Crip Theory

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Summary

Over the past two decades, crip theory has evolved into a vibrant field of study for generating new forms of knowledge that scrutinize ableist assumptions of the social world and that strive to incorporate diffuse bodily experiences into otherwise restrictive cultural structures. In doing so, thinkers indebted to crip theory have developed original categories of epistemological consideration, often referred to as "cripistemologies." As a mode of critique, crip is situated as both a methodology *and* a sensibility; it is both a tool *and* an attitude. Three discernable qualities of crip theory as it relates to Communication Studies have tended to emerge in the literature: normative understandings of the body, the contingent materialization of crip practices, and the political character of crip. These touchstones provide a useful orientation for capturing the scope of crip theory in Communication Studies, including in the areas of media representation, public culture, and performance studies.

Keywords: crip theory, cripistemology, cripping, access, ableism, disability

Subjects: Gender (Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual and Transgender Studies)

Cripping Communication Studies

Josh Hepple is a gay man with cerebral palsy who lives in London and relies on Grindr to have sex. In an essay published in *The Guardian*, Hepple (2016) noted, "I use a wheelchair, I have jerky involuntary movements, I rely on assistants 24/7 and I have a speech impairment. At the same time I have a good sex life and really enjoy challenging men's conceptions of disability." When Hepple joined the popular hook-up app, he had never had a sexual encounter with a man. Within 18 months, he had met at least 60 men and found the experiences both rewarding and liberating. He reflected, "The health benefits have been enormous and there's no denying it's been a lot of fun. I don't forget how disabled I am and I often admire how open-minded these men are. It is a far cry from how I am often treated in public." Hepple subverts a number of ableist expectations in the space of a few words: Contrary to prudish conceptions of sexual activity, he situates his many sex partners as a health benefit; presuppositions of cruelty are not given prominence; the public ambivalence frequently directed at disabled people is replaced by the generative capacities of desire.

Melissa Blake is a writer, blogger, and activist with bylines in outlets that include CNN, *Cosmo*, and *Glamour*. She regularly takes to social media to discuss living with a disability and to unload about the malicious trappings of ableism. In a post to her 115,000 Twitter followers, she writes, "Fun fact: I literally never get asked why I'm not married yet, even though society loves to ask women that very question. It goes back to how society views disabled women. We're not seen as

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women or worthy romantic partners or even desirable. That's ableism and I hate it here" (Blake, 2021). Blake adopts a critical perspective that captures the extent to which disabled people are located outside normative social scripts (including the most notoriously unwelcome gestures) because of prejudices about who counts as desirable. Like Hepple, her response reflects the complicated interplay of public and private cultural performances. Both of the advocates' posts underscore how disabled people are cast as either asexual or aromantic, not as a matter of personal identification, but because of backward glancing stereotypes. Their observations also illustrate how social media provides access to sex and solidarity that would be more challenging in a world without these technologies. For all these reasons and more, Hepple and Blake's experiences exhibit the import and vitality of "crip theory."

In its most basic rendering, crip theory "critiques systems of compulsory ablebodiedness" and challenges the "ongoing consolidation of heterosexual, ablebodied hegemony" (McRuer, 2006, p. 19). The resistive potential suggested in this definition points to crip's origins as a reclaimed derogatory term ("cripple") by disabled people, just as "queer" once was for LGBT folk. In a widely cited passage, Clare (1999) describes the pair as "cousins" and argues that these lexical kin are "words to shock, words to infuse with pride and self-love, words to resist internalized hatred, words to help forge a politics" (p. 70). True to Clare's observation, activists and scholars have taken up crip as a broad critical heuristic for assessing the normative features of everyday life that inhibit disabled people from accessing material and symbolic resources. Over the past two decades, crip theory has evolved into a vibrant field of study for generating new forms of knowledge that scrutinize dominant assumptions of the social world and strive to incorporate diffuse bodily experiences into otherwise restrictive structures. In doing so, thinkers indebted to crip theory have developed original categories of epistemological consideration, often referred to as "cripistemologies," and modes of critique, such as "cripping." The uptake of this project has been both long-standing and ongoing. Despite the fact that activists and academics have been utilizing crip as an interpretive tool for years, the idea remains as much an emergent perspective as it does an essentially contested concept.

Crip, as with queer, invites definitional uncertainty. Although they are inseparable, "crip" and disability are not inherently synonymous. Just as "queer" and LGBTQ studies assume divergent political investments, crip is explicitly committed to dissecting the nonnormative mechanisms of everyday life to chart paths of resistance and novel ways of being. Crip is frequently taken up in tandem with "queer" positionalities but, in some contexts, simply acts as the nonnormative accompaniment to disability studies, which has long been preoccupied with White male subjectivities. Such definitional qualities certainly hold implications for how we imagine the scope of crip theory. Are studies of HIV or transness necessarily tied to crip theory because of their historical relationships to medicalization, surveillance, and biopolitical renderings of disability? Is crip best situated as a universalized positionality that embraces all forms of debility and bodily function or a minoritized standpoint experienced by a sliver of the population (Sedgwick, 1990)? Can a crip sensibility be assumed even when the term is nowhere to be found in a specific scholarly analysis or movement? These are ongoing inquiries that academics and activists will grapple with for years to come. For the purposes of this article, I sometimes invoke literature that never uses the word "crip" because I believe particular works reflect a critical interpretive practice that is captured well by the heuristic. That is, I situate crip as both a

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methodology *and* a sensibility; it is both a tool *and* an attitude. Further, I tend to adopt identity-first language in this entry (i.e., disabled people) rather than person-first language (i.e., people with disabilities) because the former is currently the preferred terminology among numerous disability communities and because such an emphasis better reflects the critical impulses of crip theory. This essay probes three discernable qualities of crip theory as it relates to communication studies: normative understandings of the body, the contingent materialization of crip practices, and the political character of these approaches. I do not believe these three touchstones are the only ways that queer and crip may be convivial, but they provide a useful map for capturing the scope of this entry, which then turns to studies of media representation, public communication, and performance studies.

Queer/Crip Starting Points

As interpretive lenses and modes of critique, both queer and crip suggest, and reside outside of, culturally sanctioned normativities. I use the term "normativities" to refer to the systems through which norms, normalization, and normative categories of being are naturalized and made to seem ideal. Normativities constitute and constrain processes of meaning-making and render certain cultural practices acceptable and morally endorsed, while others are conceived as taboo, impure, or unintelligible. Sex education, for example, is a frequently cited example of how the relay of a specific kind of knowledge and practice constitutes righteous behavior and model citizenship. The terms "queer" and "crip" denote the presence of a body or an identity that is not easily assimilable to prevailing notions of personhood. In their otherness, queer and crip are the constitutive outside of bodily normality, which could not be conceived without them. As Robert McRuer (2006) notes,

> Able-bodied identity and heterosexual identity are linked in their mutual impossibility and in their mutual incomprehensibility—they are incomprehensible in that each is an identity that is simultaneously the ground on which all identities supposedly rest and an impressive achievement that is always deferred and thus never really guaranteed. (p. 9)

In other words, both able-bodiedness and heterosexuality demand constant performative gestures to approximate the identities they represent, but always with a remainder because neither category is ontologically stable. Although LGBT people and disabled people are often regarded as "more embodied" than their normative counterparts, the intense focus given to them actually illustrates the illusory sleight of hand in materializing heterosexual and able-bodied identities.

These normativities become self-evident when we contemplate the ways that disabled people, as well as those who identify as queer, have been repeatedly abused by institutions such as the medical establishment. The cures and endless experimentation that have historically been thrusted on queers and crips elucidates the ways vulnerable populations have been consistently harmed by disciplinary medical directives. The "ableist conflation" of disability "with pain and suffering" or the long-held belief that being queer constitutes a "hard life" illustrates the

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injurious legacies of these apparatuses (Reynolds, 2017, p. 150). Of course, norms are complicated and malleable. Makkawy and Moreman (2019) remind us that "crip can acknowledge how disability is pathologized from a medical perspective, but crip still honors longings for cure—if desired" by disabled people (p. 402). The blurry line between structure and agency in such assertions highlights the convoluted nature of normativities and the necessity of nuanced crip critique.

Second, both queer and crip are necessarily contingent terms (Meade & Serlin, 2006, p. 3). Generations of scholars have taught us that what is regarded as queer in one context may not necessarily be recognized as queer in another. Likewise, what is understood as a crip is never fixed or static. As with queer, crip will vary across spheres and change depending on the circumstances of the situation. The social model of disability, for example, hints at the contingent nature of bodily practices. Whereas much of society might hold that disabilities are self-evident, the social model gives deep focus to the built environment that, often consciously, excludes disabled people. Purposeful architecture or design that is crafted with the multifarious nature of the body in mind highlights the provisional dynamics of the environment and, in doing so, resists reductive notions of disability. Activist groups such as ADAPT have been especially consequential in spotlighting the limits of ableist perspectives and the ways contexts can be fundamentally altered with attention to accessibility. In this way, crip is potentially tactical and not transparently ontological (Lindemann, 2008, pp. 99–100). The adoption of crip perspectives can help to alter the conditions of space, time, and experience.

Third, like queer, crip is a notably politicized term (McRuer & Wilkerson, 2003). Critiques giving emphasis to crip theory might tackle everything from the production of bathroom spaces to the affective nature of protest to the cultural production of desire. Sandahl (2003) recognized the expansive nature of crip by envisioning it "as a body politic circulating among disabled people out of interruptive meanings generated through their interactions within normative discourses" (in Makkawy & Moreman, 2019, p. 402). The end goal of such a politic might include the development of new cripistemologies that seek to redefine ways of knowing from the perspective of those living with disabilities. Although such sensibilities have long been a defining feature of life for many disabled people, the constitution of crip politics has continued to expand its reach. People with diabetes, for example, are a relatively recent political coalition thanks in part to social media platforms such as Twitter. Those living with the condition have cripped social media exchanges about who should wear continuous glucose monitors (only people with diabetes or those who want to surveil their sugars for other health purposes); they have documented conversations with skeptical health care providers about the destructive nature of capitalism; they have engaged in terse exchanges with administrators and politicians who set the price of insulin without community input. People with diabetes have also increasingly debated the plasticity of signifiers such as "disabled."

These touchstones for contemplating disability guide the remainder of this entry, which gives close attention to three areas of Communication Studies: media representations, political rhetoric, and performance studies.

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Media Representations of Disability

Representations of disabled people and representations of LGBTQ+ people are catnip for Hollywood's awards season. Over 60 actors have been nominated for Academy Awards for portraying people with disabilities and, of those, over two dozen have won. About the same number of heterosexual actors have been nominated for playing LGBTQ+ characters and, again, roughly the same number have received a trophy. Only three actors with disabilities—Troy Kotsur, Marlee Matlin, and Harold Russell—have ever taken a statue home. The conversation about identity and recognition becomes a bit more complicated for queer actors because several have won, but many were not "out" when they collected the prize, were merely rumored to be queer, or never went public with their sexuality. Statistics and confessionals aside, there is little denying that disabled and queer identities have been essential components of media history.

The relationship between disability and sexuality does not rest apart, especially when we consider their mutual constitution in media such as cinema or television. The visual markers that have tended to define both disabled people and LGBTQ+ people are essential elements of media narratives. Incorporating a crip sensibility might ask how these two features of identity are intertwined in both expected and often surprising ways. In his text *Crip Theory: Cultural Signs of Queerness and Disability*, McRuer (2006) probes how disabilities are depicted in relation to sexuality. In particular, he offers extended attention to the late 1990s romantic comedy *As Good As It Gets*, starring Jack Nicholson, Helen Hunt, and Greg Kinear. McRuer finds that able-bodied status is achieved "in direct proportion to increasing need for heterosexual love." Drawing off of Emily Martin's notion of the flexible body, McRuer argues that heteronormative epiphanies of love are repeatedly, and often necessarily, able-bodied ones. These epiphanic moments require straight characters to materialize as flexible, where wholeness can be performed through crisis and the stability of heterosexuality can be confirmed (p. 17). Nicholson's character Melvin is able to overcome his obsessive–compulsive disorder only through an explicit performance of heterosexual courtship—as his need for love increases, his disability fades away. Importantly, however, these struggles are not carried out on the heterosexual body but are invariably projected onto the bodies of visibly queer and disabled folk. McRuer notes that it is Kinear's queer character Simon who experiences the greatest amount of trauma and whose redemption ultimately benefits Melvin. Disability and queerness are markers of instability throughout the production, but heterosexuality's flexibility permits a reaffirmation of its prized normativity.

Barounis (2009) has complicated McRuer's arguments about the flexibility of queer/crip bodies by looking to texts that fortify notions of identity rather than position them as fluid. In her analysis of the films *Murderball* and *Brokeback Mountain*, Barounis focuses on the role of masculinity in the construction of queer/crip bodies, finding that each of them is not simply compatible with masculinity but "celebrated as the logical extension of masculinity's excess" (p. 55). Barounis situates masculinity as the "visual mechanism through which disability and homosexuality distance themselves from one another, each identity to some extent disciplining the other" (p. 55). She asserts,

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> In *Brokeback Mountain* and *Murderball*, systems of heterosexuality and able-bodiedness do not combine in order to produce a stigmatized disabled/queer subjectivity. Instead, these two films set up a world where the mainstreaming of homosexuality stigmatizes disability and where claiming an in-your-face crip subjectivity relies on successful heterosexual conquest. (p. 56)

In this way, bodies are not flexible so much as they are "resolute and resistant to change" (Barounis, 2009, p. 56). Even as identities are performatively crafted, they are often imagined as ontologically grounded in markers such as masculinity to perpetuate cultural assumptions about gender, disability, and sexuality.

The relationship between masculinity and disability has been the foundation of numerous Hollywood productions, which have tended to focus specifically on the redemption narratives of White heterosexual cisgender men. The trope of transcending disability via masculinist heterosexuality is persistent in films that include *Coming Home*, *Born on the Fourth of July*, *Breaking the Waves*, *Forrest Gump*, and *The Sessions*, among many others. Scholars such as Cherney and Lindemann dissect this oft-conceived association by scrutinizing the relationship between masculinity, sport, and disability in productions such as *Murderball* and *Friday Night Lights* (Lindemann & Cherney, 2008). They argue that texts such as *Murderball*, a film that details the everyday lives of people participating in a wheelchair rugby league, can counter ableist assumptions about the vitality of people with quadriplegia (p. 108). However, they also relay that such representations can reinforce ableist and masculinist ideals, thereby working against the political goals of disability activists in the United States. For instance, they observe that *Murderball* "frames quadriplegia with a utilitarian view of the body and a daredevil masculinity, both of which accept rather than reject the dominant cultural definition of disability" (p. 121). The film's hegemonic tendencies inhibit more nuanced and variable understandings of identity and the body that might better serve disabled people.

Cherney and Lindemann (2014) produced one of the clearest examples of queer/crip critique in their analysis of the television series *Friday Night Lights*. Coupling Sedgwick's (1985) notion of the triangulation of desire, wherein homoerotic desire and homosocial relationships are closeted via a normatively rendered love triangle, the authors explore how disability and queer longing are carefully mediated by both medicalized contexts and particularly scripted relationships. Giving attention to specific "erotic triangles" of desire on the program, Cherney and Lindemann contemplate how disability obscures homosocial desire among two of the characters after one of them becomes quadriplegic. They write, "media depictions of disability that obscure displays of homosociality sustain and integrate compulsory systems of able-bodiedness and heterosexuality. This reinforces the appropriateness, utility, and oppressive potential of ableist and heterosexist strategies of viewing" (p. 14). For all of the progressive critiques forwarded on *Friday Night Lights*, including those of class and race, representations of masculinity and disability invariably fall short of more refined critiques of ableism and heteronormativity.

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Communication Studies scholars have also probed the generative potential of media texts that explore the relationship among queerness and disability. King and West (2014), for instance, turn to the film *Lars and the Real Girl* to engage how productions might reimagine approaches to trauma. *Lars* situates mental health crises as best treated through community efforts that understand trauma in culturally incisive ways rather than as a condition to be individually treated or managed. The main character Lars, played by Ryan Gosling, is not stigmatized or marginalized but "is accepted on his terms as a valuable community member" by those who embrace his fantastical and precarious relationship to the world. They read the film as offering a "utopian invocation of acceptance, rather than tolerance, as a communal norm" that playfully reproduces and "undoes normative understandings of identity, community, and relationality" (p. 60). Likewise, in their analysis of the postapocalyptic film *Mad Max: Fury Road*, Fletcher and Primack (2017) contend that depictions of disability are conceptualized generatively as adaptive conditions of human life and "not as a debilitating, life-ending, or marginalizing experience" (p. 344). These positive conceptions of disability, they argue, challenge "normative notions of able-bodiedness" (p. 345).

Studies of representation that emphasize normative conceptions of the visual are themselves artifacts that invite and demand crip critique. In the text *Trans**, Halberstam (2018) offers one path forward for displacing the overemphasis on the visual as a corporeal marker of transness, especially in regard to reductive practices such as passing that dominate trans representation. Halberstam focuses on the notion of the haptic to think through embodiment in productive ways divorced from visuality. Halberstam's emphasis on the haptic seeks to disrupt cultural scripts emphasizing a naturalness or taken-for-granted understanding of the body. For Halberstam, the haptic both "names the way the mind grasps for meaning that elude it while still holding on to the partial knowledge available" (p. 90). Halberstam's innovative and productive approach sparks countless questions for those invested in crip critique: How might we contemplate widespread representations free of visuality? Does the haptic present its own limitations for disabled people? Although more work needs to be done to answer these thought-provoking possibilities, the haptic is among the most generative and original approaches we might have for thinking anew crip critiques invested in trans representation.

Politics, Public Culture, and Critiques of the Productive Body

Crip suggests an explicit political positionality that is dedicated, in part, to resisting the exclusionary dynamics of ableism and expanding opportunities for access in a world not made for disabled people. According to Sandahl (2003), queer/crip standpoints "refuse to minimize their differences by passing as either straight or able-bodied. Instead, they appropriate and rearticulate labels that the mainstream once used to silence or humiliate them and that the liberal factions of their subcultures would like to suppress" (p. 36). She observes that people who identify as both queer and crip must embrace a radical relationship to normality, as they have probably encountered variable forms of oppression. For example, queers and crips have likely experienced ableism and homophobia not only from strangers in the polity but also within queer or disabled communities. As a political sensibility, crip must necessarily be malleable because it

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has to be utilized in variable situations and among different audiences. This plasticity can be felt in various crip critiques, which scrutinize everything from structural barriers to care to the suffocating allure of the "productive individual" prized in capitalistic cultures.

In Communication Studies, crip frequently acts as a movement signifier that enables novel identifications, meanings, and actions. Writing about this particular uptake of the term, Kuppers (2007) contends that naming "oneself part of a larger group, a social movement, or a subject position in modernity can help to focus energy, and to understand that solidarity can be found–precariously, in improvisation, and always on the verge of collapse" (p. 90). This melds well with McRuer and Wilkerson's (2003) argument that a "queercrip consciousness resists containment and imagines other, more inventive, expansive, and just communities" (p. 7). This was exactly what West (2010) found in his study of the coalitional politics practiced by the campus organization PISSAR, a queer/crip collective that advocated for safer and more accessible bathrooms. PISSAR's members found common cause in making a series of symbolic and material interventions in this banal site of cultural anxiety and, in doing so, imparted agency to those not typically imagined when restrooms are constructed. PISSAR's success stemmed, in part, from their carefully cultivated activist practices that allowed them to reduce the threat of violence or harassment while also advocating for queer/crip justice.

Disabled people have often had to develop their own norms of protest because typical renderings of activism regularly exclude them. As Vanessa Beasley has surmised, disabled people are often marginalized from common activist practices such as marching. Beasley (2020) suggests that people with visible disabilities are "subject to a double-bind: when they are seen (and thereby repudiate the historic norms of invisibility), they may not be viewed as having political agency" (p. 171). Given these historically oppressive forces, disabled people have pursued alternative venues for making their voices heard. Parsloe and Holton (2018) have examined the cyberactivist tactics of disabled people who sought to counter biomedical discourses employed by organizations such as Autism Speaks. Turning their attention to the #boycottautismspeaks hashtag on social media, they found that participants were able to forward a powerful "counternarrative of neurodiversity" by cultivating ingroup identification and creating bridges to outside communities (p. 1122). Mann (2018) has likewise explored the expanded possibilities for social movement communication in Twitter campaigns such as #CripTheVote. New forms of digital expression, he argues, can "uniquely address the concerns of disabled populations and challenge the compulsory able-bodiedness of movement necessitating embodiment" (p. 604). Even when the language of crip is not explicitly tied to notions of queerness, the influence of such theories is readily transparent with references to the normative pitfalls of "compulsory able-bodiedness" that Mann highlights.

The momentary points of identification initiated by movement politics can forge larger points of resistance against ideological frameworks, such as neoliberalism, that rarely work in the service of disabled people. Neoliberal economic models, which extol policies stressing privatization, deregulation, and austerity, generally function to harm both queers and people with disabilities. Neoliberal measures have repeatedly siphoned resources that would help to facilitate a better world for such folk by resituating public goods in the private sphere and enhancing the fictive role of "personal responsibility" onto individual bodies. This pilfering includes not only access to

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health care but also institutional endeavors that would expand education, housing, transportation, and environmental protections. In short, cultural "notions of privacy and economic relations of privatization . . . work together to facilitate heteronormativity" (McRuer & Wilkerson, 2003, p. 9). Far from an innocuous discourse, neoliberalism constructs reductively disempowering visions of disability and queerness "when it fails to accommodate those who fall outside the conception of able-bodiedness and heterosexuality" (D'Souza & Rauchberg, 2020, p. 184).

Relatedly, scholars such as Puar (2017) have engaged the relationship among geopolitical disparities and neoliberalism in the service of producing bodies that are disabled, sometimes through labor exploitation and at other times through state violence (p. 65). Access to health care and home services are among such concerns because these benefits may well become "the defining factor" in one's relationship to the prospects of a livable future (Puar, 2017, p. xvi). Here the creation and perpetuation of disability is a biopolitical end unto itself, "moving neither toward life nor death as the aim" (Puar, 2017, p. xviii). To claim disability justice, then, "is not to call for one's rights within existing social relations but to envision and demand a profoundly different set of social relations" (Crosby & Jakobsen, 2020, p. 78). De La Garza (2019) takes up Puar's notion of debility to eulogize Roxsana Hernández, a stateless transgender person living with HIV who died in the custody of U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE). The agency denied Hernández access to medical care and incarcerated her in one of their notoriously freezing holding cells, which are generally overcrowded and where people are denied adequate food and water. ICE officials cited "complications due to HIV" as the cause of Hernández's death, but De La Garza points out that her suffering actually stemmed from "systemic poverty, endemic violence, and institutional neglect" (p. 96).

In this vein, scholarship that forwards crip-inspired frameworks have focused on the production of disabled subjectivities in numerous public cultures. These works are often extensions of the critiques of neoliberalism mentioned above, and they scrutinize how disabled positionalities are effects of discourses that emanate from varied institutional and vernacular spheres (D'Souza & Rauchberg, 2020). For example, "super crip" narratives generally depict disabled folks as transcendent figures who "overcome" their disabilities through discipline, hard work, and individual triumph. Such tales frequently occlude criticisms of systematic exclusion or structural barriers to care by focusing on the fortunes of a single person who does not (and cannot) capture the varied ways disabilities might affect different people. Super crips are sometimes labeled "inspiration porn" because these depictions center the feelings and ideologies of audiences unfamiliar, or willfully ignorant, of the lives of disabled people.

Media industries, war, and the American judicial process have all garnered attention from Communication Studies scholars for the ways they facilitate the production of disability and its normative accompaniments. Kirkpatrick (2012), for instance, uses McRuer's notion of "compulsory able-bodiedness" to explore how technologies such as radio produced "differently abled bodies with differing degrees of citizenship for different applications and techniques of governance" (p. 167). Policy creation, he argued, can function as a "normalizing discourse that works to medicalize and regulate populations" (p. 168). These normative tendencies are also given attention by Gilbert (2014), who contends that a consequence of modern warfare is that the

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"wounded soldier body is a new norm of the body politic" (p. 146). Just as injured veterans often act as a stand-in for a wounded or conflicted polity in Hollywood, the figure of the disabled veteran is repeatedly manipulated by the state for the imagistic purposes of nationalism and patriotism. In this way, disabled people are carefully mediated by state actors for political purposes. During Sonia Sotomayor's judicial confirmation process, for example, the Obama administration forwarded her diabetes management to highlight what a deliberate and contemplative justice she would be on the bench. Bennett (2018) argued that this was no accident. Sotomayor was assailed constantly with racist and sexist accusations, including that she was temperamental and emotional, qualities that would have disallowed her from serving on the high court. The White House's decision to use her disability to discursively "contain" her race and gender illustrated the plasticity of intersectional politics and the dubious ways disabled subjectivities are articulated to cultural markers for political gain.

Performance, Narrative, Embodiment

Performance studies has been essential to the development of crip theory in Communication Studies. The persistent focus on queer/crip critique is not surprising when we consider how such lives are organized around the fields of visuality, embodiment, and relationality. Sandahl (2003) writes that queering and cripping are both "theatrical and everyday practices deployed to challenge oppressive norms, build community, and maintain the practitioners' self-worth" (p. 38). The extended attention paid to concepts such as narration and voice is given vitality in such works, which often confront the detractive normativities of daily life and offer affective experiences for altering audience expectations of disability and queerness. Henderson and Ostrander (2008) extend this line of thinking by contending that disability studies is always already performance studies and performance studies a form of disability studies. In their words:

> Performance studies, in its practices of oral interpretation of literature in the 20th century, has always been open to varieties of embodiment, psychology, and cognition, and prized a kind of egalitarian willingness to admit those individuals whose body conditions may not have matched in mimetic fashion with those of the texts they chose to perform. (p. 2)

Such an approach permits the investigation of previously "unexamined discourse and acts of difference" that might get lost, overlooked, or purposefully excluded in day-to-day exchanges (Henderson & Ostrander, 2008, p. 3). In doing so, such works strive to explore fissures and instabilities in the social fabric in order to foster resistance and possibility.

Performance scholars who have embraced crip interpretive practices to investigate the discursive parameters of disabilities often evince a conviviality with queer reading strategies. As a mode of scholarly engagement, performance studies can disrupt, disturb, and question the quotidian features of culture that give rise to particularly normative expressions of the body or disability. Kuppers (2008), for example, has used crip readings to consider how mental health acts as a metaphor that can "influence representational and performance practice" (p. 192). Turning to

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Mark Haddon's *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Nighttime*, she probes the main character's "strange" voice, which she finds compelling in its otherness and deep familiarity (Kuppers, 2008, p. 193). Despite the otherwise queer narration structuring the show, she concludes that *Incident* is successful in part because of its startling simplicity (p. 193). Autism is "domesticated" in the production and can be made intelligible by nondisabled audiences in ways that are straightforward and without the communicative differences that often organize the lived experiences of people who actually live with autism.

Performance studies scholarship has also played a pivotal role in giving presence to the experiences of disabled people and thereby expanding the possibilities of thinking embodiment anew. Whereas a text such as *Curious Incident* was written by a nondisabled author and utilizes autism as a means of reaching nondisabled audiences, scholars in performance studies have spotlighted disabled performers and artists. Kuppers (2007), for example, has turned to the poems of Jim Ferris and Stephen Kuusisto to explore how "disability culture emerges as an impossible horizon of desire, and as the ground for contemporary performances of criticism and writing" (p. 89). In such work, she ponders the ways "literary lyrical disability culture poetry can perform the binding of community and the singularity of experience, sharing and isolation, stepping in and out of meaning" (Kuppers, 2007, p. 90). Scott (2012) likewise explores how a performer's atypical body "allowed them to narrate from a position of 'hyperembodiment,' illuminating the implications of mortal embodiment that those unmarked by difference potentially ignore" (p. 100). The attention given to atypical embodiment, she argued, allowed disabled people "to narrate from a place of hyperawareness of the body's role in the creation of personal and shared reality" when drawing on the past or imagining the future (p. 101). Ultimately, she finds that these understandings of embodiment hold implications not only for those with disabilities but also those with normative bodily privileges. Scott argues that some people are given permission to forget that we become who we are in relation to other bodies and encounters with difference. Such is not the case for queers, crips, and those who occupy the margins and whose identities are always already positioned as a digression from the norm.

The field of performance studies indicates not just the space of theatrical productions but also the everyday practices that bring identities into being. Lindemann (2008) suggests that most of the scholarly focus on disability in performance has turned to explicitly theatrical undertakings rather than the interchanges of everyday life (p. 101). In particular, Lindemann probes how members of a wheelchair rugby league engage in practices of "sandbagging," wherein men perform an enhanced version of their disabled selves, in order to receive more favorable classifications from physical therapists. He notes, "It behooves teams to get their players classified as more immobile than the players might actually be, as a team will then be able to use a greater number of mobile players—and, presumably, more skilled players—on the court at one time" (Lindemann, 2008, p. 99). As a result, he finds that these performances have potentially broad-ranging consequences for players and their teams. They both resist the medicalized gaze but also "foster a form of surveillance that imitates the ableist gaze and reifies traditional notions of ability" (Lindemann, 2008, p. 98).

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Conclusion

Crip theory is an ever-expanding body of work, and its horizons of possibility are limitless. So long as there are normativities that forcibly marginalize disabled people and those who identify as LGBTQ, we will require activism, research, and creative forms of critique that challenge exclusionary cultural norms. Communication scholarship, in particular, is well positioned to engage the many ways that crip theory might be articulated to a range of identities, practices, and bodies. Recent works on neurodiversity, the environment, mobility, mental health, and chronic conditions all hold the potential to expand and further complicate the meanings associated with disability, health, disease, and illness. Indeed, even the signifier "disability" is being slowly taken up by communities that have traditionally not identified as such. Younger people with diabetes, for example, are increasingly adopting the label when describing their experiences with the condition in ways that older folk may not. Crip still occupies a "minoritizing" position among people living with a range of disabilities, but the concept has the potential to evolve into an umbrella term that critically assesses various aspects of the social world (Sedgwick, 1990).

Studies that take up the mantle of crip would benefit from further engagement with theories of intersectionality that give attention to a broad range of identities and identifications. There remains a dearth of scholarship in Communication Studies that surveys the complicated relationships among race, class, age, nationality, disability, sexual orientation, gender, and gender identity, among others. Cognate fields in the humanities such as queer theory, English, and gender studies have more robustly engaged these fruitful intersections. This is not to adopt a paranoid approach that finds only absence and insufficient representation but to note that the field is well positioned to think about the reparative possibilities of crip and its expansive potential in the public sphere (Sedgwick, 2003). The emergence of a critical heuristic such as neuroqueer, for example, points to the exciting theoretical, political, and cultural possibilities that await Communication Studies. Although neuroqueer has no single definition, it forwards crip critiques by resisting cure narratives, challenging expectations of conformity, and extolling "queerness and neurodiversity as human variations not to be devalued" (Oswald et al., 2021). Despite this promising work, studies utilizing crip theory in the field tend to be centered in the United States and often focus on White people.

On that note, crip theory might be more robustly taken up in different parts of the discipline. Work on crip theory has tended to rest in rhetoric, media, and performance studies. What might it look like to take up crip sensibilities in organizational communication? In interpersonal or small group? I do not intend to single out any one area of the field, only to note that these specialties would enliven the idea of crip in novel and creative ways. Makkawy and Moreman's (2019) study of crip theory in *Communication Education* provides an excellent model for further investigating the concept's potential influence on the discipline. They focus on three widely employed communication theories and then reread them through "a crip inflection that converts impairment to debility and, therefore, changes incapacity to capacity" (p. 401). In doing so, they illustrate the ableism that undergirds many of our field's most foundational concepts and also chart compelling ways for moving forward. As a discipline, Communication Studies has brought

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much to crip theory's intellectual corpus, but much work remains to realize the concept's full potential, especially when thinking through the dynamics of keywords such as ableism and disability.

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Queer Healthcare Communication

Queer Worldmaking

HIV/AIDS: The Queer Communication of HIV in the LGBTQ Community

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