

hundred trans, intersex, and gender-nonconforming people, the tangled bureaucratic web that the state and the social services it pays for spin around gender is killing trans people, especially poor trans people. The contradictions don't seem to matter to the state. Sure, they refuse to recognize the legitimacy of trans healthcare for Medicaid purposes, but then require it for ID purposes. Sure, they punish you for not having medical authorization to be yourself, but then refuse to see that medical authorization as legitimate when you need help paying for the care. Yes, being trans is real enough to get you falsely arrested and beaten, raped, or killed in prison, but not real enough to get you access to a domestic violence shelter, a drug treatment program that provides an alternative to incarceration, or a homeless shelter that recognizes your gender.

We need to do more than hope that an antidiscrimination law passes in our state. We need to look at where binary gender is being required and enforced in the administrative institutions in our states and cities, and take local action to weed out such discrimination. How are trans people faring, not just in your school or office, but in the shelter in your town? In the jail down the street? In the prison out in the country? If we examine how the most highly regulated and surveilled people are doing—immigrants, folks on welfare, people who are locked up, youth, people living in communities overexposed to the police—we'll see where gender regulation and coercion operate most sharply and we can form shared analysis and coalitional activism to undermine those operations.

PASSING LAST SUMMER

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I want to write about last summer and passing but I don't know where to begin. It's tempting to begin at the dyke march, rolling through in my scooter (read: a type of electric wheelchair) with a painful hickey on my neck, procured the night before from N, a gay man I hardly knew. I let that butch dyke marching next to me think the hickey came from another woman.

I won't pretend that this decision had nothing to do with the disdain so many lesbians feel toward queer women who express any kind of desire for men. But the decision was more about not wanting to enter into a complicated discussion about queerness and identification with a total stranger, while marching. My experience the night before had

been my only sexual encounter with a man since I began to identify as a lesbian. I couldn't imagine it erasing that identity, but there was a small part of me that felt fraudulent.

Yet in order to talk about passing and sexuality, first I must talk about being a crip.

I've started to say crip to nondisabled people now, the way I call them AB without offering an explanation. AB means able-bodied, and is used interchangeably in this essay with nondisabled. Some people use crip as short for cripple. I used to use the word crip only to mean a disabled person willing to claim that identity, but now I also say cripple to refer transgressively to other disabled people who are wheelchair users. I have always been both a crip and a cripple.

Disabled all my life, I distinctly remember threatening to sue a restaurant owner for demanding I sit in the back of an empty restaurant. I was seven. It was three years before the Americans with Disabilities Act, thirteen years after the Vocational Rehabilitation Act of 1973, which did the same thing as the ADA but was never enforced. I didn't have this context then. I had no idea there was actually a law that protected my civil rights; I was talking out of my ass, but we got reseated. It seems weird that I want to talk about disability and passing, because I use canes and an electric scooter for mobility. This equipment makes it obvious that I have some difficulty walking. For me to pass for AB, you would need to see me sitting at my desk or hear me on the phone, and even then the illusion would be short-lived. Eventually I would need to get up or roll away and you would know that I was disabled. Though once at a Halloween party, some guy asked me, "You don't really need those, do you?" I was dressed as a cat, but I guess my youth and skimpy clothes cast my canes as suspect.

I remember a conversation with a friend of mine who talked about the difficulty and stigma of outing oneself as disabled. I am rarely in situations where I get that choice. Unlike with my friend, people assume that I have some sort of disability. They stare or avoid eye contact. They challenge my own assessment of what I can do. They condescend. They become defensive when I raise the issue of wheelchair accessibility. They force me to accept help I don't need by manipulating my body, picking me up, or grabbing my arm. They sometimes refer to me as simply "the wheelchair."

Occasionally, people anticipate my need for a ramp or a curb cut because of my scooter. This, however, is rarely the case. Usually I need to remind them. I think about what a friend of mine, with an invisible disability, describes as "coming out": the difficulty of explaining exactly how her disability affects her and what her needs are in relation to the other person. But I have to do that as well.

I recognize that my claims of disability are met with less skepticism than hers because I use equipment and she doesn't, but I am forced to out myself because the scooter and canes don't express the exact specifics of my mobility. Can I walk? How far? Up stairs? My hands look fine, but I have bad tendonitis. Then there are the spasms, pain, and fatigue, all of which vary from day to day, hour to hour. The barrage of questions I am met with on a regular basis regarding my abilities is staggering—ranging from what my disability is to whether I take medication, drive a car, date, or have sex. These questions show how little is actually explained by the visibility of my scooter or canes. If outing has anything to do with understanding something about someone, explaining one's disability the way my friend described, I am always

outing myself. Unfortunately, the stigma I experience as a result of moving through the world chiefly while sitting down does little to help others to understand my needs and abilities. I am not spared the talks about the parameters of my body, my functionality, or my mobility. Visible disability does not avoid these conversations. It means that first I have to erase what so-and-so thought she knew because her aunt's friend had MS or MD (which I don't have, and even if I did, what information would that give her about my body?).

Last summer, the same body began dealing with bad tendonitis alongside cerebral palsy, which impacted not only my ability to type and write, but also to walk, stand, and dance on my feet. I was instructed by my doctor to avoid these activities because I might lose function, strength, and even sensation in my hands. To an observer, it didn't look like anything was wrong, and I could still do these things myself, but putting weight on my hands through my canes caused my hands and arms to hurt, tingle, burn, and go numb. Still, I felt like a fraud—with attendants in my room helping me to transfer in and out of bed, tie my shoes, and take a shower. I had worked for years in physical therapy to learn to do these things independently. Sometimes I would cheat by doing them myself anyway, because it was faster, cheaper, and easier. Or by masturbating (very hand-intensive stuff). But particularly by having sex with N.

The night I went home with N, we chatted for a few hours, there being a kind of foreplay in his complaint that lesbians always hit on him at the local gay bar. I made the same complaint about gay men, particularly one guy who just wouldn't leave me alone. He kept dancing with me by wrapping his arm so that my throat was in the crook of his elbow,

our height differential such that he was choking me. I kept pulling him off of me, and he kept replacing his arm. I went to sit down, but I got back up because I wanted to continue dancing. It was my whole reason for going out that night. Eventually this guy collapsed on top of me. The force of his fall knocked off my shoes. I had a bruise for several weeks, but I wasn't upset about that; I was upset about the fact that all of this happened in public, that more people would apologize as they simply brushed past me, and I would be treated as fragile for the rest of the night, even though I was not necessarily any less capable of staying on my feet than the guy who fell on top of me.

Another time, a man began dancing with me and grabbed my canes, lifting the ends up into the air and moving them back and forth as though they were arms. I had five seconds to prepare. I thought about tucking my head and pushing all of my weight forward to minimize the chance of cracking my head open on the dance floor. It worked pretty well. I fell in something of a cannonball position. In both of these cases, the men were thrown out of the club. In both cases, I remember being more upset about how I was being perceived than about the actual event itself, but I still felt attacked both times. I can't remember whether I told N these stories. They certainly came to mind when I made that comment about gay men coming on to me.

I remember explaining that my attraction to men ranged from sporadic to nonexistent and was not something I acted upon because I had no desire to be in relationships with men. Most of my emotional and intimate connections were with women. N said he felt the same way about women as I did about men. Looking back, I can see that we were negotiating our unexpected attraction. At the time, it felt like little more

than small talk. But I guess the real proposition came with N's "I'm gay, you're gay; wanna make out?"

During sex, I could not avoid using my hands. Or maybe I could have, but it didn't make me feel sexy to ask for help I didn't "need," especially in bed. There are certain orgasms that would not have happened without me using my hands—many of which were rightfully mine. Or were they? It is strange to talk about entitlement to sexual satisfaction as a lesbian involved with a gay man.

A gay male friend of mine kept trying to understand this unprecedented turn of events by putting us into different boxes. He described me as an experimenting lesbian and N as a bisexual or N as experimenting and me as frustrated or confused. Perhaps, my friend said, we were both bisexual, but my friend just didn't see me that way because I am so interested in women. I think of myself as a lesbian and I feel I have no right to put someone in a different box than the one that they claim, even if the boxes seem to make a logical contradiction. My friend accepted this contradiction, but he did feel it was unfair that, of the two of us, I was the one sleeping with a gay man. I told him that if he ever wanted to sleep with a lesbian, I would fully support him. We both laughed, but I reminded him that sleeping with a woman who's queer allows for mutable gender possibilities that he may not have considered, at which point my comment seemed less funny and more like food for thought. Several of my lesbian-identified friends expressed shock that I had started seeing a man, but when I added that he was queer they seemed relieved. Some added, "Oh, well, I would sleep with a gay man."

It seemed rather arbitrary to choose this one relationship, which was primarily sexual, as transformative of my identity. I am very at-

tracted to masculinity—butch, trans, and sometimes, rarely, even the most cliché of all: actual scrotum-toters. I draw the line somewhere, though: I have never had intercourse. I have nothing against it. There are just so many things that are more interesting to me sexually. Does this prove I'm a dyke? Does it minimize the importance of my relationships (all two) with men? Or would you call me bisexual? I felt like I was passing as bi when I talked about N. One friend invited me to her bi women's group. N began to refer to himself as bisexual and would get angry when I didn't follow his lead, though eventually he gave up. Did he chalk it up to semantic differences or denial?

I am aware, as I tell this story, that it is easier to talk about the ill-fitting nature of categories in relation to my own sexuality than it is to talk about disability in relation to sex. It is one thing to talk about parallels between the two identities and another to talk about how one identity affects the other. I don't know what it says that I have waited this long to reveal that N, like me, is disabled. He also uses a wheelchair and does not walk at all. Have I waited this long because I anticipate some sort of misunderstanding, a sense of "Oh, I see" from my imagined reader, as if our unlikely coupling is explained by the fact that we are both disabled?

Did I wait because of the stereotype that all disabled men are impotent or in some way lack the ability to satisfy sexually? This stereotype is so pervasive that it frequently becomes the only burning question with regard to disability and sexuality. In MTV's recent *Murderball*, a movie about two wheelchair rugby teams training for the Paralympics, an entire segment had to be devoted to how disabled men have sex, and specifically whether or not they can get it up. In fact, in a workshop

I attended for queer women on sexuality, after a "discussion" of disability and sexuality that basically consisted of me talking about the ways in which disability informs sexuality, the only question I received was, "Can my wife's brother, with a spinal cord injury, still have sex?" Of course this woman ignored everything I'd just said, and despite being lesbian-identified, had reduced sex to an act that centered around erection and ejaculation. But even if she had asked the more specific question behind her question, there was only one person who would have been able to answer it. Perhaps I fear that the reader will ask the same question about N. Or assume that I chose him as a partner because I was less interested in traditional penetrative sex.

Perhaps I've waited because I fear that when people see me with a disabled partner they think that disability is the reason we are together. Perhaps I've waited because, in some sense, I fear that this is true. Not in the sense that I date people because of their disabilities, but in the sense that my scholarship, my writing, and my activism have often focused on disability issues. N and I met at a discussion on sex and disability. We had more flexibility about going home together because we both lived in accessible apartments. We both used accessible transportation. It made certain things easier.

But what did N and I really have in common? There were significant differences in our politics. N was interested in working within the establishment; my political beliefs are more socialist than capitalist. I had already tried the establishment route and had found it stifling. Unlike N, who expressed implicitly and explicitly that he did not want to be poor, I had been poor. I was raised by first-generation immigrants who managed—with racial privilege, luck, and hard work—to make a relatively

clean departure to the middle class. I did worry about money from time to time, but I wasn't anxious about maintaining a particular class status. I deliberately chose a career that did not make people wealthy in order to effectively work on disability issues. I imagined N's family was more in line with the educated, well-off, white student body that I went to college with, but always felt slightly outside of and different from.

I distinctly remember N informing me that he tried to spend only a third of his social time with disabled people. I was disturbed by this proclamation, and we had a long conversation about it. N clarified that what he meant was that most of his social time was spent doing some kind of political organizing and he didn't want to be pigeonholed as someone who dealt only with disability issues. He also explained that when he first moved to the Bay Area he'd spent a lot of his time with disabled people and had felt he was losing his ability to relate to the nondisabled.

The ability to relate to the nondisabled was something I had to consciously develop, after attending a "special" (read ability- or crip-segregated) school until seventh grade (unlike N, who had always been mainstreamed). When I switched schools, I had to anticipate stigma and stereotype to a far greater degree. I was no longer allowed to walk in the halls without an adult; rumors were spread that my grades were high because teachers felt sorry for me; when the elevator broke, I was almost forced to leave. I wanted to be mainstreamed primarily because I was bored in all my classes (I was being forced to do work way below my grade level, and quickly losing any chance at getting into an academically challenging university, or a university at all). But another reason was that we didn't live in a world that was as segregated as my old

school. I had to learn how to deal with increased prejudice and stigma. I had to learn how to live in an able-bodied world.

N is younger than me, and when I was his age I distinctly remember feeling resistance to other people with disabilities, especially in terms of dating. There was a point where dating an able-bodied person felt like the ultimate sign of normalcy and acceptance. I couldn't get past my own internalized sense of lack with regard to disability, at least in my most intimate relationships, even though this did not stop me from being vocal about ableist oppression, having disabled friends, and advocating disability pride. I remember feeling that same need to distance myself from people with disabilities, afraid that it would consume my identity, and further restrict me even more than ableism already had. Although, of course, this was a restriction I was imposing on myself as a result of ableism. I feel embarrassed to admit that I felt this way. Even now I occasionally worry that my widespread interest in disability makes me come across as a one-trick pony, not only in terms of the academy, but in terms of relating to people who have no interest in disability. Yet despite this residual internal resistance, I have had several relationships with disabled partners. The longest was with someone who had the same disability as N. Is it significant that both the women who N had been sexual with before me were disabled? Did he feel more comfortable with these women because of their disabilities? Or did they feel more comfortable with him because of his disability?

After all, disability can impact sex. In my case it requires more careful logistical negotiation in terms of positioning, due to my spasticity and lack of balance. If both partners are disabled in ways that limit their physicality, it makes certain positions nearly impossible.

Hence, when someone asked me recently how my disability affected me, I replied, "Well, it sure does make me wish I paid more attention in high school physics to things like vectors and leverage." Having sex with someone who's both disabled and queer makes me feel freer, both from expectations around the body and around gender norms. My disabled queer lovers and I understand that the genitals are not the be-all and end-all of sexual pleasure. Sex is not centered around performing a prescribed set of acts, but around finding pleasure.

I'm fully aware that my desires around the kind of sex I want could change over time, depending on the partner and the possibilities and the mutability of our own desires. So many women I know who self-identify as lesbians express a desire or openness to having sex with men, but no desire for emotionally intimate relationships with them. I'm not sure what kinds of boxes it's most convenient to put these women into, or if acknowledging that desire confuses or misleads. Is it useful to use the term bisexual? And to what extent can we really know our desires, if what we want changes over time, and when sometimes we don't know what we want until we are presented with it?

I cringe as I write these words because I'm fearful of their misinterpretation. Have I just given ammunition to every sleazy, disrespectful man who trolls online posing as a lesbian, or goes to lesbian clubs and harasses women, attempting to get them to go home with him? I don't want to do us all that kind of disservice, but I want to acknowledge that one's feelings may change over time, and that feelings are not always possible to anticipate.

Similarly, I can't anticipate how my body will function, look, move, and feel with complete accuracy today. It may improve or get worse.

Activities that didn't bother me today may begin to bother me tomorrow. I may experience sensations that take on new meaning. For instance, I used to just take the prickly numb feeling in my fingers as my hands falling asleep. Now, it means blood is not reaching my nerve endings properly and if I don't change position, if my circulation doesn't come back soon, I may very well be doing permanent nerve damage to my hand. It is impossible for me to know whether I will always have tendonitis in the way I experience it now, or even at all. Much in the same way, it is impossible to know what sorts of partnering and sexual activity I will choose in the future based solely on what has happened in the past. All I can do is speak from what appears to be true, from my experiences so far, with an understanding that they may not be indicative of the future.

INNOCENT VICTIMS AND BRAVE NEW LAWS:

*State Protection and the
Battered Women's Movement*

PRIYA KANDASWAMY

The contemporary battered women's movement emerged in the 1970s. Through practices like consciousness-raising, second-wave feminists of this period began to theorize domestic violence as not simply an individual problem but as something women experienced as a class. Feminists saw domestic violence as part of the larger problem of patriarchy and understood it as primarily a problem of male power and control over women, specifically through violence within heterosexual relationships. The first domestic violence shelters emerged in the early 1970s, first in England and then in the United States. These shelters were originally women-run and women-centered, and often were simply composed of members who would take battered women into their