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Disinhibited Thoughts #23

We ended our last encounter in the midst of the question, “should we warn people in advance about a person’s difference”, and contemplated the pros and cons from the ‘outside’ point of view – that of friends, family members, partners, teachers, or work colleagues. Now we go ‘inside’ – from the perspective of the individual.

Using myself as a subject, I wonder if individual preferences may reflect one’s own comfort with his or her condition. If so, a person’s preferences may fluctuate as a function of where (s)he is at personally. Myself, I’m more of a ‘part the waters before I enter’ kind of guy – when I’m not sure if people ‘know’ or not, this leads to increased consciousness of my difference and the ensuing increase of symptoms that this heightened awareness provokes. I’m also less myself: my guard is up, and this is detectable to others whether or not they know why. Lastly, I find that telling people *reactively* rather than *proactively* (i.e. telling people AFTER there is a problem rather than BEFORE) doesn’t work as well simply because people are EXPECTING you to make excuses to get out of whatever trouble you’ve gotten yourself into, and so your credibility is shot. Inform people from the very start, and there is no opportunity for the irritation and intolerance that behavioural attributions engender to develop and fester.

But let’s flip the coin again now. I’m progressively more indifferent to what people are noticing and how they’re reacting; as a result, I’m more oblivious as well. So I suppose my preference to warn people is losing its priority as my self-comfort rises. It occurs to me that embedded within this stance is more selfishness than I used to possess, but perhaps that is not such a bad thing if it tempers a previously rampant selfLESSness. One further disinhibited thought: by not giving people an advance warning, you are also more likely to challenge preconceptions and shake the status quo. When typing this, I’m thinking of the client who, only after positively appraising my professionalism, knowledge and skill, sees my disorder. Or the chuckling individual in the grocery store line who, after watching me tic then watches me get into a vehicle with DR DUNC on it. Maybe this unexpected (and unwarned) turn of events startles him into reconsidering his initial estimation of me. I like to think it does, anyway.

Because of the polar opposite positions conceivable for loved ones to hold in trying to respect the person with a difference, because of the different places the individual him or herself may be, and because all of this may evolve over time or change with the situation, perhaps the only correct position to hold is this: as a loved one you should ASK, and as the individual with the difference you should TELL. In the end, “those who assume make an ass of u and me”, and all that rot. It has been my experience that many individuals, when offered a forum for frank discussion, will indeed ask exactly HOW they should conduct themselves in the presence of your difference (in my own case, what they should do when I tic). I typically tell them to pay it no more heed than if I was scratching a mosquito bite whilst interacting with them, and to respond accordingly.

Until next time, my friends!
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(supervised practice)

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