

## BOOK REVIEW

**Title:** *Dissonant Disabilities: Women with Chronic Illnesses Explore Their Lives*

**Editors:** Diane Driedger & Michelle Owen

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**Reviewer:** Carrie Griffin Basas, J.D.

Diane Driedger and Michelle Owen's edited volume, *Dissonant Disabilities: Women with Chronic Illnesses Explore Their Lives*, is a much-needed contribution to disability scholarship. It fills a space that still has room for other volumes yet to be written—research, literature, and essays on the experiences of women with disabilities.

Driedger and Owen solicited short pieces from women with disabilities around the world and this volume reflects that eclecticism. While the book's editors are Canadian, the book also has contributions from Singapore, Australia, Scotland, and other countries. The works included range from social sciences to memoirs, and explore “invisible” to more visible disabilities and social and personal reactions to them. Many of the essays are moving and personal, such as Susan Wendell's “Notes from Bed: Learning from Chronic Illness.” Wendell writes, “Can we value suffering without abandoning the effort to prevent or relieve it?” (p. 217). She and the other authors in the volume challenge the reader to consider how women with chronic illnesses are received by society and by feminism.

The variety and diversity of the work can be distracting, even distractingly dissonant, at times. The editors arranged the volume in five parts: “Clashing Expectations,” “Unpredictable Bodies,” “Disturbing Work,” “Shifting Relationships,” and “Traversing Dissonance.” The reader is sometimes jarred by the lack of a transition from one piece within these parts to the next. The editors included an introduction to each part within the whole, but more of a bridge between the pieces would have helped the reader to see the connections between the pieces and the editors' reasons for selecting them.

Driedger and Owen remind us they performed light editing, if any, of the submissions and tried to let the pieces speak for themselves. Once the reader adjusts to the varied cadences, the effect can be positive as well. Women with chronic illnesses explore their lives and illnesses (e.g., depression, cancer, anorexia, chronic fatigue, chemical sensitivities, fibromyalgia, bipolar disorder, chronic pain) with candor and detail, as do their partners, friends, and allies.

The reviewer can see this volume being used within college and university classrooms as a jumping-off point for a discussion on the varied experiences of women with disabilities. This book could also be a satisfying read for anyone with a disability who has felt underrepresented in existing collections of essays and memoirs. The voices are those of a group of diverse, dynamic women claiming their experiences and staking valuable discursive territory.

The editors and the authors undertook a grand project in putting together this volume. In doing so, they encourage others to take on similar projects in greater depth or detail. This book is a commendable start to a series of works in this area.

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