Unbreaking Our Hearts: Cultures of Un/Desirability and the Transformative Potential of Queercrip Porn

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Abstract

This dissertation combines critical disability studies, sexuality and porn studies, radical disability politics, interviews and the collaborative creation of queercrip porn to both explain and challenge the operation of cultures of undesirability in dominant culture. The concept "cultures of undesirability," describes the relations between systemic oppression and sexual marginalization: this dissertation documents the potential of queercrip porn to challenge and transform these relations. Through disability justice framework, we can imagine and enact disability not as pathological and unwanted, but as an opportunity to bring forth social organization that emphasizes connection, radical access, interdependency, and collectivity. In this dissertation I theorize porn as a multiple, embodied storytelling practice that contains the potential for disrupting and transforming cultures of undesirability. This dissertation also foregrounds the stories of the nine queercrip collaborators. Major themes to emerge in the research were in/visibility, shame, exclusion, and control. By enacting radical access, generating moments of access intimacy, and building community through practices of shared storytelling this research opens opportunities to push against the harm, erasure, and exclusion of cultures of undesirability. Queercrip porn, a strategic and intentional frame, is complex and always in motion. Centering the subjugated knowledges, experiences, and desires of queercrips, through the production of queercrip porn worlds disrupts dominant narratives, making room for complex personhood and messy and multiple ways of living and being. Also of significance to this work is the importance of community and "imagining otherwise" to the generation of cultures of resistance and resilience.

Dedication

For my little lion, Clancey, who always made me feel loved and special.

Acknowledgments

This dissertation wouldn't have been possible without community.

AJ Withers, my bestie, is not only a remarkable friend who holds and expands my heart and politics, but they know how to work magic in Word, saving me endless frustration. They also put all of their incredible research, organizing, and legal know-how to work when FGS denied me a reasonable accommodation to extend my student status for one more year. Dr. Catriona Sandilands is no doubt the most superduper supervisor ever. I absolutely would not have made it through the past nine years and all of the obstacles and barriers (of which there were plenty) without her. She is a brilliant academic powerhouse role model who always knew precisely what I needed to write through the hard stuff. I could not have asked for a better committee. Dr. Jin Haritaworn, tender and brilliant and Dr. Allyson Mitchell, creative and resourceful provided me with a supportive space from which do such important work. I was thrilled and deeply honoured to have Dr. Robert McRuer, Dr. Shannon Bell and Dr. Leesa Fawcett as external examiners for my defence. I also cannot thank the brilliant, funny, sexy, fierce and fabulous group of queercrip dreamboats who were my research collaborators enough: Nomy, Isobel, Allen, Corrinne, Juba, Romham, Lisa, Kylie, and Mia. I am forever changed by all that you shared and all that we created together. I also want to thank Sam (my sweetie and scene partner), Silas (Romham's sweetie and scene partner), Lee, Alex, Tricia Daria, Milo, Stacey, Patty, David, Ellery, Lee, Leah and Mik for being a part of making some seriously hot queercrip porn scenes happen.

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Introduction: Or, How I Became a Porn Star Academic

I had been looking for a scene partner for months and was beginning to lose hope that I would find the right person: someone willing to make porn, with rad politics, who queered masculinity in a way that complemented my queered femmeness. Someone who I thought was a babe and who I thought I was a babe. David suggested Sam and, when I saw his Friendster profile, I immediately recognized him as "the cute person" I had been checking out at various activist and academic events. I emailed him and a few weeks later we were at the Delta Chelsea in Toronto making porn.

I grew up in the country, a place called Lucketts, in Virginia. Our house had a lot of windows that overlooked pigs, chickens, and a vegetable garden. There was a sliding glass door that opened to the wooden ramp I used to get in and out of the house. There were these birds—I think they were mockingbirds—with a peculiar habit that stayed with me. The birds would perch on the railing of the ramp and launch themselves directly into the glass door. Upon flying into the door, they would fall to the ground. Then, after maybe 30 seconds, though sometimes it was longer, they would return to the railing and do it all over again. They would continue doing this until we chased them away.

I did not fully realize how heavily I identified with those birds until much later; they stayed with me, showing up in moments of heartbreak and devastation. I felt their wanting and determination. I felt their pain and their sense of rejection at continually crashing into a cold glass wall of impossibility. By the time I was seven years old, I was convinced that no one would ever want to be with me because I was disabled. I have no way of explaining exactly where that message came from because it was everywhere. It was there when I watched the Jerry Lewis Labour Day telethon and got terrified that I was going to die at the age of 10. It was there when, after I pierced my nose, my dad said, "why would you do that? You're already deformed enough

as it is." It was there when my doctor told me to never have sex because if I got pregnant it would kill me (not true). It was there in my mom's voice when she consistently responded to me being rejected by telling me, "it's better just to be good friends": because I needed help going to the bathroom, getting into and out of bed, and so on, I would probably be stuck living with my parents or in some sort of institutional setting since no one would want the "extra burden" of supporting me. I even heard it in the silence when no one ever asked if I was dating anyone.

This lifelong struggle doesn't mean I've had a life full of tragedy and woe, just as the birds were not always flying into the glass. At the same time that I was subjected to these harmful messages, I was also learning important lessons from my body about vulnerability, ways of living and knowing, the complexity of agency and interdependence, and the importance of structural realities, connection, communication, needs, care, and relationship. I used these lessons to build close friendships. I had older brothers who were equally skilled in care and classic big brother teasing that didn't skirt around my disability: they would regularly tip my chair back, rest it on its handlebars, and pretend to walk away. When I was little, my dad carried me around so I got see the world from 6'3", and my mom taught me the importance of questioning doctors and other authority figures. I went camping, played Glinda the Good Witch in a school play, and spent time at the beach. I loved school, animals, watching movies, going to concerts, and spending time outside in the sun. I still do.

However, the voices of undesirability and the fear of not being wanted were never far away. I was surrounded by pity, pathology, and the threat of erasure; nonetheless, I had a lot of longing for dates, for a way out of Lucketts and the possibility of living otherwise. I used my school smarts as a way out: attending Virginia Commonwealth University in Richmond granted me access to care, housing, politics, and Women's Studies classes that, when combined with my

organizing work in social justice communities, provided me new critical and practical frameworks with which to understand and explain my lived realities and the socio-political conditions of their emergence. These experiences also introduced me to the potential for truly transformative action. Once I found queer community, I experienced many rich, tender, and ambiguous relationships. I put a lot of my devotion into friendships and building deeply intimate relationships outside of the confines of romantic sexual partnership, but I never stopped trying to make those kinds of connections as well. I witnessed everyone around me (none of my friends identified as disabled) date, hook up, break up, start families; while I had some really nice kisses and make-outs along with a few other sexually charged experiences, it seemed as though sex was on the other side of the glass wall. When I finally did have sex, that night was one of the first times I experienced a marked respite from the voices of undesirability. The impossible had happened: someone (and not just anyone, but a cute, genderqueer disabled person with a heart-melting smile and wicked politics) had wanted me.

When I graduated from university, I couldn't find work due to disableism. I was struggling to get by on the woefully inadequate disability income provided by the state. Also inadequate was the amount of care support Medicaid provided; I spent the last two years of my undergraduate degree fighting with my caseworker to keep the amount of paid care I had. Every conversation we had involved me explaining to her that getting out of bed was a school-related activity. When I graduated, my care hours were cut in half and I was switched over to a different program where instead of receiving care from an agency, I had to find individuals to work for me. While this arrangement should have provided me with more control over who was helping me, the insufficient pay to workers offered through the program ($36 a day for six hours of care) made it impossible for me to find anyone. My friends filled in the gaps in care informally for a

while, and we started recognizing the similarity to other anti-state solutions to structural inequity in which we were involved. We decided to start a collective of people from our activist and queer communities to meet my care needs. Starting a care collective literally saved my life and created a powerful sense of interconnectedness within the community. The care collective also compelled to organizers in Richmond to start thinking seriously about disability issues.

As truly amazing as my friends were in Richmond, I often felt like the only radical queer disabled person in the world. Then, in 2001, I went to the True Spirit Conference and met radical queercrips for the first time, including writer and activist Eli Clare. This conference was also where I first met the cute genderqueer disabled person mentioned above, with whom I first had sex: they were handing out a flyer for their research project on transgimp experiences. I kept a copy of that flyer in my wallet for a year to remind me that I was not alone, to continue to feel connected to other queercrips. Two years after the conference, I moved to Toronto for graduate school. I now have a community of rad queercrips in my daily life and know how fortunate I am to have that.

Along the way, an important shift happened: I started questioning what was on the other side of the glass door. It was symbolic that inside the glass was a home. And not just any home: my step-mom had renovated the house I grew up in after she moved in and it looked like a page out of *Southern Living* magazine, the perfect space for a white, middle class, heterosexual family with two blonde toddlers (my sisters), a big farm dog and a cat. I never felt like I belonged in this home in any real way: I was a leftover, an outlier, a poor, disabled queer weirdo in the land of the normals. In questioning what *I* wanted and needed, new possibilities came into view: I noticed there was a really sweet birdbath two feet from the ramp and some really lovely trees.

Sam, David, and I are in a hotel room. Sun pours in through the window and Sam and I kiss for the first time. We continue kissing for a bit. We are tentative and shy,

but David is a seasoned porn-maker and knows exactly what to do to make us feel comfortable. From behind the camera, he says, "Stop. Start the scene over again." Sam and I go back to the door, enter the room again, stop in front of the window, and begin kissing. We do this several times, each time getting slightly more annoyed that we have to stop until we don't anymore. We are into it. That day was filled with so much hot sex, connection, respect, fun, and laughter. For much of my life I felt excluded from the world of dating, sex, and romantic love. For days after shooting what would become want, *my first porn, I could taste the "otherwise" on my lips. I could feel the possibility on my skin from Sam's touch. My heart was beating with an expansive reciprocal desire.*

I started this dissertation because I wanted more birdbaths: more spaces that provided nourishment, building my capacity—and that of my communities—to shout back at the roar of undesirability. I see this dissertation as a continuation of activist, artistic, and academic work already being done to resist the structural practices that construct and constrain marginalized people as broken and unwanted, as less than and too much. I started using the phrase "cultures of undesirability" in an attempt to find a way of talking about the multitude of lived experiences and structural practices that undermine the collective worth and wellbeing of "undesirable others." I wanted language that allowed us to talk about more than disableism; I wanted language that enabled us to recognize and speak to the complex multiplicity of identities, bodies, and systems of oppression. I wanted a conceptualization using disability justice and radical disability politics to address the violence and oppression in our lives. I wanted to highlight the collective brilliance, creativity, sass, tenderness, humour, and hotness that queercrips bring to the work of surviving and transforming cultures of undesirability. I also wanted to do more than write. It is this commitment to practice that guides this dissertation.

I wanted there to be a creative element to my dissertation, one that would change my collaborators and me and the spaces we inhabit in the process. Rather than let the work of this dissertation be confined to these pages, I wanted to *show* how queercrips are transforming

cultures of undesirability. The best way I knew how to accomplish these goals was to make queercrip porn. I wanted to explore queercrip porn's potential to resist the heartbreaking toll cultures of undesirability have on so many of us. I wanted to unbreak our hearts.

In the first chapter of this dissertation, "Disability, Sexuality and Cultures of Undesirability," I begin with a reflection on my experience attending the *First Global Conference on Sexuality and Disability* in May 2013. I use this reflection to identify what I consider to be crucial gaps in most academic literature regarding sexuality and disability. I then move on to outline and historicize several dominant models for understanding disability: the eugenics, medical, charity, and social models. I argue that these dominant framings are central to the production and persistence of oppression and marginalization in the lives of disabled people, and also that they structure dominant forms of social organization that rely on power, pathology, individualism, isolation, marginalization, and violence. I name "disability justice" and "radical disability politics" as vital frameworks for shifting not just how we understand disability, but also how we organize our social worlds. Disability justice and radical disability politics imagine and enact disability not as pathological and unwanted, but as an opportunity to bring forth ways of living that emphasize connection, multiplicity, community, interdependency, and collectivity. I then turn my attention to a preliminary discussion of two of my dissertation's central concepts: "cultures of undesirability" and "sites of shame as sites of resistance." I use "cultures of undesirability" to make sense of experiences of sexual oppression and exclusion, and to call attention to the complexities of identities, bodies, experiences, and social locations as they connect to desirability and power. My investigation of "sites of shame as sites of resistance," meanwhile, attempts to open up the transformative potential of embodied difference and non-normative ways of being and living to connect us with important subjugated knowledges.

In Chapter Two, I offer my theorization of porn as informed by critical engagement with porn studies literature and feminist porn videos as well as by my own experiences of making and screening queercrip porn. Aside from *want* (the film I describe at the beginning of the Introduction), I have made two other queercrip porn films: *sexxxy* (2006) and *Princess Porn* (forthcoming)*.* In addition to this experiential foundation, I draw on Ken Plummer's *Telling Sexual Stories: Power, Change and Social Worlds*, Sara Ahmed's *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others*, and José Esteban Muñoz's *Disidentifications: Queers of Color and the Performance of Politics* to enrich my conceptualization of porn. I move beyond the simple moralism still all too prevalent in the porn literature in order to theorize porn as a multiple, embodied storytelling practice that contains the potential for disrupting and transforming cultures of undesirability. Borrowing from porn studies literature, I then discuss the following four conventions of porn, arguing that each one makes porn a useful method for transforming cultures of undesirability: porn as offensive, oppressive, or obscene; porn as involved in the creation of truth and fantasy; porn as intending to arouse; and porn as intrinsically linked to the (re)production of knowledge, selves, and norms. I close the chapter by introducing the concept of "counterpublic porn" and outlining how it participates in disruption and transformation.

Chapter Three offers all the juicy details of how I set about documenting the ways in which queercrip porn disrupts and transforms cultures of undesirability. My method involves combining practices of critical sexual storytelling through semi-structured interviews with the collaborative production of queercrip porn scenes. As I explain in detail, many of the concepts and frameworks I use in this dissertation are emerging in activist and community spaces, so there is little or no academic literature that highlights queercrip thoughts and feelings on queercrip

porn or cultures of undesirability; I thus decided to do interviews and create queercrip porn in order to generate and bring together this knowledge. After describing my rationale for the empirical portion of my dissertation research, I introduce the group of nine fabulous, brilliant, creative, tender, and brazen queercrips who agreed to participate in this project with me, and provide details of the context, content, and character of the six queercrip porn scenes we created. The focus of the final chapters of this dissertation is on collaborators' experiences, feelings, and reflections during the research process. As with my other methodological decisions, Chapters Four and Five are structured in a manner that seeks to maximize collaborators' voices and knowledges.

"Transforming Cultures of Undesirability," my fourth chapter, begins with a return to cultures of undesirability, this time drawing on the stories shared during interviews to expand the concept and highlight its influence in collaborators' lives. During our discussions of cultures of undesirability as well as the process of collectively producing our queercrip porn scenes, several important and interrelated themes emerged, especially concerning in/visibility, shame, exclusion, and control. Collaborators spoke of the importance of consent and the need for a sense of agency with regard to relationships and representation; they made multiple connections between radical access, cultures of undesirability, and consent. By enacting radical access, generating moments of access intimacy, and building community through practices of shared storytelling—all key components of disability justice and radical disability politics—this research makes necessary epistemological and political interventions that open opportunities to build and live otherwise, pushing against the harm, erasure, and exclusion of cultures of undesirability.

In my final chapter I turn my attention again to porn, specifically to the queercrip porn we produced during the research process; again, I keep my collaborators' words central in

expanding understandings of what queercrip porn is and can be. Drawing on the collective experiences and emerging knowledges of collaborators, I revisit and rework the four conventions discussed in Chapter Two. First, I highlight how queercrip porn, when invoked as a strategic and intentional frame, is complex and always in motion. Centering the subjugated knowledges, experiences, and desires of queercrips disrupts dominant narratives, thereby making room for complex personhood and multiple ways of living and being. I then discuss the importance of community in generating resistances to cultures of undesirability. Following these arguments, I show the emergence of queercrip worlds through this research process: the counterpublic worlds we produced collectively re-imagine, rework, and create new possibilities and communities. In closing this chapter, I show how these four potent conventions—disruption, revealing complex personhood, relationship building, and world-making—combine to foster resilience by expanding our ways of knowing, living, and being to disrupt and transform cultures of undesirability.

The past two years, as I've worked on this dissertation, have been marked by heartbreak, emotional upheaval, grief, stress, illness, and loss, on top of all the usual stuff involved in writing a dissertation (including many fights with voice recognition software). Several significant relationships in my life ended: my dearly beloved cat Clancey, who was an endless source of love and companionship, passed away; two months following that loss, one of my most significant relationships ended and, with it, the possibility for spousal sponsorship that would have enabled me to apply for permanent residency in Canada. The Canadian immigration system is inherently racist, classist, homonormative and disableist, setting incredibly narrow standards for the particular bodies the Canadian state desires and permits as citizens. Disabled persons are determined to be inadmissible for residency on "health grounds" if their "health condition" is

determined "likely to be a danger to public health; is likely to be a danger to public safety; or might reasonably be expected to cause excessive demand on health or social services" (Government of Canada, 2001). People are exempt from these rules if they have a spouse sponsor them. The painful irony of writing a dissertation centred on the construction of desirability while trying to be accepted as a desirable citizen so that I can stay in the city where I have built home, family, and community was not lost on me. I also developed new health issues that made me intensely nauseated, increased the amount of pain I experienced beyond the threshold I always live with, and caused me to experience an indescribable level of fatigue. As if that weren't enough, my home got infested with bed bugs twice and when my mom, who lives on social assistance, was nearly evicted from her housing in Virginia, I was the one who was expected to deal with the situation. And finally, the cherry on top: York University's Faculty of Graduate Studies denied an extension of my full-time student status, despite said extension being an absolutely reasonable accommodation. This collection of experiences left me with precarious status in Canada and no income for three months while fighting for an appeal of the decision.

During this time I definitely felt like one of the mockingbirds: lying on the ground, trying to decide whether I could get up again or not. I have received an extraordinary amount of support and care from my chosen family and community over the past two years, without which I seriously doubt I would have made it back to the railing. I bonded with a kitten that found and chose me just prior to Clancey's passing: Oscar had been abandoned as a two-week old in a recycling bin on my street, and I spent several weeks feeding her with a dropper because she was too young to eat solid food. And while there were many moments when I could not imagine how I could finish my dissertation, the relationships I built with my collaborators were my lifelines, quite literally. I even managed to film some porn in those especially hard days. I *needed*

queercrip community: I needed to know how other queercrips survive and sometimes even thrive within cultures of undesirability. The story of my life, including what I tell through the queercrip porn I've made, is a single story; like the stories of so many other marginalized people, it gets misunderstood, ignored, or erased within dominant culture. This text aims to lift up multiple stories of queercrips in all their complexity and richness, with the knowledge that these stories are transformative in their telling.

Chapter One: Disability, Sexuality and Cultures of Undesirability

The First Global Conference on Sexuality and Disability

In May of 2014, I participated in the First Global Conference on Sexuality and Disability in Lisbon. When I found out I'd be presenting, I couldn't have been more excited, though I was a bit wary of the inaccessibility of Europe from previous travels in London and Berlin. A conference in Southern Europe—sunshine-filled and intellectually stimulating—offered a necessary reprieve from what had been a brutally cold, emotionally and physically difficult winter in Toronto. Plus—big bonus—Sam, who lives in London, was going to meet me in Portugal. The first red flag that this conference might not be the experience I was hoping for appeared when I received the list of presenters: out of 20 people, I was only familiar with two. The second red flag occurred when I contacted the organizers to ask a few questions about basic accessibility needs and they could provide no adequate answers.

Once I arrived at the conference, the lack of knowledge about and attention to accessibility by its organizers was glaring. Lisbon is known for being a beautiful city, but its rustic charm includes cobblestone sidewalks, steep hills, and inaccessible public transit. Conference organizers did little to support conference participants in navigating the city. Even the hotel where the conference was based was scarcely physically—and definitely not financially—accessible; attendees who use wheelchairs could barely get around any of the presentation rooms. PowerPoint was banned from the conference, limiting many participants' ability to engage with presentations, even while participation in every session was required. Though there were several disabled presenters as well as presenters from many different geographic locations, which was different than the supposedly international but actually North American dominated conferences I had attended in the past, the majority of the presenters were white. At no point were attendees

given a clear explanation of how or why this particular conference came into being; it felt like the worst manifestation of an academic exercise in curiosity by nondisabled sexuality scholars.

Which brings me to my third red flag: the conference's overall dependence on conventional and thus uncritical conceptualizations of disability. One particularly telling example was a presentation titled "Sexuality of People with Intellectual Disabilities: Parents' Perspective." There were few presentations focused on people with intellectual disabilities; those that did were centred on parents or other persons providing care, literally silencing the voices of disabled people. It is a violent and all too well established practice to refer to intellectually disabled people as having a "mental age": oppressive shorthand for labelling and describing intellectual capacity. This presentation instead used the language of "appropriate care age," which uses the level of care a person needs to make claims about both their bodily and intellectual capacities. For example, a 31-year-old woman with a disability who needs "high levels of care" gets labeled as having an "appropriate care age" of a one year old. These determinations are then used to justify any number of actions under the guise of care and/or rehabilitation without requiring consent from the individuals themselves; in the above-mentioned presentation, it was used to make assumptions about the age at which one could engage in consensual sexual behaviour. Another example occurred during a presentation given by a woman with polio regarding the experiences of women living in Taiwan with adaptive devices and sexuality. While she spoke to her own feelings and those of her interview participants with respect and empathy, the conclusion of her research was that the barriers and struggles these women experienced were due to their adaptive devices rather than cultural constructions of said adaptive devices and desirable bodies. In my opinion, she and several other conference presenters failed to engage critically with their research. When questioned about the potential

implications of using particular language or the reinforcing of dominant perspectives in their

research, many people explained that they were just using the language their research

participants used. There was very little analysis that questioned where the ideas or attitudes of

research participants came from or what impact research on disability and sexuality might have

outside of the academy. bell hooks describes critical thinking as "a way of approaching ideas that

aims to understand core, underlying truth, not simply that superficial truth that may be most

obviously visible" (2010, 9). The truths most obviously visible are often only visible because

they are made to appear through dominant ideologies. In these presentations, I witnessed the

pursuit of knowledge detached from the analyses of power and praxis necessary to avoid

repeating oppressive ideologies.

I believe there are telling reasons for the absence of critical analysis, first-person

experience, activist perspectives, and deeply intersectional transformation-focused work that I

noticed at the conference. I use my experiences in Lisbon here to draw out the specific ways this

conference reflects larger patterns, omissions, and subsequent limitations within the academic

literature on sexuality and disability. The push to intellectualize disability creates disconnection

between power, complexity, and lived experience. We can see the impact of intellectualization in

the prioritization of academic or "expert" voices as well as practices of diagnosing problems

rather than exploring pleasure. One only need to glance at a few of the articles published in the

Journal of Sexuality and Disability, the single academic journal devoted to this topic, to

understand that the way sexuality and disability was framed at the conference is the rule rather

than an exception. The tensions that exist around the conventional academic conjunction of

disability and sexuality have much to tell us about the ways in which dominant framings create

and maintain cultural logics through strategic omission. In the introduction to *Sex and Disability*,

McRuer and Mollow (2012) detail the ways in which sexuality is de-prioritized in disability studies and disability is similarly negligibly engaged with in the major texts of sexuality studies. There is an under-critiqued tendency in academic literature that joins sexuality and disability to understand itself as intersectional, while it reproduces disability and sexuality as a single issue and reinforces dominant identity categories such as whiteness, middle class identity, heterosexuality, and cisgender identity. As a result, a newly legitimate sexual subject is normalized, while many others are erased.

McRuer and Mollow allude to the ways that sexually explicit knowledge production is removed from academic discussions of sexuality and what is considered appropriate for scholarly research: "The conjunction of sex and disability, tellingly, if the conjunction is considered at all, is in a special section including fiction and poetry" (2012, loc 68). I attribute this erasure, at least in part, to sexphobia alongside an academic culture that upholds objective distance and devalues first-person experiences. Even *The Sexual Politics of Disability: Untold Desires*, a foundational text that aimed to politicize sex and disability, upheld the pathologization of sex work, porn, and disabled people's lives in a chapter titled "Bad Sex" (Shakespeare, Gillespie-Sells & Davies, 1996). Explicit discussion of sex is seen as messy, inappropriate, and unprofessional (McRuer and Mollow 2012), which limits access to particular languages and practices that challenge some of the most necessary areas for change.

The frameworks we use to conduct inquiry and make sense of our world matter. My intention for this chapter is to outline and historicize several key frameworks for understanding disability, and then to propose a new framework for thinking about disability and sexuality with particular focus on the operation of what I call *cultures of undesirability.* Inspired by McRuer and Mollow*,* my work questions "what happens to our models, central arguments, and key

claims when we politicize sex and disability together" (2012, loc 75). In framing my intentions

with the following research I am also deeply influenced by Sara Ahmed, who writes:

"Orientations shape not only how we inhabit space, but how we apprehend this world of shared

inhabitance, as well as 'who' or 'what' we direct our energy and attention toward" (2006, 3).

When the conjunction of sexuality and disability is approached using conventional frameworks,

subsequent conclusions are constrained, reinforcing marginalization, pathologization, and

violence. McRuer and Mollow argue, "when sex and disability are linked in contemporary

American cultures, the conjunction is most often occasion for marginalization or marvelling"

(2012, loc. 45). Conversely, critical questioning can lead to creative responses, which should not

be confused with answers. From this position of critical and creative inquiry, we are given the

opportunity to perceive the familiar anew and bring new worlds into being.

Let me return briefly to the First Global Conference on Sexuality and Disability as an

example. As I began my presentation, I was eager to see how conference goers would respond to

my work and the alternative perspectives by which I approach it. My fellow panellists included

Meena Seshu and Bishakha Datta, who do radical intersectional work with disabled sex workers

in India. During my presentation, I queried attendees as to their familiarity with the terms

"disability justice" and "radical disability politics." Very few people indicated they knew these

terms. Many of the participants were definitely open to and interested in these concepts and the

ways in which I framed them, but they had only been exposed to dominant frameworks for

understanding disability and sexuality. In this way, the work that my co-panellists and I

presented was a point of interruption, where our critical and intersectional understandings of

sexuality and disability offered a break from conventional narratives. For example, mainstream

disability theory has argued that the subject of structural barriers pertains strictly to the realm of

disability, thereby separating it from sexuality; however, actually living with a disability makes this containment pragmatically impossible. The lack of barrier-free housing available produces countless impacts upon experiencing, expressing, and exploring one's sexuality. This, along with countless other incorrect assumptions and misunderstandings, is the product of the dominant and highly limited frameworks for conceptualizing disability.

Then and Now: Analyzing the History of Disability

Having introduced a few of the conceptual limitations in the field of study surrounding sexuality and disability in the beginning of this chapter, I now turn to a discussion of what I consider to be the overarching frameworks for understanding disability in a Western context. I do so with the aim of exposing the ways these frameworks contribute to creating or resisting what I will theorize, at the close of this chapter, as "cultures of undesirability." This socio-historical analysis will illuminate my reasons for asserting a disability justice or radical disability politics framework to guide my research. I will approach this discussion in a manner similar to how I teach college and university students or workshop participants about the importance of critically engaging with dominant disability frameworks.

Disability as Pathology: Eugenics, Medical, and Charity Models

In the classroom, I begin with a PowerPoint slide that reads: "How many of you have seen a pharmaceutical advertisement, a telethon, or a charity campaign?" Almost everyone in the room—whether it be 15 or 200 people—indicates that they have encountered one or more of these media. I then show slides of several different images of these media and we discuss what's happening in them, guided by the following questions: What kinds of representations of

disability, bodies, and the world in general are communicated through these images? How do

they make us feel and what are their impacts on our everyday lives? Where do we encounter

these messages? Who benefits from these representations?

Figure 1 (United Way n.d.) Image description: An apartment kept in disrepair. An older white woman with messy hair, wearing a blue bathrobe lays unconscious in a chair while a younger, more active version of her is literally jumping out of the older versions body. This "improved" version is wearing a pink jumpsuit and has combed hair.
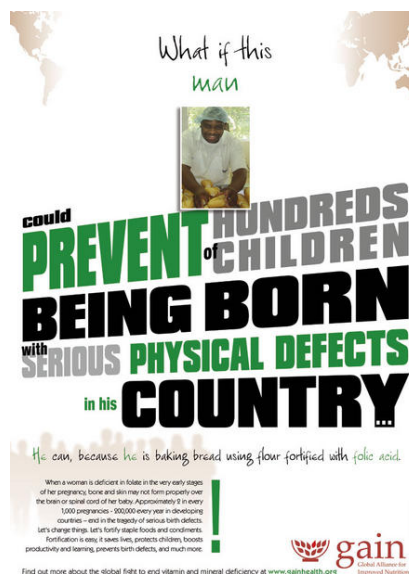
Figure 2 (Global Alliance for Improved Nutrition, GAIN n.d.) Image description: There is a small picture of a black man baking bread. He is wearing a white hairnet. The text in the ad that is readable here is: "What if this man could prevent hundreds of children being born serious physical defects in his country"
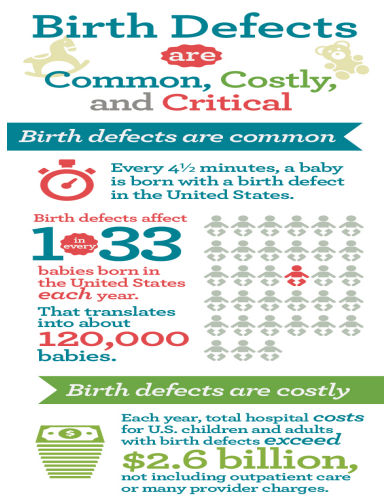
Figure 3 (Centre for Disease Prevention and Control, n.d.). Image description: A brightly coloured infographic. The text that is readable here is: "birth defects are common, costly, and critical". The advertisement goes on to explain how birth defects occur often, produce high hospital costs and cause death.

Figure 4 ("Against The Odds, A 'Miracle Boy Grows Up' : NPR." 2015) To the left. Image description: black and white image featuring a young boy looking up at the camera with big sad eyes. The text reads "if I grow up I want to be a fireman".
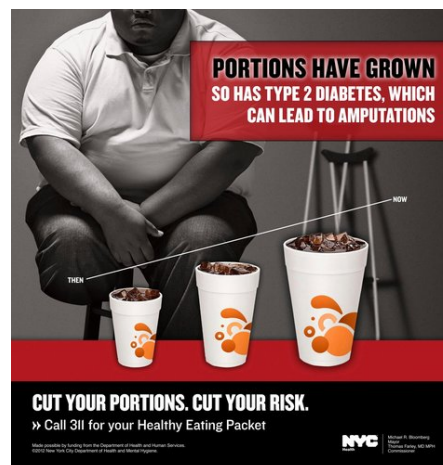
Figure 5 (NYC Health Department 2012) Image description (above): in the background a large black man with an amputated leg is seated on a stool. His hands are folded in his lap and his head is cut off by the frame of the picture. For grounded there are three differently sized cups of soda with an arrow over top singling the increase in size of the cups. The text on the ad reads "portions of grown so has type II diabetes, which can lead to amputations. Cut your portions, cut your risk".

Figure 6 (Bayer, n.d.) Image description: an older white woman with gray hair and a glazed over expression is having her teeth brushed by a black woman's hand. "The text reads what's the true cost of MS 's spasticity?"

Figure 7 (Easy Inhaler, n.d.) Image description: any preteen boy sits on an empty gym bench looking sad. The words Prince Puff A-Lot are written with an effect that makes them look cloudlike. The boy also has steam coming out of his ears and a chalk drawn crown on his head. The text that is readable here says, "help a child feel a little less different: Easyhaler".

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The stories told through these images present a pretty bleak picture of the ways that disabled people are understood. The message they convey is unequivocal: to be disabled is to live a life full of tragedy, pain, shame, and inadequacy. We see a lot of white people in these images— particularly young white children in need of saving. Whiteness is produced as a necessary factor for redemption, while blackness is shown as correlated with labour and loss (Figures 5 and 6), capitalizing on the cultural production and targeted association of blackness and masculinity as synonymous with threat. The black man featured in diabetes prevention ad (Figure 5) serves as a warning; ads featuring white people are pleas for salvation. We see sad faces. We see desperation. These are the stories that surround us. Disabled people are positioned outside the terms of normal life through a discourse in which marginalization is seen as the result of isolated personal inferiority rather than a social harm (Waxman 1994). According to these narratives, as disabled people we must literally jump out of our marginalized bodies into more normal bodies in order to be happy (see Figure 1). The frame of personal inferiority—a key component of the eugenic, medical, and charity models of disability—perpetuates narratives of asexuality and victimization that dominate mainstream discourses surrounding sexuality and disability (Tepper 2000).

As I will describe below, traditional and dominant models of disability—the eugenics model, medical model, and charity model—work together to produce a dominant idea of disability and disabled people. However, disableism, as with other systems of oppression, does not operate in a single or separate fashion. Inspired by Andrea Smith's concept the "four pillars of white supremacy," I understand each of these models functioning as interrelated logics also connected to white supremacy, colonialism, capitalism, heteropatriarchy, and cissexism (2006). Supposed truths about disabled people are informed by a long history of eugenics, medical, and

charity models, which take up disability—particularly "disabled" bodies and/or minds—as being in a state of biomedical malfunction (which has historically included many different forms of marginalization. Davis 2002). These models contribute to an understanding of marginalized others as both "less than" and "too much," if we are understood as persons at all (Shildrick 2002); they construct our lives, needs, and desires as unintelligible. Together, they produce a hegemonic story of disability: disabled people will certainly lead a life full of tragedy and/or pathology. As a result, we are treated as burdens and threats to those around us as well as to the state. We are consistently reminded that there is something wrong with *us*, not the systems of social organization that simultaneously enable some and rule out others (Siebers 2008). These practices of pathologization profoundly impact individual bodies, identities, experiences, and desires; they also contribute to the creation of categories of difference occurring along complex and contradictory points of privilege and marginalization.

In *Freakery: Cultural Spectacles of the Extraordinary Body*, feminist disability scholar Rosemarie Garland Thomson makes the claim that "the exceptional body seems to compel explanation, inspire representation and insight regulation" (1996, 1). Her intention in the text is to highlight that what we call "disability" today has always been part of the collective cultural imagination, theorizing the ways in which embodied difference has been (mis)understood throughout history: beheld as wondrous, feared, and despised. She understands the modern turn from wonder to error as the primary explanation for embodied difference: "Domesticated within the laboratory and the textbook, what was once the prodigious monster, the fanciful freak, the strange and subtle curiosity of nature, has become today the abnormal, the intolerable" (Garland Thomson 1996, 4). The term "disabled" is closely tied to eugenic theory and was originally applied to anyone considered to possess genetically or socially undesirable traits. This means that

many people who we would not consider disabled today—such as sex workers, racialized people, poor people, and queer and trans people—were included in this definition of disability by eugenicists in the late 1800s and early 1900s (Davis 2010). Marginalized communities are still pathologized and medicalized, but in popular discourse not generally thought of as disabled. Eugenics, at its core, rests on the belief that certain people are inferior and threaten the vitality and well-being of the entire population. The solution to this threat—informed by capitalism, industrialism, and imperialism—is to encourage populations deemed desirable to reproduce and to reduce the undesirable populations until they are no more. As Withers states, "it is no coincidence that the eugenic movement developed shortly after the industrial revolution, as it provided the perfect explanation for massive disparities in wealth as well as the increasing poverty and suffering among the working class" (2012, 16). Eugenics prompted a significant ideological shift away from religious or supernatural explanations of embodied difference and towards what would now be considered biological determinism and "scientific truth." Garland-Thomson similarly states, "in response to the tensions of modernity, the ancient practice of interpreting extraordinary bodies not only shifted towards the secular and the rational, but it flourished as never before within the expanding marketplace, institutionalized under the banner of the freak show" (1996, 4). Freak shows served as the cultural imaginary distribution site for eugenics: the fact that they were widely attended by "ordinary folk" provided a vehicle for reinforcing shifting ideological paradigms. Freak shows served to reinforce dominant ideologies regarding embodied difference, national identity, science, and normalcy. They also promoted practices of looking and othering often referred to as gawking, which continue to serve as all too often *the* way of looking at difference (Clare 1999). The eugenics movement established categories of ideological distinction—the abnormal and normal—along with practices to bring

forth and reiterate these distinctions (Withers 2012). According to Donaldo Macedo and Tersa

Sorde Marti (in Dudley-Marling and Gurn 2010), ideological distinctions have at least two

functions. The first is to establish a naturalized norm to measure groups and individuals; this

process is critical as it creates perpetual justification for taken-for-granted norms. Normalization

thus hinders critical reflection. The second function of ideological distinctions is to devalue

groups which do not measure up to the established normativity and valorizing those who are

deemed normal (Macedo and Marti in Dudley-Marling and Gurn 2010).

Eugenics had its heyday at the turn of the twentieth century; however, we see the

persistence of the eugenics model in the images shown above. In many of the images, disability

is portrayed as something to be avoided: prevented or changed. Whiteness, gendered

normativity, and markers of middle-class status are repeatedly used to construct desirable

subjectivity. We see repeated images of whiteness, gender normativity, and middle-class status

in need of saving from the threat of difference that "disability" constructs. An advertisement

(Figure 2) asks, "What if this man could prevent of hundreds of children being born with serious

physical defects?" The association of disability with undesirability here forecloses any

alternative to the eradication and prevention of disability. The eugenics model links disability

with death at every possible opportunity. While largely inaccurate, the association of disability

with death continues to hold much power. For example, two of the ads above state: "Birth

defects cause one in every five deaths during the first year of life" and "*If* I grow up, I want to be

a fireman" (see Figures 3 and 4). The eugenics model's link between death and disability

produces the illusion that to live with a disability is no life at all, while rendering invisible the

countless lives lost due to eugenic practices such as residential schools for First Nations people

throughout North America (Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada 2015), the forced

sterilization of people classified as "mentally deficient" (Pringle 1997), and, most recently, prenatal screening technologies (Parens and Asch 2003).

The eugenics movement remains connected to the medical model (Withers 2012). With the advent of the medical model, we see disability constructed as a disease or a condition, curable with the appropriate therapeutic or rehabilitative treatment. The goal of this model is to ameliorate embodied difference by returning the afflicted party back to normalcy (Clare 2013). The medical model takes the individual's body as the site of change, thereby constructing disabled people as broken (Linton in Davis 2010). From this perspective, the only way to help these people is through medical technology and intervention. Through this we see the how the medical model upholds the idea of normalcy as constructed through the eugenics model and continues to individualize and pathologize disability. In the one of the images above (Figure 5), we are told that the "Easy Inhaler" is the best cure for an athletic white boy named Prince Puff-a-Lot, who we are to assume is being teased and isolated due to asthma. With this medication, our Prince can "feel a little less different." We are told by another ad (see Figure 6) that the "real" cost of MS spasticity is not being able to brush your teeth, while the financial cost of the marketed wonder drug is nowhere to be seen. In these examples the focus is on using pharmaceutical interventions to change individuals so that they meet social norms, rather than on changing societal structures and worldviews.

The charity model comes into play when the medical model has determined that a specific disability's "cure" is a long way off, not possible, or not worth pursuing. The charity model takes up the notion of disability as a tragedy and uses this narrative to raise money for those it constructs as pitiful and needy (Wendell in Davis 2010). Many charities' campaigns capitalize on the notion of disability as a threat—derived from the eugenics model—and present themselves as

existing in order help ease the burden of this threat. There has been a wealth of writing about the
charity industrial complex, as well as critical interventions in social work and other helping
professions, which exposes charities' agendas as largely self-serving (Chapman and Withers
forthcoming). Paul Longmore, a renowned disability historian, has thoroughly documented the
common practice of diverting the money raised by charitable organizations such as Muscular
Dystrophy Association, The United Way, Cystic Fibrosis, and so many others to staff payroll and
research, meaning that very little of the supposedly big changes promised by charities to disabled
individuals and their families ever actually materialize (Longmore 2005).

Reclaiming the Terms: The Social Model of Disability

Let me return to my lecture. At this point, I usually present a slide with a well-known image.
You know the one: blue background with a white stick figure of a non-gendered person in a
manual wheelchair. I ask students: "What does this image say to you?" The most common
response is that the sign indicates a space or physical structure is accessible; people mention
ramps, elevators, and accessible washrooms. We then begin to unpack this moniker of
accessibility. Who does it centre? How does it render invisible many experiences of disability,
and also many different kinds of access? This image, technically referred to as "the international
symbol of accessibility," but better known as "the wheelchair symbol," was developed in 1969
under the direction of Rehabilitation International (Onley 2013). To me, the image contributes to
an understanding of disability as something that is readily apparent, stable, and individualized.
While rooting disability in the individual's body, the barely-human stick figure reinforces the
dehumanization of disabled people. I can't even begin to count the number of times I've been
referred to as a wheelchair or—in what is maybe a slight improvement—a wheelchair person.

There have been a few modifications to this symbol over the past 45 years, yet none has significantly changed the understanding of disability it continues to produce.

New slide, new question: "How many of you have seen images of disability organizing or disability resistance movements?" This time, only a handful of people indicate that they have. As I present photographs of disability activists (see Figures 7 and 8), we discuss what the images communicate: Who is in the images? What sorts of change are they looking for? How are these images different from the ones we saw in previous slides? How do these images make you feel? Who benefits from such images and why have so few of us been exposed to these images before?

One of the first comments students usually make is that there is a lot more diversity and that the people in the images look like actual people. We see people of colour, we see a variety of adaptive devices, and we see people claiming disability identities with confidence and style: full of anger, joy, and awareness of their agency. These images show people coming together as communities, rather than isolated as tragic individuals. The language used in the images is also significantly different: we see the words "pride" and "resistance." We see demands rather than pleas. We still see that there are struggles and obstacles to contend with, but the ideas about the changes necessary for disabled people to live full and meaningful lives have shifted. Now we are told, "raise the rates!" and "feed the poor!"

(ADAPT protest, n.d)
Image description: we see a long line of people marching carrying signs. There are many people using various adaptive devices. The majority of the people in this picture are white.

(Fischer and Hoffman 2011) Image description: Again we see a group of people marching carrying signs many of whom are using various adaptive devices. This time the signs are in Spanish and the all the people pictured are people of colour.

This radical shift is indebted to the social model of disability, which is in turn indebted to the Civil Rights movement, the feminist movement, and LGBTQ organizing that occurred prior to and alongside the model's original conception in the early 1970s (Withers 2012). The social model was developed by a group of disabled organizers in the United Kingdom, primarily organizing with the Union of the Physically Impaired Against Segregation (UPIAS, Oliver 1990). In the social model, disability was no longer understood as a problem located within individual bodies and manifested through their supposed limitations (Oliver 1990). The model focused instead upon needed changes at the level of society; specifically, disability activists used the social model to demand modifications to built environments that would make them more accessible. Conceptually, the social model separated "disability" from "impairment." Impairment was used to denote diagnoses, limitations, and "defects." Disability was used to describe the oppression imposed upon people as a result of impairment. The impact that the social model has had cannot be emphasized enough: some forms of public transit are more accessible, there now exists legislation in Canadian provinces mandating basic disability accommodation, numerous

institutions warehousing people labeled as disabled have been shut down, public schools are

shifting towards inclusive education, employers are being incentivized by the state to hire

disabled people, and there now exists government funding for self-directed attendant care in

Canada. These and many more vital and lifesaving changes are all thanks to organizations like

ADAPT (www.adapt.org), Not Dead Yet (www.notdeadyet.org), People First of Canada

(www.peoplefirstofcanada.ca), and so many others.

Beyond Inclusion: Disability Justice and Radical Disability Politics

Despite its crucial influence, the social model is limited primarily because it works toward

inclusion within the existing social order rather than demanding wide-scale structural change

(Mingus 2011). Even as the disability rights movement that birthed the social model borrowed

from many other civil rights and liberationist movements, mainstream disability organizing in

the US and Canada has been significantly dominated by disabled white, middle-class, cisgender

straight men. As a result, what has come to be understood as the disability rights movement, and

the issues that this movement has historically prioritized through the lens of the social model,

reinforces other systems of oppression rather than recognizing shared struggle. For example, the

more mainstream disability organizations like ADAPT have waged large-scale campaigns to

close down nursing homes while completely ignoring other institutions that confine bodies

deemed disabled, dangerous or disposable, such as psychiatric wards and prisons. In its attempts

to shift the focus away from medicalizing and individualizing conceptions of bodies using the

social model, the mainstream disability rights movement has been criticized for erasing certain

bodies and furthering disableism (Hughes and Paterson 1997). The social model is not adequate

for people who have survived psychiatrization, or live with chronic pain, or are labelled with

learning or intellectual disability diagnoses, or experience profound ableism but have never been

labeled as disabled. Disabled feminists were amongst the first to criticize the split between

disability and impairment for the false dichotomy it creates and the essentialist understanding of

bodily difference it reinforces (Kafer 2013 and Thomas 1999).

Even as it has been marginalized or erased by dominant frameworks, there has always been

disability organizing led by people of colour, queer people, and other marginalized communities.

There are several radical, intersectional, and transformative frameworks for thinking about

disability, which have greatly influenced my thinking. These include Shildrick's (2002)

Embodying the Monster: Encounters with the Vulnerable Self—a messy queer feminist take on

disability and sexuality; McRuer's (2006) *Crip Theory: Cultural Signs of Queerness and*

Disability; and Alison Kafer's more recent political-relational model, articulated in her 2013 text,

Feminist, Queer, Crip. I am also indebted to Ayesha Vernon (in Davis 2010), Chris Bell (in

Davis 2010), and Nirmala Erevelles and Andrea Minear (2010) for offering important

intersectional frameworks to challenge white supremacy within disability studies. Influenced by

these texts and others, alongside lived experience and radical activism, "disability justice" and

"radical disability" provide novel frameworks through which we can re-imagine not just

disability, but cultural norms and social organization as well. Conceptually, these models are

closely related, having both emerged in the late 2000s. As is the way with emergent models,

disability justice and radical disability politics developed out of previous models of disability;

they seek to expand on the necessary work of the social model as well as address its limitations.

"Disability justice" materialized through disabled activist of colour-led organizations such as the

Disability Justice Collective and Sins Invalid (Berne 2015). In an interview about her work, Patty

Berne, a founding member of the Disability Justice Collective and Sins Invalid—who identifies

as a mixed race woman with a very visible disability—describes how she and her collaborator

Leroy Moore were not "embraced by the disability rights movement or world, because it's a very

white centered world, and it's very much a rights-based reformist movement" (Allen 2013, np).

Similarly, many organizations not specifically focused on disability failed to address disableism

in their work. The term, "disability justice" began circulating more broadly in 2010/2011 after

the US Social Forum's Disability Justice Summit and the annual Allied Media Conference in

Detroit. Mia Mingus and Stacey Milbern also contributed to its increased circulation through

their widely read blogs.[1] Concurrently, "radical disability politics" developed through ongoing

discussions and shared learning between my best friend AJ Withers and me. We named our

framework prior to connecting with the work happening in the Disability Justice Collective.

Withers theorized "radical disability politics" in their important 2012 text, *Disability Theory and

Politics*, and Withers and I teach, organize, and write from this framework. Though disability

justice and radical disability politics have much in common, I mostly use the two terms

separately in order to recognize that disability justice is a term and a framework developed

within crip of colour led communities, largely to address the racism within mainstream disability

organizing. While I consider the work I do to be disability justice work, and understand disability

justice to mean many things, I want to respect and honour the specific work that crips of colour

do. As a white activist and scholar, centering and supporting the labour and leadership of people

of colour is a necessary part of the process of challenging white supremacy and doing radical,

intersectional and multi-politic organizing. Disability justice and radical disability politics, as

vital models for understanding disability, critique the single-issue focus of the social model and

mainstream disability organizing: its lack of an intersectional analysis, which centres

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[1]   https://leavingevidence.wordpress.com, http://dreaminghome.wordpress.com, http://www.staceymilbern.com/

considerations of interlocking oppressive systems, and its limited understanding of disability and

thus those who could and should be included in movements for disabled people's rights. Central

to both disability justice and radical disability politics is a deep commitment to working from a

framework that centres marginalized people, their knowledge, leadership, perspectives, and

passions. These radical models of understanding disability offer important interventions into

dominant structural logics, which are necessary to all radical movements for justice. As Mia

Mingus states:

> Ableism cuts across all of our movements because ableism dictates how
> bodies should function against a mythical norm—an able-bodied standard of
> white supremacy, heterosexism, sexism, economic exploitation,
> moral/religious beliefs, age and ability. Ableism set the stage for queer and
> trans people to be institutionalized as mentally disabled; for communities of
> color to be understood as less capable, smart and intelligent, therefore
> "naturally" fit for slave labor; for women's bodies to be used to produce
> children, when, where and how men needed them; for people with disabilities
> to be seen as "disposable" in a capitalist and exploitative culture because we
> are not seen as "productive;" for immigrants to be thought of as a "disease"
> that we must "cure" because it is "weakening" our country; for violence,
> cycles of poverty, lack of resources and war to be used as systematic tools to
> construct disability in communities and entire countries. (2011, n.p.)

These models question and challenge the practice of separating disability from impairment,

and they call for the importance of discussing and honouring true bodily complexity and lived

experience. If we centre disability justice or radical disability politics models, our definitions of

disability must be politicized and fluid rather than biological and absolute: "Disability Justice is a

multi-issue political understanding of disability and ableism, moving away from a rights-based

equality model and beyond access to a framework that centers justice and wholeness for all

disabled people and our communities" (Mingus 2011, np). While the social model sought to

reform existing environments to include people with disabilities, disability justice and radical

disability politics emphasize the importance of dismantling all systems that privilege certain

ways of being over others. In a recent blog post, Berne argues

> Disability Justice activists, organizers, cultural workers understand that able-bodied supremacy has been formed in relation to intersecting systems of domination and exploitation. The histories of white supremacy and ableism are inextricably entwined, both forged in the crucible of colonial conquest and capitalist domination. We cannot comprehend ableism without grasping its interrelations with heteropatriarchy, white supremacy, colonialism and capitalism, each system co-creating an ideal bodymind built upon the exclusion and elimination of a subjugated "other" from whom profits and status are extracted. 500+ years of violence against black and brown communities includes 500+ years of bodies and minds deemed dangerous by being non-normative—again, not simply within able-bodied normativity, but within the violence of heteronormativity, white supremacy, gender normativity, within which our various bodies and multiple communities have been deemed *"deviant," "unproductive," "invalid."* (2015, n.p.)

Disability justice and radical disability politics continuously question ideas of inclusion, independence, and normalcy. Moving beyond calls to change society through logistics and legislation—calls which often only succeed through the exclusion of our complex personhoods—these models seek to create space for all disabled people and our communities. This work often called creating "radical access." According to Withers:

> Access needs to be addressed collectively, across bodies, boundaries and borders. Radical access means acknowledging systemic barriers to exclude people, particularly certain kinds of people with certain kinds of minds and/or bodies, and working to ensure not only the presence of those who have been left out, but also their comfort, participation and leadership. Spaces that need to incorporate radical access principles are organizational, they are educational and institutional, but they are also the spaces closest to us, our cafés, our offices, our homes and our hearts. (2012, 118)

Each of these resistance models and frameworks offer important interventions into dominant structural and cultural understandings of disability, power, privilege, bodies, intersectionality, normalcy, sexuality, and social change. They also share a commitment to the importance of understanding and shifting dominant frameworks at play, as well as honouring individual manifestations of larger cultural and systemic practices.

Fleshing it Out: Emerging Conversations on Sexuality and Disability

It was not until the 1980s and 1990s that disabled people's sexuality, and possible barriers to its

expression, were discussed in the literature in ways that moved beyond sexual functioning and

satisfaction assessments.[2] Writers such as Barbara Faye Waxman, Tom Shakespeare, and Eli

Clare were among the first to begin to critically interrogate the historical, political, and socio-

cultural conjunctions between sexuality and disability (Waxman 1994, Shakespeare, Gillespie-

Sells & Davies 1996, Clare 1999). A few of the broad themes coming out of the more recent

critical disability and sexuality literature include: challenges to assumptions of reduced capacity

to consent (Lyden 2007 and Brown 1994); abuse (Sobsey 1994 and Higgins and Swain 2009);

sterilization, and NRT's/reproductive freedom (Parens and Asch 2003 and Block 2000); issues of

access and barriers to expression (Stevens 2008); sex work (O'Brien n.d. and Sanders 2007);

devotees/disability fetish/wannabes (Aguilera 2000, Kafer 2004 and Duncan 2002); and

facilitated sex (Earle 1999 and Odette and Silverberg 2012); and challenges to myths and

stereotypes about disabled people's sexuality (Davies 2000).

　　However, tensions continue to exist between issues considered relevant to disability

studies and activism and issues considered relevant to sexuality studies. I would argue that these

tensions are a product of conventional narratives for understanding disability, including the

social model. For example McRuer and Mollow (2012, loc 97) call attention to disability studies'

tendency to de-prioritize non-tangible barriers, which creates an important absence that needs to

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[2] *Sexuality and Disability* provides ample evidence of the predominance of this paradigm. One example is an article, published in 1979 and titled, "The Human Tragedy of Spinal Bifida: Spinal Myelomeningocele." This title speaks volumes to the perspective of this journal from its inception. Even in 2012, the tag line of the journal still indicates that it is "devoted to the Psychological and Medical Aspects of Sexuality in Rehabilitation and Community Settings."

be addressed. Mainstream disability theory has argued that the subject of structural barriers pertains strictly to the realm of disability, thereby separating it from sexuality; however, actually living with a disability makes this containment pragmatically impossible. The lack of barrier-free housing available produces countless impacts upon experiencing, expressing and exploring one's sexuality. It is impossible to attend sexual marginalization from a radical intersectional perspective without creating new frameworks for understanding both disability and the conjunctions between it and sexuality.

Cultures of Undesirability

In the classroom, I think it's particularly telling that when I show the last series of images—like those pictured below of queercrip porn and other sexually charged queercrip performances — rarely have more than one or two people encountered these representations. In the above pages I have overviewed some of the various ways that dominant understandings of disabled people and our lives are produced and circulated through the eugenics model, the medical model, the charity model, and the social model. These understandings shape the oppression that disabled people contend with on a daily basis: they limit our possibilities and ways of being. I have also outlined the ways in which the models of disability justice and radical disability politics imagine and enact disability not as a deficiency, but an opportunity to bring forth worlds that are organized around connection, interdependency and collectivity rather than pathology, individualism, isolation, and violence (Berne 2015). By outlining the various ways that disability has been conceptualized in recent history, I aim to communicate the importance of reflecting on how we think about disability and the ways we organize our social worlds.

(Ndopu, *The Feminist Wire*, 2012) Image description: here we see a naked young black femme man seated in a wheelchair. Eddie is sitting in the sun in a dark bedroom looking out the window with a smile on his face.
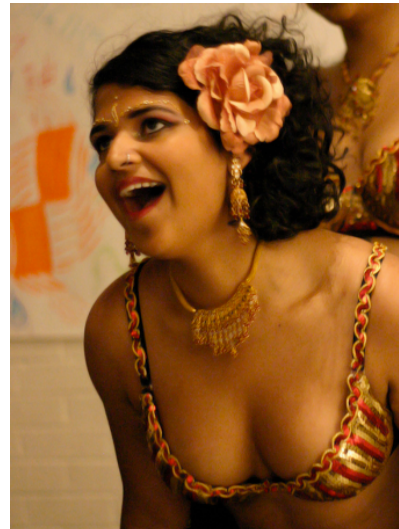
(Khor, n.d.) Image description: a Brown queer femme tosses her head back in laughter. Masti Khor has a flower in her hair and is wearing a gorgeous red and gold elaborate bra.

(Trouble, *Going Here,* 2014) Image description: two people of colour are featured in this photo. Lyric is sitting in their wheelchair with their hand inside Jiz. Jiz has positioned themselves with one foot on the handlebar of Lyric's wheelchair and the other leg is possibly on the seat of the wheelchair. They are both up against the wall of an elevator.

(Hill-Meyer, *Daily Xtra,* n.d.) Image description: The two people featured in this photo, are laying in a bed. Their faces are close to touching. Tobi looks adoringly at their scene partner as her scene partner whose eyes are closed and who is wearing an expression of pleasurable pain.

I will now establish what I mean by "cultures of undesirability," which I theorize as a conceptual alternative to "ableism" or "disableism" that speaks specifically to experiences of sexual oppression and exclusion and calls attention to the complexities of identities, bodies, experiences, and social locations as they relate to desire.[3] I have also chosen this term for its potential to connect desirability—by which I mean feelings and practices of desiring and being desired—to cultural production and systems of oppression. I will illustrate how cultures of undesirability operate and will theorize "sites of shame as sites of resistance," a concept I cultivated both through reading a number of key texts and my own experience as a queercrip person and porn maker. I will conclude the chapter by introducing queercrip porn and its world-making potential.

I was thinking about how to write out such a big and important discussion of the countless ways in which marginalized people are constructed as "undesirable others"—from large-scale systemic violence to daily micro-aggressions—and finding it hard to begin. In the midst of this pondering, I found out that a good friend's father had just killed himself. The reasons people kill themselves are never simple, but I do not think it is a coincidence that this friend's dad had just started experiencing some significant changes in his body, changes that are often understood through dominant models of disability. My friend's father was far from alone. Bethany Stevens, a well-known expert in the field of disability and sexuality, tells a similar story on her blog about a friend who killed himself; she explains that his death was due in part to the pain of internalized ableism perpetuated by narrow ideas of sex, pleasure, masculinity, and desirability that dominated his worldview (Stevens n.d, n.p). I started doing organizing and

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[3] For a strategic call to use "disableism" rather than "ableism," please see AJ Withers' website http://still.my.revolution.tao.ca/node/68

academic work on systems of oppression and radical disability politics because I recognize the

violence and oppression in so many of our lives and believe that transformation is both necessary

and possible. As I shared in the introduction, one of the earliest truths I ever learned was that no

one would ever want me as a romantic or sexual partner because of my disability. This message,

while often not stated directly, was echoed and evidenced everywhere around me. While my

experience is specific, it is not unique; many disabled activists speak to the experience of feeling

unwanted and excluded from romantic and sexual cultures (Siebers 2008). Stacey Milbern

writes:

> In fact, this has been my whole life—a string of experiences where I am the
> friend people are secretly very emotionally intimate with, but the one who is
> not invited to parties, the friend the person is conflicted about loving.... It has
> been an endless struggle to prove and remember worth in a culture that is
> relentless in its telling of the wrongness of our bodies. (2011, n.p.)

Alison Kafer begins *Feminist, Queer, Crip* with a personal narrative of how her future has been

foretold by strangers: "My wheelchair, burn scars, and gnarled hands apparently tell them all

they need to know. My future is written on my body" (2013, loc 126). Withers shares a similar

sentiment when discussing the process of getting government approval for disability benefits:

"Until the government classified me as disabled, for the sake of receiving disability benefits I

operated in a legal realm where I was simultaneously disabled and not disabled. The government

declaration that I was disabled under the law did not change anything about me, except my bank

balance" (2012, 2). Mingus, in her blog *Leaving Evidence,* conveys the relentless impact of

dominant understandings of disability:

> The truth is, I am continually giving up the able-bodied-washed version
> of myself that people have come to know. What I came to know as a
> disabled child because I never knew things could be any other way. For
> most of my life it has been easier to perform a survival able-bodied-
> friendly version of myself, rather than nurturing the harder to live

disabled-self-loving version of who I ache, desire and need to be.
Because it has often meant the difference between a-little-bit-more-
connection and a-little-less-isolation. (2011, n.p.)

The term "cultures of undesirability" emerges from queercrip and activist communities to

name the multitude of ways that marginalized people are actively imagined as undesirable others,

and to bear witness to the impacts of this construction (Mingus 2011; Gud'buy t'Jane 2011;

Ndopu 2012; and Erickson 2012). I am choosing not to present numbers, statistics or lists as

evidence of cultures of undesirability's existence; with this choice, however, I do not mean to

diminish the omnipresence of the violence that marginalized people live with every day or the

importance of this kind of information. Instead I want to take a moment here to bring forth a

number of pertinent manifestations of cultures of undesirability that were repeatedly named by

my research collaborators, which I will discuss more fully in Chapter Four. Cultures of

undesirability are built in tandem with prisons, psychiatric wards, segregated schools and

classrooms, social work offices, day centres, doctor's offices, and group homes to render

disabled people marginal, disposable, and thus undesirable; these various interconnected

institutions isolate, medicalize, criminalize and pathologize. In *Disability Incarcerated:*

Imprisonment and Disability in the United States and Canada, Ben-Moshe, Chapman, and Carey

seek to highlight connections between various sites of institutionalization and reconsider the

concept of confinement. They state: "a wide range of social service settings, including medical

institutions, jails, detention centres, and even community services, such as group homes and day

programs, share characteristics, philosophies, and goals that relate to rehabilitation through top-

down evaluation and constrained freedom, routine and physical space" (2014, ix). Pat Worth

from People First, an organization lead by people labelled with intellectual disabilities, reminds

us, "an institution is not just a place; it is the way people think" (People First n.d.). Institutional

thinking, a term coined by People First movements to reflect the ways disabled people—

particularly people labelled with intellectual disabilities—are subjected to incarcerating practices

in nearly all aspects of their lives. Institutional thinking and carceral logic—a way of thinking

characterized by control, surveillance, and punishment—are deadly. Some of us are incarcerated

in prisons, psych wards, and nursing homes. Simultaneously, Black men, Deaf people,

psychiatrized people, and people with various learning disabilities are routinely shot and killed

by police officers; hundreds of Aboriginal women are murdered or go missing; homeless people

freeze to death; and parents kill their disabled children. These forms of violence go largely

unrecognized by the institutional powers that be. If you're a disabled person who needs support

with activities of daily living such as going to the bathroom or eating, you either have to live in

supportive housing with no control over who provides you with care, or wait until enough people

die so you are moved up the waiting list to access direct funding to hire your own support

people. Disabled people seeking to become permanent residents or citizens of Canada are

considered to be an excessive demand on the Canadian health care system and denied access to

citizenship. These structural practices of dehumanization set the stage for a staggering amount of

interpersonal abuse and violence; isolation and segregation create conditions for disabled people

to have extraordinarily high rates of physical, sexual, and emotional abuse (Casteel, Martin,

Smith, and Kupper 2008). As a result of these myriad forms of oppression, marginalized people

are subject to an ever-quickening cycle of poverty, violence, criminalization, and medicalization.

This cycle undermines our collective worth and well-being on every front. Mingus (2009)

argues:

> As communities whose bodies have been owned, experimented on,
> institutionalized, hospitalized, medicalized, colonized, imprisoned, enslaved
> and controlled, we have been told that our bodies are wrong, perverse,
> shameful, bad, and most importantly; that our bodies are not ours; that they

> belong to the state, our parents, husbands, partners, doctors, children,
> families, communities, god(s), and so on. (n.p.)

These structural practices, and the cultures of undesirability they create, are far from accidental. In *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others* (2006), Ahmed encourages us to not just consider where we are, what we are facing, and what captures our attention, but the histories, inhabitances, and impressions that direct us to our particular orientations. Avery Gordon's work in *Ghostly Matters: Haunting and the Sociological Imagination* (1996) engages with the ethereal, the murky, and all of the absent presences that inhabit and shape our worlds. I am particularly interested in how Ahmed and Gordon theorize the ways in which histories inform the present and make certain futures seem more or less possible. Their work is useful in (re)thinking the past as it relates to the shadowy social forces currently impacting our lives; we need to pay attention to the ways that the legacies of oppression we inherit remain with us—the ways they haunt us.

Similarly, the concept of "sites of shame as sites of resistance" asserts that when we visit the very sites where we feel the most shame we can learn something important, because shame is produced in order to keep us from accessing those very things about ourselves and our communities that may offer us different ways of being, feeling, imagining, and resisting. "Sites of shame as sites of resistance" continues to be an invaluable concept in much of my work toward challenging the personal inferiority frame. I produced this concept through the rub between my personal experience of needing daily personal care and the work of several influential writers. Abby Wilkerson's (2002) reframing of shame as a part of social control in *Disability, Sex Radicalism and Political Agency* expanded my thinking about shame to include the ways shame is spun to internalize, naturalize, and individualize oppression. Margrit Shildrick (2002), by connecting seemingly discrete ideas of vulnerability, selfhood, and normality,

highlights the ways that spaces of shared vulnerability can be immensely productive for re-thinking bodies in isolation and relation. My theorization of "sites of shame as sites of resistance" also seeks to attend to and centre experiences and practices that meaningfully recognize what Gordon calls our "complex personhood." According to Gordon complex personhood is a recognition and respect for the contradictions, specificity, agency and constrictions that we all variously embody. Gordon explains, "at the very least, complex personhood is about conferring the respect on others that comes from presuming that life and people's lives are simultaneously straightforward and full of enormously subtle meaning" (1996, 5). To me, attending to complex personhood means centring the knowledge and experiences of marginalized people and addressing the operations of power in knowledge circulation. Much disability studies literature centres the experiences of white disabled people and produces what Chris Bell refers to as "white disability studies" (2010). The operation of white supremacy within disability studies means that many disability issues are not recognized as such and people's lived complexities are denied. Similarly, a disability justice analysis is often absent from other literatures not explicitly pertaining to disability. Black feminism—in particular the work of Audre Lorde, bell hooks, Kim Catrin Crosby, M. Njeri Jackson, and Angela Davis—has been invaluable to shaping my understanding of visibility, difference, power, intersectionality, and vulnerability. It is important to recognize the contribution of several key Black feminist writers to my conceptualization of "sites of shame as sites of resistance" and to be explicit about where my knowledge comes from. Audre Lorde encourages us to resist silencing, ignoring, or hiding sites of shame, and calls on her readers to spend time at these sites, get to know them, and flaunt them (1984). To conceptualize sites of shame as sites of resistance can mean to counter the erasure of marginalized people's individual and collective sense of worth. As hooks explains,

this erasure works strategically to justify oppression and limit people's capacity to resist it by preventing us from getting together to build community and power. By envisioning sites of shame as sites of resistance, we can begin to "imagine otherwise" (hooks 2003, 2010).

As powerful as cultures of undesirability are, queercrips are stronger. The multitude of ways we imagine otherwise amidst complex exchanges of limitation and possibility reminds us that we don't only inherit oppression, we also live with, draw on, and create legacies of resilience and transformation. If we don't share struggles, passions, and dreams with each other, we may miss out on powerful imaginings that shift dominant power structures. The stories I wish to share in the following chapters centre on queercrip survival, flourishing, and flaunting. Mia Mingus's words gesture to the importance of building crip solidarity in our world-making projects: "we will weave need into our relationships like golden, shimmering glimmers of hope—opportunities to build deeper, more whole and practice what our world *could* look like" (2010 n.p). I feel hope in the many different transformative justice projects and frameworks using community responses to the violence in our lives. I want to revel in Sins Invalid's video clips and the moving Queer and Trans People of Colour (QTPOC)-centered performance nights I've witnessed in Toronto, where folks are vulnerable, fierce, and fabulous. I am thankful for these *cultures of desirability* that marginalized people are creating every day. We embody these resistant and resilient cultures by blockading inaccessible public transit stations, occupying government offices when they cut necessary social benefits, by fucking, by cuddling with partners and friends. I want us to feel our loveliness in the power, vulnerability, and resilience we express in tears of joy, laughter, and rage. Together we can create space for and tell stories that reflect the multifaceted nature of our experiences. We create, lift up, and share stories that capture what Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarashina and Ellery Russian call "the lust of

recognition," a term they use to name the moments of recognition and finding hotness in each other's cripness (in Mingus 2010).

It was the idea of living and imagining otherwise that first prompted me to make porn. I had never seen my body or bodies that look like mine in a hot and sexy way; I didn't think it was possible. Then my best friend took out her camera and took pictures of my new nipple piercing. When I looked at the pictures I couldn't deny I was sexy. It was my first glimpse into a new world, a world I wanted to share with other people: I wanted more. I wanted to create linkages through the messiness between what we think and what we feel. I wanted to make people feel— to turn people on in an embodied way.

In Audre Lorde's poem, "Coping," she describes a scene of a young boy clearing water away from young plants that have been subjected to days of rain. When the boy is asked why he does this, he replies: "young seeds that have not seen sun forget and drown easily" (1978, 45). We know that possibility is not accidental: we must create it together. We need community, practices of disability justice and radical disability politics, and the "lust of recognition" as much as we need the sun—in fact, maybe they are a kind of sun. We must have imaginings that not only contribute to the cultivation of a collective sense of self that knows we are worth struggling for, but also nurtures our collective survival through interdependent community building. In the following chapters, I share stories that reveal queercrips' situated knowledges and the ways we care for and with each other—imaginings and actions that flaunt our ways of being, our passions, our creativity, our fabulous and fierce challenges to the dominant power structure, our loveliness, and of course, our sexiness!

Chapter Two: (Re)imagining Porn

In the previous chapter I offered an overview and critique of the dominant models through which disability is understood; I also introduced "cultures of undesirability" and "sites of shame as sites of resistance" as key concepts guiding this text. I discussed how dominant cultural narratives about bodies, disability, sex/uality, and (un)desirability are interrupted by marginalized people, and how understanding sites of shame as sites of resistance allows us to imagine cultures of resistance and desirability into being. Marginalized people do this imaginative world-making through stories and solidarity, including through the creation of porn. In this chapter I shift my attention to porn, first offering my understanding of porn as it is situated within and against the porn studies literature. I will then identify and discuss four conventions of porn that I argue make it a useful method for transforming cultures of undesirability. Finally, I introduce "counterpublic porn" and outline the ways it participates in disruption and transformation.

Theorizing Porn

While porn has the potential to open possibilities of subversive and transformative embodied knowledge regarding sexuality, sex, identity, relationship structures, bodies (in all of their intersecting complexities), fantasy, and desire/desirability, both the production and consumption of pornography can (re)produce normative ideologies, including the erasure or hypersexualization of marginalized bodies. In this chapter, I will draw from both the academic literature and my personal experiences of making, screening and discussing porn in a variety of settings to show how porn is understood through conventions, both dominant and resistant. In this process I will examine the social and political role of sexual storytelling and the various contexts in which pornographic stories and stories of pornography are told.

While the academic study of porn is not new, porn studies is a relatively new and contested discipline within academia (Attwood and Smith 2014). The primary issues for discussion in the literature reflect many of the main issues regarding sex work more generally: labour issues (van der Meulen 2012); exploitation versus empowerment (Nagle 1997); the supposed role porn plays in sexual violence and the sexualization of culture (Attwood and Smith 2014); the politics of representation and inclusion/exclusion (Williams 2004 and Taormino et al 2013); the educational potential of porn (Taormino et al 2013); the relationship between porn and art (Church 2004); and the digital era's impact on porn (Williams 2004). It is necessary to note that much of the literature in the porn studies canon, until recently, has been written by academics situated as outsiders to the world of porn; the knowledge of those involved in producing porn is largely discredited. *The Feminist Porn Book* (2013) and the recently established *Porn Studies Journal* (2014) stand out as important exceptions bringing together performers, academics and porn-star academics. While porn videos and porn studies are often paired, the latter is often seen to offer insight into the former, and does not necessarily recognize porn videos as knowledge-producing texts. My focus in this work is to place these texts in genuine dialogue with academic theorizations of porn. I will argue in this chapter that doing so can move the discussion beyond what porn *is* to what porn *does*, in a way that opens it up as a critical methodology. In this and ensuing chapters I aim to bring academic and experiential porn knowledges together to theorize porn as a multiplicitous embodied storytelling practice that contains the potential for disruption and transformation.

Porn Studies and the "Good vs. Bad" Debate

US Supreme Court Justice Potter Stewart famously attempted to define pornography in 1954, declaring: "I don't know what it is, but I know it when I see it" (in Williams 1999, 5). Despite the popular idea that porn is self-evident, definitions of pornography—and even the idea that a definition is necessary—remain contentious in the academic literature on pornography (Williams 1999, 5). In the literature we see several competing and often contradictory understandings of what pornography is, what it has been historically, as well as what it does and can do (Williams 1999, Rea 2001, O'Toole 1999 and Mason-Grant 2004). In their discussions of pornography, academic writers often immediately position themselves on one or the other side in the "porn is good vs. porn is bad" debate, and then offer a definition of pornography that supports that position; there is rarely a middle ground, due in large part to the legacy of the feminist sex wars. The sex wars, also referred to as the porn wars, "emerged out of the debate between feminists about the role of sexualized representation in society and grew into a full-scale divide that has lasted over three decades" (Taormino et al 2013, 10). Beginning in the late 1970s and early 1980s, Women Against Pornography, a collective of feminists, started a widespread campaign to legally ban pornography. Led by white academic feminists including Andrea Dworkin, Catharine MacKinnon and Robin Morgan, the group argued that pornography was essentially rape, effectively aligning themselves with sexual conservatives and the Christian Right and bolstering a societal moral panic regarding sexuality. In response, self-identified radical feminists and sex workers, including well-known women porn performers, joined forces to establish what the authors of *The Feminist Porn Book* consider to be the beginning of the feminist porn movement (Taormino et al 2013). The emergence of sex positive feminism, the feminist porn movement, and several early feminist porn films was an important and, I would argue, highly productive

response to the anti-porn and anti-sex work sentiments of mainstream feminism. However, in the extreme polarization of these two movements, critical engagement with the complexity of pornography has been largely lost. As the authors of *The Feminist Porn Book* argue:

> On one side, "Pornography" was a visual embodiment of the patriarchy and violence against women; on the other, it was defended as "speech," or as a form of cultural production that should not be foreclosed because it might someday be transformed into a vehicle for women's erotic expression. The nuances and complexities of myriad "pornographies" were lost in the middle. For example, anti-porn feminists' problematic assumption that porn is inherently oppressive to women—that women are debased when they have sex on camera—ignores and represses women's sexuality; at the same time, sex positive feminism does not always accommodate the ways in which women are constrained by dominant cultural understandings of sexuality. (2013, 14)

Much of the literature about porn is still caught in the sex wars' polarized debate. In 2001, after conducting a thorough survey of the literature on porn, Michael Rea provided a summary and categorization of its most prevalent definitions. While Rea acknowledges that these definitions often work in concert with one another, making categorization difficult, he offers six categories:

> (i) those that define pornography as the sale of sex for profit, (ii) those that defined it as a form of bad art, (iii) those that defined it as portraying men or women as, as only, or only as sexual beings or sexual objects, (iv) those that define it as a form of obscenity, (v) those that define it as a form of (or contributor to) oppression, and (vi) those that define it as material that is intended to produce or has the effect of producing sexual arousal. (Rea 2001, 123)

While Rea's categorizations are largely critical of porn and caught up in a project of defining it and taking a position on its value, his work still implies that porn *is doing* something. Indeed, a growing body of porn studies literature moves beyond the "offensive and degrading" vs. "empowering and liberating" debate. Linda Williams' *Hard Core: Power, Pleasure, and the "Frenzy of the Visible"* (1999) marked a turning point in moving beyond this dichotomy (Attwood and Smith 2014). Kath Albury conveys the significance of this shift stating:

"[evaluating] pornographic texts in exclusively moral terms—that is, to consider them primarily in relation to 'good' or 'bad' representations of sex and gender—forecloses their potential as tools for teaching and learning about *changing* sexual practices and sexual subjectivities" (2009, 650). In this spirit, I hope to avoid producing a concrete definition of what pornography is; rather, I recognize that porn's ontology—what it *is*—is tied up with what it *does*, or more accurately, what it can do or is imagined to do. This doing is important because it shifts our focus on porn as a practice, a method. The repeated failure of attempts to define and contain porn reflects its unruliness: porn is not a self-evident entity, lying in wait for someone to unearth its truest definition and finally allow us to *know* whether it is good or bad; rather the very ways in which pornography is imagined, produced, consumed, and used reflect the varied interests and investments of those involved at every level, and the social structures that all of us navigate.

Mainstream Porn and its Conventions

In *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects and Others* (2006)*,* Sara Ahmed offers an ambitious investigation of the relationships between proximity, familiarity, and habits; in other words, the various unconscious but systemic processes through which power and history are made to appear and disappear in order to erase complexity and enforce conformity. These processes—which she understands as conventions—press, align, and mark bodies and ways of being in certain directions. She shows how certain possibilities for ways of being are brought into legibility while others are excluded through these alignments. Ahmed ties this investigation to the daily realities that result from interlocking systems of oppression, including colonialism, racism, patriarchy, and capitalism.[4] She asks us to consider not just what captures our attention

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[4]An unfortunate limitation of her work is that she fails to attend to the ways that systemic ableism operates in concert with these other systems of oppression.

based on where we are and what we experience, but what brought us to our particular orientations. I find it useful to apply Ahmed's conceptualization of convention to dominant and resistant understandings of porn.

Tristan Taormino summarizes the North American commercial porn industry's formula*: x minutes of oral on her,* plus *y* minutes of oral on him, followed by *z* minutes of penis in vagina sex with several position shifts, culminating in the infamous "money shot" somewhere on the woman's body, usually face, mouth, breasts, or butt (Taormino 2010). These are the consistently repeated images found in most mass-marketed heterosexual porn; we see these repetitions largely performed by and through white, not apparently disabled, thin, young, cisgender bodies. If you watch enough porn, you know exactly what move is going to happen next, by whom and to whom, and for how long (Taormino 2010). Most of the conventions of mainstream porn seek to be cost-efficient, which in the industry means turning people on quickly and effectively and selling as many video products as possible. The industry targets white, heterosexual, cisgender men because they are by far its most lucrative consumers.

I refer to the porn described above as "mainstream porn." While mainstream porn is regulated by the state in various ways so as to not offend the general public and to keep it away from those under the age of 18, it is still readily available in corner stores, video rental stores, and sex shops to adults bold enough to ask for it. Online sites like xtube.com and pornotube.com offer free one-stop browsing and are becoming increasingly popular places to access porn. Through the broad exposure that comes with mass-marketing and the systematic repetition of formulaic content, mainstream porn comes to dominate our understanding of porn and becomes the definitive marker of what porn is.

In *Telling Sexual Stories: Power, Change and Social Worlds,* Kenneth Plummer

emphasizes the importance of the mechanisms we use to tell stories as well as the types of stories we tell (2007). He discusses in detail several types of sexual stories—including sexual assault survival stories, lesbian and gay "coming-out" stories, and "recovery" stories—each of these types of stories serve different purposes at particular times and in particular contexts. Plummer's work serves as a resource for thinking through storytelling as a method of knowledge production, and prompts me to understand porn as a language rather than an object—one with the potential to say something new about bodies, disability, and desirability. In *The Feminist Porn Book,* psychologist Keiko Lane confirms this potential by citing examples from her practice where she uses pornography with clients; porn allows her and her clients to "build somatic and visual vocabularies from which to make empowered choices" (Lane 2013, 170). I wish to discuss the particular conventions regularly associated with porn, which I believe illustrate the capacity of porn as a method for disruption and transformation.

Re-visioning Porn

While I challenge the idea of an essential quality that defines porn or makes it radically different from other forms of cultural representation, I want to honour its specificity as well as speak to some of the characterizations of porn commonly articulated in the porn studies literature that, to me, make porn a potentially useful method of disruption and transformation within marginalized communities.[5] These are: 1) porn as offensive, oppressive, or obscene; 2) porn as involved in the creation of truth and fantasy; 3) porn as intending to arouse; and 4) porn as intrinsically linked to the (re)production of knowledge, selves, and norms. In the following section I will investigate

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[5] The literature I am referring to here includes the literature that I have above identified as lacking in a creative and critical approach to porn. It includes texts such as Rea (2011), O'Toole (1999) and Lehman (2006) as well as the often-feminist porn literature that operates from a more complex and engaged perspective (see the work of Williams 1999 and 2004; Church 2004; Miller-Young 2010 and 2015; Taormino et al 2013; Attwood and Smith 2014 and Lee 2015).

how each categorization is discussed in the literature in order to deepen our collective

understanding of porn's various capacities for intervention and transformation.

Porn as Offensive, Oppressive, or Obscene

As noted by Rea in his review of the literature, porn is often understood as being offensive,

oppressive, or obscene: that is, lacking social, political, or artistic value and simply representing

prurient interests (Rea 2011, Williams 1999, Mason-Grant 2004 and O'Toole 1999). The

association of offense, oppression, and obscenity in porn is significant, as it confuses and

obscures important differences and relationships between all three concepts. For example, when I

screen my video *want,* many viewers respond by challenging the video's place in the category of

porn because, they say, "it is not offensive." In other words, it isn't objectifying or oppressive

because the agency of the performers was apparent. I would argue that this reaction reflects the

existence of a dominant understanding of porn and reveals that, as with many dominant

ideologies, this understanding is narrow and exclusive. When porn is framed as offensive it

becomes understood as morally wrong. The propagation of porn as a threat to what is considered

normal and healthy sexuality is one of the mechanisms by which porn can be utilized to enforce

a coherent, unitary sexual norm. The understanding of porn as offensive exists in the popular

imagination in part due to the formulations of mainstream porn mentioned above, including

money shots that objectify human body parts. However, there isn't anything fundamentally

oppressive about a money shot; it is simply one of a large variety of sex acts. Money shots

become oppressive when people in the porn industry are made into dehumanized objects and

money shots become a requirement for successful production.

Understanding porn as offensive and even oppressive because it is obscene frames

embodied interests as base and prurience as bad, but it also erases the transformative potential of being obscene. Obscenity, at its root, is simply that which challenges dominant ideas of morality; as Constance Penley notes, "porn isn't lewd for nothing" (2013, 187). Lawrence O'Toole, illustrating pornography's history, claims that before it was associated with sex or sex acts, pornography was used "chiefly to satirize, criticize, to tilt at the Church, the state, the monarchy... Porn was controlled during this period not because it was obscene but because it was seditious, blasphemous or defamatory" (1999, 1). In Early Modern Europe, "talking dirty" was more about anti-authoritarian politics than about explicit sex or sexual activity. O'Toole shows how access and class status impacted understandings of porn; "high-class hot texts" were not seen as obscene and were of little interest to the censors or legal regulation as they were not part of mass consumption due lack of access to literacy (1999, 2). He claims that our current understanding of porn as "regulated materials designed for sexual arousal emerged partly as a consequence of the decline in religion, and partly through the separating of sex from procreation, coupled with views from the Enlightenment that sex might actually make a person happy" (O'Toole 1999, 3). Alongside these ideological shifts pertaining to religion and sex were new theories of gender difference. Through O'Toole's work, we can recognize porn's potential to critique power structures and interrupt dominant ideologies; indeed, this potential is a rich part of porn's legacy. The connections between porn as obscene, and obscenity as that which challenges authority, are part of what inspires my commitment to porn as a tool for disrupting dominant ideologies. These connections in no way undermine the understanding that disruption can occur in alignment with the interests of dominant power structures. Criticism of porn as obscenity is often individualized, by which I mean that criticism of porn is often framed as a personal offense. As I will discuss at greater length below, the individualization of porn vis-à-vis

obscenity can work to cover over porn's potential for challenging state power. It is interesting

and important to note here that in the process of defining mainstream pornography as that which

is offensive, feminist and queer porn gets bracketed off as something different (possibly erotica)

or exceptional, as my viewers' responses to *want* indicate. While erotica, feminist, and queer

porn must depart from many of the conventions of mainstream porn to offer an effective

alternative, viewing them as entirely separate is problematic as well. The creation of a binary of

sexually explicit representation shuts down the specificity and significance of feminist and queer

porn *as porn*.

Porn as Involved in the Creation of Truth and Fantasy

There seems to be general agreement in the porn studies literature that fantasy-making is part of

the process and product of porn, but there remains a range of opinions on the associated

consequences (Williams 1999, Mason-Grant 2004 and Attwood and Smith 2014). The multiple

implications of fantasy in porn are seen in the many debates of the feminist sex wars regarding

pornography and its relationship to sexual violence (Williams 1999). For example, Joan Mason-

Grant (2004) argues from a feminist and phenomenological framework that fantasy is used to

obscure the "real" bodies and subordinate the material practices involved in producing porn.

While porn performers may indeed be subjected to exploitative working conditions, and these

conditions must be addressed, the exploitation of workers is not unique to porn; it exists within

white supremacist, capitalist, disableist hetero-patriarchy. When we view exploitation from this

orientation, our response to the problem will focus on systems of oppression rather than on porn.

Further, assumptions about how performers are experiencing a particular scene work similarly to

obscure "real" bodies and material practices in porn. Mason-Grant seems to assume that the

fantasies created by porn are always harmful, overwriting the possibility of porn to inspire new

sexual possibilities (Milne 2005). We must also be careful not to assume that the fantasies and

desires of porn performers are absent from (or present in) the production of porn. Taormino's

Chemistry and *Rough Sex* series and Tobi Hill-Meyers' website "Doing It Online" are excellent

examples of porn that actively centre the desires and fantasies of the performers.[6]

The medium of porn rests in the chiasm of truth and fantasy, making it a potentially useful

method for questioning both concepts.[7] In *Hard Core,* Linda Williams deploys a Foucauldian

analysis to unearth the complex connections between fantasy, visibility, sex, and knowledge

production. Williams cites Foucault's assertion that confession is part of the "will to knowledge"

(1999, 48), contending that confession plays a significant role in the production of modern

sexuality as an identifiable and thus containable entity. According to Foucault, there is a

"pleasure in knowing" that can be seen operating through many different systems including

medicine, law, and pornography (1976). We see in the aims of these modernist systems a quest

for the fantasy of an absolute truth supported by visual confirmation, as Williams also takes us

through a concise yet detailed history of the invention of cinematic machines. She draws out

similarities between early advances in cinematic technology, motivated by desires to capture the

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[6] *Chemistry* is set up like a reality TV show: Taormino picks several porn stars to live in a house for a weekend and she films everything. She also gives the actors cameras to film themselves and each other. *Rough Sex* attempts to challenge the belief that women don't like it rough; it features interviews with female porn stars discussing what they like about rough sex, what that means to them and how the scene came about. "Doing It Online" offers "a unique combination of explicit sexuality alongside exploration of issues and concerns affecting trans women, our partners, and our communities, each episode will tell a story that is important to the individuals involved, now expanding the focus from relationships and hookups to any and all issues related to sexuality. This might include activism, art, healthcare issues, experiences relating to pornography, bi-national relationships, immigration, transition, and family" (Hill-Meyer n.d.).

[7] I borrow this term from Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1962). The chiasm offers a way of approaching two supposedly separate but related pairs or actions. Rather than involving a simple dualism, a chiasm honours the concurrence of interwining and encroachment with divergence. This interrelation between distinction and connection serves as a constitutive factor in allowing subjectivity to be possible at all.

truth of bodies and movement, and the desire of porn to capture the truth of sexual pleasure (Williams 1999). What becomes evident in both of these endeavours is the intertwining of the visual with truth, reality, and desire. Significantly, the alignment of advances in cinematic technology with the impetus towards what Williams refers to as "maximum visibility" signals the constitutive relationship between the scientific quest for capturing truth and the creation of fantasy. What is understood as self-evident or real determines what is considered fantasy, while fantasy reciprocally creates the real (Williams 1999).

Still, Williams fails to acknowledge or analyze the relationship between scientific truth, the creation of fantasy, and the colonial project. At a panel titled "A conversation with [Toronto International Film Festival] programmers Jesse Wente and Rasha Salti on indigenous cinema in Toronto" spoke to this necessary and complex interrelation (September 16, 2014). Filmmaker and panellist Jesse Wente gave a brief but thorough discussion about the history of film and photography regarding indigenous peoples of Turtle Island. He identified that one of the first films ever created was of native performers performing "Indian" for Thomas Edison to capture and produce a colonial story of Indigenous peoples. This performance of "Indian" was connected to the role of freak shows and the birth of museums in promoting the colonial project. Co-panelist and film curator Rasha Salti talked about early missionaries who searched for the Holy Land of popular Christian imaginary; when they found something different, they used photography to create the mythology they longed for, in effect erasing the Palestinian people. Connected to this modernist and colonial project of creating truth and fantasy, "otherness" in porn is also imagined through colonialist, ableist, patriarchal, racist, capitalist, and heteronormative frames to reflect dominant imaginings and maintain privilege. In many ways, mainstream porn repeats the current dominant power structures in how it values and presents

certain bodies. In watching, many viewers are exposed to a fairly homogeneous representation of desirable subjects; when marginalized characters are present, we are often only understood to be desirable in particular "other" ways: we are regularly hypersexualized, tokenized, and segregated into fetish markets, while our sexual labour is often undervalued. In *Putting Hypersexuality to Work: Black Women and Illicit Eroticism in Pornography,* Mireille Miller-Young states:

> Hierarchies of value organize the production, distribution, and consumption of pornography media, in addition to structuring work and labor relations in the adult entertainment industry. According to this logic of sexual economy, some bodies are worth more than others; yet all are evaluated and commodified through the lens of race, gender, class, and, sexuality. (2010, 220)

In his important critique of *Hard Core,* Champagne examines the operation of "technologies of self." Drawing on Foucault's later work, Champagne argues that our collective possibility has been severely restricted in order to make for a tidier, more manageable world. However, even within this "shrinking of the relational fabric"—and possibly because of it— there exists the possibility for disruption and transformation (Champagne 1991). Focussing principally on gay sexuality, Champagne understands porn as one of the technologies that provides an opportunity for opening up new ways of being and relating. Plummer (1997), hooks (1992), Queen (1997), Muñoz (1999), and Sandahl and Auslander (2005) speak to the interaction between systemic oppression and the production of communities and individual identities, and reveal that there are multiple sources of power that limit lived experiences, personal identity, and community to maintain the status quo. Miller-Young's large body of work on labour practices and black women's experiences in pornography calls our attention to the "dual process of transgression and restriction, for both representation and labor" (Miller–Young quoted in Taormino et al. 2013, 107). When thinking about harnessing porn's relationship to fantasy in order to create cultural imaginings that expand, expose, and sometimes explode previous

possibilities—unearthing something different, creative, and necessary—we must also be cognizant of the ways that cultural imaginings, pornographic or otherwise, align with hegemonic ideologies, working performatively to narrow what is imaginable and therefore what is considered possible. In my work, I endeavour to stay attentive to the interrelation of this difficult bind.

Porn as Intending to Arouse

Porn's relationship to sexual response is one feature that differentiates it from other genres of representation. Porn involves people *having* sex, not just simulating it, and the implications of this fact are hotly debated in the literature (Mason-Grant 2004; Williams 1999; and McElroy 1995). This debate is largely premised on whether or not porn is recognized as embodied. In the dualism between body and culture, the body is reduced to a simplistic, mechanically functioning object outside of culture, rather than part of a necessary, complex, and important interplay. "Embodiment" is a concept that understands and takes this interplay seriously. On one side, porn is understood as crude, straightforward stimulation; on the other, porn is understood as a purely abstract representation requiring reflection. There are many attempts to distinguish porn from art: the latter, it is argued, falls within the province of self-conscious reflection that engages the mind of the restrained and sophisticated—read as wealthy or "high-class"—viewer (Williams 1999). Porn, on the other hand, is regarded as crass, talentless entertainment for the simple—read as poor or "low-class"—masses. In addition to reinforcing a Cartesian divide between body and mind, this distinction works to undermine the embodied processes that are part of both making and viewing porn. Thanks to the power of illusory separation between the body and mind, mainstream porn falls outside the domain of critical reflection and cultural commentary.

Furthermore, the above debates lend to totalizing understandings of both the producers and consumers porn. Analyses of porn that frame it as the representation of ideas—Mason-Grant (2004) refers to this as "the speech paradigm"—see it as a moral threat of abstract harm to society rather than as something that has material or practical impacts on people's lives. The speech paradigm also serves to diminish the complex fleshiness of porn and fails to acknowledge the tacit processes and conventions from which porn-making (and all production) happens. This is where Mason-Grant's anti-pornography text, *Pornography Embodied: From Speech to Sexual Practice,* is extremely useful in re-framing porn. Mason-Grant takes up the work of Andrea Dworkin and Catherine MacKinnon—two notable anti-porn feminists—to argue that "pornography is not merely the representation or expression of ideas—that is 'speech'—but a material practice of subordination" (2004, 2). She makes the phenomenological assertion that pornography is an embodied social practice, one that "cultivates subordinating forms of desire, perception, and sexual know-how" (Mason-Grant 2004, 8). Though her analysis is limited by her argument that porn necessarily leads to subordination, Mason-Grant's framing of porn as an *embodied social practice* is confirmed and echoed by many feminist porn scholars. Critical to my point of departure from the totalizing anti-porn sentiment of Mason-Grant's argument is Linda Williams' investigation of the ways in which porn provokes and requires embodied action and reaction; in other words, porn "moves" us (1999, 290), whether we are making it or watching it. Sometimes it prompts sexual activity—broadly understood to include masturbation and any number of sex acts, which may or may not involve genitals, and which one might do alone or with company—but most often, porn prompts feelings: shame, desire, anxiety, fear, disgust, anger, recognition and/or misrecognition, and arousal are the most commonly articulated. When porn moves us, it moves us in our bodies.

This embodied response is significant because it moves us on an affective level, connecting both producers and consumers to our bodies. When I did workshops on sexuality and disability before I started making porn, I could feel the intellectual disconnect in the room. People in the workshop would understand that disabled people are sexual beings, but they didn't feel it; they had not incorporated this affective understanding into their lives and ways of perceiving their worlds. I turn to Deborah Gould's (2009) *Moving Politics: Emotion and Act Up's Fight Against AIDS*, an important text on activism and political feelings, to support my assertion that feelings are integral to transformation. Gould asks, "What role do affects, feelings and emotions play in generating and foreclosing said political horizons?" (2009, 3). How, in turn, does affect organize political action? Through what processes do dominant understandings get transformed? I argue that the intent of porn to arouse—to make us feel—is imbued with potential. This potential all too often gets directed in alignment with dominant ideologies and power structures. When we discuss how porn "moves" us, we often become caught up in and limited by discussions regarding porn's inherent worth rather than what it is doing or what it can do. I am more interested in how porn makes us feel, albeit with careful attention to the complexity of feelings that are occurring. In what ways does the porn we make and watch reinforce or challenge the way we feel about bodies, sex, desirability, and porn itself? What Ahmed terms a queer phenomenological framework allows us to attend to the extent to which everyday practices are always already caught up in the larger context of social power (2006). This framework helps us recognize the ways that habitual embodied practices and lived experiences of the body are at play in making the conventions of porn, along with the arousal and desires inspired by them, seem natural and disconnected from larger socio-political structures.

Porn as Intrinsically Linked to the (Re)production of Knowledge, Selves, and Norms

Mason-Grant calls upon readers to focus on the material practices at play in porn as they produce

and facilitate the acquisition of sexual knowledge (2004). Despite the fact that porn is often kept

hidden under mattresses or behind locked cabinets, for many people—and especially cisgender

heterosexual men—it remains one of the most readily available ways to learn about sex, desire,

and bodies (Gibson 2004, Milne 2005 and Queen 1997). The focus on portraying "real sex" can

lend porn a realism that is reminiscent of documentary, which plays a part in how porn may get

taken up as a resource for sexual education (Gibson 2004, Milne 2005 and Williams 1999).

The various ways that porn contributes to sexual education is a useful reminder that all

porn is engaged in the work of producing sexual and cultural norms. While the literature is very

clear that alternative porn or gay porn is often understood as practice of self-making (Williams

1999 and Butler 2004), there seems to be little direct acknowledgment of mainstream porn's role

in the production of selves.[8] As argued above, the most readily available porn is mainstream

porn; the knowledge produced in mainstream porn supports the cultural norms of those in

positions of privilege. It is important to explicitly connect mainstream porn to the cultural work it

is always in the process of doing, as these connections attend to the "histories of arrival" that

replicate and challenge dominant structural regimes (Ahmed 2006, 38).

My intention in this section is to connect critical understandings of the production of selves

and the production of porn—both mainstream and "alternative"—to each other, marking porn as

a potentially useful tool for transforming and disrupting dominant ideologies of self-making

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[8] I think it is important to acknowledge the ways in which heterocentrism and/or homophobia operate in the assumption that gay and queer porn are doing explicit cultural work on selfhood. I would argue that this assumption relates to the "claiming of a self" that marginalized people are forced to do in order to counter erasure or misrepresentation. One is more likely to be seen as explicitly claiming a selfhood when their ways of being are consistently questioned, devalued, criminalized, or pathologized. I return to this critique in greater depth in Chapter Four.

through storytelling. The work of Deleuze and Guattari (1987) emerges as useful in refiguring ideas of selfhood as always in motion, always in production. Similarly, in his critique of *Hard Core,* Champagne proposes that Williams' consideration of porn as a male speculation on female difference essentializes porn, and he seeks to better explain, "the relationship of 'the spectator' to 'the apparatus'" (1991, 204). In *Power/Knowledge,* Foucault describes the apparatus as a "relational system" (1980, 194). Champagne, inspired by Foucault's articulation, asserts that any model of spectatorship needs to be understood as a "fictive discursive practice that produces different conditions of possibility" rather than a question of origins (1991, 205). An apparatus is a heterogeneous system of relations that can be established between elements that include discourses, institutions, architectural forms, regulatory decisions, laws, administrative measures, scientific statements, and philosophical, moral, and philanthropic propositions (Foucault 1980, 194-5). In the connection between elements, there is interplay: shifts in position and modifications of function that can vary widely. In discussing the practices of self-making, Foucault attempts to challenge characterizations that see self-making as an act of creation that is freely chosen at will by a self. Instead, Foucault uses the term "technologies of the self" to call attention to the cultural processes at work in self-making, understanding it as an active, imaginative process always engaged with and enabled through the multiple relational elements mentioned above (Champagne 1991). This conceptualization of self-making is important because it facilitates the understanding that each production and consumption of porn is a multiplicitous doing. There is a tremendous specificity with which any individual viewer may interact with particular videos in any given context as well as how multiple viewers may engage differently with particular videos or parts of videos. This interplay extends to the process of making porn, as we imagine or experience what happens within the various roles involved in its production.

When we add the above work on technologies of self to the idea of porn as sexual storytelling, we are granted a glimpse into the intimate connection between storytelling, cultural production, community building, and technologies of self. Kenneth Plummer (1997) addresses the social and political significance of sexual storytelling in regards to self-making and community building in *Telling Sexual Stories*. According to Plummer, stories are "used to build loves and lives" (1997, 38-9). He argues that we consume the stories of others in order to produce a self, noting that the narratives of sexual minorities often involve stories of searching: "looking for others like me" or for an unimagined possibility that helps them to make sense of their experiences. Plummer also calls attention to workings of power and the social emergence of stories. In order for stories to be successful, they need strong communities to hear them; in other words, "stories are told: stories are read; communities are born" (1997, 45). Stories thus contribute to the formation of social memory and the distribution of collective and shared knowledge. Many consumers of mainstream porn who are not part of its intended audience—that is, heterosexual, white cisgender men—echo this sentiment of looking and longing for stories.

In reading Plummer alongside Champagne, Foucault, and Deleuze and Guattari, sexual storytelling—including potentially porn—opens up the possibility of self-making within collectivity. Rather than focusing on creating new identities, I hope to encourage readers to look toward the invention of new relationship systems and consider the role that porn can play in this invention (Champagne 1991). In this regard, I am inspired by Champagne, who names gay sexuality as a site in which the existing rigid relationship structures of society can be opened up. In the socio-historical context of a dominant culture that only grants legitimacy to relationships supported by blood and/or marriage—and where that legitimacy through marriage is often only granted to those who are considered desirable citizens—queers and other marginalized people,

such as those on social assistance**,** disabled people, and indigenous people, have a long history of creating "alternative" forms of relationship, love, and ways of being in and moving through the world. This focus on creating new ways of life rather than new identities is critical in positing a vision of transformation and resistance that doesn't just benefit those with relative privilege.

Counterpublic Porn

In order to imagine otherwise and create new ways of life, we must encounter and revel in new imaginings that reflect, support, and create a new "art of life" (Foucault qtd in Champagne 1991, 185). Champagne's work allows for a framing of gay porn as one such potential art of life; he shows how practices occurring in the "gay ghetto," such as the de-Oedipalizing of the body, S&M sexuality, and the sexual practices of bathhouses, come together in gay pornographic photography and video (1991). Gay porn, by documenting these practices, participates in expanding our ways of living and being in particular ways through producing and sharing knowledge. In this section I shift my focus to porn that seeks to weave anew the genre's relational fabric. I use the term "counterpublic porn" to describe porn that attempts this work of transformation and disruption.

I borrow the concept of the "counterpublic" from Michael Warner's (2002) article "Publics and Counterpublics." In this important work, Warner sets out to describe the process of establishing "publics"; in other words, how people create and maintain social spaces. Further, he seeks to understand the link between performance and cultural change. While Warner doesn't specifically address porn, his analysis offers useful terminology for the development of my understanding of porn that intentionally seeks to transform and/or disrupt. Warner sketches out a series of distinct but interrelated conceptualizations of "public." The most common sense of the

term is "*the* public," defined as people sharing in an event, a physical space, or even a common action. Another public, and the principal focus of the essay, is "the kind of public that comes into being only in relation to texts and their circulation" (Warner 2002, 50). Warner then discusses the various ways that publics act in order to think through the role that publics play in constructing social worlds. He defines the "counterpublic" as having a conflictual relationship to dominant publics; its notion arises through opposition rather than distinction. Counterpublics are a form of the public, and thereby work within many of the same rules. For Warner, however, counterpublics are forged through reading against the grain and thus able, through circulation, to bring to fruition communities and ways of being within language and ideology. He explains, "counterpublics are "counter" to the extent that they try to supply different ways of imagining stranger-sociability and its reflexivity; as publics, they remain oriented to stranger-circulation in a way that is not just strategic, but also constitutive of membership and it's affects" (Warner 2002, 87-88). To Warner's idea of "stranger-sociability" and "stranger-circulation" I would like to add Ahmed's important reminder:

> To re-encounter objects as strange things is hence not to lose sight of their
> history but to refuse to make them history by losing sight. Such wonder
> directed at the objects that we face, as well as those that are behind us, does
> not involve bracketing out the familiar but rather allows the familiar to dance
> again with life. (2006, 164)

Warner further characterizes both publics and counterpublics as constantly fluid entities. Similarly, the language I use to talk about porn that seeks to do something different from mainstream porn, or porn that is geared towards representing particular communities, has had and continues to have many different labels.

Candida Royale was one of the original members of Club 98, a group of women porn

performers in New York City[9]. In 1984 she founded Femme Productions with the goal of

creating porn from a women's point of view. The founding of Femme Productions is recognized

as one of the inaugural moments of what is today commonly referred to as feminist porn

(Taormino et al, 2013). Along with Royale, other members of the sex positive movement also

began producing pornography intended to depart from mainstream porn by addressing and

creating alternative communities: *On Our Backs* was one of the first lesbian porn magazines, and

Fatale Video began making lesbian porn videos. A few years later, in 1989, Linda Williams

published *Hard Core,* initiating academic, feminist re-visionist perspectives on porn. For

Williams the space between re- and vision is significant; she borrows from Adrienne Rich, who

writes of the transformative potential attached to the visual, including the ways in which added

hyphens place emphasis on "entering an old text for a new critical direction" (1999, 232).

Williams argues that re-visions seem to include porn that begins to address women as an

audience, either motivated by profit or made by women but still "spoken" through mainstream

pornography and thereby limited through her various critiques of the genre of porn. Re-vision

suggests a more penetrating transformation to both porn's form and meaning.

Relatedly, José Esteban Muñoz's (1999) work engages with queer artists of colour who

perform what he calls "disidentifications" in their counterpublic performances. To disidentify

means neither assimilating into nor attempting to situate oneself as being outside the dominant

culture, but working on and against mainstream images, narratives, and politics to transform "the

cultural logic from within, always labouring to enact permanent structural change while at the

same time valuing the importance of local or everyday struggles of resistance" (Muñoz 1999,

12). The practice and performance of disidentification, as laid out by Muñoz, always strives

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[9] Candida Royale passed away just days before I defended this dissertation. She will be missed, but her legacy will
continue through the current work of feminist porn.

towards "more than cracking open the code of the majority; it proceeds to use this code as raw material for representing a disempowered politics or positionality that has been rendered unthinkable by the dominant culture" (1999, 31). Disidentification as a practice departs from purely anti-assimilation tactics in that it understands that resistance is never absolute. This practice is crucial to counterpublic activity because it keeps the focus of change on the systems of oppression and exclusion, rather than simply replacing one set of exclusionary ideologies with another. In Chapters Four and Five, I will go into further detail about the ways that counterpublic porn utilizes and challenges the various conventions laid out in the first part of this chapter to do this disidentifying work.

The work of Susie Bright, a well-known sex positive feminist, confirms porn's potential for expanding the cultural imaginary. Her work pays particular attention to desire, bodies, sex, pleasure, and relationships, and how feminist porn is both indebted to and part of a sex-positive feminist movement (Bright 1998). This movement has been challenging sex-negativity since the feminist sex wars (Taormino et al 2013). Sex-positive feminism seeks to challenge and interrupt the silence and misinformation around sex, desire, bodies, and sexuality (Queen 1997). Sex positive feminists also argue, as Williams does, that porn production needs to be in the hands of those who have been disempowered by it (Williams 1999 and Bright 1998). Tristan Taormino explains that feminist porn not only challenges dominant culture in important ways; it also questions "the very definition of what 'sex' is and what it should look like" (Taormino n.d). Elaborating on this point in *The Feminist Porn Book* Taormino loosely defines feminist porn as:

> An established and emerging genre of pornography, feminist porn uses
> sexually explicit imagery to contest and complicate dominant representations
> of gender, sexuality, race, ethnicity, class, ability, age, body type, and other
> identity markers. It explores concepts of desire, agency, power, beauty, and
> pleasure at their most confounding and difficult, including pleasure within
> and across inequality, in the face of injustice, and against the limits of gender

hierarchy and both heteronormativity and homonormativity. It seeks to unsettle conventional definitions of sex, and expand the language of sex as a neurotic activity, and expression of identity, a power exchange, a cultural commodity, and even a new politics. Feminist porn creates alternative images and develops its own aesthetic and iconography to expand sexual norms and discourses...Feminist porn makers emphasize the importance of their labor practices in production and their treatment of performers/sex workers; in contrast to norms in the mainstream sectors of the adult entertainment industry, they strive to create a fair, safe, ethical, consensual work environment and often create imagery through collaboration with their subjects. Ultimately, feminist porn considers sexual representation—and its production—a site for resistance, intervention, and change. (2013, 9-10)

In 2006 Chanelle Gallant created the feminist porn awards in Toronto, which was key to establishing feminist porn as a movement, community and a genre (Taormino et al 2013).

Related to and often situated within the concept of feminist porn are queer porn, trans porn, and queercrip porn. The categories of feminist, queer, trans, and queercrip porn vary greatly as do the conventions they seek to challenge and the manner and mechanisms by which they do so. There is no clear demarcation of powerful and powerless; even the best laid ideological plans for countering dominant structures can lead to unanticipated possibilities. Counterpublic porn at times reinforces dominant ideologies; a lot of queer and feminist porn features mostly white, thin, not apparently disabled cis people. Similar to the ways feminist porn arose from a complex history of oppression/transgression, in/visibility, and inclusion/exclusion, so too have queer, trans and queercrip porn (Erickson 2013, Hill-Meyer 2010, Johnson 2004 and *Aphrodite Superstar* 2007). What I would argue draws these categories together into a counterpublic is a commitment to making porn that seeks to transform dominant cultural logics, even if at times this effort is constrained within and through oppressive systems, thereby reproducing certain dominant ideologies while challenging others. I argue that it is this shift in commitment that differentiates counterpublic porn from mainstream porn. Further, the practice and performance of disidentification through counterpublic porn employs a strategic reworking and application of

the various conventions of porn discussed in this chapter to disrupt and transform dominant

ideologies.

want

Image description: In both images, there are two white people pictured. In the first image Sam and Loree are kissing as Loree returns the gaze of the camera. In the second image Sam is seated on a hotel bathroom sink counter with one foot resting on the seat of Loree's wheelchair. He has his cock is in his hand and we are looking at each other.

I started thinking about porn as a transformative embodied practice during the creation of *want,*

my first porn. As I created the story of *want*, I looked to my own body as a vehicle to struggle

with the voices of shame and undesirability and redefine what is sexy. As my collaborators and I

shot the footage, I felt transformation happening in my body through the sexy moments of

connection with my co-star Sam and our videographer David. In the process of editing I felt the

push-pull of normativity as I watched myself navigate the environments of my world in new

ways: the streets of Toronto; my bathroom during a care shift; and a fancy hotel for the smutty

bits. There was something undeniably transformative for me in the experience of making porn.

Something powerful happened when I met my own gaze. For a moment, the din of undesirability

quieted long enough for me to breathe in pleasure and resilience in order to connect with shared

vulnerability and red-hot fabulosity. When I screen *want* I sometimes get asked—most often by

straight, nondisabled viewers—some variation of the question, "but *can you* have sex?" I also get

emails from other queercrips who have watched *want,* thanking me for creating a new imagining

of disability, queerness, and sexiness. I recognize these articulations as disruptions to the

dominant narratives about sexuality and disability; they affirm my belief that queercrip porn is

doing something necessary.

My desire to start making porn was born out of an overwhelming absence in the porn that I

saw. I was tired of being excluded from what queer porn was producing as sexy, tired of never

seeing bodies that looked, moved, thought, or fucked like mine. Another factor that contributed

to my desire to create porn is my political commitment to understanding social change work

broadly and in ways that are inclusive of practices not commonly thought of as activism. In

Queer Phenomenology, Ahmed theorizes the ways that certain labour, practices, and bodies are

made to disappear: the work and skills of poor people, women, and racialized people are

devalued in such a way that they become separate from what is understood as "labour" (2006).

This phenomenon exists in activist communities as well, where building relationships and

fostering community is not recognized as activist work and thus largely ignored. In order to resist

the replication of dominant cultures in activist communities, I am committed to recognizing the

creation and theorization of porn as part of social justice work. I started my dissertation project

out of a longing to share my experience of creating porn and find out if it would be as

transformative for other queercrips. I am also desperate to hear other people's strategies,

practices, and methods for fostering resilience and transformation in the world. I love producing

practical and tangible things that we can hold when cultures of undesirability threaten to

overwhelm. I love imagining otherwise.

In this chapter I have brought together a variety of understandings of porn in order to make evident porn's potential for transformation and disruption. Putting the work of Williams, Warner, and Muñoz, among others, into conversation with discussions of feminist, queer, trans, and queercrip porn allows me to introduce an understanding of porn that is inclusive of both mainstream and counterpublic porn. This understanding of porn imbues it with the potential to be fluid, complex, moving, creative, disruptive, and transformative. From this framework, I will now move on to focus on the work that queercrip porn does in transforming cultures of undesirability and understandings of porn, bodies, disability, sex/uality, and so much more.

Chapter 3: Methods

My care shifter and I are in Patty Berne's guest room setting up a borrowed video camera. Nomy is next door in a room filled with sunshine and plants, laughing and chatting with Patty about what we should have for dinner. I am moments away from beginning the first interview for my dissertation, and I can't believe how lucky I am to be here—in the Bay Area, at Patty's house. Patty and I engaged with each other's work and connected through email and skype, but we'd never met in person. When I distributed my call-out for collaborators she responded by saying that while she didn't want to make porn, she would be happy to support my project in whatever ways I needed. I have known Nomy for over ten years: we met when she came to do a workshop Richmond, Virginia, where I lived at the time. I have always respected the art and organizing work Nomy does: a photo shoot she did for a now-defunct queer porn website was the first queercrip porn I had seen and definitely one of my first glimpses into another world. I talked to Nomy about being involved in my research when we were at the Femme Conference *in Baltimore in 2012, so when my favourite co-star and longtime "sweetie" Sam told me he was going to be in the Bay Area (where Nomy lives) for several months, I booked the tickets and started putting everything in place…*

In this chapter, I will outline my rationale and methodology for this research project, including a short discussion of my initial proposal for the project: a proposal that got seriously revised, as proposals do, when I actually began to do the work. From there, I will describe my research design, including: my process of recruiting collaborators; who my collaborators are and how they participated in the project; the interview process; the process of making the scenes; and the process of reflection and analysis on how to best convey the incredible amount of insight, knowledge, and hotness produced through this research.

Rationale and Methodology

I had been dreaming up this research project ever since I made *want* in 2006. My principal research question was, and remains: How does queercrip porn transform cultures of undesirability? I was interested particularly in how the act of creating porn *collaboratively* can be

transformative. In order to cultivate a robust understanding of both cultures of undesirability and queercrip porn, and explore the transformative potential of collaboratively created queercrip porn, I combined practices of critical sexual storytelling (Plummer 1997) through a series of semi-structured interviews with the production of queercrip porn scenes. As there is very little queercrip porn, I chose a methodology that engaged with the ways that queercrip porn disrupts dominant cultural imaginaries and builds new worlds centred on radical access, and I actively included the creation of queercrip porn.

My approach to this research was informed by and committed to decolonial, anti-racist, feminist, and queer methodologies that, rather than covering over operations of power, seek to recognize and respond in ways that ensure the well-being of all involved (Bloom 1998; Code and Burt 1995; Haritaworn 2008; Smith 1999; Sprague 2005). In my research, I endeavoured to open a space that highlighted the knowledge and experiences of all the people involved, myself included. I chose the term "collaborators" to refer to the people who participated in this research process with me in order to emphasize the agency of my collaborators and create distance from the dehumanizing possibilities often associated with the terms "subjects" or "participants."

Being involved in any research project entails a certain amount of risk (hence the necessary York HPRC review). Collaborating on a research project that involves the creation of porn and the sharing of personal stories involves a unique set of risks and rewards. Because of the nature of the project, it was necessary for to me to organize its design in a specific and intentional way rather than allow for risk factors to simply leak through. Of course, some leakage is inevitable: if we take the work of Margrit Shildrick (1997) seriously, a site of important knowledge and experience is always a site of risk. The people involved in this project shared their stories, bodies, desires, fantasies, histories, truths, experiences, and knowledge. I am incredibly grateful

to my collaborators for sharing so much in this project. As this research project originated from

my experience as a queercrip living and loving within the murky seas of cultures of

undesirability, and from the power of transformative potential I felt through making porn, I

thought it was important to engage with this research as a participant as well as a researcher. I

wanted to include myself in the research as more than just a researcher; I didn't want to ask

people to do something that I was not also doing. I also recognize the power I had in this process

as researcher. Despite my most sincere and concerted efforts at collaboration through the

research process, the process of writing has been less collaborative; it is dominated by me and

my voice. This project happened within an academic context, which brings with it a long history

of oppressive exclusions, colonization, and consumptive practices of research (Smith 1999). I

recognized the added responsibility of the researcher to be as transparent and communicative

about the process as possible, and explained my intentions for this research to my collaborators

at every step. I have remained in contact with collaborators and continue to check in with them to

make sure they feel like they have agency and consent over every part of the process.

My study was strongly informed by queer and queercrip theorists who discuss the

interrelated practices of "queering" and "cripping" (McRuer 2006; Sandahl 2003; Clare 1999;

Kafer 2013). Carrie Sandahl explains:

> To resist the negative interpellations of being queer or crippled (not to
> mention queer and crippled), members of both groups have developed a wry
> critique of hegemonic norms. In queer communities, the application of this
> critique has been given its own verb: to queer. Queering describes the
> practices of putting a spin on mainstream representations to reveal latent
> queer subtexts; of appropriating a representation for one's own purposes,
> forcing it to signify differently; or of deconstructing a representation's
> heterosexism. Similarly, some disabled people practice "cripping." Cripping
> spins mainstream representations or practices to reveal able-bodied
> assumptions and exclusionary effects. Both queering and cripping expose the
> arbitrary delineation between normal and defective and the negative social
> ramifications of attempts to homogenize humanity, and both disarm what is

painful with wicked humor, including camp. (2003, 37)

To me, an important component of cripping methodologies is recognizing crip-rooted skills as

legitimate sources of knowledge. For instance, for over 15 years I have met my care needs

(getting into and out of bed, going to the bathroom, organizing my glittery things, cooking,

showering, taking care of Oscar the cat, and so on) through a collective of people from my

community on a volunteer basis; over this time, I have developed much practice and skill in

building intimacy and creating spaces of shared vulnerability where individuals can connect with

their whole complex selves. I drew upon these skills to make interviews and scenes feel

comfortable; as a result, collaborators shared more. I have also developed some exceptional

communication skills, which I relied upon quite heavily throughout this process. My experience

facilitating countless meetings, caucuses, and workshops in various social justice or educational

settings has equipped me with knowledge of how to create safer spaces for transformative work.

I understand these practices, and the knowledge produced through them, as translatable to a kind

of *cripped methodology* that is crucial to this research process. The call to recognize the

importance of lived experience is also put forth in feminist, decolonial, anti-racist, methodology

practices (Schalk 2013). The radical disability politics and disability justice frameworks outlined

in Chapter One further contributed to how I approached both the interviews and scene-making

portion of the research.

Radical access, outlined in Chapter One, is fluid and responsive to communities, and so

acknowledging barriers as operating on both a systemic and an individual basis was a high

priority for me throughout the research process. One example of radical access in practice

involved the pace of the research. There is a phenomenon in crip community referred to as "crip

time." This phrase acts as shorthand to describe all of the various ways that disabled people

experience temporality differently, and can include time spent in bed due to illness or pain, or time lost due to structural and systemic disableism such as I described in the introduction to this text. Sometimes crip time requires us to operate at a faster pace than the dominant one and sometimes it means we have to slow right down. This dissertation project most certainly operated on crip time: the pace at which this research unfolded had to match the capacities of all involved. Constantly navigating the multitude of barriers placed on marginalized people is exhausting and time consuming. As a result, there were lots of rescheduled conversations, interviews, and scenes, and I always made sure there was ample time for breaks, eating, and resting.

Whenever I screen *want*, queercrips respond with excitement, identification, and relief. I knew going into the production of *want* that the film is just one small part of a larger, more complex story; I and other queercrips are hungry for more stories that speak to the vast and varied experience of queercrip-ness. I argued in Chapter One that when discussions of sexuality and disability occur in academic or mainstream cultural contexts, they are usually centred on cis white straight folks; this emphasis maintains cultures of undesirability by forwarding a single-issue politic that relies on assimilationist narratives. Rather than interrogating desire—how and who we desire, or who is recognized as desirable—the focus remains on gaining inclusion into pre-existing normative structures. Because this research project sought to better understand queercrip experience within and beyond cultures of undesirability, it was not only important to me that all of my collaborators identified with the terms queer and crip, but it was also crucial to prioritize racialized queercrips, queercrips with apparent disabilities, trans feminine queercrips, and other queercrips who, as a result of living within cultures of undesirability, are either absent from or marginalized within porn.

Another important factor in how I chose my collaborators was related to the relationship and community building component of this dissertation project. I wanted to explore how the collaborative production of queercrip porn worked in building relationships. Therefore, I sought out people with whom I had differing levels of familiarity. I also wanted to connect different groups of people doing radical disability organizing with each other. I aimed to work with at least one person I knew really well and one person I had never met. I started the project in order to offer the necessary support for queercrips to tell their sexual stories via the creation of a short porn scene. I chose to do interviews as well as scene creation in order to intentionally engage with emergent disability justice concepts within a framework that allowed for multiple voices informing the social significance and shape of these concepts. I initially planned to interview each collaborator three times: the first interview would take place prior to shooting the scene (the "pre-scene interview"); I would conduct a second interview immediately after the scene was filmed (the "post-scene interview"); and I would hold a third interview after they had seen their footage (the "third interview"). The idea of doing interviews before the scene was shot and after its completion was inspired by contemporary feminist and queer porn projects, including Tristan Taormino's *Chemistry 2;* Tobi Hill-Meyer's *Doing it Ourselves: The Trans Women Porn Project;* and *Trans Entities: The Nasty Love of Papi and Wil*, directed by Morty Diamond. In these films, actors in the scene are asked questions by the filmmakers about their experience of doing the scene, including questions about the larger socio-political framework in which these projects are produced. I borrowed specific questions from these films, such as: "What were your favourite moments?" and "Were there moments that weren't so fun?" Influenced by these porn projects, I filmed my interviews with the intention of making people more comfortable around the camera and me, as well as to provide content for a final film project that I envisioned as

including both porn scenes and interviews.

Because I did not have access to the histories that collaborators brought to this project or the particular embodied experiences that occurred for those involved, pre-scene interviews were also designed to create a space for collaborators to share aspects of who they are and what inspired the scene created for the project. Several of my pre-scene interview questions involved prompts to gather this particular information. For example: What brings you to making porn? What is your history with porn? Why do you want to be a part of this? Several questions for the pre-scene interview also focused on mapping out complex understandings of cultures of undesirability and queercrip porn. Following a long feminist tradition, Jin Haritaworn, in their recent book, writes of the kitchen table as an important yet delegitimized site where anti-racist queer of colour knowledge and critique are located and shared. Inspired by this insight, I understand the bedroom or living room as specific sites where queercrip knowledges lived within this project. Furthermore, Haritaworn (2015) recognizes the kitchen table acts as a sort of "fluid refuge," built through the ever-bumpy process of community building. The questions Haritaworn raises around how to open up this specific and intimate space responsibly to an academic and public audience challenged me to think about the effect that doing research in such intimate settings might have on what my collaborators were sharing and how to be accountable to them.

While this dissertation project fully recognizes porn as a method of knowledge production—and I will discuss the knowledge produced through the making of queercrip porn in later chapters—it is also a particular form of embodied sexual storytelling. I conceived of the post-scene interviews as a way to capture the thoughts, feelings, and reflection that happened for the collaborators in a more transparent way than observation or casual conversation. Further, I didn't want to rely completely on my own analysis of what was happening for people during the

creation of their scene; I wanted to hear their words and stories.

Finally, I was also interested in viewer response, seeking evidence for my claim that watching queercrip porn acts as a method of transformation in a way that is both different from and related to making porn. For this aspect of research, I planned to conduct two focus groups of between five and 10 people, during which I would screen two edited scenes of the queercrip porn produced—with permission—and discuss viewers' reactions, feelings, and ways the videos impact their thinking about bodies, sex/uality, disability, and desirability. One of these groups would be comprised of queercrips who are not involved in the making of queercrip porn, and the other would comprise non-disabled queer people. I conceived of these focus groups as a chance for additional conversation and reflection with community members on the transformative potential of watching queercrip porn.

Due to time and capacity limitations, I removed the proposed third interview and the focus groups from the research design. Making this hard decision gave me more time to focus on the production of the scenes. As I reference in Chapter Two, there is a decent body of literature that discusses the affects and effects of watching porn, and less that focuses on what happens in the act of making. Another positive outcome of removing the focus group component from this project was that it gave collaborators even more control over the material they produced. Removing the focus groups alleviated the need and any associated pressure for a product in the form of a scene. I do look forward to doing focus groups at some point in the future: while research exists on watching porn, none of this research highlights the voices and experiences of queer disabled people.

Research Design

Collaborators

I produced a call for participants (see Appendix A) and distributed it via email to the Queer Disability email listserv, which was created after San Francisco State University's Queer Disability Conference in 2002; via Facebook through my personal page and the Sick and Disabled Queers group; via the Kink and Disability group on FetLife; and via email to various well-known individuals in the North American queer disability community. I received approximately 20 responses. I followed up with everyone who expressed interest in the project by contacting them to determine their level of interest, their availability, and the feasibility of their participation. Paying particular attention to social location and with the aim of prioritizing the stories of people who are most impacted by cultures of undesirability and excluded from queer porn, as I outlined above, I chose 12 people to follow up with in a more in-depth way. Due to time and capacity barriers, the final group of collaborators consisted of nine collaborators and me, for a total of 10.

Not all of my collaborators participated in the creation of a scene, but they were all interviewed at least once, along with numerous preliminary conversations with me about the research project. Two participants were unable to make a scene; one of these two had, however, made queercrip porn collaboratively prior to this project. Of the seven remaining collaborators, all performed in front of the camera except for one, who remained behind the camera as a filmmaker on one scene. The group of nine offered a slightly narrower reflection of the breadth of the disability experience than the group of 12 people I had initially signed on as collaborators. During interviews and conversations, my remaining nine collaborators used the following words to describe where they were located in the vast world of disability: chronically ill, multiple

chemical sensitivities (MCS), neurodiverse, mad, experiencing post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), disabled, crip, having chronic pain, and having cerebral palsy (CP). Seven used various adaptive devices such as scooters or wheelchairs, canes and/or crutches, and prosthetic limbs on a regular basis and a cane on occasion. One person identified as deaf in addition to being disabled. The group of 10 (including myself) was also more white than the original group of 12, with four racialized collaborators and six white collaborators; all of the racialized collaborators in the final group identified as black or African American. I also asked collaborators for their preferred pronouns, which I will relate in the following section where I introduce each collaborator; some collaborators alternated pronouns rather than only using she/her, he/his/him, or they/their/them. All of my collaborators were involved with art and/or activism. All collaborators lived in cities in the US or Canada.[10] When possible, I travelled to interview collaborators living outside of Toronto and assisted them in filming their scenes in their own locations.

I wanted to highlight my collaborators as knowledge producers in this work; I wanted them to be able to be recognized for their stories and vast knowledge. At the same time, I am very aware of the discrimination and marginalization that sex workers and people involved with porn face. I decided I would let collaborators chose for themselves what names they wanted to use. Five collaborators choose to use their names, one used her porn name, and three others used a pseudonym. I will not be identifying which collaborators are using pseudonyms. I have also left certain specific facts, such as location, appropriately vague.

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[10] While some collaborators asked me to use their real names for the written component of this dissertation, others chose pseudonyms in order to remain anonymous to readers. Because I will share personal and potentially identifying information on my collaborators in this chapter and the chapters following, some collaborators asked me not to identify their specific geographic locations. Where collaborators have been comfortable to share the specifics of where they live, this information will be included below.

In their initial interviews or through informal conversation, I asked everyone involved with the project to respond to the following: What do you do in the world? What things are important to you? How do you identify? Describe yourself. Identify your social location (articulate who you are and where you sit in the world). What words do you like to use to describe yourself to other people? I recognize that identity-based questions are complex, but because this project focuses on a commitment to imagining and producing new or different articulations of complex personhood, it was important for me to try to create an open environment for people to use the language they prefer when describing themselves. To avoid generalizations and to emphasize the voices of my collaborators, I will now introduce each of them individually, largely in their own words, in the order that they became involved with this project.

Nomy

Nomy is a "fiction writer and musician and voice teacher who works with people to access their authentic voice." She is a performer and an advisory board member with Sins Invalid. She explained:

> I work really hard actually to try to find language and ways of describing
> myself that aren't just categories but I do feel like what you are asking for are
> categories... I identify as a person with a disability. I have a fake leg. I was
> born with a birth definition; it's kind of how I frame it. I've had some early
> childhood decisions made for me about my body that altered the landscape
> permanently, so that's a big part of what I live within and think about and
> work on and I'm interested in other people's experiences, and am a
> genderqueer femme. My disability or just the way that my body is shaped as
> a result of these differences and then the choices that were made for me play
> a lot into my genderqueerness… And I'm Jewish…that feels integral in my
> world in a way that I haven't been able to totally put into clear form in the
> actual world. Part of what I'm working on in my book is…telling these
> generational trauma stories that are for the most part invented. And recently
> something I've been kind of interested in and is still really new [and]

embarrassing to me is stand-up comedy. I was a riot grrl…that's very clear in
me in the way I speak and the way I move in the world (Interview 2013).

I have known Nomy for over 10 years; we met when she came to do a workshop in Richmond,

Virginia, where I lived at the time. I have always respected the art and organizing work that

Nomy does. I talked to Nomy about being involved in my dissertation project when we were at

the Femme Conference in Baltimore in 2012. Nomy's involvement in this project included two

interviews and the creation of two scenes: one solo scene, *Time to Say Hello,* and a scene with

Lisa, *Wall of Fire*.

Lisa

Lisa is:

An artist, activist, and odd jobber with mental illness and brain injury. I am
an established filmmaker, youth media enabler and film and video curator
[who] strives for accessibility in all things, putting the crayons back in
people's hands. I provide Access Support for Periwinkle Cinema and the
Idriss Stelley Foundation and identify as a genderqueer crip. (Interview
2014)

Lisa is Nomy's "sweetie," and I first met Lisa during Nomy's pre-scene interview. In the process

of having conversations around the making of Nomy and Lisa's scene, we decided that Lisa

should become a collaborator in the project. Lisa's involvement in this project included one post-

scene interview and the creation of one scene, *Wall of Fire*, which Lisa also edited.

Romham

Romham shared the following autobiographical note as a way of answering my questions on

social location and what they do in the world:

I'm a white fat queer trans genderqueer g/imp sober anarchist survivor
working-class turned feeble-ass accordion playing but barely dancing bear,

living endlessly grateful with a beautiful community of troublemakers on the rainy unceded Coast Salish Territories of the Musqueam, TsleilWaututh and SkwxwÃo7mesh peoples. I'm currently moving from self-deprecatingly conceptualizing my writing and accessibilities work as "navel gazing" and "spreadsheet hell," respectfully, to "confessional" and "experiential." I do lots of different kinds of art, from music and screen printing to writing and dancing, creating useful things out of other people's throwaways, etc. I'm involved in disability access and justice work here and elsewhere, and regularly participate in local anti-racist and anti-colonialist resistance, feminist, fat positive, migrant justice, pro sex worker, prison abolition, and other resistance. Like me, it's a growing and variously successful work in progress. (Interview 2013)

I first met Romham about seven years ago when they came to visit my roommate, their "sweetie" Silas, and we have been friends ever since. Romham was one of the first people with whom I began brainstorming this dissertation project and I was excited about them being involved as a collaborator because their writing on sexuality and disability through zines and the blog, *Building Radical Accessible Communities Everywhere*, have contributed to my own work. Romham's involvement in this project included two interviews, an additional written response to interview questions, and the creation of one scene, *untitled 1*, with Silas.[11]

Kylie

Kylie is heavily involved in online activism. She said:

> That's important for me. My online activism through Facebook, through social networks, I use those avenues to act: to act against oppression. I am also on the board of ORAD, the Ontario Rainbow Alliance for the Deaf, and ORAD is a non-profit organization. We focus on numerous things: outreach…education, social aspects, having events. That's the kind of thing we do. (Interview 2013)

In terms of identity, she shared:

> I'm going to start off with disability…I'm disabled. In terms of that, I have CP, and a learning disability. I'm Deaf. That's about it for the disability part of my identity. My cultural identity: I am Deaf, and disabled, and queer. I

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[11] While Silas was Romham's scene partner in the queercrip porn produced for the project, and participated in the post-scene interview, Silas is not a collaborator on this project because they are not queercrip identified.

can't think of what else right now. I can't think of the others right now. Oh, right, geez! I forgot: Black and I identify as a trans woman. Crip and queer and femme. (Interview 2013)

I met Kylie through my participation in ORAD events and deaf queer community in Toronto. I did not know her very well before beginning this project, and I was excited to use this project as an opportunity to get to know her better. Kylie is one of the only other wheelchair-using queer crips I see out at queer events. There are some communication barriers between Kylie and me; mainly, I don't know enough ASL to be able to have an engaged and extended conversation about porn, cultures of undesirability, and disability justice with Kylie in that language. I was grateful for the opportunity to do so with an interpreter present to facilitate a deeper level of communication. Kylie's involvement in this project included one interview, during which we focused on pre-scene interview questions.

Corrinne

Corrinne responded to my initial questions by stating the following:

> What I do in the world? Too many things! [Laughter] I do community based
> organizing around a lot of different things…around racism, around healing;
> work around ableism, work around stigma in general, specifically around
> HIV and sex work. I am a sex worker and…what else? I don't know. A lover.
> A meditator. And those are some of the things. Oh! And an artist, obviously.
> I identify as a Black queer chronically ill femme. I think that's kind of it.
> [Laughter] (Interview 2014)

I have known Corrinne for approximately six years. We became friends through a transformative justice project we worked on together. I have respected and learned much from her video and organizing work. Corrinne's involvement in this project included two interviews and the creation of one solo scene, *untitled 2*.

Allen describes himself as:

> [Someone who works] on a million small projects at once. I try to spend nice,
> supportive time with nice people. I hyper-focus on art and science
> consumption and production. I cuddle my cats a lot… do a little online
> dating, you know [Laughter]… Attempts to define identity always feel
> inadequate to me. I resist describing myself to others at basically all costs.
> But if I really need to, my (failed) response is: I am a white, queer, Jewish,
> urban but ocean-reliant trans person [who] lives with chronically and
> disruptively swinging neurological related effects, and pain. For me, a whole
> lot of labels are so contextual. I end up doing a lot of [rambling] describing
> of circumstance in the attempt to not use keyword labels unless I really have
> to. The words…disabled and crip I'll use in project contextually; like, if
> there's a specific group identity that is contingent on those labels, that's
> generally when I'm more comfortable using those labels instead of doing
> complex descriptions. (Interview 2014)

Allen and I have been good friends for 11 years; we met when he started doing careshifts as part

of my care collective. We have had many conversations over that time about undesirability,

which have sustained and nourished us both. We have also shared our slutty adventures with

each other. We weren't sure at first whether Allen would be in front of or behind the camera;

they were comfortable doing either. When Juba and Isobel needed someone to film their scene

Allen was the perfect fit: we collaborated on porn projects in the past and so I knew Allen would

shoot hot and beautiful footage. Allen's involvement in this project included two interviews, an

additional written response to interview questions, and the shooting of footage as well as lending

some really helpful videography advice on Juba and Isobel's scene, *Blackbeats &AfroCripLust*

[Light years away].

Isobel

Isobel introduces herself as follows:

I do lots of things: I read and write poetry, and play with cats, and I dance burlesque, and I do different teaching things around ableism and oppression and stuff like that, queer communities… I've had to write a lot of bios in my life in the past little while for different things…and I've always struggled. Like, what are those five things that you say at the beginning, you know? Or what do I put first? Is it queer first, or black first? Or crip first? Anyway, some of the words that I use to describe myself, in the order that I'm going to say them today: I ID as a black queer person, a poet, a writer—which took me a long time to say—a chronically ill person, kind of a femme community sister, or something, and a best friend, and a cat-mom. And in terms of social location stuff, I'm pretty sporadically employed, and have different adult experiences with poverty, and lots of moving as I'm trying to live in the city and keep things going. I think all of those things all mix together in the kind of work that I do and the way that I identify. (Interview 2014)

Isobel and I first met in 2009 when we connected through mutual friends involved in radical disability and transformative justice organizing that was happening in Toronto at the time. We became good friends over the years and have held each other's hearts through tears of joy, rage, and sorrow. This project allowed us to continue building our relationship. Isobel's involvement in this project included two interviews and the creation of one scene, *Blackbeats &AfroCripLust [Light years away]* with Juba as her scene partner and Allen as the scene's videographer.

Juba

Juba described himself in the following way:

I eat a lot of cheeseburgers… I hang out with my family a lot. I'm really big on community, community service. I read a lot of comic books. I watch a lot of 1970s…baseball games on YouTube. I work in HIV services. I do that a lot, in the community mostly, community centred, community health stuff mostly, around HIV. I'm a rapper and MC who hates rappers and MCs [Laughter]. I make beats. I hang out. I just hang out, trying to be a good human, basically. I'm going to probably have some similar stuff around "where do I put that, where do I place them?" I'll just say that I'm black and queer those are the two big ones that I have to deal with a lot. Even though they have been somewhat lifelong, crip or gimp, and queer, and chronically ill, that's been a since-childhood thing, but it's been a relatively new identification of probably the last four or five years, even though I've been part of some of those overlapping communities. Geek, perv, parent. There's a string of them, and navigating those and overlapping those at different times.

Parent, partner, curmudgeon, misanthrope! Butch Queen (that's one of my favourite ones actually). I'm very purposeful about saying "Bi-Faggot" when I'm talking about bisexuality because I was trying to be clear about what my sort of mobile relationship is to my sexuality in and of a moment and sort of particularly about foregrounding that particular queering is important to me just because it gives people a little bit of space to know where I'm coming from, about who I am at least. (Interview 2014)

I met Juba when he was recruited to be a scene partner by one of my initial collaborators. Unfortunately, that collaborator was unable to continue their involvement, but Juba stayed on and became a collaborator. I was grateful for the opportunity to get to know him and his work. Juba's involvement in this project included two interviews and the creation of one scene, *Blackbeats &AfroCripLust [Light years away]*, with Isobel as a scene partner and Allen as the scene's videographer.

Mia

Mia described herself as:

Definitely a New Yorker; I guess that pins me down to a geographic location in the ways in which living in New York City has shaped my values… I actually struggle with my gender identity pronouns, I think because words and language are sometimes hard for me on the written page; thinking about "they" and "them" grammatically bothers me, so I really haven't quite found a preferred pronoun that fits besides thinking about myself in the context of M. I use female pronouns until I find something that fits. I feel like my gender identity is still kind of evolving. I also have the privilege of palsy skinny, because I am a walkie, which is language that, you know, and vocabulary that not everybody would understand…[that] I recently have taken on, started acknowledging my skinny privilege… Often I felt I have felt in my life that I have been invalidated, whether it's being raised by immigrants who don't always speak English as a primary language and not being taught the native language of where my parents have immigrated from and so then feeling like I'm left out of a conversation because they're talking a language other than English and so I identify as a second-generation—a first generation US-born, I do identify as a first generation US, both. And…what other labels do I like to take on? Dancer. Porn star! Artist, advocate…white, lower-middle class. (Interview 2014)

I first met Mia at a conference in Philadelphia a few years ago, after I gave a presentation. She had seen my videos and was eager to show me an early version of *Krutch*. *Krutch* (2013) was one of the first queercrip porn videos I had seen that had been inspired by my work; it was truly a remarkable moment and video. I was thrilled when Mia expressed interest in being a part of this dissertation project. Unfortunately, due to various health issues we were both experiencing, Mia was unable to make a scene as part of her involvement in this project. She did do one interview, which combined pre-scene and post-scene interview questions and focused on her experience making *Krutch*.

Timeline

I commenced my research on the West Coast in March of 2013. During this ten-day trip I conducted two pre-scene interviews with Nomy and Romham, filmed two porn scenes—my scene with Sam and Romham and Silas' scene—and conducted two post-scene interviews, one with Sam and one with Romham and Silas. Shortly after this trip, I developed a set of debilitating health issues and, as I discussed in my introduction, had other life crises that significantly slowed my progress. Through this difficult time, I continued to have relationship-building conversations with collaborators even when I could not do very much else. In November 2013 I interviewed Kylie. In February 2014, Corrinne and I did a pre-scene interview the morning she shot her scene. We did our post-scene interview in person in July 2014. Following several ongoing conversations between Nomy, Lisa, and me, Nomy filmed her solo scene in February 2014. One month later, she and Lisa filmed their joint scene. We had many informal conversations following the filming of their scene, but due to extraneous circumstances we were unable to have an official post-scene interview until September 2014. In that time they

edited their film and screened it several times, which we were able to discuss during the post-scene interview. In October 2014, Juba flew to Toronto; over the course of a week I conducted pre-scene interviews with Juba, Isobel, and Allen, shot their porn scene, and conducted post-scene interviews with each of them. I conducted my final interview with Mia in early Autumn of 2014.

Interviews

Rather than drawing on a particular interviewing method, I drew upon personal experience and active listening workshops I had attended. I also took note of Leslie Bloom's extended reflection on doing feminist methodologies in *Under the Sign of Hope: Feminist Methodology and Narrative Interpretation* (1998), where she outlines guiding principles for her feminist practice and discusses the complications she faced putting these principles into action. Similar to Bloom, I was committed to interrupting the one-way hierarchical framework of traditional interviewing methods (Bloom 1998, 17). Interviews were designed to feel conversational. Questions were developed through informal conversations, moments that occurred during filming, my knowledge of the kind of work that the collaborators do, and the key questions proposed for this research project. Interview questions evolved throughout the process (see Appendix B). Due to their semi-structured form, each interview was different; they ranged from 30 minutes to an hour and a half. I was responsive and open with my histories and experiences and worked towards creating a space of shared vulnerability that was comfortable and accessible. I gave participants the option to share their reflections, thoughts, and feelings in an alternative format if the filmed interview format didn't work for them. For example, I offered the option of an ongoing journal—

audio, video, written, or drawn—for reflections throughout the process to share with me at the end. I wanted participants to have as much involvement as they desired in every step of the process. Six of the seven participants who completed two interviews and engaged in the creation of a scene chose the filmed interview format. Two people, Romham and Allen, chose to write responses to the questions in addition to the filmed interviews. They emailed these to me, responding to the list of questions I had asked them. The pre-interviews, most of which took place in person in the same space that the collaborators' scene would be shot, helped to build intimacy and comfort between my collaborators and me as well as increase their comfort with being on camera. The pre-scene interview I conducted using the software Skype, with Corrinne, also contributed to comfort and intimacy, but there was a slight sense of disconnect.

The post interviews allowed for really sweet and insightful reflections on making the scenes (see Appendix C). Several of the post-scene interview questions prompted collaborators to reflect on the process, as it was important to me and to this project that emotions as well as thoughts were shared and discussed. To me, this recognition of affect is the benefit of doing a research project that involves porn, a form of sexual storytelling that is deeply embodied and *moving,* as Linda Williams (2004) characterizes it. This research project intended to create change in not only in how we think, but also in how we feel. For example, although I had recognized the transformative potential of the interview process in and of itself, I found myself surprised when several of my nine collaborators stated that one of the most transformative parts of this whole project was the opportunity to have *conversations* about desirability, disability, and the impact of systemic oppression in their lives. It took me by surprise as it communicated to me how even when we are politicized and relatively connected to queer and queercrip communities, we still don't have these powerful conversations. Plummer's (1997) observations about the ways

that stories build communities and lives definitely became evident through the interview process. The process of taking what feel like individual experiences, sharing them, and receiving recognition and validation for them was a significant aspect of the research design. I should note that I did post-scene interviews with two of the scene partners who did not identify as disabled or queercrips, but these are not included as research content for this project. I did not include these two scene partners because I wanted the voices and perspectives of queercrips to be the principal voices in this dissertation.

My first interview took place with Nomy. This interview was video recorded on a hand held video recorder as well as an iPad for backup. My care shifter was present and operated the handheld video recorder while I used my iPad. I asked all of the pre-scene questions (see Appendix A), and the interview lasted approximately 45 minutes. Nomy's pre-scene interview shaped the other interviews by helping me to develop more nuanced questions for subsequent interviews. The next interview I conducted was a post-scene interview with my scene partner Sam. We recorded this interview the next day in an empty office on the University of California's Berkeley campus. My preference would have been to conduct the interview immediately following the scene, in order to hang onto the energy and intimacy produced by it, but we were unable to do so because of space limitations. Sam and I reflected on the scene and how it felt compared to *want*. We talked about our relationship and how in our porn videos we tried to communicate the ways we play with and complicate power and visibility. We recorded our post-scene interview using a handheld video recorder. The interview lasted approximately half an hour. It was just the two of us, which made talking easier but recording much more difficult.

Romham's pre-scene and post-scene interviews were recorded using both a handheld video

camera and my iPad on the same day that they filmed their scene, at the hotel where their scene was shot. Both the pre-scene and post-scene interviews were about half an hour in length. For the pre-scene interview, Romham sat in their scooter while I held the video camera and conducted the interview; Silas, who held the iPad, and the camera-person were also present. The post-scene interview occurred an hour after the scene, following a break for some food and rest. Romham and Silas's post-scene interview was the most intimate in the research process. The camera-person had left and it was just the three of us, Romham and Silas cuddling in the bed while I asked questions; it was a really tender moment.

I conducted the next interview with Kylie at my home. An ASL interpreter joined us for the interview. I held the video camera while conducting the interview. The interview took around an hour and a half, but much of this time was translation-related.

Corrinne and I conducted her pre-scene interview over Skype; I used the program Call Recorder to record it. One of Corrinne's support crew members was with her in the room but did not participate in the interview. We conducted her post-scene interview in a community room at a housing co-op in Toronto. Again we were the only two people present and I operated the camera as well as conducting the interview, which lasted just over an hour.

Nomy and Lisa were together for their post-scene interview. This interview occurred via Skype, and again I used Call Recorder. They were alone in Nomy's bedroom and I was also alone. This interview was almost two hours in length. We had a lot to talk about: not only the scenes but the different screenings where they had shown their work: they had curated events showing their work and the work of other artists using sexplicit films to, as Ganser and Murphy say on the Facebook event page, "explore sensuality, intimacy, safety and consent through the lens of the less-represented" (Ganser and Murphy 2014).

Juba's, Allen's, and Isobel's pre-scene interview started off with all three present. Filming for this interview took place at my house, with me operating the camera and conducting the interview. Isobel had to leave part way through, but I continued the interview with Juba and Allen. Isobel finished her pre-scene interview with me just prior to filming the scene. Altogether, the pre-scene interviews totalled about an hour and a half of conversation. Everyone was too tired to do a post-scene interview immediately after the filming scene, so I followed up with them individually. I filmed Juba's interview at my house the following day and Isobel's in the following week at a local library study room. Both of these interviews were about an hour and a half in length. Allen opted to respond in writing for the post-scene interview and also submitted supplemental answers in writing for the pre-scene interview.

Mia and I had several conversations prior to our interview, trying to make a scene come to fruition. Sadly, we were unable to make this happen because of the time limitations of my research program. Our interview took place on Skype, was recorded by Call Recorder, and we were both alone. This interview took just over two hours as we discussed both pre-scene and post-scene interview questions. As Mia had experience in making queercrip porn collaboratively with other crip-identified people, she drew on those experiences to reflect on answers to the post-scene questions.

Scenes

Six scenes were filmed for this dissertation project. The scene groups in order of completion were: Sam and me; Romham and Silas; Corrinne; Nomy; Nomy and Lisa; and Juba, Isobel, and Allen. Similar to the interviews, the process around filming each scene was distinct, but all scenes shared some common elements. I was not present for the production of every scene.

However, all of the scenes filmed in my absence—Corrinne's, Nomy's, and Nomy and Lisa's—involved someone who had filmmaking and/or pornmaking experience.

Whether physically present or not, I took on the role of a "porn fairy godmother" to accomplish this component of the project. I feel that I was very good in this role. It was my job to make my collaborators' and my own porn-making wishes come true. My fairy godmother job description was quite vast: it included everything from acquiring the necessary technical equipment for the day of the shoot to conversing extensively with collaborators toward developing their stories. It also involved purchasing feather boas from the dollar store and making sure there was enough food for everyone. Coordination of support crews was also part of the role, as was making sure all access needs were met. And, of course, I got to clean everything up. Barriers must be recognized and attended to in order to enable people to bring their whole selves. While I wasn't able to pay people for their time and experiences, I did make sure to offset issues of financial access to transportation, food, and housing.

Creating, filming, and editing the scenes happened strictly on crip time; I made sure that there was ample time for all involved to get their needs met, and scheduled in extra time just in case. Most scenes took about five or six hours, with the actual smut filming accounting for a relatively small percentage of the time. The day would generally start with everyone chatting and getting to know each other if they didn't already. We would chat while the cameras, sound, and lighting were set up and during the many moments in between when the cameras were off. This interaction was a necessary part of the process, as it allowed for comfort to develop and provided opportunities for conversation and community building. These lovely moments were part of creating an accessible space. I coordinated and recruited support crew to do camera, sound, and care work, prioritizing people from queercrip community wherever possible. I will now provide

a short summary of each scene, based on descriptions by my collaborators.

Loree and Sam, *wanting and flaunting*

Image description: Both of these pictures feature Sam and Loree. The first image shows Sam and I kissing in front of a video camera. Loree and Sam are both wearing glasses and queer fabulous outfits. The second image shows Loree reclined in her wheelchair wearing only a bright red bra. She has her eyes closed. Sam's is straddling Loree by kneeling on the seat of her wheelchair. He has his thumb teasing her mouth and his other holding his cock.

Starting with my own scene was a useful move. It had been several years since I had made porn and there was a lot to remember: how quickly a 64 gigabyte memory card fills up, which lipstick to wear so you can kiss through multiple shots without covering your partner's face each time, and how to remember to talk and not whisper during the action. Neither my support crew—a care shifter and the camera-person—nor my scene partner were crip identified, but all were active allies in queercrip communities. Everyone involved had a different level of intimacy with the others involved. The setting for our scene was a friend's beautiful, wheelchair-accessible bungalow in sunny Berkeley, California. We started off the scene in the backyard and slowly worked our way up the charming wooden ramp into the house. All fucking occurred in or on my power wheelchair. Power play, kink, sweetness, bondage, and Sam's expert wheelchair climbing all featured heavily. The summary for this scene is as follows:

> In *wanting and flaunting,* long time transatlantic sweeties, brought together almost 10 years ago as first time scene partners in *want*, are back together on screen eager for some shared devotion, desire, and transgressive sexy funtimes. Tender and toppy meets bratty and bottomy makes for a hot afternoon of bondage, bites, and brazen bodies!

Romham and Silas, *untitled 1*

Image description: Both of these pictures feature Silas and Romham, both have numerous tattoos. Romham is seated in his scooter in both pictures as well. In the first picture they are fully clothed and kissing. In the background there is a bright red wall, two lamps and a hotel bed. In the second image, Romham is naked and Silas is only wearing a binder. Silas kisses Romham stomach, as they lean back grabbing their crutches on the back of their scooter.

Romham's "sweetie" and scene partner, Silas, does not identify as a crip, but is an active ally in queercrip communities. Romham recruited a long time queercrip friend who is also a photographer to do the main camera work; it was this person's first experience with porn and videography. As with the scene above, I also shot some footage on my iPad. The setting was a wheelchair-accessible hotel room on the West coast of Canada that had a slightly Art Deco feel. The scene was intended to capture this real-life couple's incredible chemistry and communication. A major feature in the scene was re-creating a sexy and transformative moment, inspired by this research project: fucking for the first time on Romham's scooter. The scene starts off with Romham in their scooter; power shifts back and forth between the two and they eventually move to the nearby bed. This scene was sweaty and silly, hot and heavy, and filled with laughter and love. Romham and Silas summarized this scene as follows:

> Romham and Silas are two queers living on unceded Coast Salish Territories. This video was a first for us—both in terms of being filmed and fucking with the scooter—and we figured this video project would be the best time to try it out while exploring ideas around power, representation, and cultures of un/desirability.

Corrinne*, untitled 2*

Corrinne filmed her scene without me present; she wanted to film the scene in her home, which

was not wheelchair accessible. Corrinne also wanted to film in a space exclusively inhabited by

queer people of colour. The short film consists mainly of Corrinne sitting naked in front of a

white background. In her lap she holds a lit black candle that is tall and slender. As she

meditates, a solid black line travels up her body towards her mouth. There is no speaking in the

scene, but the work communicates volumes through the languages of Corrinne's body. She wrote

the following scene synopsis:

> In stillness there is power. In stillness there is pain. In stillness there is
> resilience. Through the vehicle of meditation, this piece sheds light on anti-
> Black racism, ableism, misogyny and homophobia through witnessing the
> experience of body pain. It speaks to the instance of having to sit through
> oppressive experiences and systems while often not being able to do anything
> except be aware of what is happening. The piece illustrates this painful
> process while also discussing resilience embodied through the practice of
> meditation. It presents meditation as a tool for healing despite forces beyond
> ourselves/ our control and comforts with the reality of constant change.

Nomy and Lisa, *Time to Say Hello* and *Wall of Fire*

Image description: Both pictures feature Nomy and Lisa laying in a leopard print bed. They are both
white, fat and have several tattoos. Both of the pictures are taken as a screenshot from the film. In
the first image they are almost kissing and are pressed close together. In the second image we
primarily see their butts and their legs. Nomy is wearing frilly red underwear with red and white
stripy socks which match Lisa's stripy red and white boxer briefs. The room is full of sunshine
coming through a large window.

While planning for their scene together, there was a moment of miscommunication between

Nomy and Lisa, which caused them to postpone filming their joint scene. Nomy filmed a short

solo video that night and shared it with me. The video is incredible: beautiful and real. It begins

with a close-up of Nomy's face framed by a warm lighting; the viewer is in her bedroom and she

is talking to the camera about how being able to feel her own desire and ask for things sexually

has been a major struggle in her life. The moment feels incredibly intimate, a sort of private

conversation with the viewer in which she shares all of the feelings that are part of this research

project. After a few minutes, Nomy moves on to "give it to myself." She wrote the following

statement about her scene:

> *Time to Say Hello* is a personal exploration of sexuality, struggling to find a
> clear channel for desire. Hand-held, grainy, like a diary entry, talking to the
> camera, finding solo-pleasure with the Hitachi magic wand, set to a
> soundtrack of original music.

One month later, Nomy and Lisa filmed their joint scene in Nomy's bedroom. This time, the

room is bathed in sunlight, bright and cheerful. *Wall of Fire* is a beautifully shot, playful, and

sexy exploration of vulnerability, desire, and trust. The scene takes place primarily on Nomy's

leopard print bed. Nomy and Lisa explained:

> Roles switch, paddles hit & control shifts when two fat bodied gender queer
> women, lovers off camera, push limits of pleasure, penetration & trust. A tender
> and hot afternoon make-out session climaxes in intense, consensual amputee
> sex. Original Score by Nomy Lamm. This movie was completely underwritten &
> fully funded by the Smitten Kitten.

Juba, Isobel, and Allen, *Blackbeats &AfroCripLust [Light years away]*

Image description: these three pictures feature Juba and Isobel. In the first image they are fully clothed, Juba has a purple feather boa around his neck. They are seated on the couch and look at one another. The second image features a little more skin and some really cute underwear as Juba and Isobel lay on the couch kissing. Resting on the floor in front of them is the purple boa. In the last image Juba and Isobel are standing in front of the doorway. Isobel braces herself with her blue cane stretched across the doorway. Juba is behind her kissing her back and caressing her hips.

Blackbeats &AfroCripLust [Light years away] was the final scene filmed for this research project and involved Juba, Isobel, and Allen. Filming took place at my home with two support people present. The support crew were all queercrip identified. Juba and Isobel met in person for the first time on the day of the shoot, though they had had many conversations planning out their scene over the previous week. Juba and I were meeting for the first time as well, while Allen, Isobel, and I all knew each other. One of the support people was on my care collective so I knew her quite well, but the others did not know her. The other support person knew most of the people in the room through various community connections.

Juba and Isobel created a magical, campy, sexy, Afrofuturist queercrip world together. My living room became Isobel's living room on the planet "Wakanda." The scene starts off with

Isobel comfortably reading a sci-fi graphic novel. Juba lands gracefully on the balcony and respectfully knocks. Isobel greets Juba who, dressed for the occasion, is wearing only pink boxer briefs and a purple feather boa. They exchange greetings and promptly get down to business, as it has been centuries since they last saw each other. Most of the action takes place on or around the couch, but there is an important moment where Isobel stretches her beautiful blue cane across a doorframe for support while getting spanked. Juba and Isobel shared the following contextual description of their scene:

> In preparation for our shoot, we started with where in (physical) space our characters would be, throwing out some relatively simple ideas around the general "blocking" of our sexual interactions. We based the blocking around a mix of what we were interested in and what we were physically capable of doing, which were then interwoven with some fun, campy Afrofuturist aesthetic flourishes (purple feathers!) that became part of a much more layered and dense (but still accessible) dialogue as we talked. Themes around temporality, attraction and desire in storytelling, as affected by our "real" life diasporas, came up (the meaning and relevance of "African-American" versus "AfriCanadian") and the way Whiteness as a backdrop informed relationships to race and class were rather omnipresent, as well as a sort of collapse and fracture of respectability politics framed by 20th century black American raced advocacy; modern notions of "queerness" and "disability" that don't neatly fit anywhere in large part because of obsessions with avoiding an unavoidable otherness.

> Isobel's articulation of meeting Juba, a now 800 year-old consort for a BDSM oriented tryst 300 years past their last encounter, was an interesting analog to our real life and real time preparation for the scene in the week prior to Juba's arrival in Toronto for the shoot. Marvel Comics' 1966 to present depictions of the Black Panther/T'Challa's kingdom ("Wakanda") as an un-bought and un-bossed "technocracy" untouched by European colonialism was an appealing aesthetic basis for our play, but became more complicated when we discussed the nature of Marvel's white Civil Rights Movement/edge of Black Power era scripters' insistence on a desirable and perfect "black" space being one that was imagined to have eradicated the otherness of disability and difference inside the experience of non-whiteness. The inducement to "see" an appropriate "future black" as one necessarily devoid of our real life walking sticks, tendonitis, fibro fogs, old black man aches, swollen grandma hands – things Isobel described as "defining our day to day" (and certainly

defining how we do and don't fuck) – takes on an insidious nature when one understands such as an overcultural investment in black performative spectacle devoid of the sometimes clumsy and unsure but absolutely sweet and messy process(es) necessary to make shit hot.

Knowing, understanding and respecting each other's Black was crucial to creating rapport to communicate what got us off—in and of the moments of the shoot and in general, and allowed us to represent a small but powerful representative space of erotic possibility.

Ethics, Consent, and Collective Safety

The consent and wellbeing of my collaborators and all involved in this project was and is critically important to me. Consent was informed and voluntary. All participants signed formal consent forms at the beginning of the research; I reviewed these forms with each participant, and referred to them at all stages of the research process. Consent operated as an active process, meaning that it was revisited and re-established often throughout the various parts of the project. Participants were welcome to leave the research or shift roles at any point. I am still working to remain responsible and accountable to the people who made this research possible. I continue to check in with my collaborators and make sure they feel seen and respected.

Some of my collaborators expressed concerns around being in porn, including general fears about the repercussions of being involved in sex work (even though no one would get financial compensation for their involvement in the project). There were also concerns around not having any experience making porn. I anticipated both of these concerns, and offered various resources regarding strategies for navigating whorephobia.[12] Collaborators were also invited to choose pseudonyms in order to mitigate any potential negative outcomes of being involved. An important part of this project for me was paying attention to skill building and moving at a pace that worked for everyone. I also made it clear to anyone who expressed interest in participating

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[12] These resources included: "Every Ho I Know Says So" (2010); Everyday Whorephobia (2014); and Stella (2009).

that they would have the final call on whether or not the scene that they produced would ever be publicly viewed.

Analysis

Through this process, I amassed a precious bundle of stories, laughs, tears, pleasures, relationships, hotness, video footage, memories, and so much more, and the question "what now?" loomed large. Once the camera was turned off and the feathers swept up, there were several questions I carried with me as I turned to the writing and analysis phase. How do I responsibly and respectfully hold this important, beautiful, and complex bundle? My collaborators were so open, trusting, and generous with their stories, histories, bodies, feelings, and desires. How do I share what feels like an immeasurable gift and ever do it justice? How do I translate so many significant and ethereal moments that were so deeply embodied into words? How do I create spaces of shared vulnerability within a dissertation paper? Is this even possible?

My intentions in the next two chapters are to illuminate and centre the incredible amount of knowledge, themes, and key insights shared by my collaborators. Through this process, I have gained a more textured and nuanced understanding of cultures of undesirability and queercrip porn which I will be engaging with in the final chapters of this dissertation. I wish to demonstrate the same amount of care in this part of the research process that I committed to in the interview and scene-making. The counterpublic porn texts and theories discussed in the first two chapters of this dissertation were invaluable in this effort. In particular, Muñoz (1999), Ahmed (2006), and Gordon (1996) have kept me in tune with the complex and murky histories of arrival and emergence. Paying attention to the processes behind where and who we've been and what allows us to be where and who we are now, requires an advanced commitment to reflexivity. I applied

this reflexivity to the stories that my collaborators and I shared, the knowledge we produced, our own experiences, and the ways experiences and ways of being we shared are all shaped by and shape us in complex and contradictory ways through complex and contradictory histories. Because research occurred over a long time span, over which I lived about three lifetimes worth of trauma, stress and grief that heavily impacted my memory, energy, and capacity, I journaled about the experience of conducting research; I also talked about the experience with care shifters, friends, and collaborators. I remain in regular contact with collaborators and have drawn on their practices of reflection and memory to ensure as full a retelling as possible. I treated the interviews and footage from scenes (or completed scenes,[13] where applicable) as texts. I repeatedly watched scenes and interviews and read through transcripts, all the while taking note of common themes that emerged. I pulled out several quotes and listed them according to themes. Spending time with my collaborators' insights and reflections in this way allowed me to place the texts in conversation with each other. I was able to recognize and pull out contradictions and commonalities.

In the writing of the next two chapters, I dedicate a large percentage of the text to sharing my collaborators' words and stories in an attempt to tease out the collective voice that is so key to this research. I also strive to make connections rather than conclusions. I want to invite readers to join me in this engagement as I continue to try to create spaces of shared vulnerability. I ask that readers approach this text from a position of active engagement and reflexivity (Sprague 2005). This ultimately means engaging with complex personhood and attending to the intricate workings of privilege, power, vulnerability, and interconnection always at play.

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[13] All of the scenes were filmed, but only some of them were edited into a finished short scene. I viewed the unedited footage for the scenes that were not edited.

Chapter 4: Unpacking Cultures of Undesirability

"Cultures of undesirability" as a concept is emerging and evolving in marginalized communities, that is newly being defined in the course of conversations, blogs, and public talks. This research project aims to flesh this concept out and provide a robust theoretical understanding of its various meanings and applications. This chapter centres stories told in the first set of interviews which in the first part of this chapter I describe and reflect upon the impacts of cultures of undesirability, conveying what it means to live within their nastiness (Gordon 1996) and their constraining contradictions. These impacts occur in ways that are both structural and interpersonal and always as a part of broader systems of oppression. As my collaborators and I discussed the relationship between dominant ideologies and the impacts of cultures of undesirability, the following themes arose: in/visibility, shame, exclusion, and control. In the section titled, "Navigating cultures of undesirability" I focus on these interrelated themes attending to their specificity and their interconnections. After drawing out these themes, I will conclude the chapter by highlighting the ways that organizing my research collaboration from a framework of disability justice, access intimacy and drawing on sites of shame as sites of resistance allowed us to create cultures of resistance pushing against the harmful exclusion and erasure produced within cultures of undesirability.

Defining "Cultures of Undesirability"

In response to questions about what "cultures of undesirability" means and how they understand and talk about the concept, my collaborators provided crucial texture and depth to my understanding of it and the ways in which it shows up in our lives and social organization. Isobel highlighted several key aspects of cultures of undesirability:

When I hear that phrase, it feels like a new, kind of burgeoning understanding
of terms—like a collection of terms—for me right now. I don't think I would
have thought about how I experience the world or how I experience media as a
culture of undesirability a few years ago. But looking back…it's the ways that
*different marginalized bodies are encouraged to think that they're not worth
desire, worth affection, worth respect, worth love.* So, I think it's partially *the
way we see ourselves*, but I think the way we see ourselves as undesirable is
influenced by the larger societal things that tell us that, even though it's not
true, that we're not worthy… I kind of think about it like in terms of the
industrial complex model of words, in that it does kind of encapsulate in this
way media, school, and systems and stuff, and all of that mixes together into
this culture of undesirability where we're told that we're not good enough for
anything. (Interview 2014)

My collaborators understood economies of desirability as operating through the structural logic

of capitalism. One manifestation of this logic, which appeared with some frequency in the

interviews, is the pressure to be productive. Under capitalism, bodies become legible as human

and as valuable as long as they are productive labouring bodies or consumable bodies. If one is

not productive in a capitalism system, one is disposable; this is justified by the idea that bodies

unable or unwilling to labour are a burden to the capitalist system. Romham spoke to the impact

of this on desirability and feelings of worth:

I think part of where cultures of undesirability come from is the "protestant
work ethic" bullshit mixed with catholic guilt bullshit I was raised in. We were
always working class poor; and you worked. That's how you prove yourself,
your worth, live a decent life: struggle, work, struggle, work, and you don't talk
about the hard shit of it. I was badly injured in a car accident as a kid with my
mum, and seeing the changes that happened to her—not being able to work in
that traditional sense any more, having all things become about disability
(completely without naming it that)—it was a huge shift in our family, with a
lot of unspoken shame wrapped up in it. Watching how other people responded
to her, how I responded to her… As a young adult I worked for quite some
time at labour intensive jobs that were totally not appropriate for me and my
body; I hurt myself pretty intensely because I was so freaked out about, like,
becoming that person who couldn't work anymore and who somehow therefore
lost who they were. It—and I—was a mess, until I got hurt at welding school
and had to quit and while I was laid up from that injury, my other previous
injuries reared up and by the time I was healed from the welding thing, my
body had completely shut down and was like, "No way! You're not moving!"
Then I went onto disability benefits and absolutely nothing has been the same

since. And while there's definitely some real bullshit about it all, I'm grateful
for the trajectory. (Interview 2013)

Capitalism not only creates an inequitable distribution of value and worth, it also produces the

idea that resources are finite and, as a result, it forces us into a system of competition. This

system sets individual wellbeing against collective wellbeing, creating a sense of scarcity and

justifying exclusion, as named by Juba:

> We have to slam the door behind us because all of can't be in here at the same
> time. And…it stems from a politic of scarcity, that there's not enough for all of
> us to have enough love, sex, food, money—whatever…[F]or everybody to get
> and have…somebody has to not just be excluded, but to be not wanted. So if
> we have an implicit "this is what we don't want," then it's okay to leave
> someone over here on the side. (Interview 2014)

All of my collaborators echoed that cultures of undesirability involved the creation and

assignment of worth. These processes combine to produce a powerful normativity where we are

pressured to disconnect from all that is determined to be not worthy, not good enough, or not

deserving; as my collaborators revealed, there are severe consequences for diverging from this

normativity. While this process happens in part through individual, tangible messaging, it also

occurs at the level of epistemological frameworks upon which social organization rests.

According to Romham:

> "Cultures of undesirability" is about the whole social, structural, institutional,
> and…generational process of rendering folks (including variously disabled
> folks) undesirable based on bullshit ideas about worth and hotness and so on.
> But it's not just ideas—it's actions. It morphs to fit all kinds of experiences; it
> is passed on over time; and to me, it also isn't just some kind of super-specific
> cordoned off zone of sexuality and desire, it's literally *everything*. (Interview
> 2013)

Cultures of undesirability do not manifest as a one-off experience. As Romham stated, they are

literally "everything." Whatever the context—be it a Craigslist hookup or a trip on the bus—we

often face daily barrages of people's understanding of us as less-than, undesirable, pitiable.

Kylie shared the following moments, two out of many, which reflect the pervasive reoccurrence of cultures of undesirability:

> I had invited someone over to my place for sex, and when they came by they went up in the elevator on their own and then I met them at my floor at the elevator, and I saw the look on their face. They looked like they felt sorry for me.

> There was a Deaf person on the bus with me. That person said, "Awh, I feel sorry for you." They said that I miss out. (Interview 2013)

Romham continued their reflection above by saying,

> The messages about undesirability are everywhere, from the community spaces that refuse to address their inaccessibility but want to still be considered anti-oppressive spaces, to the people gawking at me on the bus, to my doctors congratulating me when I perform ability for them in this or that way. It's in the play party organizers that just don't fucking get it when I say I need this much space to safely navigate a dungeon without getting a non-consensual whip in the face; it's in the acquaintance who says shit about how they're just worried about my health and how this that or the other exercise will cure me; [and it's] people who literally say how it's so sad that I am this way—how much of a waste it is—but who still want to…call themselves not ableist. (Interview 2013)

Romham's thoughtful articulation of cultures of undesirability illuminates the ways these dominant ideologies are not contained only to the realm of sexuality and desire: they are omnipresent. They happen on the street, at the doctor's office, at work, in our homes. Romham also specifically points to the ways we experience this harmful messaging from multiple sources and spaces, not just doctors or strangers, but allies, friends, and even ourselves. Sometimes we are able to intercept the internalization of constructions of undesirability and sometimes we are not; these messages sneak into our understanding of others and ourselves and compel us to participate in their perpetuation, as Corrinne explains:

> ["Cultures of undesirability"] basically just means that there are like ideas around what's desirable that a lot of people in communities subscribe to that [are] created by the way that we think, what we see in media, what we kind of perpetuate ourselves… What we're fed and kind of like grab onto and

replicate. So there [are] just certain things that are held up as desirable and certain things that are put down as undesirable. And that kind of just plays out in really subtle ways sometimes. (Interview 2014)

Kylie speaks to the ways larger systems of oppression create standards of desirability and practices of reading bodies and identities. These practices are critical in terms of recognition and ways of being and appearing in the world:

> Society has standards of belief of people according to a white perspective, and that standard and that belief of what is perceived as the norm, affects trans women, and trans women of color. It has an effect on how gender is viewed. It forces all of us to try to conform to that expectation, so people who don't fit that are oppressed. The standard is a cisgender white person, and that doesn't include us [trans women of colour], and that's just one of many examples of how people view me. They perceive me as a guy. They assume my gender. They've decided already. (Interview 2014)

As we see from the above quotes, cultures of undesirability, following capitalist logic, produce and circulate powerful standards of determining worth through exclusion along lines of normativity. Importantly, my collaborators emphasized that these standards are always gendered and raced. Corrinne provided an example—which I think is worth quoting at length— revealing the subtle expressions of cultures of undesirability that impact Corrinne as a black, queer, chronically ill femme:

> I find that I'm face to face with it…when I date people and everyone else they're dating is…I don't know—there's a lot of different things, but I guess especially if their other dates are not black, or they're white passing, or they have different stuff around ability, it affects me differently. Like, sometimes I feel like I'm less desirable than them, or…I don't feel less desirable, but certain things hurt more. Yeah. Like, if another person gets to spend time or whatever, then I'm like, "Huh, what's that about?" And that stuff comes up for me, because I'm like, "is it because of who I am and how I am that you don't want to spend more time?"…There was this one situation where I was dating someone who was white and there was another person who…[was] a person of colour, not a black person. Some people who are black identify as people of colour; I personally just like to say "black," because I feel like it's a different experience than other identities of colour. We had agreed that we would be able to check in with each other, and when I would ask to check in, there was kind of assumption or dealing with me as if I was really angry. And I was like,

"What's going on? I'm just asking a question… I'm just doing what we said that we would do." But I got that there was some stereotyping happening around my blackness and therefore how I was emotionally. Like, yeah, I was just assumed to be angry more than anyone else in the situation, which is really hard and made me feel undesirable. (Interview 2014)

Corrinne's example speaks to the ways in which cultures of undesirability work to erase and exclude, and highlights in particular the operation of anti-black racism and sexism in determining desirability. These determinations influence how we come to know and make sense of the world around us as well as each other and ourselves; they also shape our imagining of possible new worlds. By exposing the individual manifestations of cultures of undesirability on a collective level, we are given a glimpse into the ways that cultures of undesirability have particular expressions in particular contexts, contingent on multiple systems of oppression. Nomy discusses how desirability is erased or rendered invisible for those who do not conform to normative ideals:

I was never crushed on, I was never asked out. I grew up in a completely white, middle-class area. I had very beautiful lifeguard, soccer, athlete friends who just had dates across the board forever. And I was always the one that was kind of chubby, so I was just really put as an "other" from way back. I think for me, I just un-thought of myself that way. I just turned off thinking that I was crushable. Then when I was like, "I think I might be a kind of a homo, on top of that," I was like, "Who am I looking at? No one else is going to be queer at my school. I can't look at anybody." And it was this long stretch of numbness, or something, around that. (Interview 2013)

These experiences of disassociation from important embodied differences set the stage for the replication of normative ways of living and being. Corrinne's quote below also speaks to powerful forces of denial we are forced to employ under cultures of undesirability. Not only does connecting with ourselves as desirable feel wrong, it can often feel impossible:

I just wasn't supposed to think about any of those things, but I often felt pretty sexual, so that was interesting. I felt like it was something to kind of like fight against and not to acknowledge, but I thought a lot of women were hot and sexy. And I was just like, "Ahhh, I'm not supposed to think this; I'm not

supposed to do this"… I also didn't feel hot…kids told me I was ugly and I
totally believed them. (Interview 2014)

Dominant frameworks of understanding disability also contribute significantly to the

creation and maintenance of cultures of undesirability. For instance, Mia spoke of the way in

which the residue of the eugenics model permeated her sense of self:

> Every March 1st—on my birthday!—is the National Day of Mourning for
> Disabled Children. And… having that on my birthday has felt very complex
> and layered for me… As I was thinking about, like, the next academic step for
> me in my career or my artistic career, as I'm applying to grad school, feeling
> like, "Holy crap, I am worth it!" And thinking about the layers of oppression
> that just I hear and have internalized to the point where I've forgotten for
> myself on my birthday that I was worth it. And then thinking about all those
> disabled people who were murdered by their parents, and were worth it, and
> our lives are valuable. (Interview 2014)

As referenced above by Mia, disabled people's lives continue to be constructed such that death

via murder is seen as a mercy or charitable act.[14] Similarly, Nomy's sense of identity was

impacted by an early engagement with mainstream representation of disability:

> One of my earliest memories of seeing something in the world that reflected
> some aspect of me that made me feel like "Oh, I'm going to be alone" was the
> Helen Keller movie [laughter]. I just…I was so young…and I just didn't know
> what I was, or anything about the world really, you know? And seeing like this
> person who was, like, different… I had dreams about her telling me to not bite
> off more than I can chew, basically. Like, "some things are just going to be too
> hard." I think as I got older there's this symbol in my mind of what being in
> love would be…it would be that someone would pick me up and, like, swing
> me around in circles. And that just wasn't going to be possible and so I think
> there's a certain amount of like "oh, I can't really fall in love" because I can't
> just get swept away. (Interview 2013)

Like Nomy, Mia went on to discuss how dominant disability models, as spoken through

interpersonal relationships, informed her sense of worth, desirability, and her place in the world:

> When we're are not seen as desirable, we're not worth the time and energy
> to… invest in making… [our] lives… sustainable. Undesirables are like the

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[14] While there are many different examples of parents committing "mercy killings" of their disabled children,
probably one of the best-known examples is that of Robert Latimer who killed his disabled daughter Tracy to
end her pain and supposed suffering in 1993.

island of misfit toys [laughs] and my mother always calls my friends "misfits" [laughter] and my friends are these misfit toys, and I'll get in the car and I'll talk about my new friend and she'll go, "What's wrong with them?" and I go, "Mom…" [laughter] "Are you asking if they're disabled?" [Laughing] The ways in which my family viewed my friends as this island of misfit toys and these people who, like, were castaways, or… just put on an island to live because they were undesirable. Like, the island of misfit toys are all the undesirable toys that were rejected or defected, and these defected bodies are ignored or locked away. (Interview 2014)

The creation of disability as visible—as legible, knowable, and thus containable and consumable *vis-a-vis* the medical model—produces an exclusionary definition of disability, policing broader experiences of disability and marginalization. As my collaborators also reveal, the confluence of dominant narratives around disability and desirability creates shame and justifies the need to control marginalized bodies.

Navigating Cultures of Undesirability: "Existing in a World that Wasn't Meant for You to Survive"

In the following section, I will draw attention to the operation of cultures of undesirability through my collaborators' experiences, focusing on the following themes that emerged from our interviews: in/visibility and hypervisibility, shame, exclusion, and control.

In/visibility and Hypervisibility

Avery Gordon, using the work of Laura Kipnis, describes visibility as a "complex system of permission and prohibition, of presence and absence" (1996, 15). This complex system is never complete: even in the disappearances we are made to appear, as is evident in so many of the different moments of (mis)recognition that the various collaborators have spoken to thus far. We appear and move through the world with a constant sense that there is something wrong with us.

Bodies and ways of living are made noticeable by the disappearance of differences amongst normative bodies and the normalization of ways of communicating, moving, and feeling that adhere to the dominant terms of desirability. In this way, non-normative bodies, when they appear, are hypervisible. Gordon describes hypervisibility as a "kind of obscenity that abolishes the distinctions between permission and prohibition, presence and absence" (Gordon 1996, 8).

In this section, inspired by Gordon's work on hauntings discussed in Chapter One, I want to explore more than just noticing moments where the complex systems of in/visibility and hypervisibility appeared to my collaborators and myself. Even though noticing is an important part of the process, I want to trace how in these shared moments of recognizing misrecognition, an alternative "politics of accounting" emerges (Gordon 1996, 18). Gordon's understanding of accounting for oneself also makes me think about the difficulty in giving an account of oneself, as theorized by Butler (2005). I understand my collaborators' storying of their experiences as a technology of the self within economies of desirability, particularly how the terms of legibility, subjectivity, and possibility are forever entangled (Butler 2005 and Foucault 1988). Corrinne's response what being a queer, black, chronically ill femme means to her touched on many of the tangled threads:

> I think it means that there's a lot of intersections of things…like, when I'm experiencing something and I don't necessarily know if I'm coming up against racism or homophobia or ableism or what's happening. And I think fundamentally it's kind of like a mix of all of those things, because I can't really separate my identities. I think it means that it's sometimes a little harder to navigate the world than we're kind like of told it should be. What else does it mean? It means that I'm resilient as fuck [laughter], because the world doesn't really account for me to be in it sometimes, so I deal with a lot of invisibility stuff and just...yeah, like Audre Lorde says, "existing in a world that wasn't meant for you to survive." (Interview 2014)

Corrinne continued by clarifying what "invisibility stuff" means in her life:

I guess an example would be… at my day job I have quite a lot of sick time, and I use a lot of it because I'm sick a lot. And I remember I went on a leave and I came back to work and a co-worker of mine said, "Oh I'm really glad you're back. I saw you around in the street"… To me this was basically kind of implying that I wasn't sick, or that I shouldn't be walking around if I was off on a sick leave. It's just so interesting, because I felt like I had to justify how I'm sick and how that might look like I'm not sick… I'm sick, yeah, and I also need to eat, so I'm going to need to go out and [do] groceries when I can. And those moments that you see me out [are] when I can be out, which doesn't necessarily mean that I'm always feeling the exact same way. And I think that people often are like, "Well, you don't look sick; you look great, so therefore you must not be [sick]." And I think we have a really simplistic way of looking at people being sick. Like, if I'm not immobile in the hospital it means that I'm not dealing with anything, or going through pain, or healing from surgery, or…dealing with different meds and that kind of stuff. So I guess that would be an example of invisibility. And I definitely don't get read as femme often. It's more like I get assumed straight… I'm talking about, like, general public stuff, but I feel like it's a little bit more clear now because—I don't know—my name's kind of out there, so people know, ok, I identify as femme or I'm queer and they see who I date and that kind of stuff. So I feel like to community I'm more often, like, my femme is acknowledged. (Interview 2014)

As complex persons, we are continuously navigating the mixed messages of visibility. This story shared by Corrinne is a very typical experience for people living with chronic illness and of femmes: both of these experiences are shaped by invisibility. Some of us, or some parts of us, are devalued by cultures of undesirability and thus erased; experiences such as chronic illness, femmeness, and various learning and mental health disabilities were understood by my collaborators as erased—rendered invisible—by dominant culture. At the same time, some of the ways we fall outside terms of desirability are hypervisible. All of the collaborators of colour in this research process spoke to the ways that their blackness marked them as hypervisible, while collaborators also noted that fatness and the use of adaptive devices resulted in hypervisibility. Corrinne followed her example of invisibility with this telling story:

There was this thing that happened to me a couple of weeks ago: I was walking down the street and I felt really good. I was having a good body day, like, I wasn't having a lot of pain. And I had just had a really nice meeting with some other Black colleagues and I was just feeling pretty pumped, and it was nice, and

I was walking down the street and, like, several white men started yelling at me. And I was like, "What is happening?" But this one man was like, "Oh, you think you own this street," and he was literally yelling down the street at me. And I was like, wow, this is what happens when I'm confident. It's like threatening to people, which I thought was so interesting. And yeah, I don't know, I was wearing this big fancy coat and just feeling really good, and just saw how intensely threatening that was to, like, be myself and be, um, y'know, confident and proud of who I was. (Interview 2014)

This story clearly illustrates what happens when noticeable bodies exceed or are seen to exceed the space of marginality. In this particular example, in dominator culture Corrinne's blackness and femininity are closely associated as angry and dangerous. Furthermore, part of what is threatening is when marginalized people are feeling good, confident in all our ways of being, in our noticeable bodies; in owning visibility—not shrinking but flaunting—we are threatening. Thus, in order to feel safe we are encouraged to fall into alignment (Ahmed 2006); in other words, disappear through conformity. Corrinne added:

It's kind of like the whole femme thing. Like, I get to, y'know, sometimes in really dangerous spaces I get to be assumed as straight and…that can kind of like save me in particular ways. And so it's really shitty not to have that acknowledged about me because that's, like, a huge part of who I am. (Interview 2014)

Often, in order to become legible as human and access resources, we must participate in reinforcing the terms of normativity, possibility, and desirability. Visibility that grants us legibility is often predicated on a politic of respectability that instils a norm-based achievement occurring in spite of, not because of. We are allowed to show up as the model minority, as the supermom, as the supercrip. Mia, as a dancer with a physical disability, found her younger self immersed in the supercrip narrative:

I was in dancing school since I was six years old, so I've always been in dance, a dancer. And so when I watch my dance videos from, like I started, using the base point of 17, when I watch my dance videos from 17, I'm watching the supercrip storyline going out there and being like, "I can do this! I can be a dancer! And look at me go! And aren't I cool? Because I'm defying the odds!" you know?

And now, you know, I'm working with.. um.. dance choreographers in New York and one of them was like, "Oh, I want to use this song!" And I was like, "Okay, no, I've done the supercrip storyline already." [Laughter] I'm done doing the supercrip storyline! It's not what I want to convey anymore. (Interview 2014)

The supercrip makes dominant culture, and in particular non-disabled people, feel safe by compelling us to desire "ability" and promoting the belief that embodied difference and the associated devaluing and marginalization are avoidable if you can overcome (Peers 2012).

Another way in/visibility appeared in the interviews was that all of the collaborators spoke to the association of adaptive devices with disability and visibility. In dominator culture adaptive devices are *the* symbol of disability, and thus accommodation, rendering them hypervisible. Pens, sunglasses, earplugs, cell phones, shoes, clothing, all of these items could be considered adaptive devices because they shift bodily capacities with their use; of course, what distinguishes these adaptive devices from canes, wheelchairs, hearing aids, and so on is the combined normalization of the former and the medicalization of the latter. Normalization and medicalization processes that accompany dominant models of disability render these devices and the people using them hypervisible, as Isobel conveyed through a story:

I mean, it's something that I've tried writing about a bit, because a few years ago when I first started using a cane, I was lucky to be kind of in a nest of lots of queer crip folks who were like, "Yeah, this is really cool that you found this thing that's helpful!" And that was really, really good, and warm, and helpful in terms of helping me go out in the world with it. But then, it was almost like a morbid awakening to be in actual spaces where people had so much entitlement to my own body, and to make comments on my person. And so, I went to this dance party, and I had my cane, and it matched my outfit, and I was super fancied-up, it was a beautiful dance party, it was really, really fun. And… there was this younger black guy that I think was working there, and I was sitting down, not visibly with my cane, I guess. And he was giving me the eyes, and I was not interested, but he was doing his thing, and I was like cool, do whatever you're doing. And I walked somewhere else with the cane and he came up to me and had this whole thing about "you're so beautiful, *except*," and "what with that - I thought it was only for these kinds of people," and, "oh, it's an illness - it's okay, you're going to get better." And it was just like... the party, massive queer love

crip party was happening behind me, and I was having this tiny interaction that was just shattering all of the confidence I'd had the whole night. (Interview 2014)

In this moment, Isobel's desirability is completely dependent upon the erasure of her cane as the marker that makes her "one of those kinds of people." This moment also conveys how our senses of self are rocked when we confront moments in which our legibility as desirable people is erased. Romham's story further confirmed the impact of visibility with regard to desirability:

> The way people look or don't look at me, and how that's changed as the outward manifestations of parts of my disabilities, shift over time: sometimes it's hot, sometimes it's gross, or somewhere in between. Sometimes the shift in how people respond to me is so fast. They're hot for me until they realize what my disabilities may entail. I've seen people who have been super into meeting up for sex or play, and their face drops when I show up in a scooter. It's revealed to me every time I have to make sure they really do understand what I'm saying when I say I'm disabled, and that some of the disabilities I live with are visible to sighted folks. Similar in some ways to when I have to super-clarify what I'm saying when I say I'm trans, and yet it's still weird. (Interview 2013)

Isobel discussed the very real impact of being considered "not okay," structured by the white supremacy operating within mainstream disability discourse and communities:

> [I'm thinking about] about how the media and criminal injustice system and prison industrial complex kind of work together with mainstream disability discourse [to] make room for and make compassion for humanizing white folks who are crazy or mad identified or neuro-divergent in other ways that commit crimes, whereas many black folks who are disabled in similar ways who may or may not have committed "criminal acts" aren't given the opportunity to be human and [are] often killed institutionally or otherwise. And so the erasure of black, indigenous, and [people of colour]…in mainstream disability discourse, which is mostly white, means there is less room for us to take up space as neuro divergent or crazy folks because the risk is that we are going to get shot or arrested and then unduly tried. And I think that there is a disconnect between thinking about disability rights and civil rights and losing the intersectionality within those things. (Interview 2014)

Present in Isobel's quote and through so many of these stories shared by collaborators is the way cultures of undesirability produce an incredibly dangerous and harmful world for marginalized

people along lines of in/visibility. Systemic exclusion from the terms of worth and desirability, and by extension humanity, creates the conditions for immense violence and oppression.

Shame

The combination of shame, naturalization, and internalization works to perpetuate and justify the terms of legibility and ways of knowing and living created by cultures of undesirability. Cultures of undesirability rely on the working of shame as a panoptical device, to borrow from Foucault (1995, 202-203): within cultures of undesirability, we become ashamed about parts of ourselves that we perceive to diverge from normative standards of worth and desirability and, in turn, we monitor those shameful parts of ourselves, hiding them away or attempting to rid ourselves of them; as we monitor ourselves, we also monitor the potentially shameful parts of each other, as we sense others monitoring the potentially shameful parts of ourselves. This experience of shame functions behind the erasure, exclusion, and general tendency toward disconnection that characterize cultures of undesirability. Romham discussed the struggle involved in resisting the constant pressure to disconnect and disappear:

> I fight (myself and others) to allow parts of me to show up. I get embarrassed so easily, mortified by myself, by my body, by the stuttering that happens sometimes, by my leg cramps, and balding head, the way my fat has changed since using the mobility scooter, my tits, etc. I used to think to myself "well at least I've got strong arms from using the forearm crutches, and in a queer sexual context people (whoever THEY are!) seem to like strong arms...," that kinda shit; now I don't have such strong arms, and sometimes I wonder what I bring to the table. Considering I'm someone who is outspoken about a lot of things, including but not limited to disability justice, it sometimes throws me off how much cultures of undesirability have impacted me, and how much time and energy I spend on dealing with it, navigating it, fighting it, pretending it doesn't hurt me or fundamentally change me. I still have shame about my body, gimped, fat, trans, aging, whatever it is, there's some kind of bullshit lie being told about what it is, what it's worth, who does and doesn't want it, what's hot or not, etc, and I periodically believe it. (Interview 2013)

Romham's experiences speak to the pervasiveness of cultures of undesirability and how deeply

they are internalized and individualized. They make us question what we "bring to the table" and

of course the standards of judging the worth of what we bring is set so that our contributions

never even appear at the table. In economies of desirability, disability and embodied differences

are situated as individual deficits, rather than beneficial and important:

> I think a lot of my life was trying to figure out how to change that… I know
> there's something going on in here that people probably would probably want to
> engage with, and how do I get that aspect of myself empowered enough to be able
> to put it into a space…and then have it be respected, you know? The fat stuff was
> like enough, there had been years and years and years of body hating and dieting
> and trying to change it but the disability piece was just unchangeable and so I just
> couldn't even really think about it and when I would it was like… (Nomy,
> Interview 2013)

In Nomy's story we are given access to the difficulty involved in trying to figure out where the

source of undesirability lies. The internalization of the personal inferiority model and normative

desirability teaches us that the problem is located within ourselves—our ways of

being. Therefore, we must either change (or rehabilitate) those things about us that are different,

in Nomy's example, through dieting; or, as for Isobel and Corrinne put it, shut down (or

exterminate) pieces of ourselves. Nomy's words also illustrate that the project of undesirability is

never complete. There are also feelings and embodied lived realities that contradict or exceed the

personal inferiority narrative. In this quote from Juba we see the operation of sexuality and

disability/illness as a threat, to be avoided:

> I think that, at the same time there is a conversation around, you know, the crip-
> minded disabled body, the sick body, the infected body, but also the way that the
> decisions that get made or don't get made around acting upon desire. Like, if there
> was no such thing as an HIV, then I would probably have had a different set of
> sexual experiences like starting early in my teenage years than I actually have had.
> And there are these moments of like really serious, and people will call it
> romantic, or rose-coloured, but really, of lament, around all of this shit that I just
> didn't get to – you know I didn't get to wild out, so to speak – because I had this
> information that I was given – and fear! Stigma. When you talk about desirability,

and at work I used to talk about it all the time, and it's something that has come out in the conversation around PrEP is that for a long time, for men particularly, there is this very direct association of sex with men – sex and desire for men means illness and eventual death. And how that shift – not for everybody but for some people and the fractions that it is creating in community – in the culture of undesirability in the sense that, the slut-shaming that is going around, if you talk about younger men acting on their desire and the moralizing going on around that because they are having the space to make these decisions where it's like, "here are these people now, not because they are doing something that is medically problematic" but they get to become someone else that is different from the experience that we have experienced in this particular column. And because we don't know how to function, and haven't been given the space, and there is this trauma around sex and sexuality that is giving us a negative context around this new-new way to function and a new set of decisions to make on how to get there, their sexuality and desire, that makes them undesirable – because they don't fit into this rubric that we've been stuck in for a long time. [15] (Interview 2014)

Exclusion

The rubric of cultures of undesirability is exclusive to its core. The system of determining desirability—and thereby worth—requires exclusion. Our relational fabric, under the terms of cultures of undesirability, is necessarily constrained. We face exclusion from legibility, from resources, from pieces of our complex personhood, and from community. Exclusion works in a manner similar to shame in that it keeps us isolated. In this section I focus on the ways in which individualized pressure to reach and maintain normativity creates barriers to connecting with a collective recognition and belonging.

Dominant models of understanding disability work to systematically exclude various disabled people and their experiences from what is understood as "disability." All of the collaborators who had experiences of disability that are considered "invisible disabilities" told similar stories of their disabilities and needs not being recognized or considered

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[15] Pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP) is a medication designed to interfere with HIV's ability to copy itself in a person who is HIV negative. For more details about the debates Juba is referring to see the following articles: "This PrEP-Ed Life: Damon Jacobs on Sex and Dating in a New Era of HIV Prevention" (2015) and "The Fury of the PrEP Debate and Facts to Win It" (2015).

legitimate. These experiences contributed in part to collaborators not recognizing themselves as

disabled. As a result, for many of the collaborators, disability community felt unavailable or like

something to avoid in order to minimize stigma and oppression. Corrinne explains:

> Disability wasn't really on my radar, even though I've dealt with various
> different illnesses since I was a tiny baby. I was in the paper as a kid from
> being in and out of the hospital so many times… But yeah, it wasn't something
> that I saw for myself. But I guess I saw it in more obvious ways. Like, if people
> had impaired vision or cognitive ability then I acknowledged those things as
> stuff around ability, but I didn't really include myself in that. I feel like it's
> been a process to start to talk about [ableism and disability] and identify those
> things like in my body and in my life for a couple of reasons. I think one is just
> that it's really hard, and you come up against all of people's ableist shit. And,
> yeah, as someone who can hide it, a lot of times that's been easier to do…
> because it's easier to just kind of suffer in silence because of all the stuff I find
> that I come up against around being able to be productive and… have your
> voice be legitimate in particular ways. (Interview 2014)

Connecting with disability community can often expand our ideas about disability and grant us

access to connection with others who share similar experiences. Such community-based relations

can connect our experiences on a systemic level, cultivate collective agency. However, because

they are unavoidably influenced by cultures of undesirability, communities can also work to

dictate who is "in" and who is "out"; Romham shares:

> Among variously disabled folks, for example, we can be all cool on a physical
> mobility level, but as soon as they hear me stutter, or when I tell them I'm
> reading their lips at times because I have a central auditory processing
> disorder which fucks with my hearing and comprehension, etc, it's game off,
> y'know? That tells me very clearly that parts of me are okay, parts of me are
> not; and when I average it out, it usually means that I am not ok. (Interview
> 2013)

Isobel further highlights the ways in which dominant frameworks for understanding disability

create exclusion by preventing marginalized people from finding community:

> My understanding of disability until pretty recently was pretty mainstream-
> ish… I didn't know tons of 'out' disabled folks, or physically disabled folks

that we got to have these conversations with. We were in meetings together, but we weren't actually talking about the ways that they were experiencing ableism, or the ways that I was experiencing ableism that I didn't know I was experiencing at the time. (Interview 2014)

Romham and Isobel's experiences illustrate how unexamined internalized disableism within disability communities creates erasure and exclusion. In the same way that dominant understandings of disability can be narrow and exclusive, so too can common understandings disableism; for instance, disableism looks like structural barriers to someone with a physical disability. This narrow understanding limits the tremendous variety that actually exists, thereby limiting people's ability to find community and thus participate in collective resistance.

Exclusion also often means that complex personhood gets erased. As discussed in Chapter One, disability often gets constructed and taken up as a singular experience: we are only ever disabled, not disabled and black or disabled and queer. As a result, our complex personhood has a hard time belonging anywhere in its entirety. For instance, Isobel went on to discuss the painful moments of exclusion from black communities:

> Because the world is super anti-black racist, there are ways that we see each other and want to unite, in this way—but then my cane. It's like you're coming together, you see each other in the street, and they see the cane, and it's like, "blah!" It interrupts this, you know, swoony moment or something. And I think, for me, I think that comes from—we're already told we're so crappy; we're already told our bodies are, by being black. Two hundred years ago we were classified as disabled, which wasn't an okay thing to be. So I feel like there's ways that we try to build ourselves up, and unite with each other, and work together in a particular struggle. And in that way, we might lose track of the other intersections of ourselves. And so I feel like because we find each other, I find that folks [who] mimic some of the identities that I have will lose all politeness or something, and just be right in my business. Especially older black aunties and stuff will be like, really harsh in this weird, loving way. Like, "What are you doing? What do you need this for? You look like this," and I'm like, "You're actually breaking apart, but you're doing it so lovingly." And I feel like that's a harder undesirability to survive, because I'm invested in those connections in a way I'm not from random white folks who stare at me. I'm like, "I don't even need to smile at you, I don't need to give you any time, because you're already a waste of my time right now anyway." But when I'm

coming across with people that I really want to be connecting with, but then…they think of me as broken, and broken is a bad thing, or damage is a bad thing, less powerfully black, or … feeling like I'm embarrassing us, or something, because I'm adding this not-so-good thing onto being black. (Interview 2014)

In Romham's experience, the desexualization of disabled queers intensifies in the presence of hypersexual queer spaces:

Because sexuality is such a... strong part of a lot of queer stuff, I feel like it's hyper noticeable to me as a queer gimp. Like, there's this really intensely clear line past which I'm intended not to cross. So often I'm not recognized as queer, not recognized as sexual; and if I am recognized as either or even both of those, it's usually through this ridiculous non-disabled filter, and is actually totally unrecognizable to me. (Interview 2013)

Many collaborators also shared feeling excluded from queer community. Juba explains:

Around the spring of 1996 or so, that was about when I sort of came—or slid— out, and it meant that everybody else knew that I was queer. I think that was the first time that I remember looking at myself and thinking of myself as fat because it was the first shift in my, that I was openly articulating and talking about desire for men. And my model, and the space I knew, that was gay male culture. And even, as I've said previously, gay, bisexual, queer-identified men of colour, there was still this fierce normativity, like even if you talk about the media that was available then, it was a particular kind of body that stayed in the gym and it was muscular, and I didn't have it. (Interview 2014)

Exclusion undermines our worth, agency, and individual and collective control.

Isolation from communities that value our complex personhood leaves us vulnerable

exploitation and harm.

Control

Once constructed as disposable by cultures of undesirability, marginalized people become

objects for control and consumption, to the benefit of dominant power structures. The invasive

ownership of marginalized bodies shows up on a structural level in several ways; examples

include, but are by no means limited, to: supposed "therapeutic" sterilization, custodial care

approaches to "managing" our sexuality, corrective surgeries at birth, freak shows, and the negation of consent when being forcibly committed to psychiatric facilities. We see this structural impact through the individual examples shared by collaborators. Isobel shared the following experiences, which reflect the lived impact of a lack of control:

> There's ways that, as a person of colour, as a person who's perceived in certain gendered ways and things like that and crip ways, and performing, maybe last year or the year before I performed in really specific ways that I felt like my body was being consumed in ways that I didn't necessarily have control over. Like when people come up to me after a performance and say certain things, I'm like, who do you think you're talking to right now? Or people ask me out right after a performance and I'm like, yeah that's not actually me all the time. And feeling like I was kind of losing grasp of, like there was a split happening between public and private in this way that felt not quite my own. And I feel like when we're already noticeable as bodies, like that's already happening so much, and there's so much negotiating of, like, okay, if I'm going to go to this kind of neighbourhood I want to be perceived in this kind of way. (Interview 2014)

Nomy shared the following experience, where her and her scene partner's naked bodies were literally up for grabs:

> Well I had a partner about a decade ago now who…we had really good sex and we had fun together and interesting roles that had like interesting visual and energetic things to it. That person was a photographer, so we actually did a couple porn shoots where they were acting as a photographer and I was kind of like [a] little girl. And…there's kind of like a daddy dynamic in that too. And then we also did one shoot in an alley with the van and just being silly, like teenage boy style… The teenage boys with the van kind of situation…that was the only one that I felt like really good about how it worked out, like in terms of our boundaries not being pushed in the moment and then what happened with it in the world after that was like what had been agreed to. And the two other ones that we did, one of them was a really bad experience in the moment. Like, and I saw the pictures later but we didn't let them use it because my date felt so exploited by the way it happened. And then the other one, we like had such a great collaborative process in designing it and shooting it and that one was an actual movie, whereas the other ones were a photoshoot. And then the director, without consulting with us… [had] literally stacks of video tapes that people could just take home with them at the release. And we were just like, "Oh! We had no idea." We were not asked. And that's like our naked bodies. (Interview 2013)

Romham's experiences highlight the subtlety and constancy of boundary violations that disabled people often face:

> My consent is violated a lot as a gimp, even in seemingly small ways. People touch my body, move my equipment, etcetera, without asking; or they ask and then do it before I have a chance to respond; or they ask, hear me say "no" and they do it anyways, because I guess they know better. This happens basically every day, and it sends a clear message that my body is not my own, that my words don't have meaning, and that I don't know what I need and want and desire. (Interview 2014)

The internalization of the message that we do not know our own bodies, needs, and desires impacts our ability to consent. Exclusion and the politics of scarcity combine to compel marginalized people to accept abuse and neglect out of fear of not ever being chosen—of feeling undesirable. When we say no or assert ourselves, we are aware that we will likely either be ignored or disposed of. Nomy's video, *Time to Say Hello*, explores the ways that systematic devaluing of our bodies and ways of being make asking for what we want and stating what we do not want extremely difficult, but not impossible.

The opportunity that this project offered for collaborators to take back control over how we are seen and engaged with, both through interviews and making porn, was transformative for them. While I will expand upon the details and implications of these transformations in Chapter Five, it is relevant here to share Nomy's experience of taking back control over not only her sexuality but the terms under which she is recognized as a sexual person through shooting a solo queercrip porn scene:

> That core question about undesirability—I think that you posing that question to the world gives permission for people to engage with it, and it's a very scary topic to engage with. You know? It's very painful. And I think there's something, a key, I've been looking for for a long time. That movie [*Time to Say Hello*] is right there, I can mark it right there: there it is. That key is—and you always know that in a way—don't look to other people to validate you. That has to come from yourself or something like that, but there's this thing around sexuality where you want to share it. You want it to be recognized. There's something key to being a sexual person about feeling recognized as

that sexual person. I think for those of us who haven't had a chance, which I think…most people in our culture have not had a chance to really develop our own sexual power that we are kind of going off these tropes. So I'm really excited about experimenting with that, and that work. (Interview 2014)

Isobel speaks in similar but broader terms about not only the extensive impacts that

cultures of undesirability have on every aspect of our lives, but also the necessity of

reconnecting with a sense of agency:

> There's so little power that my body has in the world most of the time. Like, transit, meds, health, all that stuff, like I don't have a lot of power over my body, even if I want to, in a lot of my everyday life. And I feel like that is an experience of a lot of marginalized folks too. So it feels strengthening and powerful to be able to decide how we're being seen and decide how we're being sexualized and to participate in the ways that we're being perceived as sexual, because I feel that very much pushes against 89% of my experience of being catcalled and being, all the things that happen to me in the day just being out in the world. (Interview 2014)

Nomy's and Isobel's words underscores that engaging with and interrogating cultures of

undesirability needs to be done collectively and publicly to push back against the individualizing

forces of cultures of undesirability: shame, exclusion, erasure, and lack of control.

Creating Cultures of Resistance

In the midst of a nearly constant barrage of nastiness that collaborators navigate, they also

participate in the crucial work of interrupting the impacts of cultures of undesirability and

questioning the unquestionable. In fact, each of my collaborators, in one way or another, were

enacting cultures of resistance, long before this project began. In the following story by Nomy,

which was actually the continuation of her earlier story about dreaming of Helen Keller, we see

an act of imagining otherwise and the importance of possibility. She says:

> As early as I could remember, I didn't even see myself ever getting married. So I invented this story in my head 'cause I didn't really love being alive as a kid…
> Just in terms of like what's the point of this and where's it going to go? Like,

where's this going to go? Umm, so I made up this story to keep myself alive about how at some point I would have a community of people that were artists that were trying to change the world through like music and a key aspect of it was that you wouldn't be able to tell who was a boy and who was a girl. [laughs] Umm, so that was like yeah, that was kind of like a story and vision that I invented that maybe I was practicing for down the road because I just, I could never picture there being like a man and I knew that was like the normal thing, it just didn't make sense. I just couldn't fit it into my reality. (Interview 2013)

When ways of being and imagining worlds don't fit in our reality or are causing us significant harm, it's time to tell new and different stories: the very stories that cultures of undesirability make largely unknowable. Corrinne and Mia both speak to the power and potential of video and queercrip porn to reframe and re-story their experiences:

I think I play with it—the hypervisibility and invisibility. I know that there's some days where I'm like, "Oh my god, I wish no one saw me." And some days I'm like, "I want to be listened to! And I want people to see me and hear me." And so I guess I'm just really aware of those things and I try to think about what can happen to, um, call attention to that stuff and just kind of like voice and externalize what that feels like. So video has been a really awesome tool for that, for me to be able to be seen and describe myself and to create my own image, really. (Interview 2014)

Mia adds:

And, and realizing that there's all these voices [narratives of undesirability] that come out of us, and that's the whole point of doing this too, is being like, "I wanna control these voices so that people hear and listen to what I have to say and through Queercrip porn, I'm making those choices." (Interview 2014)

I will focus on the specifics of queercrip porn as a method for transformation in Chapter Five. Here I want to focus on already existing ontologies and frameworks that acted as survival strategies for collaborators. The work of restorying involves interrupting dominant ontologies and accessing as well as sharing other ways of knowing, being, and living. These ways of living arise from lived experiences and a commitment to navigating and pushing back cultures of undesirability. Rather than solutions, collaborators found strategic, dynamic, and responsive practices to resist and rework the harm, violence, constraining control, and limited imaginary

possibilities of cultures of undesirability. The ways of living and being otherwise highlighted

here are: community, sites of shame as sites of resistance, access intimacy. These themes, all

intimately tied to disability justice and radical disability politics, were central to producing the

content of this dissertation.

Community

Several of my collaborators spoke of the importance of finding communities where their

identities felt understood and affirmed. For instance, Isobel spoke of the radical significance of

finding crip community:

> Oddly—actually, I don't know if I should say oddly, I feel pretty lucky about it,
> but—I've always had hard body stuff, and hard mind stuff. And those things
> weren't really okay for a big chunk of my life, in terms of being a good, valuable
> person. But then in coming out as crip, and the abilities changing, I happened to
> be, like I said, in this little nest of queer, brown, crip, activist, performer people. It
> was like coming out as crip meant that I was coming out as a bit more like myself,
> I became more me. And that 'more me' was really welcomed, and loved. And so
> my feeling about my own desirability and disability was pretty strong… because
> of people like Loree, and all the really cool people in my life. I feel really lucky
> about that. I feel strong in my crip sexiness, sometimes. (Interview 2014)

However, cultures of undesirability, emerge even in activist communities that centre

marginalized voices and experiences, replicating dominant culture productions of desirability

and legibility exclusion and erasure. Corrinne continued offering a few important examples of

cultures of undesirability as they appear in queer communities where larger systems of

oppression are replicated:

> I find in queer community there's this privileging of masculinity, which is
> really interesting and frustrating. And I think that that comes from generally
> living in patriarchy and all of the different and complicated ways that that
> plays out. But I see it playing out in queer community like that. There's just - I
> don't know - it's like there's femme competition and… there's lots of, like, I
> don't know, you don't really see many femmes dating each other, and that kind
> of stuff. (Interview 2014)

As simple as this idea may seem, Juba's experience speaks to the complexities involved in

identifying and calling out cultures of undesirability for the ways in which they systemically

devalue certain lives and ways of being:

> Well, I can't remember where I heard it or who to attribute it to, but it really stuck
> with me, what it was saying, to paraphrase it, was that queers were just straight
> people with better fashion sense. And really, what it got at to me, was within a lot
> of my experience, with queer community and thought, there was this rhetoric or
> what people thought or think something is like, this freedom rhetoric and self-
> affirmation politic, that a lot of, and that's not just queer stuff, but if you talk about
> racialized social justice movements, if you talk about newer context of disability
> justice movements, and feminism, and their overlaps and interlocks, has been
> these implicit or overt pushes towards normativity in the sense that, the question
> of like desirability or what is desirable is challenged by this space of, for lack of a
> better word, repatriation. The idea that, there is, if you talk about it in an African-
> American context, if you talk about DuBois, you know, there was this idea of the
> talented tenth, that there was going to be a segment that was representative of the
> desires, of the wants of the community as a whole and that would invisiblize the
> rest of us, because this would be the cream that was rising to the top, so to speak.
> And even though you talk about Marcus Garvey and the Back to Africa movement
> in the 1920s. Even though people looked at WEB DuBois and Garvey as these
> poles of attitude with regards to that, Garvey was very much a purity-mythologist
> in his worst moments. In terms of his notions of African-ness or Blackness and
> what that should be or how that should be represented. And what the desire was or
> should be, not based on what was determined by the community. And so it
> becomes about this idea of communion versus community, in the sense that, to
> crib from bell hooks, the idea of community in the typical sense, even though in
> this sense what's being said is that oft times that means that someone gets left out
> on the basis of what is not desired in terms of the function of that community as
> opposed to having communion which means that we get to come together in this
> space on the basis of our not being the same and then we get to share on that.
> That's a lot of what comes up for me about that. (Interview 2014)

Juba made several important points, one of which is the necessary linkage of normativity and

economies of desirability and how they produce necessarily restrictive terms of legibility even in

space meant to resist dominant culture. Allen, responding to Juba, raised an important red flag to

be ever mindful of in doing this work of transforming cultures of undesirability. In the resistance

of such extreme and violent systemic devaluing of marginalized communities, people and ways

of living, if the operation of cultures of undesirability is not acknowledged and interrupted, we will continue to construct desirability and worth through a framework of erasure and exclusion:

> I'm really glad you said that, because when I heard that question, I was like, "oh well I know that's probably a lot of academic theory that I don't know a lot about; all the -ins and -ivities or whatever," and then I was like, "the thing is, like this representation of who is desirable or what is desirable is always at the cost of someone else, right?" and I think that is what you are getting at. And even you know, reclaiming things as desirable, you know, someone is getting stepped on. So to have, to be making projects where it's like, "oh, we're redefining what's desirable" is still to say that something is desirable. So we need to be explicit about that, and work that into the pieces in whatever kind of way". (Interview 2014)

Acknowledging the ways that cultures of undesirability manifest in our lives is an important part of the transformative process. However, as Allen reminds us, it is also necessary to not allow the conversation to stay here. Shifting the conversation away from desirability being an attribute than people either have or don't have, as has been done through the stories shared above, interrupts the deeply entrenched individualization and naturalization intrinsic to the operation of cultures of undesirability. Holding onto the possibility that sites of shame can be transformed into sites of resistance, along with cultivating spaces and relationships that centre access intimacy, assisted my collaborators and me in enacting transformation that goes beyond simply replacing the existing set of dominant culture criteria for worth, desirability, and inclusion with another.

Sites of Shame as Sites of Resistance

For Romham, featuring their scooter in the scene they created allowed them to connect to their complex personhood in a way they hadn't before. First they shared the story of getting their scooter:

A fellow wheeling gimp and a dear friend gave me her old scooter because she'd moved onto a motorized wheelchair. Though I never talked about it except with my counsellor, I was at that moment in my life feeling ready to call it quits because of pain and despair and a deep hopelessness I was dealing with, being well beyond the top of my med dosing and still in outrageous pain and fatigue, with no possibilities for relief etc. And with this simple act she literally saved my life, and totally changed everything. I didn't realize how intense the impact of it would be, or that she could become even more dear to me than she already was, and that this would come in the form of a machine that brings with it a bunch of hard stuff too, including but not limited to the changing reactions of others, of different kinds of ableism and inaccessibility, of my body changing from using it, and so on. In the end, I'm still here, and I'd say that's had a profound impact on my understandings of power, privilege, desirability (in and beyond the "bedroom"), and disability. (Interview 2013)

This story highlights how deeply significant our devices are to our sense of possibility in terms of survival, what our day to day looks like, and how we come to understand ourselves, our relationships, and the worlds we live in. Then they shared another experience of practicing using their scooter in the scene they planned:

We practiced fucking on my scooter before it was shoot day, and that was the first time I'd ever done that, and honestly, the first time that I'd ever allowed any of the "stuff" of my particular disabilities to be there with us. And also, because of the way our home is set up, I'm not able to have my scooter inside our place, so it's not something that would just organically happen like it did before we moved in together and we were able to practice it. So having this space to do this was amazing. (Interview 2013)

Romham's experience, as well as discussions with other collaborators such as Mia, who referred to her crutches as a "partner," highlighted the idea that when we shift our orientation, we can then shift what we create. In this way, shifting a site of shame to a site of resistance happens at the level of ontology, where shame transforms from something to move away from, cover up, or disconnect with to something to move toward, connect with, and feel out. In spending time within sites of shame and understanding them differently, we open up the potential to produce new knowledges and ways living.

Access Intimacy

Just as cultures of undesirability create a world that is violent and difficult, if not impossible, for marginalized people to navigate, radical access is key to creating worlds that make space for all of the things written out and written over by cultures of undesirability, worlds where it is okay for us to show up in all our complexity. Organizing this research project from a politic of radical access and disability justice was necessary in order to begin building worlds in which my collaborators and me could exist otherwise. In "Access Intimacy: The Missing Link," Mia Mingus calls attention to "the way your body relaxes and opens up with someone when all your access needs are being met" (2011, n.p.). Prioritizing radical access and access intimacy contributed to the depth of openness and vulnerability flowing through each of this project's interviews and scenes. In this chapter's final section, I want to focus on radical access and access intimacy as practices that facilitate the creation of spaces where we can push back against the erasure, shame, exclusion, and lack of control inherent to cultures of undesirability.

Many of my collaborators came to this project with a strong sense of how to cultivate access intimacy. For example, Mia Gimp reflected on filming *Krutch* (2013):

> At one point we had two people filming: Clark Matthews in his wheelchair, doing the dolly shots…and Tony, this non-disabled guy who owned the apartment we shot in… I was like, "You have to shoot my legs." [Tony said,] "Why?" [I said,] "That's the whole point of this!" and Clark [backed] me up, being like, "Yeah, she's right"… So often in non-disabled community…you find yourself explaining things and using your energy to explain your needs without actually getting what you need accomplished. [Director] Mat Fraser and I had this great access intimacy moment, to quote Mia Mingus, where I kept having to…take my shoes off and put my shoes back on… We did three or four takes of that. And Mat says to me, "Do you want me to help you?" And I go, "No," and he goes, "Yeah, I know, because it'll take too long for you to explain to me exactly what it is you need." And he understood that's exactly why I didn't want the help! I didn't have to tell him that; he already knew because he lived it and experienced it. I want to work with as few non-disabled people who aren't allies…[and] if I'm working

with allies they need to understand the language and the community…they're working with, because that made it so much easier to do the shoot. (Interview 2014)

In dominant culture, ease of movement characterizes what privilege *feels* like: ease is taken for granted and assumed, and the world is built on this assumption. This assumption results in huge amounts of extra work, work that must be done a daily basis, for those moving through a world that was not built with us in mind. Radical access compels us to start from a different point as we begin to imagine new worlds and new ways of being and living, where ease is built into the structure rather than attached to particular ways of being. Access intimacy calls us to cultivate a space "of steel vulnerability" where we can hold all of the complexities, pain, logistics, and needs for and with each other (Mingus, 2011, n.p.). When I asked Isobel about how the space of her scene shaped her experience, she replied:

> Magic. Just, who knew? The fact that I knew mostly everybody in the room and that I had performed in one way or another for folks…there was kind of an intro that was already gone, we had a bit of comfort. And the people [who] I didn't know were so good, were so easy to be around. And the fact that it was different bodies, different brains; that there was trauma talk in the room; that there was food sensitivities and needs… I find when we're in crip communities, or when we're in tight crip conversations, or when you're facilitating or something, talking about access needs comes up, but it doesn't always bleed into everything else. And I've been in performances and jobs and stuff where the organization is like, "we're super accessible," but they're not going to ask what I'm allergic to, or they're going to spray perfume in the room or something like that. So having conversations with folks, having people that I trusted, and having people that had experiences with disability and queerness, it just made it so easy. I didn't have to think about saying I was tired after… I was like, "I can't move right now, I'm really hot, I'm really tired, I can't breathe, I just need water and apples, water and apples," and then it happened! And I didn't feel guilty, I didn't feel prima donna-y, and I didn't feel snobby. It was just supportive and fun. (Interview 2014)

Allen echoes Isobel in their description of the particular space cultivated by those involved in their scene:

> From my personal perspective, there were many factors that contributed to a comfort level: I am personal friends and have nice histories with all people

involved. There was a general tone of collaboration, openness, and flexibility, and people generally seemed to feel comfortable asking for the things that would work best for them and contribute to a great scene. I feel like all of these factors were informed and shaped by disability community and connections. (Interview 2014)

In creating spaces where difference was recognized and communication about needs was appreciated, collaborators were able to take a break from the external pressures of normativity and, consequently, have fun, and feel good.

However, the internalization of cultures of undesirability, the impulse to hide away any aspect of ourselves seen as disposable, shameful, or unworthy were also in the room, mixed in with this this taste of possibility we were creating; it kind of had to be. Romham explained:

I kept forgetting things I wanted to say, thoughts I'd had about the questions you'd asked. I was trying to just roll with it because that's part of my disabilities too. It was interesting to have that in the room. It feels weird to say that because…of course it's in the room… I guess it felt hard to have it out there, and being filmed, and in a doin'-it-in-front-of-others context. I tried to think of it similarly to how I was thinking about my scooter and other mobility related stuff…trying to welcome it in a little. It was a challenge, but what was so great about it was that I could do that and I knew that even if I was feeling self-conscious about it, I wouldn't be treated like crap for it…there actually was room for it. And I get to see that played back, so I know there was. (Interview 2013)

Romham's reflection reminds us that we need to hold all of this: we need haunting in order to move to flaunting. This project rested the idea that we need to create spaces where the stories of dominant imaginary are brought forward, questioned, and then disrupted in order to tell stories that produce embodied difference as poetic and as providing necessary ways of being and living. Mia explained:

Using poems like Cheryl Marie Wade's poem, or Neil Marcus' poems, or Leroy Moore's poems, and using poems to dance to, or using the ways in which our bodies are poetic, and have a language, like the ways in which my crutch clicking has a sound scape that communicates something in it. And there's a … communication in the ways our wheels move on the ground, or the ways our bodies sit in our chairs. There's a language there. (Interview 2014)

There was something important—magical even—about the connection between access intimacy, radical disability politics, reimagining possibility, and the process of recording these precious moments.

Chapter 5: Making Queercrip Porn

Tiny, fluffy purple feathers cover the sofa and the floor. The purple dollar store boa, a delicate teacup perfectly matching the boa, sci-fi comic books, and graphic novels all sit carefully on a small table nearby. A radiant blue cane rests on the couch, joined by a dismantled boom pole. Laughter, ideas, and warmth fill the room. And of course, my cat is sitting right in the middle of everything. My living room has been transformed. I have been transformed. My collaborators and the other people involved have been transformed. And when I say transformed, I do not mean in a way that is finished, measurable, or finite; I mean something subtle yet significant, deeply felt and always moving…

I learned much through the process of collaboratively creating six porn scenes with an incredible group of funny, smart, sassy, tender, resilient, and nerdy people. In this chapter I will share aspects of this learning. However, some of what I learned is in my body and not articulable in words or thoughts; some of it waits in the space of connection between my collaborators and me, yet to be realized; and some of the insights and knowledge produced in the process could really only be experienced in the moment, or through viewing what was captured on film. The footage is also only part of the story. In some ways, the expression *"you had to be there"* feels most accurate, but refers to a "there" that doesn't land well either: the repeated and singular moments produced by and through this work certainly exceed such temporal and spatial limits connoted by "there." When I started this process, I believed that queercrip porn presented opportunities for the disruption of the dominant narratives of undesirability and the creation of new epistemologies and ways of living that would lead to transformation; both the interviews and the scenes confirmed just that. My collaborators and I experienced moments of disruption in dominant narratives and we were able to create spaces where our complex personhood was recognized and honoured. This process also enriched my own understanding not only of how cultures of undesirability operate, as explored in Chapter Four, but also of how queercrip porn and the collaborative production of it—both individual scenes and as a form of cultural

production—combine in necessary and specific ways that contribute to transformation.

In this chapter, I will discuss some of the key interrelated qualities of queercrip porn emerging from my research. First I focus on queercrip porn as a contestational and intentional form of cultural production: a *doing* as well as a *being* that is textured, complex, and always in motion. Queercrip porn offers moments of disruption to dominant narratives, which makes room for complex personhood and allows for a multiplicity of ways of being to flourish and prosper. Queercrip porn also places an emphasis on centring queercrips' control over production and representation in order to challenge and transform cultures of undesirability. In the conversations I had with collaborators about this process of transformation, representation, community, agency, and pleasure were all powerfully interrelated sites of disruption. All this disruption allows for re-imagining, reworking, and creating new possibilities, ways of living, and even worlds. We not only experienced transformative potential, but through the particular mode of this practice, enacted through a collaborative counterpublic, we created a living archive of resistance and resilience. Through this discussion I hold these aspects in relation to the four original conventions I laid out in Chapter Two: Porn as offensive, offensive, or obscene; Porn as involved in the creation of truth and fantasy; Porn as intending to arouse; and finally, Porn as intrinsically linked to the (re)production of knowledge, selves, and norms. I will conclude this chapter by reflecting on queercrip porn, and this project specifically, as resources for fostering resilience and transformative potential in the midst of cultures of undesirability.

Queercrip Porn is a Distinct and Disruptive Form of Cultural Production

As I argue in Chapter Two, and as demonstrated through the multiple contestations of identity and inclusion expressed by the collaborators in Chapters Three and Four, definitions are tricky

but strategically useful: something significant happens in the act of intentionally naming and producing queercrip porn together. Doing so creates a sort of marker for the emergence of queercrip porn as a discrete form of cultural production, and gives us shared points of reference and connection. When I asked collaborators to offer up their current understandings of queercrip porn in the first round of interviews, they expressed a lot of uncertainty. Interestingly, more than one collaborator cited my work as an initial reference point for their understanding of queercrip porn; *want* and *sexxxy* clearly had a formative influence in the naming and beginning of queercrip porn as a category of counterpublic porn. Plummer's (2007) analysis of the interdependence of emergence, distribution, and reception of sexual storytelling applies here: it's not that queercrip porn didn't exist before, as queercrips have been making porn in a variety of contexts for much longer than I have, but my films were among the first to be widely viewed, distributed, and understood *as queercrip*. According to Romham:

> Total honesty? I don't really know [laughter]. But it's something I want to see, want to *be part of* in some way. When I've seen the things you've made, there is always something (many things!) in it that really *connects for me*, there's always such hotness and creativity and humour. (Interview 2013)

While there may seem to be a touch of "I know it when I see it" occurring here, reminiscent of Justice Stewart's words, I think there is also an "I know it when I *feel* it" element, which signals an important shift. Rather than the distanced and otherizing voices of Stewart and other so-called experts on porn, Romham's words emphasize connection: Romham wants to be a part of the making of queercrip porn. Romham also highlighted queercrip experiences as constitutive of an alternative framework that shifts how both disability and desirability are understood:

> I think there are some really particular things about hugely variant queercrip experiences that I want to see more of. So sex in general, and visual exploration and representation of sex in particular feels like a really obvious place to look at it— look at what it was—and see where it might get shaken up a bit. (Interview 2013)

There is, then, an association between intention and disruption, both key qualities of queercrip porn. In showing up and becoming visible as queercrip, we intentionally shift the frame of desirability. This intentionality goes beyond a liberal concept of disability rights that demands access and inclusion into an oppressive system. Rather than demand to be recognized within dominant ideologies of citizenship, we disrupt these ideologies as conditions for gaining recognition as desirable subjects. Moments of disruption to dominant ideologies were important to each collaborator. This sense of disruption is conveyed by Juba's understanding of queercrip porn as "a sort of cliff dive for people" (Interview 2014). Queercrip porn interrupts the naturalized and taken for granted order of things by intentionally being out of alignment with normative culture, consciously doing and being something noticeably different from normalized ways of doing and being. Indeed, over the course of producing porn with my collaborators, my own understanding of queercrip porn as a counterpublic strategy seeking to disrupt and interrogate normative ideologies grew. Juba offers:

> Part of this is about having…a primary partner and co-parent of the last 13 years who has a variety of chronic illnesses that have intensified or worsened over…the course of our relationship and actually me becoming sicker over the course of our relationship. I remember she said to me that a lot of people's antagonism is about the reality that if you live long enough, you're going to be sick. You're going to have something going on. People navigating either…environmentally acquired health issues [or] differently-abled or disabled contexts that they've had since birth… It's like people being "out," and I think that's a part of why disability activism makes people uncomfortable in a particular way as well, in a similar way and a parallel way to queerness. [When] I say being "out," [I mean] sexually queer people and people who are vociferously talking about poverty, talking about racism, and intersecting them, and the way that makes people uncomfortable in the sense that if you've been taught that there's a prize or a Kewpie doll that you're supposed to get because you did it the "right" way or because you hid whatever disability that you had *effectively*, and then you have somebody over here being [disruptive] and you feel cheated. You feel betrayed in this other kind of way, like, "Shut up and stop messing up the program for me." (Interview 2014)

While Juba's reflection is not limited to queercrip porn, claiming one's own experience and

being disruptively "out" are crucial elements of queercrip porn. Corrinne adds, "redefining things

for ourselves, like we are doing here, is a really important part of transformation" (Interview

2014). At the same time, collaborators complicated a liberal concept of coming out: queercrip

porn is about more than just being out; it is about flaunting those very things about us that "mess

up the program."

Isobel explained how having agency over the representations and the worlds that were

created by this research project was a necessary component to transformation. Exerting agency in

the creation of the scenes pushes back against the lack of control over how marginalized bodies

and identities are engaged with in dominant culture:

> An example is that flash of feeling when you see yourself somewhere else, and you
> realize that there's a weird little part that exists in someone else's mind or body. It's
> been pretty cool in the ways that I've had conversations with other people who are
> experiencing that. I feel like the transformation happens when the switch goes from
> someone really used to being invisibilized… finding a way that they can have
> agency over their visibility. (Interview 2014)

Having agency over one's own representation is particularly important given that queercrips

have not traditionally had access to their own bodies. For example, Nomy had a series of

traumatic sexual experiences, some of which I discussed in Chapter Four. Nomy shared how she

often felt like she had very little power and "like aspects of me [were] taken here and there and

here and there and used in different ways that aren't my own" (Interview 2013). To me, this

reflects how cultures of undesirability construct queercrips as consumable and disposable others.

In contrast, claiming control over the process of making porn not only addresses the invisibility

of queercrip bodies but also powerfully speaks back to narratives of disposability and

consumption. In the interviews, Nomy shared how after several bad experiences of making porn,

she took a break to do deep healing work. She returned to porn after I approached her about

being involved in this project, because she felt that this would be a chance to make porn in a

more consensual and supportive context, and because she wanted to support my work. She was also in a new dating relationship with a filmmaker.

An important component of both Nomy and Corrinne's scenes involved sharing skills and embodied differences, which depart from normative desirability in order to shift the conversation away from disability as deficit and toward possibility. For Corrinne, sitting in pain during meditation posed very little challenge for her because she is very familiar with meditating in pain; however, people who do not experience chronic pain would need to acquire these skilful practices. Similarly, Nomy refers to embodied difference as "sexual abilities": "things that I can do with my body that people who do not have a little leg cannot do." Mia also emphasized how sharing the hard stuff is necessary when presenting our complex whole selves:

> It's important to see what's not there, or what I can't do, just as much as it is important to see what I can do. Because what I can't do also informs the way that I live in this world and the ways in which my body informs what I do. What I can't do actually sometimes helps me get things done because I've learned other ways to do things that are actually more adaptable and save time; or sometimes it doesn't save time, and I've learned to budget my time because I have access, because I have the need to ensure I can budget my time because it takes me longer to shower… I know how to do that because of my disability and it informs the way I live in this world. So like seeing the whole picture is something that's super important to me. And It's not only what can I do, what *can't* I do, and how does that shape how I as a person exist in this world. (Interview 2014)

Creating queercrip porn thus provides the opportunity to disrupt ideologies and fantasies of desirability that require strict adherence to normative embodiment, challenging binary containment. Queercrip porn seeks more than a simple reversal of the dominant narrative, where the triumphant overcomer—"the supercrip" (Clare 1999)—replaces tragic victim, reaffirming and rehabilitating the individual at the expense of collectivity. In this project, the stories we told, porn we made, and the lives we live are anything but simply overcoming.

By claiming embodied differences and queercrip skillsets as assets rather than deficits,

collaborators disrupted dominant ideologies of sex, disability, and bodies. As I discussed in Chapter Two, porn was historically considered any material that publicly went against the ideologies of church and state, including the representation of sex outside the confines of procreative marital relations. While mainstream porn does facilitate particular kinds of disruptive imaginings, it remains largely committed to patriarchy, heterosexism, disableism, racism, and capitalism. Many collaborators built on these critiques of mainstream porn by addressing not only the stigma and marginalization associated with porn, but with sex work more broadly. Juba discusses how even activist or advocate spaces,

> [are] really invested in, like, subcultural and outsider scenes that were really invested in overt cultural normative access. And for me, appearing in porn, participating in porn, and doing so openly was something that was disruptive of that in a way that I was really surprised [at]… porn represented this space that they didn't want to go into. And that's not having to do with sex, but about this space of otherization that they didn't want to participate in. And this is before I even got to conversations about crip, or gimp, or disabled identity. That was just another layer. (Interview 2014)

Understanding porn as a form of sex work that pushes against otherizing and marginalization has been a useful access point for several of my collaborators. While Corrinne discussed how sex work expanded her ideas of desirability, Allen discussed how porn was a gateway to sex work, which has been an exciting and transformative possibility that was previously unimaginable for him. Both Corrinne and Allen speak to the ways in which porn and sex work have potential for expanding ideas about sex and sexuality and desirability. However, Kylie said of queercrip porn, "you know the porn [you] get online for free? It's kind of so-so, 'cause that porn doesn't include everybody. Queercrip porn, in contrast, shows *our* experience. It makes us visible; you can see us." In claiming porn, and then re-imagining it as queercrip porn, my collaborators and I disrupted and remade the convention of porn.

Queercrip Porn Allows for Complex Personhood: "Tires and All"

In our pre-scene interview, Juba explained his reasons for participating in the creation of

counterpublic porn:

> That's been the biggest reason itself: to be whole, whatever whole is for someone,
> as possible. And that's not a particular way that I think people think when they're
> talking about porn, but that's certainly something that's there for me. (Interview
> 2014)

In reflecting on how queercrip porn can provide a space to practice bringing in complex

personhood, I am reminded of Romham's description, in Chapter Four, of fucking in their

scooter during the pre-shoot as some of the best sex they'd ever had; it was one of the first times

that they felt like they could bring their whole complex self forward, "tires and all," and were

really seen and held by their partner and themselves. Creating a record of moments when

complex personhood appears and is flaunted allows us to shape how others see us, as well as

how we see ourselves. According to Isobel, it is the documentation of queercrip porn that

differentiates it from other forms of public sexy performance:

> One of the epiphanies I've had is: it's hard for me to see my own body most of the
> time. I have various situations where I have mirrors at different locations, so I don't
> often get to visually enjoy my own body in the ways that people who watch me
> perform do… I've never seen my own burlesque. So an epiphany I had [through
> this process] was kind of the way that I can grow my relationship to my own body
> by being able to see it. (Interview 2014)

Through the world she collaboratively created, she was able to see herself for a moment through

the loving gaze of queercrip community. Several collaborators conceptualized queercrip porn as

facilitating the presence of multiple intersecting positionalities, movements, cultures, and

histories. Many named similar moments of recognition that shifted and validated various aspects

of their personhood, in turn disrupting internalized notions of undesirability and shame.

Queercrip porn produced with a commitment to radical access and transformative disability

justice recognizes complex personhood and embodied difference as openings to possibilities rather than threats that should be shut down; this perspective is necessary in making social change that truly supports queercrip flourishing. Nomy confirmed this notion when she spoke of her involvement in the performance group Sins Invalid:

> [It's] a disability and sexuality project, but one that social justice, racial justice, and embodiment on all these different levels [are] core to. So we have to be able to be whole beings engaging here, and sexuality is a really fabulous and celebratory and healing part of that. (Interview 2013)

For all of my collaborators, creating space for complex personhood was a key part of understanding queercrip porn. For Isobel, "There's not a whole lot of places where I can show up as my whole self, and that whole self gets to keep going through the event, or whatever. So, yeah, queercrip porn is one such place" (Interview 2014). Corrinne emphasized the importance of self-expression in porn more broadly, calling attention to the importance of porn as a potential space to represent oneself sexually, or to explore and celebrate sexuality and sexual identity:

> The celebration piece is big for me, and reclaiming sex and reclaiming our bodies and the different ways that they work. Being able to kind of take that back in our hands and create something that is subversive, I think it can be really validating for people who then get to see themselves on screen. Yeah, I actually think that's the main thing—that queercrip porn can be validating and celebratory. And I think that it can also change what we see as desirable. (Interview 2014)

Above I argued that the disruption of dominant ideologies through the creation and distribution of queercrip porn alters our conceptual frameworks and thus our embodied realities. Here will I focus on stories of adaptive devices, which I would argue signal an opportunity for contemplation on the interrelation of crip embodiment, visibility, and desirability. Several queercrip porn scenes shot for this project, or described by my collaborators in interviews, involved adaptive devices. In Isobel and Juba's scene, shot by Allen, Isobel stretches her cane across the doorframe for support while being spanked. Below, Mia explains the idea for *Krutch*

(2013)*,* a film she made outside of this project but which she reflected on heavily in her

interviews:

> I watched *want* and…*sexxxy,* and I thought, "Wow, I really like the ways in which there's commentary." It seemed to me like there was commentary on the ways in which our adaptive devices can be sexy too. You know, I thought to my crutch, right? And then there was this bondage workshop that I was taking where…there was a piece of bamboo that was tied between the model's legs and they tied a vibrator to the bamboo. And I was like, "Holy crap! I have my own stick, but its aluminum!" And so later on in the workshop, a vibrating cockring was put on a dildo, and I was like, "Well I can put a vibrating cockring on my crutch, and it'll have the vibrator with it, like the vibrator to the bamboo, and then I could tie my crutch to my body like you would tie the bamboo to one's body like in bondage play!" And I practice bondage play as a form of accessibility. My favourite quote is, "Tie my legs down to the bed so I don't kick my partner in the head." Bondage is a part of my sexuality…when I took this workshop I was inspired: "I'm going to tie my crutch between my legs." (Interview 2014)

The movie *Krutch* came up again in my post-scene interview with Nomy and Lisa:

> Nomy: I'm actually presenting an award at Super Fest[16] this coming weekend for the movie *Krutch* I just got to see it for the first time the other day and I want to show Lisa before we go… it was awesome and totally reminded me of a movie that Lisa was saying she wanted to make [about] canes—about sexualizing canes.
>
> Lisa: I'm not someone who just whips my head around, like checking people out in general. But I noticed since I moved here and Nomy is my partner that I see people with canes and I am totally looking. Like, fat femme presenting people. It's broadening the scope of what I think is hot, right? And totally identifying with a cane is hot. I also think that it's cool too because I see so many. My friends that are like, "I should be using this cane but I am not going to because I don't want to." It would make things more accessible for them to use. Or they are like, "I don't want to have to use a cane I'm so young"… And it's like, "the canes are sexy!" It's like taking back the night on that. (Interview 2014)

These moments together reframe associations with adaptive devices as both parts of ourselves

that we use to facilitate access and sources of pleasure.

The above examples also reveal that engagements with queercrip porn—making it,

watching it, and discussing it—do not only produce intellectual realizations. In Chapter One, I

discussed how I started making porn because I felt like intellectual change did not go far enough.

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[16] Super Fest, held in the Bay Area, is one of the world's longest running disability film festivals.

As queercrips, we need to *feel* differently; we need to feel new possibilities by embodying

different ways of living. Mia, in recounting the first time she had sex with another disabled

person, confirmed how deeply embodied these transformative processes are: "It was so exciting,

'cause I felt like I didn't have to communicate certain things because they were already intrinsic

to our bodies. And there was this layered language that wasn't needed and that was awesome!

[Laughs]." Lisa and Nomy share a similar insight from the making and editing of their scene,

Wall of Fire:

> Lisa: I have a little "chub rub" patch, from walking, in my crotch, so there is a little "ow" in between my legs in the movie. But it's interesting because there are some parts where…Nomy is like, "Whoa! I don't know about that." Like, her fat rolls up and I am rolling it up and she is like, "I don't know," and I am like "that is so hot! I am getting the chills right now, like that is so fucking hot I want to put it on a beat," you know, like [makes the sound of a sexy musical beat; laughter]. I've come to appreciate some of the stuff that maybe I wouldn't have used [to] because Nomy would like it; she would be like, "whoa that's really hot," or I'm like, "wow that's really hot."

> Nomy: Okay, so everyone sees that my body is fat and I could feel bad about that or something—but it's just a body that everyone is now experiencing. I know you say things like this too, about media and the way that media has the ability to shape reality because if you see something huge on the screen it becomes just a part of the world in a way that's—I don't know, it just changes what it means or the stigmas associated with it if it's not presented in a way that's stigmatized; it just is: my pussy looks like that. (Interview 2014)

Through this tender reflection we are granted access to the back-and-forth of transformation. In

moments of shared vulnerability, Nomy and Lisa show and share their bodies in all their

complexity as well as their desire for all of those things in one another. Rather than a narrative

about the personal transformation of two partners, Nomy makes clear that their transformation is

a part of a media-based project, implying that when we control the frame, the media we create

has power to shape the world in resistance to dominant narratives.

Being held and building trust are key to creating the conditions for showcasing, through

queercrip porn, embodied differences targeted by cultures of undesirability: our chub rub, memory loss, canes, kinks, wheelchairs, blackness, femmeness, queerness, cripness. A lot of this trust comes from relationship building, which was central to this process. Isobel spoke about to how it felt to be heard and know that her boundaries and wishes would be respected:

> The way that we did it was really good for me—the like, *talk, talk, talk; stop; do it again; talk, talk, talk a little bit longer; stop; do it again; talk, talk, talk; stop; do it again*—that was excellent, because I was like, "do I just start and everyone's filming, and what happens?" I wasn't thinking about the camera a lot, which was great, even though it's a massive boom… Like, I was aware and I could feel when Allen was moving around… But I think the fact that we talked about the kind of shots I feel comfortable with and what kind of parts of myself I did or didn't… Like, I knew that whatever was happening wasn't going to be, like, a close up of my ear hole or something, 'cause I didn't want that… Having, at this point, watched a fair amount of queer and feminist porn, and watching that in comparison to mainstream porn where it's all for the camera and you're, like, fucking the camera—which is totally cool for some people—but I would watch it and be like, "stop looking at me. Could you just look at the person that you're fucking? I don't really want eye contact with you right now." So knowing that [it] wasn't an expectation that I [would be] giving bedroom eyes to the camera felt good. I think the kind of fucking that we did was also more comfortable for me than doing something else on camera too. (Interview 2014)

Romham spoke of how all of the relationships present in the room as they shot their scene contributed to a comfort that allowed for them to share their whole self:

> I think because [Silas] and I are so comfortable with each other, it really helped. We have a great dynamic: silly, hot, super supportive. It was nice to be there doing this and have hilarity be there in the room too. It was also amazing having one of my…best friends doing some of the filming, and knowing that we too have seen one another in different contexts—sexually, socially—and been able to be super vulnerable with each other, even have really embarrassing stuff happen and it's all good, y'know? And having you be the person sort of wrangling all of us... it really mattered to me. I think I said that I was thinking, if I'd ever have a moment where I'd consider doing porn, this would be it; and that's in large part about you—about how you created an amazing space throughout the whole process, not just on filming day. It made me want to show this stuff I hadn't ever shown before, not even myself. It was powerful having a really clear vision of what brought you to this, and having seen some of your work before. Having such a lovely dynamic with you to start with really helped me feel at ease. (Interview 2014)

Romham's reflection emphasizes the importance of trust and connection to enacting spaces of radical access, discussed in Chapter Four, which hold our complex personhood and allow our whole, complicated, and interdependent selves to be seen and appreciated.

Queercrip Porn is About Relationships: "It's Like Electricity"

For Juba, queercrip porn has specific relational implications in both its production and consumption:

> It explicitly…doubly and triply and quadruply and quintuply [centres] all of these sort of overlapping and intersecting othernesses… If the space is entered with that particular intent…what it becomes about is: What is someone going into this with? … What is someone going into this expecting as a viewer? Like, wherever this is screened, it'll be interesting to see what [happens]. It's interesting for me what that would look [like] for some because for some I'm a particularly invisibly disabled person, or invisibly ill person, but there's somebody else who might see me…who might see absolutely everything that I navigate. They might watch it and see themselves, and see absolutely everything just by the way that I move through space… So it's all about the frame and when it's put out there for people to…give themselves permission. I think that's what it is about: saying, when we say it aloud that way, when it's spoken, or…confirmed with particular intent. I think that sometimes people need permission. And I think that's what's important about it, is about when…these spaces get created…when people say, "I'm making this particular product, or putting these particular images together because I don't get to see myself, and hopefully someone will [and see] that it is possible for them to be in it; it is possible for them to do, and it is possible for them to make. (Interview 2014)

Juba's words bring attention to the intersecting histories that we bring with us when engaging with queercrip porn. He highlights how being a part of a queercrip project allowed him to perform and be read as a queercrip, and to become visible as an invisibly disabled person in ways that may not have previously been possible. Making queercrip porn offered him the possibility to find community with other queercrips, contributing to the formation of "queercrip" as a way of living and being, thus expanding what is possible, understandable, and knowable. These acts of disruption shift how porn-makers and viewers engage with performers in queercrip porn scenes

and all of the components of scenes themselves. As Isobel stated:

> You know, it's not a normal thing that these kinds of bodies get to do these kinds of
> things and are celebrated, so it does feel strengthening and powerful to be able to
> decide how we're being seen and decide how we're being sexualized and to
> participate in the ways that we're being perceived as sexual, because I feel that very
> much pushes against 89% of my experience of being catcalled and…all the things
> that happen to me in the day just being out in the world. [In] having this multi-
> faceted experience of talking about it, planning it, filming it, talking about it again,
> and then whatever's going to happen in terms of viewing it, we've made this
> strength-web kind of thing and whatever happens with it, whoever sees it, I feel like
> it's going to fucking change their lives, because it changes; every time I see
> something that's like, that's kind of like me… It changes my day, it changes
> everything. (Interview 2014)

As Isobel's words highlight, the interdependency and connection between the makers and the

audiences of queercrip porn is both disruptive and transformative. By enacting a disability justice

framework for this dissertation, I wanted to recognize my collaborators as knowledge producers

and disrupt the frequent assumption that the audience of most academic research consists of

universal and unmarked subjects. In various ways, all collaborators expressed the sentiment that

this project, and queercrip porn in general, are "for us." Mia's words most directly express this

intention:

> Queercrip porn to me is made by community for community. It's by us, for us,
> about us… Before making my film, I felt like there wasn't enough of it, and that's
> why I wanted to make more. Ideally I would love to make, like you are Loree, a
> series to support people making a series of shorts and then sell it as its own DVD of
> vignettes, as something that people can take home with them or order online or
> whatever. That's how this whole idea started for me…in New York City there was
> nobody making porn, and then we had one of the Society for Disability Studies
> conferences in New York, and there were all these crips! All in one place! And no
> porn was made! And I was like, I wanted porn to be made! [Laughter]. (Mia 2014)

In Chapter Four, I discussed various community exclusions experienced by collaborators

and the ever-creeping pressure towards normativity running throughout even alternative

communities or communities of resistance. Despite the limits of community, my collaborators

repeated its necessity throughout this research process. In interviews, collaborators spoke to the

way that connecting with queercrip community provided support and recognition, which were

essential in creating counterpublics and new ways of living. We are all interdependent beings:

we need each other to survive. This dissertation itself would not be possible without direct

community support not only from my collaborators, but from people who let us stay at their

houses and from my care collective. Because social exclusion is such a huge part of how cultures

of undesirability operate to tear us apart from each other and ourselves, community must be

central to any effort at transformation. The process of calling people into our lives creating

queercrip porn blows apart dominant ideologies that work to cover over all of the complexity,

wisdom, pleasure, and potentiality derived through interdependence. Romham stated:

> Well, not to be awkward, but…you've helped a lot in this regard by putting yourself
> out there, showing different ideas…particularly but not only related to queercrip
> porn… One of the things that made this connection with [Silas] so special to me
> was watching them when you all lived together. It wasn't just the care team stuff,
> though that was part of it. Knowing that you trusted them that way, that they had a
> familiarity of some kind, that they were comfortable doing care stuff… It helped
> me feel like, "okay, this person can handle it." Which was pretty important because,
> y'know, so many people freak the fuck out right? And the rest of watching that was
> about the other day to day stuff, the hanging out, the laughing your asses off, the
> care between both of you that extended well beyond specific tasks; it showed me
> clearly that you trusted this person, and that it was possible to have someone *see*
> you and love you and think you're the bees knees, and fucking rad. It still impacts
> me, I think. I struggle to just sit with the fact that they see me, day to day, now that
> we live together. They see the shit I deal with, they see my body and brains, and its
> weird embarrassing stuff. And where I once thought that would render our
> connection... moot or something... I now know it's something else altogether.
> Watching you both—even for my brief visits there—did that for me. (Interview
> 2014)

In Chapter Two, I discussed the ways in which repeated calls for porn that is distinctly

queercrip reflects a void and a hunger for porn that reflects and tells our stories. Here I am

interested in lifting up narratives that fill this void: "sexual stories" that involve, as Plummer

understands them, a "searching through public worlds" for language and moments of connection

where we can "make sense" of and become able to tell our stories (2004, 33). Many of the sexual

stories told by my collaborators were about becoming recognizable to each other. There was an interpellative call similar to the experience of Marga Gomez, a queer Latina performer discussed in José Esteban Muñoz's *Disidentifications* (1999), a calling out of belonging that in the performance discussed by Mũnoz is satirically staged as the moment where Gomez is hailed through the television by a group of lesbians as one of them. For instance, Juba shared a moment of powerful resonance that occurred for him while watching counterpublic porn featuring a black queer man with asthma:

> I think I remember the first time—I think it was *TransEntities*, at the end of this real hot scene, and Will pulls out his Albuterol, this inhaler, and like takes a couple of puffs on the inhaler at the end of the scene, and I was just like "DAMN!" It was clear that you know, they were like "ok, he needs this." I was seeing that but I'm certain that's not the first time that that's ever happened in a movie somewhere, where someone was shooting porn somewhere and someone did that—but that got edited out. And that [the director] left it in there, it was just like, that was just powerful. It was powerful for me, as this moment where this Black, masculine spectrum person with respiratory issues and it's like, "I'm layin' this hot fuck, but I still need my [inhaler] and I'm not hiding that; my masculinity and the way that my masculinity is structured, I don't need it to be this immutable…container that doesn't have any cracks in it… I'm going to be all of these things in this moment and that's okay." (Interview 2014)

While some collaborators named examples of counterpublic performance, including my films and the work of Sins Invalid, Tobi Hill-Myer, and Lyric Seal—or moments found in science fiction, blog posts, and zines—most also spoke to the transformative power of interpersonal relationships in their lives. Nomy shared the significance her relationship with Ellery Russian (a.k.a. Hellery Homosex) in navigating cultures of undesirability:

> I think I met her when she was like 15 and it was kind of like my coming out as a fat person moment. I was 17. And I was going to wear this really tight pink prom dress and write "no fat chicks" on my chest because that was like a riot grrrl thing to do, to write a thing on your chest…or on your body that people are thinking when they look at you or… So we were in this bathroom changing and I was wearing a leopard-print bra and she was like, "oh my god, that's so hot" and I was like, I just don't… I wasn't used to…having my body being engaged with that way. Like, I was still in the "I wear baggy shirts and try not to let anyone see that I'm

fat." But it was like at that exact moment that I was claiming it and she was there...
Then a few years down the road I ran into her a couple of times; she was cute, she
was nice. And then I heard that she had a crush on me from somebody. And I was
like, "Oooh, I can't believe this" and then the next thing I had heard is that she had
this train accident. And she had—she lost both of her legs below the knee. Um, and
apparently she thought of me like as soon as it happened. And when she was laying
there realizing that she wasn't going to have her legs anymore, she was like, "okay,
I know this person. She has a fake leg, she dances, she hangs out, she's awesome…
this is gonna be okay." And she asked for contact with me soon after that. We—she
was like the first girl that I dated and yeah, it was brief, and it was great; it was
young, you know? [Laughter.] But yeah, just having someone that was interested in
me was so significant. (Interview 2013)

I was moved by this story because it conveyed the potency of a recognition that, contrary to the

dominant discourse, is *mutual and horizontal*, capable of transcending time and space. Even

though Nomy was not physically in the hospital with Ellery, she was there. Just as Ellery shifted

desirability for Nomy—"it was like at that exact moment that I was claiming it and she was

there"—Nomy in turn provided Ellery with a "vibrantly whole" definition of disability just as

Ellery was realizing her changed embodiment. They were opening and holding a space where

their shared and specific sites of trauma, shame, and possible disconnection were transformed to

sites of connection, resistance, and new ways of being.

For Corrinne, the spark of personal recognition and the opening up of new ways of living

and thinking was provided by Audre Lorde, even though she "doesn't necessarily name disability

stuff, she talks about dealing with cancer and…just a whole lot of stuff around intersectionality

as well." Corrinne continued, "I feel like you and Arti [Mehta] and Leah [Lakshmi Piepzna-

Samarasinha] have really been super seminal in my conversations and understanding of my own

ability and my own identity… and my own connections to this stuff and how I experience it and

how I can continue to articulate my complicated experience of the world." For Isobel:

A lot of femmes and people at the Allied Media Conference…really got me into
having conversations about disability justice in ways that I wasn't having at home,
which I was able to come home and engage with a bit more. Just, like, queer

people. Queer... *people,* everywhere. I do feel lucky that my idea, my definition of queer is queer everything; it's not just who I'm fucking, or how I present. It's how I love, how I build home, how I work… And so, I feel like I'm around a lot of people that do that, too. (Interview 2014)

Romham emphasized that, far from being a pre-existing and containable identity, queercrip is

produced in horizontal relationships that are actively formed and nurtured through

interdependence. According to Romham, it is in the moment of collective disruption and

community building that queercrip becomes possible, giving rise to new relational systems and

ontologies:

> Mia Mingus has been someone who's impacted me so deeply in terms of disability stuff, but not only that…when I read [her article] "Wherever You Are Is Where I Want To Be: Crip Solidarity," I cried because that's it, right? Whether we're talking porn or a protest, or both—or play parties, food sharing, advocating for one another—whatever it is, we need to be able to show up how we show up, we have to make each other priorities. None of it means shit if we're not doing this together. I think that's why I was like, "okay, y'know what? I need to show up for this [project], tires and all, just fucking do this thing because who the hell knows what's gonna happen?" I didn't know that doing a little run through beforehand would be some of the hottest sex I've ever had in my life. Who the hell knew that? But I think that so much of Mia's writing, and her in-person self too, has helped bring me here. (Interview 2013)

Corrinne echoed the sense that community is crucial:

> I think that that's how we get transformation. I don't actually think that we can have it without helping each other, y'know? And for me community means, yeah, like being related and supporting each other in processes. I mean, I can transform by myself in particular ways, and I think ultimately it is up to us to go through some of those transformation processes on our own. I think about meditation and stuff like that—that was something I had to do by myself. But at the same time, I needed community to do that. I needed community to be able to feed me for ten days so I could meditate, and house me, and take care of all that stuff so I could get to where I am. So I feel like, yeah, even within the individual, there's always community. And, yeah, I think it's like, you can't have one without the other. (Interview 2014)

For me, these statements signalled an important pushback to the process of

individualization that underlies the functioning of cultures of undesirability discussed in

Chapters One and Four. Juba also shared the following story about a critical moment along his

journey to identify as and with "crip":

> there was one day where I sat down with a piece of paper and drew a body on the piece of paper, and I made little points, arrows and points of all the surgeries I've had, and all of the physical stuff that I had going on at the moment. And it was jarring! And not just even physical stuff but physical stuff that I had that was related to procedures that I'd had and not just stuff that was old—like, stuff that was recent. But because I was used to thinking of them as discrete, and socialized and conditioned to think of them as discrete…and because I can get up and go to work in people's idea of what "work" is. That it made me understand what I had negatively internalized about that and about myself. (Interview 2014)

Juba reminded me here of the inherent sociality of internalized messages. Through this research process, I am able to connect experiences that were previously imagined as individual to part of a collaborative multiplicity of subjugated knowledge. In Juba's account, queercrip ways of living thereby also interrupt dominant ideologies that marginalize and individualize ways of living and being and re-hone them into collective possibilities, an insight that is similarly expressed by Isobel:

> The amount of change in my thinking about my body, other people's bodies, sex, topping, porn—like, all the things that encapsulated your project… If me, just as one person, has my margins blown open a little bit as one person's experience, I feel like queer crip porn and the exhibiting of it and the talking about it and the making of it in the community way that you're doing, which I think is really cool, it's like electricity. Like, if I'm changing and I'm totally like, "whoa!" Like, my mind is being blown, and there was five of us in that room—we're not static; we're just vibrating change, basically. (Interview 2013)

Isobel's words reflect the ripple effect of queercrip porn. By being made "by us, for us," queercrip porn centres our knowledge and ways of being and that are different from dominant imaginings. But just as we are not contained in our lived experiences, the disruptions and transformation that queercrip porn produces are collective and thus trickle up and out, as I argued in Chapter One.

Another important aspect of Isobel's above statement was that she named the collective *act* of making queercrip porn and the *reflection* on this act as significant to the transformation of

cultures of undesirability. The public nature of this project meant that my collaborators and I got

to share our stories, bodies, and desires with and for each other; as a result, I was interested in

how the process of sharing creates ripples beyond the "here and now" of queercrip community.

Isobel also noted:

> We spoke about sex ed, and the ways that we learn about sex in the beginning, and
> the ways that our representation as queer and crip people is not there. So, thinking
> about that, I had this thought of ten years down the road and this DVD showing up
> in some alternative school in Uxbridge, or something. [Laughter] I don't know, that
> could be really cool! [17] (Interview 2014)

Queercrip Porn as World-Making: "It's a Thing That We Have to Make to Exist"

In Chapters Three and Four, I discussed how this research project builds worlds from a

framework of radical access and disability justice. In Chapter One I extensively discussed the

impacts that being inundated by dominant worldviews have upon marginalized people. Here I

focus on how, in the process of producing and engaging with queercrip porn, we are makers of

new worlds. Queercrip porn serves as an opportunity for us to create and share our imaginings,

vulnerabilities, and lived realities. I will now turn to my collaborators' understandings of world-

making through porn. For instance, Juba discussed how the world of queercrip porn created

through this project opened spaces that embrace embodied differences as sites of connection and

struggle:

> To sort of paraphrase Audre Lorde and the whole power of the erotic, and… what's
> closed off for people when they're closed off from sex power and sexual
> expression, or when they're dealing with repression, what that closes them off for
> just in terms of possibility [in] their lives. And that's not to say that there's a
> particular thing that someone needs to be doing, but just people getting to be able to
> make that decision and not having that… not being ashamed, and not having that
> space circumscribed by anyone else for them. And just even having that as a notion
> as a site of actualization, whether that is about ideas or concept, or their actual

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[17] Uxbridge is a small town in Ontario.

physical self expressing sexually, I think that's what it is… a people making and doing kind of thing, not necessarily as product to sell as such, but for the sake of making and doing. (Interview 2014)

In Chapter Four I also discussed the ways cultures of undesirability work to undermine our agency. Nomy explained that through making and sharing queercrip porn she was given something to hold—a record with witnesses—which enabled her to reflect upon intimacy, her body, her connection, communication, agency, and relationship with Lisa:

It was vulnerable because we were naked but it was also very controlled. I think that's been helpful for our relationship; I think both of us as artists and collaborators and people with trauma histories being able to hold something and look at it and have some control and make some decisions about it is kind of a cool thing to be able to do around sex… Our desires are commodified and controlled by a system that is totally patriarchal and heteronormative, and the ways that we internalize those messages—and then ways that we transform them by making our own stuff and being in an economy or an ecology of artists who are supporting and exchanging this work with each other—it's a totally different module… For us to have agency around our own stories and desire…I feel that's been a big part of my work and my path and transforming cultures of undesirability was happening through my work to feel okay with myself, with love and desire, to be desired and connecting that to a political framework so that it's not just about me…I know how to engage now as myself. I think that's a piece of it and especially having been a sex worker where I was not able to be myself at all. I wasn't myself—I was playing a different character: I looked totally different, I was on the phone absorbing men's worldviews and desires, and it was really hard to extract myself from that world afterwards and then to be like, "how do I have sexuality?" (Interview 2014)

During Nomy and Lisa's scene, there was a hard moment: the director—whom they both really enjoyed working with—occasionally got a bit too controlling, giving them instructions such as, "That's hot. Do that again!" For Nomy and Lisa, the intention of the scene was to shoot what *they* thought was hot and sexy about their connection; as Nomy recalled, "This was not about [the director's] pleasure; this is about us. But for me there was a moment where she told us to do something and I tried to do it and Lisa was like [silence], and I got my feelings hurt because I was doing what I was told, so it got a little funky." At the same time, this process provided a moment for them to practice moving through the "hard stuff" together, as Lisa explained:

We made this eye contact and I could see a little bit of a change, so I was just like, "let's just slow down." We slowed it down just by kissing and touching and making out a little bit, so there is a lot of that in the movie because we were just kind of slowing things down and making sure that we had the shots that *we wanted* in the movie. Yeah, I think it was good that way. And we are still checking in about these things, you know. …it's this constant thing of checking in about consent, right? Is it okay, how do we feel about that, because we can change that. (Interview 2014)

In other collaborators' accounts, making collaborative queercrip porn was disruptive precisely because they regained control in the face of domination: a control that reflected agency combined with collective responsibility and shared vulnerability. It was in the sharing of queercrip ways of living and being that dominant ideologies are disrupted and counterpublic worlds are made. Nomy recounted the significant transformative potential of a performance, which mirrors that of queercrip porn:

For some reason I keep thinking about this performance I did in the *Doctor Frock Rocket Show* that was like a dance piece and very exposing of my body and I remember being like, "if I can do this, I'm going to change something that felt unchangeable in the world to me." That my body doesn't get to do that and doesn't get to be powerful or sexy and the piece is somewhat disturbing too… I think there is something about using performance or using media to project things out into the world and then be able to ingest it and learn the lesson from it. I think that works for other people too. I think that's part of how I have called a lot of people that I love into my life: by creating art that spoke to these needs in other people, and then we would meet each other later. (Interview 2014)

Nomy's example highlights the power of counterpublic performance to disrupt cultures of undesirability and the critical role that community plays in offering up ontologies, possibilities, and ways of living in the space of such disruption. However, queercrip porn serves as not only a means of connecting with community and ontologies, but also as a means of extension. According to Mia:

More people are making queercrip porn now because people were able to see what you produced, what I produced, and be like, "Oh, you know, people actually want this and this is a market." And there's more of it, and more people want to do it. And that's pretty much what I was going for in making *Krutch*! [Laughs] Making *Krutch* was also to say to the industry, "We're here, we want to make

porn, and you want to work with us." And then having people in the industry watching it, saying, "Yeah, disabled people should work in the porn industry" … So, like, I've seen how the work that has come after *Krutch* is captioned and some of it's audio-described and it's like, "Yes! We're getting there!" I think producing art...and sending it to these film festivals—now they have a better understanding of what to do with it because there's more of it; but making accessible art, art that is audio described and captioned also sets a standard for the art to come after it to be more accessible. (Interview 2014)

This statement invokes the trickle up practice of queercrip porn-making and its ripple effect on mainstream porn. Resonating with the literature on porn discussed in Chapter Two, queercrip porn-making transforms how we think about access and how we engage with porn both as producers and consumers.

When asked what queercrip porn does to transform cultures of undesirability, Juba emphatically replied:

It says, "YES." It says, "fuck this shit! I *am* and I *want* and I can *be* and I can *do.*" [It's] about the *capture* of it as a record. … It's really been this thing, especially for me personally in the preparation around and talking with a potential partner in a shoot previous to the shoot and saying, "Okay, these are the issues we need to navigate physically in order to make this happen and sometimes this is what we need to navigate *psychologically* to make this happen… how can we navigate that? How can we incorporate that? How can we make that be?"… This is something that just came to me, that so much of mainstream porn is about "this is what you're supposed to want and how it's supposed to look and how it's supposed to be…" Whereas queercrip porn, for me, just sort of yells to the stars: "This is where we was, right today…and we with it right now." Queercrip porn serves as a record—a record of that. And that we exist. (Interview 2014)

As Juba stated, so much of mainstream porn transports us to worlds of undesirability and, by dictating how we are "supposed" to experience sexual pleasure what we are "supposed" to find desirable, moves so many of us away from ourselves. Queercrip porn, with the deliberate and campy playfulness of Muñoz's disidentification, says "yes" to newly imagined worlds. It does so by making use of porn's potential to tell and live subjugated sexual stories. The fact that these worlds are created, recorded, and witnessed provides evidence that throws into question the supposed truths of dominant culture. Many collaborators discussed the importance of creating a

record and an archive, a matter of "leaving evidence," the powerful title of Mia Mingus' seminal

blog, which is a crucial reference to all of us involved in this project. Mingus writes:

> We must leave evidence. Evidence that we were here, that we existed, that we
> survived and loved and ached. Evidence of the wholeness we never felt and the
> immense sense of fullness we gave to each other. Evidence of who we were, who
> we thought we were, who we never should have been. Evidence for each other that
> there are other ways to live—past survival; past isolation. (2011, n.p.)

Queercrip porn, by leaving evidence, works as an art of life: it seeks to connect with subjugated

knowledge, generating new relationship systems and new ways of understanding bodies, sex,

sexuality, desirability, and identity. I think it significant that the evidence we are producing as we

work to expose the oppressive hegemonic worldview that subjugates our experiences and

knowledge does not stop at a simple reversal of truth, thereby creating another hegemonic

worldview; instead, queercrip porn grants permission to subjugated subjects to understand our

ways of living and being as valuable.

    Collaborators also spoke evocatively of the worlds created inside the various scenes

produced as part of this project. These scenes share many commonalities but also constitute their

own unique worlds, which bring into existence the critical practice of reimagining. According to

Isobel:

> To think of…things [like] pleasure, consent, and conversation, and to add
> representation on top of that, that kind of feels like it's a thing that we have to make
> to exist. … I feel like there's this…base of porn with tiny bodies and blonde hair
> and stuff, tiny hairless bodies, and we're somewhere in here, rebuilding the
> landscape of it. It's redefining what pleasure can be, in a queer way, in a crip way. I
> hear about representations of how different bodies are, but I haven't always seen
> them. Even in thinking about shooting, I'm like, "my knee might go out that day."
> And that doesn't mean we don't get to do it, it just means we're going to do it in a
> different way, and that feels very queercrip porn to me. I feel like the making it in
> that collaborative way means we're all these atoms doing this thing all day, and
> then we have all this electricity and then we're like, cool, and then we go out, but
> we still have it and we get to never not have it. (Interview 2014)

Bringing queercrip worlds into existence further creates a space to understand and claim sites of

shame as potential sites of resistance, opening up shared opportunities to practice living otherwise. Of the practice it takes to begin living otherwise, Corrinne said, "I practice ignoring the voices that say no. I practice not feeling bad or giving into shame. I was worried about not looking good. It was good watching myself at a different angle; [creating my scene] gave me a moment to reflect. If I see something I don't like I get to challenge myself around that. It's a process." For Mia, watching porn provides access to ideas and languages for learning about and exploring her sexuality:

> I find watching porn gives me ideas on what I want to do for myself sexually or gives me ideas of what I don't want to do. So increasing the accessibility of porn will maybe help people's awareness of what they want or don't want. Watching porn, developing an identity or just exploring—using porn as a way to explore one's sexuality… Watching porn, I discovered, "Oh, there's my line!" or "Oh, that's not something that interests me!" But also watching porn and feeling like, "Wow, some of this feels really inaccessible, but I kind of want to try to do this," and then, "How in my body am I going to try to do this? … Okay well I can't do that, but I can try it this way or I can try it that way." [I use] porn as a way to help build a vocabulary or not, or deconstruct a vocabulary of our bodies and our desires (Interview 2014).

Throughout our interviews, Mia continued to think through the possibilities that engaging with queercrip porn create: "what if we watched a porn where there was somebody with a communication board, and how…could [that] be shaped into a D/s[18] relationship or when people are gagged and different forms of communication are used?" Similar to the effects of access intimacy, seeing something in porn that resonates with our experiences and embodiment means we don't have to work as hard to explain our needs and justify our existence, freeing up time and capacity for rest, fun, pleasure, and imagining otherwise.

Naming the hard stuff, as Nomy did in her solo scene and Isobel did in her post-scene interview, further reflects how the complexity of our lived experiences is a necessary ingredient for creating new imaginings. Notes Isobel:

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[18] D/s stands for dominant/submissive and is used in Kink or BDSM communities and play.

Something that is true about that day [of the shoot] is that I felt so lovely and hot and sexy [in] many moments throughout the day. Then [I] had this relationship thing happen later in the day, and felt so shitty and just felt so…"I'm not likeable." And then I remember having a conversation with the person I was filming with and a friend and I was like, "But I did this. Four hours ago I was doing this thing, but it's still actually true… I still live in this culture of undesirability and I'm still made to feel this way, but that [experience of shooting the scene] still exists." That was really hard and useful in terms of thinking about realities of our lives. The reason I say that is because something I think can help change the culture of undesirability is that I don't want anyone to watch [my scene] and be like, "she's all the confidence all the time and her crip-ness allows her to do those things." Like…I couldn't get out of bed, you know? There's lots of days where I don't get out of bed because I'm too sad or because I'm too sore. And that happened to be a day where I was able to do those things, and I know we would have done other things if my body couldn't do those things. And so, to change that, I feel like I need to put into the room that I felt really shitty about me being hot four hours later and that was still just as true as how hot I felt in the moment. (Isobel, Interview 2014)

Isobel's story also reflects that we negotiate and live in multiple worlds. We are still living and negotiating cultures of undesirability every day. Queercrip porn does not solve systemic oppression, but it does provide openings for disruption, recognition, and transformation. It gives us something to hold onto: new stories to disrupt and counteract the din of undesirability.

Queercrip Porn Fosters Resilience: "It's Like We are Really Big Strong Pink Glitter and We're Pushing Back the Mud"

I started this research project because I felt like I was losing the epic battle with cultures of undesirability. I was desperate to find out how other queercrips navigated cultures of undesirability and how they survived systemic oppression and the violence and abuse in so many of our lives. Further, I was hoping to get some healing out of this work, through building new stories of connection with other queercrips. I focused on porn in part because it is one of the key ways I nurture resilience.

After hearing Isobel's story of facing cultures of undesirability in the hours following her

scene, I asked her if having made queercrip porn helped her through this confrontation. She

responded:

> The din of undesirability is so loud! It helped because I had witnesses. People were
> like, "but this other thing happened today that was really good," and having the
> kinds of people that were in the room in the room, and having conversations about
> poverty and crip-ness and soreness and meds and…burlesque. … There's
> something about the fact that this wasn't just my performance that I was performing
> on my own that other people saw and left, it was like there was a whole room of
> people who were there that day…that were part of making that desirability
> validation happen, instead of before where it would be like, "there's the well of
> undesirability and I'm totally slipping down those slimy walls and there's a
> shimmer of a burlesque that I did a couple months ago that four people that I know
> saw that kind of liked, which is cool…" But this feels like it's wider because there
> are these other people that were witness to it; we got to have conversations, it's on
> film, so there's pictures…oh, that was a good day. And…I've been able to be closer
> friends with Juba too now… If I was having a really bad day I could be like, "I'm
> having really the sad feelings. Am I hot?" And I feel like he'd be like, "Yeah." And
> you know, a month ago that golden nugget might not have been at the top of my
> well… I'm still going to feel the feelings and I'm still going to feel crappy and feel
> sick and those things. But I don't think I've fully grasped how big of a deal it is that
> I did this for me. (Interview 2014)

Isobel's words highlight the ways in which queercrip porn fosters resilience by interweaving the

four key qualities discussed above: intentional and disruptive cultural production, complex

personhood, relationality, and world-making. The interweaving of these qualities was active in

each of the scenes we made, in the conversations we had, and in the connections we shared. For

Corrinne, resilience means:

> Existing in a world that is not created for you to survive … being thrown all kinds
> of shit and dealing with it and remaining yourself, remaining intact, remaining who
> you are. Like, obviously we change in every day—in every moment—but
> [resilience is] being able to confront all the things that happen and the things we
> need to deal with and still remain true to ourselves or be who we are. I think
> resilience is, like, poor mothers raising eight kids, because everything tells you that
> it's not something you can do…it is difficult, and incredibly possible. You don't
> have a script, you know? You are just doing it… And there is no one cheering you
> on or celebrating you. And when I say no one I guess I'm talking systemically
> because friends and family along the way can definitely provide that support. We
> are resilient as community as well. (Interview 2014)

Corrinne's words resonate deeply with me, especially the connection she made between

community and resilience. Each of the collaborators, through their smiles, laughter, tears,

brilliant insights, and blazing hot scenes provided me with resilience through what were most

certainly the worst two years of my life. They were my cheerleaders. Even when I was too sick

to do much of anything, including write, I could still connect with my collaborators. Whether we

were talking through the worst aspects of cultures of undesirability manifesting in our lives, or I

was helping them shape their ideas for a scene, or even when we were watching footage and

listening to interviews, every time I connected with one of my collaborators I felt held,

energized, and so grateful.

On a day when I was feeling particularly nauseated as well as defeated by my broken

heart, I received a link from Nomy to her solo scene, *Time to Say Hello*. I watched the short,

powerful piece of footage and cried. She shared how this movie was pivotal in connecting to her

own sexual agency and power:

> The whole point of that piece is: I'm feeling sad and it's impossible for me to get
> what I want and that I don't understand, I don't know how, I don't see how it is
> possible for me to go to the person who I love most and ask for what I want and so
> then I give it to myself. And that moment, I just made that little movie in one
> night… I focused on what I think is super-hot, which is people's faces. So it was
> just on my face. Since making that movie it's kind of launched me on doing my
> own not only sexual healing…it's a different level of sexual healing where I feel
> like in the past I have been doing this sexual healing where I am like healing from
> trauma, there is bad stuff that I have to scoop out of me and now I feel like I'm
> okay, I'm energizing the battery and creating that energy in me… [It] can engage
> with others but it doesn't have to because it's actually mine and it's for me. And
> that's like a really different worldview and not one that I grew up thinking I had a
> right to. (Interview 2014)

Time to Say Hello made me cry because it was exactly what I needed at that precise moment.

Here was this beautiful, sexy, moving, complicated porn that expressed so powerfully the ways

that cultures of undesirability work to undermine our sense of being worthy of desire, love, and

celebration as whole complex persons. The erosion of our sense of worth contributes to making it difficult to ask for what we want and need and to say no when necessary. Similar to the emotions communicated by Nomy above, being able to feel worthy of asking for and receiving what I want and need from sexual partners will probably be something I'll always struggle with. Witnessing this moment of powerful vulnerability shared by Nomy made me so grateful to be a part of making this hard and necessary work happen. Earlier in this chapter, I discussed queercrip porn and the mutuality of transformation rooted in relationship and community building. Lisa shared how being invited to collaborate on this project provided "a catalyst":

> You were a catalyst for *Wall of Fire* and our relationship shifting, because I didn't know you at all…and I was, like, oh-so protective and I was like, "oh my gosh, you are going to know all this stuff about us," or whatever… My own process with my own intimacy stuff connected to survivor stuff and feeling so much more open now…thank you for that. I feel like it's why we want to know more about your work and we want to continue this relationship. Thank you for giving us the opportunity to answer these questions, because [they're] helping us to talk about this stuff… I don't think I would even be able to talk about it openly if we weren't doing it the way we are. It seems like more of a common experience than I thought it was; like, not so unique…to be totally free and giving and be bonded through love and also to be bonded through sex and be able to receive pleasure… [It's] so key to…being totally open to the world. But it's also really the hardest thing because it's scary. (Interview 2014)

Several of the collaborators expressed gratitude and relief at having a space where they felt supported and held in engaging in hard conversations.

An important contribution to resilience offered by queercrip porn is the presence of pleasure, which, as noted above by several contributors, serves as a powerful pushback to cultures of undesirability. In the post-scene interview with Lisa and Nomy, there was a moment where Nomy described in explicit detail some of the sex they had while filming. The couple had mentioned earlier that they had not been having a lot of sex lately. As Nomy detailed the hotness they captured on film, Lisa chimed in: "and this is turning me on [laughter]. This is helping us [laughter]." They told me later that they had some really hot sex after that interview. A critical

difference between the queercrip porn produced for this project and mainstream porn is that even while part of the pleasure derived from making and watching it happens on an individual or interpersonal level, queercrip porn centres a commitment to interdependence and fostering not just self-worth but a communal sense of worth. Queercrip porn centred on interdependent community building is one way to make the pushback fun and nourishing. Corrinne's piece sought to illustrate the painful impacts of oppression and embodied resilience through the practice of meditation. While this scene appears to be further from pleasure and play than some of the other scenes, Corrinne said:

> [Thinking of my scene as porn] made it more fun in certain ways—like, to think about it as play in front of the camera. I am constantly in a process…when I think about sexuality and spirituality I see them as very interconnected and I think a lot of people see them as, like, opposites or just really far away from each other. But I keep seeing different ways of them melding together and this is kind of one of those experiences where I'm like, "this is a spiritual peace," and I'm talking too about a lot of metaphysical things and really tapping into resilience in a different way. But there is always a place for the sexual and the sensual and I think that that stuff sustains me as well. (Interview 2014)

Throughout this project, collaborators repeatedly cited pleasure, play, and creativity as key contributors to resilience. Romham and Silas' scene was full of laughter and power play:

> I really loved how much fun we had, how much we laughed, because that's such a part of how we are a lot of the time. And I liked that it felt totally okay to just be ourselves. I weirdly enjoyed seeing the footage of the parts where we were trying to sort out how to set things up, like, figuring out the quirks…of the scooter. I liked seeing that reflected back... I think that we're always playing with power in our relationship, in our sex, and we did that here too, even if it's not necessarily blatantly spoken or even clear to anyone watching. We're constantly shifting our dynamic, and I was really pleased to re-watch it recently and really see that coming out, because I was unsure if it would feel like that. (Interview 2014)

Many of the collaborators talked about kink and power play as major contributors to cultivating resilience in their lives. In their scenes, these dynamics shook up traditional notions of power, agency, and dominant understandings of disabled people as sexual subjects. Isobel shared:

There's a lot of conversations about queerness and kink and BDSM right now, and I feel like our stories can get diverted away from our own narrative. … The ways that power and vulnerability and trust played out in the kink in [our] scene is ridiculously awesome… This is my first porn, and so I was nervous about lots of things… And so part of that we…put into our characters in terms of this student-teacher thing… the way that our genders are visualized and perceived, I feel like there's ways that [Juba] having power over me might be expected in a particular way, but we both had so much power in that scene. Like, there was a lot of sub-dom negotiating that was like, "I'm going to do this thing to you, but do you want me to do this thing to you?" Or, "I want you to do this thing to me, but am I going to let you do this thing to me?" And I feel like that was super fun and easy… And it was just fun to play with those characters of the 400 years of history together and stuff… Like, I think I felt strength in this big dark strong black guy who's just this tender soul being so sweetly toppy. …that was just so amazing…in terms of representation and just being like, "look at the ways that we can be, like look at all the weird ways that we can actually fuck each other and negotiate that stuff with each other, and it doesn't mean that because it's two seemingly cis, opposite gendered people in a scene." So when I think about strength and representation in that, it felt so powerful to be on screen with another black person with locks who's queer and crip and just have the power orbiting a little bit in the space. (Interview 2014)

In their scene, Isobel and Juba created an amazing, magical, hilarious, campy, Afrofuturist world

full of affirmation, tenderness, play, and hotness. Isobel explained:

"Black weirdo" is a new thing as a term and as a movement to me. And I don't actually know that many black folks in Toronto; I mean, I know them but we don't get to have these kinds of conversations and stuff. So I feel like connecting with Juba, and talking about all of this nerdy fuck-ass shit, and being like, "you?! what?! this thing?!" I feel like that's been growing my concept; I'm feeling, like, validated by nerd-dom [laughter]. (Interview 2014)

Juba shared Isobel's excitement and the rarity of how many different levels they connected on:

There were so many threads! And it was difficult to sort of reign in, because you have this sort of space and time. But every time that we would say something—and this is even in the takes—another idea would pop out…but that was also to try to figure out how to put these little bits of that in the narrative. That was interesting. So that wasn't something I expected, that I had thought about happening. And to have that happen was a lot of fun. And to have someone who would roll—who could, you know, roll—with it, and who…in their first production wasn't too nervous to be completely silly about it! (Interview 2014)

Connecting on many different levels and having fun is absolutely nourishing: having the aspects

of ourselves that are so devalued by cultures of undesirability validated and shared fosters

resilience, as we feel ourselves supported when we push back against isolation and erasure.

Isobel explained:

> "We actually have a lot of work to do. There [are] a lot of us, [but] there [are] a lot of not-us surrounding us. So I think instead of being like, "fuck society, I don't need it anyway"… putting patience into our activism is something that I'm trying to adopt. … fuck society, I don't need it anyway"… putting patience into our activism is something that I'm trying to adopt. … I think the more we can acknowledge that in the art we're making and acknowledge that in the everything that we're doing, then we become less isolated. If we're able to be more present with the—I don't know what to call it. It's like that Robert Munch book[19] of the mud thing: it's like this big cloud of mud that's seeping over the backyard…and we are really big strong pink glitter and we're pushing back the mud. I also think that pushing back constantly is really tiring and it's not accessible for everybody to push and push and push for their whole lives. …we're always like, "we got to change it right now because it sucks really bad right now." It can be hard to have that be a sustainable amount of energy. If it's one hundred percent megaphone push-back we're going to lose our voices, but if we yell and then drink tea and then yell again and then drink some tea…then slowly we're going to fill cement up in the well. (Interview 2014)

Isobel's story reminds us that resilience is not just necessary for our survival; it's also about making change in a way that is accessible and sustainable. Queercrip porn fosters resilience through interdependent community building that makes room for us to revel in our complex personhood and connect with pleasure, joy and care. Together "we are really big strong pink glitter and we're pushing back the mud of undesirability," creating cultures of resistance that prioritize connection, complex personhood, community, interdependency, and collectivity.

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[19] The *Mud* Puddle by Robert Munch is the story of a little girl who every time she go outside gets jumped on and covered from head to toe by a mud puddle.

Conclusion: Worlds of Rupture, Recognition, and Resilience

Romham and Silas, in various levels of undress, are cuddling on the dishevelled bed in the hotel room. The hotness and sheer delight of their scene hangs in the air. We are all eating chips and laughing. I am beyond touched, I am still grateful that I was able to be a part of making this incredible transformative moment happen. And I ask the first question, "So, did you have fun?" They respond with an enthusiastic, "uh huh!"

I have learned much from the process of conducting this research and writing this dissertation. The experience of working with my collaborators wholly confirmed my belief that dominant ideologies can be disrupted through the collective making of queercrip porn scenes, including the practice of creating them, sharing them, and reflecting on the counterpublic worlds they create. In highlighting our complex queercrip personhood, the process of making hot scenes together not only gave rise to new possibilities and understandings of bodies, sexuality, disability and desirability, but it also created spaces and moments where we were held, recognized, and appreciated for the very things about us that are marginalized in cultures of undesirability. Plus, we had a lot of fun.

Like the mockingbirds of my childhood, I have flown into the window several times during this process, and I'll inevitably do so again. Sometimes it feels like the glass is flying into me, like when I feel the tremendous hurt of not often being chosen as a partner, co-parent, or Canadian citizen, or when I have to battle with my own University (repeatedly) for reasonable disability accommodation. I still feel the impact of the hard glass as I witness the harm and violence that cultures of undesirability cause in so many of our lives. But this dissertation was a deluxe birdbath: a nourishing pleasure rather than a cold barrier. Working with my collaborators, I gained a broader picture of how queercrip porn fosters resilience strategies, and how it disrupts and transforms cultures of undesirability through interdependent community building from the frameworks of disability justice and radical disability politics.

As I investigated the impacts of cultures of undesirability on collaborators' lives as well as my own, I realized the need to speak to the complex and important exchanges between systemic manifestations and so-called personal occurrences of cultures of undesirability. But there was something tricky about this interpretive process: I noticed how easy it could be to slip into neoliberal frameworks of inclusion in the face of so much in/visibility, exclusion, and erasure. Collaborators spoke about how cultures of undesirability press us toward policing each other's choices and desires rather than looking for opportunities for systemic and collective transformation. We can notice this tendency playing out in mainstream disability organizing. As I was nearing the end of writing this dissertation, Facebook exploded with articles about the "first ever disabled sex orgy" happening in Toronto on August 14 at Buddies in Bad Times Theatre (Deliciously Disabled 2015). The organizers were two white disabled people and one of the staff members at Oasis Lounge, a well-known inaccessible sex club. While the idea of an accessible sex party is one I fully support -- I actually organized for years to try and find a place to host one -- the approach of the organizers screams of assimilation and inclusion. All of the media around the event, which also enjoys mentioning the ParaPanAm games, is steeped in the language of "we're just like everyone else" and single issue politics (Accessible Orgy 2015). There is no mention of the ways other marginalized communities are also sexually marginalized, no attention to access issues for trans people, no real discussion of access beyond ramps, lifts, and ASL interpreters. Their goal is to expand normative desirability just a smidge to let in some disabled people. The focus of the organizers is on changing the attitudes of individuals, not systems of structural oppression that produce individual subjects who then must be productive with the capitalist economy and understood as desirable in order to be worthy of justice. Inclusion, while tied to temporary well-being (the AODA certainly makes it easier for some

disabled people to get around and find work), will never be enough. In contrast, the work my

collaborators and I did was mindful of the push of neoliberalism and inclusion. Creating spaces

where the importance of collectivity and radical access were core to the process, means that we

are working towards necessary shifts in ways of knowing and living that brings into being social

and structural organization that enables complex personhoods, interdependence, shared

vulnerability and collective liberation.

One such shift was our understanding of queercrip porn. During her post-scene

interview, Isobel reflected on how participating in this project shifted her understanding of

queercrip porn:

> I'd say it's kind of like a capturing of deep negotiations of identity and
> connection… For me, when I think of queer porn, my association with it is the
> façade is kind of gone. Like, we don't have to be perfectly bodied in these ways.
> So I feel like that, when I think about queer porn I think of, you know, it's "real
> bodies," or "authentic" or whatever you want to call it…because I think queer still
> carries so much weight in terms of what counts as being queer and what counts as
> being queer visibility and what counts as queer sex, like you know, "Are you bi?
> You've never fucked anybody." … And I think those are still really heavy in porn.
> But then to add crip to it, and the way that I think about crip and how I crip my
> world, ha, is that our bodies get to be whatever and that our sex can be whatever
> and that our sex can be kissing and that how my body has sex in my life as a queer
> person with a disability… And there's a lot of negotiation…and there's a lot
> cushions and just a lot of access stuff that has to happen and that I get to bring that
> onto screen is I think…the thing I've learnt. That that's a thing that can happen.
> That it doesn't have to be like, "Okay, access off-screen," or, "What do you need
> off-screen, but then on-screen be really perfect and hot"… It feels more intentional.
> Crip feels like a verb or something; it's making room for our messiness that's
> really hot and lovely, into either conversations or actions or exchanges on-screen.
> (Interview 2014)

The way Isobel begins describing porn as "a capturing of deep negotiations of identity

and connection" seems to be so far from the beginning definitions of porn offered by

some of the porn studies scholars mentioned in chapter two and, yet, there are some

interesting areas of overlap, particularly the ideas that porn is connected to embodied

response and involves processes of self-making. But there is a shift in focus. In these words Isobel emphasizes the negotiation of identity: rather than being static and individualized, identity (and the porn created to reflect it) is relational, collective and perpetually in process. This view not only pushes against the individualization so evident in the personal inferiority models of disability and cultures of undesirability, it also produces an understanding of bodies, sex, porn and desirability that is expansive, complex and in motion. Rather than just making room for those parts of us that fit in, queercrip porn, makes room for and celebrates "our messiness."

This project granted me further access to different kinds of resilience. I had been a performer/creator before, and there is a particular way that being in those roles fosters resilience, as mentioned in the stories of my collaborators above. Doing this research, however, I got to do one better: I got to be the "porn fairy," making other people's queercrip porn wishes come true! And I think I was really good at it. There was something in the combination of interdependence, nurturing, and creating access intimacy that really utilized and validated a lot of the skills I feel are distinctively queercrip survival skills and knowledges. It was also an incredible honour to co-create access intimacy and spaces of complex shared vulnerability, and to witness the disruptive, transformative power of queercrip porn and community in action.

The scene between Sam and me—filmed at the very beginning of this dissertation process—was absolutely fun and hot. Our scene conveys the dirty, tender, playful, and loving connection we have built since we filmed *want* almost 10 years ago. *want*, and the relationship that grew out of it, have sustained me: when I am slipping down into the pit of undesirability, I have a lifeline to hold onto. Since conducting this research, I have even more to hold onto. I have pictures from both *want* and my most recent shoot on my walls, and I have a collection of cards

and letters Sam has sent me over the years next to my computer. I have the stories and words from the interviews, and pictures and footage from the amazing hot queercrip words we created. All of this keeps me writing even the hard stuff.

And my collaborators also now have necessary reminders that we are loved and wanted. Building relationships with my collaborators and some of the significant people in their lives as well connecting them with one another was also a powerful part of this research. Some of the collaborators I had known for a really long time, but we had never really had the opportunity to talk about this really important hard stuff; some of the collaborators I only met during the research process. Throughout this process we all had the chance to build, practice and experience queercrip worlds together.

> *Masti Khor, my dear friend (who also just happens to be an amazing Toronto-based queer brown femme crip burlesque artist) used a poem in a recent performance exploring ritual and self-love. One of its phrases, "sometimes it is necessary to reteach a thing its loveliness… in words and in touch," echoes in my thoughts and heart often. When this echo happens, I am often transported to my bedroom. Masti is lying in my bed, and I am sitting near her. We talk a lot about undoing cultures of undesirability. We hold hands as hours are filled with so much shared laughing, crying and raging. Holding hands in and through the lovely parts and the scary parts. Reteaching each other, in words and in touch, our collective loveliness.*

I see this dissertation project as part of a larger project to reteach queercrips our loveliness in words and in touch. Touch, for me, absolutely includes the physical touching that occurred through this process, the sex, caresses, hugs, kisses, bites, moments of support, high fives, and smacks. But I also felt touched, as in moved. I know that this process was transformative and nourishing for everyone involved. I hope that this work continues to proliferate: I hope that my collaborators go on to create lots more porn; I hope to get to conduct those focus groups, eventually. Most of all, I hope that this research is part of a larger movement for transforming cultures of undesirability and fostering resilience.

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Appendix A (Call Out for Collaborators)

Wanna make hot, rad, queercrip porn with a bunch of other fabulous queercrips?
Wanna transform cultures of undesirability?
**Are you an exhibitionist or a voyeur? Are you shy and nervous, but a little bit
curious/excited?**
Wanting to meet and talk about sex and bodies and desire with other queercrips?
If you answered yes, to any of these please read on…

XXX,
Loree Erickson femmegimp@gmail.com

Who I am:
Many of you know me or know of my work, if not, you can check me out at femmegimp.org. I
am committed to making this world a dreamier, hotter and less oppressive place for marginalized
people. One way I like to do this is through making sexy, political, queercrip porn which shares
and fosters queercrip knowledges, pleasures and imaginings. I am currently working on my PhD
dissertation tentatively called, "Transforming "Cultures of (Un)Desirability" Through Queercrip
Porn." I am hoping to contribute to the body of red-hot imaginings that explicitly highlight
queercrip passions, pleasures and embodiments. I am interested in how collaboratively produced
queercrip porn highlights the multitude of ways marginalized communities navigate and
transform cultures of undesirability, acts as a method for fostering resiliency through building
and nurturing our collective worth; and finally, how queercrip porn interrupts dominant cultural
and structural ways of thinking, being and organizing that contribute to sexual marginalization
and cultures of undesirability. Believe it or not, my method for gathering information is making
porn with rad people. SO… **I am looking for some rad folks, identifying as or with the term
queercrip, who want to be involved in making queercrip porn as described below. My
vision of what I mean by porn is open and collaborative. I want to enable folks to create
scenes that they think are hot and sexy and if that means explicit fucking great, if that
means something else to you great also.** If you wanna take a behind the scenes role, that is also
possible. Most folks who will be involved will not have ever made porn before due to the ways
that we've been excluded from sexual cultures/told we are undesirable so never fear if you've
never done anything like this before. My desires are to make the porn work for you, not the
other way around. I am also excited about expanding what we mean by porn queercrip style.
This project is grounded in activist and academic literature, the principal researcher's (me, Loree
Erickson) lived experience as both a shy porn performer/maker, and as a white, queer
femmegimp, relocated southerner living in Toronto, with a mixed class background who uses a
power wheelchair, works to support the work of QTPOC, Trans, and Deaf communities, as well
as being involved in collective care to survive and thrive.

I am attaching the rather lengthy call for contributors. Feel free to skim. :) I am very excited to
have many convos about this process.
What I want to do:
I am looking to collaborate and dream with an awesome group of fabulous queercrips (12-15)
who want to be involved in the creation of a series of short porn scenes, approximately ten

minutes each. I will be prioritizing communities, experiences, and embodiments often excluded from many queer porn practices (for example, people of color, fat folks, trans women). I want to create with lots of different experiences of disability/cripness/Deafness/madness/etc. I will be coming to you, wherever you are located, camera in hand. :)

These scenes will be lead by individuals who wish to tell their sexual stories. **If you choose to be involved (I hope, I hope!), you will have total control over what roles you would like to fill, roles include: collaborating to design a scene, performing various roles in scenes, editing footage, filming, and set design. Five of the participants will also be asked to engage in three sets of interviews, a practice quite common in queer, trans, and feminist porn communities.** The first interview will occur at the beginning of the process; the next will happen just following participation in the creation of a scene; and the last will occur after viewing selected video clips. All porn performers will have the opportunity to view their footage prior to screening. There will also be two focus groups. One of these groups will be comprised of other queercrips not involved in the making of queercrip porn and the other will be non-disabled queer people. After both of these research steps are complete, I will review the interviews, focus groups and porn footage looking for themes and resources regarding how queercrips navigate and transform cultures of undesirability. I will give participants multiple opportunities to give me feedback to ensure I have represented them and their knowledge respectfully and appropriately.

My priority is to create an accessible, anti-oppressive, and safer space for all involved in this research.   All documentation/recording of collaborators will be associated with identifying information only to the extent that you wish it to be. All filming and other activities will take place at a negotiated pace (including lots of communication, breaks for rest and food) in an environment that is accessible to all involved this includes acknowledgment, discussion and attention to the ways that larger systems of oppression are always with us. There will be no touching without explicit consent and consent will be revisited and re-established often throughout the process. As this process is potentially emotive, there will be off camera opportunities for people to debrief throughout the process. There will also be onsite active listeners, not involved in the research, for participants to talk to if they feel upset or triggered at any point.   Also I am THRILLED to talk through any questions, concerns or excitements you have about being involved.

Why I am doing this and why you should do this:
I started doing this work because one of the earliest "truths" I ever learned was that no one would ever want me as a partner because of my disability. This message, while often not stated directly, was echoed and confirmed everywhere around me. While my experience is specific, it is, sadly, not unique. I want to attend to the connection between experiences and feelings of pleasure as well as feeling worthy of love/loveable to feeling worthy of struggle and justice. One of the most insidious and comprehensive ways to marginalize people is to make them question their loveablity, their desirability, their collective worth, and establish social organization that reinforces and perpetuates these systemic harms; while internalizing dominance and personalizing oppression. This process is what I am referring to when I say cultures of undesirability. Cultures of undesirability involve the narrowing of dominant western cultural imaginary so that marginalized others come to be so often understood and constructed as both "less than" and "too much," if we are understood as persons at all. We are consistently reminded that there is something wrong with *us*, not the systems of structural inequality that

simultaneously enable and marginalize bodies, identities, experiences and desires in complex and contradictory ways. I do this work because cultures of undesirability cause lots of violence and trauma in so many of our lives. Cultures of undesirability work in tandem with the existence of prisons, psych wards, and group homes to render marginalized people as disposable as well as isolate, punish, and pathologize any and all deviation. Cultures of undesirability are at play in the total lack of regard and lip service that occurs when community events lack all kinds of access (financial, physical, social, cultural, etc) and thus exclude any number of particular communities and community members. I hear cultures of undesirability in conversations about how sad and hard it would be to have a disabled kid, and in every charity or pharmaceutical ad that shows disabled people as tragic, passive, and moments away from death. According to these stories of disability, the only thing we can hope for is a cure and to stay alive; certainly not large scale structural change, or love, community, and hot sex.

As powerful as the culture of undesirability is, queercrips are stronger. The stories I wish to center in this dissertation project are of queercrip flaunting, survival and flourishing. I want to think, feel, talk, create and share these stories. My work is shaped by Mia Mingus and Stacey Milbern who remind me of the importance of building crip solidarity from a perspective that takes sites of shame as sites of resistance to any project of transformation. As Mingus writes, "we will weave need into our relationships like golden, shimmering glimmers of hope— opportunities to build deeper, more whole and practice what our world *could* look like" (leavingevidence.wordpress.com). I am thankful for the culture of resistance and desirability that marginalized people create every day. I feel hope in the many different transformative justice projects and frameworks happening in communities around me. I revel in the Sins Invalid clips on youtube. I embody cultures of resistance and resilience when we blockade an inaccessible TTC station because they are raising transit fares yet again and cutting necessary transportation stipends to people on welfare and disability income, or when I cuddle with a partner/friend. I feel our power, vulnerability, and resilience in our tears of joy, laughter, and rage. And I feel it when I watch and make queercrip porn.

Eli Clare, in his keynote address at the 2002 Queer Disability conference, makes a charge to his audience that the time is now for hot and messy stories of queercrip porn.   My dissertation project seeks to answer that call. There is an extreme dearth of hot and sexy porn made by and for queercrip audiences. We need porn that captures what Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarashina and Ellery Russian call the lust of recognition (http://vimeo.com/11997033). I don't wish to simply reverse the narratives speaking only to the "positive" side, presenting simplistic purely celebratory narratives of success. I want to create space for and tell stories that reflect the multifacted nature of queercrips experiences.

Part of the reason I started making porn was to address the disconnect I regularly witnessed in workshops between theory and practice, between non-disabled people thinking in a distanced way that disabled people are sexual and feeling how disabled people can be sexy, hot and desirable. I wanted to make people feel. I wanted to turn people on in full-bodied kinda way. I wanted to make that link between what we feel and what we think and all the surrounding messiness. I want to explore what do I learn through making porn? How can we tap into the ways that porn sometimes is a useful pedagogical and methodological practice because of its disruptive nature and create a cultural shift? How can consuming and making queercrip porn foster resilience?   How can we use this practice, a practice often connected to pleasure, to tell stories of queercrip pleasure and consensual desire; rather than stories of biomedical malfunction, tragic undesirable lives, or consumable hypersexualize others?

In Audre Lorde's poem, "Coping", she describes a scene of a young boy clearing water away from young plants that have been subjected to days of rain. When the boy is asked why he says, "young seeds that have not seen sun forget and drown easily". We know that possibility is not accidental. We have to make it and we do not make it alone. Together we can build and dream cultures of possibility that extend beyond queercrip communities. We need community, practices of transformative justice, and the "lust of recognition" as much as we need the sun, in fact, maybe they are the sun. We must have imaginings that not only contribute to the cultivation of a collective sense of self that knows we are worth struggling for, but also nurtures our collective survival through resource sharing and interdependent community building; built with stories that share our situated knowledges, our passions, our ways of being, our creativity, our fabulous and fierce challenges to the dominant power structure, and of course, our sexiness!

If you want to make queercrip porn:
Send me an email at femmegimp@gmail.com with the following information.
Name:
A brief description of who ya are and what ya do in the world:
Where you live:
What roles you might be interested in:
Why ya wanna make porn (this doesn't have to be polished or complete- just give me an idea:
Email and phone number (sometimes emailing is tiring for me):

Appendix B (Possible Pre-scene Interview Questions)

1. Preferred name
2. What do you do in the world? What things are important to you?
3. How do you identify? Describe yourself. Identify your social location (articulate who you are and where you sit in the world). What words do you like to use to describe yourself to other people?
4. What were some of your thoughts and feelings when you got my Facebook call out?
5. What brings you to making porn/what is your history with porn? Why do you want to be a part of this?
6. What do you think queer crip porn is?
7. When you hear cultures of undesirability, what does that term mean to you? What terms do you use to discuss that phenomenon and in what contexts?
8. Do you have a story or moment where you have recognized cultures of undesirability revealed themselves to you that you would like to share?
9. Do you have a sense of where the messages of undesirability come from in your life/history?
10. What did "falling in love" look like? Did it include you? What does "falling in love," mean to you now? Does it include you?
11. What did hot and sexy look like? It includes you? What about now?
12. What about disability? Did it include you? What about now?
13. Who was a part of your journey to your present understanding of disability, desirability, power privilege, etc.?
14. What role does community play in transformation?
15. What work do you think making porn does? For example, what is porn's role in transforming cultures of undesirability?
16. How did you come up with what you want to share with me/us in this project/scene?
17. What are you hoping to get out of being involved with this project?
18. Anything else?

Appendix C (Possible Post-scene Interview Questions)

1. Did you have fun?
2. What were your favorite parts?
3. How was/is it different fucking on film?
4. How did your relationships with your co-star/other film artists/myself shape your experience? How do you think it will impacted having people were clear queer Crip identified? People from your social locations?
5. What was set comfort about? Were there any parts that weren't great? Are there anything that you would've done differently?
6. What were the moments that surprised you?
7. How do you feel like you were playing with power?
8. How do you feel like you were playing with representation?
9. The story of how today came through since your last interview?
10. What have you learned? From your relationship? What have you learned from making porn?
11. What do you feel is necessary towards making hot sex/the transformation of cultures of undesirability occur?
12. What skills do you feel contribute to making this happen?
13. How do you build up the skills?
14. What are you most nervous and/or excited about in seeing the footage on?
15. What is your current understanding of queer Crip porn?
16. How did this process shift your understandings of porn in general and queer crip porn?
17. What about the role of porn in transformation?