

Stories from the brainreels podcast

May 11, 2017

Introduction

[music]

CHERYL: Welcome to Stories from the brainreels, a podcast about brain injury, disability, and neurodiversity with a focus on art, culture, and disability pride.

If you went looking for this podcast in April and didn't find it, don't worry. Me, I couldn't find myself through most of April. Traveling to two different states in different time zones to go to a disability arts symposium and disability studies conference made podcasting not possible. And I'm still not caught up, which gives me the most perfect opportunity to share with you today a recording of a presentation. Documentary film star, actor, and media consultant AJ Murray and I did this presentation at the UCLA Disability Studies conference in mid-April. That [conference was called Disability As Spectacle](#).

AJ and I gave a 20-minute version of this presentation last year at Emory University. We were so excited and honored to have 75 minutes this time. I recorded us on my phone. I'm really grateful to have that kind of mobile recording at my fingertips. Thank you to AJ and Cynthia McFadden of I Push You Talk and everyone at UCLA who gave us this opportunity.

Here's a recording of our presentation "Validation for Black, Disabled Male Sexuality in US Fiction Film." (Of course, we titled it that because there's basically no Black, disabled male sexuality in US fiction film.) This episode contains some cussing!

Presentation Introduction

Well, welcome, everybody.

AJ: Hi! My name is AJ Murray, Ajani on my nametag, 'cause that's my given name. I am an actor and a public speaker, and I do consulting as well. I've known my partner for this presentation for about two years or so, and I'm so glad to be here today.

CHERYL: Likewise. I am too. I'm Cheryl. I am a media artist, multi-media artist and a Closed Captioner. Yeah, I'm glad you said two years 'cause I don't know how long I've known you. So we've known each other two years. And today's presentation really came out of conversations, ongoing conversations that AJ and I have about media representation of disability. So I wanna give a content warning. We are going to talk about sex.

AJ: Yeah!

[audience chuckles]

CHERYL: Whoo!!!

AJ: Parental discretion advised.

CHERYL: And I'm also gonna warn you. We're gonna show some videos and images that are at least R-rated. You have been warned. I will warn you again before the videos start, but I also assume some of you came because we're gonna show those videos.

AJ: Gonna get a little hot in here.

CHERYL: Yes [laughs]! There's gonna be some activity today too. It's not just us speaking. But we're gonna start out sorta by talking about masculine sexuality. Oh also, because we wrote this presentation together, and I've got the notes in front of me, occasionally, I might read some of AJ's notes.

Defining masculine sexuality

Just starting out quickly defining masculine sexuality. It really is a performance. It's performed in society and in media as strength and dominance and prowess, typically. That necessarily disqualifies disabled bodies from being viewed as sexy or sexualized. I mean, not to us; we know better. But in general. When you look at erotica and pornography in particular, disability's often celebrated as the non-disabled person's fetish. If there is disability--a character with a disability--usually it's from a freak accident. So the character was previously "normate," as the term that I like from the like from the last presentation. And so they were sexualized before, and they got disabled. Poor, poor, poor dears, them. So disability is separated from sexuality. You had a question around that.

AJ: Yeah, I was wondering: How many of you have ever seen a film or a television show or anything online, and you thought to yourself, "That person in a wheelchair or on a crutch, or maybe they have a hearing aid, that person is hot! Smoking!" How many of you have ever thought of that? Wow.

LAURA BRODY: I'm trying to think--

[audience laughs]

CHERYL: Yeah!

LAURA BRODY: --of anything that's actually portrayed that. And I can't think of anything.

CHERYL: Yeah, for sure. And the music.

AJ: No, because typically when you see us in a situation, the music is kinda somber, or it's maybe a hospital scene. Or we're in a heavy show; it's something serious. Or we're normally providing some sort of wisdom [chuckles]--

[audience laughs]

AJ: --in a very special episode.

[all chuckle]

CHERYL: Very special!

AJ: Not sexy!

Disability and pity

CHERYL: Not sexy, definitely. And so along those lines, along with special often comes pity. The picture here is showing the-- I was gonna say snarkily "beloved." I cannot even snarkily call him beloved. That is Jerry Lewis being consoled by this poor crippled child. So this is from the

Muscular Dystrophy Association telethon. You can see the existence of this child in his manual wheelchair is just too much for Jerry Lewis to bear.

[audience laughs]

CHERYL: He's got his arm over the child, resting on the child's wheelchair.

AJ: Oh my god!

CHERYL: His head in his hand, just looking like just gonna cry. But he's not looking at the child! Anyway. So I think this is a really nice example of how pity keeps relationships unbalanced. In this particular kind of relationship, or any disabled/non-disabled relationship, pity reinforces the disabled existence as broken, as opposed to the disabled existence as someone who is oppressed. Disabled people and characters are usually confined in movies. I mean you'll even see a wheelchair user living on the second floor. I don't know how they got there or how they get outta there.

[audience chuckles]

CHERYL: They're confined, and that helps to keep them pitiful.

[Not showing sexuality or fitting the stereotypes](#)

So a question that AJ and I have often asked is, "Well, how does sex fit into this story of pity?" [pages turn] Somebody didn't number their pages! [audience chuckles] How does sex fit in? Almost never. If you do see it, sexuality or sex is just hinted at; you don't actually see the sex. You just go, "I think that mighta happened." The actors are usually non-disabled. It's often one disabled partner with one non-disabled partner. And it is primarily white, straight, cisgendered representations. You had an example, *The Theory of Everything*.

AJ: Yes, I was thinking about *The Theory of Everything*. Now this is a great story. It takes place in Stephen Hawking's young life before he had the disability. But this primarily focuses on the relationship with his first wife. They had a couple children, and this story focused on the love story between them. But there was no kissing scene or any type of love scene at all. It's not specifically only about their love story, but even in some type of films that has nothing to do with a love story-- Let's say you might be watching a film about a police officer. You might see at least one scene where he's gonna be in bed and kiss somebody. And I was thinking to myself, not even in this movie where it's supposed to be about the relationship between him and his first wife, you don't even see them connecting. And even though it's a true story, you still have the narrative of disabled and able-bodied as well.

CHERYL: Mmhmm, yeah. And I mean it's based on a real story, but still, this is the narrative we get most often. And I forgot to say something at the beginning, that this slide reminded me, which is that I am white and straight. I wanted to put that out there because we talk about the topic being validation for Black, disabled male sexuality. So I wanted to just name where I'm coming from in that. And I identify as neurodivergent. So you know, criptastic.

AJ: I'm Black and straight and disabled.

CHERYL: [laughs] So this lack of representation leads to erasure and invalidation of Black, disabled male sexuality or many different kinds of sexuality. AJ, do you wanna talk about how you don't fit into stereotypes?

AJ: So sometimes when you see a Black male onscreen, they might be sexual, like Don Juan, oversexualized person or player. I don't really fit into that. Or if you see somebody that's disabled, they may be asexual or like this very wise person. We tend to give a lot of wisdom.

[all laugh]

CHERYL: Yeah! And inspiration. Don't forget about inspiration.

AJ: Yeah, a lot of inspiration.

CHERYL: Yeah. So how that plays out is that non-disabled audiences often do not even register that disabled sexuality exists. They're deprived of realistic, complex representations. They assume that disabled people don't want sex, don't have it, and aren't desirable. Which it just no. Stop it. Enough of that. So harmful.

AJ: I experience this all the time. People literally come up to me sometimes, and they say to themselves, "It didn't even register to me that disabled people would want to have sex!" So this is a very real thing.

CHERYL: Yeah.

[audience laughs]

CHERYL: Y'all gotta keep your thoughts on the inside sometimes [laughs]. And I would say that because I read as non-disabled, I don't ever have people coming, strangers coming up, asking if I can have sex. And I know that people who are read as having disabled bodies are often interrogated by strangers from...by strangers-- I didn't sleep last night at all. Anyway. Interrogated by strangers, right?

AJ: Yes.

[Brainstorming activity](#)

CHERYL: So we're gonna switch to an activity.

AJ: Yeah, we're gonna break up into groups and do some mind maps, do some investigation and really dig into this topic. I think, what are we gonna do, pick a team captain, right?

CHERYL: Yeah, yeah. If you wanna break up into groups. There are sheets of paper, one, two, three, four, five. They each just sort of put some kind of imagery or relationship out there. We're hoping that you'll take the markers that are there, and I got low-odor markers, and just free associate some words or images that come to your mind when you look at that, whatever is on the paper you choose. We'll just take a few minutes. Move around the room. Switch papers if you want. That's fine. Maybe 5, 10 minutes to just put your thoughts on paper. That would be great. Go!

[groups convene and chat]

CHERYL: I'm so excited that there are these conversations happening at every piece of paper and conversations happening on the papers. So thank you. Hopefully folks got a chance to maybe look at some of the other pages you didn't write on. There's interesting stuff that I see on here that really speaks to bias, how people are viewed, how people are interpreted. People are seen as being less employed or unemployed. Seen as un-- Does that say "unusual?" No,

asexual. "Special needs." So I appreciate the brainstorming and the conversations y'all were having. I'm sorry that I had to cut you off. So we wanna dig in a little more into these, into bias and interrogations of bias that are happening in the media. There's quite a bit around gender, race, and ethnicity, class, little bit about disability. So we're gonna go into that.

[The Bechdel-Wallace Test and Bechdel-type tests](#)

Are people familiar with [The Bechdel-Wallace test](#), sometimes just called The Bechdel Test? OK. Cool. A lot of people haven't heard of it. So I'm excited to introduce to you The Bechdel-Wallace Test, which was born just organically from this comic strip that Allison Bechdel wrote in 1985, Dykes to Watch Out For. Allison put together this comic strip. There are two lesbian women, one who is Black, one who is white. Although that isn't mentioned in The Bechdel Test that came out of it. But what's happening here is the two of them are walking and talking. "Well, I don't know. I have this rule, see. I only go to a movie if it satisfies three basic requirements. One, it has to have at least two women in it, who two, talk to each other about, three, something besides a man!" And they're passing the poster for *Conan the Barbarian*, *The Vigilante*. The friend says, "Pretty strict, but a good idea." And the first person says, "No kidding. The last movie I was able to see was *Alien*."

[audience murmurs, chuckles]

CHERYL: 'Cause nothing else fits. Once you know The Bechdel-Wallace Test, you cannot watch movies the same again. You're like, "Why?! You had this strong female lead, and Tom Cruise still saves the day! Why?!" [audience chuckles] What was that movie I just-- Argh!!

AJ: You'll never look at movies the same way again. I don't. I can't.

CHERYL: Seriously. Can't. An important factor in The Bechdel-Wallace Test is that we're not asking is it a good representation of women, just is it?

[audience laughs, chatters]

CHERYL: Is it there? Is it two women with names who talk to each other, not about a man? Since then, it's been expanded, I'm excited to say. And there are Bechdel-type tests for race and class. The citation there at the bottom, VFS Web team--and I have the whole citation at the end of the slides if anyone wants to grab that--it's [an article by Mohammed El Masri](#) who is posing questions for content creators, not for audience. But content creators, are you paying attention to who you're casting, where it's set, what the characters are like. It's a great article. You can go on Tumblr and find [The Racial Bechdel Test](#). Again, two people of color with names talk to each other about somebody besides white people. And then the [Native Bechdel Test](#) by Native Appropriations on their blog. So it's expanding very nicely, and I'm excited by that.

[Why is the best way to do disability representation to downplay the disability?](#)

And what about disability? Well, we have [The Gold Test](#). Anybody heard of The Gold Test? Maybe one person. OK. So we're going to describe it, and we're gonna critique it. AJ and I are not super happy about it. But in order to pass The Gold Test, you have representations of disability in your movie, and your movie cannot be about disability. And the character who has the disability cannot be solely defined by their disability. So one of the critiques AJ and I ask is well, what about race and class, power, gender, crip drag (a non-disabled person pretending to have a disability), sexuality? Why is it only this one thing, just disability? And in terms of passing the test because your film is not about disability, well, another question we have is what if a disabled person made the film? What if it stars disabled people? But if the film is about disabled

experience or culture or politics, it's gonna fail the disability representation test. You have some beautiful thoughts on this, AJ.

AJ: Yes, I feel very strongly about this because it talks about featuring disability but not really talking about the disability. Now on the face of it, that sounds good. But I think to myself, imagine watching a show like for instance--now this is an oldie but a goodie--but imagine watching *Murphy Brown*. Could you imagine watching a show like that, and it had never talked about issues around being a woman? Or the show like *Girls* or other shows like that, and they talk about being a woman; they don't talk about the sub-culture of being a woman. Or other type of shows like *Black-ish*, where they don't talk about African-American, Black. It plays into this narrative of you can be disabled, but don't talk about the disability. [audience murmurs agreement] Like for example, I was watching an interview. Ryan Murphy, the creator of *Glee*--

CHERYL: Boo!

AJ: --said the key to writing disability is not writing about the disability at all. Now, I know what people mean, or I know what they're trying to say when they talk about that because I'm disabled. And a lot of times, we're marginalized, and when people think of disability, that's the only thing they see sometimes: a chair, or a crutch, or a hearing aid, or if you have Down Syndrome. That's all they can see. So sometimes, we're so afraid that our disability is only gonna be focused on. But does that mean that we don't talk about it at all?

CHERYL: And you had some point about that what happens when you deny part of yourself?

AJ: Yeah, when I think of myself, I'm not just my disability. But that doesn't mean that I'm not my disability or that I shouldn't talk about it. Being disabled is an intricate part of my everyday life. I mean it's a part of my life: it affects my daily life, it affects my social life, it affects my friends, you know. So to not talk about the disability to me, it really does a disservice, and it really it's saying this part of myself, I don't like it. I'm gonna exclude it. It makes disability negative. And I think what people are trying to do is make it a positive thing, but to me, not talking about such a intricate part of yourself is making it negative. It plays into the narrative that disability is horrible. Like to me, and we really wanted to raise this question, does just showing disability, does just showing a person with a disability, is that enough? Or I don't know. Maybe it's just me, but I wanna see our culture. I wanna see our sub-culture.

CHERYL: Yeah. And you've also talked about if you deny disability, which is part of you, in fact you're denying your whole self.

AJ: Yes.

Non-disabled-made media mistakes

CHERYL: So we're gonna move on that upper of an idea. But it's true. It's true. We're gonna move on to look at what happens when non-disabled people make media for themselves! So just real quick here, these are still images from four different, three movies and one show. And I'd love a show of hands: Who has seen *Monkey Shines*? With that somehow extraordinarily buff guy who hasn't moved in two years but remains buff. *Quid Pro Quo*? OK. *Me Before You*? A couple more people. And *Ironside Reboot* from 2013. Y'all are like me. I'm like, I haven't seen all this stuff either! [audience laughs] Unfortunately, I watched *Monkey Shines* in preparation for this.

AJ: Oh!

CHERYL: Blargh.

AJ: Yeah, that one.

CHERYL: Notice any themes? Most people here have not seen most of these things. So maybe it might not be obvious exactly what themes, but I mean does anything stand out from these four pictures? Anything you see might be a common theme?

AUDIENCE MEMBER: Wheelchair users.

CHERYL: Yes, wheelchair users. Guess how many of them are wheelchair users in life?

SEVERAL PEOPLE: Zero.

CHERYL: There you go. I see so many zeroes all over this room. Exactly. Those two form a theme. Anything else?

AUDIENCE MEMBER: Men.

CHERYL: Men! Straight, cisgender men. You see two relationships shown, and those are straight relationships, yeah. I mean again, this is non-disabled people making media for themselves 'cause this is what they want to see. One thing that happens in these films, since most of you haven't seen it, and it was talked about in one of the presentations earlier this morning, in *Me Before You*: Oh, whoa is me. I cannot stand to be disabled. I must kill myself. The other ones don't die, but in *Monkey Shines* and *Quid Pro Quo*, they discover that--

AJ: I love this, y'all!

CHERYL: --that in fact, they can walk. [audience groans, turns to laughter] So they overcome their disability. And let me tell you, if you wanna roll your eyes so far back they dislodge, watch these movies because the device that they use in order to make these men walk again is two different devices, they are hideous what the screenwriters did to the story to get these men to walk again at the end. It's just atrocious. Yes, Nina.

NINA G.: So one place that I see disabled images that's made by non-disabled media is *South Park* and *Family Guy* who do--I feel it's mixed--but I feel that they do a better job with these things.

[audience laughs]

CHERYL: Absolutely! Absolutely. And they're cartoons.

NINA G.: What's that?

CHERYL: They're cartoons.

NINA G.: And they're cartoons. We could only show that experience in cartoons.

CHERYL: Mmhmm. We seem to think we can only show that if we do it in cartoons.

KRISTINA KOPIĆ: What about *Speechless*? Or *Breaking Bad*, RJ Mitte.

CHERYL: Yes. Absolutely. Absolutely. So one thing I wanna point out is that because this particular presentation is focused on sexuality, we didn't bring up Speechless. And I mean, RJ Mitte's character is of that age, but I don't remember sexuality ever coming into it. Hmm.

AJ: I don't either.

[audience laughs]

CHERYL: Yeah, his big goal in life was to drive a car like a big boy!

[audience comments aren't audible]

[Breaking the stereotypes non-disabled people have of disabled people](#)

AJ: And also, one of the things about me is we're helping each other out a lot, but I'm visually impaired. That's why she's doing most of the reading. But we wrote this together.

CHERYL: Yes.

AJ: But I had a point, but I can't remember if I'm jumping ahead or not.

CHERYL: OK. Go for it.

AJ: I just also wanted to say if you notice there's also this narrative like we can either fix you, or, in some of these shows, there's always a dream sequence where the people is disabled, but they dream of walking or being completely healed or able-bodied.

CHERYL: Yeah.

AJ: I just wanna say I can't speak for everyone; I don't represent every person with a disability. But from conversations that I have and from thoughts that I had to myself and from speaking to a lot of people in the community, we don't sit around thinking about getting out of our chairs and walking. [audience laughs] I haven't thought about walking since I was a very little kid. But if you look at and listen to the narrative, we're always falling asleep and dreaming about getting up out of our chairs and walking.

CHERYL: Yep. And you've talked about like, as an actor, you would love to be on, what's that? The Tonight Show or something like that.

AJ: Yeah! And it makes me wonder. And I don't want this to happen, God forbid. I really don't want it to happen, but what if-- Anybody here watch Jimmy Fallon, The Tonight Show? What if he was, God forbid, in a accident, and he acquired a disability? It makes me wonder, these questions: Would he be allowed to continue his job, or would he want to? Or would somebody at NBC, some exec say like, "We're glad he's OK, but we have to fire him because I don't think the audience can find him funny anymore. Because being in a wheelchair is sad."

CHERYL: Yeah.

KAREN NAKAMURA: [inaudible] beautiful intern. And then he'll kill himself. We'll give all the money to that able-bodied intern.

[audience laughs]

CHERYL: You should work in Hollywood! Yes.

[audience laughs]

LAURA: That's exactly what would happen in television.

CHERYL: Sure. Absolutely. Absolutely. And AJ's also talked about this fantasy of hosting The Tonight Show but not as Jimmy Fallon...as AJ.

AJ: Yeah. I fantasize about it as myself in all the full glory of my body and my spasticity. [audience chuckles] I just imagine it in myself. It's not like, "Look. He's wonderful. He's in a wheelchair. He's hosting The Tonight Show." I just would happen to be a host who's in a wheelchair who's funny. I mean, you don't have to walk to do a monologue. [audience laughs]

CHERYL: Thank you!

AJ: Or do comedy.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: Or sit at a desk [laughs].

CHERYL: Or sit a desk. Yes, oh my goodness. OK. Yes.

Video Clips

So we wanna show you some quick excerpts of some other people out there, lest you think it's just me and AJ saying these things. Which I know you don't really think it's just me and AJ. But we have a couple clips to show you. This first one is all ages. The second one is not. But this just a couple of little excerpts from [Dr. Danielle Sheypuk in a TEDx Barnard College](#) talk. So you can access that full talk online. It is captioned as well. So lemme just play this small excerpt of her.

I'm going to jump in here with a quick Audio Description for the podcast since you can't see what we played at the conference. Dr. Sheypuk has very light skin and long, straight blond hair. She's slender and is wearing high heels, a low-cut, sparkling dark dress, and sits in a power wheelchair on a stage. She has bright red lipstick and long eyelashes.

DANIELLE SHEYPUK: Society's misconceptions and inaccurate assumptions are the largest obstacle that we face in this area with a disability, and let me tell you, it is the size of Mount Everest. Asexual, not able to have sex, not able to have good sex, can't be a wife, can't be a mother, weak, infertile, can't be a good father.

I had a patient who was about in her 30s, and she was in a wheelchair and identified as a lesbian. It was so easy for her to stay in the closet because people didn't even think she was sexual, never mind a lesbian. Like wow! That didn't even— That would blow their minds. We take these negative stereotypes, and we internalize them because that's what we do as humans.

Media also plays a big role here in the way people with disabilities are treated in this area. We're completely left out. Rarely do you see us in TV commercials, ad campaigns, anything in the beauty and fashion industry. The message: You do not belong here.

CHERYL: So I encourage y'all to check out the whole talk. I just pulled out some little pieces I like. You know, this is a great talk, and AJ turned me onto this talk. This is straight white woman. Well, actually, I don't know if she's straight or not. But this is a white woman. And we appreciate what she's saying, of course. But this is going back to what we talked about before about

erasure and invalidation of specifically Black, disabled male sexuality. OK, here comes the not-all-ages clip. This is Ann Millett-Gallant. It goes by pretty fast. But yes, [this is Basilisk](#).

And some podcast Audio Description for *Basilisk* from Prank Films and preposterous pictures. I'm gonna set up the first 25 seconds for you and then describe as the trailer plays. The trailer opens in a bar with demonic looking drawings and show posters on the wall. Lighting is white and red. Wes, a white man in a black button down with neat, light brown hair sits at the bar with a dark beer, nearly full. Next to him is a white woman in a one-shoulder dress, bright red lipstick, wristwatch and chin-length black hair. Her mouth is scarred, and one arm stops at the elbow, the other before the wrist. Her dark beer is nearly empty, and her purse is on the bar. As they talk, we see her typing at a laptop at home in a pink negligee, working at the bookstore, and interspersed quick shots in black and white that are close-ups of naked bodies intertwined.

[conversations in a bar]

MAN: So do you come here to pick up guys?

WOMAN: Well, it's been known to happen.

MAN: What do you do?

WOMAN: I'm a writer, but I work at a bookstore in the neighborhood.

Would you maybe walk me home?

MAN: Yeah, that'd be great.

[sensual beat]

CHERYL: Montage sequence of the man and woman having sex, doing domestic things. We find out one leg stops at the knee, and the other stops not far below the hip.

FRIEND: She has no hands, Wes.

WES (MAN from above): She doesn't? What on earth? You don't approve.

FRIEND: You're a big boy. Have a ball.

WES: I am. And will.

[tense, distorted music]

WES: You're seriously doing this like this? Just like that.

Just totally blindsided. He wasn't even the one who she was in bed with. She needs me. She's a broken bird.

FRIEND: And what does that make you?

[racing dance music]

CHERYL: He sneaks up to her window, sees her in bed with a woman. Montage where she parties at the Inferno Bar and finds more sex partners of various genders and ethnicities. The

man is isolated, begins to hurt himself, cutting his hand, crawling like an animal. Text: A Film by Jay O'Berski. Holds his hand up at night. The shadow cast has six fingers. *Basilisk*. [trailer ends]

Phew! So Ann Millet-Gallant, I mean, we just love how sexualized she is in this movie. She's a professor at UNC Chapel Hill, art history. She's got some books out about disability in art and media. We just really enjoy. I don't think AJ's seen the film. I've seen the whole film. It's pretty spicy.

Positive representations of disabled sexuality, disabled-made

So we also wanted to introduce you to our new social media friend. Oh, you can't read it! So I'm gonna read you the caption that's under there. I'm so sorry it doesn't show up. It's lo-res. But this is [@Naughty_Miss_R on Instagram](#) and [on Tumblr](#). Please click and like and follow. This is a very uncharacteristic photo of Naughty_Miss_R because she's got a shirt on. [audience laughs] She is flipping the bird in half the picture, with a silly face. And then she's looking kind of coy, looking off to the side in the other picture. But most of her pictures are either fully nude or mostly nude.

AJ: Explicit.

CHERYL: Very much so. Let me read you this caption underneath this Instagram photo. She has CP. "A certain #cerebralpalsyawareness page told me they didn't want to feature my page because of how I carry myself. #Iloveme #Dontjudge. And I didn't ask to be featured anywhere. #stuckupbitches #cerebralpalsy #disabledissexy #lovethebodyyourein #fuckyourfeelings [audience laughs]

At this point, something happened that happens a lot when I'm running the audio-visual show by myself. The recording stopped, and we lost the rest, damn it. AJ did say something here about how we love examples like Naughty_Miss_R for flaunting sexuality and sexiness in a healthy, erotic way. And that there's nothing wrong with that in the context of disability. And that art is a great place to find examples of positive disabled sexuality.

The next slide we brought up has a picture of Robin Wilson-Beattie, a Black woman in a floor-length black and white dress, with long, wavy black hair, standing with a cane and smiling. Next to Robin is Bethany Stevens, a short white woman in a short black dress, legs crossed in her wheelchair and lounging back toward Robin. She also smiles. Next to them is Bethany's small, dark service dog. Text on the picture: "This is what disability looks like. F*cking Awesome." It's from the This is what disability looks like Facebook page. The quotation on the slide is from disabled sex worker Billy Autumn. "Disabled people fuck. Not showing that in porn, not including us in the platform, is harmful and inauthentic."

We had an activity planned at this point, but everyone was pretty excited about hanging out and chatting about the topics. We talked more about some of the brainstorming up on the wall, which I conveniently recycled before I realized I didn't have the audio for our discussion. I'm sorry! I recall the conversation was really dynamic and engaging, and I don't any longer know what anyone said. One thing I do recall is that when we went back to specifically asking about Black, disabled male sexuality, we could only come up with one great example: Leroy Moore and his performance work with disability justice performance group Sins Invalid. It is beyond great. We're thankful for it and for you, Leroy.

In closing, we shared a list of resources for more info on disability and sexuality. Although there were several, I think I only named one aloud because I like to say the name of the article: "[I Sit on Her Face All Day: A Conversation on Sex and Wheelchairs](#)." It's printed on

Autostraddle.com, and it goes into the different ways that people who were interviewed view their assistive devices as integral and intimate parts of their sexuality.

I mentioned *The Fault in Our Stars* and *The Sessions*, both films that portray sex and disability. Yes, it's non-disabled people crippling up. Yes, it's white people. Yes, it's heterosexual sex. But what I really, really wanted to complain about when I brought up these two films is that in both, the lead character uses equipment to assist their breathing. They use this equipment pretty much constantly in the movies. Except. Except. Except the moment before the scene starts to go from sexy to sex. In that moment, their partners gently and romantically remove their assistive breathing devices and push them to the side so the real fun can happen.

While we all practice sex and sexuality differently, one thing that most people probably share is that they breathe a little more heavily at these times. This would be one time in your day you would not want your breathing assistive equipment to be out of your reach. So while these films might be worthy of praise for some pieces of their representation, including sex, what is the message we're getting about devices or other signs of disability? That if you are gonna get some, you better not have that stuff in the non-disabled person's way? The audience who's unfamiliar with these devices sees that they are suddenly and somehow optional, that it is OK for the non-disabled person to remove them without the disabled person's permission or even consultation, and that sex had to be either non-disabled or at least disability pretty. Nonsense!

The other resources we gave include [Deliciously Disabled](#), [SexAbled](#), [Sins Invalid](#), and [the Empowered FeFes](#). Check all of them out!

Closing
[music]

Thanks for joining me for another episode of Stories from the brainreels. Find more handy info on brain injury and disability art and culture and transcripts of all podcast episodes at [WhoAmIToStopIt.com](#).