Another person’s differences, disorder, or disability is not about your comfort or convenience. Accepting that there are different ways of accessing and experiencing the world benefits everyone. There is no right way to human.

Most of the disability experience is imposed and caused by culture, design, environment, and systems. We can change physical spaces and ourselves.

An individual’s experience of disability should be respected, validated, and never diminished.

My different body does not fit into the systems, the spaces, the policies, and the social norms of my world. I look and sound different, and I experience the world as hostile and harmful to my sensory systems. So am I disabled?

Difference, Disorder, or Disability?

What makes differences in sensory integration and processing a disorder? At which point is this a disability?

It is incredibly common for differences in how a person’s body works to be blamed for that person’s experience of being handicapped, impaired, or differently-abled. The responsibility for the impairment or the deficiency is placed on the person, the patient, the client, the student. Once we start paying attention to the barriers our environment and our culture create we very quickly realize that most disabilities are imposed. This means that they are caused by the way the world is designed.

Most “handicaps” are created and perpetuated by the way we design our spaces, write laws and policies, communicate, and act.

Differences

From one person to the next there is a tremendous difference in how our brain-and-body take in and process sensation every day. This means that everyone’s experience of the world is different. We also have different sensory preferences - what is cold to you might be hot weather for someone else. What is spicy to you is usually pretty bland to someone else, yet loudness can be a matter of opinion. Some people’s sensory differences mean that their experience of the world is SO DIFFERENT that we cannot even imagine what it feels like to be in their body, and how their body feels in the world.

Disability

Sometimes a person’s sensory integration and processing differences are so profound that it is experienced as a physical disability. This brain-body disconnect can present itself in a lot of different ways. For some people, their bodies move when they do not want or expect it to, while other people’s bodies may no respond to what their brain is wanting them to do. There can also be a mixture of these two phenomena that can make things even more complicated.

This brain-body disconnect can include movement, noise making, and even speech. What makes differences in sensory integration and processing a disorder? At which point is this a disability?

Some people’s sensory differences mean that their experience of the world is SO DIFFERENT that we cannot even imagine what it feels like to be in their body, and how their body feels in the world.