

The four quotations below are taken from the works by four different writers. What connections do you see between them?

1.

*The Land of the Imperfect*

In ages past there was a land,  
In which every single man  
Stuttered when he spoke  
And limped when he walked,  
For both were thought to be the way.

A stranger saw this curious sight; and thought  
“They’ll praise me when I show them how,”  
And so he walked with normal stride.  
And all who spied him, laughed out loud,  
And all stood laughing, crying out: “Oh teach  
the stranger how to walk!”

The stranger felt he was obliged  
To straighten out this wrong reproach.  
“You limp!” he called, “I do not;  
*You* must change, *I* should not.”

Their mocking grew and grew and grew,  
As they heard the stranger speak:  
“He doesn’t even stutter!” They cried,  
“We’ll scoff at him from every side!”  
(An old German poem)

Those who deviate from the group norm are at first teased and laughed at. This type of laughter may be a phylogenetically ancient form of mobbing. . . . This does not contradict the fact that laughter is also bonding. But it only bonds those who laugh together: the person being laughed at rarely laughs along with the others, and he

perceives this laughter as an aggressive act. People are laughed at because they are awkward or otherwise behave differently from the norm. The laughter makes the individual aware of his deviating behavior and gives him an opportunity to conform. Laughter is a threat toward the nonconformist but binds together those who join in laughter.

2. When I began to walk out alone in the streets of our town, I found then that wherever I had to pass three or four children together on the sidewalk, if I happened to be alone, they would shout at me. Sometimes they even ran after me, shouting and jeering. This was something I didn't know how to face, and it seemed as if I couldn't bear it. . . . For a while those encounters in the street filled me with a cold dread of all unknown children. . . . One day I suddenly realized that I had become so self-conscious and afraid of all strange children that, like animals, they knew I was afraid, so that even the mildest and most amiable of them were automatically prompted to derision by my own shrinking and dread. (A crippled girl's account of her experiences of walking out alone in the streets)
3. The existence of a different value system among [deviants or stigmatized persons] is evinced by the communality of behavior which occurs when illiterates interact among themselves. Not only do they change from unexpressive and confused individuals, as they frequently appear in larger society, to expressive and understanding persons within their own group, but moreover they express themselves in institutional terms. Among themselves they have a universe of response. They form and recognize symbols of prestige and disgrace; evaluate relevant situations in terms of their own norms and in their own idiom; and in their interrelations with one another, the mask of accommodative adjustment drops.
4. I remember how relaxing it was, at Nitchie School, to be with people who took impaired hearing for granted. Now I wanted to know some people who took hearing aids for granted. How restful it would be to adjust the volume control on my transmitter without caring whether or not anyone was looking. To stop thinking, for a while, whether the cord at the back of my neck was showing. What luxury to say out loud to someone, "Ye gods, my battery's dead."