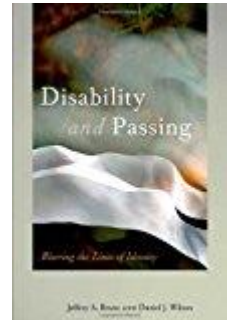


Jeffrey A. Brune, Daniel J. Wilson, eds. *Disability and Passing: Blurring the Lines of Identity*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2013. vi + 206 pp. \$29.95, paper, ISBN 978-1-4399-0980-5.



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Scholars of disability have produced numerous studies demonstrating their understanding of disability as embodied subjectivity, and the ways in which notions of disability, race, class, and gender interact to shape social identity. *Disability and Passing: Blurring the Lines of Identity*, a collection of interdisciplinary essays, provides one of the first major interventions into the subject of passing with regard to disability. Passing, as editors Jeffrey A. Brune and Daniel J. Wilson describe it, is multidirectional, with individuals acting to enhance or decrease signs of disability when others apply a disabled/nondisabled identity to a person. Further, they stress that "rather than assume a dichotomy between disability and normality, an examination of passing from a disability perspective reveals how the social construction of disability remains fluid. It also informs our understanding of what constitutes "normal," since passing expresses, reifies, and helps create concepts of normality" (p. 2). These understandings of disability and normality are uniformly presented in the es-

says as historically contingent, deeply rooted in the specific times and places in which they occur.

Taken together, the collected essays make three substantial historiographical corrections to Erving Goffman's seminal work *Stigma: Notes on the Management of Spoiled Identity* (1963). First, they argue that passing occurs at both the interpersonal level and within larger social, political, and economic contexts. Second, they center rather than offer the disabled perspective. And third, they demonstrate that passing, and by extension stigma, is always rooted in a particular historical context. The diversity of topics further demonstrates the futility of any attempts to essentialize. Tobin Sieber's article "Disability as Masquerade" provides the common thread throughout the book, with the scholars expanding on his articulation of an analytical framework for passing.[1]

The diverse range of topics covered in this book is impressive. The eight essays together argue for the need to deeply contextualize and historicize passing through examinations of a range

of disabilities and situations of passing. Two general groupings come out of the essays: conceptual and discursive examinations of passing, and case studies of particular forms of physical passing. Brune's essay on the discourse of disability passing in literature, David Linton's piece on advertising and menstruation, Peta Cox's examination of performativity and sanity, and Allison C. Carey's essay on the shifting sociopolitical contexts for passing in twentieth-century America all fall into the first category. This group of essays highlights the range of analytical frameworks leveraged in this volume. Cox engages more theoretically, taking Judith Butler's notions of performativity and gender and tracing how performances of sanity cannot be simply explained through other existing frameworks. Brune focuses on the intellectual and cultural constructions of disability, particularly tracing through John Howard Griffin's *Black Like Me* (1961) how the erasure of disability on the body can link to erasures of disability in literature and public discourse. Linton carries the theme of erasure of disability into the realm of advertising, effectively demonstrating how twentieth-century marketing reinforced and shaped menstruation as a known, "treated," and hidden condition.

The other essays in the volume center on historical case studies of passing. Wilson examines the complicated issues for polio survivors and their families raised in relation to Franklin Delano Roosevelt's highly public efforts and success at passing as able-bodied. He highlights the physical and psychological stresses of efforts to pass/perform as normal over time, showing how post-polio symptoms forced polio survivors to renegotiate their identities with respect to FDR. Dea H. Boster examines the complex interactions of race, class, and gender in accounts of enslaved African Americans' varied uses of passing, along with others' assumptions, to assert themselves and subvert slavery. Hers is the only essay to foreground non-white actors, while adding a rich layer to studies of slavery. Michael A. Rembis's essay considers the

experiences of elite disabled athletes from paralympians to baseball players and the costs--physical and psychological--of the notoriety and acclaim generally heaped on the athletes. In this context, elite athletes must align with dominant white, male nondisabled expectations of performance and personal conduct. Kristen C. Harmon takes a different approach by combining her own personal experiences of oral deaf education with a broader study of how networks of parents and institutions sought to compel children to pass. She uses readings of promotional films from the Oberkotter Foundation to unpack the messages, and lack of information, used to encourage a certain ideal of child normality.

As an opening salvo, *Disability and Passing* is not able to fully answer the wealth of questions and topics raised by the essays, a point that the editors make upfront. With respect to intersectionality, race and class are often less extensively integrated into analyses of disability than gender. The inclusion of considerations of whiteness studies, for example, would deepen examinations of normality where the assumption is that it is coded, in many ways, white and middle class to upper class. There also remain rich opportunities for enlarging the scope of the study temporally. Boster's essay is the lone study outside of the twentieth century, and effectively shows that passing is not a recent phenomenon, but one with a long historical story. The essays largely remain in an American context--Cox's piece stems from Australia, but she links it to American notions of sanity--and they point to interesting questions of how disability passing occurs in other places and times. These areas of opportunity are not weaknesses in the book, but rather show the potential of this inquiry. The essays are approachable, and as a teaching tool could be assigned to advanced undergraduate and graduate students. *Disability and Passing* provides a strong and accessible entry into this topic, and lays the groundwork for a wealth of

scholarship for continued investigating questions of identity, passing, and disability.

Note

[1]. Tobin Siebers, "Disability as Masquerade," *Literature and Medicine* 23 (Spring 2004): 1-22.

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