

Book Review

Title: *Crip Theory: Cultural Signs of Queerness and Disability*

Author: Robert McRuer

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Reviewer: Carrie Griffin Basas, J.D.

Robert McRuer's latest contribution to the fields of disability and queer studies is *Crip Theory: Cultural Signs of Queerness and Disability*. In this series of related essays, he allies disability and queer theory by situating them in relation to the dominant paradigms of "heteronormativity" and "compulsory able-bodiedness." Normativity's obsession with bodies that sense, move or experience pleasure differently manifests itself in the perpetual pursuit of fixing queer and disabled bodies.

"Homosexuality and disability clearly share a pathologized past," opens McRuer. (p. 1) Contemporary American culture is a place where able-bodiedness and heterosexuality "masquerade as a non-identity, as the natural order of things" (p. 1). Economic and sociopolitical changes have slowly transformed ideas about the visibility and invisibility of queer and disabled individuals. McRuer is concerned with how oppression is produced within the mainstream, and uses the lenses of able-bodiedness and heterosexuality to show the ways in which "normal" is but a construct of its own.

Through disability and queer theories, new identities, bodies and positions can be invented or challenged. McRuer links these emerging bodies of theory and practice with feminist, cultural, minority and film studies. In doing so, he demonstrates the place that queer and disability studies can have at the center of scholarly and cultural inquiries, disturbing notions of what is mainstream or desirable.

McRuer is not only concerned with how disability and queer theories inform other fields, but also how they sharpen and expand one another. Discourses about rehabilitation, pathology and "coming out" mark both areas of study. The demands placed upon people with queer or crip bodies are to become docile, in a Foucauldian sense (pp. 20, 22). To submit to "rehabilitative logics" is to allow "normal" others to "govern, in complex ways, who we can be" (p. 116).

Disturbing normative values is McRuer's central pursuit. He sees queer and disability studies as capable of subverting the powers of composure and control. A refrain of the disability rights movement is that eventually, everyone will experience disability. McRuer encourages that insight, but suggests, "If we live long enough, we will all become normates" (p. 198). He urges scholars and activists of disability and queer studies to participate in crafting their futures and evaluating their histories.

Crip Theory is insightful and compelling. At times, the chapters seem meandering and dense, but McRuer brings the reader back to his thematic arguments and always delights. Interestingly enough, his chapter on college composition classes being hijacked by a "corporate

model of efficiency” supports a less orderly, structured approach, in the name of disability and queerness (p. 148). Each chapter can be read alone, but is more satisfying in the collective. Scholars and students of humanities, social sciences and other disciplines will find a chapter or two that resonates with them, if not the entire book.

Carrie Griffin Basas is an attorney, nonprofit consultant and educator. She received her J.D. degree from Harvard Law School and her B.A. with honors from Swarthmore College. She received the Paul Hearne Award in disability rights leadership from the American Association of People with Disabilities. She is an adjunct professor in the MBA Program, Saint Joseph’s College of Maine.