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Disability and Women’s Writing

Disability studies has a long relationship with feminist theory and gender studies. Several texts in early disability studies, such as Michelle Fine and Adrienne Asch’s Women with Disabilities (1988) and Susan Wendell’s The Rejected Body (1996), emphasize the need to explore disability in women’s lives as well as the intersection between feminist and disability politics.1 As a result, feminist disability studies is a recognized and important area of study that can inform any reading of women’s literature. In her foundational essay, “Integrating Disability, Transforming Feminist Theory,” Rosemarie Garland-Thomson argues that disability studies and feminist theory can have a mutually beneficial relationship because both have something to learn from and contribute to the other. Garland-Thomson writes that integrating disability into feminist theory does not limit the focus to women with disabilities nor foreclose engagement with race, class, sexuality, or other vectors of power; rather, “[i]ntegrating disability clarifies how this aggregate of systems operates together, yet distinctly, to support an imaginary norm and structure the relations that grant power, privilege, and status to that norm.”2 Feminist disability theory, therefore, uses a universalizing, rather than minoritizing view of disability, understanding it as part of a broad system of privilege and oppression, based on notions of ability and disability, which interprets, defines, disciplines, and produces bodily and cognitive variation.

Feminist disability theory can also draw attention to ableism within women’s literature and feminist scholarship. For example, Alison Kafer notes that Marge Piercy’s feminist utopian novel Woman on the Edge of Time (1976) envisions a future in which disabled bodies do not exist. In fact, in order to imagine a world without oppression, Piercy does away with racial, class, sexuality, and ability differences altogether, suggesting an inability for society to contain difference without creating hierarchy and prejudice. Equality in the text is produced through sameness: similar light brown skin tones, no gendered labor, equal access to resources, and everyone is able-bodied. Kafer argues that the erasure of disability particularly is emblematic of a larger social bias. She writes, “In both the novel and the interpretation of the novel, it is assumed that disability has no place in feminist visions of the future, and that such an assumption is so natural, so given, that it does not merit public debate.”3 The common-sense nature of ableism in our culture, the belief that a disabled life is inherently a lesser life and that nondisabled people represent the ideal, often goes unnoticed and unquestioned. Feminist disability studies is, therefore, an essential counterpoint to the nondisabled privilege and ableism prevalent even in other social-justice-based fields like feminist and gender studies.

As a whole, feminist disability theory is an expansive critical lens for researching a variety of cultural domains, including literature. This approach not only helps us understand how ability/disability intersects and interacts with other social systems like gender, but also how such systems are mutually constitutive. Understanding the intersectional and mutually constitutive relationship between disability and gender is essential to reading representations of disability in women’s writing. From Aristotle’s assertion that females are merely mutilated males to Sigmund Freud’s theory of penis envy, women have long been constructed in Western thought as deformed and inferior versions of men, both physically and cognitively. Women have been represented as bound and limited by their lesser bodies and minds, particularly in regard to menstruation and pregnancy. These rhetorics of gender difference as inferiority are simultaneously rhetorics of disability, as they rely on the notion that bodily and cognitive differences can and should be valued and ranked. Such theories have long shaped cultural perceptions and treatment of women and have thus been the object of protest and criticism in generations of women’s writing. As a result, feminist disability theory provides a crucial lens for the interpretation of women’s literature from different time periods, cultures, and genres.

Representations of the Madwoman

Prior to the development of feminist disability studies, disability was already a common aspect of women’s writing. Often, disability appeared as a metaphor for other larger social issues and concerns, such as in Mary Shelley’s Frankenstein (1818), in which Dr. Frankenstein’s monster is often read as symbolizing the potential for failures in the human quest for scientific advancement, or in Emily Brontë’s Wuthering Heights (1847), in which various chronic and mental illnesses represent the interiority and morality of different characters in the novel.4 Within the first wave feminist movement, which sought to gain women the right to vote, and the second wave
feminist movement, which sought broader cultural changes for gender equality such as equal pay for equal work, reference to disability was often a vexed undertaking. In some instances, feminists sought to distance themselves from rhetorics of disability which were used against women to justify their oppression. For example, people opposed to the feminist movement argued that women are inherently mentally and physically weak – in other words, disabled in comparison to men – and that the activities of public life typically reserved for men, such as working outside the home, advanced education, and voting, would further strain if not break women’s delicate constitutions. Historian Douglas Baynton explains that early feminists’ responses to such arguments included explicit distancing from disability in one of three ways. They argued, “one, women were not disabled and therefore deserved the vote; two, women were being erroneously and slanderously classed with disabled people, with those who were legitimately denied suffrage; and three, women were not naturally or inherently disabled but were made disabled by inequality – suffrage would ameliorate or cure these disabilities.” The last argument, that women were disabled by patriarchal oppression, became a regular and prominent theme in women’s literary texts, especially in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

The representation in women’s literature of women disabled by sexist inequality and oppression often manifests through the figure of the “madwoman.” This figure appears in Virginia Woolf’s A Room of One’s Own (1929) through the imaginary tale of Shakespeare’s equally talented sister, Judith, who is driven to suicide by the limits society places upon her genius as a woman, and in Charlotte Brontë’s depiction of Bertha, the woman locked away in the attic by her husband, Rochester, in Jane Eyre (1847). Later twentieth-century feminist literary criticism, such as Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar’s The Madwoman in the Attic (1979), reclaimed representations of the madwoman as symbols of rebellion against patriarchal oppression rather than as victims disabled by it. In an article on this figure, Elizabeth J. Donaldson traces how the interpretation of the madwoman as rebel has become a ubiquitous reading in feminist criticism, often in conjunction with research which reveals the history of the pathologization of women in psychiatry and theories which suggest that madness is the only reasonable response for women to the strictures of a patriarchal society. Donaldson argues that though turning the madwoman into a metaphor seems to combat some of the stigma associated with psychiatric disability, it actually “indirectly diminishes the lived experience of many people disabled by mental illness.” Other disability studies scholars have similarly critiqued the tendency, especially within feminist theory, queer theory, and critical race theory, to represent and interpret disability as a metaphor for gender, sexuality, and racial oppression, rather than investigating the material and discursive relationship of disability and other systems of oppression or identities.

One well-known example of the figure of the madwoman in women’s literature is in Charlotte Perkins Gilman’s “The Yellow Wall-Paper” (1892). This highly anthologized short story, narrated by the “madwoman” herself through journal entries, depicts a woman’s mental deterioration over the course of several months as she is essentially confined in a room in a summer house, under the supervision and direction of her physician husband, to recover from her nervous condition. The narrator obsesses over the ugly patterned yellow wallpaper in her room, which she begins to believe moves and changes. Later, she is convinced that the wallpaper contains bars confining a woman who creeps about the room trying to escape. By the end of the text, the narrator represents herself as the woman who escaped from within the wallpaper. Throughout these changes, the narrator’s physician-husband patronizes her, treating her like a child and calling her “a blessed little goose” (32) and “little girl” (36). He remains convinced that she has a nervous ailment that will be cured with food, rest, fresh air, and little to no excitement or exertion. Scholars have interpreted this text as a feminist story that critiques various aspects of gender politics in the United States, including the confinement of women to the domestic sphere, the power of husbands over their wives, the pathologization of women’s bodies and minds, and the infantilization of women, all while asserting the power – if not necessity – of women’s creative expression. The madwoman narrator, therefore, has been read in numerous ways as symbolic of the psychological impact of patriarchal oppression on women as well as women’s resistance to patriarchal oppression. By bringing in disability studies, however, readers can ground these metaphoric interpretations in the lived experience of mental disability and in the historical and discursive relationship of womanhood and disability in the late nineteenth century.

Disability studies scholars David Mitchell and Sharon Snyder argue that “the storyteller’s strategy upends the controlling medical model of femininity’s excessive frailty and emotional instability” which was prevalent in the time Gilman was writing. What Mitchell and Snyder’s interpretation suggests is that the pathologization of femininity is part and parcel of the history of the medical model of disability, which defines bodily and cognitive differences as individual medical problems to be treated and cured by professionals and obscures the various ways that society influences how bodily and cognitive differences are interpreted, valued, and treated. This demonstrates how a disability studies perspective allows readers to interpret the story as not only a critique of sexism, but of ableism as well. The narrator’s insistence on her worsening condition, despite her doctor-
husband's assertions that she is getting well, encourages readers to question the narrator's treatment. For example, the husband states, "you really are better, dear, whether you can see it or not. I am a doctor, dear, and I know. You are gaining flesh and color, your appetite is better," but the narrator responds "I don't weigh a bit more ... nor as much; and my appetite may be better in the evening when you are here, but it is worse in the morning when you are away!" (36). This moment reveals how the dual role of physician and spouse gives the husband total control over his wife-patient. This control goes unquestioned by others, including, at least initially, the narrator herself, who early in the story states "If a physician of high standing, and one's own husband, assures friends and relatives that there is really nothing the matter with one but temporary nervous depression – a slight hysterical tendency – what is one to do?" (29). Here, it is further evident that the husband receives his authority and power over her not merely due to his gender and their marriage, but also due to his position as a respected doctor. Disability studies' challenge to the medical profession's control, expertise, and decision-making power over those deemed sick and disabled enhances a reading of the story's feminist critique of both husbands' control over wives and the influence of sexism on the medical and psychological treatment of women. Disability studies allows readers to go beyond a solely metaphoric interpretation of the text to also take into consideration the historical context and material elements of the story in regard to mental disability and women.

**Empowered Disabled Women Characters**

Thanks in part to the influence of the feminist and disability rights movements, contemporary women writers are creating more complex and empowered disabled women characters, characters who cannot as easily be interpreted as pure metaphors for oppression. In *Extraordinary Bodies: Figuring Physical Disability in American Culture and Literature* (1997), Rosemarie Garland-Thomson devotes the last chapter to representations of powerful disabled women in the work of Ann Petry, Audre Lorde, and Toni Morrison. Garland-Thomson writes that these authors "use the extraordinary body in the discourse of positive difference ... [as] a physical testimony to individual and collective experience." Changes in society stemming from the disability rights movement mean that people with disabilities are increasingly represented as complex, powerful characters rather than as simply villains or victims.

Octavia E. Butler, the first black woman science fiction writer, is another example of a woman writer who frequently represents empowered disabled women characters, but whose work has only recently been interpreted in conjunction with disability studies theories. Butler's books engage explicitly with issues of disability, race, gender, and class. One of the most notable aspects of Butler's work is her representation of complex power dynamics which make right and wrong less easy to distinguish. Butler's ability to engage disability in this often unique and complicated fashion comes in part from her position in the nonrealist genres of science fiction and fantasy.

While science fiction and fantasy literature is sometimes dismissed as juvenile or escapist, many texts in this genre have explicitly political content. In Butler's *Parable of the Sower* (1993) and *Parable of the Talents* (1998), the young black heroine, Lauren Olamina, lives with a nonrealist disability called hyperempathy. Hyperempathy causes Lauren to feel the pain and pleasure of people around her. Although, in the world of the novels, this disability has been deemed a psychological delusion, the bodily impact is nonetheless really felt by those born with the disease, colloquially referred to as "sharers." Lauren lives in a near-future California in which global warming, war, and economic depression have resulted in a dystopian setting where violence, poverty, and chaos have become the norm. In this particular time period, hyperempathy becomes a difficult and dangerous disability because of how often one witnesses pain. If Lauren was living in some utopian future where pain was rare and she could regularly share the pleasure of others, hyperempathy might be more manageable and desirable than it is in the texts. Instead, readers regularly encounter Lauren sharing the pain of others and attempting to survive when witnessing severe pain.

When she sees a person being shot, for instance, it makes her pass out from shared pain, leaving her vulnerable to being robbed, raped, or kidnapped in this dystopian society. In many ways, hyperempathy in the *Parable* books is a useful example of the social construction of disability – how time, place, location, and culture collectively determine the meaning of bodily and cognitive differences as well as how those differences are experienced.

The *Parable* series also presents a strong, black, disabled woman protagonist who creates a new belief system called Earthseed. Lauren develops the tenets of Earthseed, writes its verses, and establishes its first community of believers through preaching and relationship building. It is possible to interpret Lauren's disability as influencing her development of Earthseed. In *Parable of the Sower*, reflecting on recent violent events, Lauren writes,

If hyperempathy syndrome were a more common complaint, people couldn't do such things ... if everyone else could feel everyone else's pain, who would torture? Who would cause anyone unnecessary pain? I've never thought of my
problem as something that might do some good before, but the way things are, I think it would help. I wish I could give it to people. Failing that, I wish I could find other people who have it, and live among them. (115)

Lauren's desire to live among people with hyperempathy can be read as a yearning for a disability community or a community informed by politics and ethics arising from experiences of disability. We can then see how Lauren's disability and her desire for a disability community influences her development of Earthseed. One of the major emphases of Earthseed is change, as expressed in the first verse of Lauren's book Earthseed: The Books of the Living:

All that you touch
You Change.

All that you Change
Changes you.

The only lasting truth
Is Change.

God
Is Change. (3)

Embracing change is a primary aspect of the Earthseed communities that seek to create a new life for humanity in outer space. Earthseed also values adaptability, which is a central value of the contemporary disability rights community, as a component of embracing change. It is important to read Lauren's disability, as well as her gender, race, class, and education, as having an impact on this belief system and network of communities she helps build. In the end, Lauren is a complex heroine who makes hard decisions. She is not always likeable, but she is nonetheless humanized, powerful, and compelling—and her disability is a part of all this. In Butler's papers at the Huntington Library, early notes on Lauren's character reveal that one of her models was the Underground Railroad leader Harriet Tubman, whom Butler describes as a "black woman, illiterate, physically handicapped, who managed to do so incredibly much through her long life." These notes reveal not only Butler's knowledge of Tubman's often forgotten disability—a traumatic brain injury resulting in symptoms similar to narcolepsy—but also Butler's awareness of how attention to disability alongside race and gender is critical to comprehending the entirety of a person's life. Butler developed Lauren's character inspired by Tubman's legacy as a successful and empowered black disabled woman. Theri A. Pickens argues that "the stories [Butler] tells do not seek to neatly erase disability or difference writ large, but to live with it." It is important, therefore, to read the multiple differences represented in Butler's work together and not ignore the role of disability as an identity or lived experience. As people with disabilities continue to fight for equality, representation, and power in contemporary society, as more disabled people take on visible roles in the public sphere, it is likely we will continue to see more empowered disabled women characters in contemporary women's writing. As this discussion of Octavia E. Butler's Parable books demonstrates, this kind of work requires readers to think about the intersection of disability, gender, race, class, sexuality and other social systems in our contemporary world.

Disabled Women Writers

Finally, any exploration of women writing disability would be incomplete without a discussion of how disabled women themselves have written about disability, not only as life experience and identity, but also in relation to culture and politics. One of the primary locations for disabled women's representations of disability culture and politics is in disability life writing. Garland-Thomson argues that feminist standpoint theory is most effective when grounded in life writing; disabled women's life writing therefore provides another excellent location for bringing together feminist and disability studies literary criticism. Disabled women have been writing autobiographies and memoirs since well before the advent of the disability rights movement in the late twentieth century. In addition to the well-known life writing of Helen Keller, including her 1903 text Story of My Life and Midstream: My Later Life (1929), other disabled women also published memoirs and autobiographies, including Katharine Butler Hathaway's The Little Locksmith (1943), an autobiographical tale of love, art, faith, and independence for a physically disabled woman; Louise Baker's Out on a Limb (1946), a lighthearted memoir of life as a female amputee; and Frances Warfield's Cotton in My Ears (1948), a memoir of deafness that confronts stereotypes about women with disabilities. This history of disabled women's life writing demonstrates how disabled women writers have long crafted literary representations of their lives, many of which exhibit critical awareness of the intersection between disability and gender.

More recent disabled women's life writing, such as Nancy Mairs's Waist High in the World (1996) and Simi Linton's My Body Politic (2006), have increasingly represented disability not merely as an individual experience, but as a community, culture, and political movement.
Linton, for example, spends a portion of her memoir discussing the atmosphere and community at the Society for Disability Studies annual conference, including the now infamous dance that concludes the conference each year. She writes,

It is not only the local and immediate pleasure of these events that excited me, it is that on the dance floor at SDS something is happening that has never happened — at least publicly — before. Beyond being a significant social and political moment — a coming-out dance and celebration of our newfound liberties — it is also a cultural moment.... Our bodies in motion insist that the terms dance and dancer be redefined. Our bodies on stage challenge every assumption about the shame and displeasure that supposedly shadow disabled people’s lives. (152–53; emphasis in original)

Linton’s discussion of the SDS dance as a cultural moment that redefines our understanding of dance demonstrates how disability community and culture can create change beyond the confines of that community alone, but instead has significant meaning for society at large. This attention to the creation, role, and impact of disability community and culture is essential to disability studies and critical to any interpretation of contemporary writing by disabled women writers.

Nonfictional life writing is not, however, the totality of disabled women writers’ work. There are many contemporary disabled women poets, playwrights, and fiction writers, such as Laura Hershey, Jillian Wiese, and Susan Nussbaum, whose work warrants engagement from a feminist disability studies perspective. One prominent disabled woman writer is Anne Finger, who has published both life writing and fictional texts. Finger’s 2009 short story collection, Call Me Ahab, is an excellent example of how contemporary disabled women writers incorporate disability culture and politics into their work. Call Me Ahab reimagines the lives and experiences of various disabled people from history and literature, such as Captain Ahab of Moby Dick, Marxist philosopher Rosa Luxemburg, and Maria Barbola, the little person depicted in Diego Velázquez’s painting Las Meninas. Finger takes several approaches to representing these figures, including imagining them in more contemporary time periods, placing figures who could have never met in conversation with one another, and allowing on- and secondary literary characters to now narrate their own stories. Throughout the collection, Finger uses irony, juxtaposition, humor, and hyperbole to comment upon the role of ableism in the lives of disabled people, socially, interpersonally, and internally.

Call Me Ahab opens with the short story “Helen and Frida.” In this story, a young girl narrator, sitting on the couch in front of the television with a leg cast on, imagines a Hollywood movie featuring Helen Keller and Frida Kahlo, two famous disabled women who occupy very different spaces in the public imagination. The narrator asserts early on that “[i]t this isn’t going to be one of those movies where they put their words into our mouths,” citing older problematic films like Johnny Belinda (1948), Magnificent Obsession (1954), and A Patch of Blue (1965), but rather “in this movie the blind women have milky eyes that make the sighted uncomfortable. The deaf women drag metal against metal, oblivious to the jarring sound, make odd cries of delight at the sight of the ocean, squawk when we are angry.” Here the narrator uses the collective noun “we” to demonstrate her — and perhaps even the reader’s — alliance with disabled people. Her insistence upon a narrative created by and focused on disabled women as they are — not as able-bodied people wished they would be — permeates the entire story. One of the most prominent themes is sexuality for disabled women. Finger uses explicitly sexual language throughout, for example, describing a wound on Frida’s leg as “cunt-like” (5), but the intersection of disability and sexuality becomes most explicit when the narrator, describing Frida, insists “but she can’t be Disabled, she’s Sexual” (5). Here the girl narrator voices the social stereotype that disabled people are incapable of sexual interactions and this is particularly emphasized by the capitalization of “Disabled” and “Sexual,” making them proper noun identities that are, for the young narrator, incongruent.

As the story continues on, Frida and Helen discuss their love lives — Frida’s active and open with her husband Diego, Helen’s chaste and constricted by her mother. Soon the sexual tension between them becomes apparent as Frida “strokes gently” (7) as she signs into Helen’s hand “in its infinite, unpassive receptivity” (10). Again here, the language is sensual, building the sexual tension, eventually even drawing the reader into the mood through direct address. The narrator instructs readers to close their eyes and cover their ears to experience touch without distraction, as blind-deaf Helen Keller might have, stating that “you feel your body with the same distinctiveness as a lover’s touch makes you feel yourself. You fold into yourself, you know the rhythm of your breathing, the beating of your heart... Your cunt, in all its patient hunger” (12). Here the text interpolates the reader into its sensuality, specifically in respect to the female body, before culminating in a kiss between Helen and Frida. Though the text’s word choices have suggested such an interaction was imminent, the narrator herself states that she is “not ready for the way that Helen’s tongue probes into Frida’s mouth, the tongue that seems to be so much interested in giving pleasure as in finding an answer in the emptiness of her mouth” (12). The sexual nature of a probing tongue, combined with the desperation of trying to find an answer in an empty mouth, together prove too much for the young narrator’s own imagination. She
Shouts "cut" to her imagined film, but the scene continues on until the narrator, in the penultimate paragraph of the story, "will[s] the screen to snow, the sound to static" (13).

Back on the couch with her cast, the narrator wonders if she is a lesbian, not just for imagining this scene, but because she is "not like the women on television" nor like the mothers she knows, asking "and what else can there be?" (13). Here, the story succinctly critiques the damaging and limiting nature of the social construction of femininity and "proper" womanhood for the young narrator by revealing how this normative notion of gender is intertwined with compulsory heterosexuality and compulsory able-bodiedness. The story ends with a paragraph depicting how Helen and Frida’s images begin to merge on the screen, describing them as "the one who will be disabled and nothing more, the other who will be everything but" (13), returning readers, in the end, to the limits of the social construction of a disability identity which forecloses the possibility of sexuality.

Feminist disability studies theory aids in tracing the relationships of multiple social systems of oppression within a text – even when those social systems seem to be operating in contradictory ways. In her discussion of the wheelchair-using Barbie doll, Share-a-Smile Becky, Rosemarie Garland-Thomson notes that disabled women have been generally excluded from the confines of normative womanhood and yet, "[b]anishment from femininity can be both a liability and a benefit." Share-a-Smile Becky, Garland-Thomson argues, presents a feminist challenge to the strictures of femininity because she wears practical, comfortable shoes and clothing and is "one of the few [Barbie] dolls with flat feet and legs that bend at the knee" which "suggests that disabled girls might be liberated from those oppressive and debilitating scripts" of patriarchal society. Feminist disability studies allows readers to trace the normative systems of femininity and able-bodiedness and thereby consider how exclusion from one might result in freedom from another. By exploring this issue in regard to literary characters, the reader can explore the costs and benefits of such exclusion and freedom to individuals. The contradictory nature of systems of oppression appears in "Helen and Frida" in regard to disability, feminine appearance, sexuality identity, and sexual expression, mirroring Garland-Thomson's observations about Share-a-Smile Becky.

This reading of Finger's short story underscores the dual nature of Garland-Thomson's previously discussed theorization of feminist disability studies: that integrating disability studies transforms feminist theory and including feminist theory improves disability studies. Regarding Finger's work especially, focusing on disability without gender or gender with disability would do great disservice to the creative and critical ways in which "Helen and Frida" explores the mutually constitutive and contradictory nature of disability, sexuality, and womanhood. While a feminist reading of the text would be attuned to the story's critique of heterosexuality and femininity, especially as these two are linked in popular representations such as films, without a disability studies analysis, such a reading would miss the story's engagement with the desexualization of disabled people and how it particularly impacts disabled women. The story's critique of gendered expectations of sexuality and femininity, therefore, is one grounded in both feminist and disability politics.

Conclusion

There are many ways in which disability studies theory can enhance and nuance analysis of women's writing. Discourses of disability have been and continue to be used against women as a form of patriarchal oppression. This is apparent in the diminishment and dismissal of women's emotions through accusations of mental disability – that is, being called "hysterical" – and in the pathologization, hiding, and shaming of bodily functions associated with women, such as breastfeeding and menstruation. Disability remains, therefore, an integral aspect of women's writing both historically and contemporarily. Disability appears in women's literature as a metaphor for oppression and rebellion, as an aspect of characters' lives and identities, and as a culture and political movement. As a result, disability studies provides a necessary added perspective to feminist literary analysis which allows readers to be more aware and critical of the various ways disability is represented in women's literature. By utilizing the combined approach of feminist disability studies theory, literary scholars can be attuned to the ways in which a text engages with and represents ableism, the intersectional experience of disabled women, and the mutually constitutive nature of disability and gender as larger social systems that impact us all. Baynton argues that "[d]isability is everywhere in history, once you begin looking for it" and a similar statement might be made about disability in women's literature. Given the frequent engagement with issues of the body and oppression in women's writing, representations of disability – as metaphor, identity, experience, culture, and politics – are incredibly prevalent in this area of literature. One only needs to know how to look for them and how to analyze them. Disability studies provides the perspective and theories necessary to enhance feminist understandings of well-known and well-discussed women's literature and to expand the possibilities for interpreting newer and lesser-known texts as well.
NOTES


14. See Ria Cheyne’s chapter in this volume for further discussion of disability in genre fiction.


18. On disability life writing, see G. Thomas Couser’s chapter in this volume.


23. Adrienne Rich defines compulsory heterosexuality as the unquestioned societal assumption that heterosexuality is the sexual preference of all or most women, which does not take into account the various ways in which heterosexuality is imposed upon women within patriarchal oppression so that no other options appear valid or possible. See Adrienne Cecile Rich, “Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence (1980),” *Journal of*
Women's History, 3 (2003), pp. 11–38. Inspired by this concept, Robert McRuer defines compulsory able-bodiedness as the societal assumption that "able-bodied identities, able-bodied perspectives are preferable and what we all, collectively, are aiming for" while once again obscuring the ways in which disciplines of normality provide the appearance of choice without actually allowing for multiplicity or preference at all. Robert McRuer, Crip Theory: Cultural Signs of Queerness and Disability (New York: New York University Press, 2006), p. 9.