



Gendered Disabilities: Silent performatives in cinema

By

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SUMMARY

What ideological meanings about gendered disabilities are reflected and produced in cinema? The disabled body easily conveys meaning without speech. Disabled bodies have been mistreated and misrepresented for entertainment purposes since the birth of cinema, as freakish spectacles to be ridiculed, mocked, feared and/or pitied. While contemporary representations are orientated towards more socially just and sympathetic treatments, the disabled body primarily remains a cultural signifier of tragedy, pity, undesirability, passivity and dependence. The thesis contends that these enduring stereotypes are made to appear as though they are a 'natural' product of impaired sexed bodies. A counter-discourse challenging ableism and sexism is silenced within these cinematic scripts.

The research involves a discursive analysis of five films to reveal what I call a stylised silence. To identify a silent style, the thesis engages with Aristotle's work on the rhetorical function of enthymemes within speech acts, along with its modern application to visual images. The main framework for this thesis employs feminist disability studies, however the project includes consideration of film studies. Thus, the discursive analysis incorporates the artistic elements of film—encompassing the *mise-en-scène* in combination with the narrative script. Applying a feminist intersectional approach, the study considers representations of disability at the intersection of gender, sexuality, race and class. The category of disability is itself diverse and the selected films encompass a range of disabilities. The films

analysed are: *My Own Love Song* (2010); *The Intouchables* (2011); *Morgan* (2012); *Still Alice* (2015) and *The Theory of Everything* (2015).

The conceptual and methodological approach is outlined in the first chapter. The second chapter introduces the various perspectives, debates and approaches within disability film scholarship that has included gender. Chapter three identifies the unspoken/silent ideology produced at the intersections of disability/gender/race, within one film's fictional depiction of an African American man with schizophrenia and a white woman with a spinal cord injury. Chapter four engages with humour theories to examine the gendered silent production of ableist, racist and homophobic humour, within an interracial buddy/bromance comedy. Chapter five analyses the depiction of a recently disabled gay man, within a queer film festival production. The chapter observes how the film contains an unspoken/silent ideology of *compulsory able-bodiedness*. Chapter six analyses the gendered representation of Alzheimer's disease. The analysis identifies a silent discursive formation, which produces complex and nuanced meanings about selfhood. Chapter seven engages with Simone de Beauvoir's concept of gendered transcendence/immanence. The analysis locates and critiques the silent production of the disembodied professor, within a filmic representation of Professor Stephen Hawking. The final chapter applies Judith Butler's theory of gender performativity to these findings.

Overall, the study identifies a repeated silent discursive style which reflects and produces gendered ableist ideology. The thesis posits that silence is performative because an iterative silent discursive style produces the illusion that gendered disabilities constitute an abiding tragedy and undesirability. Bringing these unspoken discourses out of the projected silence and into linguistic life offers a way for subjects to speak back to these gendered/ableist cinematic sites of power.

DECLARATION

I certify that this thesis does not incorporate without acknowledgment any material previously submitted for a degree or diploma in any university; and that to the best of my knowledge and belief it does not contain any material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made in the text.

Signed: Tova Rozengarten.....

Date: 14/4/2020.....

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When we stop complicating any rhetoric, its discourse may become fixed, second-nature, and taken for granted. We stop thinking about that discourse, and, eventually, it becomes trite and slips into silence and then invisibility. We cannot stop questioning what becomes commonplace.

(Scott Lunsford, 2005 p.323)

Most of what I heard came in fragments and even silences, but I was becoming good at fitting these fragments together and filling in the unsaid parts of sentences.

*(Margaret Atwood, *The Testaments*, 2019, p.99)*

1. INTRODUCTION AND METHODOLOGY.

Feminism's pervasive silence

In her 2002 article entitled, *Integrating Disability, Transforming Feminist Theory*, Humanities scholar, Rosemary Garland-Thomson named feminist disability studies as an academic field, and called upon feminist scholars to integrate disability into their work. Garland-Thomson rightly argued that feminist scholarship repeatedly discounts disability in its categorising of womanhood and as a consequence theorises on matters that are intimately imbricated with disability, without considering disabled women's experiences. Additionally, she notes that disability studies often 'reinvents the wheel' as it seeks to address issues that feminist scholars have long examined. Since, then the field of feminist disability studies has delivered important insights for thinking through the gendered politics of disability, yet much gender and women's studies scholarship, along with the broader feminist political project, continues to overlook disabled women's experience. This thesis seeks to answer Garland-Thomson's call by offering an intersectional feminist political approach to an analysis of gendered disabilities in cinema. The motivation for this important academic enquiry is influenced by my travels through higher education as a disabled queer woman.

I began my university education in 2004, studying what was then named *The Bachelor of Applied Science (Disability Studies)*. While the course name has changed, it remains the only course available at a local university which centres on disability. This course offers a rehabilitation model, whereas my interest lies in an

identity politics of disability. I subsequently transferred my enrolment to the *Bachelor of Arts*, majoring in Women's Studies, where I hoped to find feminist scholarship that spoke to my lived experience as a disabled queer woman. Throughout my undergraduate experience as a Women's Studies student, I rarely encountered set readings that included disability, and the subject was only briefly mentioned in lecture content. Frequently, the feminist scholarship I came across referred to disability as entirely caused by patriarchy. A classic example of this is evident in the feminist scholarship of Marion Iris Young. In her famous article, *Throwing Like a Girl: a phenomenology of feminine bodily comporment motility, and spatiality*, Young (1980, p.152) states:

Women in sexist society are physically handicapped. Insofar as we learn to live out our existence in accordance with the definition that patriarchal culture assigns us, we are physically inhibited, confined, positioned, and objectified.

Young's work, while highly valued for an embodied corporeal approach to understanding gender, appropriates disability as a description for women's oppression and silences disabled women's experience. Nevertheless, I credit Women's Studies and feminist scholarship for providing the critical theoretical tools that have enabled crucial insights into this study of gendered disabilities in cinema. Pleasingly, Women's Studies at Flinders University, has begun to include disabled women's experiences. I extend credit to my lecturer, mentor and supervisor, Dr Heather Brook (recently deceased), who listened to my critique of mainstream feminisms, and while supervising my research, began to integrate disability into her teaching and theorising. Together, we began to think through the corporeality of gendered disabilities on screen (Rozengarten & Brook, 2016).

This thesis continues my interest in representations of gendered disabilities and centres on silent discursive cinematic projections.

In this thesis 'unspoken and silent' discursive formations are defined as a series of unstated meanings which are taken-for-granted as obvious. The audience members are expected to intuit the silent meanings by referring to their 'common-sense' knowledge. Sociologist Stuart Hall (2015 p.105) states "ideologies tend to disappear from view into the taken-for-granted 'naturalised' world of common sense". Accordingly, the thesis contends that cinematic silent discursive treatments frequently and wrongly produce gendered ableist ideology as constituting 'common-sense'. Film provides a logical location for illustrating the power of silence because to make sense of the story, audiences need to interpret images by referring to pre-existing knowledge.

The disabled body has signified ableist meanings since the silent film era and it still does. In contemporary cinema, filmmakers continue to prioritise a visual language over the spoken dialogue, and frequently these images appeal to ableist/gendered ideology. The visual language of film consists of a complex vocabulary which must be recognised as an intentional and direct non-verbal way of saying something. Nevertheless, visual images and speech-acts often contain additional meanings which are silently produced. In these instances, without a commonly understood pre-existing ableist/gendered framework, the scenes would be unintelligible. The thesis argues that the silent discourse constitutes a founding

subordination which consolidates gender and ability norms. It is difficult to speak back to silence therefore the thesis seeks to enable agency by identifying and naming silent gendered/ableist meanings—bringing them into linguistic life for critique.

Data Collection and Methods

My data collection method is qualitative, involving a discursive analysis of five films released between 2010 and 2015, which contain a central character with a disability. The films analysed are *My Own Love Song* (2010); *The Intouchables* (2011); *Morgan* (2012); *Still Alice* (2015) and *The Theory of Everything* (2015). I dedicate a chapter to the analysis of each film where I identify and explain how they repeat a silent discursive style. I have selected these films because they depict a range of disabilities covering physical, cognitive and psychiatric disability. Disabled people do not constitute a homogenous group, as subjectivities are shaped by types of disabilities, the stage of life at which disability is acquired, and other intersecting identities (Shuttleworth, Wedgewood & Wilson, 2012, pp.174-175). In recognition of this diversity, I have selected films that portray both female and male leading disabled characters, as this is necessary to examine the different ways that disabled bodies are gendered through representational systems. I have also selected films that represent diversity of race, class and sexuality.

My Own Love Song contains two lead disabled characters: an African-American man with schizophrenia and a white woman with a spinal cord injury. Therefore,

the film presents opportunities for an intersectional analysis of disability, gender, race and class. Whilst most of the films portray heterosexual disabled characters (indicative of the heteronormativity within cinematic representations of disability), I have selected *Morgan* because it centres on the experiences of a gay disabled male character. *Morgan* has screened at lesbian, gay, bisexual, transsexual and queer (LGBTQ) film festivals across the globe, so it constitutes part of queer culture and presents an opportunity to analyse queer cinematic depictions.

In selecting films, I am also conscious of the importance of examining film produced outside of the cinematic dominance of the United States. Whilst most of the films were produced in the United States, I have selected *The Intouchables* because it is a French film, enabling me to examine a non-Americanised production¹. Unlike the other films which belong to the drama genre, *Intouchables* is a comedy, so it provides an opportunity to examine whether the gendered disabled body is mocked and ridiculed, or whether the humour offers a more progressive, empowering depiction of disability. *The Intouchables* is also thematically rich in terms of disability, gender, sexuality, race and class. Finally, I selected *Still Alice* and *The Theory of Everything* because they are major Hollywood films, representing mainstream cinema. *Still Alice* is based on the fictional novel by Lisa Genova (2009) with the same title, and centres on a lead female character with Alzheimer's disease. *The Theory of Everything* brings to the screen Jane Hawking's biographical novel *Travelling to Infinity* (2014), which describes her marriage to famous physicist Stephen Hawking. *Still Alice* and *The*

¹ *The Intouchables* has been remade for American audiences, with a new title—*The Upside* (2019), but this thesis centres analysis exclusively on the original French film.

Theory of Everything depict the impact of disability on academic life and marriage. They provide opportunities to compare the way work and care are depicted along gendered lines.

In order to locate what the filmmakers leave unspoken, where a film is based on a book, I will consider ways in which it departs from and/or omits storylines from the original source material. The focus here is not to discuss everything that the filmmakers invent or omit, but rather to discuss how these departures and omissions simplify the narrative or produce a more dramatic effect—resulting in gendered ableist meanings that differ from the original source. This is particularly important when thinking through what is left unspoken when a story is transferred from page to screen.

The thesis also considers how the films have been received by mainstream film critics, disability commentators and writers, and scholarly reviewers. I consider whether mainstream film critics demonstrate a gendered ableist interpretation or criticise the films for projecting prejudice (including racism, classism, heterosexism and other oppressions). Disability commentators, writers, and scholars provide insights into how the disability community may interpret the film. Do disability commentators/writers conceive a film to be ableist or to subvert ableism? How does the film sit within the politics of disability and gender representation? Finally, I examine what the filmmakers say about their creations in order to gain insights into their intentions. I will consider whether filmmakers' intentions reveal an

unexamined ableist perspective. This provides insights into why gendered ableism is treated as a 'natural' and 'common-sense' response to disabled bodies. When available, I consider how the filmmakers have responded to questions about casting, storylines, and use of cinematic tools. I also consider whether the filmmakers have considered or responded to questions about identity politics and representation.

In describing my research methodology, it is important to recognise that my research methods and the knowledge produced are shaped by my assumptions and beliefs. The questions I investigate, and the theoretical perspectives I engage with, are linked to my epistemological beliefs, which are associated with my non-normative identity as a 'Feminist Queer Crip', but are also influenced by my middle-class, educated and white privileged subject position. Furthermore, my experience of disability will differ from others because the category of disability is diverse. I am a queer woman with a diagnosis of schizophrenia, so I have experiences of gendered ableism, however I recognise that my oppression will differ from women with different types of disability. My research results are partial truths, located within a particular context (Hesse-Biber & Leavy 2006, pp.35-39).

In acknowledging this limitation, the research process will involve a feminist reflexive practice that requires a critical evaluation of my own subject position and relation to power. This process will be embedded in the research method through the process of critical deconstruction. Hesse-Biber and Leavy (2006, p.32) note that the process of critical deconstruction attempts to place pressure on existing social systems in order to create change, rather than producing new knowledge

that nourishes the existing system. Thus, I will attempt to destabilise normative 'common-sense' and naturalised beliefs about gender, disability and intersecting identities, through an ongoing process of examining existing discourse from multiple angles of perception. In order to consider these multiple angles, I offer an intersectional analysis that accounts for how various disability representations intersect with gender, sexuality, age, race and class. This intersectional analysis is important because disability affects people of all classes, races, ethnicities, religions, genders and sexualities (Hirschmann, 2012 p. 397).

Terminology and Disability Models

According to renowned disability sociologist, Colin Barnes (1997, p.230), the use of person-first language such as the phrase 'people with disabilities', is an "explicit denial of a political or disabled identity". Throughout the thesis, I use the term 'disabled people' because it situates disability as a 'first-place' location of pride. In keeping with an epistemological position of disability pride, I also use the reclaimed word 'Crip'. Crip theorist Caitlin Wood, in her edited work, *Criptiques* (2014, p.1), states:

Crip is my favourite four-letter word. Succinct and blunt, profane to some, crip packs a punch. Crip is unapologetic. Audacious. Noncompliant. Crip takes pleasure in its boldness and utter disinterest in appearing "respectable" to the status quo. It's a powerful self-descriptor, a cultural signifier, and a challenge to anyone attempting to conceal disability off in the shadows.

I use the term Crip to align disability as a source of pride but also as a description of myself. My epistemological standpoint is influenced by my identity as a disabled queer woman, and I identify this as an inherent feature of my situated knowledge; however, in acknowledging this position, I recognise that not all

disabled people assign their embodiment to a location of Crip pride. My privilege as a white, educated woman with the benefits of belonging to a proud Crip culture and community enables me to identify in this way.

In this thesis, I adopt the concept of ableism as it is understood by Disability Studies scholar Fiona Kumari Campbell in her work *Contours of Ableism: The Production of Disability and Abledness*. Campbell (2009 p.5) states that ableism is:

A network of beliefs, processes and practices that produces a particular kind of self and body (the corporeal standard) that is projected as the perfect, species-typical and therefore essential and fully human. Disability then is cast as a diminished state of being human.

Ableism, like racism and sexism, describes a process of discrimination and in considering the effects of ableism, I engage with the work of Crip theorist Robert McRuer, in particular his work *Crip Theory: Cultural Signs of Queerness and Disability* (2006). Employing Adrienne Rich's (1980) concept of *compulsory heterosexuality*, McRuer posits that, although it is not exactly the same, able-bodiedness is also compulsory. McRuer (2006, p.2) argues that *compulsory heterosexuality* and *compulsory able-bodiedness* cannot operate in separation because they are completely interconnected. McRuer's concept of 'compulsory able-bodiedness' will be applied throughout this thesis when examining cinematic ableist portrayals of disability. I also engage with the concept of *compulsory able-bodiedness* in the concluding chapter, where I connect regulatory systems of heterosexuality and able-bodiedness to my findings on the performativity of silent discourse.

I shall now outline the medical, social and cultural theoretical models of disability and explain why this thesis adopts a cultural approach. Disability has long been understood as a medical problem that must be cured or eliminated in order for individuals to achieve full human capacities (Siebers 2011, p.3). This understanding of disability is evidenced in the majority of cinematic portrayals of disabled characters, whereby disability is located within the individual body rather than as the result of disabling social conditions (Barnes 1997; Darke 1997; Ellis 1990; Mogk 2013; Morris; 1991). Unlike this medical model, the social model understands disability as a product of social injustice resulting from discriminatory prejudicial environments (Siebers 2011, p.3). Social model theorists separate bodily impairments from socially produced disabling conditions (Hevey 1992, p.16). Whilst the social model has been important for identifying discriminatory social conditions and avoiding the stigmatising approach that attributes disability as a problem for individuals, it has been criticised for not accounting for the way that the body and society interact (Mogk 2013, p.5). Throughout the thesis, I describe how the films sometimes position ableist/gendered ideology as an inherent response to impaired/sexed bodies—here, I am pointing to the way that the films wrongly imagine ableist and gendered conditions as products of a particular deterministic model of biology.

Taking an embodied approach, the thesis adopts a cultural model of disability, as described by Cultural Studies scholars Snyder and Mitchell in their work *Cultural Locations of Disability* (2006). Snyder and Mitchell's cultural model understands

disability as the interaction between bodily impairments and culturally disabling conditions. Unlike strict social model theorists, those engaging a cultural model do not ignore the impaired body or separate it from disabling conditions, but rather “recognise identity and body as constructed” (Snyder & Mitchell 2006, p.7). In conceptualising the way bodies are constructed, the cultural model allows for a phenomenological approach: accounting for the ways in which culture shapes the body (2006, p.6). This conceptual lens is important to this thesis because the cultural model accounts for the discursive history of disability, which includes cinematic portrayals. A discursive history forms the ‘cultural location of disability’ and involves the interaction between history and the body. To explain this interactional perspective, Snyder and Mitchell (2006, pp.7-24) describe how the history of eugenics relates to modern discourses of rehabilitative science, which have shaped the experience of the lived body. Snyder and Mitchell (2006, p.19) state: “[b]iology is destiny when the rhetoric leaps from a descriptive register to a presumption of undesirability in need of erasure”. Unsurprisingly, the films analysed in this thesis repeatedly project disabled bodies as constituting an inherently undesirable tragic state, and they contain numerous depictions of a body to be corrected or transcended. Sometimes, the films wrongly project a separation between biology and culture, including a problematic dichotomy of mind/body. A cultural model accounts for ways in which a discourse of rehabilitation has shaped disabled bodies, which are subject to repeated normalisation strategies and interventions (Snyder & Mitchell, 2006 p.7). Taking a cultural model perspective, this thesis critiques cinematic dualisms of biology/culture and mind/body. Finally, consideration of the cultural history of

disability is important for identifying repeated silent discursive styles, which construct disability as undesirable, tragic, pitiable and frightening.

Film Analysis

This thesis examines the spoken script, with a view to identifying unproblematised events, but I will also focus on how *mise-en-scène*² functions as a non-verbal method of conveying and reaffirming gendered ableist stereotypes of disability. Disability film scholars Hoeksema and Smit (2001 p.33) observe that most of the scholarship about the representation of disability in cinema has neglected to include film studies. They note that scholarship primarily attends to an analysis of the political and social consequences of disability representations. This film criticism has largely reflected a politics of disability activism, and whilst it has helped solidify the importance of Disability Studies to the Humanities, it has not encouraged a “stylised analytical or structural study” of film as the expression of cinema’s language (Hoeksema & Smit 2001, p.34). Hoeksema and Smit (2001, p.35) contend that taking an activist perspective alone, to critique disability cinema, risks overlooking insights that can be gained through analysing films using the tools from the field of Film Studies. They argue that it is necessary to adopt an understanding of film as art, and to combine film and disability studies viewpoints in order to obtain a comprehensive analysis of disability in cinema. Hoeksema and Smit (2001, p.35) explain:

² *Mise-en-scène* is a French term defined in film studies as encompassing the theatrical process of staging and translates as “put into the scene”. It covers all that is put into the frame, such as lighting, sets, costumes, and props, and includes camera angles and shot sequencing (Villarejo 2007, p.28).

Without an understanding of high and low angle shots, panning, close-ups, tracking, the use of sound in film, etc., images in films are interpreted in a bland and one-dimensional fashion, thus causing the image to lose that which defines it as an artistic expression.

Additionally, Hoeksema and Smit explain that the power of film is its ability to induce an emotional response from the audience and this must be respected and understood as a cinematic technique. They assert that disability scholarship which denies emotional filmic depictions of disability results in the rejection of the genre of film itself. I argue that emotion need not be denied in films, but it is important to critically question films that insist on using the disabled body as a tool for inducing pity³ and fear, based on able-bodied stereotypical beliefs about disability.

Hoeksema and Smit (2001, p.35) explain that the emotive impact of film is primarily produced within the palpable images, rather than through the storyline, character development and themes. They argue that it is more important to consider how a film makes viewers think and feel about the subject, rather than focusing on what is conveyed through the scripted dialogue alone. This approach is important for analysing representations of gendered disabilities, particularly as I am interested in how appeals to emotion relate to pre-existing ideological beliefs, which are unspoken yet presumed within filmic discourse. Thus, tools related to *mise-en-scène*, such as the emotive use of music, sound-effects, camera angles, sets, props, costumes and lighting will form a vital component in my analysis.

³ In this thesis, I define pity as an unsolicited, unwelcome and harmful form of sympathy which involves feelings of superiority over the recipient (Clark 1997, pp.238-242; Nussbaum 2001, p.301 and Sklar 2011, pp.139-143). Sympathy is defined as an acknowledgement that another's distress is unfair and bad (Nussbaum 2001, p.302).

Conceptual Frameworks

The theoretical starting point of my analysis is the work of Michel Foucault (1969 pp.23-33), who conceptualises discourse as a 'connected series of statements'. Discursive statements can be comprised of anything that transmits meaning, including language, images, narratives, scientific descriptions and social/cultural actions (Alsop, Fitzsimons & Lennon 2002, p.81). Foucault understands discourse as a form of power because it produces a 'regime of truth', by legitimising perspectives, and constructing normative standards that define what counts as desirable/undesirable (Hall 1997, p.49). Foucault was predominantly interested in the regulatory discursive power of institutions and he theorised about who is given the power to produce knowledge and whose voices are heard and given merit. For Foucault, discourses are not only powerful in terms of what they pronounce as desirable/undesirable but also in terms of what is left unsaid. Foucault explains in his work *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (1969, p.134), that "discourse contains the power to say something other than what it actually says", and thus he reveals how any one discourse contains within it a "plurality of meanings". Foucault notes that an analysis of discursive formations charts a contradictory course, as it seeks to determine a condition in which only the signifying groups that are spoken may appear, and as such it simultaneously establishes a *law of rarity*. In this sense, he argues that statements are rare and there is always more unsaid than said within discursive formations. Foucault (1969, p.134) observes "statements (however numerous they may be) are always in deficit", arguing that statements are studied at the point that separates them from what is not said. Discursive formations present a "distribution of gaps, voids, absences, limits and divisions" (Foucault 1969, p.134).

For Foucault, the unsaid in discourse is played out through the process of interpretation; thus, it is in the interpretation of cinematic representations of disability that what has been left unsaid is revealed. This presents a problem for disabled representation because much of what is said and unsaid in cinematic discourse reflects an able-bodied viewpoint, one which an able-bodied audience is likely to interpret through an association with the ableist system. As a disabled perspective is largely omitted from mainstream discourses, the able-bodied audience is likely to take the unspoken/silent ableist ideologies embedded within cinematic depictions of disability as ‘truth’. What happens, then, when a silent discourse reflects ableist assumptions that are seen as ‘common-sense’? In response to this question, the thesis posits that silence has a performative function—producing the illusion that ableism constitutes a ‘natural’ response to disabled bodies.

As previously explained, in cinematic and other discursive formations, what is left unspoken tends to represent that which can be taken-for-granted because it is understood as common-sense, and therefore, it goes without saying. To identify styles of silent discourse, I engage with Aristotle’s classical enthymeme along with its modern application to visual images. Aristotle’s classical enthymeme belongs to the structural work of Rhetorical Studies; however, I borrow from this structural approach to locate a stylised pattern of silent discursive formations. I identify a structural style of silence but apply it to a broader poststructuralist analysis, to

locate the unspoken/silent element of film as constitutive of discursive iterative power.

Aristotle, in his study of rhetoric, described an enthymeme as the part of a verbal argument that is “suppressed because the audience is expected to supply the missing element from common knowledge” (Smith 2007, p.115). Unlike Aristotle’s classical enthymeme, which refers to suppressed speech within verbal communications, modern visual enthymemes substitute speech acts with images (Smith 2007, p.119). Audiences attribute meaning to these images by applying their ‘common-sense’ interpretations drawn from experiences/knowledges. The enthymeme denotes the assumed element of conversational speech or visual language because it constitutes that which goes-without-saying. Enthymemes are “based on probabilities, not certainties” because they may be interpreted in a number of different ways (Smith 2007, p.119). The enthymeme successfully persuades when it appeals to ‘common opinions’ and emotions, which are based upon a shared evaluation and identity (Smith 2007, pp.120-122). Accordingly, I will demonstrate that cinematic enthymematic silences⁴ are often based on ableist ideologies which conceptualise disability as something undesirable, unattractive and tragic—appealing to able-bodied identities and ableist emotions of pity, fear and revulsion. When viewers do not share these ableist perspectives it is unlikely they will be persuaded to view disability in pejorative ways, but it is still highly probable that they will understand the ableist enthymematic meaning because

⁴ I use the term ‘enthymematic silence’ to distinguish it from other commonly understood forms of silence (e.g. an absence of sound, or a silence of omission). ‘Enthymematic silence’ incorporates both Aristotle’s classic enthymeme and modern visual enthymemes. It is also useful for describing instances where the classic and visual enthymeme are simultaneously applied.

such perspectives are widely known. Thus, irrespective of viewer accord or discord regarding the cinematically projected value of disabled lives, in order to understand what is taking place in particular scenes it is necessary to occupy an ableist viewing position⁵.

One example of the silent depiction of ableist 'common- sense' can be seen in popular depictions of disability as an inevitable tragedy, resulting in a life not worth living. When cinema unproblematically depicts disabled characters attempting to end their lives, what is silently reflected/produced via an enthymematic ableist 'common-sense' is that disability is a terrible tragedy. A Crip perspective, which sees disability as a proud location of difference, is silenced through the treatment of disabled suicide as a blessed saving grace or relief from intolerable suffering. I posit that the unspoken discourse within cinematic portrayals of gendered disabilities produces a silence that is performative. This is not just a silence of omission or linguistic limitation, but rather an additive productive silence that reflects ableist/gendered conceptions of disability.

After I have identified iterative stylised silent discursive formations in the films, I will apply Judith Butler's theory of gender performativity to my findings, to which I now turn. Butler's work on performativity reveals how gender is socially constructed in a way that makes it appear as a natural result of anatomy (Butler,

⁵ See Laura Mulvey (2009 pp.14-26) for an example of how cinema positions the audience according to a heterosexual male viewing position ('male gaze'). Also, bell hooks (2003 p.209) on the 'oppositional gaze'—spectator resistance to identification with film discourse.

1990). In her ground-breaking work *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (1990), Butler adopts J.L. Austin's concept of performatives, in order to think through how gender is performed through practices (Holmes 2007 p.60). Austin posited that performatives are words that do things by bringing into existence the things of which they speak (Holmes 2007, p.60). Performative speech-acts often appear in ceremonial situations for example, saying the words "I now pronounce you married", performs the marriage when spoken by someone under prescribed conditions, who is invested with legal authority. Butler reformulates Austin's concept of performative speech by arguing that performativity is not exclusively "the act by which a subject brings into being what she/he names, but, rather, is that reiterative power of discourse to produce the phenomena that it regulates and constrains" (Butler 1993, p.xii). For Butler, stylised repetitions of gender norms operate to naturalise gender. Butler (1997a, p.402) explains, "gender is in no way a stable identity or locus of agency from which various acts proceed; rather it is an identity tenuously constituted in time – an identity instituted through a stylised repetition of acts." Butler (1990, p.140) contends that repetitions of routine bodily acts and enactments are performative because they produce the illusion of an abiding gender. It is through the power of repetition that utterances, acts and enactments have a discursive performative power.

Butler also contends that gender norms are part of a 'heterosexual matrix of desire', which she conceptualises as a compulsory framework for understanding the social construction of sex, gender and desire (Lloyd 2007, p.34). The

'heterosexual matrix' consists of regulatory laws that assume a norm of sexual difference. This matrix wrongly defines maleness as naturally producing masculinity, which results in a sexual desire for women. Conversely, femaleness is wrongly conceptualised as 'naturally' feminine, resulting in a sexual desire for men (Lloyd 2007 p.34). In her important work, *Bodies That Matter*, Butler (1993, p.xiii) describes how the laws of heterosexuality simultaneously produce abject beings. She states:

This exclusionary matrix by which subjects are formed thus requires the simultaneous production of a domain of abject beings, those who are not yet 'subjects', but who form the constitutive outside to the domain of the subject.

In other words, Butler reveals that in defining what counts as normal, what constitutes abnormal is simultaneously produced. Butler argues that queer bodies fail to appear properly gendered because they do not adhere to the regulatory norms of the 'heterosexual matrix'. In referring to abject subject positions, Butler is describing bodies that do not conform to heterosexual imperatives, but her logic about how bodies become conceived as 'Other' can be applied to consider how the normalisation of ability results in bodies that fail to appear properly gendered and able. These subjects are constituted as outside the normative domain of able-bodied social life. In turn, able-bodiedness is constituted and consolidated through the construction of disabled bodies as abject. The abject domain relates to elements of social life that are deemed 'unliveable' and 'uninhabitable', but are nonetheless occupied by bodies that do not enjoy the privileged subject position (Butler 1993, p.xiii). The films analysed throughout this thesis repeatedly depict disabled bodies as struggling to approximate able-bodiedness and intersecting

gender norms. These repeated discursive formations serve to consolidate the mutually imbricated compulsory norms of able-bodiedness and heterosexuality. The thesis will demonstrate how the 'heterosexual matrix' is embedded with an *ability system* which produces ableism through social and cultural practices. I use the term *ability system* to refer to the ways that ableism is produced. I conceptualise the *ability system* as a compulsory cultural framework that defines and regulates norms of ability. The *ability system* produces ableism by defining normative capacities which are wrongly constituted as an 'ideal corporeal standard'. These two systems operate together because gender norms assume an able-bodied starting point (Samuels, 2002 p.69).

Butler understands gender as an "illusion without substance" (Holmes 2007, p.60), because it is only through performative iterations that gender is made to appear natural. I posit that just as stereotypes of femininity and masculinity are produced through performative iterations, so too are intersectional stereotypes of gendered disabilities performatively produced. There is no substance to these stereotyped illusions; rather, they are mythical phantoms (with real effects) produced by discursive stylised iterations that may be spoken or unspoken. This thesis will demonstrate that discursive iterative stylised ways of doing gender and disability performatively produce gendered disabilities. Within film (and other locations), undesirability and tragedy appear as 'natural' products of impaired/sexed bodies. This thesis demonstrates that it is not only reiterative stylised discursive statements and actions that produce 'undesirable' and 'tragic' disabled bodies but also stylised ways of enacting silence. In my concluding theory chapter, after I

have identified styles of silent discursive reiterations across all five films, I will apply Butler's theory of performativity to my findings. I shall argue that gendered disabled bodies become understood as 'naturally undesirable' through stylised silent discursive iterations that constitute gendered disabilities as inherently tragic, pitiable, frightening and undesirable.

The term 'silence' can be understood and applied in a variety of ways and it is important to address possible misunderstandings. In this thesis, my use of silence does not refer to an absence of normative speech sounds, or an absence of sound. Therefore, it does not refer to meaning produced through sign-language and non-verbal/augmentative communication technologies. Additionally, silence is not deployed as a metaphor—denoting something negative or positive. A 'performative model' of what silence does is explicitly not an 'oppression model' that assumes silence can only be negative. It is a way of saying that silence is productive—for better or worse depending on what it produces. Thus, silence is not negative or positive in itself, but is simply a method of producing meaning. Sadly, the data does contain many negative/ableist silent discursive meanings, which is a problem I identify and critique. Nevertheless, there are occasions where the silent discourse produces positive meanings that may counter ableist ideology.

2. GENDER, DISABILITY AND FILM SCHOLARSHIP

Whilst feminist film theorists have engaged an intersectional analysis to include different categories of subjectivity, such as sexuality and race (de Lauretis 1988; Gaines 1999; Modleski 1999; Mulvey 2009), disability scholars note that they have largely overlooked the intersection of gender and disability in their theorising (Chivers & Markotic 2010; Davis 1995; Mitchell & Snyder 1997; Mogk 2013; Morris 1997). Cultural disability scholars Mitchell and Snyder (1997, pp.5-6) provide an explanation for this omission, noting that feminist, race and sexuality scholars have sought to empower disadvantaged groups by separating their identities from disabling physical and cognitive associations. This separation has inevitably situated disability as the actual limitation that must be avoided (Mitchell & Snyder 1997, pp.5-6). Mitchell and Snyder (1997, p.5) argue that the omission of disability is evident within numerous academic discourses on the body. They call for more scholars to offer a disability studies perspective because the study of disability sheds light on the complexity of able-bodied mythologies and provides a method of inquiry for more socially just representations of physical and cognitive difference.

Representations of disability/gender/sexuality have frequently been overlooked or given minimal attention in film studies; however, some scholars have begun considering these intersections (Chivers & Markotic 2010; Ellis 2008; Haller 2010; Koppers 2014; McRuer 2006; Meekosha 1999). Nevertheless, film analysis that includes intersections of disability/gender/sexuality largely tends to privilege

attention to the representation of heterosexual men with disabilities, reflecting a broader trend within disability studies scholarship that includes gender (Meekosha 1998, p.165). This literature review provides an historical overview of significant contributions to disability film theory, with a focus on scholarship that has included the intersection of gender and/or sexuality in its analysis of cinema.

Early Disability Film Scholarship

In 1972, the first issue of the American journal *Women and Film* was published, marking the beginnings of feminist film theory (Thornham 1999, p.9). Early feminist film criticism paved the way for the study of representations of minority groups in cinema (Enns & Smit 2001, p.x). Yet it was not until 1985, when disability historian, Paul K. Longmore wrote his essay entitled “*Screening Stereotypes*”: *Images of Disabled People* that disability started to be included within cinema studies. Longmore’s landmark essay introduced the first theoretical approach to cinema and disability studies which largely focused on revealing and challenging the discriminatory system underlying most depictions of disability and film (Enns & Smit 2001, p. x). Longmore reveals the high frequency of disabled figures on screen and argues that disabled characters are promptly removed from the viewers’ consciousness, once they have served their narrative purpose, which he asserts is to allay able-bodied fears and anxieties about impairments. He argues that scholars must reveal the unconscious attitudes and values within representations of disability in order to protest against the prejudice embedded within such representations. In discussing disabled sexuality, Longmore (2001, p.11) notes that film and television stereotypes reflect and reinforce the belief that disabled people are sexually deviant and dangerous, asexual, or sexually

incapacitated. When observing representations of disability and sexuality, Longmore primarily focuses on the representation of heterosexual men, which is most likely due to a lack of cinematic representations portraying the sexuality of female and queer disabled characters.

Nine years after Longmore's essay, film historian Martin F Norden published *The Cinema of Isolation: A History of Physical Disability in the Movies* (1994), which comprehensively documents examples of disability in American cinema from the early days of silent movies through to the mid-1980s. Norden's critique of disability representation is clearly influenced by Longmore's theoretical approach, and largely focuses on exposing discriminatory stereotypes on the screen (Enns & Smit 2002, p.x). Unlike Longmore, Norden considers how women and men with disabilities are differently portrayed in cinema. Norden (1994 p.315) argues that the stereotyping of characters with physical disabilities is linked to gender issues because patriarchal and ableist social systems are interconnected. According to Norden (1994, p.135), stereotypes of disability follow gendered lines in which female characters are typically portrayed as sweet, childlike and deserving of pity. He argues that disabled women are eroticised due to stereotypes of passivity and compliance, yet primarily understood as asexual subjects who fail to attain conventional aspects of feminine beauty. In contrast disabled male characters are portrayed as 'noble warriors', who bravely battle on against the odds or are presented as sexually dangerous monsters, who resent their impairments and seek to avenge their predicament by victimising the able-bodied figure of envy. Engaging with Freud's Oedipal complex, Norden attempts to partially explain the

paradox of why, in over forty years of cinema, the film industry rarely portrays physically disabled characters as sexual beings, despite consistently reproducing sex-role stereotyping regarding disabled characters. In particular, Norden (1994, p.317) examines how disabled men have been used as a narrative device to depict the castrated male, so that the disabled male body functions as a feminised disabled body in need of rehabilitation.

Whilst Norden's work has been important in tracing the history of gendered ableism in cinema, he ascribes these portrayals to an imagined Hollywood conspiracy, rather than considering how cinema not only produces, but also reflects social and cultural structures. As Mitchell and Snyder (2000, p.20) note, Norden attributes almost every portrayal of disability in cinema's history as evidence of Freudian psychoanalytic castration anxiety or the ableist prejudice of the film-making industry.

Longmore and Norden's methods are similar to early feminist film theory, but instead of centering analysis on the study of patriarchal structures they focus on revealing how ableist structures are complicit in the portrayal of disabled bodies (Enns & Smit 2001, p.x1). This thesis will focus on both systems of gender and ability because the two structures are intimately bound together. Both Longmore and Norden reveal how disabled people are frequently stereotyped in cinematic portrayals as: sweet and innocent, monsters and criminals, tragic victims, noble warriors or inspirational heroes. This criticism has been and continues to be

widely discussed within Disability Film and Culture Studies (Chivers & Markotic 2010; Ellis 2008; Haller 2010; Koppers 2014; Pointon & Davies 1997). Norden and Longmore argue for more positive representations of disability, but as disability film writers/producers Pointon and Davies (1997, p.1) explain, although disabled people generally agree on what comprises a negative portrayal, some seemingly positive and well-intentioned forms of representation may engage portrayals of the 'heroic, inspirational supercrip' variety—which many understand as problematic. Scholars focused on the problem of negative images have struggled with the heavy burden associated with their mass criticism of disability representations, and with the difficulty of identifying what constitutes a *positive* image (Mitchell & Snyder 2000, p.20).

Social Realist Perspectives

Early negative imagery perspectives of disability representation revealed that most cinematic representations of disability provide unrealistic depictions of the lived experience of disability (Mitchell & Snyder 2000, p.21). To address these unrealistic depictions, disability film critics began to call for more realistic portrayals of disabled lives. These critics hold a social realist perspective that seeks to politicise disability portrayals by revealing discriminatory systems, in order to protest against them (Mitchell & Snyder 2000, p.24). Social realists argue that images are frequently distorted. Thus, a wheelchair user is shown at the bottom of a flight of stairs and in the next scene they have miraculously ascended

to the top. Social realists argue that realistic representations would reveal the structural and attitudinal discriminatory elements of living with disability.

The call for realistic depictions is not without its problems, as disability film theorist Paul Darke (1994, p.341) explains in his analysis of David Lynch's 1980 film *The Elephant Man*, which is based on the life of Joseph Merrick. Merrick had physical deformities and was exhibited in a human freak show in the late 1800s. Lynch's film depicts the inhuman treatment of Merrick by the freak show and the medical institution. Darke warns against the social realist position because factual representations may also reflect a negative image. Using Lynch's popular film, he argues that whilst Lynch's film appears to defend difference and denounce intolerance, by challenging the pathologising treatment from within the institution of medicine and the inhuman treatment of the 'Freak Show', the film actually reaffirms many disability stereotypes. In his analysis of Lynch's film, Darke argues that some of the portrayals reflect a social realism, but the realistic portrayal is still negative, so he concludes that social realism does not solve the problem of negative imagery.

Photographer and cultural disability studies scholar David Hevey (1992, p.103) takes a social realist perspective but he explains that the social realist position does not insist that all realistic depictions would result in a positive representation of disability. Hevey claims that in order for an image to be positive, realistic depictions must be tethered to a positive overall context and purpose. Hevey

(1992, p.103) argues that a positive image should not suppress or deny the sites of struggle and oppression that impact on the lives of disabled people, and representations should be linked to the political fight against disabling attitudes. Hevey explains that the meanings of representations are grounded in their 'context, distribution and task'. *The Elephant Man* is an historical account of one man's dehumanising experience, but the purpose of the film is primarily to entertain an able-bodied audience. Thus, it is not surprising that any realistic attempt to depict Merrick's experiences is moderated through the language and purpose of the film's ableist lens and this impacts upon the degree to which realism can enact a more positive representational function.

Scholars who call for more positive representations of disability primarily assert that most disability representation is negative. The challenge facing this scholarship is the difficulty in coming to a consensus about what constitutes positive and negative representation. Hevey argues that negative representation is encapsulated in depictions that conceive of disability as an inherent tragedy (Hevey 1997, pp.210-211). He argues that positive representation shifts the focus away from the impaired body and onto the interaction between the impaired body and disabling attributes of society. Whilst I agree with Hevey's concept of positive and negative representations, I add that positive representation must also avoid other discriminatory systems such as sexism, heterosexism, racism and classism. Importantly, Hevey (1997, p.212) notes that negative or positive representation is contextually produced. He states that "the best new image in the world can have its meaning altered by adding a different text in or around it" (Hevey 1997 p.212).

This is highly pertinent for understanding how ableist stereotypes of disability are performatively produced within a silent discourse, because it is the pre-existing 'common sense' notions of disability as tragic that interact with cinematic representations, influencing their meanings. If we are to represent the interaction between impaired bodies and disabling culture, we must expose these silent discursive spaces.

Social realists also argue that disabled people must control the representational form of disability in artistic works in order to produce positive depictions of disability. Like Hevey, feminist disability scholar Jenny Morris (1991, p. 114) largely criticises films that misrepresent the experience of disability, and she also calls for more realistic depictions, and asserts that these depictions must be tethered to a proud disability culture. Morris (1991, p.114) states that representations of disability should reflect and be driven by a disability culture, in which disabled people challenge ableist culture by telling stories that take pride in their difference. For Morris, social realism must be intimately tied to the promotion of disability pride and a shared disabled cultural identity. Morris (1991, p.114) states: "we must challenge the way that non-disabled people interpret our reality by producing our own cultural representations of disability".

Not all scholars agree that positive representations will ensue if disabled people produce their own films. Darke (1997, p.14) observes that there is a widely held belief that disabled people should be making films about disability in order to ensure more positive representations, but he argues that this claim is naïve. He asserts that disabled people often have a negative self-view, due to having been

socialised into seeing disability as negative and that their own narratives are likely to depict this negativity (1997, p.14). Darke is highly pessimistic about the self-view of disabled people and his pessimism extends to the ability of disabled film-makers to produce entertaining profitable films. This is evident when he asserts that when a more difficult social, rather than personal, image of disability is presented, it rarely reaches a wider audience and entertainment value is lost.

Darke's claim that entertainment value is lost when problematic social issues are presented in film does not consider how disabled film-makers have successfully made such presentations entertaining. The same year that Darke made this assertion, the film *Dance Me To My Song* (1998), featuring disabled actor/writer Heather Rose Slattery as the star and co-author of the film, was released.

Slattery's film managed to entertain viewers whilst engaging their attention to the construction of normative and non-normative bodies and the politics of disability (Simpson & Matthews 2012, p.140). Not all scholars agree with Darke's pessimistic views on the subversive power of disability auteurs. Disability advocate and television scriptwriter Allan Sutherland (1997, p.20) disagrees with Darke, as he argues that disabled writers and film-makers have the potential to recreate the way that disability is portrayed. Sutherland states that just as black writers and film-makers have been influential in stopping the degrading joke characterisation that was popular in the 1940s, it is possible for disabled film-makers to influence similar change.

Scholarship that argues for the subversive potential of works controlled by disabled artists often stresses that disabled actors, rather than able-bodied actors, should play disabled roles. While this has merit, it is important to note that the event of placing disabled bodies on display for entertainment value has an inhumane history. Early freak shows depicted people with impairments as a freakish spectacle for the able-bodied gaze, which historian David Gerber reports, involved the exploitation and inhuman treatment of disabled people (Gerber 1996). Scholars argue that the freak show production has been transferred to television, film and theatre (Clark & Myser 1996; Markotic 2001; Norden 1994; Pointon 1997a; Weinstock 1996). Whilst these scholars assert that freak show depictions produce stereotypes of disability, one disabled artist has recreated elements of the freak show with the aim of subverting stereotypes. Feminist disability activist Petra Kuppers (2014 p 97) describes the work of disabled performer Matt Fraser and his theatre production, *Sealboy: Freak* (2001-2007). Kuppers (2014, p. 97) notes that Fraser's performance asks the question: "Can a disabled performer ever be seen as anything other than a freak, irrespective of the 'liberal' or 'postmodern' attitudes of today's sophisticated audiences?". Fraser is an actor who was born with short arms and legs caused by his mother's exposure to thalidomide during pregnancy. His theatrical work attempts to challenge the comfort zone of the able-bodied audience (Kuppers 2014, p.97). Fraser developed the idea for the show after conducting research into performers who have shared his impairment—a project that was inspired by a desire to find "his historic role models, his roots, his heritage" (Kuppers 2014, p.97). Kuppers (2014, p.97) states that Fraser's desire to locate his history, culture and role-models demonstrates that his experience of disability is not an individual state, but rather

an experience of belonging to a cultural minority group. For Fraser, the early freak shows constitute a part of the cultural history of disability and offer a location for viewing disabled performers.

It is not surprising that Fraser has turned to the early freak shows to find such a location, as disabled actors are rare on screen. Television producer and disability arts advocate Ann Pointon explains that the lack of disabled actors results in a relative absence of positive disabled role models in the arts, and this is the result of inadequate access to the arts for disabled actors (Pointon 1997b, pp.111-112). Many disabled people feel that non-disabled actors engage in a production of 'disability drag' that is highly offensive and comparable to white actors playing black characters (Kuppers 2007, p.80). According to disability film theorists Sally Chivers and Nicole Markotic (2010, p.1), able-bodied actors can rapidly achieve commendation by portraying a physically disabled character that appears convincing to a predominantly uninformed able-bodied audience. According to Kuppers the Hollywood industry reveres an able-bodied actor's ability to perform, at will, a corporeal transformation into a disabled figure, a figure "associated with the opposite of skill, choice and ability" (Kuppers 2007, p.81). In particular, Kuppers examines the limits of non-disabled actors' abilities to convincingly perform the stylised use of wheelchairs. She notes that non-disabled actors rarely provide the exciting and sensual style of wheelchair use that can be presented by disabled actors who are accustomed to regular chair use (Kuppers 2007, p.81). Thus, able-bodied actors are more likely to perform wheelchair usage that seems awkward and cumbersome. This appearance suits a narrative that seeks to

portray disability as a tragic and confining pejorative condition. Koppers' work examines the way in which wheelchairs and the performances adjoining them operate as conveyers of meaning (2007 p.81). I shall return to the discursive function of disabled bodies and disability apparatus later, as this element of disability representations fits within a broader area of scholarship that seeks to examine how disability functions as a metaphor and plot device.

So far, I have outlined the main debates circulating around calls for positive representations of disability. This thesis will step outside of the positive versus negative debate, as much as possible, in order to develop a new analytical approach. Given that representations continue to present ableist/gendered stereotypes, there is a need for new critical tools in order to reveal and discuss discursive ableist/gendered meanings in cinema. I argue that ableist stereotypes are not likely to vanish in the foreseeable future, therefore we need multiple and complex systems of analysis in order to speak back to harmful discursive scripts. I shall now turn to another key aspect of disability film scholarship. This area of analysis focuses on the production of able-bodied normality within cinema.

Constructing Normality

Some scholars have discussed how disabled characters function in cultural narratives as a way to reaffirm able-bodied 'normality' (Ellis 2008; Darke 1998; Davis 1995; Morris 1997; Nickel 2004; Norden 1994). Paul Darke groups these narratives by identifying them as belonging to a specific genre. He asserts that films often portray disabled characters as a threat to the hegemony of normality,

and as such they belong to a 'normality genre' (1998, p.184). Darke's 'normality genre' involves films that engage disabled characters as a way to reinforce the illusion of normality. He notes that the normality drama involves narratives that centre on the experiences of a key character with a disability, and the relational experience of those around them (Darke 1998, p.185). For Darke, the point of this genre relates to the comparative value of being 'normal' and/or the pursuit of 'normality'. Thus, when disabled characters pursue euthanasia and this pursuit is presented as a natural response to impairment, films reaffirm the superiority of the able-bodied 'normal' body. Additionally, when disabled characters strive to be 'normal' and this pursuit is applauded the superiority of able-bodied normality is solidified (Darke 1998, pp.187-188). According to Darke (1998, pp.188-189) cultural disability scholars should redirect their attention away from discussing the inaccuracy of stereotypes and towards revealing how they reflect the realities of social integration, because stereotypes reflect how abnormality is negated in the process of promoting the fantasy of normality. This thesis will attempt to reveal the able-bodied normative position embedded within film. In this sense, Darke's concept of the normality genre is highly relevant.

Returning to the positive versus negative representational debate, Darke (1998 pp.188-189) asserts that the demand for more positive cinematic representations of disabled people is a demand for 'pseudo-normal images of abnormality' and only reaffirms the ideology of the 'normality genre'. Thus, he argues that the call should be for the celebration of difference (abnormality), in order to break the illusion that normality is a reality. Whilst Darke's concept of the 'normality genre' holds merit for this thesis, I am not convinced with the logic behind his argument

that celebrating difference will break the illusion of normality, because in constructing difference one sets up a discourse of sameness and the argument circles around on itself.

Despite the limits of Darke's theorising, he makes a particularly crucial point about the way that cinema simplifies complicated contexts. Darke (1998 p.196) explains that "cinema simplifies and eliminates any thing or distinction that might complicate an issue or make a narrative point appear questionable". This thesis will reveal that these simplifications and eliminations are part of a silent discourse in which the non-normative is marked, leaving the normative unmarked and as such unremarkable and silent. I suggest that ableist/gendered common-sense perspectives, that imagine disability as inevitably pejorative, are reflected/produced through an enthymematic silence. It is difficult to answer back to what is unspoken, yet silently produced, therefore this thesis will identify and critique enthymematic silences of gendered ableism. Finally, whilst Darke (1998, p.188) calls for the valuation of difference in cinematic narratives, I suggest that he misses an important step and skips over the need to challenge gendered ableism directly. I shall now turn to scholarship that has examined how the disabled body itself operates as a narrative plot device within cinema.

A Narrative Device

David Hevey (1992, p.30) explains, in his analysis of disability charity campaign imagery, that the disabled body functions as a signifier of difference. Film as a visual medium often projects images of disabled bodies as a functional prop for

the signification of difference. Some disability film scholars have considered how impairment is often deployed as a character, or plot device, in which disabled bodies form an element of *mise-en-scène* (Chivers & Markotic 2010; Ellis 2008; Field 1994; Koppers 2007; Mitchell & Snyder 2000; Morris 1997; Sutherland 1997). These scholars have also identified the way that filmic techniques deploy disabled bodies to function as a narrative tool for the portrayal of gendered/ableist stereotypes for example: when impairment is used to weaken strong female characters. Sutherland (1997, p.16) explains that screenwriters are taught to use visual images rather than words to tell a story. Visual images of disabled characters often have an emotive narrative effect because the materiality of the disabled body has a discursive cultural history loaded with stereotypes (Sutherland 1997, p.17). When the able-bodied audience views a character with a limp, this often becomes an emotive message associated with sympathy and as such the disabled body has a narrative function. Sutherland (1997 p.17) points out that the narrative function of disabled bodies is successful because most of the audience hold stereotypical understandings of disability.

The language of cinema began as a silent medium and has developed a complex visual vocabulary (Sutherland, 1997 p.17). As Norden (1994) explains, a significant number of disabled bodies featured in the early days of silent cinema, and thus, the disabled body has long been part of the visual vocabulary of film. Sutherland (1997, p.18) demonstrates how disabled bodies are used to portray a variety of meanings and different impairments denote specific mythological connotations – a limp indicates a loser, whilst a hunchback evokes a ‘twisted’

character trait. Consequently, non-visible disabilities are less common in cinema because they do not provide an instant visual connotation; however, when they are featured, film-makers go to additional lengths to make them visually appear through the use of subjective 'point of view' camera angles and dream sequences (Sutherland 1997, p.19).

This visual vocabulary produces discursive meanings that form the cultural location of disability, appealing to established perspectives of disability as: undesirable, tragic, pitiable and frightening (Snyder & Mitchell 2006, p.19). These meanings have long been produced within eugenics, rehabilitation and criminalisation discursive formations. "Terms such as "feebleminded," "subnormal," "noneducable," "crippled," "defective," "monstrous," and "unfit" once infused popular media and served as professional diagnoses" (Snyder and Mitchell 2006, p.19). Without this discursive history and the widespread ableist understanding that disability is 'abnormal' and 'inferior', the visual vocabulary which Sutherland describes would be unintelligible. This is also the case for films which use disability as a metaphor or narrative device to denote loss, struggle, overcoming and something that has gone wrong. Numerous scholars have revealed how films use disability as a metaphor within a broader narrative (Chivers & Markotic 2010; Davis 1995; Mitchell & Snyder 2000; Morris 1991; Norden 1994; Sutherland 1997). Sutherland (1997, p.19) notes that the 'home from war' genre frequently features disability as a metaphor for loss and overcoming. In these films, the central subject is nationalism and the male disabled body represents a nation's sacrifice in a righteous fight against a common enemy.

Mitchell and Snyder, in their work *Narrative Prosthesis: Disability and the dependencies of discourse* (2000), take a deconstructionist approach to examine the way narratives are produced. They argue that the disabled body functions as a metaphor for something going wrong within a story. Additionally, they argue that the disabled body operates as a narrative device that enables the story to move forward, and this demonstrates how discourses are dependent upon disability to construct a story. Deploying the term 'prosthesis' they describe how the disabled body acts as a corrective literary tool. For Mitchell and Snyder, the materiality of the disabled body functions as a metaphor for deviance, as stories rely on the extraordinary in order for the subject to be worthy of narration. Thus, the "anonymity of normalcy is no story at all" (2000, p.55), disabled figures move the narrative forward, towards the erasure of difference, through rehabilitation or the death of the disabled figure, thereby solving 'the problem', and ending the story. Just as a prosthetic limb may be viewed as a normalising/corrective device, the disabled body in text must be rehabilitated or eradicated. Mitchell and Snyder's 'narrative prosthesis' presents a disabled figure that is both a material metaphor, denoting a problem to be corrected, and a prosthetic device for moving the narrative along. Referring to Longmore's (1985) landmark essay, they offer a new perspective on why cinema is saturated with representations of disability, and why we unconsciously screen them out of our minds upon viewing them. In essence, Mitchell and Snyder claim that the disabled figure is in itself a literary tool for producing a story, and this explains the prolific number of disabled figures within cultural narrative texts. Sustaining the disabled figure in our conscious minds would require viewers to observe the tools of the trade, impacting on the suspension of belief required for absorption in the story. In turning to Mitchell and

Snyder's observation that the anonymity of normalcy does not make a story, this thesis suggests that the discursive silence within texts, marks the location of the anonymous, normative, able-bodied figure within the cinematic production process.

Whilst scholars have considered how the disabled body constitutes part of the visual vocabulary of film, what remains under-analysed is the unspoken enthymematic silent discursive formations which reflect/produce ableist/gendered ideology. Disability film scholar, Katie Ellis (2008), in her book *Disabling Diversity*, identifies a concern with films that leave problematic events to 'hang un-problematically' (Ellis, 2008 p.16)—events such as the issue of euthanasia. This observation of un-problematised events in film is highly relevant to this thesis, as I intend to delve deeper into this un-problematised area by detailing the specific meanings that are reflected/produced via enthymematic silence. Consideration must be given to how the audience fills in these scripted gaps and what meanings they may attach to this silent space.

Intersections

Feminist disability scholar Susan Wendell argues that feminists must take a critical lens to their own ideals of the body. Wendell asserts that feminist theorising must include the "weak, suffering and uncontrollable body" and recognise that not all women's bodies are strong (Wendell 1996, pp. 92-93). Sociologist and feminist disability scholar Helen Meekosha, demonstrates Wendell's point about the feminist exclusion of disabled bodies, in her analysis of a film described as 'pro-

feminist'. Meekosha (1999, p.24) describes how films that have been read as presenting a feminist narrative may simultaneously be read as projecting an ableist discourse. Analysing the popular science fiction/horror film, *Alien Resurrection*, Meekosha describes how the film has been read as a “full-on feminist thriller” containing androids, clones and post-modern dialogue in a narrative that both challenges the nature/nurture dualism and alludes to lesbian/queer sexualities. Meekosha (1999, p.25) describes how the main character, Ripley (Sigourney Weaver), has been read as a tough woman who endures through pain and suffering in a male domain. Additionally, she notes how the film has been understood as representing feminist political interests, such as the right to abortion—depicted when Ripley kills her foetus, which is the consequence of rape perpetrated by an alien monster (Meekosha 1999, p.25). Meekosha (1999 p.25) notes that this feminist reading neglects to consider how the film could be read from a political disability perspective because the alien foetus could be interpreted as the embodiment of deformity—a metaphor for the promotion of genetic screening and the abortion of a foetus with undesirable genetic traits. Drawing on the political debate between geneticists and people with disabilities about the value of a right to life, and the potential for genetic screening to constitute a form of ableist eugenics, Meekosha makes a strong argument that compromises the subversive value of the film. A feminist disability reading of the film demonstrates that able-bodied feminist evaluations of what constitutes a feminist film, may automatically exclude consideration of the way that disabled bodies are represented on the screen. Importantly, Meekosha demonstrates how feminist disability interpretations of film can reveal the way that gender and ability are interconnected—complicating the value of supposedly gender subversive

discourse. Meekosha's methodology of interpreting film from both a gendered and ableist perspective is useful because she demonstrates how an able-bodied feminist discursive reading may be at odds with a disabled feminist interpretation of film.

Feminist disability film theorists Sally Chivers and Nicole Markotic in their edited work *The problem body: Projecting disability on film* (2010), explore what happens when the disabled body becomes a metaphorical site for the projection of identity. Engaging with the Freudian concept of 'projection', they examine how disabled bodies function on the screen as a psychic projection for able-bodied anxieties and desires. Chivers and Markotic (2010, p.8) describe the 'problem body' as a term that denotes how the disabled body is assembled within a 'normative body' framework. Their use of the term 'problem body' draws on Louis Althusser's notion of the 'problematic', which asserts that a concept cannot exist in isolation because it must be understood by the way it functions within capitalist structures. Chivers and Markotic (2010, p.9) contend that 'the problem body' delivers a theoretical framework that accounts for multiple and contradictory intersections of identity. Thus, they propose, disabled bodies are not a 'social problem'; rather, representations of disabled bodies, situated amongst other identity categories, "both materialise and symbolise moments of interaction between the social and the physical" (Chivers & Markotic 2010, p. 11). Their notion of a 'problem body' is useful because it offers an embodiment approach accounting for a body that is both "discursive and material" (Chivers & Markotic 2010, p.9). Examining multiple corporeal subjectivities, Chivers and Markotic (2010, p.10) question why particular

bodies are more likely to be categorised as a problem. In her later work, entitled *Disability in Film and Literature*, Markotic (2016) analyses the language of film and other media to identify ways that the intersectional disabled body is positioned as abnormal or problematic, and she celebrates texts that attempt to subvert ableist ideologies. In particular, Markotic (2016) examines ableist usage of metaphor to uncover how it constructs disability as a 'problem body'.

Drawing on 'the problem body' conceptual framework outlined by Chivers and Markotic, feminist disability theorist Michelle Jarman (2012, p.165) notes the various ways that a body becomes embedded with meaning in her analysis of the film, *Precious* (2009). *Precious* narrates the self-directed redemption of the character, Precious Jones (Gabourey Sidibe) a poor, African-American teenager who was raped by her father, resulting in the birth of her daughter who also has Down syndrome. Additionally, Precious has a learning disability, is HIV-positive, and is portrayed as an obese woman, who over-eats. Jarman (2012) offers a complex reading of the film by demonstrating the multiple ways that the corporeal identity of Precious constitutes 'a problem body' projected onto the screen, through the intersections of disability, gender, race and class.

I shall now briefly return to the work of feminist and disability scholar Rosemary Garland-Thomson, who calls for disability to be included in feminist intersectional practice because disability, like other identity markers such as race, gender and sexuality, also constitutes a cultural identity (Garland-Thomson, 2002). In her

work *Extraordinary Bodies* (1997), Garland-Thomson argues that disabled bodies should be viewed as 'extraordinary' rather than as pathologised figures of abnormality. The 'extraordinary body' occupies a space situated between positive and negative discursive readings of disability representation. Garland-Thomson's conceptualising differs from Darke's, who as I previously explained, unconvincingly claims that a celebration of difference would break the illusion of normality and result in a positive representation of disability. For Garland-Thomson, 'extraordinary bodies' are neither positive nor negative, but rather constitute a material site of difference. Thus, the 'extraordinary body' provides a corporeal materiality that escapes dominant conceptions of a problem body in need of correction/elimination, or presentations of a super-heroic figure striving to achieve normality. Importantly, the 'extraordinary body' allows for multiple intersections of identity through its position as a material site of difference. Garland-Thomson's (1997, p.136) theorising of disabled figures within cultural texts considers how the disabled body is culturally produced as an 'extraordinary spectacle', compared to the non-disabled unmarked subject. In her later work, entitled, *Staring: How We Look* (2009), Garland-Thomson delivers a reconstructionist masterpiece, which breaks new ground by presenting the disabled body as constituting *rare beauty*. Garland-Thomson (2009, p.189) explains that we need to be taught how to look at non-normative bodies and trained to see them as 'rare beauty', which is distinct from conventional beauty. Garland-Thomson (2009) demonstrates that whilst it is natural to stare at non-normative bodies, the construction of the disabled body as inherently/naturally unattractive or ugly is a socially produced fiction. The concept of *rare beauty* is useful to my thesis because it counters the undesirability/unattractiveness of disability, which I will demonstrate is wrongly

projected as a matter of common-sense on screen—an ideology so thoroughly naturalised that it can be communicated successfully via an enthymematic silence. I do not have scope within this literature review to adequately cover Garland-Thomson's considerable body of work; however, as I outlined in the introduction, this thesis intends to answer her call to advance feminist disability scholarship.

Conclusion

The literature reviewed delivers a necessarily non-exhaustive overview of disability film scholarship, emphasising works intersecting with gender, in an attempt to map the key areas of investigation and debates. Disability film scholarship has primarily sought to reveal how cinema reflects and produces harmful stereotypes of disability. While some scholars have considered how these stereotypes are presented within a gendered framework, consideration of how gender and disability intersect in cinematic depictions has been scarce within disability film studies. Some scholars concerned with the negative portrayal of disability have called for more realistic depictions of disabled lives, while others argue that a social realism perspective will not solve the problem of negative cinematic portrayals. Some scholars have considered how depictions of disability in film reaffirm the fantasy of normality, and they call for representations that celebrate difference. Scholarship that has moved beyond the negative/positive representational debate has examined the ways that film-makers use disabled bodies as tools associated with the filmic processes of *mise-en-scène* and narrative. These scholars argue that disability functions as a metaphor and narrative plot device. Finally, consideration has been given to how cinema simplifies complex issues/events, often treating problematic events as

unproblematic. While some scholarship has pointed towards these unproblematised spaces, this silent location of omission has not been analysed as having a gendered/ableist performative function. This thesis adds to disability film scholarship by exploring the gendered/ableist effects of unsaid/silent discourses in cinematic portrayals of disability.

3. DISABILITY, GENDER, RACE AND REDEMPTION IN OLIVIER DAHAN'S MY OWN LOVE SONG

The silences were almost visible; I pictured them as grey, hanging in the air like smoke. I learned to listen for what wasn't being said, because it was usually more important than what was (Margaret Atwood, 1981 p.54).

In an interview for Tribeca Film Festival Oliver Dahan describes the intentions behind his film *My Own Love Song*⁶ (2010): "I wanted to make a movie that was a bit naïve about disability, but also a little optimistic at the same time" (McCracken, 2010). Naïve representations of disability are likely to reflect and produce ableist stereotypes, due to the dominance of ableism in culture. Dahan's ableist lens is apparent within his "a little optimistic" aspiration, as he presents an optimism designed to ease able-bodied fears about disability. The primary message is that with hard work, disabled people can (to some degree) overcome their impairments. Explaining his motivation for the film, Dahan states: "I wanted to make a simple story about two people travelling together who help each other recover not only their normalcy, but their dignity" (McCracken 2010). Indeed, *Love Song* reflects Dahan's ableist motivation because it presents the pursuit of able-bodied normality as a natural and inevitable response to disability. Dahan's film portrays disability as an inherently tragic state of undesirable embodiment, demanding a special resilience and courage in order to over-come its 'undignified' effects.

⁶ *My Own Love Song* will be referred to as '*Love Song*' throughout the rest of this thesis.

Love Song failed to impress and following a screening at the *Tribeca Film Festival*, bypassed the United States box office and went straight to video (Frosch 2010; My Own Love Song: release information, n.d; Mintzer 2010;). Film critic Jon Frosch (2010) describes the film as having a weak plot, “bland storytelling” and consisting of sappy clichés. Whilst the film was unsuccessful, Dahan succeeded in his intention to provide a naïve depiction of disability. *Love Song* is riddled with spoken and unspoken ableist depictions of disability, reflecting an intentionally ignorant understanding about disabled people and their lives. I will demonstrate that through a narration that treats problematic events as unproblematic, and techniques of *mise-en-scène*, *Love Song* contains silent discursive treatments that reflect/produce gendered ableist stereotypes.

Despite demonstrating a predominantly naïve and ableist conception of disabled lives, Dahan demonstrates some sympathetic insights about the impact of poverty on disabled mothers. This important inclusion may encourage viewers to recognise that the presence of disability, in itself, is not incompatible with motherhood, but rather that socioeconomic disadvantage plays a key role in why children may be taken from disabled mothers. The film portrays characters with identities at the intersections of gender, race, class, physical and psychiatric disability, and I consider how these intersectional identities are projected on screen—often producing disabled subjects that appear tragically undesirable.

Synopsis: this is not a romantic love song.

Love Song centres around two characters who have acquired disabilities after tragic events: Jane (Renée Zellweger) is a white woman who has a spinal cord injury while her friend, Joey (Forest Whitaker), is an African-American man with a psychiatric disability. Jane's disability is the result of an automobile accident that also caused the death of her partner. Living on welfare and without supports, Jane struggled to care for her son, Devon (Chandler Frantz) who was subsequently placed in foster care by the state. As a result of her trauma and grief, Jane was admitted to a psychiatric hospital, presumably for post-traumatic stress/depression, although the exact reason is not revealed. Whilst recovering in hospital she befriends Joey who, traumatised after witnessing the death of his family in a fire, began to experience visual and auditory hallucinations, manifesting in the form of angels. The film picks up seven years after these events.

Love Song is essentially an American road trip film and, typical of this genre, the narrative centres on a journey of redemption whereby Jane and Joey work towards repairing their damaged lives, relationships and identities by coming to terms with their impairments. The friends travel to Louisiana, so that Jane can reunite with her son Devon, who mistakenly believes his mother is not capable of love. On the way, Joey attempts to prove that the angels he speaks with are not symptoms of psychosis but are a 'real' experience. Seeking confirmation of his sanity, he attends a lecture that offers instruction on how to communicate with angels. In the end, Jane, who was a professional singer before her accident, sings a song to Devon: her 'own love song' about a mother's grief over losing a son.

Reunited with Devon, Jane overcomes her depression and shows a capacity to be happy despite her grief over an inability to walk. Joey also overcomes his psychological distress after accepting his diagnosis and complying with psychiatric treatment.

Film Analysis

Part I - Rejection and Undesirability

*Forgetful heart,
Like a walking shadow in my brain,
All night long,
I lay awake and listen to the sound of pain,
The door has closed forevermore,
If indeed there ever was a door (Bob Dylan, 2009).*

In the opening scene, Jane sits alone in a dark dreary bar drinking a beer and staring into space, while a jukebox plays Bob Dylan's song 'Forgetful Heart' (a song about lost love and pain). The setting and music frame what will promptly become a depiction of seduction that ends in rejection upon the shocking discovery of the disabled body. Presenting a heteronormative cliché, Allan (Joe Forbrich) notices Jane (a pretty woman alone in a bar), and attempts to seduce her with unimaginative pick-up lines:

Allan – Your hands are beautiful. Do you play piano?

Jane – Not really.

Allan – Mind if I join you? [Taking a seat at the table] I'm Alan.

Jane – Jane [introduction].

Allan – The way you are tapping the table you should play the piano. You live around here?

Jane – Born here, raised here, stuck here.

Allan – Well, I'm just passing through. Want another? [indicating beer].

Jane – Ok.

Allan – Well, I'm in insurance. I sell farm machinery. You have beautiful eyes Jane.

Jane – I'm trying to think of an interesting question about farm machinery.

Allan – There aren't any, trust me.

Jane – No, what are we going to talk about?

Allan – You, you're interesting, I can tell. So, what brings you to this bar?

Jane – Live around here and nothing on T.V Monday night.

Allan – Tell me Jane, what do you do in life, apart from being disappointed by T.V?

Jane – Not too much.

Allan – Well, is it a secret?

Jane – No, it's not a secret.

Allan – Come on you must do something?

Jane – I'm a singer.

Allan – Oh, I wasn't far off with my piano question. Night's young, we are just getting started, how about a game of pool?

Jane – Alright, if you don't mind losing.

Allan – We will see about that.

[Jane moves away from the table and her tires screech against the floor. The music suddenly stops playing. A low-angle close-up shot shows Jane's perspective of Allan looking shocked and repulsed as he takes a step back, whilst self-consciously brushing his forehead.]

Allan – Oh, wow [shocked expression], I didn't realise how late it is. I got to get going.

Jane – Something wrong? [a high angle-shot of Jane, looking up at Allan].

Allan – No, I just got to be somewhere. [cuts to a medium close-up of Jane's face, as she expresses an unsurprised resignation].

Jane – Thanks for the beer. [Spoken as Allan quickly leaves the bar. A high-angle medium shot captures Jane's dejected expression].

The film cuts to an extreme-long shot of Jane walking alone on a quiet deserted street. Jane's voice narrates:

I remember picking a wild orange at the edge of the woods surrounding our house – I threw the orange right to the stars and it never fell back. I held that fruit only for a second and today I look at that orange tree through the window of a dark train and it seems like it is just painted on the glass.

This opening scene depicts a disabled woman who is depressed, lonely and both sexually and romantically undesirable. We are invited into Jane's thoughts through the use of her narrative voiceover. Jane's narration about holding fruit for only a second, and now the tree seeming like it is painted on glass is a metaphor: she held sexual/romantic appeal for a brief second and it is no longer a real part of

her life, and she is instead unable to be touched. The music emphasises her romantic tragic isolation as Bob Dylan sings: “the door is closed forevermore”.

According to Hoeksema and Smit (2001, p.35), it is important to consider the artistic elements of film and how the ‘palpable image’ makes the viewer feel. They explain that consideration of the elements of *mise-en-scène* enables a greater understanding of the specific effect that films produce. Thus, it is necessary to examine the way that filmmakers use the camera—what kinds of shots are deployed and how various forms of lighting and sound are applied—to manipulate the way that disability is represented in film. The opening scene provides such an opportunity, as Dahan carefully manipulates the camera, sound, lighting and music in order to induce *pathos*.

Dahan uses lighting to produce the effect of Jane as an isolated, pitiful figure, emphasising her solitude in the opening bar scene. Meaning is produced in this scene, and others, by reducing/eliminating the background illumination and applying low-key lighting to create a dramatic chiaroscuro⁷ effect. As film scholars David Bordwell and Kristin Thompson (2013, p.129) explain, low-key lighting is frequently applied to sombre settings. The contrasting effect of light and shadow gives the impression that Jane’s private trauma collides with public space and this use of lighting provides a palpable effect, separating her from others.

⁷ Chiaroscuro – An Italian artistic term that refers to the effects of contrasting areas of light and shadow.

The extreme close-up of the wheelchair tyres, corresponding with the sound of the wheels screeching on the floor and the sudden stop of the music denotes a disruption to the act of seduction. These filmic applications work in conjunction with the disabled body which has a signifying function, denoting pity, tragedy and undesirability (Hevey 1992, p.30). Without a prior knowledge of these significations, the scene would be confusing because Allan's reaction to Jane's body would not make sense. *Mise-en-scène* projects ableist meaning where the disabled body is positioned as a 'rejected body' (Wendell 1996). What is silenced in this scene is any question that the disabled body can be anything other than a beacon for tragedy, pity and undesirability. These ableist stereotypes are not challenged because they represent a 'normative' conception of disability and through this normative location ableism remains unmarked and hence unremarkable. The silence reinforces and produces disabled undesirability as though it is a natural feature of impairment.

Whilst viewers may understand that Allan's rejection of Jane is guided by prejudice, Dahan treats ableist rejection as inevitable, because instead of protesting, Jane seems to accept her apparent undesirability. Any indication that this scene is problematic is silenced by Jane's resignation to the experience of rejection. Importantly, if Jane occupied a normatively beautiful body, Allan's response would seem odd and an explanation would be required for his actions. Instead, because disabled bodies have long been subjected to iterative discourses

of undesirability, Allan's behaviour requires no explanation: the reason for his rejection goes without saying.

Aristotle's concept of enthymematic silence and its modern application to visual images sheds light upon how Dahan presents disabled bodies as naturally undesirable in this opening scene. Aristotle, in his study of rhetoric, described an enthymeme as the part of a verbal argument that is "suppressed because the audience is expected to supply the missing element from common knowledge" (Smith 2007, p.115). Unlike Aristotle's classical enthymeme, which refers to suppressed speech within verbal communications, modern visual enthymemes substitute speech acts with images (Smith 2007, p.119). Audiences attribute meaning to these images by applying their 'common-sense' interpretations drawn from their experiences and knowledges.

Dahan foregrounds Jane's wheelchair, using sound and close-up shots, immediately before depicting Allan's sudden shock and subsequent abandonment of his seduction attempt. This visual imagery constitutes an enthymematic silence because the audience is expected to intuit that Allan has abandoned his seduction attempt because he views Jane's disabled body as undesirable. Dahan clearly expects the audience to hold a common-sense awareness that disabled women are culturally imagined as unattractive/undesirable, because without this pre-existing knowledge, the abandoned seduction scene would not make sense. In

this way, the scene reproduces what constitutes a common-sense knowledge about disabled women's bodies.

According to Smith (2007, p.119), "enthymemes are based on probabilities, not certainties", and thus, it is possible that some viewers will not understand why Allan abandons his attempt at seduction; and they may ascribe different reasons for his behaviour. Indeed, cinematic projections may be read in multiple ways, as the 'active audience' brings their own life experiences into play when interpreting film. Therefore, my analysis of the scene must be understood as one of many ways to interpret its meaning. As sociologist Stuart Hall (1997, pp.32-33) explains, texts are both coded and encoded, so that the reader of a text engages in an active process of interpretation. Consequently, the meaning a viewer attributes to particular text is never the exact meaning that has been intended by an author. However, Hall explains that the production of meaning requires us to 'enter language', a system in which various codes and signs contain meanings that pre-date the text being interpreted. Given that the disabled body is well known as a signifier for pity, tragedy, undesirability, and dependence, it is probable, within an ableist culture, that the unspoken meanings will be interpreted in the way I have described.

It is necessary to consider how silence functions within discourse. The unsaid often represents that which can be taken-for-granted because linguistic expression functions by economising on statements. Foucault (1969 p.134) explains there is

always more unsaid than said within discursive formations. If I announced that ‘I went for a walk’, it is not deemed necessary to include the fact that I walked by placing one foot in front of the other, progressing forward in location. How I walked is taken-for-granted; however, there are other ways of walking (e.g. going for a walk with the use of a wheelchair). Film scholars Mast and Kavin (1996, p.5) argue that films contain “unspoken, assumed cultural values—that seem so obviously true for that culture that they are accepted as inevitable, normal, and natural rather than as constructs of the culture itself”. Thus, filmmakers identify what they assume can be left unsaid through a cultural awareness of what constitutes common knowledge. In this thesis, I identify how cinema reproduces what constitutes common-sense by identifying enthymematic silences. I contend that films produce what constitutes common-sense via what is left unspoken and in doing so, they not only reflect what is culturally understood as a taken-for-granted logic but produce it as such.

My concern is that Dahan engages techniques of *mise-en-scène* as a method of producing meanings that play to the dominant normative and able-bodied belief about the undesirability of disabled bodies. Viewers who are unfamiliar with disability politics and schooled by a saturation of ableist representations, are likely to interpret this scene as confirmation that disabled bodies are naturally undesirable. Conversely, informed viewers are likely to perceive the injustice of Jane’s solitude and experience of rejection as an unjust consequence of ableist prejudice. Audiences may pity Jane, whilst others may rightly sympathise with the

injustice that befalls her; either way, it is probable that they will understand her isolation and experience of rejection as a consequence of disability.

Just as pejorative stereotypes about disability are produced within this scene, gendered stereotypes also influence the way the scene is presented. Numerous scholars have described how disabled women are frequently coded in representations as passive, dependent and unattractive (Ellis 2008; Kent 1987; Sutherland 1997; Morris 1997; Norden 1994). Author Deborah Kent has written extensively on disability representations; in her work *Disabled Women: Portraits in Fiction and Drama* (1987), she notes that disabled women are frequently depicted as unworthy of a man's desire, both in how they perceive themselves and in how other characters view them. Jane is presented as holding such a negative self-perception, as she appears resigned to her inevitable rejection. What is missing in this narrative is best articulated by the late Australian disability activist and writer Katie F Ball's (2002, p.166) question: who would want to 'fuck an ableist' in the first place? The film does not offer disabled audiences a celebratory moment when they can cheer at an empowered disabled woman expressing righteous anger at sexist ableism. Dahan misses an opportunity to represent proud disabled women like Ball who would not tolerate men treating them with disgust. As Ball (2002, p.171) states:

I've had a gutful of being treated like some ugly lump of rotting flesh. And the worst thing is, I'm not alone. I have long argued that people with disabilities should focus our attention on sexual emancipation. Physical barriers are born of attitudinal ones.

In addition, Dahan presents a scene that follows normative gendered stereotypes relating to the role women play in the portrayal of seduction. The bar scene follows a normative stylised narrative: 'an active man approaches a passive woman in a bar'. This gendered narrative trope, described by Kent (1987, p.51) as "waiting for the prince", means that it is more likely that disabled women, rather than disabled men, will be depicted in film as experiencing this stylised form of sexual/romantic seduction followed by rejection. Kent (1987 p.51) observes:

Traditionally the woman is expected to be passive, to make herself pretty and wait patiently until a man pursues and wins her. If the woman who is physically different, however, waits passively for a suitor to come to her, she may wait in vain.

What happens when a woman's disability is temporarily hidden from the prince? In this instance, a disabled woman may experience his pursuit until her impairment is discovered and he subsequently rejects her. Allan mistakes Jane as able-bodied and upon discovering her impairment he displays his revulsion. As this scene of misplaced seduction is supported by representational iterations of disabled women as undesirable figures, it is ableist to leave this depiction of romantic/sexual rejection unproblematised. Treating Allan's rejection of Jane as unproblematic reflects and produces the gendered/ableist conception of disabled women's bodies as naturally undesirable. Imagine if Allan verbalised his feelings. Allan's dialogue would read something like this: "I did not realise you are a cripple. I'm leaving because I find you undesirable now". Now, imagine that Jane accepted this statement as a natural response. If these silently evoked messages were vocalised in this way, disabled people and their advocates would rightly complain. Nevertheless, this message is exactly what is being communicated, but

in more subtle and palatable ways. The film states that Allan is 'turned off' by Jane's disability, but the reason this is the case is unspoken and silently produced. The visual language of film and the spoken dialogue state *what* is happening, but *why* it is occurring is produced via an enthymematic silence. Through an unspoken silent discourse, a common-sense ideology of undesirable disability is produced in particularly gendered ways.

Part II – Passive Sexual Objects

In addition to presenting a rejected undesirable body, *Love Song* also portrays disabled women as sexually passive objects. Kent (1987, p.53) explains that whilst men are depicted as avoiding disabled women, due to feelings of revulsion, they may also be presented as simultaneously holding an attraction to them, due to perceptions of passivity and a correlating desire for dependent women. This is evidenced when Jane experiences unwanted sexual advances from Dean (Elias Koteas), who is a lonely character that she meets on the road. When Jane and Joey's car breaks down, Dean offers to sell the travellers a replacement vehicle at a discount price in exchange for a lift to the next town. In a disturbing scene Jane, while lying alone in her hotel bed, receives an uninvited interruption from Dean, who offers her assistance in exchange for sex. The scene initially positions Dean as threatening and creepy, but ultimately constructs him as a sad and lonely relatable figure.

Dean – I was sitting in my room and I was wondering if you, do you need, do you want me to give you a shower or something, if you need one? [Jane's perspective is projected via a medium low-angle shot of Dean leaning against the doorframe].

[Jane protectively crosses her body with a pillow. Viewers are encouraged to identify her vulnerability via an omniscient medium high-angle shot].

Dean – Or a bubble bath? [He inches slowly into the room].

Jane - I'm fine. [Stated in a whispered scared tone. Jane's frightened image is projected via an omniscient medium close-up, high-angle shot].

Dean – Can you feel anything? [He points to her legs and sits on the bed] I mean you know what I mean. [A medium close-up, low-angle shot captures Jane's perspective of Dean hovering over her].

Jane – What do you mean?

[Extreme close-up of Dean's hand grasping Jane's leg].

Dean – I just want to have a good time, you know, just a screw for the fun of it. You know everybody needs to have their tank filled. [A low-angle, medium close-up of Dean, cuts to a medium close-up of Jane, looking nervous and unimpressed].

Jane – I'm tired, Dean. [An omniscient point of view shot is cast over Dean's shoulder, showing Jane in a protective posture, still grasping a pillow to her chest].

Dean – You won't have to do much – just a little. [A medium close-up, low-angle shot captures Dean as he hovers over Jane. He visually signifies a 'little amount' by showing an inch of space between his thumb and forefinger].

Dean – It's up to you Jane. [Initially, Dean does not notice that Jane is frightened because he is looking down at her leg. Turning his attention towards Jane's face, he realises she is scared].

Dean – I'm frightening you. [A medium close-up, low-angle shot captures Dean's concern, as seen from Jane's perspective].

Jane – You should go. [A medium close-up, high-angle shot captures Jane's fearful expression from Dean's perspective].

[Dean sits on the edge of the bed, leaning forward with his hands on his knees and his head down. He stands-up and dejectedly walks towards the door. A medium, low-angle shot depicts Jane's perspective of Dean, as he hesitates at the door].

Dean – You know what Jane? For a long time, I umm, I don't feel anything inside here [points to his chest]. I mean I can walk but I think I'm crippled too. [He leaves the room, closing the door dejectedly behind him].

[A medium close-up shot captures Jane's sad expression, as she reflects upon Dean's comment].

In this scene, Dean presents as someone who does not intend to be threatening and frightening. Nevertheless, an extreme close-up of Dean's hand grasping Jane's leg, followed by a low-angle shot of him gazing at her body, while temporarily forgetting to look at her face, figures him as 'creepy'. Camera angles encourage the audience to witness Jane's subordinate and vulnerable position pitted against Dean's looming presence, emphasising the tension between the two figures. When Dean recognises that he is frightening Jane, he stops his sexual advances and the narrative shifts towards a more sympathetic perspective of Dean. In the next shot sequence, Jane's voiceover narrative serves to construct Dean as a relatable and lonely figure.

Shortly after Dean departs, Jane leaves her room and a medium tracking shot captures her as she walks past Joey's window. Joey looks sad as he quietly talks to his auditory hallucinations, while visibly alone in a dimly lit room. Jane passes

Dean's room and low-key lighting casts Jane's profile in shadow, contrasted with his bright room. A high-angle long-shot projects a lonely image of Dean watching television and smoking in bed. The low-key lighting delivers a stark contrast between the bright interior room and the darkness outside. The imagery suggests that each man resides in an isolation cell, which is compounded by Jane's voiceover narration. Walking slowly past the men's rooms the audience hears Jane's thoughts, as her voice narrates:

Is it possible to break this glass? Put your arm through the window to feel the air and speed on your skin? We are all in this together. All on the same train alone and isolated. One day I'm going to break this glass. One day I will break it. I will watch it shatter into pieces, making stars in the night sky. I will. I will.

The scene concludes with Joey sitting on the edge of his bed, as he whispers a song lyric: "if I shut myself off, so I can't see you cry – ". The film cuts to the next day, where Joey discovers that Dean has stolen their car. He has left a note with a drawing of himself by the car smiling. Joey picks it up and reads the note. It mockingly states in relation to the previous night, "I have this one, I've filled the tank". Jane asks: "What's it say?" and the scene ends, so we are left unsure if Joey shared the note with her.

According to cultural theorist, Colin MacCabe (1974, pp.8-11), film narratives often contain a discursive hierarchy whereby they present conflicting/contradictory perspectives which are pitted against each other, until one final truth is usually revealed. Dahan asks the audience to consider whether Dean is bad or sad, before ultimately positioning him as a badly-behaved but relatable sad-loser.

Aside from this forgiving approach to sexual harassment, the problem here is that Jane's fate is orientated towards sexual/romantic rejection or unwanted sexual advances from sad losers, who assume she is equally desperate and lonely. Dean has a notably low self-image because he describes himself as 'emotionally crippled'. It is clear that he views Jane as someone who might have sex with him despite his self-perceived inadequacies because, like him, Jane is a 'sexual loser'. The scene conveys a clear message about the type of man that Jane is able to sexually attract. Jane's romantic/sexual isolation is not resolved in the film, and Dean's unwanted advances constitute the last time she experiences sexual attention. Thus, Dahan represents disabled women as sexual losers who are only able to attract other sexual losers.

Although the scene demonstrates that disabled women are not easy sexual conquests, because Jane rejects Dean's advances, the sexist/ableist view that disabled women are passive sexual objects is left intact. The type of sex that Dean is offering does not require Jane to feel sexual pleasure or desire – she is required as a passive vessel for his pleasure. This is evidenced when he informs Jane that she “won't have to do much”, and also by his lack of concern regarding his unanswered question about her ability to feel touch. It is not important to him if she can feel pleasure, as Dean's primary interest is his own sexual gratification: he “just wants to have a good time—a screw just for the fun of it”. Additionally, the silence surrounding Jane's ability to feel sensation may reinforce ableist beliefs that disabled women are unable to enjoy sex. Finally, Dean wrongly assumes that Jane requires assistance to wash, a service he will gladly provide. Indeed, his

assistance would also provide an opportunity to gaze upon and touch Jane's naked body. Troublingly, Dean assumes that Jane will be properly grateful for his help by repaying him with sex. In this sense, Jane is not only wrongly imagined by Dean as dependent on such assistance, but he also assumes she will pay for his help with sex, irrespective of whether she finds him desirable or not. Dahan portrays the disabled woman's body as a passive vessel for the sexual gratification of a lonely man. Once again, Dahan leaves an occurrence of gendered ableism unproblematised, because rather than protesting such objectifying treatment, Jane appears to empathise with Dean and to interpret his behaviour as an inevitable result of loneliness: a condition she relates to. Jane's voiceover narration invites viewers to hear her thoughts: "we are all on the same train together, isolated and alone". *Love Song* informs disabled women that, not only are they undesirable, but the only sexual attention they can expect is from similarly undesirable men. Furthermore, disabled women are advised that they should not expect sexual pleasure from such men.

Disabled women have long been represented as passive sexual objects (Ellis 2008; Kent; Morris 1997; Norden 1994; Sutherland 1997). Thus, treating Dean's assumptions as unproblematic holds an iterative power that appears to naturalise such treatment. A counter-discourse reflecting the politics of disabled women is silenced, because Jane does not demonstrate anger at being objectified in this way—an anger that is undeniably felt within the political protests of disabled women (Asch & Fine 1988; Ball 2002; Brown 2014; Kent 1987; Morris 1997). The scene ends immediately after Joey discovers Dean's letter informing them that he

has stolen the vehicle. Dahan misses an opportunity to show Jane's understandable anger at the mocking sexual taunt, which objectifies her body by comparing it with an automobile. As film scholar Katie Ellis (2008, p.16) observes in her analysis of disability representations, 'problematic events are frequently left to hang, un-problematically'—*Love Song* continues this trend.

Part III – Madness, Race and Gender

In addition to physical disability, *Love Song* also represents psychiatric disability via the character of Joey, who experiences auditory and visual hallucinations. Whilst Dahan avoids attaching a diagnostic label to the character, it is highly likely the audience will read Joey as a figure with schizophrenia because voice hearing is commonly associated with this diagnosis. Non-visible disabled representations are rare in film (Sutherland 1997, p.18), as are portrayals of psychiatric disabilities intersecting with non-white subjectivities (Harper 2009, p.101). Therefore, *Love Song* could be praised for depicting an under-represented group. However, such praise is mitigated by the film's projection of numerous ableist stereotypes associated with psychiatric disability, which problematically intersect with racist stereotypes of black subjectivities. Racist discourses relating to black bodies parallel ableist stereotypes relating to psychiatric disability. Stereotypes such as: feeble-mindedness, a propensity for violent outbursts and an underdeveloped childlike mind, have long been associated with both psychiatric disability and racialised bodies (Cross 2010; Gilman 1985; Goodley 2011; Harper 2009; Jarman 2011; Rohr 2014). Given the racist history of aligning madness with blackness (Gilman 1985, p.147), ableist portrayals of psychiatric disability become complicated when applied to black racialised figures. I am not suggesting that

filmmakers should avoid representing black figures with psychiatric disability, because omitting such portrayals would silence their experiences. My point is that, when filmmakers present *ableist* depictions of psychiatric disability and black subjectivity, ableism fuses with racism.

Further, non-visible disabilities are misrepresented when filmmakers work to make them visually appear. Sutherland (1997, p.18) notes that when filmmakers represent non-visible disabilities, they often depict characters who have a number of characteristics associated with specific impairments, constituting an unusual presentation within one individual. In this sense, a vast array of possible symptoms associated with an impairment are presented within the one body. This can be observed in Whitaker's portrayal of Joey, as he presents a figure with an exaggerated anxious verbal stutter, unusual facial tics and odd bodily movements such as, hand-flapping and a strange walking gait. This portrayal is clearly intended to make Joey's disability visual for filmic projection; however, it misrepresents the symptoms of psychosis and projects an image of a black body out of control. Joey's out-of-control body metaphorically signifies an uncontrollable and unpredictable character. At times, Dahan portrays Joey as dangerous by linking the potential for violence with psychiatric disability. In working to resolve the 'violence problem', the film debates the pros and cons of using antipsychotic medication to treat psychosis within a 'hierarchy of discourse'⁸. Competing discourse appears through individual character voices, visual images, and the narrative ending. The film ultimately asks the audience to view antipsychotic

⁸ See, O'Shaughnessy & Stadler (2008) and MacCabe (1974) for a detailed explanation of how visual images operate within a 'hierarchy of discourse'.

medication as a necessary response to unpredictable violence, which it problematically positions as caused by psychosis.

In a pertinent scene, Jane arrives home and discovers her house in disarray when her angry neighbour arrives to complain about Joey. The neighbour plays a minor role in the film, and he is first seen in a brief confrontation, in which he complains to Jane about her untidy yard. In his second appearance, the neighbour stays true to his interfering unsympathetic persona when he begins yelling at Jane. Dahan engages a hand-held camera and zoom lens to produce a rapid, tilting low-angle panning shot, zooming into a medium close-up of the neighbour. This technique serves to project Jane's anxiety and confusion, along with placing emphasis on the neighbour's intimidating presence because he appears to be standing-over her while raising his voice in anger.

Neighbour – Miss Wyatt! I've been looking for you - where have you been? We had no idea where you were! It's your buddy. He tore your house-up and then he ran out into the street and threatened my wife! The cops came, they tackled him and he's screaming at everybody about a fire somewhere – ranting like a mad man!

Jane – They took him away? [Jane appears highly anxious and a high-angle medium close-up captures her distress, while the neighbour continues yelling].

Neighbour – Like an animal. Straight to the hospital. My wife is still in shock. He pulled her hair! [The soundtrack instrumental 'Forgetful Heart' begins to play at an escalating tempo, emphasising Jane's increasing distress and providing a sound bridge – to the next scene, where she arrives at the hospital and confronts Joey].

This rhetoric, which compares Joey's behaviour to that of an animal, constructs people with psychiatric disabilities as less-than-human abject figures. This construction is also problematic in terms of race because racist discourse has historically associated animalistic characteristics to the behaviour of the black racialised Other (Hall, 1997 p.245). The audience is clearly expected to view the neighbour as unlikable and threatening. Furthermore, as a minor figure, his racist/ableist discourse does not carry much weight in the narrative. Nevertheless, his role in this scene serves an important narrative function, because it introduces the idea that Joey's personal problems result in unpredictable/uncontrolled violence. The fact that Joey is taken to hospital in police custody encourages the audience to attribute psychological causes to the character's problems. This aligns with the film's overall narrative structure which primarily presents individual character problems as caused by personal deficiencies.

In the next sequence, an angry Jane arrives at the hospital. A medium tracking shot follows Jane, while the music plays in time to her angry march through the corridors. A nurse asks her if she needs help finding her room. Jane responds bitterly: "Do I look sick?⁹". Storming into Joey's room, she begins hitting her heavily medicated and confused friend, while she screams:

⁹ The nurse demonstrates an ableist view that physically disabled women cannot be carers/hospital visitors. This scene reflects my personal experience because my partner, who uses a wheelchair, has been mistaken as a psychiatric patient, when supporting me during hospital admissions. In these instances, I have been wrongly positioned as her carer due to ableist beliefs which insist that physically disabled people must be sick and cannot be carers.

You son of a bitch. You smashed all my dishes. You broke all my stuff. What do you think, I am just loaded – and I can buy all new stuff every time you freak-out? I don't give a shit that you hear voices. You can't just break my house!

The scene serves to solidify Joey's unpredictable behaviour as constituting a problem for Jane, who is obviously frustrated and angry. The image of Joey in hospital looking disorientated, confused and drowsy visually represents the negative impact of antipsychotic medication because it shows unpleasant side-effects. However, the depiction of schizophrenia as dangerous to others serves to justify the essential need for antipsychotic medication. In representing Joey as a figure capable of random violence, these scenes reflect/produce a stigmatising stereotype which associates schizophrenia with violent behaviour. To resolve this problem, the film problematically advocates for chemical restraint when subjects refuse treatment.

Cultural Studies scholar Simon Cross (2010, p.141) notes that popular representations of schizophrenia convey the message that diagnosed individuals who do not take medication are likely to be a danger to themselves and society. The implication is that all people with schizophrenia must be chemically restrained in order to resist acting upon voice commands. Thus, the presence of schizophrenia is imagined as affecting individuals in such a way that they are at the mercy of the voices in their head, as though they are puppets controlled by unseen forces. The myth that individuals are always unable to resist acting upon voice commands has influenced the enactment of laws in which people can be forced by court order to take medication against their will (Cross 2010, p.24).

Some people with schizophrenia may commit violent crimes but the same can be said for those without a diagnosis. *Love Song* reflects the societal view that voice-hearers are inherently dangerous because it links Joey's unpredictable violent behaviour with his refusal to accept medical treatment. Importantly, Joey is shown to be violent as a direct response to auditory hallucinations, while at other times, he appears kind, gentle, passive and child-like. This suggests that without the voices, inciting him to act out, at heart, he is harmless. I will return to this contradiction later, but first, I examine how the film consolidates the view that unmedicated psychosis produces unpredictable violence. Consider the following scene, where Jane answers her front door and is confronted by her angry neighbour, Dr Clark (Joey's psychiatrist) and a police officer, who are looking to apprehend and forcefully medicate Joey:

Neighbour – [Urgently directing the police officer]. He is here. Go get him and lock him up!

Police officer – [Instructs the neighbour] Just calm down.

Dr Clark – [Addressing Jane]. Morning Maam. I'm Dr Clark from the county psychiatric hospital. [A low angle medium close-up shot frames Dr Clark, the police officer and the neighbour, who is standing behind them in the middle of the frame].

Neighbour – [Interrupting and correcting Dr Clark] This guy is dangerous. We don't have time for this. [A high-angle medium close-up frames Jane's annoyed expression].

Police officer – [Ignoring the neighbour. He questions Jane]. Maam, do you know a Joey Navinski?

Jane – Yeah. [Spoken in a quiet tone, sounding hesitant. A high-angle medium close-up frames her wary expression].

Police officer – Well, he escaped from the hospital last night and your neighbour said he saw him coming into your house. You know, I don't need to tell you that harbouring a fugitive is a violation of the law. [The camera cuts to an image of Joey on Jane's sofa as he becomes anxiously aware that the authorities have arrived to take him away].

Dr Clark – [Corrects the officer] Look officer, this intervention is first and foremost medical so – [The camera cuts back to the three men, as seen from Jane's perspective via a low-angle medium close-up shot].

Police officer – Your patient is clearly a danger to himself and others. He's committed an assault and it is my duty to make sure – [The camera cuts back to a high angle medium close-up of Jane, as she appears increasingly annoyed by the officer's description of Joey].

Jane – [Addressing the officer, her hand rests on the door as she taps her fingers against the wood, in irritation]. Well, he is not here, so –

Dr Clark – [Interrupting] See, the thing is, Mr Navinski is still on probation and he could go to jail this time. He needs treatment. [A low-angle, extreme close-up frames the doctor's face].

Jane – Well, he came by last night, but he left. [The camera location is suddenly positioned behind Jane. An omnipresent low-angle long shot frames the men standing in front of her while her wheelchair blocks the doorway. This serves to emphasise the dominant position of the men, but it also shows Jane's resistance to cooperate with their demands].

Neighbour – [Interjects]. She's lying, I won't stand for this. My wife is still scared to come out of the house!

Police officer – [A low-angle medium close-up shot, shows the officer's irritation. He turns to address the neighbour]. Just calm down, alright.

Neighbour – [Responding to the officer]. You will do something!

Police officer – [Instructs the neighbour]. For the last time, calm down. [Turning his attention to Jane] Now Maam, this is serious. If you see him, I want you to call me. Do you understand?

Jane – I will call. Understood officer.

Jane closes the front door, and, speaking in a quiet whisper, she calls out to Joey. Looking around, she hears him knocking over pans in her pantry. In a reassuring tone, Jane asks him to come out of the pantry. Joey opens the door and a medium low-angle shot frames him standing uncomfortably in the cramped space—he appears ashamed and grateful. The camera cuts to a high-angle medium close-up of Jane, as she smiles sympathetically at her friend.

Joey – I ain't going back to the hospital. [Appearing and sounding determined in his conviction].

Jane – They are talking about jail. [Appearing and sounding worried].

Joey – I ain't gonna get those pills crammed down my throat. I ain't gonna get those needles in my arm, and I ain't gonna be sedated anymore. I need you to come with me. [An extreme close-up frames Joey's face, as he kneels down in front of Jane and looks up at her pleadingly]. I need to know if I'm the only one who hears these voices. Jeff Novick can help me [referring to an author who speaks/writes on the topic of talking with angels].

Jane – No. [Spoken in a quiet voice. A close-up frames Jane's face as she looks down at her lap].

Joey – Please Jane, you are the only one who cares about me [hugging her], please, please. [An extreme close-up frames her sad and sympathetic expression, as she appears to give in to Joey's pleading request].

Jane clearly distrusts the police because she protectively hides Joey, and when the officer asserts that Joey is dangerous, she appears unimpressed, showing her disagreement. However, Jane is clearly conflicted because she also demonstrates a belief that voice-hearing causes violence. I will return to this contradiction shortly, but first, I note that the character of Joey presents an argument against antipsychotic medication. In response, Jane demonstrates an empathy regarding his experience with sedation; however, she seems undecided about whether he requires medication. Ultimately, Joey's perspective on medication is discounted when the film ends by presenting him as a recovered figure who not only happily accepts antipsychotic treatment, but also appears untroubled by its side-effects. I am not implying here that medical treatments are unbeneficial in treating symptoms, or that individuals should always reject medical assistance. My criticism is that in arguing a pro-medication case, *Love Song* discounts the harmful side-effects of treatment, and wrongly represents non-medicated madness as a violent threat.

Love Song's depiction of a subject on the run from medical and legal authorities is not in itself unrealistic; as I have explained, such legal/medical interventions exist in the United States (and elsewhere). The problem is that this complex topic is not adequately problematised, and schizophrenia is wrongly depicted as inherently dangerous and frightening unless medicated. What is left unsaid is a counter-discourse explaining that people with schizophrenia can and do live in the community untreated, without becoming violent. Indeed, it is highly possible that black people with schizophrenia will be the victims of violence. As feminist

disability scholar Michelle Jarman (2011, p.11) explains, there is “a very real danger of being read as both “black” and “crazy” in the United States”. Jarman argues that people with psychiatric disability are docile compared to how law enforcement responds to black subjects experiencing psychosis, and the psychiatric practice of enforcing treatment. Joey expresses his fear of the authorities, but this emotion is ultimately overcome when he accepts treatment and all his problems are seemingly solved. Joey’s fears are discounted because, in the end, the audience is reassured that the authorities are helpful. The idea that Joey’s fears may be intensified by the threat of racist police and psychiatric authorities is not broached in the film.

I now explain how an unspoken and silently produced discourse firmly solidifies the violence myth. *Love Song* projects the violence myth without showing Joey’s assault on Jane’s neighbour; therefore, viewers do not see whether any external forces played a role in his outburst. Dahan does not need to show Joey assaulting the neighbour because the audience is expected to intuit that the attack was the result of hearing voice commands. If Dahan had included this scene it would be difficult to make it appear convincing without also providing an audible narration of Joey’s voices. Dahan resists giving sound to Joey’s voices throughout the film, preferring to show Joey conversing with invisible subjects in space. There is no need to make Joey’s voices audible because existing myths about the nature of psychosis enable the audience to deduce that voices compelled him to attack. These voice commands constitute a silent speech act because the audience does not hear Joey’s voices, but rather, is merely presented with their effects. Joey is

not provided with an opportunity to explain his violence, as Jane does not ask him if or why he attacked her neighbour: she assumes his guilt and intrinsically knows why he became violent. The absence of Jane's enquiry would seem unusual in ordinary circumstances; however, Jane does not need to ask Joey to explain himself because common beliefs about schizophrenia dictate that Joey must have been responding to voice commands. The automatic connection of violence to the presence of schizophrenia is directly reflected/produced through the narrative script but also indirectly through what is left unsaid. Imagine if Jane asked Joey why he attacked her neighbour. This question would at least inform the audience that his violence could be unrelated to voices because the question provides for alternative possibilities. Instead, the omission of this question forecloses other possible triggers, presenting violence caused by voices as a self-evident, taken-for-granted and obvious deduction, requiring no explanation.

Film historian Martin Norden (1994, p.3) argues that ableist myths about disability are often unrecognised and unproblematised by mainstream audiences because, through the process of repetition, they take on a "ring of truth" in culture. In *Love Song*, Jane's failure to seek an explanation for Joey's alleged violence informs the audience that the reasons for violence are obviously due to psychotic symptoms. I am not implying that an alternative explanation for Joey's violence justifies his behaviour. As a feminist I condemn violence, however I am arguing that the presence of psychiatric disability should not foreclose alternative possibilities for the causal factors that incite violence. I suggest that over time what is iteratively left unsaid solidifies what can be read as a taken-for-granted logic. In this way,

silence operates to naturalise ableist myths. Schizophrenia and other voice-hearing impairments are represented as unquestionably resulting in violent behaviour. This discursive treatment does not necessarily mean that all viewers will agree that Joey's alleged violence should naturally be understood as caused by voices. Some may think of this unspoken element as a common-sense truth, others will know it as a myth/stereotype and view it as incorrect or a partial truth. Nevertheless, it is probable that viewers will know the filmmaker expects them to intuit that Joey's alleged violence is incited by madness: it goes without saying that the voices made him do it.

In *Love Song*, the unspoken element constitutes a discourse that produces multiple ableist myths. Jane's failure to question Joey also reflects the ableist view that people with schizophrenia are inherently unable to give testimony for their actions because they have a mind that cannot know itself. According to linguistics scholar, Catherine Prendergast (2001, pp.53-57), people with schizophrenia are often imagined as lacking insight and, as a result, their rhetoric is frequently dismissed. Prendergast (2001, p.53) states, "to be disabled mentally is to be disabled rhetorically" because the testimonies of those deemed insane are not considered valid. In *Love Song*, Joey's claims are silenced because he is imagined as an unreliable witness: his communications are frequently dismissed as evidence of an unstable mind. Jane's failure to ask Joey to explain his violence reinforces the cultural belief that testimonies of those with schizophrenia are untrustworthy and invalid.

I have described above how *Love Song* presents a problematic portrayal of race and psychiatric disability. I shall now discuss how the film attempts to promote racial tolerance whilst leaving ableism unchallenged. *Love Song* challenges racism when Joey discovers that his favourite author, Jeff Novray (Richmond Hoxie), is racist. Whilst waiting to hear Novray speak about talking with angels, Joey overhears the author complaining to his manager about his audience. The scene is set in a toilet block and unlike the audience, Novray is unaware that Joey is in one of the cubicles:

Novray – My readers are white, and they come to hear me in five-star hotels. Have you seen this crowd? All a bunch of black Mexican retards; who knows what diseases we are catching exposed to these third-world losers, dumb enough to think angels exist. [Joey bursts out of the cubicle, violently takes hold of Novray's shirt and begins to hit him].

Joey - What do you mean by retard? We came from Kansas City to see you and you're a racist and you're a liar.

This scene reflects what Mitchell and Snyder (1997, p.6) refer to as the *representational double bind*, whereby oppressed groups seek to separate themselves from disabling physical/cognitive associations, instead positioning disability as the actual limitation to be avoided. Joey's response to being called 'retard', while challenging racist assumptions about the cognitive capacity of black people, does not seek to challenge ableist expression. Calling someone a 'retard', irrespective of the presence of intellectual disability is culturally understood as an insult because to be marked as intellectually impaired is to be positioned as abject. Disability theorist Tobin Siebers (2013, p.24) remarks:

It is now possible to recognise disability as a trope used to posit the inferiority of certain minority populations, but it remains extremely difficult to understand that mental and physical markers of inferiority are also tropes placed in the service of disability oppression.

Siebers (2013 p. 24) argues that underlying racist and gendered stereotypes, which ascribe a biological inferiority to blackness and femininity, situates disability as deficiency. In *Love Song*, when Joey vehemently protests against being labelled a 'retard', he rightly rejects the racist belief that black people are not as smart as white people; however, in doing so, he leaves unremarked the view that intellectual impairment is something bad in the first place. While the scene names and shames Novray's racism, his ableism remains unmarked and invisible. The scene informs people with intellectual/learning disabilities that they are inferior, and that there is something shameful about their existence. In holding ableism to account, it is necessary to challenge the thoroughly naturalised belief that having a prescribed form of intelligence constitutes a moral superiority. Rhetorical Studies scholar, Scott Lunsford (2005, p.332), in his theorising on disability rhetoric, provides insight into how ableist ideology becomes common-place:

When we stop complicating any rhetoric, its discourse may become fixed, second-nature, and taken for granted. We stop thinking about that discourse, and, eventually, it becomes trite and slips into silence and then invisibility. We cannot stop questioning what becomes commonplace.

It is important to ask why the term 'retard' functions as a derogatory term and to question the commonplace belief that a particular kind of cognitive ability is superior. In *Love Song* the 'inferiority' of intellectual disability is both reflected and produced as something that goes without saying, because to be so-called, is to be insulted.

The naming and shaming of racism, while simultaneously producing ableist discourse, has a history in American film. According to film analyst John Nickel (2004), the American racial tolerance film era frequently depicted African-American men as disabled. These films promoted racial tolerance, whilst simultaneously presenting the black man as a child-like figure in need of white paternalistic care. Racial tolerance films portrayed black disabled men as asexual and passive, which Nickel (2004, p.32) suggests reassured a white audience that black men do not pose a sexual threat, thereby allaying white racist fears associated with the myth of the over-sexed black man (Davis 1983, pp.172-201). For Nickel, in racial tolerance films, “the victims are not damsels in distress but debilitated, defenceless, emasculated ...feminised black men” (Nickel 2004 p.39). I have discussed above how *Love Song* positions Joey as potentially violent in ways that reflect ableist stereotypes of madness, but as I show below, paradoxically, when it comes to his sexual identity, he is represented as passive, non-threatening, naïve, child-like and vulnerable.

Love Song portrays Joey as sexually naïve, particularly regarding his ability to express desire for Billie (Madeline Zima), whom he befriends on his travels. Joey is depicted as lacking the confidence and knowledge required for seduction. In a pertinent scene Billie and Joey are shown sitting alone by a wishing well. Billie describes how she made wishes by the well as a child—closing her eyes to make a wish. Joey, misreading Billie’s body language, tentatively leans in to kiss her but Billie opens her eyes and he looks away. Joey seems to resemble an adolescent

with his first romantic crush: unsure about how to express his feelings and unable to read whether his love interest might reciprocate. *Love Song*, like the early racial tolerance films, challenges instances of overt racism, whilst simultaneously presenting a sexually passive, naïve and vulnerable black disabled figure.

Numerous scholars have argued that disabled men are often feminised in discursive representations because they are portrayed as vulnerable, dependent and passive (Cheu & Tyjewski 2011; Kanyusik 2012; Longmore 2003; Nickel 2004; Shuttleworth, Wedgwood & Wilson 2012;). While I acknowledge the discursive iteration of vulnerable, dependent, and passive disabled male figures, this should not be treated as a unique problem for disabled men. Disabled women are frequently depicted as vulnerable, dependent and passive due to stereotypes of sexed bodies and disability (Ellis 2008; Kent 1987; Morris 1991; Norden 1994; Sutherland 1997). A focus on these discursive representations as a special problem for disabled masculinity positions such problematic ableist discourses as unproblematic for disabled women. Indeed, cinematic attempts to emphasise the masculinity of disabled men have come at the expense of representing women as subordinate subjects (Kim 2010, p.138).

In addition to depicting Joey as sexually naïve, *Love Song* represents him as romantically undesirable. Joey's romantic undesirability is represented as a consequence of psychotic symptoms, and this is most notable when Billie informs Joey that his hallucinations cannot be shared. The scene begins with Joey and

Billie looking at the night sky. Joey is smiling and laughing to himself. Pointing to his angels in the sky, he asks Billie to “look at them”. We are provided with Joey’s point of view via superimposed images of cotton-like threads, which resemble floating white dandelion seeds being dispersed by the wind. Billie explains that she cannot see anything: “There is nothing there, Joey, or maybe there is, but I don’t want to think that things exist that I can’t see. It’s not encouraging, it’s depressing”. Joey continues trying to share his angels, and Billie explains: “But you’re the only one who can see them. You can’t share them and if you can’t share them, then what is the point? You don’t need angels or ghosts or magic. The sharing is what’s extraordinary”. Joey looks sad as he reflects on Billie’s comments, he offers her a reassuring smile and responds, “then let’s just share the moon”—as he looks up at the night sky, his angels disappear. In the next scene Billie gets on a train and is not seen again in the film.

The above scene, when read within the context of Joey’s unrequited romantic desire for Billie, can be interpreted as a comment on Joey’s capacity to participate in an intimate relationship. Billie’s insistence that Joey’s ghosts/angels cannot be shared, coupled with her assertion that sharing is important, can be read as a comment on Joey’s struggle to engage in intimacy. Billie does not ask Joey to describe his hallucinations, but instead rejects his experience as depressing and frightening, thereby foreclosing the potential for connection. Thus, it follows that people who experience psychosis inevitably struggle with intimacy, reaffirming the ableist view that people with psychiatric disabilities are romantically undesirable. *Love Song* depicts people with psychiatric disability as existing in a world of their

own which is separated from sane minds, making intimate connections largely unattainable. The mistaken assumption that people can normally and routinely share a reality is left uncontested. Through the film's dismissal and silencing of Joey's rhetoric, psychiatric disability is produced as undesirable. The discourse insists that intimacy requires the ability to share experience whilst simultaneously producing a figure that is not allowed to speak. Dahan misses an opportunity to depict Joey's hallucinations in this scene as beautiful—instead he projects a normative conception of psychosis as frightening to others. Joey's visual hallucinations resemble something that happens in nature (dandelion seed dispersal) and therefore the potential exists to describe them in a way that may even appear romantic. Instead, the film wrongly insists that Joey cannot be intimate and psychotic: he is either one or the other. When Billie explains that his hallucinations frighten and depress her, Joey begins to recognise that his voices may be causing him to miss out on romantic opportunities. The scene represents a moment when the narrative turns towards Joey's eventual acceptance of psychiatric treatment and a life without angels.

Love Song negates the lived experience of schizophrenia by insisting that Joey cannot speak with angels, and that he needs to stop talking to voices. The instruction that Joey stop interacting with his hallucinations because they are not 'real' and cannot be shared not only trivialises his experience, but also reflects the ableist belief that people with schizophrenia do not try hard enough to manage their behaviour. At numerous points throughout the film, Joey demonstrates that he wants to talk with angels and that he believes they can help solve problems.

Indeed, he frequently suggests that his angels may be able to help others with their troubles. In this way, the film does appear to project Joey as a virtuous man because his hallucinations are not demonic, but angelic. Nevertheless, the narrative dismisses Joey's insistence that the angels offer him comfort, and it positions his experiences as an illness that must be overcome. This overcoming is presented as a personal problem without consideration of the social conditions that may influence the role auditory hallucinations play in people's lives. Joey is unemployed, and at no point does Dahan depict him receiving paid community support services. His sole friend seems to be Jane, and, in the absence of family or other supports, it is reasonable to assume that his angels (hallucinations) function as a social connection. The idea that Joey should 'medicate his voices away' ignores how poverty, loneliness and a lack of support produce conditions that make the presence of his angels functional and perhaps even desirable.

Love Song insists that disabled people can regain their 'normality and dignity' if they work hard enough. However, this narrative omits a recognition that their 'abnormality' and absence of 'dignity' is directly related to how culture and the body interact. Indeed, it is ableist culture that constructs disabled bodies as inherently undesirable and undignified in the first place. Discourses of personal efforts to overcome present disability as an individual problem, thereby letting culture off the hook. Discourses of personal overcoming insist that the disabled body constitutes an undesirable embodiment and treating this narrative as unproblematic reflects/produces undesirable disabled bodies. *Love Song* is a clear example of what film theorist Paul Darke (1998, pp.187-188) classifies as the

‘normality genre’. Darke asserts that this genre seeks to reaffirm able-bodied normality and superiority by applauding disabled characters efforts to be ‘normal’. Dahan assumes that disabled people would ultimately choose to be able-bodied if given the option—an assumption that queer disability theorist Robert McRuer (2006 p.2) refers to as ‘compulsory able-bodiedness’.

Part IV – Performing Disability and Walking Dreams.

One problem with films focusing on disabilities acquired after tragic events is the tendency to emphasise loss of ability and corresponding feelings of grief. Filmic representations of disabled people born with impairments are rare (Sutherland 1997, p.20), and representations of acquired disabilities often centre on the period of adjustment, emphasising feelings of grief and loss. Subsequently, disabled people are rarely represented as exhibiting pride and pleasure in their bodies. Filmic representations of recently acquired disability, inevitably tend to feature the disabled figure having flashbacks to their previously able-bodied selves or obsessing about cures and dreaming of able-bodied futures (Dolmage, 2017, p.181). I acknowledge that people with recently acquired disabilities are likely to experience grief over lost ability; however, the dominance of this storyline, in film and other discursive locations, reproduces ‘compulsory able-bodiedness’. This discursive iteration reinforces the myth that all disabled people would choose to be able-bodied if given a choice and *Love Song* repeats this narrative trope.

In one scene, Jane breaks down, stating: “I don’t know how to live without the things I have lost, but I would like to be able to walk again”. Another scene

features a slow-motion dream sequence depicting Jane's car accident, as we hear Jane's voice praying for answers: "Mama, will I ever walk again?". The dream sequence includes a slow-motion long-shot of Jane walking towards the camera, while her hair blows in a gentle breeze, as she repeats several times—"I am walking". Dahan superimposes a background image consisting entirely of night stars as he centres the lens on a pretty feminine figure walking towards the camera in space, with her eyes closed. The image invites what feminist film scholar Laura Mulvey (2009) identifies as the 'male-gaze', because Dahan fills the screen with a normative feminine body upon which viewers may experience a slow visual pleasure.

Importantly, flashbacks and dream sequences provide an excuse for the hiring of able-bodied actors who can perform normative abilities such as walking. The hiring of able-bodied actors is problematic because disabled actors experience difficulties obtaining employment (Pointon 1997b, pp.110-116). Secondly, some argue that able-bodied actors, playing disabled roles, mock disabled people (Chivers & Markotic 2010; Koppers 2007; Lynch 1997; Morris 1991; Norden 1994). Disability activist s.e. smith (2015a) describes such performances as 'cripface'—drawing comparisons with the racist practice of blackface. The problem with this comparison is that it risks wrongly positioning racism and ableism as identical axes of oppression. Furthermore, unlike racial identities anyone can become disabled, so able-bodied actors could be seen as playing their potential future selves. Similarities may equally and perhaps more usefully be attributed to young actors using make-up to play older characters. These performances may lack

authenticity and appear obviously fake, but this is also a problem for able-bodied performances of disability—a point I will return to shortly. Finally, the casting of an able-bodied actor may serve to allay able-bodied fears about the possibility of becoming disabled (Dolmage 2017, p.175). Disability Studies scholar Jay Dolmage (2017, p.175) states: “When that able-bodied actor confidently walks up to the stage to eloquently accept their Academy Award, everyone can feel better knowing that it was all an act”. In this thesis, my primary concern is the way that able-bodied actors may project ableist meanings of tragedy and pity, to which I now turn.

Dolmage (2017 pp.176-181) claims that flashbacks and dream sequences encourage the audience to identify with the character’s former able-bodied self, rather than the disabled person they have become. For Dolmage, these depictions promote the view that beneath the ‘disability costume’ lies the actual able-bodied self. Dahan clearly assumes an able-bodied audience because *Love Song* encourages identification with Jane’s former able-bodiedness. Able-bodied audiences immersed in disability melodramas may imagine themselves experiencing the ‘tragedy’ of disability, with the consolation of returning to their able-bodies at the end of the film. Viewers are able to conclude that their lives, despite whatever problems they may be experiencing, are not too bad because at least they are not disabled. *Love Song*, in its projection of disability as a personal tragedy promotes a pity response from able-bodied viewers. As Disability activist Joseph Shapiro (1994, p.24) explains, pity directed at disabled people “divides the world between the lucky and the unlucky, between us and them”. *Love Song*

enables the able-bodied audience to recognise their inherent lucky status, and subsequently, to feel better about their lives.

As my thesis centres on unspoken silent discourse, it is necessary to consider the materiality of the body as a form of non-linguistic expression. What meanings are produced when able-bodies perform disability? Disability arts scholar Petra Kupperts (2007) considers the appearance of wheelchair performance, offering another reason for why casting able-bodied actors is problematic. Kupperts (2007, p.81) explains that non-disabled actors are rarely able to perform the “exciting sensual aspects of wheelchair use familiar to disabled performers, for instance the smooth and graceful curve that is impossible to achieve by bipedals, or the full-movement range of wheelchair athleticism”. Able-bodied actors, inexperienced in wheelchair use, have difficulty in portraying the “sensuous and choreographic potential of chairs” (Kupperts 2007, p.81). Kupperts notes that non-disabled actors use the chair as a rhetorical device, often symbolising the tragic burden of impairment. Their performance frequently fails to reflect the chair as a symbol of freedom and an aesthetic, even sexy, statement of the self (Kupperts 2001, p.81). Indeed, many wheelchair users see the chair as an extension of the self and fashion their chairs with colours, wheel decorations and other aesthetic features (Kupperts 2007, p.81). Jane’s wheelchair lacks personal style, appearing as though it has come straight off the factory floor, devoid of any personalised modifications. This seems unusual given that Jane has numerous tattoos and chunky pieces of jewellery, reflecting a preference for styling the body with adornments. Additionally, Zellweger is unconvincing in her portrayal of a character

with years of experience using a wheelchair. Zellweger's portrayal of Jane shows a figure that is tragically confined, burdened and uncomfortable with her chair. Jane's chair use, as performed by an able-bodied actor, has a material corporeal effect that conveys disability as tragic, burdensome and pitiful. Via the unspoken silent visual imagery of Jane's burdensome struggle with wheelchair use, ableist beliefs about disability as tragic and undesirable are produced.

Part V – Disabled Mothers.

Feminist disability scholar Corbett O'Toole (2002, pp.82-83) argues that it is widely believed that disabled women cannot be mothers, despite the fact that many do successfully parent. Consequently, disabled women are often prevented from experiencing motherhood through forced sterilisation or the forced removal of children (Frohman & Ortoleva 2013, p.2). The political activism of disabled women has long sought to remove policies, practices, and attitudes that seek to deny them the right to parent (Michelle Fine & Adrienne Asch 1988, p.29). Due to a gendered culture that ascribes mothers the primary role of caring for children, disabled fathers are less likely than disabled mothers to be represented as unable to parent. Similarly, because women are more likely than men to experience poverty, they are frequently unable to fund the disability supports they require (Barile 2001, pp.49-53 and Hirschmann 2012, p.401). *Love Song* depicts this gendered/ableist injustice and may encourage viewers to consider how poverty, isolation, and a lack of support, rather than the presence of disability itself, results in the removal of children by the state.

In a pertinent scene, Dahan contrasts the perspectives of mother and child and in so doing, he enables a narrative that may, to some extent, subvert ableist assumptions about disabled mothers. When Devon explains to a friend why he lives with a foster family it is clear that he holds the mistaken impression that his mother is unable to care for him due to disability. Unlike Devon, the audience knows that Jane's disability does not stop her loving and caring for her son. The scene contrasts Jane's experience of poverty, isolation and emotional distress, with Devon's mistaken view that it is disability itself that prohibits his mother from loving and caring for him.

Friend – Is it true your father died in a car accident?

Devon – He died when I was three.

Friend – And your mother, did she die with your first father?

Devon – Na.

Friend – So, why do you have a new mother?

Devon – Because the first one is sick and she couldn't take care of me after the accident.

Friend – Why?

Devon – She was in a coma.

Friend – What's that?

Devon – It's like being asleep and when you wake up your brains changed and you can't give love anymore.

[The film cuts to Jane talking with Billie about her son].

Jane: A week later, they told me I wouldn't walk again, and mum helped out a lot when she was alive, but when she passed away, I guess I went crazy. State put Devon in foster care and it has been seven years now.

Billie – He's inviting you [referring to Devon's party], it's time to start again.

Jane – I don't have a job and I got no money and I don't have a nice home. I wouldn't even know what to say to him.

Billie – Joey says you're gonna sing him a song.

Jane – Ha, well that's not going to happen.

The audience is encouraged to sympathise with Jane, who clearly loves Devon but, owing to a lack of support and resources, has been forced to relinquish her parenting role and has internalised the view that he is better off with a wealthy couple. Towards the end of the film, Jane arrives at Devon's lavish party and sees him surrounded by wealth and privilege. Mustering her courage, Jane sings her 'own love song', thereby presenting her son with something money cannot buy. The film concludes with a short scene showing Devon returning home to his mother, Jane. Dahan does not reconcile the issues of poverty, because Jane remains without disability supports and the comforts that money can buy. *Love Song* presents a happy ending to suggest that love conquers all, and this offers audiences a warm feel-good experience at the expense of a missed opportunity to promote awareness of what disabled mothers need. While the film may encourage an awareness of the impact of poverty it inevitably returns to a simplistic solution.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have discussed some of the ways that *Love Song* represents gendered and racialised disabled figures as inevitably tragic, undesirable and dangerous. Women with physical disabilities are represented as sexual losers who can only attract other sexual losers. Conversely, men with schizophrenia are

represented as incapable of sharing romantic intimacy because, trapped in their own reality, they are unable to share and connect with a partner.

Love Song offers an ableist representation of psychiatric disability that problematically intersects with black racialised subjectivities. The film depicts the black mad figure as a violent threat due to symptoms of psychosis. The violent psychotic myth is solidified via a narrative that silences the testimony of the accused subject. This silencing of testimony also reflects/produces the myth that people with psychiatric impairments have a mind that cannot know itself. *Love Song* also presents both physical and psychiatric disability as something that individuals must strive to overcome, thereby solidifying the superiority of able-bodiedness. Despite these problematic gendered/ableist discourses, *Love Song* offers a narrative about the forced removal of children from their disabled mothers, and the film is sympathetic to the social and economic conditions that leave mothers vulnerable to unjust state interventions. While it is encouraging to see a sympathetic depiction of the injustice facing unemployed single-disabled mothers, the film ultimately negates the complex problems it alludes to by delivering a romantic and simplified resolution.

I have illustrated the stylised way that ableist/gendered stereotypes are reflected and produced through unsaid silent discursive treatments. Through techniques of *mise-en-scène*, such as camera angles, lighting, music and props, gendered/ableist stereotypes are visually reflected/produced without speech. The disabled body acts as a visual discourse and is encoded to signify tragedy and danger. Thus, meanings are conveyed without the need for a spoken narrative. I

have demonstrated how the narrative contains enthymematic silences that present ableist myths as taken-for-granted truths. These ‘truths’ allow filmmakers to economise on statements, conveying ableist discourse without speech. There is no need to announce that disability is tragic and undesirable because the audience is expected to automatically read disability in this way. In the chapters that follow, I will demonstrate how cinema repeats these stylised silences. This process of repetition has an illusionary effect—presenting gendered ableism as a natural and inevitable response to sexed impaired bodies.

4. DISABILITY AND HUMOUR IN OLIVIER NAKACHE AND ERIC TOLEDANO'S THE INTOUCHABLES

Lying is done with words, and also with silence (Adrienne Rich 1975 p.186).

Praised for its 'no pity' approach to representing disability French filmmakers Olivier Nakache's and Eric Toledano's film, *The Intouchables* (2011) presents a new way to examine silence via the genre of comedy. *Intouchables* contains two significant enthymemes and problematic silences of omission. Films designed to make us laugh often amuse by crossing the boundaries of what should be said in polite society – consequently, the cultural norms that dictate the 'unsayable' are broken. This enables subversive opportunities, but it can also result in offensive/abusive humour. *Intouchables* contains some offensive jokes that laugh at disability; and sometimes the disabled body is abusively treated as a comedic narrative prop. Engaging with humour theories and the conception of jokes that *punch-up* at privilege and *down* at marginalised identities, I extend these directional positions using my own phrase, *punching-through*. *Intouchables* contains jokes that *punch-through* the materiality of the disabled body while *punching-down* at the black man with lower cultural capital. When the jokes *punch-through* the disabled body they are ableist but also racist, classist and heterosexist depending on the target. At times the joking narrative portrays an ableist violence whereby the humour negates and silences the harmful effects resulting from violence against disabled people. A lie is produced within this silence and via the location of humour—it's just a joke, after all.

Some disability humour has subversive potential because it counters tragic and sentimental portrayals, making it possible to associate pleasure and joy with disabled lives (Haller, 2003). Unlike melodramas which often convey the undesirable, tragic and pitiful disabled trope, the comic film may joke about disability, inducing laughter rather than tears. *Intouchables* largely avoids the portrayal of tragic disability and does depict a disabled figure experiencing pleasure and happiness. Nevertheless, ableist notions of tragedy are not absent in the film because the disabled man is portrayed as experiencing a broken masculinity, which can be repaired through heterosexual practices. In the final section of this chapter, I will discuss how *Intouchables* rightly positions the disabled figure as worthy of romantic love. However, I will argue that this more respectful inclusion is problematically executed because the disabled body is portrayed, through enthymematic silences, as constituting a problem for sex-appeal. In this way, *Intouchables* repeats the silent production of disabled 'unattractive/undesirability' which I identified in the previous chapter. To resolve the 'unattractive/undesirable' dilemma the film foregrounds other desirable character traits, thereby compensating for the 'problem body'.

Synopsis: more than just an interracial buddy film.

Intouchables is set in Paris and depicts a friendship between two men who are both social outcasts, but who occupy vastly different social positions within French society. Philippe (François Cluzet) is a wealthy aristocrat who acquired a spinal cord injury (quadriplegia) following a hang-gliding accident. Philippe is unhappy, not because of his disability *per se* but because he is grieving over the death of his wife. Philippe hates to be pitied and struggles to find an assistant who views him

without pity. Driss (Omar Sy) is an immigrant from Senegal living in the poor outer Parisian suburbs, and his aspirations are limited to collecting social welfare payments and committing petty crimes. In order to qualify for welfare benefits, Driss must produce evidence that he is looking for work. His search for such evidence brings him to the mansion of Philippe for the purpose of attending a job interview. Driss assumes he will not be offered employment, but his apparent lack of pity pleases Philippe, who offers him work as a personal attendant. Driss finds himself residing in an opulent setting where he is employed to assist a disabled wealthy white man. Driss helps Philippe regain his zest for life and encourages him to seek out love and joy again. In return, Philippe enables Driss to achieve a kind of redemption by learning to care for others and the development of a strong work-ethic. Driss also learns new social skills that enable him to integrate (to some degree) within upper class society. *Intouchables* is best described as an 'interracial buddy'/bromance comedy with a disability twist.

Background and Film Reviews.

Intouchables is inspired by the true story of French aristocrat Philippe Pozzo di Borgo and his friendship with his personal attendant Abdel Sellou, an Algerian immigrant who grew up in the poor immigrant suburbs of Paris. Filmmakers Toledano and Nakache take their inspiration from Philippe's autobiography entitled *A Second Wind* (2001 & 2012). The revised 2012 edition includes an afterword in which Philippe refers to *Intouchables*, stating: "the constraints of the film and their imaginations led the directors to simplify, change, cut, or invent many events" (Di Borgo, 2012 p.252). One significant alteration to Philippe's story is that Toledano and Nakache changed the race and name of the character representing Abdel. In real-life Abdel is not a black man from Senegal, as the character Driss is

portrayed, but rather an Arab from Algeria. When asked why they cast a black actor to play the role of Philippe's care attendant, Toledano and Nakache (2012) explain that they considered Sy to be a perfect casting because he was from the same socioeconomic background as Abdel. Sy, like Abdel, also lived in the suburbs outside of Paris. Toledano and Nakache (2012) argue that racial differences are not relevant to a French audience stating:

In France, such distinctions have little consequence. Light or dark-skinned, North or Sub-Saharan African, immigrants from all parts of the world live in the same neighbourhoods and share the same limited options in France's socio-economic system, regardless of their community of origin.

Toledano and Nakache's comment could easily be read by non-French audiences as culturally insensitive, although their perspective on race does reflect French social policy. According to French film scholar, David Pettersen (2016, p.55), French policymakers consider the term 'multiculturalism' to be a foreign construct, preferring to focus on the integration of immigrants into French culture.

Intouchables has been widely celebrated, with audiences laughing out loud at the incongruous social conditions that arise when a black African man from the poor Parisian suburbs, attempts to socialise with the French aristocracy. Following its release in France the film became a transatlantic success (Michael 2014, pp.123-125; Pettersen 2016, p.51); however, some American reviewers were critical, arguing that the film depicts racist stereotypes (Ebert 2012; Holden 2012; Scott 2012; Weissberg 2011). Indeed, Hollywood film reviewer Jay Weissberg (2011) stated that the film "flings about the kind of Uncle Tom racism one hopes has

permanently exited American screens”¹⁰. French film scholar Charlie Michael (2014, pp.133-135), notes that the film received divided responses from French audiences, with some praising what they saw as a positive representation of France’s social underclass, whilst others criticised it as a form of trashy popular culture with a moralising romantic ending.

French reviewer Daphnee Denis (2012) claims that for French audiences, if the film is to be criticised it is not for being racist but for presenting a fantasy about social mobility. According to Denis, the story of a French aristocratic wheelchair user who receives help from a man receiving social assistance (welfare) has a striking symbolism, she writes: “White France is paralysed; immigrant France has become its arms and legs” (Denis 2012). Denis engages disability as a metaphor in order to signal something abnormal: a particularly ableist literary technique¹¹. What is abnormal for Denis is the fantasy that an immigrant on social welfare can become friends with a French aristocrat because this conceives of a world without social conflict and crisis. Denis highlights the reality of the class divide in France by referring to the 2005 Paris riots, in which a state of emergency was declared¹². Denis writes that “privileged France trembled at the idea that the French poor would burn down the city”. For Denis, it is the fairy tale about bridging the class divide that French audiences find unrealistic, but what is missing in her critique (and others’) is any consideration of how disability, gender, class and race

¹⁰ Pattersen (2015 pp.54-55) explains that Weissberg’s use of the phrase ‘Uncle Tom racism’ refers to the Black American archetypical portrayal, in which Black characters are presented as the childlike and loyal slave to white masters.

¹¹ The metaphorical use of the disabled body has been problematised by Mitchell & Snyder (2000 p.49), who assert that the disability metaphor functions as a ‘narrative crutch upon which literary narratives lean for representational power’, signifying a deviation from normality.

¹² The riots occurred in response to the death of two teenagers, who died while fleeing police. The teenagers came from the underprivileged suburb of Clichy-sous-Bois (home to African and Arab communities) (BBC News, 2005).

intersect. Without dismissing the conflict existing between class and racial divisions within French society, I suggest that the 'fairy-tale' friendship may be convincing to audiences because Philippe has a disability, and as such, he is imagined as socially excluded: an 'untouchable'. Driss, as the archetypal black servant, becomes a trusted companion, in the absence of other social options.

While I agree with commentators who criticise the film for its racist/classist representation, what is strikingly apparent is a lack of critical analysis regarding the representation of gendered disability. The filmmakers had to defend their decision to change the race of the character representing Abdel, yet questions about the decision to cast an able-bodied actor in the role of Philippe have been notably absent. When reviewers comment on the film's representation of disability, many have argued that *Intouchables* laughs *with* disability, not *at* it, because the real-life Philippe enjoys the joke and disabled viewers are pleased by the absence of pity (Corliss 2012; Farndale 2012; Norman 2012; Warmann 2012; Wise 2012). We should not assume that because some disabled people interpret the film as joking with disability and avoiding, or sidestepping, pity that all disabled people share this interpretation. In the pages that follow, I will demonstrate how analysing intersections of disability, gender, sexuality, race and class exposes connotations of tragedy and the potential for pity responses. *Intouchables* has been described as belonging to the interracial buddy film genre (Holden 2012, p.1; Pattersen 2016, p.5); however, it is much more than just an interracial buddy film

with all the racist, classist and gendered tropes ascribed to such scripts¹³.

Intouchables also contains degrading, violent/abusive ableist discourse.

Humour and Disability.

Numerous theoretical approaches can be applied to the analysis of humour. In my analysis of *Intouchables*, I combine incongruity and superiority theories because, together, they offer insights into whether a joke constitutes ableist or subversive humour. I will briefly outline these theories, discuss their function in the analysis of disability humour, and note some of their limitations. Additionally, I will provide a short and non-exhaustive overview of the most relevant scholarship and debates on disability humour/comedy before moving on to film analysis.

According to Humour Studies scholar, John Morreall (2009 p.68), the most broadly recognised theory of humour is incongruity theory, which posits that what makes a situation humorous is that it contains something 'odd, abnormal or out of place'.

Since the birth of cinema, disabled bodies have functioned as a comedic prop signifying oddity and deviance (Norden 1994, pp.14-26). In his account of the silent film era, historian Martin Norden (1994, p.19), explains that physical disability in slapstick comedy was prolific. Norden cites numerous examples, including, for instance, depictions of amputees hopping around in chase scenes. Norden (1994 p.20) describes how early silent films contained scenes of disabled people being victimised by the able-bodied, or situations where an impairment causes trouble. In these films, humour is derived from the misfortune of disabled

¹³ See Melvin Donalson (2006 pp.3-13) for a detailed account of the racist, classist and gendered tropes associated with the interracial buddy film.

figures, and it is their misadventures, resulting from the incongruity of disabled bodies in able-bodied environments, that produce a comedic effect. Incongruity theory provides some useful insights; however, it is insufficient in itself in determining whether a joke constitutes prejudice: the disabled body is typically and usually 'odd' and 'out-of-place' not just on screen, but also within normative environments. Indeed, disabled bodies are 'normally' incongruous—and, in this respect, incongruity theory takes us only so far. It is necessary to consider, also, whether the incongruity is positioned as constituting an inferiority; in such cases, the humour is likely to be ableist. Context matters: who is telling the joke and their position in relation to the mocked/ridiculed subject is important in determining whether the humour is likely to be interpreted as oppressive. In making such considerations, superiority theory adds important insights.

Superiority theory considers how humour is used to raise one perspective over another and is useful for understanding comedy that serves to persecute or harass (Wilde, 2018 p.32). In her recent work, *Film, Comedy, and Disability* (2018), Disability Studies scholar Alison Wilde favours incongruity theory for its capacity to expose misrepresentations (Wilde 2018 p.32), but also applies superiority theory for its insights into humour that taunts and/or persecutes others. The terms *punching-up* and *-down* are used in the application of superiority theory as a way to refer to the political/social divisions between the joke teller and the target of the joke (Wilde 2018, pp.41-42). Wilde (2018, pp. 25-27) makes an important class observation about the comedy genre, noting that it is rarely conceived of as an artistic form (high-art), but is instead culturally understood as part of 'popular

culture', which is often positioned as entertainment for those with low cultural capital. Of course, comedy is in fact a form of artistic expression which is enjoyed by people across all economic and social class divides. Like all art, comedy is political and jokes that mock and ridicule marginalised groups appeal to prejudicial ideas. Wilde (2018, p.42) applies superiority humour theory to explain why the President of the United States, Donald Trump, notoriously mocked a disabled reporter by adopting a fake verbal-stutter and mimicking physical spasticity. Wilde (2018, p.42) explains that Trump supports the self-worth of those who hold prejudicial ideas by facilitating feelings of superiority. Trump's mockery *punches-down* at the disabled by ridiculing their impairments. Trump's performance rightly earned him widespread condemnation from disabled people and their advocates (Carmon, 2016). This demonstrates that when people in high social positions makes fun of the disabled, they are likely to be judged as insensitive and cruel.

Superiority theory also enables the identification of humour that serves oppressed groups. Disabled comedians may *punch-up* at ableist culture by ridiculing able-bodied perspectives, attitudes and behaviours. Disability and media scholar Beth Haller (2003), argues that some disability humour has subversive potential because it counters tragic and sentimental portrayals, making it possible to associate pleasure and joy with disabled lives. However, superiority theory offers limited insight into the significance of broader contexts, and in understanding how disabled people use humour to encourage the able-bodied to reject pity by laughing at/with them (Shakespeare 1999, p.49). In these circumstances, disabled people may deploy techniques of 'identity management' in order to

defuse tensions arising from able-bodied people's discomfort and uncertainty about how to respond to disability (Shakespeare 1999, pp.49-50). One strategy for managing able-bodied discomfort is for disabled people to make a joke and laugh at themselves. Shakespeare (1999 p.50) notes able-bodied people feel an obligation to maintain an 'unbearable weight of empathy', and that disabled people may positively deploy self-depreciating humour in order to release them from this burden, thereby encouraging laughter instead of tears. *Intouchables*, contains jokes that may well represent the filmmakers' intention to defuse able-bodied discomfort by encouraging laughter. However, because the humour is not performed by the disabled figure, it does not constitute an example of 'disability identity management', nor a socially just comedic inclusion.

Two particularly noteworthy volumes bring together scholars working on the subject of disability humour/comedy: I refer here to special issues of *Body and Society* (1999) and *Disability Studies Quarterly Symposium* (2003). Both raise ideas and issues relevant to my analysis. The first volume features a controversial article by Education Studies scholars Ian Stronach and Julie Allan, who argue that in some circumstances involving disabled people, "it is phenomenally impossible" to laugh at the disabled, due to an apparent "taboo" on laughing at disability. They argue that laughing directly at disability is only permissible if the disabled person authorises the laughter, claiming "there is an obvious taboo (bad taste) involved". For Stronach and Allan the existence of tragedy and pity contaminates the potential for an acceptable laughter reaction. In response, sociologist and disabled advocate/comedian Tom Shakespeare (1999) expresses concerns with

Stronach and Allan's methods and conclusions. Against them, Shakespeare argues that there is no taboo (though there may well be 'bad taste') when it comes to disability jokes. There is ample evidence that society enjoys laughing at difference, and such humour thrives in 'uncivilised' situations such as drunken parties, schoolyard antics and, I might add, amongst some of Trump's supporters. Shakespeare (1999, p.48) explains that stage and film performances relish mocking and/or ridiculing the disabled figure, and audiences share the delight of laughing at abnormal bodies. The debate between Stronach and Allan versus Shakespeare is indicative of the many complex debates in these special issues, which primarily centre on the positioning of laughing *at* versus laughing *with* disability, and the related question as to whether any particular comedic performance constitutes oppressive or subversive humour. Shakespeare's contribution to these debates is highly relevant to my analysis because he associates disability jokes as belonging to the 'uncivilised' realm: they are a matter of 'bad taste' and hence a marker of (intersectionally significant) class and racial stereotypes. In the analysis to come, I draw from both Stronach and Allen's work alongside Shakespeare's to show how *Intouchables* presents laughing at the disabled as taboo for members of the French aristocracy, and, in doing so, positions Driss' jokes as evidence of his lower-class 'uncivilised' position. It is important to note that given a racist history of aligning the 'uncivilised' with blackness, it is discursively violent to project a black figure in this way. This racist/classist construction serves a narrative function because it enables the filmmakers to depict disability humour as constituting a taboo, while simultaneously telling the 'forbidden' joke¹⁴.

¹⁴ There are obvious parallels in these debates to the broader question of 'political correctness' and

One of the limits of superiority theory is that it offers little scope for understanding humour between two separate and distinct (let alone intersectionally imbricated) marginalised figures. How can viewers identify the superior/inferior binary positioning when both the joke-teller and the butt of the joke are marginalised? Additionally, sometimes the joke-teller is deliberately positioned as the fool to be laughed at, thus blurring the binary line between the mocker and the mocked. With this in mind, I extend the notions of *punching-down/up* to include the term *punching through*, which I intend as a way to think through the slippery subject positions within the joking performance, and also as a means to mark the objectification of the disabled body.

Film Analysis

Part I – Punching-Through the Disabled Body.

I begin my analysis by considering how *Intouchables* uses physical violence towards the disabled figure to garner laughs. A montage sequence depicts Driss' awkward adjustment to Philippe's upper-class wealthy environment and his new care-attendant position. In the middle of the sequence, a brief forty-five second clip shows Driss accidentally pouring scalding hot tea on Philippe's leg. Shocked and in disbelief that Philippe does not react in pain, he deliberately repeats the action. Driss is not depicted as maliciously violent; rather, his actions are presented as constituting a childish naivety. The clip begins with a shot of Driss, who is shown inattentively massaging Philippe's legs while soul music ("The Ghetto", a remake of Donny Hathaway & Leroy Hutson's 1970 hit), adds sound and meaning to the scene. The music reminds viewers that Driss is from 'the ghetto' and as such, is out of place within his surroundings. Rhythmically moving

its relationship to the protection of freedom of speech.

along to the music, he distractedly attends to Philippe's personal care needs. Driss moves Philippe's arm and playfully touches his fist to Philippe's hand: a 'home-boy' type of gesture. Philippe looks serene with his eyes closed and seems undisturbed by Driss' antics. Sitting on the bed, Driss pours a cup of tea and accidentally spills the hot fluid onto Philippe's leg. He curses under his breath and apologises to Philippe, while he quickly tries to clean the spill. A close-up shows Driss' anxious expression as he expects Philippe to cry out in pain. At this stage, Driss has not registered Philippe's calm response to being scalded.

Philippe – What is going on? [Camera stays on Driss and a close-up shot frames his worried expression].

Driss – Nothing.

Philippe – You sure?

Driss – Just massaging away. [Camera delivers an extreme close-up shot of Driss' hands wiping the tea off Philippe's leg].

[The film cuts to a neutral shot of both men. The camera height is at Philippe's eye level – emphasising Driss' stature within the frame. Driss looks down in astonishment at Philippe's leg. Stunned that Philippe has not registered pain, he glances at Philippe to check that his eyes remain shut before he touches the hot teapot to Philippe's exposed leg. A medium close-up and neutral angle shot captures Philippe's unmoving expression. In the corner of the frame, we see the tea pot moving up and down, in time to the music].

Driss – Fucking weird. [A neutral shot frames the two men. Philippe's entire body is shown laid out in front of Driss, who is standing over the lower part of the man's legs. Driss looks at Philippe's face while he intentionally pours more boiling water on his legs].

Philippe – Have you finished playing? [Spoken calmly. A close-up frames Philippe's mildly amused, condescending expression].

Driss – You can't feel anything? [A medium close-up low-angle shot captures Driss' amazement, as he looks down at Philippe's leg. The camera cuts to a medium shot of Marcelle (nurse), as she frantically rushes into the room].

Marcelle – Have you gone mad?!

Philippe - He's experimenting [Spoken with a neutral tone. A medium neutral shot, frames Philippe, Driss and Marcelle, showing a contrast between her panic, Driss' astonishment and Philippe's calm observation of the events].

Driss – He can't feel anything! [Pouring more water on Philippe in an effort to prove this seemingly astounding fact].

Marcelle – You will burn him! [She rushes to stop Driss causing more harm. The montage sequence cuts to another setting, where Driss has been punishingly assigned the boring task of opening a stack of envelopes. At this point the montage sequence ends].

Lisa Nesselson's (2012) Australian review for SBS movies expresses some distaste towards the scene which she notes had French audiences 'roaring with laughter'. Nesselson (2012) states: "That never happened in real life, where at least second degree burns rather than laughter would have been the result". Understandably, Sellou distances himself from this degrading depiction in his autobiography, *You Changed My Life*. He writes, "I never got a laugh from emptying a hot teapot onto his legs like my character does in the film *Intouchables*: Monsieur Pozzo doesn't feel anything, sure, I get it" (Sellou 2012 p.152). It is unsurprising that Sellou has proclaimed the scene fictional, given its ableist violence and racist/classist depictions. The filmmakers' invention of the scene reads as a racist/classist discourse, whereby the black underclass is imagined as childlike, ignorant and dangerous. The scene also degrades the disabled body and makes light of violence against disabled people.

In this scene, violence towards the disabled discursively enters the domain of humour but the disabled body is not the intended target of the joke. We are not expected to laugh at the disabled body because the joke is aimed at the racist stereotyped figure and his foolish antics. The bullet just happens to pass through the disabled body on its way to hitting the intended target. The portrayal neither laughs *at* or *with* disability but rather *punches through* the materiality of the objectified disabled body, which functions as a narrative comedic prop.

Intouchables blends racism with ableism in order to garner laughs as the black man is portrayed as a childish fool who wrongly and dangerously plays with the disabled body. Driss, clearly does not intend to endanger Philippe; rather, he is depicted as not understanding the consequences of his actions. Thus, the joke is racist, but it is also ableist because it is made at the expense of the disabled body. A body that does not feel physical pain still sustains injury, and a lack of care for the body constitutes a lack of care for the person. It is dehumanising to treat the violence in this scene as a harmless joke. The violence only appears harmless because Philippe is presented as untroubled by such treatment: instead of displaying understandable anger, he seems mildly amused by Driss' childlike wonder. The filmmakers treat carer violence against the disabled as harmless and this is particularly deplorable because it is so far from the truth.

Disabled people, as a group, are fifty percent more likely to be victims of violence than able-bodied people, and those reliant on personal care assistance have an increased risk of abuse by those entrusted with their care (Mikton & Shakespeare 2014, pp. 3055-3057). Unlike Philippe, most disabled people lack the financial resources to enable full choice and autonomy when it comes to finding assistance.

When a wealthy disabled man, with the power to terminate the employment of violent attendants is represented as accepting abuse, the real-life complaints of disabled people are trivialised and silenced. When violence against the disabled becomes a discursive tool for humour, the pain of victims becomes a joke rather than an atrocity. Whilst Marcelle points out the physical harm caused by Driss' actions, the audience does not see Philippe's injury because he appears unharmed.

Applying Incongruity Theory, this situation can be interpreted as humorous because it contains something 'odd, abnormal or out of place'. Philippe's disabled body would appear an obvious comic target; however, *Intouchables* presents amusement via the character of Driss, who is represented as the 'out of place' figure within aristocratic French society. Presumably, Philippe would also appear 'out of place' in Driss' world (poor-outer Parisian suburbs), but the men's relationship takes place exclusively in the aristocratic environment. Driss is unaware of how to behave in Philippe's world and fails to recognise the social mores regarding how the white upper-class treat disabled people. When Driss teases Philippe, his behaviour is abnormal for the social environment because the humour pushes at the boundary of middle/upper-class social mores which insist that it is 'uncivilised' to ridicule, mock and laugh at the disabled. *Intouchables* repeatedly makes fun of Driss' lower-class antics, by *punching through* the materiality of the disabled body.

The route the joke takes does not always feature physical violence; sometimes the humour is derived from other forms of ableist abuse. In keeping with a narrative

that emphasises social class difference, *Intouchables* includes a scene inside an art gallery, which is an ideal setting for portraying class distinctions via the expression of cultural taste. The scene also includes ableist abuse masquerading as humour. It begins with a shot of Philippe examining an abstract painting while Driss seems bored and questions why anyone would consider purchasing a picture that he claims resembles a 'nosebleed'. Philippe tries to explain why the art is important, but Driss mocks him, insisting that the only purpose the piece serves is to make money. Applying superiority theory, the scene could read as comedy that *punches up* at the aristocracy, but Driss begins to mock Philippe's disability and this shifts the comedic positioning. In his boredom, Driss amuses himself by refusing to share chocolate and making fun of Philippe's inability to take the chocolate for himself.

Phillipe – Enough! Give me a chocolate [a high-angle, medium close-up frames Philippe with his mouth open as he waits for the chocolate to be served].

Driss – No [Driss eats his chocolate. A low-angle shot frames the back of Philippe's head and Driss, who is standing in front of him, with a serious expression].

Phillipe – Give me a chocolate. [A high-angle medium close-up shot captures Philippe looking slightly irritated].

Driss – No handy, no candy [A low-angle medium close-up of Driss, looking serious. The camera cuts to a medium close-up of Philippe with a look of disbelief and disdain. There is an awkward silence, which is broken by Driss' laughter]. It's a joke. I'm kidding. [A low-angle medium close-up frames Driss from Philippe's perspective. Driss laughs at his own joke].

Phillipe – It's a joke? [A high-angle medium close-up frames Philippe's relieved expression].

Driss – Yes.

Phillipe – A joke?

Driss - It's a good one [laughing].

Phillipe – A very good joke [tone of voice indicates he does not agree].

Driss – That's the punchline see, but in your case [A low-angle medium close-up frames Driss, as he laughs].

Phillipe – Come on. [A high-angle medium close-up frames Philippe as he opens his mouth for the chocolate].

Driss – It's wicked [laughing].

Phillipe – It's a good joke [His tone of voice and expression indicates disdain].

Driss – You got no hands, Phillippe [A low-angle medium shot frames his robust laughter].
I'll tell it to Marge Simpson. [Still laughing as he finally shares the chocolate].

The sales assistant who was previously sent away to find the price of the 'nose-bleed' artwork, returns. Driss is shocked when Philippe buys the artwork, which costs forty-one thousand euros – much more money than Driss would make in a year. A high-angle medium close-up frames Philippe with an expression of superiority.

On the surface this scene appears to be *punching down* at Philippe's impairment but once again the target of the joke is not the disabled body. We are not expected to find humour in the fact that Philippe cannot access the candy, nor are we expected to find the rhyming mockery "no handy, no candy" particularly amusing. We are, however, expected to find Driss' childish and inappropriate behaviour amusing. Disability theorist Tom Shakespeare (1999a p.48) states that:

Disability jokes flourish at the margins of civilized society: among children in the playground...[they] emerge when social sanctioning is temporarily suspended – for example, when people are drunk together and encounter a physically different other.

Driss is depicted as coming from the margins of 'uncivilised' society because he is unable to comprehend high art and like a bored child, entertains himself by making fun of Philippe's impairment.

In her analysis of *Intouchables*, Media and Communications Studies scholar, Karin Ljuslinder (2014, p.275), claims that the film is empowering to disabled people because the disabled character is represented as an educated, sophisticated art expert. Similarly, Ljuslinder (2014 p. 275) suggests that the film challenges racial discrimination, stating:

Driss, coming from circumstances that, due to cultural assumptions, often elicit discrimination, is 'normalised' by the empathetic way he cares for Philippe. In these scenes his black skin, his criminal background and his meagre education are de-emphasised.

Ljuslinder does not acknowledge that the disabled figure is represented as having power at the expense of Driss, who is dichotomously positioned as uneducated and unsophisticated by virtue of stereotypes attributed to his race and class. Driss' race is emphasised, rather than de-emphasised, because the filmmakers engage contrasts of lighting and shadow to exaggerate his features in ways that resemble the blackface make-up common to the American minstrel show (Pattersen 2016, pp.58-59).

Image removed due to copyright restrictions

“Ghostly apparition of blackface” [Still from *Intouchables* reproduced in Pattersen, 2016, pp.58]¹⁵.

It is difficult to understand how Driss, who ridicules and laughs at Philippe’s disability, can be imagined as an empathetic carer¹⁶. Ljuslinder does not consider how the materiality of the disabled body functions as a comedic narrative device within the scene. The insertion of ableist humour [ridicule of impairment] holds a narrative purpose because it enables white upper/middle class audiences to laugh at stereotypes of the racialised lower-class figure. Thus, *Intouchables punches through* the disabled body and *down* at stereotypes of race and class. Viewers are expected to laugh because Driss fails to understand that teasing the disabled and laughing at impairment is not socially acceptable within the norms of sophisticated society. These norms are grounded in the myth that disability is something tragic/pitiable/sad and therefore those who make fun of disabled people or enjoy such jokes lack compassion (Haller 2010, p.155).

¹⁵ Pattersen (2016) acknowledges the image was provided with courtesy from the Weinstein Company.

¹⁶ This is not to suggest that Driss never demonstrates compassion and empathy.

Just like Stronach and Allan (1999), Ljuslinder (2014) argues that in contemporary western societies it is widely accepted that it is taboo to laugh at disabled people, particularly if the joker is not disabled, irrespective of how humorous the situation may appear. Yet, as noted earlier, Shakespeare (1999) disputes that laughing at the disabled is widely taboo because it is common practice in 'less civilised' locations and when cultural mores are temporarily postponed. Thus, the 'taboo' is a feature of certain environments such as in classrooms, boardrooms and locations associated with high cultural capital. Setting the joke inside an art gallery positions the humour as taboo, by virtue of the upper-class environment, while simultaneously telling the forbidden joke.

Ljuslinder also claims that *Intouchables* empowers disabled people by challenging the restrictions that exclude them from comedic representation. She reasons that *Intouchables* enables disabled people to be the subject of humour in the same way that other social/identity groups are included in comedic representations. Ableist ridicule does not become empowering simply because it includes disabled subjects within the comedic domain and *Intouchables* is not an 'equal opportunity offender'¹⁷. Additionally, the inclusion of disabled characters in comedy should not come at the representational expense of other marginalised/oppressed groups.

Ljuslinder engages with the work of Disability and Media scholars Beth Haller and Sue Ralph (2003), who describe four phases of disability humour: phase one belongs to the abject depictions in freak shows; the second belongs to sick jokes

¹⁷ A term used to describe non-politically correct comedy that ridicules all groups/identities (see Wilde, 2018 p.46).

in which non-disabled people make fun of impairments; phase three involves disabled comedians applying their perspective to able-bodied culture; and the fourth phase is where the disabled are positioned as simply another character within a broad comedic realm. In this fourth phase, the disability humour forms part of the comedy genre without being the reason for the comedy. Ljuslinder (2014, p.276) concludes that *Intouchables* belongs to phase four of Haller and Ralph's model because disability appears as part of 'normal human diversity' rather than the central focus. While Ljuslinder (2014, p.276) admits that disability is key to the storyline, she insists that equal attention is given to ethnicity, education and class. Given that Philippe is the only disabled character I do not agree that *Intouchables* positions disability as a normal part of human diversity. Instead, the disabled figure appears as a single deviation from the able-bodied norm because *Intouchables* omits disability culture/community and identity politics. Secondly, Haller and Ralph (2003, p.11) clearly emphasize that phase four humour must be understood as comedy produced/performed by a disabled artist, otherwise its subversive and empowering potential is lost. Given that the filmmakers and actor François Cluzet are not known to be disabled, it is inaccurate to describe *Intouchables* as belonging to Haller and Ralph's subversive/empowering fourth phase. I contend that *Intouchables* fits better with their second phase of disability humour whereby the able-bodied make fun of impairment.

Finally, Ljuslinder (2014, p.275) argues that the joke in the art gallery scene is not offensive because, while Philippe does not laugh, he obviously does not take offense at Driss' humour. The assertion that the scene is not offensive, based on

Philippe's response, fails to consider the power of representation on disabled people as a group. Disabled people may find such representation cruel rather than funny, particularly those who have experienced abusive treatment from those entrusted with their care. Philippe, with his white aristocratic privilege, not only has the power to terminate the employment of support staff who commit violence/abuse, but also to pursue legal recourse, while many disabled people do not have accessible pathways to justice. Philippe's acquiescence suggests it is acceptable to taunt disabled people.

Ljuslinder's claims also fail to consider how the use of the phrase 'only joking' makes it difficult for disabled people to protest. Humour theorists Dennis Howitt and Owusu-Bempah (2009 p.48) assert that the 'only joking' defence is a rhetorical device often deployed in an effort to nullify protests that label a joke offensive. It is a device deployed when joke tellers refuse to take responsibility for causing offense. The 'only joking' rhetoric blames the offended party for the social difficulty, claiming that they lack a sense of humour. When Driss claims that he is 'only joking', he insists that Philippe must not feel insulted by his ableist joke. Disabled viewers and their advocates must also avoid taking offence or risk being understood as humourless. In this way, *Intouchables* silences the pain and suffering of disabled people who have experienced abuse at the hands of those entrusted to provide care and support. The joking narrative makes light of their experiences and restricts opportunities for protest.

In a number of scenes, Driss plays with Philippe's body: he dances him around and positions him in ridiculous ways, as though playing with a doll. In one

noteworthy scene, he plays ‘fancy dress’ by altering Philippe’s clothes and hair in order to accomplish a comic effect. Philippe initially enjoys the fun and agrees to close his eyes in anticipation of each costume, but when Driss gives him a Hitler-style moustache, Philippe protests:

Philippe – No, that’s not funny.

Driss – Nein! That’s what you mean [imitating a German accent].

Philippe – No, I don’t agree!

Driss – Philippe, very angry [while styling his hair to look like Hitler].

Philippe – I’m just your plaything now [whilst suppressing a laugh]. You will end up in the looney bin.

Driss – Don’t you feel like starting a war?

Philippe – I think it is time to shave it all off now. You’re having fun?

Driss – You bet. How about Nazi invalids? It must have been weird saluting like this [holding Philippe’s hand up in a Nazi salute].

Philippe – You’ve had your fun now. Get rid of it!

[Driss begins to mockingly mimic the German accent whilst barking orders and Philippe eventually laughs].

The forced manipulation of the disabled body into a Nazi costume is particularly problematic. Given the eugenics practices performed on disabled people during the Holocaust, the joke about Nazi invalids and the Hitler performance might be read as a denial—silencing—of the treatment of disabled people during the Holocaust. What is left unsaid is that it is incongruous with the policies and practices of the Nazi party to conceive of having a disabled person within their ranks. Perhaps this incongruity is intended, in order to produce a humorous effect, however as a disabled Jewish person I find the scene unsettling.

The joke may be understood as another example of Driss' bad-taste because dressing up as a Nazi is generally understood to be unamusing. Once again, the materiality of disabled body functions as a comedic narrative prop for a joke which targets laughter at the foolish unsophisticated antics of the lower-class black figure. The comedic effect relies on the physical manipulation of a 'docile' body which is treated as object rather than subject. In this sense, the humour *punches through* the materiality of the disabled body. This objectification is reflected in Philippe's protest, which is subsequently ignored: "I'm just your play-thing now".

I have argued that *Intouchables punches through* the disabled body and *down* at the stereotypical black figure; however, the humour is sometimes aimed directly at disability. One clear example of *punching down* at disability can be observed when Driss shares an ableist joke with Philippe:

Driss – Where do you find an invalid?

Philippe – I don't know.

Driss – Where you leave him.

Philippe – bastard.

The scene denotes a playful masculine banter between the men and neither Philippe nor Driss appears to take each other seriously. While the characters may not take this joke seriously, the joke *punches down* at disabled people by ridiculing their physical limitations and finding humour in their vulnerability to physical restraint. Comedic writer and journalist Howard Jacobson, in his book *Seriously Funny* (1997), criticises those who take offence at jokes about gender, race, sexuality and other categories. He argues that they are 'humourless little shits' who fail to distinguish between fantasy and reality (Jacobson 1997 pp.15-36). Humour theorists Pickering and Lockyer (2009 p.13) explain that we cannot

always be certain that a clear distinction between fantasy and reality can be easily identified. They argue that the purpose and power of make-believe is to trick us into seeing representations as the *real thing*. Distinguishing between fantasy and reality becomes particularly difficult when representations claim to be based on a true story. A second problem with identifying a clear distinction between fantasy and reality is that Driss' joke reflects real-life ableist abuse, and it is therefore not simply a playful imagined scenario that finds humour in the preposterous.

Wheelchair users, who have experienced times when they have been literally parked in a corner and denied freedom of movement, may consider the joke to be laughing at disabling conditions.

In his analysis of racist jokes, sociologist Michael Billig (2009, p.35) explains that some racist joke tellers believe that because they are 'only joking' their jokes do not denote real prejudice. Similarly, ableist joke tellers who engage the 'only joking' defence may believe their joke is harmless make-believe. Billig (2009, pp.34-36) argues that some jokes involve situations in which the joke teller encourages enjoyment from imagining violence and abuse towards oppressed groups. Driss' joke can be understood as encouraging a form of enjoyment through imagining conditions of ableist abuse. One might argue that Driss does not seriously intend to park and leave Philippe, and so taking this joke seriously denotes an inability to distinguish between fantasy and reality. But are the boundaries between on-screen fantasy and reality easily separated? *Intouchables* does contain scenes where Driss 'parks' Philippe against his will. Indeed, when physical restraint is not taken seriously, the practice is discursively positioned as a banal action rather than a serious act of abuse.

This discursive banality enables physical restraint to appear harmless: for example, when Driss uses restraint as a legitimate requirement for delivering 'tough love'. Restraint as a function of 'tough love' can be observed in the final scene when Driss arranges a romantic date for Philippe with Eléonore (Dorotheé Brière). Philippe has spent months writing romantic letters to Eléonore, but has shown a reluctance to meet with her in person due to a fear of ableist rejection. Driss parks Philippe in a restaurant to wait for Eléonore and ignores his requests to leave. The audience is expected to understand that Driss has disabled Philippe's movement for his own good. We are expected to believe that without Driss forcing Philippe to attend the date, he will forever avoid romantic opportunities and never find love. Thus, 'parking' the disabled is discursively portrayed as a harmless joke in one scene, and as a necessary act of care in another. 'Parking' the disabled is presented as a legitimate way to force disabled people to participate in something that able-bodied carers consider important, even if the disabled person does not want to participate. *Intouchables* leaves conditions of physical restraint unproblematised, thereby silencing disabled peoples' protests regarding physical restraint practices and the denial of choice and autonomy. A lie is produced through this silence because physical restraint is portrayed as banal rather than a form of abuse.

Gender also plays a role in the types of jokes one performs and in how one reacts to a joke. The scenes containing the jokes 'no handy, no candy' and 'where do you find an invalid?' can be understood as portrayals of masculine banter whereby the ability to take a joke signifies masculinity. Traditional norms of masculinity

dictate that 'real men' can 'take a joke' and can tolerate, in good humour, playful teasing from other men. Heterosexist gendered norms dictate that showing offence when ridiculed constitutes a feminine display of emotional sensitivity. 'Real' men, according to these norms, must avoid appearing overly sensitive because a failure to 'take a joke' may incur accusations of 'behaving like a girl'.

Part II – Damaged Masculinity and Gender Rehabilitation

Disability is culturally perceived as incompatible with normative conceptions of masculinity due to assumptions that align disability with stereotypes of weakness, vulnerability, dependence and passivity. Disability Studies theorists Shuttleworth, Wedgwood and Wilson (2012, p.175) argue that disabled men experience a 'dilemma of masculinity'. At numerous times *Intouchables* contains scenes that depict the 'dilemma of disabled masculinity', as Philippe, due to stereotypes of disability, is portrayed as embodying a damaged masculinity in need of repair. Cinematic representations of disabled men frequently contain themes that address this dilemma via discourses relating to sexual incapacity and rehabilitation (Shakespeare, Gillespie-Sells and Davis 1996, p.62; Kim 2010, p.138).

Intouchables screens this trope, positioning Driss as the facilitator of Philippe's gender/sexual rehabilitation by actively promoting heterosexual desire and sex in order to restore his masculinity.

The 'damaged masculinity' discourse also contains a narrative that aligns with the imperatives of Judith Butler's (1990) conception of the 'heterosexual matrix of desire'. As I explained in my methods chapter, this matrix contains regulatory laws

that assume a norm of sexual difference which must be actualised through a desire for differently sexed bodies (Lloyd 2007, p.34). Thus, according to the heterosexual matrix, to be properly gendered is to be exclusively heterosexual. Indeed, the imperatives of the heterosexual matrix are stamped all over the film and it explains why heterosexuality is central to Philippe's gender rehabilitation. Additionally, gendered racial stereotypes explain why Driss can accomplish or help realise it.

Feminist scholars Chris Beasley and Heather Brook (2019 pp.168-191), examine the cultural politics in buddy movies and their contemporary equivalent, 'the bromance'. They argue that a core feature of these films is 'homosociality', which denotes plutonic loving bonds between men, which are similar but distinct to homosexual relationships. Beasley and Brook (2019, p.183) argue that homophobia is typically a feature of the homosocial narrative within bromance films. *Intouchables* equates disability with femininity, and because Driss views Philippe's 'feminised' state as intolerable he actively seeks to help Philippe regain his masculine dignity. Driss' intervention begins with the rejection of 'feminine practices' and moves onto the promotion of heterosexual desire and sex acts. In a telling scene, Driss is charged with assisting Philippe to get dressed but he initially refuses to help him with a pair of compression stockings because they represent a horrifying slip into femininity, and by extension, homosexuality. Driss looks distastefully at the stockings before teasing Philippe:

Driss – Where is the skirt?

Philippe – They are support stockings. They help the blood flow properly, so I don't faint.

[Driss appears horrified]

Driss – I'm not doing that; there is a problem here, seeing as I won't be doing it.

[Driss calls out to Marcelle for assistance]

Driss – Maybe Marcelle can put them on you; she knows how to do it, being a chick and all that. I'm not doing it, ok, you're better off fainting! I mean sometimes we just refuse to put them on. We are men!

In the next shot sequence, Driss reluctantly assists Philippe with the stockings while Philippe teases him about his feminine abilities, but when it comes to more intimate support he adamantly refuses to assist:

Philippe – You are good with stockings, only natural with that cute earring. You're a natural at this; have you ever considered work as a beautician? [A high-angle shot frames Driss, kneeling in front of Philippe, which provides a rare moment when the disabled body is visually positioned as superior].

[Driss notices a pair of rubber gloves]

Driss – What are the gloves for?

Philippe – Let's wait awhile, you're not ready for that yet.

Driss – What do you mean? Ready for what?

[The film cuts to a shot of Driss complaining to Marcelle in the kitchen]

Driss – I'm not emptying the arse of a guy I don't know or even a guy I do know. I don't empty anyone's arse on principle. I don't go in for this sick stuff. The stockings were bad enough. It's just wrong!

This discourse demonstrates how *Intouchables* portrays Philippe as feminised because of impairment. The stockings, aside from their therapeutic benefit, are culturally understood as a feminine garment; therefore, they indicate that because of impairment, Philippe must 'dress like a woman'. The gloves, within the context of personal care, signify the practice of facilitating bowel movements via anal penetration, but this act also functions as a cultural code for gay sex. The filmmakers clearly intend the gloves to signify both intimate personal care (a disability discourse) and gay sex (a sexuality discourse). Driss' marks anal penetration as "sick stuff", and in order to avoid a threat to his heterosexuality, he rejects the task. Eventually, Driss provides toileting assistance, signified by images of him putting on gloves, but it is only after his heterosexuality has been firmly established, a point to which I will return to later. Philippe's heterosexual status is also portrayed as under threat due to his personal care needs, which Driss imagines as unnatural for men. Thus, both receiving and performing personal care work are discursively situated as conditions that threaten masculinity/heterosexuality. This narrative portrays a 'dilemma of disabled masculinity' and functions to set the stage for Philippe's gender rehabilitation.

Initially, Philippe is represented as uninterested in sexual pursuits. However through Driss' influence, we begin to witness Philippe as a sexually desiring figure. In one scene, camera angles show Philippe's gaze resting upon a woman's bottom; however, his gaze, by virtue of his physical location, results in camera angles that look up the woman's leg stopping just short of her skirt hem. The shot positions wheelchair users as having a unique potential for gazing up skirts. While

Philippe's disability prevents him from performing what Shuttleworth (2004, p.171) refers to as the 'traditional masculine repertoire' (bodily actions such as putting an arm around a date), his impairment is discursively represented, via camera angles, as offering a unique ability to objectify women. The scene also portrays sex as having a special therapeutic purpose because Philippe's sexual desires are depicted as offering a solution to his physical pain. As the men take an evening walk, Philippe describes the limits of medication for addressing his pain and the benefits of sex.

Philippe – The medication has its limits; doctors call them phantom pains. I feel like a frozen steak tossed onto a red-hot griddle. I feel nothing but suffer anyway.

Driss – Surely something could help?

[Philippe looks towards a group of young women. The camera presents his point-of-view, via an extreme close-up of a woman's thigh as it meets her short skirt].

Philippe – That could. [Indicating towards the woman wearing a short skirt. An extreme close-up of the woman's thigh projects Philippe's point of view. The camera cuts back to a shot of Driss].

Driss – We are all sick for that, me worse than you probably.

Driss' response connects Philippe's solution to physical pain with a gender stereotype about men's imagined insatiable need to have sex. In this way, masculinity is presented as a way to compensate for disability. Further, Driss suggests that his sexual desire is stronger than Philippe's, and this plays to the stereotype of the hyper-sexual black man (Davis 1981, p.174). Driss, as the hyper-sexual expert, is positioned as a perfect facilitator for sexual therapy, but his knowledge is limited to able-bodied sex.

In *Bodies That Matter*, Butler (1993, p.xiii) describes how the laws of heterosexuality produce abject beings because in constructing what is normal, we simultaneously construct what is abnormal. In discussing abject subject positions Butler is referring to bodies that do not conform to heterosexual imperatives. The abject domain relates to elements of social life that are deemed both 'unliveable' and 'uninhabitable', but are nonetheless occupied by bodies that do not enjoy the privileged subject position (Butler 1993, p.xiii). Philippe fails to adhere to the regulatory rules of the heterosexual matrix (Butler 1993, p.xiii), and as such, he exists in the "unlivable and uninhabitable zones of social life". Underscoring this representation, lies a 'tragedy of disability' trope, because what is conveyed through the narrative script and culturally coded images is the notion that disabled men face a unique tragedy: a crisis of masculinity. Through a heterosexual rehabilitation discourse, the filmmakers offer a way to address this crisis.

Part III - Crip Sex and Gender Rehabilitation

Intouchables contains an important inclusion about disabled sexuality because it depicts a person with a spinal injury who is able to enjoy sexual pleasure. Importantly, the film presents a way to think beyond normative notions of penetrative heterosex and genital erogenous zones. Continuing their conversation about sex as pain management, Driss queries Philippe about his capacity to engage in sex acts. In this exchange, Philippe educates Driss about non-normative sexual pleasure.

Driss – I wanted to ask you, with women, how do you manage?

Philippe – You adapt.

Driss – So you can do it or not?

Philippe – You may not realise but I feel nothing from my neck to my toes.

Driss – So you can't.

Philippe – It's not that simple. I can but it's not my decision and you can find pleasure elsewhere.

Driss – Yeah?

Philippe – You've no idea.

Driss – You're right. How for example?

Philippe – For example, the ears.

Driss – The ears?

Philippe – The ears are a highly sensitive erogenous zone.

Driss – You get your ears licked [laughs]. I'd never have guessed.

[The film cuts to the next scene which is set in a restaurant and the pair continue their discussion about sex].

Driss – Sorry, but you really get off with your ears? If your ears are red, that means you're turned on?

Philippe – Exactly [laughing]: sometimes they are hard when I wake.

Driss – Both of them? [laughing].

Philippe – Yes! [The men laugh together].

This alternative way of receiving sexual pleasure constitutes a Crip-sex¹⁸ discourse, and could be viewed as challenging normative assumptions about heterosex. However, while the film subverts notions of disabled asexuality or a complete lack of sexual capacity, it stops short of portraying disabled bodies as capable of sharing in mutual sexual pleasure. Instead, the film depicts sexual pleasure as limited to commercial sex, which is discursively positioned as a therapeutic service.

Intouchables projects a commercial sex work as therapy trope via a short scene depicting an erotic massage service. Films often portray commercial sex as a special rehabilitative service for disabled men (Kim 2020, pp.138-142; Rozengarten & Brook 2016, pp 1-21), and therefore, this discourse has a stylised iterative cultural impact. Filmic portrayals of sex scenes rarely involve disabled characters in more mutually oriented forms of sexual intimacy. The dominance of the 'sex-work as rehabilitation' trope means that disabled bodies—primarily men's—are typically portrayed as receiving sexual enjoyment rather than giving sexual pleasures (Rozengarten & Brook 2016, p.17). What is silenced is a discourse promoting the desirability of disabled bodies and the sexual pleasure that disabled people can offer to their sexual partners.

¹⁸ I use the term Crip-sex to denote the practice of adapting sex-acts in innovative, non-normative ways in order to enable sexual performance. I capitalise the 'C' in Crip-sex to denote 'Crip' as a marker of cultural identity.

In the sex-work as rehabilitation trope, sex-workers are positioned as rehabilitators; however, *Intouchables* positions Driss as the facilitator of such rehabilitation. Driss, as sexual rehabilitator/therapist trades on stereotypes of black men as yielding a racialised form of sexual prowess. When two erotically dressed Asian women¹⁹ massage the men, Driss directs the action. The masseuse attending to Philippe moves from massaging his ears to rubbing his chest. The camera projects a close-up of her hands stroking Philippe's chest hair. Driss quickly interjects by taking hold of her hand and directing her, "no, stick to the ears". This is followed by a close-up panning shot, directing attention to Philippe's 'erogenous ears' being rubbed. Thus, the viewer's gaze upon Philippe's body is cut short and his sexual embodiment is restricted to his ears, as though the rest of his body does not exist.

This scene is the culmination of a montage sequence whereby Driss performs intimate care tasks for Philippe such as dressing assistance and putting on latex gloves, in preparation for bowel stimulation via anal penetration. Clearly, Driss learns to accept that providing intimate care does not make him either feminine or homosexual and thus, the film provides some space for care to be understood in non-essentialised gendered ways. Yet, in order to dislodge disability and care from their feminised cultural position, the filmmakers ensure that the men's masculinity/heterosexuality cannot be questioned through the inclusion of a commercial sexual service.

¹⁹ This requires further analysis about sex-work, race and gender but due to the constraints of this thesis I have left this untouched.

Terry Callier's (1973) song 'You Goin' Miss Your Candyman' plays throughout the montage sequence. The lyrics contain the words "I do declare you're gonna miss your candyman, keeping you safe and warm, keeping you out of harm". The care-work montage sequence culminating in the active direction of the masseuse, coupled with the music, signifies that Driss is directing Philippe's sexual service, and his presence is required in order to enable Philippe. The massage scene is projected as part of the intimate care-work package. What is unchallenged and treated as unproblematic is that Philippe is capable of instructing the masseuse himself: his voice as a sexual agent is silenced.

The scene depicts masculine bonding, in which the men emotionally connect by sharing their consumption of a commercial erotic service, in the same way that men might bond by attending a strip tease performance. The salient difference between traditional male bonding, via shared patronage of commercial erotic services, and the *Intouchables* portrayal, is that the men are not depicted as equal sexually active agents. Philippe is portrayed as passive/vulnerable and in need of Driss' care. While some disabled people may require assistance to engage in sexual life, Philippe does not require Driss to direct the erotic massage. Driss' role is to re-masculinise Philippe, and his assistance with commercial erotic services is narratively portrayed as a path towards Philippe re-acquiring (to some degree) his masculinity. Driss is both reminding and teaching Philippe how to be a 'real' man. The scene concludes with a shot of the men sharing a marijuana joint, which emphasises their masculine bonding through mutual pleasure.

image removed due to copyright restrictions, original image available here: <<https://www.nytimes.com/2011/12/08/movies/intouchables-is-a-magnet-for-french-moviegoers.html>>.

'Erotic massage: rehabilitating masculinity'. (Still from *Intouchables*, reproduced in de la Baume, 2011, *The New York Times*, section C p.1).

When Driss temporarily leaves Philippe's employ, due to family commitments, Philippe asks his new attendant to organise a cranial massage, thereby attempting to take charge of his own sexual life but, without Driss' assistance, his attempt at self-determination fails. The new care-attendant, unaware that the service is about heterosexual erotic pleasure, hires a man for the job. When the masseur arrives, Philippe appears disgusted and hostile whilst screaming: "Get out! Leave me alone!". Philippe's rage represents a heterosexual defence, because he is both angry at having his heterosexual desires misinterpreted, and defensive about the potential for being placed in a queer sexual position. The scene not only functions to highlight Philippe's unquestionable heterosexuality, but also to foreground his dependence upon Driss. Importantly, his angry rejection of a male massage therapist functions as a way to cast homosexuality as inherently

undesirable and unnatural. The discourse insists that disabled male homosexuality is incompatible with the successful rehabilitation of a damaged masculinity. This in turn situates disability stereotypes associated with the damaged masculinity discourse (passivity, vulnerability, dependence, weakness) as unproblematic for both disabled women and disabled gay men. *Intouchables* is mostly explicit in its prejudices and therefore it tends to openly state them through the film language and dialogue. However, the film does contain enthymematic silences which produce disabled bodies as inherently unattractive/undesirable and lacking sexual appeal. This is mostly apparent during the second stage of Philippe's gender rehabilitation – the move from sex acts to finding romantic love.

Part IV – Love, Intimacy and Ableism

Philippe's romantic life is introduced as limited to writing love letters to Eléonore, whom, as stated earlier, is a romantic pen-pal he has never met. In ordinary circumstances, letter-writing would be a private act, but, due to impairment, Philippe must dictate his letters to his assistant, Magalie. It is not clear why Philippe does not use a computer with dictation technology. This would reflect how disabled people may engage modern technology to enable their lives. I suspect that the filmmakers avoided this enabling portrayal in order to both highlight and justify Philippe's dependence and his lack of privacy, thereby making him vulnerable to unwanted intrusions. Indeed, this vulnerability is key to the narrative because Driss does intrude and meddle with Philippe's personal romantic life. When Philippe dictates a love letter to Eléonore, Magalie transcribes but Driss interrupts to provide his opinion and unsolicited advice.

Philippe – [Dictating his poetic letter] Her shining eyes are made of charming minerals, and in this strange symbolic world –

Driss – fucking boring!

Philippe – [Ignoring Driss] Where the invoke angel and ancient sphinx.

Driss – This is killing my mind! Why bother with this crap? Sphinxes, daisies, angels.

[Directing his question to Magalie] You'd go for this stuff?

Magalie – True, one could be more direct.

Driss – [Asking Philippe] What's she look like?

Philippe – I don't know. That's not what matters. It's intellectual and emotional, not physical. I want a mind-to-mind relationship.

Driss – If she's a troll, it'll be mind to troll!

Philippe – Very subtle. Really, what can I say? Bravo. [Philippe looks irritated].

Driss – How long's it been going on?

Philippe – Please [indicating to Magalie to answer].

Magalie – Six months.

Driss – Six months and you've never seen her! Maybe she's fat and ugly or handicapped.

At the end of the poem, put 'how's your weight'?

Philippe – Thank-you very much for your sound advice, Driss. Let's carry on. Where was I?

Driss – A sphinx was eating daisies with an angel, then running and doing stuff. Call her!

[Philippe ignores Driss and keeps dictating the poem]

Driss – Call her, ok!

Philippe – I can get more across with the written word, ok! He's incredible [talking to Magalie].

Driss – I'm going to find her number, this is stressing me out! [He grabs letters and starts reading the sender's address]. Dunkirk, that's bad.

Philippe – Put that down.

Driss – No beauty queens there. Only trolls.

Philippe – Put that down, right now!

Driss – Her number is here. That means she wants you to call.

Philippe – Put it down, please.

Driss – She wrote her number here. That means 'call me, I'll lick your ear'. [Driss starts dialling the telephone numbers].

Philippe – [looks at Magalie] What's he doing? Don't call her!

Driss – Enough poetry after six months.

Philippe – He's totally crazy. I won't speak to her.

Driss – I bet she has an accent. They talk weird up there.

Philippe – Hang up!

Driss – I want my Philippe [mimicking Eléonore]. She is going to get him. [Woman answers the phone and Driss covers the receiver] The voice sounds okay. [Driss puts the phone to Philippe's ear, but he shakes his head].

Philippe – No!

Driss – Improvise talking about the daisies.

Philippe – [talking on phone] Eléonore? It's Philippe. I'm calling because I really wanted to hear the sound of your voice and with that first hello I'm fulfilled. [Woman responds, but it is not Eléonore, so she calls her to the phone. Driss puts the phone on loud speaker].

Driss – [Educating Philippe]. Too wordy. Try simple sentences.

Eléonore – Hello.

Philippe – Eléonore. It's Philippe. I was writing you a letter, and it just hit me: why don't I call her?

[Magalie and Driss, start to exit the room].

Driss – Ask her weight? [A final instruction].

Thanks to Driss' unwanted intervention, Philippe begins to enjoy regular conversations with Eléonore. I have already discussed how Driss uses physical force, ignoring Philippe's protests. This scene constitutes another example of such ableist abuse, but I set this aside to focus on discourses of gendered disability and desire. Central to this scene is the film's theme of damaged masculinity and gender rehabilitation. In his research into disabled masculinity, Shuttleworth (2004, p.172), notes that the inability to enact conventional bodily styles of masculine performance, inspires some disabled men to adjust their gendered style. Accordingly, some heterosexual disabled men reject hyper-masculine sexualised behaviour, such as the objectification of women, in favour of more emotionally intimate relationships with women (Shuttleworth 2004, p.173). Philippe insists that his relationship with Eléonore is intellectual and emotional, rather than physical. The filmmakers miss an opportunity to portray this choice as a valid masculine

style. If Philippe's masculinity was portrayed as intact the ableist narrative of rehabilitating damaged masculinity would be nullified. I acknowledge that this alternative portrayal would, if not carefully composed, risk representing disabled men as inherently asexual, but the gender rehabilitation discourse insists that Philippe is not masculine enough. Alternative ways of performing masculinity are de-legitimised by this discourse.

When Driss worries that Eléonore might be "fat, ugly or handicapped" the filmmakers are engaging ironic humour. We are expected to laugh at the notion that a disabled man might be turned off by a woman's size, impairment and other bodily appearances that fail to meet normative standards of beauty. In particular, we are expected to laugh at the irony of a disabled man rejecting a disabled woman because of her 'unattractive' impairment. Without the thoroughly naturalised belief that all disabled bodies are undesirable, the discourse would not succeed as a form of irony. Interestingly, the sexist/ableist 'unattractive disabled woman' trope is given voice, while the corresponding 'undesirability of disabled men' is unspoken within the narrative structure of ironic humour. Perhaps this is because judging a woman's worth, based upon physical appearance, is a common sexist practice in culture. We must consider why the humour works as a form of irony. If the scene makes us laugh, it is because disability is culturally imagined as typically undesirable/unattractive and results in lost sexual appeal. There is no need to explicitly state that disabled men are 'undesirable/unattractive' because ableist culture understands this as a taken-for-granted, common-sense logic. In this way, the ironic humour depends upon an enthymematic silence, in order for

the joke to work, because the audience must intuit that disabled bodies, regardless of gender, are normatively unattractive. This is not to say that the audience is encouraged to view Philippe as completely undesirable, because he is portrayed as compassionate, generous, wealthy, humorous, stylish, charming and intelligent. The issue is that Philippe's desirable character traits are presented as a way to see past 'undesirable/unattractive' disability. The cultural understanding of disabled bodies as naturally and normatively 'undesirable/unattractive' remains intact, but the film suggests that men with certain attributes and privilege can overcome their unfortunate appearance.

Unlike the drama genre, which, as I discussed in my analysis of *Love Song*, silently produces the 'undesirability' of disabled women, the comedy genre enables the unsayable to be spoken. Through the 'it's just a joke' defence, the maliciousness of calling disabled women unattractive is disguised. What is unspoken, yet silently produced is the cultural belief that disability constitutes a tragedy. It is easy to imagine that being understood as inherently 'undesirable/unattractive' constitutes a personal tragedy. Furthermore, whenever there is disability/tragedy discourse, a pity response is anticipated, but *Intouchables* detracts from pity through efforts to make us laugh at disabled bodies. The comedy alters a discursive script that would normally produce pity, because instead of crying tears of pity we are expected to laugh. The problem is that replacing pity with ableist ridicule is not an acceptable solution to subverting the tragic/pitiful stereotype. *Intouchables* therefore simply replaces one ableist construction with another.

When the men discuss physical attractiveness and theorise about what women want the undesirability of disability is again treated as a taken-for-granted logic and therefore produced via an enthymematic silence. Consider the following conversational exchange, when Philippe reports that Eléonore has asked to see a photograph of him:

Philippe - Good news and not so good news.

Driss – The good news?

Philippe – Fifty-three kilos [referring to Eléonore's weight].

Driss – Fifty-three kilos, that's good, unless she is one metre tall.

Philippe – The bad news is she wants a photo [referring to an image of Philippe].

Driss – So?

Philippe- Very funny.

Driss – What do you think women want?

Philippe – Beauty, charm, elegance.

Driss – Bullshit! They want dough and security. Just ask him [indicating a wealthy older man sitting with a young woman] and you have what it takes.

Philippe – I'm naïve, I hope to charm with more than just my bank account.

Driss – After six months reading your lame poems, she is hot for you. She is an original, all right. The chair won't bother her.

Philippe – That's true.

Driss – Up north, guys drink and beat women. She will be safe with you.

Philippe – Bastard.

Driss – Pragmatic right? If she sends her photo, it means she wants to go further. Send a photo of you without the chair really showing. It does not have to be a Telethon one, with you drooling and looking like shit.

This conversational exchange highlights *Intouchables* repeated sexist practice of judging a woman's worth by her level of physical attractiveness. Eléonore's weight is adjudicated by both men as 'good', thereby making her worthy of Philippe's attention. It is at this point that Philippe's disability is understood as a possible barrier to romantic success. Importantly, ableist beliefs that imagine disabled bodies as 'undesirable/unattractive' are produced through an enthymematic silence. Philippe does not need to state why he is worried about sending a photograph because his concerns are obvious. Driss knows that Philippe's concern is not related to wrinkles or greying hair or other normative concerns regarding personal appearance. Philippe does not need to explain his fears because they can be taken for granted due to common-sense notions of disability as constitutive of unattractiveness reducing sex appeal/desirability. In the last chapter, I explained Aristotle's conception of an enthymeme as the part of a verbal argument that is "suppressed because the audience is expected to supply the missing element from common knowledge" (Smith 2007, p.115). *Intouchables*, like *Love Song*, reiterates this silence when expressing the 'undesirability of disability' stereotype. Driss states that Eléonore is an 'original' and "the chair won't bother her", and the reason this statement makes sense is because we are expected to take it for granted that most women would be put off by disability. The discourse

assumes that only a woman with a special resilient desire or gaze would welcome a disabled lover (Rozengarten & Brook, 2016).

I have discussed how gender rehabilitation promotes the successful achievement of heterosexuality. Driss' role as 'a gender rehabilitator' is to assist Philippe to obtain sexual/romantic relationships. To encourage Philippe, Driss attempts to alleviate his fears by arguing that women are interested in money, security and safety from violence. Clearly, Philippe can offer financial security and his character is portrayed as kind, so it is reasonable that Eléonore would be safe with him. Nevertheless, Driss is clearly teasing Philippe for not being manly enough to pose an aggressive threat.

Discourses of class, gender and disability are reflected and produced when the men discuss 'what women want'. Philippe's class privilege is portrayed when he claims that women want a man with 'beauty, charm and elegance' – reflecting stereotypical values associated with the aristocracy. In contrast, Driss believes women will sacrifice sexual desires for money, security and safety from violence, reflecting gender and class stereotypes associated with disadvantaged women. Certainly, women from disadvantaged backgrounds are likely to be more vulnerable to violence. What is troubling is that *Intouchables* portrays them as likely to sacrifice romantic/sexual desires for financial security and safety. Indeed, safety from violence should not be represented as a commodity that can be traded. All women have the right to safety from violence. The scene is also ableist because it discursively implies that wealthy disabled men can compensate

for their 'undesirability/unattractiveness' and 'reduced sexual appeal' by paying for romantic relationships.

Driss offers his advice regarding what image to send Eléonore, noting that it does not need to be a Telethon picture (referring to the ableist pity discourse associated with charity Telethons). This is a worthy contribution to the film, and it offers a welcome counter to cinematic representations that associate the sexual/romantic activities of disabled people with discourses of pity sex and charity (Rozengarten & Brook 2016). Nevertheless, *Intouchables* simultaneously produces a discourse of 'undesirable/unattractive' bodies, so that disabled people remain cinematic projections of pity. The filmmakers insist that disability constitutes a problem for a successful sexual/romantic life.

When Driss helps select a photograph for Eléonore, he suggests an image of Philippe pictured in his chair. Driss observes: "Sure, there is a problem, but you look good. Want to try it?" Philippe agrees, but later he exchanges the photograph for one taken prior to his accident. Here, once again, the 'unattractiveness' of disability is discursively reflected/produced. While, Driss points out that Philippe 'looks good', his disability is identified as a problem for sex-appeal. When Driss refers to 'a problem', he does not announce that the problem is disability. This meaning is unspoken and conveyed via an enthymematic silence. We know that disability is the problem, because the 'undesirability/unattractiveness' of disability is so entrenched in ableist culture that it can be taken for granted and treated as

common-sense. The 'disability problem' is positioned as an individual matter that can be overcome by emphasising other normatively attractive characteristics. Therefore, while *Intouchables* portrays Philippe as relationship-worthy, it projects disabled bodies as both unerotically and unsexy, reproducing the ableist notion that disability reduces sex-appeal, and this must be mitigated by other normatively appealing traits.

Another highly problematic representation is the way that Philippe appears to accept the ableist stereotype that conceives of disability as undesirable/unsexy. Philippe's internalised ableism is obvious when he substitutes the photograph of himself as a disabled man with a photograph depicting his former able-bodied self. This is an ableist trope because cinematic representations routinely portray disabled people as having an internalised ableism when it comes to finding sexual/romantic intimacy. All too often disabled characters believe that no one will find them desirable or lovable. These representations typically involve able-bodied characters who save the disabled person from their negative self-image (Norden 1994, p.30). This representation fosters the myth that disabled people need able-bodied people to help restore their self-esteem because they imagine themselves to be ugly, unattractive, undesirable and unlovable. Within this discursive trope disability pride is silenced and able-bodied pity is fostered. A lie is produced through this silence because many disabled people view their bodies as beautiful, desirable, sexy and lovable (Ball 2002; Garland-Thomson 2009; OToole 2015; Wood 2014). I am not suggesting that ableism does not have truth effects and I acknowledge that disabled people do experience internalised ableism, but the

problem is that an alternative story which depicts disability pride is rarely seen on the silver screen.

Continuing to assist Philippe with overcoming his fear of ableist rejection, Driss encourages him to attend a date with Eléonore. At first, Philippe attempts to meet Eléonore without Driss' help, but he panics and abandons the date before she arrives. In the final scene, Philippe has another date with Eléonore but this time he stays the course because Driss parks him against his will—repeating the abusive practice I discussed earlier. Eléonore arrives and a shot shows Philippe smiling, relaxed, and happily conversing with her but we do not hear their conversation: the scene is linguistically silent. The final shot is cast through the restaurant window, and we see Driss swaggering off into the distance: his work is done. Able-bodied audiences are able to feel good that the kind disabled man, with the support of his able-bodied assistant, has overcome his fear of ableist rejection. The disabled man has a romantic date with an able-bodied woman and audiences are left reassured that all is well. Able-bodied viewers get the pleasure of absolution and the gift of empathy, without being held to account for their complicity in the production of ableism.

Conclusion.

Playing to stereotypes of race and class *Intouchables* depicts laughing at the disabled as a characteristic of the black uncivilised clown, who does not understand that such humour is taboo within the French aristocratic society. I have argued that the disabled body is positioned as a comedic narrative prop,

used by the foolish clown in his performance of forbidden jokes. In this way, the humour *punches- through* the materiality of the disabled body while *punching-down* at the black lower-class. This discursive treatment, when viewed intersectionally is simultaneously objectifying, violent, ableist, racist and heterosexist.

The film contains discourse which reflects/produces ableist/gendered conceptions of disability as a 'dilemma for masculinity'. Trading on stereotypes of black men, the film positions Driss as the hyper-sexual expert who can rehabilitate the disabled man through heterosexual practices. *Intouchables* produces/reflects many ableist meanings directly through the language of cinema and the narrative script, perhaps because the comedy genre allows for what is normally unsayable to be said. Yet despite this liberty to say the unsayable, the film contains significant examples of gendered ableist enthymemes which silently produce disability as inherently 'unattractive/undesirable'. Unlike *Love Song*, the disabled figure is depicted as relationship-worthy, through a discourse that foregrounds desirable character traits. Nevertheless, in a similar style to *Love Song*, the ableist view that the disabled body constitutes an inherent problem for sexual appeal is produced through enthymematic silences, which assume that disability is an inherently undesirable/unattractive state. I have discussed how the film projects the disabled figure as having an internalised ableism with a corresponding fear of ableist romantic rejection. In the next chapter, I will demonstrate how the film *Morgan* (2011) repeats this iteration both through enthymematic silences and the narrative cinematic script. *Intouchables* offers an important depiction of Crip sex,

which subverts the asexual stereotype and the notion that spinal injuries result in sexual incapacity. This is a worthy contribution to the narrative and in the chapter that follows, I will demonstrate how the omission of Crip sex in *Morgan* results in a particularly ableist portrayal.

5. REPRESENTING DISABLED GAY MEN IN MICHAEL AKERS' AND SANDON BERG'S MORGAN

Ideologies operate hegemonically when we collectively consent to assumptions that are often unspoken because they are taken for granted as what is natural (Carrie Crenshaw, 1997 p.262).

Morgan (2012) has screened at numerous queer film festivals across the globe with director/writer Michael Akers and co-author Sandon Berg receiving praise for their efforts to bring the disabled gay figure out of the 'celluloid closet' and onto the queer screen. The film, as the title denotes, centres on the character of Morgan (Leo Minaya), a young gay man with a recently acquired spinal cord injury.

Morgan contains problematic disability tropes such as: tragedy/pity and the inspirational figure who learns self-acceptance. The narrative largely fails to recognise the impact of ableism and Morgan's problems are presented as the result of a bad attitude: an individual matter to be overcome.

Queer cinema, via its celebration of diversity, would seem an accessible location for the screening of Crip sex; however, *Morgan* maintains a normative gay sexual discourse, because the ability to obtain an erect penis is portrayed as essential for sexual performance. Alternative/adaptive methods for sexual performance are not depicted and *Morgan* also fails to represent the unique conditions that restrict queer disabled people's access to sexual citizenship. Queer disabled figures are rarely seen in film and other discursive locations. Filmmakers who depict disabled queers are arguably pioneers deserving recognition for representing those whose existence has been cinematically denied. Nevertheless, it is because such depictions are scarce that critical attention must be applied, not only to what is

spoken within the narrative script, but also to what is left unsaid. Queer disabled people may not feel gratitude for their 'on-screen' inclusion when such depictions reflect/produce ableism. I acknowledge that the film does contain some praiseworthy moments but, as I will demonstrate, these moments are overshadowed by an ableist ideology which is sometimes discursively produced within an enthymematic silence.

Synopsis: some victories are personal...

Winning is everything to Morgan Oliver, a professional cyclist who recently acquired a spinal cord injury after falling from his bike during a racing event. Prior to his accident, Morgan was employed as a bartender and had a boyfriend, but both his employment and his relationship ended once he became disabled. The film follows Morgan's personal journey from unemployed, single, and unable to compete in able-bodied sports, to achieving self-acceptance as he adapts to life as a disabled gay man.

Morgan categorises people as either winners or losers and he sees his newly disabled body as constituting a personal transformation from an athletic able-bodied winner into a disabled loser. Things start to change when, after walking home from the liquor store, Morgan meets Dean (Jack Kesy), a sensitive gay man who has spent years caring for his terminally ill mother, until her recent death. Dean, like Morgan, is grieving a loss and adjusting to a new life. After years of keeping his sexuality secret due to fears of parental rejection, Dean is trying to find himself again. Following a short dating period, the men fall in love, but Morgan

questions his romantic desirability, wondering why Dean is not troubled by his impairment. Anxious about his ability to perform, Morgan starts taking erectile dysfunction medication, but experiences high blood pressure (a side-effect of the medication) and is forced to stop taking the pills.

Determined to become a 'winner' once again, Morgan enters the wheelchair division in the 'Over the Hill' cycling race: the same competition in which his accident occurred. Pushing himself too hard, the training has an adverse impact upon his health and puts a strain on his relationship with Dean, his best friend Lane (Darra "Like Dat" Boyd), and his mother, Peg (Madalyn McKay). Angry that his friends and family do not support his desire to race and determined to conquer the hill where he broke his spine, or at least to die trying, Morgan races his chair down the steep incline. Once again, he loses control and crashes. Crying in anguish and despair, he drags himself along the ground in an agonising effort to climb back up the hill. Morgan finally accepts his limitations and begins to repair his relationships. He learns that he does not need sporting awards to be a winner and that some victories are personal.

Background and Film Reviews:

In a pre-release interview with film reviewer Lewis Whittington (2011), Akers explains the film's leading character: "Morgan had this image of himself as the hot bartender and cyclist before the accident. We focused the story on how does he regain his masculinity, attractiveness and self-esteem?" Akers' statement clearly assumes that a loss of masculinity, attractiveness and self-esteem is a natural and inevitable consequence of impairment. While recently disabled men may

experience reduced self-esteem and a sense of diminished masculinity/attractiveness, it is important to recognise that ableist/gendered culture is complicit in the production of these conditions. Later in this chapter, I will return to how the film represents disabled masculinity and self-image, but now I shall examine the filmmakers' source of inspiration and research methods.

Feminist disability scholar, Petra Anders (2016), in her blog post reviewing *Morgan*, praises Akers and Berg's 'deliberate research', resulting in a realistic portrayal of disability and sexuality. However, I disagree, and propose that the research is limited, resulting in a storyline that largely overlooks the impact of ableism. I also disagree with Anders' claim that the sexual representation is realistic, or the suggestion that realism equates with positivity, but I will return to this at a later point. Examining the limitations in Akers and Berg's research methods explains why the film largely overlooks the impact of ableism. Berg interviewed several young men with spinal cord injury, hoping to learn about how disability impacts upon their lives (Whittington 2011). Akers and Berg also tested their representation by gaining audience feedback at a pre-release screening. In the official movie press kit (United Gay Network, 2012), Berg describes his reaction to noticing a man in the audience using a wheelchair:

I was suddenly a wreck. Was he going to like the film, or would he think it was ridiculous? How did I have the audacity to think I could tell a story about what it is like to be in a wheelchair? This is all a big mistake. I kept watching him.

After the screening, Berg approached the man (Jerry) and discovered that he had recently acquired a spinal cord injury. Jerry told Berg "I'm alone and I'm in pain.

Most days I want to kill myself". Berg asked Jerry if he liked the movie and he replied: "I loved it. I saw so much of myself in Morgan".

People with recently acquired disabilities are likely to have ableist perspectives and beliefs, acquired from an ableist culture and a lack of exposure to alternative perspectives²⁰. They are likely to be grieving a loss of ability and may consider their fate to be worse than death. Identification with self-hating disabled characters on screen makes sense during this stage of adjustment and they may not know anyone with a disability. They are highly likely to be immersed in a medical model approach to impairment: a framework that centres on rehabilitating the body whilst largely overlooking the harmful effects of ableism. It is unlikely that they will be exposed to disability culture, community and politics during the rehabilitation stage. Disability activist Simi Linton in her memoir, *My Body Politic* (2006, p. 108) describes her path towards what she calls *claiming disability* identity:

I have become a disabled woman over time. I certainly would have rejected such a title in the beginning...It took many people to bring me into the fold. To help me move toward disability, carrying myself in the upright posture of a newly enfranchised citizen.

Most filmic representations of wheelchair users are about recently acquired spinal cord injuries, which project the tragedy of lost ability, and it is this iteration that reflects/produces ableist beliefs about disability. Anders (2016) claims that the tragedy and overcoming trope is unavoidable when realistically depicting the early

²⁰ I acknowledge that people with congenital disabilities may also experience an immersion in ableist culture and a lack of access to disability culture.

stages of acquired disability, but realistic portrayals do not ensure non-oppressive products (Darke 1994, p.341). Furthermore, I suggest that the problems associated with the tragedy and overcoming trope can be addressed by representing a longer time frame—depicting the characters' evolution into a *claiming disability* stage. Garland-Thomson (2007, p.118), explains how stories about disability community differ from traditional isolating portrayals. These stories, she notes, reshape disability narratives from an individual problem to be heroically overcome, into a social political narrative: a communal over-coming.

Berg questions his right and ability to represent “what it is like to be in a wheelchair”, but even his question is problematic because ‘what it is like’ varies greatly, according to type of impairment, when impairment was acquired, age, gender, sexuality, race, class and other intersections. If Akers and Berg had interviewed people within disability/Crip culture a different story might have been screened. Morgan’s feelings about loss of attractiveness, damaged masculinity and low self-esteem could have been portrayed as a stage of adjustment before he discovers that these feelings are largely a consequence of an ableist and gendered culture. Instead, his feelings are taken-for-granted as a natural consequence of impairment requiring a self-acceptance and individual overcoming.

In an interview for *Gay Star News*, Akers and Berg report that the inspiration for *Morgan* began when they were casting for another film and a disabled actor

auditioned for a role (Morgan 2012). The actor was deemed unsuitable, but the filmmakers took the opportunity to ask him questions about dating and relationships as a gay disabled man. Akers explains, “In the already body conscious gay community, he had to fight even harder to get others to see the person he really is” (Morgan 2012). Akers and Berg elected not to portray the difficulty of gaining community acceptance because they considered this narrative would not be relatable to enough people. Instead, they decided a more universal theme would be to focus on ‘the journey of self-acceptance’ (Morgan 2012). Akers states: “Accepting themselves is a large part of their journey and is an amazing testament to their strength of character” (Morgan 2012). A much larger part of this ‘journey’ is fighting to be accepted, loved and desired by others: a battle that goes on long after acquiring self-acceptance. Fighting ableism also takes ‘an amazing strength of character’, but *Morgan* leaves this story untold.

Morgan is deliberately and unashamedly an example of what the late comedian/activist Stella Young (2012) termed ‘inspiration porn’. Inspiration porn is a term used to describe discourse designed to inspire able-bodied people. The assumption behind this discourse is that disabled lives are unbearable and therefore disabled people’s everyday achievements must be extraordinary. Within this epistemological framework, able-bodied people put their problems into perspective by recognising that their able-bodied life is superior to disabled lives, and telling themselves that if disabled people can live a happy life, then so can they. *Morgan*’s inspirational achievement is portrayed as his ability to develop a positive attitude despite his disability: the character inspires because he keeps on

living and learns to be happy. In the final minutes of the film, Akers does include silent shots of Morgan serving a customer in a bike shop (suggesting he finds employment) and for a brief second, before the credits roll, he delivers an extreme close-up of an 'Over the Hill' cycling medal. These short images suggest that Morgan does achieve his racing goal and becomes employed again, but the film does not focus on these events; instead, the inspirational journey is portrayed as learning self-acceptance and it wrongly suggests that these other achievements naturally follow. *Morgan's* inspirational message has been observed by film reviewer, Joe Morgan who uncritically compares the film with inspiring discourse about the Paralympics. Morgan (2012) writes: "As the Paralympics continues to show off real-life superhumans who have battled against adversity to display their talents, a new drama is hoping to inspire as well". What makes the Paralympics inspiring within this discourse is not the skills demonstrated by professional athletes but their battle against adversity which is imagined as an extraordinary ability to keep on living, whereby their sporting success represents a capacity to stay positive despite impairment. Indeed, when it comes to filmic production, disabled actors must 'battle adversity to display their talents', as they are overlooked for roles in favour of able-bodied actors hired to portray disability (Pointon 1997b, pp.111-112). Akers and Berg admit they found inspiration for *Morgan* from talking with a disabled gay actor who they rejected for a role in another film (Morgan, 2012). When casting *Morgan*, the filmmakers gave the disabled role to an able-bodied actor and they tell this story without observing the irony. In the film's press kit (United Gay Network, 2012), the filmmakers explain that they needed an able-bodied actor to perform in flashback sequences, but the final cut did not include depictions of Morgan's former able-bodied life. Given the

story of the nameless disabled gay actor who inspired the film, Akers and Berg cannot pretend to be unaware about casting politics. Disabled people inspire filmmakers, who in turn create disabled characters to inspire able-bodied audiences. Finally, to rub salt into the wound of disabled people, the filmmakers hire an able-bodied actor to perform the part.

Morgan has won awards at queer film festivals, most notably winning best feature at the Sacramento International Gay and Lesbian Film Festival and the Chicago Gay and Lesbian International Film Festival. The film also won best screenplay at the Film Out Festival (2012) in San Diego (Morgan Awards, n.d). Film reviewers have praised the film for a rare portrayal of disability (Clay 2012; Craddock 2011; *Metro weekly* 2011; Goldberg 2011; Narloch 2011). Michelle Clay (2012) writes:

Morgan is not a sophisticated film, but it is a very human one. *Morgan* has an abundance of heart and speaks to the travails of the disabled in a way that is rarely addressed in cinema, queer or otherwise.

Presumably, Clay's reference to the rarity of *Morgan's* portrayal of disability denotes the representation of gay romantic/sexual disabled figures. Whilst this rarity is a valid observation and an important point, Clay ignores the film's ableist tropes, which are extremely common in cinema and worthy of critique²¹. Clay's reference to the film's 'heart' ignores how *Morgan* pulls at the pitying heartstrings of able-bodied people, unable to imagine a fate worse than disability and inspired by Morgan's ability to overcome.

²¹ The ableist tropes of tragedy, pity, inspiration and overcoming will be analysed, in detail, later in this chapter.

When examining film reviews it is interesting to note the ableism embedded within the language used by film critics. Congratulating the Sacramento International Gay and Lesbian Film Festival (SIGLFF) for screening the film, Chris Narloch (2011) praises *Morgan* for its representation of disability, romance and sex:

Kudos to SIGLFF for showing this film, which features a poignant depiction of romance (and sex) between a disabled person and a non-disabled person. Don't let the subject matter scare you away. *Morgan* is surprisingly entertaining.

Narloch is largely writing for queer readers²² and it is reasonable for him to assume that a queer culture would embrace diverse forms of sexuality, romantic expression and gendered embodiment on screen. Thus, his caution 'not to be scared by the subject matter' is particularly disturbing, and suggests an assumption on his part that his queer able-bodied readers are likely to imagine filmic depictions of disabled sexuality as unpleasant. Narloch's statement that *Morgan* is 'surprisingly entertaining' implies that his queer readers are likely to view cinematic representations of disabled sexuality as lacking entertainment value. Narloch fails to consider that his readers include disabled queers and their advocates, who may rush to the box office for a rare chance to see queer disabled sexual representation on screen. In the next section, I shall analyse the film and consider how *Morgan* portrays disability as an inherent tragedy to be overcome through a positive attitude. I will demonstrate that the 'tragedy and overcoming' inspirational trope is largely communicated by engaging an enthymematic silence which relies on a common-sense ideology of 'compulsory able-bodiedness' and 'compulsory heroism'.

²² Sacramento's local queer publication (*Outword magazine*).

Film Analysis

Part I – “The Only Disability in Life is a Bad Attitude” (Scott Hamilton).

The film begins the morning after Morgan returns home from hospital and in the opening five minutes, Akers carefully deploys techniques of *mise-en-scène* to visually introduce the story. In a slow opening sequence, the camera zooms in on numerous objects: cake decorated with the message ‘welcome home’, balloons printed with ‘get well soon’ wishes, and an upside-down racing bicycle. Sombre music plays as the opening credits roll and more telling objects are placed on screen: a shower chair in the bath and a commode chair next to the bed. Morgan is hiding under the bedsheet when his alarm chimes and he pulls back the covers while the camera cuts to a close-up of his legs. With a despondent manner, Morgan transfers into his wheelchair, while the camera closes in on his effort to lift his legs and feet into place using his hands. In the next shot the camera is positioned directly in front of sports trophies, which obscure the view of Morgan in his wheelchair. This visual positioning of the camera juxtaposes Morgan’s disabled embodiment with his previous able-bodied physical achievements. Morgan moves awkwardly through the apartment, bumping into door frames and glancing sadly at his bicycle. After struggling to reach a drink in his refrigerator he transfers to the sofa and turns on the television to watch a professional cycling race. The first verbal dialogue begins as the race commentators discuss how friction and speed can cause accidents. In the next shot, Morgan is shown sitting in front of the computer, presumably looking at pornography, whilst he unsuccessfully attempts to masturbate. Dramatic music signifies Morgan’s despair as he gives up his futile attempt to achieve an erection/climax. The scene

concludes with a shot of Morgan's computer screen which shows him entering a bid online for a sports wheelchair.

The *mise-en-scène* informs viewers that a tragic accident has recently resulted in an acquired disability. Sombre music, camera angles and contrasting positions of various props signal a dichotomy of ability/disability, which persuades audiences to feel pity for the recently disabled man. Morgan is shown masturbating and this would ordinarily seem like an unusual activity in a scene which depicts sadness and tragedy but instead we understand his failed masturbatory attempt to signify an additional loss associated with masculinity: his failed attempt at sexual pleasure is a defining part of the tragedy. Just like the opening scene of *Love Song* (discussed in Chapter Three), this scene states *what* is happening but *why* it is happening is produced via an enthymematic silence. The film states that the man has failed to successfully obtain an erection, but why this is the case is unspoken because viewers are expected to intuit that sexual pleasure cannot be attained due to disability. Without a thoroughly naturalised conception that disability is tragic, and that disabled men cannot enjoy sexual pleasure, the meaning in this scene would be unclear. Audiences would wonder why a man is attempting to masturbate within a sombre scene and why his attempt has failed. As I have explained in previous chapters, Aristotle's classical enthymeme denotes suppressed speech within verbal communications, whereby audiences supply the unspoken element by deferring to common-sense. Similarly, modern visual enthymemes require audiences to interpret the suppressed meaning within a sequence of images, by drawing upon a 'common-sense' logic derived from their

experiences/knowledges. Communication studies scholar Valerie Smith (2007 p.120) explains:

To be persuasive, enthymemes must identify with the common opinions of their intended audiences. Creators of visual enthymemes must discover these common opinions in context and culture, incorporating them into their messages.

Disability is widely imagined as a tragic condition within a culture that insists on 'compulsory able-bodiedness'. McRuer (2006 p.1) argues that able-bodiedness is imagined as the 'natural order of things', and hence the disabled body is dichotomously positioned as something gone awry with nature: a tragic corporeal flaw. Projecting objects on screen, associated with disability, such as mobility aids, form a rhetorical function particularly when contrasted with objects denoting able-bodied achievement, such as sporting awards and equipment. The visual images are intended to convey the message that something has gone awry. Morgan's failed attempt at masturbation silently denotes a damaged masculinity/sexuality, and the search for a sports wheelchair signifies an attempt to repair this 'gender trouble' by reclaiming his identity as a competitive, strong, active athletic figure.

Smith (2007, pp.119-122) explains that numerous interpretations of enthymemes are possible because they are "based on probabilities, not certainties", and visual enthymemes persuade via appeals to logic and emotion. *Morgan's* opening scene appeals to an ableist and gendered logic, whereby disability is imagined as naturally tragic, constituting a unique crisis for masculinity. The visual enthymemes' communicative success is based upon a common knowledge about

how disability/gender is imagined in culture. To what extent the visual images persuade audiences to feel sadness/pity depends upon whether the viewer accepts the tenet that disability is inherently tragic and incompatible with masculinity.

I acknowledge that many men with acquired disabilities do experience an initial sense of personal tragedy affecting their gendered identity, and my argument is not to claim otherwise. The problem rests with the gendered/ableist myth that these conditions constitute a natural, inevitable and universal Truth about disabled lives. Additionally, this myth is figured as a continuing Truth that must be accepted as a fact and reality to be addressed by the disabled person alone, leaving ableism out of the picture. Thus, the able-bodied are relieved of the responsibility to examine their own ableism and privilege. It is because of these dominant ableist/gendered beliefs that images symbolising disability/sexuality, when contrasted with images denoting ability/masculinity, have a silent discursive function. *Morgan* begins with a silent discourse in which disability is portrayed as naturally inferior compared with ablebodiedness and hence inherently tragic. Adding weight to the tragedy, the silent discourse projects disability as a unique crisis for masculinity, setting the scene for the overcoming narrative to follow.

Disability scholars and activists have widely critiqued the overcoming narrative for decades (DeVolder 2013; Grue 2015; Morris 1997; Rousso 2013; St. Pierre & Peers 2016; Titchkosky 2007; Wendell 1996; Young 2012). Feminist Disability

Studies scholar Beth DeVolder (2013p.747) argues that the overcoming story is a tactic for the promotion of normalisation. DeVolder (2013) expands upon Adrienne Rich's concept of *compulsory heterosexuality* (1980) and Robert McRuer's notion of *compulsory able-bodiedness* (1996) to argue that the overcoming story constitutes a form of *compulsory heroism*. In her study of Canada's annual 'Courage to Come Back' (CTCB) Awards²³, DeVolder (2013 p.747) describes how the overcoming narrative is a compulsory normalising apparatus. Firstly, the hero mantle is compulsory because disabled heroes cannot refuse the title and the discourse resists critique. Secondly, it performs and regulates "the normal" and supplants other stories. Thirdly, it is deeply gendered; and there is a "*compulsion to its iteration*" (DeVolder 2013 p.747). The 'inspirational hero' identity cannot be resisted because those who reject the claim attract attention for being modest and their humbleness inspires. Those who bestow the hero award believe they are being charitable and because calling someone inspiring is understood as a positive affirmation, the inspirational hero discourse resists critique. Disabled heroes are celebrated for a successful rehabilitation which is defined by their ability to overcome the tragedy of impairment. Thus, the 'normal' is produced and regulated according to the ability/disability dichotomy as disabled people are celebrated for striving to achieve 'normality' which is understood as demonstrating ability. Overcoming stories celebrate a successful rehabilitation whereby the hero often inspires simply because they do not end their lives or wallow in self-pity. Rehabilitation often involves the achievement of a normative gender performance, which may involve efforts to align with hyper-masculine/-feminine social roles

²³ CTCB Awards is a charitable event involving a dinner celebrating the achievements of 'everyday heroes', defined as people who inspire by overcoming personal challenges and giving to the community (DeVolder, 2013 p.747).

(DeVolder 2013, p.748). Just like the CTCB awards, cinematic narratives insist upon *compulsory heroism* through an overcoming story; however, filmic depictions of the 'struggle to overcome' often present a failure to achieve self-acceptance as life-threatening.

'Compulsory able-bodiedness' insists that, given a choice, all disabled people would choose to be able-bodied (McRuer 2006, p.9), and following this logic, disabled people must struggle to accept themselves. Failing to achieve self-acceptance has life-threatening consequences when disabled figures are portrayed as suicidal. Cinematic representations of disability have come under criticism for projecting the trope 'better off dead than disabled' (Haller 2010, p.177). Morgan declares that he would prefer to be dead than disabled when during an argument with his friend, Lane, he states:

You think I'm in this fucking wheelchair because I'm too lazy to walk or something. I'm stuck in it for fucking ever! You hear me? All these people keep saying that I'm so lucky to be alive, but I'd rather be fucking dead.

Unlike other 'better off dead' films such as *Million Dollar Baby* (2004) and *Me Before You* (2016), *Morgan* does not end with the death of the disabled figure. Instead, Morgan overcomes his death wish, finding happiness in living and his overcoming is portrayed as something inspirational: a unique special strength. In a later scene, following an argument with his partner (Dean), the film takes a dramatic turn when Morgan recklessly races down the hill where he acquired his disability. This moment could arguably be understood as an attempt at self-harm, and functions as the crisis point before a narrative turn. When a bruised and

tearful Morgan arrives home, he confesses his self-hatred and fears of romantic rejection to his mother (Peg). In this scene, Peg rightly reassures Morgan that his disability does not make him unlovable, but the narrative contains a troubling enthymematic silence. The scene begins when Morgan arrives home to find his mother anxiously waiting for him.

Peg – My God Morgan. Where have you been? Lane called, all upset and I – [Peg rises from the sofa, looking relieved and worried. The camera is positioned behind Morgan, and a medium shot frames Peg standing in front of him].

Morgan – I'm alright mum. [A high angle-medium shot frames Morgan with his head bowed looking dejected]. I haven't learned anything. [He appears remorseful as he looks up at Peg].

Peg – What are you talking about? What happened? [A medium close-up frames Peg looking confused and concerned].

Morgan – I chased Dean away. He broke up with me. [The camera is positioned at Morgan's height. A medium shot shows him looking up at Peg. His eyes are red from crying].

Peg – Hon, I'm sorry. [A medium close-up shot frames her sympathetic expression].

Morgan – No one will ever love me. [A neutral medium close-up frames his sad and defeated expression].

Peg – Someone will. You just need to find the right person. [A medium close-up of Peg nodding her head, with a reassuring smile].

Morgan – No. No one will ever love me because I hate myself. Don't you get it? [The camera cuts back and forth between the figures, showing their respective emotions. Morgan looks depressed and Peg appears unconvinced by his convictions].

Peg – Just because you are in a wheelchair doesn't mean that no one will ever love you. [A medium close-up shows Peg's reassuring smile, as she corrects Morgan. The camera cuts to a medium close-up of Morgan as he cries].

Morgan – Mum, I don't know what to do [While he cries, Peg strokes his cheek and hair].

Peg – You have hiked mountains, won races, you can do this, I know you can. You just need to find that part of you again. [A medium close-up continues to swap between the figures].

Morgan – I just realised I never say thank-you. Thank-you Mum. [They hug and Morgan keeps crying].

Peg – Why don't you go and get cleaned up? [A medium close-up shows Peg's loving expression, as she pulls back from the hug to look at Morgan. She wipes his tears away]. Do you need any help with anything?

Morgan – No, but if I need help, from now on, I will ask for it okay? [A medium close-up captures his tough resolve as his tears start to dry-up. The camera cuts to a medium close-up of Peg who is smiling, before cutting back to a high angle shot of Morgan returning the smile. A long-shot frames Morgan from behind, showing Peg patting him on the shoulder before walking away].

Peg assumes that Morgan hates himself and believes he is unlovable because he is disabled, but Morgan does not state that his feelings are related to disability.

Morgan's reasons for feeling unloved are suppressed because they are taken as self-evident. At no point is Morgan asked why he hates himself and feels unlovable/suicidal. I propose that the absence of an enquiring speech act, constitutes a *performative silence* because the illusion of disability as naturally tragic/undesirable is produced via what is left unspoken. I shall explain my concept of silence as performative and its interaction with enthymemes in greater detail, later in this thesis. My point is that *Morgan* demonstrates how the tragedy/undesirability of disability can be expressed in silence, as something that 'goes without saying', giving the illusion that disability is 'naturally' tragic/undesirable. In previous chapters I have demonstrated how ableist common-sense enables the undesirability of disability to be communicated via an enthymematic silence and *Morgan* repeats this stylised silence.

The scene equates Morgan's ability to live a happy life with his athletic victories however what is unsaid, yet silently conveyed, is the ableist premise that being happy and loving oneself, as a disabled person, requires special ability—akin to 'hiking mountains'. In locating disability as a personal battle to be overcome the film largely leaves ableism unmarked and this performs the illusion of able-bodiedness as 'natural' and 'normal'. Sustaining this illusion requires the compulsive iteration of overcoming and heroism within discursive products.

Morgan does include brief moments when ableism is obvious and held to account. In an important scene, Dean begins to descend a flight of stairs, leaving Morgan behind, before realising his mistake and apologising. Morgan responds by describing his frustration about inaccessible spaces:

Morgan – The whole world is built for leggers.

Dean – Leggers?

Morgan – It's a word I made up for you people who have legs.

Dean – You have legs.

Morgan – For people who can use them.

Dean – I think it's going to sweep the nation. You know, 'leggers'.

Morgan – It will you watch.

Unfamiliar with the terms 'bi-pedal' or 'able-bodied', Morgan must invent the term 'leggers' because he is isolated from disability community/culture. It is common for cinematic representations to isolate disabled figures from each other (Norden

1994, p.1), and Akers and Berg follow this trend. Nevertheless, it is uncommon for filmic portrayals to identify the social production of disablement and most representations project a medical model, whereby disability is imagined as entirely a personal problem to be overcome (Darke 2010; Longmore 1985; Markotic 2016; Mogk 2013; Norden 1994). Whilst Akers and Berg predominantly follow the trend they provide some consideration for socially disabling conditions and this offers a much needed, if not irritatingly brief, inclusion of a social model.

The film also includes a scene where Morgan's wheelchair is portrayed as liberating, rather than as a symbol of tragedy. When Morgan's new chair arrives, he excitedly assembles it and Akers delivers close-up images of the chair's slick new wheels. Morgan spins around in his new chair while joyously exclaiming, "Woo hoo!" and "fuck yeah!". He attempts to pop the front wheel up and falls over backwards whilst laughing and shouting out: "Woo! Alright. Awesome!". This scene delivers a welcome depiction of the liberation that wheelchairs offer and counters common representations of wheelchairs as objects that bind. *Morgan's* portrayal of a happy liberated figure is far too brief as the filmmakers return to the tragedy discourse.

Morgan frequently describes his disabled self as a loser compared to his former winning able-bodied self. Immediately following sex, Morgan and Dean share their past experiences. Dean explains his time in a criminal gang when he got into trouble for fighting and expresses a wish that he could remove his gang tattoo,

whilst Morgan explains how his scar symbolises loss. These corporeal signs form a focal point for a discussion about 'toughness' and regret. Morgan's masculine self-image is presented as damaged because he is no longer able to compete as an able-bodied athlete. Athletic competition, as a disabled man, is discursively presented as 'not the same'. In this scene, the couple are in bed and Dean is propped-up on his elbow, looking down at Morgan. Close-up shots convey intimacy between the couple:

Dean – I wish I could wash these damn things off [indicating gang tattoos]. I was in the military for a while. Pretty boring shit really. I thought of doing things to make it interesting. Things got a little too interesting. I got into trouble. Just for fighting, nothing serious.

Morgan – Tough guy?

Dean – You would think so, huh. No, I wasn't. I heard about my mum. It seemed like forever but when I got out I just wanted to be by her side. I promise the people I love that I would always be there for them. I don't know if that makes me tough.

Morgan – I say it does.

Dean – Besides, what about your scar? It is way tougher.

Morgan – It took everything. [A close-up shot frames Morgan from Dean's perspective. Morgan turns his gaze away from Dean and a sad expression emphasises his feelings of loss].

Dean – Do you think it changed you? [The two men fill the frame in an intimate close-up of their faces which shows Dean looking down at Morgan].

Morgan – Of course; I was a winner.

Dean – I can see that. [Indicating Morgan's trophies, on the dresser].

Morgan – I look at those things and wonder who that guy was. [Camera cuts to a slow panning shot of Morgan's extensive collection of gold cycling trophies, before cutting back to a close-up of Morgan's serious expression]. I'd give anything to be him again.

Dean – Do you think you can still compete?

Morgan – It's not the same.

Dean – Why is it not?

Morgan – Because I'm not the same. [Morgan looks resigned to his tragic fate. The camera cuts to a medium shot of the couple, showing Dean with his head resting on Morgan's chest].

Morgan's belief that disability makes him a loser is repeated again in a scene with his friend, Lane. Morgan has a chance to return to athletic competition; however, he lacks the financial means to pay for a racing wheelchair, so he begins asking people for a loan. When Lane refuses to loan Morgan money, he refers to his fear of remaining a loser. Here, the film critiques the notion that masculinity demands a competitive, tough winning identity via the character of Lane. In this scene, Morgan interrupts Lane at the bar where she works to ask for money.

Lane – I'm not giving you no money for no damn racing wheelchair. [Lane is shown standing behind a tall bar, as she wipes the counter and looks unimpressed].

Morgan – I have to beat that hill! [A high-angle medium shot shows Morgan's low position in relation to the inaccessible tall bar. He looks desperate].

Lane – You are too damn competitive man. Now you want to try and beat a mound of dirt!

Morgan – I'm not a quitter!

Lane – You got to stop this macho bullshit and accept the fact that there are some things that you just cannot do anymore. [Pointing at Morgan as she lectures him on how things really are].

Morgan – No, I don't. I don't have to accept being a loser. [Morgan looks at his legs, when he says the word 'loser' – emphasising his disability as constituting a 'loser identity'].

Lane – You're not a loser. [Lane adopts a condescending posture, tone and expression].

Morgan – I know. I'm just surrounded by them! [Morgan storms out looking angry].

In these scenes, Morgan identifies disability as a threat to his masculine identity and this sets the stage for his toughest competition, which is presented as the battle to re-establish masculinity and become a winner again. Lane's character represents a counter-discourse because she describes his competitive urge as 'macho bullshit'; however, this message is ultimately undermined through the film's projection of the 'overcoming trope'. The film's narrative closure insists that Morgan's overly competitive masculine attitude is not the problem; rather, the issue is that he needs to harness that competitive characteristic to overcome disability and learn self-acceptance.

In one of the final scenes, after a failed attempt at racing down the hill, Lane visits a sore and remorseful Morgan, who has finally accepted his limitations. In recognition of Morgan's 'victory over the self', she gives him a medal inscribed with the words, "some victories are just personal". This medal functions as a narrative tool, symbolising the inspirational achievement of disabled self-acceptance. He is literally given an award for learning to accept his limitations as a disabled man.

This patronising discourse insists that Morgan has achieved something extraordinary because he has learnt to live a happy life despite being disabled. The film critiques the 'masculine hero' mantle but ultimately ends by affirming it because Lane awards Morgan a medal for his 'heroic overcoming'. In *Morgan*, the traditional gender norm of 'competitive masculinity' is reconfigured along ableist lines because the film wrongly suggests that disabled men cannot compete against others, but instead they must battle with themselves, so that "some victories are just personal".

I have demonstrated how *Morgan* engages discourses of 'self-acceptance' and 'personal victory', portraying disability as an individual problem to be overcome. The film's narrative reads like the well-known and widely critiqued 'inspiration porn' of former ice-skating champion and cancer survivor, Scott Hamilton: "the only disability in life is a bad attitude". This *compulsory heroism* denies legitimate space to express anger at ableism and conceals social/cultural systems of oppression (DeVolder 2013 p.750). The film operates in a similar way to literary and cinematic narratives of self-hating queer figures who learn self-acceptance. Imagine if contemporary queer film depicted an ideology of *compulsory heterosexuality* whereby the homosexual figures are depicted as struggling to love themselves or to see themselves as lovable, with their less-than-ideal sexual identity. What if these figures attracted a hero mantle for not committing suicide, and were projected as inspiring because they managed to find happiness, despite their tragic sexual preference? What kind of reception would the film receive if Morgan's success was constituted by the degree to which he could approximate

heteronorms? I am not suggesting that *compulsory heterosexuality* and *compulsory able-bodiedness* are identical axes of oppression but rather that they have similar contours. *Compulsory heterosexuality* is clearly oppositional to queer politics and is obviously incompatible with the objectives of queer film; however, *Morgan* projects this same unthinkable ideological shape onto the screen when representing disabled identity. If queer cinema presented *compulsory heterosexuality* as a natural and common-sense ideology that can be clearly communicated within an enthymematic silence, queer audiences would protest. Queer activists and allies would chant their political mantra, promoting queer pride and rejecting shame. *Morgan* largely omits recognition of Crip pride/politics/culture, and, as I shall demonstrate, it condescendingly depicts able-bodied figures as tolerant, caring lovers able to ‘rescue’ their disabled partners from a negative self-image.

Part II – Love and Care.

Morgan is portrayed as a hot, sexy gay disabled figure so unlike other discursive treatments of disabled people (Rozengarten & Brook, 2016), the disabled body is not portrayed as physically unattractive and undesirable. The film also, to a certain extent, attempts to counter ableist notions of disability as pitiable. In a pertinent scene, Morgan tells Dean about his decision to break up with his previous pitying partner.

Dean – He left you while you were in the hospital?

Morgan – I kind of ran him off. I couldn’t stand the way he kept looking at me. He was just sticking around for the wrong reasons. Just out of obligation. Not because he wanted to. I don’t need that pity.

Dean – Well you were right to dump him.

This scene portrays a disabled figure who rejects conditions of pity because Morgan describes unwanted pity and obligation as the rationale behind efforts to push away his former partner. Dean validates Morgan's decision to put an end to the pity-based relationship, and it is clear that viewers are expected to agree with him. In this way, the film challenges ableist pity; however, the break-up story is not depicted, and consequently, the filmmakers privilege a narrative about Morgan's adjustment to disability while ignoring his ex-partner's need to acclimatise. This simplifies the story, casting the former partner as shallow and unloving.

While Morgan appears to reject a pity-based relationship, the film stops short of projecting a disabled figure who starts out believing he is worthy of romantic love. Instead, as I described earlier, Morgan must learn to love himself before he is able to identify himself as lovable. It is clear as the film progresses that Morgan's urge to push his partner away was likely a misguided 'noble-breakup', whereby he spares his lover from what he perceives to be an undesirably burdensome fate. Morgan repeatedly questions Dean's commitment because he imagines his disability as a potential threat to their happiness. This sense of unworthiness is ultimately disproved because the film ends with a happy, romantic, successful coupling. Nevertheless, there are some problematic and complex representations of the able-bodied partner, to which I now turn.

Ableist culture imagines the capacity to stay with a disabled partner as inspiring and courageous (Haller 2010, p.129). Dean is primarily portrayed as having this uniquely tolerant and inspiring quality because he provides care. Feminist Disability scholars Adrienne Asch and Michelle Fine (1988 p.18) describe how able-bodied male heterosexual partners are often believed to be 'saintly' because they suffer the burden of caring for a disabled woman. I suggest that Dean is portrayed as especially unique because he is largely presented as a nurturing/sensitive/caring gay man and these associations are stereotypically attributed to women. If Dean was a woman, I wonder whether the caring role would be portrayed as special/extraordinary to the same extent. Indeed, Morgan describes Dean's caring commitment for his late mother as something worthy of personal pride.

Dean – I was taking care of my mother. She got cancer and it took a while. It became my life. We don't have to talk about this.

Morgan – It's fine. Why not? I think it is something you should be proud of.

Dean does not always demonstrate a unique special caring/loving quality, worthy of pride. When Morgan decides to ignore medical advice by participating in athletic competition, Dean worries that Morgan's risky behaviour will increase his disability, causing him to require higher levels of care. In this instance, it is not the existing presence of disability but the potential for increased disability, that leads him to question his commitment. Dean's willingness to stay in the relationship is dependent upon Morgan's level of disability remaining consistently the same²⁴. At stake is Dean's mental health which threatens to unravel under the potential

²⁴ See Garland-Thomson (2007 p.114) for a discussion on why it is 'tenacious cultural fantasy' to imagine bodies as predictably stable.

burden of care. Dean's objections to Morgan's risky pursuits are not grounded in an understandable fear that the person he loves may hurt himself or be injured but rather reflect his self-interests. In a telling scene, Morgan angrily arrives at Dean's apartment in the middle of the night to complain about a lack of support regarding the pursuit of his racing goal and to ask his partner to loan him money. When Morgan does not get what he wants, the couple argue before temporarily breaking-up. Lighting plays an important part in this scene because low-key side lighting provides a single light source when shooting Morgan – creating a sinister shadow over half his face. In contrast, Dean is framed by a high-key three-point lighting system, which gives a naturalistic effect and provides a greater detail of his facial expressions, thereby enabling viewers to more easily observe his emotional response and encouraging an empathy with the character.

Morgan – Dean! [Morgan bangs loudly on the door]. Come on, open-up, Dean! [Dean opens the door and Morgan angrily barges in]. I normally wouldn't be asking you something like this, but I need to borrow some money. I have to pay for my racing wheelchair myself. [Spoken in a whiny tone].

Dean – What happened? [Dean sounds slightly annoyed. A medium shot shows him standing in front of Morgan, with an unimpressed posture and expression].

Morgan – Wes (Morgan's racing sponsor), he's listening to the doc. I don't know, I told him I am fine, but he does not want the liability.

Dean – The doctor says you are not fit to race? [A medium shot shows Dean with a concerned and irritated expression.]

Morgan – What does he know?! Look, I can pay you back. If I move in here, I can pay you back even faster.

Dean – Jesus Christ, are you listening to yourself? The doctor said no racing. [A medium shot shows Dean leaning against the wall. He looks perplexed by Morgan's attitude. He reacts with an annoyed disbelief that Morgan is ignoring the doctor's advice. Emphasis is conveyed when Dean repeats the doctor's instructions to Morgan using a firm tone of voice].

Morgan – Why is everybody trying to stop me? It's my decision. [Medium shot shows Morgan as he starts angrily and defensively gesturing with his hands].

Dean – No it's not your decision! [Raising his voice and gesturing in frustration with his hands to emphasise his point]. What if something happens to you? [Camera cuts to a medium close-up of Morgan. He has an expression of anger and disbelief]. What if you get hurt? Who is going to take care of you? Me? [Camera cuts back to a medium shot of Dean, showing his increasing desperation to make Morgan see sense. Dean lowers his voice, looking worn out]. I already went through this with my mother. I'm not going to be trapped again! [He leans back against the wall, looking exhausted].

Morgan – Trapped? [A medium close-up shows Morgan, tilting his head slightly as he speaks with judgmental tone of voice. The image suggests that Morgan has finally caught Dean out – for acting in the same way as his former partner, after all].

Dean – I didn't mean trapped. [Spoken in a low voice, looking away from Morgan and towards the floor. He slightly rolls his eyes in frustration].

Morgan – Then I think you should start saying what you really mean. [The camera cuts to a medium shot of Morgan, who looks angry and cynical].

Dean – Morgan, I can't handle this right now. [Dean puts his hands together and moves them up and down to emphasise his inability to manage the situation].

Morgan – Are you breaking up with me? [A medium close-up shot of Morgan shows his questioning judgemental expression].

Dean – No. I don't know. I just need some time to clear my head. [Spoken in a gentle tone with a pleading expression].

Morgan – You asked me to move in here and now you don't even know what you want? [Referring to an invitation that Dean made earlier to help Morgan financially].

Dean – Look, I was going to tell you during dinner. I decided to keep my promise to my mother. [The camera cuts to a close-up of Morgan, who responds to Dean's words with an expression of contempt. It is clear he thinks a promise to a dead person is not as important as his needs]. I'm going to the mountains alone.

Morgan – But I told you we can go after the race. [Spoken in a condescending tone. Morgan is ignoring the fact that Dean promised to scatter his mother's ashes on a specific date of significance].

Dean – Look, I realised I still don't have closure with my mother's death.

Morgan – What difference does that make? She will still be dead after the race. [A medium close-up shows Morgan's hostility].

Dean – If you weren't in that chair! [Dean's words indicate his urge to react with violence. He points at Morgan, with a thinly veiled expression of rage].

Morgan – If I wasn't in this chair you wouldn't be leaving me. [Morgan's voice sounds whiny and he shakes his head in judgement. The camera cuts back to a medium close-up of Dean].

Dean – No. You don't understand a goddamn thing Morgan! [The camera cuts to a close-up of Morgan shaking his head. His lips are pursed, showing contempt. The camera cuts back to Dean, who turns away from Morgan, leaning against the wall]. I think you should leave!

Morgan – Quit! That is what you do best isn't it? [Spoken in a judgemental voice. With pursed lips to emphasis his contempt, Morgan walks slowly past Dean on his way to a

dramatic exit]. I will win without you. Without anybody. I will get what I deserve! [Shouting to emphasis his spiteful angry resolve].

Dean – Maybe you already did. [Spoken in a quiet tone. Dean looks away from Morgan in a dismissive manner. The camera cuts to a close-up of Morgan who shakes his head with an expression of pain and anguish. Morgan quickly leaves and a long-shot frames Dean, as he puts his hands in his pockets, tilting his head in sad contemplation].

Audiences are clearly expected to sympathise with Dean, and this is conveyed not only through the lighting but also because Morgan is such an unsympathetic character in this scene. The scene positions Dean as the suffering partner forced to bear the burden of care for a selfish disabled lover. It is problematic to cast the disabled character as the unlikeable bad guy in this scene. Firstly, while it is easy to judge Morgan for risking future injury by ignoring medical advice, it is important to recognise that disabled people are not always granted the right of self-determination, which encompasses a right to take risks and bear the consequences. The idea that disabled people are especially vulnerable can lead able-bodied people to enact an over-protective control over their choices (Marsh & Kelly 2018, p.308; Perske 1972, p.1). Additionally, the notion of disability as social burden may lead to the 'risk-taking' rights of disabled people being denied. It is the potential of being trapped by an additional caring burden which primarily drives Dean's fears.

Secondly, in emphasising a burden of care discourse the film overlooks the interdependent nature of relationships and it is unclear what positive contributions Morgan offers his partner. This omission is significant, because a failure to

recognise that disabled people contribute to intimate relationships and society at large drives an ideology of disability as burden. Caring for the disabled becomes a selfless charitable social duty driven by pity. It is Morgan's insensitive and selfish behaviour which intensifies Dean's burden and threatens to ruin the couple's relationship. It is because Morgan is portrayed as selfish, demanding and insensitive that Dean appears uniquely tolerant. Dean resists the urge to hit Morgan; however, within his carefully controlled rage, sits the unspoken manifestation of pity. When Dean exclaims, "if you weren't in that chair...", the audience is expected to apply meaning to the unfinished statement. Clearly, what is left unstated refers to the desire to hit Morgan: "if you weren't in that chair" [I would hit/punch you]. The desire to hit/punch Morgan is unspoken, but Dean's expression contains another unstated element. The audience is expected to know why Morgan's wheelchair using status prevents Dean from acting upon his violent urge. What is unspoken but produced via an enthymematic silence is that Morgan's disability qualifies him for a special tolerance because disabled people are imagined in ableist culture as vulnerable and pitiful.

Intimate partner violence should be unacceptable regardless of ability/disability, yet the rationale for its avoidance, here, is clearly based upon the presence of pity, rather than the inherent injustice of violence itself. It is pity, not compassion, that prevents Dean from acting upon his violent urge. Dean's angry words deny compassion as they are clearly intended to hurt. When Morgan insists "I will get what I deserve", Dean responds, "Maybe, you already did", reflecting an ableist belief that disability is not only a bad thing, but also a punishment. Pity towards

the disabled is unspoken but clearly produced via enthymematic silent discursive techniques. In an apparent attempt to elicit feelings of guilt, Morgan asserts “If I wasn’t in this chair, you wouldn’t be leaving me”. It may not be the filmmaker’s intention to portray Morgan as correct in this assertion, but given Dean’s fears about obligation, burden and emotions of pity, I suggest that Morgan is at least partially right. The lovers’ argument diminishes the portrayal of Dean as an extraordinarily resilient and caring partner because his saintly halo slips when he indicates a propensity for violence. Nevertheless, this diminished sainthood is largely overridden by a narrative structure that ultimately encourages audiences to interpret Dean’s response as understandable in the circumstances.

Disability law scholar Frankie Sullivan (2017, p.414), describes how discourses of extreme burden have been used in court, as mitigating factors, when sentencing partners and family members who have used lethal violence towards the disabled person in their care. These cases have raised questions about the neoliberal mentality that fails to support disabled people and their families and friends who supply unmet care needs. Sullivan explains how caring for the disabled is portrayed as an ‘unreasonable’ and ‘unrelenting’ burdensome task, pushing ‘ordinary people’ to ‘snap’. Narratives of burden not only excuse violence towards disabled people, but wrongly send the message that ‘disability incites violence’ (Sullivan 2017, p.414).

Shakespeare (1999b, p.165), explains that it is important to consider filmmakers' intentions when developing a balanced evaluation of disability representation; otherwise, it is easy to reduce complex/nuanced portrayals as definitively negative, offensive and discriminatory. It is unlikely that Akers and Berg intend to excuse violence against disabled people or convey the message that 'disability incites violence'. Rather, the argument/break-up scene is most likely intended to perform a narrative function. The scene marks a point within the narrative arc when everything falls apart for the protagonist. This narrative point propels the story forward by engaging a strong dramatic effect. The film's narrative turn drives Morgan onto the path of redemption yet, in depicting Morgan as the figure seeking redemption, Dean appears blameless. Morgan is to blame for the relationship breakdown and must make amends. Within the context of the storyline and irrespective of the film-makers' intentions, the portrayal of potential intimate partner violence as a 'natural' reaction to burdensome care, remains highly problematic, and reflects a potentially lethal ideology for disabled people.

Representations of disabled people's romantic happiness and success should not be portrayed as a situation dependent upon partners who are: unique, inspiring, courageous, highly tolerant and resilient. Such portrayals inform disabled people that loving them takes special strength. While *Morgan* does not depict Dean as a lover with these relentless superpowers as he does falter under pressure; however, the film does present partnering with imperfect, ordinary, and non-saintly able-bodied people as uniquely fraught. In cinema, able-bodied/disabled romantic couples are either defined by saintly care, or as relationships under threat when

ordinary able-bodied lovers snap under the strain. It is therefore unsurprising that the presence of disability may be viewed by disabled and non-disabled people alike as a barrier to romantic and sexual success, or as a disqualification for sexual citizenship. I shall now turn to the way the film configures Morgan as holding an 'irrational' fear of romantic rejection and Dean as the 'rational rescuer' who teaches him to overcome his 'internalised oppression'²⁵.

In their ground-breaking work *The Sexual Politics of Disability: Untold Desires* (1996), Disability Studies scholars Tom Shakespeare, Kath Gillespie-Sells and Dominic Davies interviewed disabled people about barriers to being sexual. They report that disabled people show 'internalised oppression' by believing that their disability disqualifies them from sexual and romantic life (Shakespeare, Gillespie-Sells & Davis 1996 pp.40-42). One respondent (Daniel) reports:

I know if I met Mr Right, this gorgeous, perfect person I have been waiting for, that nothing would happen, I would be too frightened to allow it to happen...there is something about my distress about my impairment, which although it is so much less now, still holds me back.

The film depicts this 'internalised oppression' when Morgan questions Dean's affections. While the portrayal of a disabled figure with an internalised oppression may realistically represent many people with a recently acquired disability²⁶, there is a problem with this depiction. As I have outlined previously, realism does not automatically equate to a positive depiction of disability (Darke 1994, p.341).

²⁵ 'Internalised oppression' refers to attitudes and beliefs that are held by oppressed people which produce conditions of self-harm or self-denial (Shakespeare, Gillespie-Sells & Davies 1996 p.40).

²⁶ I acknowledge that people with a 'long-term' disability and those with congenital disabilities may also feel this way.

Representing the internalised oppression of disabled people is highly problematic if it does not coincide with a critique of an ableist culture which encourages this self-view. In *Morgan*, the disabled figure must learn to overcome his internalised oppression with the help of a caring able-bodied man. This is a problematic and well-established cinematic trope, whereby the disabled figure's anxieties are configured as "silly and unfounded" when the able-bodied rescuer helps them to realise that there is nothing to fear (Norden 1994, pp.30-42). Consider the projection of 'internalised ableism' in the following scene:

Morgan – You're just too cool about this wheelchair thing. It's unnerving. It's got to bother you at least a little bit? [The men are shown seated closely together on the sofa. The camera cuts between each character, delivering medium close-up shots].

Dean – What if it does? [Spoken in a gentle tone].

Morgan – So you're saying it does? [Morgan displays a concerned expression].

Dean – Sure, I wish you could walk and do some of the things that I want to do, and I know you want to do them too, but you can't. It's not your fault. [Slightly shaking his head, with a reassuring tone and slight smile].

Morgan – Should I be worried? [Morgan raises his eyebrows questioningly].

Dean – No. This is why I don't like talking about it, see? It bothers you more than it bothers me. What can I do to prove it to you? [Spoken in a light-hearted reassuring tone].

Morgan – Nothing; it's me. [Looking down at his lap and shaking his head in a dismissive way] Forget it. Could you just get us some more wine please? [Morgan smiles at Dean in a clear effort to suppress his sad emotion].

Dean – I'm going to be in the wheelchair tonight, so you don't have to think about it: how's that? [Dean sits in Morgan's chair and goes into the kitchen for more wine, whilst Morgan calls to him].

Morgan – Dean! You made your point. Dean! [Morgan is smiling and chuckling].

Dean – I spilled some wine. Had to cheat to get the paper towels. [Dean returns with the wine and a big smile on his face. Morgan laughs and then cries].

Dean – Sorry, I was just fooling around. I'm sorry. I didn't mean to. [A medium omniscient shot frames Dean kneeling in front of Morgan].

Morgan – No, listen it's great. I really needed this. I didn't think anyone could understand but you do. [Dean extends both arms to hold Morgan's face affectionately].

Dean – Are you sure you are okay?

Morgan – You just make me freak out sometimes. I have to keep reminding myself that I'm fucking handicapped. In case you decide you're not coming back. So I won't be surprised or hurt.

Dean – Morgan, you got to know I'm falling for you. [The camera slowly closes in on the two men to emphasise their intimacy].

Morgan – Really? [Dean kisses Morgan] I'm just afraid that I can't do the things that you want because I can't. [Morgan leans forward and holds Dean's face to encourage direct eye contact and emphasis his point].

Dean – It's ok, let's figure it out together. [They share a passionate kiss and classical piano music begins to play. The music functions as a sound bridge to the next scene, where the couple have sex for the first time].

When Morgan states “you are too cool about this wheelchair thing, its unnerving”, it is clear that he imagines his disability as inferior to able-bodiedness and hence

undesirable. Dean encourages Morgan to improve his self-esteem and view himself as romantically worthy. In this way the film may educate ableist viewers to see disabled people as a valid relationship choice. However, this educational benefit may come at the price of irritating disabled viewers who yearn for depictions of proud disabled figures. Proud disabled figures do not need the able-bodied to rescue them from themselves. The film omits any recognition that Morgan's fears are influenced by an ableist culture that typically imagines disabled people to constitute a poor relationship choice. Instead, Morgan's fears are projected as 'unfounded' because love conquers all. It is Morgan's negative self-view rather than ableist culture that must be surmounted before the lovers can skip off into their happy ending. Dean acts as the rational, benevolent, able-bodied rescuer who helps Morgan to overcome his fears.

Morgan describes a need to mitigate romantic expectations by constantly reminding himself that he is "fucking handicapped". The term 'handicapped' originated as a reference to pity-based street begging, and denotes having one's 'cap in hand'. Consequently, the use of this term has pity connotations: Morgan is literally stating that he must never forget that he is 'fucking pitiable'. Indeed, it is a capacity for 'fucking' which primes Morgan's fear that Dean will break up with him. When Morgan states: "I'm just afraid that I can't do the things that you want, because I can't", and Dean replies, "Let's work it out together", what is unspoken but clearly produced is that Morgan is referring to his lack of sexual capacity. Disabled men are widely imagined within ableist culture to lack sexual capacity and because this is a taken-for-granted belief, Morgan's fear about sexual

performance is easily communicated via an enthymematic silence. The unspoken element appeals to common ableist myths and stereotypes about disabled men's sexual capacities. In the next scene, the couple have sex (aided by medication): they work it out together, but ultimately, Morgan's sexual citizenship is stripped away. In the next section, I will further problematise the film's depiction of disabled sex.

Part III – Sex and Disability

The film's storyline depicts Morgan's efforts to reclaim a 'damaged' masculinity via participation in sex and athletic competition, yet when one option fails the other avenue is consequentially denied. Initially, Morgan obtains medical approval to participate in athletic competition, albeit with a caution not to over-exert himself. Morgan also requests and receives, again with a caution, pharmaceutical assistance to enable him to have sex.

Morgan – I got a question. I'm having problems with my equipment not working right.

Dr – Are you able to achieve erection?

Morgan – No. So, I'm hoping you can give me something to help.

Dr – I can prescribe an erectile dysfunction pill. You take it ahead of time. Be aware of some side-effects: headache, dizziness, nausea. Most likely you won't be able to ejaculate. They told you that in the hospital, didn't they?

Morgan – Yeah

Morgan returns home, takes the pill and immediately begins masturbating. Having not allowed enough time for the pill to work, he fails to obtain an erection and gives up in frustration. Moments later, in the shower, he gets an erection and excitedly

screams, "About fucking time, Woo!". Morgan's sexual problems initially appear easily and normatively remedied, but his pleasure is short-lived. After experiencing side-effects from the medication, Morgan returns to the doctor. In this scene, the doctor retracts his approval for Morgan to race and takes him off the erectile dysfunction medication.

Dr – Morgan, it's not good. Your blood pressure is too high. I think we need to take you off the erectile dysfunction medication.

Morgan – What! Why? [He appears stressed].

Dr – It can contribute to high blood pressure. It might have made you pass out.

Morgan – But, I don't want to stop having sex. [looking increasingly anxious].

Dr – You shouldn't put pressure on yourself to live life like you did before the accident. You need to adjust to the way things are now.

Morgan – Whatever. Just give me the ok for the race. [He appears irritated].

Dr – I'm sorry. I can't do that. Not until your blood pressure levels out.

Morgan – When will that be? [Sounding anxious].

Dr – I will see you in two weeks.

Morgan – It will be too late by then! [Spoken with desperation].

Dr – I'm sorry. I can't say you're healthy if you're not. Maybe next year.

The doctor's instruction not to expect to live like he did before the accident, contains an enthymematic silence. What is silently conveyed is that Morgan must accept a life without sex. The context of the scene, and cultural myths about the sexual capabilities of men with spinal cord injuries, enables the audience to supply

meaning to the unspoken script. Sex, in this sense, is understood as penetrative sex, and reflects a culturally normative and traditional ideology about what constitutes legitimate sexual activity. This phallogentric sexual narrative is ableist because it fails to imagine alternatives for sexual practice. As I explained in the previous chapter, disabled people may engage innovative ways of performing sexual acts, including the relocation of erogenous zones. Disabled people have also developed new ways to please their partners by adapting erotic environments to suit their access needs (Siebers 2011, p.149). It is frustrating that the film begins by offering a rare and much-needed representation of a sexually active gay man, who is shown receiving and providing sexual pleasure, only to take sex away due to the disabled figure's failure to sustain normative penetrative sex. At no point does the film return to Morgan's sexual activity, and the audience is left with the impression that he cannot continue enjoying masturbation and sex. This not only sustains the ableist myth that disabled men (particularly those with paralysis) cannot enjoy sexual pleasure but reflects/produces the cultural expectations and myths surrounding normative sexuality, albeit normative gay sexual practice.

Disability theorist Tobin Siebers (2011, p.150) describes how normative penetrative sex with its beginning, middle and end may not suit disabled people and I contend it may also be unsuitable to plenty of able-bodied people. He notes that sex acts, for disabled people, may not include an action or performance defined by distinct stages. Disabled sex "may extend beyond the limits of endurance for penetrative sex, resembling slow-dancing instead of the twist", and may appear kinky compared with able-bodied sex (Siebers 2011, p.150). Queer

cinema would appear the perfect location for the screening of non-conventional, diverse, kinky Crip sex, but instead, Akers and Berg project a normative/conservative sexual style which their disabled figure fails to sustain. “Disabled sexuality has long been closeted” (Siebers 2011, p.155) and with the collapse of a chemically induced erection, Akers and Berg cast their disabled queer figure back into the celluloid sexual closet.

Crip sex disrupts the myth that authentic sex must be spontaneous because many disabled people need to plan for sex (Siebers 2011, p.150). Preparing for sexual activity may involve setting up slings, lifts, and modified beds, teaching new lovers about bodily movement/structure and performance, and arranging privacy in supported settings. The filmmakers briefly depict Morgan’s attempt to plan sex when, unsure about what his body can do, Morgan asks his physiotherapist about sexual abilities. The therapist recommends Morgan teach Dean about how his body moves and operates by having him help with physical exercises. This advice may be helpful to a point, but the mechanics of bodily movement does not necessarily reveal new erogenous zones or methods for delivering sexual pleasure. When Dean uses the close contact afforded by assisting with physical exercise as an opportunity to initiate a kiss, Morgan stops him. It is unsurprising that Morgan stops the intimacy, given that he remains uncertain about what his body can do. Morgan also plans sex when seeking pharmaceutical help but aside from these minor indicators of sexual planning, when sex occurs, like most cinematic depictions of sex, it appears spontaneous and physically simplistic.

As noted earlier, prior to sex, Morgan confesses his fears to Dean: “I’m just afraid that I can’t do the things that you want because I can’t”, and Dean replies: “It’s ok. Let’s figure it out together”. This narrative implies that the audience will have an opportunity to witness the lovers as they discover innovative ways to achieve sexual pleasure, expanding upon normative sexual acts. Disappointingly, the sex-act itself seems uncomplicated, as the lovers appear to easily ‘figure it out together’. The film cuts to a shot of Morgan as he seductively slides backwards along the floor. Dean appears in a standing position gazing down at Morgan. As Morgan slides into the bedroom, Dean slowly follows. A tender love song provides the sound for the scene. Dean slowly helps Morgan undress before undressing himself. Morgan appears vulnerable and unsure, resembling a virgin experiencing sex for the first time. Dean sits on top of Morgan and the camera projects extreme close-up shots of skin being gently caressed. One close-up shows Dean stroking Morgan’s broken spine. Both men appear to enjoy sexual pleasure and the imagery primarily projects tenderness and care.

In an interview with film reviewer Lewis Whittington (2011), Akers describes his intentions for the film’s sex scene:

Morgan was aggressive before the accident and we didn’t want to take that away from him in this situation. So, we having [sic] him leading and seeing how it would really happen and we were surprised at how normal and surprising that scene turned out to be.

Contrary to Akers’ intentions, Morgan does not appear assertive, as it is Dean who seems to take the lead. Dean presents as a gentle able-bodied lover guiding a vulnerable and inexperienced disabled man through his first sexual experience. In

one shot, the camera zooms down over Dean's shoulder, onto Morgan's face, capturing an expression of fear and timidity. Morgan's sexual lack of confidence makes sense, especially given it is his first sexual encounter since becoming paralysed. Nevertheless, Morgan is not a virgin and his past sexual experiences appear to have been erased: he appears too innocent, naïve and vulnerable. Not all commentators share my concern about the film's ideology, and for paraplegic devotees it is a lack of intimate realistic details which frustrate. It is not the lack of realism that concerns me, but rather the ideological projection of problematic stereotypes of disability.

Unsurprisingly, *Morgan* has attracted the attention of paraplegic devotees for its representation of care and sex between an able-bodied and disabled gay man. The Paradevo²⁷ website contains a review of the film by Devushka, one of the site's contributors. The review primarily praises *Morgan* for a rare depiction of paraplegia, romance and sex. Devushka (2013) is critical that Morgan was played by an able-bodied actor and the review goes into excessive detail about how this impacts the film's realism. Devushka (2013) complains about matters such as: unrealistic muscle tone and balance; unrepresented bladder and bowel issues; undisclosed levels of Morgan's ability to feel pleasure; unrealistic appearance of sexual spontaneity; and the minimal detail regarding erectile dysfunction. Disability devotees have been criticised for the eroticisation of care and dependence (Duncan & Goggin 2002; Fiduccia 1999; Solvang 2007). Devushka's (2013) concerns are unsurprising coming from the perspective of disability fetish and the

²⁷ Paradevo is a website that caters to (mostly men) who are sexually aroused by bodies with paralysis.

eroticisation of passivity/dependence. Whilst Devushka (2013) is correct about the film's level of realism, I am more concerned with the ideological shape of the film than the capacity for the image to arouse, based upon extreme realism surrounding impairments. I share some of Devushka's concerns, such as unrealistic spontaneity and undisclosed capacity to feel pleasure; however, my critical rationale is different. The lack of attention to sexual planning and pleasure sensation denotes a lost opportunity to depict empowering, diverse, proud, Crip sex and the chance to discover new erogenous zones. Following this track would provide a way out of the erectile dysfunction problem, where the figure loses sexual capacity. If the film-makers went to extreme levels of realism, such as depicting bladder and bowel problems, it is highly likely that this would increase their problematic depiction of care as undesirable burden—a problem I will examine in the next chapter. As I explained earlier, realistic depictions may not produce a positive outcome (Darke 1994, p.341), especially if such depictions are attached to an oppressive overall context (Hevey 1992, p. 103). A much more nuanced narrative would be required for the portrayal of extreme realism, where problematic matters are not treated as unproblematic. In any case, films offer an escape from reality, and realism is rarely the reason why people go to the cinema.

In her praise of *Morgan*, Anders (2016) describes the film's sexual representation as realistic and relaxed. Anders (2016) asserts that although Morgan needs erectile dysfunction medication for a gratifying sexual life, the representation is positive, because the romantic relationship allows a disabled figure to enjoy a sexual life without the use of commercial sex or technical aids such as penis

pumps. What Anders (2016) fails to consider, aside from the film's limited realism, is that Morgan's gratifying sex-life is short-lived due to the removal of medication. I agree that the filmmakers deserve some recognition because they have provided a rare depiction of a disabled gay sexual figure who experiences romantic love and sex. Pleasingly, *Morgan* does avoid the popular gendered/ableist discourse about heterosexual disabled men recovering masculinity via commercial sex (Kim 2010; Liddiard 2014; Sanders 2007; Rozengarten & Brook 2016). Morgan and Dean are both presented as attractive and sexy, so the film subverts ableist assumptions about the presumed asexuality and sexual undesirability of disabled people. It is unfortunate that they afford their disabled figure sexual citizenship only to subtract it later in the film. The insistence that sexual pleasure must revolve around a normative gay penetrative sex-act is both limiting and problematic, and silences diverse, innovative techniques for the performance of Crip sex.

Conclusion

Morgan projects iterative enthymematic silences which position disability as something negative that must be overcome. The film assumes that disability constitutes a threat and impediment to sexual/romantic happiness. While Morgan is successful in finding love, this achievement hinges upon overcoming a negative self-image which is attached to disabled embodiment. Thus, *Morgan* individualises the 'problem' of romance for disabled people and negates how ableism impacts upon a successful coupling. Despite offering a rare depiction of disabled gay existence, the film strips the protagonist of his sexual citizenship. In *Morgan*, what is taken-for-granted is the ableist ideology that conceives of able-bodiedness as superior to disability, because the disabled figure must learn to

accept his newly 'disenfranchised' state. I have explained how the film depicts caring for a disabled partner as requiring a special tolerance and caring capacity. In the next chapter, I will examine the gendered representation of acquired cognitive disability, and its impact upon marriage, family and work.

6. LOSING LEXICON: REPRESENTING ALZHEIMER'S DISEASE IN RICHARD GLATZER AND WASH WESTMORELAND'S *STILL ALICE*

Silence remains, inescapably, a form of speech (Susan Sontag, 1969 p.11).

Richard Glatzer and Wash Westmoreland's cinematic adaptation of neuroscientist Lisa Genova's bestselling novel *Still Alice* (2007) has been widely championed for raising awareness about Alzheimer's disease (AD). *Still Alice* (2014) may arguably raise awareness but the film is primarily designed to entertain and stir emotions. Julianne Moore stars as Alice Howland in a role that won her an Oscar for her portrayal of a linguistic professor struck down by early onset AD. Howland is rapidly stripped of her vast lexicon as she becomes increasingly silent. The novel and film play to extreme tragedy because Howland's loss is amplified by her intellectual fall from the lofty heights of prestigious academia. Howland's memory and language decline strikes a blow at the very heart of her academic disciplinary skills. Unable to perform her academic role, she becomes increasingly restricted to the private gendered domains of family and care. In *Still Alice* we see the gradual isolation of the gendered disabled subject from the public sphere.

Central to the film is the question of whether Professor Howland maintains her selfhood. Has Alice suffered a living death or a fate worse than death? Is she still Alice? The chapter considers whether *Still Alice* constitutes a neurological 'snuff film' or whether it challenges the 'better off dead' trope. Does the film project a dying or a transforming mind? How the film represents a disabled figure with diminishing cognitive abilities and verbal communication skills will be examined.

As the protagonist's speech fades, the silent unspoken meanings provide important insights—most notably that enthymemes may position *anti-ableist* ideology as constituting what can be taken-for-granted as common-sense. In this way, *Still Alice* is an important film because it contains a silence which does not produce ableist logic.

Synopsis: the art of losing

The film opens with Howland celebrating her fiftieth birthday over dinner with her family. The Howland family are primarily university educated: Alice's husband, John (Alec Baldwin), is a cancer cell biologist; her son, Tom (Hunter Parrish), is a medical student; and daughter, Anna (Kate Bosworth), practices law. Howland's youngest daughter, Lydia (Kristen Stewart) is notably absent from the celebrations. Lydia, to Alice's dismay, is studying to be an actor and resists her mother's request to obtain an academic qualification. Academia is sacred to Howland and constitutes a core part of her identity, as well as of her hopes and dreams for her children.

Howland's initial memory lapses appear innocuous: for example, when she struggles to conjure the word 'lexicon' during the delivery of a linguistics conference paper, her ironic memory slip is easily attributed to fatigue. Lapses in memory quickly become terrifying when Howland finds herself lost in a familiar place—the university campus where she teaches linguistics. Worried about brain tumours, she visits her GP, who refers her to a neurologist. After undergoing brain

scans and humiliating mental tests, Howland is diagnosed with hereditary early onset AD.

Howland breaks the devastating news to her family who have mixed responses. John experiences anger and denial and, with Tom, searches for medical solutions. Anna grieves for her mother but also worries about the possibility of having the Alzheimer's gene, especially because she is trying to fall pregnant. Later, a pregnant Anna finds out she has the gene, but embryo testing provides some good news: she will not pass it on to her unborn child. Lydia does not wish to know if she has the gene and is highly sensitive to her mother's distress.

In an attempt to carry on as normal, Howland returns to work, but after receiving critical student evaluations, she discloses her diagnosis to her supervisor, resulting in the termination of her prized career. The narrative quickly shifts from a very public professional life to a private family life defined by love and care. Howland makes one brief final public appearance when she delivers a speech for an Alzheimer's association. In her speech, Howland challenges the stigmatisation of people with AD and describes how she is mastering the art of losing. Howland explains, that she is not suffering, but struggling to stay connected to whom she once was.

Worried about her future care, Howland visits a nursing home where she is confronted by withdrawn, disorientated, and isolated elderly people whose movements are restricted by staff. Seeking to avoid this fate she plans a timely suicide to be actioned when she is no longer able to remember the important things. Howland's suicide plans fail when she is interrupted during the act, and forgets what she was doing. Rapidly, Howland's memory declines and she becomes primarily silent as she loses her verbal abilities. The film closes with the title words 'Still Alice' fading out on a white screen. The audience must decide—does Alice remain?

Screening Dramatic Dementias: Background, Film Reviews and Academic Treatments of *Still Alice*

Media, film and television discourses of AD and other dementias often evoke frightening images associated with lost selfhood—describing it as a living death, deploying zombie metaphors, and presenting it as a fate worse than death (Cohen-Shalev & Marcus 2012; Graham 2016; Hillman & Latimer 2017; Behuniak 2011; Zeilig 2014). Stories that attempt to depict the experiences of dementias often focus on the extremes of the disease, producing it as monstrous/freakish (Cohen-Shalev & Marcus 2012; Hillman & Latimer 2017; Zeilig 2014). Alongside these stories are representations that offer hope, via a cure, but these narratives maintain a sense of hopelessness for those with the disease; indeed, a life worth living with dementia remains unimagined (Hillman & Latimer 2017, p.2). Cultural studies scholar Hannah Zeilig (2014, p. 261) describes the impact of individual stories projecting an outsider view, as opposed to depicting the perspective of the person with dementia/AD:

We, the audience, are in the position of witnesses (even judges) to something that is totally alien. Although we seem to connect with individual stories about dementia, the consequence is to create an even greater sense of distance between “us” and “them”.

According to sociologists Alexandra Hillman and Joanna Latimer (2017, p.2), *Still Alice* and other recent cinematic representations have begun to challenge discourses of ‘fighting’ dementia and images of the monstrous, depicting it as a disease that transforms, rather than annihilates, personhood. Citing *Still Alice*, among other recent films²⁸, Hillman and Latimer (2017, p.2), observe how filmic representations embody the contradictions of contemporary dementia discourse:

On the one hand, they reflect our fears of obliteration, the tragedy of a gradual chipping away of our humanity; while on the other hand, we are met with characters who remain present as a moral force, who feel pleasure and pain, who have emotional responses and connections to their social and material worlds.

Still Alice poses existential questions about what makes us human (Hillman & Latimer 2017, p.2) and problematises the notion of an abiding sense of self. My analysis will demonstrate how *Still Alice* evokes terror around the notion of lost selfhood/identity/ability, to reflect and produce the fear/tragedy of disability trope. Discourses of fear and tragedy remain throughout the film, but running parallel to this ableist ideology, sits a nuanced contradictory conception of selfhood as transformative and relational, rather than lost. This chapter presents an examination of the unspoken/silent discourse where these contradictory tones can be observed.

²⁸ *Iris* (2001) and *Robot and Frank* (2013).

In an article published in *Discourse: Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education*, film scholar Elizabeth Marquis (2018), compares two films: *Still Alice* and *The Theory of Everything*²⁹. Importantly, she identifies how each film depicts gendered binaries about public/private space, concluding that both films, to varying extent, reproduce notions of masculine academia versus feminine domesticity. Marquis observes that *Still Alice*, in some ways, repeats the trope of ‘the woman unable to control her body’ which it presents as a gendered/disabled tragedy. Marquis (2018, p.830) explains that cultural beliefs about the professor’s body assume a ‘rational’ mind detached from bodily affairs. Marquis (2018, p. 831) states: “The normative university professor, like the normative body in most Western societies more broadly, is male, white, able-bodied, and straight”. Marquis focuses on the way each film represents disabled academics according to popular mythical conceptions about the disembodied professor. According to Marquis (2018, p.835, p.838), *Still Alice* asks viewers to question academic values such as ‘cerebral dominance’, rationality and autonomy, whilst simultaneously denying a place for bodies that fail to meet these ideals. In this chapter and the one that follows, I will engage with and critique Marquis’ ideas throughout my film analysis. Here, I consider the way *Still Alice* has been treated as an accurate source of information about dementias.

Still Alice has received critical acclaim within mainstream media for an accurate, moving, and sensitive portrayal of AD (Bradshaw 2015; Ehrlich 2015; Hall 2015; Kingsley 2017; Macaulay 2014; Robey 2015; Seymour 2015; Young 2014). *Still*

²⁹ *The Theory of Everything* (2015) will be analysed in the next chapter.

Alice may be moving and sensitive, but it should not be evaluated as an accurate source on dementias. Professor of Dementia Studies, June Andrews (2015), argues *Still Alice* has been championed for raising awareness, but it is not a 'great public information' film because it requires more context; does not include more common dementias, and fails to differentiate between AD/dementia meanings. Importantly, she asks, given the tradition of exploiting sickness for dramatic purposes, is *Still Alice* just "another source of cinematic thrill?" Andrews (2015) concludes:

Sensible information in plain language is increasingly available...We can't afford to be muddled by Hollywood about what the big problem really is, although personal tragedy always wins more artistic prizes.

Andrews makes a valid point about what should be expected from Hollywood which is to provide thrilling, pleasurable entertainment. This thesis is not concerned with medical realism, but rather with the ideological shape that film projects about disabled people. Consideration of the film's media reception provides insights into how the film has shaped and/or challenged popular conceptions of AD.

Some film reviewers have awarded *Still Alice* accolades for its ability to incite fear/terror in response to losing selfhood and intellect (Bate 2015; Haskell 2014; Parkin 2015; Siemienowicz 2015). These critics praise the film from an ableist perspective, reflecting an ignorance of disabled activism/politics and culture. Writing for feminist magazine *Lip*, Jade Bate (2015) explains how the film depicts

Howland's perspective as she "spirals into the terrifying unknown". Bate comments:

Alice is constantly humiliated and ashamed of what is happening to her mind... She [Moore] anchors the film by depicting Alice as an unlikely hero who is losing a grip on reality, making her both an unreliable narrator and a tragic figure.

Applauding the filmmakers, Bate states: "their direction is subtle and restrained, a perfect way to show respect to Alzheimer's sufferers and provide a realistic portrayal of life with a disability". Bate's praise of *Still Alice*, with reference to a suffering, tragic, humiliated, and ashamed disabled figure, demonstrates an ableist perspective. Bate's comments reveal a lack of awareness about disability politics/culture, and consequently, her assessment that the film offers realism in its portrayal of disability is disturbing.

Still Alice has accorded some criticisms from mainstream media (Edelstein 2015; Lemire 2014; Shone 2015). *New York Magazine* film critic David Edelstein, (2015), praises Moore's performance, while criticising the filmmakers' thin portrayal of other characters. In particular, he describes John (Alec Baldwin) as: "a dull guy, loving and supportive at first, then more concerned with his own career as his wife's symptoms worsen, and he doesn't seem fully present". While I agree that the character lacks depth, and at times, John appears self-centred (a gendered situation I will return to later), the filmmakers' central focus on Alice and their minimal attention to those who provide care was a deliberate effort to offer the perspective of the person with AD (Westmoreland, 2014). This is important because filmic depictions have been criticised for focusing on the carer's point of

view, whilst silencing the perspective of characters with AD (Chivers 2013; Cohen-Shalev & Marcus 2012; Orr & Teo 2015; Zeilig 2013). Another criticism comes from respected American film critic, Christy Lemire (2014), who comments:

Co-directors and writers Richard Glatzer and Wash Westmoreland don't shy away from the steady and terrifying way the disease can take hold of a person and strip away her ability to communicate and connect with the outside world. But they also don't tell this story with much nuance or artistry in adapting Lisa Genova's novel.

Lemire's complaints relate to the absence of nuanced filmic art techniques (flat lighting, awkward cutaways, overuse of sad music and medium shots), techniques better suited to the small screen. Thus, it is filmic style that troubles her about the adaptation of Genova's novel, rather than the omission of important story elements—a problem I will revisit later. When praising the film, Lemire refers to “not shying away”, and it is the filmmakers' efforts at realism that appeals; however, like many critics, she unproblematically celebrates representation of disability as terrifying. I primarily agree with her observation that the film depicts lost communication and connection; however, her discursive descriptions of AD ‘taking hold’, ‘strip-away’ and ‘outside world’ gives an ableist impression of a passive, restrained, lacking, and Othered disabled figure who is separated from the world. I will argue that the film does not “strip away” Howland's communication, but carefully, albeit subtly, projects non-verbal and *extra-verbal* communication methods.

One scathing review comes from film critic Tom Shone (2015), writing for United Kingdom magazine, *The Spectator*. Shone condemns *Still Alice* as ‘boring’,

accusing the writers of displaying “an amazing failure of nerve and crushing levels of good taste”. Shone claims that the film is boring because Moore’s acting skills regress to performances from her early career. In a sexist attack, Shone (2015) states:

[W]alled in by her beauty. When she smiles, the only thing that moves is her mouth. This very inexpressiveness gives her an air of trapped intelligence, which she used to great effect in the early part of her career playing a string of numbed-out beauties.

Still Alice was also poorly received by disability writer/activist, s.e. smith who accused Moore of ‘playing Cripface’ in a transparent attempt to win an Oscar. An able-bodied performance and lens targeted at non-disabled viewers, angers smith (2015b):

Variety [magazine] described the film as being told ‘from the patient’s point of view’, when in fact nothing could be further from the truth: This was a film acted by a woman who doesn’t have any firsthand knowledge of the condition she depicted. And it actually focused much more on the lives of her friends and family, told through a nondisabled lens and played for a nondisabled audience.

I do not deny the occurrence of ableist ideologies, yet for smith, these projections are a consequence of denying disabled performers/filmmakers the chance to tell the disability story. Whilst it is true that Moore is an able-bodied performer, acting as disabled, and winning an Oscar for the skill of physical transformation (particularly facial expressions), it is inaccurate to describe the film-makers as entirely holding an able-bodied perspective. Filmmaker Glatzer (now deceased), had Motor Neurone disease (MND), which impacted upon his mobility and communication. Indeed, whilst filming, he communicated by typing on an iPad

using his toe, and his romantic partner (also his co-writer/director) provided personal care (Zeitchik 2015). Thus, he was personally experienced with impaired verbal communication and presumably able to identify, to an extent, with Howland's communicative difficulties and experiences of familial care. In fact, what *Still Alice* demonstrates is that disabled filmmakers are also capable of projecting moments of ableism. My analysis will show how the film contains some ableist projections; however, it is not relentless. There are subtle moments of subversion, and it contains some insightful depictions (perhaps aided by Glatzer's personal experience), of how someone with a cognitive/communication impairment may engage communication/memory strategies.

Movies, regardless of their genre/quality/intentions, have effects that are imbricated in power relations (Beasley & Brook, 2019). Filmmakers should be aware of the influence they have over public opinion and aim to correct prejudices (Segers 2007, p.58). I consider whether the film produces ableist/gendered ideologies about people with acquired cognitive disability, via enthymematic and other forms of silence. To what extent does it subvert and/or reflect ableist/gendered ideologies, and does it engage silent unspoken discourse to challenge or reinforce prejudice? I begin by analysing how the film depicts the gendered disabled body at work in the academy.

Film Analysis

Part I – Disavowing the Disabled Professor.

When Professor Howland delivers a guest lecture at UCLA, she is introduced by a male colleague who lists her intellectual accomplishments, before commenting

that she also managed to raise three children while working. Thus, Marquis (2018, p.832) observes that Howland is portrayed as exceptional because she achieved in spite of her sexed body, which is presented within a normative gendered understanding about the roles/capacities of mothers. Aside from the gendered portrayal of 'the woman who manages to have it all', Marquis (2018, p.832) describes how Howland is initially presented in alignment with normative cultural beliefs about the professor's body. Marquis (2018, p.832) observes that when Howland commences her lecture, the filmmakers obscure her body behind a lectern, focusing instead on her cerebral performance. The scene presents the disembodied academic³⁰ as though it was normative, and this perception of academia sits uncomfortably alongside popular conceptions of AD.

During her lecture the professor forgets, ironically, the word 'lexicon', and in this moment, Howland makes a joke before appearing to seamlessly move on. The memory lapse appears to irritate her, but it is not a moment of terrifying panic; rather, it is a relatable event, especially to academics familiar with conference travel and fatigue. This scene performs important narrative functions: firstly, it introduces Howland as a renowned linguistics professor; secondly, it marks her early stage symptoms of memory loss as relatable to an audience who may easily identify with the common experience of forgetting; thirdly, already aware they are watching a figure who will be diagnosed with AD, the narrative encourages a nervous questioning about the viewers' own cognitive health; finally, it demonstrates Howland's communicative competence because she manages her

³⁰ See Margaret Price (2014 p.5) on rhetorical constructions of the normative academic.

lapse of linguistic performance by using the situation as an ice-breaker, establishing rapport with the audience.

Shortly after her lecture, Howland goes for a run around the university campus where she teaches. Suddenly, she becomes disorientated and is unable to remember the landscape—lost in her home environment, Howland panics. This experience of memory loss, unlike her previous lapse, is not easily relatable to viewers: rather, it appears unusual and terrifying. The filmmakers artfully engage *mise-en-scène* to charge the event with dramatic effect. A tight close-up of Howland follows a blurred point-of-view shot, reflecting a shallow depth of field that operates to isolate her from her surroundings. Rapid swinging images of the surroundings become clearer, but the camera movement projects a perspective of lost context. After taking a deep breath, she looks up and reads the signage on the library building, identifying Columbia University. The scene symbolically disconnects/separates Howland from her academic home, and thus, the *mise-en-scène* provides a terrifying introduction to a narrative that gradually removes her from professional/public life.

Doctor of medicine Kurt Segers (2007), in his analysis of degenerative dementias in film, notes that highly educated people are over-represented in cinematic portrayals of degenerative dementias. Segers (2007, p.58), explains:

One must not forget that the way in which patients are portrayed by screenwriters and actors is primarily intended to serve a dramatic rather than an educational purpose. This is

illustrated by the screenwriters' choice for highly educated people, probably in an attempt to make the impact of the forgetting as dramatic as possible.

Still Alice provokes cultural anxiety about the threat of AD, which it projects as particularly dangerous and dramatic for academics.

Still Alice portrays a disabled academic figure struggling with her teaching performance and attempting to pass as able-bodied. After receiving the AD diagnosis, Howland is determined to maintain her academic life for as long as possible; however, the number of students attending her class has drastically decreased. In a telling scene, Howland enters a mostly empty lecture theatre, opens her laptop, and appears to struggle with identifying which lecture to deliver. A blurred shot of the computer screen reveals six files titled: syntax, acquisition, semantics, comprehension, phonology, and pathologies. This out of focus image, denoting Howland's point of view, reflects her effort to remain connected to academia, whilst the file titles ironically reflect areas of linguistic life impacted upon by AD. The few students attending appear restless, bored, and frustrated while they wait for the professor to begin. Attempting to disguise her confusion, Howland engages academic authority, presenting her silence as an effort to test the students' connection with the syllabus.

Howland – Can anyone tell me what it says on the syllabus for today?

Student – Phonology.

Howland – And can anyone tell me what phonology is?

[No response, Howland opens the appropriate file.]

Howland – Phono is from the Greek word “*phone*” meaning sound, and phonology, broadly speaking, is the study of the sounds of language. It should be carefully distinguished from phonetics...

This brief scene concludes the film’s depictions of the professor performing a teaching role. The narrative does not include a portrayal of disability employment supports or any accommodation enabling her to delay her exit from academia. In a meeting with the head of her department, who is aptly/ironically named Eric Wellman (Daniel Gerroll), Howland is informed about negative student evaluations for her topic. Reading from his computer, Wellman recites a number of student comments, while a medium shot shows Howland sipping her tea as she listens uncomfortably.

Wellman – “I had been looking forward to this course my sophomore year, but I was thoroughly disappointed. The content was often muddled and delivered with little focus or care.” “Class was a waste of time. I ended up just following the on-line version.” [The camera cuts to a shot of Wellman, cast over Howland’s shoulder, as he stands leaning over his desk while reading from his computer]. “I found Linguistics 201 very erratic.” “I had a hard time following Dr Howland’s lectures – even she seems like she gets lost in them.” [He turns his head to look at Howland with a disapproving expression].

Howland – Eric, I am so sorry. I didn’t know the students felt this way. Obviously, I will make the necessary adjustments and we can re-evaluate my performance next semester. [A medium shot shows Howland trying to remain composed].

Wellman – Listen, is everything okay at home? Is everything all right between you and John? [Wellman is shown perched on the edge of his desk, looking down at Howland].

Howland – Yes, everything is fine with John. [The camera cuts to a high-angle medium shot of Howland, as she looks-up at Wellman].

Wellman – Is it something we can help with? Stress, depression...? [A medium shot of Wellman cast over Howland's shoulder shows him looking slightly annoyed, as he tries to seek an explanation].

Howland – No. It's not that.

Wellman – Substance abuse? [Wellman moves from his desk to sit at the table with Howland].

Howland – Oh God, no. Eric, no it's nothing like that. It's, uh, it's medical. It's a medical issue and I admit I had a hard time teaching last semester and I wasn't aware of how much it showed. [Camera delivers a medium shot of Howland, cast over Wellman's shoulder. She struggles to make eye contact and seems nervous].

Wellman – Alice, I'm not following. [A medium shot of Wellman with his hand flat on the table, looking down before turning his attention to Howland with an expression of concern and confusion].

Howland – I have a mild cognitive impairment. [Howland speaks in a controlled voice. She is clearly uncomfortable while trying to maintain a professional appearance].

Wellman – Would you unpack that for me?

Howland – In early February I was diagnosed with Early Onset Alzheimer's disease.

Wellman – What? Alice, oh my God. I'm so sorry. [The figures are shown close together in the frame via a medium shot cast from behind Howland. Wellman initially looks shocked, followed by a concerned sympathetic expression and tone of voice].

Howland – It's early. It's still in the early stages. I mean obviously it will limit my abilities as time goes on but for now I feel perfectly capable – [Talking at a faster pace but remaining clear and articulate as she attempts to reassure, but Wellman interrupts].

Wellman – Really there's no need to...We don't want you under any undue stress. That would be counterproductive. [A medium shot shows him looking concerned and attempting to comfort Howland].

Howland – I can handle the stress. I would like to remain in the department for as long as we all think it's possible. [A medium close-up shows Howland with tears brimming. She slows her voice but speaks with an assertive tone].

Wellman – I'll have to let the department and faculty know. [Spoken in a low gentle voice. Camera cuts to a medium shot of Wellman. He shakes his head slightly, looking uncertain and concerned as he appears to be considering the broader ramifications, while trying to show compassion].

Howland – Yes, of course. [A medium close-up shot captures Howland and her eyes are brimming with tears].

Wellman – I'm so, so, sorry. [The camera lingers on Howland, as she takes a deep breath].

Howland's surprise when she learns about her students' criticisms, represents a lack of insight into her social performance, and this portrayal contradicts other scenes when, aware of her limitations, she implements effective strategies in order to pass as able-bodied. It is odd that the professor, in the early stages of AD, fails to notice the declining number of students in her lectures. The scene produces the ableist view that people with impairments of the mind lack insight about their performance and the capacity to implement effective strategies to succeed.

In her analysis of the scene, Marquis (2018 p.833) observes that Wellman, as a white male, embodies the 'normative professor body' with the power to question Howland's ability to remain in the department, despite her claim that she can

'handle the stress'. Marquis argues the scene denies Howland the chance to claim the 'normative professor body', while accentuating how her academic future will be affected by those whose bodies are able to occupy the norm. Wellman, (living up to his 'well-man' name) asserts an able-bodied male rationality to decide on Howland's behalf that 'stress will be counter-productive'. Howland's right to self-determination is cut off because she is denied the opportunity to prove her academic capacity, not offered any supports/accommodations, and silenced in her attempts to proclaim her abilities. The scene encourages audiences to empathise with Howland, but Wellman is not cast as the bad guy; rather, he reads as someone who is taken off-guard and required to make a difficult decision, based upon what he imagines is in the best interests of the students. Following this scene, the professor is not shown again within the traditional academic domain, and although the film does not show a formal expulsion from the academy, it is clear that her position is revoked. The film's narrative structure suggests that Wellman was right to be concerned about Howland's capacity to remain in the department because her cognitive decline is rapid. The speed of her decline produces the impression that Howland was wrong about her capacity to keep working during the early stage of disease, because she begins to show later-stage symptoms almost immediately after her meeting with Wellman.

Careful attention to the elements of Genova's novel, omitted by the filmmakers, reveal how the film silences narratives of ableism and disability culture/community. Contrary to the film, Genova's novel does not immediately expel the professor from academia; although her lecturing role does cease, she continues to supervise

a research student and participate in seminars. In keeping her protagonist in the academy, Genova depicts academic ableism when colleagues exclude Howland, causing her to feel isolated at work. Genova's story includes a moment when the professor attends a seminar with colleagues who actively avoid her, leaving her to sit by herself. Genova (2009, p.118) writes:

After a few minutes, Alice noticed that every seat at the table was occupied except for the one next to her, and people had begun taking up standing positions at the back of the room...She looked at everyone not looking at her. About fifty people crowded the room, people she'd known for many years, people she'd thought of as family.

The filmmakers' decision to exclude Genova's representation of Howland's continuation in the academy silences a narrative that points to the existence and effects of ableism in academia. In the novel, it is ableist exclusion and isolation that eventually causes the professor to leave academia, rather than the cognitive limitations of early stage AD. Genova (2009, p.198) writes:

She felt bored, ignored, and alienated in her office. She felt ridiculous there. She didn't belong there anymore. In all the expansive grandeur that was Harvard, there wasn't room there for a cognitive psychology professor³¹ with a broken cognitive psyche.

Unlike the novel, the film presents Howland's departure from academia as a direct consequence of cognitive disability rather than an effect of ableism. In doing so, cognitive impairment is projected as tragic, while the devastating impact of ableism within academia (and professional working life in general) is silenced. It is the thought of acquiring a diseased mind, incapable of participating in working life, that

³¹ Genova depicts Howland as a cognitive psychology professor and this differs from the film. In the film she is depicted as a linguistics professor.

audiences are expected to fear, rather than the depressing impact of exclusion caused by a discriminatory workplace.

In the film, Howland departs from professional collegial life to occupy a private existence defined by familial care. In the private domain, she lacks collegial relationships and, aside from when she delivers a speech for the Alzheimer's Association, she is not shown engaging with disability community. The film reflects what Norden (1994) describes as a *cinema of isolation*, where disabled figures are routinely isolated from able-bodied people, but also from each other. In her novel, Genova describes Howland's response to rejection from work colleagues and depicts a figure who searches for new collegial relationships—those living with early onset AD. Genova (2009, p.208) has her protagonist founding an early onset AD support group in an attempt to locate collegial relationships within a disability community:

She was the only person she knew with early-onset Alzheimer's disease at Harvard...She needed to find her new colleagues. She needed to inhabit this new world she found herself in, this world of dementia.

In omitting this storyline, the filmmakers largely project the iteration of cinematic isolation—silencing the power of disability culture and community. The film contains only one scene adapted from Genova's novel which depicts Howland engaging with other AD figures. When Howland delivers her speech for the Alzheimer's Association, the audience consists of people with AD, carers/family, and health professionals. In this scene, she is introduced to her audience as a former linguistics professor who has been living with early onset AD. Therefore,

her introduction signals the loss of academic status alongside the transition into academia's dichotomous Other—cognitively disabled subjectivity. The filmic narrative, unlike the novel, disavows the cognitively disabled professor as the two subject positions are discursively denied the opportunity to coexist.

Howland's speech describes her experience of struggling to maintain identity, losing ability and living with ableist attitudes/beliefs about people with AD. Standing at the podium, she reads from a script whilst using a marker to highlight the text. This strategy enables Howland to identify her place on the page without relying on cognitive recall, and demonstrates her ability to apply innovative solutions to accommodate disability. Nervously, taking in the audience, Howland begins:

Good morning. It's an honour to be here. The poet, Elizabeth Bishop, once wrote: "the art of losing isn't hard to master. So many things seem filled with the intent to be lost that their loss is no disaster". I am not a poet. I am a person living with Early Onset Alzheimer's and, as that person, I find myself learning the art of losing every day. Losing my bearings, losing objects, losing sleep, but mostly losing memories.

Howland drops her papers from the podium and quickly scrambles to recover them before managing the discomfort by making a joke:

I think I'll try to forget that just happened [audience laughs warmly]. All my life I've accumulated memories, they've become, in a way, my most precious possessions. The night I met my husband. The first time I held my textbook in my hands. Having children, making friends, travelling the world. Everything I accumulated in life, everything I've

worked so hard for – now all that is being ripped away. As you can imagine or as you know, this is hell, but it gets worse.

Who can take us seriously when we are so far from who we once were? Our strange behaviour and fumbled sentences change others' perceptions of us and our perception of ourselves. We become ridiculous, incapable, comic; but this is not who we are, this is our disease, and like any disease it has a cause, it has a progression, and it could have a cure. My greatest wish is that my children, our children, the next generation, do not have to face what I am facing, but for the time being, I'm still alive. I know I'm alive. I have people I love dearly. I have things I want to do with my life. I rail against myself for not being able to remember things, but I still have moments in the day of pure happiness and joy, and please, do not think that I am suffering. I am not suffering. I am struggling. Struggling to be a part of things. To stay connected to who I once was. So, 'live in the moment', I tell myself. It's really all I can do, live in the moment and not beat myself up too much for mastering the art of losing. One thing I will try to hold onto though, is the memory of speaking here today. It will go, I know it will. It may be gone tomorrow but it means so much to be talking here today, like my old ambitious self, who was so fascinated by communication. Thank you for this opportunity. It means the world to me.

Howland's emotive call for a cure, alongside her description of AD symptoms as 'hell', sits uncomfortably within a Disability Studies/activist framework, which has long argued against 'cure' rhetoric and discourses of pathos³² (Charlton 1998; Haller 2010; Hevey 1992; Kemp 1981; Shapiro 1994). A standard response within Disability Studies scholarship would be to criticise the film for a narrative that trades on pathos to garner support for a cure. Disability scholars and activists argue that the call for a cure is often made by able-bodied people holding an assumption that disabled lives are inferior to able-bodiedness and/or not worth living (McRuer 2006, p.9). This critique began as a response to the dehumanising

³² I use the term *pathos* to describe representations that evoke emotions of pity or sympathy (see Prendergast 2008, p.242).

rhetoric embedded in charity campaigns, most notably the Jerry Lewis muscular dystrophy telethons, in which Lewis described disabled people as 'half-people' who can only become 'whole' with a cure (Haller 2010, p.141).

However, Howland's speech cannot be reduced to this kind of dehumanising rhetoric. It contains important nuances and situates the call for a cure alongside an impassioned plea to end prejudice towards people with AD. Howland attempts to highlight the stigmatisation directed at people with AD by insisting that people with AD are not 'ridiculous, incapable, comic'. In doing so, the speech discursively separates individuals from diseased symptoms by insisting that it is not people with AD who are ridiculous, incapable, comic, but rather the disease itself. Cure the disease and these traits vanish. This discourse is clearly an attempt to discourage the audience from reducing people with AD to nothing more than symptoms of disease; however, the tactic would have been more powerful if ableism was clearly held accountable for ascribing pejorative connotations to symptoms of impairment. Howland reduces stigmatised ascribed character traits to a consequence of diseased pathology, rather than emphasising how ableism drives stigma (culture) and calling for the outright rejection of such dehumanising projections. The disease is not ridiculous, incapable, and comic, but a pathologised and stigmatised classification of bodily variance. Nevertheless, despite the reduction of ableist culture into pathology, the narrative could be interpreted as a plea for sympathetic positive solidarity. Howland's speech engages both a medical and social model of disability because she campaigns for

a scientific cure, while simultaneously arguing against heavily stigmatising conceptions of people with AD and demanding respect.

The relentless pursuit to find a cure for the disabled reflects a *compulsory able-bodiedness*, whereby disability is portrayed as unnatural and inherently undesirable. Robert McRuer (2006, p.9) explains:

A system of compulsory able-bodiedness repeatedly demands that people with disabilities embody for others an affirmative answer to the unspoken question, “Yes, but in the end, wouldn’t you rather be more like me?”

Howland’s speech does contain within it an answer to this unspoken question because her call for a cure insists that she would rather be able-bodied; however, she also narrates a script that counters ableist assumptions that disability is inherently and completely tragic. While proclaiming her desire for a cure, Howland simultaneously explains that she experiences ‘moments of pure happiness and joy’—signalling to those who may feel pity towards her that life with AD is not entirely devoid of pleasure.

It is arguably challenging for those with a proud Crip/Disability identity to feel comfortable with ‘cure’ discourse. Indeed, because I identify as a proud Crip, cure discourse often makes me bristle with angry contempt towards an able-bodied culture that imagines my corporeal state as something to be eradicated—an inferior embodiment. Nevertheless, it must be acknowledged that disabled people are not a homogenous group. Those who acquire disability late in life may be

grieving a recent loss of ability/functioning and long to return to their former selves. Similarly, those whose impairments cause pain or result in premature death (as is the case with early-onset AD) may understandably wish for cures and effective medical treatments. The cure discourse within *Still Alice* does not incite my Crip anger, but instead encourages a recognition that my sense of Crip pride is a privileged position. It is an identity formed through access to Crip culture and it is a subject position related to my class status. My proud Crip identity did not form overnight but evolved after many years of adjusting to disability.³³

A call for a cure requires action from scientists and medical professionals, whereby non-medical/scientific persons may only act by encouraging donations or by giving to charity. Cure rhetoric does not normally ask able-bodied people to address their own ableism and fight against prejudice/discrimination. Historically, cure discourse screens in film and other locations as a beacon for pity, tragedy and fear. The screening of cure discourse frequently appeals to ableist conceptions about what it means to be disabled. Typically, cure discourse produces ableism while silencing a disability politics which seeks to eliminate ableist prejudice. A good disabled life is not usually imagined within the 'find a cure at all costs' discourse. *Still Alice* attempts to position cure discourse alongside a disability politics which demands that disabled lives are respected, worthwhile and involve pleasure.

³³ Simi Linton (2006) also refers to a period of adjustment before 'claiming disability' as a proud marker of identity.

The film demonstrates that it is possible to engage *pathos* in a manner that does not encourage problematic conceptions of pity, but rather enables sympathy towards disabled people's experiences of ableism. Howland is calling for an end to the dehumanising treatment that envisions people with AD as 'ridiculous, incapable and comic', and in doing so, her speech encourages others to sympathise with her when she describes experiences of ableism.

Sympathy and pity are frequently conflated (Sklar 2011, p.137), and as I noted in Chapter One, this thesis defines sympathy as an acknowledgment that another's distress is unfair and bad (Nussbaum 2001, p.302). Conversely, pity constitutes an uninvited, unwelcome, and detrimental form of sympathy, whereby the sympathiser holds superiority over the recipient (Clark 1997, pp.238-242; Nussbaum 2001, p. 301; Sklar 2011, pp. 139-143). Literary theorist, Howard Sklar (2011, p.142), asserts that sympathy directed at an awareness of ableism, with a recognition that such discrimination should be "alleviated", is a form of "positive solidarity" and does not position disabled people as deserving of pity. When Howland states that she is "struggling, not suffering" and when she insists people with AD are not "ridiculous, incapable and comic", she is evoking *pathos* to elicit "positive solidarity".

While the speech does encourage consideration of ableist prejudice, it could have been stronger in making connections between Howland's struggles and her experience of discrimination. Howland states: "I am struggling to be a part of

things and to stay connected to who I once was”, yet what is unspoken is that academic ableism, notably her premature dismissal from academy, produces conditions of exclusion and disconnection from selfhood/identity. In this sense, the speech presents her struggle to stay connected and included as largely a result of impairment, rather than highlighting the pertinent social conditions inherent in her exclusion. Geriatrician Elizabeth Herskovits (1995, p.156) states that a loss of selfhood is primarily caused by social stigma rather than the disease itself. Thus, identity is relational to how others treat and imagine the person with AD. People aware of the impact of ableism will probably recognise that Howland’s struggle to remain a part of things is hindered by ableism. Unfortunately, those without such insights are likely to view her struggles as entirely contained within a personal fight against disease. AD is categorised by the way it impacts upon communication and social connection; however, social responses to people with the disease also have a significant impact upon the ability to connect. The likelihood that audiences will read Howland’s struggle to connect as a personal battle is high because of prolific discourses of ‘fighting disease’ circulating within popular texts (Sontag 1991, pp.59-65; Zeilig 2014, p.260), and the way the disease itself impairs communication. Zeilig (2015, p.19) advocates for representations that avoid presenting dementias as exclusively a private problem by recognising it as a social issue affecting and reflecting society at large. The notion of disease as an internal fight within the body does not aid in the struggle to be included in the face of prejudice. *Still Alice* attempts to present AD as a social issue, but falls down when it fails to connect Howland’s struggles to her early forced retirement from academia.

Howland's speech misses an opportunity for a stronger embodied approach, encompassing both the way that impairment hinders communication ability and the way ableist discrimination excludes those with AD. Due to the dominance of the medical model and discourses of individual battles against disease, it is highly likely that the unspoken reasons for Howland's struggles with connection/inclusion will be interpreted as entirely contained within the diseased body. Struggling to remain a part of things becomes primarily a personal problem, when in fact communication is limited by both the body and the social and these cannot be separated. Communication is embodied because it is dependent upon the body's capacity to produce signifying actions and the social capacity/willingness to interpret meanings. The speech contains an enthymematic silence because the unstated reasons for her struggles are left to be interpreted by the audience's common knowledge about AD. This is problematic because 'common knowledge' is likely to be based upon a medical model and ableist understanding of cognitive disability.

The way the film portrays disability exclusion (Howland's dismissal from the academy) discursively constructs the loss of employment as an inevitable consequence of disease. In doing so, the film, via an enthymematic silence, portrays academia and cognitive disability as irreconcilably incompatible. The common belief that the professor's body must involve a non-impaired brain remains intact because Howland appears to accept her premature retirement from academy as inevitable. While it is reasonable to assume that AD would eventually preclude her from working, her dismissal during the early stages of the disease

could have been avoided with the application of appropriate accommodations. Instead, the disavowal of the disabled professor is presented as a consequence of impairment, silencing acknowledgment of the ableism behind the deed. Indeed, her premature dismissal from academia removes the professor from the public realm into the private domain, constituted by familial care. In the familial domain, her ability to stay connected to herself and others is hindered by her husband, John and daughter Anna.

Part II – Familial Care and Gender.

John does not consider Alice's³⁴ struggle to remain connected when he decides to relocate to Minnesota. Despite her desire not to move and plea that he take leave from work, John refuses to accommodate her wishes. Consider the following scene:

Alice – I understand that work is important. I miss working. I think you should ask them [Mayo Clinic] if you can start next year. [A medium shot shows Alice, dressed in casual mismatched clothing, sitting on the bed. Her speech is slow, and her facial expressions appear flat/blunt when compared with her previous animated expressiveness].

John – It's not academia, Ali. They don't give sabbaticals. [A medium shot shows John sitting on the bed, dressed in a suit and tie, looking irritated].

Alice – But to pick up and move, at this point, when I...when we...[shakes her head]. Why can't I say what I want to say? [She looks frustrated as she concentrates hard on her words].

John – Ali, one way or another, we'll still be together.

Alice – So no time off.

³⁴ I use Professor Howland's first name when discussing family/home life as a deliberate reference to the way her academic identity ceases when she exits public life to reside in the private domain.

John – I just can't take a year off. Financially, it's not an option. God knows what we'll be facing further down the line.

Alice – That's it then, that's it. [A medium shot shows Alice looking hurt].

John – What?

Alice – You don't want that. A year at home, with me, watching this. You don't want it.

John – I didn't say that. [A medium shot shows a miniscule twitch on his face, before turning into a neutral expression].

Alice – You didn't have to. [A medium shot pauses on Alice's hurt expression].

Alice knows that finances are not the reason for the move because John has steady employment at the university. The scene has a narrative function because it ensures the audience knows Alice's opinion about moving before her language and memory skills begin to fade. This is important because John justifies his disregard for Alice's wishes by positioning her as confused and unable to make rational decisions. Alice rightly accuses John of not wanting to spend time with her and watching disability. John clearly demonstrates a belief that AD is taking Alice's selfhood, as he no longer sees her as an equal partner with whom he can share decisions, nor does he appear to maintain an enjoyment of her company. While on numerous occasions the film subverts the notion that AD obliterates selfhood, John's behaviour is not directly challenged in the narrative, which is a gendered point I shall return to shortly.

It is important to consider how and why the Howland family demonstrates an inability to relate to someone with cognitive impairment. Marquis (2018, p.834)

observes that the Howland family (with the exception of Lydia) values high intellect and autonomy, which is consistent with the ideals of higher education. These values hinder their ability to relate to someone with AD (Marquis 2018, p.834). Most notably, John attempts to avoid Alice, while Anna becomes patronising and withdraws from their shared intellectual activities (Marquis, 2018 p.834). In a pertinent scene, John, Anna, and Tom discuss Alice's care needs and future living arrangements. John and Anna demonstrate a belief that Alice has lost her selfhood/identity by talking about her in the past tense and failing to include her in their conversation. Tom, although a part of the conversation, does not engage past tense language, and while he demonstrates a concern for Alice's need to remain connected, he does not include her in the discussion or encourage inclusive actions. The scene begins with Alice on the couch while the family members, shown out of focus in the distance, sit around a table engaged in discussion.

John – There are days she knows where she is, certainly, but just as many days when she doesn't. Maybe she thinks she's a child back in New Hampshire, or who knows where.

Anna – It's happening more and more, Tom. She doesn't know what's going on.

Tom – Yeah, but I just keep thinking about what she said in the speech, you know, how important her memories are to who she is.

Anna – Yes, but that was months ago.

John – Guys, this is difficult for all of us but it's important to remember who Alice was. She would not want to be a burden. Anna, you have babies, and you want to go back to work. And you're not in a position to care for her, not seriously, Tom. And I can't keep Mayo waiting. Beginning of the month, I'm gone.

[Alice starts to wake up and the camera adjustment brings the family into focus].

John – Now I want to take her with me. I will get her the best possible care and once she adjusts to Minnesota, she will be happier for it and so will all of us.

Tom – Lydia's going to flip out.

Anna – So let her.

Tom – Well, she is.

Anna – Well, she has no right to. If she really cared, she wouldn't be on the other side of the country.

[The family become aware of Alice listening]

Alice – It's hot in here [looking directly at her family, with an expression of annoyance].

Marquis claims that the scene solidifies Howland's increasing distance from academia, whilst simultaneously asking viewers "to reconsider the values/norms of higher education" (Marquis 2018, p.834). In positioning the camera alongside Howland, Marquis (2018, p.834), argues that the filmmakers encourage the audience to recognise the cruelty of the family's behaviour. Indeed, camera use plays an important role, particularly for the projection of Alice's perspective, via an out-of-focus lens turning into a sharp clear shot, as she becomes aware that she is the topic of conversation. Marquis does not consider how a short verbal utterance signifies Alice's emotional response to ableist exclusion, and also functions as a protest to being talked about in such a dehumanising manner. I suggest that one of the most important lines in the film is Alice's comment, "It's hot in here", because the utterance contains an enthymematic silence, whereby the audience is expected to understand that her words denote a complaint about the family's

ableist behaviour. Unlike every other example in this thesis, here an enthymematic silence positions an *anti-ableist* perspective as constituting an unspoken norm. The exact meaning of this utterance is unspoken, but context informs the viewer that the statement is not a comment about temperature. In context, the audience is aware that Alice has lost significant lexicon, and so it is reasonable to assume that her utterance constitutes a substitution for what would otherwise be an articulate complaint. If Alice could find the words, it is reasonable to assume a response such as: 'Talk with me, not about me, and I resent the implication that caring for me, when I have long cared for you, constitutes an onerous burden'.

Linguistic philosopher Valentin Volosinov (1987, pp.98-101), considers how the relationship between the said and the unsaid alters the meaning of language within social interactions. Volosinov refers to this element of linguistic communication as *extra-verbal context*. Three elements of *extra-verbal context* are required to successfully change the meaning of language: 'common spatial purview', common understanding/knowledge and a shared evaluation of the situation (Volosinov 1987, p.99). An *extra-verbal* situation exists when the speaker and audience share an understanding based on a previous experience or shared knowledge and this alters our understanding of what is taking place. Importantly, *extra-verbal* situations contain enthymematic silences, because they require a common understanding/knowledge and shared evaluation in order for the unsaid to alter the meaning of what is spoken.

Extra-verbal context changes the meaning of Alice's utterance: "it's hot in here".

The visible image of the family talking in front of Alice, but not with her, constitutes the *common spatial purview* between speaker [Alice] and audience. Secondly, the scene depends upon a common understanding that AD has reduced Alice's lexicon, resulting in her use of an obscure utterance. Finally, Alice's utterance succeeds as a complaint if the audience agrees that it is cruel to describe another as a burden and to speak about the person without including them.

As explained in the previous chapters, "enthymemes are based on probabilities, not certainties" (Smith 2007, p.119). It is possible that some viewers may interpret the family's behaviour as an unproblematic and natural response to disability. Some viewers may understand Alice as incapable of comprehending her family's discussion. They may interpret her comment as exclusively a remark about the temperature, misinterpreting the filmmakers' intention to change the meaning of her utterance. Similarly, it is not clear that the family understands her utterance as a complaint about their behaviour, particularly because they continue to treat Alice as lacking comprehension in the scenes that follow. This suggests that they perceive Alice's statement as confirmation that she is confused and not fully present. Unlike the audience, the characters do not have the benefit of seeing from Alice's perspective. Thus, enthymemes are not infallible because they require a shared knowledge and evaluation of situations.

Despite the potential for viewers to apply an ableist interpretation to this scene, Glatzer and Westmoreland clearly intend a 'preferred anti-ableist reading', because they artfully engage *extra-verbal context* to give Alice a voice. In doing so, they project a disabled figure with reduced linguistic power who is able to protest against ableist treatment. Filmic enthymematic silences, described in this thesis, have consistently treated ableist ideology as a common-sense and unproblematic response to disability. *Still Alice* flips this projection because the filmmakers take it for granted that their audience understands an event as ableist, sharing a common evaluation that ableism is wrong.

Alice's selfhood is repeatedly threatened by the way she is treated by John and Anna. The commonly held belief that AD produces a loss of self has been widely challenged by researchers (Cohen-Shalev & Marcus 2012; Herskovits 1995; Jennings 2009; Kitwood & Bredin 1992; Sabat & Harre 1992). These scholars argue that the construction/deconstruction of the self is relational, rather than entirely a consequence of disease. The 'relational-self position' constitutes part of a wider philosophical debate about personhood and cognitive impairment, whereby some philosophers question the inclusion of individuals with severe cognitive impairment into the category of humanity³⁵. In keeping with a social model of disability, this thesis argues against such dehumanising ideologies and assumes a standpoint that views all human beings, regardless of cognitive capacity, as persons. Psychologist Steven Sabat and philosopher Rom Harre (1992, p.443), argue that the 'self' consists of two parts: the self-1, which

³⁵ For an overview of this wider debate about speciesism, rationality and personhood see Carlson & Kittay 2009.

constitutes personal identity; and the self-2, consisting of multiple personae, projected into society with the cooperation of others. They argue that for people with AD, the self-1 continues well into the end stage of disease, while self-2 remains as long as others assist in its projection, so it depends upon “how others view and treat the Alzheimer’s sufferer”³⁶ (Sabat and Harre 1992, p.443). The way that John and Anna treat Alice threatens the continued existence of her self-2. Indeed, the ableist threat to Alice’s selfhood intersects with gender when John assumes a patriarchal role by making important life decisions on her behalf: denying her agency. John and Anna read Alice’s confusion as evidence that she lacks rationality and the ability to make decisions/choices: they wrongly believe the Alice they knew is lost.

Unlike Genova’s novel, the film does not present a clear critique of the ways that gender and disability intersect in domains such as rationality, decision-making, capacity for choice and the provision of care. With the onset of AD diagnosis, the filmmakers portray John as the rational male head of the family with the authority to make unilateral decisions—even when his choices are presented as unjust and cruel. In turn, Alice is dichotomously positioned by John as the irrational/incapable/passive disabled wife, while it is her daughters who are held morally responsible for understanding and caring for her, physically and emotionally.

³⁶ Sabat and Harre’s use of the term ‘sufferer’ is problematic and may reflect/produce a pity/tragedy perspective of disability.

The filmmakers elect to omit important details in Genova's novel where John's gendered ableism is held to greater account. Glatzer and Westmoreland dramatically alter the portrayal of Anna, changing her from a sympathetic daughter into an ableist figure who becomes the primary target for criticism. In the film, Anna collaborates with John in the ableist treatment of Alice. This differs from the novel which portrays Anna and Lydia as united in confronting their father about his ableist views and behaviour. Genova's version depicts Anna challenging her father's notion of 'care as burdensome' when she states: "She's not a burden, she's our mother" (Genova 2009, p.262). Importantly, Genova (2009, p.294), portrays Anna and Lydia as concerned daughters who advocate for their mother by attempting to talk their father out of accepting a job in New York³⁷ and demanding respect for Alice's selfhood. Anna asks her father, "Why doesn't Mom get a say in this choice?", and Lydia joins in, stating, "She doesn't want to live in New York. She's said she doesn't want to. Go ahead and ask her. Just because she has Alzheimer's doesn't mean she doesn't know what she does and doesn't want". Anna adds, "It's like you don't get that she's not gone yet, like you think her time left isn't meaningful anymore. You're acting like a selfish child" (Genova 2009, p.294).

The filmmakers elect to avoid this portrayal of empowered sisterhood, instead choosing to project Anna in collaboration with John and positioning the sisters in opposition. Consider the following scene when Lydia, and to a lesser extent Tom, challenge Anna on her behaviour. In this scene, Anna talks about her mother as though she is not present, and attempts to control Alice by discouraging her from

³⁷ In the book, John's new job is in New York and in the film, it is Minnesota.

engaging a strategy that enables. The scene depicts Alice with her family, sharing a meal at home. The atmosphere starts out relaxed and happy, before changing to tense and argumentative.

Tom – So Mom, how are you feeling?

Alice – Mostly fine.

Tom – Really?

Alice – Yeah. I use this thing [indicates phone]. You know, instead of a memory. It reminds me to take my medications and things like that.

Tom – It's nice how technology can help.

Alice – Lydia, what time is the play? [Alice is concentrating on her phone].

Lydia – It's eight o'clock.

Tom and Lydia talk about the play for a few minutes.

Alice – I'm sorry, what time did you say it was again?

Lydia – Eight o'clock.

Anna – Mom, you don't have to schedule it. It's ok [tilting her head with a patronising expression].

Alice – No, no. I want to put it in. And where is it? [Still looking at her phone, Alice appears not to notice the tension between the siblings].

Lydia – The Saugatuck theatre.

Alice – Can you spell that?

Anna – Come on, Mom – it’s not like we’re going to forget to bring you. [Anna has an irritated expression, in response to Alice disrupting the smooth flow of conversation].

Lydia – Just let her do it [starts spelling for Alice].

Anna – Oh God [frustrated].

Tom – Anna, you’re not helping [spoken with a calm tone].

Anna – No, you’re not helping. Why should she have to worry about remembering something that she doesn’t have to remember?

Lydia – Well, if you just let her do it, she won’t worry. What’s the problem? Don’t talk about her as if she isn’t sitting right here [gesturing towards Alice].

Anna – I’m not. I’m talking to her. Aren’t I Mom?

Alice – Yes. Yes, you are [referring to the immediate question directed at her, whilst distracted typing].

The sisters insult each other until John enters the room and the family becomes silent. In another scene, Anna and John position Alice as a confused figure who is unable to engage in important conversations and make rational decisions. The scene begins with a discussion about John’s plans to start a new job:

Anna – Everything on track? [Referring to the new job. A medium close-up frames John and Anna standing together in the kitchen – Anna unpacks groceries].

John – Yeah. They’ve made a very generous offer.

Anna – Oh, that’s great [Smiling].

John – I guess. [Sounding conflicted, as he tilts his head and sighs].

Anna – No it is. It's absolutely the right decision. [Anna touches his arm reassuringly, before the camera cuts to a medium shot of Alice, sitting at the table concentrating on a jigsaw puzzle].

John – Would you like some water? [The camera stays on Alice].

Anna – Yes please.

Alice – John, what happened? Who was that on the phone? [referring to a phone call taking place when Anna arrived].

John – That was the hospital honey, the Mayo Clinic [Referring to the clinic offering him employment].

Alice – Oh. Is someone sick?

John – No. Nothing's wrong. Everything is fine. [The camera cuts back to John and Anna, as they continue unpacking groceries].

[Opening the freezer, John picks up a frozen mobile phone and shows it to Alice].

Alice – Oh, no. I was looking for it all last night. [Forgetting that she lost it a month ago and that she was deeply distressed at the time, because it functioned as an important memory device. John gives Alice the phone and she looks at it closely].

John – [Whispers to Anna] That was a month ago. [The camera delivers a medium shot of John and Anna].

Anna – [Rolling her eyes] Right [sighs].

When John finds the phone, Alice demonstrates an inability to recognise the passage of time since first losing it. John presents the situation to Anna as evidence of his wife's confused/lost state, and he positions it as a justification for his exclusion of Alice from sharing important decisions. Anna validates her

father's position, sharing the view that Alice cannot comprehend events or make decisions. With Anna's encouragement, John takes advantage of Alice's struggle to track conversation and remember events. Alice's confusion enables him to make plans without her, about matters that affect her, while aware that relocating goes against her wishes.

The film presents a hierarchy of discourse which debates whether John is right or wrong about the way he responds to Alice, and his decision to exclude her from important decisions. Ultimately, his position as the male authority figure is not adequately challenged, and instead of encouraging us to perceive John's gendered ableism as wrong, the film encourages us to sympathise with him and presents Anna as complicit in facilitating his insensitivity. The acting in the scene projects John as a sympathetic character because he appears conflicted about his choice to relocate. It is Anna who we are encouraged to read as wrong because she ignores her mother's concerns and wishes, by reassuring her father that "it's absolutely the right decision". Additionally, Anna unsympathetically rolls her eyes, when Alice shows signs of confusion and therefore she reads as insensitive to her mother's needs. In contrast, John demonstrates uncertainty about whether his decision is right for Alice, so we are encouraged to view him more favourably. In the end, it is unclear whether the couple relocates, and therefore we are not offered a narrative closure on whether John ultimately makes a decision that respects Alice. Nevertheless, we are encouraged to see John and Anna as failing to properly interact and include Alice. This is mostly achieved by contrasting their ableism with the respectful and compassionate approach of Lydia

The filmmakers highlight and subvert ableist behaviour by positioning Lydia as an advocate and model example for how to engage respectfully with a person who has AD. Conversely, Anna becomes the critical target when Lydia challenges her ableist disrespectful behaviour. Unfortunately, Lydia's advocacy is limited to addressing the ableism of her sister, leaving her father's patriarchal and ableist treatment untouched. The construction of the traditional male authority figure embodied in the notion of husband, father, and head of the household, whose decisions are final, is projected in the film because nobody confronts John about his gendered/ableist behaviour. While the film, at numerous points, challenges the ableist construction of the person with AD as irrational/ incapable/ confused/ passive, it leaves the gendered construction of male rationality and authority largely in place.

Still Alice projects traditional gendered ideologies about the provision of care because most of Alice's care needs are provided by Lydia, rather than by her husband or son. Towards the end of the film, when Lydia moves in to care for her mother, John tells her "You're a better man than I am", and bursts into tears. Thus, the audience is expected to see John as a husband struggling with watching his wife deteriorate, and Lydia as strong because she is able to care for her mother, managing the emotion-work. John's inability to provide care is portrayed as the consequence of his lack of emotional strength, reflecting the gendered ideology that women are naturally better at emotion and nurturing/care work. John may be presented as the male head of the household; however, he is not always

presented as being right in his ableist decisions. Nevertheless, we are encouraged to forgive his failings, while the women are held morally responsible.

Lydia, unlike John and Anna, values Alice's perspective and recognises her mother as a moral agent who is able to make decisions and choices. In the early stages of AD, when Alice retains a high level of verbal communication skills, Lydia shows an interest in her mother's experience of disability. In a touching moment, Alice and Lydia connect:

Lydia- What is it [AD] like? I mean, what does it actually feel like?

Alice- Well, it's not always the same. I have good days and bad days. On my good days, I can almost pass for a normal person. But on my bad days, I feel like I can't find myself. I've always been so defined by my intellect, my language, my articulation, and now sometimes I can see the words hanging in front of me and I can't reach them, and I don't know who I am, and I don't know what I'm going to lose next.

Lydia- It sounds horrible.

Alice- Thanks for asking.

In another scene, the pair communicate via video link and Alice asks Lydia's opinion on her prepared speech for the Alzheimer's Association. Alice becomes frustrated and annoyed when her non-academic daughter suggests she offer a more personal account of living with AD, but Lydia patiently encourages her mother.

Lydia- It's good, Mom. It's good. It's very scientific.

Alice- Yes, well you know.

Lydia- And I'm sure it's valid. But um...

Alice- but what?

Lydia- I mean, is there any value in making it a bit more personal?

Alice- I don't understand. What do you mean by personal?

Lydia- You're not speaking to a room of scientists. What I want to know, really, is how do you feel? What does it feel like? What does this disease mean to you?

Alice- You weren't listening because that's all in there. That's in the speech.

Lydia – Okay. Don't ask me then.

Alice- Oh no then, I won't ask – then.

[Lydia waits a moment before re-engaging her mother].

Lydia- Hey, Mom, let's give it one more shot, okay?

Alice- I can't because I have done it already. I use this – this yellow thingy [highlighter] – to make it so I don't have to read the same line over and over and over again!

Lydia- Got it. Totally. Just print out one more.

Alice- No No! It took me three days!

Lydia- Sorry.

Alice- Three days.

[Alice disconnects the video call].

Lydia shows an interest in her mother's experience and a care for her feelings. This differs from John and Anna, who assume Alice is incapable of articulating a rational view, so they disregard her feelings. Importantly, Lydia rightly imagines

that Alice has the capacity to problem-solve, when she encourages her to adjust the speech. While, Alice responds with frustration, she does eventually incorporate Lydia's suggestions.

Marquis (2018, p.835) claims the scene suggests Alice, as a disabled woman, is no longer able to do scientific work because she is discouraged from such a narrative and persuaded to write a personal account. In positioning Lydia (a non-academic artist), as someone more capable of relating to cognitive disability compared to her academic family, the film critiques the superiority of academic knowledge (Marquis 2018, p.835). Simultaneously, the filmmakers create a binary between academia and art, ascribing embodiment with art, and denying a place for embodied identities in academia (Marquis 2018, p.835). Marquis (2018, p.835) explains that in denying Alice's scientific script and repositioning her speech into a non-scientific and 'personal' narrative, the film reproduces binary epistemologies:

Rather than engaging with the potential for an embodied, female academic to claim space within the university context, then, the film ultimately reinscribes a sense of higher education as a place of disembodied, corporeal control even as it critiques that notion.

I agree that the film problematically disconnects the disabled body from yielding academic authority/knowledge. Marquis is justified in her assertion that *Still Alice* reproduces the construction of the disembodied academic, while simultaneously problematising the notion of superior disembodied academic ways of knowing. Nevertheless, the scene is highly nuanced in ways that Marquis does not unpack because, while it disavows Alice's identity as professor, seeming to unravel her sense of self-2, it also depicts a respect for Alice's selfhood with consideration for

her transforming mind. It is necessary to examine Lydia's preferable way of relating to Alice in more detail. In reading AD as constituting a transformative mind, Lydia adjusts her rate of speech, enabling Alice to absorb information. Importantly, the film portrays Alice as capable of receiving and responding to critical feedback, thereby positioning Alice's self-2 as remaining intact. The filmmakers demonstrate a relational approach towards maintaining selfhood when Lydia rightly imagines that Alice, in the early stages of AD, has retained academic characteristics such as interpreting feedback, critical thinking and problem solving.

In this section, I have described how the film presents the existence of self-2 as relational. John and Anna put Alice's selfhood at risk by treating her as confused/irrational and incapable, while Lydia facilitates the continuation of selfhood, with a respect for Alice's transforming mind. *Still Alice* offers some pertinent examples of ableist treatment and the impact upon selfhood, juxtaposed against respectful approaches that sustain relational selfhood within a transforming mind. Despite these important contrasts, the film does contain some AD tropes and ableist events/conditions, which are treated as unproblematic, and to which I shall now turn. I will conclude by examining how the film subverts ableist ideologies about the value of disabled life.

Part III – A Fate Worse Than Death?

In representing AD, the filmmakers deploy problematic tropes in order to visually represent cognitive decline. Alice initially appears to dress in a stylish fashion with a neatly kept hairstyle, but as her cognitive capacity begins to deteriorate the

filmmakers alter her wardrobe, presenting her in baggy, ill-assorted clothing with untidy dishevelled hair. In changing Alice's personal style, the filmmakers risk representing AD as causing a loss of selfhood, which is arguably a trope the film attempts to subvert. Additionally, people who have impairments of the mind are often represented as untidy/unstylish on screen, and this projection has an Othering effect—producing disabled bodies as undesirable/unsexy. I am not suggesting that films should always represent disabled figures as dignified, but rather that able-bodied figures are overwhelmingly presented as the dignified opposite: we do not see them sharing a lack of dignity on screen.

In another scene, the filmmakers visually represent cognitive decline when Alice becomes disorientated while on holiday with John at their summer house. In this scene, Alice forgets the location of the toilet, and unable to orientate herself in time, she wets her pants. John arrives, and the filmmakers project his point-of-view as he witnesses Alice standing at the bottom of the stairs with a large wet patch on her pants and reddening, flushed skin, denoting her humiliation.

Alice- I couldn't find the bathroom.

John- It's okay, baby. Come on, let's get you cleaned up.

Alice- I don't know where I am [Alice cries, as John puts his arm around her and they go upstairs].

The image of Alice's urine-soaked pants may affirm ableist conceptions of undesirability and disgust. Indeed, this visual discourse has an iterative powerful effect because the portrayal of incontinence is a common trope used to signify

later stages of AD (Cohen-Shalev & Marcus 2012, p.82). The projection of disabled incontinence problematically intersects with gendered conceptions about women's bodies. Marquis (2018 p.834) notes that the scene signifies uncontrolled female embodiment whereby Alice cannot exhibit a 'control of mind over matter'—a control normatively ascribed to men. Alice's incontinence signifies what feminist scholar Margarit Shildrick (1997) calls the 'leaky body', referring to gendered conceptions about uncontrollable female embodied subjectivity (Marquis 2018, p.834). For Marquis, the 'leaky' female body is at odds with traditional beliefs about the disembodied professor, and therefore, the scene further signifies Alice's separation from academia.

Still Alice presents a further separation, not just from academia, but also from society at large, in a scene depicting institutional care. Alice visits an aged-care facility because she is considering her future care needs. During the visit, she encounters isolated withdrawn individuals whose movements are restricted by staff. A care-worker provides a tour of the facility, believing Alice is investigating options for an elderly parent. The care-worker informs Alice that the residents wear electronic bracelets which prevent them from using elevators or leaving the building. Explaining the rationale for this restrictive practice, she states:

I don't know if you've experienced this yet with your parent, but a lot of times they get night-time restlessness and wandering. This way, we can prevent their elopement without our patients feeling they are locked in.

Alice is advised that visitors are welcome at any time, but she notices that none of the residents appears to be hosting a guest. Suddenly, the quiet room is disrupted

when a woman vacates her seat and begins verbalising indecipherable speech sounds. An alarm emanates from the chair she abandoned, but it is quickly silenced when another care-worker returns the woman to her seat. The care-worker explains that some residents have chair alarms as a precaution, so that the staff know when they are moving around. Alice appears to find the atmosphere distressing, as she imagines herself residing in such an environment.

This scene is deeply troubling because it unproblematically portrays restrictive practices as a 'precautionary method', necessary for the person's own good, while clearly depicting their use without any signs of immediate danger. Instead of enabling freedom of movement, the care-worker denies the woman a right to mobilise by directing her back to the chair. It is true that people with AD living in residential care facilities are sometimes subjected to restrictive practices, but these methods are considered controversial from both a human rights and health perspective (Chandler, White, & Wilmott 2016, pp.361-363; Deveau & McDonnell 2009, pp.172-177; Ridley & Jones 2012, pp. 33-36; Sturmey 2015, pp.3-30). The 'precautionary measure' rationale asserts that restrictive practices are necessary to protect individuals, but this justification is often deployed when, in truth, the practice occurs as a matter of staff convenience or due to inadequate staffing (Ridley & Jones 2012, p.34 and Sturmey 2015, p.20). The film does not present restrictive practice as inhumane, although it is depicted as frightening. The audience is not invited to critically consider if the reasons behind policy are justified, because the nurse appears caring. The film contains no further reference to institutional care settings and Alice does not investigate other facilities. In this

way the film invites us to see restrictive practices as a standard uncontroversial intervention. The banality of the care-workers comment, 'It's just a precautionary measure', is disturbing and paints a bleak and terrifying future, which is necessary for the next dramatic turn.

In the next scene, Alice plans her suicide, to be actioned during the later stages of AD. Alice does not want to end her life until her precious memories are gone, so using her iPhone as a mnemonic device, she creates a memory test, to be completed each day. A brief cut-away shot shows Alice asking a doctor for Rohypnol pills, claiming she needs help sleeping. In the next shot, Alice is at home, using her computer to record a video file, in which she delivers suicide instructions to her future self. At numerous times throughout the film, Alice is shown answering questions on her phone. This repetition ensures the audience is reminded of her suicide plan. The repeated image of Alice typing on her iPhone signals that late-stage AD is utterly terrifying and it invokes a question about whether Alice would be better off dead. This interpretation requires that viewers already understand the 'better off dead' motif. In this way, the film repeatedly contains an enthymematic silence that produces a common-sense logic, which imagines disabled existence as unliveable. This iteration forms part of a discursive hierarchy where the film debates whether Alice is better off dead or whether her life remains worthwhile.

Smith (2015a, 2015b), criticises *Still Alice* for ableist tropes of burden and tragedy, within the context of physician-assisted suicide:

the film unabashedly preaches for physician-assisted suicide, without much nuanced discussion of a sensitive and extremely complicated social issue. Because who wouldn't rather be dead than disabled?

I agree that the film does, at times, depict tragedy and burden, which is problematic, especially within the context of euthanasia/suicide; however, I disagree with the view that *Still Alice* 'preaches for physician-assisted suicide'. Rather, the filmmakers complicate this highly political issue because as the film progresses, it remains unclear whether it promotes or challenges the 'better off dead' ideology.

Still Alice projects moments when tragedy, burden and better off dead tropes are subverted or subjectively unclear. Rather than offering a clear 'better off dead' ideology, Alice's attempt at suicide, within the overall context of the film, can be read in two ways. Proving my point, film critic Tom Shone (2015) criticises the filmmakers for the scene's overall message, which unlike Smith, he reads as opposed to suicide. Shone (2015) states, "they score the scene with an ominous throb of violins – a reprehensively prissy chastisement on their part, as if Alice were now the bad guy for her wish". Shone's comments, whilst insensitive to disability politics, reveal how *mise-en-scène* functions as a method for projecting some doubt about the film's message. A detailed look at the *mise-en-scène*, to which I now turn, reveals a nuanced message about disabled suicide in relation to a transforming mind and identity.

When Alice eventually views her suicide instructional video, she does so without intent/desire to end her life. The scene begins when Alice accidentally opens the video file on her computer, whilst searching for something else. Viewing a younger, coherent and reassuring version of herself, she appears intrigued and amused. Alice begins to listen attentively when the film delivers instructions on how to find her secret pill stash. Unable to recognise the seriousness of the video message, Alice appears to view the situation as a game with a problem to be solved—like a treasure hunt with a prize at the end. The video instructs her to go upstairs, locate a drawer, open a bottle of pills and take all the pills. Alice struggles to follow the directions, and after getting to the top of the stairs she forgets the next step and returns to the recorded message. Dramatic music adds tension to the scene, as Alice repeatedly fails to follow the instructions that she once carefully prepared for herself. Eventually, she takes the laptop with her, following the instructions in real time. Just as Alice is about to take the pills, she is interrupted when her care-attendant calls out from downstairs. Startled, she drops the pills, and the scene ends with a close-up of the spilt tablets on the floor, followed by a shot capturing multiple angles of Alice's reflection in the mirror. The multiple images of Alice's reflection signify a split between her past and present self. The scene asks the audience to consider whether Alice's past wishes should be applied to her present desires. Specifically, the filmmakers ask the audience to consider whether it's fortunate that Alice failed to complete the task, or tragic that her past wishes failed to eventuate? It is easy to read the suicide narrative as evidence of the 'better off dead' trope, and some viewers, heavily influenced by ableist culture, may view Alice's life as a fate worse than death. Some may claim

that Alice's former wishes, made when she had greater cognitive capacity, should be respected, seeing her failed suicide attempt as tragic. However, those who claim the scene preaches a 'better off dead' ideology fail to consider the visual elements of film and neglect to situate the scene within the broader storyline, which ultimately represents AD as a transformation, rather than an obliteration of the self. Indeed, the final scenes suggest that Alice's life remains worthwhile.

Directly after the attempted suicide scene, John and Alice enjoy yogurt at Pinkberry (yogurt franchise). John reminds Alice about her past life before bringing into question her desire for a continued existence. This process of reminding/remembers informs the context for a questioning about suicidal intentions. The film poses the question: having lost a culturally valued high level of intellectual capacity, would death be preferable to living with cognitive disability? In turn, the cultural ableist evaluation of intelligence as inherently superior is held to account. Consider the following dialogue between Alice and John, as they enjoy yogurt at Pinkberry:

John- Ali, you see that building over there? Do you know what it is? [Cuts to a shot of the university building].

Alice- I don't think I know that. [A medium shot frames John and Alice, sitting together. Alice looks happy].

John- That's Columbia. Where you used to teach.

Alice- Someone told me, I was a good teacher.

John- Yes, you were.

Alice- I was really smart. [Close-up of Alice – she eats more yogurt and seems content].

[John looks away, struggling not to cry].

John- You were the smartest person I've ever met. [John pauses, hesitating] Ali, do you still want to be here?

Alice- I'm not done yet. Do we have to go? [Medium close-up captures Alice, looking happy and with a sparkle in her eyes].

John- No. Don't worry. Take your time. [A medium close-up of both figures, shows an intimacy between the couple. John smiles at Alice with tears in his eyes. The image shows his continued love for her].

The scene contains *extra-verbal context* and an enthymematic silence which alters the linguistic meaning of the script; consequently, it can be read in two ways depending upon if the enthymeme succeeds or fails. The common-sense ableist belief that AD is a fate worse than death informs the intended meaning of John's question—"do you still want to be here?". His question is existential and refers to an unspoken inquiry about Alice's quality of life. When John asks, "do you still want to be here?", the audience is expected to know that he is asking Alice if she wants to die. Without ableist cultural ideologies that assume cognitive impairment as inferior to high intellect and disability as worse than death, John's question may be read exclusively within the context of the present activity—finishing the yogurt.

A broader narrative context also informs the audience that John is asking Alice if she has a desire to die, because the scene takes place directly after she fails to follow her suicide instructional video. Alice, having forgotten her former wish to

commit suicide and her subsequent accidental attempt, lacks the context to understand the intention behind John's question. Alice positions John's question in relation to the here and now and it is clear that her response 'I'm not done yet' refers to the fact that she is not finished eating her yogurt, but Glatzer and Westmoreland allow for a different interpretation. Alice's response, 'I'm not done yet', contains an *extra-verbal context* that offers an alternative meaning to what is spoken, because it could equally be understood to mean that she is not done with life. The film subverts the ableist ideology 'better off dead than disabled', because Alice does not want to die—she is 'not done yet'. I began this chapter with a quote by Susan Sontag (1969, p.11) in which she states, "Silence remains, inescapably, a form of speech". The silent unspoken discourse alters the meaning of utterances. Indeed, silence and speech are inescapably entwined.

Conclusion

Still Alice contains some silent discursive projections that, like the previous films I have analysed, produce ableist/gendered meanings. Nevertheless, unlike the previous films, *Still Alice* contains nuanced *extra-verbal context*, altering the meaning of the spoken script. *Mise-en-scène* plays an important function in telling the story of early onset AD—projecting a transforming mind and continuation of selfhood. Attention to the unspoken, silent and *extra-verbal context* reveals that the film cannot be reduced to another ableist example of the 'better off dead' trope. Nevertheless, gender and disability intersect when care is unproblematically depicted as 'women's work'. Additionally, the narrative reinforces ideas of male rationality both in the home and at work. In *Still Alice*, cognitive disability is presented as incompatible with academia and the professor is prematurely retired

to the private domain. In the next chapter, the physically disabled male genius thrives in academia, but as in *Still Alice*, care-work remains the domain of women.

7. LOVING STEPHEN HAWKING: GENDER, DISABILITY, MARRIAGE AND CARE IN JAMES MARSH'S *THE THEORY OF EVERYTHING*.

Professor Hawking is simultaneously silence and speech (Hélène Mialet, 2012 p.87).

The Theory of Everything (2014) is a biopic focusing on the life of British theoretical physicist Stephen Hawking, who died in 2018, aged 76. Hawking was diagnosed with Motor Neurone Disease (MND) in 1963, when he was still working on his PhD. Despite a dismal prognosis, Hawking lived a long and celebrated life. Adored by science fiction fans and frequently referenced in popular television programs, Hawking became a pop culture icon. Indeed, his televised image has screened on everything from popular animation (*The Simpsons*, *Futurama* and *Family Guy*) to cameo appearances in programs such as *The Big Bang Theory*, *Star Trek: The Next Generation* and *Late Night with Conan O'Brien*. Arguably the most famous physicist and disabled person of our time, when Hawking spoke about the laws governing the universe, using his trademark computer synthesised voice, he literally embodied science and technology.

This chapter analyses *The Theory of Everything* from several angles, and in several sections. After offering a synopsis of the film and surveying its scholarly reception, I consider the extent to which the film departs from or reinforces Cartesian dualism—the influential idea that mind and body can be understood as separate. Cartesian dualism has been debated and contested in philosophical and

feminist political thought.³⁸ Throughout the chapter as a whole, I reflect on the implications of *The Theory of Everything's* imbrication with dualism for feminist and disability scholarship. These implications inform my analysis of *Theory's*³⁹ strongly (hetero-) gendered discourses of genius, marriage, and care. I argue that *Theory* both reflects and produces ableist gendered stereotypes, but also features (occasional) moments more consistent with a progressive, socially constructed understanding of disability.

The chapter begins with a synopsis of the film and a brief account of its reception. Like most biopics, the film is 'based on a true story'. Indeed, *The Theory of Everything* draws heavily on Jane Hawking's (2007) memoir about her marriage to Stephen. Consistent with the critical reception of biopics in general, media reports about the film's depiction of the Hawking union have questioned whether the film accurately represents the couple's marriage and divorce (Anderson 2014; Dean 2014; Dockterman 2014; Moorhead 2015; Readman 2016). There are many interesting and intriguing differences between Jane Hawking's book and *Theory*, and it may be pertinent to consider why certain aspects of their story demand finessing or adjustment, while others are entirely omitted. However, my main concern in this chapter is not with cinematic verisimilitude, but with gendered representations of disability, genius, and care. In other words, my interest lies not so much in whether the film reflects the historical reality of the Hawkings' marriage, but rather in the politics of voice—and, in particular, how and why some perspectives are silenced. To this end, I introduce Cartesian dualism and its

³⁸ See Moira Gatens (1996) 'Imaginary Bodies: Ethics, Power and Corporeality'. Iris Marion Young (1980) 'Throwing Like a Girl: A Phenomenology of Feminine Body Comportment Motility and Spatiality'.

³⁹ For brevity, I refer to the film, *The Theory of Everything*, as *Theory* throughout the chapter.

critiques in order to build a framework for analysis of the film in the three sections that follow.

I begin analysing *Theory* by using and extending critiques of Cartesian dualism to unpack representations of the disabled (male) genius. I demonstrate how *Theory* consistently reinforces the idea that the body limits and constrains rather than facilitates our capacity to think. The academic/institutional context of the film offers a location for striking metaphors concerning Cartesian dualism, including silent discourses of intellectual ability pitted against bodily disability. The dualistic treatment of disabled genius in *Theory* is generally consistent with a range of familiar narratives. Just as familiar, arguably, is *Theory*'s representation of masculine heterosexuality. In the second part of the film analysis, I argue that while Stephen Hawking's sexuality is represented in ways that might seem, at first glance, to be somewhat hopeful or progressive, those representations are built on a heteronormative and ableist foundation. Focusing on one controversial scene near the end of the movie—a reverie sequence in which Hawking imagines himself walking—I argue that heterosexuality and ability are intertwined as a kind of cinematically hegemonic masculinity. In the third and final section of this chapter, I consider how *Theory* represents the (gendered) nexus of marriage and care. This section identifies some of the myths and messages *Theory* conveys about heterosexual marriage, care and disability. Taken together, each section contributes to an understanding of how unspoken/silent discursive formations produce ableist/gendered ideology as a common-sense response to disabled bodies.

Synopsis and background: the physics of love

The Theory of Everything was written by Anthony McCarten (2014), who based the screenplay on Jane Hawking's memoir, *Travelling to Infinity: My Life with Stephen* (2007). Directed by James Marsh, *Theory* narrates a love story spanning thirty years of married family life. The style is realist and follows a more-or-less straightforward chronology.

Synopsis

It's 1963, and a young Hawking (Eddie Redmayne) races his bicycle through the streets of Cambridge, with his friend Brian (Harry Lloyd), on their way to a student party. Upon arrival, Brian turns his head to gaze at a young woman and comments to Hawking, "What if the secret of the universe has something to do with sex? Why don't you do your doctorate on that? The physics of love." In the next shot, Hawking notices an attractive woman looking at him. Thus begins the love affair of an unlikely couple as Hawking, an atheist and scientist, falls for Jane Wilde (Felicity Jones), a faithful parishioner studying arts.

Meanwhile, in the prestigious halls of Cambridge University, glimpses of Hawking's genius appear. He outshines his fellow students and astounds Professor Dennis Sciama (David Thewlis), presenting the answers to nine out of ten complex mathematical equations, hurriedly scribbled on the back of a train timetable. Sciama presses the young prodigy to decide on a thesis topic and Hawking elects to study time, specifically, the point at which the universe began. Everything seems to bode well for Hawking in both love *and* physics. A montage

sequence shows the young physicist producing mathematical equations, numerically winding back time to locate the birth of the universe. Excitement mounts as he draws closer to achieving his goal. Suddenly, Hawking's clock is interrupted by a scene depicting him falling badly in the campus courtyard. After medical testing, he is diagnosed with MND and receives a bleak prognosis: he is advised that his body will rapidly waste away, and he will die within two years. Depressed and defeated, Hawking withdraws from his friends and attempts to push Jane away but, refusing to be dissuaded, she declares her love. The couple marries, Hawking is awarded his PhD, and children soon follow.

Hawking ascends the academic ranks, achieving the title of professor and winning numerous prestigious awards. Surviving well beyond the prescribed two years of life expectancy, albeit with increasing levels of disability, Hawking's care needs increase. Taking on the sole care for her disabled husband and their children, Jane appears to suffer a heavy burden. The narrative shifts when Jane forms a friendship with Jonathan (Charlie Cox), the choirmaster at her church. Lonely after his wife's death, Jonathan offers to help Jane care for Hawking and his children. Images of the Hawkings and Jonathan appear in a montage sequence showing a happy, albeit unconventional family life. Things begin to go awry as Jane and Jonathan struggle to suppress their emerging sexual attraction.

When Jane and Jonathon begin an affair, she wrestles with feelings of guilt. Tension escalates when Stephen Hawking develops pneumonia, and she must

decide, on her husband's behalf, whether to consent to life-saving tracheotomy surgery: a procedure that will permanently remove his capacity for producing normative speech sounds. Hawking undergoes the tracheotomy and understandably experiences a period of melancholy as he tries to adjust. New enabling technology provides the professor with a computer synthesised voice and, with a renewed zest for life, he begins writing a book. Recovering from surgery, Hawking accepts home nursing care and is charmed by his nurse, Elaine (Maxine Peake). As the professor and his nurse flirt with an increasing sexual attraction, the film ends with the Hawkings agreeing to separate and begin anew with their respective lovers.

Oscar-bait, he-says/she-says, and academic treatments of *Theory*

In his Oscar-winning role, Eddie Redmayne made audiences marvel at his ability to twist/contort his body into the already familiar shape of Hawking's embodiment, an acting feat widely celebrated in the film's reviews (Harrah 2016; Hornaday 2014; Denby 2014; Marquez 2014; Setoodeh 2014; Weber 2014). However, not all disabled people and their advocates agree that Redmayne's performance or the film's representation of disability is deserving of acclaim (Crossan 2015; Dolmage 2017; Harris 2015; Marquis 2018; smith 2015b). Disabled writers/activists Rob Crossan (2015) and s.e. smith (2015b) criticise the filmmakers for projecting ableism and described Redmayne's performance as 'Oscar bait'—a derogatory term used to describe Hollywood's willingness to recognise the purported skill required of an able-bodied actor to play a disabled person. The film's consultant neurologist, Katie Siddle describes Redmayne's performance as 'extraordinary' because he was able to mimic facial fasciculations, and accurately demonstrated "a spastic gait with foot drop" (Chinthapalli 2015).

The capacity to transform the body into a disabled shape is considered the pinnacle of acting prowess, and performers are often praised for their willingness to research real disabled lives—meanwhile disabled actors struggle for roles.

The media has shown significant interest in Professor Hawking's personal response to the film (Grossman 2015; Khatchaturian 2014; Readman 2016; Selby 2015; Setoodeh 2014). After watching an advanced screening, Hawking was reportedly so pleased with his portrayal that he allowed Redmayne to use his trademarked synthesised voice (Setoodeh 2014, p.48). Hawking is said to have confided in director James Marsh that at times he believed he was watching himself (Setoodeh 2014, p.46). Jane Hawking was decidedly more critical of *Theory* than her ex-husband, claiming "it needed more emotion" and understates the hardships she experienced in caring for her husband (Moorhead, 2015). Ironically, Professor Hawking stated the film "needed more science" (Moorhead 2015). Thus, their respective responses to the film reflect a classic gendered sciences/humanities dichotomy.

Theory is a relatively recent film and has so far drawn limited scholarly attention. At the time of writing, three article-length treatments of the movie stand out, each with their own limitations. The first and most comprehensive treatment of the film comes from Marquis (2018), whose article I introduced in the previous chapter. Marquis analyses *Still Alice* and *The Theory of Everything* to consider how each film depicts gendered non-normative bodies within the academy. In her analysis

of both films, Marquis was more critical of *Theory*, arguing that it projects a mind/body dualism in representing disabled male genius. Marquis claims the film presents a 'mind over matter' dichotomy which serves to reproduce the idea that academia is a place for disembodied minds. For Marquis, *Theory* positions Hawking's intellect as even more extraordinary because of his disability and in this way, the film reaffirms the dominant conception of academia as a place for normative bodies, even though the story itself presents a chance to destabilise such a view. Marquis takes up promising lines of thought, but she sabotages them with (at best) imprecise and (at worst) ableist discursive formulations and these will be discussed as my analysis proceeds.

In an article published in *Disability & Society*, Disability studies scholars Vickie Gauci and Anne-Marie Callus (2015, p.1282) claim *Theory* portrays two starkly separate aspects of Hawking's identity: the physicist and the disabled person. They observe a distinct representational contrast between a swiftly developing physicist's mind and a body becoming increasingly unresponsive to the mind's basic physical commands. Here, like Marquis, they point to a representation that imagines mind and body as separate, distinct and dichotomous. Their interest lies in how the film depicts Hawking struggling with the physical environment (stairs), alongside moments when the physical space enables (wheelchairs, synthetic voice technology). The authors briefly describe a small sample of scenes to illustrate a political point about the environmental barriers disabled people experience within a largely inaccessible world. Gauci and Callus (2015, pp.1282-1283) briefly mention Merleau-Ponty's (2002) work on how the physical environment shapes 'being in the world' to support a social model perspective of

disability. They argue that the defining feature of disabled bodies should not be physical and cognitive impairments but rather the 'mismatch' between bodies in 'space and place'. They complain that *Theory* projects a medical model of disability whereby Hawking's scientific achievements constitute an extraordinary feat of mind over matter. For Gauci and Callus, the film frequently shows Hawking struggling with space and place, yet they argue it does not recognise that struggle as embodied because his mind is presented as separate to the physical world. Gauci and Callus' article is short, and as a result, they do not offer a comprehensive analysis. Consequently, their conclusions do not account for the broader narrative and overall context of the film.

In contrast, communications scholar Declan Fahy (2014) claims the film projects a thoroughly embodied figure. In a short article published in *The Conversation*, he argues that *Theory* subverts the myth of Hawking as a disembodied mind. Fahy (2014) claims that images of Hawking falling, choking, coughing, and struggling to move his muscles, reveal a figure anchored to the physical world. Fahy explains how the film depicts Hawking receiving care from his wife Jane, and later, from his nurse, Elaine. He concludes that the depiction of physical care subverts the popular notion of Hawking as a disembodied professor, and casts Jane Hawking as the inspirational heroine. Fahy is right that the film emphasises Jane's role in providing care and presents her as an inspiring heroic figure, but he does not problematise this depiction in relation to feminist disability politics. I refer here to a politics of representation which would criticise the film for projecting an ableist/gendered trope that positions care as constitutive of an onerous burden, typically suited to women and performed by inspiring/self-sacrificing heroines.

I suggest that Hawking's physicality is indeed foregrounded (often in reference to his care needs) and as such, his subjectivity cannot be read according to normative notions of the disembodied professor. Nevertheless, in *Theory*, the gravity and weight of his body is conveyed as tragic, whilst his cerebral capacity is narratively portrayed as a saving grace. In this sense, *Theory* does not subvert the myth of the disembodied professor, as Fahy suggests. Rather, as Marquis (2018), and Gauci and Callus (2015) observe, it frequently reflects and produces a dualistic understanding of Stephen Hawking's mind/body. This dualism, as my analysis will show, often appears as a dichotomous transcendent mind/immanent body made apparent when celebrating the professor's genius, contrasted with a pitying of disabled flesh.

Cartesian dualism on wheels

Western culture generally conceives of the mind and body as separate and distinct, with a privileging of mind over body. The dominance of this world view originated with Rene Descartes' (2000 p.14) [1637] famous claim "I think therefore I am". The Cartesian view imagines the body as an object which can be controlled in a variety of ways in separation of the self (Howson 2004 p.7). Cartesian logic can be seen in the biomedical model of disease which locates illness/disability within the individual body, frequently excluding social and cultural locations (Howson 2004 p.7). Cartesian logic is a problem for critical disability scholars who seek to identify/problematised conditions of social and cultural disablement which are themselves fundamentally entwined with how people think about disability (Garland-Thomson 2011, p.594; Weiss, 2015 p.78). Additionally, dualisms have

long been a problem for feminism because they produce gendered dichotomies. The dichotomous positioning of 'mind over matter' is problematic from a feminist perspective because women's bodies have been essentialised as grounded in nature, whilst men's bodies are aligned with the rational mind, resulting in the widespread devaluing of women⁴⁰.

In critiquing the mind/body dualism, I draw on the phenomenology of philosopher Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1962), who claims that consciousness originates through bodily actions. For Merleau-Ponty (1962, p.137) "consciousness is in the first place not a matter of 'I think' but of 'I can'". Thus, rather than "I think, therefore I am," Merleau-Ponty (1962, p.137) conceptualises a lived body through the formulation "I can, therefore I am". Merleau-Ponty (1962) insists a body cannot be reduced to a mere object from which consciousness escapes because one does not have a body; rather, the self is a body. Philosopher Gail Weiss (2015, p.77) explains, that for Merleau-Ponty, it is not through our consciousness that we directly engage with the world, but rather, through the body. Merleau-Ponty (1962, p.124) states: "We cannot relate certain movements to bodily mechanism and others to consciousness. The body and consciousness are not mutually limiting, they can only be parallel". To illustrate his point, Merleau-Ponty describes how individuals with impairments such as *Aphraxia* and *Agnosia*⁴¹ engage with and make sense of the world differently to those with a normative physiology, to conclude that symbolic consciousness must be understood as embodied.

⁴⁰ It is beyond the scope of this thesis to flesh out the many ways in which feminists have problematised dualisms and the body. See Moira Gatens (1996) 'Imaginary Bodies: Ethics, Power and Corporeality' for a comprehensive reading on this topic.

⁴¹ *Aphraxia*: complete or significant loss of ability to perform voluntary movement. *Agnosia*: an inability to interpret sensations and recognise people and objects.

Merleau-Ponty has been criticised for assuming a male body in his logic about what a body can do, most notably by Marion Iris Young (1980), who argues that women's bodies are shaped/restricted by patriarchal culture. Whilst Merleau-Ponty has been rightly criticised for failing to account for the way bodily capacities are imbricated in power relations, his insights encourage attention to the way society facilitates or restricts the meaningful interactions of certain bodies (Weiss 2015, p.78). My critique of the Cartesian dualisms projected in *Theory* is therefore influenced by Merleau-Ponty's conceptualising of embodiment, which I extend by taking account of contemporary understandings of gender and disability.

In order to build a framework for conceptualising the Cartesian dualisms projected in *Theory*, I engage with the philosophy of Simone de Beauvoir, specifically her claim that patriarchal society is defined by a tension between transcendence and immanence. In *The Second Sex* (2010), de Beauvoir aligns transcendence with masculinity, describing transcendent pursuits as an active attempt to extend into the future, and thus becoming released from biological fate. In contrast, she describes immanence as associated with femininity, which she claims is primarily prescribed as uncreative work involving life-sustaining modalities of existence marked by passivity, simplicity, and acceptance of biological fate (Veltman 2006, p.119). de Beauvoir explains that transcendent activities discover, create and progress into the future, whilst immanence involves biological functions such as child-birth, eating, cooking and cleaning (Veltman 2006, p.119-120). Thus, for de Beauvoir, patriarchy aligns scientific pursuits with transcendence, and the everyday mundane functions of the flesh with immanence.

de Beauvoir's work has been foundational to feminist philosophy and has been much debated and criticised (Hartsock 1983; Jaggar & McBride 1985; Lloyd 1984; Lundgren-Gothlin 1996; McMillan 1982). It is important to recognise that de Beauvoir uses the paired terms transcendence/immanence not to argue in favour of the distinction, but rather, to contest the 'Cartesian ghost' haunting it, and to point to its gendered application (Butler 1986, p.39). Indeed, de Beauvoir rejects the notion that women have a 'maternal instinct', identifying motherhood as a cultural institution (Butler 1986, p.42). Thus, in describing immanent activities as unproductive/uncreative, de Beauvoir is pointing to and contesting an androcentric patriarchal logic. Gendered transcendence/immanence continues to dominate popular conceptions of mind/body, and the distinction constitutes a useful framework for analysing cinematic representations of gendered disability. While I reject the notion of a separate and distinct transcendence/immanence, these terms are useful for describing *Theory's* filmic projection of a problematic mind/body dualism. I suggest that gendered disabled bodies are frequently imagined as trapped in immanence, while transcendent escape requires an exceptionally brilliant mind or genius.

Film Analysis

Part I – Disabled Genius and Masculinity.

Theory largely portrays Hawking as a striking example of male rationality, positioning his exceptional mind as transcending the immanent body. In projecting a dichotomy of mind/body, *Theory* celebrates the professor's transcendent mind whilst simultaneously presenting his flesh as a spectacle for pity or mourning,

grounded in horrific, tragic immanence. This celebration of the transcendent mind and mourning of immanent flesh is most clearly projected via the *mise-en-scène*. In a similar style to *Still Alice*, *Theory* wordlessly projects a frightening and shocking experience on campus to signal the tragic onset of disease. In a pivotal scene, Hawking is shown quickly writing equations on a blackboard, before hurrying through the campus, accompanied by a rapid musical tempo. Suddenly, the young scholar on the verge of a scientific breakthrough experiences a dramatic fall in the campus courtyard. The music suddenly stops and an extreme close-up shows Hawking's face pressed-up against the concrete. The film cuts to a high-angle shot of a fallen Hawking as seen through a window. According to Marquis (2018, p.836), the positioning of Hawking's fallen body as external to the building signals an emerging potential for outsider status. Yet, this high-angle shot also distorts the distance/height of Hawking's fall, which appears as both an extreme bodily collapse and a metaphorical fall from a great height. Fahy (2014) reads this scene as evidence that genius is bound to the body, debunking the myth of Hawking as "a pure intellect and unfettered mind". Fahy (2014) states:

By showing Hawking cracking his head on the concrete, it inverts the central idea of the myth: Hawking's mind is not free of his body, but is instead bound inextricably to it.

Thus, for Fahy (2014) the mind/body dualism located in the myth of the disembodied professor is obviated through the highly visible weight of Hawking's body. I disagree with Fahy's claim that the film subverts the mind/body myth because the narrative dichotomously positions mind-over-matter, through a celebration of Hawking's intellect, while his physicality appears frightening, tragic, and pitiful.

Music plays an important communicative function within the scene by conveying academic time as fast, steady, and incompatible with disability. A quick musical tempo foregrounds Hawking as he completes complex equations and purposefully dashes through the campus. The music comes to an abrupt stop when he falls, signalling a departure from normative academic time. Disability studies scholar Alison Kafer (2013) proposes that disabled bodies operate in 'crip time', which denotes bodies that move through time and space at a different tempo from 'normative' able-bodies. *Theory* portrays the onset of disability as a strongly literal temporal displacement from the academy. The film often separates the mind from the body via dichotomous associations of celebratory transcendence and mournful, tragic immanence. The film's portrayal of tragic immanence begins with the appearance of disability.

Immediately following Hawking's fall on campus, a montage sequence shows him struggling to perform simple physical tasks under close medical observation. Sitting with a doctor in a quiet hospital corridor, the wordless sequence concludes as Hawking receives his diagnosis, delivered with a hopeless prognosis:

Doctor – It's called motor neurone disease. It's a progressive neurological disorder that destroys the cells in the brain that control essential muscle activity such as speaking, walking, breathing, swallowing. The signals that muscles must receive in order to move are disrupted. The result is a gradual muscle decay, a wasting-away. Eventually, the ability to control voluntary movement is lost entirely. I'm afraid average life expectancy is two years. There's nothing I can do for you.

Stephen Hawking – What about the brain?

Doctor – The brain isn't affected. Your thoughts won't change, it's just that, eventually, no one will know what they are. I'm ever so sorry [Doctor walks away].

Neurologist Krishna Chinthapalli (2015) interviewed *Theory's* producer (Lisa Bruce) and consultant neurologist (Katie Siddle), who explain the rationale behind the scene:

The doctor is actually shot at a different speed because when you're getting information like that, we imagine it would be quite surreal for someone. You wouldn't even really be hearing everything they're saying because it's such dramatic news ... so it was almost dream-like or nightmarish. And we chose to have the doctor make his statement and then walk away partly to emotionally play the idea that Stephen was completely isolated.

The projection of this intentional and underlined isolation is problematic within the context of an ableist culture. Whilst the diagnostic moment is likely to be experienced as a personal crisis, the representational problem lies not in depicting distress, but in the unproblematic and ableist conceptions of what Bruce and Siddle project as an isolating and horrific nightmare. The scene encourages an able-bodied audience to imagine what it would be like to receive a dismal prognosis, but because the film's depiction of the diagnostic moment is unrealistic by modern standards⁴², it constitutes a form of cinematic fearmongering. It could be argued that medical practice has a history of callousness, and perhaps the depiction is accurate for the time in which the events are set. However, the scene does not reflect what actually took place in 1963, when the real-life Hawking was *not* told his diagnosis/prognosis in order to spare him the distress (Dobson 2002,

⁴² See Baile, et al (2000) for clinical guidelines on the delivery of dismal prognosis.

p.1478). McCarten's (2014, p.41) screenplay invents a callous diagnostic moment, and Marsh's filmic adaptation emphasises isolation. Able-bodied audiences are encouraged to fear the possibility of becoming disabled themselves but also by extension, disabled people as a group.

What is left unspoken in the diagnosis scene is any reference to the existence of disability supports. The audience is left, in this moment, to believe that nothing can be done to improve the quality of Hawking's life. This silence amplifies the scene's projection of abiding tragedy because the audience, aware that Hawking lives well beyond two years, with a physical condition that does significantly deteriorate, may imagine disability as a 'fate worse than death'. The scene deliberately conveys a heightened sense of horror and tragedy because it presents Hawking as confronted with an isolated life in which his knowledge/ideas will become trapped in his head—thereby exaggerating the mind/body distinction.

While viewing the film's portrayal of diagnosis, the audience is likely to ponder why and how the real-life Hawking stayed alive for so many years. In the diagnostic scene, Hawking asks if his mind will be affected and this question gestures towards a possibility that his longevity derives from his superior intellect—an exceptional case of 'mind over matter'. Neurologists have speculated about Hawking's longevity, concluding that his survival is likely a combination of excellent care, age of onset, and having a type of MND that is slow-progressing. Neurologist Leo McCluskey, a specialist in MND, rejects the notion that mind

power aided in Hawking's longevity (Harmon 2012). *Theory* omits any reference to medical reasons for his longevity, and perhaps this is because it is more entertaining to project an inspirational story, about a genius whose exceptional mind enables him to transcend the fate of immanence.

Like *Still Alice*, *Theory* amplifies conceptions of crisis/tragedy by positioning disability as especially devastating for academics. Disability studies scholar, Jay Dolmage (2017, p.176), in his research into ableism within academia, explains that *Still Alice* and *Theory* speak to the fears of able-bodied academics who are encouraged to examine what it would mean if they suddenly lost their career-defining capacities such as intellect, concentration, and ability to "stand and deliver". Unsurprisingly, the film emphasises Hawking's immediate concern about the future of his cognitive capacity, thereby reflecting/producing a mind/body dichotomy associated with the values of higher education. The narrative implies that so long as he can maintain cerebral power his physical disability poses little threat to his academic activity. According to Marquis (2018, p.835), the knowledge that his cognitive capacity will not be impacted allows Hawking, to some extent, a continuing claim to academic identity despite a corporeality at odds with the normative professorial body. *Theory's* critique of the normative professor's body, for Marquis, is ultimately diminished because she claims that as the film progresses Hawking becomes "too embodied". Marquis use of the term "too embodied" is confusing because it wrongly suggests that embodiment can be subject to degree. I understand that Marquis is applying a 'middle voice' to describe and critique the way the film projects a Cartesian dualism. I suspect she

means that Hawking becomes 'too disabled', and that by foregrounding his physical flesh, his academic mind wrongly appears separated from his body. In this sense, Marquis' argument is more aligned with my own because we are both troubled by how the film produces a problematic Cartesian dualism. Nevertheless, throughout her article, Marquis reproduces this conceptual misstep, during moments when she is not describing what the film does. This suggests that her account is haunted by a 'Cartesian ghost' in which disabled subjects, who are often defined by the weight of their fleshiness are wrongly ascribed to a liminal space—existing apart from the normalised embodied subjectivity which constitutes humanity. I suggest that it is more accurate and useful to view the film's discourse as emphasising Hawking's immanence, and thus, projects Cartesian dualism.

Theory successfully conveys an unspoken/silent discourse of tragic immanence because it is assumed that the audience will take it for granted that disability is inevitably experienced as something dreadful—a horrifying flesh that one must attempt to transcend. Through the unspoken elements of *mise-en-scène*, the director repeatedly conveys a body defined by horror and tragedy. Accordingly, McCarten (2014, p.iv) explains his motivation for the screenplay: "I wanted to tell the horror story of ALS⁴³, this brutal disease that takes and takes until you are either dead or silenced".

⁴³ Motor Neurone Disease is also known as ALS (acronym for amyotrophic lateral sclerosis). MND is also known as Lou Gehrig's disease (after the famous baseball player diagnosed with the disease).

Theory conveys the understanding that the disabled body is to be feared in a number of ways. Marsh frequently delivers close-up shots focused on impaired legs, feet and hands as Hawking negotiates inaccessible spaces. Projections that appeal to a fear-of-disability are restricted to Hawking's physical body which is presented as distinctly separate from his acclaimed mind. For example, analysis of the moments immediately preceding Hawking's doctoral *Viva*⁴⁴, contrasted with the depiction of him celebrating his results, demonstrates how Marsh engages *mise-en-scène* to project transcendence/immanence. At home before the *Viva*, Hawking awkwardly slides horizontally down the stairs. Jane assists him into an upright position and wishes him luck. The film cuts to an extreme close-up of Hawking's slow unsteady gait as he moves through Cambridge campus. Using walking sticks, his legs cast in shadow, the music fades out and is replaced by the sound of Hawking's feet sliding along the ground. The close attention to Hawking's legs and feet as he nervously walks to his assessment distracts the viewer from an emotional engagement with the nervous facial expressions of a student awaiting examination results. Instead, *pathos* is deflected away from the anxious student and towards the tragic/pitiful disabled body. As it turns out, Hawking's thesis is accepted with high praise, and, as he departs via the same courtyard through which he shuffled in, the film centres on his face as he looks up into the sunshine—capturing a glowing, bright expression of delight and hope. Thus, in stark contrast to the tragic visual emphasis applied to the disabled physical body, the mind appears celebrated, positioned apart from the physical body via an extreme close-up of Hawking's joyful facial expression. Lighting performs a communicative function because the visual image contrasts light with

⁴⁴ *Viva Voce* is a Latin term meaning 'by live voice'. A doctoral *Viva* involves the oral defence of the PhD thesis to a panel of examiners.

dark to project a bright mind set apart from a body in shadow, symbolising outward transcendence/inward immanence.

In the next scene, a small dinner party at home depicts Hawking celebrating his success. Once again, an extreme close-up shows him struggling to lift a spoon to his mouth. He leaves the table and another close-up captures his laborious attempt to crawl up the stairs. Marsh projects Hawking's point of view as he watches his friends celebrating through the staircase banisters. The film cuts to a shot of his infant son staring down at him from behind a safety gate—drawing a comparison between the two figures which, as Marquis (2018 p.837) observes, has an infantilising effect. This image also presents Hawking as caged/trapped, like his infant son, behind bars separated from the able-bodied adults at the table. Marquis (2018, p.837) notes that the scene positions Hawking as both academically authoritative and non-normatively embodied, whereby his physicality appears as a 'tragic aberration'. In depicting Hawking's struggle on the stairs, the film not only affirms the tragedy of his situation but also avoids an alternative interdependently-oriented reading whereby the disabled figure requests assistance. Perhaps this is designed to portray Hawking's attempt at maintaining masculine autonomy, albeit a failed one.

Why should Hawking's physical disabled body be understood as tragic above all, when the scene depicts the celebration of his high achievement? The tragedy of the disabled male body is unspoken, yet clearly communicated via a visual

enthymeme. Images of Hawking's struggle to move his body conveys meaning without speech because an ableist/gendered culture conceives of disabled bodies as inherently incompatible with normative conceptions of masculinity.

Representations of Hawking's cerebral abilities/successes are in this way moderated through a lens that emphasises the immanent body as separated from the celebrated masculine transcendent mind.

Disability theorist Tobin Siebers (2008 p.69) asks, "What would it mean to esteem the disabled body for what it really is?" To begin answering this important question, I suggest that a celebration of the disabled body requires a rejection of the mind/body dualism and transcendence/immanence dichotomy. When Professor Hawking's scientific theories are imagined as embodied accomplishments, celebrating his mind requires simultaneously respecting or honouring his flesh. The film does contain a brief moment when Hawking's physicality can be understood according to an embodied understanding of his consciousness. Here, his intellectual ideas are formed through his physical engagement with the world, in a Merleau-Pontian sense of consciousness. In the scene, Hawking's head becomes stuck in his jumper, and while he waits for Jane to assist him, he peers through the fabric and sees flames burning in the fireplace. The image of fire, seen from this perspective, inspires him to think about the structure of black holes and, with time to think, he develops his famous theory about them radiating heat. Thus, Hawking's crip positioning in time and space provides a uniquely embodied perspective for the production of scholarship. Here, the film presents a more progressive, Merleau-Pontian concept of embodiment

because Hawking's conscious thoughts are formed through the materiality of his body in time and space.

Indeed, the same scene can—alternatively or additionally—be read as an example of Stephen Hawking's masculine transcendence and Jane Hawking's feminine immanence. When the professor becomes stuck in his jumper, it is because his wife has left him for a moment to attend to their infant child. It is clear that she has a difficult task in balancing the competing needs of motherhood and caring for a disabled husband. The storyline is loaded with references to Jane Hawking's burden, and the jumper scene could be read as Stephen Hawking achieving a moment of transcendence via scientific thought, while his wife struggles with immanence work. Nevertheless, his scientific idea originates from an embodied perspective because the position of his flesh in time/space provides a unique perspective that enables him to develop his physics. This is a singularly unusual scene among many more that are much more strongly ableist and dualistic. As the film progresses, Stephen Hawking's physical needs are displayed as largely a burden on Jane, while the professor's mind appears largely unfettered by the body. Jane cares for and worries over her husband's body, while he appears less troubled by physical bodily matters because the physics of time and space offer a transcendent distraction. I merely note this here, and will return to projections of Jane's burden in greater detail when examining the representation of marriage and disability.

Hawking's disabled identity may mark a (limited, constrained) place for non-normative bodies within the academy; however, his position as a heterosexual middle-class married man aligns much more neatly with normative gendered conceptions of the professor's body. Engaging an intersectional analysis, Marquis (2018, p.837) rightly observes that Hawking's disabled flesh fits within the academy because he is privileged by his gender, race, and class. Marquis rightly points to the film's Cartesian construction of mind/body which is emphasised by positioning Hawking's physical disability as tragic, juxtaposed against the primacy of the mind. However, her argument is undercut by a haunting from the 'Cartesian ghost' in her analysis. Using the intriguing phrase "increasing embodiment", Marquis (2018 p.837) asserts:

By foregrounding Hawking's increasing embodiment alongside his academic success, it questions to some extent the notion of the normative professor body, suggesting (unlike Alice) a place for atypical bodies within the academy. It does so, however, in ways that draw upon Hawking's claim to other elements of the normative professor identity (e.g. his gender, race and class) and rearticulate the supposed separation of mind and body and primacy of the mind. Furthermore, by positioning Hawking's progressing illness as tragic, the film leaves the presumed desirability of the normative academic body unchecked.

Once again, Marquis wrongly applies degree to the concept of embodiment by describing an 'increasing embodiment', and, in doing so, she suggests embodiment for disabled people constitutes an affliction rather than a universal experience of the lived body. Indeed, throughout her critique of the film she repeatedly presents embodiment as increased by disability, most notably when she writes: "the film does much to frame his growing embodiment as tragic" (Marquis 2018, p.836). Indeed, the film does project an escalating tragedy, but a

better phrasing would be to describe the film as framing his increasing impairment as tragic—which is what I suspect Marquis actually means. Importantly, the film foregrounds impairment, which overshadows conditions of social disablement.

Marquis' observation that the film leaves unchecked the desirability of the normative professor's body is important because Hawking appears to be a rare exception to the norm. The film does not depict any events in which the inaccessible Cambridge campus is modified to accommodate disabled staff/students. This absence implies that Hawking represents an exclusive rare incidence of disability in the academy, and suggests he was able/willing to get by without the need for environmental modifications. The film appeals to the privilege of Hawking's gender, sexuality, and class, as access barriers are primarily overcome with assistance from his wife and, later, his personal nurse. *Theory* reflects and produces a discourse of individual over-coming and distracts viewers from considering questions about a collective responsibility for ensuring appropriate access on campus. As Dolmage (2017, p.176) explains, in playing to the fears of able-bodied people (including academics), films like *Still Alice* and *Theory* distract from more rational considerations relating to disability in the academy. Able-bodied academics are not encouraged to think about what access accommodations their employer might provide or how they can advocate for the access rights of their disabled colleagues (Dolmage 2017, p.176). Dolmage suggests that perhaps the reason films like *Still Alice* and *Theory* succeed in Hollywood is because they do not require or even encourage viewers to ask these questions. Rather, for Dolmage (2017, p.176), *Theory*—unlike *Still Alice*—portrays

a fantasy in which the audience can imagine that all disabled students and faculty members receive supports such as accessible housing and assistive technology. The film, however, does not portray suitably accessible accommodation, as the physical environment is not modified to suit Hawking's needs, his housing is not accessible (for example, the residence features stairs), and a lack of access on campus requires him to accept assistance from colleagues. In my view, the film does not, as Dolmage implies, present the illusion of an accessible utopia; rather, the fantasy projected is that inadequate access/supports suffice. In her memoir, Jane Hawking (2014 p.338) states:

The Cambridge colleges were so remarkably slow in implementing the Disabled Persons Act – which in its initial form had first reached the statute book in 1970 – that in the 1980s new buildings which made no provision for disabled access were still being commissioned.

In this and other parts of her book, Jane describes how she and the professor campaigned in the media for disability access. The film contains no reference to political action in relation to disability access, thereby hiding the existence of academic ableism and silencing its disabling impact. Instead, the film presents obstacles as largely overcome through personal hard work or with the assistance of Jane and the professor's colleagues. Collegial assistance is never problematised, leaving viewers to believe that modifications to the environment are not essential because disabled academics are happy to receive help from their able-bodied counterparts who are capable, willing and able to assist. Interestingly, Jane Hawking (2014, pp. 216 & 233) describes not only her own efforts in assisting her husband at work, but also how the professor's students provided personal care in exchange for academic guidance, food and boarding. This part of

the Hawking story is notably omitted from the film—presumably because such arrangements would be considered ethically unacceptable in universities today.

Dolmage (2017 p.176) argues that *Theory* promotes a false belief that disabled faculty/students are assured success, provided they work hard. Extending Dolmage's point, 'assured success' may also depend upon the capacity to enact male heterosexual privilege. Social disablement in academic space is rendered invisible in *Theory* because the film presents Hawking's success as largely maintained not only by his efforts to overcome obstacles but also in Jane's individual efforts in the gendered role of 'the dutiful wife'. Hawking's need for accommodations on campus are de-emphasised, because Jane, in the hetero-normative position of 'the wife', largely provides the gendered work associated with care/support—a point I shall return to later.

I have explained how *Theory* largely overlooks Hawking's need for personal care and access accommodations in the workplace. *Theory* does, however, show Hawking's use of enabling technology⁴⁵, which is progressive compared with discursive tropes such as wheelchairs that bind/confine subjects. Marquis problematises the depiction of technology, claiming it projects a Cartesian dualism. For Marquis (2018 p.837) Hawking's use of augmentative communication presents

⁴⁵ I acknowledge that Hawking's speech generating technology problematises corporeal silence, however, 'silence' in this thesis is not related to an absence of normative speech sounds, and therefore this enquiry is beyond the scope of this thesis.

a disabled figure who is ‘unfettered’ by his physical body. Marquis (2018 p.837) compares the gendered use of technology within *Theory* and *Still Alice*, stating:

[Hawking's] very existence is framed as a striking example of mind over matter. Moreover, whereas [Alice] Howland's attempts to discipline her body through technology in *Still Alice* ultimately fail, Hawking is able to make use of technology to mitigate and almost transcend the intrusion of his unruly physicality.

While I agree that *Still Alice* problematically disallows the successful use of technology for a disabled woman, I am not so convinced that *Theory* depicts masculine transcendence (or even ‘almost’-transcendence) through technology. Marquis (2018, p.837) claims the film positions Hawking's use of a power wheelchair and augmentative communication as technology that “enables him to return unfettered to a life of the mind”. Her claim is based upon how the technology appears to liberate Hawking's mind because he is shown to have a dramatic increase in scholarly work. Thus, Marquis (2018, p.837) claims that the film projects a “transhumanist fantasy” by deploying reason and technology to overcome physical restrictions. This point can be honed and enriched, without committing the ableist sabotage that Marquis unwittingly engages in, by applying Merleau-Ponty's conception of embodiment. I suggest the representation could be read as portraying a technologically embodied figure by depicting consciousness through an interaction between flesh and material world. Technology and flesh combine—as they do for everyone, not just Hawking—enabling conscious thought. Such a reading avoids the ‘Cartesian ghost’, because rather than reinforcing the dualism of ‘I think, therefore I am’, it conceives of consciousness as taking place when the flesh interacts with the material world—“I act by moving/speaking, therefore I am”.

So far, I have identified how the film frequently projects, via unspoken elements, a dualistic representation of transcendent celebrated mind/immanent tragic flesh. This Cartesian projection is neither inescapable, nor complete, because *Theory* contains nuanced moments which can be interpreted as depicting a necessarily embodied subject. I now focus my analysis on the film's representation of masculinity and sexuality to demonstrate a clear tension between transcendence and immanence.

Part II – Disabled Masculinity and Heterosexuality.

In a partial departure from long-established ableist representations of disabled people as asexual, contemporary cinema has begun to represent disabled figures as sexual subjects. As I have discussed in earlier chapters, cinematic depictions of disabled sexuality largely focus on heterosexual men. I have argued that disabled men are frequently imagined as having a 'broken' masculinity which can be repaired through sexual (primarily heterosexual) desires/acts. *Theory* repeats this contemporary trope, ensuring that audiences are aware that, despite Hawking's disability, he is able to perform normative sex and has the desires of a 'normal' man. In relation to the Hawking story the emphasis on promoting a normative heterosexuality and capacity to perform sexual intercourse seems excessive and unnecessary because he fathered three children after becoming disabled. Despite his success at sexual reproduction, the film presents a typical mainstream cinematic style when it positions Hawking's masculinity as impaired by his disability—it then works to repair the gendered damage by emphasising his 'natural' desires. In this section, I analyse some of the film's ableist gendered and

heterosexist depictions with a focus on silent unspoken meanings. I have argued that the film depicts a tension between immanence and transcendence— frequently positioning a transcendent celebrated mind juxtaposed with a tragic fleshy immanence. Towards the end of the film, audiences witness a shocking reminder that despite his cerebral accomplishments, Hawking remains constrained by immanence. The projection depicts Hawking’s yearning to walk—reflecting an able-bodied assumption about disabled people’s hopes and dreams.

Dolmage (2017, p.181) observes that dream sequences frequently depict disabled figures who are obsessed with memories of their former able-bodies, with a yearning for cures and normative lives. In *Theory*, Hawking has a walking dream before calling from his scholarly mantle for scientific endeavour to deliver a cure. The dream sequence links Hawking’s masculine heterosexual desires with his yearning for an able-bodied life. The scene begins with Hawking slowly moving through a throng of paparazzi and fans. The film cuts to a shot of Professor Sciamma, who introduces his protégé to a large audience:

Sciamma – It has been one of the great joys of my life to watch this man defy every expectation, both scientific and personal. Please welcome onto the stage my esteemed colleague, my dear friend, Professor Hawking [Hawking appears on stage and Sciamma invites the first pre-selected question].

Guest 1 – Now you are recognised everywhere, how do you deal with all the attention?

Stephen Hawking – I was stopped recently by a tourist in Cambridge who asked if I was the real Stephen Hawking. I replied that I was not and said the real one was much better looking [audience laughter].

Guest 2 – In 1979, you talked about the possibility of a theory of everything being discovered before the end of the century.

Stephen Hawking – I now predict that I was wrong [audience laughter].

Guest 3 – Professor Hawking, you have said you don't believe in God [sound fades out as Hawking begins to daydream, after noticing a young woman drop her pen].

In this reverie, Hawking slowly rises from his chair and with increasing competence he swaggers over and gallantly retrieves the young woman's pen. Crouched before the star-struck woman, he returns her pen. Abruptly, the dream concludes, and a low-angle shot captures Hawking back in his chair. As the sound returns, the guest continues his question.

Guest 3 – You have said you do not believe in God. Do you have a philosophy of life that helps you?

Stephen Hawking – [starting with a look of despair before smiling]. It is clear that we are just an advanced breed of primates on a minor planet orbiting around a very average star in the outer suburb of one among a hundred billion galaxies, but ever since the dawn of civilization people have craved for an understanding of the underlying order of the world. There ought to be something very special about the boundary conditions of the universe and what can be more special than that there is no boundary? And there should be no boundary to human endeavour. We are all different. However bad life may seem, there is always something you can do and succeed at. While there's life, there is hope. [crowd give standing applause—some faces filled with tears].

Disabled writer and activist Rob Crossan (2015), angrily condemns this scene:

We are supposed to believe that the best thing that could possibly ever happen to him [Hawking] is not to make another scientific breakthrough about black holes, but to simply stand up and have a stroll around the room.

Crossan's observation about what audiences are expected to believe reflects the filmmakers' intentions. In her interview with Chinthapalli (2015 p.1), producer Lisa Bruce describes the intention behind the scene:

That scene is more for able-bodied people thinking what it would be like if you were trapped inside your body. Wouldn't you dream of yourself moving and wouldn't you just want to do the simplest act—not go run a marathon—but simply walk across and hand somebody a cup of tea.

Clearly, the filmmakers directed the scene towards able-bodied audiences, with a view to encouraging sympathy with Hawking's plight by enabling viewers to 'walk' in his shoes and feel his assumed distress. This attempt to elicit pathos is poorly executed because the scene positions able-bodiedness as naturally superior and preferable to disability, reflecting/producing an ideology of 'compulsory able-bodiedness'. In projecting able-bodiedness as superior, the scene is likely to elicit fear and pity rather than sympathy because audiences can reassure themselves that no matter how bad things may seem at least their existence is better than what Hawking must endure. When someone as accomplished as Professor Hawking is positioned as a subject to be pitied, disabled audiences may well ask what chance they have of escaping the same subjective fate. Chinthapalli (2015, p.1), describes the irony of this scene:

He is shown helpless as he looks at the pen and imagines himself being able to walk over to it... The irony is that he was at an event to publicise his bestselling science book, *A Brief History of Time*, but he could not pick up a pen.

Chinthapalli identifies the scene as ironic because the writer cannot pick up a pen, but the scene contains another irony because it depicts an admired accomplished

scholar who is simultaneously a beacon of pity and esteem. Chinthapalli's observation that the scene depicts a figure who is 'trapped' and 'helpless' demonstrates how the film departs from earlier discourses of liberating technology because the scene positions his power-chair as confining. Chinthapalli's description of the scene's irony clearly demonstrates the tension between transcendence and immanence, because, while Hawking can transcend through science, he is, despite his genius, unable to solve the problem of his tragic immanent flesh.

This scene projects a deeper desire than for a normative physical mobility because Hawking's yearning to walk also appears as a heterosexist fantasy. Hawking seeks to repair his masculinity, which is positioned as impaired by immanence. In swaggering towards a young woman and rescuing her pen, the scene shows how physical mobility enables the performance of gallantry, flirting, and the pursuit of his normative masculine desires. What is silently communicated, via a visual enthymeme, is the ableist notion that disabled men have a damaged/restricted masculinity. Without a taken-for-granted belief that disabled men have a reduced masculinity, audiences would not recognise this 'gendered tragedy' and the significance of Hawking's swaggering heterosexual gallant fantasy.

There is a striking gendered contrast between the walking dream sequence in *Love Song*, which I described in Chapter Three, and *Theory's* reverie. In *Love*

Song, Jane walks alone in a dream state where she swishes her hips and hair as she moves towards the camera, surrounded by animated images of stars in a night sky. When the disabled woman dreams of walking, her image is presented as normatively beautiful and a figure to gaze upon, while in *Theory*, the disabled man swaggers with active intent. The contrast reveals a dichotomous example of the visual economy described by John Berger (1972, p.47), in which “men *act* and women *appear*”. Cinematic walking dream sequences are stylised, iterative and productive. Walking dream sequences, as an ableist trope, have an iterative power which silently produces gendered disabilities. Disabled figures are constituted as Other, via a visual enthymematic discursive style that silently produces their bodies as inherently yearning for an abiding and gendered ability to walk.

In order to rehabilitate Hawking’s assumed impaired masculinity, *Theory*, on several occasions, points to his sexual capacity and ‘natural’ manly desires. Firstly, the filmmakers explain how a man with limited control over his body is able to perform sexual acts. In a pertinent scene, Hawking celebrates a successful presentation by cavorting through the streets with his friends. The group encounters a flight of stairs and Brian picks up his friend and is surprised by the heavy weight of the slender man. With Hawking in his arms, Brian asks him about his sexual functioning.

Brian – Stephen, your motor-mouth disease, does it affect, you know, everything? [He nods his head slightly in the direction of Hawking’s groin].

Stephen Hawking – What? No, different system, automatic.

Brian – You serious? That’s pretty wonderful isn’t it. Certainly, explains a lot about men
[both laughing].

Brian’s question contains an enthymematic silence because Hawking and the audience are expected to intuit that he is asking about the physical capacity to obtain an erection. This unspoken meaning is easily understood because it is taken for granted that disabled men’s capacity to obtain an erection is a common and natural curiosity. The basis for this sexual curiosity is grounded in the commonly-held belief that disabled men cannot perform normative heterosex. Throughout this thesis, I have identified a cinematic enthymematic silent iteration that produces unspoken ideas about disabled men’s sexual capacity, and *Theory* continues this stylised trend.

Hawking’s short response also contains an enthymematic silence because it is expected that Brian, and audiences, will understand that he is identifying how his penis operates differently from other parts of his body. Hawking is articulating, in few words, that whilst his limbs are passive and cannot be controlled by desire, his sexual desires automatically exert an influence upon his genitals. Jokingly playing to the stereotyped view that all men are at the mercy of their uncontrollable sexual urges, Brian positions Hawking as ‘a natural man’. Thus, the filmmakers deploy a problematic gender stereotype to restore and normalise Hawking’s masculinity. This gendered stereotype aligns with Butler’s (1993) concept of a ‘heterosexual matrix of desire’ which, as I explained in chapter one, is a framework for understanding the social construction of sex, gender and sexuality (Lloyd 2007 p.34). The matrix wrongly insists that masculinity is a natural feature of the male-

sex. Masculinity is then incorrectly defined as naturally expressed through the sexual desire for women (Lloyd 2007 p.34). *Theory* restores the disabled man's masculinity by foregrounding his 'natural' sexual capacity and desire.

Ensuring there is no doubt that the professor is 'a real man', the narrative emphasises his interest in *Penthouse* magazine—once again foregrounding his 'natural' masculine desires. Hawking's interest in *Penthouse* first appears when he informs Professor Sciama about a scientific wager with a colleague. The loser of the bet must buy the winner a subscription to *Penthouse*, and Sciama seems highly amused by the prize.

Sciama – I don't understand, you've spent years believing black-holes exist and you believe Cygnus X-1 will turn out to be the first black hole we can actually observe and yet you bet Kip Thorne that it is not a black hole.

Stephen Hawking – Yeah [smiling].

Sciama – What did you bet him?

Stephen Hawking – One year's subscription to a magazine.

Sciama – Which magazine – *Nature*?

Stephen Hawking – No, *Penthouse* [smirking].

Sciama – *Penthouse!* [laughs].

Sciama's amusement could be interpreted as humour derived from the incongruity of an apparently passive body actively objectifying women. He is perhaps amused by what he imagines as the relentless strength of the male urge to desire and

consume women's bodies, regardless of assumed bodily suffering. Equally, the audience is prompted to chuckle with Sciama at the incongruous situation and the apparent strength of the male-sexual drive in the face of adversity.

The filmmakers ensure that Hawking is depicted enjoying the sexualised images in *Penthouse*. Although he loses the bet with Thorne, Hawking receives a share of the *Penthouse* prize thanks to his nurse, Elaine, who uses the pornographic material to help seduce the Professor. Elaine's obvious sexual attraction to the Professor subverts the ableist view that disabled people are undesirable; however, because she is his nurse, the depiction connotatively suggests that pornography and sexual seduction have a therapeutic value. Elaine's behaviour constitutes a negative representation of paid disability support, and her behaviour is unprofessional. Consequently, professional workers may rightly take offence at the 'naughty nurse' depiction.

When Sciama enters the professor's office and interrupts an intimate moment between Hawking, Elaine and *Penthouse* magazine, he is shocked rather than amused by the pornography. In this scene, a heterosexual desire to objectify women is positioned as 'what men want' and it begins when Elaine discovers Kip Thorne's *Penthouse* prize in Hawking's office.

Elaine – Professor? [Holds up magazine].

Stephen Hawking – It's for a friend.

Elaine – Of course it is. [Close-up of Hawking smirking] That's what they all say [Opens the plastic cover].

Elaine – You don't have to be embarrassed in front of me, Professor. I know what men are like. Shall we take a look? [Removes Hawking's work from his book stand, replaces it with the magazine and opens it. She stands back smiling flirtatiously].

[Sciama enters and the film cuts to a centring shot of the magazine cover, clearly positioned between Hawking and Elaine].

Sciama – Oh, I'm sorry. [Shot of Sciama with an uncomfortable facial expression as he promptly exits and the camera cuts back to Hawking and Elaine laughing.]

Elaine – Next one? [Nodding towards the magazine].

[Hawking gazes up at Elaine with desire].

Elaine – What?

[A close-up lingers on Hawking's face as he adoringly gazes at Elaine].

The scene normalises Hawking by emphasising his 'natural' active male desires in accordance with the imperatives of the 'heterosexual matrix'. Representing disabled sexuality is important and I am not suggesting that disabled people should be de-sexualised. The problem is not in the sexual portrayal of the disabled body, but with a discourse that positions gender norms as 'natural' and treats women's bodies as objects. I have argued throughout this thesis and elsewhere that modern cinematic representations have attempted to rehabilitate disabled men from an imagined damaged masculinity, typically with references to commercial sex (Kim, 2010; Rozengarten & Brook, 2016). Following this trend, *Theory* rescues Hawking's masculinity by depicting his interest in pornography.

Audiences are informed that Hawking is not sexually passive, but rather a 'normal' man with an active sexually objectifying gaze.

In this section, I have argued that *Theory* portrays ableist generalised beliefs about the sexual and reproductive incapacity of disabled men, which it then discounts as the audience learns that Stephen Hawking is able to engage in penetrative sex and father children. Despite showing that not all disabled men are sexually and reproductively incapacitated, through enthymematic silences the film reproduces ableist ideologies about sexual/reproductive ability. A silent discourse produces sexual/reproductive incapacity as something taken-for-granted and treated as common-sense, unless otherwise stated. Additionally, I have argued that *Theory* represents disabled masculinity by repeatedly reflecting/producing gendered norms which it positions as a 'natural' abiding feature of maleness. In the next section, I extend this discussion to consider how the film reflects/produces gendered norms about care-work, which it positions as belonging to the domain of feminine immanence.

Part III – A Wife's Burdensome Duty.

In this section, I consider *Theory's* depiction of care-work through an intersectional analysis of gender and disability. The film reflects/produces gendered/ableist ideologies of inspirational care and conceptions of disabled people as burden. I begin by setting out media and scholarly commentary on *Theory's* depiction of care. I contextualise *Theory's* depiction of care-work with reference to political debates between liberal feminists and disabled feminists/activists, as they

occurred during the Hawking marriage and when the film was released. Here, I incorporate references to how the 'real-life' Jane Hawking described her role as Stephen's carer. Taken together, this background informs my analysis of *Theory's* unspoken/silent discourse, which I claim constitutes a gendered/ableist politics of care.

Sociologist Fraser Readman (2016, p.35), writing for *Film Matters*, describes Jane Hawking's caring role, in real life and in *The Theory of Everything*, as "a truly inspiring example of heroism and devotion". *Theory* positions Jane as inspirational and courageous for sticking with the marriage over many apparently burdensome years. Correspondingly, the film imagines burdensome care as the primary reason for the couple's separation, and presents Jane's infidelity as an inevitable need for solace in the face of relentless caring. Disability activist/writer s.e. smith (2015b) asserts that *Theory* presents disability as a burden in the context of romantic relationships. smith argues that the film positions Jane Hawking as a saintly martyr and perpetuates the myth that able-bodied people, in romantic relationships with disabled people, stay in the relationship out of obligation/duty rather than love. At odds with smith, popular culture writer Alyssa Rosenberg (2014) praises *Theory* for "explaining why caregiving is real work". Conversely, film critic Michelle Dean (2014) is critical of *Theory's* depiction of care work: her complaint is not about the film's construction of disabled burden, but rather with how it ignores the gendered elements of caring. Dean (2014) claims the filmmakers "do Jane Hawking a disservice", because they gloss over how she sacrificed her own study/career to care for her husband. These perspectives

reflect aspects of debates about the nature of care that took place between liberal feminists and disabled feminists/activists in the United Kingdom when the Hawking marriage was ending.

Feminist scholars Chris Beasley and Heather Brook (2019) demonstrate that films are not only forms of entertainment but also political products. It is therefore important to contextualise *Theory* and Jane Hawking's account of care within the broader political and economic landscape in which it is constituted. The Hawking marriage was ending at a time when the social movement to deinstitutionalise disabled people saw the introduction of community care policies in the United Kingdom. According to sociologist, Jackie Barry (1995, p.361), the move to community care increased the unpaid care provided by families. Disabled feminists and some liberal feminists debated who should provide care and where care should take place. At the time, many feminists argued that because women provide the majority of unpaid labour within the home, 'community care' increases rather than alleviates women's oppression, and for this reason, institutional care is necessary (Finch & Groves 1980; McIntosh 1981). Resulting from feminist concerns about unpaid care-work, a discourse of informal care emerged as a way to identify unpaid labour (Barry 1995 p.361). Individuals who provided unpaid assistance to disabled people (primarily family members) became defined and widely known as carers or informal carers; however, sometimes paid support workers have been classified as carers (Barry 1995; Heaton 1999; Molyneaux et al 2011; Morris 1991). According to sociologist Margaret Lloyd (2001, p.724), when community care policies were introduced liberal feminists conceptualised unpaid

carers as “trapped by their own feelings of love, duty and guilt”. Lloyd observes how the discourse of ‘care as duty’ constructs individuals as reluctantly providing care because they lack choice. This carer subjectivity is discursively apparent within Jane Hawking’s personal account of caring for Stephen and, by extension, in *Theory’s* depiction of care.

Jane describes herself as “Stephen’s carer” (Moorhead 2015), emphasising a subject position that would appear at *prima facie* an unproblematic self-descriptor. However, it is important to consider why this term is preferred over other terms such as ‘wife’ or ‘partner’. Scholars and activists have long argued that discourses of informal care construct disabled people as passive and dependent, thus ignoring the interdependent nature of their relationships (Barry 1995; Heaton 1999; Molyneaux et al 2011; Morris 1991; Pilgrim & Rogers 1999). Many people who are defined as ‘carers’ reject the label, preferring to identify themselves in ways that acknowledge their relationship/kinship with the disabled person whom they love (Heaton 1999, p.768)⁴⁶.

During the community care-versus-institutionalisation debates, disabled feminist Jenny Morris (1991, pp. 148-168), admonished mainstream feminism for failing to account for the experience of the ‘cared for’ in criticisms of community care.

⁴⁶ It is pertinent to acknowledge my subjectivity because the Australian National Disability Insurance Agency (NDIA), recently defined me as an ‘informal carer’ in reference to my long-term relationship. It is a label I strongly reject because it silences the mutuality of care that I experience; however, I recognise that some individuals prefer to self-identify as carers and they may perceive their relationships as largely defined by dependence.

Morris (1991, p.155) argued that mainstream feminism excludes disabled women, many of whom require care, from the category of women. She states:

This separating out of disabled and older women from the category of 'women' comes about because of a failure of the feminist researchers concerned to identify with the subjective experience of 'such people'. The principle of 'the personal is political' is applied to carers but not the cared for.

Decades later, Morris' claims remain valid as most/many feminists continue to ignore disabled perspectives within carer discourse. In her review of *Theory*, feminist scholar Mary Evans argues the film is "conventional" because it leaves unquestioned the "willingness of women to worship (and work) at the feet of great men" (Evans 2015). She points to the way patriarchal culture positions women as ready and willing to sacrifice their own careers for their male partners. *Theory* does present Jane's transition from accomplished student to wife and mother as natural and inevitable. It projects only a few short images of Jane struggling to study amongst familial demands/distractions, before abandoning her scholarly identity entirely. Evans rightly criticises the film for reinforcing gender stereotypes, however, she conceptualises Jane Hawking's unpaid caring labour entirely from an able-bodied perspective of care as burden. In doing so, Evans fails to consider the subjectivity of the cared-for, invoking a problematic discourse of carer hardship. Evans writes:

Fantasy and magic become the conditions through which "genius" emerges – the fantasy, in the case of Hawking, that it is possible for a man seriously debilitated by motor neurone disease to live a professionally successful life without the presence of round-the-clock, exhausting care that involves not just witty verbal exchange but constant and intimate engagement with every aspect of that person's body. To present, as *The Theory of*

Everything does, these challenges as always effectively overcome suggests an extreme case of showing the world as we might like it to be rather than as it is.

Evans positions care as inherently and relentlessly exhausting, implying an exceptional burden however, it is equally fantastic to imagine that care is always so exhausting. Representing care 'as it is' requires an acknowledgement that Jane Hawking was not solely responsible for her husband's care throughout the length of the marriage. Professor Hawking was aided by students, friends and professional support services, and the film depicts at least some of these supports. Secondly, Evans' account could be enriched by consideration of what it is like to receive constant physical assistance and the lack of privacy/seclusion that accompanies high levels of support. The challenges of producing scholarship while constantly having to interact with others who provide assistance and negotiate work around a support schedule, are completely absent in her account of care 'as it is'. Sociologist Margaret Lloyd (2001, p.725) reports that disabled women have argued that care should be understood as inherently constituted by mutuality and reciprocity within a loving relationship, even when one partner has a high level of impairment. Lloyd (2001, p.725) notes that disability care is widely conceptualised as a predominantly physical activity, which tends to negate how disabled people may reciprocate through emotional expressions. Evans does not criticise *Theory's* largely absent depiction of reciprocal care, probably because her account of care aligns with the real-life Jane Hawking's carer perspective—overlooking the 'cared for' within a politics of women's unpaid labour. It is unsurprising that the film largely neglects to show the disabled professor reciprocating care because it is based upon Jane Hawking's account of care as burden (Hawking 2014). The real-life Stephen Hawking may well have been

negligent in providing emotional care; however, because few stories are told about relationships involving disabled partners, the 'realism' is problematic. Marsh and McCarten do not strictly adhere to cinematic verisimilitude and it is interesting that they elect to stick to Jane Hawking's account about an 'emotionally absent' husband, while altering her account in other areas. I have explained that realism does not necessarily equate with socially just representations (Darke 1994, p.341), and this is another example. *Theory* largely omits a depiction of reciprocal care, within the representation of disability and marriage, and this silence of omission is ableist because it positions disabled partners as inherently unable to care.

Theory was released at a time when principles of economic austerity were governing United Kingdom welfare and National Health Service (NHS) policy reforms. These reforms have diminished the quality of life for disabled people and those who care for them (McRuer 2018, p.13, p.32). In her protest against economic cuts to the NHS, Jane Hawking reflects/produces an ableist ideology of disabled people as social burdens through a carer discourse of isolating hardship. In an interview with journalist Joanna Moorhead (2015), Jane states:

Being Stephen's carer was such a struggle, and it's a lonely job looking after a disabled person. Thinking back, I honestly wonder how I got through it. But what you hope is that the years since have brought improvements to the lives of disabled people and their carers, and I think for a while it was like that. But the clock is turning back, and we can't let that happen.

It almost goes without saying that the level of professional assistance provided to disabled people even in wealthy, first-world nations is indeed frequently

inadequate, and remedies are obviously warranted. The political protests of 'carer groups' have endeavoured to fight economic cuts to disability services, and, while I agree with their goal, I disagree with their methods. Promoting a sympathy with carers by engaging discourses of hardship/burden comes at the expense of disabled people's image. Jane Hawking, in her description of care as a 'lonely struggle' implies a universal experience defined by isolation, hardship and burden. While she recognises that this experience has improved with increased supports, she does not identify how a reciprocal care dynamic impacts upon relationships irrespective of external assistance. Many people who provide care (including myself) see their role as part of a reciprocal caring arrangement (Molyneaux 2010 p.423). I have provided care to my partner (who uses a wheelchair) for over twenty years, with minimal external supports; however, because she cares for me, my experience is not felt as an isolating, burdensome hardship. It is misleading to imply that a lack of external supports constitutes a universal experience of isolation, burden, and hardship.

Theory arguably encourages viewers to sympathise with Jane's apparently burdensome plight and by extension the hardships of those who care.⁴⁷ *Theory* repeatedly shows Jane drowning in the kinds of unpaid labour all wives were expected to undertake without complaint: cleaning, cooking, caring for children, assisting her husband. In *Theory*, wifely labours are extended by Stephen Hawking's disability. Tasks associated with his care are presented as similar, additional burdens. In numerous scenes, Jane's domestic labours coincide with

⁴⁷ Even so, Jane Hawking has complained that the film downplays her suffering (Shoard, 2018).

images of her struggling to push Stephen's wheelchair over difficult terrain and balancing childcare with his personal care. In this and many other quietly entymematic ways, Stephen is presented as additional housework—he is another chair/pram to be pushed, another surface to be cleaned. The projection of the professor as additional housework is easily conveyed via visual images because of a taken-for-granted gendered ableist common-sense ideology, which understands caring for a disabled husband as constituting additional domestic burden and hardship. The audience applies this ableist/gendered ideology to interpret the unspoken meanings conveyed through these sequenced images.

Relief from Jane's exhausting role arrives when Jonathan, a recently widowed choirmaster from the local church offers his assistance. After eating dinner with the Hawkings, Jonathan makes a generous offer:

Jonathan – If there is anything I can do to be of service – to the family, I mean – I would consider it a privilege. I have no children or commitments so... I only mean that if I could be of help I might find a purpose that would help alleviate my own situation.

[Cut to the Hawking's getting ready for bed]

Stephen Hawking – I understand if you need help. If someone is prepared to offer it, I won't object. [The couple tearfully embrace, and the scene ends].

Missing from this scene is a contingency described in *Travelling to Infinity*. Jane Hawking (2014 p.285), writes:

Generously, and gently he acknowledged that we all needed help, no one more than himself, and if there was someone who was prepared to help me, he would not object as

long as I continued to love him. I could not fail to love him when he willingly showed such understanding and, most importantly, communicated it to me.

In omitting Stephen Hawking's expectation of continuing love, the filmmakers depict a disabled man who appears to accept that his wife must naturally require intimacy from an able-bodied man. This is particularly apparent given that the professor becomes aware of a growing attraction between the pair, yet he acts to ensure the continuation of Jonathan's help—for his wife's sake. The filmmakers position Stephen's need for help as entirely his wife's responsibility, and not a shared or reciprocal arrangement. In this way, the film appeals to common-sense gendered stereotypes in order to present care as a wife's burdensome duty. The audience is informed that it is Jane who needs help to provide care, rather than her husband requiring additional support. This subtle distinction is important because the speech-act contains an enthymematic silence which represents a sexist stereotype. What is unspoken but taken-for-granted is the sexist view that a wife is responsible for the care of her husband—an assumption grounded, at least in part, in the institutional weight of marriage and through the gendered conception of immanence work as feminine. It could be argued that the film offers a rare depiction of a male carer, but because Jonathan's motives may be complicated by his attraction to Jane, the depiction remains problematically gendered. Indeed, Jonathan's caring assistance is first and foremost a gift for Jane, and secondly a Christian charitable service to the disabled professor. This narrative sets the scene for the sexual desire and adultery to come.

In its depiction of marital infidelity, *Theory* presents Jane as the first to break marital vows, when she falls for Jonathan while her husband helplessly watches on. When Hawking's father, Frank, observes the attraction between his daughter-in-law and Jonathan, he implores his son to hire professional assistance, instead of accepting Jonathan's unpaid 'friendly' care. The scene is set at a family garden party, and when Frank notices that Stephen is alone, he approaches him to offer fatherly advice. A medium shot frames Frank standing by his son's side with a hand on his wheelchair.

Frank – Now, you know I've always been supportive of your choice not to have home-help but we need to find a more permanent solution. This situation cannot continue. [He turns his head and cutaway shots show Jane with the baby, and Jonathan playing with Hawking's older child]. You need to have a proper live in nurse immediately.

Stephen Hawking – We have help. [A medium close-up shot of the Professor looking up at his father].

Frank – Look, you know what I'm talking about. [Frank looks over at Jonathan].

Stephen Hawking – We can't afford a live-in nurse. [Returning to a medium close-up of the Professor, still looking up at his father].

Frank – Stephen, you need to find a way for your family's sake. You're world famous.

Stephen Hawking – For black-holes not for rock concerts [Smiling].

Frank – Stephen, this isn't funny. I believe it's urgent. [Piano music begins to play – acting as a sound-bridge that connects to the next scene, where Isobel Hawking confronts Jane].

Frank is expressing concern that his son will be 'cuckolded'. The irony here is that when 'professional' paid care is eventually secured, Stephen's nurse is unprofessional and works to seduce him—signalling the beginning of the

Hawkings' marital breakdown. Immediately after Frank cautions his son, the film cuts to Jane Hawking in the kitchen, when suddenly Stephen's mother appears and confronts her daughter-in-law about the paternity of Timothy (her third child).

Isobel – We do have a right to know! We have a right to know, Jane! [A medium shot frames both figures. Jane turns away from the sink to look at her mother in law, who stands against the counter with an authoritative expression].

Jane Hawking – Know what?

Isobel – Whose child he is [referring to Timothy], Stephen's or Jonathon's?

Jane Hawking – That's what you think of me. [Camera cuts to a medium shot of Jonathon standing out of the women's sight in the doorway]. There is no way that Timothy can have any other father than Stephen. None! [Camera returns to a medium shot of the women as they turn and notice Jonathon].

After overhearing the exchange, Jonathon promptly exits and Jane races after him.

Jane Hawking – Jonathan, please don't go. [A medium close-up shot of both figures].

Jonathan – I have to go, everyone is talking [whispering].

Jane Hawking – So, what does it matter?

Jonathan – It's difficult for me because I'm just trying to help. [He appears anxious].

Jane Hawking – You're trying to help and your help is valuable.

Jonathan – The best thing right now is, I think if I step back for now.

Jane Hawking – Please, Jonathan. We need you, the children need you, I need you and Stephen needs you.

Jonathan – There are other things as well. I have feelings for you. [Whispered extra quietly and a medium close-up shows Jane looking behind her, in case others are listening].

Jane Hawking – And, I have feelings for you too. [Turns back to Jonathon].

Jonathan – Thank-you Jane [Spoken in a whisper as he looks down before walking away].

The film cuts to an image of Stephen Hawking who has been watching the exchange from a distance, with a concerned expression. In the next scene, the professor informs Jane that he has been invited to Bordeaux, France.

Recognising that his wife hates flying, he suggests that she drive to Bordeaux, camping with the children on the journey, and meet him in France. Jane rejects this suggestion as too difficult, so Stephen suggests she bring Jonathan, to which she sternly replies, “I doubt he would be willing”. In the next scene, the professor shares a beer with Jonathan in his church, and asks him to return to helping the family. Importantly, rather than explaining that the family needs help, the professor insists that it is his wife who needs help.

Jonathan – Hello Stephen.

Stephen Hawking – Is this okay? [Indicating the beer, in church].

Jonathan – I won't tell if you won't [Jonathan helps him to drink]. Just bearing in mind you have to drive [a joke about driving a powerchair].

Stephen Hawking – Jane needs help. [Jonathan nods and the scene ends].

This conversational exchange positions Jane as needing help, but the professor does not need to explain what help she needs. What is unspoken, yet silently produced, is that Jane is suffering hardship due to burdensome care: she needs help with caring for him. Once again, the film portrays Jane as unable to manage

her gendered burden as a wife and mother. Jonathan returns to Jane's aid and a montage sequence shows her and Jonathan camping, contrasted with images of the professor at the opera in Bordeaux. The montage ends with Jane slipping into Jonathan's tent, while the professor collapses at the opera and is subsequently carried away in an ambulance. The filmmakers invented this depiction of Jane's infidelity, and they are careful to only hint at the transgression. In *Travelling to Infinity* (2014 pp. 280–281), Jane writes that sex with Jonathan did not happen for many years after he came into their lives. *Theory* projects her affair as a direct consequence of burdensome care because she slips into Jonathan's tent almost immediately after the professor pleaded with him to help his struggling wife. The audience is expected to empathise with her need for intimacy, rather than judge her for adultery.

After a guilty night with Jonathan, Jane learns of her husband's critical state and rushes to his bedside. When the professor eventually returns home, he acquires an augmentative communication device, and this event coincides with the arrival of paid 'professional' help from Elaine. Jonathan disappears from the Hawking family life, only reappearing at the end, when he is shown living with Jane after her divorce.

Film critic Michelle Dean (2014) rightly criticises the filmmakers for inventing a respectful, sorrowful and mutual break-up, because Jane's account describes heated arguments and anger after the professor finds new love with his nurse.

Her account in *Travelling to Infinity*, describes how paid staff (particularly Elaine), took over the household and with a star-struck response to the famous professor as they granted his every whim. The film briefly depicts Elaine's inappropriate behaviour in the Hawking home when she interrupts Jane's attempts to communicate with her husband. *Theory* glosses over Jane's increasing anger at watching Elaine's persistent seduction of her husband. Towards the end of the film, Professor Hawking and his exhausted 'carer'/wife end their marriage in a heartbreaking scene. Typing on his communication device, Stephen declares that his care will be taken over by Elaine. An image of the professor's computer screen fills the frame as he appears to hesitate over pressing the announcement button. The professor watches Jane as she files documents before he makes his announcement:

Stephen Hawking – I have asked Elaine to travel with me to America – she will look after me [Medium shot of Jane – her expression unchanging, cutting to a medium shot of the Professor, looking sad].

Jane Hawking – Will she? [Jane moves to stand in front of Stephen].

Stephen Hawking – Yes. [He looks sad and nervous].

Jane Hawking – You always used to tell me when an invitation came in [A medium close-up shot of Jane as her voice starts to break with tears brimming in her eyes].

Stephen Hawking – Another award. What can you do? [A close-up shot of the Professor, forcing a smile. The camera cuts to a close-up of J. Hawking as she begins to cry]. I am sorry [close-up of Stephen]. How many years? [Tears brimming in his eyes, before the camera cuts back to a close-up of Jane].

Jane Hawking – They said two. [close-up of the Professor looking sad]. You've had so many. [Shakes her head and turns away to cry].

Stephen Hawking – Everything will be ok. [He moves closer to her, she turns to him and he smiles reassuringly].

Jane Hawking – [Jane kneels in front of Stephen and a high-angle medium close-up shows her tearful face, as she looks up at him]. I have loved you. I did my best. [Both Hawkings cry].

The scene sadly concludes their marriage with an unspoken message that, despite loving her husband, caring for the disabled as Jane has done is an exhausting and unsustainable duty. Jane expected to provide care for two years, never imagining the marathon of care that would ensue. Elaine, a paid nurse, will not only take over her burden, but also the tiring role of loving Professor Stephen Hawking. Whilst the scene shows Jane's sadness about her marital separation, it reads as a bittersweet ending because she is freed from her duty, finally able to pursue an unfettered romantic life with Jonathan.

Audiences may wonder why Jane Hawking did not leave her husband earlier, given her love for Jonathan, and the film clearly presents her willingness to stick with the marriage as a duty. In doing so, it positions Jane as a saintly martyr and her disabled husband as a pitiable subject. This discourse of the saintly martyr and pitiable subject is unspoken but clearly produced within the narrative of marital burden and adultery. Without the taken-for-granted assumption that disabled people are pitiful, audiences would not understand why Jane stayed in her marriage when she loved another. This question does not require a spoken

answer because the visual images of a wife's burdensome duty clearly indicate a woman who felt morally obliged to stay and care for her disabled partner.

The film does not cover Stephen Hawking's life after his divorce; however, it is widely known that he marries (and later divorces) Elaine. Audiences are expected to understand that when Stephen proclaims that Elaine will look after him, the unspoken element of his speech act is that he is leaving his wife to begin a romantic relationship with his nurse. This narrative, whilst based on real-life events, is something of a cliché in film. *The Sessions* (2012), a film based on the life of Mark O'Brian and the fictional, and highly protested ableist film, *Me Before You* (2016), both depict disabled men who have a relationship with their nurse or therapist. In the cinematic world, disabled men are rarely seen to have sexual relationships outside the nursing/care dynamic. Despite the cliché, audiences may understand Hawking's decision to leave his wife, because, after watching her fall for another man, he may have felt like a burdensome third-wheel (impeding Jane and Jonathan's happiness), as the subject of their pity and obligation. Disabled people deserve to be depicted in relationships that are not based on obligation borne out of pity.

Conclusion

Theory reflects/produces the Cartesian myth that mind/body are separate and distinct. The film may celebrate the genius of Professor Hawking, but it does not celebrate the disabled body. I have argued that Hawking's disabled body could be celebrated by framing his consciousness (and hence genius) as deriving from the body. However, *Theory* overwhelmingly projects a dichotomy of

transcendence/immanence, whereby Hawking's genius is celebrated as separate and distinct from his physically disabled body, which is conceptualised as tragic. Hawking's genius is able to thrive because his bodily concerns are taken care of by his dutiful wife, allowing him to transcend. In this way, the film presents the gendered problem identified by de Beauvoir, where transcendence is dichotomously positioned as masculine and immanence as feminine. Through a narrative of burdensome care, *Theory* positions loving a disabled person as relentlessly tiring. In doing so, it constructs disabled people as sometimes less-than-human, and almost always as undesirable marital partners—even when the disabled person is a famous and successful genius.

Following other examples identified throughout this thesis, Hawking's masculinity is positioned as potentially threatened by his disabled status, so the film works to emphasise his heterosexuality as a form of gender repair. Ultimately, it turns to an ableist/gendered notion of the disabled masculine figure who yearns for an abiding masculine walk. In the next chapter, I will bring Judith Butler's ideas into the discussion, where it will become clear that the very notion of a masculine walk is an illusion produced by gendered (and, I add, ableist) performatives.

8. PERFORMATIVE SILENCE

Like the zero in mathematics, silence is an absence with a function, and a rhetorical one at that (Cheryl Glenn, 2004 p.4).

Judith Butler's (1990) concept of gender performativity is the key conceptual framework for this thesis. In the first chapter, I introduced Butler's ideas before putting them aside to focus on identifying repeated styles of silent discursive gendered/ableist treatments. In this final chapter, I return to Butler's work to think through the effects of this discursive iterative power. Here, I apply and extend Butler's ideas to demonstrate the performativity of discursive silent projections of gendered ableism. I shall argue that gendered/ableist silent performatives construct and confirm subjects according to the combined imperatives of the *heterosexual matrix* and the *ability system*. Butler (1990, p.140) explains that bodily actions and enactments consolidate gender norms, which she notes "cannot be attributed to the subject, but, rather, must be understood to found and consolidate the subject". As I have previously explained, Butler argues that gender norms are part of a 'heterosexual matrix of desire', which she conceives as a framework for understanding the social construction of sex, gender and desire (Lloyd 2007, p.34). The 'heterosexual matrix' consists of regulatory laws that assume a norm of sexual difference. This matrix wrongly defines maleness as naturally producing masculinity, which results in a sexual desire for women. Conversely, femaleness is wrongly conceptualised as naturally feminine, resulting in a sexual desire for men (Lloyd 2007, p.34).

Butler's theory has limitations and it is difficult to account for intersections of gender and disability within her paradigm of how gender is produced through performative actions. Critical Disability Studies scholar Ellen Samuels (2002, p.69) observes that Butler's theorising includes physical stylised acts that assume an able-bodied starting point. Samuels (2002, pp.58-76) cautions disability theorists about engaging with Butler's work and notes that many authors make an error when they simply substitute gender/sex with disability/impairment, and that this error results in the conflation of identity categories which are in fact quite different. To account for disabled bodies in my application of Butler's theory, without falling into the trap that Samuels identifies, I combine the 'heterosexual matrix' with the 'ability system'. In Chapter One, I briefly introduced Campbell's conception of ableism and my use of the term *ability system*. I shall now revisit and expand on my explanation of these concepts before applying them to a discussion of my findings.

I conceptualise the 'ability system' in line with Campbell's (2009, p.5) definition of ableism, but I separate what she describes as the production of ability norms from their ableist effects. Campbell (2009, p.5) acknowledges that "there is little consensus as to what practices and behaviours constitute ableism". She notes what is widely accepted is that an ableist perspective involves "a belief that impairment or disability (irrespective of 'type') is inherently negative and should the opportunity present itself, be ameliorated, cured or indeed eliminated" (Campbell 2009, p.5). For Campbell (2009, p.5) ableism is defined by "a network of beliefs,

processes and practices that produce (the corporeal standard)” and this standard constitutes what is to be counted as the perfect body. In other words, ableism produces and consolidates able-bodiedness as a superior and ‘natural’ state, which in turn constructs disability as its abject opposite. In this sense, ableism produces a dichotomy in much the same way as Butler describes a gender dichotomy, produced through the *heterosexual matrix of desire*.

Perhaps it is because a consensus cannot be reached about which processes/practices produce ableism that Campbell’s definition appears to collapse social and cultural practices into their effects. I understand this manoeuvre because the two are mutually imbricated, but I find it useful to separate processes/practices from effects in order to more easily overlap these networks with Butler’s *heterosexual matrix of desire*. Butler does not define the *heterosexual matrix* as homophobia or heterosexism; rather, she notes such forms of oppression as the *effects* of a regulatory gender system. In this thesis, I use the term ‘ability system’ to denote the social and cultural practices/processes which define and naturalise the norms of ability. The ‘ability system’ is built into the design of things, in this case filmic art—and this system of ability shapes practices, attitudes, beliefs and perceptions, producing ableist effects. The ‘ability system’ operates in conjunction with the *heterosexual matrix* to produce ‘compulsory heterosexuality’ with an overlapping ‘compulsory able-bodiedness’. McRuer (2006, p.2) explains:

the system of compulsory able-bodiedness, which in a sense produces disability, is thoroughly interwoven with the system of compulsory heterosexuality that produces

queerness: ... in fact, compulsory heterosexuality is contingent on compulsory able-bodiedness, and vice versa.

The 'heterosexual matrix' intersects with the 'ability system' regulating gender/ability norms, which consolidate the 'naturalisation' of heterosexual able-bodied desire. This thesis has revealed not only how gender and disability operate in similar ways, but also how they interact with one another. I have demonstrated that disability is cinematically constructed as inadequate masculinity and hyper-femininity. This is different from the simplistic equation of gender and disability that Samuels is worried about, because it is not substituting impairment/disability with sex/gender, as if they are the same thing, but instead looking at how the categories are mutually constructed.

According to Disability Studies theorist Tobin Siebers (2011, p.81), "disability does not yet have the advantage of a political interpretation because the ideology of ability remains largely unquestioned". I contend that an ideology of ability is largely unquestioned because it is widely counted as common-sense. It is therefore unsurprising that discursive styles of gendered ableism are produced in silence. Performative utterances, actions/enactments and silences succeed because they are supported by the norms, regulations and conventions of the *heterosexual matrix* and the *ability system*, which together found and consolidate subjects. Extending Butler's formulation, I contend that silent cinematic discursive styles produce the illusion that gendered/ableism constitutes a natural response to sexed/disabled bodies. The thesis concludes by briefly considering Butler's (1997b) work on *Excitable Speech* to argue that bringing voice to these

ableist/gendered meanings offers a way out of the projected cinematic silence by enabling disabled subjects to speak back to gendered ableism.

As previously explained, Butler (1990) reformulates J.L. Austin's (1975) speech-act theory in order to think through the way that gender is performed. Austin posited that certain utterances are performative because they bring into being that which they speak. Butler (1990, p.140) applies the concept of performatives to argue that gender is performative because stylised repetitions of routine bodily acts and enactments produce an illusion that gender is natural. She states:

The effect of gender is produced through the stylization of the body and, hence, must be understood as the mundane way in which bodily gestures, movements, and styles of various kinds constitute the illusion of an abiding gendered self.

Thus, for Butler, ways of speaking and acting are performative because they produce the illusion that gender is a natural product of sexed bodies. I posit that silent discursive practices, identified throughout this thesis, may also be understood as having a performative function. Certainly, many bodily actions may be understood as a silent performative (producing gender without speech sounds), but this thesis extends beyond the stylisation of the body to include visual images on screen and unspoken meanings within speech-acts. Applying Butler's formulation, I contend that gendered disabled bodies become understood as naturally undesirable, unattractive, burdensome, tragic, pitiful, and frightening, through stylised silent discursive iterations. What is silently produced has an effect whereby gendered ableism appears as a 'natural' and 'common-sense' response to sexed/disabled bodies.

To identify silent discursive styles, I have adopted Aristotle's concept of the classical enthymeme, along with its contemporary application to visual images. As I have explained, to be successful enthymemes must appeal to a common cultural knowledge. I posit that because gendered ableist ideologies are so thoroughly naturalised in culture, they have iteratively come to be understood as 'common-sense', representing that 'which goes without saying'. To show the performativity of silence the following repeated silent cinematic styles have been identified throughout the thesis. Firstly, the films present a *silence of omission* by ignoring or overlooking a Crip/disability and feminist/queer political voice. Secondly, the unspoken part of the spoken script operates as a *classical enthymeme*, invoking that which can be taken for granted. Thirdly, through various elements of *mise-en-scène*, which includes the materiality of the disabled body as a cultural signifier, the films project numerous *visual enthymematic silences*. Finally, *extra-verbal* situations contain *enthymematic silences* which communicate additional discourse that changes the meaning of what is said, and they also extend the exact 'dictionary defined' meaning of spoken words. *Extra-verbal context* expands upon the meaning of utterances, and in these instances, linguistic enunciation cannot be distinctly separated from the diegetic silent discursive communication. Taken together, each style, through the power of iteration, produces what can be counted as a common-sense understanding of gendered disabilities. I have identified many individual examples of these silent discursive styles throughout the thesis, and it is not my intention to list them all here. In the sections that follow, I will discuss pertinent examples to show an

iterative silent performative power. I begin with an analysis of how the films contain a *silence of omission* because they neglect to include socially disabling conditions, and the political concerns of disabled people, resulting in problematic events that go unquestioned. This is important because the spoken script and storyline contain events that, when left unchallenged, provide the necessary conventions for gendered/ableist silent performatives to succeed. Secondly, I move to a more general discussion of the gendered ableist meanings performatively produced within the films, to show how the other three forms of performative silence work. Thirdly, I will consider whether silence can be harnessed to subvert ableism. The thesis concludes by discussing why my findings are politically important for feminist disability scholars, activists and filmmakers, and I identify areas for future research.

Silence of Omission

The thesis has identified problematic events that are treated as unproblematic or left unquestioned. These events tend to omit a disability politics and produce the mythical illusion that tragic conditions are a direct consequence of disabled bodies, thus silencing ableist social/cultural conditions. In *Still Alice*, the cognitively disabled professor has her academic position revoked, but her departure from academia is unproblematically presented as a direct consequence of cognitive disability which ignores and omits the effects of academic ableism. It is the thought of acquiring a diseased mind incapable of participating in working life that audiences are expected to fear, rather than the depressing impact of exclusion caused by a discriminatory workplace. In this case, the filmmakers elected not to include elements of Genova's book which describe and challenge ableism on

campus. Conversely, In *The Theory of Everything*, Hawking's disability access needs on campus appear easily resolved, thereby omitting the 'real life' Jane Hawking's account of the struggles Hawking faced in campaigning for improved disability access on campus. In *Morgan*, the disabled man's problems are configured as a bad attitude that he must learn to overcome, by accepting his limitations. In this way, the film promotes the idea that disability is largely a personal problem. Condescendingly, he is provided a literal medal for accepting himself as a disabled man, and this victory is configured as an effort akin to hiking mountains. In the film, *Love Song*, the narrative contains a serious omission at the intersection of race and disability. In this film, a black man with schizophrenia is depicted as having an unpredictable potential for violence. The narrative omits any recognition that in the United States being 'black while mad' means he is highly likely to experience violence from the state. These stories omit a disability politics silencing the voices of disabled people and their advocates. By ignoring disability politics, ableist conditions are left unchallenged, thereby consolidating a thoroughly naturalised ideology which normatively conceptualises able-bodiedness as dichotomously superior to disability. I posit that in omitting references to disabling social/cultural conditions in preference of a medical model of disability, the films consolidate the norms of the *ability system*. The storylines and spoken scripts frame the silent discursive projections and provide the necessary conventions for gendered/ableist silences to succeed as performatives.

I have observed that the films produce ableist meanings through *enthymematic silences* which involve an *omission* of enquiring speech acts. In *Love Song*, a

man with schizophrenia is denied a chance to give testimony. After his neighbour accuses him of violence, he is not asked if he did it and why. He is automatically found guilty and his assumed violence is presented as naturally motivated by auditory hallucinations, which commanded him to act. I have noted that these auditory hallucinations are themselves silenced because the audience can deduce, by referring to stigmatising myths, that psychosis is to blame. The ableist myth that people with schizophrenia are naturally violent because they are unable to resist responding to voice commands is performatively produced in silence through the *omission* of an enquiring speech act.

The *omission* of an enquiring speech act is repeated in *Morgan*, but in this case, what is foreclosed is the potential that a disabled man's self-loathing and misery can be caused by anything other than his disabled state. In *Morgan*, it is assumed that disability must equate to feelings of unlovability, self-hatred, and a suicidal desire. When Morgan confesses to his mother that he fears no one will ever love him because he hates himself and wishes he was dead, his mother assumes that these feelings are related to disability when she states: "just because you are in a wheelchair does not mean that no one will ever love you". He is not asked why he feels this way because it is self-evident. The disabled character does not need to state his reasons for feeling unlovable and suicidal because they are taken as self-evident. Here, the filmmakers engage both a *silence of omission* and *enthymematic silence*: there is an absence of an enquiring speech act because the audience is expected to apply ableist 'common-sense', which imagines disability as a naturally tragic fate. In the sections that follow, I will demonstrate

that the films often simultaneously deploy both *silences of omission* and *enthymematic silences* to produce ableist/gendered meanings. In this way, silence is performative because it produces the illusion that disability is naturally experienced as a tragedy, resulting in feelings of an abiding undesirability. In turn, the norms of the *ability system* are consolidated because the films engage a silent discourse to project a 'compulsory able-bodiedness', which is constituted as a superior and preferable state to disability. The next section expands upon the various ways in which disabled figures are iteratively constituted through silence as 'undesirable' sexual/romantic subjects.

Undesirable sexual/romantic subjects.

Like in the *Morgan* example above, performative silences within cinematic representations of disability have been repeatedly observed when disabled characters are portrayed as naturally unable to find sexual and romantic partners. These films enact reiterative/stylised representations of romantic/sexual rejection, and it is through these discursive repetitions that gendered disabled characters appear as naturally undesirable. A silent discourse performatively reflects and produces common assumptions about the sexual romantic worth of disabled subjects. I posit that the 'undesirability of disability' is taken for granted as a form of common-sense logic, and for this reason, it is iteratively produced in the silent cinematic discourse. The audience is frequently expected to intuit that romantic and sexual possibilities are, at best, unlikely to eventuate, or at worst, completely unachievable for disabled figures. When disabled figures have a romantic/sexual partner, their bodies are frequently positioned as constituting a unique threat for the continuing success of such relationships. Extending Butler's theory of gender

performatives to include disability, we can see that a single isolated statement that 'disability is undesirable and tragic' does not produce tragic and undesirable disabled bodies. Rather, tragic undesirable disabled bodies are produced through stylised discursive reiterations. This 'reiteration' is not just repeating a 'statement', but repeatedly *not* explicitly stating it, via enthymemes. These silent reiterations are performative because they make tragedy and undesirability appear as though they are a natural feature of sexed/disabled bodies.

The sexual/romantic undesirability of gendered disabled bodies is silently produced and reiterated across four of the five films examined in this thesis: a disabled woman is rejected in a bar; a man with schizophrenia experiences unrequited love; a disabled man worries about sending his image to a romantic pen pal; a gay disabled man believes he is unlovable and expects his partner to end the relationship; a disabled man's able-bodied spouse finds sexual intimacy and love with another. In each of these instances, the silently projected reason behind the romantic/sexual rejection is that disability is undesirable. In the case of relationship breakdown, the unstated reason is that caring for a disabled lover constitutes an excessive burden. Through silent discursive stylised patterns, disability is repeatedly projected as constituting an inherent undesirability and subsequent threat to one's romantic and sexual happiness.

In *Intouchables*, the ableist belief that disabled bodies are inherently undesirable is necessary for the success of ironic humour. When it is suggested that a disabled

man should ask for a photograph of a potential partner, in case she turns out to be ugly and/or disabled, the audience is expected to laugh at the irony that he would reject someone with the same 'undesirably disabled' characteristic. Without the thoroughly naturalised belief that all disabled bodies are undesirable, the joke would not succeed as a form of irony. Here, a *classic enthymematic silence* communicates undesirability because, typical of jokes, the reason the humour works is unexplained yet expected to be understood. This undesirability is oddly repeated when the disabled figure is reassured that he will not be romantically rejected. In this instance, the woman he desires is described as an 'original', so, "the chair won't bother her". The reason this statement makes sense is because we are expected to take it for granted that most women would be put off by disability. The naturalised view that disability constitutes inherent undesirability appears again, when the disabled man's photograph is observed as showing 'a problem', but he is assured that [in spite of this] 'he looks good'. It is not announced that 'the problem' is disability, yet this meaning is clearly conveyed via a *classic enthymematic silence*.

I have explained how the illusion of disability as naturally tragic and undesirable is performatively produced both via *silences of omission* and *classic enthymematic silences*. In these scenes, we know that disability constitutes a problem for romantic success because the undesirability/unattractiveness of disability is so entrenched in ableist culture that it can be taken for granted and treated as common-sense. This gendered romantic trouble is frequently positioned in the narratives as something that individuals must learn to overcome, either by

emphasising other normatively attractive characteristics or through holding onto a hope that the right 'special' partner will come along. Finally, these stories insist that the disabled figure must learn to love themselves despite their 'undesirable/tragic' embodiment. I shall now discuss the gendered representation of disabled sexuality which is intimately tied to ableist conceptions of undesirability. Here, the sexuality of disabled bodies is constituted according to the regulatory norms of both the *heterosexual matrix* and *ability system*. Disabled bodies which fail to demonstrate normative ideals of ability/gender are produced, through a silent discourse, as 'undesirable and/or unattractive'.

Gendering Disabled Sexuality

In screening disabled sexuality, heterosex for disabled men is narratively presented as having a rehabilitative/therapeutic quality, whilst anything that points to homosexuality is depicted as constituting an additional threat to their already precariously gendered lives. What is silently produced is the gendered/ableist ideology that imagines masculinity as something that is naturally damaged by disability. Interestingly, the representation of disabled women did not attempt to repair an imagined gender trouble through sexual practices. Indeed, the sexuality of disabled women is almost entirely absent from the cinematic landscape which I examined, and this constitutes a *silence of omission*. In the one instance where a disabled woman's sexuality is depicted, the representation is intersectionally sexist and ableist. Here I refer to the film, *Love Song*, where the disabled woman is treated as a passive sexual object for a man's pleasure. Therefore, when a disabled woman's sexuality is depicted, it is constituted by sexist ableism. I use the term *sexist ableism* here to denote how sexism and ableism are

intersectionally imbricated within the representation of disabled women's sexuality. *Sexist ableism* occurs when the norms of the *heterosexual matrix* and *ability system* intersect. Thus, sexist oppression, which defines women's bodies as objects of sexual desire, intersects with the ableist conception of disabled women as having a heightened passivity, vulnerability and inability to enjoy sex. Disabled women's capacity and desire for sexual pleasure is entirely absent, reflecting another *silence of omission*. This iterative silence is performative because it produces a cinematic environment where disabled women are constituted as unable to experience sexual pleasure. *Sexist ableism* constitutes disabled women as hyper-feminine, objectified, passive subjects.

In projecting the sexual abilities of physically disabled men, the films analysed do offer a more socially just presentation of their heterosexual erotic lives, compared with historic depictions of asexual subjects. Physically disabled men are depicted as sexually desiring subjects with a capacity for experiencing sexual pleasure, and in the *Intouchables*, there are important inclusions of alternative and adaptive Crip sex. Nevertheless, ableist and sexist ideologies are evident because their sexual capacities are treated as deriving from a naturally persistent and relentless male sexual urge. This is ableist because a 'relentless sexual urge' is imagined as a way for men to overcome an assumed damaged masculinity. Furthermore, physically disabled heterosexual men's capacities tend to be limited to receiving pleasure, rather than to a more mutual orientation. The story is quite different for disabled women because their sexual capacities are of interest only to the point that they are seen as capable of pleasuring a man. Additionally, as I have

previously explained, gay disabled subjects rarely appear on screen and their under-representation reveals a cultural tendency to mark disabled homosexual lives as virtually non-existent. None of the films analysed in this thesis depict disabled lesbians because at the time of film selection, I could not locate a single cinematic representation within my nominated film release dates⁴⁸, and this constitutes an obvious *silence of omission* across the cinematic landscape. In my analysis of one filmic representation of a gay disabled man, the character is depicted as giving and receiving sexual pleasure, but his capacity and agency ends with the withdrawal of medication. When the disabled gay man rightly insists that he “does not want a life without sex”, his doctor instructs him “not to expect to live like he did before the accident”. In other words, he is told that he cannot have, or even want, a satisfying sex life (which is assumed to require an erect penis), but this is not explicitly stated. Thus, a *classic enthymematic* performative silence produces an ableist discourse where disability is constituted as causing sexual incapacity. The context of the scene and cultural myths about the sexual capabilities of men with spinal cord injuries enables the audience to supply a ‘common-sense’ meaning to the script.

Finally, the depiction of disabled subjects’ erotic desires and sexual capacities is restricted to physical disability. Characters with psychiatric and cognitive disabilities do not appear in sex scenes and are either unsuccessful in acquiring sexual partners, or their erotic life seems to end with the appearance of significant

⁴⁸ I have since discovered the film ‘*Margarita With A Straw*’ (2014), which centres on the story of a bisexual disabled woman (Internet Movie Database, n.d.). This film was unavailable in my country (Australia), at the time when I selected the films for this thesis.

disability. This *silence of omission* is perhaps indicative of a broader ableist cultural tendency which imagines such identities as inherently childlike. A cinematic landscape which repeatedly *omits* representation of the sexual lives of psychiatric and cognitively disabled people constitutes a *performative silence*. Through an iterative *silence of omission*, non-visibly disabled bodies are constituted as abiding outside of sexual citizenship: they are therefore cinematically consolidated as abject beings.

I shall now discuss how the films reflect an able-bodied cultural curiosity about the sexual capacity of disabled subjects. Often, able-bodied characters are shown enquiring about the disabled figure's sexual capacity via imprecise communicative methods such as speech-acts that do not explicitly mention sexual abilities, but nevertheless indicate a query about such bodily capacity. In these moments, the audience is expected to understand that a question is being posed about the disabled subject's sexual abilities because common-sense infers that this query constitutes a natural curiosity. The sexual capacities and erotic life of disabled figures are either *omitted* or subject to able-bodied fascination in particularly gendered ways. In *Love Song*, a disabled woman is asked the question, "Can you feel anything?", and context informs viewers that the query relates to feelings of sexual pleasure. When she does not answer, the man clarifies that she will not need to do much, indicating that his interest rests with his sexual gratification, not hers. In *The Theory of Everything*, Hawking is asked if his disability affects everything, and, once again, context informs viewers that the question is specifically about sexual capacity. He responds that his physical capacity is

'automatic', and his male friend replies, "That explains men, then"—a joke which plays to the sexist myth about the 'relentless male sexual urge'. This sexist myth is evoked again in the film, *Intouchables*, when Philippe indicates that sex with a woman would help his physical pain and his male care attendant, Driss, explains that all men are 'sick for that'. Driss then asks: "How do you manage?" and here, once again, context informs us that the question relates to sexual capacity. In each of these instances, what is repeatedly communicated via an *enthymematic silence* and *extra-verbal context* is the question: "Does your disability prevent you having sex?". As I explained earlier, *extra-verbal context* refers to verbal situations where diegetic context changes the meaning of what is spoken. The silent *extra-verbal* meaning in these films reflects a culturally pervasive able-bodied fascination, which is positioned as constituting a common-sense response to gendered physically disabled subjects. If audiences are required to repeatedly apply their common-sense knowledge (acquired from ableist/gendered culture) to the unspoken part of a speech act, then ableist/gendered ideologies are constituted and consolidated as common-sense: in other words, silence becomes performative. This consolidating of gendered/ableist norms takes place even if these prejudicial ideologies are later discounted on an individual basis, because the default position is an assumed sexual incapacity and undesirability. Disabled people as a group remain subject to these ideas which individuals must then disprove. If the same *extra-verbal* style of questioning which I have identified, was applied to able-bodied subjects, the utterance would not be understood. It is because ableist culture understands disabled people as naturally unable to perform sex acts, that the silent meanings at play within *classic enthymematic* and *extra-verbal* situations can be understood. Able-bodied subjects are not asked to

confirm their sexual capacities because it is automatically assumed that they have a normative functionality. This iterative cinematic silent discursive stylised pattern consolidates the norms of the *ability system* and the *heterosexual matrix*, because it produces an enmeshed ideology of ‘compulsory able-bodiedness/heterosexuality’. In this way, silence is performative because it discursively constitutes disabled subjects as having an abiding sexual trouble, which is consolidated as ‘natural’ through the power of repetition.

As Butler’s *heterosexual matrix* shows, sexuality and gender operate together and here I move into a discussion of gendered disabilities. The gender trouble in which disabled men are constituted is communicated through elements of *mise-en-scène*. In *Intouchables*, the appearance of disability apparatus functions as a narrative device for communicating a ‘dilemma of disabled masculinity’. The feminisation of disability is projected when Driss is required to assist Philippe with his compression stockings. Here, a connection is drawn between male feminine practices and homosexuality. Driss is horrified to learn that he must don rubber-gloves in order to perform digital rectal penetration on the disabled man. These props have a symbolic function which trade on cultural codes about disability, gender and homosexuality. The visual images serve to project disability as constituting an intolerable homosexual threat to masculinity. In *Morgan*, disability apparatus appears in a similar communicative style when a backdrop of sporting awards is juxtaposed with images of a commode and wheelchair. In this instance, the problem relates to a loss of active masculine pursuits, which must be overcome through learning self-acceptance. What is conveyed via a *visual*

enthymeme is that disabled men experience a gendered tragedy, because in order to interpret the meaning of these images, viewers must take-it-for-granted as 'common-sense' that disability is damaging to masculinity.

Butler's conception of gender as something that is produced through bodily enactments sheds light on how and why disabled bodies may fail to appear properly gendered. It has been observed that disabled men may fail to enact a 'normative masculine performance' due to limitations caused by impairment; thus, the body may restrict their capacity to produce a 'male swagger' or put their arm around a date (Shuttleworth 2004, pp.167-170). Conversely, disabled women may struggle to enact a 'normative feminine performance'. They may fail to meet normative standards of beauty and/or to produce a 'feminine walk', for example, by the swishing of hips.

Unsurprisingly, in cinematic projections of disabled bodies, I have observed that walking is silently and iteratively produced in gendered/ableist ways. Disabled women and men are both depicted as longing for a normative gendered walking capacity which consolidates the corporeal standard defined by the '*heterosexual matrix*' and '*ability system*'. It is expected that the audience will intuit why these figures yearn to walk because wheelchair use is routinely conceptualised as an undesirable and binding form of mobility. I have explained that sequences in which disabled figures dream of walking is a known cinematic trope. *My Own Love Song* and *The Theory of Everything* both repeat this ableist trope in

gendered ways. Both project walking dream sequences according to a standard gendered visual dichotomy where “men act and the women appear” (Berger 1972, p.47). In these films, a masculine swagger is positioned as important for seducing women, and a feminine swish of the hips is required for female desirability. In both cases, silence has a performative function because a *visual enthymeme* discursively produces gendered ableist meanings as though they are ‘natural’ and constitute a ‘common-sense’ logic. Walking dream sequences produce the illusion that physical disability is naturally tragic, pitiable and undesirable, and do so in gendered ways. These iterative gendered/ableist *visual enthymemes* consolidate the norms of the *heterosexual matrix* and *ability system*, and through the power of repetition, silence becomes performative. In these sequences, disabled subjects yearn for an able-bodiedness, which is positioned as naturally preferable and superior to disability. In turn, able-bodiedness is constituted as enabling a normative gendered identity, while disabled subjects are presented as embodying a gendered trouble. In these scenes, an ableist ideology which imagines disability as tragic and pitiable is performatively conveyed through silent enthymematic discourse.

While my analysis is limited to five films, and therefore my conclusions must be understood as based upon a small sample of gendered disabled sexual representation, it is clear that even in this small sample there are strong repeated patterns. Future research that examines the representation of gendered disabled sexuality within a global cinematic context and spanning a longer time period is highly recommended, in the hope that it will uncover less ableist representations of

disabled sexuality. For now, however, I shall discuss how the films have engaged the visual language of cinema to convey disability as tragic, pitiable and frightening.

Tragedy, Pity and Fear

While film language is in itself not always a silent discourse, it must often be interpreted by appealing to common-sense gendered/ableist ideological beliefs. In this way, the *mise-en-scène* frequently engages *visual enthymemes* to silently communicate disability as tragic, pitiable and frightening. Frequently, the films deploy camera angles and lighting techniques, in conjunction with sombre music, to convey a tragedy and fear of disability. Lighting techniques project disability in the shadows and this serves to isolate disabled subjects. This same lighting and camera work project a tragedy of disability by deploying extreme close-up shots of impaired body parts and disability apparatus cast in shadow. If this same technique was applied to able-bodied figures, we would understand that the film language is telling us that there is something tragic and/or frightening on screen, but *what* is to be feared or pitied and *why* would be unclear. It is therefore the *what* and *why* that is silently projected via *visual enthymemes*. The audience members must appeal to a pre-existing knowledge of gendered/ableist common-sense ideology, in order to intuit what meanings are conveyed through the visual images. In *The Theory of Everything*, the understanding that the disabled body is to be feared is produced in a number of ways. I have described how the film delivers repeated close-up shots focused on impaired legs, feet and hands as Hawking negotiates inaccessible spaces. It has been observed that projections appealing to a fear-of-disability are restricted to Hawking's physical body, which is

presented via lighting techniques as distinctly separate from his acclaimed mind. I have argued that the visual image contrasts light with dark to project a bright mind set apart from a body, symbolising a problematic outward transcendence/inward immanence. Here, the notion of masculine transcendence is dichotomously positioned against a feminine disabled immanence. The film conveys the gendered/ableist notion that disability constitutes a tragic problem for masculinity, which it produces through iterative *visual enthymematic* silences. Therefore, the norms of the *heterosexual matrix* intersect with the *ability system*, so that disabled male bodies are constituted and consolidated as 'object', through an iterative *visual enthymematic* performative silence.

Visual enthymemes are also engaged to project ableist meanings associated with invisible disabilities. In projecting invisible disabilities, point-of-view shots are often deployed to communicate isolation, tragedy, pity and fear. In the case of psychiatric disability, point-of-view shots depict hallucinations in ways that project a mind separated from reality, and tragically, pitifully, and frighteningly unable to share perceptions. Similarly, I have observed how a tragedy and fear of Alzheimer's disease is projected through rapid swinging camera movements which serve to communicate a terrifying disorientation, while point-of-view shots cast a shallow depth-of-field to isolate the cognitively disabled subject. Without a pre-existing knowledge of ableist 'common-sense', which understands psychiatric and cognitive disabilities as frightening, tragic and pitiable, these filmic techniques would convey that something is frightening, but precisely *what* is to be feared and *why* would be unclear. In this way, an iterative *visual enthymematic* silence is

performative because it discursively produces frightening, tragic and pitiable disabled bodies. This consolidates the norms of the *ability system* which defines able-bodiedness and regulates it as a 'compulsory', preferred, and naturally superior state to disability.

Contemporary films provide high-quality sound, but this itself functions to inject a scene with ableist enthymematic meanings. I am not suggesting that music and sound should be understood as a silent discourse because the soundtrack directly communicates that something should be understood as tragic, sad or frightening. Nevertheless, embedded within the soundtrack are enthymematic silences that communicate what is to be pitied, grieved and feared, and why this is the case. Repeatedly, the films incorporate sombre or tense music to signify a tragedy and fear of disability on screen. This is highly successful, because, as I have argued, ableist culture conceives of disability as inherently tragic and frightening. *Love Song* opens with a sad song about love forever lost, thereby presenting disability as constituting a tragic loneliness and the end of a successful romantic life. The film does not explicitly state that disability is the cause of tragic loneliness, because it is anticipated that the audience will intuit this meaning by drawing on a common-sense ableist understanding of disability as romantically undesirable. Thus, an enthymematic silence informs viewers *what* is the cause of sadness and tragedy, and *why* this is the case. In *Still Alice*, a fluctuating musical tempo accompanies rapid swinging camera work, thereby framing the cognitively confused disabled mind through a lens of tension and fear. In *The Theory of Everything*, a rapid musical tempo conveys an exceptional mind on the brink of a

breakthrough, but, when Hawking's body falls to the ground, the music comes to an abrupt stop, emphasising the tragic crisis unfolding on screen. Sound-effects are also strategically tuned to produce disability as tragic and frightening. In *Love Song*, a screeching sound emphasises a wheelchair braking hard against the floor, and this draws viewers' attention to the shocking spectacle of disability, disrupting an otherwise heteronormative scene of seduction. Similarly, in *The Theory of Everything*, the sound of Hawking's feet dragging along the ground, accompanied by the clinking of his crutches, are foregrounded to convey a tragic burdensome mobility. When combined with the visual images, the soundtrack successfully emphasises ableist meanings of tragedy, fear and pity because disability is commonly understood in these ways. If these same techniques were applied to able-bodies, the meanings would be entirely different or completely confusing. Thus, the soundtrack and visual images work together to produce enthymematic meanings which performatively produce gendered/ableism, by appealing to prejudicial common-sense ideologies.

Sometimes *extra-verbal context* offers nuanced readings.

Discursive iterations are not fixed; as Butler explains, repetitions are inexact copies: "let us remember that reiterations are never simply replicas of the same" (Butler 1993, p.226). For Butler, iterations produced within different contexts and times have the potential to challenge or subvert stereotyped assumptions (Alsop, Fitzsimons & Lennon 2002, p.103). In the film, *Still Alice*, context appears to challenge and subvert ableist meanings. I have argued that *Still Alice* is highly nuanced and contains meanings that can be read in multiple ways. This film provides opportunities for audiences to look differently at disability and consider

the effects of ableism. After Alice's seemingly accidental suicide attempt, her husband John enquires about her desire to live. Seated in a Pinkberry yogurt franchise, Alice is shown enjoying her favourite treat, when John asks her: "Do you still want to be here?". The common-sense ableist belief that Alzheimer's disease constitutes a fate worse than death informs the intended meaning of John's question. I have argued that the scene contains *extra-verbal context*, and an *enthymematic silence* which alters the linguistic meaning of the script. Consequently, it can be read in two ways depending upon whether the enthymeme succeeds or fails. This question constitutes an *extra-verbal* enthymematic inquiry about Alice's quality of life. The audience is expected to know that he is asking Alice if she wants to die. Without ableist cultural ideologies that assume cognitive impairment as inferior to high intellect and disability as worse than death, John's question may be read exclusively within the context of the present activity: finishing the yogurt. When Alice responds, 'I'm not done yet', she is clearly referring to her unfinished yogurt, but *extra-verbal context* offers an alternative meaning to what is spoken because her utterance is clearly intended to signify that she is not done with life. I have argued that the filmmakers engage *extra-verbal context* to subvert the ableist ideology, 'better off dead than disabled', because Alice does not want to die—she is 'not done yet'.

In my analysis of another scene, I have argued that *extra-verbal context* may function to subvert ableism. In this important scene, the Howland family are shown discussing Alice's deteriorating cognitive state and associated 'burden of care' matters. When Alice interrupts their conversation to register a complaint,

extra-verbal context changes the meaning of her words. In my analysis, I posited that one of the most important lines in the film is Alice's comment, "It's hot in here", because the utterance contains an *enthymematic silence*, whereby the audience is expected to understand that her words denote a complaint about her family's ableist behaviour. The exact meaning of this utterance is unspoken, but context informs the viewer that the statement is not a comment about temperature. In context, the audience is aware that Alice has lost significant vocabulary, and so it is reasonable to assume that her utterance constitutes a substitution for what would otherwise be an articulate complaint. Consequently, *Still Alice* engages silence differently than the other films because instead of treating ableist ideologies as a 'natural' response to disabled bodies, the filmmakers take it for granted that their audience understands an event as ableist. Here, the audience is expected to share a common evaluation that ableism is wrong. If Alice's utterance is not interpreted as a complaint, it may be because cultural ableism is too strong and trumps the filmmakers attempt to flip the enthymeme. This raises the question: can silent discourse be deployed to successfully work against ableism? If so, silences within discursive formations could be engaged to change what counts as common-sense. This potential fits with Butler's theory of gender performativity because it is through inexact repetitions, produced over time, that gender norms change. As Butler (1997a, p.402) explains, gender is not a stable/fixed identity, but rather, it is 'tenuously constituted in time' and instituted through iterative discursive styles. Thus, it follows that silent performative meanings change throughout the course of time, via slightly different iterations. While a definitive conclusion about the subversive capacity of silent performatives

and changes over time cannot be drawn from this limited selection of films, this presents an exciting possibility for future research.

Conclusion: Speaking Back to Silence

In her work *Excitable Speech: A politics of the performative* (1997b), Butler argues against the censorship of hate speech because hate speech provides opportunities for resistance; she notes that hate speech is 'a founding subordination, and yet the scene of agency' (Butler 1997b, p.38). Butler (1997b, p.38) claims that subjects named within hate speech tend to respond by repeating the speech, but for reasons other than its original intention:

Because I have been called something, I have been entered into linguistic life, refer to myself through the language given by the Other, but perhaps never in the same terms that my language mimes.

The silent discourse within cinematic representations of gendered disabilities constitutes a form of hate. This discursive script is censored, through its exclusion from linguistic life. The subversive power of repeating ableist stereotypes with the intention of disrupting their intentions can be observed when disabled film-makers and artists portray ableism, with the intention of poking fun at or condemning able-bodied beliefs⁴⁹. Silent performatives must be brought into linguistic life, in order for subjects to speak back to harmful ableist stereotypes of gendered disabilities.

Engaging with Aristotle and Butler, I have presented a theoretical framework for identifying silent gendered/ableist performatives within cinema. I have argued that

⁴⁹ See *Shameless: The Art of Disability* (2006) by feminist disabled filmmaker Bonnie Sherr Klien for examples of speaking back to ableist filmic tropes.

what is silent in discursive formations is performative. An iterative silent discursive power produces the illusion that gendered disabilities constitute an abiding undesirability and tragedy, to be pitied or feared. These silent performatives represent what is to be counted as a 'common-sense' response to gendered disabilities. Silent performatives consolidate gender and ability norms and constitute a founding subordination. Giving voice to this silent discourse brings ableist ideologies into linguistic life for critique.

This thesis offers a theoretical framework that can be applied to any discursive treatment of gendered disabilities. Some areas require more research: for example, my conceptualising of an *ability system* has been a useful framework for an intersectional analysis of gendered disabilities, applied in combination with Butler's *heterosexual matrix*. Yet, the constraints of this thesis have not enabled a thorough discussion into the vast and complex ways that a system of ability operates. Future research is needed into the study of ability and how it is normatively defined and regulated. Future research may also apply the concept of silent performatives to representations of gendered disabilities in news-media, television, literature and government/public policies. This thesis covers a small sample of recent films, and I have not considered every film genre, nor covered a broad global context. It is therefore recommended that future research continues to examine cinematic silences.

This thesis has observed rare moments when what is silently produced seems to challenge ableist 'common-sense' ideologies. This constitutes exciting possibilities for feminist disability scholars examining discursive power. It is highly recommended that future research investigates whether silent performatives can be harnessed to subvert gendered ableism and change what counts as 'common-sense'. Finally, I hope that my concluding comments resonate with audiences and filmmakers alike. Gendered ableism is so familiar that it can be performatively produced through discursive silence. These performative silences represent what can be taken for granted as a 'common-sense' response to sexed/disabled bodies. If the purpose of art is to defamiliarise the familiar, by altering perceptions (Shklovsky 1965), the work must make gendered ableism appear strange by bringing it out of the projected silence.

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