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Anosognosia and the Politics of Patient Dissent

“Anosognosia,” a neurological term describing a person’s lack of awareness regarding his or her disability, has recently crossed over into the psychiatric literature. While the classic “anosognosic” was a stroke patient unable to recognize partial paralysis diagnosed by physicians, mental health patients who “lack insight” may now also be so described. This paper will interrogate the recent psychiatric use of “anosognosia” and consider the political consequences of attributing patient dissent to the very diagnosis, usually schizophrenia, in question. Utilizing insights from disability studies, consumer/psychiatric survivor accounts, as well as the existing psychiatric literature this paper will attempt to engage anosognosia as a historically situated and biocultural phenomenon, neither pre-discursive disease symptom nor simple medicalization of psychiatric patient oppression. Perspectives on subjectivity and insight from psychoanalysis may also be considered.