
The Usual Suspects: Navigating Experiences of Debility, Disability Identification and Institutional Responses in the Era of the Pandemic

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Résumé

In this paper I focus on three different moments in my life to juxtapose the certitude of disability identification in liberal disability discourses in the U.S., with varying meanings of crip subjecthood, survival and belonging as they emerge in expressions of often less recognizable chronic health/disabled, race/caste and gender/sexual variance, which have been further heightened in the context of Covid 19. I simultaneously recall and resist these events to demonstrate the contrast between institutional requirements to render my body definitively legible (via the often-exclusionary rubrics of disability identification) and the chronic health conditions/related disabilities I have acquired before and during the pandemic. Alongside this dissonance, I discuss everyday expressions of crip time, kinship and community that work together via relational circuits of belonging, actively challenging colonial and structural articulations of static, institutionally comprehensible disability, and related accommodations. The storied body is but one performative site where these events spanning different moments and dynamic disability (Benness, 2019) come together. My intent in engaging my body through autoethnographic storytelling (Chawla & Atay, 2018), is to illustrate some of the ways that such an embodied gesture mobilizes the conjunctures and dissonances that emerge in liberal (and globalized) discourses of disability politics (Chaudhry, 2018), further enhanced by the "disabling paradoxes of Covid responses" (Goggin and Ellis, 2020), while enacting a hopeful and potentially transformative political imagination (Campbell, 2009) that nurtures modes of belonging through incertitude.

To this end, I rely on literature from Intersectional, Women Of Color, Feminist Autoethnography, and Critical Disability Studies (Erevelles 2014; Chaudhry 2018; Puar 2017; Brown 2013; Durham 2020) to unpack the relationship between bodily excess/transgression and disability identification, while also disrupting normative modes of knowledge production about health, well-being and disability in the contemporary.

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