

Introduction

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An ongoing project on interdisciplinary approaches to disability has grown from a brief exchange of e-mails between one of us, a professor of psychology and disability studies, and the other, a lecturer in disability studies and editor of a journal that focuses on literary and cultural studies of disability. The outcome of the exchange has thus far been twofold, both elements going under the title *Theorizing Culture and Disability: Interdisciplinary Dialogues*.

Firstly, in 2008, a conference was organized by the Research Institute of Health & Social Change and the English Research Institute at Manchester Metropolitan University, in association with the *Journal of Literary & Cultural Disability Studies (JLCDS)*. Tom Coogan and Suzanne Ibbotson chaired the international event, which hosted papers by Lucy Burke, Stuart Murray, and Irene Rose, as well as heralding five of the six articles that are included in this issue, and launching Stuart Murray's book series, *Representations: Health, Disability, Culture* (Liverpool University Press).

Secondly, in editing this special forum, we have joined forces with colleagues in the humanities and the social sciences – namely, Lucy Burke, Senior Lecturer in English at Manchester Metropolitan University, Rebecca Lawthom, Reader in Community Practice at Manchester Metropolitan University, and Rebecca Mallett, Senior Lecturer in Disability Studies at Sheffield Hallam University. The five of us have worked as a team throughout the editorial process in an endeavour to provide a multidisciplinary perspective on the topics of impairment and disability.

Hitherto, the relationship between disability studies and literary and cultural studies has, at least in the UK, been a weak one. While elsewhere scholars such as Lennard Davis, David Mitchell, Sharon Snyder, Rosemary Garland-Thomson, Rod Michalko, James Overboe, Tanya Titchkosky and Susan Wendell have forged critical links between the humanities and the development of social theories of disability, analyses in the UK and other minority world contexts such as the Nordic countries and Australasia have tended to centre around the social sciences, particularly sociology, education, and social policy. While there have been attempts to colonize other disciplines with disability studies, such as psychology (e.g., Goodley and Lawthom's (2005) edited collection *Disability and Psychology*) and literary studies (e.g., *JLCDS*, Liverpool University Press, founded in 2006), cultural and literary disability studies tend to reside on the periphery of debates outside the US. *JLCDS* and developments such as the Centre for Culture & Disability Studies, provide critical spaces to merge cultural and social scientific foci which, as demonstrated in this special forum, retain the sociocultural and political aims of a critical disability studies. An under-girding aim of all the articles presented here is that disability must be analysed as a social and cultural phenomenon, which says as much about normalizing/non-disabled society as it does about the constitution of disability. Indeed, in the

current economic climate, the need for analyses of disablism in everyday cultural life is arguably more necessary than ever.

The interdisciplinarity of this issue becomes apparent in many ways, as a common interest in disability studies is combined with an array of other disciplines – most obviously, cultural studies in Rebecca Mallett’s response to contemporary British comedy, postcolonial Studies in Clare Barker’s reading of Salman Rushdie’s *Midnight’s Children*, literary studies in Brett Smith’s Bakhtinian exploration of research boundaries, media studies in Alison Wilde’s investigation of attitudes toward television soap opera, queer studies in Kateřina Kolářová’s discussion of pain and desire in the work of Bob Flanagan and Sheree Rose, and marketing studies in Elizabeth DePoy and Stephen Gilson’s analysis of design and branding. The result is an exciting one precisely because we are reminded of the intersections of subjectivity, culture and society but also of the interconnections that disability studies must make with other transformative, trans-disciplinary and radical writings. Disability remains a complex cultural phenomenon. The articles in this special issue draw attention to the ways in which understandings of disability can never be separated from other analyses of marginalization and oppression.

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