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Crippling and queering gender-based violence prevention: bridging disability justice, queer joy, and consent education

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ABSTRACT

Although frequently relegated to the periphery in conversations about gender-based violence prevention, the disabling impacts of traumatised subjectivity both affect survivors' abilities to fully participate in sex and contribute to survivors being more than twice as likely to be sexually (re)victimised compared to peers without trauma histories. In this paper, we seek to crip and queer approaches to gender-based violence prevention, particularly consent education, by learning from 2SLGBTQ+ and disabled trauma survivors' affective experiences of queer, crip sexual joy and the radically messy ways in which they establish their own care networks for deeply pleasurable sex through the principles of disability justice. Refusing pathologising understandings of survivors as those who need to be cured, we highlight traumatised subjectivity as emblematic of the ambiguity and ambivalence inherent in sex as well as the possibilities for caring, consensual sex that moves beyond the concept of consent employed in colonial, neoliberal capitalist societies' binary (Yes/No) consent laws. Drawing on the work of crip and queer theorists such as Mia Mingus, Alison Kafer, Leah Piepzna-Samarasinha, and J. Logan Smilges, we reveal how disability justice principles, such as interdependence, collective access, and access intimacy, offer transformative understandings for anti-violence efforts.

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Introduction

Despite effort towards incorporating the notion of intersectionality (Collins and Bilge 2020) into anti-gender-based violence efforts, disability continues to be marginalised, even within conversations considering the ways in which people are multiply targeted by systems of oppression. This looks like, for example, sexuality and gender-based violence prevention education that ignores Mad, autistic, and young adults labelled/with intellectual and developmental disabilities, and their experiences in relation to sex and harm (Campbell, Löfgren-Mårtenson, and Martino 2020). Further marginalised

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in conversations about disability and gender-based violence is how Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder or being traumatised can also be a disability (Morrison and Casper 2012). Traumatized subjectivity impacts survivors' ability to fully participate in sex (Mark and Vowels 2020; Oosterhoff et al. 2023) and contributes to survivors being more than twice as likely to be sexually (re)victimised compared to peers without trauma histories due to the psychosocial impacts of trauma (e.g. dissociation, hypersexuality) (Statistics Canada 2017; Wright 2022; 2024). These struggles are compounded for survivors who are Two-Spirit, Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans, Queer, and other sexual and gender minorities (2SLGBTQ+), Black, Indigenous, and people of colour (BIPOC), and/or disabled, as members of these groups face disproportionately higher rates of violence compared to cisgender, heterosexual, white, non-disabled people (Shakespeare 2014; Wright et al. 2023a). In this paper we seek to crip and queer approaches to gender-based violence prevention, particularly education, by learning from the affective experiences of a diverse group of 2SLGBTQ+ and disabled survivors of trauma and the radically messy ways they establish their own care networks through the principles of Disability Justice (Berne et al. 2018; Wilkerson 2002). We crip and queer gender-based violence prevention education using insights from queer and trans youth survivors' perspectives on consent and joyful queercrip sex.

In their provocation for Critical Trauma Studies and Critical Disability Studies to explore the crossover between these fields, Morrison and Casper (2012) assert that 'a fruitful engagement should start with the meanings of trauma and disability in their embodiment' (1). We bridge these fields to promote sexual health and reduce gender-based violence by turning to affect as a generative conceptual framework 'for grasping transformations, potentialities and 'unpredictable connections between bodies'' (Pedwell and Whitehead 2012, 116). We draw specifically on the affective experiences of queer, crip sexual joy as ones that create possibilities for meaningful social connection and political solidarity. Queer sexual joy is used as an analytic device to consider how survivors' experiences of collaborating to find safety and pleasure offer a transformative framework for gender-based violence prevention which disrupts the white, cisheteropatriarchal, non-disabled status quo (Wright, Falek, and Greenberg 2024; Wright and Falek 2024). Tristano (2022) writes that 'queer of colour joy is vital for creating better and more sustainable worlds [as] a joyous state allows us to...use desire to propel us through the social worlds where we refuse colonial futures and expand decolonial options' (279). The queer joy we are interested in refuses to collude with the oppressive status quo and supports the envisioning of more sustainable, just futures (Lorde 1981). Black queer writer and poet, Cole Arthur Riley explains 'There is a joy that is defiant... A way to say, we will not be captive to despair nor abandon our belief in beauty. Joy with teeth' (Riley 2023). Examining queer joy both signals that suffering and trauma do not overdetermine queer and trans people's lives and refuses the 'joy deficit' present in much research on and with 2SLGBTQ+ communities (Shuster and Westbrook 2022).

This refusal to reproduce the status quo recognises the continued existence of colonial discourses of psychiatry that continue to individualise and pathologise sexual trauma while obfuscating survivors' resistance and thriving. As such, the tools to address any challenges the survivors of gender-based violence have during sex tend to neglect the influence of sociopolitical context. Importantly, sexual consent

education, the most relied upon form of gender-based violence prevention education, reifies a hyper-individualised concept of consent wherein sexual negotiation is seen as an apolitical contractual, transactional process of binary ‘Yes’ and ‘No’ saying by atomised actors (Beres 2021; Wright 2022; 2024; Wright and Falek 2024). Refusing pathologised understandings of trauma survivors as in need of cure, we seek to highlight traumatised subjectivity as emblematic of the messiness and ambivalence inherent to sex and the possibilities for caring, consensual sex that moves beyond the concept of consent employed in colonial, neoliberal capitalist societies’ binary (Yes/No) consent laws (Butler 2011; Wright 2022).

Historically, tensions have existed in Critical Disability Studies around the inclusion of trauma as a form of disability, as the field’s commitment to celebrating disability as empowering does not align with the negativity attached to trauma and chronic illness (Kafer 2016). However, it is now more widely accepted that trauma survivors not only require accessibility accommodations and are disabled, but also possess crip wisdom and skills for imagining and creating less traumatic, oppressive worlds (Kafai 2021; Piepzna-Samarasinha 2018). In this paper, we turn to those who are disproportionately impacted by gender-based violence – in the form of a diverse group of 2SLGBTQ+ survivors – to examine their anti-hegemonic practices of queer, crip sexual joy and how they navigate their ‘sexual access needs’, or the needs they have in order to access non-harmful, mutually pleasurable sex. We demonstrate how forms of relationality imbued with queer sexual joy illuminate Disability Justice praxis, which is a framework for community building rooted in radical care and anti-oppression. We bridge scholarship about disability and gender-based violence prevention by employing queer sexual joy as an analytic device for opening up pathways to Disability Justice-informed, liberatory, and transformative anti- gender-based violence education. Drawing on data from the Queer Sexual Joy project, a mixed-methods study of the joyful consensual sexual experiences of 2SLGBTQ+ young adults in Canada and the USA, we show how anti-violence education must learn from 2SLGBTQ+ survivors, who are imagining and practising radical forms of care and access interwoven with Disability Justice principles.

We begin by reviewing a series of Disability Justice principles and how they relate to the project to end gender-based violence, before examining how disability and trauma are positioned in Western societies as problems to be cured in ways that pathologise survivors and make their access needs during sex unthinkable. We then examine the tensions between Critical Disability Studies and Critical Trauma Studies, asserting the need for these fields to be brought together to better address gender-based violence. Sexual consent education is then addressed directly, and we demonstrate the need for crippling this programming. The methodology of the project is then described before moving on to examine three key themes developed from project. We conclude by calling for consent education to centre queer crip survivors and incorporate Disability Justice principles to help prevent gender-based violence.

Disability justice and gender-based violence prevention

The concept of Disability justice was developed in the mid-2000s by the Disability Justice Collective, a group of racialised, queer, trans, and poverty-class disabled people,

who introduced the framework for building a more just world that foregrounds intersectionality and examines ableism and historical systemic oppression (Collins 2020; Kafai 2021). Sins Invalid, a North American disability collective led by disabled, queer and trans people of colour, has articulated 10 principles of Disability Justice: intersectionality; leadership of those most impacted; anti-capitalist politic; cross-movement solidarity; sustainability; commitment to cross-disability solidarity; interdependence; collective access; and collective liberation (for descriptions see Berne et al. 2018). In this paper, we focus primarily on the principles of interdependence and collective access, which refer to modes of relating grounded in radical practices of community care. We consider how these principles can be used in gender-based violence prevention education to help address survivors' sexual access needs. Our use of the phrase sexual access needs or sexual access intimacy is developed from Mia Mingus' broader notion of access intimacy.

Mingus (2011) saw 'access intimacy' as a deepened form of intimacy based on a shared understanding and appreciation of another's access needs, describing it as 'the closeness I would feel with people who my disabled body just felt a little bit safer and at ease with...[and] that elusive, hard to describe feeling when someone else 'gets' your access needs'. It may take the form of 'knowing glances shared across a room or in a group [of disabled people] ...or the feeling of instant familiarity to be able to ask for help or support' (para.4–5). Mingus notes that access intimacy 'can happen with complete strangers, disabled or not' or 'it can be built over years' (para.4). We extend this concept to sexual realms to consider trauma survivors' experiences of access intimacy during sex and the ways survivors accommodated each other's sexual access needs – or their need for accommodations by sexual partners to overcome barriers to consensual, non-harmful sex – using crip wisdom and Disability Justice principles.

Disability and sexual trauma as a 'problem' to be solved

Disabled people are often positioned as 'problems' in neoliberal capitalist societies (e.g. in terms of the cost of assisted technologies or institutionalisation) (Titchkosky 2021). In a deficit-based approach to disability 'there's nothing good about disability, no skills or brilliance. We are just a fault to be cured. The only good crip is a cured crip, one who has ceased to exist' (Piepzna-Samarasinha 2018, 96). Trauma, which is sometimes equated with disability in popular culture (e.g. the tragic accident survivor who becomes disabled), is similarly perceived (Rakes 2019). A Disability Justice lens reveals how disability is situated as a problem in Western societies because of systemic and individual failures to value all bodyminds¹.

Needing community support to navigate the impact of sexual or other trauma is not the problem. If there is a problem to be dealt with, it is a rape culture (among other forms of systemic violence) which traumatises people and offers apolitical therapeutic remedies *via* the medical-industrial complex (Piepzna-Samarasinha 2018). The medical-industrial-complex can be understood as 'medicine under capitalism' and it promotes an ideology of cure—cure, as a 'solution' and response to trauma, which works in tandem with other oppressive logics to demand survivors pursue the embodiment of 'the ideal bodymind of the settler colonial imaginary' (Johnk and Khan 2019, 26). The associated binaries of wellness/illness and fixed/

broken produce and naturalise a categorical Other, who is either wilfully resistant or 'incurable'. These binaries limit the imaginability of survivor futures in which persons are *thriving* but not *cured* (Piepzna-Samarasinha 2018, 96).

Countering this limited framework, considerations of disability must inspire a 'politics of wonder', to open up possibilities to 'question unquestioned and taken-for-granted knowledges about disability' and to understand it as something 'other than a problem' (Castrodale 2014, engaging Titchkosky 2021). Instead of using a deficit frame to understand trauma and disability, we see survivors as possessing skills that emerge from survivorhood. These *crip* skills offer lessons for gender-based violence prevention concerning how survivors and all people can facilitate less harmful and more just, ethically pleasurable, consensual sex (Piepzna-Samarasinha 2018, 96).

Rather than seeing sexual trauma, along with the disability it can cause, as only tragic, unfortunate, and marked by loss, we see it "as possibility, as relational possibility...when we know we need each other and we act like we need each other" (Rakes 2019, 86–9). We agree with Smilges (2020) who writes that, 'though experienced differently across various axes of power and subjection, trauma carries the potential to facilitate togetherness, to offer new kinds of community and coalition' (para.3).

Putting critical disability studies and critical trauma studies into conversation to address sexual trauma as disability

In 2004, James Berger asserted that theoretical connections between Critical Disability Studies (CDS) and Critical Trauma Studies (CTS) were almost non-existent. Twenty years later, as fields of practice and praxis, CTS and CDS must take greater steps to bridge this gap, and we specifically urge CDS to move towards a more critical understanding of trauma through the perspectives of queer and trans survivors of gender-based violence.

Alison Kafer (2016) notes Critical Disability Studies tends to ignore 'the *effects* or *manifestations* of impairment, such as pain' (emphasis in the original) in ways similar to the popular social model of disability that 'pays little attention to the *causes* of impairment' (5). Kafer draws from Berger (2004) to consider how 'traumatically induced impairment' does not differ from congenital impairment as presented in CDS scholarship. Morrison and Casper (2012) add that CDS is 'remarkably silent...on matters of the traumatic origins of many disabilities, and the ongoing relationship between shocking events, their abrupt and chronic impacts, and experiences of disability' (para.2). It is important therefore to foster the relationship between Critical Disability and Critical Trauma Studies as *being* disabled cannot be divorced from *becoming* disabled: 'these causes are often traumatic sites of violence, both individual and structural, both singular and chronic' (Kafer 2016, 6). In particular, these disciplines must be in conversation to create space for establishing meaningful connections to cultivate greater access to care, joy, pleasure, and healing for survivors.

As study participants' experiences demonstrate, more sustainable sexual cultures can be understood by recognising the debilitating impacts of trauma and the ways survivors, particularly 2SLGBTQ+, BIPOC, disabled survivors, use *crip* wisdom to subvert and reimagine violent hegemonic sexual scripts. Critical Disability Studies can locate the connections between trauma, rape culture, and settler colonial systems of oppression by centring the

embodied experiences and perspectives of 2SLGBTQ+ survivors of gender-based violence whose conceptualisations and responses to trauma are grounded in experiences of, and resistance to, systemic inequity and violence (Shelton 2020, 455).

Crippling sexual consent education

We imagine crippling consent as an ontological destabilisation of current forms of consent education that employs frameworks prioritising cisheteronormativity and able-bodiedness/mindedness (Wright and Greenberg 2024). Crip consent does not demand a queer or disabled subjectivity, rather, it critically applies a queercrip perspective to consent education revealing ‘the interanimation of disability and queerness’ (Smilges 2020, para.16), referring to the ways in which disability rejects and destabilises heteronormative logics of sex and desirability.

Crip consent emphasises the importance of establishing consent while understanding that consent by itself does not ‘entail respect, desire, fulfilment, and enthusiasm’ (Fischel 2019, 18). Indeed, the demand for ‘enthusiastic’ consent in affirmative consent definitions may guilt survivors who, understandably, may have a hard time enjoying sex after assault. We crip consent to unravel the ways in which binary Yes/No models of consent do not adequately capture the liberatory potential of erotics, pleasure, and pain that are borne of queercrip sex.

Globally, consent education is becoming a preeminent form of gender-based violence prevention (Beres 2021; Fischel 2019). Sexual harm is often thought of as a violation of one’s autonomy, and ‘consent’ supposedly remedies this violation by insisting upon a clear, self-determined ‘Yes’ or ‘No’ before proceeding with a sexual act. Despite the reliance on consent to ‘solve’ gender-based violence, consent and sexuality education scholars critique the limits of this education (Beres 2021; Butler 2011; Wright 2022; 2024; Wright and Falek 2024).

Most consent education problematically reduces consent to ‘simple’ ‘Yes’ or ‘No’ utterances (Brady and Lowe 2020; Butler 2011). An analysis of US campus consent campaigns by Schowengerdt, Lamb, and Brown (2021) found they commonly assert messages such as ‘Consent is simple. If it’s not yes, it’s no’, and ‘Consent is an enthusiastic yes. If it’s not yes, it’s rape’ (7). This approach to preventing gender-based violence has ‘very little to offer regarding the ethical underpinnings of human relations beyond the idea of the contract, and rarely evoke[s] empathy or care’ (12). When consent is understood as a contract by parties entering the negotiation on equal footing, it removes the sociopolitical context and perpetuates a neoliberal discourse of individual choice. Other empirical studies have found that ‘consent is simple’ messaging in consent education fails to capture how consent is complicated by sociopolitical inequities as well as ‘grey areas’ of consent (Brady and Lowe 2020; Wright 2021; 2022). A contractual model for consent forecloses the possibility of recognising the importance of how consent is intersubjectively defined (Butler 2011).

The needs of those who are most likely to be (re)victimised by sexual violence – trauma survivors – (Statistics Canada 2017) are left out of consent education when a binary Yes/No concept of consent is relied upon, as it obfuscates grey areas² where many of their experiences occur as a result of the psychosocial impacts of trauma due to dissociation and acquiescence (Mark and Vowels 2020; Wright 2021; 2022).

Fundamentally unknowable elements are intrinsic to sex, and grey areas are to some degree inevitable (Butler 2011). However, there are also harms in grey areas produced by power disparities such as those integral to cisheteronormativity (Gavey 2015). A Disability Justice-informed approach to gender-based violence prevention education would assist in addressing the myriad harms happening in the grey area of consent since Disability Justice principles such as interdependence, cross movement solidarity, and collective liberation, point to a form of relationality that moves beyond the current transactional model of consent found in much consent education. Disability Justice directs us away from the logics of objectification, dominance and conquest that undergird the cisheteronormativity that lies at the root of rape culture (Piepzna-Samarasinha 2018).

Methodology

The Queer Sexual Joy project is a mixed-methods collaborative study with Egale Canada that engaged 100 US and Canadian 2SLGBTQ+ young adults aged 18–35. It asked: how does queer sexual joy challenge the colonial, racist, ableist, sexist, homophobic, transphobia cultural norms that perpetuate rape culture? What does it look and feel like to experience queer sexual joy, particularly as a departure from the confines of compulsory cisheteronormativity? What can be learned from experiences of queer and trans sexual joy for gender-based violence prevention? Study participants were involved in two surveys ($n=55$ and $n=14$), a series of participatory visual arts-based workshops and two focus groups, and eight semi-structured one-to-one interviews. The data used in this paper come from all sections of the study including the qualitative parts of the surveys.

Participants were spread evenly across the 18–35 age range. Among the 100 participants, 13 came from the USA and 87 were from Canada. Participants were asked about their sex and gender identifications. Most identified their sexuality as queer ($n=58$), followed by pansexual ($n=12$), bisexual ($n=12$), lesbian ($n=9$), gay ($n=4$), asexual ($n=3$), Two-Spirit ($n=1$), and T4T (trans for/loving trans) ($n=1$). Only 26 participants identified as cisgender (4 cis-men and 22 cis-women), with nearly 74% of participants in the study identifying otherwise, with the largest proportion ($n=63$) identifying as non-binary (e.g. non-binary she/they). Two participants identified as Two-Spirit, 1 as trans masculine, 5 as trans women, and 3 as trans men.

Most participants identified as white ($n=56$), followed by mixed race/bi-racial/multi-racial ($n=15$), Black ($n=9$), South Asian ($n=5$), Latinx ($n=4$), Indigenous ($n=4$), Southeast or East Asian ($n=4$), and West Asian ($n=2$). Disability and/or neurodiversity were not examined in the first survey we conducted, however, of the remaining 66 study participants, 82% identified as having a disability and/or being neurodiverse. 75% of survey participants identified as survivors of sexual violence, and all other participants spoke of having experienced gender-based violence.

Qualitative data were analysed using a grounded theory approach in which themes were identified throughout each stage of the research during group conversations. A code set was iteratively developed by the team during and after data collection (Srivastava and Hopwood 2009; Thornberg and Charmaz 2014). The full data set was re-coded as needed. Coding of each transcript and the qualitative survey data was

undertaken individually using Dedoose, and involved cross-checked by at least two researchers. From this analysis, we identified the three themes related to trauma, disability, and sex. The first of these described how survivors refused normative notions of consent and rebuilt understandings and practices of consent with other survivors to find queer, crip sexual joy. The second theme showed how survivors' radical care for one another in relation to sex facilitated joyful queercrip intimacies that allowed for reprieve and healing from cisheteronormativity and rape culture. The third theme examines participants' experiences of 'rawness' and authenticity during sex, which opened up possibilities for sexual joy and created transformative models for deeply meaningful consent.

Findings

Rebuilding consent and pleasure

Survivors can face numerous challenges navigating sex after trauma (Mark and Vowels 2020; Oosterhoff et al. 2023; Wright 2022). Yet, participants in this study spoke of how other survivors who were 2SLGBTQ+ helped rebuild their sense of consent and safety, leading to sexual joy. While conventionally consent education positions consent as a contractual matter between two individual actors who possess equal opportunity to say 'yes' or 'no', employing a Disability Justice framework recognises that we rely on one another for care in order to facilitate meaningful consent and non-harmful sex (Fischel and O'Connell 2015; Wright 2022). A survey participant, Kelly, articulates how their queer and trans partners thought expansively about sex so as to accommodate their sexual access needs:

I think part of what made that pleasure and comfort so possible with queer and trans partners is unfortunately that most of us have had our consent violated before, and we've had to work to make consent clear and repeatable and pleasurable again. I think queerness and transness both allow us to dissolve the 'scripts' society dictates for what consent is supposed to look like, and especially after traumatic events, queerness is what enables us to make consent look however it needs to, as many times as it needs to happen in one encounter. I think queerness is what gets us through trauma and allows us to rebuild pleasure and consent however we can, often in unexpected ways.

Like Kelly, queer and trans survivors in the study were aware not only of the harms of consent violation; they also perceived dominant understandings of sex and consent as perpetuating harmful cisheterosexual sexual norms and rape culture. The iterative quality of 'mak[ing] consent look however it needs to, as many times as it needs to happen' refutes the notion that consent is simply an apolitical contractual agreement. Instead, Kelly intersubjectively defined consent on an ongoing basis with their partners, accommodating past trauma and their sexual desires. While these practices might be deemed 'deviant, strange, or at the very least 'not sexy' by heteronormative, nondisabled expectations' (Smilges 2020, para.12), they reflect "sexual culture for disabled people" (Siebers 2012, 52) and a Disability Justice approach interwoven with care. Such experiences of 'trauma sex' (Smilges 2020) – or behaviours during sex that occur as a product of being a trauma survivor – do not position traumatised or accommodations during sex as problems to be solved so one can simply perform

normative sexual scripts. Instead, survivors are reinventing what consent is, and how to 'do' consent, by embodying principles of Disability Justice to queer and crip sex.

Nox, a trans man, spoke about how the survivors of gender-based violence he had encountered helped him process the sexual shame and transphobia he experienced by creating space to both speak about the uncomfortable aspects of sex, and negotiate boundaries to reclaim embodied pleasure. He noted that sexual countercultures and specifically queer and trans communities' BDSM (Bondage, Discipline, Sadism, Masochism) practices can facilitate queer sexual joy by both celebrating gender and sexual non-normativity, and acknowledging the presence of trauma within community. He said:

I see people get involved in kink communities and find a lot of [queer and trans] joy from taking agency over their own pleasure... I recently came to realise that I was seeking out unpleasant sexual relationships or encounters because of internalised shame and transphobia, and I've had people who are survivors be incredibly patient, kind, and communicative with me [in my process of] explor[ing] sexuality and reclaiming pleasure for myself.

Nox's breaking free from cisheteronormative scripts which deny the beauty in his transness and personhood following trauma allowed him to reject 'cultures of undesirability' in which only some bodies are deemed productive/valuable and attractive (white, non-disabled, cisheterosexual, upper class bodies) and thus deserving of care, pleasure, and protection (Erickson 2016).

Importantly, it is through Disability Justice principles such as 'collective access' that Nox was able to experience queer and trans sexual joy. As Berne et al. (2018) explains, collective access is, in part, defined by knowing that 'We can share responsibility for our access needs, we can ask that our needs be met without compromising our integrity, we can balance autonomy while being in community, [and] we can be unafraid of our vulnerabilities knowing our strengths are respected' (229). Nox was welcomed by other survivors into BDSM community spaces, where his queerness and transness, as well as his survivorship and access needs, could be held, accommodated, and valued. By being supported in and by community, Nox found his way to deeply consensual and meaningful experiences of queer and trans sexual joy, which also served to help heal the trauma he had experienced from rape culture, homophobia, and transphobia.

The healing power of queer and trans sexual joy

Participants spoke of the ways in which queer and trans sexual joy helped them heal from sexual trauma and/or the violence of systems of domination that intersect with rape culture. In particular, survivors in this study found healing in partnership with other 2SLGBTQ+ survivors. Such healing was attributed to their joint rejection of cisheteropatriarchal sexual scripts, which enabled them to navigate previous sexual traumas more freely. Nox said, 'we have this immense pressure that sex should be sexy all the time and [be] so perfect and polished and glamorous but intense emotion, crying – these things that we stigmatize in sex – [do] happen'.

For some survivors of gender-based violence, particularly those dealing with dissociation, having non-hegemonic sexual experiences in queer and trans communities forged space for healing. Darby's journey involved noticing that they felt disembodied

during sex with cisgender heterosexual men and finding sex that felt authentically pleasurable for them with the help of queer and trans partners:

I think blocks [to queer sexual joy] came from experiencing sexual violence...Where queer partners helped me was in being able to show up as my authentic self in my body during sex...I haven't experienced that in a cishet relationship, unfortunately... I was focused on penetration for a long time and like, that's not actually what I enjoy at all. Having space to check in with myself was really healing for me in terms of exploration: What do I actually get pleasure from? What leads me to orgasm? It really shifted a lot. And, you know, being able to talk about sexual violence in a queer lens has been really healing too... I think, absolutely, having a queer and trans—and my partner is non-binary and disabled—has really helped me navigate my triggers and feel safe in my body again.

Hegemonic sexual scripts continue to define sex as 'penetration for men's pleasure' wherein women are to find fulfilment in 'giving pleasure' (Holland et al. 1994, 31). While these scripts can and are reproduced in queer and trans communities, Darby's experience, like other study participants', reflects how they found reprieve from rigid sexual scripts and, with that, embodied sexual joy (Harvey, Jones, and Copulsky 2023).

Erin, a survey participant, found that navigating sexual access needs with queer and trans partners was very different compared to cisheterosexual partners:

For the most part, queer and trans people in my life share some kind of trauma background and immediately recognise what is happening – they know what it is, and have often experienced it themselves, and do not need a full explanation. With one exception, my cishet partners have mostly needed me to "educate" them on what trauma is and how trauma responses look, which is honestly exhausting. A few tried to make some effort to learn more about it during our relationships, but most of them basically required me to be a teachable moment while I was living it.

Erin and other participants spoke to how survivors' embodied understanding of access intimacy helped them to accommodate other survivors' sexual access needs.

The high prevalence of gender-based violence survivors in queer and trans communities may resultantly mean that these communities are better equipped than cisheterosexual spaces to support survivors' access needs during sex. By finding a community that accepts and celebrates them, and that nurtures community care and access, participants were healed in ways that brought them joy and that simultaneously disrupted the systems of oppression that perpetuate gender-based violence.

The process of finding and embodying queer sexual joy created space for participants to acquire self-knowledge in ways that supported self-esteem, bodily confidence, and understanding of what is pleasurable and what is not. Disability Justice practices fostered queer sexual joy and offered profound learnings about what sex and consent could be outside of rape culture. As the caption on a still image from Kit's cellfilm read, 'Our growth is an act of resistance' (Figure 1).

Queer, trans, crip sex through rawness, authenticity, and caring consent

Participants also spoke about the development of self-love through queer sexual joy. This was often related to being seen by others who understood the experience of being 'Othered' by dominant systems of oppression. Winter said:

I love being in a relationship with another trans person and it's really freeing to... when we talk about sex, we don't have the exact same experience, we don't have the exact

same feelings about our bodies, [but] there's just a baseline understanding... I feel subversive.

Confidently navigating subversive spaces drew participants towards sexual experiences that felt authentic or as Jiva put it, 'raw':

I agree with what folks said earlier about feeling a sense of safety [in relationships with queer and trans partners]. I also feel there's an aspect of, like, rawness that I haven't been able to experience in a lot of my relationships with cishet men. I think it's because, as someone who is not only queer and non-binary, but also someone who's brown, I'm a very hairy person, for example, and I've known that queer people just get it. Whether or not they are going to be perfect around it, they understand that it's just a part of my identity; I'm brown and queer and don't want to shave my legs because it doesn't bring me any comfort. Queer sexual joy for me is having partners appreciate my body in its entirety, truly accepting it and loving it as it is, and not wanting to create an image of what they think that I could look like if I were more sexually appealing to them. I feel like



Figure 1. Caption on a still image from Kit's cellphilm.

that rawness is what separates my queer experiences from sex with cishet men, where there's always an element of like, kink, or the fact that I'm non-binary. So it's already a queer experience, but I know that they're not reading it as that kind of situation. I know they're still reading me as a woman, and so it's not the same level of comfort. Yeah, being able to settle in with the partner that you feel seen with feels so good.

Jiva's queer experiences here are distinguished by a rawness collectively accessed through a mutual appreciation and understanding of bodies and scripts that defy cisheteronormativity. Through Jiva account, we can understand how queer joy is accessed through the absence of dominant scripts dictating what sex should be. This radical space created is one wherein 'crip sex is an offering, an atlas guiding us back to the inherent knowing that our bodyminds deserve pleasure, bliss, and contentment' (Kafai 2021, 70).

Neurodivergent and queer survey participant, Rose explained that the absence of hegemonic sexual scripts in sex creates 'space to say YES, because there is space to say no and space to say maybe', adding that,

There are no scripts for how we will come together tonight. Nobody to dictate how our bodies and our genitals should touch and move together and apart. There is no end goal to this experience. We are both working towards mutual pleasure, take responsibility for communicating our needs and desires, and are attentive and responsive to verbal and non-verbal feedback throughout.

Queer, crip sex prioritises unscripted, raw communication which creates space for navigating consent beyond restrictive yes/no binaries. Interdependence captures rawness and authenticity, and the collective access to sex it fosters destabilise cisheteropatriarchal sexual scripts that blur boundaries around consent and perpetuate sexual trauma. Like Jiva, Rose emphasises the importance of queer folks' interdependent, mutual understanding of the ways in which gender appears and disappears through sex and intimacy, which can radically affirm queer identity and meaning making. Qi shared,

Queer folks have understood and been able to support gender dysphoria feelings as they connect to sexual assault and validate that transness/gender presentation and sexualised/gendered violence are not discrete or inseparable things. Queer folks have also helped me be creative about sex which has been healing inherently, but also allowed me to break free from the sexual confines that resulted from trauma.

Here, Qi highlights how queer and trans people who have experienced gender-based violence can show support for one another (also see Wright, Fonarev, and Greenberg 2023, Wright, Falek, and Greenberg 2024; Wright and Falek 2024).

For some participants, queer and trans pleasure involved conceptualising consent and pleasure through non-verbal and non-ambulatory forms of communication that prioritised disability access needs and interdependent care. Kylie uses non-verbal communication 'sometimes with looks, touches, and repositioning', seeking to discover with their partners 'the most tantalising way to ask and to answer. [We] give and take within our boundaries'.

Imagining consent and pleasure through somatic communication of this kind crips consent, pushing frameworks for understanding consent well beyond verbal yes/no binaries (Fischel and O'Connell 2015). This cross-solidarity through different kinds of communication rejects the unimaginability of disability as desirable and erotic (Kafer

2020). Kylie recalled sex with a partner who self-stimulates, and the ways she honours her partner's communication needs by creating space for him to 'stim [self-stimulate] violently for five seconds before he can find the words to say it feels good'. These kind of relationships reconceptualise possibilities for imagining and practising clear, and open communication as an integral part of consent, in which shared traumas, boundaries, and desires can be navigated interdependently, vulnerably, and through transformative modes of care.

Conclusion

As the participant narratives examined in the paper demonstrate, conversations about gender-based violence, disability, and trauma must be bridged in service of gender-based violence prevention. By learning from the alternative sexual cultures of 2SLGBTQ+ disabled people, we may better support survivors and all people in achieving deeply consensual and pleasurable sex that refuses the limited, colonial imaginary represented in transactional Yes/No binary consent laws and health education.

Disability Justice principles, as well as notions of access intimacy, draw attention to how Critical Disability Studies and Critical Trauma Studies can greatly benefit from engagement with the shared knowledge of 2SLGBTQ+ survivors of gender-based violence. These survivors' embodied experiences of queer, crip sexual joy provide insights into how queer and trans bodyminds can identify traumas and engage in acts of pleasure and healing through Disability Justice praxis interwoven with interdependency, vulnerability and care.

By queering and crippling gender-based violence prevention, it is possible to see how the current frameworks found in consent education disregard the ways in which 2SLGBTQ+, BIPOC, and disabled people are impacted by gender-based violence. These groups and their experiences must be made more central to efforts to challenge the colonial, compulsory able-bodied/minded, cisheteronormative sexual scripts that lie at the root of rape culture. More research is needed to understand how consent education and gender-based violence prevention more broadly can learn from the ways in which BIPOC and disabled queer and trans communities seek to resist, question and undermine rape culture by engaging in raw, authentic, deeply consensual, and joyful sex.

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Notes

1. 'Bodyminds' is a term which rejects the Cartesian separation of body and mind wherein instead of being separate entities they are recognised as part of a single integrated unit.
2. Grey areas can be understood as areas "of experience that [are] not easily categorised as consensual and wanted or as violent or criminal" (Wright 2021).

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Due to the sensitive nature of this research, study data are not publicly available.

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