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Desiring Disability? Problematizing Devoteeism and the Undesirability of Disabled Bodies Through the Lens of Amputees

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ABSTRACT

Several studies argue that disabled people are trapped between being only desired *in spite of impairment/disability* or, alternatively, precisely *because of it*. In the latter case, disabled bodies are fetishized by 'devotees'. The aims of this paper are (1) to theoretically examine how desire for impaired and disabled bodies and specifically devoteeism are conceptually constructed at the intersection of ableism and heterosexism and (2) to empirically explore how amputees experience and conceptualize their bodies as objects of sexual desire, the role of consent and how this relates to (or resists) the devotee narrative. To do that, we draw on a qualitative interview-based study on the differences between six heterosexual men and women with amputations. The findings are divided into three themes: (1) Consent as a rhetorical device that condones devoteeism in an abstract way that does not necessarily problematize the undesirability of disability. (2) The intersection between gender and dis/ability regarding gendered understandings of 'the devotee'. (3) Cripping desire and gender roles beyond devoteeism. In conclusion, devoteeism can be understood as a codification of desire that is simultaneously a product of ableism and heterosexism, and individuals with impairments 'crip' these oppressive systems by expanding desire beyond devoteeism.

1 | Introduction

> *This is an uncertainty fed by the stares I receive on the street; an uncertainty stoked by the threats of disgust and promises of desire I find in devoteeism; an uncertainty nurtured and ended by my own struggles to come to terms with the substance of my desires and the terrain of my body.*
>
> (Kafer 2012, 349)

Over the past three decades, numerous studies have demonstrated that disabled people have historically encountered exclusion from affective and sexual relationships (Shakespeare and Richardson 2018; De Boer 2015). Liddiard (2012) captures the paradoxical position in which ableism traps disabled people when it comes to their sexuality:

> Disabled people are desexualized and degendered (…) within ableist cultures. Until recently they have been defined predominantly as asexual, as lacking

> any sexual feeling and desire. Alternatively, they are defined as sexually inadequate or as sexual victims and objects of fetish: the assumption that their only experience of the 'sexual' is through sexual violence and abuse *and through 'devotees'* (*who themselves are pathologized for their sexual attraction to impairment*)
>
> (Liddiard 2012, 13; emphasis added)

While Liddiard (2012) and many others (Shakespeare 1999; Gerschick 2000; García-Santesmases and Sanmiquel-Molinero 2022) have thoroughly explored how disabled people construct their sexual selves and relationships in ableist and patriarchal contexts, fewer studies (Saltes 2013; Solvang 2007) have specifically focused on their fetishization, specifically on *devoteeism*. Devotees are defined as people who experience impairment and/or disability-focused sexual desire. More specifically, devotees tend to look for a very specific type of functionality and/or appearance. While the first study—a market survey—on this topic appears to be from 1976, the first academic account of 'devoteeism' appears to date from the mid-nineties (Bruno 1997) and comes from Health Sciences, which have tended to pathologize this attraction. According to the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-5), the attraction of 'body part(s), Non-living object(s), Other' is listed as a fetishistic disorder under paraphilic disorder (American Psychiatric Association 2013, 33) The medical literature considers that there are two types of devotees depending on what attracts them: *Abasiophiliacs* prefer people who use some type of orthopaedic aid such as wheelchairs, splints and orthoses, while *acrotomophiliacs* are attracted to people with amputations. Sometimes, both kinds of attraction happen at the same time (Mora 2018; Limoncin et al. 2014).

Most people who identify themselves as *devotees* are able-bodied, heterosexual men (Limoncin et al. 2014; Bruno 1997) desiring people with particular physical impairments, preferably women. The type of target and the gendered expression involved is reminiscent of other types of fetishization of the female or feminized bodies such as 'tranny chasers' (Tompkins 2014) when it comes to trans women, 'chubby chasers' (Pyle and Loewy 2009) in the case of fat women and gay men, and 'yellow fever' when it comes to the fetishization of Asian women (Zheng 2016). Limoncin et al. (2014) found that amputation is the type of impairment that most male devotees prefer, although there is also attraction towards orthopaedic devices, paraplegia, blindness and others.

While fetishization occurs in real-life contexts too, it is clear that the expansion of the internet—and particularly, amateur pornography and self-produced images through social media—platforms, 'brings the viewer closer to the freakish body than ever before' (Williams 2017, 115). On the one hand, the internet has expanded the expression of fetishist desire (Fay et al. 2016). Saltes (2013) suggests that the online space is ideal for people to reveal hidden, sometimes stigmatized, desires and feelings due to the possibilities of anonymity and nicknames, which allow them to conceal their identity. On the other hand, several studies have demonstrated that social media are a fertile ground for the (hyper)sexualized representation of young women's bodies, but also 'sexually othered' bodies, sometimes in objectifying ways (Vendemia and Fox 2024; Davis 2018).

In this context, the aim of this paper is twofold. First, we intend to examine theoretically how desire for impaired/disabled bodies and specifically *devoteeism* are conceptually constructed at the intersection of ableism and heterosexism. We will resort to Critical and Feminist Disability Studies to problematize how, under ableism, disabled people can only be desired *in spite of impairment/disability* or, alternatively, precisely *because of it*. In this context, we contend that devoteeism is not so much a specific type of fetishization as it is a result of the intersection between ableist and heterosexist ways of reading desire for disabled bodies. Second, we will conduct an empirical exploration of how amputees experience and conceptualize their bodies as objects of sexual desire, the role of consent in this process and how this relates to (or resists) the heterosexist and ableist narrative of devoteeism.

To do that, we draw on a qualitative interview-based study on sexuality and disability developed with amputees. The study focuses on the differences between heterosexual men and women when it comes to understanding and experiencing impairment/disability-related desire. Not only is inquiring into these issues crucial to make historically marginalized experiences visible—such as that of disabled people's sexualities—but also to contribute to a broader understanding of how ableism and heterosexism work together to constrict the (un)desirability of bodies and subjects. Within this framework, devoteeism is particularly noteworthy as it fetishizes and sexualizes the disabled body because of the impairment, rather than in spite of it, reproducing dominant constructions of (un)desirability. However, as we intend to show in this paper, amputees resist such dominant constructions in various ways.

2 | A Critical and Feminist Disability Studies Analysis of the Un/Desirability of Disabled Bodies

2.1 | Sex, Gender and Disability at the Intersection

Back in the nineties, Oliver (1996) proposed the social model of disability, which is often said to inaugurate Disability Studies as an academic field. Drawing on the sex/gender dichotomy that feminists had promoted in the seventies, the social model established the *impairment/disability* dichotomy. *Impairment* was defined as the lack or loss of a bodily structure of function (and thus the object of intervention of biomedical sciences), while *disability* was defined as the socially produced oppression imposed 'on top of' *impairments*, which should be the object of social transformations. For early social modellists, transforming disability meant transforming structural barriers that capitalist modes of productivity imposed on people with impairments. However, disability scholars soon noted that the social model was 'somatophobic' because it abandoned the impaired body at the hands of biomedicine (Hughes and Paterson 1997) and thus neglected the role of sexuality in the exclusion of disabled people (Shakespeare 1999). As (Foucault 2007) states, sexuality is a privileged field for analysing the biopolitical logics of bodily disciplining and its

demarcation of abnormality. This premise has been widely explored from a Critical Disability Studies (CDS) stance. CDS encompasses theoretically diverse approaches such as 'crip theory' (McRuer 2006), studies in ableism (Campbell 2009; Wolbring 2008) and Feminist Disability Studies (Garland-Thomson 2002; García-Santesmases 2023).

Importantly, these theoretical frameworks have pointed out that, in order to analyse how dis/ability[1] and sexual desirability are socially constructed, not only should we take into account what social modellists had termed as *disability* (later called *disablism* by Thomas 2007), but also *ableism*. Disablism (Thomas 2007) includes an array of structural (e.g., inaccessible leisure spaces that prevent a person with an impairment from getting to know potential partners) and psycho-emotional barriers (e.g., invasive questions about sexual capabilities at the hands of strangers) that *disable* the (sexual) lives of people with impairments. In turn, *ableism* comprises a network of beliefs and practices that establishes which bodies and minds are deemed (less than) fully human (Campbell 2009) and thus susceptible to being devalued and discriminated against, also in the sexual arena. Ableism is a precondition for disablism, but also for heterosexism, racism or ageism, inter alia (Wolbring 2008). For this reason, scholars in CDS have explored the links between, gender, sexuality and dis/ability by not focusing exclusively on disablism nor what we identify today as 'actual' disabled bodies. In this sense, it has been pointed out that ableism and heterosexism are deeply intertwined in that women (Wolbring 2008), racialized (Garland-Thomson 2002) and non-heterosexual people (McRuer 2006) have been historically pathologized and considered 'inferior' in terms of abilities when compared to their normative counterparts.

Authors in CDS have also explored the other side of the issue. Performing gender and heterosexuality correctly requires certain *abilities* (García-Santesmases 2023). Consequently, as Liddiard pointed out, disabled people are de-gendered and de-sexualized in ableist cultures. According to Sandahl (2003) and Thorneycroft (2021), the othering of disabled people' sexuality is closely related to de-genderization: their bodies and behaviours often do not align with hegemonic gender categories, rendering them neither fully male nor female but rather in a state of liminality (García-Santesmases and Sanmiquel-Molinero 2022) that renders them sexually undesirable. De-genderization and de-sexualization, however, are not absolute; they are context-dependent and ambivalent.

As Gerschick (2000) states, expectations for disabled bodies to adhere to gender mandates vary by impairment type, functional impact, whether it is congenital or acquired and visibility. In this vein, Pioneers Fine and Asch (1988) coined the expression 'sexism without the pedestal' to describe how women with impairments experience the gender impositions of femininity while being denied the traditional gender roles that feminist theory critiques as cultural constructs. Disabled women's femininity is questioned or considered 'perverse' (Hirschmann 2013) due to deviations from normative patterns of beauty and self-care standards, especially when their autonomy over these aspects is limited (i.e., in care institutions or when they are taken care of by a relative). Importantly, de-genderization makes (sexual) violence against disabled women invisible and difficult to recognize as related to gender (García-Santesmases Fernández and Pié Balaguer 2017). In the case of disabled men, symbolic feminization is significant: they do not perform according to normative ideals of physical strength and sexual potency. However, they retain a patriarchal privilege, compared to disabled women, allowing them to express their sexual needs and desires more freely (García-Santesmases 2023). This has a direct impact on sexual representations of disabled men and women online. As Williams notes, while disabled women are usually represented as passive objects in porn websites, when videos feature disabled men, 'the man is both emasculated ('what chick would want to fuck them?'; he must rely on a prostitute, etc.) and masculinized (he can 'pound a bitch good' despite his disability), suggesting that maleness and disability are at once contradictory and superfluous' (Williams 2017, 126).

On a more positive note, as García-Santesmases and Sanmiquel-Molinero (2022) show, disabled men and women usually contest their de-genderization by reclaiming their masculinity and femininity through their appearance and sexual practices. In addition to everyday actions that counter ableist, de-gendering and de-sexualizing practices, several authors in Critical and Feminist Disability Studies have devoted themselves to exploring how disability can *crip* sexual agency and sexuality (Thorneycroft 2021). According to McRuer (2017), 'cripping' entails radically revisioning, from committed anti-ableist positions, the taken-for-granted systems in which we are located'. In this sense, disability can 'crip sexuality' by promoting imaginative, novel and pleasurable sexual practices' (Ebrahim 2019).

Cripping sexuality does not mean assuming that all sexuality experimented and desired by disabled people is necessarily anti-ableist. In this sense, the discussion surrounding devotee desire cannot be resolved as if it were solely about a kind of attraction for disabled bodies that promotes the 'beauty of diversity'. Contrarily, such desire is framed within an ableist and patriarchal system that needs to be carefully analysed. The next subsection explores how CDS can provide a nuanced tool for understanding sexual desire and disabled people.

2.2 | Reading Desire Towards Disabled Bodies

Because impairment puts into question disabled people's gendered and sexual embodied capital, experiencing sexual desire for disabled bodies has historically been 'stigmatized by association' (Goffman 1963) with the 'sexual other'. Thus, people who want to establish relationships with members of sexual minorities 'become sexual suspects' (Fiduccia 1999, 280). As Williams claims: 'The classification of attraction to disabled bodies as pathological suggests more than a fetishization of vulnerable bodies. In fact, it suggests another blurring between the bodies of the abled and disabled. Who, in such a sexual relationship, is the freak?' (Williams 2017, 120). In other words, sexual desire for disabled people runs the risk of being pathologized. At least, it must always be *explained* away with regard to impairment. In what Kafer calls 'the exceptionalist logic of desire and disgust' (Kafer 2012, 337), in ableist contexts, disabled people can only be desired 'in spite of' impairment/disability or 'because of' it.

As for the first option, according to Campbell, since ableism attributes an irrevocably 'negative ontology' (Campbell 2009, 12) to impairment, anything positive/healthy/successful that disabled people do or that happens to them, must be *in spite of* their *impairment/disability*. If we apply this to sexual desire, in ableist cultures, non-pathological desire for disabled bodies can only happen once impairment has been effectively overcome or outright overlooked by the desiring subject. Sometimes, it is even positioned as a disembodied desire, such as in 'I do not see the wheelchair, I see the person'. Campbell compares this discourse to that used by men who have sex with men, or even male partners while stating 'I am not gay, I am attracted to a wonderful person who happens to be a man' (Campbell 2009, 183). For this reason, even if disabled people manage to engage in and maintain romantic relationships, many still experience feelings of diminished sexual attractiveness, tending to view themselves as asexual and physically undesirable (Ebrahim 2019; Chambers 2023; Shakespeare 1999).

As for the second conceptualization of desire in ableist contexts, if impairment/disability are not removed from the equation as the 'in spite of impairment/disability' narrative, disabled people can only be (pathologically) desired *because of* their impairment/disability. And this is where *devoteeism* comes in as an automatic and essentialized resort towards attraction to disabled bodies. As Kafer points out, this suspicion also applies to romantic attraction: According to the exceptionalist logic of desire and disgust, to love an amputee is to be a devotee; to refuse such an appellation is to love an amputee only partially, ashamedly, reluctantly (Kafer 2012, 337). But what do devotees actually desire? Who gets to be codified as a devotee and what role does gender play in this process? And, finally, how do devotees manifest their desires?

According to Jackson (2021) and Limoncin et al. (2014), while some people who identify themselves as devotees focus their object of desire on particular impaired body parts (such as stumps) or on bodily prostheses that people with impairments use (such as wheelchairs), others focus their desire on *disability* or *disablism*. Namely, they specifically eroticize the fact that disablist barriers restrict people with impairment's mobility. Thus, as Williams (2017) suggests, de-sexualization is present even when disabled women are represented in porn, since the object of the audience's desire is seeing disabled people struggle with everyday non-sexual activities, not them having sex (which is usually what pornographic material displays). In fact, she suggests that this equates disability porn with 'inspiration porn' (Young 2014). Namely, the kind of disability representation where people with impairments are objectified as vessels for the inspiration and motivation of the 'normal'. In (Thorneycroft's 2021, 10) words, 'disability is constructed as an erotic object of pity; and (...) disabled people cannot appear as sexual beings (in pornography)'. While it could be argued, with Thorneycroft (2021), that disabled people are de-sexualized in porn, we would add that they are in fact hypersexualized at the same time. The fact that such 'de-sexualized' representations appear on *pornographic* websites means that they are connected to sexual arousal. The gaze projected onto the disabled body does not entail mere condescension, but the (hyper)sexualization of the daily struggles involved in overcoming barriers. In this sense, this resembles misogynistic pornography, where women's (performance of) suffering is highly eroticized.

This brings us to the second question: *what desires for disabled bodies* come to be codified as '*devotee*' and what role does gender play in this process? While Bruno' study recounts a case of a female devotee, he states that the overwhelming majority of devotees 'are male' (Bruno 1997, 253). Similarly, according to Kafer, most devotees are 'white, middle- to upper-middle class, well-educated men between the ages of twenty-five and sixty-five' (Kafer 2012, 335). In Mora's (2018) quantitative survey on devoteeism only four women were found for every five-hundred male devotees. Limoncin's study is based on 219 male respondents, and it excluded 10 women 'because of impossibility to perform significant comparisons' (Limoncin et al. 2014, 52). In this paper, rather than assuming that 'there is no such thing as devotee women', we argue that gender and heterosexism inform the devotee imaginary. In patriarchal contexts, occupying "the female position" in a relationship—regardless of actual gender identity—entails embodying "the object of desire" of the "male position" (Llevadot 2022). Conversely, for Llevadot (2022), the "male position" entails the urge to dominate and fragment the female body. As a consequence, women or people who occupy "the female position" might not identify with devoteeism as they do not tend to entertain, embody or express sexual desire in a dehumanizing or objectifying way[2].

As for the third question—how devotees express their desire—it is worth noting that some people who self-identify as 'devotees' are well aware of the risk of being criminalized, pathologized or discriminated against (Chambers 2023) on the grounds of their desire. Following Saltes (2013), the online space is ideal for people through the possibilities of anonymity, pseudonyms and, therefore, hiding their identity, makes it easier to tell intimate information and reveal hidden desires and feelings. A multitude of websites and forums for the exchange of information, testimonies and erotic and pornographic images of disabled people, especially women, can be found on the Internet (Williams 2017). While some of these sexualized representations might be consensually obtained, many others are not, and it is young disabled women who are the main targets of their proposals. Indeed, many disabled women have denounced being stalked by devotees and being photographed or videotaped without their consent (Kafer 2012). Williams (2017) and Elman (1997) argue that devotees usually harass, stalk and even organize disability events in order to engage with disabled women. In this context, several authors have defined devotee desire as irrevocably dangerous for disabled people, and women specifically (Aguilera 2000; Mora 2018, Mora 2017; Senet 2014; Limoncin et al. 2014; Bruno 1997).

In contrast, Sullivan (2008) rejects this demonization and poses devoteeism as a chance to crip disabled sexuality by rejecting the idea that disability is essentially unnatural and undesirable. This author points out that locating the problem, not in the violent behaviour of some individuals, but in the desire for disabled people, is ableist as it reduces disabled people to their impairment and thus objectifies them (which, ironically, is what devotees are accused of). In this vein, Kafer recognizes that, while devotee desire disturbs her as a disabled woman, there

are 'women who had felt profound shame about their bodies reported significant gains in their self-confidence after discovering devotees' (Kafer 2012, 333).

Beyond the theoretical debate, it is relevant to understand how disabled people, specifically female amputees, perceive their bodies as objects of desire by and beyond devotees, what their specific experiences with devotees are and their concerns, worries and pressures. So far, the most prominent studies in this thematic area have mainly adopted approaches in the medical field or have employed only quantitative methodologies (Mora 2018; Senet 2014; Limoncin et al. 2014; Aguilera 2000; Bruno 1997). Importantly, these investigations have not significantly incorporated a feminist and anti-ableist perspective. Our research seeks to contribute to the field by offering qualitative data and a new critical perspective that integrates both gender and dis/ability dimensions in the analysis of the sexual experiences of people with impairments.

3 | Methods

This work is based on a qualitative study developed by the third author with the aim of investigating the sexuality of amputees. Qualitative approaches have been deemed especially appropriate for exploring silenced and stigmatized realities inasmuch they are 'sensitive to certain topics such as emotions, contexts and social interactions' (Beiras et al. 2017, 55). Particularly, qualitative methodologies that place disabled people' sexual stories at the centre are a way of countering the fact that this research has historically only explored the voices of 'those who govern the sexual lives of disabled people' (Liddiard 2012, 82) and have revolved around sexual function and adjustment (Shuttleworth 2010).

Importantly, focusing on the voices of disabled people does not entail limiting ourselves to describing what they have to say about their experiences. According to the epistemology of 'situated knowledge' (Haraway 1988), knowledge emerges as participants' and researchers' accounts of a given experience come together so that emancipatory readings of that experience can emerge. In this study, we aim to read disabled participants' experiences from the standpoint of Feminist Disability Studies. While we do not claim that this lens holds the absolute truth about our participants' experiences, we argue that it contributes to palliate 'hermeneutical injustice' (Fricker 2007). According to disabled philosopher Shelley Tremain (2017), hermeneutical injustice happens within feminist epistemologies whenever the ableist apparatus of disability is not taken into consideration when interpreting disabled people's experiences.

The study was developed in Spain. As for sampling, the snowball method (Patton 2002) was used to identify cases of interest by connecting with an orthopaedic aids store owned by amputees and trusted by the third author. They provided us with the contact details of those they considered to be valuable interviewees. The sample included six lower limb amputees (two cisgender men, three cisgender women and one trans woman; all heterosexual) residing in Spain and ranging from 25 to 65 years of age (Table 1).

TABLE 1 | Sample table with respective characteristics.

Sample						
	Manolo	**Irene**	**Raquel**	**Jorge**	**Camila**	**Aina**
Age	61 years	26 years	41 years	38 years	52 years	27 years
Type of amputation	One leg at tibial level	One leg at tibial level	One leg at tibial level	One leg at tibial level	One leg at tibial level	One leg at femoral level
Age of amputation	At around 35 years old	At 11 years old	Between 25 and 35 years old	At 37 years old	At 25 years old	Congenital
Gender identity	Cisgender man	Cisgender woman	Cisgender woman	Cisgender man	Transgender woman	Cisgender woman
Sexual orientation	Heterosexual	Heterosexual	Heterosexual	Heterosexual	Heterosexual	Heterosexual

The interviews were conducted both face-to-face and online formats to accommodate the participants' needs, taking into account the accessibility of the locations. These interviews were conducted between March and May 2022, they lasted between 60 and 90 min and were recorded. The interviewees signed an informed consent, and pseudonyms were used to preserve the privacy and identity of the participants.

The interviews focused on the sexual experiences of individuals with amputations. The interview guide consisted of several questions regarding three broad thematic areas: (1) Body image and appearance management practices; (2) Representation and cultural imaginaries around disabled bodies; (3) Sexuality, relationships and desire. This third part included the questions: 'Do you know what devotees are? How do they make you feel?' If the participant did not know what a devotee was, the interviewer offered a brief definition: 'devotees are individuals who are attracted to people with impairments'. Participants were then allowed to elaborate on the topic as they wished. The interviews were thoroughly transcribed and then coded into analytical categories manually. Different thematic categories were identified for this paper: (1) Devotees; (2) Undesirability; (3) Vulnerability; (4) Gender differences; (5) Violence; (6) Alternative sexual practices; (7) Desire and pleasure.

4 | Findings and Discussion

The analysis presented in this section is divided into three themes. In the first theme, we explore what the participants think about devotees and how consent operates as a rhetorical tool that serves to legitimize devoteeism in an abstract way that does not necessarily problematize the undesirability of disability. In the second theme, we address the intersection between gender and dis/ability when it comes to understanding how men and women relate differently to 'the devotee', whether they have encountered people who identify as such or they reflect on devoteeism as an abstract figure. In the third theme, we explore how participants incorporate impairment into sexual practices as an object of desire beyond devoteeism, in a way that transcends the ableist constructions of desire and 'crips' traditional gender roles.

4.1 | 'You Can Find Anything Out There': Consent as a Limit of Unfeasible Sexual Preferences

Generally speaking, in the responses of all participants, aversion towards devotees was found through such explicit comments as 'I hope I never meet a devotee' (Aina). Still, men and women had different affective responses towards devoteeism, reflecting a gendered 'affective politics' of fear (Ahmed 2014, 64) where women read 'the openness of the body to the world'—openness to devotees in our case—as '[involving] a sense of danger' (Ahmed 2014, 69). As for the interviewed men, none of them had had contact with people who could be identified as devotees, and they did not know what devotees were before the interview. Thus, their accounts and opinions were not based on their personal experience. Instead, their discourse was disembodied: they saw devotees as something distant, which did not compel or threaten them. In fact, they were considerably more concise in their responses than women, and they approached the topic with humour. Manolo joked that he could monetize devotee's attraction and build his own business out of it: 'Does it pay well? I'm not surprised, given everything that's out there, it takes all sorts to make a world' (Manolo). Similarly, Jorge describes devotees who focus their desire on impairments as follows:

> I feel that these people are crazy. It's a different thing if it's just about sex; everyone has their own fetishes and preferences. (...) I have included the wheelchair in my sexual relationships, for the thrill of it. The hospital bed, too (laughs), but that's about it. (...) I have never thought about *devotees* before, but I can believe they exist because you can find anything out there. I find the situation a bit comical—it's funny.
>
> (Jorge)

Jorge and Manolo's responses reflect that devoteeism is perceived as pathological ('they are crazy') and, at best, only validated through a resigned acceptance of diverse preferences ('it takes all sorts to make a world', 'you can find anything out there'). This underscores how men perceive impairment as conventionally *undesirable*, but also how they regard the possibility of having a body part sexually objectified and even monetized ('Does it pay well?') as *ridiculous*. Interestingly, in Jorge's discourse, the fact that he actively incorporated orthopaedic or disability-related elements in sex—such as wheelchairs or hospital beds—was considered as an 'acceptable *fetish*'. In contrast, strangers focusing on impairment as the object of desire was *not* acceptable.

In turn, Raquel quickly qualifies devoteeism as 'weird'. This contrasts with Raquel's male mentor's view: he had been an amputee for longer and he found the expression of devotee desire on the Internet completely *normal*. As we suggested before, gender codified the perception and experience of amputees surrounding devotees:

> When I joined (name of an amputee association), I started being hit on by people, and I was like 'wow, this is weird'. People began talking to me on Facebook and told me they were attracted to people with disabilities. Of course, I was new to all of this, so I asked someone who was kind of my mentor, and he told me it was 'completely normal' and that there was even a webpage devoted to it. There's even a foreign name for this [she means *devotees*].
>
> (Raquel)

Interestingly, while pathologization of devotee desire *in itself* was common among participants, both men and women argued that 'it is fine' as long as it is consented. They use 'consent' as a tool to draw the line between 'sex' and 'violence', and to solve the discussion around devoteeism:

> As long as they don't harm anyone or force anyone... If both the person showing it and the person receiving

> it agree to do it, I think it's fine. If they're both comfortable and happy, it doesn't matter to me.
>
> (Manolo)

> If it's part of a consensual sexual practice that both parties are interested in, I think it's absolutely fine. Everyone has their own kinks and preferences, and as long as both people feel comfortable, it's fine by me. But if it's like how I experienced [devotees], I don't think it's right.
>
> (Irene)

> I looked it up online, and there's all sorts of things out there... It's well-rooted. And those who have an amputation and make videos—that blew my mind too. But if it's consensual, I think it's great.
>
> (Raquel)

While it is clear that consent is important to prevent violence, it also appears a way to end the discussion without addressing the obvious tension that the aforementioned pathologization of devotee desire implies. As Srinivasan claims, 'When we posit consent as the only ethically acceptable constraint on sex, we are driven to a naturalization of sexual preferences' (Srinivasan 2021, 144). When Manolo says, 'As long as they don't harm anyone or force anyone', it seems that there is nothing more to say. This way of thinking prevents us from reflecting ethically on the practices and relationships that are acceptable, fair, just, equitable, affirming that everything can be acceptable as far as it is consented. Consent is not fixed and viewing it as a contract that can guarantee good sex promotes a liberal perspective, conceiving individuals as intentional beings with full agency who freely make decisions, thus overlooking structural inequalities regarding the capabilities to consent and the consequences of not consenting to certain practices (Angel 2021; Losiggio et al. 2021; Fischel 2019).

In that sense, violence is defined exclusively as 'that interaction which is not consented' without reflecting, for example, on symbolic violence resulting from visualizing misogynist and/or ableist content. Devotee desire can 'blow your mind', as Raquel said, but 'it is great' if it is consensual. In the case of Irene, this logic goes further: even if her experience with devotees was bad ('if it's like how I experienced [devotees], I don't think it's right'), she argued that because everyone had 'their own *kinks* and preferences', as long as both people felt comfortable, it was 'fine by her'. As Srinivassan points out, 'A practice which is consensual can also be systemically damaging', (Srinivasan 2021, 147). This view resonates with Hellman's (2011) account of the objective wrongness of discrimination inasmuch as it involves treating someone as if they were 'of lesser moral worth'. According to Srinivassan, saying that everyone can desire whatever or whoever they want is 'a liberal demand' that does not take into account the importance of social inequalities such as misogyny, racism, ableism or transphobia'. In contrast with Hellman's account, Srinivassan does not claim that, whenever such social inequalities are making it possible for 'demeaning' sexual practices to happen, these practices are fundamentally wrong regardless of consent. Instead, she reminds us that we should at least problematize these systems of oppression before assuming they are fundamentally right just because they have been consented.

4.2 | Stranger Danger: Sexual Terror at the Intersection of Gender and Disability

In contrast with men, most interviewed women (three out of four) had heard of devotees and had interacted with men who identified as such through social media. Thus, women reflected on this topic in a more embodied, lengthy and serious manner than men. They found discussing devoteeism more challenging and had a more visceral reaction to the topic. Irene and Raquel recounted how they were contacted by *devotees* through social networks, and Aina reflects on how she would interpret being contacted by one:

> I was shocked when I discovered them. I had already done the work of accepting my body (...) but if they catch you very early on, they can take advantage of you very easily. The guy who hit on me via Facebook told me that I was a woman, an amputee, a wheelchair user and also plump, I met all the requirements. I was surprised and asked him if that was really what he was looking for in a woman, and he said yes, I had all the requirements. I thought he didn't know me, and I didn't understand why he wanted something with me: he had only seen my picture. It's important to emphasize the fact that they can catch you in vulnerable moments. It is up to you whether you are fine with devotees or not, but you need to be aware of what it is. (...) [Devotees] can be dangerous because they see you in a specific way (...) You end up being their toy, their obsession. We are vulnerable with these people.
>
> (Raquel)

> All the requests for pictures of my stump have been from men, 'Hi, you're so beautiful, can you send me a photo of your stump?' I have my Instagram public, but if you look at my feed, the prosthesis doesn't appear much. If I post a story where it's visible, I don't mind; it's just that I don't talk about my leg much because I don't give it much space, but still. (...) It disgusts me because I experience it as if a total stranger asked me for a picture of my breasts.
>
> (Irene)

> This sounds like something from *Criminal Minds* (laughs). I knew this kind of attraction existed, like people who are into feet and also, I knew there were people attracted to amputees, but I didn't know the name. So, it might seem like they're in love with you, but they could be a devotee—what a hassle! (...) Devotees are a little weird. Being asked for a picture

> of your boobs would be the normal thing to do, you know what I mean?
>
> (Aina)

The three women problematize the devotees' behaviour insofar as the object of their desire is the stump (and also *fatness* in Raquel's case), which resonates with the undesirability of those traits in ableist and heterosexist contexts. The devotee desire is viewed as a dehumanizing and fetishistic practice, among other reasons, by interpreting this desire through pathologization. This leads to its visceral rejection by disabled individuals, especially women. In this sense, Raquel, Irene and Aina pathologize devotees as 'weird', 'obsessive', 'abnormal' and even 'dangerous' and 'criminal'.

However, not only is rejection of devoteeism related to an ableist interpretation of desire—in which specific attraction to impairment/disability is considered creepy—, but also to the fear of sexual violence and objectification of female bodies. The quotes from Aina, Raquel and Irene discuss the idea that female disabled bodies are 'vulnerable' and 'exposed' to the threat of sexual objectification ('their toy'), fragmentation (in being asked for pictures of specific body parts) and even commodification ('I met all the requirements') at the hands of men in online interactions. This finding resonates with Kafer (2012) as she recounts that she began to fear devotees as soon as she knew of them after becoming an amputee. In fact, she states that because of fear of devotee harassment, many female amputees (including herself) limit their actions, such as joining organizations, sharing personal information or photos or showing up in public with prostheses. Kafer herself does not answer any more messages from amputee women in fear that they are 'hidden devotees'. Disability and gender intersect by constructing disabled women as essentially vulnerable. However, not only is the embodiment of sexual terror something 'that happens to women', but a way of constituting them *as* women (Barjola 2018). Namely, an essential pattern of female and feminizing socialization is that women learn that they are vulnerable to experiencing sexual violence, putting them in a state of 'sexual terror' (Barjola 2018; Segato 2003). Just as able-bodied female teens tend to be constituted as women once they are aware that it is 'normal' that men may (hyper)sexualize certain parts of their bodies and that they are vulnerable to sexual violence, devoteeism can be read as one of the mechanisms through which disabled women come to be constituted as such (García-Santesmases 2023).

In this context, is it the same to objectify and sexualize a breast or a stump? How do women experience and react to these requests? Aina and Irene's discourses are different. While Irene finds both requests 'disgusting', Aina normalizes heterosexual objectification of the female body, but not the objectification of the disabled body. Whereas female breasts epitomize the quintessential sexualized bodily part of contemporary female corporeality, the stump appears to signify a shameful, anti-erotic and de-feminizing element. Consequently, the reference to what is considered 'normal' in the request for photos highlights how ableist and heterosexist mandates can influence the perception of what is acceptable (or not) in the realm of sexuality. Aina's rhetorical question ('Being asked for a picture of your boobs would be the normal thing to do, you know what I mean?') confirms that it is socially assumed that there is a shared understanding of the social undesirability of stumps as opposed to the hyper-desirability of breasts with the interviewer (who is an amputee herself).

Notably, in Raquel's and Aina's quotes, the devotee is portrayed as a threat that is lurking online, someone who may *disguise* as someone who 'is in love' with the woman, but who only aims to 'take advantage' of (vulnerable) disabled women. Just as able-bodied women are made responsible of not mistaking lust for love preventing rape in 'sexual terror' heterosexist cultures (Barjola 2018), Raquel's quote makes the same move with regard to disabled women and devotees. Namely, she places the responsibility of avoiding the threat that devotees pose on disabled women themselves, who need to decide 'if they are fine with devotees or not' and must have sufficiently 'accepted their bodies' before engaging with one.

Paradoxically, this approach pathologizes disabled women who fall 'prey' to devotees. This detaches the devotees' conduct from any kind of structural system. It is the victim who must somehow control their actions and live in fear. This narrative of sexual terror fosters the idea of the 'devotee threat' and generates the 'sexist micropolitics of power', which explains that violence against women would be exerted doubly on their bodies: through explicit physical violence and through the instructive narrative that controls their behaviour through surveillance. Also, this resonates with ableist psychologizing discourses that turn violence into a problem of individual maladjustment (Sanmiquel-Molinero 2023). As Kafer (2012) recounts, it is common to pathologize disabled women as 'people with low self-esteem' when they reject devotee's proposals. This is an important difference when comparing devoteeism with violent expressions of heterosexuality: it would be unlikely that an able-bodied woman argued that once she accepted her breasts, she no longer minded strangers writing to her asking for 'boob pics'.

4.3 | Not Because of, Not in Spite of: Cripping Desire?

Many participants incorporated their impairment into their sexual practices with long-term relationships in ways that transcend the 'in spite of' and 'exclusively because of impairment/disability' narratives, thus disrupting ableist mandates that prescribe *disembodied desire or devoteeism* as the only possibilities. However, whether *impairment* can be considered an *object of desire* during sex in long-term relationships is a contested issue. On the one hand, Jorge and Raquel recount how it is difficult or not particularly pleasant to 'make room' for the stump in the context of sex, even if their partners demonstrate that it is an object of sexual desire:

> In sexual relations, I do not make room for my stump—not me. But it is true that sometimes they like to caress it. It's a bit strange; I'm not really sure. If she likes it, that's fine, but I don't see the point in it—there's no preference as to whether I like it or not. Maybe it catches her attention at that moment. It

> doesn't bother me, but I wouldn't say I enjoy it either. I understand that, at that moment, she's accepting it well, and that's not a problem. Touching the stump, I think, is a way of engaging with it. (...) I prefer when they touch it as a massage, especially when I get spasms or cramps—then, I really love it. During sex I don't know... after sex, yes.
>
> (Jorge)

> At first, the stump and I, it was like the phallus: don't touch it, don't look at it, or when someone touches the stump, I think, 'I'm not touching you, so why are you touching me?' That has changed a lot. Now my partner massages the stump because you need to moisturize it or because you want a massage.
>
> (Raquel)

In Jorge's quote, sexually engaging with the stump is an act of 'acceptance' (not desire). 'Acceptance' might go beyond 'classical tolerance' i.e., tolerance as mere forbearance (Von Bergen et al. 2012). However, acceptance is only intelligible inasmuch its object is considered inherently undesirable and thus subject to 'conditional approval'. In contrast to such acceptance in sexual contexts, engaging with the stump is considered explicitly pleasant if this is framed as an act of 'care' outside sex. Both participants accept therapeutic touch—they specifically mention that they enjoy receiving massages on the stump—, which resonates with the pervasiveness of the ableist medicalized conceptions of disability. In contrast, these participants feel uncomfortable with the sexualization of the stump—which is, in Raquel's case, explicitly conceived as a phallus (see also Duncan and Goggin 2002 on the phallic nature of stumps).

On the other hand, Irene and Camila present a more positive picture of 'making room for the stump' in sexual encounters:

> [After the amputation] many times I noticed how they [male sexual partners] would avoid that area; they would go as far as the upper thigh, but they wouldn't go near the stump. You're having sex or whatever, and they touch it, and it creates a moment of, 'What happened?' You end up focusing all your attention there—it's not like they're touching your arm. With my current partner, I've noticed an evolution; I could tell by his gestures that he wanted to do it, but he didn't. We talked about it, and I told him that sometimes I felt he was putting a limit or avoiding that area. He told me it wasn't intentional; it just happened, and he didn't really understand why. I think from that point on, he understood that it was important because, for me, it feels like rejecting a part of me and it's a part of who I am.
>
> (Irene)

> When I'm having sex with my current partner, sometimes I'm on the bottom and he's on top of me, and we're kissing. So, with my stump, I play with his cock, and I always try to get him hard by playing with it and all that. One time, we were in the same position, and I didn't do it, and he said, 'Baby, your little stump!' He was hinting that I should do it (laughs). So, I was laughing my ass off, and I said, 'Oh yes, *papi*, the stump' (...). I have three hands (laughs).
>
> (Camila)

While in Jorge and Raquel's quotes incorporating the stump as an object of desire in sexual encounters is considered unpleasant or awkward, Irene and Camila actively incorporate it during sex. Interestingly, they both crip desire in different ways. First, Irene does so by pointing out that excluding the stump from sex is in fact a sign of rejection of 'who she is as a person', thus resisting the ableist idea that she should be desired 'in spite of' her stump. Interestingly, such incorporation is presented as the *outcome* of a *process*. Initially, incorporating the stump is framed as an unpleasant 'accident' that interrupts sex. Later, the stump is an unconsciously avoided but secretly desired area, and this requires Irene to do 'emotional work' (Liddiard 2012) to make her partner understand that this is in fact *disabling* for her.

Second, Camila resists ableism by positioning her stump not only as something that should be accepted by her partner, but as something that can be turned into a sexual asset—'a third hand'—used creatively to generate pleasure during sex: in Camila' story, it is not a matter of waiting and seeing how her partner will interact with her stump, but a matter of sexualizing the stump in a way that is even *missed* when it is not there. In this line, based on his interviews, Shakespeare (1999) suggests that alternative sexual techniques or the use of sexual toys—in Camila's case, her stump could represent a sexual toy—would benefit all sexually active individuals, not just those with physical impairments. Tepper (2000), in his study, presents similar conclusions and affirms that those people with spinal cord injury who were able to assume bodily change and abdicate ableist models, valued their sexuality as pleasurable. Like ours, these studies illustrate that disabled sexuality raises important questions about the definition of sex, since it should not be solely defined as penetration leading to orgasm but can encompass a variety of sexual engagements (Ebrahim 2019, 81).

Finally, on an intersectional note, incorporating the stump during sex also *crips* gender roles for some participants. In the same line, Wilkerson (2002, 51) states that it is a sexuality that moves away from the phallocentric model and Wendell emphasizes that it is critical of 'the patriarchal obsession with genitalia' (Wendell 1996, 274) For instance, some female participants are 'masculinized' insofar as their stump is conceived as a 'phallus'. We have seen that in the previous quote from Raquel, but also in Camila's story. She recounts how, over her years as an escort, she encountered some men who had asked her to penetrate them with her stump, which she actively rejected. Thorneycroft (2020) describes *stumping*—name derived from *fisting*, meaning to penetrate with the fist—as a practice that involves the insertion of a stump into a partner's body, transforming the stump into an erogenous

zone and challenging traditional sexual practices. However, Camila's refusal to engage in this practice may be influenced by her trans identity, as performing penetrative acts could be perceived as masculine. Despite *stumping* being framed as a way to explore new sexual possibilities and challenge normative ideas of pleasure, for Camila could confront societal pressures to conform to stereotypical feminine roles (Scandurro et al. 2022). In the same vein, the 'cripization' of gender roles can also be seen in Irene and Jorge' stories:

> In sex, as a woman, I tend to take on more of a submissive role, but I think that's due to the traditional male–female role I have internalized. However, in moments when the other person seems unsure of how to act regarding the prosthesis, or if they ask whether it hurts or bothers me, I immediately take the lead and switch to a more dominant mode.
>
> (Irene)

> I like to be in control, but I let others take it sometimes. When we're going to have sex, [before amputation] I used to prefer taking things more slowly and romantically, but now I skip certain steps and get to the point more quickly. I'm not as romantic anymore. I don't spend as much time on preliminary details for convenience. From the preparations to the sex itself, there are moments when I need to rest because I can't keep up, and that affects me. It's mostly positional; if I overuse my stump, I have to find a way to make it work. Sometimes, I have to let the other person take control—I ask her to put on the music, to lower the blinds. I used to do everything myself. Not doing all the preparations myself means I no longer focus on certain details that I used to. I let others take the lead more, and I ask for help, which I didn't do before.
>
> (Jorge)

Thus, in Irene's case, when the stump or the prosthesis is seen in an ableist light during sex (as an object of care or as something undesirable), she feels forced to take on a more masculinized role. To put it another way, resisting the attribution of vulnerability during sex feels de-feminizing. As for Jorge, we can see how the narrative of 'symbolic feminization' of the male disabled body (García-Santesmases 2023) is simultaneously reinforced and disrupted. It is reinforced as Jorge's impairment now requires him to give up control and seek assistance during sex. At the same time, symbolic feminization is disrupted as his approach to romance is less pronounced than before, as he must conserve energy due to his stump. Interestingly, when discussing all these experiences with partners, none of the participants identified the incorporation of impairment during sex as *devoteeism*. This resonates with Kafer (2012) when she recounts that she resisted problematizing her partner's desire; the thought of her lover being with her based on the logic of disgust and desire would be too painful.

5 | Concluding Remarks

Drawing on the theoretical and empirical findings of this study, we can establish some concluding remarks regarding desire and dis/ability from a feminist CDS perspective. Amputees navigate sexuality and relationships while relating to ableist discourses that posit the undesirability of impairment and disability (Campbell 2009; Liddiard 2012). Devoteeism, in its articulation of desire *'because of impairment/disability'*, could be read as an alternative that resists ableist mandates of undesirability of impairment and disability. Campbell argues that 'success in spite of impairment' narratives are 'profoundly different to stories that embrace impairment and are based on the notion of 'success *because* of disability' or stories about living with ableism' (Campbell 2009, 29).

In contrast, via our Feminist Disability Studies lens, we argue that devoteeism is also a product of ableism itself. While it can be radically anti-ableist to consider that impairment can have a positive impact on disabled people's good/healthy experiences (also in the sexual terrain), this is not always the case. 'Because of impairment/disability' narratives can reproduce ableism *if* they are a consequence of the 'spread effect' (Wright 1983)—the ableist prejudice by which *everything* in disabled people's lives is almost exclusively determined by their impairment/disability. Eroticizing an impairment might challenge ableism insofar as it questions its irrevocable negative ontology. However, eroticizing impairment like devotees have done with some female participants might reproduce ableism if the person is objectified by being equated with their impairment, thus reinforcing the 'spread effect'. In addition to ableism, devotees might reproduce disablism by eroticizing it—when the object of desire is a person with an impairment experiencing hardship due to inaccessibility, for instance—, but participants in our study have not recounted this kind of attraction.

Our study, via our participants' accounts, brings to the fore the debate on whether devoteeism can be compared to the fetishization of sexualized female body parts (such as breasts or vaginas) and 'gendered prostheses' (such as lingerie or high heels) by heterosexual men, which brings us to the intersection between gender and disability. In fact, the study reinforces the idea that devoteeism cannot be understood solely with regard to ableism but needs an intersectional lens. Specifically, devoteeism is better understood as another violent expression of male desire that has ableism as a condition of possibility (García-Santesmases 2023). Devotee desire is constructed within sexist parameters that objectify female bodies, manifesting the continuum between objects of disgust and desire (Shildrick 2008; Kafer 2012). This is why both men and women tend to reject devotee desire, yet women feel more implicated because they are *vulnerable* to potential abuses, especially through social media. Importantly, we should not equate disability and womanhood to inherent vulnerability (Losiggio et al. 2021). For instance, in sex, we are all at the mercy of someone. This implies recognizing the vulnerability of the people involved, the dependence and the desires we have for recognition from the other when we find ourselves within a context of intimacy and desire.

A renewed sexual ethics should acknowledge that desire is not clear, it is opaque, contradictory and sexuality is fraught with discomforts and linked to risk, to not knowing, which is even part of its appeal (Angel 2021). Such an ethics should help us understand how asymmetrical vulnerabilities are socially and structurally constructed (Pié Balaguer and Solé Blanch 2018), positioning certain bodies as 'potential objects of abuse'. Rather than solely problematizing self-esteem—as devotees tend to do with disabled women 'who reject them'—, it is important to address and transform the ableist and heterosexist structures that perpetuate sexual terror cultures and the undesirability of disability. In this vein, it is also necessary to problematize consent as the sole basis of our sexual ethics. As we have seen, some participants' use of consent to legitimize devoteeism did not necessarily imply a critical problematization of disability undesirability. Using consent in this way only serves to reproduce a 'sexual liberalism of fear' that conceals 'orectic injustice' (O'Shea 2020, 2). That is, injustice related to the unequal distribution of desirability. Importantly, we agree with Srinivasan in that no one should be obliged to desire anyone else, and no one has a right to be desired, but who is (not) desired is a political question that is often answered by general patterns of domination and exclusion (Srinivasan 2021, 90). As O'Shea suggests, the strategy against orectic injustice should not be 'punishing those with racial or ableist sexual aversions or fetishes' but finding 'structural solutions [that] include making changes to the architecture of online dating, removing unnecessary legal obstacles to sexual intimacy and ensuring that institutional and urban design pays sufficient attention to social mixing' (O'Shea 2020, 11).

The most dangerous thing about devotees are not devotees in themselves, but the fact that devoteeism is one of the only mechanisms that ableism and heterosexism provide us with to make attraction towards disabled bodies intelligible. This is problematic insofar as it creates an atmosphere of suspicion regarding attraction to disabled people (Sullivan 2008) and limits enjoyment possibilities for all involved. As we have recounted, participants actively offer specific examples of a 'sexuality that is rich and robust not in spite of impairment, and not fetishistically because of impairment, but in relationship to it' (Kafer 2012, 346). Thus, they 'crip sexuality' by opening up new landscapes of possibility where impairment (and disability-related elements) can be incorporated in sexual activity in playful ways that transcend the 'in spite of' and 'exclusively because of' impairment/disability ableist binary, as well as traditional gender roles.

6 | Future Lines of Research

As for future lines of research, we suggest looking back at some issues that pioneer Bruno (1997) pointed out in his study, but with a crip, non-pathologizing lens. First, we should further explore non-male desire for disabled bodies is codified. Interestingly, while it has been repeatedly established that most people who identify—and are identified as—devotees are heterosexual men, one of the first accounts of devoteeism (Bruno 1997) is illustrated with the case of a woman who fetishistically desires a disabled man. García-Santesmases (2023) argues that women who engage sexually or romantically with disabled men are not usually read as 'devotees' because female desire does not typically involve the sexual objectification of a specific type of corporeality nor, in the case of heterosexuality, the fetishization of the male body. Instead, able-bodied women's desire for disabled men is usually codified as a maximized expression of women's 'natural inclination to care', and that expression of selflessness and sacrifice is indeed intelligible and socially upheld. As Solvang argues, 'For women attracted to men with amputations, there are heroic roles, for example, that of a maternal instinct leading to a life dedicated to caring for the disabled man' (Solvang 2007, 60). Authors in CDS have long reclaimed that care-taking relationships where disabled people do not control how care is being done can be extremely objectifying (García-Santesmases and Sanmiquel-Molinero 2022; García-Santesmases Fernández and Pié Balaguer 2017; Kröger 2009). Thus, able-bodied women's relationships with disabled men are not necessarily less objectifying than those that involve able-bodied men and disabled women. Instead, the desire of 'taking care' is probably not socially read as a 'women's pathological desire to dominate', and thus women are not considered devotees. In this vein, future studies should explore how women in inter-abled relationships with disabled men understand desire, as well as the ways in which such desire reproduces and disrupts heterosexist and ableist mandates.

Secondly, Bruno pointed out that some devotees expressed that their desires allowed them to perform a 'less macho persona' (Bruno 1997, 253), which brings us to the intersection of devoteeism in bodies that occupy 'the female position' (Llevadot 2022). In recent years, some studies and cultural products have explored devoteeism in non-cisheterosexual contexts, such as the gay community (Adelman 2022). In this sense, it would be interesting to explore how gay disabled people understand devoteeism, whether their ways of circulating desire for impairment/disability differ from those of heterosexual men, and whether they go beyond the logic of objetualization-fetishization (desire *because of* impairment) and romanticization-disembodiment (desire in *spite of* impairment).

Finally, Bruno (1997) suggested that there is such an overlap between devotees, pretenders and wannabes that he suggests the term DWP (Devotees-Wannabees-Pretenders). While devotees desire impairment/disability sexually, pretenders and wannabes desire to embody impairment and disability. According to Solvang (2007), 'pretenders' use mobility aids like wheelchairs and crutches to feign disability, and 'wannabes[3]', also known as 'transabled', have a strong desire to acquire an impairment such as an amputation or a spinal cord injury. For Bruno, DPW's pathological desire is caused by the fact that they experienced lack of attention and love during childhood, so 'disability—real or pretended, ones [sic] own or that of another—provides an opportunity to be loved and attended to where no such opportunity has otherwise existed' (Bruno 1997, 257). Such an interpretation pathologizes and condemns desire for impairment/disability *in itself*, irrespective of whether it is expressed in violent objectifying ways. From a CDS perspective, it could be said that what these desires have in common is that they question the ableist mandate according to which any encounter with impairment/disability needs to be mediated by misfortune, resignation and obligation, never choice or desire (García-Santesmases 2023). In this sense, we argue that the links between devoteeism, pretenders and transabled people should be further investigated from a CDS perspective. Namely, by exploring in what ways these

communities reproduce and disrupt ableism and heterosexism in complex ways.

Lastly, the revised literature does not recount devotee desire focusing on people with intellectual impairments, and our paper does not address this topic. The few recent studies that do recount that inter-abled relationships are subjected to ableist prejudices by the public (Ungarino 2024), and that LGBTIQA+ people with intellectual impairments tend to prefer dating other disabled people over inter-abled dating (Santinele Martino and Moumos 2024). Thus, future studies should examine how desire for people with intellectual impairments is codified, especially when it involves inter-abled relationships, as well as the challenges around sexual consent and sexual violence that such relationships entail. Additionally, given the focused scope of this study, certain factors—such as the link between life experiences and sexuality, including the age of amputation in relation to sexual puberty—could not be explored in depth. Future research should consider these aspects to provide a more nuanced understanding of how developmental and life-stage factors influence attitudes towards impairments and sexuality.

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Endnotes

[1] Goodley (2014) proposes the term 'dis/ability' to account for the mutually constitutive nature of disability—the subaltern and usually problematized position—and ability—the usually concealed normative position that produces the former as a deviation.

[2] Laura Llevadot draws on Lacan to theorise the female and male positions. While Lacan has been accused of being excessively cryptic, we agree with Fink (1997) in that Lacan's intentionally obscure language forces the reader to examine their own unquestioned beliefs. Focusing on devoteeism, Lacanian male and female positions allow us to understand why there might be more men than women who identify as (or are identified as) devotees as they tend to identify with 'the male position', while not excluding the possibility of women identifying as/being identified as devotees.

[3] The term 'wannabe' is commonly used in academic discourse, as first proposed by Bruno (1997), to describe individuals who express a strong desire to embody disability. While occasionally used self-referentially by some individuals with Body Integrity Identity Disorder (BIID), its usage remains primarily academic and descriptive. BIID, as discussed by Barrow and Oyebode (2018), is characterised by a persistent desire to acquire a physical impairment and is recognised for its complex clinical and ethical dimensions.

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