

# Body of Pride

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agree to not wear perfume so people with Multiple Chemical Sensitivities could safely attend. And in what should become standard at queer events, bathrooms were designated "gender free," enabling transgender and genderqueer attendees to have a place to safely pee and shower.

And with all these access considerations, there were clashing needs as well. Blind participants were frustrated when furniture was moved by wheelchair users so they could get by. People with ADD complained that sign language interpreters or real time captioning made it difficult for them to focus. Some of these clashes, these physical realities, had some humor. Lesbian cartoonist Alison Bechdel donated a signed *Dykes to Watch Out For* book for the raffle and it was won by a blind gay man whose first language is not English.

## Queer Crips

*Crip*, like *fag*, *dyke* or *queer*, can be hurled with cruelty by outsiders, or reclaimed as statement of pride by insiders. *Crip* is used matter-of-factly, proudly, to claim identity. I first learned it back when I was active with ACT UP/New York, by a queer crip who also eschewed the term "differently-abled."

"I'm not 'differently-abled'" she'd say. "It's not like you can walk and I can fly. I am *disabled*." Sugarcoating works to make disabled people and their real lives invisible, while reinforcing the ableist dichotomy that views disabled people as either pitiful or heroic. There's pity for the poor kid in a wheelchair, but isn't it inspirational when she or he actually performs some act of everyday life while in it!

Pity is encountered on a daily basis by disabled people, one woman noted in a workshop on making art. It was one of the barriers for her creating work by denying her personal dimensions. And along with pity is the thought on the part of able-bodied people that every crip wants to be cured.

"On the list of things I want, a cure for my disability is pretty low," wrote Laura Hershey, a con-

ference organizer and long-time disability rights activist, in her essay "From Poster Child to Protester." "Higher up on the list would be achievement of my personal, professional, and social goals, and these are not in any way dependent on a cure.

"Our culture considers it shameful to be physically unable to dress oneself, or to need assistance in going to the bathroom," she continued. "When so many of us feel so negative about our disabilities and our needs, it's difficult to develop a political agenda to get our basic needs met. The *cure* is a simple, magical, non-political solution to all the problems in a disabled person's life. That's why it's so appealing, and so disempowering. The other solutions we have to work for, even fight for; we only have to dream about the cure."

It was a relief to many who came that they didn't have to explain their queerness or their disabled selves to attend – there was no need for a Disability 101 or Homophobia 101. But expand queerness by 300 definitions and disability maybe even more so, and you get something that is not only quite powerful, but also quite messy. You have an exhilarating, eye-opening, enlightening weekend.

And you have a tangled, frustrating, things-are-missing and much-too-short weekend. Activists wanted more strategy sessions, artists wanted more time to talk about their own work and not just other people's, academics wanted more theory. I wanted an opportunity to think about ideas and finish a conversation and not just run off to the next emergency.

The immediate aftermath was like leaving a beautiful day at the beach – sunburned, happy, exhausted – many things all at once and not quite being able to explain it. New Yorker Becca Widom said after the conference, "When I first got home from the conference, I was telling all my friends 'I laughed, I cried, I came out dancing!' It changed my life, but I don't have much more specific than that to say."

▼

## Websites

### Bentvoices.org

A journal of crip gay voices

### Cripcommentary.com,

Laura Hershey's website

### Deafqueer.org

Disabledwomen.net/queer,

the home page for the QD conference

### Eminism.org,

Emi Koyama's website

### Queeringdiabetes.com

Transfeminism.org

<http://home.earthlink.net/~rivalehrer/>

website of artist featured at QD

[www.raggededgemagazine.com/](http://www.raggededgemagazine.com/)

not queer specific, radical disability rights magazine.

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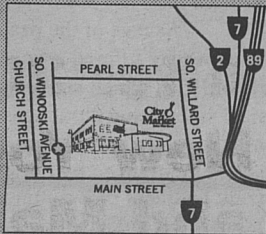
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