



DisAbility im Europa der Frühen Neuzeit DisAbility in Early Modern Europe

Abstracts

Patrick Schmidt: Writing a Discourse History of Multiple Discourses. An Approach to Perceptions and Constructions of Dis/ability in Seventeenth- and Eighteenth-Century European Societies

Reconstructing discourses is a cornerstone of dis/ability history. The eighteenth century is sometimes considered a crucial era of change in the perception and treatment of dis/abled people in Western societies. Hence, applying the method of discourse history to this era seems highly desirable. In doing so, however, scholars are faced with a dilemma, namely, the fact that no unified dis/ability discourse was yet in existence at that time. This article proposes a solution for this methodological conundrum by presenting the results of a study analysing a plurality of discourses in which physical and sensorial dis/abilities were regularly thematised or alluded to in the second half of the seventeenth and in the eighteenth century. The study is based on a wide range of articles and advertisements published in British, French and German newspapers and journals of that period. This article introduces the main features of four discourses with respect to the perceptions and constructions of dis/ability they convey: the discourse of poverty and poor relief, the discourse of illness and cure, the discourse of extraordinary corporeality, and the pedagogical discourse. It also points to patterns of perception that can be observed in several of these four discourses or beyond them. What comes to light is a wide range of sometimes contradictory ideas on what it meant to be dis/abled or how societies should treat impaired persons.

Philine Helas: Sick, Old, Blind. On the Representation of the Beggar in Italian Painting between the Fourteenth- and Eighteenth-Century

Sickness and physical disability by no means affect only the poor, but here they often coincide: Inability to work meant poverty in many cases, and physical impairments were explanations and justifications for seeking help. Sick and physically impaired people are depicted in medieval and early modern art primarily in two contexts: as seeking healing and being healed by Christ, Mary, or saints, or as needy and recipients of the beneficence of saints or charitable organizations, where their infirmity serves as proof of their neediness. With regard to Italian art, it can be noted here that physical impairment is almost exclusively demonstrated on men, but without violating the decorum of a painting: It is visible more in all kinds of aids than in the display of deformed bodies themselves. The depiction of blindness presents a particular difficulty for artists. Negative attributions of the fraudulent or criminal beggar are far less common in Italy than north of the Alps. Whether a social reality corresponded to the pictures of a handicapped beggar with no negative connotations, but rather aiming at the empathy of the viewer, cannot be deduced directly from them. None of the pictures should be understood as a direct depiction of reality, but always as a product of the interaction of social practices, the intentions of the commissioner, and an artistic-aesthetic discourse.



Riikka Miettinen: 'Disabled' Minds. Mental Impairments and Dis/ability in Early Modern Sweden

The article examines mental impairments that limited a person's ability to perform daily and socially expected activities related to work, religious practice and marriage in early modern Sweden. The case studies among the peasantry, legislation and early modern views on 'insanity' show that the effects of mental impairments varied greatly depending on the nature, degree and duration of the condition. In practice, impaired mental or intellectual capacities and conditions that were at the time understood as milder, yet pathological 'mental weaknesses' did not generally restrict the ability to work or take communion but could nonetheless entail a stigma in community life. In spite of certain disabling and marginalizing structures and practices in society, most of the mentally impaired lived at home or within their local village communities and participated actively in work and social life. Mental impairments typically interfered in limited ways with daily life, only occasionally or periodically. However, chronic and severe forms of 'insanity' that manifested continuously were more drastically debilitating and disabling. Family support was vital; the mentally impaired needed care during the times they were unable, or less able, to work. The study has shown that the mentally impaired were a very heterogeneous group with respect to dis/ability. However, more research is needed from intersectional perspectives to better understand their lives and position in early modern communities.

Carlos Watzka: Prevention and Rehabilitation of Disabilities for Earning Capacity as Parts of Health Care in Early Modern Confessional State. The Example of the Brothers of St. John of God in Austria and their Support by the Habsburgs

The article discusses the Austrian court's promotion of hospitals run by the Catholic monastic order of 'Barmherzige Brüder' ('Charitable Brethren'; 'fatebenefratelli'), showing that important elements of biopolitics are already visible in early 17th-century Habsburgian Austria. Particularly, the preservation and restoration of social functionality was an issue within emerging central government authorities. Clergy-managed hospitals in fact achieved better outcomes with their medical treatment than contemporary alternatives. Considerable efforts and expenditures were made to ensure not only adequate nursing and care, but also good conditions for the eventual rehabilitation of at least some chronically ill persons, who were in the upper class. Regarding this, one 'case story', at least partly documented by a written nursing contract, is described in detail.

Simon Jarrett: Myths of Marginality. Idiocy in Britain in the Long Eighteenth Century

Many historians have argued, and continue to argue, that in the pre-modern period 'idiots', or people with intellectual disabilities as we would say today, were highly marginalised, ignored, abused, isolated or even killed. This article argues, using the example of idiocy in Britain in the eighteenth century that this was far from the case. 'Idiots' were part of local communities which adapted to their 'oddity' out of necessity. Multiple sources suggest the integration of idiots in eighteenth century communities, and two trials from London's central criminal court, the Old Bailey, one involving an alleged 'idiot' perpetrator and the other an alleged 'idiot' victim, are examined in particular. The article argues that assumptions of early-modern marginality by modern historians are more revealing of current thinking about disability than of early-modern attitudes. The myth of marginality perpetrated by some historians is itself instrumental in the process of historical marginalisation of out groups.



Bianca Frohne: Living with Pain. Exploring *Strange Temporalities* in Premodern Disability History

In recent years, *temporality* has emerged as a valuable category of analysis for disability research. The concept of *crip time* encourages us to look at experiences of disability, illness, and pain in premodern cultures from a new perspective. This article focuses on the history of chronic pain, a phenomenon that has not received much attention regarding the Middle Ages and Early Modern period. This is partly due to the assumption that in premodern societies infectious diseases outweighed chronic illnesses. Still, many painful conditions developed in early years or even in childhood, such as hernias, urinary stones, ulcers, or inflammations, and could last for years or decades. We also regularly find examples where the cause of lasting pain was not known. Drawing on examples from printed miracle books, based on a tentative survey of collections dedicated to Marian shrines from the 15th to the early 17th centuries, the article studies premodern *pain narratives* with an emphasis on the *temporalities* of pain, asking how time is addressed with regard to pain, if the pain experience is described as changing over time, and what emotional and social impact chronic pain, as opposed to acute pain, could have on a day-to-day basis. In conclusion, the article contests notions of chronic pain as a disturbing, unnatural phenomenon emblematic of today's culture, and reflects on how historians can contribute to establishing a more nuanced view regarding lives lived and shared in, with, or through pain.