



Disability Intimacy

**Essays on Love,
Care, and Dreams**

EDITED BY

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Disability Intimacy
Discussion Guide

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Disability Intimacy is a fascinating text that explores a wide range of ways that disability and intimacy intertwine and interact. This discussion guide addresses each piece individually through a series of discussion questions for each, though it is recommended that the different pieces also be discussed in conversation with one another.

Disability Intimacy

1. What do you think of when you hear the phrase, “disability intimacy”?
2. Given what you know about various forms of stigma and internalized ableism, how might those factors impact how both disabled and non-disabled people respond to the phrase “disability intimacy”?
3. What are the different types of disability intimacy that you think of straightaway before reading this book?

Introduction, by Alice Wong:

1. In the introduction, Alice Wong writes about how she maintained intimacy in the form of friendship during COVID. What are some ways that you’ve maintained intimacy of any sort during periods of isolation?
2. Wong describes her desire “entire dumpling cart of intimacy,” including referencing Jane Austen and “downright filthy texts.” What’s on your dumpling cart of intimacy?

Poem: I Promise You, by John Lee Clark:

1. In "I Promise You," the poet explores the significance of faces in the context of intimacy and relationships. How does the poem depict the interplay between facial expressions and emotional connections? What deeper insights does it offer about the role of non-verbal communication in human connection?
2. How does the poet convey the nuances of intimacy, trust, and vulnerability through the description of facial expressions and gestures? What elements of language convey these as well?
3. The title "I Promise You" suggests a commitment or assurance. How does the poem use the theme of promises to reflect on the implicit agreements and understandings that occur within intimate relationships, particularly in the exchange of facial expressions and emotions?

PART I: LOVE AND CARE

Unspooling, by Nicole Lee Schroeder:

1. How does Nicole's journey from internalized ableism to empowerment reflect broader themes within the disability rights movement?
2. Discuss the significance of finding community and mutual respect within the disability rights movement for Nicole.
3. Reflect on the role of self-care and self-compassion in navigating disability and activism.

Rosasharon Teaches Me to Breathe: On Animals, Disabilities, and Intimacies, by Ada Hubrig:

1. Explore the parallels between Ada's experiences and those of Rosasharon in navigating physical difficulties.
2. Discuss the theme of worth and belonging in the context of Ada's relationship with Rosasharon and Ada's father.

The Last Walk, by Melissa Hung:

1. Reflect on Melissa's experience of grief and loss, and the significance of the gift she receives from Judith.
2. Discuss the challenges of navigating chronic pain and illness without a clear diagnosis, as portrayed in the essay.
3. Explore the theme of friendship and support in the face of illness and mortality.

My Journey to Motherhood: A Parenting Odyssey, by Marie E. S. Flores:

1. Reflect on Marie's decision-making process regarding IVF, genetic testing, and navigating pregnancy as a disabled person.
2. Discuss the emotional impact of miscarriage and the challenges of pregnancy during the pandemic.
3. Explore the theme of resilience and joy in Marie's journey to becoming a mother.

To the You That Used to Be Home: An Anatomy of a Disabled Heartbreak, by Mia Mingus:

1. Discuss the complexities of heartbreak within disabled, queer relationships, as depicted in the essay.
2. Reflect on the use of metaphors, such as fire, to describe the intensity of heartbreak and loss.

Care During COVID: Photo Essay on Interdependence, by Kennedy Healy and Marley Molkentin:

1. Reflect on the experiences of providing and receiving care during the COVID-19 pandemic, particularly for disabled individuals.
2. Discuss the importance of accessibility and safety measures in caregiving, especially for immunocompromised individuals.
3. Explore the themes of intimacy and connection in caregiving relationships.

This Is My Solemn Vow, by Maria Town:

Discuss the systemic barriers faced by disabled individuals in accessing healthcare and support services, as depicted in the essay.

1. Reflect on Maria's advocacy work and the significance of the #DisabledLoveIsBeautiful hashtags and other similar hashtags.
2. Explore the intersection of disability, love, and activism in Maria's personal and professional life.

The Exhaustion of Pretense and the Illusions of Care, by Khadijah Queen:

1. Reflect on the experiences of masking and concealing disability, particularly within the context of race and gender.
2. Discuss the impact of societal expectations and ableism on Khadijah's journey to self-acceptance and diagnosis.
3. Explore the theme of identity and authenticity in the face of societal pressure.

The Most Valuable Thing I Can Teach My Kid Is How to Be Lazy, by Elliot Kukla:

1. Reflect on the challenges of navigating chronic illness and fatigue in a society that values productivity and hustle culture.
2. Discuss the importance of rest and self-care in managing chronic conditions, as depicted in the essay.
3. Explore strategies for promoting self-compassion and acceptance in the face of societal expectations.

What Getting My First Milwaukee Back Brace Was Like, by Ingrid Tischer:

1. Reflect on Ingrid's experience of body image and self-acceptance in the context of scoliosis and wearing a back brace.
2. Discuss the emotional impact of medical interventions and the intersection of disability and beauty standards.
3. Discuss the theme of resilience and self-love in the face of physical challenges.

Igniting Our Power by Reclaiming Intimacy, by Ashley Volion and Akemi Nishida:

1. Discuss the concept of "access intimacy" and its role in fostering intimacy and connection among disabled individuals.
2. Reflect on the importance of diverse representations of disability and intimacy in media and literature.
3. Explore strategies for promoting accessibility and inclusivity in relationships and communities.

Primary Attachment, by Yomi Sachiko Wrong:

1. Reflect on Yomi's experiences as a foster parent and the challenges of navigating parenthood as a disabled individual.
2. Discuss the intersections of disability, caregiving, and identity within the context of foster care.
Explore the themes of resilience and love within unconventional family structures.

Poem: Elegy for a Mask Mandate, by Ellen Samuels:

1. Reflect on the significance of mask-wearing as a form of care and solidarity, particularly for immunocompromised individuals.
2. Explore strategies for promoting public health and safety while respecting the needs of disabled individuals.

PART II: PLEASURE AND DESIRE

Skin Hunger and the Taboo of Wanting to Be Touched, by s.e. smith

1. How do societal stigmas and taboos around disability impact the ability of disabled individuals to experience intimacy and touch?
2. In what ways does the essay challenge the notion that disabled individuals are not entitled to intimacy and pleasure?
3. Reflect on the importance of advocating for the rights of disabled individuals to experience touch and intimacy on their own terms.

Know Me Where It Hurts: Sex, Kink, and Cerebral Palsy, by Carrie Wade:

1. How does Carrie's journey towards self-acceptance and embracing pain tolerance challenge traditional narratives around disability and sexuality?
2. Discuss the role of BDSM in Carrie's exploration of their body and pain tolerance. How does BDSM empower them to redefine their relationship with pain and pleasure?
3. Reflect on the essay's portrayal of pain as a source of empowerment and self-discovery for disabled individuals.

Staring at Curvature, by Travis Chi Wing Lau

1. Explore the ways in which art, particularly portraiture, can challenge societal norms of beauty and disability.
2. Discuss the significance of Travis' exploration of their own body through photography as a means of reclaiming agency and identity.

republics of desire, disabled lineages of longing, by Leah Lakshmi Bipsna Samasinha

1. Reflect on the concept of self-intimacy as explored in the essay. How do disabled individuals navigate self-love and fulfillment in a society that often marginalizes their desires?
2. Discuss the theme of resilience in Leah's portrayal of disabled individuals finding joy and fulfillment within themselves.
Explore the ways in which disability intersects with other aspects of identity, such as race and gender, in shaping experiences of longing and desire.

Strange Love via Crip with a Whip, by Robin Wilson Beattie

1. Reflect on Robin's journey into BDSM and its role in embracing her disabled body and sexuality. How does BDSM empower her to reclaim agency and pleasure?
2. Discuss the importance of representation and visibility of disabled individuals within kink and BDSM communities.
3. Explore the ways in which kink and BDSM can serve as avenues for self-discovery, empowerment, and intimacy for disabled individuals.

Pleasure is the Point: On Becoming a Pleasure Artist, by Sami Schalk

1. Discuss the concept of pleasure activism and its importance in fostering healing and liberation for disabled individuals.
2. Reflect on Sami's experiences with boudoir photography as a means of leaning into pleasure and self-expression. How does this form of expression challenge societal norms around disability and desirability for a variety of disabled people?
3. Explore the role of pleasure as a form of resistance and self-care in the face of systemic oppression and ableism.

How I'm Navigating Play Parties as a Disabled Immunocompromised Kinkster, by Jade T. Perry:

1. Reflect on the challenges and importance of accessibility in kink communities for disabled individuals. How can these communities better accommodate diverse needs and ensure inclusivity?
2. Discuss Jade's strategies for navigating play parties as a disabled immunocompromised individual. What are some considerations and precautions that could be implemented to create safer spaces for all participants?
3. Explore the intersectionality of disability and kink culture. How can kink communities actively work towards dismantling ableism and fostering a more inclusive environment for all members?

Hi, Are You Single, by Ryan J. Haddad:

Poem: doppelgänger, by Cyrée Jarelle Johnson:

1. How do "Hi, Are You Single?" and "Doppelganger" challenge conventional narratives surrounding disability and sexuality? How do they celebrate and validate the sensual experiences of individuals with disabilities?
2. Both poems "Hi, Are You Single?" and "Doppelganger" portray sexuality in nuanced and unapologetic ways. How do the poets navigate the intersections of disability, queerness, and eroticism within their work?
3. In "Doppelganger," the concept of a queer utopia is explored alongside themes of disability and sexuality. How does the poem use this utopian framework to imagine new possibilities for inclusive and empowering sexual experiences?

PART III: CREATIVITY AND POWER

Soa, by Pelenakeke Brown:

1. Explore the themes of performance, creativity, and embodiment in Pellina's experience as a disabled artist. How does their art serve as a form of self-expression, empowerment, and resistance?
2. Reflect on the challenges and barriers faced by disabled artists in accessing creative spaces and resources. How can communities better support and amplify the voices of disabled creators?
3. Discuss the intersectionality of disability and creativity. How do Pellina's experiences as a disabled artist intersect with other aspects of their identity, such as race, gender, and sexuality?

My Journey with Beadwork, by Sarah A. Young Bear-Brown:

1. Reflect on the cultural significance of beadwork and its role in expressing love and connection within the Meskwaki community. How does beadwork serve as a means of preserving tradition, storytelling, and intergenerational knowledge?
2. Discuss Sarah's personal journey with beadwork and its impact on their sense of identity and belonging. How does the act of beading contribute to healing, resilience, and cultural pride?
3. Explore the potential for beadwork to foster community-building and solidarity among disabled individuals. How can traditional artistic practices be adapted to accommodate diverse needs and abilities?

Disabled Queer Love Exists, by Tee Franklin:

1. Discuss the importance of representation and visibility of disabled queer love in media and literature. How can increased representation challenge stereotypes and promote acceptance within both the LGBTQ+ and disability communities?
2. Reflect on the impact of societal attitudes and norms on the portrayal of disabled queer love in mainstream media. How can storytelling and narrative representation contribute to broader social change and inclusivity?

3. Explore the intersectionality of disability and queerness in shaping experiences of love, desire, and intimacy. How can storytelling and advocacy efforts amplify the voices and experiences of disabled queer individuals?

Letters I Never Sent, by Sejal A. Shah:

1. Discuss the themes of connection and intimacy through written correspondence and storytelling. How do the letters in the essay facilitate a sense of connection and understanding between the author and her recipients?
2. Reflect on the role of storytelling as a means of processing emotions and experiences. How does the act of writing letters serve as a form of self-expression and healing for both the author and the recipients?

“many of whom have never been and are like me and feel alienated by it”: Access Intimacy on Archives, by Gracen Brilmyer:

1. Reflect on the concept of archival intimacy and its role in building connections within disabled communities. How do shared narratives and experiences preserved in archives contribute to a sense of belonging and solidarity among disabled individuals?
2. Discuss the importance of preserving and amplifying marginalized voices within archival spaces. How can archival practices be made more inclusive and accessible to ensure that diverse perspectives are represented and celebrated?
3. Explore the ways in which disabled individuals reclaim agency and empowerment through the act of storytelling and archiving. How does engaging with archival materials contribute to a sense of collective identity and resilience within disabled communities?

Love Letter to London, by Emilie L. Gossiaux:

1. Reflect on the bond between Emilie and her guide dog London, and the role of animal companionship in disability. How does London provide support, companionship, and a sense of independence to Emilie?
2. Discuss the emotional significance of guide dogs for individuals with visual impairments. How do these animals enhance mobility, safety, and overall quality of life for their handlers?
3. Explore the broader implications of Emilie's love letter to London. How does their relationship challenge societal perceptions of disability and animal companionship?

Crip Ecologies, Complicate the Conversation to Reclaim Power, by Naomi Ortiz:

1. How can we ensure that discussions about climate change and adaptation strategies are inclusive of disabled individuals and their unique needs?
2. In what ways can the concept of "Crip Ecology" be applied beyond climate change to advocate for accessibility and interdependence in various aspects of society?
3. What role can creativity play in fostering resilience and adaptation within disabled communities, particularly in the face of environmental challenges?

Poem: Top Secret Club Abjection, by Ashna Ali:

1. How does herbalism contribute to fostering intimacy and connection within disabled communities, especially for individuals who may be physically distant?
2. What are some other creative methods or practices that can be utilized to overcome barriers to intimacy and connection among disabled individuals?
3. How can online platforms and digital communities be leveraged to create spaces for intimacy and support for marginalized groups?

PART IV: EVERYTHING AND EVERYWHERE**an incantation, by Aimi Hamraie:**

1. How do the various elements of crip culture, such as refusal of normalcy, humor, and pleasure, contribute to resistance and intimacy within disabled communities?
2. In what ways can crip culture serve as a framework for challenging societal norms and fostering inclusivity and acceptance?
3. How might the principles of crip culture be applied in other social justice movements to promote equity and empowerment?

The Leg Chapter, by Ashley Shew:

1. What societal perceptions and challenges do individuals with prosthetics face regarding the visibility and acceptance of their disabilities?
2. How can narratives like Ashley's challenge the notion that prosthetics should prioritize concealing disability rather than embracing it?
3. What are some strategies for creating environments that promote acceptance and celebration of diverse abilities, including those reliant on prosthetic devices?

First of All, I Love You, by Dr. Syrus Marcus Ware:

1. How does Dr. Blair's Activist Portrait Series contribute to the representation and visibility of marginalized communities, particularly within the realm of activism?
2. In what ways can art and visual storytelling be used as tools for fostering empathy, understanding, and connection across diverse identities and experiences?
3. How might the concept of love be intertwined with activism and community building, as exemplified in Dr. Blair's work?

Profoundly Together, by the Redwoods:

1. What insights can be gained from the experiences of plural systems regarding intimacy and connection within oneself and among system members?
2. How does the concept of plurality challenge traditional notions of identity and selfhood, and what implications does this have for understanding human relationships?

3. What are some ways in which individuals and communities can support and affirm the identities and experiences of plural systems?

Strange New Worlds and Other Love Languages, by Marieke Nijkamp:

1. Reflect on the role of science fiction fandom in creating community and intimacy, particularly during times of isolation. How does shared fandom contribute to a sense of belonging and connection among fans, especially those who are disabled or marginalized?
2. Discuss the ways in which science fiction narratives explore themes of identity, difference, and social justice. How do these narratives resonate with disabled individuals and provide space for imagining alternative futures and possibilities?
3. Explore the potential for science fiction fandom to serve as a platform for activism and social change. How can fan communities leverage their collective power and influence to advocate for greater inclusivity and representation within the genre and broader society?

Crip Class, by Gabrielle Peters:

1. Consider the intersection of disability activism and intimacy, particularly in the context of advocating against ableist legislation. How do disabled individuals and activists navigate the tensions between personal intimacy and collective advocacy within disability rights movements?
2. Reflect on the role of personal storytelling and lived experience in disability activism. How do individual narratives contribute to broader efforts to challenge ableism and promote social change?
3. Discuss strategies for building solidarity and collaboration within disability rights movements. How can activists balance personal experiences with broader systemic advocacy to create meaningful change and foster greater intimacy within communities?

A Tale of Three Hospitals, by Jaipreet Virdi:

1. How do disparities in access to healthcare contribute to experiences of fear, discomfort, and mistreatment within hospital settings, especially for marginalized individuals?
2. In what ways do structural inequalities, such as socioeconomic status and geographic location, impact healthcare outcomes and patient experiences?
3. What steps can be taken to address systemic barriers to healthcare access and improve the quality of care for marginalized communities within hospital settings?

Dreaming of Black Disability Doulas: An Imagining, by Moya Bailey:

1. What are the potential benefits of having disability doulas or support systems to assist individuals in navigating the complexities of disability identity and experience?
2. How can the concept of disability doulas be expanded and applied in other contexts to support marginalized individuals in their journeys of self-discovery and acceptance?

3. In what ways can healthcare providers and communities better serve the needs of individuals who identify as disabled, particularly within Black, queer, and Southern communities?

Thirteen Considerations of the Holy Bug, by Claude Olson:

1. How do societal attitudes and stereotypes about disability, such as fetishization and objectification, impact the lived experiences of individuals with dwarfism and other disabilities?
2. What role can personal narratives and storytelling play in challenging harmful stereotypes and promoting understanding and acceptance of diverse identities?
3. How can individuals with disabilities reclaim agency over their own narratives and identities, despite societal pressures and misconceptions about their bodies and experiences?

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Esmé Weijun Wang is the author of the New York Times-bestselling essay collection [*The Collected Schizophrenias*](#) and the novel [*The Border of Paradise*](#). She received a Whiting Award for Nonfiction (2018) and was named by Granta as one of the Best Young American Novelists in their decennial list (2017). Born in the Midwest to Taiwanese parents, Esmé is the founder of The Unexpected Shape Writing Academy for ambitious writers living with limitations, and can be found at esmewang.com.