

## Letter from the Editor

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As I read the narratives in this issue on Disability as Diversity, I came to a deeper understanding of the meaning of this phrase. The articles point to a distinct reality experienced by those who cannot pretend to speak with disembodied voices, whose bodies must be acknowledged constantly in everyday life. This reminder of the tenuous nature of life may be threatening to those of us who have not come to terms with our own mortality. The view through the woods of the socially constructed everydayness of life offered by the differently abled may impel some of us to turn away with a shudder. One repeated theme of these articles that I found compelling was the way we have been schooled not to look directly at the disabled. This is not out of politeness, as we have convinced ourselves, but out of fear of being reminded of our human frailty. To live in such a shadowed reality, as a differently abled person, is to experience the oppression of the invisible. It is to experience the marginalization of being the feared other. In this way the disabled share with all oppressed groups the outcast status.

The concept of disability itself comes from the perspective of the outsider looking at persons who may have less in common than it might appear, aside from

their treatment by the rest of us. I am thinking of how differently people who are hearing impaired, visually impaired, or moving through space in wheelchairs, for example, experience the world and solve the everyday problems of reality. Yet we place all those who seem different from us in a bodily way into a single group, speaking of them, reacting to them, and considering them as one. These articles made me see again the invidious nature of this social construction embraced, however inchoately, by many of us--that the disabled are less capable and less whole than we are.

The privileges of the ableist culture have shadowed the reality of the barriers we construct for the disabled. These barriers include physical ones, and it is here that progress is being made and measured, as accessible buildings, academic, and workplace accommodations are growing through legislative initiatives. These physical barriers have become economic barriers, excluding the disabled from the benefits of productivity in a market economy and it is important that they be overturned. But the psychological and social barriers of living in a world little understood by others, and of feeling minimized and dehumanized in silent but powerful ways have a profound impact that the culture of disability is

forced to confront.

These articles remind us that the full range of human experiences, including support and betrayal, belongs to those whom we have called disabled. Like our hold on life, our hold on our body wholeness is time limited. The change can be sudden or gradual, but it will come. We will become the "other", sooner or later. These articles may make us wonder whether, when it is our time; we will have the strength of these authors.

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