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An Intersectional Examination of Disability and LGBTQ+ Identities In Virtual Spaces

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An Intersectional Examination of Disability and LGBTQ+ Identities In Virtual Spaces

by

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A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
Department of Sociology
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Key Words: Disability, Sexuality, LGBTQ+, Queer Theory, Crip Theory

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DEDICATION

To my wife Shannon. And for the queer, the crip, and those who experience intersectional invisibility but refuse to stop fighting. Your Existence is Resistance!

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation is a multi-methodological project that examines the experiences of being both LGBTQ+ and disabled from an intersectional perspective through narratives constructed in virtual spaces. In this project, I address the question ‘how do individuals who identify as both disabled/chronically ill and LGBTQ+ negotiate these often contradictory identities?’ I also complexify this intersectional analysis by examining how LGBTQ+/disabled identities are constructed in relation to race, class, and gender. Additionally, by conducting virtual ethnography as the primary method of data collection, I explore questions pertaining to how members of LGBTQ+ and disability online communities engage in virtual identity construction and virtual community building. Through these projects I seek to bring disability and LGBTQ+ identities into the intersectionality literature and discourse that has frequently excluded, and at times even ignored, these positionalities.

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Disability and sexuality are often thought of, understood, depicted, and described as incompatible and contradictory, at least when conceptualized within popular imagination. As McRuer and Mallow wrote “Sex and disability are if not antithetical in the popular imagination, then certainly incongruous” (1). Work on disability and sexuality within sociology (and within academia at large) has been shockingly minimal. The work on intersections of disability and LGBTQ+¹ identities has been even more slight. Indeed, there only a small number of empirical academic works examining the intersections of disability and LGBTQ+ identities (See for example: Axtell 1999; Bernert, Ding, and Hoban 2012; Chelsea Whitney 2006; Duke 2011; Dykes 2010; Eliason, Martinson, and Carabez 2015; Elderton et al. 2014; Fish 2008; Foglia and Fredriksen-Goldsen 2014; Hirschmann 2013; McRuer 2003; McRuer 2013; McRuer 2013; McRuer 2006; Meyer 2002; Noonan and Gomez 2011; O'Toole 2015; Robert, Greenhill, and Cookson. 2016; Samuels 2003; Sandahl 2003; Sherry 2004; Shildrick 2009; Sinecka 2008; Yep 2013)

Although the intricacies of the relationship between disability and sexuality and the complexities associated with experiences of identifying with intersecting identities of LGBTQ+ and disability have been (at times) theorized (Kafer 2013; McRuer 2013; McRuer 2013; McRuer 2006; Sherry 2004; Sinecka 2008; Shildrick 2009; Hirschmann 2013) they have rarely been

¹ Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans, Transgender, Queer, Genderqueer, Intersex, Asexual Pansexual, Omnisexual, and other nonheterosexual/noncisgender identities. Throughout the duration of the paper I will use LGBTQ+ to represent the full acronym as it is written here, unless otherwise noted.

examined empirically (Atkins and Marston. 1999; Axtell 1999; Chelsea Whitney 2006; Dykes 2010; Elderton et al. 2014; Kirby, Demers, and Parent 2008; Robert, Greenhill, and Cookson. 2016). In this dissertation I explore the relationship between disability and sexuality and disability identities and LGBTQ+ identities through an empirical examination of organizational discourses and personal narratives. My intention in this dissertation is to explore the experiences of being both disabled and LGBTQ+. Below, I describe the intention, and scope of this project. I begin with a statement about the guiding research questions. I then describe the scant previous research associated with the intersection of LGBTQ+ and Disability identities and experiences. After which I provide a brief description each chapter.

The overall guiding research question for this project was how do queer disabled people construct and negotiate theses often socially contradicting identities for themselves and their communities? The specific research questions this project addresses are: 1) How do social movement organizations respond, incorporate, and account for members who identify with complex intersectional identities? 2) How do fluid understandings of sexuality and disability shape strategies used by social movement organizations? 3) How do individuals who identify as both LGBT and disabled negotiate these (at times) socially contradicting identities? 4) How does the importance placed on progressive and curative discourses shape and affect LGBT disabled peoples' personal narratives and experiences?

Previous Research: Disability and LGBTQ+ Experiences

Intersection of LGBTQ+ and Disability Identity

Both disabled² people and LGBTQ+ people have and continue to experience marginalization and discrimination at both the institutional and personal level (Berger 2013; Kafer 2013; McRuer and Mollow 2012; Oliver and Barnes 2012; Sherry 2004; Siebers 2008; Seidman 2003; Shakespeare 1994; Shakespeare 2013). They have been ignored and forgotten in research, media, and the popular imagination (Eliason, Martinson, and Carabez 2015; Doty 1993; Dow 2001; Gomillion and Giuliano 2011; Gross 1994; Raley and Lucas 2006). When they are considered they are often tokenized, stereotyped, oversimplified, and troped (Doty 1993; Dow 2001; Gomillion and Giuliano 2011; Gross 1994; Raley and Lucas 2006). They are understood and presented through one dimensional stories and are rarely understood as complex and multifaceted people who approach and see the world through a multitude of different experiences.

Indeed disability and LGBTQ+ identities are rarely considered separately, and they are almost never considered together. While experiences of being both disabled and LGBTQ+ is sorely lacking within academia, it is even less present in popular media and popular imagination. Disabled people are frequently de-gendered and desexualized in both popular imagination and research (McRuer and Mollow 2012). The notion that disabled people are not gendered nor sexual leads to the invalidation and invisibility of LGBTQ+ disabled people, further

² There have been many debates and commentary on the uses and importance of person first verses identity first language (specifically as it pertains to disability). It is my opinion that identity first language at least when referencing disability identities claims a powerful and unapologetic approach to identifying as disabled. As a disabled person it is also my prerogative to use such language. I do however recognize that other disabled people may prefer person first language (person with a disability). I also want to stress that non-disabled scholars should never use disability first language when referencing participants without their permission or without very reflexive theoretical reasoning.

marginalizing them (Egner 2016). Findings of this dissertation project suggest that LGBTQ+ disabled people feel left out, marginalized, and invisible not only within popular/dominant society but within their own marginalized communities³ and groups, as well (Egner 2016). In other words, LGBTQ+ disabled people feel rejected by both LGBTQ+ communities and organizations *and* disability communities and organizations. It is the lack of representation of LGBTQ+ disabled people in media and research, as well as their invisibility within and outright rejection by popular society, LGBTQ+ communities, and disability communities that is the mandate for this study (Egner 2016).

Furthermore, disability and LGBTQ+ sexualities have some common themes that warrant further investigation in to the lived experiences of LGBTQ+ disabled people. Firstly, both LGBTQ+ and disability identities have been pathologized through processes of medicalization in similar ways (see below sections on medicalization of disability and sexuality in literature review). Second, as Goffman (1963) argues is common for stigmatized characteristics that are not “tribal” in nature, LGBTQ+ and Disabled people rarely inherit their identities from their parents nor are born in to communities with which they identify. While many people identifying with marginalized identities are born into families that identify similarly (i.e. families bonded together based on class status, race, or ethnicity, nationality) disabled people and LGBTQ+ people are rarely born to disabled parents and LGBTQ+ parents. These commonalities further complicate the experiences of being disabled or LGBTQ+ and could certainly have some affect

³ My use of ‘communities’ rather than community (as commonly seen when referencing ‘the LGBT community’ or ‘the disability community’) is purposive in that there are thousands of different communities of people identifying as LGBTQIA or disabled and that each letter of the LGBTQIA acronym should not be conflated. Furthermore, the use of communities recognizes that those identifying as LGBT or Disabled may not identify as one singular community.

on the relationship between disability and sexuality or identifying with this particular intersection.

There has been little research examining the relationship between disability and sexuality. Most of the current work that takes up disability and sexuality together is theoretical and often this work is situated within disability studies, literature, or gender studies (Hirschmann 2013; Kafer 2013; McRuer 2003; McRuer 2013; McRuer 2006; McRuer and Mollow 2012; O'Toole 2015; Sandahl 2003; Schalk 2013). There are only a small number of works within the social sciences examining disability and sexuality (See for example: Bernert, Ding, and Hoban 2012; Caeton 2011; Chelsea Whitney 2006; Sinecka 2008). There is even less research on disability and LGBTQ+ identities (See for Example: Atkins and Marston. 1999; Axtell 1999; Brent L. Bilodeau 2005; Duke 2011; Dykes 2010; Elderton et al. 2014; Eliason, Martinson, and Carabez 2015; Fish 2008; Foglia and Fredriksen-Goldsen 2014; Kafer 2013; Kirby, Demers, and Parent 2008; McRuer 2013; McRuer 2006; Meyer 2002; Noonan and Gomez 2011; Robert, Greenhill, and Cookson. 2016; Samuels 2003; Sherry 2004; Weinberg and Williams 2010; Yep 2013). The work that does examine this intersection is very rarely concerned with personal narratives (Elderton et al. 2014; O'Toole 2015; Sandahl 2003; Schalk 2013). Rather, much of this work is focused on health practices, health education, health risks and health outcomes for disabled LGBT people (Eliason, Martinson, and Carabez 2015; Fish 2008; Foglia and Fredriksen-Goldsen 2014; Brent L. Bilodeau 2005; Dykes 2010; Thompson, Bryson, and Castell 2001). There is an absence of both qualitative work and work examining the lived experiences of individuals who identify as both LGBTQ+ and disabled.

It is possible that there is a connection and an unexplored relationship between LGBTQ+ identities and disability. Indeed, Bernert, Ding, and Hoban (2012) have found that there are

staggering differences in how disabled and nondisabled college students identify as it pertains to sexuality. Of nondisabled colleges students 92.6% identify as heterosexual while 2.1% identify as gay/lesbian and 2.9% identify as bisexual. This is quite different for students with disabilities, as 16% identified as heterosexual while 24 % identified as gay/lesbian and 34.2% identified as bisexual (Bernert, Ding, and Hoban 2012)⁴. Researchers have found that not only is there a connection between disability and LGBTQ+ sexualities and gender identities but that people identifying with this intersection do have some similar experiences across specific identities (Elderton et al. 2014; Robert, Greenhill, and Cookson. 2016; Thompson, Bryson, and Castell 2001). This possible relationship has not been explored within empirical academic work and it is imperative that this be examined further.

LGBTQ+ & Disability Social Movements

Those who have studied the history of the LGBT movements have found that fixed identity categories can be both the reason for oppression and the foundation for which to gain political power (Gamson 1995). This leaves LGBT activists with what Gamson has called the ‘queer dilemma’. Assimilationists may retain political capital but at the cost of fluid identities. It is the blurring of these identity categories that could cause more hegemonic factions of a movement to lose political power. It is the blurring of boundaries of sexuality and gender identities (such as bisexuality, transgender, and gender queering) that are welcomed by movement members who are intent on queering (as well as by postmodern and queering scholars) (Gamson, 1995). Although many scholars believe that the LGBT movements are currently focused on hegemonic political gains, there is a substantial push from those identifying as queer to blur the boundaries and deconstruct this hegemonic collective

⁴ It appears that many of the disabled students were not accounted for in or did not answer this question.

identity. Queer members of LGBT movements argue that the hegemonic, homo-normative, and dominant factions of the LGBT movement reflect the white middle class experience.

Seidman argues that “[T]oday, at least in the United States, we are witnessing something new: Heterosexuals, gays, lesbians, bisexuals recently fighting for their right to an identity are now staking out positions against the very idea of sexual identity.” (Seidman, 2010. P.83). For some of those engaging in queer politics the movement is about recognizing and celebrating the differences within LGBT movements while for others it is about denying categorization of sexual identity entirely. “Queer, then, is a revolt against the idea of the normal, and it is defense of a culture that is comfortable with sexual and gender ambiguity and ambivalence” (Seidman, 2010, p.87).

Disability rights movements reflect similar positions as LGBT movements. The movement is broken up into several factions focused on a differences of collective identity. The two most predominant factions are disability activists and scholars who are more hegemonic in their activism and function within social model understandings of disability and those that are concerned with queerness and queering and who identify with crip theory. The social model was developed as a reaction to the “personal tragedy theory” which blames the problem of disability on one’s own personal failings (Oliver, 1983). The social model was developed and expressed by disabled individuals as a way to respond to the more individualistic personal tragedy model (Oliver, 1990).

Chapter Descriptions

This dissertation is a multi-methodological project that examines the experiences of being both LGBTQ+ and disabled from an intersectional perspective through narratives constructed in

virtual spaces. In this project, I address the question ‘how do individuals who identify as both disabled/chronically ill and LGBTQ+ negotiate these often contradictory identities?’ I also complexify this intersectional analysis by examining how LGBTQ+/disabled identities are constructed in relation to race, class, and gender. Additionally, by conducting virtual ethnography as the primary method of data collection, I explore questions pertaining to how members of LGBTQ+ and disability online communities engage in virtual identity construction and virtual community building. Through these projects I seek to bring disability and LGBTQ+ identities into the intersectionality literature and discourse that has frequently excluded, and at times even ignored, these positionalities.

Chapter Two “A Messy Trajectory: From Medical Sociology to Crip Theory.” This chapter is an historical analysis of sociological literature focusing on processes of medicalization and pathologization of both disability and sexuality. It is published in *Research in Social Science and Disability, Volume 9*. Sociological and popular understandings of disability and sexuality have often mirrored each other historically. In this chapter, I argue that the medicalization and pathologization of human differences, specifically as it pertains to sexuality and disability within the medical sociological literature, have led to constructionist, social model, and feminist critiques. It is these critiques that then laid the foundation for the development of crip theoretical approaches to disability.

Chapter Three: Hegemonic or Queer?: A Comparative Analysis of 5 LGBTQ+/Disability Intersectional Social Movement Organizations. This chapter approaches the broad research questions that guide this dissertation project that pertain to social movements. Pulling from social movements literature and using both critical and queer theoretical perspectives, this paper employs a virtual ethnography and discourse analysis to

examine the online rhetoric of social movement organizations that advocate for people who identify as both disabled and LGBTQ+. This chapter explores how Social Movement Organizations (SMOs) that seek to address issues faced by people who identify as both LGBTQ+ and disabled engage in boundary work. I examine five SMOs' online presence via the text and images displayed on their webpages. This paper answers the specific research question: How do intersectional LGBTQ+/disability social movement groups position themselves and construct collective identity and collective consciousness? Specifically, this paper explores the degree to which these organizations stress sameness and/or difference in relation to the dominant group by engaging in boundary work and establishing collective identity and collective consciousness. By exploring how these groups engage in practices of inclusion and exclusion related to the construction of boundaries, I examine how the stressing of sameness and/or difference informs SMOs' positions in relation to and use of queer/crip or hegemonic discourses. The data in this study show that groups that use hegemonic discourses frequently suppress difference while those that use queer discourses celebrate difference.

Chapter Four: “The disability rights community was never mine”: Neuroqueer as the Intersection of Neurodiversity and LGBTQ+ Identities. This paper explores online neuroqueer communities. In this chapter I explore how online neuroqueer communities (via blog spaces) are actively co-constructing both collective and individual identities. Neuroqueer is a community co-created project that requires those who engage in it to disidentify from both oppressive dominant and counterculture identities that perpetuate destructive medical model discourses of progress and cure. It is a collaboration of academics, activists, and members of online blogs who are engaging in practices of online community building focusing on neuroqueering. Members of neuroqueer communities explain that they feel excluded from

LGBTQ+, feminist, and disability/neurodiversity communities based on their complex intersectional marginalized identities. Blog members describe employing neuroqueer practices as subversive tactics to combat this exclusion. I examine these narratives through and relate them to queer and crip theoretical perspectives of sexuality and disability. Specifically, I address the following questions: What/who is neuroqueer(ing)? How has neuroqueer been conceptualized in relation to normative and/or hegemonic narratives of disability and sexuality? What does a Neuroqueer project entail? And, how can it help scholars to re-conceptualize understandings of gender, sexuality, disability, and queer and crip theories?

Chapter Five: We love each other into meaning”: Queer Disabled Tumblr Users

Constructing Identity Narratives Through Love and Anger. In this chapter I examine a group of online Tumblr users who identify with complex intersectional identities—many of which identify as LGBTQ+ disabled people of color. The Tumblr users describe feelings of exclusion from and experiences of intersectional invisibility within identity-based communities and identity-based social movement organizations. Posters employ narratives that contribute to the construction of identity and reject their exclusion. They incorporate two well-known and recognizable narratives (“Pride/Community- and self-love” narratives and “Our Lives Matter/Deserving of life”) in to their personal and identity narratives. Posters have re-conceptualized these narratives to accurately represent their intersectional experiences. Embedded in these narratives are the recognizable emotion codes of love and anger. These posters are engaging in activist and social movement work through the deployment of identity constructing narratives.

Chapter Six: “My Existence is Resistance!”: Visible Survival as Crip Resistance.

Using the same data set as in Chapter Five, this chapter examines posters are experiences of

intersectional invisibility. Posters frequently described experiences exclusion of from identity-specific groups and communities and described these spaces and communities as inaccessible and unsafe. The results from this chapter suggest that posters use social media to create online spaces in which build online community, construct group and personal identity, and to safely counteract experiences of multiple marginalization in a number of strategic ways. Furthermore, they have reconceptualized what it means to engage in social movement activism and resistance to include community and individual survival.

Chapter Seven: Discussion and Conclusion. In this final chapter I discuss the overall objectives of this project and the implications for future work.

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CHAPTER TWO:

A MESSY TRAJECTORY: FROM MEDICAL SOCIOLOGY TO CRIP THEORY

Abstract

Purpose The purpose of this paper is to draw attention to the work of sociologists who laid the foundation for queer and crip approaches to disability and to address how queer and crip theory has and can help to re-conceptualize our understandings of health, illness, disability, and sexuality.

Methodology/approach This paper is an examination of historical moments and prominent literature within medical sociology and sociology of disability. Sociological and popular understandings of disability and sexuality have often mirrored each other historically. Although this literature review focuses primarily on medical sociology and disability studies literature, some works of scholars specializing in gender studies, sexuality, literature, history, and queer studies are also included

Findings In this paper, I argue that the medicalization and pathologization of human differences specifically as it pertains to sexuality and disability within the medical sociological literature have led to constructionist, social model, and feminist critiques. It is these critiques that then laid the foundation for the development of queer and crip theoretical approaches to both disability and sexuality.

Originality/value Crip and queer approaches to disability provide a clear call for future sociological research. Few social science scholars have applied queer and crip approaches in

empirical studies on disability. The majority of work in this area is located in the humanities and concerned with literary criticism. A broader array of empirical work on the intersection of sexuality and disability from queer/crip perspectives is needed both to refine these postmodern theoretical models and to examine their implications for the complex lived experience that lies at the intersection of sexuality and disability. In queering disability and crip- ping sexuality and gender, we may be able not only to more fully conceptualize disability, sexuality, and gender as individual social categories, but also to more fully understand the complex intersection of these social locations.

Introduction

Sociologists have been both complicit in the process of pathologizing dis- ability and sexuality and critical of this process of pathologization. Social constructionist arguments, both in and outside of medical sociology, have chipped away at the foundations of medicalized approaches to both disability and sexuality. I argue that the cracks in the foundations of accepted understandings of disability and sexuality revealed by social constructionist critiques of medicalization have played a pivotal role in the development of the emerging perspectives on disability. It is these cracks through which alternative understandings of disability, such as a queer/crip approach to the intersection of disability and sexuality, have been able to leak.

The purpose of this paper is to draw attention to these cracks and to the work of scholars who carved them and thereby laid the foundation for emerging approaches to disability which seek to re-conceptualize our understandings of health, illness, disability, and sexuality. In other words, I intend first to identify and describe precursors to crip perspectives of disability by examining earlier works on the social construction of health, illness, and sexuality in response to dominant practices of pathologization and the concept of medicalization within medical

sociology. I will then examine how the emergence of queer theory contributed to non-binary understandings of sexual identity and laid the groundwork for crip theory in disability studies and the sociology of disability. Indeed, crip theory did not develop in a vacuum nor did it appear out of thin air. Rather crip theory emerged from the cracks created by the collision of a number of perspectives that preceded it. Lastly, I will consider how queer/crip approaches to disability (which often stem from work done by scholars and activists who find themselves at odds with the dominant research and practices within medical sociology) might help future scholars re-envision not only disability, but also medical sociology, health, illness, and sexuality.

Although queer and crip theoretical approaches should not be conflated and are not synonymous, they have similar (and sometimes entangled) historical trajectories. Queer and crip theoretical perspectives both attempt deconstruction often through practices of discourse. Both are concerned with challenging reductionist understandings of human experience and both question the utility of binary understandings of normality versus abnormality.

For the sake of clarity, a note on how the terms queer and crip are used in this paper is in order. In this text, I use queer in several ways: as a description of a theoretical approach that challenges dominant notions of identity boundaries (queer theory); and as a verb to indicate the act of challenging these boundaries (to queer or queering). In some places in this text, I use these terms to denote challenges to boundaries that are specific to sexual identity (heterosexuality vs. homosexuality). In other cases, I use it to denote a theoretical perspective that challenges binary identities more broadly (including disabled vs. able-bodied). When queer is used in this broader sense, crip theory can be understood as a disability focused queer approach that is concerned with the relationship between the physical body, embodiment, and the self. This way of challenging binary notions of boundaries between disabled and normal identity is sometimes

called crip theory or criping. In this paper, I use the terms queer and crip interchangeably when discussing approaches to disability that seek to queer disability (challenge binary disability discourses) except where authors express a specific preference for terminology. I use the term queer/crip to denote a perspective that approaches the social world and the body (specifically disability and sexuality) through an intentional amalgamation of crip and queer theory. The terms have a short history of being used together to describe a perspective that is both queer and crip (as is evident in Kafer's *Feminist Queer Crip* (2013)). Queer/crip sociologists are especially concerned with discourse because they focus on ways that language and imagery can greatly affect individuals' lives and experiences. For example, ablest discourses used within medical institutions can stigmatize disabled individuals and drastically affect their interactions and experiences with medical communities. For example, a physician who approaches a patient's disability as a problem that needs to be solved (at the individual level) and uses curative language (i.e., treatment, cure, recovery) to discuss the patient's disability may stigmatize patients who do not view their bodily difference as a problem in need of solution. The physician's use of curative language may be perceived as a devaluation of the patient's body and identity. This stigmatization is evident in the controversies surrounding Deaf/deaf/hard of hearing communities and cochlear implants, communities of little people and limb lengthening surgeries, and neurodivergent and autistic people and serotonin reuptake inhibitors (to name a few).

While queer and crip theorists might object to the creation of lists of goals on the grounds that such lists tend to create the kind of fixed ideologies that queer and crip perspectives seek to challenge, in order to make this section more accessible to a broad readership, I offer the following as a list of some goals that I understand to be implied by queer and crip approaches to

the study of disability: (1) to understand intersectional identities as fluid and complex; (2) to focus attention on the experiences of sexuality as a way to also understand the experience of disability; (3) to subvert ableism⁵ and ablest discourses and narratives; (4) to uncover ways in which discourses such as language and imagery used in media, governments, law, educational institutions, and other organizations subtly and overtly reinforce normative expectations; (5) to reject the notion that disabled people must seek cure while providing alternative narratives; and (6) to deconstruct these normative expectations through subversive tactics.

This paper will focus on the medicalization and pathologization of sexuality and disability within the medical sociological literature that serves as a backdrop to the development of queer and crip perspectives individually and to the combined queer/crip perspective that is the focus of this paper. Due to the fact that the sociological study of both disability and sexuality has been greatly shaped by other disciplines (such as disability studies, communication, and women's and gender studies), this paper must have a somewhat interdisciplinary focus. Understandings of sexuality and disability have shifted historically in both popular culture and academe, and have often paralleled each other in many ways. Processes of pathologization of sexuality and the pathologization of disability have mirrored histories. Non-normative sexual practices and gender identities have often been categorized as disabilities, while the sexuality of people with bodily differences has been denied or pathologized in both the medical and educational institutions and in public discourse and media portrayals. In sociology, constructionist approaches to both gender and sexuality developed out of a critique of the

⁵ Ableism refers to a system of oppression (similar to racism, sexism, or heterosexism) where some bodies and minds are deemed normal while others are viewed as abject (Berger, 2013). To the majority of people ableism is often unconscious and invisible but for disabled people it can have severe implications and can drastically affect their daily lives (Berger, 2013). Ableism can take many forms from appearing as a preference for able-bodiedness to determining humanness (Berger, 2013; Siebers, 2008).

pathologization of women's bodies and of sexuality. Similarly, social model approaches to disability, emerged in critique of medical and individual models of disability. Feminist perspectives of sexuality and feminist perspectives of disability developed (in and outside of sociology) at least in part in response to this pathologization. These feminist understandings of sexuality and disability also critiqued some aspects of constructionist approaches to sexuality and social model approaches to disability (such as critiquing both models for not being intersectional enough, specifically the exclusion of people of color and LGBT people). These critiques laid the foundation for queer and crip perspectives on disability. In this paper, I intend to show how these historical shifts and events have helped to transform sociological understandings of both disability and sexuality since the rise of industrial capitalism, and how these understandings might inform modern scholars' future work. Queer theory has a short history of attending to questions of the body, but has been criticized for ignoring and avoiding disability. [McRuer and Mollow \(2012\)](#) posit that much is lost by not engaging with "disabled subjects, crip, or queercrip subjects" (p. 26). In this paper, I explore the historical underpinnings of a queer/crip approach to disability as well as how a queer/crip perspective on disability might contribute to a reconceptualization of medicine, health, and illness in the future.

I will begin with a brief history of medical sociology within the United States. I then examine the ways in which scholars have been complicit in the process of medicalizing and pathologizing disability and sexuality. Next I explore the "medicalization" literature and work by scholars who critique this process. Finally, I will explore ways in which social constructionist and social model sociologists, critical, and feminist scholars have set the stage for the development of queer, crip, and queer/crip theories of disability.

This paper's primary focus is on the ways in which social constructionist scholars of

disability have opened the door for crip theory approaches to disability. Crip theory is, however, an interdisciplinary project and its development has been greatly influenced by feminist and queer theories. Changing perspectives on sexuality must be explored along with work on disability because the lines around queer and crip approaches to disability and sexuality are blurry. These perspectives have evolved from earlier perspectives that also share much common ground. For example, there are both significant differences and considerable crossover between social model conceptions of disability and feminist disability perspectives. Moreover, many aspects of each of the models and perspectives discussed here can and have been used together. Queer and crip perspectives have, for example, sometimes been intentionally blended together in order to construct a perspective that more powerfully challenges binary notions of normality than either queer perspectives on sexuality or crip perspectives on disability could accomplish individually (Kafer, 2013; McRuer, 2006).

A Brief History of Medical Sociology

Since its inception with the work of Charles McIntire in 1894, medical sociology has provided perspectives on the social effects and significance of health and illness in society (Freeman & Reeder, 1957; Hollingshead, 1973; Rosich & Hankin, 2010). Medical sociology and, more recently, the sociology of health and illness (Tiefer, 1996) have been concerned with a variety of issues, including: social aspects of health and disease, health care functions and practices, operations of health care organizations, social organization and health, behaviors of health care professionals, behaviors of patients, patient and health care professionals' relationships, power relations among those who hold a stake in medicine/health care, authority of physicians, attitudes and values associated with health care, disparities and inequalities among demographic characteristics, personal and collective identities associated with health and illness,

and social movements that have evolved around health-related issues (Freeman & Reeder, 1957; Rosich & Hankin, 2010).

Since its development in the late 1800s the meaning and goals of medical sociology have changed drastically (Hollingshead, 1973). Medical sociology was first described as studying social phenomena related to the experiences of physicians themselves (McIntire, 1894). McIntire understood medical sociology as an exploration of the relationships between the medical profession and society as a whole and was concerned with structures and the development of conditions (Hollingshead, 1973).

The rise of industrial capitalism led to an increased focus on the body through its relationship to labor. For example, disabled people were excluded from work and social activities, as industrial societies began to place a great deal of importance on a productive physical labor force. The health of the social body became dependent upon the health of individual bodies (Berger, 2013; Oliver & Barnes, 2012). Rising interest in the United States in health and illness, as evidenced by the 1887 foundation of The National Institutes of Health (NIH) and the development of federal programs such as those associated with The New Deal (which sought to alleviate poverty and poor health via social welfare), led sociologists, such as Bernard Stern and Michal Davis, to be concerned with diseases and physicians in the 1930s and 1940s (Hollingshead, 1973). The early 19th century and the end of World War I brought public health programs, reforms, and rehabilitation movements (Berger, 2013). Medical rehabilitation movements sought to rehabilitate disabled people and have contributed to the establishment of the medical model (Berger, 2013). Additionally, the NIH brought together biologists and sociologists specifically to form the National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH) (Hollingshead, 1973).

The growth of medical sociology mirrors that of the NIMH and is strongly related to its expansion (Hollingshead, 1973). Medical sociology continued to grow during the 1950s as collaboration between physicians and sociologists became common in both teaching and research expeditions within schools of medicine and public health (Hollingshead, 1973). In 1957, medical sociology started to split into two sub-disciplines. Robert Strauss suggested that sociology of medicine and sociology in medicine were two distinct fields (Freeman & Reeder, 1957; Strauss, 1957; Usher, 2007). Sociology in medicine was housed in hospitals and medical schools while sociology of medicine, not directly connected to medical facilities, became the concern of academic sociologists (Freeman & Reeder, 1957; Hollingshead, 1973). At this time, sociology in medicine focused on serving medicine and medical professionals (Usher, 2007). Its emphasis was often applied and aimed at solving problems for the medical community (Usher, 2007). Using sociology to support medicine and its goals was critiqued for neglecting the goals of sociology (Usher, 2007). Such critiques, often spear-headed by sociologists of medicine, further separated and solidified these two distinct fields.

During the 1960s the field of medical sociology continued to expand. In 1960, The American Sociological Association (ASA) developed a section on medical sociology (Hollingshead, 1973). By 1963, it became the largest substantive interest section in the association (Hollingshead, 1973). In 1966, the Association adopted the *Journal of Health and Social Behavior*, securing medical sociology's position within ASA. Subsequently, research on the social factors of health care tripled from the 1960s to the 1970s (Hollingshead, 1973). More recently, medical sociologists have paid considerable attention to the ways in which social life has been medicalized. This will be addressed further in the following section, which specifically focuses on the pathologization of human difference and social life particularly disability and

sexuality.

The Concept Of Medicalization As A Social Process

As the medical sociology section (within ASA) continued to flourish through- out the 1960s and into the 1970s, an increased focus on medicalization became prevalent (Conrad & Barker, 2010). This focus on medicalization continued through the 1990s and into the early 2000s (Conrad & Barker, 2010). Sociological scholars of health and illness consider medicalization to be a process by which aspects of everyday life come to fall under the dominion, authority, influence, and surveillance of medicine and medical systems, institutions, and communities (Zola, 1983). “Medicalization describes a process by which nonmedical problems become defined and treated as medical problems, usually in terms of illnesses or disorders” (Conrad, 1992, p. 209). The medical community describes aspects of life in terms of distinct medical models, values, and institutions and thus acts as an agent of social control (Conrad & Barker, 2010; Hayes & Hannold, 2007; Tiefer, 1996; Zola, 1972). In addition to physicians, the medical community is also comprised of health-related professionals (Hayes & Hannold, 2007), scientists behind new medical invention and study, and social science researchers (medical sociologists included) who contribute to medical discourses. Medicalization occurs at multiple levels: the conceptual, institutional, and interactional levels. (Conrad, 1992). At a conceptual level, medicalized definitions and vocabulary come to define problems. At an institutional level, organizations develop to treat, study, and examine these medical problems. At the interactional level, medicalization occurs between the interaction of physicians, health professionals, and patients (Conrad, 1992).

Medicalization locates behavior, activities, and experiences within the jurisdiction of medical expertise (Conrad & Schneider, 1980; Hayes & Hannold, 2007). In this vein, deviance,

crimes, habits, and physical and mental (dis)abilities become defined as medical problems or illnesses which the medical community becomes responsible for solving and treating (Conrad, 1975, 2005; Conrad & Barker, 2010; Tiefer, 1996). The expansion of medical jurisdiction as an agent of social control over deviant behavior has gained considerable attention and medicalization has been a central focus for social scientists since the 1970s (Conrad, 1975; Szasz, 1970; Zola, 1972). Most medical sociologists who focus on the process of medicalization do so from a social constructionist perspective (Conrad, 1975; Crawford, 1980; Szasz, 1970; Tiefer, 1996; Zola, 1972). These sociologists have investigated (and often critiqued) the development and construction of medical categories and the expansion of medical dominion (Conrad, 1975; Crawford, 1980; Szasz, 1970; Tiefer, 1996; Zola, 1972) and have employed concepts such as claims-making and professional dominance in their critiques (Conrad, 2005). Medicalization can be seen as one aspect of a larger process that is often described as the individualization of social problems (Conrad, 1975). Much of the medical community, and medical sociologists who function within medical understandings, search for causes and solutions to complex social problems within individuals, rather than within larger social structures and cultural discourses and beliefs (Conrad, 1975). When medical professionals and academics (and by extension government and popular society) medicalize deviant behavior and search for the cause of these newly described medical conditions within individuals and their bodies, they may stop searching for answers in the social structure, and thus the political structure as well (Conrad, 1975, 2005). By critiquing the advance of medicalization and the medical community's ability to lay claim to an ever greater proportion of the lived experience of humans, including deviant behavior and non-normative bodies, social constructionist sociologists have been able to draw attention to medicine as an increasingly powerful form of social control.

In this way, social constructionist scholars have paved the way for alternative perspectives of the body, including the social model, feminist, and queer/crip perspectives on disability.

Furthermore, they have created cracks in medicalized understandings of human experience through which these emerging perspectives on disability have been able to leak.

Social Constructionist Critiques of Medicalization

Social constructionist scholars within medical sociology have argued that medicalization has shaped various ideologies within western society, such as the understandings of appropriate behavior, feelings, relationships, bodies, and identities (Crawford, 1980). Through the process of medicalization, ordinary human processes come to be understood and treated as medical problems or pathologies (Conrad & Barker, 2010). Behaviors that have been medicalized include alcoholism, hyperactivity, sexual activity, dietary choices, child-raising, and recreational pursuits (Conrad & Barker, 2010). Both feminist scholars (in and outside of sociology) and medical sociologists who take a social constructionist stance argue that the medical community has exercised particular control over natural aspects of women's bodies such as the reproductive processes of menstruation, pregnancy, and menopause (Crawford, 1980). This can result in over-diagnosis and treatment for natural bodily functions as well as acting to constrain the sexual and reproductive behavior of women (Conrad, 1992; Conrad & Barker, 2010). Indeed, throughout the 1960s and 1970s, increasing numbers of scholars began to critique the trend in which nonmedical issues were rapidly transforming into medical ones (Foucault, 1978; Schneider, 1978; Scull, 1975). In addition to highlighting the increasing prevalence of medicalization, social constructionists also began to deconstruct medical authority by focusing on how people and groups construct the social meaning of, participate in, and impact the production of knowledge about health and illness (Conrad & Barker, 2010; Rosich & Hankin, 2010). In other words, the

medical community and those who hold medicalized understandings of human experience tend to pathologize human difference, while sociologists who take a social constructionist approach attempt to understand how and why these differences have been medicalized, and what effect this process has had on individuals, social structures, and societies (and vice versa).

Social constructionists have also argued that within western society, medicine and the medical institution have had the prerogative to gerrymander its jurisdiction by redefining physical conditions as illness, disability, and disease. The medical community has had the authority to lay claim to any aspect of the lived experience and the body (Barker, 2010; Freidson, 1970). This redefining of physical conditions as illness, disability, and disease can have severe implications in terms of treatment, costs, function and structure of the health care system, and social legitimacy of symptoms (Conrad & Barker, 2010; Rosich & Hankin, 2010). By defining social behavior as illness, medical communities, psychiatry, and public health have acted as agents of social control (Conrad, 1975; Foucault, 1965; Rosich & Hankin, 2010; Szasz, 1970). Before the “discovery” by the medical community of certain disorders relating to behavior, specific behaviors most likely were considered deviant, as Conrad argues is the case with Hyperkinesia (Conrad, 1975). Scholars (especially those with a social constructionist focus) have increasingly focused on deconstructing the power and authority of the medical community to medicalize as well pathologize human experience (Conrad, 1992, 2005; Conrad & Barker, 2010). Social constructionists argue that the advance of complex modern medical technology has increased the prevalence of medicalization and thus the possibility of social control through pathologization (Chorover, 1973; Conrad, 1975).

In particular, pharmacological technology has allowed for expanded medical control over human behavior previously considered deviant. Medicalization of deviant behavior has been

particularly successful as an agent of social control in terms of mental illness. Medicalization of behaviors that have been defined as falling within the jurisdiction of psychiatry and mental health professionals has been an effective means of social control since the seventeenth century (Foucault, 1965). It has been argued since the mid-1970s that advancements in pharmacology may increase the medical community's dominion over deviant behavior still further in the future (Conrad, 1975). Some have argued that the institution of medicine may become so powerful as to be the main agent of control in the future (Rosich & Hankin, 2010; Timmermans & Oh, 2010). The process of medicalization has, for example, expanded to include new stakeholders such as hospital administrators and insurance regulators (Rosich & Hankin, 2010; Timmermans & Oh, 2010). A trend toward commercialism and consumerism has habitually led medical professionals and the medical community to function as revenue-seeking businesses. With the introduction of new drugs, pharmaceutical companies have become one of the most profitable aspects of the new medical business (Timmermans & Oh, 2010), and thus one of the most powerful stakeholders. The development and advertisement of new pharmaceuticals play large roles in determining which human experiences the medical community and, by extension, the rest of society consider to be treatable medical problems (Blum, 2015; Conrad, 2005; Rosich & Hankin, 2010).

It is the social constructionist critiques of the tendency of medical and allied professions to pathologize ever greater aspects of human difference and the increase in medical authority over all aspects of knowledge about human bodily experience that social model scholars, feminists, and queer and crip disability theorists have taken up. The emerging queer and crip disability perspectives have been particularly influenced by feminist critiques of the medicalization of sexuality and social model critiques of the medicalization of disability. The

next sections explore scholarship related specifically to these areas of medicalization.

Medicalization of Sexuality

This section is an examination of the medicalization of sexuality. In this section, I use the term “sexuality” broadly to include sexual orientations and identities as well as sexual acts, practices, and desires. Sexuality has been medicalized by the medical community and academia since the seventeenth century (Foucault, 1978; Tiefer, 1996). Medicalized understandings of sexuality have permeated every major institution, including legislation and government, education, employment, and the economy (Tiefer, 1996). Historically, sociological research on sexuality (specifically “homosexuality”⁶) has also been understood in terms of pathology (Risman & Schwartz, 1988).

In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, sexologists contributed to the medicalization of sexuality by defining sexuality as a fact of nature and a part of the biological and genetic makeup (Hirschfeld, 1948; Kinsey, Pomeroy, Martin, & Sloan, 1948; Krafft-Ebing, 1965; Masters & Johnson, 1970; Money, Hampson, & Hampson, 1955; Money & Hampson, 1955; Risman & Schwartz, 1988; Seidman, 2003; Tiefer, 1996). Sexuality came to be understood by the rest of the academy and popular society in the same manner: as a basic human function, no different than sleeping or eating and therefore a driving force in human behavior (Tiefer, 1996). Sociologists, as well as sexologists, attempted to find out how and why a person develops sexually (Risman & Schwartz, 1988).

In understanding sexuality as a function of the body, researchers located sexuality within

⁶ My use of single quotes when citing sexual orientations is to denote that the terminology used, such as “homosexuality” is medical terminology that is often pathologizing, but it is not terminology many activists, members of lesbian/gay/ bisexual (LGB) communities, and feminist scholars often use. “Homosexuality” is a term that is used often in medical and psychological references to same-sex behavior or identities. However, the terms favored by activists and feminists would be “same- sex behavior/desire” or (LGB).

the jurisdiction of the medical community (Tiefer, 1996). Normal sexuality was viewed as inherently heterosexual and contrasted with abject and deviant sexual behavior (Tiefer, 1996). Through the process of medicalization, women's sexuality and un-heterosexual acts and desires, like deviant behavior and ordinary aspects of women's bodily experience, were conceived as medical and individual problems to be treated with medical interventions. Under this model, people who participated in or desired un-heterosexual behavior were deemed non-normative and diagnosed with a sexual disorder (Tiefer, 1996).

Medicalization of Disability

Within modern capitalist societies, disability has also been conceived of as an individual problem through the process of medicalization. With the rise of industrial capitalism came an increased focus on productive labor. Human value became associated with the ability to engage in and sell one's labor. Prior to the Enlightenment and rise of industrial capitalism, disability was understood via moral or religious perspectives (this is still the case in many places and communities today) (Bingham & Green, 2015; Mackelprang & Salsgiver, 2009). People with disabilities were viewed as morally incompetent or as being punished by the divine. "With the rise of enlightenment thinking in Western Europe, though, the moral/religious lens was largely eclipsed by the medical lens" (Bingham & Green, 2015, p. 9; Mackelprang & Salsgiver, 2009). These changes in society brought about by capitalism led to changes in sociological perspectives on disability as well. Disability, like sexuality, fell into the jurisdiction of the medical community, and thus was studied via the medical model.

Scholars of disability studies often describe the medical model as defining disability as an individual problem that needs to be treated, fixed, or rectified (Berger, 2013). Furthermore, disability scholars often describe the medical model as having essentialist domain assumptions (such as a preoccupation with biological determinism) (Berger, 2013). Like medicalized

conceptions of sexuality, at the heart of the medical model of disability lies a positivistic or naturalist epistemology (Berger, 2013; Oliver & Barnes, 2012). Researchers functioning within the understandings of the medical model are often concerned with etiology, diagnoses, prevention, and treatment of disability (Berger, 2013). Scholars who conduct this kind of research may not use the term “medical model” to describe their work. The term is, however, widely used within disability studies and the sociology of disability by scholars who critique this approach to disability and contrast it to the social model of disability. The description of the medical model that follows is based on the work of these critics. Critics of the medical model of disability argue that it is ableist, in that: it understands and portrays people with disabilities as lacking or incomplete and inherently less valuable than non-disabled people; and in that it assumes that (disabled) individuals, not society, must change or adapt in order to solve the problem of disability (Berger, 2013). With the rise of industrial capitalism, disability became an issue to be dealt with by the medical profession which in addition to attempting to cure individuals of their disabilities also asserted control over individual bodies by classifying people as being capable or incapable of engaging in the labor market. This sorting process often segregated or excluded disabled people from society (Berger, 2013; Oliver & Barnes, 2012).

The professionalization of medicine gave the medical community⁷ the ability to create socially significant theories. The medical community quickly developed the scientific biomedical model and germ theory of illness and disease, swiftly securing for themselves power and demand for their services (Oliver & Barnes, 2012). Germ theory proposes that there is an explicit discernible factor that is responsible for every illness and disease (Oliver & Barnes, 2012). This

⁷ As explained above, the medical community comprises physicians, health-related professionals (Hayes & Hannold, 2007), scientists behind new medical invention and study, and social science researchers (medical sociologists included) who contribute to medical discourses.

positivistic understanding of illness produces the belief in apolitical objective knowledge. This suggests that illness and disability is a failure of the body, distinguishable from the normative condition (Oliver & Barnes, 2012). Therefore, disability became a health problem that requires medical expertise to fix (Berger, 2013; Oliver & Barnes, 2012). This understanding of health and disability accordingly contributed to the cultural belief in an able-bodied and able-minded normal (Berger, 2013; Oliver & Barnes, 2012).

Critical Responses to The Medicalization of Disability

Social Model

The social model emerged in Great Britain in the 1970s (Berger, 2013; Shakespeare, 2013). Shortly after its European emergence, scholars and activists in the United States were drawn to this theoretical reconceptualization of disability (Berger, 2013). Contrary to the medical model, the social model of disability suggests that it is not an individual's impairment that determines a disabled person's lower social status over able-bodied/ able-minded individuals, but rather the barriers imposed by society (Berger, 2013). These barriers can include the inaccessibility of buildings, the limited types of communication and transportation, and the prejudice of ableism (Berger, 2013). Social model supporters explain that it is through the belief in the existence of a normative body that disability becomes a subordinate social status and the lives of disabled persons are devalued (Berger, 2013). According to the social model, people have impairments but are disabled by society. Therefore, the experiences of disability are dependent on social contexts and historical location. Disability is socially constructed and thus varies by culture and society (Oliver, 1990).

Since disability is produced via social structure and arrangement, it can therefore be decreased and possibly eradicated (Oliver, 1990). The problem of disability is not one of bodies

or impairment but is strongly situated in material social forces and physical environments⁸ (Shakespeare, 2013). The social model does not deny the existence of impairment but locates the root of the problem of disability in the social structure (Oliver, Sapey, & Thomas, 1983). The problems of disability are not the personal failings of the individuals identifying as disabled, but are rather societal failures to offer suitable services and meet the needs of disabled people within social organizations (Berger, 2013; Oliver & Barnes, 2012).

For supporters of the social model, disability is not a medical condition, but rather a social state (Oliver & Barnes, 2012). In this view of disability, there is a distinction between illness and disability. Social model supporters take issue when doctors attempt to treat disability similarly to the way in which they treat illness (Oliver & Barnes, 2012). Since disability is perceived by social model scholars to be a pervasive social issue, it is not treatable or curable by medical professionals (Oliver & Barnes, 2012). This understanding results in the belief that medical intervention and control over disability is not only inappropriate but also detrimental to disabled individuals and society as a whole (Oliver & Barnes, 2012). Medical understandings of disability function under the notion that the normative body is an abled body, therefore the medical community's aim, as it pertains to disability, is to repair disabled persons and restore them to normalcy, whether or not they have ever been able-bodied (Oliver & Barnes, 2012). For disabled people, the medical community can be discriminating and oppressive (Oliver & Barnes, 2012).

The social model of disability has come to be understood as a progressive approach, while the medical model is often viewed as conservative, reactionary, and backward (Shakespeare, 2013). In moving from individual and personal tragedy models of disability to

⁸ Opposed to discourses as will be discussed in the Queer/Crip section.

impugning societal barriers as the cause for deficiencies, disabled individuals are often able to feel liberated from social persecution (Shakespeare, 2013). As we will see in the next section, while the social model is widely considered to have benefited disabled people, both individually and collectively, it has not gone unchallenged. Among the grounds for its critique is that in drawing attention away from impairment and defining disability as social oppression, the social model has served to disembody the disability experience in ways that do not resonate with the personal experiences of many disabled people.

Critical Disability Perspectives

This section will highlight critical responses to medical and social model understandings of disability. The term “critical” exemplifies what this perspective is about. One of the main tenants of critical perspectives of disability is the value and necessity of critiquing and reexamining all currently and previously accepted understandings of disability (Goodley, 2013). As a consequence, there may be as many critical perspectives on disability as there are critical disability scholars. It is not my goal here to pick apart the different strands of critical perspectives on disability. Rather, I intend to highlight the similarities within this school of thought in terms of its critiques of both the medical and the social models of disability and the ways in which these critiques open the door for queer and crip perspectives. The goals of critical (as well as many feminist) perspectives are to recognize disability as shared experiences of marginalized individuals, focus on ideology, the body, and emancipate disabled people by eradicating the world of discriminatory attitudes and practices. Critical sociologists of disability argue that the medical model is too concerned with biology and disability as a personal failing (Siebers, 2001; Thomas, 2004; Williams, 1999; Williams & Bendelow, 1998). They also argue that social model is too concerned with structure and material while simultaneously claiming that it is not concerned enough with bodies and lived experiences. Many critical sociologists

understand critical realism as bridging the gap between medical model and social model notions of disability (Thomas, 2004; Williams, 1999).

Disembodied emphasis on structure. One common critique is that social model understandings of disability are concerned almost entirely with materialist barriers (Goodley, 2013). These barriers and their associated disablement are not always physical, but they are always material, which critical disability studies scholars claim has oversimplified the multidimensional oppression of disabled people, particularly those that identify with intersections of multiple marginalized identities. Indeed any deviation from the social model has often been dismissed and critiqued as taking away from the political message and objective of scholars and activists concerned with these material issues (Berger, 2013; Goodley, 2013).

In concurrence with the social model of disability, critical studies scholars broadly understand disability to be constructed socially rather than being an individual's medical problem. In contrast to the social model, critical disability scholars find the significance of disability not only rests in the material world, but also is constructed within interactions between physical bodies and their social experiences (Shakespeare, 2013). In other words, often critical disability scholars critique the materialism of social model scholars as oversimplified, arguing that it is material issues (such as physical barriers and low socioeconomic statuses) along with other aspects of the social world (such as oppressive prevalent and proliferating opinions and notions about disabled people) that lead to the disenfranchisement and oppression of disabled people. Indeed, one of the prevalent critiques against social model perspectives is evident in Tom Shakespeare's argument that social model scholars have been lacking in "attention to the question of meaning and representation. Where it is necessary to cover the issues, they have done so schematically using an approach I would suggest is close to Marxist conception of ideology.

That is, ideas about disabled people are consequences of the material relations involving disabled people” (Shakespeare, 1994, p. 286).

Bringing Bodies Back in. Critical sociologists argue that the medical model/social model divide and the body/society and structure/agency debates have stifled scholarship and research progress (Shakespeare, 1994; Siebers, 2001; Thomas, 2004; Williams, 1999; Williams & Bendelow, 1998). For critical sociologists, critical realism offers a possible way to move beyond these debates. They critique medical model for being too concerned with bodies and the social model for not being concerned enough (Shakespeare, 1994; Siebers, 2001; Thomas, 2004; Williams, 1999; Williams & Bendelow, 1998). As Williams (1999) states “The body, in short, is everywhere and nowhere today.” (p. 798). He argues that social model disability scholars have reduced the body to “what is known about it” and urges them to “bring the body back in.” He explains that critical approaches to health, illness, and disability “attempt to ‘rethink’ the biological in terms which do not simply reduce it to the social or vice versa.” (p. 807). For critical sociologists, identities are located within bodies and it is imperative to not attempt to separate the ideological and the physical (Shakespeare, 1994; Siebers, 2001; Thomas, 2004; Williams, 1999; Williams & Bendelow, 1998). Williams outlines three aspects of critical realist approaches to disability, health, and illness: (1) bring bodies back in; (2) examine the relationship between the individual and society in a “non-unidirectional way”; and (3) rethink questions of identity related to real selves and real bodies. In this way, critical sociologists of disability are concerned with multidimensional approaches to identity and their relationships with the body and physical and ideological environments and structures. Critical disability scholars desire to focus on the reality of disabled lives (Shakespeare, 1994; Siebers, 2001; Thomas, 2004; Williams & Bendelow, 1998). As Williams (1999) puts it, the focus should be on

“real bodies, real selves; real lives, real worlds” (p. 815).

Critical approaches to disability have not been as popular as either the social or medical model. However, the introduction of critical perspectives within disability studies has contributed to the development of queer and crip perspectives. Crip and queer theorists have shaped their work in response to the emphasis critical disability scholars (in and outside of sociology) have placed on scholars’ emphasis on complex identities, critiques of materiality, and the goal of “bringing bodies back in.”

Feminist Disability Studies

Feminist (and some critical) sociologists of disability critique other models for not focusing enough on gender, sexuality, and complex intersectional identities, and for being too concerned with materialist barriers. One common critique is that both the medical and the social models of disability are often unconcerned with gender and sexuality, and rarely consider the complexities of multiple marginalized identities and statuses (Berger, 2013). It is the disenfranchisement of disabled women, people of color, and other people of intersectionally marginalized identities, combined with social model scholars’ preoccupation with materialism that lead to the emergence of critical feminist theories of disability (Berger, 2013). Similar to critical disability scholars (and in contrast to the social model), many feminist disability scholars understand the significance of disability as created within interactions between bodies and social experiences (Garland-Thompson, 2005; Shakespeare, 2013). I see a difference between feminist work that references and/or uses disability to make points about feminism, discuss feminism, or reach feminist means and goals and scholars who are rooted in disability studies and approach disability from a feminist perspective. The latter perspective is the focus of the next sections.

Under-Emphasis on Ideology and Beliefs

Feminist disability studies are primarily concerned with eradicating discriminatory

attitudes and practices as a result of the stigma felt by disabled people, not just social, physical, and material barriers (Garland-Thompson, 2005). From this point of view, disability is not just about the material world but also about ideology and beliefs (similar to many critical disability critiques). Instead they understand disability as shared experiences of marginalized individuals (Garland-Thompson, 2005). In this way, disability is a cultural and historic trope and a community that raises concerns and inquiries about societal interpretations of the material body, as well as bodily and mental experiences (Garland-Thomson, 2003; Goodley, 2013). Moreover, ideologies and beliefs about disability are based on a social structure of power that privileges some bodies and minds over others (Garland-Thompson, 2005). For many feminist and critical scholars alike, it is not impairments of bodies and minds that make someone deficient.

Rather, it is the representation of and meanings given to the marked body that labels their body insufficient (Garland-Thompson, 2005). As Goodley (2013) (writing about both critical and feminist disability perspectives) states, “the question, however, is how do bodies matter, or perhaps more accurately, how do they become materialized; that is made, to matter?” (p. 635). Frequently, feminist (similar to critical) conceptions of disability then are concerned with cultural and social inscription of class, race, sexuality, gender, and disability (and other identity categories) onto the body, as well as the interpretations of marginalized bodies (Garland-Thompson, 2005; Garland-Thomson, 2003; Goodley, 2013). Feminist disability theory is concerned with how culture pervasively influences the meaning of bodies (Garland-Thompson, 2010). It is important to note that many social model scholars who may not identify as working within feminist or critical frame-works do in fact also take up ideology and beliefs, but feminist disability scholars argue that these components tend to be under-emphasized in a strict application of social model thinking.

Intersectionality as a missing piece. Many feminist disability scholars critique the social model not only for being preoccupied with materialism but also for this preoccupation leading scholars to ignore the complexities of intersectionally marginalized identities. Feminist scholars are concerned with how different modes of oppression can have multipliable effects on people identifying with multiple marginalized identities (Berger, 2013; Garland-Thompson, 2005; Goodley, 2013). Feminist disability studies focuses on intersectionalities, understanding that identities are complex and layered, which often can lead to compounded and extreme oppression of marginalized people (Berger, 2013). “Intersectionality is not simply about bringing together these markers but to consider how each supports or unsettles the constitution of one another. Intersectionality seeks to explore convergence and divergence of multiple markers” (Goodley, 2011, 2013, p. 636). In this vein, disabled men are seen as feminine and incompetent and unable to access the capital that masculinity would afford them, while disabled women are further marginalized and disabled women of color are doubly oppressed (Berger, 2013). Disabled people have been consistently feminized (and by extension often infantilized) within modern western societies. The complexities of gender, sexuality, race, and disability have been taken up by many critical and feminist disability scholars (Corker & Shakespeare, 2002; Manderson & Peake, 2005; Meeuf, 2009; Sherry, 2004).

The importance of power and voice. Feminist disability studies attempt to disturb traditional stereotypes, which are usually conceived as being perpetuated by “normative” members of the dominant group, about people with disabilities (Garland-Thompson, 2005, 2007). The aim of feminist disability studies includes: (1) confronting dominant notions about what it means to live with a disability (Garland-Thompson, 2005); (2) examining experiences and understandings of disability in the context of power and social inclusion (Garland-Thompson, 2005); (3)

championing the rights of disabled people, as well as pointing out when and how they are excluded from society; (4) emancipating people with disabilities by seeking to represent their dismissed and unheard voices through their reporting their experiences (Garland-Thompson, 2005). It is evident in Garland-Thompson's description of feminist disability studies that not only is she influenced by feminist scholars, but also by Goffman's more sociologically traditional understandings of disability and stigma, experienced through social interaction and discourse (Goffman, 1986).

Feminism within Disability Studies: A Contested Alliance. Feminism within disability studies has frequently been conceptualized out- side of or apart from other feminisms. Specifically, there is often disagree- ment between feminist disability scholars and pro-choice feminists. Popular pro-choice feminist discourses concerning reproductive rights have focused on maternal choice, health, and control. This stance, when examined through disability focused paradigms, takes on different meanings and pre- sents difficult ethical dilemmas (Caeton, 2011). Should mothers be allowed to choose to selectively abort a fetus because of the presence or risk of impairment? If so, what does this say about the value of disabled lives? (Caeton, 2011). Despite these serious disagreements and conflicting ethical positionalities, there has, none-the-less, been much crossover between dis- ability and feminist studies and activisms. Indeed, this crossover is frequently recognized by scholars of both. As Caeton states "were it not for feminist activists, disability rights activists would have found their struggles much lonelier and they would have worked against domination without the bolstering benefits of amity" (2011, p. 3). This mutuality is echoed within narratives of disabled feminist activists such as O'toole (2015) and Rousso (2013). However, this crossover and influence does not extend to every area within disability studies and feminisms as evident by the contentious disagreement over reproductive rights,

abortion law, and more recent discussions of “Physician-assisted-suicide” or “death with dignity” (this terminology alone calls attention to the popular ablest assumption that disabled existence is without dignity). Caeton argues

that there still exists a climate of failed mutual recognition between feminism and disability studies. For, when we truly bring the body back into discourse, we risk alienating the two fields from one another. To illustrate this hazardous potential it would be useful to examine one of the most polarizing issues in contemporary U.S. culture the discourse of reproductive rights, which reveals just how tenuous are the bonds that knit together feminism and disability studies. (Caeton, 2011, p. 13)

Today’s legalized abortion was shaped (and is continuing to be shaped) by many court cases, the most prominent of which are *Roe v. Wade* and *Doe v. Bolton* (Caeton, 2011; Egner, 2016). It is important to note however that abortion law has been consistently fluctuating since *Roe v. Wade* (Egner, 2016). Although, disability and feminist scholars are often united in their objection of forced sterilization specifically of disabled people (as well as people of color, specific ethnic backgrounds/nationalities, and specific classes) there are many inconsistencies in how both scholarships approach other reproductive rights such as abortion. Herein lies an inconsistency in pro-life feminism and disability rights. As Caeton posits “How could ... an individual woman’s right to abortion never be questioned when it would have to be questioned in order to protect fetuses with deformities or other perceivable disabilities from being unfairly terminated? Can both the individual and a class of citizens be protected when we are dealing with the same issue?” (Caeton, 2011, p. 17). As disability rights activists and scholars (specifically Berube, 1998; McRuer, 2006; Shakespeare, 2013) have pointed out, able-bodied people force upon people with disabilities hypothetical ultimatums of “but wouldn’t you rather be like me?” Revealing “more about the able-bodied culture doing the asking than about the bodies being interrogated” (McRuer, 2006, p. 9). In this vein, “Many able-bodied people would choose not to have a child with a disability, but barring the ability to make such a choice, they would choose to

abort the child altogether ... the rhetoric of eugenics and the rhetoric of reproductive freedom have begun to coalesce because of these [new reproductive] technologies.” Indeed, selective abortion of disabled fetuses perpetuates the oppression and disenfranchisement of disability and disabled people and exemplifies atrocities of such eugenic practices. In examples of reproductive rights we see stark differences between feminist disability studies/activism and other types of feminist work.

Feminist perspectives of disability has not been as enthusiastically taken up as other models of disability but it can offer scholars and activists new ways of examining identity and academic scholarship could greatly benefit by engaging with feminist disability perspectives. Even though there is a paradox between feminist women’s rights and feminist disability rights, the examination of these inconsistencies can lead to greater and more original understandings of disability and intersectionalities. Furthermore, the introduction of feminist perspectives within disability studies has greatly influenced the development of queer and crip perspectives. Indeed, queer theory developed out of feminist examinations of the body. Crip theorists have been greatly influenced by critical and feminist disability scholars’ focus on complex intersectionalities and multidimensional identities as well as their critiques regarding materiality and their attempts to “bring bodies back in.”

Crip and Queer Theories

Crip theory is an emerging, postmodern, critical epistemology that can offer a rare fresh eye in refining and combining aspects of the medical and social models in order to construct new comprehensions of disability (Cosenza, 2010; Davis, 1999; Johnson & McRuer, 2014; Kafer, 2011, 2013, 2013; Kannen, 2008; McRuer, 2006, 2013; McRuer & Johnson, 2014; Sandahl, 2003; Willey, Subramaniam, Hamilton, & Couperus, 2015). Crip and queer approaches to disability are not synonymous, but have entangled histories. Crip theory emerged out of queer

critiques of disability (McRuer, 2006), which developed out of postmodern examinations of feminist approaches to gender, sexuality, and power (Butler, 2006a, 2006b; Butler & Scott, 2013). Crip theory also draws on African and Latino/a studies, rhetoric and English, and globalization studies along with sociology (McRuer, 2006).

As briefly touched on in the introduction, there is a recent tradition of referring to crip perspectives through an amalgamation of crip and queer theoretical approaches and practices. It is not uncommon to see scholars use feminist queer or queer feminist perspectives together. While feminist and queer are not synonymous, they have been used in conjunction with each other (even though there are, at times, inconsistencies and theoretical paradoxes throughout their histories). With the introduction of Kafer's *Feminist Queer Crip* we are seeing the joining of these three perspectives to create a disability focused feminist queer theory (or a queer focused feminist crip theory). My use of queer crip, crip/queer, or queer/crip theory is in reference to the ways in which they can and have been used together and their shared histories. Queer/crip approaches examine the social world, discourses, and the body (specifically disability and sexuality) through blending of crip and queer theory. In short, when I am referring to queer/crip I am referencing the way they can be used together to create a perspective that is both queer and crip.

In the introduction, I have outlined six specific goals of queer/crip theory. Although these are not all inclusive of every crip theorists' intentions of individual projects they reflect the ways in which scholars can apply crip perspectives to sociological projects. In the following section, I will describe these goals in more detail.

Intersectional identities as fluid and complex constructs. Influenced by social model and feminist sociologists, crip theorists attempt to understand intersectional identities as fluid

and complex (goal one). Crip theory is concerned with how some bodies and identities are viewed as normal while others are viewed as abnormal (McRuer, 2006). Crip theorists recognize that the oversimplification of identities and lack of recognition of the complexity of human experiences contributes to practices that de-normalize and stigmatize groups of people.

Intersecting Hegemonies: Normative Notions of Sexuality and Ableism. By building on the work of social model, feminist, and critical sociologists of disability and incorporating queer perspectives, crip theorists seek to understand how disabling discourses affect the social experiences of groups and individuals' lives. Crip theorist is concerned with experiences of sexual-ity (goal two) and often looks to them in an attempt to subvert ableism and these ablest discourses and narratives (goal three). This is evident in McRuer's work on compulsory able-bodiedness, which is often cited as the first development of crip theory (McRuer, 2006, 2013; McRuer & Johnson, 2014). McRuer uses Adrienne Rich's notion of compulsory heterosexuality to frame compulsory able-bodiedness and calls for a queer disability studies (which would later be termed as crip theory) (McRuer, 2013). He approaches this work from a postmodern stance, calling attention to the use of texts and discourse in the execution of power over disabled individuals (McRuer, 2013). He describes heterosexuality as defined in opposition to homosexuality as many feminist and queer scholars have done in the past (McRuer, 2013). He, however, draws parallels from the construction of heterosexuality and homosexuality to the construction of able-bodiedness and disability. Furthermore, he connects this construction of discourse to the rise of industrial capitalism similarly to how Oliver and Barnes connect the problematizing of impairments in the social model argument to the rise of capitalism (McRuer, 2013; Oliver & Barnes, 2012).

The power of discourse in everyday life. Crip theorists seek to uncover the ways in

which discourses subtly and overtly reinforce normative expectations (goal five). Crip/queer theory, at times, borrows from Foucauldian tradition in understanding power as located within discourses. In this sense, discourses are more than just speech and the written word, encapsulating any form of communication including but not limited to gestures, products, videos, pictures, and all other forms of communication. Indeed, for crip theorists the significance of disability is not just in the way disabled bodies move about the physical and social world (though it is important for crip scholars that the body not be disregarded) but how disabled bodies and minds are represented in media, how they are pictured and portrayed, how they are spoken about, and how they are viewed and looked upon by able-bodied members of society (i.e., “staring as dominance” and how they are gazed at) as well as how disabled people are expected to talk about and represent themselves and how they actually do so.

Crip theorists are especially concerned with discourses that privilege narratives of progress and cure (Kafer, 2013). Kafer has explained that by solely stressing narratives of cure and progress society pictures utopian futures without disability and thus without disabled people (2013).

Replacing the narrative of cure through subversive acts. Crip theorists reject the idea that disabled people should wish to be able-bodied and seek to provide alternative narratives (goal five). Furthermore, they intend to deconstruct these normative expectations through subversive tactics (goal six). This is evident in McRuer’s notion of “severely disabled.” McRuer, in claiming the importance of discourse in regards to disability, draws attention to the power of holding a critical perspective and naming that perspective. In naming a critically queer disabled perspective McRuer introduced the notion of “severely disabled” within crip theory. A severely disabled positionality is not one that is applied to a disabled person by able-bodied

members of society. Rather, it is a critical position that one claims on their own accord. Similar to the way that “queer” has been re- appropriated by gender and sexuality scholars, activists, and feminists or similar to Tony Kushner’s use of “fabulous,” those interested in crippling practices and theory can claim “severe.” McRuer writes those claiming severely disabled calls “attention to the ways in which the disability rights movement and disability studies have resisted the demands of compulsory able-bodiedness and have demanded access to a newly imagined and newly configured public sphere where full participation is not contingent on an able body” (2013, p. 306). Severe in this way is a critical critique of compulsory able-bodiedness as well as compulsory heterosexuality and any other practices or attitudes that perpetuate oppressive discourses. It is subversive and unforgiving in its boldness. McRuer states

A severe critique is a fierce critique, a defiant critique, one that thoroughly and carefully reads a situation and I mean reading in the street sense of loudly calling out the inadequacies of a given situation, person, text, or ideology. “Severely disabled,” according to such a queer conception, would reverse the able-bodied understanding of severely disabled bodies as the most marginalized, the most excluded from a privileged and always elusive normalcy, and would instead suggest that it is precisely those bodies that are best positioned to refuse “mere toleration” and to call out the inadequacies of compulsory able-bodiedness (McRuer, 2013, p. 306)

Siebers (2008), Sandahl (2003), and Schalk (2013) make similar claims in arguing that disabled identities and crip critiques assert political, social, cultural, and theoretical power. The claiming of such a critical position is useful in examining societal conceptions of disability. It is also important to note there that while some crip scholars may use the term “disabled identities” within crip theory these identities are always conceived to be fluid and not understood as stable and essential. Rather, a crip approach to claiming disability identities focuses on the usefulness of these identities to destabilize and deconstruct normative notions of disability and the body.

In contrast to other models, crip/queer theory is not entirely concerned with the material

world but instead understands the significance of disability as residing in discourses (McRuer, 2013). Moreover, this does not mean that materiality is completely disregarded as it is in some factions of post- modernism. Rather it could be argued that crip theorists are concerned with postmodern new materialist approaches (Coole & Frost, 2010; Frost, 2011; Jagger, 2014⁹) to disability. While this approach has not been explicitly articulated in the disability studies literature, New Materialism, introduced by feminist natural scientists (most famously biologist Anne Fausto-Sterling) and feminist science studies scholars, is concerned with the relationship between physical, biological bodies, and the material and social world (Frost, 2011). Feminist new materialism is a response to social constructivist understandings that are preoccupied with meaning making and the social world, in that it urges feminists to “develop models of causation and explanation that can account for the complex interactions through which the social, the biological, and the physical emerge, persist, and transform” (Frost, 2011, p. 69). It is here that we see some overlap with crip theory which also focuses on “brining bodies back in.” In contrast to some social model understandings, the problem of disability marginalization is not just a result of physical and environmental barriers. In contrast to some feminist understandings of power, oppression of disabled persons is not just a result of interaction and social structure. Rather, all power is knowledge and all knowledge is power that is enacted via discourse (Foucault, 1988). Furthermore, disability and disabled bodies are not necessarily a problem of the material world (McRuer, 2006; Shakespeare, 2013). Indeed, disability is only recognizable and given meaning via discourse. It is important to note that crip theory is not the only model that has examined the complex relationship between bodies, embodiment, and the social world nor is it the only one to

⁹ Coole and Frost (2010) write in new materialism of postmodernism and Jagger (2014) writes critiques of new materialism. Both of these pieces along with other new materialist literature could provide unique and fascinating understandings of crip theory and disability.

study disability via discourses. Indeed, there is a growing interest among disability scholars in this complex interactional way of approaching disability (Shakespeare, 2013; Siebers, 2008). However, focusing on both the enactment of disability via discourses and on the complexities of embodiment and the relationships between bodies and the social are central components of crip theory. Simply put, a description of disability lacking these components would not be recognizable as a crip theory.

Summary and Implications For Future Scholarship and Research

Crip approaches to disability are a critical response to academic, medical, and social practices of pathologization of the body and mind specifically as it pertains to disability and sexuality. The paradigms and perspectives outlined here (social construction of health and illness, social model of disability, critical and feminist approaches to disability, and queer theory) all critique practices of pathologization and medicalization of health, illness, and (dis)ability. Scholars working in these perspectives are influenced by and influence each other's work. It is evident that crip theory has emerged not only in response to medicalization but also in response to the prominent critiques of medicalization that scholars working within these areas have made. These perspectives and the scholars working within them have chipped away at dominant practices of medicalization, opening cracks through which crip theory has been able to leak. In short, the relatively new perspective of crip theory is heavily influenced by these other approaches and without them crip theory is less likely to have emerged. As described above, disability and sexuality have similar histories of medicalization and mirrored academic and social responses to this medicalization.

Sociologists and scholars of gender, sexuality, disability and health, and illness have developed perspectives that critique practices of medicalization creating constructionist

approaches to gender, sexuality, and health and illness and social model approaches to disability.

Social construction of health and illness and critiques of medicalization within medical sociology was one of the first perspectives to address the ways in which deviant behavior becomes pathologized and scholars working within this area were some of the first to point to the immense amount of social control that pathologization affords the medical community. Social constructionist medical sociologists such as Zola, Conrad, and Baker argue(d) that medicalization locates behavior, activities, and experiences within the jurisdiction of medical expertise thus defining certain behaviors and bodies as medical problems and illness which the medical community is responsible for solving and curing. In this way, the medical community can exercise power over groups of individuals. Crip theorists take up and build upon this argument explaining that in defining behaviors and bodies as deviant, the medical community creates normalizing social practices and rhetoric that describes some bodies and minds as normative and others as abject. Whereas medical sociologists were primarily concerned with medical and social practices (specifically of meaning making) and hierarchies, crip theorists examine these arguments primarily in relation to discourse.

The social model of disability has also greatly influenced crip theory in a variety of ways. First, both crip and social model scholars understand disability as dependent on social and historical contexts. Second, although crip and social model scholars locate the problems associated with disability in different spaces (for crip theorists, problems associated with disability are located in discourse while social model scholars locate problems of disability within material social forces and physical environments), both perspectives understand that disability is not a personal failing. Third, and one of the greatest influences social model perspectives have had on crip theory, is the idea that disability is a pervasive social issue that it is

not treatable or curable by medical doctors thus medical intervention and control over disability is inappropriate and detrimental to disabled individuals and society as a whole. However, for crip theorists, arguments against cure are not necessarily only about disability being a social issue but rather a rejection of curative narratives of progress.

Feminist perspectives of sexuality and critical and feminist perspectives of disability emerged in response to pathologization and medicalization, as well as in opposition to specific aspects of constructionist approaches to sexuality, health, and illness and specific aspects of the social model of disability. They, too, have had an impact on the development of crip theory, primarily through their critiques of other models of disability, health and illness. Many feminist and critical disability scholars argue that other models are not concerned enough with intersectional and complex understandings of identity and the effects of holding multiple marginalized positionalities. Crip theory builds upon this argument in understanding that any oversimplification of identities, specifically identity politics and practices of normalizing and de-normalizing identities, should be deconstructed. Crip theorists have a complicated relationship with some feminist disability critiques of materialism. Feminist and critical disability scholars alike have argued that other models (including the social model) are too concerned with material and physical environments and that more attention should be placed on other factors such as oppressive opinions and ideology. Many feminist scholars stress that it is material issues along with other aspects of the social world that lead to the disenfranchisement and oppression of disabled people. Many crip theorists also agree that more attention should be paid to understanding, studying, and deconstructing ideology and that disability is not entirely the product of physical barriers. However, crip theorists often stress a focus on materiality in that bodies matter similar to arguments made by critical realist scholars. For crip theory, it is

important to not disregard the lived experiences of the body and it is equally important to not reduce disability to just physical or social environments and experiences. It is also important to reiterate that queer theory developed as feminist and sexuality study scholars took up questions of the body. In this way, both feminist and critical approaches to the body have greatly affected the development of crip theory. Crip theory, heavily influenced by the above perspectives, developed in the merging of disability and body studies with queer perspectives of gender and sexuality.

Crip and queer approaches to disability provide a clear call for future sociological research. While empirical work stemming from the medical and social model traditions is abundant, few social science scholars have applied queer and crip approaches in empirical research on disability (Meyer, 2002; Solis, 2007; Whitney, 2006; Willey et al., 2015). The majority of work in this area is located in the humanities and concerned with literary criticism. There is much to be gained by applying queer theorists' perspectives on sexuality and disabled bodies and minds in social science research (Anzaldua, 1991; Haraway, 1991; Morland, 2012; Rubin, 2012; Fausto-Sterling, 2012). Furthermore, while disability, feminist, and queer scholars have been concerned with both sexuality and disability, few have focused on the intersection of disability and non-normative gender/sexual identities (Duke, 2011; Odette, 1999; Sherry, 2004; Sinecka, 2008). A broader array of empirical work on the intersection of sexuality and disability from queer/crip perspectives is needed both to refine these postmodern theoretical models and to examine their implications for the complex lived experience that lies at the intersection of sexuality and disability. In queering disability and crippling sexuality and gender, we may not only be able to more fully conceptualize disability, sexuality, and gender as individual social categories, but also develop richer and more nuanced understandings of the complex

intersections between and among these social locations and the experience of living within them. Queer/crip perspectives highlight questions concerning the complexities of intersectional identities, specifically as it pertains to disability and sexuality. For example, queer/crip perspectives suggest specific future research questions such as: (1) How do individuals who identify as both LGBT and disabled negotiate these (at times) socially contradicting identities? (2) How do social movement organizations respond, incorporate, and account for members who identify with complex intersectional identities? (3) How does the importance placed on progressive and curative discourses shape and affect disabled peoples' personal narratives and experiences? (4) How do fluid understandings of sexuality and disability shape strategies used by social movement organizations?

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CHAPTER THREE:

HEGEMONIC OR QUEER?: A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF FIVE LGBTQ+ INTERSECTIONAL SOCIAL MOVEMENT ORGANIZATIONS

Abstract: This paper explores how Social Movement Organizations (SMOs) that seek to address issues faced by people who identify as both LGBTQ+ and disabled engage in boundary work. This paper answers the research question: How do intersectional LGBTQ+/disability social movement groups position themselves and construct collective identity and collective consciousness? Specifically, this paper explores the degree to which these organizations stress sameness and/or difference in relation to the dominant group by engaging in boundary work and establishing collective identity and collective consciousness. By exploring how these groups engage in practices of inclusion and exclusion related to the construction of boundaries, I examine how the stressing of sameness and/or difference informs SMO's position in relation to and use of queer/crip or hegemonic discourses. By employing narrative analysis and virtual ethnography I examine five SMOs' online presence via their webpages and web-spaces via the texts and images displayed. The data in this study show that groups that use hegemonic discourses frequently suppress difference while those that use queer discourses celebrate difference.

Introduction

This paper explores how Social Movement Organizations (SMOs) that seek to address

issues faced by people who identify as both LGBTQ+¹⁰ and disabled engage in boundary work. Specifically, it explores the degree to which these organizations stress sameness and/or difference in relation to the dominant group in establishing collective identity and collective consciousness, and how this emphasis informs their position in relation to and the use of queer/crip or hegemonic discourses. I use the term ‘hegemonic discourses’ to refer to discourses that promote practices of assimilation and/or normalization where normative ways of being (specifically as it pertains to ability, gender, and sexuality) are understood as ideal. I use hegemonic discourses to describe discourse typically associated with strategies of civil rights tactics that encourage “at least the appearance of normality” as normality “is central to gaining political room” (Gamson, 1995: 396). I also call on Connel and Messerschmidt’s (2005) use of hegemonic masculinities, often understood as practices that embody “the currently most honored way of being a man”(832). Hegemonic masculinity requires “all other men to position themselves in relation to it...Hegemony did not mean violence, although it could be supported by force; it meant ascendancy achieved through culture, institutions, and persuasion” (832). Hegemonic masculinity has been extended to sexuality (hegemonic heterosexuality) and in the context of this paper I extend it to discourses focused on ability (hegemonic ability). As such, hegemonic ability would require that people position themselves in relation to the ideal able body/mind which holds an ascendant position within social hierarchies. In this way, a discourse is hegemonic if it promotes assimilation through strategies of normalization (often by supporting a close position to normative ideals) in attempt to gain “political room”. Hegemonic discourses also frequently support neoliberal rhetoric through the promotion of assimilation. The term *queer*

¹⁰ Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans, Transgender, Queer, Genderqueer, Intersex, Asexual Pansexual, Omnisexual, and other nonheterosexual/noncisgender identities. Throughout the duration of the paper I will use LGBTQ+ to represent the full acronym as it is written here, unless otherwise noted.

is often used as an umbrella term for anyone identifying as LGBT. Although using the term *queer* in academic writing, activism, and personal identities has its benefits (avoiding ‘alphabet soup’ in that it is shorter, quicker, and more unifying) it is not all-inclusive to the participants represented here. Some of the organizations and their members represented in this paper do not identify with or as *queer*. Thus, I use LGBTQ+ for its inclusiveness and accuracy to this particular study. Here, however, I use *queer* as a noun to signify an individual who wishes to challenge the dominant notion of identity boundaries and also as a verb to indicate the act of challenging these boundaries (to queer). In some places in this text, I use the term to denote challenges to boundaries that are specific to sexual identity while in other cases I use it in a more encompassing way to denote a perspective that challenges binary boundaries more broadly (including disability identity) (Egner 2016). This perspective is sometimes called *crip* and the act of challenging boundaries between disabled and normal identity is called *cripping*. Queer and crip theoretical perspectives, although not synonymous, both attempt deconstruction—often through practices of discourse (Egner 2016). Crip theory approaches can be understood as disability-focused queer practices that are concerned with the relationship between physical body, embodiment, and the self. Queer and crip perspectives both emphasize difference and argue against binary notions of normality (Egner 2016; Kafer 2013; McRuer 2006; McRuer and Johnson 2014; McRuer 2013). In this paper, I explore how social movement organizations (SMOs) use tactics and discourses that are queer/crip and/or hegemonic/assimilationist. In other words, this paper examines how groups come to celebrate or suppress difference as they establish the collective identity of the SMO.

It has been theorized that collective identity is comprised of a multitude of complex factors and cannot be reduced to a single component. Taylor and Whittier define collective

identity as comprised of three complex and interrelated factors: boundary work, collective consciousness, and negotiation (Taylor & Whittier, 1998). I build off of this work and situate this study within their understandings of collective identity. For the purpose of this paper, I focus on the rhetoric SMOs use to construct boundaries and the meaning of those boundaries in terms of collective identities and thus collective consciousness. I am concerned here with the processes by which boundaries are constructed and collective identities formed. Specifically, I examine the online presence of five SMOs that represent and advocate for specific complex collective identities centered on the intersection of LGBTQ+ and disability identities. This paper examines the process by which these groups form boundaries, identities, and collective consciousness and present these through discourse. In pursuing this goal, I address the following research question: How do intersectional¹¹ LGBTQ+/disability social movement organizations position themselves (as it pertains to boundary construction, practices of inclusion/exclusion, and strategic use of discourses) and how do they construct collective identity and collective consciousness?

Previous Literature

In this section I will examine the relevant sociological literature on social movements as it pertains to collective identity and collective consciousness. I then describe the ways in which

¹¹ Drawing on Crenshaw's (1991) approach to intersectionality, I understand that the experiences of those who hold complex multifaceted identities cannot be completely summarized by examining those identities separately. Crenshaw has explained that discourses associated with either anti-racism or feminism cannot fully represent the experiences of women of color as they are marginalized within both (1244). As such, I recognize disabled LGBTQ+ people may also experience marginalization within both of these communities and to fully capture their experiences I cannot examine their identities separately. Furthermore, I also acknowledge that an intersectional approach to identity means considering all identities an individual holds and that the experiences of being both disabled and LGBTQ+ can be greatly affected by an individual's other identities, specifically as it pertains (but not limited) to their race, class, age, education, and nationality.

SMOs engaging in processes of collective identity have been theorized in relation to processes of boundary making. Additionally, I relate SMOs' use of hegemonic and queer discourses to the work of Gamson and Bernstein. Specifically, I will call on Gamson's arguments about queer identity movements (1995) and Bernstein's explanation of SMOs engaging in acts of suppression or celebration of difference (1997). Though the works of Bernstein and Gamson referenced here were published over 20 years ago, these works remain relevant and still provide important considerations to the examination of LGBTQ+ social movements. Specifically, it is imperative to examine these works in relation to the construction of queer and hegemonic discourse within organizations advocating for the rights of people who identify with varied and complex multiple intersecting identities. Although Bernstein and Gamson's works examine LGBTQ+ movements, these works can provide scholars with useful conceptualizations of disability movements, as much of disability rights approaches are in response to the societal notion that bodily difference should not be celebrated (Clare 2001). Lastly, I will give a brief history of how queer and hegemonic discourses relate to both LGBTQ+ and disability social movements.

Collective Identity and Collective Consciousness

Collective identity is the focus of much of the research on new social movements. New social movements are frequently described as movements that challenge images of identity, while more traditional social movements are often understood as those seeking to redistribute resources. For many theorists, collective identity is an essential and fundamental concept used to organize and explain identity-centered movements (Malucci 1989, 1994; Hunt and Benford, 1994; Taylor & Whittier, 1992, 1998; Bernstein, 1997; 2003, Jasper 2011, 2003; Flesher Fominaya, 2010a; 2010b; Mann, 2004; Yang, 2000). Collective identity is often defined in terms of group-level processes or as an individual's relationship to a group. Though these definitions

are interrelated, they are distinct in their level of organization. For some researchers, collective identity is defined as a phenomenon occurring at the group level (Malucci 1989, 1994) and for others as an individual's connection with or perception of belonging to a broader community, group, or institution based on values, principles, and/or emotion (Polletta & Jasper, 2001). For the purpose of this paper, I focus primarily on group identity but also illuminate linkages between collective and personal identity.

Taylor and Whittier define three factors that influence the development of collective identity within social movement work: the creation of a consciousness that recognizes that the group's position within the social structure is due to social and structural conditions, the creation of social boundaries, and negotiation of internal and external group meanings (Taylor & Whittier, 1998). Consciousness provides a collectivity with significance (Taylor & Whittier, 1998; Hunt & Benford, 1994; Owens et al, 2010). Rather than personal failings, collective actors must believe that their dissatisfaction and grievances are due to structural, cultural, or systematic causes (Taylor & Whittier, 1998). Consciousness is a continuous process imparted through discourse, in which groups reexamine themselves through their shared experiences, understandings, opportunities and common interests. In other words, collective consciousness informs and is informed by collective identity. For many theorists, collective consciousness is developed in opposition to dominant society, frequently referred to as oppositional or political consciousness (Hunt & Benford, 1994). Since this paper's objective is to examine how SMOs that seek to address issues faced by people who identify as both LGBTQ+ and disabled engage in boundary work, it is imperative to examine the relationship between the construction of collective consciousness and processes of boundary making.

Boundary Making

Boundaries identify who is and who is not a member of the group. By emphasizing differences between activists and the rest of society, boundaries indicate the in-group and the out-group or the “us and the them” (Taylor & Whittier, 1998). Social movement groups, in participating in collective action and in pursuit of a goal, engage in a process of drawing boundary lines (Taylor & Whittier, 1998; Hunt & Benford, 1994). It is this boundary making that establishes the in-group and the out-group; consequently, boundary work is essential to the development of collective identity (Taylor & Whittier, 1998; Hunt & Benford, 1994). Organizations and institutions frequently construct boundaries based on the categorization of social actors and these constructions of boundaries often have material consequences (Armstrong and Bernstein, 2008).

This leaves us with a question of inclusion and exclusion. How are these boundaries formed? Who counts as the in-group and who counts as the out-group? And how does this drawing of boundaries affect the consciousness of the group? Surely, the relationship between boundaries, collective identity, and consciousness is interrelated and possibly even reciprocal, with boundaries determining consciousness and consciousness determining boundaries.

Clearly, not all social movements are a united group with consistent understandings of their group’s boundaries. A case in point: LGBTQ+ and feminist social movements have both developed into multiple factions based on differences of collective identity (Bernstein, 1997, 2003). Understandings of collective identity affect how they relate to dominant society, what goals they aim to accomplish, how they determine the in-group and out-group, and what tactics they use to achieve said goals. These differences of boundaries, identity and consciousness—as well as the relationship to the dominant society, goals, and tactics—can be examined by analyzing the rhetoric produced and maintained by SMOs.

This paper investigates five different SMOs within a complex, factionalized, and intersectional movement. It is probable that collective identity informs and is informed by the groups' position and use of queer/crip or hegemonic rhetoric and the way that they construct boundaries. The relationship between collective identity and interactions with dominant society and how this shapes SMOs' position as queer/crip or hegemonic groups (for definitions see section on queer/crip and hegemonic discourses) will be examined here. In order to do this, I seek to examine collective identity via the boundaries these SMOs draw based on inclusion and exclusion (i.e. who can join the group as activists and who the group is advocating for) in relation to their collective consciousness' as well as how these aspects of collective identity are presented through queer/crip and hegemonic discourses. In short, I explore the processes of how groups form boundaries, identities, and consciousness and present those through rhetoric and discourse.

Hegemonic and Queer Discourses: Sameness or Difference in Assimilation or Anti-assimilation Politics

Bernstein (1997) argues that identity movements either celebrate or suppress their differences from the dominant group. The suppression or celebration of difference by social movement organizations is often in response to the way variation from the norm is understood socially. "Irrevocable difference could be cause for celebration, but in this world it isn't. The price we pay for variation from the norm that's defined and upheld by white supremacy, patriarchy, and capitalism is incredibly high" (Clare 2001: 362). Whether identity movements celebrate or suppress difference is based on a multitude of factors and this emphasis between celebrating and suppressing differences can shift throughout the course of the movement's existence. Processes of boundary work and collective conscious construction are, in part,

manifested via these types of celebration or suppression. Bernstein (1997) suggests that different factors determine how the gay and lesbian rights movements have determined their relationship to the dominant group. Moreover, identity movements celebrate or suppress differences as the result of “political access, movement interactions with opposing movements and with the state, as well as of interactions among groups within activist communities” (Bernstein 1997: 560). Ultimately, it is the relationship the social movement organization has with the dominant culture (which is partly expressed in political access) that determines how these groups define their difference(s). According to Bernstein, the closer a social movement’s members are to the dominant group (i.e. the more political access they have) the more likely they are to express their similarities to the dominant group (instead of their difference). Bernstein’s argument infers that if a group has members with certain hierarchal categories (i.e. gay, white, businessmen) and political access, then the group will seek changes in policy by emphasizing their sameness to the dominant group (Bernstein 1997).

Conversely, if groups do not have their own institutions and a political consciousness, they will frequently focus on using identity for empowerment in order to build community (Bernstein 1997). As a social movement’s opportunities develop, the objective of identity shifts. Established groups’ decisions to celebrate or suppress differences are contingent on the group’s access to the polity, the extent of opposition, and the degree of inclusiveness of movement organizations (Bernstein 1997). When a movement lacks this access they will produce critical identities that often result in celebrating difference opposed to emphasizing sameness. Since SMO’s boundary work is, in part, played out via acts and use of discourses of celebration and suppression to the dominant group and by examining how groups engage in these different discourses and acts, we are able to more closely examine processes of boundary work.

Similar to the categorization of groups based on their emphasis of sameness or difference, other scholars have categorized SMOs into hegemonic and queer categories. Groups that stress hegemony emphasize their similarities to the dominant group and often stress assimilation politics. These groups also frequently stress neoliberal agendas in their corporate like structure and support of big business like structure (Duggan 2002). This is evident in groups that use such discourses to support homonormativity (Duggan 2002). Groups that stress queerness will emphasize their difference and often use anti-assimilation political strategies. However, sameness and hegemony and difference and queerness are not synonymous terms. While it is evident that hegemonic groups attempt to incite political (and at times, cultural) change by stressing their likeness to the dominant group, queer groups do not necessarily stress their difference from the dominant group. Instead, queer groups will often celebrate difference by attempting to break down all boundaries between individuals, challenging the very idea of binary comparison (Gamson 1995). Queer groups and individuals may not emphasize sameness because they assume that every individual (even those who are members of the dominant group) is different (Sedgwick 1990). Those engaging in queering understand that symmetric binary oppositions, specifically dichotomies of identity (such as homosexual/heterosexual, masculine/feminine binaries, disabled/able-bodied), are fundamentally unstable and unintelligible because each binary requires a coherent definition of and is dependent on its opposite for its existence and meaning (Sedgwick 1993). Queer politics attempt to end discrimination by critiquing not only the normal behavior but the idea of normal behavior as well (Gamson 1995). Queering often means embracing stigma in order to reclaim it (Gamson 1995). As Gamson (1995) explains, queering is not glorifying difference but is attempting to revise the group boundaries by stressing that everyone identifies on the fringes (this is slightly different

than the celebrating of difference that Bernstein discusses.) Queering, then, is not only celebrating difference but also emphasizing sameness through the view that everyone is different. Although queer groups may position themselves in contradiction to more normative understandings of identity, they do not always outright reject identity altogether. Members of queer SMOs frequently claim signifying identities that may seem contradictory to queering projects in that utilizing such personal identities such as lesbian, gay, bisexual, and/or trans emphasize a collective identity that may appear to support dichotomies of identity. This, however, is not necessarily antithetical to queer projects in that queer groups frequently recognize these identities as fluid and use them to attempt to destabilize within. Gamson understands that queer groups often attempt to deconstruct collective identity through processes of destabilizing from within. Destabilizing from within “calls attention to a general dilemma of identity politics: Fixed identities are both the basis for oppression and the basis for political power” (Gamson 1995: 391).

This leaves identity movements with two options: do they accept the structure of dominant society and attempt to gain cultural and political capital (and therefore become more equal) or do they reject the social structure all together (and queer)? Gamson explains this as the “queer dilemma” (1995). In identity movements, an inclusive queerness can challenge the idea that identities (based on such categories as gender or sexual orientation) are fixed and natural and therefore have grounds to be political and members of these nationalized groups should be equal both politically and socially (Gamson1995). Hegemonic groups that function under the notion that identity is fixed and natural are able to make political gains. However, they do little to critique the political and cultural structure itself. Herein lies the problem: that queering does not

take on the direct political issues constrained by law and medicine and hegemonic groups do not take on the larger structural issue that constantly privileges some identities over others.

Here we see an inconsistency in the literature. Whereas Bernstein (1997) argues that groups that have political access as groups that are more likely to emphasize sameness (i.e. use hegemonic means), Gamson proposes that these groups are more likely to take the risk of queering (Gamson 1995). For political gains and safety, groups construct themselves as having clear criteria for membership (Gamson 1995). For Gamson, lesbians are particularly threatened by the blurring of gender and sexuality categorization as such blurring would make it more difficult for lesbians to experience political and social gains. It is in the solidifying of sexual and gender categories that such gains are made. Therefore, lesbians are more threatened by the blurring of boundaries than gay men because gay men hold a stronger political position and have a more established public identity while lesbians occupy a position further from dominant society as they must not only win gains against the dominant society based on their sexual orientation but also based on their gender (Gamson 1995). Lesbians, on the other hand, are forced by queer politics to share what newly found political ground they have gained and to undermine their political goals by asserting that gender and sexuality are fluid categories (Gamson 1995). In this vein, SMOs with members who are less marginalized are more likely to queer.

The groups examined here often use techniques and strategies of employing hegemonic and/or queer discourses to either celebrate or suppress their differences. Processes of collective consciousness, collective identity, and boundary work are often employed through stressing sameness or difference and celebration or suppression of this difference to the dominant group. SMOs use different techniques to articulate their relationship to the dominant group as it pertains

to difference. One of these techniques is the way in which groups employ rhetoric and discourse. I argue that the groups in this study using hegemonic discourses will often suppress difference, thus stressing sameness to the dominant group, while groups that use queer discourses are more concerned with celebrating and stressing difference. The findings indicate that the use of these discourses, and how groups position themselves in turn, affects processes of boundary work. Furthermore, the data suggests that queer and hegemonic discourses function on a continuum. Queer and hegemonic are opposite ends on a sliding scale and groups' discourses can present varying degrees of hegemony or queerness in any given situation. Foucault has explained that discourse has tactical polyvalence in that they have many meanings and can be employed strategically in a variety of different ways (1978). For Foucault it is not necessarily what is being said via a discourse but rather what power/knowledge produces or is produced by said discourse. Therefore, queer/hegemonic discourses are locally and situationally constituted. An action's or discourse's subversive potential is determined within specific contexts. In other words, the same statement said in different places at different times can have different meanings. As such, I recognize that groups in this study have produced discourses at varying degrees on a queer/hegemonic continuum. Moreover, as addressed above, queer has been used as an umbrella term and in this way it has been taken up by organizations that frequently emphasis hegemonic and assimilationist rhetoric. Therefore, queer discourses are sometimes constructed through hegemonic discourses. However, the use of queer in this paper explicitly attempts to avoid this type of umbrella categorization. When organizations use the term queer as part of assimilationist rhetoric it is not categorized as queer discourses as it pertains to this study.

LGBTQ+ Movements and Queer and Hegemonic Discourses

LGBTQ+ movements have traditionally been categorized in to two categories: assimilationist and separatists¹² in which assimilationists emphasize sameness and separationists emphasize difference (Gamson 1995; Seidman 2003/2010). Throughout the life spans of the LGBT movements, the emphasis on sameness or difference has shifted (Seidman 2010), as is common for movements, historically (Bernstein 1997; 2003). As identities based on sexuality have become more categorized, they (along with their organizations) have become mainstream (Seidman 2010). According to some scholars, the lesbian and gay movements have mostly abandoned their emphasis on difference from dominant society and currently focus on similarities to the majority (Bernstein 1997; 2003; Seidman 1993; 2002; 2003/2010).

Scholars studying the history of the LGBTQ+ movements have found that fixed identity categories can be both the reason for oppression and the foundation for which to gain political power, leaving LGBTQ+ activists with the ‘queer dilemma’ (Gamson 1995; Seidman 2003/2010). Assimilationists may retain political capital but they do so at the cost of fluid identities. It is the blurring of these identity categories that could cause more hegemonic factions of a movement to lose political power. Although many scholars believe that the LGBTQ+ movements are currently focused on hegemonic (and often assimilationist) political gains, there is a substantial push from those identifying as queer to blur the boundaries and deconstruct this hegemonic collective identity. Queer members of LGBTQ+ movements argue that the hegemonic, homonormative, and dominant factions of the LGBTQ+ movement reflect the white, middle class experience. Seidman argues that, “Today, at least in the United States, we are witnessing something new: Heterosexuals, gays, lesbians, bisexuals recently fighting for their

¹² Although I recognize that this dichotomous categorization and the perceptions of the historical contexts that have led to this categorization could be and has been problematized (Sedgwick, 1993), it has often been presented this way in the literature.

right to an identity are now staking out positions against the very idea of sexual identity” (2003/2010: 83). Seidman continues by explaining that “queer then is a revolt against the idea of the normal, and it is defense of a culture that is comfortable with sexual and gender ambiguity and ambivalence” (87). For some of those engaging in queer politics, the movement is about recognizing and celebrating the differences within LGBT movements while for others it is about denying categorization of sexual identity entirely.

Disability Movements and Queer/Crip and Hegemonic Discourses.

The disability rights movement reflects similar positions as the LGBTQ+ movements. The movement is broken in to several factions, each focused on or presenting a different collective identity. Two of the most predominant factions are disability activists and scholars (who are more hegemonic in their activism and function within social model understandings of disability) and those that are concerned with queerness and queering and identify with crip theory. These approaches to understanding disability often coalesce through one another and other models (such as critical and feminist models) and are not always easily distinguishable. Disability rights movements have taken up both social model and queer/crip approaches in their work against the personal tragedy model. As Clare explains, “disentangling the body from the problems of social injustice has served the disability rights movement well. The dominant paradigms of disability—the medical, charity, supercrip, and moral models— all turn disability in to problems faced by individual people locate those problems in our bodies, and define those bodies as wrong” (2001: 360).

The social model was developed as a reaction to “personal tragedy theory”, which blames the problem of disability on an individual’s personal failings (Oliver 1983). It is often expressed by disabled individuals as a way to respond to the more individualistic personal tragedy model (Oliver 1990). Both social model and queer/crip approaches to disability reject

medical, charity, supercrip, and moral models. Within social model approaches, problems associated with disability are not caused by the personal failings of the individuals identifying as disabled but are instead a product of society's failure to provide proper services and fulfill the needs of disabled people within social organizations. Furthermore, society's failure does not just rest on the shoulders of the individuals who identify as disabled but also has larger systemic effects (Berger 2013; Oliver & Barnes 2012).

While there are differences between queer and crip approaches, crip theory emerged out of queer critiques of disability (Egner 2016; Kafer 2013; McRuer 2013; 2006), which developed out of postmodern examinations of feminist approaches to gender, sexuality, and power (Butler 2006a; 2006b; 2011; Butler and Scott 2013). Those who promote criping attempt to call attention to the use of texts and discourse in the execution of power over disabled individuals (McRuer 2013) similarly to those who promote deconstruction of sexuality (Foucault 1988; Butler 2006a; 2006b; 2011). Both social model and crip disability activists recognize that disabled bodies are not the aspect of disability that needs changing. As Eli Clare writes, "Disability activists fiercely declare that it's not our bodies that need curing. Rather it is ablism—disability oppression, as reflected in high unemployment rates, lack of access, gawking, substandard education, being forced to live in nursing homes and back rooms, being seen as childlike and asexual—that needs changing" (2001: 360). Whereas social model approaches understand the problem of disability to be located within the social world (through lack of accessibility, physical and ideological barriers, and experiences of stigma), crip approaches attempt to bring the body back in to disability rights by recognizing lived experiences of pain.

To answer the research question (see above), I will examine collective identity of identity-based movements. These movements celebrate or suppress differences to the dominant

(Bernstein, 1997). It is the relationship the social movement organization has with the dominant culture that determines how these groups define their difference(s). As described above, identity movements are often left with two options: accept the structure of dominant society and attempt to gain cultural and political capital (through assimilation) or reject the social structure altogether and queer (as Gamson has explained). By using the above understandings of queer/crip and hegemonic/assimilationist discourses within this paper, I investigate SMOs' collective identity.

Methodology

In order to address these research questions, I conducted a narrative style discourse analysis of five social movement organizations' websites (Blind LGBT Pride International, Ontario Rainbow Alliance of the Deaf, Rainbow Support Group, Queers on Wheels, and Queerability) in accordance with grounded theory (Glaser and Strauss 1967). Using virtual ethnographic techniques (Hine 2000), I was able to examine over a dozen websites associated with SMOs and selected five for this analysis based on predetermined criteria: (1) Included website had an explanation of the objective or goal of the SMO. This objective or goal was often in the form of a mission or declarative statement. (2) In order to be included in this sample this statement needed to explain the objective as the advocacy and/or support for individuals who identified as both disabled and LGBTQ+. (3) To be included the website needed to have announcements and/or explanations of activities, events, and/or classes that the group developed, hosted, participated in. Eight SMOs fit these criteria and from those eight, five were selected based on amount of data (those that were selected had a substantial amount of posts, pictures, announcements...etc.). (4) The SMO's website(s) and online presence needed to be public and accessible without the use of passwords, membership, or log in information. In other words, if

the website was not accessible using a simple Google search or if there was any mention on the website that the information contained on the page was for members only then I did not include it. All of the organizations' websites examined here were open to public access and did not require me to log in. Furthermore, none of the websites examined here had real-time chatting or commenting that required handles or screen names. For the websites that did have comment boxes and conversations, they were occurring in spaces where posters were able to post anonymously and were not required to sign in with a screen name. In one case, an SMO used the social media platform Tumblr, as part of their online presence. Tumblr members are able to sign in and create their own screen names and pages as well as comment on other members' Tumblr pages. However, one does not need to be a member of Tumblr to see and engage with these pages (they are completely open to the public if visible), nor does a membership to Tumblr denote membership to any specific page or group.

These websites represent messages that specific organizations want directed to readers. What is described on these websites may not reflect the opinions of specific individuals within these groups. Most of the websites here also do not depict interactions between the groups' members nor can they represent the processes of how groups choose what to write or display on these websites. Therefore, there is no way of knowing if there are differing opinions and narratives within groups. The SMOs' websites represented here can, however, represent overall and formal goals and objectives of their organizations. These websites act as the picture and/or story the organizations' leaderships would like to show and/or tell to the world. In other words, we have no way of knowing how the person(s) who runs each website decide what images and text to include but these texts and images are reflective of the organization's image they desire to show to the public. I understand these websites as being one technique these groups use to

attempt to achieve their goals and objectives. Furthermore, these websites are meant to represent the opinions, goals, ideas, and discourses these organizations intend to put out to the world.

Data

I obtained data from each of the five SMOs' webpages and compiled them into documents. This data includes but is not limited to: by-laws, mission statements, "FAQs" (frequently asked questions), meeting and convention minutes, announcements for social activities and classes, blog posts, comments from members, posted news articles, pictures, logos, flyers for events, and videos. The data amounted to over three hundred pages of type and over fifty images, flyers, and videos. Below, I provide a brief description of each group:

Blind LGBT Pride International, founded in 1996, is a special-interest group affiliated with the American Council of the Blind (ACB). The purpose of this group is to "Offer advocacy, education, programs, alliances, and support for persons who are either blind or vision impaired and who are gay, lesbian, bisexual or transgender." These programs include seminars on topics such as dating while LGBT and Blind, social activities such as movie nights and group cruises, and an annual conference. The majority of members must be legally blind.

Ontario Rainbow Alliance of the Deaf (ORAD), founded in 2001, is a not for profit organization that serves "Deaf, deaf, deafened, hard of hearing and hearing people who are LGBTTIQQ2S* communities in the Province of Ontario." They "Coordinate social events, and provides educational and social outreach workshops through our LGBTTIQQ2S communities" These educational and social events come in the form of American Sign Language (ASL) classes, ASL singing groups, camping retreats, helping members find interpreters, attending and walking in World Pride, and activist branch groups such as "queer women against violence".

Rainbow Support Group is an affiliate of New Haven Pride (founded in 1996). The Rainbow Support Group is "for people with intellectual disabilities that identify as GLBT". They define themselves as "a group of friends and care givers who are, or who are here for, LGBT people with disabilities including people with intellectual disabilities, learning, TBI, Asperger's and other challenges, as well as their families and friends." They engage in social activities, such as cookouts and get-togethers, and have created multiple documentaries during these outings about the members and their lives.

Queers on Wheels is an organization that promotes the sexual well-being of the physically disabled community. They welcome individuals "from all sexual identity groups, including those who identify as GLBTQ (gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, or queer)." They provide both education tools and networking opportunities. The educational tools included

classes, workshops on sexuality and disability focusing on topics such as dating, finding aids to help with sex, talking to partners about sex, and masturbating.

Queerability was recently founded by a college student and is a LGBTQ and disability rights advocacy organization run by a group of LGBTQ people with disabilities. Queerability works to “ensure that the voices of LGBTQ people with disabilities are heard in the conversation around LGBTQ and disability.” This group’s website is in the form of a blog that is active multiple times a week. The online community is active in their comments, questions, and conversations with the group leaders and other members. This group is also involved in many offline sites creating and organizing events with Campus Pride (a national group), guest speaking, and other expressions of activism.

Methods of Analysis

I conducted a narrative analysis by examining the discourses SMOs employ on their webpages. Narrative analysis is useful to explore the prevalent narratives organizations produce and put out to the world via these web spaces. I used qualitative analysis software Atlas TI to generate verifiable themes for later writing. I coded data from each SMO webpage in search of thematic commonalities and narratives in information pertaining to the research questions. The data was codified and then categorized, after which a codebook of common themes was created. I used coding to generate concepts and then categories of concepts.

I explore the discourses displayed and utilized in the online presence and websites of SMOs that advocate for LGBT disabled people by employing a narrative analysis (Charmaz 2002; Loseke 2007). Narrative is the best method to examine the cultural codes embedded in the stories provided. Narratives are recognizable stories and they “create identity at all levels of human social life” (Loseke 2007: 661). Narratives can examine formula stories, which are understood as stories where typical actors are “engaging in typical behaviors within typical plots leading to expectable morel evaluations” (Loseke 2007: 664). When narratives are believable and understood to be telling an important story they are often effective in acquiring support from others. If the narratives are read as unbelievable and trivial then they will most likely not gain

support from the public (Loseke 2007). Through prevalent and common narratives, often described as formula stories, people are able to make meaning of their own experiences and identities, “For the good and the bad, social actors can use their understandings of socially circulating formula stories as resources to make sense of their selves and unique others” (Loseke 2007: 673).

It was imperative that a narrative analysis be conducted because narratives “have the capacity to reveal truths about the social world that are flattened or silenced by an insistence on more traditional methods of social science and legal scholarship” (Ewick & Silbey 1995: 199). Because the SMOs’ websites directly engaged with cultural codes through a critique of the current social structure (as is the case with many SMOs), narrative analysis is the most useful method to examine not only the cultural codes SMOs are attempting to critique but those they employ through their hegemonic and queer/crip discourses. Narratives also tell stories about types of people (Loseke 2011). This is useful in examining the inclusivity and exclusivity of membership of these organizations. The online rhetoric of these particular SMOs frequently depicts boundary drawing, membership, and collective identity via the use of narratives. Specifically, many of the organizations presented here describe the creation of their organization and their typical membership as well as whom the group is advocating for and why by story telling. For example, the welcome page of Blind LGBT Pride International’s website tells the story of their creation, in which they explain why and how they were founded, describe their goals and membership. They state,

Blind LGBT Pride International, a special-interest affiliate of the American Council of the Blind (“ACB”), was founded in 1996 when a group of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender (“LGBT”) and straight allies met at the annual conference and convention of ACB. The discussion centered on the needs of those who are blind and vision impaired

and LGBT as that need was not being met in any organized national movement for the vision impaired and blind. In 2000, Blind Friends of Lesbians and Gays (“BFLAG”) was officially chartered in ACB. In 2009 the name was changed to Blind LGBT Pride International to better reflect the purpose and mission of the organization. The purpose of Blind LGBT Pride International (“Blind Pride” or “BPI”), a 501c(3) organization, is to offer advocacy, education, programs, alliances, and support for persons who are either blind or vision impaired and who are gay, lesbian, bisexual or transgender.

Narrative analysis was employed to investigate the stories that are told on these websites in order to examine boundary drawing, collective identities, and how these inform queer and hegemonic positionalities through discourse and narrative.

Results

Boundary Construction: How do intersectional LGBTQ+/disability social movement groups construct boundaries?

With access to a multitude of already established SMOs advocating for LGBTQ+ or disabled individuals from both queer and hegemonic positions, what is the need for groups advocating for this specific intersection? Each SMO in this study defined their reason for establishment as the lack of inclusion from groups that do not specifically deal with this intersection. Members of these SMOs felt left out of the larger LGBTQ+ communities and an indifference or lack of understanding toward their sexuality from disability communities. They were developed in response to the shared exclusion individuals of this particular intersection experienced. Members of these SMOs were not only excluded from dominant society but also lived on the fringes within their own marginalized groups (the LGBTQ+ and disabled community). Below, a member of Queerability comments on a post titled “When it gets tricky to be LGBT and disabled at once.” On this post, group members commented on the different

challenges they experienced as individuals identifying as both disabled and LGBTQ+. They¹³ (the poster of the comment below) explain that because disabled individuals are not viewed as sexual, historically, society attempts to police the bodies of disabled individuals who are sexual (specifically ones who identified as gay or engaged in same-sex sexual behavior) by denying them access to their sexuality via castration. This member of Queerability continues to explain that the lack of empathy and understanding from the LGBTQ+ community about the differences and difficulties faced by the LGBT disabled community (particularly historically and systemically) is the reason that they do not feel accepted in the LGBTQ+ community.

Talking to a mixed LGBT group about the way developmentally disabled men have historically been castrated for being gay, or sexual at all. Having the first question out of someone's mouth be, "Well did they request castration?" Not knowing. Not knowing how to bridge the gap. Wanting to cry. Wanting to scream. Wanting to say that punitive castration for being gay, or for being sexual at all, is not and will never be the same as sex affirmation surgery. No words. None at all. Just distance. Distance like I was floating away from the rest of the room. They were all in the room. I was floating down a tunnel, far away, somewhere they couldn't see me anymore, and I couldn't see them. And they couldn't see that I was far away. They couldn't see the distance. I felt the distance. I still feel the distance. That's when I knew the LGBT community, or the L community, or the T community, could never fully be my community, at least as currently constituted.

In the quotation above, the member of Queerability explains that differences in the histories of the LGBTQ+ community and disabled community and a lack of understanding of what it means to belong to both communities has created a distance between these communities that may not be able to be bridged. They describe feeling this distance even from the Trans community, which has suffered an immense amount of discrimination and has traditionally been more accepting of difference than more normative communities have (such as the homonormative, white, gay, cisgender, male community).

¹³ I use "they" as a gender-neutral term as I do not know how the individual posting identifies.

The SMOs not only explain that members do not fit into the LGBTQ+ community but that, traditionally, they are denied access to discuss their gender and sexuality as disabled individuals within the dominant society and as LGBTQ+ individuals within the disabled community. The excerpt below is from Queerability's website, addressing the importance of SMOs like theirs.

“People with developmental disabilities get degendered and desexualized. And denied basic words to talk about gender, sexuality, and their own bodies. This is an abuse. It is not a liberating rejection of the sex and gender binary. There is such a huge difference between rejecting words like penis/clitoris/vagina/breasts as ways of describing your body and *not having those words in your vocabulary to begin with* because people deny you access to them.”

Queers on Wheels echoes this sentiment below in an excerpt from their mission and objective statement.

“There's a common social attitude that disabled people are not sexual that something about disability strips people of their sex drive, and that, moreover, disability makes people inherently sexually unappealing, so it's not like they could find partners even if they wanted them. This is accepted as common knowledge, despite the fact that it creates some extremely harmful social attitudes and social structures.”

All of the groups' websites indicated (via the texts displayed) that their organizations were important because they seek to abolish stigma for individuals identifying with this intersection. Below, Rainbow Support Group states that the understanding of disabled individuals as sexual is relatively new. They compare today's societal understanding of disabled individuals as LGB sexual beings to 'pre-Stonewall days', explaining that just as being gay was extremely deviant (and still is in some ways today) so is being a disabled individuals who is sexual. Furthermore, this stigma is increased if that sexuality has been traditionally thought of as deviant (i.e. “homosexuality”).

“Although the process is complicated, it is doubtful that even those who are most understanding can imagine the obstacles of trying to navigate the intricacies of a sexual

orientation discovery by a person with a developmental disability. Acknowledging that people with mental retardation are sexual is a new development in the human service field, but one that is still in pre-Stonewall days regarding those who are gay. Although people with mental retardation are given unprecedented freedom to make personal vocational decisions, there is an unfounded expectation that they do not have a sexuality, let alone a homosexuality”

The quotations above elucidate the popular notion that disabled people are not sexual and are often degendered. Many of the groups stated that there is a lack of understanding of sexuality and gender diversity within disability centered spaces and communities. This is evident in the workshops that Queers on Wheels organizes for disability organizations on LGBTQ+ sensitivity training. They explain that it is “designed to help organizations to better serve and include people who are part of the gay lesbian bisexual transgender and queer communities.” Many of these organizations understand there to be a lack of sensitivity and education concerning LGBTQ+ identities within society, generally. Moreover, this is also reflected within disability communities. Often, resources for finding aids and interpreters, as well as information and education about sex and sexuality, may be provided within disability communities. However, these resources are frequently not LGBTQ+ focused and do not represent their experiences. The organizations studied here often explained that part of their mission was to provide LGBTQ+ resources for disabled people (often in the form of workshops, education, and information). For example, Queers on Wheels has developed a resource guide for disabled people who want to explore their sexuality because they recognize that disabled people are not often afforded those resources (both from society, in general, and from disability communities). Moreover, both Queers on Wheels and ORAD provide information and resource lists for LGBTQ+ friendly aids and interpreters, inferring that LGBTQ+ focused information is rarely available or shared within disability communities. Not only are these resources frequently not available but, in some cases, organizations stressed that LGBTQ+ disabled people are not even afforded the language to

discuss LGBTQ+ sexualities and gender. This is evident by the call for a workshop ORAD organizes titled “More than just LGBTQ*” below.

More than just LGBTQ* – a workshop focusing on terminology of queer and trans words, signs, and definitions. Discussion of romantic and sexual identities are included. note: queer is typically used to define sexual identity and trans represent all gender identities under the trans umbrella.”

All of the SMOs in this study discuss this feeling of distance and general lack of understanding from the dominant, LGBT, and disability communities. Underlining this feeling of distance is the difficulty of identifying with an intersection of two historically socially contradicting identities. Often, society views disabled individuals as asexual and de-gendered and historically LGBT individuals have been demonized. When someone identifies as LGBTQ+, their gender and sexual identity become a major focus of who they are for society (McRuer and Mollow 2012). Indeed, it is impossible for many people to see LGBTQ+ individuals outside of their sexual/gender identities. Individuals identifying as both LGBT and disabled bring to the forefront their status as LGBTQ+ individuals and force society to recognize that they are gendered and sexual beings. This recognition of disabled people as queerly-gendered and sexual tends to make society (even members of the LGBT and disability communities) uncomfortable.

These SMOs explain that their work is not only imperative because they are rejected by both the dominant society and LGBTQ+ and disability communities but also because not recognizing these complex identities can be detrimental for society. This denial of not only sexuality and gender but specifically also LGBTQ+ sexualities and genders of disabled individuals can result in larger social problems. Queers on Wheels states that this denial of sexuality of disabled individuals can lead to social problems such as sexual abuse

“The insistence that disabled people are not sexual, for example, plays directly into the denial of sexual abuse and violence committed against disabled people. After all, people claim, these behaviors are rooted in sexuality (why this belief persists despite all evidence

to the contrary is beyond me), and since disabled people have no sexuality, this means they can't be assaulted or abused - it's almost as though people genuinely believe that disabled people are like children's dolls, with a great big void where their genitals would be. (One wonders what they think happens to people who acquire disabilities later in life.)"

The SMOs in this study call for an intersectional approach to advocating for sexuality/gender identity and disability. Below, Queers on Wheels asserts that it is only through an intersectional approach to sexuality and disability that people identifying with this intersection can be valued for their whole self.

"Since people with disabilities are often overlooked as sexual beings, the mission of Queers On Wheels is to liberate and empower them with information and support. This narrow way of thinking does not value a person as a whole, but rather focuses on an aspect of their identity. Queers On Wheels recognizes that people have multiple identities and that those identities need to be valued and appreciated. We recognize the need for a community that incorporates all identities."

Furthermore, due to their unique perspective as individuals identifying with two highly stigmatized and marginalized identities, members of these groups have concerns that can only be addressed via an intersectional approach. This is evident in the quotation below from the Rainbow Support Group.

"Participants are able to discuss the same concerns as other gay people, but in a support system that recognizes their unique perspective. Discussions at meetings have a surprisingly familiar sound. Members are concerned with being forced into heterosexual social situations, since that is the only available option to socialize. Some members have a fear of being "outed" to peers and staff, which is not without merit, since many people with disabilities are not their own legal guardians. They are acutely sensitive to retaliation from staff and family, such as being ostracized from family functions or ridiculed by unsupportive staff. Additionally, there are concerns that are specific to the members. Transportation is a constant issue, since most people with mental retardation do not drive; that is most often the reason for missed meetings."

The SMOs in this study were established to provide services and advocacy for individuals identifying with two highly stigmatized and marginalized communities. They stress an intersectional approach to advocacy and activism. They state that this intersectional advocacy

is necessary because they are misunderstood by not only the dominant society but by the LGBT and Disability communities as a whole.

Intersectional LGBTQ+/disability SMOs begin to construct boundaries at the time of the conception of their organizations. The SMOs develop out of a sense of shared exclusion from dominant society, LGBTQ+ communities, and disability communities and thus they are created with a specific purpose: to eradicate stigma associated with being both disabled and LGBTQ+ and created for a specific membership. Those who, because of their complex intersectional identities as disabled and LGBTQ+, are excluded from popular society as well as other interest groups, communities, and SMOs. As these identities have been historically constructed as socially contradicting, members of these communities come together to recognize their existence. Members creating these groups understand that if their shared intersectional identity goes unrecognized there will continue to be many detrimental effects on their personal lives as well as popular society. In creating these SMOs, members understand that it is imperative to approach identity from an intersectional standpoint, as it was the lack of acceptance of complex intersectional identities that excluded them from other identity-based SMOs. It is around these shared purposes and identities that intersectional LGBTQ+/disability SMOs construct boundaries.

Practices of Inclusion and Exclusion:

In this section I examine how practices of inclusion and exclusion related to the construction of boundaries, as well as how particular boundary construction strategies, affect collective identity and collective consciousness.

As explained above, collective identity is formed by drawing boundaries to define who is a member of the in-group and who is a member of the out-group. This section will analyze the boundaries drawn by these SMOs by defining them as exclusive groups or inclusive groups. The

five SMOs examined in this study were either inclusive or exclusive in their membership. Who was allowed to join the group and whom the group was advocating for was clearly stated on each one of their websites. Questions of inclusion are important to understand where the group is drawing their boundaries. I am operationalizing the boundary of who counts as the in-group based on who the group is advocating for as well as who can join as members. I understand that the inclusivity of a group is based on not only membership but also whom the group is advocating for because, historically, non-disabled individuals were encouraged to advocate and speak for disabled people and therefore membership alone cannot describe how SMOs construct boundaries.

Groups were either mostly exclusive in both sexuality/gender and disability (advocating for only certain people within the disability community and certain people within the LGBTQ+ community), or, they were mostly inclusive (advocating for all people in both communities). Inclusion and exclusion are only two poles of boundary work; groups could be inclusive in one area and exclusive in another, or fall somewhere in the middle for either or both categories of identity. For example, an organization could be mostly inclusive when it came to LGBTQ+ membership and issues of advocacy but exclusive in disability membership, advocating for only individuals with certain types of disabilities. The SMOs also were not necessarily inclusive or exclusive in their discourses, all of the time.

I have organized the SMOs into four categories (Figure 1) based on whether they were mostly exclusive or mostly inclusive in their discourse. Organizations were labeled as mostly inclusive if they had multiple written statements about inclusion, activities that included a variety of differently identifying and abled individuals, and inclusive and all-encompassing in their framing materials such as marketing materials and communication materials (flyers, videos,

pictures of events). If groups had statements about members and advocacy that excluded members of the LGBTQ+ or disability communities, did not advertise activities explicitly attempting inclusion, or did not present a variety of LGBTQ+ and disability identities in their framing materials then they were labeled as exclusive.

I must state here that I am not making moral judgments about exclusionary or inclusionary practices and discourses, as they both have benefits and disadvantages. I am merely pointing out where each SMO falls within this categorization based on the discourses they presented on their websites. Groups that were mostly exclusive advocated for very specific members based on certain and specific identity categories while groups that were more inclusive advocated for members and individuals with a wider range of identities or often stressed the fluidity of identity (at times rejecting the notion of identity categories).

Figure 1		Disability	
		Inclusive	Exclusive
LGBT	Inclusive	Queerability	Ontario Rainbow Alliance of the Deaf Queers On Wheels
	Exclusive		Blind Pride International Rainbow Support

Inclusive and Exclusive

As shown in Figure 1, two groups (Blind LGBT Pride International and Rainbow Support Group) were found to be (mostly) exclusive in their discourse surrounding membership and advocacy in both identity categories. Blind LGBT Pride International states that they are a “special-interest affiliate of the American Council of the Blind.” In other words, they were developed as part of a larger organization established to advocate for a specific disability. The group was founded “when a group of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender (“LGBT”) and straight

allies met at the annual conference and convention of ACB.” Blind LGBT Pride International is exclusionary based on disability in that it is mostly advocating for blind individuals (which is only a small proportion of individuals with disabilities). They are also exclusionary in who they are advocating for based on sexuality/gender in that they advocate for lesbian, gay, bisexual, and/or transgender people, whereas other groups are more inclusive in the definitions of who they consider the marginalized group for which they are advocating. This group is not attempting to advocate for all LGBTQ+/disabled individuals as evident by this quotation, “The discussion centered on the needs of those who are blind and vision impaired and LGBT as that need was not being met in any organized national movement for the vision impaired and blind.”

Rainbow Support Group is also exclusionary in who they are advocating for and discourse presented on their webpage is primarily geared toward people with developmental disabilities. Below is the description of the meaning of their logo where they cite the importance of advocating for individuals identifying with the intersection of “mental retardation” and LGBTQI; however, they pay notably more attention to gay sexuality over other gender/sexual identities. They do justify the use of the word gay to mean an umbrella term after the discussion of their logo.

“The logo has a three-point focus, which speaks to the intersection of people who experience mental retardation and also are part of the sexual minority community. The rainbow is a symbol of gay solidarity. The pink triangle is the symbol that the Nazis used to identify homosexuals in the concentration camps and the stylized circles are borrowed from the Special Olympics logo. The mismatched colors of the triangles and circles symbolize the dual stigma faced by people with mental retardation who identify as gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, intersex and questioning.”

Blind LGBT Pride International is not only exclusionary in whom they consider the marginalized group that needs advocating for but also who can be members of the organization and do the advocating. The Constitution and Bylaws of Blind LGBT Pride state that in order to

be considered a regional or local group the “majority of members of such affiliate must be legally blind as defined by the Internal Revenue Service.” There is no mention on their website about accommodating for members with other types of disabilities (this was present in the more inclusive groups). Furthermore, there is no mention of accommodating individuals who may be both blind and have another type of disability (this was also present in the more inclusive groups).

Both Blind LGBT Pride International and Rainbow Support Group are not entirely exclusionary in their discourse as they do make statements about disability, in general. Below are a few examples from a list of do’s and don’ts for interacting with someone with a disability provided by Blind LGBT Pride International:

“Many disabilities are not apparent to a casual observer, and are sometimes called “hidden” or “invisible” disabilities. Some examples are diabetes, heart disease, cancer, epilepsy, sickle-cell anemia, organ transplant, or emphysema.”

“Some disabilities are variable from day to day. Some conditions are progressive, becoming more severe over.”

“Speak as you approach a person. State clearly who you are. Speak in a normal tone of voice.”

“Offer assistance if the person appears to have difficulty locating a specific service area. Be descriptive when giving directions; give the person verbal information that is visually obvious to people who can see. For example, if you are approaching steps, mention how many and the direction.”

Though Blind LGBT Pride International and Rainbow Support Group discourses are not entirely exclusionary of disabilities other than blindness and developmental disabilities (respectively) they frame their advocacy and membership only around these two types of identities and gear their discourse towards individuals identifying as such. This is evident in the examples above; the advice Blind LGBT Pride International is giving able-bodied/non-disabled

identifying individuals is framed in the way they perceive blind people wish to be interacted with (i.e. speak as you approach, offer assistance).

Blind LGBT Pride International is also not entirely exclusionary in who they advocate for based on sexuality and gender identification. They do state that they advocate for LGBT individuals, leaving out an explicit statement about queer, questioning, two spirited, Asexual, Pansexual, intersex, and/or omnisexual individuals. They do, however, make reference to diverse genders in a post where they congratulate Facebook for expanding their gender choices to include multiple gender identities. They also make references to two spirited individuals as they are affiliated with “NativeOUT”¹⁴. Even though they make references to varied gender identifications their activities are clearly intended for more hegemonic sexuality and gender identified persons. This is evident in the type of activities they host and who attends these activities. For example, they host movie nights; below is an excerpt from a flyer from the last movie night they hosted, where the movies are often geared toward gay men and lesbians.

Behind the Candelabra: The tempestuous life of Liberace: This Film’s drama recreates the glittering private world of Liberace (Michael Douglas), the flamboyant, phenomenally successful entertainer whose extravagant costumes, trademark candelabra, and elaborate stage shows made him the most bankable entertainer of his time. The story focuses on Liberace’s tempestuous relationship with Scott Thorson (Matt Damon) in Las Vegas from 1977 to 1982 – a time when Liberace was at the peak of his popularity but remained closeted as a homosexual. Featuring a pair of electrifying performances by Douglas and Damon, Behind the Candelabra captures the essence of Liberace’s appeal while reminding viewers how different attitudes were at the time, as few high-profile entertainers (including Liberace) could admit they were gay, at least in front of the public which made them stars.

Although I have no way of knowing who actually attends the activities and events it is evident by the pictures of said events that the group posts that they are geared toward primarily white, gay men. Out of all the pictures on their website, four female-presenting individuals were

¹⁴ NativeOUT is a national nonprofit education and media organization, actively involved in the Two Spirit Movement.

present and twenty-three male presenting individuals were present. They also seemed to be overwhelmingly white. Rainbow Support Group does reference different sexual orientations and gender identities, similar to Blind LGBT Pride International, but those pictured on their website are overwhelmingly male/masculine presenting. I have no way of knowing what race, gender, or sexuality these individuals identify with, however, my description of a group's exclusivity is not based on actual variety in members but what their discourse presents. Therefore, it is possible that there were many women (and people of color) at these events that were not pictured. Yet, it is the deliberate picturing and placement on the website that frames their hegemonic discourse.

As presented in Figure 1, Queerability is the only organization that is inclusive in both categories. They explicitly state that they are a group advocating for individuals who are both queer (as an umbrella term) and disabled and they include all disabilities. Below, they describe who they “consider queer”:

Anyone who is agender, androgynous, bigender, genderfluid, genderqueer, intersex, transgender/trans*, transsexual, asexual/romantic, bisexual/romantic, demisexual/romantic, gray-asexual/romantic, gay, lesbian, pansexual/romantic, polysexual/romantic, queer, or anything similar to these are queer.

When advising non-disabled/able-bodied individuals on how to interact with individuals who identified as disabled queer ability wrote they stated:

When you're running a group and people with disabilities seem to be overwhelmed, don't pressure them to talk about their disability or their access needs. Offer, but don't pressure. Do make your email address available to group members. This makes it easier for them to tell you things that are hard to say in the moment.

This is in stark contrast to Blind LGBT Pride International, who gave advice that was geared toward interacting with how they perceived blind individuals would like to be interacted with. Unlike Blind LGBT Pride International, Queerability made a point to explain that interactional needs are different based on the individual, as evident by the quotation above. This signifies their

understanding of the diversity of different disabilities.

The pictures presented on the websites of groups categorized as exclusionary show similar-looking individuals without much diversity. The pictures on the websites of the other groups display diversity in race, age, and gender presentation and, in one instance of a single post where the majority of people presented had a similar look, the organization apologized for the lack of diversity. In a post by Queerability about people with Crohn's Disease showing themselves wearing colostomy bags, the majority of the individuals in the picture were white and presented a cisgendered body presentation. Queerability stated "I wish there were more body, gender, and racial diversity, but it's great that folks with Crohn's/folks who have colostomy bags are feeling empowered to wear what they want and not feel like they have to hide part of their body."

The other two organizations were neither wholly exclusive nor inclusive. Ontario Rainbow Alliance for the Deaf (ORAD) and Queers on Wheels both excluded membership and advocacy based on disability but made a point to be inclusive based on gender and sexual identification. ORAD describes themselves as a "not for profit organization serving Deaf, deaf, deafened, hard of hearing and hearing people who are LGBTTIQQ2S* [Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transsexual, Transgendered, Intersexual, Queer, Questioning, 2-Spirited] communities in the Province of Ontario." They use an asterisk on the LGBTTIQQ2S to link to an explanation of inclusivity of varying sexual orientations and gender identities within the LGBT community.

Below is an excerpt from that statement discussing their objectives and goals

"To coordinate events and activities for the Deaf, deaf, deafened, hard of hearing, and hearing people who are gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgendered, transsexual, intersexed, queer, questioning, two-spirited, bisexual-curious, straight-curious, and queer positive, regardless of race, age, sexual orientation, sex, gender, religion, ethnic background or

abilities”

It is evident by the quotation above that ORAD is only advocating for deaf/Deaf communities (and not the entirety of the disabled community) but are attempting to be inclusive of the LGBT community. This discourse extends to the videos and pictures posted on their website. Many genders, races and sexualities are referenced. This is also evident in the programs, classes, and activities they host. Both ORAD and Queers on Wheels have programming designed for individuals who identify with a variety of different sexualities and genders but are geared toward only people with specific disabilities (deaf and physically disabled). Such events and services that ORAD provides include Queer & Trans* ASL Classes, LGBT Queer Friendly Interpreter, Deaf Queer Women Against Violence and a workshop titled “More than just LGBTQ*¹⁵”

“A workshop focusing on terminology of queer and trans words, signs, and definitions. Discussion of romantic and sexual identities are included. Note: queer is typically used to define sexual identity and trans represent all gender identities under the trans umbrella.”

Similarly, Queers on Wheels states that they offer sensitivity training complete with do’s and don’ts of interacting with the physically disabled community as well as providing “the physically disabled GLBTQ community the following: a resource guide that discusses issues such as hiring queer-friendly aides, a discussion group to meet other GLBTQ disabled people, an online listserv to discuss issues relevant to GLBTQ disabled people and find out about upcoming events, workshops discussing how being GLBTQ and disabled affects dating, sex, personal aides, and how to masturbate if you need assistance.”

The Queers on Wheels founder even put out a book, *Queers on Wheels*, creating a resource guide for disabled people who want to explore their sexuality. This guide includes:

¹⁵ Notice the asterisk again

Information about how to hire open minded and queer friendly aides, maintaining a good relationship with your aides, how to adapt sex toys, sex positions, and assisted masturbation. Since this information is not readily available, we decided to put all this information in one convenient place: the *Queers On Wheels* book! We hope the guide helps other disabled people lead a complete and full life - one that incorporates sexuality.

As stated earlier, none of the organizations were completely exclusive or inclusive in either category. But ORAD, unlike the groups that were categorized as exclusive in both categories, makes statements about the Wheelchair Accessibility of their spaces. They even state that if any other organization or person wants to hold an event with them they require that all venues be wheelchair accessible.

The SMOs represented here based their membership on both sexuality/gender and disability. They were either mostly exclusive in both sexuality/gender and disability or they were mostly inclusive. Two groups were found to be (mostly) exclusive—Blind LGBT Pride International and Rainbow Support Group—in their discourse surrounding membership and advocacy in both identity categories. Queerability was found to be the only organization that is inclusive in both categories. Ontario Rainbow Alliance for the Deaf (ORAD) and *Queers on Wheels* were neither wholly exclusive nor inclusive. They both excluded membership and advocacy based on disability but were inclusive based on gender and sexual identification. It is through the inclusion and exclusion of membership and advocacy that SMOs often engage in boundary making.

Discourses of Sameness and Difference: Queer/Crip and Hegemonic

In this section I explore how processes of boundary construction position groups in relation to dominant society and how strategic employment of those positions affects the group's use of queer/crip and hegemonic discourses.

The SMOs in this study presented either hegemonic collective identities or queer collective identities via the discourse on their websites. They were categorized by hegemony or queerness in disability and LGBTQ+ categories similarly to how they were categorized in inclusive and exclusive categories above. None of the organizations were exclusively hegemonic or exclusively queer in the discourses presented. Similarly to exclusion versus inclusion categorization, I operated under the notion that hegemony and queerness were poles on a sliding scale and I categorized the SMOs based on how frequently they presented hegemonic or queer discourses.

All five of the organizations in this study, at times, presented a hegemonic collective identity either by having hegemonic goals, participating in hegemonic activities, or using hegemonic discourses. However, only two of the organizations presented dominantly hegemonic collective identities through their discourses: Blind LGBTQ+ Pride International and Rainbow Support (see Figure 2). Both of these organizations used hegemonic discourses in relation to both disability and LGBT advocacy.

Figure 2		Disability	
		Queer	Hegemonic
LGBTQ+	Queer	Queerability Queers on Wheels	Ontario Rainbow Alliance of the Deaf
	Hegemonic		Blind Pride International Rainbow Support

Queer and Hegemonic

Both Blind LGBT Pride International and Rainbow Support Group were involved in hegemonic and assimilation focused LGBTQ+ rights organizations. For example, both SMOs were connected with official LGBT Pride parade organizations. Pride, although started as a subversive tactic (Seidman 2003/2010), has become a hegemonic rite of passage for gays and

lesbians and even many non-LGBT individuals attend this event. Blind LGBT Pride International also started as an organization titled BFLAG (as previously stated). Although their website never explicitly states that it is connected to PFLAG (Parents and Friends of Lesbians and Gays) it could be assumed that, if nothing else, at least they were inspired by PFLAG. PFLAG is an organization that has many connections with Pride (PFLAG WEBSITE) and could also be considered another hegemonic organization. Blind LGBT Pride International is also involved with other traditionally hegemonic organizations such as *The Trevor Project* and *It Gets Better*. According to Blind LGBT Pride International's website, "The Trevor Project is the leading national organization providing crisis and suicide prevention services to lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and questioning (LGBTQ) youth." Also, *It Gets Better* is a project that "was created to show young LGBT people the levels of happiness, potential, and positivity their lives will reach - if they can just get through their teen years... it WILL get better." Blind LGBT Pride International has also been connected with the Human Rights Campaign (HRC), "America's largest civil rights organization working to achieve lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) equality" in order to "provide information on changing laws and regulations." The HRC is an organization that, as stated above, works to achieve equality for LGBT individuals through hegemonic means such as policy reforms. The HRC could be considered the world's largest assimilation advocacy group.

Similarly to the other organizations in this study, Blind LGBT Pride International's purpose is to "offer advocacy, education, programs, alliances, and support for persons who are either blind or vision impaired and who are gay, lesbian, bisexual or transgender." However, they explain that this advocacy must not be in the form of protest or propaganda and that it must be approved through their legislative and advocacy team.

“With board approval, the Legislative and Advocacy committee shall develop and implement blindness and/or LGBT related advocacy strategies, follow and report on legislative issues, and educate Membership and allies as to trending issues as needed.”

It is possible that this need for activity approval and strict rules against protest and propagandizing is to legitimize their organization as a hegemonic structured organization.

This organization presents a hegemonic collective identity in the way that they attempt to enact change. They attempt to advocate for blind LGBT individuals through hegemonic means such as changing policy within formal institutions such as government and education as evident by their work with on the Alice Cogswell and Anne Sullivan Macy Act. According to their website this act is intended to

“Improve the delivery of appropriate special education and related services to all students who are blind or visually impaired and deaf or hard of hearing, including students who may have additional disabilities... legislation will ensure that properly designed and individually tailored services are in fact provided, meeting the unique learning needs of students who are blind or visually impaired, and that the educators who serve them are prepared and supported to do their jobs well”

This act is based on a proposal that the ACB and Blind LGBT Pride International submitted to the U.S. House of Representatives. Blind LGBT Pride International goes as far as to provide members and anyone who visits their websites with the names of the Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions. This is a clear execution of hegemonic means to obtain a hegemonic goal.

It is important to note that all of the organizations in this study presented queer collective identities in one way or another by having queer goals, participating in queer activities, or using queer discourses. In other words, some organizations may be categorized as mostly engaging in hegemonic and assimilation practices but could at times describe queer goals or practices. For example, the majority of their goals may be assimilationist but the group may wish to

deconstruct normative understandings of gender. However, only Queers on Wheels and Queerability were queer in the majority of both their Disability and LGBTQ+ discourses. They both understood queer as an umbrella term to signify anyone who identifies with a broad spectrum of sexual and gender identifies as explained above (See Inclusion) by their use of the word queer as inclusive. Moreover, the queer groups in this sample did not do away with identifiers such as lesbian, gay, bisexual, or trans. Rather, they take them up in a slightly different way than groups that use them more normatively. Using such terms in a normative way employs them as signifiers of a stable identity category. To employ them queerly is to engage in what Gamson (1995) identifies as destabilizing from within. In using LGBT identities in queer ways they deconstruct the identities from within, performing them in ways that may not normally be associated with such identities. Furthermore, queer groups that use terms such as LGBT do so with the understanding that they are flexible and mean different things in different times, locations, and to different people.

As queering denotes a blurring of boundaries, if not an attempt to completely dismantle them, it is evident that these groups present a queer collective identity by attempting to blur boundaries of sexuality, gender, and disability. Both of these groups made mention of individuals who identified as non-binary as apparent by this next quotation from Queerability. In the quotation, Queerability is describing a picture (they describe all pictures as a way to accommodate for anyone's disability who may not be able to see the picture): "They are a white, non-binary person wearing a grey cap with sunglasses attached to the front of their t-shirt. Behind the two figures are others in the parade, along with a rainbow flag." It is in the acts of blurring of boundaries as displayed in this example that queerness is enacted. In blurring boundaries and refusing to abide by dichotomous normative gender expectations organizations

are able to deconstruct normative exceptions via the discourses they use.

Queerness assumes that individuals cannot be categorized and that an individual's experiences are unique to them. Both groups make references to understanding both sexuality/gender and disability identification as being unique to the individual. They both denounce broad categorizations in this way. This type of denouncing of broad categories was less common for the other three groups (though this type of discourse did appear on ORAD's website a few times). Below is a quotation from Queerability explaining that the experience of disability is unique to the individuals and a quotation from Queers on Wheels recognizing the complexity of personal identity.

“Disability is personal. Coping mechanisms and disability-related choices are deeply personal. Some people with disabilities are fairly open about their specific issues and choices; for others, that's a topic reserved for close friends.”

“Queers On Wheels recognizes that people have multiple identities and that those identities need to be valued and appreciated. We recognize the need for a community that incorporates all identities.”

Similarly to how the hegemonic groups were connected to other organizations that were traditionally hegemonic, both Queerability and Queers on Wheels are connected and make reference to groups that either define themselves as queer or present queer collective identities. For example, Queers on Wheels makes reference to and plans activities with a group called GenderQueer/QueerGenders which is a “multidisciplinary, multimedia conference... It will be a forum for people who've been thinking about queerness and gender from different places (institutions, geographic locations, identities) and through different means (performance, scholarship, organizing , cultural politics, etc.).” The purpose of this queering organization is to

“Bring together artists, scholars and activists as equal contributors to conduct workshops, exhibit and perform art, and present academic research. A priority of this conference is to

reflect the diversity and complexity of gender expressions and the meanings gender has in different racial and cultural locations. To that end, we particularly encourage proposals by and for people of color, working-class people, and people with disabilities.”

A central component to queering is the critique of dominant society (Gamson 1995). Both of these organizations, at times, criticize dominant society, as well as the disabled or LGBTQ+ community for not being inclusive of complex identities and expressions of identities.

Queerability even took a stand against comments made by two well-known gay icons.

Queerability critiqued George Takei (an actor and prominent figure in the gay rights movement) for his use of a picture of physically disabled woman as a point of mockery. Below is an excerpt from an announcement Queerability published on their website to critique Takei and spread word of a petition they drafted to force the actor to remove the image from his social networking accounts.

“Queerability expresses our profound concern about George Takei and an image he shared. The image was of a woman who uses a wheelchair standing up to reach a bottle of alcohol, and the image was captioned with ”There has been a miracle in the alcohol aisle.” This image reinforces dangerous misconceptions and stigmas around people with disabilities. Some wheelchair users are able to stand or walk for brief periods of time, but this does not make the wheelchair user’s disability any less significant. We are also concerned that George Takei refused to listen to people with disabilities and our allies when the disability community expressed its concerns about the image to George Takei. George Takei, an openly gay man, has been a strong voice for the acceptance of LGBTQ people, however; we are concerned that he is ostracizing people with disabilities, especially LGBTQ people with disabilities, by sharing this image.”

Queerability also condemned Andrea James (a trans woman and LGBT advocate) for Twitter commentary “which used autism and other disabilities to insult individuals who voiced their concerns about Meghan McCain, a straight, cisgender person, being on the board of an LGBTQ rights organization.” Queerability explained that, “these comments are damaging to autistic people and furthers the stigma associated with autism.” This critique of members of the hegemonic LGBT movement factions show that, although these SMOs can relate to aspects of

homonormativity, they do not completely identify with them.

Hegemony attempts to emphasize sameness to the dominant culture in order to make political and structural gains. Therefore, a hegemonic movement tends to downplay difference and avoid overtly subversive activities. Queering has a subversive component to it. Often individuals attempting to queer and blur boundaries will use subversive tactics to get their point across. These can be as elaborate as a performance (a tactic the Genderqueer group associated with Queers with Wheels uses) or something as simple as taking back a derogatory slur. The term queer is just that reclaiming of a derogatory slur. Both Queerability and Queers on Wheels use these types of tactics not only in their discourses on their websites but in the names of their organizations as well. By using the word “queer” in a positive fashion these organizations turn the categorization of what sexual and gender expressions are valued. This point is driven home with this next quotation from a member of Queerability. On a post about reclaiming slurs they explain the events of a recent night where they are insulted in public with a string of extremely derogatory slurs and, instead of being upset by it, they explain that they laugh and enjoy those moments

“I heard one of my favorite insults of my life so far while walking from Baltimore Penn Station to Liam Flynn’s Ale House the other night. Someone called me a “crippled-ass faggot motherfucker,” and I couldn’t help but laugh out loud. If I savor the bluntness and vulgarity of moments like that, it tends to soften the blow.”

The SMOs in this study presented hegemonic and queer collective identities via the discourse on their websites. They were categorized by hegemony or queerness in disability and LGBTQ+ category. All five of the organizations in this study, at times, presented a hegemonic and queer collective identity. Only Blind LGBT Pride International and Rainbow Support presented mostly hegemonic collective identities through their discourses while Queers on

Wheels and Queerability were queer in the majority of both their Disability and LGBTQ+ discourses. Ontario Rainbow Alliance of the Deaf (ORAD) presented some queer discourses concerning their LGBT representation but mostly hegemonic concerning disability. What we see here is some groups, those who used hegemonic discourses, as often expressing assimilationist politics. Often these groups used their position to the dominant popular society to stress sameness. For the groups using queer discourses we see a focus on difference, difference from both the dominant group as well as each other. Difference in the queer groups was celebrated and they often critiqued practices of assimilation

Conclusion

This paper focused on the how five SMOs advocating for individuals identifying with intersections of disability and LGBTQ+ identity engage in boundary work in order to stress sameness and/or difference to the dominant group and how this informs their position as Queer or Hegemonic organizations. The findings of this study indicate that SMOs develop a queer or hegemonic collective identity determined partly by the boundaries they draw. Inclusive organizations were more likely to be queer, while the exclusive organizations in this study were more likely to present hegemonic discourses. This helps address questions about *how* organizations advocating for a particular intersection, such as these, determine boundaries of in-group and out-group. It remains unclear *why* these organizations present hegemonic (stressing sameness to dominant group) or queer (stressing difference) collective identifies. Gamson (1995) found that individuals who had stable identities and political power were more likely to be comfortable with the idea of queering. However, that is not what the findings of this study suggest. The organizations in this study were more likely to use queer discourse if they were

inclusive of a wide range of marginalized identities. Bernstein (1997) has proposed that those who have access to political power are more likely to emphasize sameness while those who do not have access to such power are more likely to stress difference. This explanation is consistent with the data here. The larger, more organized SMOs (ORAD and Blind LGBT Pride International) were more likely to present hegemonic collective identities. It is interesting that Queers on Wheels was mostly exclusive when it came to membership based on disability but still presented primarily queer discourses concerning disability. It is possible that, although they focused their membership on primarily people with physical disabilities, they were very broad in their definition of physical disability. They never described physical disability as only disabilities affecting mobility and it appeared that for them, physical disabilities could include sensory disabilities and/or chronic illness. This broad understanding of physical disability may have contributed to the use of queer discourses. It is also possible that their queer discourses were stemming from their very inclusive and flexible approach to sexuality and gender and that this approach extended to discourses on disability.

Overall, the more organized and exclusive SMOs were more likely to present hegemonic discourses while the more inclusive groups were likely to present queer discourses. It is possible to explain these findings using social exchange theory and Homans' Law. It has been suggested that collective identities can act as cultural capital (Taylor & Raeburn 1995), but it is possible that collective identities are developed based on the cultural and political capital of the group. Homans' social exchange theory states that individuals are more likely to associate with those of a similar ranking or class (Homans & Merton 1974). It follows, then, that if hegemonic collective identities are developed because the SMO wishes to emphasize sameness, then they emphasize this sameness in order to be viewed as the same rank as the dominant society. This, then, will

allow them to achieve their hegemonic goals of equality and inclusion within the current social structure. Queer organizations, on the other hand, reject the dominant structure and therefore would have no desire to attempt to emphasize sameness as a means of being considered similar in rank. Homans' Law states that those with the most power rarely associate with those in the rank right below theirs as it could challenge the maintenance of their elite control (Homans & Merton 1974). If this is true in the case of queer and hegemonic groups, then this can explain the hegemonic SMOs' attempts to distance themselves from the queer groups. Since the hegemonic SMOs are attempting to emphasize sameness to the dominant society, in order to gain political power they would also attempt to distance themselves from the queer factions within their organization. They attempt to distance themselves as a way of maintaining the political power and identity boundaries that they have formed.

Moreover, these findings indicate that more affluent and exclusive organizations are more likely to adopt hegemonic narratives and, as such, organizations' positions as queer or hegemonic are likely shaped through race, gender, age, nationality, and class. Many of the organizations here did not explicitly address intersectionality, race, class, age, and nationality outside of equal access statements. Many of the organizations that uploaded photographs of meetings and their membership frequently presented quite a homogenous group of people. This is the case with Rainbow Support Group, whose photographs were almost entirely of white male/masculine presenting people. Queerability, on the other hand, was an exception. As the organization that was most inclusive and frequently employed queer discourses, they presented very diverse membership in comparison to the other groups. Queerability was the only open forum where commenters wrote and interacted with each other through comment sections. There were often conversations focused on race, gender, age, and class. Conversations on nationality

did occur but they were less frequent. For example, there were conversations about the connections between disability rights movements' and civil rights movements' joint activism as well as conversations about not forgetting black disabled queer teens in activist work. Furthermore, conversations about race, gender, and class were not just occurring in the comment sections. Queerability frequently addressed such issues in their direct posts. For example, in one post showing photos of people proudly displaying their colostomy bags, Queerability wrote that they wished there were more people of color represented. Though there is no sure way of knowing how queer and hegemonic discourses were shaped through members' identities as it pertains to race, class, age, and nationality in this particular project it is clear that the data represented here indicates that the more affluent groups frequently use hegemonic narratives and those that use more queer discourses frequently expressed more inclusivity of a wide range of marginalized identities. Therefore, it is possible that these groups may have more diverse membership. More work should be done to examine how queer and hegemonic discourses are shaped through race, nationality, gender, age, and class. There is work that suggests that those who are more well versed in intersectionality rhetoric frequently have access to or hold other positions of privilege (especially in relation to class) and many of those lacking forms of privilege may try and remain "unpolitical" (Ward 2003; 2008a). This, however, is inconsistent with the findings here as it pertains to LGBTQ+ and disability identities. The larger groups that appeared to have more affluence frequently positioned themselves in relation to more assimilationist perspectives while the groups that were visually more open to complex intersecting identities seemed to be smaller and less funded. It is unclear, however, exactly how race, class, age, and nationality influence these discourses. Ward's work (2003; 2004; 2008a; 2008b) has demonstrated that within the framework of multicultural SMOs it is difficult for

members not to stress and prioritize specific oppressions as the experiences and meanings of sexism, racism, homophobia and other forms of oppression are distinct in their histories and lived experiences on personal, political, and organizational levels. Future work should examine the relationship between race, class, age, and nationality in influencing discourses of LGBTQ+/Disability organizations.

Homonormativity, pinkwashing, and homonationalism are often present within assimilationist discourses. Although this paper does not specifically address the ways in which organizations that engage in hegemonic or queer discourses also employ homonormative, and homonational discourse, there is evidence to support that this is common occurrence, especially within and as a component of hegemonic discourses (Ward 2008a; 2008b). A follow up examination could analyze how organizations often promote homonormative and homonationalism and engage in pinkwashing in relation to how these organizations position themselves as queer or assimilationist.

This paper brings to light questions about how the LGBTQ+/disability community constructs collective identity via boundaries and consciousness and develop queer and/or hegemonic discourses. More research is needed to fully understand why LGBTQ+/disability communities have constructed identity in this way and what makes some groups present primarily queer discourses while other groups present predominantly hegemonic discourses. Though this paper posits whether an SMO develops a queer or hegemonic collective identity as determined partly by the boundaries they draw, it is unclear why they draw those particular boundaries. Furthermore, because this research relied entirely on discourse presented via online websites it is unclear if the boundary work and consciousness are the determining factors or if

there is a mitigating factor effecting whether the SMOs in this study constructed a queer or hegemonic collective identity.

Limitations: I experienced some unforeseen difficulties, as there were some limitations of this study. Although I intended to examine every website associated with a SMO focused on the advocacy for individuals who identified as both disabled and LGBTQ+, these unforeseen difficulties made that impossible. The issues that inhibited the analyses of every SMO with a website (that fit the aforementioned criteria) were that (1) some websites required that you be a member and log in to view, (2) many websites were shut down or the domain name was inactivated or sold, (3) some websites would have home pages but no information on that page and no other pages, and (4) many website had not been active in the last 10 years. Furthermore, I have no way of knowing if these organizations have been active past their last online update. It is possible that these organizations do not update their websites often as they regularly meet and are content with their websites' messaging. It is also possible that some of these organizations are not active offline.

As addressed in the methodology section, what is depicted on these websites may not reflect the opinions of particular individuals within these groups. The majority of the websites here do not portray interactions between the groups' members nor can they represent the processes of how groups choose what to write or display on these websites or how members interact in person. Consequently, there is no way of knowing if opinions and narratives differ within groups and these websites do not represent processes that occur when members are together or decide what discourses to put out to the world.

Moreover, since the data represented here is collected from SMO's websites, their presented rhetoric could be influenced by the organizations' funding and thus have monetary motivations. In this particular project it is impossible to untangle rhetoric that is stemming from an organization's activist work from the rhetoric that is stemming from the desire to obtain funding/financial resources. It is possible that much of the rhetoric presented on these websites is influenced and constructed with both the goal of activism and obtaining monetary support in mind. As such, the rhetoric may be shaped by corporate influences. Many of the websites are not forthright about whether or not the organization receives funding and from whom. Therefore, it is difficult to ascertain the effects of such concerns on the discourses that are presented. This leaves questions pertaining to funding and corporate sponsorship unanswered, such as whether or not groups seek out funding, how they obtain funding. Therefore, it is difficult to know how these concerns influence the rhetoric displayed and what audiences these organizations are attempting to reach through their websites. Since the data in this study does not depict funding and corporate sponsorship, I do not engage with the relationship between big business and activism. I do recognize that advocacy has and can be understood as a money-making big business but because the motivations of these organizations in relation to financial resources are unknown I do not speculate their effects in this particular project. Previous work has found that corporate approaches to diversity within SMOs can support and sustain white, ablest, heteronormative, and sexist normative understandings within organizations (Ward 2004; 2008). Therefore, it is extremely important that future works examine such a relationship and the way advocacy has been constructed as big business, especially how such strategies can marginalize and excluded groups of people.

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CHAPTER FOUR:

“THE DISABILITY RIGHTS COMMUNITY WAS NEVER MINE.”: NEUROQUEER AS THE INTERSECTION OF NEURODIVERSITY AND LGBTQ+ IDENTITIES

Abstract

Drawing from the data present on contemporary blogs, this paper is an examination of the emerging term “neuroqueer.” Neuroqueer movements, communities, and practices deserve attention from scholars, specifically as it pertains to scholarly dialogues concerning gender, sexuality, queer theory, and disability studies. I examine the narratives present on two online blogs through and relate them to queer and crip theoretical perspectives of sexuality and disability. I find that Neuroqueer is a community co-created project that requires those who engage in it-disidentify from both oppressive dominant and counterculture identities that perpetuate destructive medical model discourses of cure. It is a collaboration of academics, activists, and bloggers who are engaging in practices of online community building. Blog users explain that they feel excluded from LGBTQ+, feminist, and disability/neurodiversity communities based on their complex intersectional identities. Blog members employ neuroqueer practices as subversive tactics to combat this exclusion through a rejection of able-hetero assimilation as well as a rejection of counteridentification in favor of disidentification.

Introduction

Drawing from the data present on contemporary and relevant blogs, this paper is an examination of the emerging term “neuroqueer.” Neuroqueer is a crip project co-created by

academics, activists, and other members of online neuroqueer communities. Neuroqueer requires those who engage in it disidentify (Munoz 1999) from both oppressive dominant and counterculture identities that perpetuate destructive medical model discourses of progress and cure. In other words, neuroqueering is a rejection of able-hetero assimilation as well as a rejection of counteridentification in favor of disidentification. In this paper, I answer the following questions: What/who is neuroqueer(ing)? What does a Neuroqueer project entail? What does neuroqueer disidentification mean in relation to existing feminist, queer, and crip theory? What is its value for feminist-sociological knowledge-projects and what is its value for people engaging with or identifying as neuroqueer?

I began by briefly describing feminist disability studies and the emergence of crip theory. I then examine the use of neuroqueer(ing) within previous scholarly work and describe my theoretical framework. I answer the questions above and explore the narratives utilized on two blogs by engaging in virtual ethnography and narrative analysis in combination with grounded theory. Using an intersectional approach, I describe the creation of neuroqueer communities, the narratives associated with neuroqueer, and explain neuroqueering as a crip project in disidentification.

Drawing on feminist disability research methodology (Garland-Thompson 2005), I recognize that research involving marginalized populations should be emancipatory in focus. One of the objectives of this project is to locate a group of people engaging in self-emancipation and bring further attention to their goals and creative work. My goal with this paper is not to coopt their narratives but, rather, to bring their work to the attention of mainstream academic audiences. I am specifically interested in bringing their work to the attention of the readership of *Gender & Society*, as feminist approaches to intersectionality could benefit from incorporating

more diverse understandings of neurodiversity.

Queer, crip, and neuroqueer approaches to disability present an apparent call and appeal for future sociological research. Only a small number of social scientists have applied queer and crip approaches in empirical examinations of disability (See for example: Fish 2008; Hirschmann 2013; McRuer 2003; McRuer 2013; McRuer 2013; McRuer 2006; Meyer 2002; O'Toole 2015; Samuels 2003; Sandahl 2003; 2004; Schalk 2013; Sherry 2004; Shildrick 2009; Yep 2013) and almost none have applied neuroqueer approaches to such work (Falek 2016; Kafer 2016; McWade et al 2015; Milton 2017; Richter 2017). Work on the intersections of sexuality, disability, and neurodiversity from neuroqueer perspectives is required to not only refine queer, crip, and neuroqueer theoretical models but to also consider the implications for the complex lived experiences that lay at the intersection of sexuality and disability.

Queer and crip theoretical perspectives are not synonymous, should not be conflated, and should not necessarily be used interchangeably. They do, however, have intertwined histories and applicability (Kafer 2013; McRuer 2003; 2006; 2013; Samuels 2003; Sandahl 2003). They “both attempt deconstruction often through practices of discourse. Both are concerned with challenging reductionist understandings of human experience and both question the utility of binary understandings of normality versus abnormality” (Egner 2017: 161).

The term queer is used in several ways in this paper: 1) as an identity—when bloggers specifically identify as such; 2) as a theoretical approach that challenges dominant notions of categorization and identity boundaries (queer theory); 3) as a verb to signify the act of challenging these categories (queering or to queer). At times, queer can denote challenging boundaries that specifically pertain to gender and sexuality and, in other spaces, queer denotes a perspective that challenges binary identity categorization more broadly (Egner 2017). Crip

theory/cripping is a way of challenging binary notions of boundaries between disabled and “normal” identities/bodyminds¹⁶. “Crip theory can be understood as a disability focused queer approach that is concerned with the relationship between the physical body, embodiment, and the self” (161). In this paper I argue that neuroqueer disidentification can be taken up as a neurologically focused criping. The majority of disability studies, including the work done by crip theorists, has been primarily concerned with physical disability. Indeed, neuroqueering can provide for crip theorists an approach to examine the ways in which able-mindedness is tied to and coalesces through able-bodiedness and practices of normalization of the body. Neuroqueering can answer the call Kafer outlines when she writes

What is needed, then, are critical attempts to trace the ways in which compulsory able-bodiedness/able-mindedness and compulsory heterosexuality intertwine in the service of normativity; to examine how terms such as ‘defective,’ ‘deviant,’ and ‘sick’ have been used to justify discrimination against people whose bodies, minds, desires, and practices differ from the unmarked norm; to speculate how norms of gendered behavior - proper masculinity and femininity - are based on nondisabled bodies; and to map potential points of connection among and departure between queer (and) disability activists (2013:16).

I examine how a group of neuroqueer bloggers describe the ways in which they experience such discrimination through practices of assimilation and the common usage of medicalized notions of cure. Furthermore, by considering neuroqueer as a project in disidentification, I argue that neuroqueering is a contestation of such discrimination and practices of normalization through the rejection of both able-hetero assimilation and counteridentification (such as LGBT Pride) in favor of disidentification.

¹⁶ Inspired by Corbett O'toole's and Margaret Price's uses of this term I use bodyminds to mean bodies and minds and act as a rejection of the Cartesian mind/body split that posits bodies versus minds.

Previous Literature

Broader contexts of disability and sexuality

Sex and disability are, “if not antithetical in the popular imagination, then certainly incongruous” (Mollow & McRuer 1). Disabled people are frequently de-gendered and desexualized in media, popular imagination, and research (McRuer and Mollow 2012). The notion that disabled people are not gendered or sexual leads to the invalidation and invisibility of LGBTQ+ disabled people, further marginalizing them (Egner 2016). The identities of people who are disabled and sexual become even more contentious in the popular imagination when they identify with sexualities that are deemed non-normative (McRuer 2006). Historical practices of medicalizing disability and sexuality have functioned to delegitimize both queer sexualities and genders, as well as the sexuality and gender of disabled people.

The pathologization and medicalization of both sexuality and disability have paralleled histories (Egner 2017). There is a long history of medicalizing and describing queer identities and practices as disability/illness (Risman & Schwartz 1988; Tiefer 1996; Foucault 1978) while the gender and sexuality of people with bodily and mental differences have been denied and pathologized (Kafer 2013; McRuer 2006). In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, medical communities began defining sexuality as a fact of biological nature and “normal” sexuality was thus deemed inherently heterosexual and contrasted with deviant and abject sexual behavior and desire (see for example: Hirschfeld 1948; Krafft-Ebing, 1965; Masters & Johnson, 1970; Money, Hampson, & Hampson, 1955). Non-heterosexual desire and behavior was consequently described as sexual disorders/illness (Egner 2017; Tiefer 1996) and such practices thus contributed to the medicalization of queer identities.

Disabled people’s bodies are consistently policed and they are frequently denied access to their own sexualities and genders (Dinwoodie, Greenhill, & Cookson 2016; Hirshmann 2013;

Noonan & Gomex 2011; O'Toole 2015; Shakespeare 1994; 2013) as evident by practices such as institutionalization and forced sterilization of, infantilization of, and lack of sex education for disabled people. Moreover, queer autistic people frequently experience their queerness being reduced to a symptom of their autism diagnosis (within public/medical/academic discourses).

Feminist disability studies and the development of crip theory

Feminist approaches to gender and sexuality developed at least in part out of critiques of such pathologization of women's bodies and sexuality. Similarly, feminist disability studies are frequently constructed in response to such pathologization and critique other models of disability for not being intersectional enough and too concerned with materialist barriers. Specifically, feminist disability scholars have argued that other models have excluded people of color and LGBTQ+ people from analysis of disability (Berger, 2013; Garland-Thompson, 2005; Goodley, 2013). The objectives of feminist disability studies as outlined by Garland-Thomson (2005) are to confront dominant notions about what it means to be disabled, to examine the experiences of and notions about disability through contexts of power, make visible the ways in which experiences of disability are presented as grounds for exclusion, to champion the rights of disabled people, and to emancipate people with disabilities by representing their dismissed experiences (Garland-Thompson 2005).

Such approaches have laid the foundation for the development of crip approaches to disability, specifically through their critiques of other models of disability and health and illness (Egner 2017). Crip theory developed as feminist and sexuality scholars took up questions of the body and builds upon their work through a purposeful amalgamation of disability studies and queer theory (for an outline of this trajectory see Egner 2017). Crip theory (see theoretical

framework) has built upon the critique that scholars of disability have been unconcerned with intersectionality, attempting to deconstruct oversimplification of identity, identity politics and practices of normalizing and denormalizing identities. Disabled identities and crip critiques assert political, social, cultural, and theoretical power (Siebers 2008; Sandahl 2003; Schalk 2013).

Neuroqueer

The term neuroqueer(ing) has recently been employed in academic work but is rarely defined. There is a forthcoming publication written by authors of these blogs¹⁷ that has a tentative release and the majority of the works mentioning neuroqueer reference the blogs examined in this study. Neuroqueer has been referenced as an identity or used to signify how a person or group of people may identify. This is the case in Kafer's *Un/Safe Disclosers* (2016) when she addresses the inclusivity/exclusivity of U.S. disability studies. She uses neuroqueer to signify a group of people alongside other groups of people who identify with similarly marginalized identities such as queer folk and people of color. Similarly, Falek (2016) recognizes neuroqueer as an identity in a review of "Defiant" by Monje (one of the authors of the neuroqueer blogs), describing the main character as a "neuroqueer protagonist".

Scholars also liken neuroqueer to theoretical projects similar to queer theory. In Milton's (2017) autoethnography of reading Robert Pirsig's work in relation to Milton's own "autistic ways of being", he mentions Neuroqueer once alongside crip and queer theory. Similar to both Milton's and Kafer's references of neuroqueer, many of the scholars who mention neuroqueer only do so once, often in passing. In a paper titled, "Mad studies and neurodiversity: a dialogue", McWade, Milton, and Beresford explore the shared concerns of neurodivergent and mad-

¹⁷ This book may be able to provide a much need analysis and history of neuroqueer.

identified scholars attempting to make space for their identities within academia. They briefly mention neuroqueer writing, “The intersections between neurodiversity and trans* and queer identities are already being realized around the term neuroqueer” (McWade et al 2015: 307).

In one of the few works that employs neuroqueer as a theoretical approach, Richter (2017) uses a neuroqueer critique to examine family units and narratives of autism as an American crisis in need of curing in his chapter titled “Melting Down the Family Unit: A Neuroqueer Critique of Table-readiness”. Using a queer-crip approach, Richter examines narratives of autism through a Neurodivergent analysis while providing alternative pro-autism narratives. Richter provides scholars with an excellent example (and possibly the first published scholarly work of its kind) of how neuroqueer can be used within scholarly work. However, Richter makes no distinction between queer, crip, and neuroqueer and does not define or explain what exactly neuroqueer critique is/how it is employed. As such, I seek to provide such an explanation through an examination of the neuroqueer blogs.

Theoretical Framework

In this section, I will expound more on the six crip theory tactics outlined in the introduction. I will then describe crip theories approaches to able-mindedness and connect this literature in to intersectionality.

Crip Theory

The following are some of the tactics that I understand to be implied by crip approaches. I offer these crip theory tactic to provide summary of crip theory, to make this paper more accessible to scholars outside of disability studies, as well as tactics that can be employed to conceptualize crip projects within research and activism (as I will do throughout this paper in conceptualizing neuroqueer).

The first tactic is *to understand intersectional identities as fluid and complex*. One of the benefits of criping is how its fluidity provides new insights into identity politics. Queer theory

“has critiqued minority identity precisely because of the tendency of the resistant sense of minority identity to devolve into mere celebration of difference, posits instead a more contingent, fluid sense of identity. Disability studies’ current emphasis on a strong (and nonessentialized) minority identity emerging from a common experience of able-bodied oppression...might usefully inform, and reinvigorate, understandings of minority identity in and around queer theory.” (McRuer 2003: 97)

Crip scholars prevent essentializing minority identities and avoid perpetuating binaries based on notions that promote some bodyminds as more valuable than others (McRuer 2006). Moreover, “one of the most productive and provocative elements of crip theory, and of crip in general, is the potential expansiveness of the term” (Kafer 2013: 15). It is this expansiveness and nebulousness that lends crip theory to the exploration of neuroqueering and it is its fluidity and ever-changingness (Sandahl 2003) that will allow a reconceptualization of crip theory by incorporating neuroqueering.

The second tactic is *to focus attention on the experiences of sexuality as a way to also understand the experiences of disability*. Crip theorists seek to build on the work of feminist and queer theorists by doing disability-focused readings of prevalent queer theory/feminist works. Crip builds on the premises of Rich’s (1981) compulsory heterosexuality and Butler’s (2006) conception of gender as a “imitation for which there is no original.” Indeed, crip theory’s central conceptualization is that ideal able-bodiedness cannot exist. In referring to Rich’s *Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence*, McRuer establishes the notion of Compulsory Able-bodiedness and explains, “as with heterosexuality, this repetition is bound to fail, as the ideal able-bodied identity can never, once and for all, be achieved” (2006: 9). In so doing, he calls for a queer disability studies (i.e. Crip theory).

The third tactic is to *subvert ableism and ablest discourses and narratives*. By calling attention to the ways discourses execute power over disabled people, crip theorists attempt to understand how such disabling discourses affect the social experiences of peoples' lives. Crip theorists subvert such discourses by engaging in the fourth tactic; attempting *to uncover ways in which discourses such as language and imagery used in media, governments, law, educational institutions, and other organizations subtly and overtly reinforce normative expectations*. These discourses contribute to the determination of some bodyminds as normative and others as deviant and, as such, crip projects attempt to subvert these ableist discourses.

The fifth tactic crip theorists employ is *to reject the notion that disabled people must seek cure and provide alternative narratives to medical model conceptions of cure*. Dominant discourses position disability and illness as "obstacles to the arc of progress." Kafer states

In our disabled state, we are not part of the dominant narratives of progress, but once rehabilitated, normalized, and hopefully cured, we play a starring role: the sign of progress... Within this frame of curative time, then, the only appropriate disabled mind/body is one cured or moving toward cure. (28)

Crip scholars reject this notion of cure as progress understanding that progressive pictures of future utopias, built on imperatives of ridding humans of disability and illness, devalue disabled bodyminds..

Ablebodieness is most evident in the insistence of a 'but wouldn't you rather?' narrative (Berube 1996; McRuer 2006; Shakespear 2014). Scholars point out the inefficiency of inclusion model rhetoric by drawing attention to the common question thrust upon disabled people: "equality and inclusion of the disabled is good but at the end of the day wouldn't you rather not be disabled?" In asking such questions, the popular imagination assumes

“in advance that we all agree: able-bodied identities, able-bodied perspectives are preferred and what we all, collectively are aiming for. A system of compulsory able-bodiedness repeatedly demands that people with disabilities embody for others an affirmative answer to the unspoken questions, ‘yes, but in the end, wouldn’t you rather be more like me?’” (McRuer 2006:9).

For many disabled people who accept the curative and progressive ‘individual’ medical model, the answer is ‘yes, I would rather not be disabled’. However, for those active in crippling (and neuroqueer) projects the answer to the question ‘but wouldn’t you rather not be disabled?’ is a resounding ‘*go fuck yourself*’.

The sixth tactic is *to deconstruct these normative expectations through subversive tactics*. The Crip conception of answering no to the “wouldn’t your rather” question is more oppositional to hegemonic dominant narratives than the simplicity of disability pride in that a crip response not only intends to counter these narratives but also seeks to deconstruct such expectations through subversive tactics. The crip conception is one of valuing disability to the extent that if it could be a choice, there is *nothing wrong* with choosing to be disabled. As long as compulsory able-bodiedness permeates the popular imagination, disabled bodyminds can never truly be a preferred existence over able-bodiedness/mindedness and therefore disabled people are never truly valued (no matter how inclusive a society).

Able-mindness

As I have outlined above crip theory is constructed around the notion of compulsory able-bodiedness. However, disability studies (crip theory included) has paid little attention to able-mindedness. Kafer (2013) addresses the critique that disability studies focuses too heavily on physical disabilities at the expense of other disabilities. By combining “references to bodies with references to minds and pair[ing] ‘compulsory able-bodiedness’ with ‘compulsory able-mindedness’”, she calls on disability scholars to be more inclusive by starting to experiment “with different ways of talking about and conceptualizing our projects.” Neuroqueering does just

this; it can be conceptualized as a neurologically and mind based crip theory. Kafer states “I have only just begun to scratch the surface of what able-mindedness might mean in relation to able-bodieness”(15). Neuroqueering can provide unique and rich conceptualizations of what able-mindedness is, how it is entangled with conceptions of compulsory able-bodieness and compulsory heterosexuality, and how these compulsions permeate every layer of social life.

Intersectionality

Feminist disability studies have called on scholars of disability to draw from intersectional perspectives (Crenshaw 1991) to construct their work and have asked feminist intersectionality scholars to incorporate disability into their analysis. Garland-Thompson stresses the importance of such an approach to examining disability, writing, “ Integrating disability into feminist theory is generative, broadening our collective inquires, questioning our assumptions and contributing to feminism’s intersectionality...The most compelling and complex analyses of gender intersectionality take into consideration what I call the ability/disability system-along with race, ethnicity, sexuality, and class” (2002: 4).

The majority of intersectional work in sociology has either ignored or only superficially engaged with disability. Feminist disability and crip theorists have critiqued scholars of gender, sexuality, feminisms, and intersectionality for only minimally engaging with disability studies (if at all) and have argued that disability has been excluded from feminist studies (Asch & Fine 1988; Garland-Thomson 2002; 2005; Hirschmann 2012; 2013; Kafer 2013; Samuels 2002; Tevis & Griffen 2014) and that this absence is “particularly notable in scholarship employing the lens of *intersectionality*” (Tevis & Griffen 2014, 240).

When disability is considered it is often rendered a descriptor of nuance (Erevelles & Minear 2010). Everelles & Minear call on critiques of “nuance theory” in which black women’s

oppression is described as only an intensified example of the oppression of (white) women and where black women are used to exemplify how bad things truly are for all women. Feminist studies has, at times, ignored the experiences of black women and critical race feminisms and intersectionality studies have deployed a “similar analytical tactic through their unconscious non-analysis of disability as it intersects with race, class, and gender oppression” and “Disability, like race, offers not just a “nuance” to any analysis of difference” (Erevelles & Minear 2010, 128). Indeed, “Intersectionality is not simply about bringing together these markers but to consider how each supports or unsettles the constitution of one another.” (Goodley, 2011, 2013, p. 636).

Hirschmann (2012) contends that feminist scholars are often better at calling for intersectionality then engaging in it, stating “feminist approaches to intersectionality have been limited, in part because, no matter how much feminists remind ourselves that “women” occupy all racial, ethnic, religious, class, and sexuality positions, one tends not to hold all of that multiply in mind when one uses the term”(401). Hirschmann further argues that disability can allow for the enactment of intersectionality in ways that have yet to be conceptualized within feminisms. Intersectionality is often employed in ways that distinguish individuals and groups from others. Hirschmann writes, “Intersectionality theory tells me that as a professional, straight, white woman, for instance, I am different from black, working class, lesbian women. Too often there seems no recognition of what we also share”(403). Similarly, disability theories recognize that the bodily experiences, stigmatization and oppression differ based on types of disability. However, it also “maintains that this difference is precisely what makes me the same as all these others.” The disability understanding of intersectionality is described like a “web,” “where we are linked to each other sometimes directly, other times indirectly through a complicated path of connections” (Gilligan 1982; Hirschmann 1992, 4-3). Intersectionality has been employed in the

naming of difference to examine who is excluded and marginalized. Feminist disability studies and Crip approaches to intersectionality, however, are more concerned with how to include by recognizing the similarities in the experience of difference.

In recognizing identity and bodies as fluid, Crip theorists seek to take up feminist disability scholars' call to attend to intersectionality. Hirschmann writes that disability "can help feminism develop intersectionality's truly radical potential: namely, the ways in which "difference" is just another word for being human" (404). I argue that Neuroqueer disidentification is one such approach to developing intersectionality's most radical potential of conceptualizing difference as similarity through practices of intersectional inclusion. It will become clear through the duration of this paper that neuroqueer disidentification is, in part, a practice of rejecting any form of exclusion and binaries (such as assimilation or counteridentification). Furthermore, if feminist intersectionality has lacked examinations of disability then it (like much of disability studies) has certainly ignored neurodivergency. Theoretical perspectives of intersectionality could greatly benefit from considering diverse approaches to neurodiversity. Neuroqueer brings together crip understandings of disability and feminist disability approaches to intersectionality by attending to compulsory able-mindedness through practices of disidentification.

Methodology

After conducting a virtual ethnography of two blog focused on conversations concerning neuroqueer, I employed narrative analysis in order to examine the data from these sites. In line with the intersectional approach outlined in my theoretical framework, my analysis took into account the experience of multiple marginalized identities.

Virtual Ethnography

Virtual ethnography (or digital ethnography) is the concept of employing ethnographic methodologies in virtual spaces (Hine 2000; Maloney 2013). Similar to other ethnographic methods, virtual ethnography is useful when “dealing with complex and multi-faceted concepts like culture” and “offers the promise of getting closer to understanding the ways in which people interpret the world and organize their lives” (Hine 2000:42). Indeed, scholars have taken up virtual methods as especially important for qualitative inquiry (Hine 2000; Kandall 1999; Maloney 2013; Markham 1998; Mann and Stewart 2002; 2003; Miller and Slater 2000; Wilson 2006). Online sites allow individuals to express themselves and examining such sites is especially important when written by individuals who are not represented in other forms of popular media. The voices of disabled people have been historically and culturally silenced and ignored (Berger 2013). Indeed, the “general history of disability representation is one of oppressive or negative forms” (Hevey 1993, 423). By focusing on blogs, voices that are otherwise silenced can be examined. Online mediums are especially valuable when addressing disability, as digital technologies are able to break down some communication barriers. Virtual ethnography is particularly apt for narrative analysis examinations of online data because it allows researchers to collect stories told by posters and follow stories as they are commented on, taken up as relevant or representative, and adapted by individuals across the internet. Hine has described virtual ethnography as useful in exploring the ways in which the internet is (and becomes) socially meaningful. It allows researchers to examine the internet as both culture and cultural artifact. Researchers are able to learn about the internet or a more specific site by immersing themselves in it.

Site selection

The sites were chosen based on the following predetermined criteria: (1) the site must be currently active, (2) updated within the 12 months prior to data collection, (3) contain posts or comments from people identifying as or discussing neuroqueer(ing) and (4) be completely open access. Two blogs fit the above criteria: neurocosmopolitanism.com (written by Nick Walker concerning neurodiversity, autism, and cognitive liberty) and neuroqueer.blogspot.com (organized by IB Grace and an editorial staff). Although both of the blogs examined here are open access, I recognize the importance of citation. As such, I have provided information for the blogs.

Finding the sites for study required moving about the internet, searching for websites and blog spaces that fit specific criteria (listed above). Maloney describes being able to find communities focused on specific identities by following websites through “internal linkages” to one another (Maloney 2013: 133). I employed this technique in order to find the sites for this study. Frequently, the two blogs represented here referenced each other and I was able to follow linkages from one to the other. The members and posters of a particular site/blog were with each other within their blog as well as posters on the other site, effectively building an online multi-site community.

Each site was structured in a way that a particular post would be uploaded to the site and individuals could comment. These posts took a variety of different forms such as narratives, reblogging an article or post from another site, pictures, videos, and poetry. Content was created by the site leader or submitted to the site from an outside writer(s). Many of the commentators on the blogs were anonymous and little demographic information was available for posters. The posters who did self-identify identified with a variety of genders, sexualities, disabilities, and neurodivergent identities. Almost all of the posters who self-identified, described themselves as

LGBTQ+ and neurodivergent (many autistic), about half with identified with other types of disabilities (such as cerebral-palsy, D/deaf, “mobility impaired,” chronic illness/pain, mental illness). Most posters did not self-identify their race and of those who did most identified as white.

Data Analysis Procedures

I compiled the data in to documents that amounted to over seven hundred pages of text and images. I then conducted a narrative analysis using the qualitative data software program *Atlas ti* to generate verifiable themes. I coded the data in search of thematic commonalities pertaining to the question ‘What is neuroqueering?’ Drawing on Loseke’s (2012) guidelines for narrative analysis, I first began by asking questions to situate the context of these stories: Who are the authors? Who is their audience? What type of story are they attempting to tell? Then the data was codified and then categorized, after which common themes were established in accordance with grounded theory (Charmaz 2002) and lumping and splitting techniques (Zerubavel 1996). I closely read the data to examine the narratives being told and to gain an understanding of the central themes of the stories present. I coded each post, comment, or passage within posts based on discursive themes of the passages. In subsequent passes I then re-coded, using lumping and splitting techniques (Zerubavel 1996) to begin generating common thematic categories. I used these categories and codes to examine the themes that were common across multiple posts from different blog moderators and commenters.

The bloggers/posters are directly engaging with cultural codes through a critique of the normative. Therefore, I employ a narrative style analysis (Loseke 2007; 2011), as this method is used to examine the cultural codes embedded stories.). Such narratives devalue disabled bodyminds, further fueling the marginalization of disabled people. Because people frequently

use narratives that already exist and are currently circulating as a resource to construct the narratives of their own lives and identities (Loseke 2007: 673) and the majority of narratives concerning disabled people devalue their bodyminds (Berger 2013; Hevey 1993; Rouss 2013), disabled people are left feeling frustrated by the lack of representational stories. These bloggers are engaging in a conversation as people who do not feel represented by the current available narratives. By using narrative analysis I am able to examine the construction of neuroqueer through the online community building of blog members. Narratives do not simply describe and depict ‘existing ideologies’; rather, through the telling of stories, they create them. New stories “emerge when there are new people to listen to and understand them through interpretive communities” (Weeks 1998: 47).

Findings

The data from the blogs reveal that neuroqueering is a crippling project. The ways in which the neuroqueer project is accomplished will be demonstrated throughout this section in the following themes: neuroqueer’s co-creation, its ever-changing and fluid definitions and purposes, its rejection of dominant discourses (specifically those stemming from medical model understandings of disability, gender, and sexuality), and the insistence that all bodyminds should be valued. Moreover, posters on the blogs represented here often describe the goals and applicability of neuroqueer(ing) similarly to the goals of cripp theory I have outlined above. If crippling can be understood as a disability-focused queering then it is possible to imagine neuroqueering as a neurologically-focused crippling.

Co-created Project

The founding authors of the two blogs understand themselves as co-creators of the term neuroqueer. These co-creators include (but are not limited to) IB Grace, Melanie Yergeau, Michael Scott Monje Jr., and Nick Walker. Although they may have been the first to create a space for the discussion of neuroqueering projects online, it is possible that they may not have been the first to use this term publically. They are not the only scholars/activists engaging with neurodiversity and queerness but since this is an examination of the emerging term neuroqueer I have focused on their blogs. Walker explains in one post that three of the blog founders were involved in an online conversation when they realized that they had all been exploring the same term: neuroqueer. "...We discovered that all three of us had been playing around with the same term." He continues "The term neuroqueer was coined independently and more or less simultaneously by Elizabeth Ibbey Grace, Michael Scott Monje Jr. and myself...the set of concepts and practices represented by the term came to heavily inform our thinking."

Grace states that many people have been engaging with neuroqueer and that there are as many different definitions and meanings as there are people experimenting with the term. They write, "I suspect all of us will have different meanings for the term, which, when you see what my meaning will turn out to mean, is perfectly perfect according to what I mean and I look forward to seeing what everyone means!" The founders also recognize neuroqueer as a community co-created project, as evident in their recognition of the increasing use of the term.

It's showing up in academic papers and conference presentations, creative projects,...and all manner of social media platforms...when a new term/concept spreads beyond the social circles of its originators that's generally a sign that it's 'got legs, as they say. In other words, it's a term that your likely too be hearing a lot more of in the years to come. (neurocosmopolitanism.com)

Furthermore, rather than debating what should (not) be included in/as neuroqueer, they are seeking explanations from anyone who would like to be involved in the conversation.

Neuroqueer.blogspot wrote a post asking “the community for a wide representation for the definitions that people engaged with the topic actually work with. The goal is to fill in our ideas of what neuroqueer is about with conversations rather than limited definitions.”

Fluid and Ever-changing

Similar to the use of queer, neuroqueer is often employed as an identity term on these sites (as well as in most of the academic work that references it). This, however, is not to say that someone who describes themselves as neuroqueer is necessarily employing yet another identity category to describe sexuality. Rather, it became apparent throughout my analysis that posters who claimed the term neuroqueer as an identity term, do so to describe someone who engages in practices of neuroqueering. Thus, many posters point to neuroqueer as a politic, project or doing; in which one rejects able-heteroassimilation. In a poem titled “Neuroqueer, or, how the birth of the clinic met my dangerous desire” Elizabeth Hassler writes about the possibility of neuroqueer:

...my queerness is in lower-case,
and I came to it easily
once I stopped tasting my experience in rights-based alphabet soup
I fled
toward radical corners...
My neuro-queer
is in the silences, in the coy,
in coastal metaphors, in the third person,
in building her a life
and tides of disabled pleasures...
I am a crazy crippled girl
with desires,
and I am learning
to access intimacy and that neuro-queer
has so much potential for joy...

In this poem Hassler rejects the identity based categorization of “Queer” or LGBTQ+ identification, explaining that their queer is lower-case a reference to queer practice opposed to “Queer” identities. Neuroqueering provides a fluidity that identity categories cannot. Moreover,

the data suggest that posters understand neuroqueer to have fluid definitions. Often, the originators of the blogs describe neuroqueer's fluid and multi-definitional foundation. This is referenced when Walker writes that blog writers have been "approaching it from different angles, our various interpretations of neuroqueer (or neuroqueerness or neuroqueering) were in no way incompatible." (neurocosmopolitanism.com). Walker also urges against attempting to establish 'authoritative' definitions of neuroqueer as its fluidity holds power and, thus, an authoritative definition would be antithetical.

Any effort to establish an 'Authoritative' Definition of neuroqueer is in some sense inherently doomed and ridiculous, simply because the sort of people who identify as neuroqueer and engage in neuroqueering tend to be the sort of people who delight in subverting definitions, concepts, and anything authoritative.

Members' approach to the fluidity of neuroqueer is often extended to and inspired by their approach to identity, in general. Posters take a very fluid approach to identification, specifically as it pertains to their disabilities, neurodivergency, sexuality, and gender, rejecting any form of exclusion (addressed more explicitly in the subsequent sections). Crip theory allows for a contingent, fluid sense of identity (rather than mere celebration of difference). Neuroqueer fosters similar types of fluidity.

Shared Exclusion

The posters describe that they have an affinity with neuroqueer and each other through their shared exclusion from identity-based communities. Indeed, many posters come to neuroqueer by recognizing that their exclusion is evidence of the limitations of identity movements and categorization. The fluid and multi-definitional term neuroqueer provides for members of this community what identity-centered movements and politics cannot: inclusion and value of their unique intersectional complex selves.

The neuroqueer bloggers describe experiencing complex, multisided oppression. Underscoring these experiences of marginalization is the challenge of identifying with this particular intersection of two historically socially contradicting identities. Disabled people who identify as LGBTQ+ highlight their gender and sexuality and force society to recognize that disabled people are gendered-sexual beings. This forced recognition of disabled people as queerly-gendered/sexual has the propensity to make society (even members of the LGBTQ+ and disability communities) uncomfortable. Those who identify as neurodivergent and LGBTQ+ often find themselves excluded and/or rejected not just from dominant or popular society but also academic, feminist, LGBTQ+, and disability identity-based communities and spaces.

Many posters commented on this type of marginalization—one poster on Neuroqueer.blogspot explained “I worked hard to be ‘good’ and ‘acceptable’ to ‘fit in; and ‘not cause trouble’ because I knew that I was allowed in nondisabled society only as long as I did not inconvenience them.” Even within groups that are attempting to be inclusive and reject dominant discourses, those who hold multiple and complex, often marginalized, identities are frequently excluded.(specifically LGBTQ+ and disability communities). Another poster describes how disabled individuals are often understood as incapable of advocating for themselves; this is especially so for disabled people.

“The rich unfortunate history has to do with people going About us Without Us. And when some of our own tried to say something about it, these ‘do-gooders’ seemed to express, to put it charitably, irritation. What they did not seem to do was listen, at all. Though they said they were doing whatever the were doing for our own good.” (Neuroqueer.blogspot)

It is because dominant medical model discourses permeate even ‘inclusive’ activist and ‘do-gooder’ conceptions of disability that so often people “go about us without us”. Medical model conceptions see stigmatized bodyminds as a problem that needs fixing thus forcing them to

conform to normative expectations of behaviors, practices, and bodyminds. To reiterate, crip and neuroqueer reject the notion that deviant behaviors and bodyminds are an individual problem. Rather, they recognize that the problem is located within dominant discourses that devalue bodily and mental diversity.

The bloggers describe neuroqueer not as a new identity category for queer neurodivergent people (although it can be used as such) but as a doing of neuroqueer politics; a politics that those who experience exclusion from identity-based spaces can participate in without needing to fit a particular mold or present themselves as a prototypical member. Furthermore, it is apparent throughout conversations on these blogs that to engage in neuroqueering one does not need to be neurodivergent and/or LGBTQ+. Indeed, Grace states that “Queer isn’t about sex, it’s about not letting people erase you... what I meant to say was that it’s not *all and only* about sex.” Rather, to identify with neuroqueer one needs just reject assimilation and heterocisnormativity (which I will explore more in-depth in subsequent sections), and understand that exclusion (especially based on identity) is antithetical to neuroqueering. In discussing the “Queer part of neuroqueer,” a poster writes about the meaning of queerness for them. They describe the fluidity of the queer part of neuroqueer, explaining that it is not about identity categorization and relate this to their experience as a disabled black person. They write

The meaning of Queerness as taken tends to mean not being heteronormative and not being cisnormative...But doesn’t disability and race run up against heteronormativity and cisnormativity? I am a Black bisexual trans woman. If I were to be a Black cis straight man, I am quite sure that heteronormativity and cisnormativity would be barriers for me anyway because of my...disability... How does my Blackness and the racialization of Black masculinity conflict with the white supremacist forms of cisheteronormativity?...I think that queer experiences that we have are all unique and situational and should be respected, recognized and acknowledged.

This poster describes that queer is not about meeting specific identity categories—it’s about experiences of shared exclusion and a rejection of hetero-cisnormativity. This notion is taken up

by the bloggers.

Making Exclusion Visible and Rejecting Exclusionary Practices

A central component of neuroqueering is making this exclusion visible and strategizing against it. For example, posters frequently expressed frustration with academia (many consider themselves academics) for its lack of accessibility. Recognizing that, for many disabled scholars, taking a position against academia's inaccessibility can mean being shut out of the very gates they are attempting to open and can result in further stigmatization, as a commentator explains, "academia beats the possibility of this response out of us...But we can occupy academia; we can stand against oppression and when we find it in ourselves, respond with the truth even if it is very risky." As evident in this quotation, neuroqueer practices attempt to point out this exclusion, reject it, and strategize against it.

Experiences of exclusion are certainly not confined to academia; bloggers describe frequent stigmatization within communities where valuing diversity and inclusion are central goals. Many of the posters describe neuroqueer as focused on inclusion and vehemently reject any group, organization, or ideology that excludes, marginalizes and/or is inaccessible to any person—especially (but not limited to) neurodivergent people. In a post titled *You are Not My Sister*, Corbett Joan O'Toole writes a letter to feminists about a conversation she had with her friend Mary.

Mary is a fierce feminist warrior. When she became disabled she used her considerable skills to making her world better for other disabled women. She is part of a national community of feminist NCF...Mary believed, because it was incomprehensible to her not to, that she is an important and respected part of that community. Yesterday she found out she was wrong.

O'Toole describes how Mary was attending a women's concert and sat with a group from the organization she has given the pseudonym National Community of Feminists. Mary is a wheelchair user and has moved from her chair to the ground where everyone was sitting. Below, she describes the exclusion Mary and many disabled people often feel within able-bodied feminist spaces.

An hour after Mary made the trek from her wheelchair to the ground, one of the concert organizers invited all the NCF women to join them onstage to honor their years of community service....at this point in her story I expect Mary to tell me how they all worked together to get her quickly into her wheelchair so they could show their NCF commitments to solidarity and social justice but....the women surrounding Mary stood up, stepped over her, and walked rapidly up onto the stage...Mary tells me that she was shocked by their behavior. I am not. I say to them: you are not my sisters. You never were.

O'Toole describes a narrative in which they and now Mary point out exclusion and actively rejects such practices.

In rejecting exclusionary practices those engaging in neuroqueer frequently engage in recognition of their own privileged positionalities. Although, there were only a handful of posters who openly identified as people of color conversations concerning race still frequently occurred, specifically discussions about addressing whiteness and centering anti-racism as part of a neuroqueer project. It was common for posters to recognize their own whiteness or how disability communities or LGBTQ+ communities perpetuated whiteness. For instance, in Hassler's poem, they critique "Queer" community movement for perpetuating whiteness and classism. They write, "...I shy away from Queer. But I am queer, nonetheless, even though our movement politics are so white and so middle-class and imagined so exclusively on dance floor." In another post titled "Centering anti-racism" Grace writes about relating to many experiences of oppressions and violences perpetuated against marginalized people due to their position as a queer

disabled person. Grace, however, makes a distinction between what they experience as a white disabled queer person and the violences people of color experience. They write

Nothing about any of this [being queer and disabled] will ever make me know what it is like to worry every day that someone will hatefully take it upon themselves to murder my precious babies just because of the color of their skin...It is unconscionable. But Black mothers know.

Grace continues by recognizing neuroqueer's potential to center anti-racism alongside anti-ableism and anti-hetersexism "Deep, committed solidarity, love and respect for racialized minorities. I need to learn to do more. For me, it starts now, in this intersection, for all the world and everybody's babies."

Challenging of Identity Hierarchies and Rejecting Assimilationism

This exclusion becomes even more evident when these identity-based communities expressed assimilationist goals. Grace explains how their conceptions of queer were rejected for a more assimilationist rhetoric.

We all marched together and we said were queer, were here, get used to it. That was desperately shocking, back then. The others told us to stop really, stop, your making us all look bad...your making us all look like freaks, nobody will ever accept us when you act like that...they'll never imagine that we are just like them.

As neuroqueering rejects exclusionary practices, this anti-assimilationist rhetoric was prevalent. For posters, assimilation was not worth the price of excluding others. One poster explains that, often, lesbian and gay focused SMOs would exclude others in trying to achieve assimilation.

The flagship way of being queer...or poster child way...is to be gay or lesbian, and I am this, which gives me privilege of a relative sort. It gives me the kind of privilege to where I could have choses (if I were that kind of unfortunate person to be one of these unctuous HRC slime balls who though it necessary to throw everyone else under the bus to assimilate" (Neuroqueer.blogspot.)

They recognize they are privileged as someone who is gay or lesbian who could easily fit their sexuality into the boxes that these identity movements construct. A commenter continues, explaining that this type of exclusion creates a hierarchy within identity-based communities and relates the hierarchy in LGBTQ+ communities to those in disability-based communities.

“as for those being ‘thrown under the bus for assimilation’ I think a hierarchy is followed with some more valued at other’s expenses with autistic advocacy. I’ve heard it suggested that the ones represented in the protest for “nothing about us without us” are the best and brightest advocates. I wouldn’t describe it in the same way. That description honors a value system...most, of what motivates the unfair discrimination, elitism, and bigotry in the society being challenged is echoed in the very advocacy movements presenting the challenge...I understand how autistics (capitol A) have the privilege...Most are autistics (without the capitol A) and could benefit from a movement but not much can be gained from one that supports the societies’ exclusive ideals which need challenging” (comment on [Neuroqueer.blogspot.](http://Neuroqueer.blogspot.com))

A central point of neuroqueering is challenging hierarchies that develop within identity-based communities/movements. For those engaging in Neuroqueer projects one of the most important aspects is inclusion and acceptance of all complex intersectional understandings of self. Below, Hassler critiques both disability and ‘queer’ identity communities explaining that they are both exclusionary.

I never pretended I had a nondisabled body, online or in my head. But I know the disability rights community was never mine—I still won’t read books of disability history that insist WE on their covers. I never made sense of my life in cultural nationalism, and so I shy away from Queer. But I am queer, nonetheless... Crazy (which some people who call themselves queer have told me not to reclaim) seems less distant from disability now. ([Neuroqueer.blogspot.](http://Neuroqueer.blogspot.com))

As posters explain, it is important that neuroqueer challenges these identity movements because communities based on identities often support a rhetoric that can be extraordinarily damaging to those who do not fit into specific boxes of identity (even when these identities are

created in opposition to dominant discourses). This is evident in the quotation below when a poster describes destructive beliefs they find prevalent in autism communities.

This is an idea that was born out of my own sense of discomfort, out of my feeling that, in order to find support in an autism community, I needed to ‘suck it up’ and find solidarity with people who were really holding on to some attitude that I found destructive...dangerous...their effects could reach beyond the person who held these destructive beliefs and weak harm in society. Along with the push to be more tolerant of these views, there was a curious kind of quite around issues that were not child-centric—issues such as sexuality, negotiating consent and power in adult situations, end-of-life issues, and basic civil rights.

The destructive beliefs referenced above frequently stem from the hegemonic and medicalized discourses that describe disabled (especially autistic) people as asexual and child-like.

Rejection of Medical Model and Narratives of Cure

Neuroqueer is in not only opposition to assimilation but also to identity politics that employ counter-discourses that use progressive narratives. It is the prevalence of narratives of progression (indicative of medical model conceptions of the bodymind) in dominant Western society and identity-based communities that create the forced exclusion and oppression of disabled people (specifically those who experience complex intersectional marginalization).

Similar to crip theory, the neuroqueer community cites medical model discourses of cure as a central point of marginalization. One member writes how curative conceptions of disability proliferate every aspect of Western society and uses *Sesame Street* as an example of forced conformation. “For autistics, it will always be. Broke. Because this is what Sesame Street has said to us. You can be fixed. You can be just like your friends. We can help you. You are welcome on our street...if you learn to be someone else.” In referencing *Sesame Street*, this poster is describes how neurotypical behaviors/narratives of cure are subtly reinforced by media. Other posters reference a more obvert reinforcing of normative behavior. In a post titled ‘quite

hands’, a blog member describes consistently being chastised by family and educators for stimming and instructed to sit still and “quiet” their hands.

Such reinforcement of normative behavior and cure can have severe implications for the daily lives of disabled people. In a prose style post, another poster writes about the exclusion she feels as someone who is considered a ‘low functioning autistic’ and how when she has shown certain types of progress she became worried that her autistic identity would be reduced to a past tense.

“she can recall the words they used to say around her. “independent’ (she will never be.) “intelligence” (there are no signs of.) “functioning” (she is low.) “career” (she will never have.) “comprehend” (she does not.) “severe.” “Finances” “Divorce.” “Competence.” ... “willful.” “failed.” “fault.” “Suicide.” “Depressed.” “Give up.” “lost.” “stolen.” Missing” “empty.” Hope (that she will become something they can be proud of.) The words she hears now threaten to put her in past tense. Relegate her to an Autistic yesterday. “Recovering.” “progress.” “Healing.” “Improving.” “indistinguishable.” “typical.” “reduced.” “Acquired.” “Reclaimed.” (Neuroqueer.blogspot.)

In recognizing the damage these types of discourses do, those engaging in neuroqueer projects attempt to challenge these notions. Walker clearly describes this below.

“When it comes to human neurodiversity, the dominant paradigm in the world today is what I refer to as the pathology paradigm. The long-term well-being and empowerment of autistics and members of other neurological minority groups hinges upon our ability to create a paradigm shift- a shift from the pathology paradigm to the neurodiversity paradigm. Such a shift must happen internally, within the consciousness of individuals, and must also be propagated in the cultures in which we live. (Walker)

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Posters on these online neuroqueer community spaces feel a sense of shared exclusion. Neuroqueering attempts to make this exclusion visible through strategizing against it. Furthermore, neuroqueering requires that those engaging in it reject assimilationist rhetoric and

challenge identity hierarchies. Neuroqueer is focused on inclusion and active rejection of and opposition to any group, or ideology that excludes, marginalizes and/or is inaccessible to any person. Moreover, neuroqueering requires individuals to meet the crip theory tactics outlined above. Therefore, I suggest that neuroqueer is a crippling project devoted to conversations of neurodivergency. These posters who are participating in neuroqueer practices understand identity as fluid and complex (Tactic 1). They also often relate and focus attention on the experiences of sexuality as a way to also understand the experience of disability and vice versa (2). They frequently attempt to subvert ableism and ablest discourses and narratives, often pointing inaccessibility and exclusionary practices out and find ways to strategize against them (3). They attempt to uncover ways in which discourses such as language and imagery used in media, governments, law, educational institutions, and other organizations subtly and overtly reinforce normative expectations and frequently recognize the damage these types of discourse can do (4). Neuroqueering is intimately involved with deconstructing dominant narratives of cure. Members engaging in neuroqueering reject the notion that disabled people must seek cure and shared their experiences with expectations of cure and often attempted to provide alternative narratives. (5). Furthermore, neuroqueering posters deconstruct normative expectations through subversive tactic, consistently finding ways to strategize against exclusion (6). The stories that are referenced here are subversive in their intention to deconstruct. Subversive stories are those that are grounded in specific experiences that are able to ‘break the silence’ and counter hegemonic narratives that produce marginalization.

Neuroqueer is a crip project in its strong focus of deconstructing and challenging dominant discourses that privilege some bodyminds over others as well as challenging discourses of pride and celebration of difference that do not question oppressive medical model narratives.

Neuroqueering is thus a project of engaging in disidentification (Munoz 1999). For Munoz, minoritarian subjects have three options for identification. First, (the most widely available option) one can identify with dominant society and make a trade: assimilating and finding representing within normative society by sacrificing and giving up one's personal non-normative identities (Munoz 1999). Second, some individuals have the option of counteridentification (Munoz 1999). By employing counteridentification individuals can identify with a marginalized (often) militant counter cultural group. Counteridentification may denounce dominant discourses but such opposition often reifies and perpetuates dominant discourses through a false binary. The third option for some minoritarian subjects is disidentification in which individuals resist the binary of identification/counteridentification.

Disidentification is a performative mode of tactical recognition that various minoritarian subjects employ in an effort to resist the oppressive and normalizing discourses of dominant ideology. Disidentification resist the interpellating call of ideology that fixes a subject within the state power apparatus. It is a reformatting of self within the social. (Munoz 1999: 97)

There is little choice in which mode of identification minoritarian subjects assume. Often identifications/counteridentifications are unavailable to individuals with complex identities. Due to the complexity of their intersectional identities Neuroqueer posters are excluded from other communities and thus may have no other choice but disidentification. Through disidentification one can rouse desires and break free or imagine breaking free from the limitations of the social body (Munoz 1999). This is congruent with data from neuroqueer blogs as posters describe processes of attempting to break free from the oppressive that marginalizes non-normative bodyminds through practices of discourse. Kafer calls for the deconstruction of these oppressive able-bodied/able-minded discourses (see quotation on page 5). Neuroqueering, as outlined by the online neuroqueer blogs examined here, can answer this call by employing disidentification from both dominant and

identity based communities, rejecting progressive medical model discourses, and attempting to challenge and deconstruct such discourses.

As described in the theoretical framework section there has been some intersectional work that considers disability. However, few theorists of intersectionality have engaged with disability, and neurodivergency is rarely attended to. Neuroqueering can provide for feminist scholars an approach to intersectionality that engages with a diversity of bodyminds, while considering practices of ablebodieness/ablemindedness. While the neuroqueer perspective presented by these bloggers is not entirely free of the tendency of previous scholarship to replicate ever more specific pairings of identity categories, their work does take us some way down the road of challenging the usefulness of bounded categories, even in the context of intersectionality. We are still a long way from a dynamic theoretical perspective on intersectionality in which issues of race, gender, sexuality, disability, neurodiversity, and other aspects of human difference can be thoroughly, and simultaneously, considered, instead of being broken into discrete categories of oppressive experience. The work of these bloggers does, however, challenge us to push the limits of identity-based theoretical and activist perspectives in ways that might move us forward in that direction.

Limitations and considerations for future work. The purpose of this paper is to bring the creative work of the neuroqueer blog authors and posters to the attention of mainstream academic audiences. This paper focused on the emerging term neuroqueer by highlighting the work present on blog spaces and therefore it does not consider other approaches to neurodiversity. Much can be gained by engaging with multiple approaches to neurodivergency. Indeed, neuroqueering should be further conceptualized by attending to conversations about neurodivergency on other social media platforms like Twitter (particularly the use of hashtags like #actuallyautistic) and considering other academic work such as the newly released anthology *All the Weight of Our*

Dreams: On Living Racialized Autism. It is especially important to attend to the voices of neurodivergent people of color as the majority of the bloggers self-identified as white or did not self-identify at all (although some neuroqueer bloggers made it a point to center anti-racism by pointing out their own whiteness). As whiteness often goes unmarked, for neuroqueer to be successful in rejecting all exclusionary practices it is imperative that future neuroqueer work more explicitly engage with issues of race, as to not perpetuate whiteness.

Furthermore, there were many themes from blogs that could not be attended to in this paper. Future work should consider issues of academic gatekeeping as it applies to disability and neurodivergency least we risk reifying the exclusionary structures neuroqueer seeks to dismantle. Posts attending to academia's inaccessibility were very prevalent in the blogs, which opens up conversations about imagining possibilities for accessibility of language and academia through centering disability. Additionally, one of the objectives of this paper is introducing neuroqueer and the work of neuroqueer bloggers to sociological audiences therefore there are many approaches to neuroqueer that could not be explored here that are worth attention. Specifically, academic audiences should engage with the work the scholars and activists on these blogs are producing in their own right (not just the work academics have done by citing these blogs). In other words, scholars attending to intersectionality, able-mindedness, and/or neuroqueer should take up the work of Grace, Yergeau, Monje Jr., Walker and blog commentators in conceptualizing their projects.

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CHAPTER FIVE:

“WE LOVE EACH OTHER INTO MEANING.”: QUEER DISABLED TUMBLR USERS CONSTRUCTING IDENTITY NARRATIVES THROUGH LOVE AND ANGER

Introduction

This paper examines the narratives that are artfully constructed by a diverse group of Tumblr users in ways that counteract experiences of exclusion, invisibility, and stigmatization within identity-based communities. This paper extends the scholarly conversation on the use of “Pride/Community- and self-love” narratives and “Our Lives Matter/Deserving of life” narratives as well as adds to the literature on emotion cultures, specifically as it pertains to the deployment of love and anger to counteract experiences of shame and marginalization.

The posters represented here identified with a multitude of different complex, intersecting, and marginalized identities. Most all of the posters identified as disabled, many of which self-identified as holding (at least) two marginalized identities. Many of the posters described themselves as LGBTQ+¹ disabled people of color. I employed a narrative analysis to examine how a group of Tumblr users who hold remarkably different identities construct sameness and, furthermore, how they construct identity through the deployment of two common social movement narratives (“Pride/Community- and self-love” narratives and “Our Lives Matter/Deserving of life”).

Although the posters’ identities varied, many complained throughout the posts about a lack of representative, recognizable, and relatable stories that accurately depict their complex and intersectional experiences. Moreover, they described a lack of positive representations of people

with complex identities. A lack of representation contributes to the exclusion and stigmatization from identity-based communities often in the form of invisibility. Indeed, many scholars researching media and narrative have found that there is minimal representation of people with complex marginalized identities and that the representations that do exist often contribute to oppressive stereotypes (Adams-Bass, Stevenson, and Kotzin 2014; Dahl 1993; Doty 1993; Dow 2001; Gross 1994; Gomillion and Giuliano 2001; Fujioka 2005; Hartnett 2000; Mok 1998; Raley 2006; Suddeth 2017; Tuchman 1979; Ward 2004; Wilton 1995). Researchers have found that this is the case for representations of women, people with disabilities, LGBTQ+ people, and people of color. Indeed, Hevey has explained this, stating that the “general history of disability representation is one of oppressive or negative forms” (1993: 423). It makes sense, then, that posters who identify with more than one of the above identities find almost no representation of their experiences and that the representation that does exist often portrays them in a negative light, as a stereotype, and/or contributes to their marginalization.

The posters represented here are combating their invisibility and marginalization by narrating themselves into existence by attaching their experiences to two well-known and recognizable social problem narratives that are frequently used by social movement communities. Posters have re-conceptualized these narratives to accurately represent their intersectional experiences. Embedded in these narratives, as told by this group of Tumblr posters, are the recognizable emotion codes of love and anger. These posters are engaging in activist and social movement work through the deployment of identity constructing narratives.

Previous Literature

Narratives

Narratives are stories that construct identities and meaning at the personal, organizational, and institutional levels of the social world and are embedded with cultural, symbolic, and emotion codes (Loseke 2007, 2009). Narratives are frequently culturally recognizable and convey images of types of people that can be powerful resources for making sense of the self and others (Loseke 2011; Melucci 1995). When narratives are believable and understood as conveying an important story they can be successful at acquiring support from audience members. If a narrative is read as trivial or unbelievable, it will not gain support from the public (Loseke 2007).

Narratives are often structured and presented in the form of formula stories (Berger 1997; Gamson and Modigliani 1989; Loseke 2007). Formula stories are easily understandable and recognizable stories (Gamson and Modigliani 1989), in which typical actors are “engaging in typical behaviors within typical plots leading to expectable moral evaluations” (Loseke 2007: 664). Frequently constructed by social problems advocates, formula stories present prevalent and common narratives, through which people are able to make meaning of their own experiences and identities (Berger 1997).

Although narratives are often easily recognizable and produce identities and shared meaning, this is not to say that audience members always interpret them identically. There is no supreme system of meaning that produces and determines universal interpretation. Indeed, there are various “thought communities” (Zerubavel 1996), “local cultures” (Holstein and Gubrium 2000), and “emotion cultures” (Mesquita & Walker 2003) that contribute to meaning making

processes. Systems of meaning are in flux, and are locally and historically situated (Stearns 1985). As such, audience members and storytellers are active participants that can resist, create, and alter cultural meaning systems (Loseke, 2017). In other words, narratives are evaluated as believable and important when they reflect how audiences already understand the world. Narratives are thus tools for authors to use to craft stories that are understandable and emotionally compelling. Examining narratives is important, as they “have the capacity to reveal truths about the social world that are flattened or silenced by an insistence on more traditional methods of social science” (Ewick & Silbey 1995: 199).

Symbolic and Emotion codes

Symbolic codes, also called cultural codes (Alexander and Smith 1993), are cultural ways of thinking (Alexander 1992; Loseke 2009), and are connected to specific emotion codes, which are cultural ways of feeling (Geertz 1973; Gordon 1990; Loseke 2009; McCarthy 1989; Solomon 1995). Emotion codes have also been referred to as feeling rules (Hochschild 1979), emotion cultures (Gordon 1990), emotionologies (Stearns & Stearns 1985), and emotion schemas (White 1990). Emotions have been conceptualized as cultural artifacts (Geertz 1973) embedded in belief systems (McCarthy 1989). Emotion codes and cultures consist of expectations, standards, and ideals of emotions as well as all discourse concerning and employing emotion (Loseke and Kusenbach 2008).

Understanding emotion codes and narratives are extremely important because “politics are increasingly interwoven with popular culture, which is substantially about feeling” (Loseke 2009: 498). Furthermore, power relations, in part, determine talk (what can be and how something is said) and emoting and talk about emotion contributes to the formation, assertion, modification, and reinforcement of power and status differentials (Abu-Lughod and Lutz 1990). By conceptualizing emotion as discourse social scientists are able to empirically examine

emotional meaning as social phenomena and challenge the notion that emotion is only based on individual psychology (Abu-Lughod and Lutz 1990; Loseke 2009; McCarthy 1989). Which then facilitates scholars in understanding the social and political consequences of emotion.

Cultural ways of feeling can determine expectations of how and when emotion should be displayed, the types of emotional displays and moral evaluations of these displays, as well as contribute to the moral evaluations of social problems (Loseke and Kusenbach 2008). Loseke argues that “it is not possible to understand how people think or make moral evaluations without understanding how people feel” and that it is not possible to understand how people feel without also understanding how they think (Loseke 2009: 499). Cultural ways of thinking (symbolic codes) and feeling (emotion codes) supply standards for which group or societal members are able to recognize, identify and discuss emotions, as well as evaluate and regulate emotions in accordance with their group’s values (Gordon 1990).

Such symbolic and emotion codes are embedded in narratives and contribute to the way audiences respond to storytelling. In examining the narratives within this project, it is important to analyze the symbolic and emotion codes embedded within because narratives are tools that authors (i.e. the posters) employ and a story’s success is determined by how emotionally appealing and understandable a narrative is. Emotion codes thus contribute to the construction of identity and consequentially inform how successful social movements narratives may be. The Tumblr posters examined here are resisting their invisibility by narrating themselves into existence. Through use of existing cultural narratives often recognized as important and valuable (Pride narrative and Deserving of life narrative) authors construct a relatable story that is representative of their experiences. Embedded in these narratives are the recognizable emotion codes of love and anger that contribute to group identity construction.

Social Movement Narratives and Collective Identity

Sometimes stories are not culturally recognizable, and this is often the case for marginalized groups. When a story doesn't conform to expected cultural codes, identity-based social movements often take up the task of creating new stories. The objective of creating new stories is to change the negative evaluation of existing stories. Social movements, specifically those concerned with identity politics, often deploy formula stories to build a culturally recognizable narrative. These narratives often do two things, they 1) construct identity around a specific story and 2) engage in claims making by constructing a narrative with the attempt to change the way a specific story (frequently identity-based) is evaluated.

There are continuously circulating, competing social problems claims that seem to rely less on "facts" with charts and statistics to convince audiences, but stories. "Narrativity is what grips us, what keeps us listening or reading" (Polleta 1998: 423a). Indeed, as we are told we live in a "post-fact" world, the ways audiences feel is arguably more important to understand than how audiences think. Social problems narratives are employed by claims makers to convince audiences a social problem exists and should be changed (Miller & Holstein 1989; Spector & Kitsuse 1977). Identity communities, social movement groups, and claims-makers must establish narratives—which, if relatable, understandable, and evaluated as consistent with cultural ways of thinking and feeling—will be successful at gaining audience attention and support. In this way audiences are evaluators of social problems, social movements goals, and group identities. Therefore, narratives contribute to social problems work by providing relatable stories (Miller and Holstein 1989) in order to convince audience members that a set of social conditions is a problem and should be changed (Spector and Kitsuse 1977).

Constructionist scholars of social problems examine the *processes* by which groups make assertions and claims about supposed conditions (Spector and Kitsuse 1977: 75). Social

movement groups and activists may engage in social problem claims-making in order to mobilize participation. Social movement actors and activists artfully deploy symbolic and emotion codes within narratives that reflect larger emotion cultures, which can lead to cultural resonance (Gamson and Modigliani 1989; Williams and Williams 1995), encourage emotional engagement (Hunt and Benford 2004), and contribute to the construction of a group's collective identity.

The circulation of stories and the act of storytelling can contribute to the recruitment of members of a community or social movement and that community's and/or social movement's impact on politics (Polleta 1998 a). Narratives can inform the emergences, trajectories, and consequences of movements (Polleta 1998a, 1998b) and storytelling can act as a form of activism (Taylor & Wallace 2012). Successful narratives have the ability to capture audience attention. "Narrativity is what grips us, what keeps us listening or reading" (Polleta 1998: 423a). Stories can motivate collective action and contribute to the construction of collective and community identities (Bradford & Clark 2011; Clark 2007; Loseke 2007; Melucci 1995; Polleta 1998a).

New social movements are often focused on community collective identity, what scholars refer to as 'identity movements'. Stories motivate collective action and contribute to the construction of collective and community identities (Bradford & Clark 2011; Clark 2007; Loseke 2007; Melucci 1995; Polleta 1998a). Indeed, Polleta has argued "[a]n activist may be trying more to make sense of what is happening around her than to mobilize participation, but when she tells a story of the collective "we," she is helping bring that identity into being" (Polleta 1998a: 423). The examination of narratives is especially important in examining fledgling movements and communities (Polleta 1998 a) because 1) stories function "as forms of politics, broadcasting

Voices excluded from or neglected within dominant political structures” (Bradford and Clark 2011: 180) and 2) telling the right believable story can lead to social movement and community action and collect identity construction (Bradford & Clark 2011; Clark 2007; Loseke 2007; Loseke and Kusenbach 2008; Polleta 1998a, 1998b; Spector and Kitsuse 1977). As such, narratives have the ability to “challenge the power of dominant groups” and can promote self and community reliance and creativity (Bradford & Clark 2011: 180) and are important in examining how marginalized groups construct identity, make claims about their oppression, and advocate for social change.

Narratives of Pride and Narratives of Deserving of Life

As described above, social movement actors commonly deploy narratives that contribute to both identity construction and claims making. Identity social movements tell a story about the marginalized people the movement is advocating for. I am concerned here with two specific identity-constructing narratives: The “*Pride/Community- and self-love*” narrative and “*Our Lives Matter/Deserving of life*” narrative. Both of these narratives are present in the data and have a history of being deployed within social movements. Moreover, I am concerned with how these narratives are employed and how particular emotion codes are embedded within each narrative in the construction of collective community identity. Specifically, these narratives have been deployed to construct identity while counteracting shame.

Pride and narratives of self-love have commonly emerged in social movement and identity community rhetoric, especially for communities associated with identity politics (Britt & Heise 2000). Many scholars have examined narratives of pride and self/community-love in identity-based communities, specifically as it pertains to LGBTQ+ identities, race, ethnic, and cultural identities, and disability identities (Bruce 2013; Corbett 1994; Cornelius & Blanton 2016; Herrera & Butkovich 2016; Morris 1991; Martin 2012; Pullar 1992; Rand 2012; Rinderle

& Montoya 2008; Seidman 2001; Shakespear 1996; Slagle 1995; Sullivan 2014; Willis 2017).

The “Pride” narrative is a common narrative associated with LGBTQ+ social movements.

Indeed, many LGBTQ+ organizations have established entire community events to celebrate pride in their individual and community identities and commemorate specific moments in LGBTQ+ history (such as pride parades and festivals). The starring role in a pride narrative is a member of a marginalized community who visibly contests social stigma and personal shame (see below subsection for more on shame) by promoting self-affirmation and ‘pride’ in their stigmatized identities. This member becomes a hero for others who identify similarly, providing positive representation of a community and individual identity.

Fewer scholars have examined “deserving of life/our lives matter” narratives, however such narratives have been present in activist and scholarly work. Such examinations have been made in relation to race and ethnicity identity communities, specifically associated with Black Lives Matter movements (Garza 2014; Matter 2015; Obasogie and Newman 2016; Yang 2016), and disability identity communities (Hubbard 1997; Hill and Blanck 2009; Hurst 2003; Living 2005; Shakespeare 1988; Verdugo, Navas, Gomez and Schalock 2012). Such narratives are also found in animal rights activist communities to describe the rights of animals (Jasper and Nelkin 1992; Anderson 2004). Deserving of life narratives have received less attention from scholars and popular media than pride narratives. Such narratives rarely have a hero; however, there are clear victims and villains. The victim in a Deserving of life narrative is a person who has been wrongfully killed, murdered, and/or denied access to a quality of life based on their identity, while the villain is the person or system that perpetuated this discrimination. For instance, in the deinstitutionalization movement for people with disabilities, the victims were institutionalized disabled people who were forcefully drugged, denied clothing and access to hygiene, and were

locked in overcrowded ‘hospitals’ and the villains were the physicians and administrators who ran the institutions as well as the government that supported and funded the institutions. As another example, in the Black Lives Matter movement the victim is usually a black man who has been murdered by the villain, often a police officer.

Use of Narratives to Counteract Shame. There has been a considerable amount of research examining the use of narrative to counteract stigma. Previous research (consistent with the results of my analysis) has found that narratives of pride/self and community love and deserving of life/our lives matter narratives are often employed to counteract stigma and feelings of shame. Some researchers have examined how communities employ narratives and tell stories to cope with, transform, resist, and contest shame (see for example: Britt & Heise 2000; Leeming & Boyle 2013; McCarty, Romero, & Zepedo 2006; Sifver 2007; Stefansdottir & Traustadottir 2015). Scholars have found that storytelling is useful in transforming shame and stigma concerned with specific identities into affirmative understandings of personal and community identities (Bradford & Clark 2011; Stefansdottir & Traustadottir 2015). Many scholars have conceptualized a dichotomous relationship between shame and pride/self love (Davidson 2006; Johnston 2007; Munt 2000; Taylor 1985), highlighting the usefulness of narratives in shifting shameful conceptions of self and community to prideful identities.

The relationship between shame and pride narratives has been especially prevalent in examinations of LGBTQ+ identities (Davidson 2006; Halberstam 2005; Greer 2016; Johnston 2007; Kaufman 1996; Rand 2012; Weiss 2008) but has also been extended to the examination of other identity communities, specifically: disability (Gray 2009; Garland-Thomson 2007; Morris 1991; Stefansdottir & Traustadottir 2015), women, mothers, and feminist (Taylor & Wallace), bodies and embodiment (Probyn 2000), nationality (Miller-Idriss & Rothenberg 2012), race and

ethnicity (Pastor 2014; Squire 2002; Solway 1994). Counteracting shame with narratives of pride has been used as a social movement tactic and can mobilize identity communities and social movements and lead to organized social movement activity such as protest (Greer 2016; Rand 2012; Morris 1991; Kaufman 1996; Young and Craig 1997).

Two narratives associated with identity communities and social movements came through in the data. Although these will be discussed more in-depth in the results section, here I describe the previous literature on the two recognizable narratives: “Pride/ Community- and Self-Love” and “Our Lives Matter/Deserving of life.” This group of Tumblr posters felt that there is no cultural representation of people who identify the way that they do. As activists on Tumblr, posters are artfully constructing identity narratives by composing this exclusion (i.e. lack of cultural representation) as a problem. The emotion codes of love and anger are embedded within these two prominent narratives that posters are engaging in constructing.

Methodology

Virtual/Digital Ethnography

I conducted a six-month virtual ethnography (Hine 2000) of a community of Tumblr users who post about being queer and disabled. Virtual ethnography, or the application of ethnographic methodologies in virtual spaces (Hine 2000, Maloney 2013), like other ethnographic methods, is useful in “dealing with complex and multi-faceted concepts like culture, as compared with the more reductive quantitative techniques” and “offers the promise of getting closer to understanding the ways in which people interpret the world and organize their lives” (Hine 2000:42).

A note on Tumblr: To understand the data collection process, the structure of a social media platform is important. Virtual ethnography is particularly useful in exploring the ways the

Internet is (and becomes) socially meaningful. The construction of, and the way a site is set up, is just as important as the doings on the site. All social media sites are structured in particular ways and each site allows users to do different things and engage in interaction with other users.

Tumblr is a blog site, which means each user has their own home page. Each home page is moderated and set up according to the users' preferences. Additionally, the content is determined by the user. There is also a feed page in which users can see the doings of other users who they "follow" as well as search hashtags to find content that they are interested in.

Tumblr is unique and works quite differently than many other social media and blog spaces. Tumblr works as a web—it is not linear like many other social media sites. When quotations and data are referenced in this paper they are not just pulled from one user's webpage, rather they are connected and pulled from many. On many other social media and blog sites, users can leave comments on particular posts. Facebook, for instance, allows a user to write a post and 'friends' of the user are able to comment and have a conversation; they can also repost the original user's post. This is consistent with many blog platforms. On Tumblr, one cannot comment on other users' posts. A user must re-blog a post and if they wish to comment they 'add' to the post via their re-blogged post. There is no word or character limit for posts and one can post almost any type of content, including images, videos, gifs, and audio. Therefore, one can re-blog a whole conversation that happens via re-blogs over extended periods of time. Some of the data for this project came from conversations between Tumblr users that occurred over many months. Furthermore, because Tumblr allows for easy access to each user's archive, one can return to conversations months and even years after they originally occurred. Posts can also include photos, videos, and links. This makes for incredibly rich data in that members of a Tumblr community can engage in conversations over extended periods of time and can re-blog

stories and posts that resonate with them personally while commenting on the entire post.

Therefore, researchers are able to examine how and when stories are taken up, how they change over time, and how narratives are constructed through extended period of online interaction.

There is little restriction on the type of material one can post, thus Tumblr is a popular site for artists and writers. Furthermore, there is little censorship so graphic images and texts as well as nudity are common¹. However, sensitive and ‘not safe for work’ (NSFW) content must be flagged as such. Additionally, visitors to Tumblr pages that do not have permission to view private content are unable to view any material that is not open access, and as such I only examined data from Tumblr users whose post are open for public consumption.

By using virtual ethnography a researcher is able to go to a specific site and allow a research question to guide how they travel from that site (Hine 2000; Maloney 2013). This paper is part of a larger project examining the use of social media by people who write about their experiences as self-identified LGBTQ+ disabled people. I entered Tumblr through Queerability’s Tumblr page (a site examined as part of this larger project) and found an active community on Tumblr of people who identify as queer and disabled, many of which identify as people of color. As such, I followed internal linkages while on Tumblr to examine the narratives posters presented. By immersing myself in an online site, I was able examine the specific site and a specific online community of mostly people who self-identified as queer disabled people of color, as both culture and cultural artifact (Hine 2000).

By engaging in virtual ethnography, I was able to follow field connections (Hine 2000) also called “internal linkages” (Maloney 2013) to move from one blog on Tumblr to another. Field connections allow us to find communities of people online by collecting data from online interaction (such as note sections which are made up of re-blogs and ‘likes’). Following Maloney’s

practice of following “internal linkages” (p 133) in her examination of Pro-Ana communities online, I traveled from my point of entry on Queerability’s Tumblr to other Tumblr pages whose moderators re-blogged or commented on Queerability’s posts. Maloney does this wherein she is able to find communities focused on specific identities (Pro-Ana) by following websites through “internal linkages” to one another (Maloney 2013:133).

Hine (2000:65) describes virtual ethnography as a process of “intermittent engagement rather than long term immersion” and can be “based on strategic relevance to particular research questions rather than faithful representations of objective realities.” In other words, virtual ethnography allows for flexibility in data collection time frames. Although the data were collected over a period of six months, the site’s archive function allowed me to collect data that spans over three years. I used both the archival and search options to pull data from previous months and years. I was able to collect and save data at regular intervals throughout the data collection time period. Specifically, I engaged in data collection for this project from January to June of 2017. Using the archival and search functions, I was able to collect data from a three-year period beginning in February 2014 and ending on June 30th 2017. Specifically, the data for this project is constituted from online narratives from a blog/social media space. Following the example from Maloney and because this type of electronic material is flexible, the data from these web-spaces was saved onto a server at regular intervals.

Virtual ethnography is particularly apt for narrative analysis of online data because it allows researchers to collect stories told by posters and bloggers and to examine the re-blogging of stories with individuals’ added personal commentary (Maloney 2013). It allows a researcher to follow stories as they are commented on, taken up as relevant, or represented and adapted by

individuals across the internet or web-space. This is especially important in my analysis of this project as I followed internal linkages via re-blogging of stories.

Data Collection

The data for this piece is constituted from online narratives collected from posts written by people who identify as LGBTQ+, disabled and as people of color on a blog/social media space (Tumblr), over a three year time period, and focuses on the two years prior to, during, and six months after Trump's inauguration. My point of entry into Tumblr was Queerability's webpage but because this study aims to reflect the point of view of a larger community (i.e. Tumblr users concerned with the intersection of LGBT disability identities) rather than one specific site (Queerability), I collected data from multiple Tumblr pages. Tumblr has a search feature that is beneficial for Tumblr users and researchers alike who are interested in engaging in a conversation, reading posts, and finding blog pages about a specific topic. I utilized the search function to examine all Tumblr posts concerned with the intersection of LGBT and disability identities within a specific three-year time frame (2014 – 2017). Specifically, I traveled from Queerability's homepage to the general Tumblr search function. I conducted two searches: in the first, I searched for LGBT and disability (resulting in over 280 posts) and for the second, I searched queer and disability (resulting in over 320 posts). From there, I collected posts that fit the following criteria 1) The post must be open and allow me access, 2) the focus of the content of the post must pertain to both disability and LGBT/queer identities, and 3) the post must be primarily Tumblr content (in other words, a post with just a link to a news article, video or gif was not considered—the reason these posts were not considered is that an analysis of news articles and videos is beyond the scope of this study and may not represent the point of view of Tumblr users). This collection process resulted in 186 posts that were searchable by the tag “LGBT and disability” and 295 posts searchable by the tag “Queer and disability”. The data

collected via the search and archival functions combined with the data found from other external linkages amounted to about 240 single-spaced pages of written data and another 30 pages of images.

Data Analysis

I examined the prevalent discourses and stories common across the selected posts. These were discourses and stories shared and told over and over again by many different posters. Virtual ethnographic data can be analyzed in qualitative analysis software in the same way any other data that has been transformed into text can be analyzed (Maloney 2013). The content from each post selected from the above criteria was inserted into an electronic document organized by date of post, publication, and location of post (e.g. the specific Tumblr page). This document was then downloaded into qualitative analysis software Atlas ti for analysis. I utilized Atlas ti's coding function to analyze the data in multiple passes. Employing Loseke's (2012) guidelines for narrative analysis, I first began by asking questions to situate the context of these stories: Who are the authors? Who is their audience? What type of story are they attempting to tell? Next, I closely read the data to examine the narratives being told and to gain an understanding of the central themes of the stories that are most prevalently told. During this close read, I coded each post, comment, or passage within posts based on discursive themes of the passages. In subsequent passes I then re-coded, using lumping and splitting techniques (Zerubavel 1996) to begin generating common thematic categories. I used these categories and codes to pull out the narratives that were common across all the posts from different posters. Two main narratives emerged: 1) the pride/community and self-love narrative and 2) We deserve to live/our lives matter narrative. Lastly, I examined the symbolic and emotion codes embedded in the data (Alexander 1992; Gertz 1973; Gordon 1990; Loseke 2009; McCarthy 1989).

Narratives are recognizable stories and they "create identity at all levels of human social

life” (Loseke 2007:661). By investigating personal narratives through Tumblr blogs focused on the experiences and advocacy of LGBTQ+ disabled people, this study examines how identity can be conceptualized as a story-making process. Because the posters and Tumblr users represented in this study identified across a wide variety of specific disability, LGBTQ+, race and ethnic identities, it is expected that their experiences will be very dissimilar. Posters self-identified with a variety of different race and ethnicities (such as white, black, African-American, native, indigenous, Latinx, Indian-American, Desi, Asian-American and others), disabilities (such as disabled, chronically-ill, mentally-ill, wheelchair users, autistic, having PTSD, depressed, learning disabled, having Cerebral Palsy, blind, experiencing mobility impairment, Deaf/deaf, hard of hearing, having an invisible disability and others), sexualities and romantic orientations (lesbian, heterosexual, poly, asexual, aromantic, omnisexual, monosexual, gay, queer, and bisexual), and genders and gender expressions (cisgender, trans, trans masculine, boy, femme, butch). Examining narratives provides insight into shared systems of meaning and collective identity processes as well as the larger, cultural systems of meaning. It is through prevalent and common narratives that people are able to make meaning of their own experiences and identities. I examined how this group of remarkably dissimilar people construct sameness through identity constructing narratives.

Results

Posters identified with a multitude of complex, intersecting, and (most often marginalized) identities. Almost all posters self-identified as holding at least two marginalized identities and many posters self-identified as LGBTQ+ disabled people of color. Posters expressed that there was a lack of representative, recognizable, and relatable circulating stories

that accurately depict their experiences in recognizable ways. Due to this lack of representation, posters often describe experiencing marginalization, exclusion, and stigmatization from both popular society and identity-based communities often in the form of invisibility. The Tumblr users represented here frequently post about their experiences with marginalization within general society as well as experiencing exclusion and stigmatization within identity-based counter communities, social movement organizations, and social circles constructed around specific identities (such as LGBTQ+ communities, disability communities, and communities of people of color).

In ways that combat their invisibility, posters narrate themselves into existence by attaching their experiences to two well-known and recognizable social problems narratives. The first narrative is the “Pride/Community- and self-love” narrative, commonly associated with LGBTQ+ communities and social movements. The second narrative posters construct is the “Our Lives Matter/Deserving of life” narrative commonly associated with communities and social movements like Black Lives Matter. Posters reconceptualize these narratives in ways they feel more accurately representational of their intersectional experiences. Both of these narratives counteract social stigma and experiences of shame.

Although these two popular narratives are associated with each other, very different emotion codes were used in counteracting stigma and shame. When posters construct “Pride” narratives the narratives are often embedded with emotion codes of love, which contributes to the transformation of shame to acceptance. When posters construct “Deserving of life” narratives emotion codes of anger are often entrenched in their stories which effectively transforming shame to strength and encourages community survival. Furthermore, these two distinct narratives are extremely interrelated for this group of Tumblr users. Posters frequently explain that survival

can only occur through self- and community-love and pride, and one can only learn to accept themselves and have love for and pride in their communities by rejecting popular notions that people like them do not deserve to live.

I have begun the Results section with a brief overview of the results of this project and, in the following sub-sections, I will illustrate posters' expressions of lack of representation and describe how they contest this lack of representation by narrating themselves into existence. Next, I describe how posters deploy two socially recognizable narratives (pride and deserving of life) and explain the effect of the employment of these narratives in constructing identities that contest shame. I will begin with the Pride narrative and then Deserving of life narrative, describe the emotion codes embedded in each and then illustrate how each narrative serves to counteract shame. Finally, I will illustrate how these narratives, although distinct, are extremely entangled for this group of posters.

Lack of Representation

Posters identified with a multitude of complex, intersecting, and (often marginalized) identities, of which almost all self-identified as LGBTQ+, disabled, poor, young, and/or people of color and most identified with multiple of these identities. It was common to see posters write about the lack of complex and multidimensional characters in TV shows, movies, books, and comics as well as describe a lack of general cultural narrative that recognizes experiences of intersectionality. As one poster, Broadway-Hamilton¹ wrote, "representation is not having a storyline on a character becoming about their identity or their struggles, [it] is about having tridimensional characters with complex storylines that happen to be poc¹/queer/trans/disabled/etc." Posters recognize that in searching for representation the only narratives that exist are often one-dimensional and rarely address the experiences of

intersectional identities. In the following example of a Tumblr post, Joy describes that she is always forced to choose between her different identities. Furthermore, she explains that what passes for diversity in media is often used to fill diversity requirements but doesn't accurately depict the complexities of her life experiences. She writes

"I am done choosing between my womanhood and my blackness. Stop giving me fictional white female characters and telling me "these are the fictional women to admire, the ones that break the mold, the feminist icons, **the representation you've been longing for.**" **Stop asking me to squint to see myself represented on screen....** We are not your first step towards success, we aren't a tool to be used to avoid criticism, or appease higher ups afraid of losing money because of the lack of diversity and representation in their shows. We are not either women or black, **we are both....** Stop giving me a drop of water and calling it the sea.¹"

Another poster, who refers to herself as Tumblr Mom, writes to her LGBTQ+ followers (that she often calls her LGBT+ children) in which she argues that representations of LGBTQ+ people are often based in stereotypes and rarely consider experiences of intersectional identities. She writes:

"My dear lgbt+ child,
Some people have a certain idea how lgbt+ people look like or how they dress.
Some of them are **stereotypes**:
"Lesbians have short hair"
"Gay men dress feminine"
Some are a lack of understanding what being lgbt+ means:
"Asexual? But she wears sexy dresses all the time!"
"Trans woman? So, like those men who wear lots of make-up and sparkly dresses?"
Some are less obvious and more visible in the lack of representation
The silent assumption there are no lgbt+ people of color
The silent assumption there are no lgbt+ people with a disability
...And **if you feel like there's no representation of people like you, i feel your pain**
and i hope we can change that together - but in the meantime, please know even without any representation, you're valid and real and fantastic!
With love,
Your Tumblr mom"

Other posters explained that they were able to find one or two examples in media or stories that represented their experience but that there were so few of them, that as

disenfranchised people, they often latched on to those stories and characters. Indeed, one poster writes “A big part of the fandom consists of women, people of color, queer or with disabilities, **latching on to the few characters they could find representation in.**” Having only a few positive representations can mean that there isn’t a recognizable cultural for that particular experience. This is elucidated in the next quotation when Ashe, a self-identified demi-pan, autistic, “white boy”, writes about how there will only be enough representation when they no longer have to “beg” for it.

Begging for more representation of disabled / queer / feminist / poc / intersectional characters like it’s genuinely great that an example does exist, and we should praise and acknowledge that but that **doesn’t mean it’s good enough**, and oftentimes these comments come across like “here’s your one example have fun with it now you’re done” no, we’re not *done*, the point of *good enough* comes **when representation is available in such high abundance we don’t have to ask for it anymore**. praise the examples that already exist. keep pushing.

Many posters explained that having both no representation and having negative representations that contributed to their invisibility and oppression were equally as problematic. Below, an anonymous poster discusses this issue:

The two problems are interrelated in this way. Playing the which is worse game only ends up putting a burden on marginalized groups as well as those who speak up with them against poor or absent representation....**A lack of representation and problematic representation stems from the same place and the same perspective**, and there isn’t much point in establishing a “better or worse” scenario. **Both have a negative impact on how communities perceive themselves, and how others perceive them as well**. The point is to change perspective before these problems come to fruition (so that they don’t happen).”

For the posters examined here, representation matters. Certainly there was a shared understanding of the importance of representation and being able to identify a positive representative cultural narrative. As one poster simply stated in conversation with Joy, “We all know representation matters.” Posters want stories to be told that are representative of their experiences. Having culturally recognizable stories about characters that identify similarly is

important in the construction of one's identity, building self-esteem, and an important device in combatting stigma. This is articulated below by one Tumblr user named Skeptical who self identifies as a queer, autistic, disabled, Canadian, woman and Sociology major who writes "critical commentary on media" on her blog, when she posts about the importance of disability representation in comics. As evident by her post, a lack of recognizable narratives can silence a group of people.

I guess I'm just frustrated by **disability being so big of an afterthought for representation** that even discussions ABOUT representation?...I want, like many people do, for my story to be told. I see people championing for queer stories, for female stories, & as a queer women, I get hope & joy from that. But I'm disabled too. I'm autistic. It's not something you can separate out from me. It's not something I want to get a magic fix for,...or an extra super-power so my disability can be treated not-really-a-disability-just-something-kinda-cool-because-REAL-disability-means-you-are-gross-and-useless, like a lot of comic book depictions of disabilities tend to deal in. **I'm disabled. I'm proud of that. It is as much a part of my voice & experiences as being female...** Ignoring disability as a important axis of representation? **It silences me. It silences a lot of other people.** Disabled people can be heroes. Disabled people have stories that are worth telling. Disabled people have universal stories. **If you are speaking up about diversity, in comics or in other media, include disability in the conversation. Include our voices.**

Other posters shared similar sentiments, explaining that lack of representation and culturally recognizable stories leads to further stigmatization. In this next post, Tumblr Mom writes about how a lack of representation of intersectionally marginalized identities can lead to experiencing harassment and invisibility as well as can contribute to people (especially LGBTQ+ people) questioning the validity of their own identities.

My dear lgbt+ children,
This letter goes out to all of you who are lgbt+ *and*...
Lgbt+ and a person of color, Lgbt+ and poor, Lgbt+ and disabled, Lgbt+ and chronically ill, Lgbt+ and a abuse survivor, Lgbt+ and on the autism spectrum, Lgbt+ and religious. These are just some examples what your "*and*" could be. These things might make it harder for you to feel safe enough to come out. ...maybe, **you feel like it did cause it and that leaves you feeling like your identity is less valid.** Perhaps people even say people like you can't be lgbt+ or you feel sad because **there's zero representation of**

people like you in the media. It makes me sad but it's even a possibility that you get bullied or harassed for it. Maybe people accuse you of "trying soo hard to be special" or they act as if you're a walking contradiction. Or maybe other people are accepting but you struggle to accept yourself....

You are not alone.

With all my love,

Your Tumblr Mom"

Posters wrote about the exclusion of people who are multiply disenfranchised from identity-based communities. Indeed, posters often wrote of the exclusion and invisibility of queer and disabled people in communities of people of color, feminist communities, and communities of people with disabilities. This was especially evident in posts that pertained to social movement organizations, ideologies, and activities. (See Chapter 5 for examples). Not only is there no recognizable cultural narrative for LGBTQ+ disabled people of color, but the lack of representation of these identities can result in exclusion and marginalization IRL (see Chapter 5 for examples).

Narrating Themselves Into Existence

Posters are responding to this lack of cultural narratives by narrating themselves into existence. They are writing stories and creating art with complex characters that are representative of their identities and experiences; they are sharing photos of themselves and using Tumblr as a space to live visibly and meet other people who identify similarly; they are creating and sharing book, movie, and TV show lists with quality representations effectively building an online queer, disabled, people of color focused library; they are using their Tumblr to write analyses and critiques of social organizations, ideologies, and media representations, and they are engaging in conversations with each other. In doing so, they are constructing narratives to represent their communities. For example, as one poster who rewrites popular TV shows characters as LGBTQ+ and disabled explains, "I wont have to headcanon¹ characters as lgbt/disabled when there is good lgbt/disabled representation." Some Tumblr users post about

writing books and screen plays while others, like Kym, the poster from the following quote, are creating podcasts about fantasy and science fiction TV shows and books with diverse representation.

Help me make a podcast?

So, I've been thinking about starting a podcast. It'd be fantasy and maybe sci-fi, containing magic and stuff. I want it to be diverse, as diverse as possible.

Meaning: - People of color- All kind of MOGAI¹/LGBT representation- Disabled people- Neurodiverse people. I probably forgot a few things that I'll add if I remember or somebody messages me. Now, if you want to help me write the podcast, or you just want to add ideas or your voice, message me, and please spread the word!... **that's why I want people to help me - I want a really diverse cast and it's best people who already know a lot help with the design,**"

It was extremely common for posters to ask for and share knowledge of good and positive diverse representations of characters from popular media, as evident by the quotation from a librarian looking for diversity in books below. Posters from this online community responded by re-blogging, creating, and adding to a list of books.

Ok I'm a librarian and I noticed that while we have a ton of books in our youth and YA section , there's a real lack of diversity. Help me out. Can you guys give me books written by and featuring POC characters, Characters with physical and/or mental disabilities, LGBTQA+ characters (there's a real lack of Ace character so that would be hugely appreciated) and so on. Thank you so much, **I'll try to add as many as I can to our shelves!**

It is also important to note that, as a librarian, she intended to add the recommended books to the shelves of the IRL library; therefore this community contributed to the availability of accessible representation for people who may not be Tumblr users.

Many posters wrote about writing and creating film and art to fill the gap in representation of intersectionally marginalized people. In this quotation Emerson, a novelist who identifies as agender and autistic, shares a film they made in response to a lack of LGBTQ+ disabled characters in movies and TV. They explain that it is important to have a positive representation of such an identity out in the world and ask people to re-blog and share.

So here is a short film I made in response to #LGBTFansDeserveBetter it's about an LGBT+ disabled couple and superheroes. Please reblog this, seriously! It is the culmination of two months of effort and it means a lot to me to **get this positive representation out there**. Please check it out, or at least spread the word! [Film Link]

Tumblr as the apparatus for narration and representation. Many posters are using Tumblr as the medium for which they disseminate this representation. Many posters used Tumblr to post pictures and stories about their experiences, often even citing it as representation of their communities. This is the case with many of Jax's¹ posts (quoted below). Jax frequently posted about using images and stories about their life to represent and support their community. They frequently engaged in narrative building on Tumblr to, as they explained, combat ableism and queerphobia. Jax writes:

I'm Jax, out here trying **to represent other disabled queer/trans Chicanxs/Latinxs since we hardly get any representation**. Being Mexican and queer has been hard. There's not many places where I'm from to completely live in my truth without judgement. **There's so many layers to my intersecting identities**. Most days it's hard as hell. **Living in a world where no one wants you to live**. Ableism kills, so does queer/transphobia.

It was common to see posters engage in blackouts in which black Tumblr users would post pictures of themselves with the #Blackout tag to have visual representation of black people on Tumblr. Many other identity groups would create tags to share stories of their experiences and images of themselves as minority communities and often stigmatized people. Many of the posts collected from this community used hashtags to connect with others in their community and to engage in a conversation. It was common to see tags like: #queeranddisabled, #LGBT, #Disabled, #queerwomenofcolor, #weneeddiversebooks, #girlslikeus, #redefiningrealness, #Actuallyautistic #queershut, #audacityinblack, #intersectional, #pride, #Accessibility, #disabilityawareness #lgbtawareness, #representation, #asexualdisabled #helloIexist, just to list a

few. Below, one poster talks about the importance of using such tags as a way to represent and support identity communities.

Like the #BlackOut tag, we want to see all walks of life in the tag, bringing representation and pride within our race/culture. Let's encourage ALL API-identified groups from ALL backgrounds to say "Hi! I exist and I support my community!" Many posters explained that this type of representation is important to combat invisibility. This invisibility, of course, is one of the outcomes of not having a recognizable cultural narrative. It is evident by these excerpts from Tumblr users' posts that they are not only contributing to building a representative narrative but they are intending to do so. Below, Kameron, a self-identified queer, disabled sexual assault survivor explains the importance of being open about her relatively invisible identities to contribute to the building of a cultural narrative for intersectionally marginalized people.

I don't exist to make other people comfortable. I exist to better my life, and the lives of those I love. This includes the disability community. The identities which matter most to me are largely invisible, which affords me a great deal of privilege. As a queer, disabled survivor of sexual assault + partner violence, I have the option of keeping these key parts of me hidden beneath a white blonde femme exterior. This option is not available to most people. It is important that I openly represent my invisible identities, for as long as I am safely able to do so. This is not about identity. **It is about representation and pushing forward for a better quality of life for my communities.**

Posters recognize that there is little positive representation for people who identify similarly to the way they do and, therefore, they are taking to Tumblr to spread representational narratives that they are creating.

Two Prominent Narratives

The two most prominent narratives found within the posts represented here were the "Pride/Community- and self-love" narrative and the "Our Lives Matter/Deserving of life" narrative. These are two recognizable narratives associated with other social movements and communities to write themselves into a more recognizable cultural narrative. These narratives serve as cultural resources that can be incorporated into new stories. Existing narratives are

resources that can be used and taken up by others in creating new stories. Therefore, it makes sense that this group of marginalized Tumblr users who do not have recognizable representation may use prominent already existing narratives in constructing identity. This can be a successful tactic for claims makers trying to find support for their cause; by borrowing a recognizable story to describe their experiences, posters are able to attach themselves to a cultural narrative that has already been validated.

Narratives Counteracting Shame. Both “Pride/community- and self-love” and “Our lives matter/ Deserving of life” narratives are deployed by posters in ways that serve to counteract social stigma and experiences of shame. Although these two popular narratives are associated with each other, within these two separate narratives very different emotion codes were used to counteract stigma. A typical Pride narrative is one in which a hero rejects social stigma and personal shame through self-affirmation and acts as a representative model for their community. When posters deploy “Pride” narratives they often construct emotion codes of love. This use of love serves to transform shame to acceptance. In Deserving of life narratives there is always a victim whose life, or quality of life, has been threatened by an oppressive villain. When posters employ “Deserving of life” narratives they frequently deploy emotion codes of anger, which serves to transform shame in to strength. The employment of this narrative also encourages community survival. In the following sections, I will describe how the emotion codes of love and anger are embedded in the two prevalent narratives posters employ.

“Pride/Community- and self-love” Narrative. Pride narratives have commonly been used in social movement and identity communities to mobilize support. Scholars have found that narratives of pride and community/self-love were common in identity-based communities, specifically as it pertains to LGBTQ+ identities, race, ethnic, and cultural identities, and

disability identities (Bruce 2013; Corbett 1994; Cornelius & Blanton 2016; Herrera & Butkovich 2016; Morris 1991; Martin 2012; Pullar 1992; Rand 2012; Rinderle & Montoya 2008; Seidman 2001; Shakespear 1996; Slagle 1995; Sullivan 2014; Willis 2017). Many posters artfully construct such narratives in their posts, often linking pride or self love to representation. For example, in one post a Tumblr user uploaded a picture of themselves and their partner and captioned it: “Happy Blackout!!! Proud to be Black Queer and Disabled!! They/Them only for me He/They for my partner.” This poster, participating in a Blackout Day, states that they are proud of their identities, effectively using both a pride narrative and engaging in an act of visual representation. In another example of using both pride narratives and photo to increase visual representation, Thomas/Priya, a poster who identifies as a “genderfucked” Indian-American, physically disabled and mentally ill Model who goes by two names, captions a ‘selfie’ of himself sitting in a wheelchair covered in purple tulle wearing a purple and gold floor length gown and sporting hot pink shoulder length hair, with

My therapist told me to try and think of powerful people like me and **I realized I might have to be my own queer, desi, disabled, mentally ill, powerful person** so I’m going to do that my face my selfie caption game sounds deep but I was ungracefully ranting when it happened also I incorporated my chair into my outfit look.

Requesting re-blogs and that other users share a post was common, especially on posts that encouraged community love and pride. This indicates that not only were posters actively participating in writing these narratives but also that they intended for these stories to be shared with people both inside and out of their communities. In an excerpt from a post celebrating body diversity, a self-identified queer, disabled “brown round boi” named Jay attempts to garner community support through re-blogs. Furthermore, they explain that loving non-normative bodies can upturn notions about privileged bodies and identities. They write:

Re-blog if you **love and adore** chubby round queer and disabled bodies, bodies of all

shapes and sizes, black disabled trans bodies, brown gender non-conforming bodies, bodies that flop and shake, bodies that waddle and wobble, bodies that haven't medically transitioned, choose not to take hormones, bodies on hormones, bodies that house multiple languages and moved many borders, bodies that fly and flail. **Re-blog if you here for people with all kinds of bodies that upturn hetero cis straight white skinny fit able-bodied boredom.**

The pride narrative is embedded with the emotion code of love. This narrative, then, contributes to the construction of an identity that functions with a local emotion culture of self and community love. This is evident in the quotations above. The posters above write about loving and adoring different and often intersectionally marginalized bodies. They also write about being proud of their identities and attaching such feelings of pride of community love. Additionally, they wrote about loving and respecting themselves as their own heroes because there is no positive loving popular representation of people like them. This will be further elucidated in the following section.

Transforming Shame to Acceptance through Love. The culturally recognizable emotion code of love was often embedded in posts that employed pride/community love narratives. It was extremely common to see statements about the importance of loving one's self in order to feel pride in one's community and identities. Often, Tumblr users wrote posts declaring that in loving oneself one may begin to fully accept themselves. They often described loving oneself as a processes to counteract self and community shame and to contest social stigma. Often, posters wrote statements to encourage others to engage in such processes of transforming shame to acceptance through validating community members' experiences of marginalization and showing support and love. This is evident in the quotation below from Tumblr Mom, when she writes:

I want you to know that i see your struggles. They're real and you're not making it up. It is tough. But, and this is even more important, so are you. All parts of you are valid and deserve to be respected. **And you deserve to feel proud of yourself!** ...I hope that you

have wonderful people around you who let you know how precious you are...**But if anyone makes you feel any less than proud and confident in being lgbt+ and [other identieis] believe me that i believe in you and support you and love you** – and so do plenty of others all over the world who are lgbt+, too.

In this quotation, Tumblr Mom validates other posters' struggles as well as their identities. She encourages other Tumblr members to feel proud of who they are, attaching pride to self-acceptance through the emotion code of love, even stating that she supports and loves the other members. It was common to see posters send "shout outs" to other members of their communities via Tumblr posts, in which the authors wrote encouraging statements of love, self-acceptance, and pride frequently juxtaposing those emotion codes and narratives to social stigma and self-shame. Other posters wrote about their own experiences of learning to accept their full selves and reject social stigma and shame as evident by the quotation from Jax, below. Jax writes about loving themselves and their body, rejecting the shame that they felt and accepting their identities as a disabled, trans fat person of color. Jax writes:

Believe me when I say, y'all aren't ready! I'm feeling so fucking beautiful in my brown skin. Can't no one tell me disabled bodies aren't beautiful!.... I love my fat, I love my rolls, I love my body hair, I love how my stretch marks look like rivers and lakes on a map. I love how my sides dip in and out like mountains and valleys. I love my Mexican forehead and nose, my chubby cheeks and my thick lips. I'm not here for unwanted ableist, fatphobic opinions about my body. **I'm in love with every inch of my skin, even when I'm not feeling it. It's taken me more than a decade to be able to say that I love myself so deeply and fiercely! I won't apologize for my body. I spent way too long doing that shit. I spent too long feeling ashamed.**

It is evident from the quotations above that when Tumblr users deploy pride narratives they frequently use emotion codes of love. Since the point of a pride narrative is to construct a story where a character rejects social stigma and shame by accepting oneself it makes sense that posters employ emotion codes of love.

“Our Lives Matter/Deserving of life” Narrative. The second narrative that was prominent in the posts collected was the “Our Lives Matter/Deserving of life” narrative. This narrative has been used in other social movement and identity-based communities and is recently most commonly associated with Black Lives Matter. It was extremely common to see posters write “Our Lives matter” or “we deserve to live,” especially on posts discussing healthcare, current political climates, nationalism, and the marginalization and stigmatization posters explained that they experienced. Posters often used this narrative in association with the need to survive. Posters understood that the cards were stacked against their survival and often explained that their lives, bodies, and experiences were rarely valued by popular society. Additionally, researchers have often made similar claims about disabled people, LGBTQ+ people, and people of color. This is evident in this quotation from a post written to Donald Trump and his supporters: “You never stood for my rights...I am a woman of color and I know for a fact that my life doesn’t matter to you because it never fucking did.” In another example of the “deserving of life” narrative, this excerpt from one poster discusses the outcome of the 2016 U.S. presidential election. They write:

Do It Out of Motherfucking Spite. No. This is not the end. Do you guys hear me? THIS IS NOT THE END. Even if Trump wins House, Senate, and Presidency. THIS IS NOT THE END. I promise you that. Even if you have to leave the US or fight tooth and nail just to keep breathing. Keep going. Please. Even if it feels like the end, please promise to keep going... Hang on. I have faith in your ability to survive. Women, PoC, LGBTQ+, the disabled, the poor, etc. have all survived marginalization before... Then do it out of motherfucking SPITE. **Do not give them the satisfaction of giving in to despair. Don’t give them the satisfaction of dying.**

Similar to posts that used pride narratives, Tumblr users employing “we deserve to live” narratives often linked these narratives to representation. Frequently, posters recognized that in order to fight the oppression that they experience their narratives had to garner support and be

widespread. Many posters wrote about voicing their experiences to further their movements, as elucidated in this quotation, “I want to see black trans brilliance everywhere and until that day comes, we will not stop. The movement will always continue. Our voices will forever be the loudest. We will always walk with the fervor and passion that our fore sisters embodied. We are the revolution. We are Goddesses. Our lives matter.”

Transforming Shame to Strength through Anger. The emotion code of anger was often embedded in posts that employed Our Lives Matter/ Deserving of life narratives. It was exceedingly common to see statements that rejected social stigma and stereotypes of weakness to promote community survival through anger. These statements were often found in the same posts that employed the deserving of life narrative. Frequently, posters used coded language that was steeped in anger, often employing imagery of fighting and resisting current social structure. This was especially prevalent in combating societal perceptions of weakness of disabled people. Below, Christina, writing the morning after the 2016 presidential election, authored a post titled “all the women in me are tired” in which she references her intersectionally marginalized identities and reaches out to other posters who experience social stigmatization. She uses imagery of a boxing match to discuss combating such stigmatization. Such language is coded in both anger and strength. Throughout the post she writes about fighting to survive, listing identity communities that she believes deserves to be supported in this fight. She writes:

This morning, I’m exhausted. But **I’m not going to stop fighting for those who matter to me.** For my Muslim brothers and sisters, for my LGBT, disabled, and non-cis brothers and sisters, for women everywhere, for all the POC who live in this country and in this world... I’m not done. **Time to wake up, look into that morning light and re-wrap the boxing tape around my hands. I’m ready to keep fighting for what matters.**

Tumblr users writing posts with embedded Deserving of Life narratives commonly use colorful language, like the poster above, and will frequently use expletives to illustrate their anger. This is evident in the quotation from an Australian poster who self identifies as ‘bi’ writing in response to the 2016 presidential election. Similar to the two posts above, they are writing about fighting to survive while using language that reflects the emotion code of anger.

Listen. To. Me. **You fucking fight** I’m not american, I can’t imagine how terrified those who are LGBT+, POC, Disabled, Female, Islamic, and any other minority of the US must feel right now, despite how scared I am myself. **But you wake up tomorrow and you fight. You show that fucking orange dickbag that you will not go quietly. You will survive.** You are smart, brave and important to your country no matter what anyone tries to tell you. You fight to keep yourself safe, you fight to make your voice heard, you fight for your future, you fight for those around you. This is not the end, this is the beginning of a long road ahead but I believe in you. Stay safe, look out for yourself, stay informed, **and survive just to spite them.**

Unlike the posts that construct Pride narratives, posters employing Deserving of life narratives are not often expressing emotion codes of love to transform shame to self-acceptance. Rather, anger is embedded in their posts (as evident by their language) and such narratives may encourage member strength and empowerment. Such posts are often constructed in opposition to oppressive social and political structures. In the quotation below, Jay, who identifies as agender, ace, and as having borderline personality disorder, is yet another poster writing about the current U.S. administration and describes that specific identity communities are not valued, that they may have difficulty survive or ‘could actually die’ and writes about their anger.

“Protest votes” are like the ultimate and most evident show of an **absolute lack of empathy**. Like. Y’all literally don’t care about people who could actually *die* under Donald Trump’s government. **If you voted third party/null you are a privileged ass.** Have fun explaining to your black, latinx, queer, disabled and women friends why they don’t matter to you at all. **I legitimately feel nothing but contempt for you.**

Emotion codes of anger are embedded in the Deserving of Life narratives the Tumblr users utilize. Typically, when Deserving of Life narratives have been deployed, a clear victim and

villain are constructed. When these Tumblr users employ Deserving of Life narratives they engage in a rejection of oppression, mistreatment, social stigma, and possible poor quality of life by constructing a story in which a victim (the marginalized person) is encouraged to become a survivor. It makes sense, then, that posters employ emotion codes of anger to transform themselves from victim to survivor.

Tangled Narratives

The two prominent narratives found in this Tumblr community's posts are intertwined and interrelated. Posters frequently explain that survival can only occur through pride and self- and community-love and one can only learn to accept themselves and have love for and pride in their communities by rejecting social stigma and popular notions stating that they do not have value. Furthermore, the transformation from (possible or actual) victim to survivor involves a deployment of both narratives. Although the majority of posts represented either a pride narrative coded with love and self-acceptance or a Deserving of Life narrative embedded with emotion codes of anger and strength, a number of posts employed both narratives. For example, in this next quotation, Max (who identifies as a "Mexican Transman") uses the emotion code of love linked to both narratives. By calling attention to the fact that they are alive and by calling for resistance, they are employing the Our lives matter/Deserving of Life narrative and by wishing members a happy Pride month and using the emotion code of loving they are calling on the Pride/Community love narrative. "*They are alive. You are alive. And TOGETHER, WE RESIST. HAPPY PRIDE MONTH! Stay safe, I love you all*". In another post, a self-identified disabled trans woman with mental illness uses emotion codes of love and anger to describe both self-acceptance and strength. She then explains that, through loving and supporting each other, they can 'make it'. Furthermore, she constructs herself as a survivor, effectively employing both a pride/self-love narrative and a Deserving of Life narrative. She writes:

I struggle every day with major depression, and have come close to suicide more than once. **And yet, I'm still here** — and I'm still *me*, despite being told I couldn't be. Embracing the truth hasn't been easy. I was 29 when I finally got the courage to live as myself. These past three years of transition have been full of pain and loss — most of my family has rejected me — and yet, **I wouldn't trade any of it for anything**. I draw strength from womanhood — both my own womanhood, and the incredible and powerful womanhood of so many other #girlslikeus. I treasure my female friends and lovers, **as we live and love and fight together. As long as we can embrace ourselves and each other, I think we might just make it...I am a writer, survivor, resilient, loving, and a woman.**

In this next quotation, Bobbie, who uses gender natural pronouns and identifies as disabled, references the exclusion that disabled LGBTQ+ people experience in LGBTQ+ communities and then they write about how they (queer disabled people) matter and it is through loving each other that queer disabled people can come to matter. “Sometimes pride feels like the time of year when enabled queer community gathers & reminds disabled people **that we do not belong & we do not matter**. yet, we do. we do. **we love each other into meaning**.” This type of post contributes to narrating this community into existence using emotion codes of love and attaching this emotion code to both “Deserving of Life” and “Pride” narratives. For these posters, these narratives were not mutually exclusive and they, at times, employed both narratives in one post (as evident by the examples above). In these cases, posters often used both emotion codes of anger and love to show both self-acceptance and strength because, for these posters, self-acceptance and loving oneself required a great deal of strength. In order to truly love oneself, one had to contest social stigma, which takes strength. Furthermore, posters who stressed survival and used Our Lives Matter narratives frequently recognized that in order to survive one had to not only have strength but self acceptance, community and self-love and pride, so it was common to see both narratives in posts. This is evident in the following quotation from Jax.

My contribution to the Trans Day of Visibility! **Fuck gender norms**, I'm making my own definition of masculinity, and reinventing “pretty boy swag.” Reppin’ it for all the other disabled qtpoc folk out there. **Rise up and let your voices be heard! Never be**

silenced, never let this world erase you. Live your truth and be proud, because you matter. Your voice, your presence, together we **show the world that we matter**, that we're here and that they're not taking shit away from us. **No matter how much they oppress us, we ain't goin no fuckin' place!** Keep on living your truth, and living authentically. **You are beautiful and valid.** Always remember that you matter, and that you are enough!... hey round of applause for mentally ill & disabled lgbt ppl in this rough time” Shout out to the crips, shout out to the spoonies, the mentally ill folks. Every breath you take is a protest. **We're here, we're empowered, this world will not silence us; no matter how hard it tries! Your existence IS resistance**

Jax, like many of the other posters represented here, is skillfully constructing stories using cultural references to anger and strength when they (Jax) writes statements like “Rise up and let your voices be heard! Never be silenced,” “not taking shit away from us,” and “we ain't goin no fuckin' place!” Jax makes references to emotion codes of love and self/community-acceptance as well when writing statements like “You are beautiful and valid” and “Keep on living your truth, and living authentically.” They are not only urging survival and Deserving of Life narratives through statements like “Every breath you take is protest” and “Your existence IS resistance” but also Pride/Self and Community-love narratives are present in the above quotation through statements like “Live your truth and be proud.” Employing both “Pride” and “Deserving of Life” narratives serves to construct a victim as survivor and hero championing representation.

Discussion and Conclusion

There is currently no culturally recognizable narrative that is representative of the experiences of being an LGBTQ+ disabled person of color. Indeed, for these posters, there was a lack of representative, recognizable, and relatable stories that accurately (and without stereotyping) reflected their experiences. Posters expressed that there were limited options of good representations in media. Due to this lack of representation, posters often describe experiencing marginalization, exclusion, and stigmatization from both popular society and identity-based communities often in the form of invisibility. Posters specifically felt excluded

from communities of color and social movement events and ideologies like Black Lives Matter, from communities of LGBTQ+ people, gay bars and clubs, and Pride events and social movement communities, as well as from communities and social movement organizations of disabled people. To contest their invisibility and marginalization, posters use Tumblr as a platform to narrate themselves into existence. Posters are writing stories with characters that better represent their identities, often rewriting popular TV shows and movies to include characters that are more representative of their experiences, they are also constructing their own narratives and telling stories from their own lives, they are creating art and making podcasts, and they are engaging in conversations about their identities all on Tumblr. Posters often attach their experience to two well-known and recognizable social movement narratives: “Pride/Community- and self-love” narrative, commonly associated with LGBTQ+ communities, and the “Our Lives Matter/Deserving of life” narrative, commonly associated with communities and social movements like Black Lives Matter. By relying on and building off of these two different recognizable stories, posters reconceptualize these narratives to accurately represent their experiences of multisided marginalization. Posters frequently use both of these narratives to counteract social stigma and experiences of shame. When posters use “Pride” narratives they often use emotion codes of love to counteract shame and encourage self and community-acceptance. When posters employ “Deserving of Life” narratives they frequently use emotion codes of anger in transforming shame to strength and to encourage community survival. Additionally, these two narratives are extremely interrelated and intertwined within many posts from this community of Tumblr users. Posters frequently explain that survival can only occur through self- and community-love and pride and one can only learn to accept themselves and have love for and pride in their communities by rejecting popular notions that people like them

do not deserve life.

The relationship between posters and such social movement narratives is complex. For posters here, survival is extremely important: in order to survive one has to combat social stigma, marginalization, and oppression from both popular society and identity-based communities. In order to counteract such stigma, posters need to contest any feelings of shame in themselves and be both strong and accepting of themselves and their communities. The only way for posters to be able to engage in this process is to have pride in their identities and experiences. This process shows that, although posters are using very culturally recognizable narratives, these narratives are a part of the doings of their lives. They are not just ‘jumping on the bandwagon’ or ‘appropriating’ existing narratives. Rather, they are artfully constructing their own community narratives by drawing from culturally circulating and available narrative recourses. Furthermore, they are sharing these narratives with others to help them find meaning in their experiences, effectively engaging in community-building and identity construction.

The posters in this study identified with a multitude of different marginalized and minority identities. For example, Jax identified as a trans gender queer, disabled boi of color, while Tumblr Mom identified as a queer person with disabilities, Kameron identified as a queer women with mental illness, and others identified as black genderqueer people with disabilities, or as gay wheelchair users, as autistic and disabled queer people. They identified with a multitude of different race and ethnicities, gender identities, sexual orientations, and disabilities. This group of people is not bound together by location, nation, or region. They have different experiences with education systems and come from different socioeconomic statuses. Because they all identify so differently and have varying backgrounds, they should not be using the same two narratives to represent their identities. There are no social movement organizations,

community organizations, or clubs that represent this group of people IRL. Yet they consistently use the same narratives and engage in conversation on Tumblr with each other. This group of people is not bound together by what they don't have in common. Rather, they find meaning in the same narratives because of what they do have in common: hyper-marginalization and exclusion from multiple identity-based communities. The social movement and identities narratives that organizations like Black Lives Matter and Pride use are relatable and recognizable to many members of this Tumblr community. Moreover, many of the posters here may identify with these groups, their messages, and their goals but because these groups are not accessible to the hyper-marginalized members within them, those with multiple and intersectionally complex marginalized identities may find meaning in these narratives but cannot fully construct their identities within them. Rather, they take these narratives, alter them slightly to include their intersectional experiences, and then combine these two popular narratives into one story. Posters are thus writing a counternarrative, one in which inclusion and representation of intersectionally marginalized people is imperative above all else. The effect of this narrative is it unites quite a diverse group of people through experiences of shared exclusion from identity groups. Unlike the narratives deployed by social movement organizations associated with Black Lives Matter and LGBTQ+ Pride, these narratives are not aimed at necessarily effecting or changing social policy. Instead, these narratives are constructed in a way that challenges ideology and notions of who counts as in-group within identity movements. When these two popular narratives are deployed in this way they are counternarratives that are doing both resistance work and community/identity building work.

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CHAPTER SIX:

“MY EXISTANCE IS RESISTANCE!”: VISIBLE SURVIVAL AS CRIP RESISTANCE

Introduction

Scholars of social movements have been critical of online social media activism. Some have questioned whether online participation in social movement activity, especially participation via social media, can even be considered true participation, and others judge movement success by the ability to foster policy change. The few scholars who do see value in online social media activism tend to focus on the ability of social media to mobilize offline actions. I argue that within marginalized social categories to which traditional strategies of resistance and activism may not be accessible, neither policy change nor mobilization should be the sole criteria used to judge the potential value of social media as an activist tool. People who occupy multiple marginalized identities may feel that they are invisible within traditional activist groups. Disabled people who also identify as LGBTQ+ may feel, for example, that they are poorly represented by the actions of both LGBTQ+ and disability movements. This paper explores how a group of social media users who identify with multiple complex intersectional identities have re-conceptualized traditional notions of resistance through the use of online activism to enhance individual and community visibility and survival in order to counteract this kind of intersectional invisibility. As background for this exploration, I begin with a brief overview of the theoretical framework of intersectionality and intersectional invisibility. I then provide a review of the literature that examines online social media activism, specifically as it applies to identity communities.

Theoretical Framework and Previous Literature

Intersectionality and Intersectional Invisibility

As is well documented in research in the social sciences and humanities, people who identify with multiple minority identities experience marginalization and discrimination in complex and unique ways that may differ from the experiences that are typical of just one of their identities (Crenshaw 1989, 1991 Collins 1999). Furthermore, people identifying with multiple marginalized identities often experience exclusion from, or are further marginalized within, communities and ideologies that are based on just one of their specific minority identities (Balsom 2011; Bernstien 1997; Crenshaw 1989, 1991; Collins 1986, 1999; Gamson 1995, Giwa & Greensmith 2012; Han 2007; Kumashiro 2001; Nast 2002; Vernon 1999). Many scholars have described the estrangement of black women from both antiracist/civil rights and feminist/women's movements, and communities and lesbian, bisexual, and trans women from feminist/women's and lesbian and gay movements and communities (Bernstien 1997; Breines 2006; Crenshaw 1989, 1991; Collins 1986, 1999; Elliot 2016; Gamson 1997; Walters 1996). Crenshaw (1989: 140) writes, "Black women are sometimes excluded from feminist theory and anti-racist policy discourse because both are predicated on a discrete set of experiences that often does not accurately reflect the interaction of race and gender." Crenshaw (1989, 1991) explains that, frequently, there is a focus on the most privileged group members within a community and as such many community members with complex identities or those who are "multiply-burdened" are further marginalized within an often already marginalized community. She writes

This focus on the most privileged group members marginalizes those who are multiply-burdened and obscures claims that cannot be understood as resulting from discrete sources of discrimination. I suggest further that this focus on otherwise-privileged group members creates a distorted analysis of racism and sexism because the operative conceptions of race and sex become grounded in experiences that actually represent a subset of a much more complex phenomena (Crenshaw 1989: 140)

Drawing on Crenshaw's concept of intersectionality, Purdie-Vaughns and Eibach (2008) describe such experiences of exclusion as intersectional invisibility. Intersectional invisibility is the "general failure to fully recognize people with intersecting identities as members of their constituent groups...Such individuals tend to be marginal members within marginalized groups. This status relegates them to a position of acute social invisibility" (381). In other words, intersectional invisibility is often experienced by people who hold multiple marginalized identities, and it can occur in both dominant society and within minority identity groups. Intersectional invisibility is a result of androcentric (the tendency to define the standard person as male), ethnocentric (the tendency to define the standard person as a member of the dominant ethnic group (i.e. white Americans in the U.S.)), and heterocentric (the tendency to define the standard person as heterosexual) conceptualizations of identity community members. Furthermore, I argue that experiences of intersectional invisibility for the population examined in this study are also a result of ablecentrism (the tendency to define the standard person as able-bodied/minded, also sometimes referred to as or a component of compulsory able-bodiedness and ableism). Such centristic notions can cause people with intersecting marginalized identities to be perceived as "non-prototypical of their constituent identity groups" and thus may render them invisible (Purdie-Vaughns & Eibach 2008:376).

Moreover, Purdie-Vaughns and Eibach explain that "the politics of research on the intersection of social identities based on race, gender, class, and sexuality can at times resemble a score-keeping contest between battle-weary worriers" (2008: 376). Instead of examining marginalized identities as a hierarchy and to avoid oppression Olympics, Purdie-Vaughns and Eibach (2008) suggests we should ask how forms of oppression are shaped differently for people with intersecting disadvantaged identities than those who experience a single disadvantaged

identity. Additionally, “by recognizing that people with intersectional identities experience distinct forms of oppression, we can shift the focus away from score-keeping to a richer analysis of the complex field of oppressive forces in which people with intersectional identities are situated (380).”

Activism on Social Media

Social media as well as digital and technological developments have contributed to changes in how individuals, groups, and organizations advocate for social change, generate awareness, participate in causes, participate in collective action, and construct collective and group identities (Diani, 2000; Glenn 2015; Meyer & Workman Bray 2013; Van de Donk, Loader, Nixon, & Rucht, 2004). What it means to be a social activist and the ways in which to engage in social activism have recently been reshaped by social media and digital technologies. Indeed, there has been a divergence from “traditional” notions of activism as conceptualized by social movement activities prevalent in the 1960’s. Activism has most prominently been conceptualized as those activities “associated with interdependent groups mobilizing through tangible resources, including space” (Glenn 2015) in order to organize protests, public meetings, strikes rallies, boycotts, and anti-consumption campaigns as well as acts of civil disobedience such as sit-ins (Conway 2003; Glenn 2015).

Armchair Activism, Slacktivism, Clicktivism, and Hashtag Activism. Scholars have begun to examine the efficacy of online (specifically social media) activism, social movements, and group identity construction. Some scholars, activists, and popular media sources have been critical of online activism (Butler 2011), terming such online participation as “slacktivism,” “clicktivism,” or “hashtag activism” (common nomenclature for online social media activism). This kind of activism is often labeled “armchair activism” and viewed as inferior to “real” or in person activism because people can engage in it without ever leaving home (Lim 2013).

Activism that doesn't require one to leave their home is often viewed as low risk and requiring less commitment than participating in offline, traditional activism (Deibert, Palfrey, Rohozinski, & Zittrain, 2008). Critiques of social media activism often attempt to define what a "real activist" is and what counts as political and social participation (Butler 2011; Anduiza, Cantijoch, and Gallego 2009). Scholars have questioned whether or not online participation, especially participation via social media, can even be considered participation (Anduiza et al. 2009). Slacktivism, a combination of 'slacker' and 'activism,' has "increasingly been used to describe the disconnect between awareness and action through the use of social media" (Glenn 2015). Slacktivism has been conceptualized as "feel-good back patting" (Knibbs 2013). Clicktivism has been described as a low-risk and low-cost social media activity with the purpose to raise awareness (Halupka, 2014). Hashtag activism, or the use of hashtags to spread awareness and ideas as well as engage with others in a conversation over a specific topic over social media, has often been deemed neither valuable nor effective, and is often excluded from definitions of activism (Reynolds & Mayweather 2017).

Scholars and activists who critique social media activism as armchair activism often conceptualize good and valuable activism in part by a participants' willingness and ability to leave home to participate in activist, social movement, and resistance activities. Such critiques conceptualize social media activism as trite, superficial, and inadequate and furthermore unable to transform institutions, ideology, and policy (Morozov 2009; Shulman 2009; Gladwell 2010).

In recent years, however, scholars have begun to see value in social media activism and some scholars and activists have even looked quite favorably upon the use of social media to encourage activist participation (Lomicky & Hogg 2010). Still, many scholars who have examined online activism investigate its efficacy in creating offline mobilization (Wilson 2007;

Lomicky & Hogg 2010). Indeed, much of the research that examines the use of social media examines its ability to organize and mobilize offline action and change policy (Lotan et al. 2011; Eltantawy and Wiest 2011; Tufekci and Wilson 2012; Gleason 2013; Borge-Holthoefer et al. 2015; De Chaurdhury Bastos et al. 2015; Weber, Garimella, and Batayneh 2013; Varol et al. 2014; Sandoval-Almazan & Ramon Gil-Garcia 2014). Scholars have examined how social media activism has mobilized offline activity and collective action in a variety of movements, including: Black Lives Matter and anti-racist movements (De Chaurdhury Bastos et al. 2015; Yang 2016; Reynolds and Mayweather 2017; Bonilla and Rosa 2015), Occupy Wall Street (Caren & Gaby 2011; Gleason 2013; Hardt & Negri 2011), Arab Spring (Borge-Holthoefer, Magdy, Darwish & Weber 2015; Eltantawy & Wiest 2011; Lotan, Graeff, Ananny, Gaffney & Pearce 2011; Tufekci & Wilson 2012; Wolfsfeld, Segev, & Sheafer 2013), Gezi park movement (Varol et al. 2014), Kony2012 (Glenn, Thomas, McGarty, Stuart, Hall & Goddard 2015), Bring Back our Girls (Carter Olson 2016; Ghiluwa & Ifukor 2015) and Feminist movements and everyday sexism (Khoja-moolji 2015; Bowles Eagle 2015 Horeck 2014; Clark 2014).

Although the value of online activism is primarily constructed based on its ability to mobilize and bring members from online spaces to participation in real life (IRL), there is a small body of research that examines social media activism in its own right. Such examinations have considered online activism's ability to spread awareness, raise large amounts of money, and, more recently, shift popular and dominant ideologies (Knibbs, K 2013; Fang 2016). At times, scholars have measured social media activism's efficacy within the terms listed above as well as in relation to offline mobilization. In such cases, scholars frequently understand the value of social media activism not only by its ability to move participation offline but by also measuring online activism's validity and cogency within digital spaces alone. This

conceptualization of social media activism constructs such activism as valuable if it is able to spread awareness, raise money, and shift popular opinion and ideologies online without necessarily seeing offline social movement changes. Whereas scholars who conceptualize activism's value in terms of offline participation use terms such as hashtag and armchair activism in pejorative ways, scholars who recognize the value in social media activism as more than its ability to mobilize offline frequently employ such terminology without satire (Horek 2014; Yang 2016; Williams 2015, Glenn 2015 Reynolds & Mayweather 2017; Freelon, Dea, Charlton McIlwain, & Clark 2016; Freelon, McIlwain, and Clark 2016; Bonilla and Rosa 2015; Clark 2014; Knibbs, K. 2013; Williams 2015). For example, Yang defines hashtag activism as "Discursive protest on social media united through a hashtagged word, Phrase, or sentence" (13). Yang and other scholars who define social media activism value in terms of online participation often recognize hashtag activism and armchair activism as valuable forms of protest.

Social Media Activism and Identity. Many researchers of social media activism examine youth participation, often researching social media activism as an activity conducted primarily by teens, college students, and young adults. Few scholars, however, have examined participation in social media activism based on identity. "Traditional" approaches to activism and collective action (as typified by collective action of the 1960's) are not necessarily available and accessible to all individuals, particularly to the people represented in this study. Therefore, some activists may turn to engagement in social movement activity and activism online and through social media as a way to participate when the risk of IRL participation is too great.

Recent "lower participation in collective action has been tied to large time and financial commitments the internet has dramatically lowered participation costs and even allowed for individuals to make smaller contributions that, when aggregated, account for a much larger

whole” (Butler 2011). Therefore, it makes sense that for people who are unable to commit extensive amounts of time and for those whose offline activism is too much of a finical burden, online participation maybe one of the only ways to engage in activism. Furthermore, it is possible that online activism may be the most accessible way for people who are frequently excluded from identity groups due to experiences of intersectional invisibility to engage in social movement activism.

Methodology

In order to explore ways in which social media is used by people who identify with multiple marginalized social categories, I conducted a narrative analysis of data collected from of a community of mostly self-identified LGBTQ+, disabled people of color on the social media site Tumblr. I employed an intersectional approach throughout the analysis for this project.

A note on Tumblr: When conducting a virtual ethnography, the structure of a social media platform matters. Using virtual ethnography, it is not just the community interactions that should be investigated but the apparatus through which they communicate as well. Virtual ethnography is particularly useful in exploring the ways the Internet is (and becomes) socially meaningful. By immersing themselves in an online site or sites, virtual ethnographers examine the Internet, or a specific site, as both culture and cultural artifact (Hine 2000). In other words, the construction and make up of a site is as important as the doings on the site.

Tumblr is structured differently than other more widely-known and studied forms of social media sites. Tumblr differs from both Facebook and Twitter. For example, many other popular social media and blog sites (such as Facebook), allows users to leave comments on particular posts. On Facebook, users are able to write a post and their ‘friends’ (people who

publically request to follow a Facebook user) can comment and have a conversation. They can also repost the original user's post. On Tumblr, one cannot comment on other users' posts. They must re-blog it and if they wish to comment they 'add' to the post via the re-blogged post. Twitter has a function similar to Tumblr where users can re-blog or re-tweet posts they want to show up on their site. Tumblr does differ from Twitter in that there is no word or character limit for posts. Therefore, one can re-blog a whole conversation that happens via re-blogs over extended periods of time. Some of the data for this project came from conversations between Tumblr users that occurred over many months. Furthermore, because Tumblr allows for easy access to each user's archive one can return to conversations months and even years after they originally occurred. Posts can also include photos, videos, and links. Therefore, Tumblr is a great site for narrative analysis as there are incredibly rich data of Tumblr users engaging in conversations over extended periods of time through the re-blogs and adding to stories and posts. Additionally, visitors to Tumblr pages that do not have permission to view private content are unable to view any material that is not open access, and as such I only examined data from Tumblr users whose post are open for public consumption.

Data Collection and Analysis

In order to collect and analyze the data for this project I have engaged in virtual ethnography (sometimes called digital ethnography), which is the application of ethnographic methodologies in virtual spaces (Hine 2000, Maloney 2013). Similar to other ethnographic methods, virtual ethnography is useful when "dealing with complex and multi-faceted concepts like culture, as compared with the more reductive quantitative techniques" and "offers the promise of getting closer to understanding the ways in which people interpret the world and organize their lives" (Hine 2000:42).

I conducted a narrative analysis of a community of Tumblr users who mostly identify with and/or are writing about the intersection of LGBTQ+¹ and disability identities, many of which also identified as people of color. Virtual ethnography is an exceptionally appropriate form of data collection for narrative analysis of online data. This is because it enables researchers to collect and analyze stories told by posters or social media users and to further examine the re-blogging of stories with individuals' added personal commentary. It allows a researcher to follow stories as they are commented on, taken up as relevant, or represented and adapted by individuals across the internet or web-space (Maloney 2013).

Field connections and Internal Linkages. Those engaging in virtual ethnography follow field connections rather than going to field sites (Hine 2000). Maloney (2013) follows “internal linkage” in her study on Pro-Ana websites, wherein she is able to find communities focused on specific identities (Pro-Ana) by following websites through “internal linkages” to one another (Maloney 2013:133). The data from this study was collected as part of a larger project, in which I identity-based organizations and communities of people who identified as both LGBTQ+ and Disabled. I employed the use of internal linkages by immersing myself in a community on Tumblr. My point of entry into this community was through Queerability's Tumblr. Queerability is a social movement organization that advocates for members who identify as both disabled and LGBTQ and their Tumblr is how they engage with and communicate information to their members. While examining the conversations on Queerability's Tumblr I was able to find a community of mostly LGBTQ+ disabled Tumblr users. I then followed internal linkages through Queerability's page to collect data. I was also able to use Tumblr's search and archival functions.

Hine explains that virtual ethnography is a process of “intermittent engagement rather

than long term immersion” and can be “based on strategic relevance to particular research questions rather than faithful representations of objective realities” (2000: 65). Therefore, virtual ethnography allows for flexibility in the time frames associated with data collection. Hine argues that this kind of intermittent engagement allows researchers more flexibility in that they can examine multiple sites at once. The data for this project was collected over a period of six months, January 2017 to June 2017, and, by using the site’s archive function, I was able to collect data that spans over three years beginning in February 2014 and ending on June 30th 2017. I used both the archival and search options to pull data from the previous years.

Although my point of entry into this Tumblr community was Queerability’s webpage, this study aims to examine a larger community (i.e. Tumblr users concerned with the intersection of LGBTQ+ disability identities) rather than one specific site (Queerability). Therefore, I collected data from multiple Tumblr pages. Similar to how an ethnographer may find participants by way of a snowball sample, in which one participant introduces a researcher to another possible participant (that may have a similar experience or identity), I followed conversations on Queerability to other users’ pages and utilized Tumblr’s search feature to access even more pages focused on experiences of being both LGBTQ+ and disabled and/or authored by LGBTQ+ disabled people. This search function is useful for Tumblr users (as well as researchers) who are interested in engaging in a conversation, reading posts, and finding blog pages about a specific topic. Thus, Tumblr can be a fantastic space for community building and interaction. Using the search function I conducted two searches: in the first, I searched for LGBT and disability (resulting in over 280 posts) and for the second, I searched queer and disability (resulting in over 320 posts). I then narrowed the data to posts that fit the following criteria 1) The post must be open and allow me access, 2) the focus of the content of the post must pertain to both disability

and LGBT/queer identities, and 3) the post must be primarily Tumblr content (a post that was just a link to a news article, video or gif was not considered—these posts were not included because an analysis of news articles and videos is beyond the scope of this study). This collection process resulted in 186 posts that were searchable by the tag “LGBT and disability” and 295 posts searchable by the tag “Queer and disability”. The data collected via the search and archival functions combined with the data found from other external linkages amounted to about 240 single-spaced pages of written data and another 30 pages of images spanning over a time period of three years.

Use of Narrative Analysis. By combining virtual ethnography with narrative analysis I was able to follow internal linkages via re-blogging of stories and examine which stories were taken up as relevant and important by this community of Tumblr users. Indeed, it was common for Tumblr users to post original content to their pages and then, if this story resonates with other Tumblr users, they frequently re-blogged the post, often adding their own commentary to it. As a researcher using internal linkages as a data collection strategy, I follow the comments and track re-blogging to examine which post resonated with this community of users.

I conducted a narrative analysis by examining the prevalent discourses and stories common across the selected posts. Virtual ethnographic data can be analyzed in qualitative analysis software in the same way any other data that has been transformed into text can be analyzed (Maloney 2013). The content from each post was inserted into a digital document, organized by date of post publication and location (specific Tumblr page). This document was then downloaded into qualitative analysis software Atlas ti for analysis. I utilized Atlas ti’s coding function to analyze the data in multiple passes. Employing Loseke’s (2012) guidelines for narrative analysis, I first began by asking questions to situate the context of these stories: Who

are the authors? Who is their audience? What type of story are they attempting to tell? Next, I closely read the data to examine the narratives being told and to gain an understanding of the central themes of the stories that are most prevalently told. During this close read, I coded each post, comment, or passage within posts based on discursive themes of the passages. In subsequent passes I then re-coded, using lumping and splitting techniques (Zerubavel 1996) to begin generating common thematic categories. I used these categories and codes to pull out the narratives that were common across all the posts from different posters.

I utilized narrative analysis as a way to examine the experiences of everyday life of people who identify as both LGBTQ+/Queer and disabled. Narratives are recognizable stories and they “create identity at all levels of human social life” (Loseke 2007:661). By investigating personal narratives through blogs focused on the experiences and advocacy of LGBT disabled people this study examined narratives and identities. Because the posters and Tumblr users represented in this study identified across a wide variety of specific disability, LGBTQ+, race and ethnic identities they will have many experiences that differ from one another. Narratives allow us to examine what is similar across these groups and from individual to individual. It is through prevalent and common narratives, often described as formula stories, that people are able to make meaning of their own experiences and identities. “For the good and the bad, social actors can use their understandings of socially circulating formula stories as resources to make sense of their selves and unique others” (Loseke 2007:673). Because narratives contribute to the construction of identities at multiple levels of social life, narrative analysis is a particularly apt methodology to employ in this project. Narratives allow us to research what is common across spaces, groups, communities of specific identities, and individuals.

Intersectional Approach. I employ an intersectional approach (Crenshaw 1991) in that I

acknowledge disabled LGBTQ+ people may also experience marginalization within both of these communities. Additionally, I recognize that an intersectional approach means considering all aspects of individual's identities and experiences. Furthermore, the experiences of being both disabled and LGBTQ+ are compounded by an individual's other identities, specifically as it pertains (but not limited) to their race, ethnicity, class, age, education, and nationality.

Employing an intersectional approach, I understand that the experiences of those who hold complex and multifaceted identities or are 'multiply burdened' cannot be completely summarized by considering those identities separately. Crenshaw has explained that movements and communities associated with anti-racism or feminism cannot fully represent the experiences of women of color as they experience marginalization within both communities and associated discourses (1244). Following this logic, I recognize that disabled LGBTQ+ people of color may experience marginalization within all three of these social locations.

Results

The posters that are represented in this study describe experiences of intersectional invisibility. Posters identified with a multitude of complex, intersecting (and often marginalized) identities. Many self-identified as queer, disabled people of color. Due to their intersectionally marginalized identities, posters in this study do not fit the perceived prototypical member of their constituent identity groups and as such they experience marginalization in the form of intersectional invisibility. This lack of visibility led to the exclusion of posters from identity-specific groups and communities (such as LGBTQ+ communities, disability communities, and communities of people of color). Posters frequently described these spaces and communities as inaccessible and unsafe. In other words, posters' expressions of exclusion infer that identity

communities did not, could not, and often didn't know how to accommodate members that hold complex intersectional identities because members of identity communities did not recognize other members intersectionally marginalized experiences. Results suggest that posters employ social media to create online spaces in which to safely counteract multiple marginalization in a number of strategic ways. The Results section is organized around five themes related to this process: 1. Intersectional Invisibility; 2. Exclusionary Safe Spaces are Not Safe; 3. "I'm Tired of Fighting; 4. Re-conceptualizing Existence as Resistance; 5. Self and Community Care as a Strategy for Visible Survival.

Intersectional Invisibility

The posters represented in this study describe experiences of intersectional invisibility. Posters understood themselves as experiencing their identities intersectionally; many of them cited not being able to identify a 'master status'. Indeed, they acknowledge that these identities were intertwined, tangled, and converge with and within each other. Furthermore, posters explained that the marginalization that they are subjected to (often in the form of exclusion and invisibility) is multisided and directed toward every aspect of their identities and is intersectionally experienced. As one poster wrote, "I am done choosing between my womanhood and my blackness."

In another conversation, one poster prompted other Tumblr users who identified as LGBTQ+ and disabled to answer the question "What is your more dominant identity? Is your disability identity more dominant than your LGBTQ identity or vice versa?" Some posters were able to name an identity they found more dominant, often citing it as the identity they held the longest or as the one they feel is associated with the most amount of stigma. However, the majority of posters answered this question by stating that they are not able to untangle their

intersectional identities as they are extremely complex and all of their identities contribute to their perception of self. This is elucidated in the quotation below from Taylor¹, a poster answering the prompt. They write:

This question made me double-take, because it assumes a widespread understanding of identity that makes no sense to me at all. my identity is Taylor. being autistic, queer, and mobility-impaired are parts of that identity, as are being short and burly, having freckles, liking cats and caramel and thumpy music, disliking centipedes and mustard and romance movies.... **i'm always equally autistic, equally queer, they don't wax and wane.**

Almost all of the posters described experiences of intersectional invisibility, in which one or more of their identities were rendered invisible within their specific identity groups. Many Tumblr users wrote posts contesting this type of exclusion. Frequently, posters urged their readers (often members of their constituent identity-based groups) to recognize the experiences of intersectionally marginalized members. Speaking to other Tumblr users, one poster wrote ¹ "black people are not just black...get this...they're also disabled, queer, trans*, poor, and from hated religions. and it IS often worse for us." Other posters have reverberated these sentiments, often explaining that the way they experience marginalization and stigma is complex and unique because of their intersectional identities. In a post of encouragement one Tumblr user writes

"shout out to all the lgbt mentally ill & disabled people who have to put up with their symptoms / coping mechanisms being **used to judge & deny the rest of their identity** ("are you sure you're trans? what if it's your illness talking" "it's hard to be an ally when you're this hard to deal with" etc) **as well as being treated like an absurd and unbelievable checklist of tokens** by the mainstream ("what's next, an autistic lesbian woc??") you rule & your continued existence is a blessing to others"

This poster explains that it is especially difficult being disabled and/or mentally ill and LGBT because their illnesses are often used to deny their LGBTQ+ identities. Processes of medicalization have historically defined LGBTQ+ identities as illness while pathologized conceptions of disability frequently reduce disabled individuals' queerness to a symptom of their

disability diagnosis (especially for LGBTQ+ autistic individuals). Posters frequently referenced such processes of pathologization of their identities. Such narratives were extremely prevalent and especially so for posters elucidating the complexity of identifying with multiple intersectional stigmatized identities. The above quotations speak to experiences of intersectional invisibility. As people who occupy multiple marginalized identities, these posters find themselves excluded from their identity groups.

Intersectional Invisibility within Social Movement work and Identity politics.

Sociologists have described the ways in which people who identify with marginalized identities frequently seek out other similarly identifying people in attempt to build community (Mereish 2012; Pause 2014; Purdie-Vaughns & Eibach 2008; Schug, Alt, Lu, Gosin, & Fay 2017; Schug, Alt, & Klauer 2015; Sesko & Biernat 2010). Often, these communities are concerned with social movement activity and engagement in identity politics. Individuals, who identify as people of color, LGBTQ+, disabled, and/or with other stigmatized identities, frequently express experiences of marginalization and consequently, they attempt to advocate for themselves by engaging in such identity-based communities and social movement activity. We also know that people identifying with more than one marginalized identity often experience a double bind, outsider within, and/or intersectional invisibility (Crenshaw 1989; Collins 1986, 1999; Elliot 2016; Gay & Tate 1998; Gedro 2006; Hamilton & Armstrong 2009; Krefting 1990; Malcom, Quick Hall, & Brown 1976; Malcom & Maheley 1976; Mereish 2012; Norman 2011; Pause 2014; Purdie-Vaughns & Eibach 2008; Schug, Lu, Gosin, & Fay 2017; Schug, Alt, & Klauer 2015; Sesko & Biernat 2010; Simpson 2008; Stuart 1992). Intersectional invisibility has been well particularly well documented among black women in civil rights or feminist communities/social movement organizations (SMOs) as well as for lesbian and bisexual women

in feminist spaces and feminist SMOs. The Tumblr users described in this paper identify with this type of experience (Purdie-Vaughns & Eibach 2008). Posters detailed feeling excluded, stigmatized, and marginalized because of their complex identities within feminist spaces, LGBTQ+ communities, Pride Parades and events, Black Lives Matter groups/SMOs as well as other marches, protests, activities, and events associated with identity-based communities. Tumblr users felt that these identity-based communities and community leaders were not well equipped to accommodate the needs of people who identify that particular community when those individuals also identified with other marginalized identities. Posters explained that community members and organizers ignore and/or are uninformed about axes of oppression. Below, Anne, a women who uses a wheel chair and identifies her self as bi/polysexual and a “proud mad cripple” expounds on their experiences with being excluded when attempting to participate in social movement activity.

I cannot stress the importance of this enough...It truly sucks, as a physically/otherwise impaired person, to arrange transport to a gathering (maybe a full hundred miles from your isolated town) **at which you hope you'll feel welcomed.** Finally. Except, to realize that you can't march with everyone else because of the shitty city streets and **that the organizers, well informed on one axis of oppression, ignored a ton of other kinds.** Let the cripples set the pace and do not allow hills segregate us from “normal folk”. Yay pride! Down with ableism and willful ignorance!

As described above, posters felt excluded, stigmatized, and marginalized by popular society as well as identity-based communities, specifically as it pertains to spaces and events associated with identity-based communities. Nearly a fifth of the stories collected in this study described this type of exclusion. The poster below who writes a blog about crafting while chronically ill, describes this when they write

I have been ‘left behind’ by a Pride march **overtaken by the folk carrying the 'we are the end of the march' banner and told to get on the pavement out of the road.** I have also fallen or nearly fallen out of my wheelchair on other marches because they cross a road, or go via a flight of steps which when you're marching as part of a crowd, at bum

height, you can't see until you're falling down them!

In the subsequent subsections, I will highlight examples of posters' experiences of intersectional invisibility within communities of people of color, LGBTQ+ communities, and communities of people with disabilities. It is important to make clear that communities of people of color, disabled people, and LGBTQ+ people are not always exclusionary. Rather, it is how specific community discourses and narratives are taken up that can lead to the erasure of people with intersectionally marginalized identities. Furthermore, when discourses are exclusionary, it leads to intersectional invisibility which gives rise to exclusionary practices.

Intersectional Invisibility within Communities of People of Color. Many Tumblr users of color expressed feeling stigmatized, forgotten, and left out of communities of people of color because of their complex identities. Specifically, many posters referenced exclusionary practices of Black Lives Matter (BLM) groups and events. Posters critiqued the ideologies and discourses associated with and the goals of BLM as, at times, ablest, heterosexist, and especially transphobic. Below, in an excerpt from a conversation between an ANON¹ ask and a Tumblr user, the two Tumblr users discuss and write about exclusionary practices of BLM movements.

ANON ask: It will probably always bug me that Mike Brown and Trayvon are the faces of #blacklivesmatter, and not Cece... Why doesn't she count? Is sexual violence off topic here?...**Are black trans women just too complicated for every community?** They just muddy the topic up too much? Was it because she's a woman, or didn't die? What's the fake reason? This is so mentally tiring....

Tumblr Poster response: It seems like a lot of people miss the fact that #blacklivesmatter was started by women. One of them, Alicia Garza, has even spoken about the ways in which **the movement has been changed and Black Queer women silenced as the cry and the movement were taken up by the public...** And much like the way that national media botches the facts when they report on most Black lives lost, even when these stories DO make the news they are cloaked in misgendering and transphobia....**There is even transphobia within the protests that are currently occurring. It seems like the indifference toward lost Black Trans lives is another layer of complexity** on what is already such a deeply rooted issue in our society... It'll take more than a year of a few trans women in media to transform decades of structural oppression and violence,

decades of misinformation, decades of exiling....Our lives matter. **It is important that when we take up the cry of #blacklivesmatter, we do not forget its roots.** We **MUST listen to Trans Black voices** and use our privilege in any way we can to make sure that there is space for them at the table of national discourse about Black lives.

Intersectional Invisibility within Communities of LGBTQ+ people. Disabled posters and posters of color described feeling excluded from LGBTQ+ communities. Many posters who identified as both LGBTQ+ and disabled described not being able to enter spaces or engage in political activity because the spaces where events were held were not accessible. One Tumblr user posted a gif of Wendy from Peter Pan with the words “internally screaming” in large and blinking font. They captioned the photo “me when I find out yet another lgbtq+ space isn’t wheelchair friendly”. The inaccessibility of LGBTQ+ spaces does not just exclude people with physical disabilities from getting into the building; it also is inaccessible to people with a variety of disabilities.

... reminder that while smoke and a plethora of glitter/sparkles (from cigarettes, e-cigs, cooking, etc.) may be fun for you, they aren’t fun for everyone. I have been to multiple LGBTQ events where **I’ve had to seclude myself because I literally couldn’t breathe without getting overwhelmed.** And I’m honestly thankful that I haven’t been to any outdoor LGBTQ events since my eyes started getting more sensitive cause that would be hell.

Such exclusion is not a problem described by just disabled posters, below, Aranae, who self-identifies as a “disabled, queer, fat, Jewish non-binary femme” describes the racism, transphobia, and ableism implied by “corporate gay” communities and rhetoric. They explain that LGBTQ+ communities have a long history of erasing people with intersectionally marginalized identities. This erasure, therefore, leads to multiply marginalized members experiencing intersectional invisibility and further marginalization.

...the LGBT community has history of erasing QPOC, disabled queers, bisexuals, pansexuals, trans folks especially those who do not pass/do not want ‘the surgery’/are not ‘the right kind of trans’, non-binary or genderqueer folks, mentally ill queers, fat queers, ace/aro folks, etc. The usual Image of the queer community is a

White, Affluent, Thin, Cis, Lesbian or Gay individual or couple. Even on magazines specifically marketed to us, the covers are overwhelmingly decorated cut¹ white dudes ...It's been a problem since I was a tiny queer, and it's still a problem now. We have an image issue, **which then permeates the community, and pushes marginalized queer folks further to the edges, or out of the community altogether**...racism, cissexism, ableism, biphobia, acephobia, and the misguided mentality of the Purity of the Movement or the Queer Litmus Test, and respectability politics, among others - **has a tendency to cause us to fight each other over scraps rather than lift each other up.**

This poster goes on to describe that many life or death issues (issues such as youth homelessness, prevalence of STDs, murder of trans women), often faced by [a] “less privileged segment of the community are often downplayed or dismissed in order to focus on marriage equality.” They describe the whitewashing and ciswashing of Stonewall and explain that that is not what these communities should be doing. They believe they should support all people and “not just the segment which is most palatable to small-town America. It's an old problem, and it's not over.”

Posters recognize that such exclusions can have severe real life implications.

Pride events were especially criticized for being both physically and ideologically exclusionary. Bek, a poster who identifies as mentally ill, exclaimed “can we take a sec to remember that pride months isn't a whole month for cis white gays? **it's for neurodivergent, religious, poc, and disabled queer people too.**” In a plea to pride goers and in support of disabled LGBTQ+ people, Bobbie, a Tumblr user who uses gender neutral pronouns and identifies as disabled, wrote “Sometimes pride feels like the time of year when enabled queer community gathers & reminds disabled people that we do not belong & we do not matter.”

Stigmatization within Communities of Disabled People. Although the majority of posts describing this type of exclusion, marginalization, and stigmatization focus on communities of color and LGBTQ+ communities, it is not avoided within disability communities. Multiple posters described disability spaces as anti-black, anti-people of color, and anti-LGBTQ+. In an excerpt from a conversation, a disabled, bisexual, black person (self-

identified) responds to language they describe as anti-black used by a poster who identifies themselves as white and disabled.

The poster below points out that “the disability community” and “the Bi community” often silence and marginalize people of color and exhibit a lack of awareness of racism. They write

I’m disabled myself, I have PTSD too, and a few more mental disabilities, **but my personal comfort shouldn’t be prioritized over matters of people being oppressed and silenced from spaces.** Of course you feel more comfortable with that language, as it considers your entire humanity as a nonblack disabled person. I would never and can never claim my disabled status as a justified reason to embrace pseudo-theory that marginalizes black people’s reality like a nonblack person can. **I’m not even gonna start on the disabled community. There’s less of a large conscious of (antiblack) racism in mainstream disabled activism in the west than there is in the bi community.**

This lack of visibility led to the exclusion of posters from identity specific groups and communities as these spaces and communities were often inaccessible and unsafe. It is clear by the quotations above that the poster felt that identity communities did not and could not accommodate members that held complex intersectional identities like these posters because they did not recognize their intersectionally marginalized experiences.

Exclusionary “Safe Spaces” are Not Safe

Identity-based communities often function as safe spaces. For example, in LGBTQ+ communities, people will seek out chosen queer families as many of them have experienced rejection from their biological families (Cantu 2001; Oswald 2002; Stacey & Davenport 2002; Weston 2005). Similarly, LGBTQ+ bars and clubs are frequently referred to as “safe spaces” where LGBTQ+ identifying people can feel comfortable to be themselves and will not experience stigmatization (Eves 2004; Hanhardt 2013; Lugosi 2009; Myslik 1996; Rushbrook 2002; Skeggs 1999). Often, identity-based community spaces and events are advertised as ‘safe spaces’ for identity-based communities. For instance, if you peruse the websites of any LGBT

youth community centers or college campuses pride organizations, you are likely to see statements and images display the words “safe” and/or “inclusive” space.

Many posters who identify with multiple and intersecting identities explain that, because stigmatization and discrimination is prevalent within identity-based communities, they rarely get to experience these communities as safe spaces. This is evident in the quotation below when Chance, a poster who identifies as non-binary and as living in a very rural place, publicly inquires about the lack of safe queer spaces for people who, due to their complex identities, cannot access gay bars/clubs and pride events.

where r my soft queer spaces. where r my lgbt+ cafes and bookstores and parks, where r my underage & ace/aro & mentally ill/disabled accessible safe spaces. the only spaces that are really “for us” are gay bars/clubs and pride parades, the former being 21+ and uncomfy for lgbt+ addicts, and the latter, while in theory an all-ages event, being frequently very sexualized. **Both spaces are also likely to be super overstimulating for asd and/or anxious lgbt+ ppl as well as inaccessible for physically disabled lgbt+ ppl.** i just wanna chill w other ppl who know how tough it is. **i just wanna have a cup of tea or whatever and talk about how trans i am. where r my gently & lowkey safe spaces**

This poster describes the lack of safe spaces for people with complex intersectional identities and expresses a desire to access these nonexistent open safe spaces. Below is an excerpt from a post in which a Tumblr user writes about their experiences as a black queer disabled person.

Throughout a 3-page narrative, they describe the importance of Pride and other supposed safe community spaces and events, they express never feeling safe in any of their community groups, and thus never truly being able to relax, and they write about how they are singled out and often deemed as dangerous because of their blackness. They then describe finding a safe space amongst a small group of disabled LGBTQ+ people: A rare moment that led to them being able to let their guard down, to feel safe, and to celebrate. Furthermore, because this Pride occurred in LA in June 2016 the day after the mass murder of 49 (mostly) Queer Latinx people at Pulse nightclub in Orlando, the Pride activities were heavily policed. Rather than being the subject of

scrutiny from law enforcement, this poster felt, for the first time, that the police were there for their protection. A self-identified queer disabled black poster who goes by the blog name Always Waiting writes

Unless I am singing in a pew, **I am never not aware of my blackness**. I think about race constantly and assume that others do as well. After all, race and gender are the first two things people notice upon meeting a stranger. I am often the primary contributor of melanin to the spaces I occupy. For this reason, **I have repeatedly been singled out by law enforcement to be harassed and threatened in various modes**. Because of my many negative experiences with police, their presence always makes me feel uneasy and fearful... I must also note that because of nerve damage, I am unable to stand for more than a few minutes at a time without getting very lightheaded and possibly passing out.... I did not experience the parade in the company of the friends I came with. Instead, I experienced it waist-high, sitting on a red curb, sometimes with wheel-chair bound parade goers and service dogs. We had our own little disabled section. **People don't look down when you're below them and that provided me a sort of invisibility. There was my own zone and a safeness as my body was not defined by a powerful stance and was thus deweaponized**. I was afforded the chance to retreat into my own thoughts, to marvel at the parade and reflect on the grandness of it all. **That day, in that moment, I was able to occupy my many identities safely**, but not only that. **I was able to celebrate and given reason to celebrate my many identities as well. For this day, I will always be grateful.**

Below, another Tumblr user, who posts under the blog name Queer Anarchy, writes how many of these “safe spaces” are exclusionary and, as such, they are not in actuality safe. They talk about the types of problems that arise from exclusionary safe spaces.

Exclusionary safe spaces can also create pressure within them to conform to some set of expectations for your identity. In that way, they set up a hierarchy based on who is most vs. least able to conform. Absolutely true. They also create **an illusion of safety**. A ‘this group of people won't harm you’ vs ‘this group will’ which simply isn't true. Which doesn't mean you can never practice exclusion in safe spaces. Good examples are organising a trans-only sauna where people can get naked without cis people staring, or doing healing work with an invitation-only group of people that know and trust each other. But as a tool to create safer communities, I think exclusion tends **to do more harm than good**, especially when it is seen as the only tool needed and especially **when it is accompanied by a vigilant effort to figure out who is queer enough / woman enough / disabled enough etc to fit in the space**.

“I'm Tired of Fighting”

Experiences of intersectional invisibility often contributed to posters' feelings of

immense exhaustion and burnout in this population of Tumblr users. Many of the posters explained that because they are marginalized within identity communities they are thus denied access to the comfort of safe spaces. Therefore, posters must constantly advocate for themselves and they rarely get a break from experiences of marginalization. It makes sense, then, that posters consequently express experiences of high levels of emotional and physical exhaustion. They are tired of constantly having to fight to be included, to receive accommodations, and to be understood and respected as equal to other members of their identity groups. It is clear by the posts above that exclusion from and stigmatization by communities that should be safe spaces can be particularly damaging for two reasons because (1) the posters feel excluded and stigmatized and (2) because they never have a chance to rest, relax, and feel comforted. The exhaustion posters expressed is similar to what scholars have described as burnout. This exhaustion, combined with the enervation commonly experienced by marginalized people and the typical physical/emotional fatigue that accompanies navigating an able-bodied world as a disabled person, results in many of the posters feeling extremely overwhelmed and, at times, despondent. Below is an excerpt from Dex, who posted a list about the things they write on their Tumblr, in which they point out the exclusionary practices of LGBTQ+ communities as well as how different their experiences are from others. At the end of the list they explain that there is so much more but that they are too tired to continue to address them.

things i want to/have been meaning to post about...
the relationships between my identity as an intersex person, a trans person, gender in general, and labeling sexual orientation. (because recently i've come to find that the thought of calling myself a non-binary intersex lesbian fits more than almost anything else)...what it's like to grow up while hormonally intersex and how different that experience is than pretty much any other...**being queer and disabled how fucked up all of the exclusion-type arguments are** in the lgbt+ community and how much i Loathe basically all of that Discourse™ and Why i loathe it so much there's probably more **but i'm. very tired.**

This poster relates the constant experiences of marginalization to their feelings of exhaustion. Many posters told similar stories in which they expressed that their experiences with intersectional invisibility and exclusion, coupled with infrequent moments of relaxation within safe spaces, becomes a day-to-day struggle with exhaustion. Below is an example of how difficult it can be to deal with the exhaustion stemming from constantly needing to advocate for oneself while rarely experiencing the comfort of safe spaces. Below, a poster who writes a blog about mental health writes about losing access to the only safe space they have known when their counselor went on medical leave.

fuck like I guess the clinic I went to forget to mention the woman I was supposed to be seeing for counseling is on medical leave and so like....the only ones available are Monday-Wednesday and I am in school....The woman was v condescending and was like “focus on the positive!!!” and like I thought I was finally gonna get help and no like fuckand the other two places available for counselling are short term and one’s a sliding scale and like I need something full term? I am autistic ffs. like what I need is a long term therapist good in PTSD and trauma but also like.....good with disabled queer people????????? **so fuck it. I can’t get help. I am tired of fighting... it’s clearly a sign so I am just gonnna go down the road of fucking self-destruction I guess.**

Narratives about feeling exhausted were so prevalent that many posters took up “tired” or “Exhausted” as identities and it was common to see posts like this one by a poster who identifies as queer, disabled and black, “Queer, disabled and tired. I’m a triple threat.”

Re-conceptualizing Existence as Resistance

The popular notion of what it means to engage in acts of resistance (traditional tactics) are not always available to the posters represented in this study and, as such, posters have reconceptualized resistance, refiguring traditional resistance activities in an accessible way. In so doing, they are mitigating experiences of intersectional invisibility and burnout. These traditional conceptions of resistance (that many posters have described attempting to engage in) are often ableist and social movement actors utilizing traditional methods of resistance can be heterosexist

and racist. If this ableism, heterosexism, and racism are not overtly deployed they are certainly subtly reinforced through practices of exclusion based on intersectional invisibility. Posters thus recognize, that because of the overwhelming and unique pressures they are under, sometimes resistance comes in the form of just surviving and continuing to exist. They acknowledge that their continued survival and existence is a form of powerful resistance. Additionally, posters recognize that part of the power of existence as resistance is in surviving visibility therefore posters turn to online sites to engage in activist work by broadcasting their survival through social media and thus posters are attempting to counteract experiences of intersectional invisibility. They turn to online activism because, for many of them, it is one of the few accessible spaces for engagement in activist work.

Furthermore, these posters believe that the goal of much of the marginalization they experience (especially that coming from the current presidential administration) is to eradicate the world of LGBTQ+, Disabled, People of color and thus killing them. Indeed, posters point to the murder of black and trans people, attempts to over turn Affordable Health Care Act and components of the American with Disability Acts, and enactment of bathroom laws as examples of an agenda of the eradication of disabled, LGBTQ+ and people of color. Therefore, it makes sense that they take up survival as their resistance tactic. They have come to understand their existence as resistance. As Jax posts, “Shout out to the crips, shout out to the spoonies, the mentally ill folks. Every breath you take is a protest. We’re here, we’re empowered, this world will not silence us; no matter how hard it tries! Your existence IS resistance”. This is further elucidated by an Australian Tumblr user who posted a reaction to the shock that they and many people in their Tumblrverse were experiencing, post-election. They call on marginalized Americans to “stay safe” and to “survive”

“So What Do We Do Now?”

pulls your face real close to mine Listen. To. Me. You fucking fight I’m not american, I can’t imagine how terrified those who are LGBT+, POC, Disabled, Female, Islamic, and any other minority of the US must feel right now, despite how scared I am myself. But you wake up tomorrow and you fight. **You show that fucking orange dickbag that you will not go quietly. You will survive. You are smart, brave and important to your country no matter what anyone tries to tell you.** You fight to keep yourself safe, you fight to make your voice heard, you fight for your future, you fight for those around you. **This is not the end, this is the beginning of a long road ahead but I believe in you. Stay safe, look out for yourself, stay informed, and survive just to spite them.** I love you all. Let me know what more I can do.

This was not the only post that expressed survival as a way to resist and spite those that wanted them dead. Below, another poster sends a message of support to their Tumblr community urging them to fight to survive. This quotation makes it clear that the posters are not using the term survival as a metaphor or hyperbole but, instead, they are explaining that they are resisting by literally not dying.

Do It Out of Motherfucking Spite. No. This is not the end. Do you guys hear me? THIS IS NOT THE END. Even if Trump wins House, Senate, and Presidency. THIS IS NOT THE END. I promise you that. Even if you have to leave the US or fight tooth and nail just to keep breathing. Keep going. Please. Even if it feels like the end, please promise to keep going. It will get better, I promise, just hang on. Until his term is up/you can wreck the house in the midterms/he’s impeached or he dies or whatever happens. **Hang on. I have faith in your ability to survive.** Women, PoC, LGBT+, the disabled, the poor, etc. have all survived marginalization before, though never on such a disappointing scale. I’m sorry your country failed you because this never should have happened. But please, for the love of everything, just hang on until it gets better. And if you can’t believe that it will? **Then do it out of motherfucking SPITE. Do not give them the satisfaction of giving in to despair. Don’t give them the satisfaction of dying.**

Accessible Resistance and Virtual Space. Internet and virtual spaces, such as Tumblr, become an important place for this type of resistance. Posters have come to Tumblr to seek out the safe space they are lacking IRL and to engage in a more accessible form of resistance activity. Posters with complex intersectional marginalized identities do not find safe space within dominant or identity based communities IRL as such these particular posters have turned to online spaces, specifically Tumblr, to engage in community building and activism. Posters

recognize that Tumblr should be a safe space for people who are marginalized and hold complex identities because they do not experience safe spaces elsewhere¹. As one poster wrote “ No shit POC/queer/trans/disabled/etc people are treated as more superior on this little nook of the internet **because once they log off they are treated like trash and murdered...**” Another poster, who identifies as gay, white, and male and who writes a blog a bout being a child abuse survivor with chronic and mental illness, reiterates the notion that virtual spaces are imperative for the well-being of intersectionally marginalized people (specifically adolescents) when they wrote “For a lot of LGBT+, disabled, or mentally ill adolescents, the only affirmation they get is online. I don’t know how much more simply that can be put.”

Moreover, many posters reached out through the Tumblrverse to offer each other comments of support and intentions to engage in resistance activity. Posters recognized that although they may not be in physical proximity with one another they are still able to engage in resistance as a group, virtually. As Hayley wrote:

In 2009, when Barack Obama was inaugurated, I watched it on TV and I cried.
In 2017, when Donald Trump is inaugurated, I will watch it on TV and I know I will cry.
I’m not with you; but I am with you guys. I will support you in any way I can in the next 4 years: whether that’s more donations to charities to help minorities; campaigning via social media; or just here to send you hugs and give you space to rant. I am here 100%.

Many posters expressed resisting through uniting, often describing that they all must stand/sit/and lie together and that this can be done using social media spaces like Tumblr; it was common to see posts like this one (written in all capital letters) “TOMORROW IS A NEW DAY. WE WILL RISE AGAIN IN LIGHT AND POWER AND SOLIDARITY AND SHOW THE WORLD JUST HOW UNSTOPPABLE WE ARE”.

Visible Survival. These posters are reconceptualizing what resistance means by taking up surviving as a form a resistance and then broadcasting their survival over social media in

ways that make their community more visible. Many posters describe that one of the reasons existence is resistance is that when they survive while openly and proudly occupying their stigmatized identities they are contributing to the betterment of not just their own lives but the lives of others similar to them. In this way visibly surviving is a resistance strategy that contests intersectional invisibility. In the quotation below, Kameron, a self-identified queer, disabled sexual assault survivor, explains that they continue to survive and exist for themselves, people who identify similarly and for the people that they love. They stress the importance of visibly surviving

I don't exist to make other people comfortable. I exist to better my life, and the lives of those I love. This includes the disability community. The identities which matter most to me are largely invisible, which affords me a great deal of privilege. As a queer, disabled survivor of sexual assault + partner violence, I have the option of keeping these key parts of me hidden beneath a white blonde femme exterior. This option is not available to most people. It is important that I openly represent my invisible identities, for as long as I am safely able to do so. **This is not about identity. It is about representation and pushing forward for a better quality of life for my communities.**

The notion of visibly surviving was prevalent throughout all three years of the data collection. However, similarly to posts about marginalization and posts pertaining to their exhaustion, users expressed these ideas more frequently around political and social events that posters found to be particularly tumultuous. Below, Jax, a poster who self-identified as a disabled, queer, Latinx, femme, trans, Boi describes the importance of not only surviving but also showing the world that one is surviving in a very visible way while simultaneously expressing narratives of self pride¹ (specifically as it pertains to complex intersecting and stigmatized identities). He writes

Happy Trans Day of Visibility!!! I'm Jax, out here trying to represent other disabled queer/trans Chicanxs/Latinxs since we hardly get any representation. Being Mexican and queer has been hard. There's not many places where I'm from to completely live in my truth without judgement. There's so many layers to my intersecting identities. Most days it's hard as hell. **Living in a world where no one wants you to live. Ableism kills, so does queer/transphobia.** Some days I'm like "why am I even trying?" Honestly, if it

wasn't for my support system, I don't think I would be here. **Non Binary erasure and Binarism is rampant as hell in the Trans Community...**Not all of us want hormones or surgeries, and that's valid as hell. We still deserve respect and dignity! Be gentle with yourselves, friends. Know that you are valuable and worthy of happiness, stability and love. **Don't let this world erase you. Love yourselves fiercely and fully, even on days where you don't think you can. This world is fucking tough. But we have each other. We have community - even if it's just online. That shit is real, and meaningful.**

Here, Jax points to the importance of virtual space to both building community and visible surviving when he states that online community is real and meaningful. Many posters similarly linked survival, resistance, and online space; such a reconceptualization of resistance rejects notions that "armchair activism" is not important or meaningful. Moreover, this quotation points to the importance of self-care as a factor in one's ability to survive and thus can be deployed as a resistance strategy.

Self and Community Care as a Strategy for Visible Survival

As mentioned above, posters come online to build community as they rarely experience the support of such communities IRL so they use Tumblr as a platform to experience safe space and engage in resistance through visible survival. In order to survive (and escape burnout) posters engage in self-care and community care by sharing knowledge and resources such as engaging in radical giving and by making and sharing art. Furthermore, such a reconceptualization of resistance contributes to the ability of posters to counteract experiences of burnout. Unlike the activists in the studies referenced in the literature review, these posters recognize the importance of self- and community- care. In linking resistance to survival, self-care is no longer selfish but is a way to engage in activist work. Moreover, because they are publically engaging in these survival strategies they are contributing to the visibility of their survival and communities and are thus continuing to resist. Stated simply, posters reconceptualize their own existence as resistance as by engaging in three strategic acts 1) building

community online, 2) counteracting burnout, and 3) surviving visibly.

Tumblr users promote self and community care through statements of encouragement and exclamations of love of community and self. Statements of love and encouragement are common posts such as this post by one Tumblr user: “Neurodivergent Queer People Deserve Love.”

Similarly, it was common to see posts such as this one “hey round of applause for mentally ill & disabled lgbt ppl in this rough time”. Many of the posts referenced people who identify with complex intersecting identities like the one above. Frequently, posts referenced the current political climate (as seen above). Posts like these foster community and may contribute to the community’s survival. Some users posted words of encouragement and love in order to hype up and draw community support in the form of re-blogging as evident by the next quotation from Jay, a self-identified queer disabled “brown round boi.”

Re-blog if you love and adore chubby round queer and disabled bodies, bodies of all shapes and sizes, black disabled trans bodies, brown gender non-conforming bodies, bodies that flop and shake, bodies that waddle and wobble, bodies that haven’t medically transitioned, choose not to take hormones, bodies on hormones, bodies that house multiple languages and moved many borders, bodies that fly and flail. Re-blog if you here for people with all kinds of bodies that upturn hetero cis straight white skinny fit able-bodied boredom.

Other posters would take on a family role in order to foster community through statements of love. A user who often writes posts of encouragement refers to herself as Tumblr Mom, often addressing users as their children. For example, below is how this user addresses a post speaking to LGBT+, disabled and Tumblr users of color. Throughout the duration of her post, she continues to address living with these identities and encourages visible survival when she writes

It is tough. But, and this is even more important, so are you. All parts of you are valid and deserve to be respected. And you deserve to feel proud of yourself! I hope that you have wonderful people around you who let you know how precious you are. But if anyone makes you feel any less than proud and confident in being lgbt+ and, believe me that i believe in you and support you and love you - and so do plenty of others all over the world who are lgbt+, too.

You are not alone.
With all my love,
Your Tumblr Mom

Some of the posts address survival, specifically. It was not uncommon to see posters shouting out to a group of people and reinforcing the idea that survival alone is powerful and that they are powerful and amazing for simply surviving. This is evident in the following quotation: “chronically ill queer people are... you guessed it... fantastic and amazing! and **i’m so proud of us for surviving even when our symptoms are unbearable.**”

Posters often expressed statements of self-acceptance and self pride, such as this caption attached to a selfie of a queer and disabled identifying woman named Jamie: “LOOK HOW CUTE I AM”. These posts of self-love and acceptance often referenced their identities. These statements could be as simple as an affirmation of self or stating their pride in an accomplishment such as the case in the following post “today your local queer disabled kid conquered pride!” In an effort to promote visibility, posts of self-love were often accompanied with photos of posters and others. For example, the next quotation is a caption on a photo of a queer identifying person and their partner “I actually felt good about myself and my cane recently so here is me and my partner”.

This type of self-care also contributes to community survival by promoting visibility and representation. When referencing their multiple identities and pride in those identities, posters often linked personal pride to the betterment of their Tumblr community. In other words, they see personal pride as political strategy. For example, this next quotation is a caption of a photograph of a couple. The Tumblr user posted it on Blackout day, a day where black people post pictures of themselves on Tumblr to increase representation and visibility of the black Tumblr community. “Happy Blackout!!! Proud to be Black Queer and Disabled!! They/Them

only for me He/They for my partner”. Posters understand self-acceptance as an important component of self and community survival. For example, in this next post a user, who self identifies as a disabled, queer, femme, and non-binary trans boy, wishes the Tumblr community a happy “Trans day of visibility” which, similar to the blackout day describe above, is a day that Tumblr users from the trans community post pictures of themselves and narratives about being trans to increase trans representation. It is evident from this quotation that posters believe that the marginalization people experience when they identify with complex intersectional identities causes exhaustion and makes it difficult to survive as this marginalization “can kill”. In this post, Jax describes the importance of representation and of caring for yourself in order to survive. Jax writes

Know that you are beautiful with your mental illness(es), with your disabilities, with your queer/transness. not despite it/them. Celebrate all the small victories in your life. **Practice self care, acknowledge that you are more than your productivity. When you’re feeling shitty or dysphoria hits, be sure to take care of yourself.** Wrap yourself in a blanket, watch something on TV, play video games, eat something you love. Nurse yourself like an athlete would nurse a sprained ankle.

In this quotation, Jax is making a direct link between self-care and survival. It is evident by the above and many other posts that these Tumblr users are committed to this visible survival through self-care and community-care as an act of resistance. They actively contest racism, heterosexism, and ableism through these narratives of self-care. Another poster captions a photo of themselves “Your dash was lacking Queer, Fat Disabled people, Happy Blackout!” In doing so, they are calling out the lack of representation of queer, fat, and disabled people on Tumblr in general but also during the blackout campaign.

Kyle, a poster who identifies as trans masculine and deaf, contests ableism when they write about making the decision to communicate in only American Sign Language (ASL). They intend to make their identities more visible through the use of ASL and to force others to accept

the way they want to communicate by refusing to do so any other way. They write that they want to stop trying to be someone they are not in this statement of self-acceptance. Furthermore, they attempt to garner community support through re-blogs as they link this entire decision to resisting the Trump administration.

Reblog if you think I should strictly stick to American Sign Language for the next four years. I still (try to) communicate orally most of the time and it is the f*cking worst. Nobody believes you when you say you're Deaf (and then they forget ten seconds later.) Nobody respects your choice to communicate the way YOU want to (what's wrong with pen and paper?) Everybody gets annoyed when I can't hear them (because they again, forget I'm Deaf.) Everybody assumes I can read lips (and that it works like magic 100% of the time). I'm complimented on my voice, I'm pitied, I'm prayed for (by family and strangers), and I've even visibly frightened and intimidated people with my inability to hear...on a DAILY BASIS. I see no better way to stick it to Trump and the rest of the world than to be proud of who I am as a Deaf queer agender individual. And to stop trying to be someone I'm not.

In this next quotation, Jax once again describes his visible survival as resistance. Through a narrative of self-love and self-care he contests the racism, heterosexism, and ableism of general society as well as the body positivity movement. He attaches five photos of himself posing in a vogue-like manner while wearing bright colorful make up and a grey crop top.

Believe me when I say, y'all aren't ready! **I'm feeling so fucking beautiful in my brown skin. Can't no one tell me disabled bodies aren't beautiful!....** I love my fat, I love my rolls, I love my body hair, I love how my stretch marks look like rivers and lakes on a map. I love how my sides dip in and out like mountains and valleys. I love my Mexican forehead and nose, my chubby cheeks and my thick lips. I'm not here for unwanted ableist, fatphobic opinions about my body. I'm in love with every inch of my skin, even when I'm not feeling it. **It's taken me more than a decade to be able to say that I love myself so deeply and fiercely! I won't apologize for my body. I spent way too long doing that shit. I spent too long feeling ashamed.**

Jax goes on to say he's not here to "pass" and explain that he will take up the space he is entitled to. By doing so he is exclaiming and claiming the visibility of his identities as a non-binary, disabled, person of color. Throughout this quotation he is directly calling out a systems of oppression and contesting them through a self-love narrative.

Fuck the “body positive movement” that completely leaves people with disabilities out and erases us and continues to deem visibly disabled bodies unworthy. The whole “eff your beauty standards” bullshit only upholds cis, hetero-normative, white supremacist views of what is and isn’t “appealing”. Fuck your whiteness tbh. I don’t want it! **I’m tired of being erased and silenced and part of my self care is taking up the space that I’m entitled to! I’m glad if my existence makes you uncomfortable bc I’m not here to assimilate, I’m not here to “pass” or meet your toxic ass Eurocentric beauty standards. Every day I’m alive, every breath I take is a protest. MY EXISTENCE IS RESISTANCE!**

Discussion and Conclusion

By constructing existence as resistance, posters are engaging in crip resistance. Crip resistance is the work done by activists that utilizes crip approaches in contesting ableism (for a review on Crip theory see Egner 2017). I understand crip resistance to be resistance with the following characteristics: (1) Crip resistance is deployed with an understanding that identities are fluid, complex, and experienced intersectionally. (2) Crip resistance activities will often focus attention on experiences of sexuality to understand disability (and vice versa). (3) Crip resistance attempts to subvert ableism and ableist discourses. (4) As well as uncover the ways in which and reject discourses used in media governments, law, education institutions, and other organizations that subtly and overtly reinforce normative expectations of the body and identity. (5) Crip resistance is in part a rejection of notions that disabled people must seek cure while providing alternative narratives while (6) deconstructing normative expectations through subversive tactics.

The posters described in this study engage in resistance that meets the criteria I associate with crip resistance in a number of ways. Posters identified with a multitude of complex, intersecting, and marginalized identities, many self-identified as queer, disabled people of color. Many posters do not fit the perceived prototypical member of their constituent identity groups and therefore they experience marginalization and exclusion within these identity-based groups in the form of intersectional invisibility. The data from this study infers that identity

communities did not, could not, and didn't know how to accommodate members that held complex intersectional identities. The intersectional invisibility of multiply marginalized identities can lead to a lack of safe space for people with intersectionally marginalized identities. Posters were unable to relax in safe spaces, which resulted in experiences of emotional and physical burnout. By rejecting practices that relegate posters to experience intersectional invisibility, posters understand identities as fluid, complex and intersectional and are thus are engaging in crip resistance.

The burnout posters experience, combined with the exhaustion that is commonly experienced by marginalized people and the typical physical/emotional fatigue that accompanies navigating an able-bodied world as a disabled person, results in many of the posters feeling extremely overwhelmed. The desire to resist marginalization and discrimination as described by posters and the exhaustion that comes from engaging in resistance has been amplified by the current political climate of nationalism in both the U.S. and the UK. Many of the Tumblr users who wrote posts pertaining to the elections expressed experiences of fear that were intense and profound as they were worried that others or themselves could die as a result of actions and institutionalized bigotry triggered by the outcome of the election. Posters were terrified that a Trump win would result in the loss of civil rights and important and needed institutional support (such as healthcare) and that this loss could result in the deaths of marginalized individuals. It is possible that such fear heightened experiences of burnout.

To combat burnout while engaging in activism posters have reconceptualized traditional notions of resistance to better participate. The popular notion of what it means to engage in acts of resistance (traditional tactics) are not always available to the posters represented in this study and, as such, posters have reconceptualize notions of resistance reconstructing resistance

activities in accessible ways. Indeed, scholars have frequently linked lower participation in social movement and resistance activity to large time and financial commitments. These time and financial commitments may be prohibiting activists who are multiply marginalized from engaging in traditional forms of resistance.

Furthermore, the data from this project suggests that traditional conceptions of resistance (that many posters have described attempting to engage in) are ableist. If this ableism, heterosexism, and racism are not overtly deployed within identity based communities and social movement groups they are certainly subtly reinforced through practices of exclusion based on intersectional invisibility. Posters thus recognize that, because of the overwhelming and unique pressures they are under, sometimes resistance comes in the form of just surviving and continuing to exist. By rejecting institutional discourses that reinforce normative expectations of identity and by rejecting traditional conceptions of resistance that are ablest while constructing their own definition of resistance, posters are participating in Crip resistance.

Additionally, posters point to the murder of black and trans people, attempts to over turn Affordable health care act and components of the American with Disability Acts, and enactment of bathroom laws, as examples of an agenda of eradication of disabled, LGBTQ+ and people of color. Posters believe that people want them dead. Therefore, it makes sense that they take up survival as their resistance tactic. They have come to understand their existence as resistance. The Tumblr users represented here describe engaging in resistance by continuing to survive in a world that desires to eradicate their existence. Moreover, histories of violence informed by ideologies and practices of eugenics give further reason to these posters to conceptualize existence as resistance. Eugenics has stigmatized and been used to deny rights (specifically rights to education, reproduction, and even life) to LGBTQ+ people, disabled people, and people of

color in different but similar ways. Specifically, disabled people have been framed as “obstacles to the arc of progress” (Kafer 2013: 28) Moreover, non-normative sexualities and genders and nonwhite races and ethnicities have been framed in terms of disability, illness, and disease, therefore relegating nonwhite and LGBTQ+ people to inferior social positions by linking such identities to disability. Practices of eugenics and medicalization have thus constructed who is a good and valuable person and who is abject. As such it makes sense that LGBTQ+, disabled, posters of color have conceptualized their survival as a form of resistance. In rejecting the ideologies of eugenics, posters are providing alternative narratives to cure.

The power of the narrative of existences as resistance is in surviving visibility. By broadcasting their survival through social media posters are counteracting experiences of intersectional invisibility as well as contesting histories and ideologies of eugenics via a the subversive tactic of high visibility. Like the chanting of Act Up activists shouting “we’re here we’re queer!” posters deploy strong language and an in your face feeling in many of their posts and thus these posts resemble prominent subversive street tactics. Additionally, posters employ a variety of survival tactics in order to accomplish their goals of existing while resisting. These posters are actively working on individual and community survival through strategies of community- and self - care. Posters take to social media to engage in care such as sharing resources, making and sharing art, and expressing self and community love. By reconceptualizing resistance to include both virtual activities and individual and community survival, posters are able to engage in accessible resistance in which self-care is no longer conceptualized as selfish but is rather an important survival strategy.

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CHAPTER SEVEN: DISCUSSION

The ways in which disability and queer sexualities and genders have been pathologized and medicalized have quite similar historical trajectories. Indeed, there is a long history of medicalizing disability and just as long of a history of pathologizing and describing queer identities and practices as disability, illness, and disease (as I have outlined in the introduction and chapter two). Yet disability and sexuality are often understood as incongruous. Disabled people are consistently degendered and desexualized in both popular media and in their own lives by the able-bodieminded public.

In this dissertation, I sought to examine the experiences of queer disabled people; experiences that are often silenced. By breaking with the norm of the unmarked heterocisgender experience, the existence of queer disabled people forces the popular imagination to consider the sexualities and genders of disabled people. In other words, in highlighting the experiences of queer disabled people we are able to make more visible the experiences of gender and sexuality of all disabled people.

I had four objectives with this dissertation: First, I aimed to understand how queer disabled people construct and negotiate these often socially contradicting identities for themselves and their communities. Second, I attempted to shine a light on the experiences of queer disabled people to also better facilitate understanding of disability and sexuality for all people. Third, I aimed to explore the possibility of virtual spaces as an accessible place for community building and identity construction. And fourth, I sought to reduce the stigmatization

of both disabled people and queer people (but specifically queer disabled people) by providing a place for queer disabled narratives and a contribution to positive representation.

Narrative and Discourse

As a crip theorist, it was apparent that in order to meet the above objectives it would be beneficial to this project to examine discourses associated with experiences of queer disability. As outlined in chapter two, crip theorists are concerned with how language and imagery can greatly affect individuals' lives and experiences. Crip theorists attempt to uncover the ways in which discourses reinforce normative expectations. Building on Foucauldian tradition, crip theorists understand that power is located within discourse. Crip theorists are thus concerned with how disabled bodyminds "are represented in media, how they are pictured and portrayed, how they are spoken about, and how they are viewed and looked upon by" the able-bodied minded public as well as how disabled people are expected to and do represent and talk about themselves. As such, I decided to focus on discourses on virtual sites by examining narratives. There are many approaches to analyzing discourse—narrative analysis is one such way. As a sociologist interested in how identity and community is constructed via storytelling online, it made sense to employ narrative analysis within this project.

There are few culturally recognizable narratives of disabled people as sexual. Yet today, we are not lacking narratives about disability and there is certainly much disability representation (albeit in quite negative forms) in popular media. Indeed, 2017 was coined the "year of autism inspired TV" (Hickman 2017; Hickman & Craig 2018). However, disability and sexuality are so antithetical that storytellers (especially those in popular media) have employed many strategies to mitigate the sexuality of disabled characters. One need look no further than their own Netflix queue to see examples of this. There are hundreds of TV shows and movies depicting disabled

characters, yet they are frequently presented as one note and almost always fall victim to dehumanizing stereotypes and tropes. For example, consistent with supercrip stereotypes, disabled characters are often deemed unlovable and ugly until they have been rehabilitated, overcoming their impairments and are then worthy of love and romance. Similarly, disabled characters are consistently killed off before they can engage in intimate relationships, holding true to the ‘better off dead’ stereotype as evident by recent block busters like “Me Before You” in which a young man who has been paralyzed refuses to burden his love interest with his disabled body and chooses euthanasia. Disabled characters are also frequently presented as the punch-line in romantic comedies as evident by *Atypical*, a Netflix original TV show in which the main character with Asperger’s tries to enter the dating world and hilarity ensues. Or they are simply written as asexual and/or agender.

Narratives (especially those present in media representation) are extremely important because they help construct how we understand the world. As such, the lack of positive narratives about disability and sexuality render disabled people’s experiences of gender and sexuality invisible and inaccessible. Furthermore, if disabled people are constantly understood as agender, and thus asexual, any marker that highlights sexuality or gender can be contested and removed. In other words, the rejection of disabled people as gendered and/or sexual has contributed to real world practices of policing disabled peoples’ bodies. As evident by practices of forced sterilization, marriage laws, and pillow angels.

This becomes increasingly apparent when we reflect on queer sexualities and genders. Disability and sexuality become even more contentious in the popular imagination when considering queer sexualities (McRuer 2006). If there are limited circulating narratives of disabled people as sexual, certainly there are less pertaining to disability and queer sexualities.

LGBTQ+ and disability identities are often deemed socially contradicting. Indeed, queer disabled people have had their experiences silenced through processes of medicalization and the construction of narratives of disabled people as only asexual and agender. Queer disabled people (especially neurodivergent and those with intellectual disabilities) often have their non-normative gender and sexualities reduced to symptoms of their disabilities.

It is this lack of positive disability representation and the lack of narratives about disability and sexuality that led me to my exploration of the four objectives of this project.

Objective One: Understand how queer disabled people construct and negotiate these often socially contradicting identities for themselves and their communities. Objective One functioned as my overall guiding research question and led to the construction of four more specific questions around which I based my research for this project: 1) How do social movement organizations respond, incorporate, and account for members who identify with complex intersectional identities? 2) How do fluid understandings of sexuality and disability shape strategies used by social movement organizations? 3) How do individuals who identify as both LGBT and disabled negotiate these (at times) socially contradicting identities? 4) How does the importance placed on progressive and curative discourses shape and affect LGBTQ+ disabled peoples' personal narratives and experiences?

I set the stage for the examination of online data guided by these research questions in Chapter Two, wherein which I employ a historical analysis to examine the processes of medicalization and pathologization of both disability and sexuality within the sociological literature. In this chapter I argue that the medicalization and pathologization of human differences, specifically as it pertains to sexuality and disability within the medical sociological literature, have led to constructionist, social model, and feminist critiques. It is these critiques

that then laid the foundation for the development of crip theoretical approaches to disability. By outline processes of pathologization in this chapter, I begin to address research question four.

In Chapter Three, “Hegemonic or Queer?: A Comparative Analysis of 5 LGBTQ+/Disability Intersectional Social Movement Organizations”, I attend to both research question one and two (How do social movement organizations respond, incorporate, and account for members who identify with complex intersectional identities? and How do fluid understandings of sexuality and disability shape strategies used by social movement organizations?). In this chapter, I examined how Social Movement Organizations (SMOs) that seek to address issues faced by people who identify as both LGBTQ+ and disabled engage in boundary work. I examined five SMOs’ online presence via the text and images displayed on their webpages. This paper answers the research question: How do intersectional LGBTQ+/disability social movement groups position themselves and construct collective identity and collective consciousness? Specifically, this paper explores the degree to which these organizations stress sameness and/or difference in relation to the dominant group by engaging in boundary work and establishing collective identity and collective consciousness. By exploring how these groups engage in practices of inclusion and exclusion related to the construction of boundaries, I examine how the stressing of sameness and/or difference informs SMOs’ positions in relation to and use of queer/crip or hegemonic discourses. The data in this study show that groups that use hegemonic discourses frequently suppress difference while those that use queer discourses celebrate difference.

In Chapter Four, “The disability rights community was never mine’: Neuroqueer as the Intersection of Neurodiversity and LGBTQ+ Identities”, I attend to research question three and

four (How do individuals who identify as both LGBT and disabled negotiate these (at times) socially contradicting identities? And How does the importance placed on progressive and curative discourses shape and affect LGBTQ+ disabled peoples' personal narratives and experiences) by exploring how online neuroqueer communities are actively co-constructing both collective and individual identities. Neuroqueer is a community co-created project that requires those who engage in it to disidentify from both oppressive dominant and counterculture identities that perpetuate destructive medical model discourses of progress and cure. It is a collaboration of academics, activists, and members of online blogs who are engaging in practices of online community building focusing on neuroqueering. Members of neuroqueer communities explain that they feel excluded from LGBTQ+, feminist, and disability/neurodiversity communities based on their complex intersectional marginalized identities. Blog members describe employing neuroqueer practices as subversive tactics to combat this exclusion. They reject curative and medical notions of disability to adopt a neuroqueer perspective that requires that those who engage in neuroqueer reject not only able-hetero assimilation as well as counterculture assimilation (such as disability pride, LGBTQ+ pride and feminisms).

In Chapter Five, I answer research question four (How do individuals who identify as both LGBT and disabled negotiate these (at times) socially contradicting identities?) by examining a group of online Tumblr users who identify with complex intersectional identities—many of which identify as LGBTQ+ disabled people of color. The Tumblr users here describe feelings of exclusion for identity based communities, experiences a lack of representation of complex identities in popular media and socially prevalent narratives, and experience intersectional invisibility within identity based social movement organizations. As such, posters are employing narratives that contribute to the construction of identity. The posters represented

here are combating their invisibility and marginalization by narrating themselves into existence, by attaching their experiences to two well-known and recognizable social problem narratives (“Pride/Community- and self-love” narratives and “Our Lives Matter/Deserving of life”) that are frequently used by social movement communities. Posters have re-conceptualized these narratives to accurately represent their intersectional experiences. Embedded in these narratives, as told by this group of Tumblr posters, are the recognizable emotion codes of love and anger. These posters are engaging in activist and social movement work through the deployment of identity constructing narratives.

Chapter Six, “My Existence is Resistance!”: Visible Survival as Crip Resistance, addresses research question three (How do individuals who identify as both LGBTQ+ and disabled negotiate these (at times) Socially contradicting identities?). Drawing from the same data set as Chapter Five, I found that the posters that are represented in this study describe experiences of intersectional invisibility. Due to their intersectionally marginalized experiences, posters in this study rarely fit the perceived prototypical member of their constituent identity groups therefore they experience marginalization in the form of intersectional invisibility. This lack of visibility led to the exclusion of posters from identity-specific groups and communities (such as LGBTQ+ communities, disability communities, and communities of people of color). Posters frequently described these spaces and communities as inaccessible and unsafe. In other words, posters’ expressions of exclusion infer that identity communities did not, could not, and often didn’t know how to accommodate members that hold complex intersectional identities because members of identity communities did not recognize other members intersectionally marginalized experiences. The results suggest that posters employ social media to create online spaces in which to safely counteract multiple marginalization in a number of strategic ways.

They have reconceptualized what it means to engage in social movement activism and resistance to include community and individual survival. Thus they reject eugenic practices and those influences within activism.

Taken together, this research highlights how queer disabled people construct and negotiate identity at both the individual and community level. In every chapter there is a theme of intersectional invisibility. Posters, social media users, and social movement members represented in this study experience intersectional invisibility because, as people holding intersectionally marginalized (and contradicting) identities, they do not fit the perceived notion of the prototypical member of their identity groups. As such, they experience exclusion from identity-based spaces. Furthermore, the social media users engage in a rejection of that exclusion by constructing group and personal identity informed by intersectional marginalized experiences. It is evident by the work in this dissertation that the social media users examined here negotiate their (at times) socially contradicting identities and mitigate their experiences of invisibility by constructing their identities as fluid and intersectional. In every chapter, we see a rejection of exclusionary practices that do not conceptualize identity and community members' experiences in this way.

Objective Two: Shine a light on the experiences of queer disabled people to also better facilitate understanding of disability and sexuality of for all people. My second objective in this dissertation project was to highlight the experiences of queer disabled people to contribute to the research and knowledge on not just queer disability but also experiences of sexuality for all people. The results of this dissertation infer that queer disabled people experience a paradox of In/visibility. As disabled people, their sexualities and genders are frequently rendered invisible and as people who hold multiple marginalized positionalities their identities as both queer and

disabled people are made invisible. Yet, at the same time, their queerness makes their sexualities and gender hyper-visible. As people who identify with genders and sexualities that are often deemed non-normative they are thus marked as such. The marked visibility of queerness forces the popular imagination to view disabled people as both sexual and gendered. In other words, if there are queer disabled people there must be heterocisgender disabled people and knowing that there are queer disabled people can lead one to think and posit about sexual and gendered activity, practices, and expressions of disabled people (both queer and heterocisgender). By highlighting the narratives constructed by queer disabled people and social movement groups in virtual spaces, I hope to contribute to the rejection of the notion that disabled people are without gender and without sexuality. To be clear, there are indeed asexual and aromantic disabled people and they, at times, identify as queer and some social media users in the study did identify as such, but their asexuality and ace/aro identities do not negate the experiences of disabled people who identify with other sexualities. The existence of ace/aro disabled people does the exact opposite as it highlights the unmarkedness and the assumption that all people are pro-sexual as well as features one way to approach sexuality as a disabled person but certainly by no means the only way.

Objective Three: Explore the possibility of virtual spaces as an assessable place for community building and identity construction. The substantive research chapters in this dissertation attend to how community is built and identity is constructed within virtual spaces. In Chapter Three (“Hegemonic or Queer?: A Comparative Analysis of 5 LGBTQ+/Disability Intersectional Social Movement Organizations”), I examine the rhetoric on social movement organizations websites and how such spaces are used to construct group boundaries and collective identity. In Chapter Four (“The disability rights community was never mine”:

Neuroqueer as the Intersection of Neurodiversity and LGBTQ+ Identities”), I examine how blog users are co-constructing a theoretical project and building community around the notion of neuroqueer via blog spaces. In Chapter Five, I examine the narratives that are constructed by via social media users and employed on Tumblr. And, in Chapter Five, I explore how these same social media users are treating Tumblr as a virtual space to engage in accessible resistance.

The social media users represented in this project are sharing ideas and interacting and communicating with each other online. Taken together, the results from this dissertation suggest that virtual spaces can be a place for more accessible community building and identity construction. These online sites provide a place for individuals to express themselves and examining such sites is particularly important when individuals who are not represented in other forms of popular media write and participate on them. As I have referenced throughout this dissertation, the voices of disabled people have been historically and culturally silenced (Berger 2013) and much of the disability representation has been in the form of oppressive and negative stereotypes and forms (Berger 2013; Black & Pretes 2007 ; Hartnett 2000; Hevey 1993). By focusing this analysis on virtual spaces such as social media sites and websites, voices that are otherwise silenced can be examined. This becomes especially valuable when addressing disability, as digital technologies are able to break down some communication barriers. These spaces thus act as a virtual place for users to engage with each other, construct identity, and build community as well as a place for them to exercise and employ narrative that counteract marginalization, stigmatization, specifically experiences of intersectional invisibility.

Objective Four: Reduce the stigmatization of both disabled people and queer people (but specifically queer disabled people) by providing a place for queer disabled narratives as well as a contribution to positive representation. The final objective of this dissertation was to provide

alternative and positive narratives about disability in order to counter ableism. As a feminist queer crip scholar, it is one of my goals that my work contribute to the emancipation of marginalized people and as a queer disabled identifying person I have a personal investment in both the scholarly and activist work concerning sexuality and disability. I focused the analyses on the experiences and narratives about queer disabled people as told by queer disabled people rather than the stories told about them by heterocisgender abledbodyminded people.

Implications for Future Work

The findings of this dissertation suggest several avenues for future research. First, the theme of intersectional invisibility prevalent in chapters three through six suggest that this is a common experience for people who identify with complex and intersectionally marginalized identities. Although the social media users in this study often described experiences of intersectional invisibility offline, further work is needed to attend to how and if these experiences are articulated from participants who are not interacting online. Are these experiences present in other forms of data? Specifically, it would be beneficial to conduct non-virtual qualitative projects to evaluate if participants articulate similar experiences when not in the virtual world.

Second, the scholarly and activist work on neurodivergency and queerness is rapidly shifting and the work on neuroqueering should be further conceptualized by incorporating other approaches to neurodivergency. Specifically, conversations about neurodivergency on Twitter (particularly hashtags of #actuallyautistic) and the newly released anthology *All the Weight of Our Dreams: On Living Racialized Autism* could be considered in the construction of neuroqueer as a theoretical project.

Third, much of the results of this dissertation elucidated to systemic and ideological practices of eugenics. Further exploration concerning the histories of eugenics, experiences of intersectional invisibility, and the conceptualization of resistance as survival for queer disabled people is needed to fully articulate this connection. Indeed, it makes sense that the posters examined in Chapter Six have constructed resistance as survival when practices of eugenics would see the world eradicated of disabled people. Furthermore, disability, race, and sexuality have an entangled and complex historical relationship to eugenics and more work is needed to better understand this association and how it has informed exclusionary practices within social movements groups, communities, and institutions.

Fourth, more work is needed to better understand and conceptualize crip resistance. Future research should consider other forms of online activism, specifically the resistance occurring on twitter and the use of hashtags such as #Cripthevote. The notion of crip resistance can also be informed by offline practices. More research is needed to examine accessible activism offline and the relationship between online crip resistance and offline crip resistance. It would also be beneficial to examine how activists are engaging in crip resisting within already established social movement organizations.

Finally, the fifth consideration for future research that has come out of this dissertation is both an outcome from the data in this project as well as a product of my experiences conducting this work within an academic and sociology setting. It is imperative that future research address experiences of ableism within academia. A common theme throughout the data in this project was the inaccessibility of academia. Indeed this was a very prevalent talking point on the Neuroqueer blogs. When disabled academics attempt to critique academic ableism and gatekeeping they are often met by responses in which their disabilities are used as the very

criteria for which to exclude them. What I mean by this is academia's focus on meritocracy, standards of productivity, and notions of what it means to be a good scholar is conceptualized by and for the able-bodied/minded academic public. When the standard of quality work is constructed based on an able-bodied/minded and neurotypical norm of course disabled and neurodivergent people are often framed as poor scholars. Future research could examine the use of the hashtags #AcademiaIsAbleist and #EverydayAcademicAbleism on twitter to examine how academics and college students are describing experiences of ableism within academia. Work should be done to examine how academic practices have inhibited the performance and contributed to the gatekeeping of people with disabilities. Moreover, we should begin to imagine ways in which academia can be more accessible to disabled people both within and outside of the academy. I suggest that Kafer's (2013) conception of crip time could be an interesting and valuable resource in constructing academia in a more accessible way.

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