

***My Body Politic*: Discussion Questions**

Introduction

The following set of questions are for all readers, and may be of particular use for discussion in book clubs and university courses. I know that some readers are familiar with disability – intimately, in fact – and others may be new to this territory. Whatever your experience is, whatever you bring to the reading of *My Body Politic*, I hope these questions will provoke further thinking.

Questions

1. Did reading *My Body Politic* challenge any of your assumptions about disabled people? What were some of the key moments in the book that made you confront these assumptions?
2. What surprised you most about Simi Linton's story? Why?
3. What made you laugh in this book? What made you squirm? Where did you get angry or sad?
4. This book paints a vivid portrait of the music and culture of the 1960s and 70s. Are there cultural moments that you remember, or have heard about, that were described in *My Body Politic*? Were anti-war demonstrations, rock and roll, or hippie clothes part of your formative years? How did reading about them through the lens of disability alter the way you think of those moments?
5. The book talks openly about sexuality and disability. What was your reaction to reading about this subject? What did you learn? What surprised, intrigued or embarrassed you?
6. Where do you think people generally get their ideas about disabled people's lives? Think about films, plays or television shows you have seen that include a disabled character. How many can you think of? What do you remember about those characters and about the actors who played them?
7. Simi Linton takes issue with the way in which our culture portrays disability. Do you agree with her?
8. What are the differences between thinking of disability as a medical/health issue, and treating it as a social/political issue? For instance, imagine that someone who uses a wheelchair goes to her local polling place to vote and finds there are a number of steps into the space. If you employ a medical analysis, the focus might be on the woman's condition that prevents her from climbing stairs. A social approach would more likely lead to an analysis of the exclusionary practices of polling sites, laws that prevent such discrimination and so forth. Come up with some other examples, and consider how each approach might be used in that situation.
9. How does disability exclude or set people apart in society? How is it like or unlike race, sexual orientation, class or ethnicity in creating social divides?

10. Thinking about your daily life, what activities do you engage in or places you go that are off limits to disabled people or exclude people with specific impairments? How might those situations be altered to include people with a wide range of disabilities?
11. In her book, Simi Linton describes many of her disabled friends. Who among them do you remember most vividly? Was it Corbett and her daughter Meecha, in their brightly colored power wheelchairs? Was it Barbara and Daniel and their politically charged wedding? Was it the whirling Devva, with her flowing skirts? Was it dancer Homer Avila? What do you think makes that person stand out for you?
12. In the last chapter, Simi turns to the pressing issue of disabled Iraqi vets. In what ways can the United States ease the entry of these men and women back into our society. How does their situation differ from that of the wounded vets returning from Vietnam, thirty-five years ago?
13. There are several widely-debated topics discussed in *My Body Politic*, such as prenatal screening and selective abortion, or physician assisted suicide. What are your own thoughts on these controversial topics? Does a disability-focused analysis shift the terms of the debate or challenge your thinking on these issues?
14. What is your favorite chapter title? Why do you think Simi chose that title? Play with the titles – can you think of a title that you'd like to see instead?
15. How did Rufus (the power wheelchair) change Simi's life?
16. In the chapter titled "What I learned" Simi writes: "I no longer said 'I am a woman with a disability,' instead I was likely to describe myself by forefronting disability. 'I am a disabled woman,' I would say." What difference, if any, do you think these different formulations make?
17. Why has the emergence of disability studies been so important to Simi and to a general understanding of disability?
18. Does the Epilogue add anything new to the story?