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The nineteenth century American trend of identifying and classifying human bodies arose from the simultaneous development of several complex historical processes: “greater geographic and class mobility; urbanization, colonialism and expansion; the beginnings of the welfare state; and challenges to racial and gendered hierarchies” (1). Since the 1800s, “fantasies of identification” have been marked by a unifying characteristic—a tendency to “claim a scientific, often medical framework and function to consolidate the authority of medicine,” even though they “often exceed or contradict any actual scientific basis” (2-3). In *Fantasies of Identification: Disability, Gender, Race*, Ellen Samuels examines various ailments that unified “under the modern signifier of disability” in the 1800s (20). She uses the social model of disability, which highlights how differences from and exceptions to standards of normalcy caused social anxieties regarding the standardization and classification of human bodies (21).

In the first section of her study, entitled “Fantasies of Fakery,” Samuels sheds light on the relationship between the genuine and the counterfeit in the production, performance, and perception of disability. Using Ellen and William Craft’s 1845 camouflage as an example, she argues that through their effective masquerades, fugitive slaves undermined the southern white belief that race was an unchangeable category (27). Moving into the latter half of the century, in a chapter on Herman Melville’s *The Confidence Man: His Masquerade* (1857), Samuels considers public responses to various types of disabled bodies, highlighting the importance of words in such encounters (50). For instance, she notes that in Melville’s novel, “the mute” is cast as “a figure of pure textuality,” subject to derision (57). The apex of her argument is her

explanation of Melville's decision to cast an "herb-doctor," who asks about other people's medical conditions, as a con man. Samuels eloquently contends that such a choice "allows Melville to explore questions of truth and the efficacy of language" in the time "of the increasingly medicalized understanding of bodies" (62). The section ends with an analysis of Thomas Edison's portrayal of the con man in *The Fake Beggar* (1898) and of the figure of "the disability con" on the American screen in the twentieth century (66-67). Samuels points out that in cinematography, the concepts of disability and disability con are inseparable since the "real" and the "fake" of disabilities and filming techniques that render them get conflated (75). Thus, the use of language in performances, interpretations, and filming of disability shapes our perception of and responses to disabled bodies.

The section entitled "Fantasies of Marking" enables us to understand how permanent bodily marks influenced perceptions of disability in the mid- and late 1800s. Drawing on Hortense Spillers, who has argued that "the literal, physical marks of slavery's violence became a form of cultural memory internalized and passed down generationally as racial marks," Samuels contends in a chapter on Salomé Müller's trial that this mechanism is embedded in "modern critical slippages between literal and figurative marks" (89). Müller caught public attention in 1845 while trying to prove that she was "a white German immigrant kidnapped into slavery as a child" (89). She succeeded owing to her moles, "identified by witnesses from her infancy and *authenticated by eminent white physicians* who examined her under court order" (89, *my italics*). White slaves such as Müller complicated the process of identification, which is why Müller's moles had to be thoroughly examined. The necessity of such examinations affirms the interdependence of the language, truth, and bodies (91-92). Samuels develops this argument further in "Of Fiction and Fingerprints," where, using Mark Twain's *Pudd'nhead Wilson* (1894)

as an example, she demonstrates that disability underlies the interdependence of fingerprinting and scientific racism. Relying on the accuracy of fingerprinting, Lawyer Wilson resolves the case of black and white babies switched at birth, revealing who is black and who white, and whom should be enslaved and whom freed, thus shifting the power dynamic in the novel. Samuels further reminds us that the “conjoined twins” who appear in Melville’s novel were based on Italian twins Giacomo and Giovanni Tocci, who “shared a single set of legs and lower torso” (106). By choosing this unique example of extremely interdependent bodies, Twain metaphorically represents “slavocracy” since “black and white, slave and master” can never leave without quickly inverting the link between the bodies (107). The perception of both disability and fingerprints as permanent and unalterable phenomena perpetuates the power circuitry in interracial relations.

Samuels’s incisive argumentation in “Fantasies of Measurement” illuminates cultural methods for determining degrees of disability in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. She notes that a contemporary perception of disability centers on the premise “that disability is a knowable, obvious, and unchanging category” (121). Building on Foucault’s notion of biopolitical citizenship, Samuels names this mechanism “biocertification” (122). She observes that although physicians’ diagnoses are standardized cultural tools for proving disability, in some U.S. states they are not required if disabilities are detectable by eyesight (130-32). An example of the latter practice is citizens’ commentary regarding the (ab)users of parking spots reserved for the disabled on *Handicappedfraud.org* (133-37). Since not all disabilities are noticeable, some of the disabled people with invisible ailments have criticized the contributors for their rash judgments (139-40). Samuels expands her argument on biocertification by analyzing “the institutionalization of blood quantum identification for Native people of the United States” (141).

She concludes that Native Americans who chastise this practice consider it a reflection of white American hegemony, that those who approve of it view it as a tool for the protection of “tribal culture” (141), and that both “federal” and “tribal” establishments modify “definitions of *Indian* according to economic and other pressures” (145). Therefore, conceptualizations of ethnic belonging are shaped by a historical moment they stem from.

Samuels ends the section with a provocative analysis of the contemporary perception of DNA as a blueprint of selfhood. She points out that in the last half of the past century, “sex-linked chromosomes” were the prevalent tool in the process of sex identification (191-92) and that this method was regularly used in global athletic events (194-95). However, 1992 marked a shift in the testing procedures in sports championships since, after a long period of public chastisement, the International Amateur Athletic Federation (IAAF) abolished the “universal chromosomal testing” that year and introduced “genital inspection during doping tests and the right to require medical examinations on a random or individual basis” (195). Caster Semenya, for instance, was asked to submit to such examinations in 2009 after a few remarkable athletic successes (199). Although the results of her testing had not been publicized, in 2011 the IAAF surprised the public with “new” policies that completely disregarded “genetic sex” and instead emphasized the importance of “hormonal status, specifically the condition of hyperandrogenism, or an excess of male hormone (i.e., testosterone)” (203). Samuels notes that the IAAF’s official classification of women based on the thickness of pubic hair is racist since “the hirsutism scale presents a normative white Euro-American version of the female body” (207). Clearly, racial and gender fantasies shape the official classification of candidates for international athletic competitions and guide the process of admission.

Samuels concludes her study by underlining that fantasies that give birth to standardizations and groupings of human bodies should be scrutinized. Aware that completely dispelling either the scientific or cultural criteria of classification would push us into a realm of arbitrary judgments, she emphasizes that in our attempts to fathom “identity,” we must grant “greater authority to the expert knowledge that individuals have about their own bodies—and by extension, that communities have about their members” (214). This will help us build societies shaped by humanistic values.