



Cultural Locations of Disability

By *Sharon L. Snyder, David T. Mitchell*

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In *Cultural Locations of Disability*, Sharon L. Snyder and David T. Mitchell trace how disabled people came to be viewed as biologically deviant. The eugenics era pioneered techniques that managed "defectives" through the application of therapies, invasive case histories, and acute surveillance techniques, turning disabled persons into subjects for a readily available research pool. In its pursuit of normalization, eugenics implemented disability regulations that included charity systems, marriage laws, sterilization, institutionalization, and even extermination. Enacted in enclosed disability locations, these practices ultimately resulted in expectations of segregation from the mainstream, leaving today's disability politics to focus on reintegration, visibility, inclusion, and the right of meaningful public participation.

Snyder and Mitchell reveal cracks in the social production of human variation as aberrancy. From our modern obsessions with tidiness and cleanliness to our desire to attain perfect bodies, notions of disabilities as examples of human insufficiency proliferate. These disability practices infuse more general modes of social obedience at work today. Consequently, this important study explains how disabled people are instrumental to charting the passage from a disciplinary society to one based upon regulation of the self.

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Cultural Locations of Disability By Sharon L. Snyder, David T. Mitchell Bibliography

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Editorial Review

Review

“Snyder and Mitchell offer a provocative, reasonable, and well-written history and analysis of the ‘cultural dis-locations’ of disability since the industrial period and the appearance of eugenics. Here they bring together historical, cultural, and literary methods of analysis in order to advance a deeper understanding of the complex attitudes surrounding disability and people with disabilities. There is indeed no other book like it. It should become a staple in the libraries of every disability scholar.”--Brenda Jo Brueggemann, The Ohio State University

(Brenda Jo Brueggemann 2005-11-09)

“In *The Cultural Locations of Disability*, Sharon Snyder and David Mitchell have provided us a fine book on how to understand how dominant culture works. Though the book interrogates how culture specifically works on disability, what is especially valuable is how the book illuminates all sorts of dark secrets and disabling myths that ultimately helps us see better and understand more about disability oppression and where the struggle against it must be fought. I highly recommend the book.”

(James I. Charlton, author of *Nothing About Us Without Us* 2005-11-09)

“I learned something new and unanticipated from almost every page of this book. Snyder and Mitchell’s *Cultural Locations of Disability* lays out in an extraordinary fashion the historical cultural locations of disabled citizens: charity systems, institutions for the feeble-minded, the disability research industry, medical and popular film representations of disability, and current academic trends. The authors’ strategy is to interpret these cultural locations as forms of oppression, not characterized by exclusion but by a pervasive inclusion that nevertheless does violence to disabled people. This is a book that should be read and reread, and I am confident that people will be reading it for years to come.”

(Tobin Siebers, University of Michigan 2005-11-09)

“I am glad I read this book. It ranges widely, and makes some sweeping generalizations. Although it is hard to agree with it in every detail, as a contribution to understanding of disability, past and present, it is a book not to be missed.”

(Jan Walmsley *Medical History*)

From the Inside Flap

In *Cultural Locations of Disability*, Sharon Snyder and David Mitchell trace how disabled people came to be viewed as biologically deviant. The eugenics era pioneered techniques that managed “defectives” through the application of therapies, invasive case histories, and acute surveillance techniques, turning disabled persons into subjects for a readily available research pool. Snyder and Mitchell argue that the social production of human variation as aberrancy. From our modern obsessions with tidiness and cleanliness to our desire to attain perfect bodies, notions of disabilities as examples of human insufficiency proliferate. These disability practices infuse more general modes of social obedience at work today. Consequently, this important study explains how disabled people are instrumental in charting the passage from a disciplinary society to one based upon regulation of the self.

About the Author

Sharon L. Snyder and **David T. Mitchell** are faculty in the Department of Disability and Human Development at the University of Illinois at Chicago. They are the authors of *Narrative Prosthesis: Disability and the Dependencies of Discourse*, and editors of *The Body and Physical Difference: Discourses of Disability; Eugenics in America, 1848-1945: A History of Disability in Primary Sources*; and *The Encyclopedia of Disability*.

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