

## Between Crippling and Redaiming

Epistemological implications of Disability Studies' feeling strategies

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### Abstract

Disability Studies promote different feeling strategies pushing for social change towards a more inclusive and less ableist society. There is a utopian touch to this: How can we change the world by feeling differently about disability? Disabled people have discussed how to navigate ableism's emotional toll probably since the Disability Rights movement's roots. The paper-at-hand oscillates between two strategies that Disability Studies scholars and activists have advocated for: *Crippling* – deliberately changing one's emotional reaction towards disability – and *Reclaiming* – acknowledging hurtful emotions connected to an ableist society. Both strategies acknowledge the sociality of emotion but differ on what this sociality entails. Whereas *Crippling* preaches the deliberate enactment of different feelings, *Reclaiming* promotes acknowledging *authentic* feelings – feelings rooted in a discriminatory society and thus social in origin. However, *Crippling* as a political endeavour has often been criticised as an elitist issue – irrelevant to the lived reality of most disabled people. In contrast, a contemporary take on authenticity problematises its performative constitution and commodification in consumer capitalism. Considering *Crippling* and *Reclaiming* as complementary feeling strategies promoted in Disability Studies for social change, I argue that we should engage with underlying epistemological questions to point out their respective implications. To this end, shared theoretical concepts and terminology on feelings, affect, and emotion should be developed for a comprehensive engagement around emotionality within the field of Disability Studies.

### Keywords

Disability Studies, Ableism, Crippling, Reclaiming, Affective Practice

## Introduction

The paper at hand seeks to acknowledge how disabled people<sup>1</sup> navigate and counter how society makes them feel about their difference. To this end, I introduce two converse yet complementary feeling strategies promoted in *Disability Studies: Crippling and Reclaiming*. Crippling invites us to feel proud about disability, whereas Reclaiming acknowledges the hurtful feelings that, at times, belong to the disability experience. The following sections will elaborate on what those two feeling strategies do, the utopian hopes attached to them, their major critique and respective preconditions, differing epistemological implications and their common ground.

I am using the term strategy here to describe a subjectively meaningful action to solve a problem, navigate a situation, or survive the everyday. These mundane strategies should be valued, made visible, and regarded as a resource to develop. At times, feeling strategies are collectively negotiated and claimed by scholars and activists (Merri Johnson and McRuer 2014). Nevertheless, they similarly encompass subjective navigations of an ableist society, developed intuitively by different disabled people and their allies (McLaughlin and Goodley 2008). This rich archive of intuitive, experiential knowledge laid out *Disability Studies'* journals and other publications informs the paper at hand.

Disability Studies are a research programme that argues from a 'subaltern' (Spivak 1988) standpoint similar to Gender or Queer Studies. They, thus, do not take their topic – disability – as epistemologically given (Boger 2017) but rather as 'a difference constructed in and through society and culture' (Waldschmidt 2018: 69). When taken as epistemologically given, disability has commonly been cast as tragic and equated with functional impairment then framed as the sole explanation for disabled people's exclusion (Dobusch and Wechuli 2020). Disabled activists and scholars have criticised such an understanding of disability as individualising a social problem. Disability Studies as a research programme launched when the Disability Rights Movement condemned social barriers, which include those disabling attitudes (Union of the Physically Impaired Against Segregation 1976). Hence, a basic understanding that emotions are socio-culturally shaped is not new but even inherent in Disability Studies. However, countering a tragic and pitiful view of disability brought about a reluctance to engage with emotionality in this research programme due to a fear of playing into such individualising views of disability (Watermeyer 2009). This reluctance has led some Disability Studies authors to lament that '[t]here is definitely no crying in Disability Studies' (Donaldson and Prendergast 2011: 129)

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<sup>1</sup> I speak of disabled people here to indicate the social position to be disabled *by* society. This disablement is to be distinguished from impairment-related restrictions of activity – staying mindful that impairment is a bio-social phenomenon not to be naturalised (Thomas 1999).

The paper at hand draws on a PhD project that seeks to outline how emotions are theorised in Disability Studies. It will suggest productive extensions and a common language on emotion to facilitate a comprehensive engagement with emotional topics in Disability Studies, which is still lacking. After all, it can be assumed that feelings play a paramount role in lived experiences of the disabled bodymind and societal disablement. Disability Studies provide a rich archive of emotional topics that is yet to be tapped into by the Sociology of Emotions<sup>2</sup>. This paper seeks to specifically unpack the strategic handling of feelings towards difference as promoted by Disability Studies.

In my PhD, I outline that centring emotion from a Disability Studies perspective can hold three meanings. (1) Repertoires of emotion (Poser et al 2019) in *reaction* to disability say less about disabled people (as subjects or a collective) than about the respective social and cultural context, in which we acquire display rules or mutually intelligible labelling of feelings as discrete emotions (Poser et al 2019). After all, one of Disability Studies' main concerns is investigating how society and culture shape how we react to dis/ability<sup>3</sup> and what this tells us about underlying norms (Waldschmidt 2018). Ableism is a focal point for Disability Studies as a research programme to elaborate on such (specific) socio-cultural contexts. An ableist logic contains information on what is considered *normal*, namely an able body and mind that one should strive for (Campbell 2019) – including 'the kinds of emotions and affect that are suitable to express' (Campbell 2019: 147). It further divides people into allegedly distinct categories of either *normal* or *not normal* (Campbell 2019). However, Disability Studies' theory building in this domain mainly relies on reconstructive sense-making where scholars speculate about emotional reasons for, among other things, discrimination. Hence, it remains at least questionable what emotions are triggered by disability. (2) Irrespective of whether non-disabled people subjectively experience fear, hate or other emotions, socio-culturally shaped *reactions* impact disabled people's lives. I term this impact *disabling affect* to stress two aspects: *Disabling* hints at the performative character of the processes at hand and its 'enormous weight' (Campbell 2009: 166) for disabled people's subjective experience. *Affect* – understood as a '*relational dynamics*' (Slaby and Mühlhoff 2019: 27; italics theirs) reminds us that we do not have to distinctly name emotional *reactions* to inquire about their consequences for disabled people. Foregrounding disabling affect ties in well with the Disability Studies principle that disabled people's experience is supposed to take centre stage in this standpoint epistemology. (3) Lastly, we can acknowledge how disabled activists and scholars navigate ableism's emotional toll and push for social change towards a more inclusive and less ableist society. To tackle ableism, Disability Studies promote different *feeling strategies*, which are the focal point of this paper.

Trying to map the vast emotional archive Disability Studies provides, this distinction/taxonomy was developed by the author to further theorise emotions in Disability Studies by suggesting a common language on emotion and affect for this field. This taxonomy understands emotions as socio-cultural and

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<sup>2</sup> Up to Volume 3(1), no paper on disability or disabled people has been published in *Emotion and Society*, for instance.

<sup>3</sup> The neologism dis/ability foregrounds that disability and ability 'can only ever be understood simultaneously in relation to one another' (Goodley 2014: xiii) as socio-culturally co-constructed notions.

historic by aiming to show that the emotions of non-disabled people in reaction to disability and the emotions of disabled people are interrelated. From another angle, this taxonomy explores the role of emotion in shaping disability as a negatively perceived difference in society (ableism). Hence, the distinction I am suggesting is supposed to sharpen the theoretical toolbox for carving out the socio-cultural function of emotions in sustaining, experiencing, or struggling against ableism as a social structure.

The paper at hand will firstly introduce Crippling and then Reclaiming as feeling strategies promoted within Disability Studies. In a second step, their differing epistemological implications and complementarity will be explored.

### **Crippling: celebrating difference, interconnection, and subverted norms**

Disability Studies promote to strategically feel proud about disability for the sake of social change. In the following, two related feeling strategies will be introduced and distinguished: Disability Pride and Crippling.

What is Disability Pride, and why do I call it a feeling strategy? Uncountable disabled activists and scholars have called for a positive revaluation of disability as a source of pride (Clare 2015, McLaughlin and Goodley 2008, McRuer 2006). Disability Pride serves as an empowering counter-narration to a tragedy narrative of disability, eliciting feelings like guilt and shame (Corbett 1994). Like other social movements, disabled activists redefine feeling rules (Hochschild 2012) about their social identity that elicit ‘demobilizing feelings such as shame or guilt’ (Flam 2005: 20). Adopting a politicised disabled identity is framed as coming out disabled or *crip* – as overcoming passing (Goffman 1963) when learning to feel differently about disability (Corbett 1994). Disability Pride is read as a precondition for resisting ableism, internalised oppression, and specifically, disabled people’s material exclusion (Clare 2015).

‘Without pride, disabled people are much more likely to accept unquestioningly the daily material conditions of ableism: unemployment, poverty, segregated and substandard education, years spent locked up in nursing homes, violence perpetrated by caregivers, lack of access. Without pride, individual and collective resistance to oppression becomes nearly impossible’ (Clare 2015: 107).

Disability Pride does not refer to a single, distinct emotion but facilitates a whole range of other feelings like anger (e.g., at one’s exclusion), strength, and joy (Clare 2015). Pride and anger have been similarly paired in a Sociology of Emotions perspective on public collective action in democratic Global North settings (Flam 2005).

When disabled people and their allies are invited to feel proud about disability, the question remains how to induce this change of feelings. As feeling strategies, Disability Pride and Crippling *celebrate difference*. They emphasise the affirmative to counter tragic notions of disability (Garland-Thomson 2007). Even

facets of disabled lives that seem unambiguously negative, like a shortened life expectancy (Liddiard et al 2019) or pain experience, can be framed as entailing positive aspects. Pain, for example, can be affirmed as constitutive of being alive, as generative of opportunities to empathise (Mintz 2011), as creating a focus of attention or an instant of pause (Scheuer 2011), or even as enabling a different kind of pleasure when taken up in non-normative sexual practices, which *crip* sexuality (McRuer 2006, Sheppard 2018, Shildrick 2007).

While Disability Pride and Crippling share the basic idea of intentionally changing our feelings towards different into the affirmative, the two strategies can also be distinguished. The more recent notion of *Crippling* – inspired by Queer Studies<sup>4</sup> specifically explains *why* we should feel positive about or even proud of disability. Crippling frames disability as a source of pride due to its potential to *subvert norms*: it makes toxic socio-cultural norms more visible and, therefore, workable. The unachievable, ableist ideals we aspire to – e.g., autonomy and independence, or bodily perfection – are detrimental to many disabled people and many ablebodied people (Goodley 2014). Ablebodied people can strive to learn from Disability Arts, Disability Culture, and Disability History (Goodley 2021) to overcome their attachment to ableist ideals (Goodley 2014). Framing disabled people as avant-garde in this sense does not have to lead to *inspiration porn* (Grue 2016) or other forms of fetishization (Cain 2010, Goodley 2021, Koppers 2008) – it can encourage imagining social innovations.

Crippling can, for example, challenge our aspirations and positive feelings towards independence or achievement (Kafer 2013, Samuels 2017) and embrace vulnerability instead (Koppers 2008). From a Crippling perspective, we can also question what it means to be beautiful (Liddiard and Slater 2018), human (Goodley et al 2015), or a good worker. When disabled workers in the service sector struggle to meet the sector's demands (Wilton 2008) in terms of *emotional labour* (Hochschild 2012), Crippling as a feeling strategy will take this observation as an occasion to replace alienating with needs- and experience-based *feeling rules* (Hochschild 2012). For instance, it can be challenged whether tirelessly smiling at customers is an essential feature of the performed task (Wilton 2008).

One subverted norm that Crippling centres as a source of pride is *interconnection*. From a Crippling perspective, Disability can teach us to value interdependence, self-care, or pleasure instead of independence or achievement (McRuer 2006). Many Disability Studies writers draw on Deleuze and Guattari (1983, 1987) for affirmative understandings of desire and interconnection. Crippling draws on the fact that objects of desire – what we desire – are socio-culturally shaped, not least by our social

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<sup>4</sup> Crip Theory defines the notion of 'compulsory able-bodiedness' (McRuer 2006: 2) inspired by Queer Theory as the cultural assumption of a general preference for able bodies, identities and subjectivities: Like being heterosexual when sexual orientation is framed as choice, '[n]early everyone, it would seem, wants to be normal in the able-bodied sense as well' (McRuer 2006: 7). Since this prescription does not only target the body but also the mind, it is compulsory to be able-bodied and able-minded (Kafer 2013).

position (Goodley 2021). *Crippling* desire questions who is considered as an object (or subject) of desire. Affirmative readings of desire, thus, often focus on but are not limited to disabled people's sexuality. First, affirming disabled people's sexuality means allowing disabled bodies to be attractive, pleasurable, and desirable – but not fetishised (Campbell 2009, Kafer 2012). We could say that *Crippling* desire starts with a transgression of compulsory ablebodymindedness in the realm of sexuality.

A Deleuzoguattarian (1983, 1987) reading of desire is further taken up to cherish the feeling of interconnectedness, and innovative ways of conviviality disability enables beyond sexuality. An affirmative reading of interconnection has been employed to make sense of the lived realities of disabled families (Goodley et al 2015). Families with disabled family members provide a rich archive for such proud affirmations and revaluations of non-normative bodies (Goodley and Runswick-Cole 2013). Ablebodied parents 'resist normative modes of feeling about their disabled children, as they seek out productive alternatives' (McLaughlin and Goodley 2008: 19). Based on their lived experience, parents often rework their understanding of disability towards accepting difference – affirming their disabled children as independent personalities contributing to their family life (McLaughlin and Goodley 2008). Social interconnectedness is further cherished in mutual crip care and community when interdependency is framed as a source of pleasure to be desired, allowing survival and thriving despite abjection and stigma (Kolářová 2014).

However, *Crippling* and even Disability Pride as political endeavours have been condemned as *elitist*. *Crippling* is criticised for its exclusionary notions irrelevant to the lived reality of most disabled people. 'First, most disabled people do not live in the world of SDS [Society of Disability Studies; YW] and we can't ignore the majority whose experiences and feelings have less to do with disability pride than with stigma' (Brune and Garland-Thomson 2014: n.p.). This critique specifically targets the terminology of *Crippling*, perceived as firmly rooted in an ivory tower. Notably, the neologism of *cripistemology/cripistemologies*, a composite of crip and epistemology, meant to convey a call to literally *crip* epistemology (Merri Johnson and McRuer 2014) received polarised feedback. It kicked off emotionally charged discussions (Merri Johnson and McRuer 2014), despite a sympathetic grassroots origin story provided by its authors:

'The back and forth in this mix generated discussion about knowing and unknowing disability, making and unmaking disability epistemologies, and the importance of challenging subjects who confidently "know" about "disability," as though it could be a thoroughly comprehended object of knowledge. We were questioning, in other words, what we think we know about disability, and how we know around and through it. Two weeks later, Lisa texted Robert, "We're really talking about cripistemologies here"' (Merri Johnson and McRuer 2014: 130).

However, the core of this critique hits the notion of pride since feeling proud to be disabled might feel outright impossible<sup>5</sup> when struggling with adverse ‘impairment effects’ (Thomas 1999: 43) like unreliable bodyminds due to, among other things, pain or fatigue (LaCom 2007, Meekosha 2000) or aetiologies rooted in inequality. Inequality complicates pride: Disability Studies are accused to not adequately represent disabled people who do not claim this social identity because their poor health is expected, e.g., exploited workers in the Global South (Grech 2015, Puar 2017).

If deemed possible, revaluations like Crippling generally require emotion work (Campbell 2009). To claim a politicised disabled identity, one has to feel entitled to belong to the disability community, not an impostor who is not disabled enough (Clare 2015). ‘Pride is not an inessential thing. [...] But disability pride is no easy thing to come by. Disability has been soaked in shame, dressed in silence, rooted in isolation’ (Clare 2015: 107). Further, belonging and entitlement are difficult to claim in a blame culture that contests disability status and eligibility (Campbell 2015). Thus, Pride and Crippling are preconditional feeling strategies.

In a nutshell, what do the feeling strategies of Disability Pride and Crippling do? Both redefine feeling rules (Hochschild 2012) about difference to enable resistance to demobilising feelings. To this end, both celebrate difference and elicit a whole range of feelings – not only pride. Crippling specifically establishes why we should feel proud towards disability: disability invites us to subvert toxic norms and instead cherish the interconnection disability enables. Yet, both feeling strategies require emotion work and a sense of entitlement as preconditions. Consequently, Disability Pride and, even more so, Crippling are criticised for being elitist and irrelevant to many disabled people’s lived experience.

When pride is difficult, if not impossible, to maintain at times, other feeling strategies are called for. The following section elaborates the *Reclaiming* of hurtful feelings as a converse yet complementary feeling strategy to Crippling.

### **Redeeming hurtful feelings: nuanced subjectivity and survival**

A converse feeling strategy to Disability Pride and Crippling is the Reclaiming of hurtful feelings that are often – if certainly not always – connected to the experience of disability, like loss, trauma, sadness, or loneliness. Why do I call Reclaiming a converse feeling strategy to Crippling? While Crippling argues for intentionally changing how we feel about disability, Reclaiming seeks to depathologise feelings assumed to be present all along yet subject to feeling rules (Hochschild 2012) that prohibit their expression. Namely, pride strategies counter tragic and pitiful notions of disability that individualise the social problem

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<sup>5</sup> Whether or not feeling proud of being disabled should be deemed impossible is for disabled people themselves to decide, not academics or practitioners who are supportive of emancipatory notions of disability but ‘draw the line to different degrees on the notion of celebrating and indeed enjoying disability’ (Campbell 2009: 170).

disability. To express hurtful feelings allegedly confirms such stereotypes and thus cements discrimination. Disability Studies' reluctance to negotiate unpleasant feelings is, at times, read as pride strategies gone too far rather than as avoidance of other emotions (Shakespeare 2013). That pride is difficult, if not impossible, to maintain at times (see above) is an indication that these feeling strategies went too far. Reclaiming stays mindful that the reclaimed emotions are frequently instrumentalised to medicalise disabled people's experience<sup>6</sup> and emphasises disabled people's own emotional needs instead (Watermeyer 2009).

If medicalisation is a threat, why should unpleasant feelings be strategically reclaimed? Reclaiming is supposed to enable a nuanced representation of disabled *subjectivity*, to allow *survival* or even healing, *political activism* and, ultimately, a self-determined *knowledge production*.

From a Reclaiming perspective, a representation of disabled *subjectivity* may be called nuanced when it includes the emotional exploration of a potentially traumatic acquisition, lost functioning, or pain experience. Alison Kafer (2016) argues that neither disability experience nor disclosure can be separated from (potentially traumatic) experiences of becoming disabled connected to feelings of mourning and loss. Several Disability Studies scholars seek to elaborate emotional aspects of lost functioning. Disability Studies should explore 'the deepest emotions of living with a failing/changing body and all that comes with it – envy, fury, loss of self-esteem and often a complete inability to know how to cope with deteriorating bodily functions' (Meekosha 2000: 814). Pain as a socio-culturally shaped affective experience is another nuance of the disability experience that many authors claim to engage with, albeit in a depathologising way (Campbell 2009, Wolfe 2002). A pain-induced loss of functionality, fatigue and the somatic experience of pain itself might feel destabilising and depressing (Scarry 1987). (Chronic) pain is 'reliably unreliable' (Sheppard 2020: 8) because severe pain can render daily routines impossible (Dederich 2020) when it dominates all consciousness (Mintz 2011). Negotiating (and affirming) pain should be acknowledged as an emotional process, and listening to pain as (often gendered) emotion work (Bendelow and Williams 1998, Sheppard 2020). Unfortunately, ablebodied people are often unwilling to hear about pain (Dederich 2020, Sheppard 2020).

Reclaiming hurtful emotions or engaging with a nuanced disabled subjectivity as a feeling strategy is supposed to *enable survival*. Surviving in emotionally healthy ways requires resources like energy and

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<sup>6</sup> Disabled people's emotions are frequently medicalised (Wechuli: in Review): expressed unpleasant emotions such as sadness or anger are misinterpreted as 'impairment effects' (Thomas 1999: 43) rather than a reaction to discrimination. Expressed anger is often heard as disabled people being rude or (inherently) bitter (Cahill & Eggleston 1994; Goodley et al. 2018) against the general expectation to make others comfortable with their difference and with their experiences in a discriminatory world (Watermeyer & Swartz 2008). Thus, disabled people are subjected to feeling rules (Hochschild 2012) such as a prohibition to publicly negotiate stereotypically ascribed emotions not to justify discriminatory treatment (Wechuli: in Preparation). Whether expressed unpleasant emotions are misread as symptomatic varies with impairment labels, e.g., mental health issues (Evans 2020) or intellectual disability (Fish 2018; Goodley & Runswick-Cole 2011) as well as intersectionally, e.g., by gender (Molow 2014) or race (Erevelles 2010).



time. Yet, disabled people are kept busy with the unfulfillable task of complying with feeling rules (Hochschild 2012), which demand concealing or not even experiencing stereotype-confirming feelings. Neither ableist violence nor ‘impairment effects’ (Thomas 1999: 43) like chronic pain or fatigue can be discussed away or removed by a sole insistence on social accommodation (Wolfe 2002). One can argue that these feelings neither vanish when adopting a proud *crip* identity (Kafer 2016). Most importantly, disproving stereotypes must be deemed impossible since such feelings may have good cause in an ableist, inaccessible environment. When disabled people do not concentrate on their own emotional needs, they stay rooted in the same devaluing stereotypes they try to disprove and, thus, complicit in ableism (Watermeyer 2009). If they acknowledge feelings of, e.g., grief, they unsubscribe from such futile endeavours and may, thus, focus their freed energies on their own emotional needs.

Enabling survival also entails the prevention of further injury. From a Reclaiming perspective, disabled people prevent being hurt further by expressing their subjective experiences of ableism and impairment. Christiane Hutson (2016: 240; my translation) reminds us not to ignore any form of violence as ‘[i]t still hits us’. In a discriminatory society, it causes further injury to keep emotional injuries a secret because victims of violence tend to feel ashamed and blame themselves for experiences that remain unshared (Hutson 2009). Paying attention to shame can make us aware of disabling narratives and, thus, prepare us to resist them. Shaming narratives on welfare eligibility, for example, undermine disabled people feeling worthy. Shame is, thus, not to be understood as a solely *negative* emotion or antonym of pride (Tabin et al 2020). Rather, it may expose (and thus challenge) the labour and pain caused by ableism to discourage internalisation and individualisation when it is disclosed (Campbell 2009). In this sense, a collective Reclaiming of pain can discourage individualisation and, instead, encourage people living with pain to claim disability as a social position (Wolfe 2002). Non-disclosed shame is demobilising (Flam 2005), individualising (Clare 2015) and isolating (Hutson 2009), though.

Whether Reclaiming as a feeling strategy can successfully prevent further injury and free energies to be engaged according to disabled people’s own emotional needs crucially relies on the availability of *safe spaces*. Whoever has experienced sharing unpleasant, socio-culturally rooted feelings only to learn from the audience’s reactions that those feelings have been read as rooted in one’s difference rather than discrimination knows that making oneself vulnerable is a risky strategy that can backfire. To find the courage to share emotions stereotypically ascribed to disability, disabled people need to feel confident that others’ impressions of them will consequently not be dominated by those same stereotypical ascriptions (Watermeyer 2009). When can a space be called safe? There is a widely shared consensus that the *safe* in safe space translates to judgement-free (Liddiard 2018, Watermeyer 2009), acknowledging (Forrest 2020, Watermeyer and Swartz 2008), and non-*bureaucratic* (Titchkosky 2020) and relational way to respond to, e.g., suffering. A *safe* way to engage with one another when difficult feelings are expressed has to be negotiated based on the emotional needs of the involved persons (Kafer 2016, Rogers 2015). However, safe spaces are unequally distributed and associated with privilege (Hutson 2009); they are particularly hard to find for disabled people, even among other minorities (Campbell 2009,

Watermeyer and Swartz 2016). After all, most disabled people grow up amongst non-disabled relatives who do not share their bodily nor social experiences. Many continue to rely on ablebodied people when they depend on support (Watermeyer and Swartz 2016). Further, safe spaces and community-building have been confounded with segregation and, hence, discouraged (Campbell 2009). Just like Disability Pride and Crippling, Reclaiming transpires as a preconditional feeling strategy.

Beyond disabled people's subjective or collective emotional wellbeing, hurtful emotions are considered a resource for political activism or even *knowledge production*. Some authors advocate breaking the 'cycle of silence' (Watermeyer 2009: 101) around the personal and psychological effects of ableism to build a political movement (Watermeyer and Swartz 2016) or activist communities (Marks 1999). Brian Watermeyer (2009) even reads emotional oppression as the central obstacle to a worldwide, revolutionary disability movement.

'Political movements, like people themselves, cannot become strong by denying what is stigmatized as weak – strength comes from recognizing, naming and engaging with the difficult emotional issues which oppression causes, and may even be designed to cause' (Watermeyer and Swartz 2016: 275).

Such claims are founded on the feminist insight that *the personal is political* (Douglas et al 2021, Liddiard 2013, Marks 1999). Politicising the private realm should attend to disabled people's emotional wellbeing and thus seek to depathologise disabled people's emotional experience (Liddiard 2013) in 'revealing linkages between structural and psycho-emotional forms of disablism' (Liddiard 2013: 126). Acknowledging the politicisation of the emotional lives of disabled people and their allies opens up 'political possibilities of affect and activism' (Douglas et al 2021: 40). It allows them to make anger or even rage fruitful for resistance and activism (see for a similar reasoning within the sociology of emotion: Flam 2005). '[W]e cannot separate feelings from action' (Douglas et al 2021: 48). Hence, a Reclaiming perspective politicises the private to use hurtful emotions as a resource for political activism.

Beyond political activism, the navigation of difficult emotions is also recognised as an epistemological resource for research and theory building in Disability Studies that can foster ways of knowing that can be called 'criphistemological and that might also be described as disabled' (Mollow 2014: 199–200). Alison Kafer (2016) urges Disability Studies to build an 'archive of feelings' (Cvetkovich 2006) and an anti-ableist vocabulary on the link between disability and (ongoing) trauma, for instance. Disability Studies scholars reclaim anger (Cheyne 2016), grief (Watermeyer 2017), fear (Liddiard 2018), or disgust (Campbell 2009) to advocate for self-determined knowledge production. The recognition of different unpleasant emotions as a resource for knowledge production is unsurprising given that many scholars' commitment to Disability Studies as a research programme is experience-based. 'Many if not most of us come to Disability Studies with this experiential knowledge, and we know that experiential knowledge is necessarily emotional knowledge' (Chrisman 2011: 179). In what way can unpleasant feelings serve as

a resource for knowledge production? They can be used as a motivator for research or for deeper reflection in data analysis and theory-building.

The motivational function of emotions for research has been emphasised elsewhere (Barbalet 2002, Morton 2010) – specifically for creative and explorative research concerned about the research subjects (Morton 2010). Unfortunately, affective motivations for research projects are not commonly accepted in the academic context and are usually erased from publications (Bergman Blix 2015, Wettergren 2015). In Disability Studies, reclaimed anger and grief bear the potential to motivate emancipatory research. Anger at ableism and omnipresent barriers, for instance, can be a powerful driver for research (Cheyne 2016). Drawing on the notion of melancholy, grief can, similarly, be used as motivation to address discrimination (Watermeyer 2017). Melancholy – a permanent state of grief blocked by self-reproaches and distinguished from *healthy* forms of mourning (Freud 2004[1917]) – refers to the failure to mourn one’s degradation by constant assimilation pressure properly. Disabled people are subject to such pressure to fit in when expected to fulfil non-disabled norms like ideas about the *good life*, which at the same time remain barred from them (Watermeyer 2017).

In research already initiated, emotions may unfold their reflective potential in data analysis if not obscured or even lost by rationalisation (Barbalet 2002) – a resource that qualitative research has long drawn upon:

‘Unlike quantitative research, qualitative methods take the researcher’s communication with the field and its members as an explicit part of knowledge instead of deeming it an intervening variable. The subjectivity of the researcher and of those being studied becomes part of the research process. Researchers’ reflections on their actions and observations in the field, their impressions, irritations, feelings, and so on, become data in their own right, forming part of the interpretation, and are documented in research diaries or context protocols’ (Flick 2011: 16).

Researcher-centred methods like autoethnography specifically draw on emotions’ reflective potential by employing what can be called an emotional epistemology (Marvasti 2014). Also, in qualitative interviews, the researchers’ reflection on her or his emotional engagement is used as an epistemological tool. Well-versed interviewers should be able to register which interview passages sparked feelings of irritation or discomfort to use their emotionality as a source of information in data analysis. If the specific type of interview allows further questions, like later phases of narrative interviews, the researcher’s emotionality can guide attention to what questions should be asked (Helfferich 2011). Kirsty Liddiard (2018) argues that researchers’ emotional engagement is necessary for reflexivity in qualitative research within Disability Studies. Her informants confirmed some of her worst fears as a real cause of concern that she had previously dismissed as irrational. These concerns are specific to her own embodied experience and informed by identities and marginalisation shared with her informants. To keep up a professional performance, she initially felt compelled to surface act (Hochschild 2012) rather than disclose her emotional distress. Liddiard is implying that her anxious investment in her research topic allowed her to reach a deeper engagement with her qualitative material.

From an intersectional perspective, Christiane Hutson (2016) calls on Sick people of Colour to produce their own knowledge to trace and reject projected unpleasant feelings and oppressive epistemologies.

Tapping into their experiential knowledge, Sick people of Colour, e.g., *know* that they are blamed and shamed for their health status, for instance, when cancer is linked to depression (Lorde 1997) or the failure to be or become happy. Such framings individualise the responsibility for health and happiness but oversee unequal opportunities to stay healthy or happy (Hutson 2009). Spelling out what it means that *the personal is political*, unpleasant feelings are an epistemological resource for a self-determined knowledge production for activist and scientific communities.

What does the feeling strategy Reclaiming do? It acknowledges and reappropriates hurtful feelings connected to the disability experience that usually tend to be medicalised. Reclaiming explores disabled people's subjectivity in a nuanced way that includes traumatic aetiologies, lost functioning, and pain. As for the hopes connected to this feeling strategy, Reclaiming is supposed to enable survival in an ableist society by preventing reinjury and freeing emotional energy used up to disprove stereotypes. Ultimately, Reclaiming is supposed to enable emancipated knowledge production in terms of research motivations and a deeper analysis of (qualitative) data. However, reclaiming is a risky strategy that might contribute to the medicalisation of disabled people's feelings. To avoid medicalisation or objectifying disabled people's feelings, Reclaiming centres their subjective experience. At the very least, it necessitates safe spaces that are unequally distributed.

## Concluding discussion

This contribution mainly focuses on feeling strategies promoted by Disability Studies to tackle disabling affect that is informed by socio-culturally acquired repertoires of emotion in *reaction* to disability. Crippling and Reclaiming are discussed as converse yet complementary feeling strategies. To this end, their differing epistemological implications and common ground will be elaborated on in the following.

Both Crippling and Reclaiming acknowledge the sociality of emotion but differ on what this sociality entails. Following Katharina Scherke (2009), a sociological perspective on emotion may look at two aspects: the social *origin* of emotions or the social *impact* of emotions, for instance, their role in social change. While Crippling and Reclaiming are both connected to hopes of social change, they understand and use emotions' social origin differently.

The Crippling discourse acknowledges that emotions are socio-culturally contingent as it preaches to feel differently about disability. As previously mentioned, the feeling strategies Crippling and even Disability Pride have often been criticised as elitist endeavours – irrelevant to the lived reality of most disabled people (Campbell 2008), as overlooking inequality (Grech 2015, Puar 2017), and requiring considerable – and potentially exhausting – emotion work (Campbell 2009, Clare 2015, Sheppard 2020). Arguably, this notion of simply feeling differently towards disability provokes such outrage precisely because it is *not* that simple. Therefore, inclusive notions of Crippling stay mindful of the emotion work involved in proud revaluations of disability (Campbell 2009, Clare 2015, Sheppard 2020) while acknowledging disabled people's lived realities that complicate relationships with pride, for instance, unreliable

bodyminds (LaCom 2007) and traumatic aetiologies (Kafer 2016), or socially produced impairments (Puar 2017) and blame culture (Campbell 2015).

Quite contrary to that, Reclaiming as a feeling strategy acknowledges that hurtful feelings connected to the disability experience are rooted in a discriminatory society and, thus, social in origin. However, Reclaiming does not promote changing but rather making conscious of such hurtful feelings and depathologise them by recognising their social origin. Still, the worry that Reclaiming might confirm stereotypes and cater to the medicalisation of disabled people's experiences expresses a concern that Reclaiming might not achieve the social change it seeks to inspire. Moreover, Reclaiming's call to acknowledge hurtful feelings implies the idea of *authentic* feelings and a sense of alienation of one's (presocial) self or feelings (Samuels 2017, Watermeyer and Swartz 2008). Yet, a contemporary take on authenticity problematises its performative constitution (Illouz 2018) and commodification in consumer capitalism (Illouz 2018). The notion of authenticity further stands in opposition to Crippling's approach to feelings.

To consider Crippling and Reclaiming as converse feeling strategies highlights the need to engage with underlying epistemological questions and their respective implications. For the Sociology of Emotions, Disability Studies can provide an extensive archive of emotional topics drawn from disabled people's lived experiences and explored from their standpoint. However, so far, these topics are not discussed comprehensively. Thus, Disability Studies will profit from a more thorough theorisation of emotions, affect and feelings, for instance, from guidance regarding emotional terminology. Still, its emotional archive is a resource for further theorising of, e.g., subaltern emotions while neither taking the (neat) categorisation as subaltern nor the preference of able bodies and minds as given.

Based on their opposing epistemological implications, Reclaiming and Crippling transpire as antithetical feeling strategies. Still, both seek to prevent disabling affect and, particularly, a medicalisation of disabled people's feelings (Jenell Johnson 2011). Both feeling strategies cherish community-building and mutual learning to enable survival in an ableist society – be it in families, arts, or political activism. Drawing on Randall Collin's (2008) interaction rituals theory, social movements can foster feelings of solidarity and end draining emotions experienced in subordinating interactions outside the movement. By generating emotional energy, social movements build the emotional foundation for social change (Summers-Effler 2002). Both, Crippling and Reclaiming foster solidary and nurturing emotions to counter emotional interactions in an ableist society experienced as draining.

Crippling and Reclaiming struggle for a common cause, which advocates of both feeling strategies have also grasped. Not surprisingly, proponents of Reclaiming still endorse Pride (Meekosha 2000, Watermeyer 2009), just like proponents of Crippling value unpleasant feelings (Clare 2015, Merri Johnson and McRuer 2014) – similar to Reclaiming's key concern – when cripisthemologies (see above) intend to point out suffering (Merri Johnson and McRuer 2014). Thus, a comparison of Crippling and

Reclaiming emphasises how important it is to move beyond an alleged dichotomy of *positive* and *negative* emotions.

In this paper, I have framed Pride/Cripping and Reclaiming as *feeling strategies*. When seeking connectivity to methodology in the Sociology of Emotions, feeling strategies could be further discussed as affective practice (Wetherell 2012). Practices are what the social world is made up of – embodied, meaningful performances routinely reenacted and inscribed into people (*habitus*) and things (*artefacts*). The notion of affective practice centres the processual, collaborative production of affect. It highlights how affective interpretations are endlessly unfinished and can, thus, continually be revised (Wiesse 2019). As both Crippling and Reclaiming aim at changing affective interpretations of dis/ability, they can be read as affective practice. What is to count as affective aspects of practice can only be reflexively reconstructed in a second-order observation (Wiesse 2019). When exploring affective practice, one can ask how affect is enacted and how actors themselves reflexively thematise the affective aspect of their actions (Slaby and Scheve 2019). In this way, affective practice promises to provide a fruitful perspective when reconstructing the feeling strategies Crippling or Reclaiming in qualitative research in the future.

The paper at hand has introduced and distinguished Disability Pride, Crippling and Reclaiming as feeling strategies promoted by Disability Studies. It has outlined what those two feeling strategies do, the utopian hopes attached to them, their major critique, and respective preconditions. Their differing epistemological implications and their common ground have been pointed out. Considering Crippling and Reclaiming as complementary feeling strategies proves highly relevant for Disability Studies, other standpoint epistemologies and the respective social movements. Recognising their complementarity can highlight that one can fight for the same cause with different means. This realisation might invite activists and scholars who draw on one strategy to cherish the others' approach instead of contesting each other. Moreover, conceptualising different feeling strategies as complementary can encourage to employ them situationally as needed, thus promoting greater flexibility in the struggle towards a less ableist and more inclusive society.

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