

***Disability, Avoidance and the Academy: Challenging Resistance.* Edited by David Bolt and Claire Penketh. Routledge: New York, 2016, 212 pp. ISBN 978-1138858664.**

Reviewed By: Grace Lockhart

In *Disability, Avoidance and the Academy: Challenging Resistance* David Bolt and Claire Penketh have put together a diverse collection of work that explores, challenges, and critiques the avoidance of disability in academia. The chapters in this book touch on a range of topics starting with foundational problems of avoidance, policy formation, and the institutional culture of avoidance. Critiques of the avoidance of disability in academia also include flaws within mainstream educational practices and school textbooks. The implementation of a cultural agenda related to disability in educational studies is also suggested.

Within the book, curricular reform in relation to disability is challenged in the study of special education, social work, marketing studies, creative writing, theatre studies, and Gandhi studies. Throughout different chapters the avoidance of disability is also critiqued in literary reviews, literary criticism, modernist literary studies, and modern fiction. Not only are current theories of disability avoided and omitted from the curriculum, but new knowledge that is being generated is also averting, rather than incorporating, disability as a whole. In a world where disability is becoming more prominent and acknowledged in policy, academia is taking backward steps and perpetuating stigma, instead of combating it. This innovative collection of work from around the globe addresses this mistake challenges normalcy by confronting the pervasive avoidance of disability in the academy.

David Bolt begins the book with a discussion that introduces the topic of avoidance in the academy. He introduces the concept of disability in the academy and explains how it has become an “otherness” through multiple facets and perspectives the academia has produced. Bolt identifies members of minority groups related to such categories as gender, sex, and class, as “marked bodies” that are automatically framed as different in comparison to the normate. From this definition and many examples of marked bodies, Bolt incorporates several theories of disability and shows how they relate to this concept of otherness. However, what makes disability distinctive, according to Bolt, is that it permeates all categories of people and identity. Bolt stresses the ubiquity of disability and how prevalent it is, even though it is seldom considered as an explicitly othered category. His introductory thoughts provide a foundation for readers to understand how disability is currently perceived in society and how it relates to other social identities, before encountering more specific issues that are confronted in the book, and namely the avoidance of disability in the academy.

When disability is present in the work of academics, Bolt explains that there is a lack of understanding of disabled people. This is because discussions about disability are “critically unnoticed”, meaning that scholars do not engage with existing issues or debates. Bolt also recognizes the fact that there has been some growth around how disability is being incorporated into academia, as seen through the establishment of “disability studies” as a field of study. Instead of criticizing the academy for its total neglect of disability, Bolt acknowledges the fact that the presence of disability in academia has been progressing and expanding. His introduction sets the tone for the

rest of the book after identifying the Othering of disability as a crucial issue that is embedded in academia.

The contributions in “Disability, Avoidance and the Academy: Challenging Resistance” are divided into 16 chapters. In the first chapter David Mitchell creates a link between professionalization and normalization in the academy and proposes that the professionals produced by the academy have the same views towards normalcy as the broader academy. In order to further his explanation of ableism and avoidance, Mitchell uses the work of other authors’ who assess whiteness and adapts these critiques to apply to ableism in universities (15). He takes theories of whiteness and relates these lessons of exclusion to disability and in doing so, connects ableism to the more familiar experience of racism. Mitchell creates a link between disability and research on racism, and uses that familiarity to further explain the depth of the avoidance of disability in the academy and the process of professionalization as a whole. Furthermore, he highlights how academia serves as a factory that produces sameness and normalization, meaning that in order to obtain degrees from universities, one has to be part of the norm.

In the second chapter Sushil Oswal discusses avoidance in policy formation in relation to academia. He uses a report written by the the American Association of University Professors (AAUP) to critique policy formation in the academy. Oswal reviews how policies avoid topics of social prejudice in universities, and as a result of ignoring disability and examples of disability oppression that are present in the university, policies remain ableist. He not only critiques the AAUP report, but also

proposes strategies to confront the issues that are identified. For example, he highlights where the report could be adjusted to influence change in the academy and challenges the duplication of normalcy that the report perpetuates. To spark a discussion about the issue of avoiding disability in policy information, Oswal finishes the chapter by showing how there is room for other authors to produce more information to enhance his critique. Similar to chapter two, chapter three by Jow Petrie adds to the topic of policies by discussing how the potential force of employees with disabilities has the capacity to challenge the policy makers who are not disabled.

The critical avoidance that Owen Barden explains in the fourth chapter of this volume is the avoidance of students with different learning needs in curriculums. His discussion centres on dyslexic students and how they are separated from mainstream education and deemed weaker than the norm. He critiques the segregationist attitude of academia and the way in which it presents dyslexia as a deficit or a failure on the part of the student. Instead of blaming students, Barden comments on the education system and their “inadequate response to diversity” (46). Since mainstream education is not based on teaching in diverse ways, students with dyslexia are labelled weaker than the rest of the students; Barden explains that students with dyslexia start believing that negative perception of themselves. To conclude, he illustrates that even when disability is acknowledged in academia, it is represented as flawed and misconstrued.

Related to representation, in chapter five Alan Hodkinson challenges school textbooks and the lack of portrayal of disability. He explains that textbooks either

construct disability as abnormal, or omit disability altogether. As a result, students reading the textbook believe these representations and formulate their own negative attitudes towards people with disabilities and Other them: when textbooks avoid discussing disability or mention disabilities in a negative way, they contribute to the perpetual cycle of Othering people with disabilities in academia. Hodkinson proposes a way to challenge the negative, or absent, representations of people with disabilities in textbooks by suggesting that teachers educate students about disabilities and teach them about disability in a positive light. He concludes with a discussion about the relationship between the teacher and the textbook and the importance of teacher mediation between the students and reading materials that lack positive representations of disabilities, or that fail to mention of disabilities at all.

In chapter six, Claire Penketh and Laura Waite consider special educational needs as a developing field of study in academia. Not including disability studies in the academy creates an avoidance of the subject. Similar to this, Rita Hoffman and Maria Flamich incorporate cultural studies into their chapter and discuss the paradigm of disability, transmitted by culture, and how disability studies can positively revolutionize education. Educating people about disability through constructive representations changes the narrative of disabilities, and this is achieved through culture. In chapter 9, Kathy Boxall and Peter Beresford focus on mental health issues and how social work is connected to these issues. To support their work they use Bolt's (2012) analysis of "antilocution", in which prejudice towards specific groups of people is assumed to be

tolerated, as long as the people being discussed are not nearby. The negative comments result in discrimination being regarded as tolerable when the person or persons are not there to defend themselves. In this chapter, the discipline of social work within the academy is described as avoiding disability. The types of disability that are being discussed include mental health, matters of madness, and distress.

The next chapter, written by Tom Coogan and Robert Cluley, uses a historical background to examine marketing studies, in order to determine how certain privileges were produced. In marketing, people with disabilities are seen as inactive consumers and Coogan and Cluley's analysis urges a reconsideration of these assumptions. To support their argument about disabled consumers in marketing they use a comparison of the medical and social models of disability. Their comparison of "biological impairments" and "social disadvantages" enhance their claim that people with disabilities are seen less as consumers than other people.

Avoidance of disability in creative writing is discussed in chapter ten by Cath Nichols. Her discussion is based on the notion that creative writing students are trained to exclude or remove disability from their writing. They either avoid writing about it altogether, or use it in their writing and then neutralize the non-normativity through a resolution at the end of the story. The students are taught that disability is abnormal instead of learning how to write stories that are disability-inclusive. Nichols stresses the fact that disability needs to be incorporated into the teaching structure of creative writing not only because it is good writing practice, but also because of the ethical discussions

that can be generated. Avoiding disability in creative writing promotes negative connotations of impairments and people with disabilities, when writing should actually be a space for discussion and learning. Expanding on discussions of disability in arts education, Ann Fox considers how theatre studies also avoid talking about disability. She suggests that disability is either ignored altogether, or is used simply as a metaphor. Fox suggests that the boundaries between disabled and non-disabled need to be collapsed so that theatre and disability can work in unison. Instead of avoiding disability, theatre studies would benefit from incorporating it into its work and learning.

In Chapter 12, Hemachandran Karah discusses Ghandi studies and how this can encourage a “transcendent ethic of care” when connected to disability studies. Karah proposes that elements of Ghandi studies can help enhance the study of disability in the academy by creating “an inclusive normative agenda” (142). Related to working agendas, Emmeline Burdett examines literary reviewers and the avoidance of disability when the reviewers are unsuccessful in recognizing historical facts about disability. As a result, disability is not considered relevant or significant in reviews. In the next chapter, Arianna Introna also discusses literary criticism and how it does not use disability in its analysis. Disability is a valid category for literary criticism, yet it is avoided entirely. This creates negative assumptions about disability, which are reproduced when the topic is further avoided.

In Chapter 15, Chris Ewart offers a different critique of literary studies, specifically by discussing the othering of disability within modernist literary studies and culture. His argument considers how the incorporation of the notion of the other into

literary studies makes disability difficult to avoid because its influence can be detected in stories. Although literary studies attempts to avoid disability, disability occurs in literary works anyway. However, in chapter 16, Will Kanyusik discusses modernist fiction and the way in which disability is othered and avoided in this style of writing. Kanyusik's chapter, which focuses on practices of othering in American modernist fiction, compliments the previous chapter by Ewart, which is situated in an Irish context, by extending discussions of disability literary studies to different location.

Having multiple perspectives from different countries also demonstrates how ubiquitous disability theories have become and provides readers with a more well-rounded discussion. Many of the authors in this book also acknowledge the fact that there has been some progress with the growth of disability studies and the acceptance of disability in a general sense. Their arguments and debates are broad and informative because they do not disregard the fact that disability studies has been gradually developing throughout the history of the academy. While respecting the progress that has been made with disability in the academy and in society more generally, the authors prove that there are still gaps in the acceptance of disability and disability studies. This collection, as well as each individual chapter, cover many aspects of the academy from a critical angle and support the movement to encourage the academy realize the valuable and interdisciplinary nature of disability studies.

Chapters in this book also go beyond the academic world and connect to multiple facets within society. They touch on social activism, popular culture, and lived experience. This original collection of work not only demonstrates how disability can be

incorporated into academia, but also how curricular reform can change the social and cultural assumptions that are made by society about people with disabilities and other groups of people who are viewed as non-normative. The chapters in this book cover many subjects within academia as they relate to disability and disability studies that may not have been considered in past evaluations of this issue. In addition to this updated review, the work in the book comes from various locations and is not limited to a single country. The analyses come from Australia, Canada, Hungary, India, the United Kingdom, and the United States. The collection of information contained in *Disability, Avoidance, and the Academy* and the potential it creates for knowledge mobilization supports new ways of thinking about disability in the academy, while effectively challenging resistance to its inclusion.