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Coming to Claim Crip: Disidentification with/in Disability Studies

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Abstract

This creative-critical paper combines creative non-fiction and theory to trace one non-disabled scholar's personal experience with disability studies as a field and a community. Using disidentification and crip theory, this paper theorizes the personal, political, and academic utility of identifying with *crip as a nondisabled, fat, black, queer, female academic. This crip identification then undergirds and informs the researcher's scholarship in and relationship to disability studies as a field. Specifically referencing the Society for Disability Studies dance as a potential space of cross-identification, this paper suggests that disidentification among/across/between minoritarian subjects allows for coalitional theory and politics between disability studies and other fields, particularly race/ethnic and queer/sexuality studies.*

As a young gender, race, and disability studies scholar, my entry into and relationship with/in this last field of study is not the story many expect when I tell them that I do disability studies. Unlike many people in the field, I am not (yet) a person with a disability and I am not (yet) the parent, guardian, sibling, or partner of a person with a disability. Ten to 15 years ago, being a nondisabled [1] disability studies researcher [2] with no immediate, personal experience with disability would have been relatively unusual. However, due to the growth of disability studies as an academic field since the 1990s, more people are encountering disability theory in the course of their academic careers whether or not they identify as or have a personal relationship with a person with a disability. Although I do not identify *as* a person with a disability, I nonetheless have come to identify *with* the term "crip" as elucidated by feminist and queer crip/disability theorists such as Carrie Sandahl, Robert McRuer, and Alison Kafer. As a fat, black, queer woman, my experiences have led me to have particular personal and political connections to the term "crip" and a disidentified relationship with disability studies. In what follows, I argue that disidentification can be used by minoritarian subjects to disidentify with other minoritarian subjects, communities, and/or representations and that this kind of disidentifying process among/across/between minoritarian subjects can allow for coalitional theory and political solidarity.

By coalitional theory, I mean theories which are inclusive of multiple minority groups without being limited to only those people who occupy multiply minoritized positions. Regarding political solidarity, I follow Chandra Talpade Mohanty who defines solidarity as follows:

> In terms of mutuality, accountability, and the recognition of common interests as the basis for relationships among diverse communities… who have chosen to work and fight together. Diversity and difference are central values here—to be acknowledged and respected, not erased in the building of alliances (2003, p. 7).

My goal here is to show through both my own experiences and existing theory how disidentification with/in disability studies and identification *with* crip offers transformative possibilities for disability studies to make stronger academic and political connections to other identity-based fields, particularly race/ethnic and sexuality/queer studies—connections that the field has not yet been able to make thus far in substantive and lasting ways. [3]

As an undergraduate first coming into my feminist voice, I began to embrace my many marginal identities and understand how my body/mind/desire/behavior [4] shape(d) my past, present, and future experiences. I became a loud, at times angry, young activist who consistently called out others on their white, straight, upper-class, and/or male privilege. When it came to the oppression Olympics, I was a gold-medal contender, the ultimate minority, and I made it my business to teach those privileged subjects around me how to be allies to feminist, antiracist, and LBGTQIA [5] movements. I thought I knew it all.

Then, during my sophomore year, I took an elective course for my Women's Studies major entitled "Women and Disability" with Drs. Kathy McMahon-Klosterman and Jean Lynch. [6] In that course, I encountered my own unrecognized privilege for the first time. While I was aware of my class and nationality privileges, they didn't bother me because I easily recognized them and tried to act as an ally as a result. The experience of learning about (dis)ability [7] as a social system of oppression and privilege, however, one I had never even remotely considered, shifted my entire worldview. I had previously scoffed at the notion of white guilt, [8] but my initial reaction to the revelation of my ability [9] privilege was also one of guilt. Though it took some time to come out of that emotionally reactive state, I did eventually begin to pay critical attention to the ability privileges I receive each day and before the end of the semester I had declared myself a vocal ally of disability rights communities. I did this not only because I immediately made connections between (dis)ability and other systems of privilege and oppression, but also because I realized that if I ever again wanted to call someone out on their other forms of privilege or encourage them to be an ally to me, I absolutely had to evaluate my own ability privilege and become an ally myself.

The "Women and Disability" class led to other classes on disability and eventually to a disability studies minor, a senior thesis on student activism, and membership in the Society for Disability Studies (SDS). The summer after I graduated I attended the SDS annual conference with Dr. Kathy McMahon-Klosterman to help lead a roundtable discussion about student activism. It was this conference experience that solidified my relationship to disability studies.

Initially, I was simply thrilled to be in the presence of such academic and activist greatness. I met Rosemarie Garland-Thomson at lunch. I attended a workshop with Eli Clare. I sat behind Jim Ferris at a panel. I had never experienced such an interesting, exciting, and friendly intellectual environment. Something felt right about this space. On the last night of the conference I prepared myself for the (in)famous SDS dance. I had read about the spirit of SDS and the unrivaled nature of its culminating dance in Simi Linton's (2006) memoir, *My Body Politic*, so I was more excitedly nervous for this event than I was for my prom. Would the dance live up to everything Linton made it out to be?

As I entered the basement hallway of the CUNY building where the dance would occur, I could hear the music thumping with the strong trembling bass used so people who are Deaf, hard of hearing, or hearing impaired can feel the rhythm pulse. I entered the dark space to see a cornucopia of bodies scattered around the room: people spinning, rolling, jumping, shaking, wriggling, fist-pumping, sashaying, and bouncing in an explosion of movements, large and small. I saw people in chairs (wheeled and not) sitting on the sidelines clapping their hands or tapping their feet as they talked, drank, and laughed, their bodies close, sometimes interlaced. There was ethos of community and love in that room and though I was terrified of knowing no one and not fitting in, I also desperately wanted to dance.

Though still unsure of myself, when I located the unmistakable hair of Simi's husband, David, across the dance floor, I headed over to join their group of dancers. That night, my body moved more freely and less self-consciously than it ever had before because, at this dance, people were not watching me the way they sometimes stare or leer at dance clubs or bars; folks *were* looking, but here with friendly excitement or admiration. One of my dance partners that night, the beautiful and talented Alice Sheppard of AXIS Dance Company, followed the lead of my movements, adapting and responding to them with her own agile body and wheelchair. Then she helped me learn to watch her as well, to follow her movements, spinning, sliding, touching hands, and shaking our hair. I didn't leave until the wine was gone, the music stopped, and people started to disperse. I replayed the dance in my head as I headed back to my hotel and though I did not yet have the language for it, my first Society for Disability Studies dance was the moment I began to both disidentify with/in disability studies and identify *with* crip.

I am primarily using disidentification as elucidated by José Esteban Muñoz (1999) in *Disidentifications: Queers of Color and the Performance of Politics.* He defines disidentification as a strategic survival strategy of identification for/of/by those with multiple intersecting marginal identities whom Muñoz refers to as minoritarian subjects. Muñoz's theorization of disidentification relies upon Michel Pecheux's reworking of Louis Althusser's theory of interpellation in which disidentification is defined as a third identification stance in relation to dominant ideology that refuses to either fully conform or fully resist. Muñoz uses disidentification similarly to understand how queers of color relate and/or respond to dominant representations, particularly through performance.

For example, Muñoz opens the book with a description of Marga Gomez's performance piece, *Marga Gomez Is Pretty, Witty, and Gay*, in which Gomez sees lesbians on television for the first time and is captivated by their mysterious allure because the women are all depicted wearing raincoats, wigs, and sunglasses to hide their identities. Muñoz uses this as an example of a minoritarian subject negotiating and reinterpreting a mainstream image intended as negative. He insists that the act of disidentification is neither assimilationist nor anti-assimilationist, but rather, it's an alternative political resistance strategy that works with and against dominant ideology at the same time for the performative and political purposes of minoritarian subjects.

In *Aberrations in Black: Toward a Queer of Color Critique,* Roderick A. Ferguson (2004) makes similar claims about the possibilities of disidentification regarding queer of color critique's disidentification with historical materialism. Ferguson writes that to disidentify means to take up *with revisions*, to determine "the silences and ideologies that reside within critical terrains" (p. 5) and refuse to take up or extend legacies of racism, sexism, or homophobia in theory and research. [10] Disidentification is therefore a way to locate one's self within, take up and (re)use representations and theories in ways that were not originally intended. Disidentification is not, however, the only useful minoritarian political strategy and may not be appropriate or effective for all subjects or situations (Muñoz, 1999).

Despite the fact that both Ferguson and Muñoz focus on queers of color (minoritarian subjects) disidentifying with dominant (majoritarian) representations and theories, both indirectly suggest that disidentification can be used by minoritarian subjects in relation to other minoritarian representations. For example, Muñoz suggests that a queer woman might disidentify with the work of Frantz Fanon (2004), being critical of its sexist and homophobic moments while still finding and revising useful aspects of the text. Fanon, a black psychiatrist and postcolonial philosopher, is not a majoritarian subject, however, he is privileged on multiple fronts and his discussions of women and homosexuals in *Black Skins, White Masks*, for example, adheres to majoritarian ideology in regard to these other minoritarian subjects. As documented by intersectionality scholars such as Kimberlé Crenshaw (1991), Lisa Duggan (2002), and Jasbir Puar (2007), different subjects can simultaneously resist certain hegemonic ideologies while being complicit in others.

Taking up this adapted understanding of disidentification, I find myself, a minoritarian subject, disidentifying with disability studies, a minoritarian field of research, because although the field's resistance to the pathologization of non-normative bodies appeals to me as a nondisabled, fat, black, queer woman, the shortage of substantive race analysis within the field and the relatively minor attention given to issues of class and sexuality trouble me deeply and disallow me any direct Good Subject [11] identification. The whiteness of disability studies has already been noted by Chris Bell (2006) in his essay "Introducing White Disability Studies: A Modest Proposal." However, the ubiquitous citation of this essay as *the* reference for disability studies scholars attempting to acknowledge race in relation to disability simply underscores the need for more critical scholarship on race in the field at this time. [12] While this lack of a substantial amount of research on race and disability does not necessarily mean there are also no people of color within the field (because people of color do not necessarily do research on race), the racial diversity of the disability studies researcher population that I've witnessed is minimal. The continued conspicuous presence of my racialized body at disability studies conferences and events disconcerts me and makes me wary of being tokenized. These emotions further facilitate my disidentification with/in disability studies. Following Ferguson and Muñoz, because this collection of theories and practices do not seem originally intended for me, as a researcher I must take up and revise disability theories and scholarship while refusing to extend its legacy of whiteness and racism.

Despite the disjuncture I experience in the field as it currently exists, I still have a deeply personal, emotional affinity with disability studies scholar and activist communities. This affinity is what facilitates my coming to claim and identify *with* crip. Note here, that there are a few key differences between *disidentification* and *identifying with* as I am using them. Disidentification is primarily in respect to representations, ideologies, and theories which have important, useful aspects that the disidentifying subject takes up, uses, or revamps while leaving behind or being critical of other problematic or damaging elements. To identify *with*, as I will explain more below, is to personally and politically align oneself with a group one may or may not belong to, but with which one feels a positive connection. I discuss these concepts separately in order to distinguish my relationship to the field of disability studies from my relationship to the concept of crip, not to claim one form of identification is more positive or useful than the other. In fact, disidentification and identifying with have important areas of overlap and intersection.

Crip is a term many people within disability studies and activist communities use not only in reference to people with disabilities, but also to the intellectual and art culture arising from such communities. Crip is shorthand for the word "cripple" which has been (and is) used as an insult toward people with disabilities, but which has been re-appropriated as an intra-group term of empowerment and solidarity. Thus, crip "is a term which has much currency in disability activism and culture but still might seem harsh to those outside those communities" (Kafer, 2013, p. 15). An early proponent of crip's social and political potential, Carrie Sandahl (2003) describes crip as a "fluid and ever-changing" term which "expanded to include not only those with physical impairments but those with sensory or mental impairments as well" (p. 27). In a footnote to her use of the term, Sandahl recognizes the still-developing state of disability studies and writes: "If I had my druthers, I would replace the term *disability studies* with *crip theory* or *crip studies* to represent its radical edge" (p. 53; original emphasis).

Robert McRuer (2006), however, proposes that crip theory is not a one-to-one replacement for disability studies, but rather, crip theory has "a similar contestatory relationship to disability studies and identity that queer theory has to LGBT studies and identity, [although] crip theory does not—perhaps paradoxically—seek to dematerialize disability identity" (p. 35). This move away from the postmodern dematerialization of identity positions is a key connection between crip theory and queer of color critique by scholars such as Cathy Cohen (2005), Lawrence La Fountain-Stokes (2009), and others who have actively resisted such moves, insisting that to move entirely away from identity and identity politics is not a viable option for those who are multiply marginalized and who need such identity positions for survival and collective action. As Roderick Ferguson (2004) writes, queer of color critique rethinks categories, but does not discard them. Related to Ferguson's rethinking of categories, Alison Kafer (2013) argues that crip theory expands and enriches disability studies by departing from the social model's assumption that "disabled" and "nondisabled" are discrete, self-evident categories, choosing instead to explore the creation of such categories and the moments in which they "fail to hold" (p. 10).

Sandahl, McRuer and Kafer all emphasize the relationship of crip and queer. Sandahl (2003) insists that like queer, crip is not only a noun and adjective, but also a verb: to "crip" means to spin "mainstream representations or practices to reveal able-bodied assumptions and exclusionary effects […to] expose the arbitrary delineation between normal and defective and the negative social ramifications of attempts to homogenize humanity" (p. 37). Crip as verb can therefore be understood as a specific form of disidentification. Making further connections between crip and queer, Sandahl writes:

> As a pejorative, the term *queer* was originally targeted at gays and lesbians, yet its rearticulation as a term of pride is currently claimed by those who may not consider themselves homosexual, such as the transgendered, transsexuals, heterosexual sex radicals, and others. […Although] I have never heard a nondisabled person seriously claim to *be* crip (as heterosexuals have claimed to *be* queer), I would not be surprised by this practice. The fluidity of both terms makes it likely that their boundaries will dissolve (p. 27).

This specific aspect of the relationship between queer and crip, the possibility of these terms referring to or being claimed by people not previously referenced by them, is critical to the current direction of crip theory and to my own identification with the term. Kafer (2013) writes that crip, or crip affiliation, could include both "those who lack a 'proper' (read: medically acceptable, doctor-provided, and insurer-approved) diagnosis for their symptoms" and, more complexly, "people identifying with disability and lacking not only a diagnosis but any 'symptoms' of impairment" (p. 12-13). In a related vein, McRuer (2006) writes that although one must be "attuned to the dangers of appropriation," it is both theoretically and politically "important to raise issues about what it means, for the purposes of solidarity, to come out as something you are—at least in some ways—not" (p. 37).

I align myself with McRuer's "coming out crip" and Kafer's "crip affiliation" by claiming crip and declaring myself a *crip-identified*, fat, black, queer woman. Kafer writes:

> Claiming crip can be a way of acknowledging that we all have bodies and minds with shifting abilities, and that such shifts have political and social meanings and histories. It can be a way of imagining multiple futures, claiming crip as a desired and desirable location, regardless of one's own embodiment or mental/psychological processes… thinking through what nondisabled claims to crip might entail will require exploring whether such claims might be more available, more

> imaginable, to some people than others (and on what basis) (pp. 13).

I argue that my particular relationship to racial, gender, and sexuality systems of oppression and privilege is what makes claiming crip available to me. The ways in which my fat, black, queer, woman's body/mind/desire/behavior is constantly read and reacted to as non-normative, sometimes excessively so, makes me feel particularly akin to those who identify *as* disabled and/or crip, people whose bodies/minds/desires/behaviors are also outside the social norm. In this way, I argue that I am similarly situated in regard to many vectors of power as people with disabilities and that interrogation into the processes which have so situated us are needed in order to develop coalitional theory and political solidarity.

It is important to emphasize that I am calling myself crip-identified, meaning that I identify *with* not *as* crip, a distinction McRuer (2006) suggests in his work, but does not make sufficiently clear. I use identify with to mean having acknowledged and prioritized political and personal connections to a group with which one does not identify as a member. To identify with means to feel implicated by the culture and politics of another group and seek to better understand this link. While to identify with could be understood as analogous to being an ally, I contend that there is something more personal, sustained, and affective about it. Identifying with is a careful, conscious joining—a standing/sitting among rather than by or behind a group—which seeks to reduce separation while acknowledging differences in privileges and oppression. I connect identifying with to Cathy Cohen's (2005) call for a radical politics of shared resistance built on identities as they are impacted by and invested with different degrees of normative power. Identifying with is particularly important in the case of disability which, as many have noted, is the only identity category which one can join at any moment without intent. I use crip-identified as something different than disability ally because it is an almost-not-quite-yet identification. I am crip-identified not only because my body/mind/desire/behavior is non-normative in terms of race, gender, sexuality, and size, but also because of its precarious relationship to disability as this term is currently culturally understood.

I want to be clear that I am aware of my ability privileges and I know, as McRuer (2006) insists, that I cannot make such privileges "magically disappear" by simply refusing them because "the benefits that accrue to nondisabled people in that [ability/disability] system are bigger than any individual's seemingly voluntary refusal of them" (p. 36). With this recognition of privilege in mind, I contend that fatness represents an important form of embodiment which needs further engagement within the field of disability studies. Fatness is one of the primary avenues through which I identify with crip and therefore I want to discuss a few of the connections between fatness and disability here to further illustrate how I have come to claim crip.

The parallels and overlaps between disability and fatness are striking. Both fatness and disability are highly pathologized, viewed as medical and/or health issues located primarily in the failed body/mind/desire/behavior of the individual. Within disability studies this framework is referred to as the medical model. An aspect of the medical model which also applies to fatness is the representation of disability and fatness as medical/health problems which ought to be "fixed" or "cured" *even if* such "fixing" goes against the wishes of the person and/or does not improve overall health. As April Herndon (2011) notes, "there is very little compelling evidence that losing weight equals a step toward health or that losing weight is even really possible for the vast majority of folks" (p. 250). Additionally, even if weight loss is attainable, in order to achieve or maintain weight loss many people resort to dieting and disordered eating practices that can have negative long-term health effects (Lyons, 2009). In terms of disability, the medical [13] push for cochlear implants for Deaf/deaf people or limb-lengthening for little people as well as the general societal pressure for people with disabilities to perform as much able-ness as possible, even when the strain and fatigue of such effort causes health problems, all represent aspects of the medical/social obligation to be as close to the norm as possible at any cost.

There are also a number of other social conditions that connect fatness and disability. Both terms are highly contextual and socially constructed. Recognition as fat or disabled varies depending on where, when and with whom one is located. This understanding of fatness and disability falls under the social model of disability that locates problems not within bodies/minds/desires/behaviors, but in the social attitudes and the environment. Both disability and fatness are terms without consistent definitions, either in terms of social or medical understandings. This is illustrated by the open-ended wording of the Americans with Disabilities Act and the continually expansive way it has been legally applied to include categories such as drug and alcohol addiction (Herndon, 2011, pp. 248-49; Vade & Solovay, 2009, pp. 169-70). Similarly, notions of fatness include a wide range of bodies and body parts. Socially "'fat' can mark any woman, referencing body size in general, a jiggle of a thigh, or the slight swell of a tummy," while medical and professional definitions of and perspectives on fatness are also quite varied (Herndon, 2011, 258, 50). [14] For example, at my current weight I am "obese" according to the most common measurement, the body mass index (BMI); however, I am also "acceptable" according to my body fat percentage and "low risk" according to my waist to hip ratio. [15] According to these standards, I am somehow extremely, moderately, and mildly fat all at the same time.

These various medical, legal, and cultural perspectives all contribute to the social construction of disability and fatness. America is a particularly fatphobic place in which many people "believe that fat is unhealthy, immoral, and often downright disgusting" (Herndon, 2011, p. 250) and thus fat people are often subject to hateful verbal, emotional and physical abuse (Herndon, 2011; Prohaska & Gailey, 2009; Royce, 2009). People with disabilities also face attitudes of hatred and contempt, especially in the form of microaggressions: indirect, non-physical interactions which communicate hostility, negativity, and insult toward a marginalized individual. [16] People with disabilities additionally encounter attitudes of pity and infantalization. As Herndon (2011) notes, however, discourses of both "weight and disability seem perpetually freighted with issues of choice and frivolity" (pp. 249-250), notions which stem from what Joyce L. Huff (2009) calls our cultural "fiction of absolute corporeal control" (p. 176). In terms of environment, stairs, heavy doors, poor signage, inaccessible bathrooms, and other barriers prevent people with physical disabilities specifically from fully accessing certain spaces. In a related way, the design of airline seats, classroom desks, seatbelts, and more prevent fat people from fully accessing some spaces, at least not without discomfort or shame (Hetrick & Attig, 2009; Huff, 2009).

Finally, I find an important connection in the construction of fat and disabled sexualities. Both groups are constructed as nonsexual and undeserving or incapable of having satisfying sexual relationships (Asbill, 2009; Kaufman, Silverberg, & Odette 2003; Pyle & Loewy, 2009). Both groups also experience what Abby Wilkerson calls "erotic segregation" (as cited in Rainey, 2011, p. 3), which Sarah Smith Rainey explains occurs both socially and environmentally for people with disabilities because of institutions, nursing and group homes, inaccessible dating spaces like clubs, restaurants or bars, and the social taboo on disabled/nondisabled dating.

While there are fewer environmental barriers to fat sexuality, [17] social attitudes do associate fatness with unattractiveness and similarly assume that fat people will/should only have relationships with other fat people, if at all. This is exhibited by the 2009 FOX dating show *More to Love* in which plus-sized women vied for the heart of a plus-sized man as well as by the dating website bbpeoplemeet.com, a niche site for "Big and Beautiful" people owned by Match.com (Wymore, 2009). Additionally, sexual attraction to people with disabilities and/or fat people by a nondisabled or nonfat person is considered a non-normative desire or fetish, as exhibited by a variety of niche/fetish pornography videos and websites. [18] Despite the substantive web presence of these so-called fetishes, pornographic films with people with disabilities and films with fat people are not included as independent categories for the annual Adult Video News (AVN) Awards. Unlike other fetishes with separate categories such as "Best Transsexual Release," "Best MILF Release," or "Best Foot/Leg Fetish Release," fatness (referred to as "BBW," the abbreviation for Big, Beautiful Women) and disability (referred to only in the specific instance of "midgets") are only mentioned on the AVN Award Category Description website as examples of films which fall under the "Best Specialty Release, Other Genre" category along with "wrestling" and "stocking fetish" (Adult Video News). Clearly fatness and disability are not viewed, even by the super sex-positive AVN, as award-worthy sexual matters, and as Rainey (2011) so aptly puts it: "When a fetish is excluded from the menu at AVN, it is clearly depraved" (p. 41).

It is particularly through these many, varied connections between fatness and disability—medicalization, social construction, cultural attitudes, environmental barriers, and sexuality—that I have come to be crip-identified, however, I also identify with crip because of my own shifting levels of ability in terms of my sight due to early retinal degeneration and because of the impurity of the term disability generally. As the social constructionist argument of disability contends, this category is historically and culturally specific. As fat, black, queer woman, I cannot help but recall that homosexuality was a psychological disorder in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders until 1973, that runaway slaves were said to experience the mental disorder "drapetomania" which made them run, that free blacks were said to have higher rates of mental and cognitive disability than those still enslaved, and that women have and continue to consciously and unconsciously disable their bodies in order to adhere to beauty norms through practices such as corseting, cosmetic surgery, tanning, and extreme exercise and dieting (Herek, 2012; Jarman, 2012). Herndon (2011) writes that both fatness and disability:

> … remind us that bodies are subjected to changing sociocultural

> contexts as well as physiological changes…Many women have times in their lives when they gain weight and/or become disabled. Regardless of whether either is permanent or temporary, the existence of these possibilities removes bodies from solid ground and acknowledges once again that bodies are unstable (p. 258).

I know that my body/mind/desire/behavior (and the culture which interprets it) is not fixed. I am crip-identified because I am not afraid of this instability. I am not afraid of this instability because I am crip-identified. My identification with crip is neither simply personal nor purely academic. It is both of these things as well as highly political and it is this politics of claiming crip as a nondisabled, fat, black, queer woman that I believe has the most value for the future of disability studies.

My identification with crip is not a cure-all for the problems of race, class, and sexuality within the field of disability studies. It also certainly does not fix the problem of disability being left out of intersectional analyses in race and ethnic studies, queer and sexuality studies, and women's and gender studies. However, I believe being crip-identified is an enactment of solidarity which can be beneficial politically, socially, and academically for multiple minoritarian groups. I want disability studies scholars not only to consider how to bring disability to, for example, black studies or to bring blackness to disability studies, but also consider how we as disability studies scholars and activists might disidentify with people of color, women, queers, or gender non-conforming people. How can we identify *with* social categories we don't identify *as* and how can this benefit us all? What are the similar, but not same, aspects of the lived experiences of people of color and people with disabilities? We would do well to ask those who identify *as* both, but the burden of proof should not lie with them alone. Disability studies has a long history of borrowing from work in other fields and civil rights movements, but this borrowing tends to emphasize the difference or exceptionality of disability [19] rather than its similarities or overlap—the places where disidentification across/between/among minoritarian subjects could occur. This coalitional politics through minoritarian subjects disidentifying with other minoritarian subjects, representations, theories or practices need not, however, be for political or intellectual purposes alone. It can also be, like my coming to claim crip, deeply personal and affective.

For me, no space is more emblematic of the creative, affective possibilities of minoritarian disidentification and identifying with than the Society for Disability Studies dance. As Petra Kuppers (2011) contends, disability culture, and thus disability dance space, is more process than product. Therefore the things I describe here are examples of the work and values which go into creating disability dance space. Since my first SDS in 2008, I have returned each year ready to dance. I'd like to now return to these lived experiences and explore how Society for Disability dances have helped me claim crip. I earlier described the dances as having an ethos of community and love. This ethos that first drew me into SDS is established by a firm commitment to access and inclusion on the part of those who plan the conference and dance as well as individual members. Although many members are old-timers who return to the annual conference to re-connect with activist and scholar friends whom they may only see once or twice a year, everyone still dances with everyone else across (dis)ability, generational, and academic/activist divides, welcoming newcomers to the mix with encouraging smiles, shouts, signs, and applause. The SDS dance is a space of non-judgment, not only about people's individual dance styles and movements, but also individual's choices about how to engage. Although sometimes a group of friends may egg on a shyer companion, for the most part, people are free to dance, mill around, stay still, or take breaks on the side and outside of the room for food, drink, and general respite. For example, if a person who finds social situations taxing decides to abruptly walk out, they can do so without needing to make excuses or worry about raising eyebrows from others. There is no single way to participate. There are no "best" dancers who take up the entire floor doing all the "right" moves to Beyoncé's "Single Ladies" because at these dances there are no wrong moves. We're all right.

And this rightness extends beyond just moves. There is also no dress code at SDS dances. We wear what we want. I typically show up in a sleeveless dress and shoes I can kick off as soon as I step inside. Other people wear jeans, shorts, t-shirts, dress shirts, halter tops, whatever is comfortable for that person's body/mind/desire/behavior. I personally prefer cotton for the dance because I know that I'm going to sweat. At SDS, I work it out; I dip it low, shimmy, and shake. I dance with my friends, with Simi and David, Alice and Mallory, Bethany and Margaret, Akemi and Adam, and I feel amazing. I feel beautiful.

Such feelings are not typical for me when it comes to moving my body. I often feel fat shame in other spaces in which I want to dance, but don't, holding back or only dancing in the safe confines of a circle of friends. April Herndon (2011) writes: "I am a large *woman* and therefore have sinned not once but twice" (p. 245; original emphasis). As a crip-identified, fat, black, queer woman, my sins add up even further. My body/mind/desire/behavior is not supposed to fit anywhere, but at the SDS dance, I don't feel myself being rejected or exotified for being a (sometimes *the*) black woman out there dancing and I don't worry about someone homophobically scrutinizing my dances with women. [20] I see other people doing things my body cannot do—popping wheelies in chairs, dancing on one leg or two hands—and things I would never have thought to do with until I witnessed it on the SDS dance floor—tongue dancing, floor dancing, and dancing with closed eyes while sitting or standing in place. The SDS dance allows me crip-identification with bodies/minds/behaviors that are not mine, but which call to me nonetheless, not through any single race, gender, sexuality, or (dis)ability identification, but through the non-normativity of us all in those moments together. Crip-identification here is not about fitting in. My multiply marginalized positions make completely "fitting," in the sense that the majority of the people around me are "like" me, in any community nearly impossible and even undesirable since I believe more is lost than gained in such homogeneity. [21] Instead, crip-identification is about feeling connected and recognizing those connections as both affective and political.

I know that not all dance spaces are experienced this way by everyone, not even the SDS dance. For some, the crowds and/or loud music can result in overstimulation, so I acknowledge that my particular crip-identification tactic may not be effective for everyone, but a recent interaction helped me see an additional possibility for disidentification through dance. In a conversation at a different conference, my friend and fellow academic, Margaret Price, told me that even when she isn't out there dancing because she needs a break from the crowds, she still finds joy in watching me dance with such exuberance. [22] In those moments, my body/mind/desire/behavior becomes a site of cross-minoritarian disidentification for Margaret and thus, even from a distance, dance can be affective. While not a perfect space—universal accessibility is still an ideal more than a reality—the Society for Disability Studies annual conference dance is a site for disidentification across/among/between minoritarian groups and though I have not quite figured out yet how to have a giant worldwide non-normative dance party, I do believe there is something to be learned from the SDS dances.

To conclude, in honor of Chris Bell's creative top-ten-style list in his modest proposal, here are the top six crip lessons I've learned about coalitional theory and political solidarity at SDS dances (because ten would just be too normative):

6. *There's nothing like music to bring people together*. There are certain mainstays of the SDS dance that precede my time within the organization. Every year songs such as Sister Sledge's "We Are Family" and Chic's "Le Freak" pull more reticent dancers onto the floor because of the disability/crip community's ability to disidentify—very much here in Muñoz's sense of the term—with the lyrics of these songs and this tradition of locating ourselves in mainstream music not necessarily directly intended for us continues (Chic, 1978; Sledge, 1979). The final song for the 2011 SDS dance, Lady Gaga's "Born this Way," was a new one, but the easy disidentification the song permits brought a final joyous burst of energy to the room (Gaga, 2011). Although many in the crowd were not born with their disabilities, the song of non-normative pride nonetheless provided a communal connection and cause to dance.

5. *First know and love yourself*. I have learned from dances at SDS that self-knowledge, understanding and love are critical gateways to knowledge, understanding, and love of others. When we know ourselves deeply and complexly, we are better able to recognize parts of ourselves in others and create identifications *with* those individuals and groups. By coming to better know my body/mind/desire/behavior and understand the social systems which help produce my moments of shame in other public dance spaces, I am able to identify with my fellow dancers at SDS who refuse such shame in that space and help me to do the same, knowing and loving them better in the process.

4. *Don't assume what people can or cannot do*. SDS dances are proof that looks can be deceiving, that apparent physical impairment does not pre-determine the abilities of the body and that invisible impairment, physical or otherwise, can have just as much impact on a person's participation as those aspects which can be more easily identified. A good politics of solidarity does not assume limits or set expectations ahead of time, but only in the process of interactions.

3. *Communication is key*. We cannot do the beautiful dance of coalition if we do not communicate. Communication here is not simply through language (written, spoken, or signed), but also through signals, sounds, touches and looks. Smile when you want me to come close on the floor. Shout "make way!" when you're about to do spins on your crutches. Use your hands on my hips to help me know which way to move with you. When we pay attention to each other and understand that communication cannot be limited to a prescribed form, we can work (and

dance) together better.

2. *Stasis can be productive*. Sometimes we need to slow down, stop, and reflect. Sometimes our plans go awry and it is better to pause, communicate, and regroup than to keep moving and hoping it all somehow works out. I have learned the benefit of stopping to rest and observe for both my physical and mental wellbeing. If all I did at SDS was dance, if I did not allow myself moments of stasis, I would have never witnessed and learned from some of the amazing and beautiful moves of others in the room.

1. *We cannot know in advance what might arise from creatively bringing our differences together*. The top lesson I have learned at the Society for Disability Studies dances is that different bodies/minds/desires/behaviors can produce amazing results that could have only occurred because of and through those differences. Nowhere else have I seen a woman with one leg shimmy underneath another woman's wheelchair as she (the wheelchair user) held it half off the ground. Nowhere else have I seen a man on crutches dancing with both a woman *and* her assistance dog at once. It is only by the joining of our different bodies/minds/desires/behaviors that such dances are possible and I believe the same is true for coalitional theory and political solidarity. We can only know what our differences might create if we are willing to risk such proximity to one another.

My goal for these lessons is to help us think creatively about the future(s) of disability studies, its relationship to a wide array of non-normative bodies/minds/desires/behaviors and to related fields of study such as race and ethnicity, queer and sexuality, and women's and gender studies. I have argued that disidentification is possible among/across/between minoritarian subjects and that as a nondisabled, fat, black, queer woman, I can identify *with* (rather than *as*) crip as part of my personal, political, and affective connections to disability studies. I contend that my location among various vectors of power in our society positions me in a way that makes it particularly possible and useful to build political solidarity with disability rights communities and to develop coalitional theories in my academic work which are attentive to a variety of marginalized groups. While I recognize that there are limits to identity-based arguments, terms like crip and queer—especially queer as used by queers of color—offer us fluid concepts that work both with and against identity, pushing the boundaries of these categories and opening them (and us) up to one another.

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Endnotes

1. I use "nondisabled" rather than "able-bodied" not only because, as Sarah

Ann Rainey (following the lead of Nancy Mairs and Simi Linton) notes, "nondisabled" moves disability from margin to center, but also because "able-bodied" erases or ignores the experiences of those with non-physical disabilities (Rainey, 2011, p. 11).
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2. To be clear here, I mean disability studies as a field arising from the disability rights movement headed by people with disabilities to resist the medical model of disability and introduce the study of disability into the humanities and social sciences in ways not previously performed. Within this field, the majority of researchers are people with disabilities or people who have family or partner relationships with people with disabilities. I recognize that in areas like rehabilitation, medicine, special education, and speech and hearing therapy the majority of researchers and practitioners have been and often continue to be nondisabled.
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3. This is not to imply that only disability studies scholars should be doing this work of solidarity and coalition, but it is mainly to this group that I direct this particular article.
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4. I use body/mind/desire/behavior in order to imply these things are not distinct entities that can be understood or experienced separately. This is a critical intersectionality approach which refuses to consider my race, gender, sexuality, and (dis)ability identities as "separable analytics" (Puar, 2007, p. 212).
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5. Lesbian, Bisexual, Gay, Trans-, Queer and Questioning, Intersex, Asexual, and Ally
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6. I am forever grateful for the many things I gained by being a student of Dr. KMK and Dr. Lynch at Miami University. From them, I learned not only about disability studies, but also about being a teacher and an activist committed to social justice. This essay is dedicated to them.
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7. I use "(dis)ability" here to reference the overarching normative body system which includes ability and disability, since unlike terms such as gender, which references man, woman, genderqueer, transgender, and other gender identities, disability without the parenthetical adjustment merely references disability and impairment. Other scholars use "dis/ability," "disAbility," or "ability/disability" to reference this system.
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8. White guilt is a liberal idea that white people feel guilty about either their own privilege (past or present) or people of color's oppression (past or present) and often as a result feel as if there is nothing they can personally do about it. Several scholars critique the notion of white guilt. See for example, Margaret Price, "Cripping Revolution: A Crazed Essay," Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Society for Disability Studies (San Jose, CA: 2011).
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9. I use "ability" rather than "able-bodied" in order to not emphasize physical impairment over mental, cognitive, emotional, and behavioral impairments. For more, see note 1.
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10. These are the specific forms of discrimination Ferguson is concerned with, however, clearly I would add that we must be careful not to extend legacies of ableism in scholarship and theory as well. This argument is made specifically regarding the work of Judith Butler in Ellen Samuels, "Critical Divides: Judith Butler's Body Theory and the Question of Disability," *Feminist Disability Studies*, ed. Kim Q. Hall (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2012).
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11. Good Subject here refers back to Althusser's concept of interpellation. A Good Subject is one who properly responds to being hailed, who is easily interpellated.
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12. It's critical for me to acknowledge the work that has been done on race and disability. In addition to Chris Bell, other key scholars include Nirmala Erevelles, Michelle Jarman, Cynthia Wu, Mel Chen, Susan Burch, Ellen Samuels, Anna Morrow, Moya Bailey, and Terry Rowden. At this time the majority of this work is in the form of articles and anthology chapters. There are only five monographs which focus extensively on disability and race—and most are quite recent. These are: Susan Burch and Hannah Joyner, *Unspeakable: The Story of Junius Wilson* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007), Terry Rowden, *The Songs of Blind Folk: African American Musicians and the Cultures of Blindness, Corporealities Discourses of Disability* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2009), Nirmala Erevelles, *Disability and Difference in Global Contexts: Enabling a Transformative Body Politic* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), Cynthia Wu, *Chang and Eng Reconnected: The Original Siamese Twins in American Culture* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2012), Mel Y. Chen, *Animacies: Biopolitics, Racial Mattering, and Queer Affect*, Perverse Modernities (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2012).
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13. Note that in terms of cochlear implants in particular, the push is not only medical, but also socio-cultural, stemming from hearing parents of deaf children and even some segments of the Deaf community.

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14. For more critical investigation of scientific and medical approaches to fatness, see Michael Gard and Jan Wright, *The Obesity Epidemic: Science, Morality, and Ideology* (London; New York: Routledge, 2005), or Jan Wright and Valerie Harwood, *Biopolitics and the 'Obesity Epidemic': Governing Bodies*, Routledge Studies in Health and Social Welfare (New York: Routledge, 2009).
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15. The body mass index (BMI) is a body fat indicator which uses height and weight to calculate whether a person is under weight, normal, overweight, or obese. The BMI is known to be a poor indicator for adolescents, the elderly, and athletes. Body fat percentage is a more complex calculation developed by the Navy, which typically uses weight and the circumference of the waist, hips, wrists, and forearms to calculate what percentage of fat the body contains, but other methods such as underwater weighing are also used. Body fat percentage categories are essential fat, athletic, fit, acceptable, and obese. Hip to waist ratio is a simple calculation of the difference between the circumference of the hips and waist to determine fat distribution—where fat is carried on the body—to determine a low, moderate, or high risk fat distribution. BMI, body fat percentage, and hip to waist ratio calculators can all be found online. I determined mine using the Fitter: Fitness Calculator app for iPhone on December 8, 2011.
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16. This term comes from critical race theory, but has been used in relation to a variety of marginalized identities. For more see Derald Wing Sue, *Microaggressions and Marginality: Manifestation, Dynamics, and Impact* (Hoboken, N.J.: Wiley, 2010), and Derald Wing Sue, *Microaggressions in Everyday Life: Race, Gender, and Sexual Orientation* (Hoboken, N.J.: Wiley, 2010).
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17. Environmental barriers to fat sexuality might include lack of access to sexy/sexualized clothing and lingerie and bars/clubs with bouncers who adhere to a "no fat" policy for entry.
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18. Rainey cites the following disability fetish sites: devoteesdelights.com, amputee-devotee.com and gimpsgonewild.com (40). Fat fetish pornography can be found at sites such as bigfatcreampie.com as well as under the category "BBW" on many general adult websites such as youporn.com. For fat men, there is a less prominent, but still well-established "chubby" and "chubby-chaser" gay male culture. For more on this see Nathaniel C. Pyle and Michael I. Loewy, "Double Stigma: Fat Men and Their Male Admirers," *The Fat Studies Reader*, eds. Esther D. Rothblum and Sondra Solovay (New York: New York University Press, 2009).

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19. See, for example, Sharon L. Snyder and David T. Mitchell, *Cultural Locations of Disability* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006) 10-16.
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20. Note that just because I have not (yet) felt this, it does not mean that others have not or that I have not been seen in such negative ways by others who simply never made their feelings known to me. The relationship of people of color, queer people, and queer people of color to the Society for Disability Studies has been a continually fraught and working relationship that remains the subject of much conversation at the annual conferences.
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21. While I might gain some comfort for the moment, I would lose the possibility of coalition and solidarity with other groups in such a setting. Although we all need moments of feeling like we belong and indeed all communities should feel safe, I want to challenge us all to think about the difference between feeling safe in a space and feeling comfortable—how can discomfort or disagreement be productive within safe spaces?
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22. Personal conversation with Margaret Price at the National Women's Studies Association conference in Atlanta, GA. 12 Nov 2011.
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