



Editorial

Arpita Das & Remi Joseph-Salisbury

Within discourses of sexuality, people with disabilities and their sexual desires are often marginalised; at the same time, sexuality hardly appears as a matter of significance for people with disabilities. Too often, the sexual and reproductive needs, desires, and concerns of people with disabilities remain ignored. People with disabilities are often perceived as ‘hypersexual’ beings needing to be controlled or, as ‘asexual’ without any sexual and reproductive needs.

This journal issue attempts to address these under-represented and marginalised voices and aims to advance scholarship at the intersections of disability and sexuality. It has not been an easy process to reach out to scholars and academics for papers for this issue and as editors, we have had to extend the deadline twice in order to be able to collect and present an array of papers. This could be due to a number of reasons. It is possible that the call for papers did not reach scholars who are invested in the intersectionalities of disabilities and sexualities. However, this could also point to factors such as the limited number of scholars working on issues of disability, limited number of people with disabilities in academia working on this issue due to a number of reasons including challenges to access to mobility, higher education etc., and limited number of scholars who may be working on areas of disability and sexuality, which are both marginalised in society. These challenges point to the difficulty of terrain for scholars who are working on these intersectionalities. This issue has therefore taken a longer duration than usual.

At the end of the process however, we have a rich collection of papers from scholars who are geographically well spread out and have been able to bring up very relevant issues that cover a rich array of topics – from people with physical disabilities, people disabled during war, mental disability, ‘wannabe people’, to caregivers of disabled soldiers from war, from representation in art and culture as well as juxtaposition of issues of people with disabilities with other marginalised communities including people of diverse genders and sexualities, people practis-



ing sexual behaviours that are again ostracized, for example, practises of bondage, domination, sadism and masochism (BDSM) and pornography. We are therefore very proud to present this issue to our readers and we hope it will help enhance dialogues and debates. As our readers will notice, different authors in this issue have used terms like ‘people with disabilities’ or ‘disabled people’ and have also used their own definitions of disability. It is interesting to observe the different interpretations and the wide spectrum of definitions that have emerged from the different submissions. We are also happy to note that we have received articles from varied geographical locations including caregivers of people with disabilities from war in Sri Lanka to looking at disability and sexuality in African literature.

People with physical disabilities thus go through different layers of marginalisation in which they are taught early on about the undesirability of their bodies and therefore the need to ‘correct’ them through procedures which may sometimes last a lifetime. In *Cultures of (Un)desirability: Creating Cultures on Resistance*, Loree Erickson writes about cultures of undesirability through which people with disabilities (like many other marginalised communities) are made to feel “less than” or “too much” loveable or desirable and thus marginalised; societal indoctrination teaches people about how certain bodies do not fit ideas of the ‘perfect body’ or the ‘right body’. Erickson analyses this scenario within pornography with people with disabilities often being invisible as consumers or players and viewed in particular ways. Interestingly however, Erickson presents a reverse narrative and uses queercrip pornography as a tool to resist these cultures and build resilience.

In *Disabling Sexualities: Embodiments of a Colonial Past*, Omolola A. Ladele attempts to advance the critical discourse on sexuality and disability in African literary debates and discusses the interconnections between identity, embodiment, sexuality and oppression. Ladele discusses African identities and embodiment in the context of disability and sexuality locating them in postcolonial Zimbabwe and discusses them through Dangarembga’s novels with their preoccupation with the postcolonial. Ladele discusses how these novels discuss women’s bodies as tropes in postcolonial African writing and the creation of ‘catharsis’ to suppress the experience of colonial violence; similarly, Ladele engages with images of male characters as deeply scarred and emerging through the colonial narrative of ‘castrated masculinities.’ The author also makes interesting observations about definitions of disability and how characters in the novels relate to disability in different ways.

In *Fighting pain with pain: Bob Flanagan /Sheree Rose and Catherine Opie*, Alexandra Mondin writes about three American artists – Bob Flanagan who worked individually and in collaboration with Sheree Rose and Catherine Opie who works with documentary photography; who use physical pain to tackle mental trauma stemming from different disabilities. While for Flanagan it is his physical disability along with his chronic illness, for Opie it is her social disability and stigma attached to her sexual orientation. Mondin discusses how these artists through their work blur the divide between the public and the private and complicate gender and sexuality through the discourse of BDSM thus redefining pain and pleasure. Mondin explores how Opie through her work troubles the representation of the LGBTIQ community, and Flanagan and Rose blur notions of gender.

Authors Hettiarrachchi and McCarthy discuss issues related to caregivers for people with disabilities. In *Of Love, fears and dreams: Narratives of wives of soldiers disabled in war*, Shyamani Hettiarrachchi presents an account of five female partners of military servicemen who were wounded and rendered ‘disabled’ during the prolonged war in Sri Lanka and discusses the reactions of these intimate caregivers, the sense of abandonment by their native families, and their resilience to forge forward on the task of caregiving to their partners with disability. It is interesting that out of the five women, two had married their partners before the injury and the other three after the injury sustained in the war. In *Effects of informal care on the sexual self: A disability perspective*, Andrea McCarthy discusses the power relationships and dynamics of people receiving informal care by either a family member or a partner. McCarthy highlights the personal experiences, issues of identity and private relationships of people with disabilities with carers and discusses how informal and unpaid care can be disempowering for both carers and for people with disabilities. The difficulties highlighted can range from the feeling of ‘inappropriateness’ of caring especially when seen in the context of opposite genders in a society which upholds the heterosexual norm as well as the unpredictability and lack of spontaneity in intimate relationships when the lines between caring and intimacy gets blurred. It is also relevant how McCarthy brings up that for care to be empowering, it has to be linked to the rights framework, evolving a better understanding of the impairment for the carers, but also acknowledging the other identities of people with disabilities beyond that of disability alone.

In *Love, sex, disability, coming out and John Travolta in New York and Je-*

rusalem: A twenty year journey, Scott Shieldlower presents a personal narrative of living with disability, sharing his experiences with seeking medical treatment, his love for the movies, his experiences with homophobia and of seeking a partner. This personal narrative gives us an account of the juxtaposition of disability with sexuality and how the intersections between the two levels of marginalisation pose additional difficulties with finding one's own identity.

In *Armless: Wannabe people and the desirability of the disabled body*, Andrea García-Santesmases Fernández reviews the film 'Armless' and discusses societal notions of wannabe people as 'monstrous', highlights the counter narrative of the amputee body as desirable, and questions the stigmatisation of the amputee body, devotee people and pretender people. The author also makes an interesting comparison between wannabe people and their desires for a different body and the need for depathologisation to transsexual people.

In *Neoliberalism and regimes of life and death: A book review of queer necropolitics*, Heather Tucker reviews the book 'Queer Necropolitics', which offers a collection of writings at the intersections of queer politics, gender studies, critical race studies. Tucker makes connections between queer studies with that of disability studies and highlights how biopolitics affect people with disabilities in similar ways.

Editing this volume has been an arduous process; however, it has at the same time been immensely rewarding to receive papers from a variety of fields introspecting and interrogating ideas and notions of disability and the relations with sexuality people with disabilities they share. Although Disability Studies is an emerging field of study and the scholarship on disability is advancing steadily, scholarship on looking at the intersections of disability and sexuality is limited. There is a need to advance knowledge in this field and this journal issue is an attempt to do that. We acknowledge that both disability and sexuality contain vast discourses and this issue is just the tip of the iceberg. Additionally, issues of mental and developmental disabilities remain further marginalised within discourses of disability and we are mindful of the gap within this issue.

We would like to thank all the authors for their submissions and their patience in working and engaging with the feedback received. We are very grateful to our reviewers who have painstakingly read through the papers and provided nuanced feedback for the authors to work on and sharpen their arguments. We are

thankful to our Copy-editor, Nadia Hai, our Web Editor Michael En, and our Design and Layout Editor, Boka En, for being a wonderful team and helping with getting this issue ready and running. Thank you all. Lastly, we thank all our readers and followers for engaging with the journal through different platforms; your support means a lot to us. Please continue to engage with us and do keep your feedback coming!