



Kids As Self Advocates

## The Truth About Disability

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by [Christina Mills](#)

*Although this was originally written for a class, the message is important for all. Christina Mills writes about the importance of knowing disability history.*

Often times people refer to those with disabilities as being handicapped. Most of the time it is not that they are being rude or intentionally insulting, but instead have had a lack of education. Even those that do have disabilities sometimes refer to themselves as being handicapped. Unfortunately, the phrase "people with disabilities," is not yet universally excepted and that is why not everyone is yet saying it. The disability rights movement began far before the American with Disabilities Act in 1991, but because of the media and educational system, the phrase has not yet come to be politically correct such as other terms relating to ethnicity. Many people do not even realize that saying the word handicapped is very derogatory to those who do have disabilities. People with disabilities are by far the largest minority group in the country and are often times the most forgotten about because of the way they look or act. In fact, that is why a large percentage of people with disabilities have low self esteem, are angry, and feel as if they are in a lower social class. It wasn't till the mid 1900's when people with disabilities were given the choice of living in their own communities. Hospitalization and institutionalization use to be the way of the world until a few people with and without disabilities got the government to see what they were doing to people, human beings, just like you and me. People with disabilities have been and are still fighting for their civil rights. The educational system needs to focus more on the history of people with disabilities, the fact that they can lead normal productive lives, and be a asset to our society.

About seventy percent of all people with disabilities in the United States are unemployed. Many people with disabilities feel that this is because of the lack of history pertaining to disability. While growing up and attending school most people learn about different wars and how the United States came through for their people. What you don't hear is how many people became disabled during that war. The reality is that because of these unknown facts many people who become disabled, one way or another, feel there is no reason for living. After all, who would want to live with the burden of a traumatic brain injury or having to use a wheelchair day after day. In Nancy Mairs essay, "On Being a Cripple," she makes the cringing statement: " I haven't always been crippled, a fact for which I am soundly grateful" (149). Many would say that it is because of the educational system a person would make this sort of judgment.

It is blatantly obvious that the writer who acquired her disability only thinks this way because the educational system has failed her. Most likely she did not have disabled friends or know of anyone with a disability that actually felt good about themselves. While growing up her parents probably taught her not to look at people with disabilities, but instead to look down or away from them as quickly as possible. Therefore, it is no wonder why she feels grateful to say that she has not always been disabled. I firmly believe that if the educational system would have taught her about disability culture she would never had made such a profound statement. However, it is not just the educational system we should blame. Society as a whole has also played a role in how people with disabilities are perceived.

When thinking of the perfect family most people think about a mother, father, a son, and a

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daughter. The mother taking care of her children while working a full-time job and the father working to make a better life for his family. Often times the perfect family can be found camping, running around at the beach, or participating in various sporting events. When a life changes and a person becomes disabled they feel as if they can no longer have a family life because of their condition. In the essay, "On Being a Cripple," the author sadly states that: " Our society, with its emphasis on fun and its association of fun with physical performance, offers little encouragement for a whole spouse to stay with a cripple partner" (152). Many times when a person becomes disabled they feel that because of their physical limitations they will no longer be loved or accepted as much by their spouse and family members. This preconceived notion is one of the reasons why most people with disabilities end up in divorce or never getting married at all. If a person can not be involved in physical activities then they sometimes feel that they are not worthy of being married to some who is.

Naturally I disagree with the author's statement. There are many pieces of adaptive equipment in the world today that allow people with disabilities to fully participate in physical activities and lead a normal lifestyle. Adaptive equipment such as an off road wheelchair, power-beach-chair, or bi-ski can just as easily be used when fulfilling the need of a physical activity. When it comes to living a normal life there are several ways people with disabilities can do so. Besides adaptive equipment there are also ways of making other things in society more universally accessible for people with disabilities. Besides being able to participate in daily living activities people with disabilities can also be assets to their communities.

Having the ability to participate in physical activities is not the only barrier people with disabilities are faced with. Many times they are thought of as non-contributors among society. How could a person with a disability possibly give something to society when they are forced to continuously worry about their health, especially when seventy percent of them are unemployed? In the essay, "On Being a Cripple," the author expresses this idea when he says: One was immensely cheered by the information that I paint my own fingernails" (151). When in public many people with disabilities feel as if they are being treated as children or animals simply because of their disability. For example, people who use wheelchairs are often patted on the head for doing a good job or for looking cute. On other occasions people with disabilities are given less responsibilities than their peers because they are unable to do as much as the average person.

I oppose this idea because there are many people with disabilities that are assets to our society, we just hardly see them. The media chooses who they want America to see on television, and unless it is a feel good story, you rarely see the true faces behind disability. Many people are unaware of the fact that people with disabilities take part in political actions as well as employment opportunities. There are several state and federal councils that mandate a person with a disability to have active membership in. For example, the Statewide Independent Council. All members must have a disability and be appointed by the governor. Then there is the State Rehabilitation Council that also consists of people with disabilities. The list goes on and on. It is not that people with disabilities are non-contributors of society instead it is the media that portrays it that way. When was the last time you saw a person with a disability standing up for their rights vs. a person getting a new wheelchair or van on T.V.? The evidence proved, needless to say, is why people with disabilities are thought of as non-assets to our society.

In conclusion, people with disabilities deserve to be as equally treated as all other human beings. The educational system needs to focus more on the history of people with disabilities, the fact they can indeed live normal productive lives, and be assets to our society. By reading this essay I hope to inform those who most often do not take into account that people with disabilities are as valuable as

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all other people. Many times people only think of the negative things that come with having a disability, when in fact there are many good things as well. Having a disability can be extremely mind opening to a person who has never been faced with challenges or has been friends with someone with a disability. The truth about people with disabilities lies within the eyes of the person who perceives them.

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