

Book review

Disability, Spaces and Places of Policy Exclusion

Soldatic, K., Morgan, H., and Roulstone, A., (eds)
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Disability, Spaces and Places of Policy Exclusion brings together a fascinating collection of inter-disciplinary reflections and research addressing a wide variety of contemporary themes in disability discourse. With chapter contributions from geographers, sociologists, and academics working in disability studies, social work, social policy and social studies, these diverse approaches form a satisfyingly cohesive volume. Whilst intended to be a social science approach to disability, the book knowingly takes a geographical perspective, unifying contributions around the concepts of space and place. In so doing, the socio-political, economic and legal issues faced as a result of the stigma and marginalisation of disabled people can be demonstrated to have tangible impacts on their everyday lived experiences, in terms of access to both public and private space. As such, policy is positioned as a spatial phenomenon through which social perceptions of impairment have a direct impact on the daily lives and relationships of disabled people.

The edited collection seeks to take a critical approach to the notion of policy and disability from a UK and international perspective, exploring the various ways that stigma and marginalisation manifest through policy at different scales. The volume draws on a social understanding of disability, seeing disability and associated spatial exclusion as a product of society's failure to effectively address the needs of impaired people within social and public policy initiatives. Meanwhile, the chapters draw on an understanding of the importance of the diverse and individualised needs of impaired people, recognising the embodied nature of impairment, and the embodied impact of policy and law. The volume is divided into two halves: Part I addresses conceptual issues in the construction and reproduction of public policy. Chapters within this section address topics including citizenship, changing welfare regimes and disability within criminal law. Part II contains chapters related to empirical research on topics ranging from place biographies to sex lives. Whilst Part I and Part II are presented as distinct sections of the book, there is much interplay between the contents, with running themes concerning the way in which national law, and changing economic policies, impact on the domestic and local experience of disabled individuals.

The vast majority of the chapters, and particularly those in Part II, address disability from a UK context. This largely reflects the publication bias within disability discourse across a range of disciplines in the UK. Publications have typically foregrounded experiences of disability in a Western context, reflecting, not necessarily the priorities or

interests of scholars, but certainly their geographical location (for example, Chouinard et al., 2010). The regional focus is also likely to be a reflection of the fact that the collected volume is compiled from papers presented at a UK conference. However, chapters addressing Ireland, Australia, and more broadly, the Global

South, in Part I, offer some opportunities for international comparison of approaches to disability within a public policy context. This is explicitly done in Grover and Soldatic's chapter that compares the provision of welfare in Australia and the UK (Chapter 5). As with other chapters in the volume, Grover and Soldatic move beyond a utilitarian policy-focus to explore power relations and the relevance of broader cultural concepts in social science. The focus on 'time' in this chapter draws together the explicit temporal nature of monetary benefits and the bodily rhythms of disabled people that may distinguish them from the non-disabled. As such this chapter presents a potentially uncomfortable discourse that engages with both the embodied and the socially constructed facets of disabled identity.

The volume does much to move away from the traditional critique of disability studies as focused on physical impairments, with a number of chapters considering chronic illness, hidden disability and intellectual disability. Edwards' chapter in Part I (Chapter 2) and Hollomotz and Roulstone's chapter in Part II (Chapter 9) present particularly thought-provoking explorations of the way that paternalistic national policies, intended to protect people viewed as vulnerable from harm, in fact restrict their right to make choices about their personal relationships and their own bodies.

In so doing, the law presents a mechanism of control in which individuals experience a loss of human rights, as a result of being classified as intellectually impaired. Hollomotz and Roulstone's chapter is particularly moving in its discussion of the invasive nature of the interference of 'responsible adults' in the extremely personal, and even entirely solitary, sexual activity of intellectually impaired adults.

Intersectionality is brought to the fore in Grech's chapter on poverty and disability in the global South and in the UK context on the consideration of the impact of changing welfare regimes on the financial wellbeing of disabled people (Chapters 4, 5, 8 and 10). Here welfare reform is positioned as a key driver in the changing services available to disabled people, whilst disabled individuals are positioned as being reliant on welfare, and therefore vulnerable in the face of government spending cuts. The emphasis throughout the volume on the powerlessness of disabled individuals to act in the face of government policy initiatives demonstrates a lack of agency as a result of a confluence of social inequalities. However, from a personal perspective, as a children's geographer, I would have liked to see more engagement with notions of the lifecourse, particularly in relation to education and transition; key areas of social policy focus and change through which national law and policy impacts on the spatial experience of disabled people.

This volume presents a fascinating contribution to developing discussions of disability within contemporary geographical debate. However, the implications of this book are wider reaching. This volume demonstrates the value of inter-disciplinary discourse in the exploration of the lived experiences of disabled people. Moreover, it also demonstrates the ways in which a developing understanding of the lived experience of disabled people, can throw light on broader social inequalities and injustice in international systems of law and governance.

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