

justify holding it. To the contrary, she seems content to associate this view of disability with disabled people's own "denial." Indeed, she writes that when "the distress disabled people experience" is attributed to societal oppression, disabled individuals are "prevent[ed] from forming a clear sense of their own identity." As I interpret it, Hillyer's remark not only diminishes the political import of the social disablement view of disability, but is also a rather patronizing one.

THE MORE WE GET TOGETHER

Houston Stewart, Beth Percival and Elizabeth R. Epperly, eds. Charlottetown: gynergy books, 1992.

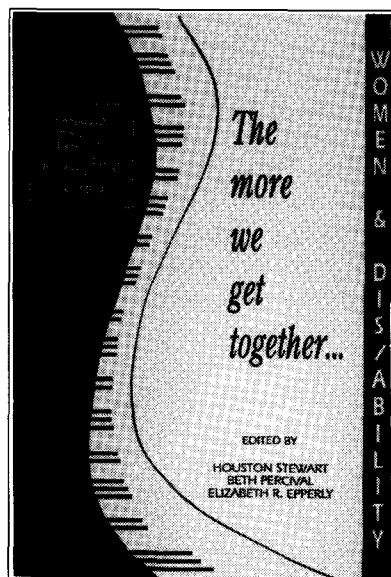
by Deborah Kent

Movements have a proven tendency to fragment, even as they grow larger and stronger. Dedicated members of a movement may break into subgroups around a galaxy of distinctions, from age to ethnic background, from educational attainment to career. The disability rights movement and the women's movement have both struggled for a sense of solidarity while embracing the diverse perspectives of people from every stage in the life cycle, from every culture group and geographic region, representing an extraordinary range of abilities.

The 1990 conference of the Canadian Research Institute for the Advancement of Women met the issue of diversity head-on with its theme "the more we get together, the happier we'll be." *The More We Get Together* reprints twenty-two papers delivered at the conference, and raises a host of thought-provoking questions. The majority of the papers deal with disability, but others cover topics as outwardly varied as the women's temper-

ance movement in the 19th century and the novels of L.M. Montgomery. The essays are arranged in four sections: "Difference and Dis/ability," "Herstory," "Caregiving and Mothering," and "Language and Writing."

Joan Meister's keynote address, "The More We Get Together," introduces disability in its many facets, and explores differences in terminology (disability vs. handicap vs. impairment). Meister sur-



veys the needs of women with disabilities—access to information, educational and employment opportunities, sexual expression, reproductive choice, and, ultimately, greater self-esteem. As she points out, these needs are common to all women, but women with disabilities typically encounter more obstacles than their non-disabled peers.

In "Notes Toward a Unified Diversity," Sharon Dale Stone tears open some of our most cherished notions about differences and commonality. Stone, a lesbian who has a disability, contends that no one else can truly understand her life, because each individual's experience is unique. Why then, she asks, do we feel that we must obliterate our differences before we can communicate with one another? "Why is it so scary to face the fact that we don't have much in common?" she pursues. "Why is it necessary to 'overcome' or 'transcend' difference in order to see others as 'people equal in value and dignity?'" She does not ask that others accept

her as being like they are, but instead wishes that they "will listen to what I say about my life, try to imagine what it is like, and then work with me to change what oppresses me."

Other pieces in the section on difference and dis/ability discuss women and psychiatric hospitalization, childhood sexual abuse and multiple personality disorder, and women with disabilities and the medical establishment. Particularly interesting is an article on the phenomenon of "passing" by Milana Todoroff and Tanya Lewis. Drawing on interviews with seven women who have disabilities, the authors conclude that passing, or working to appear "normal," is a healthy survival technique. The pressure to conform is crushing, and the penalties for failing to do so may be disastrous. As one informant confides, "It's frightening how unwanted [we are]. How people can't think of a place we ought to be other than extremely somewhere else."

Traditionally, the issues surrounding women with disabilities have been handled in separate books or special issues of feminist or disability rights periodicals. *The More We Get Together* is a refreshing change. Here the essays which focus directly on women with disabilities are interspersed with intriguing pieces on an assortment of other topics. In the section entitled "Herstory" a paper on the history of the disabled women's movement shares space with discussions of Lesbian Studies, women of Scottish ancestry, and the complex issues around ecofeminism. The section "Language and Writing" contains articles on writing workshops composed of women with disabilities, as well as pieces about romantic fiction and the ways language is used to mask the fact that most acts of domestic violence are committed by males. Women with disabilities belong here as a part of a sprawling social mural that encompasses virtually every aspect of women's experience.

Nearly all of the pieces in this book will be enlightening for both the uninitiated and for women who have already done some serious thinking about the convergence of women's issues and disability issues. The only essay which I find disturbingly weak is Beth Lawson's "Mothering a Disabled Child." Lawson writes that "tears, anger, frustration, and fear" have "remained an integral part of my

life." She refers to her blind daughter's "misery," and states that "it must be terrible for a blind child to cross even the quietest of streets." Clearly, Lawson has not accepted her daughter's blindness and does not respect her child's ability to function competently in the world. This article is legitimate as one woman's perceptions, but it could have been balanced by a piece reflecting a healthier view. As it is, it reinforces stereotypes about disability as tragedy, stereotypes which are blessedly absent in the rest of the anthology.

Two articles by Karen A. Blackford examine the experiences of mothers who have disabilities. In "Why Chronically Ill Women Say to Their Temporarily Able-Bodied Sisters, Thanks But No Thanks," Blackford reports on a study of the feelings of mothers with MS and lupus toward the friends and relatives who assist them with homemaking tasks. To varying degrees, nearly all of the women expressed resentment and frustration, sharing the sense that these helping persons deprived them of their role within the family. In "The Baby Crib and Other Moral Regulators of Mothers with Disabilities," Blackford looks at widely-held assumptions about "good" and "bad" mothers. She demonstrates that these assumptions can brand a woman with a disability as a moral failure for having and attempting to raise a child. Both of these pieces are dense with sociological terms and references which may discourage some readers. But they are definitely worth the extra effort.

Within the framework of this book, the exploration of diversity and sameness enhances our understanding of disability. Conversely, disability becomes a vehicle for probing more global issues around difference and conformity. Within this context, even Elizabeth R. Epperly's concluding article on children's author L.M. Montgomery, "The Restraints of Romance," has much to say that is relevant. In examining the novel *Anne of Green Gables*, Epperly shows how Anne finally yields up her vibrant individuality and accepts the conventions prescribed for young girls of her time. She opts to "pass," to subvert her true self in order to win social acceptance, as do the women with disabilities interviewed by Todoroff and Lewis. Yet, Epperly points out, Anne's

real romance is not with the young man who wins her love, but "with her own voice and with imaginings, perceptions, and self-discoveries." The richness of each individual's unique voice resonates through the diverse essays in this anthology, drawing them together in a startling harmony.

DOUBLE THE TROUBLE, TWICE THE FUN

Pratibha Parmar, filmmaker. V-Tape, 1992.

by *Shelley Tremain*

In an article which appears in *FUSE Magazine* ("Blasted Categories: Observations on *Desh Pardesh* and Recent South Asian Film and Video" Vol. XVI, No.4, May/June 1993), Ian Rashid observes that film- and video-maker Pratibha Parmar has "[heralded] the emergence of a South Asian lesbian and gay subjectivity." With her recent video, *Double the Trouble, Twice the Fun*, Parmar continues her pathbreaking work. Insofar as *Double the Trouble, Twice the Fun* depicts the previously unrepresented identities, perspectives, and experiences of lesbians and gays with disabilities, that video 'heralds' the emergence of disabled lesbian and gay subjectivities (to borrow Rashid's phrase).

Although *Double the Trouble, Twice the Fun* is only 25 minutes in length, Parmar focuses effectively upon a wide range of concerns that are relevant to lesbians and gays with disabilities. For this reason, Parmar's video will be an important tool for disabled activists and educators, as well as for our non-disabled queer sisters and brothers. Many of the disabled lesbians and gays here speak of the oppression which they have in common with straight disabled persons; namely, ableism. For example, some of the disabled lesbians and gays shown at-

tempt to dispel the pervasive myth that disabled persons are asexual. Moreover, others shown aim to refute the patronizing belief that disabled lives are tragic ones. At the same time, though, these lesbians and gay men draw attention to the homophobia of disability communities. One disabled dyke, in particular, remarks on the ways in which disabled lesbians and gay men are marginalized by the non-disabled lesbian/gay community, as well as by the disability movement. For her, these margins parallel each other.

In order to avoid broaching these issues in a fashion which is either too didactic, or overly rhetorical, Parmar alternates between two formats: dramatized sequences, on the one hand, and interview/discussion-formatted ones, on the other. Weaving the dramatic segments with the documentary sequences enables Parmar to show that the systemic political oppressions of disabled lesbians and gays are forms of cultural marginalization that have deep personal impact.

The dramatic segments depict two gay men with disabilities, Tim and Peter, on a date in the former's candle-lit apartment. After the two characters converse and drink some wine, they begin to caress, and embrace each other. In an unprecedented cinematic moment, the men join each other on Tim's bed, undress one another, and make love. Now, some feminists might be tempted to dismiss the scenes depicting Tim and Peter's lovemaking; that is to say, some might suggest that Parmar has unfortunately presented one more display of male sexuality. But, in a sense, that sort of (ableist) reaction would surely miss the point. By including those scenes in her video, Parmar begins to subvert some of the obstacles which disabled women and men confront when they attempt to "come out" as lesbian or gay.

To be sure, the coming out process is often difficult for many non-disabled lesbians and gays, particularly if one does not fit with the white, gay male stereotype. But consider the specific problematic involved in coming out as a *disabled* lesbian or gay. Consider the uncertainties disabled women and men might experience taking up the *sexual* identities of 'lesbian' and 'gay' within ableist social contexts where disabled persons are commonly perceived as asexual. How, if at all, are disabled lesbians and gays to con-