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**Karin Lesnik-Oberstein (Ed.) (2015). *Rethinking Disability Theory and Practice: Challenging Essentialism*.
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In the introductory chapter of *Rethinking Disability Theory and Practice: Challenging Essentialism*, editor Karín Lesnik-Oberstein, citing the severe and inequitable impact of austerity measures in the UK and elsewhere on disabled people, acknowledges that in such pressing times it may seem like a “luxury – or even an indulgence” to engage in the theoretical “thinking on paper” that characterizes the articles in this collection (1). In response to this concern she points out that the concepts of “theory and practice are never separate” (1), thereby effectively setting the tone for the range of articles that follow, all of which attempt to “explore how thinking about disability is inhabited by a range of assumptions – essentialisms – that shape the arguments and actions that are invoked in relation to it” (1). She cautions that these discussions may not always stand out in obvious relevance to the need for “resistance” to ableism and “deprivation” (1) in its many forms but that this sort of theoretical, interdisciplinary and intersectional enterprise is nevertheless “a means precisely of uprooting disempowering, taken for granted assumptions in both theory and practice” (3).

Rethinking Disability Theory and Practice: Challenging Essentialism is both impressive and inclusive in the range of topics it addresses. I note, as a parent of a disabled child and as a practitioner in the field of inclusive education, some chapters stood out to me with greater urgency at first glance. These included the chapters on prenatal diagnosis, ADHD mythology,

decolonizing deaf education, and the place for psychoanalytic treatment in the mental health field given the increasing popularity of neuroscience as a means of understanding 'mental illness'. I found that these chapters did not disappoint, offering the promised challenges to many forms of essentialism that often dominate conversations on these topics. Other than this personal connection, however, it would run counter to the philosophy of this text, as well as misrepresent my experiences, to say that any of the other chapters presented as less "essential" to the stated intent of the book. I was equally rewarded by the chapters on materiality in disability studies and animal studies, the disabling impact of hirsutism, queer readings of in-vitro fertilization, the phenomenon of interpreting a character from a Herman Melville short story as autistic, a critical reading of vision as it is discussed in a review of the painting *Blind Beggars*, and constructions of the disabled subject in critical responses to Hitchcock's *Rear Window*. A more detailed analysis of the de-essentializing arguments used in each of these chapters is beyond the scope of this review but it is my hope that a review of some of the claims of two chapters reveals how each of the chapters of this volume have been carefully selected to open up theoretical space within essentialist thinking about disability and attendant assumptions and practices.

The chapter on prenatal diagnosis addresses a profoundly difficult issue that pits concepts including choice, agency, and reproductive rights against a concern about ableism (Wright, 2012). Lesnik-Oberstein unsettles Shakespeare's claim that, based on our understanding of identity and personhood, the "I would not have been born" (11) argument, so frequently evoked in debates about screening, is emotionally resonant but illogical. In doing so, she points out that this argument rests on the rationalist assumption of an embryonic "cluster of cells" falling short of any meaningful notion of existence but discounts that more abstractly the individual is "always already a subject" once it has been conceived. (11). Similarly, the author

uses temporality to challenge Davis's claim that prenatal decision making is a balance between the "desire to have a child for [one's] own sakes and being open to the moral reality that the child will exist for *her* own sakes" (14, emphasis in original), and that "children have a right to an open future" (14). The author argues that this reasoning as well as the analysis of the problems with sexual selection that follow, posit good parenting in relation to a child that exists even as the child is seen in the larger argument not to exist. Finally, the author introduces an unacknowledged essentialism in this debate by pointing out that conversations on prenatal screening all tend to privilege the concept, biologically and in terms of our capitalist economy, of "ownness" or the "own child" of reproductive technology. She sets the privileged concept of "ownness" against concepts such as "any child", "other child", "of adoption, fostering, or friends" (16) demonstrating that conversations around *which* choices might be appropriate, moral, or permissible are limited in the contemporary moment. Though the author does not identify this pattern in order to suggest "guidelines" or provide "answers" (16) in making this claim she does mention the hope that it will provoke "different and further" questions in the debate.

Despite reading frequently in the areas of disability theory and queer theory, I had never viewed the issue of women's hirsutism through these particular lenses. I, therefore, experienced the chapter in which Louise Tondeur offers this particular set of perspectives as surprising, revealing, and thought-provoking. With particular reference to the idea of the "policing stare" (37) as explored in both crip and queer theory, the author offers a compelling view of how "reading a woman as hairy is a form of social control, and, as such, is a disabling force" (37). Tondeur insists that whatever else hair is, it is not "trivial" and indeed is often a marker for the enforcement of rigid gender categorization and violence towards those inhabiting marginalized categories. Tondeur evokes Butler concept of "queering" rigid categorization

through embodiment (39) and Inckle's notion of "casting...the dehumanizing gaze back into the eye / I of the beholder" (40). The chapter goes on to chronicle the many clinical interpretations of hirsutism that tend to "produce what they are treating" (44) and declare "every hairy female...an endocrine problem" (43). The final section analyses the politics of bathrooms can initially subject hirsute women "the stare". Yet, once inside the "threshold" of, for example, the disabled toilet, this space also holds the potential to be a space for "psychical replenish[ment]" (49). Overall the chapter is very successful in depicting how hirsutism can "impinge on what it means to 'enter the category of the Human'" (50) and, as a rejoinder to the policing of "the stare" does indeed suggest the need for queer / crip coalitions around this particular issue.

Gadamer (1992), in a convocation speech, reflected "bureaucratized teaching and learning systems dominate the scene, but nevertheless, it is everyone's task to find his [sic] free space. The task of our human life, in general, is to find free spaces and learn to move therein" (59). The tendency for even activist discourses to become institutionalized and sedimented, as many of the ideas surrounding disability rights movements such as school inclusion have (Florian, 2014), speaks to the need for challenging, original, multidisciplinary, and above all, non-iconic work that seeks out such free spaces. Overall, as I hope my analysis of these two exemplary chapters suggests, "Challenging Essentialism[s]..." is successful in this project. My only words of caution are that, given the complexities of the project of categorical unsettling that the authors engage in, the text, while not unlively, is thickly theoretical and likely better suited to scholars with familiarities with disability studies, and / or queer theory, or at least the roots of critical theory that undergird much of this scholarship. That said, this work is deserving of close reading; it reveals the many free spaces in the eclectic approaches contained within its pages.

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