2. Variations in Connective Tissue

There are many variations in connective tissue that occur in human and animal species. Two cautions: 1) Connective tissue variations are framed by science and medicine as “disorders.” We use the term “variation” to resist pathologizing human diversity as “disease.” However, it is important to hold in tension that many of these variations are labeled as disease/disorder because they produce pain, suffering, and other impairments that diminish wellbeing. We will proceed with the term variation while honoring the lived experience of people and animals who have variations in their connective tissues. 2) Scientists using the reductive model of science and medicine have categorized connective tissue disease into two types–genetic and acquired/autoimmune–but some acquired/autoimmune connective tissue diseases are also heritable. Moreover, genetic variants in connective tissue often have impacts on immune function that can produce autoimmunity (an immune response to one’s own tissues). This is a clue that we should be critical of the categories used to describe variations in connective tissue. The categories scientists use are socially constructed and reflect the culture and politics of the context in which scientists live and work.

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