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Book Review

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Ann Leahy's book *Disability and Ageing: Towards a Critical Perspective* is a welcome addition to emerging scholarship that interrogates the intersections of aging and disability. Both are obviously "fundamental aspects of humanity" (2), but there are paradoxes between scholarship, policy, and popular understandings of how they intersect (3). For example, while the economic 'burden' of impairment in old age is a key focus of public policy, little is known about those older adults at the centre of these policies—those living with disability or chronic illness. Further, while impairment is associated with old age, it is rarely considered a disability at this stage in life, and as this reading audience is likely aware, research into age and disability have been overwhelmingly siloed. The limited scholarship that attends to this 'aging-disability' nexus has focused on policy approaches to and experiences of care between those aging with and those aging into disability (see the edited volume by Aubrecht, Kelly, and Rice 2020). Leahy's book addresses these paradoxes by exploring how social processes of aging intersect with disablement in old age, paying particular attention to the experiences of people aging *with* and *into* disability. Understanding how these experiences converge and diverge is an important step in creating policies, programs, and discourses that accurately reflect the complexity of aging and disability.

The book is divided into two sections. The first section is a comprehensive literature review, spanning three chapters, that students, scholars, and policymakers engaging with questions of aging and disability will find useful. In Chapter 2, Leahy covers variable definitions of disability, noting that she follows a relational approach to disability as a product of both social and biological processes. In Chapter 3, she reviews intersections and differences between scholarship in critical gerontology and disability studies, and in Chapter 4 discusses the separation of public policies on aging and disability and its consequences. One of the main arguments of her literature review is how disability is understood and approached changes as people get older; in old age, structural approaches to disability are replaced with medicalized approaches to impairment. In response to this tendency, Leahy's study explores aging through a disability lens.

In the second half of the book, the author presents an empirical study based on interviews with individuals who are aging with disability (AwithD) and those who have experienced disability with aging (DwithA) in Ireland. She explores not just how older people experience physical and sensory impairment, but how they interpret their increasing disablement, whether as 'aging,' 'disability,' 'success,' or 'decline' (Chapter 5). Adding to the interpretation piece, she explores how disability and aging are impacted by the environment, which her participants experienced variably as both disabling

(compounding their bodily limitations) and enabling (mitigating their bodily limitations) (Chapter 6). Foregrounding this balance, between the limitations of the body and the environment but not allowing either to foreclose possibilities of self and meaning is a commitment of Leahy's book.

Leahy's findings are illuminating in their challenging of the assumptions that tend to separate understandings of age and disability. For example, individuals who experienced disability onset with aging described being disabled, but not necessarily because of their bodily limitations. At least for those with resources, impairments could be mitigated through environmental adaptations such as ramps and canes (though those who lacked economic resources expressed being disabled by their bodies). Instead, disablement was experienced through the exclusion that occurs with being othered or disregarded as 'old' or incompetent (116-117). For these individuals, disability in later life meant a loss of social status having "crossed a boundary into a discredited social category due to ableist norms" (139). In contrast, those aging with disability tended to reflect positively on aging because they felt more included as they got older. Leahy notes, as have others (Grenier, Griffin, and McGrath 2020) that the structuring of disability policy and programs separates disabled individuals from peer groups. In later life, the lives of those AwithD became more aligned with normative expectations of the life course (136) and they felt less othered than they had in their younger years.

This is not an ethnography of aging and disability.. Rarely does Leahy identify the particular disability of her participants. Though sometimes references to wheelchairs, hearing loss, or conditions such as post-polio syndrome are included, she does not "consider the cause of impairment important" (179). Yet certain disabilities have strong community identification, such as deaf communities (Friedner 2015) that would affect the social processes that shape the experiences of deaf older adults. By Leahy's own admission, more research is needed to understand the specificities and complexities of aging and disability. Exploring the particularities of aging within disability groups seems an important next step. On this point, I was surprised that in her extensive literature review she did not reference Samantha Solimeo's (2009) study of older adults with Parkinson's Disease. Though not specifically from a disability perspective, it is in my mind an important early work on how impairment is experienced in later life. Further, I found a fair amount of redundancy throughout the book as Leahy routinely offers extensive roadmaps of what is to come as well as extensive reviews of what has already been covered. Still, policy makers and academics will find this book an excellent resource and will likely feel inspired, as I was, to contribute more anthropological perspectives to research on disability and aging.

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