

Rebekah Taussig. *Sitting Pretty: The View from My Ordinary Resilient Disabled Body.*
New York: HarperOne, 2020. xiii + 237 pp. \$25.99, cloth, ISBN 978-0-06-293679-0.



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When I was approached to write this review, I initially thought that *Sitting Pretty* would be yet another “tragic,” “brave,” “overcoming,” or “heroic” disability tome. However, I was happily and importantly mistaken. This autoethnography is a refreshing, realistic counternarrative to majority understanding of life from a seated position. To provide context, the author had an established social media presence @sittingpretty before writing the book. A wheelchair user and educator, Rebekah Taussig is letting the reader in on a personal knowledge journey that is by no means maudlin, harsh, or sentimental. Full of thoughtful insight and humor, the book presents a straightforward conversation beginning with disabled people’s cultural invisibility and representation.

An American living in the midwestern United States, Taussig, the youngest of six children, acquired disability from early childhood. She talks about creativity in a nonconformist body that, particularly in one’s early years, is not different or strange, good or bad: it is simply your body. Taussig discusses the necessity for chronic creative

approaches when the disability and impairment is not expected, or planned for, in the majority culture. Moving through adolescence, she carefully traces her gradual acclamation of the broader social trope of the “burdensome” or “problematic” disabled body indicative of endemic ableism/disableism. She views current definitions of able-bodied and ableism as overly simplified. We have to move away from the all or nothing binaries and out of long-established cultural comfort zones. Taussig explores the seeming naturalness of disability deprivation, exemplified by poverty and unemployment.

Taussig poignantly discusses assumptions of asexuality and intimacy, and the overarching cultural discomfort with disability and sexuality. She relates how the subject is dismissed and/or ignored while simultaneously caught up in ideas of bodily perfection, invisibility voyeurism, and freakery. She underscores the narrow configuration of the “acceptable” body and the copious amounts of physical and psychological energy required to make others feel comfortable with those who fall

outside the “lines.” The author’s discussion of the medical and social models of disability illustrates the need for a serious philosophical shift in the understanding of disability beyond one-dimensional understandings of “weakness,” “defect,” “incapacity,” or “cure.” An interesting exploration of the impact of the systemic perception of disability demonstrates that the process is not straightforward.

What is meant by social citizenship is analyzed by way of perceived role expectation, position, utility, and lack of presence. The cultural narrative of disability is rarely developed by disabled people’s experience. Disability is often “understood” in terms of loss, functionality, worth, cost, and premium, particularly in the midst of a profit-driven medical system when decisions are made in all aspects of life. Benefits and supports that are often tied to income level dictate employment decisions or lack of them. Social marginality is maintained and reinforced.

Taussig presents an interesting discussion of the illusion of inclusion and the taken-for-granted aspects of the body, physicality, and disability accommodation beyond ramps and accessible toilets. There is a need to move beyond these simplistic understandings. Examining concepts of speed, space, and time provides the basis for a far more nuanced understanding of disability and society. Similarly, the author highlights the need for the “sisterhood of feminism” to truly engage with disability issues in a substantive manner. Furthermore, there is a detailed analysis of unexpected, uncontrolled encounters with strangers and their concepts of kindness toward disabled people, what it demonstrates and reflect.

The author advocates moving beyond a best-intentions and better-than-nothing approach to access and inclusion. Taussig provides a useful list of resources and individual contacts for further information and research. *Sitting Pretty: The View from My Ordinary Resilient Disabled Body* is a modern approach illustrating the impact of

ableism in the daily lives of disabled people. This is a much-needed resource.

If there is additional discussion of this review, you may access it through the network, at <https://networks.h-net.org/h-disability>

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