

Existing on the Outside

Category: Being in the Minority

written by Ronna L. Edelstein | May 1, 2021

My ninety-year-old friend gets her hair styled weekly, goes out to dinner often, and invites friends into her home—all during the pandemic. A fifty-year-old friend rented a local movie theater to entertain his friends and himself, held an ice cream social under a gazebo to memorialize his mother (herself a big fan of the icy treat), and spends most evenings at a local pub—all during the pandemic. A close friend is patiently waiting for me to give a thumbs-up to a get-together. More and more people are embracing the freedom of vaccinated life by returning to a somewhat pre-COVID normalcy.

I am in the minority, still frightened of lying in a hospital attached to a ventilator.

Being in the minority is not new to me. Although my race gives me majority status—and being a woman never held me back—my struggles with self-esteem always blocked me from entering the mainstream social group. Due to my taller than usual stature, I felt awkward dancing at a time when “American Bandstand” ruled the television, and jitterbugging was a must for becoming popular. Because of my inability to break the rules by having a cherry Coke and fries after school instead of going home and studying, the other girls forgot about me. I traveled from kindergarten through grade twelve with the same population, but I remained an outsider—a minority of one.

I do not pretend that my marginalized life equates with the lives of discrimination and abuse experienced by people of color. While I profoundly sympathize with these individuals, it would be wrong to say that I understand their pain well enough to empathize with them. Being ostracized from the popular girls’ lunch table or being the only wallflower at the school dance is far from comparable to having a knee on your neck and being unable to breathe. Yet I do have an inkling of what it means to be an outsider—to be treated as invisible or, even worse, as a threat to the status quo.

Ironically, those of us facing mental health challenges might constitute the majority if the societal stigmatization of this illness did not prevent us from speaking out. Until we—and all people who are different due to emotions or appearance—are accepted, we will remain minorities who try our best to survive each day with our minds and bodies intact.

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