

## **Book review, *British Journal of Learning Disabilities***

**Title of Book:** Disability Experiences: memoirs, autobiographies, and other personal narratives. Volumes 1 and 2.

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**Cost:** \$325

This is a weighty tome by any standard comprising, as it does, of two weighty volumes and some 913 pages. Weighty, not only, in content but both books are actually quite heavy, and this makes them difficult to hold and manoeuvre when working between the two volumes. Notwithstanding, this work is masterful, beautifully presented, and breath-taking in its comprehensiveness in the coverage of biographical material that includes the personal narratives of people with disabilities. Helpfully front matter includes a three-part *Thematic Outline* to assist the reader navigate their way through multiple entries that relate to differing disabilities such as, and for example, cognitive, and through the use of differing media such as, and for example memoirs, poetry or photography, and relating these to themes such as feminism or motherhood. Again within front matter an essay, from one of the academic editors, entitled '*Disability Experiences in the Classroom*' precedes the *Thematic Outline*, and provides pedagogical directions as to how the works might be used. An annotated list of some 100 additional important disability memoirs is also included in an appendix of further reading. The work itself comprises some 200 narratives that are all written by people with disabilities. It has to be said that whereas there is breadth of disabilities covered, most of those presented are physical, but this has not excluded, albeit with less emphasis, psychological or psychiatric conditions, and developmental or intellectual impairments, or addiction. Whereas most are written by people with disabilities themselves, a small number of biographies, and family memoirs (such as those written by parents or spouses) were included when the advisory board felt they were important contributions to communicating the disability experience. Included are works by those that might be thought of as '*famous*' such as; Temple Grandin and Christy Brown, as well as others who are likely to be unknown beyond the world of disability studies, such as; Terry Galloway (who shares her experience with deafness) and José P. Ramirez (who shares his experience with leprosy). Each of the entries examine a particular author, and literary work for example Kay Redfield Jamison's, *An Unquiet Mind*. Each entry also provides biographical, historical, and literary context around the author and their work, as well as expanding the role the text has played within disability memoir. It is clear that the works selected and presented will perhaps prove most useful to those perusing disability studies, but it will also provide rich insights for those studying sociology and anthropology courses, and students pursuing minority and gender studies, as well as those studying English literature. Additionally, this publication offers members of interdisciplinary teams in health, and beyond, rich material to inform and assist their professional development by obtaining authentic

insights into the lives of those whom they serve. I can imagine that extracts of this book will be used as an excellent pedagogical resource to explore phenomenological aspects of a range of disabilities, and in this respect I found the critical responses for each entry very helpful.

Throughout the book there are some excellent plates which are helpful, if not only in illustrating the various themes, where they occur, but also to break up the text which otherwise might be a little overwhelming. I understand the how this works has been priced, but the cost is almost certainly be prohibitive for most students - it is costly at \$325. 00 (almost £250.00 sterling) – so in all probability *'beyond the pocket'* of most students. This said it may not be beyond, albeit already stretched library budgets, and is therefore worthy of investment as a library acquisition, and particularly so if not an essential addition to all those intuitions of higher education that teach and, or, research issues of disability.

This book is undoubtedly well crafted and pleasing to read and certainly well presented. It represents, to me at least, the only unouque and authoritative collection of narratives - the like of which I have not seen before. Finally I found this book a source of inspiration and one that I have no hesitation in both commending the Editors, and recommending to all without reservation.

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