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Power and Resistance in the Disabled Community

The disabled community is a group whose thoughts and ideas tend not to be recognized often enough in the media. In Sky Cubacub's "Radical Visibility: A Disabled Queer Clothing Reform Movement Manifesto", Zipporah Arielle's "What Seeing Selma Blair Walk The Red Carpet Felt Like, As A Disabled Woman", and Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha's "Crippling The Resistance: No Revolution Without Us", the authors each discuss different personal stories related to having a disability. These three personal accounts from *Disability Visibility* depict a portrait of the disabled community that many abled individuals fail to recognize – a portrait of undeniable power and inspiring resistance.

All three of the authors have unique personal experiences with their disabilities. Sky Cubacub is a nonbinary clothing designer whose stomach mysteriously developed a still undiagnosed stomach disorder when they were twenty-one years old. When they began looking for clothes to fit their needs as a nonbinary person with this disorder, they noticed that there was a lack of options for people like them. Because of this, they decided to start their own clothing line that makes clothes catered towards disabled people. Zipporah Arielle is a writer and a disabled woman who uses a cane as a mobility device. When she saw Selma Blair, an actress with MS, walk onto the red carpet with a cane, she felt inspired to start showing off her cane more often. Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha is a nonbinary writer who has autism. They have experienced ableism in their life with people having ideas about what they are capable of.

Each author's experience with their disability contributes to their essays, as the reader gets to hear from a disabled person's perspective on certain topics.

Throughout *Disability Visibility*, all three of these authors describe a particular power within the disabled community. Cubacub explores the power of clothing created for those with disabilities, Arielle discusses the power of disability representation, and Piepzna-Samarasinha explains the power of having well-honed survival skills. In their essay, "Radical Visibility: A Disabled Queer Clothing Reform Movement Manifesto", Sky Cubacub shows the power generated by having clothing made specifically for disabled people. Cubacub explains how they created their clothing line because they recognized that there was a lack of clothes in the clothing industry that catered towards the various needs of disabled people. They explain that fixing this gap is so important to them because "[They] consider [clothing] armor because it has the power to give you the confidence and strength to feel comfortable in your first skin" (Cubacub). Before Cubacub's clothing line, people with disabilities could rarely find clothes that fit their unique needs. After creating their "Radical Visibility" clothing line, Cubacub has been able to give disabled people the power to go against societal norms and feel confident in the way that they present themselves. The clothing previously available for the disabled community tended to only cater to older people and didn't include much activewear. These old clothing options did not allow for the disabled community to feel powerful through their clothing because it pushed the idea that disabled people should hide parts of themselves and that they can't be active. With Cubacub's clothing line, disabled people are able to feel empowered to embrace themselves and not feel ashamed of who they are. The bold patterns and colors of the clothing items help them to stand out. Additionally, the designer does not have sizes for their line, instead they take measurements so that customers don't have to worry about being a certain size. When disabled

people can feel good in the clothing they wear and the way they present themselves, it can give them the power to also feel good about who they are and the disability that they have. Cubacub's clothing line proves how garments catered towards all types of disabled people is so powerful because it can allow them to celebrate their disabilities rather than hide them.

In her essay "What Seeing Selma Blair Walk The Red Carpet Felt Like, As A Disabled Woman", Zipporah Arielle describes a different form of power in the disabled community – the strong influence that media representation can have on the community. Arielle explains how seeing Selma Blair, a celebrity with MS who uses a cane, on the television was so important because seeing Blair "admit that she too sometimes falls or drops things is encouraging, and to do so publicly helps both to spread awareness and to encourage those in similar situations." This representation is so encouraging to the disabled community because Blair proves that those with disabilities don't have to hide their mobility devices and that having a disability doesn't mean that you cannot work. This encouragement is powerful because it allows the disabled community to feel seen and be inspired to go out in the world and not be ashamed of their disability. It also proves to the community that disabled people can do things that those that are able-bodied can do like walking the red carpet or any other activity that a disabled person wants to do. Having someone in the media that one feels is similar to them gives those with disabilities the power to feel that they can embrace who they are.

The third writer, Piepzna-Samarasinha, celebrates not the power of fashionable, unique clothing, nor the power of media representation, but rather the power of creativity within the disabled community. In their essay, Piepzna-Samarasinha describes how they used to feel frustrated when trying to help change the world with protests like Black Lives Matter. They explain that because disabled people can't always act in the same way as able-bodied people in

these protests and revolutions, they have to come up with other ways to help. They give examples such as “Using our mobility devices to block entrances,” and “Using the ways some of us might be seen as “helpless cripples” who aren’t a threat to sneak in places or do things in plain sight, like lockdowns, wheatpasting, banner drops, occupying offices, or much more” (Piepzna-Samarasinha). The author describes how even though disabled people may not be able to contribute in ways that are considered typical, the disabled community is still able to make powerful contributions. By disabled people getting involved in revolutions, the impact of the revolutions can become a lot stronger. By coming together and coming up with different ways that they are able to help, the disabled community shows how powerful their involvement can be. The disabled community exudes lots of power through their creative efforts to participate in revolutions. Each of the three authors’ personal accounts regarding disability demonstrate much power. All of the different forms of power described by these authors allow members of the disabled community to be more visible.

Besides demonstrating tremendous power, these three authors also engage in resistance against certain societal views about the disabled community. Cubacub discusses resisting societal norms about how disabled people should dress while Arielle discusses involvement in resisting able-bodied people’s ideas on what disabled people can and cannot do, and Piepzna-Samarasinha discusses how simply living as a disabled person is resistance itself. In their essay, Sky Cubacub shows how they are resisting societal norms in fashion with their clothing line. Cubacub’s clothing line is designed for the disabled community to be able to embrace who they are through clothing. They point out that “Cultural norms don’t encourage trans and disabled people to dress stylishly or loudly. Society wants us to “blend in” and not draw attention to ourselves.” Cubacub challenges these norms and asks the reader to consider “What if we were to resist society’s desire

to render us invisible? What if, through a dress reform, we collectively refuse to assimilate?” Because of current societal norms, many disabled people try to dress or act in a way that makes them blend in more with able-bodied people. Cubacub’s clothing line was designed to help disabled people feel confident in what they wear and in themselves so that they are no longer “blending in”. It allows them to not only stop hiding their disability but instead to embrace it and be proud of it. This rejects the idea that society has about disabled people dressing more “normal”. Through the clothing designed by and for disabled people, the disabled community is able to engage in resistance against societal norms in the clothing industry.

In her essay, Zipporah Arielle describes a slightly different way that these stereotypes about the disabled community are resisted. Arielle explains how Selma Blair’s red carpet appearance rejects a variety of ideas by “opting to let her mobility device shine.” She states that other ideas that Blair rejects are “The notion that being sick means we cannot work...She’s rejecting pity and rejecting the “tragedy” narrative that so often is forced on those who have received a diagnosis” (Arielle). By appearing on the red carpet with her cane and including it in all of her pictures, she rejects the idea that mobility devices can’t be stylish. By walking the red carpet as a person with MS, she is showing that people who are sick or disabled can still do things that people don’t expect them to be able to do. She is showing that she is proud of her disability and is not afraid to show that she has it nor is she afraid to work while having it. Blair’s appearance on the red carpet shows how the disabled community can engage in resistance by doing things that many able-bodied people don’t believe that they can do.

Piepzna-Samarasinha, the third author, also shows resistance in the disabled community, but they show how simply surviving is one of the ways that disabled people engage in resistance. They explain how a goal of many of those in the disabled community is just trying to survive and

explains that “To exist is to resist” is a saying many of us [(disabled people)] say- all the ways we survive a world that wants to kill us as disabled people is resistance” (Piepzna-Samarasinha). In society, disabled people tend to experience a lot of ableism. There are also many things that are not accessible for them as disabled people. Because of these challenges, the world is set up in a way that is not favorable for the disabled community. This means that their thriving in this world is an act of resistance in itself, as to do well in this world, they often have to fight and go against the barriers that society has created. By fighting to survive as disabled people, they reject all of the ways the world is set up to kill them. In describing these different forms of resistance, both Cubacub and Arielle describe resisting ableist paradigms, and Samarasinha reveals that disabled people need to fight for their survival, in large part due to obstacles imposed by the able-bodied community.

Each of the three authors’ depictions of different aspects of having a disability display various ways in which power and resistance within the disabled community. This power and resistance show aspects of the disabled community that are not often recognized by those that are able-bodied. These aspects that are uncommonly recognized by able-bodied people are common themes for those that are disabled, and through these three articles and others like it, more people will be able to recognize these strengths of those that are disabled. In the future, there should no longer be a need for those with disabilities to have to fight so hard to survive. Additionally, there should be many more clothing lines that cater to all different types of disabled people and much more media representation. This way those that are disabled will be able to feel seen and heard.

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