

Creative disclosures of difference: The crip body in the temporal space of higher education.

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The term 'crip' is a contestatory one, being both a fluid and ever-changing term which has been claimed by those people to whom it did not originally refer, for example, those who have mental illness and/or chronic pain, and for those with whom it can now be intertwined, for example, those who identify as queer and crip. Similarly to 'queer', 'crip', from the word 'cripple', is a term which begets change and political action. Critically claiming the term 'crip' is to recognise the ethical, epistemic and political responsibilities behind such claims. Crip deconstructs the binary between disabled and able bodies, and how such binaries are brought into existence. Understandings of the crip body are gained through reading queer and feminist theories about the body and understanding that disability is a political category rather than an individual pathology. Feminist theory has long been associated with bridging theory and practice and explorations of the intersections of crip, queer and feminist praxis will explore this further. Disability is experienced in an individual body and resonates through and from a medicalised discursive model. This individual experience of disability constructs disabled bodies as abject and aberrant. The crip body contests this construction, highlighting the systemic social and political statuses that would prefer to frame it this way. Thus, in both the physical and politico/social model, individual bodies are treated with an expectation that familial and medical support will be utilised, rather than increasing social supports or bringing about widespread social change. In contrast, a political/relational model has the 'problem' of disability not residing in individuals, but in the temporal and built environment of the university site and in the cultural and social models that require individuals and their friends and family to negotiate such spaces for them. The question is how are norms of embodiment allied with queered understandings of crip and disability? This paper will identify and explore the intersections of queer and crip status in an individual crip body, utilising an autobiographical narrative of disclosure allied with the creative production of poetry. While affirming personal affiliations and identifications with feminist, queer and crip, these terms will nevertheless be critiqued. The politico/medical model of disability theory will be contested by an unpacking of crip theory, with a narrativised, autobiographical focus.

Keywords: poetry; crip theory; temporal; autobiographical

Introduction

When I began thinking about writing this paper, I wanted to take the reader on a journey with me into the significance of my own crip body in the higher education space where I have worked and studied for more than twenty years. I wanted the reader to consider the potentiality of crip theories of embodiment and what they mean to a non-normative body such as mine. In realising the old feminist adage, that the personal is political, there are profound implications for the hegemonic social, political and cultural contexts of equity in and access to higher education through an understanding of crip and queer embodiment. What I intend to demonstrate is that the university space, which is profoundly ableist in structure and in its treatment of crip bodies, denies those very bodies the agency and ability to perform their embodiment in a way that reclaims them from a categorisation of ‘dis’ability. The entry or access to institutions and the ‘mattering’ of crip bodies in those spaces is made more difficult – for example, being able to enrol into a course or degree, or to work as a teaching colleague where, due to ableism, difference is regulated and seen as problematic, and diversity, with its celebration in glossy pamphlets and advertisements, is embraced.

Crip embodiment leads to a lack of access, inclusion and true difference of these bodies that matter, which concerns both subjectivity and status, and literal embodiment, or the occupying of physical space in a higher education institution. Crip personhood or ‘matter’ is a difference to be regulated and controlled in that space. Temporality, the progression and ‘experience’ (Bennett & Burke 2018, p. 915) of normative and heteronormative, or ‘straight’ time and spatiality (the built, geographic landscape such as a higher education campus and the cultural and discursive spaces of Higher Education as well) are important to understandings of crip embodiment as they are exclusionary times and spaces for people who are queer and/or crip. Time is neither ‘ahistorical, objective [nor] rational’ and it does not contain the homogeneity of the ways that temporalities are ‘lived, embodied and experienced’ (2018, p. 915). Temporality or ‘our being in time’ (Clegg cited in Bennett & Burke 2018, p. 916) is reformed and performed by non-normative bodies.

As Burke (2015, p. 389) frames it, universities, while being ‘reformed through globalisation and market-forces’, remain institutions which bear an imprimatur through which ‘violence, exclusion and misrecognition’ can often occur (p. 389). This violence, is, of course, symbolic, but it is also enacted structurally through physical, geographic means which are largely ableist. According to Bourdieu (2000) the social order is, fundamentally, the ordering of bodies (2000, p. 168) and symbolic violence is coercion, or the assent that the dominated give to dominator(s) with their understanding of knowledge forms that the dominators have access to (2000, p. 170). In the higher education space, institutionalised misrecognition occurs in these bodies. This misrecognition helps us to see what is otherwise invisible: the regulation of difference and of different bodies in higher education spaces. With the misrecognition of the crip bodies that inhabit these spaces I will address how this becomes embodied and lived experience.

In discouraging and problematising difference, this symbolic misrepresentation and misrecognition leads to the Othering and disenfranchising of female and trans female bodies, of crip bodies and of queer bodies. Indeed, anybody that does not conform to the hegemonic order and requires people to transform themselves to being other than they actually are. Connell (2013) argues the irony of universities set up for the advancement of knowledge, and through knowledge the students and staff who are part of the university environment now seek to restrict that knowledge to attain a financial benefit from it (2013, p. 108). Crip theory draws on feminism and queer theory, and I will also be drawing on these in this paper. As a queer woman I note that being queer is concerned with more than just one’s sexual orientation. Queerness refers to non-

normative sexuality, non-normative relationships and non-normative performance of gender and gender roles, such as in the diversity of LGBTIQA identities.

In this paper I will firstly begin by stating my methodology, a version of collage with creative and theoretical writing and then unpacking crip theory, explaining what it is, its history, and how it is useful as a theoretical tool to make sense of my non-normative, differently-abled female body. I draw on my personal experiences of the temporalities and spatialities of higher education to illuminate exclusions and inequalities more broadly. I will discuss higher education and the effect that being crip or queer has on this space, the difference between difference and diversity and the performative nature of crip embodiment. I identify crip identity as a state of non-normative embodiment through physical impairment or disability, chronic and long-term illness, pain disorders, conditions such as dyslexia and Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), mental health issues, being on the Autism spectrum, and more profound chromosomal and physical impairment(s).

Collage: The creative and the theoretical

I will intersperse sections of theory about crip embodiment with what Cosenza calls ‘collage’ (2014, p. 158) which is a combination of creative and theoretical writing. I will be positioning my personal experience of crip embodiment with broader insights connected to crip theory. To do this, I will be including two of my poems and will also explore experiences I have had throughout my time of identifying as crip-bodied. By exploring the regulation of difference in Australian universities, I contend that there is a need for a reclamation of the power that exists in them. As Bennett and Burke (2018) so succinctly state it: ‘(e)veryone both exerts and is subject to power’ (2018, p. 915). In this paper, part of this reclamatory work of power will be done through the inclusion of my poetry. In my poetry I do some of the theoretical work of this paper through creative praxis and I am able to assume ways of performing my ‘Self’ that has more to do with the experience of time, or temporality and the act of embodiment, or materiality.

Poetry is proposed as an alternative expression of embodied knowledge for my medicalised, crip body. As a poet I craft language that carries and generates crip, queer and feminist perspectives to consider how the body lives in ways that cannot be fully known in the terms of medical logic, science and crip theory. These perspectives encompass deeply personal and political facets of history, emotion, power, illness and sexuality. Drawing from the diverse and little-discussed experiences of living with an acquired disability that threads throughout my body of work, these two poems narrate the embodied experience of science and medicine, and crip embodiment. In the first poem, *Panic*, a painful crip body experience is explored. The literality, or *matter* of the crip body is also demonstrated. In the second poem, *At Fifty-two*, the failure of the material body assumes significance as the place it fails is disembarking and embarking on the train, instead of going to work at my university campus. Temporality or the normative experience of time works internally, with the travel between railway stations, along with the external passing of years with the actual ageing process.

How is this lived experience best articulated in creative production such as poetry? Eagleton’s (2007) discussion of the ambiguity of poetry suggests that the ‘distinction between the empirical and the moral is not the same as the difference between fact and fiction’ (2007, p. 31). This ambiguity of the poem is produced, in part, by breaking sentences into lines on the page and applying specific rhythm or rhyme schemes (p. 32). Readers respond to these generic cues by reading a poem very differently from reading prose. ‘To call something a poem is to detach it from its immediate, empirical context and put it to wider uses’ (p. 31), Eagleton suggests, also asserting that ‘simply by being arranged on the page as it is, [poetry] offers a meaning which is

potentially [and infinitely] shareable' (p. 32). The telling and sharing of my stories/poems is the way I give voice to my embodied, lived experience. And the difference and telling is best articulated by a combination of theory and creative praxis – in this case, as an exegetical framework of abjection and normativity, and exclusion and inclusion, in the higher education space. I write as an academic and as a poet. I am also both queer and crip, and write poetry and theory with the theories of both.

Cosenza (2014) contends that through collage there are temporal or time-based ways of becoming one's Self – a narrative of subjectivity that adheres to Butler's theory of performativity, where a person is 'hailed' into being in the same way that Althusser's police officer 'hails' a subject into her subjective identity by calling to her on the street (Salih & Butler 2004 p. 7). I will further discuss the mattering and the literal matter of the crip body. How little it matters, in a hegemonic cultural sense in the university space and the matter, or materiality that it occupies as a subject in this space. Burke states that 'subjectivity highlights the relational, discursive and embodied process of identity formation' (2012, p. 57). By this she means that people are constructed and 'made' as subjects as well as bodies within discourses such as education, medicine, gender and sexuality and the implication of these discourses affects their access and inclusion in hegemonic experiences of higher education.

Crip theory

Crip theory attends to the contemporary cultures of the intersections and overlaps of disability and queerness. Queer theory emphasises the fluid and the humanly performed nature of sexuality, gender, age and/or sexualities. Like 'queer,' 'crip' and 'cripple' are terms which 'forge a politics' (Clare 1999, p. 70) and beget change and political action (Kafer 2013, p. 15). Sandahl (2003) and McRuer (2006) use the term 'crip' as a more 'contestatory' term and Kafer (2013) notes that it is a 'fluid and ever-changing' term which has been claimed by those people to whom it did not originally refer and with whom it can now be intertwined, with feminist and queer methodologies and praxis (pp. 15–17). This twisting of queerness (as suggested by Butler) is also employed by Kafer, (2013) who aims to 'twist' (p. 16) queer and crip with feminism.

Crip (from the word cripple) is a term which Mairs suggests can cause people to 'wince' when they hear it (Mairs 1992, p. 9). However, I would add that this wincing is perhaps a part of the contestatory impact of what it is to be crip. Like 'queer,' 'crip' and 'cripple' are terms which have been reclaimed by the people to whom they previously referred as an epithet. I will argue that crip embodiment in its very materiality (or matter) is also performative, according to my interpretation of Butler's (1993, p. 12) theory of performativity. Performativity is not a single act, but rather, a 'reiteration of norms, or a set of norms' (p. 12). This 'mattering' paradoxically exposes how crip bodies do not come to matter within a higher education institution with crip theory bringing to light the imperative to critique dimensions of subjective formation that are naturalised and taken for granted in hegemonic discourses of equity in higher education.

I include in these subjectivities, for example, Whiteness, middle-class heterosexuality and hegemonic masculinity, and other such normative subjectivities that work to reproduce spaces of exclusion for crip bodies in higher education. Theorists such as McRuer (2006, 2018), Sandahl (2003) and Kafer (2013) use crip and queer theories to suggest that crip bodies are woven and shaped by their particular practices and behaviours, and that being crip is enacted through bodies, but these theorists use crip and queer theories to help to make sense of the world in which a crip body resides. Crip can refer to physical impairment or non-normativity, (my preferred term) but also takes into consideration such medicalised conditions as neuro-divergence, mental illness, and chronic and long-term pain. Unlike the medicalised model of disability, which sees

normative people stare, question or turn away from the non-normative body, the crip body shakes things up and jolts people out of their complacency and normative understandings of disabled and non-disabled people (Kafer 2013, p. 15). This is because the crip body blurs the binaries of disability and ability, embodiment and disembodiment. A wheelchair, a walker or a cane, for example, become objects of addition to the physical experience of these bodies.

Crip sees hegemonic culture as refusing to accede to the non-normative subject, which is hailed, like Althusser, via Butler (1993, p.122) into its non-normative subjectivity with the built environments of geography and physical landscape such as stairs, escalators and high rise buildings a major part of the problem, rather than the individual with crip status being the problem. It was not until I became a crip subject that I truly appreciated the difficulties of moving around an unforgiving campus that, in its ableist structure, was for able-bodies and not for people like me.

Chrononormativity

Queer is a broad term and by its very nature overlaps broadly with other minority and marginalised groups. This intersectionality is referred to throughout this paper with my understanding of the queering of my own body, sexuality and identity with its crip status. I am constantly in and on view now, and my 'coming out' narratives (as both queer and crip) and my claiming of non-normative, precarious temporality sees me reiterating a status of non-normative queer sexuality and embodiment. Cosenza (2014, p. 158) argues that this claiming of so-called normal [*sic*] time, or chrononormativity, masks the 'hidden rhythms of privilege', in heteronormative and able-bodied experience. Time is 'structured, constructed and experienced in contemporary higher education in relation to processes of rapid and continuous change' (Burke & Manathunga 2020, p. 663) meaning that privilege is performed as a form of discipline that relies on change being understood as part of the experience of temporality. 'Time frames daily habits, rituals and routines in the name of progress [...] to repetitive (re)production [...] to the arbitrary schedules of capitalism and heteronormative notions of family, of production and reproductivity' (Cosenza 2014, p. 156). Consequently, crip and homosexual bodies are seen as non-normative and non-productive. Crip theory becomes a framework for 'denaturalising able-bodiedness and heteronormativity' (Cosenza 2014, p. 157).

The disciplining of docile bodies also relies on chrononormativity, a term devised by Freeman (2010, p. 4) which refers to keeping the well-oiled machine of education and industry running 'on-time' (p. 4). Chrononormativity is the systematic naturalising of time and the practices that create a heteronormative and able-bodied regulation of time and its practices. Chrononormativity, as a regulation of time, relies on more than individual bodies, instead making a whole population through 'institutional restraints, whereby institutional systems, economic and educational systems function congruently to discipline all bodies', (Cosenza 2014, p. 158), whether normative or crip, heteronormative or queer. Queer, crip time exists as one of these non-normative, counter-hegemonic intersections with normative time and space.

In using some elements of queer theory and the focus on queer time, I take the following concepts into account: Queer theory shows us something important about embodiment, a teasing out that is useful for thinking about crip/queer intersectionality. Butler is the theorist to turn to when discussing this, in terms of reiterating subjectivity and embodiment and the reiteration of space and place, and time and bodies, in these times and spaces.

Crip status and higher education

Higher education pedagogy has been linked to the enhancement of globalised market forces, rather than contributing to the social, political, physical and emotional well-being of its student and staff populations. Coffey (2020) argues that this neoliberal emphasis on what is a body's value, becomes properly articulated with what a body can 'do' in a neoliberal institution (2020, p. 636) – such as a university. This focuses on choice and autonomy with the body being a 'source of value' (p. 636), a product to be 'made over', and to have a psyche and intellect that can be valued and appreciated. Perhaps even advertised in glossy brochures of invitation to a particular campus?

Kafer (2013) asks whether claiming crip status can be a method of claiming 'multiple futures', (p. 13) and whether claiming the term 'crip' critically is to recognise the 'ethical, epistemic and political responsibilities behind such claims' (p. 13). While the intent is to deconstruct the binary between disabled/able bodies and evaluate how such binaries are brought into existence in a hegemonic ableist culture, the reality can be bleak. Claiming crip status has been personally challenging for me, for the reality of it was that I found myself in exclusionary spaces. The hopefulness and expansiveness with which Kafer (2013) claims crip identity for herself and others, belies, I believe, the roadblocks for those who would claim it for themselves.

There are a number of incidents that I can refer to, which make the visible crip status and the accoutrements of disability (cane, mobility scooter, wheelchair) more apparent. It has become a wry realisation to me that there are 'advantages' for me and whomever I am with in having some of these accoutrements: an Australian Council for Rehabilitation of Disabled (ACROD) pass for close parking at the university campus and other 'advantages' for having a visible disability. People put us to the front of queues, we get front row seats at lectures and concerts, and at a workshop I took part in with my friend we received one-on-one tuition on how to complete the activity. I reiterate, for no other reason that I could discern than my able-bodied friend accompanied me, her wheelchair-bound friend, to the workshop.

At my previous university campus I was able to understand the difference with which my crip body was now regarded. After eight weeks of medical treatment it was decided that I would trial a return to work. I arrived in my car, parked in the ACROD bay, and began the journey to where my office was, on the fourth floor of the library. I rolled into the library and made my way to the lift. Unfortunately, it was festooned with 'Out of Order' signs, and I was literally stuck in the library entrance with no access to my office. A fruitless day's activities ensued as I had no access to my computer or belongings and there was no one able to tell me when the lift would be fixed. This was my first and last day at work as a crip body.

The following poem, entitled *Panic* is about a panic attack, in the midst of a recitation. Anxiety is a crip phenomenon that occurs invisibly in the body, even if the markers of anxiety are made visible, through breathlessness, sweating and laboured speech. In this auto/biographical poem the difficulties of speech and breathlessness and wanting to claim a visible space of theory and embodiment are articulated and bring my poem to life. The difference and dissonance between normative, able-embodiment and crip materiality of the body are articulated:

Panic

Spaces of discontent.
 Your crip heart
 running
 like a mouse
 at work on the wheel in your chest,
 like a negative of the darkened, ruby cut air.
 Breath *hurts*.
 A banquet of pain at the back of your skull,
 coloured green and blue and yellow
 sharpish echo of
 bruises ascending
 moth wings hammer
 trapped
 in your throat.

What is the sound of chaos
 but words on the page
 creeping
 and crawling
 beneath your skin?

Pebbles.
 Beetles.
 Scratching yourself raw.
 Scars and tattoos alike. Gooseflesh.
 Goose Steps

on a chest of
 stone and wood.
 Tumbling and creaking.

Everyone else normative
 workmanlike
 builds their walls with matched dry stone.
 Filling the room with colour and air
 while you are parched and punched.
 Solar plexus folding
 in on itself,

Disappointment, with
 your gentle lines butchered and ugly.

Alone
 on the
 Stage.

It would be easier, perhaps, to

 Pass out.

To die.
All alone.

To cut out your traitorous heart
bloody and pulsing in your right fist.

Hold it
aloft.

A solitary offering.

A gift.

This poem illustrates how panic is experienced fundamentally as a non-normative, embodied experience, located centrally within a body that is ‘traitorous’ and a ‘disappointment’. To experience that body, the body/subject must be prepared to engage with all the disparate sensations and feelings that attend to its crip status: severe headache, parched throat, tingling arms and chest, gooseflesh. A panic attack renders the body as useless and unable to be trusted (Orr, 2006). This is a clear definition of crip status – the body that betrays its occupant time after time. The body that is weakened and, by default, runs on empty. When I wrote this poem, I tried to explain each embodied, panicked moment as something that someone could understand even if they had never had a panic attack. Constructions of crip status that render crip bodies in the things that join us together, rather than by the things that separate us, are important as they take the locations of gender, class, sexuality and disability seriously.

As with Butler’s theory of performativity the reiteration of a thought or concept of embodiment is a way of it being reinforced. In crip creative works like the poem above, crip identity is reaffirmed and reasserted, in a Butlerian sense. This is similar to Frida Kahlo’s art, where Kahlo continually reiterates her disabled status, even though she does not have to, as her disability is never in question.

Kafer (2013) critiques the notion that ‘dis’ability leads to impairment and negative experiences of life, suggesting rather that ‘we’ (those who have crip bodies) desire the same sort of future as ‘you’ (those who have not). She argues that disability is disavowed in two ways. Firstly, the value of a future that contains disabled people goes unrecognised, while the value of a disability-free future is seen as self-evident. Also, its future as a contestable, critiqued and contentious entity is unacknowledged. The second failure of recognition makes possible the first: the ‘monolithic’ fact of disability being located in a body beyond the realm of the political and cultural. This perspective, according to Kafer, is coloured by ‘histories of ableism and disability oppression’ (2013, p. 3). She imagines a future of ‘access and engagement’, (2013, p. 3) based on queer, feminist and crip theorists such as herself.

Body ‘work’

As a feminist and as an academic I am aware of the mutability of the female body. I have studied and restudied feminist body theory. I can almost quote passages of Elizabeth Grosz and Adrienne Rich by heart. Yet, it is the collision (itself a word that is imbued with a violent rhetoric) of queer/crip theory that speaks to me now – both in the theoretical and creative sense, and in the personal sense. Crip theory is violently originated because the pain that it suggests is often violently experienced. Violence in this instance is the result of ableist normativities and

continually gets reiterated in the experience of pain. Once again, Butler's exemplar of performed bodily matter is reaffirmed here.

The workshop I attended with my friend and to which I referred earlier was kintsugi (*kin* meaning gold and *tsugi* meaning brokenness) – the mending of pottery with gold mica paint powder and glue. I took my inexpensive, IKEA butter dish and placed it in a pillow case and carefully hit it with a hammer. It broke into three triangulated pieces, and I glued them together with epoxy resin and tapped the glue joins with gold mica powdered paint from a horsehair brush. The completed project was quite beautiful, and it gave me a sense of the wholeness and completion that can come out of brokenness.

The broken body can be understood as a 'horizon of value' to be controlled and cultivated. Body work practices can then be understood as the means by which neoliberal health and gender ideals are mobilised and lived (Coffey 2018). It is easy to forget how gendered the experience of higher education is to this notion of perfection and accumulating of privilege and status. It is only relatively recently since women as a group have been a part of, and had access to, higher education. It remains the fact that only certain ethnic and cultural groups of women (read white, middle-class, cisgendered) have had across-the-board access to it. Historically, it was not until the nineteenth and twentieth centuries that women were able to attend university, and this was a very classed experience and one for which they had to struggle mightily (Burke 2012, pp. 16–17). The absence of women of colour from higher education was a 'collective amnesia' (p. 17) and, was, as Spivak argued (cited in Burke 2012, p. 17) a form of 'epistemic violence' (p. 17), akin to the symbolic violence that diversity practices render in access to crip, queer and other minorities in contemporary accounts of higher education. There is also the narrative of extremely gifted and talented people who 'reside' in crip bodies, (consider, for example, Stephen Hawking) that produce a stereotypical notion of "broken" genius inhabiting disabled bodies.

The following poem, *At Fifty-two*, covers the terrain of age, gender, mutability and the ways that a crip body in higher education can let its inhabitant down, and be let down, that its very crip status can render us beholden to medicine and a medicalised discourse that we have to 'appreciate,' tolerate and even value. Foucault's work on medicalisation and discourse and the material body (cited in Grosz 1994, p. 146) is relevant here as an exemplar of reiterative practices. That the reiteration is necessary is a sign that bodies never quite comply with the norms by which their materialisation is impelled in higher education. Indeed, it is the instabilities of embodiment and the potentialities for materialisation that mark one domain, such as higher education, in which the force of hegemonic, regulatory law can be turned against itself to spawn repeated (performative) rearticulation.

At Fifty-Two

I: Then

Riding the train

10.30am: I should be at work.

10.30am: The mellow voice comes over the loud speaker.

On my own aboard this monstrous metal engine,

so many times I have taken this journey.

I watch as kilometres of anonymous sky flies by.

I buy, time after time: an all-day ticket.

No-one knows me here. No-one cares. I am

an automatic insatiable engine, counting down the minutes,

10.40am.

10.50am.

Stop. Start again. Stop, the hours of travel
broken up into five- and ten-minute intervals.

II

I have the diagnosis: menorrhagia:
a hot spatter, almost always unexpected,
a crimson stain spreading onto my white skirt,
or onto my dress. Blood-soaked knickers
at any time of the month.

I have the diagnosis: incontinence: shitting myself
because I can't make it to the toilet in time—a triptych of
PTSD, Irritable Bowel, and a loose sphincter
from too many kids, my doctor says.

III

I am wet and sticky. I smell like shit.
I try in vain to wipe myself clean
with handfuls of toilet wipes, then
scrub my belly and thighs
with water and stiff paper towel
from the dispenser, hiding, half-naked
in the stinking metal toilet stall
at whichever station I pressed the bell for.
I wrestle clean underwear
and flannels from plastic Ziplock bags
I keep in my handbag.

IV

Back on the train I close my eyes to the click and shutter
of these chattering strips of light,
a recluse on this anonymous afternoon's journey.
I've been here so often I've learnt all the stations off by heart:
Welshpool—Queen's Park—Cannington
Challis—Sherwood—Armadale,
the clackety clack of metal on metal the only noise that soothes me,
this carriage the only place that demands nothing of me, but time.
My head bumps rhythmically against the window,
my cheek invisibly chalked with the skin cells
of a thousand previous faces.

V

My mind is a revolving line of unspooling track, pebbles for words,
going forward and back, forward, and back, my teeth lightly chatter
in this hermetically sealed, air-conditioned tube.
Slicing through my invisible wounds like light through glass.

I have to get off the train again, my body barely
 holding back the flood of diarrhoea, cramping, sweat dripping,
 my body bends and sways as the train screeches to a halt.
 Pulling my bag onto my shoulder,
 my feet firmly planted,
 hurrying, hurrying away.

VI

Despite all the preparation, despite
 the specialists' visits and myriad procedures,
 despite handfuls of different coloured pills,
 swallowed with water that is blood warm and tastes like the metal
 of this stall, it is here I have ended up,
 scrubbing underwear in a restroom sink
 until my knuckles are raw,
 washing shit or blood clots down the plughole.

VII: Now

My landscape is an overworn garment, my body is
 pressed and repressed, darts let out,
 seams undone. Everything soft and loose,
 with all my days collected and broken up, stacked like driftwood,
 the passing decades riven and fragmented.

All my days picked at and scrutinised,
 and at my back I always hear time's winged chariot,
 (as co-passenger and confidante), hurrying near.
 Alas, I think, alas, the years slip by; with so little notice taken.

Costa branca, I am blood and shit and water,
 my body a mass of softened hills, as white as wool,
 intercut with tattooed pathways,
 tears streaming down my face like the hard, bright sea.
 There, in that carriage, was my memory.

This poem is a crip recasting of age and normative embodiment in which age does weary, and the years do condemn. Childbirth, followed by the onset of menopause and the intersections of history and story-telling, combine with a crip sensibility to highlight the affirmation of the crip, queer, female body. There are overarching similarities between this classed, gendered and academic body and the body described by the second wave feminist, Adrienne Rich. I appreciate the bodies I am reading and writing about, young women and older women like myself who battled with these bodies as a matter of reality. When I bore my eight children I found resonance in the theory and storytelling of the women who came before and after me. This poem is both queer and crip because it articulates what Kafer (2013) called the twisting (violently iterated) of crip into queer and queer into crip and how both highlight the risks of such a twisted inclusion (Kafer 2013, p. 16). Indeed, Butler herself argues for queer to be seen as a site of collective contestation, to be 'always and only redeployed' (1993, p. 223). The implications for an indifferent higher education space which does not value (the reality of) difference, rather endeavouring to elide it in its academic setting. Institutional racism and sexism that co-exist with

neoliberalist structural and political forces continue to deny agency to female and trans female crip and queer bodies. As Burke and Manathunga (2020) state, time is ‘pedagogical and deeply entwined with culture’ (2020, p. 667). However, it is not only time that is pedagogical and cultural, but embodiment, history and storytelling as well. To pretend that there are not racist, sexist and political undercurrents to women’s existence, both temporally and spatially, is disingenuous and misleading.

The implications of and for higher education

Kafer (2013) argues that the ‘problem’ of disability does not reside in individuals, but in the built environment and in the cultural and social models that require individuals or their friends and family to negotiate such spaces for them. Since I am discussing crip status and its experience in the higher education university space, it is imperative to understand that the open spaces and physical landscape of a university campus – the distances to be travelled, the stairs to be negotiated, the hills, the roads and paths and the lack of wheelchair access, the lack of disabled toilets, as examples, are all problems that no number of friends, family or colleagues are able to negotiate on a disabled person’s behalf.

Butler (1993) argues that ‘the subject may appear to have “an identity” which is resolutely written on the body, but this is only because reiteration “conceals or dissimulates the conventions of which it is a repetition”’ (1993, p. 12). The pun in *Bodies that Matter* is that matter refers to both the reiterated significance of the body (*it* matters) and the materiality of the body (*the* matter). That the reiteration is necessary, is a sign that materialisation is never completed. In this instance, bodies find it difficult to comply with the norms by which their materialisation is impelled. Indeed, it is the instabilities, the possibilities for re-materialisation, that mark one domain in which the forces of the regulatory law of normative embodiment can be turned against itself and then be recognised as a crip body. This normative body excels and is foregrounded in higher education, to the detriment of the non-normative body.

Butler’s performativity theory and its relationship to the materiality of the crip, queer body is therefore a central argument in this paper. It is a little humorous to say ‘matter matters’, but the crip body in its very essence is the stuff of non-normative subjectivity. The right to higher education is about subjectivity and which subjects have the ‘right’ to it (Burke 2012, p. 50). In short, whose bodies matter, in the hegemonic culture of higher education. Samuels (2003) argues that crip and queer individuals often find themselves in a place where they need to ‘come out’ and tell people about their sexual practices/desires and/or their disability status. This is especially true for people with non-visible disabilities; however, even people with disability marked on the body are often forced to ‘explain’ their disability, in application forms, to tutors and lecturers and when seeking spaces that are inclusionary and welcoming, as well as its origins, and its impact on daily life.

Cosenza (2014, p. 158) argues that there are many ways to read the body-as-text and in this lies its queer and crip possibility. Fassett and Warren (2007, p. 65), explain that the disciplining of bodies through space and time is similar to the experience that occurs in higher education. Foucault (1995) calls this discipline in the likeness of the oppressor as the creation of ‘docile bodies’ (1995, p. 136). Furthermore, he argues that a docile body is one that may be ‘subjected, used, transformed and improved’ (p. 136). This body is the sort of diverse body that institutions in higher education welcome. Fassett and Warren (2007, p. 65) call this system of education as the education ““machine” containing normative representations of embodiment and sexuality’, (p. 65) whereby a well-organised process reproduces itself through its own image by the control of the docile bodies that flow through the higher-education machine (p. 65).

The machine of higher education promotes the beliefs and values of the white, masculinist, middle-class hegemony as well as normative cultural, social and political beliefs. Coffey (2020) argues that what a body can ‘do’ in a neoliberal framework, thinking in this instance of a university space implicates the mattering for which the body will be determined. This focus on access, choice and autonomy sees these bodies being ‘source[s] of value’ (p. 636). Or for bodies of difference, of lesser value. The consequences of not being able to access one’s value ‘can trigger [feelings of] discomfort, embarrassment and shame’ (Read & Leathwood 2020, p. 541). Burke (2017, p. 433) suggests that ‘inclusion might also be seen as a discursive space in which the politics of shame play out in ways that are experienced as personal failure and simply not being the “right” kind of person’ (2017, p. 433). A crip/queer body is one that is inculcated with shameful feelings of exclusion and difference.

This is highlighted with my position as a queer academic in an Australian university and a realisation that queerness, crip status *and* academia go together to form an inextricable link that both defines and unites me with my colleagues and the queer and/or crip students I have taught and with whom I have cohabited in the higher education space. Burke (2012, p. 61) states that bodies at university are ‘formed as much through difference as they are through sameness’. This is because, she suggests, being too ‘different’ requires self-correction and self-regulation, whilst diversity is something that institutions continue to embrace (p. 62). The temporal and the spatial exist as an exclusionary space, for bodies of difference, working as they do against, rather than with, privilege.

Conclusion

‘Non-traditional’ students, and multiply diverse academics, such as me, are part of the new network that addresses widening participation in higher education. The fact of widening participation came about in Australian universities as a result of redressing the entrenched inequalities (Burke 2012, p. 53) that persist in universities, both sandstone and ‘younger’ institutions. Burke argues that universities must grapple with socio and political inequalities across differences of ‘age, class, disability, ethnicity, gender, nationality, race, religion and sexuality’ (2012, p. 53) in order to encourage widening participation and access.

As I ‘tap,’ carefully, or not, on my body, with the kintsugi hammer of pain, and with my cane on the path before me, on a university campus, as well as in the open world, the more likely it is that I will experience the arbitrary nature of completion and brokenness that is attended to by cultures of disability and queerness, crip status and depression and anxiety, and the imperatives of feminist theory on these experiences. As McRuer (2018) attests, ‘to crip’, like ‘to queer’, ‘gets at processes that unsettle, or processes that make strange, or twisted’ (p. 23). The physicality of this description (twisting) also mentioned by Kafer (2013), accentuates the epistemic and physical ‘grappling’ that crip bodies must necessarily perform, in order to unsettle. And in examining the queer, crip body I can then begin to explore what discourses of recovery ‘do’ in ‘strange and twisted’ (p. 23) women’s lives and how the imperative to recover ‘normativity’ is realised and how this ‘normativity’ intersects with embodiment, queerness, crip status and its over-arching impact on my own experiences of higher education.

I have also explained the interconnections that my personal story (in poetry) has had with the theoretical research I have included in this paper. Foucault explains what he means by story writing about himself, and theory writing. He says:

Whenever I have tried to carry out a piece of theoretical work it has been on the basis of my own experience, always in relation to processes I saw as taking place around me. It is because I thought I could recognise around me [...] a few fragments of autobiography. (Foucault cited in Burke 2012, p. 76).

Drawing on queer theory, and the central concerns of crip theory considers how such a critical perspective might impact cultural and historical inquiry. Crip theory attends to the contemporary cultures of disability and queerness.

In doing this research I have been imbricated in the act of self-story-telling in the form of poems that give depth and resonance to my theoretical understandings of what it is to be a body of difference, rather than part of the welcomed, population of diversity, lacking access to an acceptable higher-education temporal space. Fragments of research can be teased at, revealing their intricacies and subtle shifts. Poetry can be an accessible pathway through theory, for others, who may or may not identify as queer or crip, and who may be a colleague or a student with whom I have contact. The higher education space revels in expressions of diversity in its student and staff populations, but recoils from real difference and the reality of a crip, queer body in a higher education institution. As Butler (1993) states, what constitutes the fixity of the material body [I add my crip, queer body here], its contours, its movements, depends as much on performances of normativity as it does on reiterations of actual materiality (1993, p. 2). The higher education space denies, in a tangible sense, access to it in its elision of crip, queer and other forms of non-normative, marginalised bodies in higher education.

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