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Difference and Identity: A Special Issue of Literature and Medicine

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In an increasingly diverse society, it is essential that medicine be aware of matters of difference. Medical humanities programs promote awareness of the social aspects of medicine, and the Association of American Medical Colleges has recently instituted cultural competencies for clinical interaction for the training of medical students. Yet these efforts to impart understanding of the cross-cultural aspects of medicine are still hindered by a significant limitation: within a medical system whose currency is diagnosis, difference is primarily defined through disease.

This special issue of *Literature and Medicine* focuses on difference and identity in the context of disease and disability. The articles collected here explore the complex ways in which notions of disease, disability, and difference are related and in which bodies marked by gender, race, disability, sexuality, and ethnic identities experience disease in specific ways. The essays take a humanities-based approach to the subject and emphasize an awareness and sensitivity to difference through forms of symbolic representation such as metaphor and narrative.

This volume provides a heuristic lens through which relationships between individual expressions of identity and communal experiences of difference can be considered. Each article speaks to the process whereby individual stories and strategies shape, and are in turn shaped by, the institutions they seek to transform.

Literature and Medicine is devoted to exploring interfaces between literary and medical knowledge and understanding. The journal showcases the creative and critical work of renowned physician-writers, leading literary scholars, and medical humanists.

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