part of it, I think, is because that's when the Party was mostly led by women, and it was considered less revolutionary work to, for example, establish a school, to provide safe walking assistance to the elderly, to provide food to people. That image that folks have of the Panthers of predominantly Black men in leather jackets and berets holding guns—visually, it's exceptional, right? And there's not that same kind of visual threats of violence behind "here's some food for people, here's a sickle cell anemia fair for testing folks." It doesn't look the same. But one of the things that Bobby Seale, one of the founders of the Party, says in some of his work later on is that the community survival programs, which is what they call these programs that eventually became the focus, that that is the foundation of doing any kind of revolutionary work because you can't ask people to protest, to be out in the streets, to come to a session, to have political education and consciousness-raising, if their basic needs are not met. If people's basic needs are not met, then they are not able to do other kinds of revolutionary work. And so, it is revolutionary work to say these folks need these things and, along the way, we're going to provide some political education. But we're going to let them know that we believe there should be a world where these things are accessible to everyone, that you can get food and medical care that is good and quality,

and that's the way the world should be. So, modeling that world for people to implant in their heads, to suggest to children who go to the school that there can be a world where you are celebrated for who you are in the classroom. A lot of the kids that went to their school were kicked out of public schools and deemed uneducable. So, I think that that's part of it, this kind of feminine work of working with the elderly and food and children and care work—that gets dismissed as less revolutionary. So, I think that's really one of the biggest reasons: You have the leadership of women, the types of programming that they were doing, and then just the fact that it is less kind of in your face, but the reason it was less in your face was because of the intense pushback and disruption of the organization that they had experienced because of COINTELPRO, the FBI's counterintelligence program which purposefully sought to disrupt the organization by killing people, by destroying headquarters, and also just trying to create discord between people—so, you know, telling people that, "Oh, somebody cheated on you with somebody else"—like creating these fake stories and putting people inside of organizations to purposely cause harm inside of it. So, this was a purposeful effort by the FBI, who really labeled the Panthers as the greatest internal security threat to the nation in the late 1960s. Right? The greatest internal security threat, which is so ironic now because a couple of years ago then they labeled the Black Lives Matter movement as "Black identity extremist," was the term the FBI used, and also labeled this movement as an internal security threat. And then, you know, a couple of years later it's White supremacists that are attacking the Capitol and, like, who is the actual internal security threat in this country? So, yeah, the Panthers were labeled that way and then just had this incredible crushing weight against them because of the FBI. And so, they had to change their tactics, they had to adapt, and they had to really hone in on doing this local work in Oakland.

Emma Wathen: Yeah, and this school that you mentioned was the Oakland Community School founded by Ericka Huggins?

Sami Schalk: Yeah, the Oakland Community School started off in their community center that the Panthers ran, and it grew to the point where people had their unborn children on the waitlist trying to get into this school. It started with folks within the Panthers needing a space to take care of their children, especially who are preschool age, as well as deal with the harassment. Some people's kids were being harassed by police because they were known to be kids of Panthers as they were walking home from school or being pushed out of school, so they created another space where they were resisting some of the really narrow ways that things were being taught in schools. They got rid of standardized testing. They allowed a really fluid way that students would move through programs. So, it wasn't based on "okay, you're this age, you're in third grade." But instead, "let's assess where your levels are with math and with reading and with these other skills," and then you might be in different levels of classes, with different aged children based on your maturity and your skillsets, and that's the way that they tried to move through that school space.

Emma Wathen: And another example you talk about in that chapter are the 504 sit-ins in San Francisco. Could you tell us a little bit about how the Black Panthers participated in those?

Sami Schalk: Yeah, so the 504 sit-in is kind of infamous. I'm sure anybody listening to this who does disability history knows all about the 504 sit-ins in San Francisco at the Health Education and Welfare Office, where folks occupied the building nonviolently for twenty-eight days in order to ensure that the section 504 regulations of the Rehabilitation Act were signed into effect. So, the Panthers were involved in a couple of different ways, and I say this in the book as well, that a lot of the disability history of this says, "Oh, the Panthers brought us food," and I often feel like people mention the Panthers as a way of being like,

"See how cool and radical disability politics were? We worked for the Black Panthers." [laughs] It's used as this cool cred, but very rarely is there further engagement than that. So, before I did any of the research, I was like, "Okay, they brought some food, that's great," but then I did a little more digging and found that not only did they just bring food, they brought at least one, sometimes multiple meals a day for all of the people inside, even as the FBI tried to stop them from doing this, tried to prevent them from bringing food, and they insisted that they would just keep bringing more Panthers until they let them bring the food inside. So, they were providing regular food, which allowed the protest to stay and sustain itself as long as it was, but they also provided other kinds of material support. There's a quote from Elaine Brown, who talks about that they provided a mobile shower unit for folks to bring inside. They also had a member, Brad Lomax, on the inside who was there with Chuck Jackson as his aid. There's an article by Sue Schweik that talks about Brad Lomax and his legacy in particular, and I think it's super important to talk about Brad Lomax and lift him up, but one of the things I wanted to do with the book is to make clear that it wasn't just one person who was like, "Oh, I'm going to do this, and I happen to be a Black Panther," but it very much was the entire Black Panther Party and the organization supporting and standing behind this work. And so, what I do is then dive into not just the material support that was provided in this form of people on the inside, shower, food, but also this political support through the way that it gets represented in their newspaper. And so, I analyze all of the different newspaper articles inside of the Black Panther Party or the Black Panther newspaper that they put out. You know, it's on the cover. The win, when they finally win, is on the cover of the Black Panther newspaper, which is huge, right? That's not a Black or even international anti-imperialist—which was the other organizations and work that they would focus on—that's not a Black organization win, but it was very clear to them that it was part of this larger quest for liberation of Black and all oppressed communities, which is the way that they would talk about it in their ten-point platform. So, I do that analysis to show that the larger ideology and the larger political platform of the party was very inclusive of disability, even when they weren't quite aware of it yet. But as soon as they were made aware of disability politics, they were like, "Oh, yeah, totally, that just fits right into what we understand." And so that's really important for me because I think that there's other spaces where that can happen, that it's not that folks are explicitly or intentionally ableist, but they might just not know how to do the work yet, or they're doing the work in a different way. And so, I really wanted to highlight the way that just because the Panthers weren't always using the exact same language, weren't always talking about disability in this way, they very much understood the liberation of disabled people to be tied to the liberation of Black folks.

Emma Wathen: Moving on from the Black Panthers, the second organization you focus on is the National Black Women's Health Project, which you argue addressed disability through the framework of Black feminist health activism. As an example, you analyze their HIV/AIDS work. So, how did their approach compare to other organizations doing AIDS work at this time?

Sami Schalk: So, the big difference is they were focusing on Black women, and at the time in the late 1980s, HIV was still considered very much a gay, if not White gay man, disease. And so, if other folks had HIV, the assumption was that they were drug users, and then that was used as an excuse to say, "Well, we don't care about those people," which is not to say that some of the women they worked with were not drug users or sex workers, but they were a variety of folks who all deserved care. So what the organization did that, I think, is really unique and interesting and important, especially for folks who are thinking about how to do public health work now is that they tried to think about how do we both deal with prevention—preventing the spread of HIV—while also still supporting the people who have it, not just saying, "Oh, you don't want to get this, look how scary and bad it is." Which

reminds me a lot of how we've been dealing with COVID but then not really doing anything with the people who have it. Being like, "Well, sucks for you" or even "maybe it's your fault that you have it, so we don't care about you." They didn't have that kind of model. They really centered the experiences of Black women with HIV or AIDS and asking them, "What do you need? What has your experience been like?" And so, they had these focus groups. They also had a conference where they brought together major leaders in health, education, and health care treatments with Black women with HIV/AIDS who talked about "here's my experience, here's what we need," and they used that bench to develop programming specific to Black communities, to create some education and do prevention work within the community. And so, this happened in a couple of different ways. They, for example, talked about doing more education for health care workers like nurses, who might not have the same level of up-to-date information on what HIV/AIDS is like because a lot of the women were talking about health care workers and social workers not wanting to touch them—for example, thinking that touch or breathing the same air was going to be one of the ways that you could contract HIV. So, they were trying to deal with that, and then they were also trying to dismiss this idea that it's only gay men who are getting HIV within Black communities. This is one of my favorite examples from their work because I just think it's so smart, it was so smart. So, they were thinking about, "How do we get this information out there?" And part of it was that folks didn't really trust some of the White public health folks coming into the community. And so, they were like, "We need people who are respected and valued, their voices valued within Black communities." And so what they ended up doing was doing education sessions specifically for beauticians and barbers, had them learn and have the proper information, and then gave them brochures and other information that they could have in the barbershop, have in the beauty shop. So, folks who aren't familiar with the way this works within Black communities, you often spend a lot of time if you're going to the beauty shop or the barbershop, not necessarily because what you're having done takes a lot of time but because people are running behind and people are chatting. And it just becomes a community space where folks hang out. And so they use that as an opportunity with their own knowledge of how community information spreads and capitalized on that in the way that a lot of the White public health workers were focusing on club spaces and clinics as educational spaces, as spaces where they would, for example, give out condoms. But the National Black Women's Project was like, "We need to figure out how this information gets to Black folks in a way that they trust and believe." And so that's what they did, worked with barbers and beauty shops.

Emma Wathen: Oh, wow, that is a fantastic strategy. You mentioned seeing some of the same problems today with the response to the COVID-19 pandemic, about the focus being so much on prevention while people who are experiencing long-term effects from COVID are being neglected. What do you think public health workers could learn from Black disability studies scholarship to improve their approach?

Sami Schalk: Yeah, well, I think early on there was so much confusing and misinformation about how COVID works, how masking worked. I think there's still confusion for some people in how masking worked. And so, rather than these broad messages, really thinking about specifically within individual communities, "How do we get information out? How do we get it to people in ways that they trust?" Because a lot of folks don't trust what's coming from doctors and hospitals for good reason. For really good reason, they don't trust it, they don't believe it, and I think especially as the vaccines were coming out, you know, there were a lot of Black people that were like, "They've never cared about our health and wellbeing, so why all of a sudden do they care and want us to get this? I'm suspicious." You know, rightfully, suspicious. And so, I think really focusing on that community-level, specific work and working with leaders within communities—that requires you to be a part of the community to understand who the leaders are, who are the ones that our people are

believing and listening to. And working at that level, I think, is one of the lessons from *Black Disability Politics* that there is not a one-size-fits-all approach to public health work.

Emma Wathen: Yeah, and you interview some of these community leaders in your book. Could you tell me about some of these Black disabled activists and cultural workers whom you interviewed? How did you meet them? And what kind of projects are they working on?

Sami Schalk: Yeah, so I started the interviews primarily by contacting the folks who are part of the Harriet Tubman Collective. The Harriet Tubman Collective is a group of Black disabled activists, organizers, artists, cultural workers, changemakers of all sorts, who organized digitally. So, they organized virtually online from all across the country and came together to respond to various things happening politically within Black communities or within disability communities. One of the big ones that I talk about is when the Movement for Black Lives released their platform, originally that platform did not include disabled people. It had like one reference to “differently abled,” and that was it. And the Harriet Tubman Collective got together, and they wrote a response statement to say, “This is why this is a problem, this is why including disability is essential to any Black liberation work,” and demanding a revision of that platform. So now, if you go look at the Movement for Black Lives, on their website, you will see disability being addressed in various ways within their platform of the kinds of things that they want to see happen in the world, and that was really largely because of this group. So, I started with that group, asking folks from there. That included people like TL Lewis and Vilissa Thompson. TL Lewis works with HEARD, which is a group that works with incarcerated, Deaf, and hard-of-hearing folks, helping provide them access. Vilissa Thompson is the founder of Ramp Your Voice, which has focused on Black, particularly Black Women, Black disabled women’s work, and she made the Black Disabled Syllabus several years ago and continues to write a bunch of different venues. Dustin Gibson, Patrick Cokley, T. Banks—yeah, I interviewed a whole bunch of folks: Heather Watkins, Candace Coleman... Candace is in Chicago and does incredible work there. And so, I really started with those folks, and then I branched out a little bit, ended up with eleven folks that I interviewed at the end of 2019, right before the pandemic hit.

Emma Wathen: And some of your branching out involved reaching out to the creators of hashtags like #DisabilityAblesplained and #EverywhereAccessible and #AutisticBlackPride. Is that how you became familiar with their work?

Sami Schalk: So pretty much everyone I was familiar with their work either because of the Harriet Tubman Collective or because of just disability Twitter. I had been starting to follow more and more contemporary activists as I started the work. So, I started with the historical work, honestly thinking that it was just going to be a chapter or two and then I would do more contemporary and cultural stuff because that’s what I’ve done before. And then there was just so much in the archive that I wrote four chapters and sent it to my editor, and she was like, “I think this is almost a book already,” and I was like, “Huh, okay. Well, I guess I accidentally wrote this book that is mostly historical.” So then I wanted to incorporate that contemporary element by interviewing folks. So, yeah, most people I had met through disability Twitter or other kinds of digital organizing that folks have been doing.

Emma Wathen: Yes, well, we’re very happy to welcome you to the interdisciplinary history community. [laughs] So, let’s talk the other chapters then. So in addition to the four chapters we’ve talked about about the Black Panthers and the National Black Women’s Health Project, it also includes two praxis interlude chapters where you critique aspects of the approach to disability taken by these two organizations—specifically, their use of ableist language and their infrequent invocation of disability identity—and then you envision how contemporary social justice movements might learn from these examples. So, this is a big

question, but what would you say is the most important lesson that you want social justice activists and cultural workers to take away from this book and incorporate into their activism and political work?

Sami Schalk: Yeah, I would say it's really hard to say, like, one thing. I'll note that at the beginning of the book I talk about who the audience is, and I say that I really am writing this for a Black audience, and a Black disabled audience especially. And that doesn't mean that I don't want White folks to read it or folks who are non-Black to read it. The metaphor that I use in the book is, imagine that you've walked into my living room, and I'm having a conversation with my Black disabled peers. You're welcome to be here, you're welcome to listen, you will definitely learn something, you might even contribute something, but mostly this is a conversation among us. And so I'm going to respond to your question in kind of a sideways way and say that if I'm speaking to Black liberation workers in particular, Black activists in particular, the big takeaway for me, then, is just that there is no Black liberation without disability justice. There is no way for us to do this work, to dismantle White supremacy, to address anti-Black racism, without addressing ableism and the ways that these systems interact, the way that ableism impacts all Black people, whether or not you are or identify as disabled, because of the construction of Blackness's inferiority and the way that inferiority is then associated with disability and the need for medicalized treatment or isolation. So that's the takeaway, that's the thing. You can't do this work without thinking about disability. And I don't just mean that in the sense of, like, "Is your meeting in a wheelchair accessible place?" Yeah, absolutely, but it also means thinking about how does the whatever issue you're working on, whether that is police in schools, reproductive justice, food access, any of those things that you're working on, how does it particularly impact disabled folks, how does ableism play into the way that this particular social issue that you're addressing manifest, and then, of course, thinking about how to create or make more accessible activist work. So, whether that means having a protest where you say in advance, "Hey, we're going to be marching a mile, so if marching a mile is not what's in your repertoire, here are other ways to participate, other ways to support," or "We're going to be at a stationary rally, so we're just going to be standing still, and we're going to make sure that there's food here, we're going to make sure that there's places for people to sit down if they need to sit, and that's how we're going to make sure that this space is accessible and welcoming to all people." So, really thinking about that and making that information clear upfront is another way to increase the accessibility of your movement.

Emma Wathen: Yeah, exactly, that's great. So, I know you are pretty involved in activism within the Madison community, and you describe participating in the protests following George Floyd's murder. Did your experience as an activist shape how you were thinking about Black disability politics?

Sami Schalk: Yeah, absolutely. The timing was really remarkable because I was basically done with the book. I needed to write a conclusion, and I needed to do some revision, and one of the revision points that one of the anonymous readers had suggested was making the critiques of the organizations more clear and bringing in some of the contemporary stuff earlier. Originally, I just had historical chapter, historical chapter, historical chapter, historical chapter, contemporary, done. And so, in the revision, in the course of doing the uprisings and being a part of the uprisings, that's where the praxis interludes came into play, where I wanted to think about what are the practical things that I can offer people that are going to be useful. And a lot of that came from seeing the way that people were responding and organizing in that moment. In one of the praxes, the first praxis interlude, I talk about the case of Jacob Blake and the way that folks were talking about the fact that he had been paralyzed in this way that seemed to suggest that his entire life was over and worthless now. I was like, "Oh, we need to be better, like, there's better ways to do this."

And so, yeah, the organizing in the summer of 2020 really shaped that activist component of the book. I wrote the conclusion in June of 2020. My goal was to finish the revision of the book by my birthday. My birthday is in June, so I wrote it in June, even as everything else was going on. And it really just made me shift from a book that I thought was going to be as traditionally academic as my first book to something that felt useful. And I think that was the biggest thing after going through the uprisings and dealing with the backlash and harassment that I was facing as a result of being a professor at a public institution very publicly involved in the uprising. Just that I wanted something that felt useful to people and useful beyond the academy. And so, it really shaped the ultimate version of what you all get to read. [laughs]

Emma Wathen: So, as of this recording, your book has just been published a little over a month ago, but it's never too soon to ask, what are some things that you are working on now? What's next for you?

Sami Schalk: Well, it shows up a little bit in the book. I talk about pleasure activism as an example of other spaces where I see Black disability politics happening in the contemporary moment. And so that's the next project. I will be on a research leave next semester, during which I will also be going on a book tour. [laughs] But I will be beginning interviews. I just started, I've done two interviews so far, but I'm interviewing organizers of what I call "pleasure spaces"—that can be any kind of social space that is intended for pleasure, joy, healing, creativity. So, that's anything from craft clubs and amateur sports groups to dance parties and sex parties. Really broadly construed, but anyone who's organizing spaces like this for multiply marginalized people, whether that's Black women, whether that is disabled queer folks, whether that is trans women, but anyone who has more than one marginalized identity creating spaces specifically for them around pleasure. So, yeah, I'm looking at trying to understand what does the practice of pleasure activism look like, building on the work of adrienne maree brown, whose book, *Pleasure Activism*, is great. So that's what I will be working on next semester as I get a little leave from teaching to start diving into the new work.

Emma Wathen: That sounds fascinating. Well, despite your incredibly busy schedule, we're very grateful that you spent some time with us today. Before we officially finish off, was there anything else that you wanted to mention that we haven't had a chance to talk about?

Sami Schalk: Yeah, so the only thing I want to add is that *Black Disability Politics* is completely open access. So, it's available through Duke University Press for free. If you go to any of my social media—I'm @DrSamiSchalk on Twitter and I'm fierceblackfemme on Instagram—if you go to those things and click my linktree, there's a link to get to the open access version, where you can download PDFs of the individual chapters, read the whole book. I paid Duke with a research award that I got here at the university to make this happen. It was really a priority for me. Once I realized how much I wanted this book to be speaking to folks outside of the academy, I wanted to then make sure that it was financially accessible. So, I try to make sure in every interview and every time I talk to folks, I let them know because I think it provides a lot of potential for—you know, I think folks listening to this might be more in the academy, but that means for teaching purposes, for letting your students know that this is available. No one has to pay to read the book. It's available to anyone who has Internet access, and I also hope that folks who do organizing work outside of the academy might think about using it in reading groups and other kinds of political education.

Emma Wathen: Amazing. It's hard to say no to a free book, especially this one. So, if you like what you've heard here today, check out *Black Disability Politics*, and please spread the

word to your friends. I think that everyone will benefit from reading or interacting with this book. So, thank you very much. It was a pleasure to have you here, Dr. Schalk.

Sami Schalk: Thanks for having me.

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Caroline Lieffers: Thanks to everyone out there for listening or reading the transcript. Please join us again next time. Bye bye!