

## RDS EDITORIAL

Do I Have to Like It?  
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One of the actual problems of being an enthusiastic, “I am disabled now hear me roar” type of Crip is that sometimes being disabled is not very sexy. How to respond when someone close to you says, “But I don’t see you as being disabled. I just see you as yourself.” This is a lovely sentiment during, say, a romantic dinner on a cruise ship, but not so lovely when you fall on your face disembarking from the ship because your special someone forgets that you are blind. How can you respond with enthusiasm in the first instance, when you are glad to be seen as yourself in all of your loveliness, and yet still expect people to remember that there are times when you *want* to embrace your Disabled identity, or simply need their assistance?

I am not talking about the complete strangers who approach you with, “Aw shucks, you don’t *look* or *act* disabled.” These people need to reflect seriously on their prejudices and assumptions and don’t really warrant the space of an entire column. What interests me is the question of, are there times in our daily lives when being Disabled is just not relevant? If I assert myself in one instance as “Loud and Proud,” am I being hypocritical if the next moment I “Just Wanna Be Me” (and that doesn’t include my impairments)?

I remember the first time I felt like I was part of a community of people with disabilities. It was the summer between 6th and 7th grade, and I was attending, for the first time, an Easter Seals sleep-away camp. Up to that point, I don’t even remember actually meeting another person with a disability, and my disability had frankly just been a source of frustration and oppression. My mother and I pulled up to the cabins on the shores of the Hood Canal in Northern Washington State, and there was a group of kids with various disabilities playing an enthusiastic game of volleyball with lots of cheering and humorous put downs. I was like, “Whoa, this is different.” The whole week was like that. I was finally among my peers and to be a member you had to have a disability, which entitled you to forget that your disability existed. Numerous other experiences in my youth and young adulthood encouraged me to simultaneously see my disability as “something to be proud of” and “something that doesn’t matter.”

I also remember the first disability studies text I ever read, the oft-cited *Claiming Disability* by Simi Linton (1998), a book that seemed radical for a twenty-something who had never read the word “freak” with relish. One memorable passage:

“We have come out not with brown woolen lap robes over our withered legs or dark glasses over our pale eyes but in shorts and sandals...We are, as Crosby, Stills and Nash told their Woodstock audience, letting our ‘freak flags fly’...”(pg. 3).

These days, as a faculty of Disability Studies, I spend my days thinking about, writing about, and teaching about disability as a positive identity. I am often called upon to assert myself as Disabled in order to protect my interests. In my profession, and sometimes in my daily life, being Disabled is a badge of honor. But the fact is that I don’t really spend very much time on

any given day thinking about *my* disability identity. Most of the time I am thinking about what I will cook for dinner, whether or not it will rain today, whether or not we have the money to go on vacation this summer, how I will get my daughter to do her homework, and how cute I (hope I) look in my new pink Ellen Tracy top and LA Girl almost-black skinny cropped jeans.

In the poem, “Beauty and Variations” (*Disability Studies Reader*, L. Davis, Ed., 2013, pg. 529), Kenny Fries writes: “What is beautiful? Who decides? Can the laws of nature be defied?”

Is it o.k. to “like” it when someone says “I don’t think of you as being disabled”? Just as on Facebook, there doesn’t seem to be a way to “sort of like it.” I think that I have spent so much time trying to make good of my disability that I have forgotten that “identity” is just a way of projecting ourselves in a definable way. It doesn’t mean that others who are close to us can’t see how complex we really are.