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Pritchard, E. (2023). Midgetism: The Exploration and Discrimination of People with Dwarfism. Routledge. ISBN: 978-1032465944

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This book is one in an ever growing and insightful body of literature from Pritchard, which seeks to contribute empirically to the contemporary social and cultural experiences of people with dwarfism. Methodologically, Pritchard engages with autocratical discourse analysis (Bolt, 2021); a hybrid process which seeks to acknowledge the legitimacy and status of autoethnography, personal narrative, and subjectivity, in the pursuit and construction of knowledge. As a methodological tool, this approach places importance on Pritchard's identity and lived experience as a woman with dwarfism, alongside her reputation as an academic expert in the field of dwarfism and disability studies. Through this lens, the book goes on to explore the complexities and challenges that surround dominant discourses and cultural representations of dwarfism and its impact on the people who live with this condition.

From the outset, Pritchard underlines the important distinction between broader disability discrimination, and the specific forms of treatment experienced by people with dwarfism. A key strength in Pritchard's work, and in this particular book, is the recognition that for dwarfism research and advocacy to evolve, specific frameworks for interpreting data and constructing knowledge need to be built around the recognition that dwarfism, as a physical disability and social construct, is not socially regarded like other forms of disability. Justice cannot be fully achieved for people with dwarfism, if the somewhat unique experiences of ableism and discrimination experienced by this community, are conflated within the larger body of disability literature and theoretical models.

The book is divided into eight chapters. Major themes cover the representation of dwarfism in the media, as well as public entertainment spectacles, such as 'midget wrestling' and 'freak shows' past and present. The topics raised and broad direction of the chapters is well trodden terrain for scholars in the fields of cultural studies, disability, and dwarfism. Pritchard's objective here is not to necessarily claim a novel angle of analysis in this area, but to lay out a justification for her development of the term 'midgetism' as an all-encompassing definition to describe the unique forms of ableism and discrimination faced by people with dwarfism.

In the first chapter, Pritchard makes an argument for an exclusive term to describe the discrimination and dehumanisation of people with dwarfism. Introducing her newly coined 'ism' in the second chapter, Pritchard (p. 13) defines midgetism as an umbrella term which can be used to refer to 'a form of disablism, but as disability is not a homogenous group, it only seems right to provide a term that encompasses the unique disablism […] that people with dwarfism encounter'. An unapologetic activist, Pritchard (p. 12) describes her motivation:

> I want to provide a definition of the discrimination that is unique to people with dwarfism. I felt that the term 'midgetism' was appropriate, but at the same time, it is derived from a word that I detest […] The term presents flashbacks to numerous occasions where people have shouted it at me in public. However, it only seems fitting that a word used to describe the unique discrimination people with dwarfism experience should derive from the word midget, as it aids in reclaiming the term without placing it upon people with dwarfism.

Pritchard's work here is important. Likewise, somewhat distinctive from other forms of activism which seek to 'reclaim' words as a form of resistance and reclamation of power. In recognising the need to use 'midget' – a word she admittedly despises – Pritchard (re)locates the term away from, rather than upon, embodied actors, by inverting its meaning to describe the very types of discrimination and oppression its original use was intended to invoke upon this minority demographic. Previous scholarship regarding dwarfism has often highlighted the impact of cultural representations on people with dwarfism and sought to recognise their experiences as forms of disablism and hate crimes (Shakespeare et al., 2010). However, until now, scholarship has not adequately attempted to carve out a dwarfism specific term that can be utilised by academics to fully describe the unique types of disablism faced by people with dwarfism.

In the third chapter, Pritchard returns to the historical and cultural legacies of the Victorian freak shows. Representations of dwarfism, particularly the construction of dwarfs as not distinctly part of the human race, but living away from society in dwarf communities, set a precedent for societal attitudes that still impact us today. Intertwining her own experiences throughout, Pritchard reflects on her time as a student, when one resident in her accommodation remarked that ‘whenever he saw someone with dwarfism “he just had to pick them up” and had actually done that to a woman with dwarfism that he had seen in a supermarket’ (p. 35). Pritchard, considering the impact, highlights that regarding dwarfism, people’s societal consciousness, and what they deem appropriate behaviour, have been influenced through businesses and corporations which have capitalised on dehumanising the condition through the framing of dwarfism as a commodity, not as a disability.

In the fourth chapter, Pritchard, analysing midget wrestling as a form of employment, highlights how capitalism and the neoliberalist labour market have manipulated disability equality laws when it comes to dwarfism and wrestling. She argues that:

> The trick is to frame it as a job for them. It is a neoliberal coy that places the economic value of midgetism over social equality for the majority of people with dwarfism. Ironically, this hinders equality for people with dwarfism as opposed to promoting it. Those truly benefiting financially from the performance, are the averaged-sized promoters as opposed to the midget wrestlers (p. 57).

Moreover, Pritchard explores how dwarfism associations, such as LPUK, have conflicting interests in promoting equality and social justice. She argues that a dwarfism charity which advocates for dwarfs, would always be limited, and ultimately controlled through their networks and financial links to the very same entertainment industries perpetuating a stereotype of dwarfism that hinders the advancement of equality for people with dwarfism. In teasing out these conflicts, Pritchard questions in whose best interest are these types of associations and charities working for (if not for the pursuit of social justice and equality of people with dwarfism)?

This theme is further explored in the fifth chapter, whereby Pritchard extends her analysis to consider how the progress in employment and equality rights for disabled people have also come at a time when contemporary opportunities have nevertheless perpetuated a niche area for midget entertainment – thus subsequently, acts of midgetism. Pritchard posits that midgetism derived attitudes and opportunities are still fundamentally no different than those that hark back to the Victorian ‘freak shows’. A situation, she argues, results in ‘keeping dwarfs in their place’ (p. 62). Fleshing out these observations throughout the chapter, Pritchard offers readers her own experiences and encounters. For example, she discloses that as a child, a supposed ‘expert’ physician in Achondroplasia asked her mother if she had considered ‘joining the circus’ (p. 63). This encounter is all the more problematic given the status and authority the doctor inevitably held over her access to healthcare. In later years as an adult, she was randomly approached and asked, just because of her status as a person with dwarfism (with no history of acting or performance to her resume) if she would appear in pantomime, and during another encounter, asked to attend a birthday party dressed as a Hello Kitty character – which of course, she declined.

In the sixth chapter, Pritchard goes on to examine the ways in which acts of midgetism is defended – by midget entertainers who work in the industry, as well as wider society. A consumerist ideology which supplies the demand is driven by the notion of individual choice; nobody is forced to watch midget entertainment, and anyway, even if it is offensive, *it is only a joke* [my emphasis]. Exploring the personal narratives of dwarf entertainers, Pritchard observes that many have internalised midgetism narratives, therefore seek to be financially ‘compensated’ through the performance of midgetism. That is to say, as one entertainer argues, ‘I might as well use what I have [dwarfism] to the best of my advantage’ (p. 84). Pritchard raises the issue of collective responsibility. In other words, how dwarf entertainers may manipulate midgetism for their (financial) benefit, but by doing so they also reinforce further midgetism onto other dwarf bodies who do not share the same (financial) recourse as the entertainer. Again, Pritchard is outspoken regarding the impact she considers Warwick Davis’ (LPUK association for people with dwarfism) has within dwarf entertainment; specifically, the actions she believes perpetuated midgetism through his private agency. Moreover, she perceives this as a lack of concern for the wider dwarfism community, a sacrifice borne by others, due to his financial self-interest.

While Pritchard provides rich descriptions of midgetism through empirical data, personal reflections, and analysis of historical and cultural representations, she also highlights concerns of epistemic injustice. Although a theme hinted out throughout the book, the notion of epistemic injustice is most prominent in the seventh and eighth chapters. This is also where empirical data becomes sparser, and Pritchard’s voice as an activist in dwarfism advocacy really bores through. Using her positionality and experiences as an ‘embodied expert’ as a tool in which to analytically and reflexively explore midgetism, community, and activism, Pritchard takes to task dwarfism associations’ perceived (in)ability to cater for the needs of the demographic. In part, she argues, this is due to the over saturation of average statured parents involved in the associations silencing the voices of those with dwarfism. She argues:

> Associations are meant to allow people with dwarfism to discuss issues that they face in society and act as spaces of advocacy. However, the voices of people with dwarfism are often silenced by average-sized members, especially parents. There is nothing new about disabled charities being overrun by non-disabled people with their own self-interests in disability. There is a contention in regard to the participation of parents of disabled children in disability activism (p. 98).

Now, full disclosure: I am from the very demographic that Pritchard problematises. I am an average statured mother to a child with achondroplasia. In her book, Pritchard is firm in her assumption that '[o]ne of the biggest divides between parents and people with dwarfism is the result of conflicting attitudes concerning treatments and possible cures for people with dwarfism' (p. 102). Here is where I feel that at times Pritchard's observations and positionality hinders nuance in her analytical writing. For example, the above quote is an absolute binary division between 'people with dwarfism' and 'parents'. Yet my own research – I am a doctoral researcher exploring the very themes of mother's decision making regarding their dwarf children (a substantial component of that is healthcare choices and drug trials), observes that the boundaries are a lot blurrier. As an example, there was a significant number of what I coined 'mixed-statured' relationships – where one parent had dwarfism and became the driving force behind decisions to put their children through clinic drug trials to gain height. This was motivated by their own rejection of dwarfism as an inherently important part of their identity, as well as from their own traumatic experiences of midgetism. Therefore, these dwarf parents hoped that the gain in height would alleviate some of this abuse; a clear link to Pritchard's notion of internalised midgetism. There are also other examples throughout where these types of positions are drawn out, mainly through Pritchard's experiences of online forums and through associations for people with dwarfism. That is not to discredit Pritchard's findings, actually, it is important, as it demonstrates how differing ‘realities’ can be felt and embodied as sometimes ‘personal truths’. Building on Rogers (2020) notion of socio-political death to consider the experiences within the dwarfism community, I have previously argued that missing stories, results in missing data, as disabled people are silenced and their experiences stolen, resulting in socio-political death which is a form of symbolic violence against a community (Saville, 2020). Indeed, engaging with auto/biographic methods, I have also previously reflected how as Pritchard points out in her book, some ‘stories’ are just not mine (as an averaged statured mother) to own (Saville, 2020).

In tying up the themes of the book, Pritchard in the last chapter reflects on the cathartic nature of the writing process. However, she admits to finding the whole experience emotionally draining. As is evident in her writings, Pritchard is passionate about dwarfism advocacy and for society’s attitudes towards people with dwarfism to change. She cares about social and individual responsibility for this. As an academic and activist, she has positioned her (dwarf) body as a site for political and social action. A very literal embodied experience. Making a final call for a collective voice, she posits that this is the most effective way to drive forward social justice and change for people with dwarfism.

While Pritchard offers an arguably invaluable addition to research into the experiences of people with dwarfism through her defined term ‘midgetism’ – there is a noticeable lack of theoretical engagement and development related to ‘midgetism’ as a broader conceptual idea. Recognising Pritchard’s extensive research into the social, cultural and spatial experiences of people with dwarfism, further work in developing the concept of midgetism would break new ground theoretically, politically, and empirically. In terms of the embodied nature of the book, further engagement with feminist embodied theories could have contributed to the development of new feminist and embodied perspectives on contemporary dwarfism research. However, these considerations do not take away from Pritchard's contribution to dwarfism research.

Pritchard offers up midgetism as a potential lens in which to explore dwarfism discrimination in future scholarship. This book highlights the desperate need for an expansion of the theoretical landscape regarding dwarfism and embodied realities. Indeed, future work which engages with midgetism theoretically, allowing the concept to be built into a deployable framework would be pioneering for research into this area. This book would be of particular interest to academics and university students who focus on interdisciplinary research with themes which intersect the boundaries of cultural studies, sociology, media studies, disability studies, dwarfism, autoethnography, storytelling, and social movements.

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