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Navigating Ambivalence

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Abstract

This commentary explores the sometimes uncomfortable ambivalence that colors most people's experience of disability, either as an aspect of a person's own identity, or as an aspect of a person's interactions with a person with a disability. Disabilities are experienced by many as *both* a positive and a negative aspect of a person's identity. The commentary describes the work of two disability scholars who have recently explored how this ambivalence affects both legal schemes and parenting decisions, and argue for a 'destigmatizing' of this ambivalence. The framework provided by these scholars illuminates ways in which ambivalence about the experience of disability is revealed by many of the contributors to this collection of essays, and suggests that an open confrontation with this ambivalence may facilitate more satisfactory relationships between people with and people without disabilities.

Commentary Navigating Ambivalence

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Abstract: This commentary explores the sometimes uncomfortable ambivalence that colors most people's experience of disability, either as an aspect of a person's own identity, or as an aspect of a person's interactions with a person with a disability. Disabilities are experienced by many as both a positive and a negative aspect of a person's identity. The commentary describes the work of two disability scholars who have recently explored how this ambivalence affects both legal schemes and parenting decisions, and argue for a 'destigmatizing' of this ambivalence. The framework provided by these scholars illuminates ways in which ambivalence about the experience of disability is revealed by many of the contributors to this collection of essays, and suggests that an open confrontation with this ambivalence may facilitate more satisfactory relationships between people with and people without disabilities.

Key Words: Accommodate, Acceptance, Ambivalence, Devalued Difference, Disability, Disability Culture, Identity, Stigmatize, Valued Difference

One of the many valuable insights contained in this collection of extraordinary glimpses into the lives of people with disabilities is that ambivalence pervades most people's experience of their own disability. Many of the authors in this collection both embrace the aspects of their identity shaped by their disabilities, and bemoan the aspects of their disability that make life difficult for them. They also offer some surprising observations about how failure to appreciate this ambivalence can undermine their relationships with people who do not share their disabilities. As Emily Hutchinson eloquently comments, "It is a rare few who accept what Cerebral Palsy and epilepsy offer to my life and to their

own, with all of their accompanying complexities, possibilities, and contradictions." Two disability scholars have recently written important works exploring that same ambivalence from other perspectives, such as how this ambivalence complicates fashioning satisfactory legal schemes on matters important to people with disabilities, and how it complicates the task of parenting a child with a disability. The authors in this collection validate some of the premises of these scholars. More importantly, though, these essays offer some important lessons in navigating that ambivalence through the panoply of relationships between people with disabilities and people without disabilities.

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