

Defiant Bodies:

A Punk Rock Crip Queer Cabaret: A Punk Rock Crip Queer Cabaret: Crippling and Queering Emancipatory Disability Research

This chapter argues for a critical revisitation of Emancipatory Disability Research (EDR) (Oliver, 1992) through a crip queer lens. To achieve this, there will be a shift away from the Social Model of Disability (UPIAS, 1976; Oliver, 1990) often associated with EDR, to a Political-Relational Model (coined by Kafer, 2014) of disability so that EDR might be true to its political and activist aspirations. The authors believe that if crip and queer theory is not situated at the core of EDR, then such a research method is in danger of undermining its very intentions, in which “participants are involved in a process designed specifically to heighten political awareness and to lead to radical social change” (Walmsley and Johnson 2003 p.28).

To take a “critically queer” position is to work within the idea of always failing to conform to a fixed identity, indeed to the very notion of a ‘norm’ itself (Butler (1993), Halberstam (2011)). Both crip and queer theory actively work against the existing oppressive systems that adhere to the constructed norm, pushing towards a political and activist reimagining of society instead. Crippling insists that the system of compulsory able-bodiedness is not and should not be the norm and, crucially, it imagines bodies and desires that fit beyond that system (McRuer 2006 p.32). In this way, crip may be thought of as inherently queer in a way that queer theory is not, perhaps, inherently crip though it should be¹.

In what follows, the authors will offer the reader practice-based insight into the crippling and queering of EDR through their critique of the processes and outcomes of a devised performance research project, *Not F..ckin’ Sorry*². The performance reappropriated the Freak Show as a means of both exposing the enduring discriminatory and voyeuristic experiences of learning disabled³ (LD) and neurodivergent people⁴, and rejecting the objectified positioning inherent to a medical model of disability (WHO, 2001). The performance research project enabled the participants/co researchers to ‘come out’ as crip through a series of devising tasks which functioned, here, as research methods. These included a crip queer revisitation of ‘stimming’ (a socially taboo behaviour of self-stimulation often associated with neurodivergent people); the use of masks as an improvisation task to challenge the ‘stigma management’⁵ often performed daily by LD people and, crucially, the crippling and queering of the autobiographical stories reflecting

¹ While we cannot explore this here, the mutual dependence yet unequal relationship between crip and queer theory is noteworthy, in that queer has shored up its worth perhaps through focusing on sexuality and gender at the expense of other non-normative identities. See, for example, Halberstam, Eng and Munoz (2005) ‘Social Text: What’s Queer about Queer studies now’, pub. Duke University Press

² *Not F..ckin’ Sorry* was performed at the Royal Vauxhall Tavern, London, 29.03.16 and at The Electric Brixton, London, 03.12.16

³ The term learning disability is a contentious label and for an in-depth discussion on the complexity and politics of such a term refer to Hargrave (2015) page 21 to 27. However, the British Institute of Learning Disabilities states on their website: ‘The term learning disability is a label, and a label only ever describes one aspect of a person; a person with a learning disability is always a person first. <http://www.bild.org.uk/about-bild/aboutbild/>.

⁴ Singer, J (1998) “Odd People In: The Birth of Community Amongst People on the “Autism Spectrum””: A personal exploration of a New Social Movement based on Neurological Diversity” Faculty of Humanities and Social Science, University of Technology, Sydney, 1998. Judy Singer wrote: For me, the significance of the “Autism Spectrum” lies in its call for and anticipation of a “Politics of Neurodiversity”. The “Neurologically Different” represent a new addition to the familiar political categories of class/gender/race and will augment the insights of the Social Model of Disability. The rise of Neurodiversity takes postmodern fragmentation one step further. Just as the postmodern era sees every once too solid belief melt into air, even our most taken-for granted assumptions: that we all more or less see, feel, touch, hear, smell, and sort information, in more or less the same way, (unless visibly disabled) are being dissolved. (pp 12-13)

⁵ Stigma Management: “Garland-Thomson described her ideas on stigma management at the NEH Summer Institute. She was building on the work of Erving Goffman, as she also does in *Extraordinary Bodies: Figuring Physical Disability in American Culture and Literature* (New York: Columbia

the continued marginalisation experienced by disabled people. The role of the non-disabled researcher/director is integral to this ‘coming out’ and we use the Political/Relational model of disability to scrutinise, rather than ignore, the power dynamics at play between disabled and non-disabled researcher.

The crip queer EDR model proposed here embraces ongoing critical reflection, not just for the non-disabled researcher but, crucially, for the learning-disabled researcher as well. This ensures that the common aim of the research sits within a specific shared language that enables the learning-disabled researcher to become a proud crip activist in their own right. The critical interrogation of the non-disabled researcher entreats us to ask:

What right have I to undertake this research? What responsibilities arise from the privileges I have as a result of my social position? Does my writing and speaking reproduce a system of domination, oppression or challenge it?”

(Barton, 2005 p.325)

The non-disabled researcher then needs to ensure that the research process is centered around “openness and trust; being prepared to make ourselves vulnerable rather than disguise mistakes; being prepared to have one’s own perspective criticised; being prepared to make one’s own skills, knowledge and experience accessible” (Barton, 2005 p.213). In this heightened awareness of the vulnerability and power of such intersubjective dynamics, this research and this chapter are very much engaged with questions of ethics. While this is not something we can explore here, our crippling and queering of EDR and of our performance practice methods are also reflected in the format of this chapter through the collaborative, reciprocal dialogue between the two authors which punctuates this chapter, and could be seen as crippling academic practice itself.

This chapter takes the form, therefore, of a critically reflective discussion between two of the co researchers: Emma Selwyn, performer and co deviser, and Liselle Terret, director and co deviser. It is important to make explicit here that both position themselves as crip queer feminists each with their own journeys of coming out. As the ‘non-disabled director’, Liselle felt it important to challenge the authority and status accorded to her position, which is used so often to reinforce the very divisions that the authors seek to crip and queer. While she has managed to hide (to an extent) her own ‘failings’ and thus to access many opportunities available to ‘normates’⁶, she sees it as her role to identify and break down the binary notion between the disabled and non-disabled, so that the crippling and queering of such a research method begins with the emancipation of the LD co researchers.

Emma: As part of the *Not F..ckin’ Sorry* cast, I remember thinking, “Yes, this feels right.” I’d forgotten what it was like to be part of a democratic devising process and it was important to be reminded of this. In my previous circumstances, before arriving on the course, I experienced constant discrimination. Importantly you, Liselle, also shared some of your own experiences – both personally and in your own performance practice. This had a very positive impact upon the process, as it was about us working as a collaborative group of artists with a sense of equality and professionalism.

University Press, 1997)” in Sandahl, C (2003) *Queering The Crip or Crippling The Queer: Intersections of Queer and Crip Identities in Solo Autobiographical Performance*, published *GLQ: a journal of lesbian and gay studies* 9 (1), 25-56 (p.41)

⁶ Petra Kupper’s (2014) talk about the Normate, and how it shatters and reveals the social construct of ‘Normal’, which is used as a political device to expose the ‘normalized’ exclusion and marginalisation based on those who cannot do; act; behave; look; talk (etc.) in the narrow definition of ‘Normal’.

Liselle: I was very explicit right from the start that I needed the performers to collaborate with me as equals, and as performance makers who wanted to use performance to address the politics of disability and the marginalisation experienced due to this. I asked the participants /co researchers to constantly feedback if they did not trust the environment, to haul me up and others in the group if we were silencing and making assumptions about one another, or if performers felt unable to engage and be proactive in the space. As a normate I was aware of the pressure that was on us to create something amazing. The performance had to be off the scale due to the discriminatory attitudes still generated towards learning disabled people.

OUR CRIP QUEER EMANCIPATORY DISABILITY RESEARCH PERFORMANCE PROJECT

On 29th November 2016 *Not F..ckin' Sorry*⁷, a Crip Queer cabaret was performed by 6 neurodivergent & learning disabled actors at the Royal Vauxhall Tavern⁸, London, for Bar Wotever⁹, a weekly queer cabaret night and on Saturday 3rd December 2016 at The Electric Brixton¹⁰, London for Duckie.¹¹ Duckie is a queer arts enterprise that uses performances ‘to bring about community solidarity’ (ibid) for its 1,500 audience members. Its producer, Simon Casson, provides a clear sense of the liberatory potential of the piece:

This is the first time I have seen a piece by artists with learning disabilities (or neurodivergent) that was utterly queer and uncompromising. It made me want to make up my own rules about how to live life. It was utterly energising. Punk is DIY, it's subversion and breaking the rules, I find this attitude very exciting in performance. Audiences need to be educated and they take a while to catch it... as [they are] being shocked and affronted by it.

Simon Casson, Producer of Duckie's (2017)¹²

Casson's emphasis on queer community and solidarity chimes with our breaking down divisions and so became the perfect venue and environment for the performance.

Not F..ckin' Sorry was the outcome of a larger project, a one year part-time course¹³ developed by Nick Llewellyn, Artistic Director of Access All Areas¹⁴ and Liselle Terret¹⁵ and funded by the Leverhulme Trust¹⁶. The course was created “in response to the exclusion of adults with learning disabilities from current professional HE performance-related training courses” and reaffirms the performer as co creator in authoring devised solo and ensemble performances to develop new aesthetic performance forms and pedagogical practices that are post-dramatic, experimental and often site specific. It focused on ‘subverting and challenging hegemonic values and assumptions experienced by people with learning disabilities’ (Mackey, Terret, 2014).

In a previous paper (Terret, 2016), Liselle documented some of these processes through the observation and critiquing of two visiting

⁷ Not F..ckin' Sorry was the outcome of a 3-week rehearsal process as part of the Diploma in Performance Making for learning disabled people at The Royal Central School of Speech and Drama (2016)

⁸ Royal Vauxhall Tavern <http://www.vauxhalltavern.com/>

⁹ Bar Wotever <https://woteverworld.com/>

¹⁰ The Electric Brixton (Formally The Fridge) <http://electricbrixton.uk.com/>

¹¹ Duckie <http://www.duckie.co.uk/>

¹² Interviewed via email on 31.01.17 (<http://duckie.harmsen.net/artist.php?id=77>)

¹³ RCSSD <https://www.cssd.ac.uk/course/performance-making-diploma-learning-disabled-adults>

¹⁴ AAA <http://www.accessallareastheatre.org/>

¹⁵ <https://www.uel.ac.uk/Staff/t/liselle-terret>

¹⁶ <https://www.leverhulme.ac.uk/>

practitioners on the course, Mat Fraser¹⁷ and Katherine Araniello¹⁸, whose devising practices crippled performance and disability as described above. As part of this paper, she also articulated the outcomes of an EDR project that was integral to the course, where a self-selected group of LD participants operated also as co researchers, meeting outside of the course teaching time to critique the trajectory and pedagogy of the course/project. However, when we set this same structure up for the third year of the course, the co researchers explained that they felt that their role was redundant and instead suggested that the critiquing of the project become embedded within the course so that all of the participants are involved as co researchers. Thus the outcomes of these discussions became integral not only to the management of the course but to the actual content and themes of the devised performance. More than this, however, with the participants becoming co researchers, the practice increasingly chimed with Barnes' (2001) criteria for EDR.

Criteria for EDR

Adhering to Barnes' criteria for EDR, our research project could be seen to be defined by the participants in the rehearsal room, as our ongoing findings were constantly interrogated and rearticulated through different aesthetic performance forms created by the participants. In terms of the political activism of the EDR performance project, throughout the devising process there was ongoing critical discussion of how an audience would be challenged by the issues explored in the rehearsal room, so that our intentions were constantly outward. Stevenson (2010) describes an EDR project where he was "building relationships over time with my co researchers, listening, observing, and presenting opportunities for them to participate in different ways [and through this] I have discovered a range of research abilities, interests, and talents among my co researchers" (Stevenson 2010 p.42).

This reflects our own process in our rehearsal room, where we strove for a devising process that situated the participants at the centre of that practice being developed, and which celebrated the different 'abilities, interests and talents' and, more than this, the different cultural identities in the room. (ibid). Within rehearsals we initially worked within Swain and French's (2000) 'Affirmation Model of Disability' before moving into Kafer's Political-Relation model. The Affirmation Model of Disability was particularly important for us due to the articulated and performed apologetic, self-critical and low status selves presented by most, if not all, of the participants especially at the start of the research performance project. This model of disability aims to shift the individual into a position of pride, and to ultimately reclaim agency. However, we found that this model of disability had limitations, and so we utilised it purely as a process towards an end product – but not the end product in itself. Matt Hargraves (2015) articulates his concern about the limits of the Affirmative Model when he critiques identity politics in disability arts stating that it is, "lacking in the means to theorise collaborative theatre of increasing aesthetic complexity", Hargraves (2014 p.31). This can be applied to *Not F.. ckin' Sorry* as the Affirmative Model does not describe or offer a means of articulating the multi-layered performance aesthetic and political intention of the production in relation to the audience. Instead, Kafer's Political-Relational model formed a crucial framing for our EDR as it refuses to depoliticise disability and instead insists that we "recognise the politics of engagement of disability in and through relationships, and not in isolation ... offer(ing) disability as a 'site for collective reimagining'" (Kafer 2013 p. 8-9). This 'collective reimagining' was the central focus for our research performance project, as the co researchers fiercely performed their own rules. Through the Political-Relational Model of Disability, the LD participants/co researchers shifted into a place of political activism that involved an exploration of how we would create a crip queer performance to radically challenge audience members into action as will be illustrated further below.

From *Sorry I'm Here* to *Not F.. ckin' Sorry*

EDR also states that "disabled people's experiences, narratives, and stories...to highlight the serious politics of the discrimination

¹⁷ Mat Fraser <http://matfraser.co.uk/blogs/>

¹⁸ Katherine Araniello <http://www.araniello-art.com/Biog-Statement>

experienced” (Barnes, 2001 p.13). *NS note: this quote doesn't make sense without inserting something...is it supposed to be something like “...narratives, and stories [are used] to highlight...??* However, again, within a Political-Relational Model of disability, our task and practice was to involve a crippling and queering of such stories, shifting from pity into pride and ultimately into political activism. We worked abstractly so that personal experiences and narratives were transformed into rebellious, sexy, confrontational, angry crip queer personas on stage. We used performance as a means of protest for change, the ultimate aim of EDR. Clare (2013) states that ‘pride’ is essential to activism as without it “...individual and collective resistance to oppression becomes nearly impossible.” (Clare, 2013, p.156). This passage to pride was integral to the devising process.

Liselle: During the devising process, I noticed that mostly everyone including myself kept apologising for anything and everything, constantly saying, ‘I’m Sorry’ before or after any utterance and any sharing of our work-in-progress.

Emma: Perhaps the constant apologising stems from the severe marginalisation that has been internalised by disabled people. The following includes some of the ‘I’m Sorries’ that were spoken throughout the devising process:

I’m sorry for doing it wrong; I’m sorry for the way I look; I’m sorry I talk like this; I’m sorry for the way I move;
I’m sorry I don’t understand; I’m sorry for my anger.¹⁹

Liselle: In the rehearsal room, we made a game of catching one another out before the apology so that we could move it into an ‘I’m Not Sorry’ utterance instead. This had a profound impact upon the whole direction and focus of our performance piece. Through this game, the actors made declarations of what they were not sorry for in order to move on from any performance of victimhood or self-pity²⁰. The very opening of the final production of *Not F..ckin’ Sorry* began with Emma (as Mistress of Ceremonies) opening with a (self-written) declaration. She repeats this at the end, with the 5 other actors taking up positions in a ‘chorus line’ of confrontational rebellion:

So, just what is it that you fuckers want?
You keep calling us broken.
You don’t know the cracks that every single one of you has given us.
The mental scars, the physical scars.
We are sick and tired of being your circus dogs.
This is our time now. We Are Not Going Away.
And No, We Are Not Fuckin’ Sorry! ²¹

A remix of Lily Allen’s *Fuck You (Quad Hands Up Remix)*²² comes on loudly. It starts with a record scratch and 1950s-style American radio presenter saying ‘*Fuck You*’(appendix).

Look inside
Look inside your tiny mind
Now look a bit harder
Cause we're so uninspired

¹⁹ 31.12.16 This was from an audio recording of the two author’s critical reflections of the rehearsals recalling the quoted ‘I’m Sorry’ statements.

²⁰ Mat Fraser’s practice on turning pity into parody in Terret’s chapter in Applied Theatre text

²¹ Emma Selwyn created this during a rehearsal at The Royal Central School of Speech & Drama during 5th to 22nd July 2016

²² Lily Allen - Fuck You (Quads Hands Up Remix) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MDpf9iw23nM>

So sick and tired of all the
Hatred you harbor
So you say
It's not okay to be gay
Well I think you're just evil
You're just some racist... ²³

During the first part of the song, the actors slowly raise their middle fingers out to the audience, standing still until the chorus begins. They then explode into wild punk-rock style jumping about, keeping their middle fingers out to the audience. In response, the audience also go wild, copying the actors, and ultimately following the actors' lead, as noted earlier by Simon Casson saying, "Audiences need to be educated and they take a while to catch it..." Casson, 2017.

Unmasking Stigma Management

During the devising process the challenge was how to move the actors from 'pride' into this rebellion as described above. The following sections will offer an analysis of the use of masks to unveil the 'stigma management'²⁴, "the effort to put the non-disabled at ease by hiding or minimising the appearance and impact of impairments" (Sandhal, 2003, p.40)

Liselle: Considering all the discrimination that the actors experience on a daily basis, which was often shared before and during each rehearsal day, I decided that it might be a useful dramaturgical tool to explore the impact of masks as a way of revealing the consequences of these constant experiences of discrimination. We used masks as part of the devising process to expose learnt behaviors often performed daily that masks the core of who we are. I wanted the masks to enable the performers to instead visibly flaunt and redefine how they wanted to perform their bodies on stage in their own terms. By doing this, the co researchers engaged in a political act that violated the learnt codes that disabled people perform every day to appease non-disabled people, using the Garland's (1997) "stigma management." However, in our rehearsal room we were also exploring the neurodivergent and cognitive differences that are often masked. We used a variety of plastic, gendered and transparent masks for an improvisation task to conceal the everyday persona that we carry in order to reveal the hidden parts of ourselves as a means of responding to the labels of 'idiot', 'fool', 'sub-human', 'cast-off' - terms historically often associated with learning disability. Rosemarie Garland-Thomson (1997) calls this "stigma management", and in fact Emma explained that she had experienced this for many years, trying desperately to hide her difference, to perform as a normate before coming out as disabled and neurodivergent. There is a repositioning of identity that happens on stage when the LD person is revealed as a political and disability activist, saying "...damn right, you better look. Look long and hard.... Look at me straight on, because for all your years of gawking, you are still not seeing me" (Clare 2010 p. 110). This coming out and the averted gaze it is greeted by can be aligned with that of the queer 'coming out of the closet'.

Emma: The mask that I chose was cracked, the one that no one else wanted. I put it on and presented myself through the curtain, whilst the other cast members sat as an audience. The broken mask that I wore somehow represented and physicalised the scars that I carry,

²³ Lyrics of this song sourced at <http://www.azlyrics.com/lyrics/lilyallen/fuckyouverymuch.html>

²⁴ Stigma Management: "Garland-Thomson described her ideas on stigma management at the NEH Summer Institute. She was building on the work of Erving Goffman, as she also does in *Extraordinary Bodies: Figuring Physical Disability in American Culture and Literature* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997)" in Sandahl, C (2003) *Queering The Crip or Crippling The Queer: Intersections of Queer and Crip Identities in Solo Autobiographical Performance*, published *GLQ: a journal of lesbian and gay studies* 9 (1), 25-56 (p.41)

that I have to hide behind, and so it became in a way a metaphorical mask, to cover up my own emotional scars, but the crack in the mask allowed me to speak out defiantly to the audience.

Liselle: You embodied the broken mask through this improvisation task, which in fact formed the whole framing of the show, as you implicated the audience through your opening line, “What do you fuckers want?”²⁵ It was emotive and very powerful at the same time. During rehearsals, Actor S responded to Emma by saying, “Calm Down, we are your friends” (ibid), and you responded angrily back with, “Friend? Friend? You have let me down my whole life” (ibid). I think that your mask performance in rehearsals had a real impact upon the rest of the cast as you offered your own personal testimony that was angry.

Behind the mask: Intersectionality as part of the Political-Relational Model of Disability

Emma: We had extensive discussions about the layers of discrimination that we each experienced day after day outside of the rehearsal room, but which inevitably were always there with us throughout the process as well. Our varying disabilities bore many labels and social taboos, that made our marginalisation more severe due to the multi-layers of our oppression based on other people’s perceptions of gender, sexuality, learning disability, physical disability, neurodiversity, class, sexuality, ethnicity, mental health, fat/deviant bodies and speech, which were all in many ways at the core of our devising practice.

Liselle: We identified Crenshaw’s (1991) notion of Intersectionality as a way of framing, articulating and interrogating our performance-making practice and to unravel the multiple meanings in the actual production as well. Crenshaw’s work has been developed by Collins (2000) as she defines Intersectionality as;

... Cultural patterns of oppression [which] are not only interrelated, but are bound together and influenced by the intersectional systems of society. Examples of this include race, gender, class, ability, and ethnicity. Collins (2000)

Liselle: For me Emma, you gave me a hand in to seeing the Intersectionality within the room in terms of the load that the students had to carry based on the experiences of interrelated forms of oppression. By gradually finding a devising form, the actors would reveal their stories that were often informed from their daily experiences of being at the receiving end of discrimination. These stories would then lead to discussions and disclosures about ATOS²⁶ (the UK assessment company that decides whether one should receive benefits), lack of social, emotional and mental-health support, unemployment, poverty and being socially isolated.

Emma: There was definitely something powerful and supportive in the group; a sense of empathy and awareness of the different levels of challenges that each performer experienced depending on their past and current living circumstances.

Liselle: I wanted to use this devising space to explore these multiple forms of discrimination and, as an ensemble, to create a politicised and outward facing performance company. The level of support was something that I had never witnessed in normate spaces. It’s about the experience of living as an outsider and the impact of this upon one’s mental health, well-being and sense of agency. The Intersectionality as described above worked with our crippling and queering of disability. We understand this as meaning ‘do not label or judge us according to your constructed binary social rules of disability that govern society.’ We wanted to create a crip queer performance that says, “[T]here are moments when we are all queer/disabled, and that those disabled/queer moments are desirable”. (McRuer 2006, p.157) This was our challenge, to reframe how disabled people are perceived in society so that the rereading

²⁵ These utterances were performed during the rehearsal period 5-22th July 2017 & are evidenced on video.

²⁶ Atos Healthcare: <http://www.atoshealthcare.com/>

of disability becomes one of desirability. This can be seen in *Not F..ckin' Sorry* where we juxtaposed the violent consequence of the constructed fear created around disability and a moment in *Cabaret* (Masteroff, Kandor, Ebb, 1998)²⁷ showing the Gestapo 'rounding up the disabled.' We wanted to expose the binary of desire and non-desirability within the frame of our celebratory and confrontational in-ye-face angry and proud strength surrounding disabled people.

During *Not F..ckin' Sorry*, Actor A, in his grey suit and greased-back, side-parted hair, marches heavily and slowly to the beat of the music. He does not smile; he just looks directly ahead, with the intention of resembling the Gestapo rounding up the 'sub humans and feeble-minded'. The sound of the marching increases whilst the music fades out. Actor K then repeats the following;

what doesn't make you stronger makes you wish you was dead;
what doesn't make you stronger makes you wish you was dead;
what doesn't make you stronger makes you wish you was dead

Darcy, 2016

This repeated one-liner was written by one of the cast members as part of a larger poem²⁸. Its effectiveness lies in its 'makes you wish you was dead' rather than the saying, 'What doesn't kill you makes you stronger'. The performers announce these lines with a strength of intention to return the disabling gaze back out to the audience. We wanted to challenge current ideologies of disability into "moments when we are all queer/disabled, and that those disabled/queer moments are desirable" (McRuer (2006, p.157). *Not F..ckin' Sorry* wanted to crip the public's notion of disability, to "make people wince ... to jolt people out of their everyday understandings of bodies and minds, of normalcy and deviance...(to challenge their)... staring, aggressive questioning, and/or a turning away from difference, a refusal to see." (Kafer 2013, p. 15).

Liselle: The culture of crip as desirable took us to Petra Kupper's (2014) idea of the normate as mentioned previously in this chapter, that which shatters and reveals the social construct of 'normal', just as in Butler's 'heterosexual matrix'²⁹. We might use this to further understand the idea of the normate, where we are always trying to become 'normal', but of course, like gender and sexuality, there is no truth around these constructs, and so we remain in the constant process of always trying to become.

We used our research performance project to dig deeper into the tools used to discriminate and separate disabled people from the wider society. We wanted to crip and queer social beliefs that are used to justify the alienation, marginalisation and the undesirability experienced by disabled people to explore the Othering, and move instead into a position of pride. We wanted to expose the censoring and surveillance that is embedded within society where we mock and label one another depending on stigmatized cultural patterns and behaviours.

Crippling and Queering, Stimming and Socially Taboo Behaviours as part of our EDR

Liselle: I was interested in us using the devising process as a tool to reveal the behaviours that we all have that we have learnt to hide and feel ashamed about and indeed the detrimental consequence of this upon our own agency. I wanted us to explore how we learn that

²⁷ *Cabaret*, written by Masteroff, Ebb and Kandor is set in Berlin and through a narrative based on Sally Bowles, a cabaret performer at the Kitkat Club, Cabaret tells the story of the horrific consequences of the rise of the Nazi party.

²⁸ Rachael Darcy was in the original cast of *Not F..ckin' Sorry* and wrote this as part of a longer piece of work.

²⁹ Judith Butler's heterosexual matrix—"that grid of intelligibility through which bodies, gender, and desires are naturalized" (Butler, 1999, p. 194)

in order to be accepted and to 'fit in', we become our own surveillance cameras, from the inside out, and vice versa, so that we enable the gradual eradication of ourselves as we constantly fail to become a 'normate.'

Emma: Stimming is short hand for Self-Stimulation and is used by neurodivergent individuals for regulating emotions.³⁰ As an autistic individual who had been raised to behave as much like a normate as possible, stimming to me was a dirty thing that I felt had to be repressed. It wasn't until I engaged in the course, and met other out spectrumites³¹ that I realised that it would be safe for me to drop the 'circus dog' normate act, and to come out as me, and to own the person who I am.

Liselle: That is really interesting that you say that Emma, because from my perspective you seemed to arrive onto the course being very articulate and 'out and proud' about your queer identity, however you were in the closet (so to speak) with regards to your disability?

Emma: Definitely. My personal experience has always been that it is much easier to come out as queer than it is to come out as being on the autistic spectrum.

Liselle: I think that your coming out as someone who was able to stim openly in the rehearsal room as well as being proudly feminist and queer had a profound impact upon the ethos, ownership and direction of the project.

Emma: As part of our devising process, we compare stimming with other repetitive (and emotionally regulating) behaviours, in order to identify which behaviours are deemed socially acceptable, and which aren't, and integrally, the underlying social politics within this. We each began in turn, sharing different stims in a circle, whilst the rest of the group copied the behaviour or adapted into another type of stim. Examples included shaking of the wrists, clapping the palms of hands, patting heads, and pacing up and down. I really enjoyed this task because I found it fascinating trying to familiarise other people with this amazing new thing I had discovered, i.e. I could be open about stimming, and realising that so many others in the group also had their own types of stimming behaviours.

Liselle: We then moved the activity into creating a Circle of Taboo Faces³², where we each took turns to share habitual facial expressions that we consciously hide from public view. Everyone in the company had a turn, and seeing one another's secret and private facial habits being performed in a public space impacted upon the group in several profound ways. For me there was a moment of realisation as I felt very uncomfortable and vulnerable showing others my own hidden and very personal habitual facial behaviours that secretly give me '*emotional regulation*'. I had a strong visceral awakening of my own self-surveillance and that I too was perpetuating the binary of them and us. I realised that, like you Emma, I also had learnt to hide parts of myself. I remember articulating this with the co researchers when we critically reflected upon this task and I recall a welcoming acknowledgement from everyone, a sort of relief that somehow I managed to 'get it' along with all the co researchers.

Emma: From firsthand experience, I was taught that those of us with disabilities have to pass as normate, to accept the circus dog training and if we don't pass, then we are ostracized and made to believe that we are failures.

³⁰ https://www.autism.com/symptoms_self-stim

³¹ Emma Selwyn has coined this term Spectrumites

³² Circle of Taboo Faces took place during rehearsals during 5th to 22nd July 2016 at Royal Central School of Speech and Drama

Liselle: We then moved into the 'Circle of Socially Taboo Behaviours'³³ (recognised as different from stinging behaviours), and on reflection I felt that the outcome of this task became another key moment in the devising focus. Before we began I explained that individuals would be welcome to opt out of the task and just watch the outcomes. Mimed gestures included nose-picking, smoking, scratching itches in intimate body-places, masturbating and secret eating. This activity also created a group act of breaking social rules and boundaries.

Liselle: Emma you were able to be very open about your sexuality and fluidity of your gender, and it paved the way for the others to own the space and indeed the process.

Emma: Sexuality and being sexy is different to different people. *Not F..ckin' Sorry* embraced all our different bodies, genders, disabilities and sexualities; this was something that I had never experienced in my upbringing even though I knew at the age of 13 that I was queer. I am aware, as a queer neurodivergent woman, that so many disabled people are involuntarily desexualised in our society and so I felt impassioned that I had to perform my own fluid sexuality as this is an essential part of who I am. Shockingly, only 3% of disabled people are living together in a relationship meanwhile 70% of normates live in a relationship.³⁴

We have evidenced above how we used a devising crip queer process as the method for our research performance project to break down barriers and challenge social convention as well as public/private space so as to move into a crip queer practice that is liberatory, intimate and equal and one of desirability. Ultimately we used this crip queer devising method to "...experiment with the production of cultural meanings on bodies willing to try a range of different significations for spectators willing to read them." (Sandhal 2003, p.25). The co researchers/participants brought into the foreground taboo and 'forbidden' sexual behaviors and desires so often denied to learning disabled people, and performed the very construction of correct/norm femininity/masculinity/sexuality but more importantly 'norm' behaviors. Our next challenge was how to move our devising process into performance whilst remaining within our crip queer framing so as to restage these 'different significations'. We decided to returned to the first place where disabled bodies were performed as spectacle, The Freak Show, which we once again criped and queered and reappropriated.

Queer Crip Neo-Burlesque Cabaret As A Neo-Freak Show

As highlighted in the previous section. the co researchers/participants often articulated desires to engage in and perform as sexualized and gendered adults, however as noted by Sandhal (2003) too often disabled people are infantilised and desexualised. She continues to state that:

"...crip performers seldom rely on typical modes of gender performativity. ...To be female and disabled is to be seen as not quite a woman; to be male and disabled is to be seen as not quite a man. The mannerisms that help define gender—the ways in which people walk, swing their hips, gesture with their hands, move their mouths and eyes as they talk, take up space with their bodies—are all based upon how nondisabled people move. The construction of gender depends not only upon the male body and female body, but also upon the nondisabled body." (Sandhal 2003, p.47)

As described by Sandhal above, we criped and queered the performance of the learning disabled body on stage so as to directly

³³ Circle of Taboo Behaviours took place during rehearsals during 5th to 22nd July 2016 at Royal Central School of Speech and Drama

³⁴ Emerson, E., Malam, S., Davies, I. and Spencer, K. (2005) Adults with Learning Disabilities in England 2003/4 [obtained via <https://www.mencap.org.uk/sites/default/files/2016-08/2016.126%20Relationships%20vision%20statement%20copy.pdf>]

challenge this de-gendering and desexualising so often projected onto learning disabled people. The opening of *Not F..ckin' Sorry*, consists of "Actor S comes forward downstage, framed in a cloud of smoke, 'fag' in hand, slowly taking several drags of her fag³⁵. Actor A tries to reprimand her with the rest of the cast also looking, willing for her to 'behave' but instead she takes her mic and says defiantly, "Oh, Fuck Off", followed by another long drag." She then announces out to the audience, "We Are Not Fuckin' Sorry". This actor is a 27-year old Down Syndrome woman³⁶. There is an enormous roar and cheer from the audience. She continues;

Actor S: Does anyone here smoke? Does anyone here drink? I do! I drink, I smoke, and I swear.

Actor B: And when I see an ugly person like you, I point and stare.

Actor E: I watch Porn

Actor D: I read Dirty Magazines

Actor K: And stay up way too late³⁷

And finally, the sixth performer, Actor A, takes his sparkly hat and performs rubbing it repeatedly against his crotch. As he savors every moment he announces,

Actor A: And every free moment, I masturbate. (ibid)

There is an uproar from the audience that leads straight into Tom Jones's *Leave Your Hat On* sung by Actor B, without the stutter that usually impacts upon his spoken speech, whilst the other five perform as his 'Chorus Line'. Actor B oozes sexual masculinity whilst the others also perform their sexualities, writhing in every moment, teasing the audience as the hat is grabbed from one actor to the next, as they adoringly take their turn in the spotlight. Actor S once again breaks the rules, as she unapologetically steps out of line to upstage everyone; her dance performance is sassy, seductive, cheeky and celebratory of her womanhood.

Actor S: I wanna kiss you, I wanna touch you, I wanna take you on holiday but there's no strings attached mate.

(Andrews, Bennet, Cracknell, Churchill, Darcy, Ducarreux, Hassan, Johnson, O'Brien, Newman, Selwyn, Smith, Terret, Keber, 2016)

The actors then create intimate symbiotic tableaux and offer sexual and romantic declarations out to the audience:

Actor E: I want to fuck each and every one of you, because you're all so hot.

Actor D: I want to feel you all deep inside.

Actor K: I fancy you. (To a member of the audience) Yes you.

Actor A: You. Are. So. Hot. You're like a radiator, getting hotter and hotter.

Actor B I only have to look in your eyes and I want to marry you.

³⁵ lines from the *Not F..ckin' Sorry* script (email l.terret@uel.ac.uk for copy)

³⁶ Thank you for the permission of this actor to include her cultural identity.

³⁷ These lines were edited and developed from a published poem that Steph Newman located on in the internet: *Bad Habits* by Jason Kirkwood [<https://allpoetry.com/poem/9967535-Bad-Habits-by-Jason-Kirkwood>]

Actor B earlier on holds up a life-sized real-looking bloody heart³⁸:

Actor B: (directly out to the audience) ‘Do you want my heart? Do you want to eat my heart? Go on I know you want it. Go on, eat it, you do it anyway’

He throws the heart out into the audience. (ibid)

Liselle: This moment mirrors a similar choice of using the heart as a symbol for ‘human connection’ as described by Joan Lipkin (Sandhal, 2002). I offered to use this heart symbol as I used the same artefact for my own solo performance as described below where I also held out a heart, but I ended up gorging on it as part of my performance piece called *Flushed*. My own performance practice, which I have previously coined as Lipsick Queer Feminist Neo-Burlesque³⁹, had a profound impact upon the structure and research performance methods that we used in the rehearsal room. I felt that this practice offered us a useful dramaturgical tool to embrace the metaphorical intention of neo-burlesque for revealing the layers and forms of social construction projected onto learning disabled bodies.

In 2007 I coined the term Lipsick Queer Feminist Neo-Burlesque as a result of my own frustrations with neo-burlesque whilst devising a solo performance. I was hindered with the narrow definition of neo-burlesque, and felt that it did not embody my own politicised and feminist application of it. The devising of *Not F.. ckin’ Sorry*, was by Lipsick Queer Feminist Neo-Burlesque as a means of re-representing the Other on stage, by developing and reclaiming our own DIY, subcultural performance practice. I define Lipsick Queer Feminist Neo-burlesque as:

a DIY subversive, subcultural aesthetic that burlesques oppressive and stereotyped perceptions of the Other, to provoke and subvert the gaze in order to reveal the masquerade (Butler, 1990). It is mischievous, teasing, ironic, self-parodying, and grotesque as a means of challenging institutionalised binaries of gender, race, class, disability, sexuality and other social constructions that exist within the heterosexual matrix (ibid). It is about subverting everyday signs and symbols, making so-called comforts uncomfortable; it seduces then attacks the viewer; it is glamorous and grotesque and abject; it is playful yet in-her-face and political, and ultimately it is about exploiting the exploiters. (Terret, 2014)

I developed the Lipsick as a means of reframing and to re-represent women, domesticity, mental health and bulimia on stage through a personified relationship of a woman with her large golden toilet.⁴⁰ There were obvious connections between *Flushed* and *Not F.. ckin’ Sorry*, for example the re-framing of the confessional into confrontational direct speaking out to the audience, the seduction, self-parodying and ultimate reveal of constructed ideas about the Other. It also takes us back to Barton’s very questions about the ethics of the ‘non-disabled’ researcher / director undertaking such research in collaboration with learning disabled people, asking, “What right have I to undertake this research? And Does my writing and speaking reproduce a system of domination, oppression or challenge it...?” Barton (2005). Lipsick is committed to using a performance aesthetic that “exploit(s) the exploiters” which was the through line and very intention of our EDR, so as to move our findings in the rehearsal into protest and activism so as to challenge and haul up the exploiters/oppressors. Eli Clare (2006) critiques the Victorian Freak Show which was based on the construction of disabled people as ‘freaks of nature’, (Clare, 2006 p.86) and so I also ‘colluded’ with the co researchers/participants to reappropriate the Freak Show so as to turn around this disabling gaze.

³⁸ This motif of the edible bloody heart (a dyed giant marshmallow twisted into the shape of a heart) was created by Liselle Terret and used in her *Flushed* performance on Mental Health, women and bulimia. (for information email l.terret@uel.ac.uk)

³⁹ www.lipsickqueerfeministneoburlesque.wordpress.com I coined this term as part of my developing practice and published a REF website, conferences (need to write more here to explain)

⁴⁰ *Flushed* devised and performed by Liselle Terret at Duckie’s and Bar Wotever at the Royal Vauxhall Tavern, London and Dada Festival, Liverpool 2016

...gawk at "freaks", "savages," and "geeks" "... [to be] titillated and repulsed....to have their ideas of normal and abnormal, superior and inferior, their sense of self, confirmed and strengthened....[T]he freak show ...revolved around ableism and racism... (Clare, 2006, p.86)

Emma: I had never even dreamt of the idea of an individual, never mind a whole company of us, doing a cabaret-style piece. Both cabaret and neo-burlesque are certainly not forms of performance that are associated with learning disability.

Liselle: Cabaret and neo-burlesque are camp aesthetics that involve teasing, seduction, heightened sexuality and the queering of gender identity, within Bakhtin's 'Carnavalesque' (Bakhtin, 1968)⁴¹. Kupperts (2014) eloquently describes Carnavalesque as, "...ritual social moments ... where social ties are inverted and the body becomes the stage for disruptive practice" (Kupperts, 2014, p.102). *Not F.. ckin' Sorry* was therefore created within the form of a crip, queer Cabaret and Neo-Burlesque aesthetic in response to the infantilising, de-gendering and desexualising of neurodivergent and learning disabled people.

We took the historical Victorian Freak Show, reappropriated it by crippling and queering it in the form of neo-cabaret, so that we could parody and satirise the constructed discriminatory beliefs held around disability. Six historically 'freak' bodies performed on stage, smashing down the fourth wall to expose the integral role of the spectators in their discriminatory and stereotyped labels as Other. Throughout *Not Fuckin' Sorry* there is direct confrontational address out to the audience that ends with a finale that consists of the performers singing and dancing (as described above) to Lily Allen's 'Fuck you'. The performers threw this out to the audience with their vocal and gestural 'fuck you' signing. In addition, Emma's first and last declaration out to the audience ("We are sick and tired of being your circus dogs, this is our time now") was a direct reference to the Freak Show. Through this, she took hold of the oppressive power dynamic projected upon and experienced by the performers so as to reveal the violation of human rights.

Clare (2006) continues to explain that the managers of these freak shows would collaborate with the 'freaks' to create performances that fed into these stereotyped constructs in order to make an income as they:

...colluded together to dupe the audience, to make a buck off the rube's gullibility. Within the subculture of the freak show, rubes were understood as exploited victims - explicitly lied to, charged outrageous sums of money for mere trinkets, pickpocketed, or merely given incorrect change at the ticket counter. (Clare, 2006, p.86)

This is all very well and perhaps this reading of the freak show moves it into a place of romanticism and a place where Othered people managed to gain some agency. However, there were others who were "trapped by unscrupulous managers, who typically were also their legal guardians... cognitively disabled people (were often in positions that were) set up for exploitation". (Clare, 2009, p.95.) We therefore critically re-appropriated the freak show, so that we could "disrupt the historical discourse of the sideshow in order to challenge the ablest ideologies that serve as its foundation" (Eisenhauer, 2007, p.12.) The confrontational quality of *Not F.. ckin' Sorry* aimed to make the viewer aware of their process of looking. In *Not Fuckin' Sorry* we therefore aimed to throw back the stare so that the "audience became the objects of the performer's stare" (Eisenhauer, 2007, p.12).

As has been articulated in the previous section, by reappropriating the freak show through cabaret and Lipsick Queer Feminist Neo-

⁴¹ Source of Carnavalesque from Bakhtin, M (1968) *Rabelais and his World* Cambridge: MIT Press

Burlesque, we ‘colluded together to dupe the audience’ (ibid); to make them uncomfortable about their ableist gaze. The performers did not want any pity from the audience, instead they seduced them, using the historical and continued freak-gaze projected onto learning disabled people. The audience’s tragedy model of disability-gaze afforded the performers the means to reposition themselves centre stage and then crip queer this gaze into a performance of proud sexuality, gendered bodies and a celebration of disability as ‘desirable’.

Conclusion

This chapter has offered a revisitation of EDR as a defiant crip queer performance research method used as a political agent in breaking down the continued ‘freaking’ and discrimination experienced by learning disabled people in all aspects of our society. We believe that in order for any political impact to happen (through EDR), there needs to be a radical shake-up of how outcomes are communicated, who distributes them and indeed who needs to receive and digest them. Through dialogue and critique, we have sought to offer a devising research practice and approach that is defiant at its core so that the social constructions embedded in our society that dictates binary constructs of ‘norm’, of notions of beauty, desire, able-bodiedness, fragility are crippled, queered and rescripted. We want to end with a final quote from Simon Casson, as he so beautifully offers an important positioning of *Not F..ckin’ Sorry* as a seminal piece that adds to the canon of radical performance art. As a product of our devising methods, he recognises how it underpins the move for learning disability from pity to pride, into activism, and arguably its foundational place in queer and crip politics.

I haven’t been so affected by a performance for f..ckin’ years. The ensemble was so beautiful; personal, political, sexy, wild, punk, vulnerable, tough and so very fresh. You broke down the fourth wall and encouraged Revolt into Style. The style and sensibility was Sandra Bernhard meets The Great Rock’n’Roll Swindle. From confessional to spectacle: smoke, sequins, stoppiness and sexuality. Learning Disabled people are often labeled as fragile and vulnerable and yet here they were on stage, powerful bodies, glamorous, provocative, looking a million dollars telling us all (the ‘normals’) to f..ck off! Like Leigh Bowery at this same venue in the 1980s or say early punk gigs or The Divine David at his most provocative, the audience literally didn’t know what to do with themselves.

Simon Casson (2017)

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