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**Queer and Crippled: Intersectional Feminism in Nicola
Griffith's *So Lucky: A Novel***

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Abstract

Critics have only recently discussed the intersections of Queer Theory and Disability Studies. This new theoretical approach examines the representation of identity through sexuality and impairment. Specifically, the use of Disability Studies in Queer Theory provides the discipline with a heterogeneous representation of queer identities. At the same time, Queer Theory redefines the non-abled individual as a gendered sexual being. Nicola Griffith's novel *So Lucky: A Novel* (2018) exemplifies Queer-Crip theories through the portrayal of Mara, a lesbian woman diagnosed with multiple sclerosis. This dissertation analyses violence and hate crimes as the main intersection between queerness and impairment, and aims to analyse the particular portrayal that Griffith offers.

I argue that Mara shapes the experience of her degenerative illness through previous events of assault and gender discrimination. Mara is unwilling to be defined as a weak woman after she is beaten up by two men. Similarly, she rejects the role of passive sufferer that society imposes on her after she is diagnosed with multiple sclerosis. This study also explores ableist and heteronormative discourses depicted in the novel. I employ McRuer's theory of coming out scenarios to argue that impairment is portrayed in the novel as an invisible identity in comparison to queerness. Mara is very open about her sexuality but once she comes out as a person with MS she is fired from her work. Thus, this dissertation offers an insight to the life experience of Mara as a lesbian impaired woman.

Keywords: Nicola Griffith, *So Lucky: A Novel*, Queer-Crip Theory, Intersectional Feminism, Impairment, Sexuality, Violence, Hate Crimes, Futurity, Ableism.

0. Introduction: Crip Bodies, Queer Thought

Carol Anne Douglas narrates in her chapter “The Madwoman of *off our backs*” (1995) in the anthology *Restricted Access: Lesbians on Disability* the unexpected and unsettling experience of developing a mental illness. Douglas admits that she never imagined that she would suffer from relentless episodes of psychosis. As a result, Douglas became certain that the police was following her; schizophrenia aggravated her already bad relationship with law enforcement. Her previous involvement with feminist activism had provoked her deeply-set antagonism against the Government. Douglas claims that the origin of this enmity was in the 1970s, when the FBI questioned several women in feminist communities. The police jailed some of those women when they refused to reveal the whereabouts of underground activists. In addition, some documents went missing when the newspaper office where Douglas volunteered was broken into. This incident happened after the publication of an article that had exposed the identity of an undercover agent that posed as a radical feminist.

These events spurred an atmosphere of distrust and suspicion that negatively affected Douglas and her experience of schizophrenia. Indeed, this hostility against feminist activists jeopardised her medical rehabilitation. Douglas only accepted to receive treatment on condition that her therapist and doctor were feminist women. Her lesbian friend Lorrain readily accepted to be her therapist, yet the task to find a feminist psychiatrist was rather difficult. Douglas was also terrified by the possibility of having to be hospitalised in a psychiatric ward since she knew that some lesbian women had been abused in those facilities.

Douglas' psychosis severely exacerbated her inner fears on how feminist activism and lesbianism were perceived in the period. The common factor between the

experience of feminist lesbianism and the particular mental illness of Douglas is paranoia. The anxiety that she felt as a lesbian feminist in the 1970s was aggravated by her suffering from schizophrenia. At the same time, paranoia fed her fear against the police and the Government. Nevertheless, her first suspicions against the authorities seem justified within the historical context of the USA in the 1970s. The Upstairs Lounge arson attack is a remarkable episode in the recorded history of discrimination against gay people in the country. Rodger Dale Nunez allegedly murdered thirty-two men and left fifteen injured in this gay bar in New Orleans yet the efforts to prosecute and judge this criminal were minimal: "Churches refused to bury the victims' remains. Their deaths were mostly ignored and sometimes mocked by politicians and the media. No one was ever charged. A joke made the rounds in workplaces and was repeated on the radio: 'Where will they bury the queers? In fruit jars!'" (Stack, 2016: online). Despite the fact that schizophrenia distorted Douglas's experience of reality, her perception of the law enforcement body does not seem unfairly misrepresented; feminist women and queer people must have felt at the time that the police was an enemy rather than an ally.

Although this dissertation does not focus on mental illness, Douglas' story marks one of the many intersections between queerness and disability. As previously suggested, these intersections are sometimes very subtle, and often fluid, since the experience of disability varies according to the kind of impairment. In her exploration of the narrative of many testimonies where disability and queerness conflate within personal experience, Carrie Sandahl concludes that "queer stories of illness and disability are less tidy, less controlled by a singular mode of crisis, than the stories of the previously able bodied white middle-class heterosexual who dominates the genre"

(2003: 12). Sandahl notes that the narrative about white heterosexual males are ordinary stories interrupted by illness, yet queer stories show that illness or impairment are “interwoven with other ongoing crisis, conflicts, and challenges” (12).

Robert McRuer further explores these intersections in his book *Crip Theory: Cultural Signs of Queerness and Disability* (2006). He declares that “queerness and disability clearly share a pathologized past” and argues that there is “a growing awareness of the intersection between Queer theory and Disability studies” (2006: 1). McRuer explores the invisibility of heterosexuality and compares it to the naturalisation of able-bodiedness. He complains that Queer Studies has focused on how heterosexuality reinforces ideologies of gender and race, yet Queer Theory has frequently disregarded disability as a victim of normative discourses (1). This specialist emphasises that “able-bodiedness, even more than heterosexuality, still largely masquerades as a non-identity, as the natural order of things” (1). McRuer examines the political representation of disability and deploys Queer Theory to conceptualise it. He argues that the system of compulsory able-bodiedness creates disability in the same manner that heteronormativity produces homosexuality (1). Specifically, McRuer supports the notion of ‘crip’ and defines the term as a “form of resistance to cultural homogenization” (33). In this sense, Disability Studies had also theorised the social meaning of disability, with scholars deconstructing established notions of non-ablebodiedness in order to introduce new cultural values about illness and impairment. In particular, Michael Oliver documented the history of the social movements to defend non-abled people’s rights in the 1970s. The British organisation Union of Physically

Impaired Against Segregation (UPIAS) formulated a manifesto¹ by which they challenged essentialist notions of disability, and claimed that disability is a historical and cultural construction. Oliver records this movement and theorises the re-definition of disability made by UPIAS. He differentiates between disability and impairment and claims that disability is “the disadvantage or restriction of activity caused by a contemporary social organisation which takes no or little account of people who have mainstream impairments and thus excludes them from participation in the mainstream of social activities” (Oliver 1996: 22).

However, some critics suggest that the term disability is rigid and exclusive. For instance, Carrie Sandahl notes that Disability Studies excluded mental illnesses from its definition. Furthermore, many disability scholars refuse to explore the term impairment and how it connects to Disability Studies. In this sense, some critics have suggested the word ‘crip’² as a more inclusive term since it denotes any kind of mental and physical impairment (McRuer, 2006: 34). Crip scholars also argue that categories such as ‘disabled’ and ‘handicapped’ have been normalised. Thus, the essayist Nancy Mairs argues that she employs the word ‘crip’ to make people wince (Mairs cited in Kafer, 2013: 15). Likewise, Alice Kafer believes that “this desire to make people wince suggests an urge to shake things up, to jolt people out of their everyday understandings of bodies and minds, of normalcy and deviance” (2013: 15).

¹ This manifesto can be found on the Disability Archive of the University of Leeds at the following link: <https://disability-studies.leeds.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/sites/40/library/UPIAS-UPIAS.pdf>

² Similarly to the word ‘queer’, which was used as a pejorative term by those who created it, the word ‘crip’ can be considered a collective contestation of its original meaning. The employment of this term has a political purpose; it challenges traditional understandings of impairment and rearticulates them with a sense of pride in order to formulate new fluid definitions of disability.

These Disability scholars alert that Disability Studies has adopted an essentialist and exclusive approach. For example, Tom Shakespeare criticises the rigid nature of disability rights' movements such as the UPIAS and complains that "the group was small, and dominated by men with physical impairments, which meant that they were not representative of the diversity of disabled people's experiences" (2006:online). Despite the fact that the UPIAS adopted post-structuralist discourses to criticise essentialist perspectives on disability, Disability Studies has excluded minorities from the theorisation of its approach. Shakespeare explores this rigidity and proposes that Disability Studies need "to understand the complexities of identity and experience, and not stick to rigid ideologies" (Shakespeare, 2006: online). In these same lines, feminist scholar Barbara Fawcett argues that we tend to assume that discourses of resistance such as Disability Studies are innocent knowledge. However, Fawcett claims that minority discourses can also become essentialist and discriminatory. Like Shakespeare, Fawcett proposes to explore the particular experiences of individuals and continuously reassess the theorisations that conceptualise them (2000: 38).

In this sense, the analysis of Queer-Crip Theory offers new possibilities to open up productive new readings; the use of Disability Studies in Queer Theory provides the discipline with a heterogeneous representation of queer identities. At the same time, Queer Theory redefines the non-abled individual as a gendered sexual being. The aim of Queer-Crip Theory is to claim social recognition of (allegedly) deviant physical and psychological bodies that are also defined by alternative sexual identities. Queer-Crip theory challenges normative discourses of heterosexuality and able-bodiedness that have been taken for granted. Likewise, it offers new perspectives on alternative bodies and sexualities. For example, the Spanish documentary *Yes, We Fuck!* (Antonio

Centeno and Raul de la Morena, 2015)³ offers an insight on how people with diverse impairments experience their sexual identity and carry out different sexual practices. The documentary is very explicit and shows several scenes of sexual intercourse between impaired individuals and abled people. The graphic visual content is employed to shock spectators and invite them to reflect on the perception of those images. The documentary notes that sexuality is culturally linked to able-bodiedness and thus, impaired people are not expected to have a sexual identity nor be sexually active.

English writer Nicola Griffith (Leeds, 1960) also challenges normative perspectives on impairment and lesbianism in her literary work. Her experience as a lesbian woman with multiple sclerosis seems to have deeply affected the writing of her novels. In fact, the author confesses that multiple sclerosis influenced her first novel *Ammonite* (1993)⁴. This science fiction novel describes a female world where a virus has killed all the men and twenty percent of the women. The infection continues to alter all the newly born women; the virus is often dangerous and painful, but once its effects are overcome, the women become an improved, post-human version of humankind. The women on planet Jeep are capable of experiencing what their predecessors lived. In fact, this female society uses this capacity to learn from the experiences of their ancestors. Thus, women who are not capable of carrying out this introspection are perceived as a strange exception. In a later essay, Griffith acknowledges that the inclusion of a virus is the result of her experience of illness. The author claims that “(she) would have started a book, and it would have been about a women-only world, but there might not have been

³ Some fragments of the documentary can be found at the following link: <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCcFYiwQ3WsMI1qkZGN27ToQ>

⁴ *Ammonite* won the James Tiptree Jr. Award, the Lambda Award and Premio Italia. This same novel granted her the Permanent Residence Card to live in USA which immigration authorities had denied to her several times. Griffith won the status of national interest in the country and moved in with her female partner in Atlanta.

a virus, and without the virus everyone and everything might have been different” (1999: 226).

The author has a particular and distinct way of portraying illness and queerness in her work. For instance, the experience of lesbianism in Jeep goes unquestioned throughout the novel. She does not describe characters that face homophobic situations since, without men, there is no heteronormative perception of gender and queerness in her novel. In this sense, the author remarks that “none of my characters talk about being dykes, they just are. They don’t encounter homophobia. That’s influenced some people, I think, for the better. Of course, I would say that, wouldn’t I?” (cited in Newman, 1998: online).

Griffith is an English novelist, essayist and teacher. She moved to the USA with a temporal Visa in the 1988 and decided to stay permanently in 1993 after the publication of *Ammonite*. The author continued to publish several novels⁵, anthologies and short fiction after being diagnosed with multiple sclerosis also in 1993. The lead role of these stories is played by lesbian women who carry out active roles such as anthropologists, vice-presidents of software companies and even fugitives. These women often struggle to construct their identity while at the same time, fight against society impositions. Her most recent work *So Lucky: A Novel* (2018) presents the identity struggle of Mara, a lesbian woman with multiple sclerosis⁶. The protagonist shapes the experience of her degenerative illness through previous events of assault and gender discrimination. Mara is unwilling to be defined as a weak and defenceless woman after she is beaten up by two men. Similarly, she rejects the role of passive

⁵ These include *Slow River* (1994), *The Blue Place* (1998), *Stay* (2002) and *Hild* (2013).

⁶ The publication of the novel was due to the 15th of May, 2018. I contacted the author through her online community #CripLit (2016) and she kindly sent me a copy of her work in advance.

sufferer that society imposes on her after she is diagnosed with multiple sclerosis. I argue that Mara challenges social conventions by being a very active and dynamic character; thanks to her experience helping HIV carriers in the NGO she works for, she creates a non-profit organisation for MS sufferers. Furthermore, she helps to solve a serial of killings that are perpetrated against members of the disability community.

The novel offers a protagonist that continuously reflects on her identity; in particular, she ponders over how her status as an impaired person intersects with her identity as a lesbian woman. Thus, *So Lucky* presents diverse scenarios where the experience of queerness and disability meet. The first chapter of this dissertation examines the common factors between queerness and the particular experience of a degenerative illness such as multiple sclerosis. For instance, Griffith's novel portrays hate crimes as an experience shared by the two identities: Mara is traumatised by the experience of being beaten up by two men. Although the narration does not clarify the particular circumstances of the event, it does point out that the protagonist understands the incident as a hate crime. Secondly, Mara investigates several deaths that are carried out against members of the disabled community. The novel confirms in the end that the suspicions of the protagonist were correct, and the police reveal that the murderers acted with premeditation against disabled activists.

The second chapter of this dissertation explores ableist and heteronormative discourses in Griffith's novel. In particular, I focus on coming out scenarios. I will use McRuer's theory of normative identities to argue that *So Lucky: A Novel* presents situations where coming out as queer and cripp are similar experiences. However, the novel notes that Mara's coming out as a sufferer of multiple sclerosis has many more negative consequences than coming out as a lesbian. People who surround her seem to

readily accept the fact that she is not heterosexual, yet Mara is fired when she comes out as a woman with multiple sclerosis. Finally, this second chapter also analyses the concept of futurity described by Alison Kafer in her book *Feminist, Queer, Crip* (2013). Kafer argues that futurity is used to reinforce compulsory able-bodiedness and heteronormativity. She narrates her experience as an impaired young woman after she suffered a domestic accident. She describes in the book the negative discourses imposed on her when the doctors announced that she would not be able to use her legs. Kafer remembers that medical staff pictured a bleak future for her; they warned her that any effort to accomplish her dream of graduating would be futile. Kafer was also told that her life would be a struggle against the traumatic experience of the accident; she even was told by another patient that a life with impairment was not worth living. Nevertheless, Kafer strove against those misconceptions with the positive help of her family and other people with impairments. Thus, she explores in her book how futurity is used against impaired people to limit their real capacities. Kafer also argues that the concept of futurity is similarly used against queer people. Heteronormative discourses predict bleak futures for those who choose a different path by suggesting that their lives will be devoid of any privileges and full of hardships. In particular, futurity is deployed when same-sex couples decide to have children. Those couples are reminded that their innocent children will be discriminated against because of their parents. As a result, heteronormativity foretells that children of same-sex couples will have a life full of suffering and exclusion.

So Lucky: A Novel explores the concept of futurity in relation to impairment. Despite the fact that Mara is fired as a consequence of her coming out discourse, his boss uses futuristic reasoning to justify his decision. He argues, unfairly and with no

evidence, that Mara will commit grave mistakes because of her illness, and thus, she will not be capable of working normally. However, Mara is capable of establishing her own non-profit organisation and successfully managing it. The concept of futurity is especially relevant in Mara's case since she suffers from a degenerative illness that gradually impairs the individual. Despite the fact that Kafer's theoretical approach to futurity is employed to analyse queerness and impairment, the novel does not present a futuristic approach to discriminate against Mara on the basis of queerness. This specific portrayal seems the result of the fluidity and flexibility of queer-crip identities. I argue that other impairments and diverse experiences of queerness might result in different intersections than the ones resulting from the analysis of this novel. Nevertheless, this dissertation aims to claim that the intersections previously discussed demonstrate that lesbian identities affect the formation, exposure and expression of selfhood of an impaired individual.

Griffith describes in her short essay "Writing from the Body" the connection between her body and the art she has produced. The author admits that she is interested in somatic information, which she explains as experiencing the world from the body. She also confesses that her illness and her identity have modified her art. For example, Griffith tells the reader that her illness made her stay outdoors more often than she used to (1999: 226). She contemplated the sky much of the time and as a result, she claims "Ammonite is full of sky" (226). Similarly, *So Lucky: A Novel* is born from her recent acceptance of crip identity, which she announced in 2016: "today I'm coming out as a cripple. I'm not talking about acknowledgement of physical impairment but about claiming identity as a crip" (2016: online). Thus, her novel is full of scenes of crooked bodies but also of intense lesbian love.

1. Queer-Crip Intersections: Hate Crimes and the Construction of the Self

1.1. Heteronormative Menaces and Lesbian Existence: Gender, Sexuality, and Violence

“Our scars are more than just the body’s
method of remembering a wound” (Hammer, 2014: 159)

The reviewer Joanne Rixon claims that Nicola Griffith does not portray an inspirational cripple in her novel but tells the universal story of “how a human being faces fear when there is good reason to be afraid” (2018: online). In fact, Mara has many reasons to be scared; as a lesbian woman with multiple sclerosis, she faces the history of violence enacted against impaired and queer people. Brotman and Drummond state that “people with disabilities, and queer people have much in common, such as sexual oppression and a shared history of injustice” (2014: 535). In this sense, physical violence has been employed to grant able-bodiedness and heterosexuality the status of normative. Specifically, queer people have been repeatedly the target of homophobic attacks as previously noted in the introduction of this dissertation. Likewise, impaired people have also suffered merciless assaults: the news often show cases of defenceless men and women being assaulted because of their impairments. Even children have been victims of this kind of hate crimes. For example, the seven-year-old girl Skye Preston with Down Syndrome was attacked by a stranger in Sunderland last December, 2016; her father reported that an unknown man grabbed the young girl and threw her into the road while he shouted at her (Boult, 2016: online).

The novel by Nicola Griffith also describes hate crimes as a shared experience by lesbians and impaired people. The protagonist suffers a brutal assault from two men

and consequently, she becomes permanently traumatised. Mara recalls that “I was fearless until I was twenty-two; until one night in a bar I was beaten by two men and I learned the story that most women already knew: that men beat women for no other reason than that they could, because they were raised on the story that women are weak” (44-45). This event scars Mara especially during her young adulthood. Consequently, she becomes more aware of gender discrimination: “We (women) are taught we are weak. The message was beamed at all of us, from all sides, from TV and radio, plays and movies, novels and jokes, comics and social media” (45, emphasis in original). Mara’s gender awareness turns into a significant amount of rage; as Rixon states in her review “that vulnerability, and Mara’s fury over it, forms the spine of *So Lucky*” (2018: online). I would further argue that Mara’s rejection of that vulnerability is the root of the novel. In fact, Mara becomes obsessed with self-defence and learns professional karate. In this sense, her ex-wife, Rose, notes that Mara became too susceptible of gender discrimination and complains that this new behaviour jeopardised their relationship:

You were angry all the time. ‘Women,’ you said. ‘We’re being hunted like deer!’ And off you’d go to the dojo to hit things and dream about hitting people. You never let up. Every movie we saw, you’d shout at the screen, ‘Why isn’t that woman fighting back!’ You saw violence against women everywhere (69).

Mara does not fully acknowledge her obsession despite the fact that Rose complains that this aggressive attitude frightened her; the protagonist argues that violence against women is indeed everywhere (69). Mara’s complaints about society compelling women to depend on men and trust their goodness points out heteronormative discourses: “we must rely on the kindness of strangers, call forth a man’s better nature, placate the savage beast, appeasing” (45). Her speech is intrinsically linked to Adrienne Rich’s popular article “Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence”. Rich expresses her concern about the impossibility of carrying out women-to-women relationships

within a heteronormative society: the critic argues that women who want to choose other women as “passionate comrades, life partners, co-workers, lovers, tribe, has been crushed, invalidated, forced into hiding and disguise” (Rich, 1980: 632). In this sense, Mara seems to believe that gender violence is also specifically a tool to undermine lesbian couples. If women are supposed to be naturally weak, lesbian couples are doubly unprotected from male aggressiveness. Mara is greatly concerned about the fact that gender violence is employed to endanger her relationships with women. Thus, her obsession with gender discrimination reflects her fear of heteronormative menaces. In fact, Rose points out that fear is the trigger of Mara’s aggressive attitude: “I tried to talk to you but you couldn’t see, you *wouldn’t* see, that you were so angry because you were scared” (70, original italics).

Rich concludes in her article that women in heteronormative societies suffer from problematic relationships with men but also with each other. She further argues that these relations are highly disordered and even disabling for women (Rich, 1980: 632). The critic notes that heteronormative societies do not allow female kinship to be completely fulfilled. Specifically, Rich curiously uses the word ‘disabling’ to describe the process which enables heteronormative societies to annul lesbian bonds. Rich seems to perceive the cultural meaning of the word ‘disabling’ which she employs to define the destructive agency of compulsory heterosexuality. Furthermore, Rich compares heterosexuality to male dominance while she acknowledges lesbian relationships as “a source of knowledge and power available to women” (1980: 632). In this sense, the novel seems to suggest that this power must be fought for. Mara becomes a very active character that decides to defend herself and her partner in any situation. For this reason, she obliges Rose to practice several drills in their home. Rose complains that Mara

forced her to rehearse several dangerous situations: “All those drills you made me do: what to do if I was in the kitchen and you were in the bedroom and a man with a knife came in. What to do if I were held hostage” (70). Thus, Mara’s need to feel safe cannot only be interpreted as her unwillingness to be defined as a vulnerable individual, but also, as her wish to protect her relationships with other women.

This wish to defend other females is also represented through the adoption of a fiery cat. Mara visits different shelters once she gets ill. Finally, she finds a pet shop that has an available litter for adoption:

I bent to look. It lifted its head and looked straight through me. It had white whiskers and a pink nose, fur smudged beige-and-cream-and smoke of fudge ripple ice cream. ‘Why is this one on its own?’
‘She fights’ (46).

The adoption of this particular cat is quite significant since Mara chooses a female animal that has become isolated because she is too aggressive. Since Mara is also perceived as extremely antagonistic and combative the cat appears to be an alter ego of the protagonist: the kitty seems tiny and weak in appearance but at home it “ripped up everything that got in her way” (47), even Mara. As previously noted, the adoption of the cat also points out Mara’s need to protect others. Despite the energetic attitude of the cat, Mara expresses an urgency to shield her little companion: “‘That’s right,’ I whispered to her as her paws kicked in a kitten dream, ‘I’ll protect you’” (47).

So Lucky: A Novel shows that violence and fear are closely interconnected within Mara’s identity. The amount of fear is directly proportionate to Mara’s aggressiveness. This attitude not only scares Rose but also threatens Mara’s current relationship with her new girlfriend, Aiyana. Mara is alone after her divorce from Rose and Aiyana’s departure to Australia, who leaves after winning funding for post-doctorate research at the University of Auckland’s Douglas Human Brain Bank. The

correspondence between the two women becomes less frequent with the passage of time until Aiyana stops answering Mara's e-mails. Mara assumes that Aiyana is overwhelmed by the recent diagnosis of multiple sclerosis; yet, Aiyana finally points out that it was Mara's self-centred attitude that made the communication between the two difficult: "What the fuck? No!!! It's not the MS that freaks me out, it's your bitterness. It's hard to talk to an angry person. And it's like what happened between us doesn't exist. You never talk about us. How am I meant to process that?" (172). As Rixon points out, Mara's anger "makes her reckless and her fear turns her selfish and petty" (2018: online).

I argue that this depiction of the protagonist makes Mara a unique character. Queer-Crip scholars suggest that intersectionality allows crip and queer embodiments to trigger new ways of thinking that defend "experimental and open-ended practices, freedoms, modes of being that do not require social legibility to thrive" (Cohen, 2015: 154). This theoretical autonomy allows literary writers to produce new portrayals of identities that have not been previously considered. In this sense, Margrit Shildrick states that Queer-Crip intersections do not aim "to rework existing definitions, but to look for something different, to take the risk of trying out the untested and unexpected" (cited in Cohen, 2015: 156-157). In this sense, Mara can be analysed as an unprecedented character. Despite the fact that she might not be an inspirational figure, Griffith offers in her novel a unique but also realistic character that faces discrimination as well as she can. This attitude might be considered "selfish and petty" but in the end, Griffith portrays through Mara the violence and discrimination that impaired queer people suffer. In contrast, previous novels tended to depict disabled characters within normative discourses. For instance, Emily B. Baldys explores disability in popular

romance novels and concludes that this genre usually reinforces heteronormative and ableist discourses: “Yet while these novels do not deny disabled people sexual subjectivity, they do strictly limit the kinds of (heterosexual, marriage-oriented) romantic options available to disabled characters. They also showcase ableist commonalities in their deployment of narrative strategies that serve to downplay, reinscribe, and rehabilitate disability” (Baldys, 2012: 130). However, Griffith’s thriller challenges this tradition: the writer depicts a lesbian character that does not try to rehabilitate her impairment but, as we will see, fights for acceptance and inclusion. Above all, for self-respect.

1.2. Disability and Gender: Individual versus Collective Experience

The novel traces connections between the anger that Mara felt when she was beaten up and the rage she expresses a few years later when she is diagnosed with multiple sclerosis. Thus, Mara often resorts to irony to deal with people’s reactions to her illness. For instance, she gets very upset and sarcastic when she tells her boss about her diagnosis:

‘I have MS.’ Sufferer. Victim.
‘Multiple sclerosis?’
No, you prick, I’m the new owner of Microsoft (23).

This behaviour intensely worries Rose, who tries to reason with her ex-wife. Rose claims that fear is the reason that Mara is again aggressive: ““And now you’re scared again. I don’t blame you. MS is a scary thing. Fear is understandable. So is anger. But not this kind of anger, this awful, burning rage that just feeds on itself” (70).

Mara struggles to construct her new identity as an impaired woman. In particular, she strives for connecting this new identity to her wider society. For instance,

Mara decides to attend a support group run by her local community centre. However, her point of view of the illness directly clashes with that of the people who attend the meeting: “This group felt like nothing but self-pity and learned helplessness. Their shoulders were hunched, their eyes evasive, as if they all expected to be treated like victims, as though they had abnegated responsibility for their lives. Nothing like me” (57). Mara does not feel identified with the group and acknowledges that her emotions are similar to those she felt when she was beaten up. In fact, Mara tries again to recover her agency through anger: “Anger made me restless. More research. More rage. And I began to see a pattern” (61).

Mara resorts to the Internet to express her own vision of MS since she fails to find support in her community centre. In particular, she uses the platform Twitter to address her frustration and dissatisfaction: “Back to Twitter. I used the #MultipleSclerosis and #disability hashtags, added, with bitter fuck-you pride, one of my own, #CripRage, and began a storm of tweets” (61). These tweets challenge typical stereotypes attributed to people with impairments. In this sense, Mara’s tweets are similar to the manifesto by the UPIAS and compile the most common prejudices that impaired people suffer nowadays. For instance, the protagonist states that “<I’m not a sweet crip here to inspire you. I’m not here to be liked. I won’t disguise my impairment to make you think I’m just like you>” (61). This particular tweet makes reference to “inspiration porn”. Some critics complain that impairments are used as an advertising tool to inspire abled people (Shelton, 2017: 2). Sentences such as “You’re excuse is invalid”⁷ accompanied with images of impaired people have been severely criticised by

⁷ Stella Young thoughtfully deals with this topic in her talk “Inspiration Porn and the Objectification of Disability”, which was carried out in Sydney, 2014: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SxrS7-I_sMQ

disability scholars. The aim of this marketing tool is to commodify the impairment of non-abled people to encourage abled individuals.

Likewise, UPIAS mainly complained about materialistic aspects of discrimination against people with impairments; they would demand more medical control of their impairments as well as better public access for non-abled people. On her side, Mara writes some other tweets that follow the same formula: “<Big Pharma will sell you drugs to treat the damage. And then drugs to treat that drug damage too>” (62). However, Mara’s tweets also protest against gender discrimination: “<Two, gender bias. Four times more women than men get MS. And women in this world don’t have control>” (63). This specific tweet intersects multiple sclerosis with gender prejudice. The UPIAS disregarded gender in their manifesto as well as other identity markers. However, Mara is aware that as a woman, impairment affects her more negatively than it might influence men.

Tina Koch notes the specific vulnerability of women with multiple sclerosis. In particular, Koch focuses on the sexual aspect of this intersection. She analyses several experiences of women with multiple sclerosis and concludes that “health professionals might not view women with illness and disability as sexual beings. This negative stereotyping may deny women the assistance and support they need to stay in touch with their sexuality alongside the convoluted experiences of living with chronic illness” (Mosek cited in Koch, 2002: 138). Koch further argues that illness also changes the manner in which women perceive their body and femininity. In this sense, Mara feels that her impairment not only affects how she perceives her body but also how men and women regard her sexually. Mara acknowledges as an abled person that “For those in the warmer waters close to the surface, the big late-night, bar-based, strange-city

conference teemed with sexual opportunity” (86). However, she is treated as if she was invisible when she goes to a bar as an impaired person: “I walked into the bar, deprecating smile ready, but those who looked up eagerly seemed to not see me. The cane outweighed even the special maroon-and-turquoise lanyard on my conference badge and KEYNOTE printed in block letters under my name” (87). Similarly, Mara believes that her therapist treats her as an asexual subject: “The therapist, Brian, had been perfectly polite, but it was clear I was of no account, a cripple not a woman, someone he had to touch because it was his job, about as important to as a chair” (89). In this sense, Mara feels that the negation of her sexuality causes her a restless feeling of emptiness: “For my whole life men’s sexual attention had been nothing but an irritating, occasionally exhausting consequence of being alive –like gravity: not something you think about much until it’s gone” (89). Griffith’s comparison between men’s attention and gravity points out that Mara feels uncomfortable with the asexuality imposed on her despite the fact that she does not yearn for male attention. In this sense, we might conclude that invisibility is forced on her regardless of her sexuality.

Mara’s anger and her decision to share her own vision through the Internet generate a positive acceptance from other people with impairments. Several unknown people answer back the tweets with their own complaints and subjective experiences: “I got up at five the next morning to check my messages. There were more than three hundred (...) I scrolled through them all, tears running down my cheeks” (64-65). This feedback compels Mara to create the non-profit organisation: Cripples Action Team (CAT). Rose questions whether the political implication of Mara with the creation of the non-profit organization is in fact a scape goat to deal with her individual trauma. In

this manner, the novel shows what seems a binary opposition between the disabled political agenda with the sudden acceptance of an impaired body:

'What is it this time?'

'Nothing.' She stroked Rip some more. 'I just think you need to look at what exactly you're fighting.'

'What do you mean? All this inertia isn't enough for you? How about discrimination? What about—'

'That's not what I mean (...) You're acting the same way you did twelve years ago, when you first started karate and self defense. As though if you could just find the right lever to pull you could make the world safe' (69).

This point of view takes it for granted that overcoming an individual trauma is incompatible with promoting disability rights. In fact, scholars such as Mike Oliver employ this argument to dismiss intersectional approaches. He argues that individual differences are seen as a threat to the disabled agenda: identity markers are considered dangerous for the unity of Disability Studies. However, Mara's story demonstrates that individual experiences are a beneficial tool for the communal goal of disabled activism. Her experience as an executive director of the HIV non-profit organisation allows her to build a new non-profit association; but Mara's awareness of gender discrimination is the main reason that allows her to recognise the lack of rights within the MS community and thus, engage with the creation of this organisation. Hence, I argue that Mara's political involvement with the non-profit organisation feeds her search for a new identity. Likewise, her experience of discrimination as a lesbian woman serves to identify biased conducts against disabled people. Indeed, this acknowledgement allows Mara to formulate a solid political agenda.

This interaction between collective experience and individual trauma is described progressively through the novel. In the beginning, Mara doubts her motives as she remembers her ex-wife's advice on facing her fears: "It would be a golden opportunity to take us national. *To stay busy and angry*, the Rose in my head whispered.

To not face your fear” (79, original in italics). Mara feels that Rose might be right and guesses that her restless attitude is the result of her fear of MS. For instance, Mara severely worries about all the problems that could arise when she is outside her home:

What will you do if the bus doesn't come? Use the phone. What if your phone doesn't work? I could drive home and call the Justice Institute. What if the car breaks down? My air was running out. I couldn't breathe properly. What if the car breaks down on the interstate in one of those dead spots? (80, original in italics).

In the end, Mara progressively learns to cope with her fears and accepts the fact that she might have faced the same problems as an abled person; she acknowledges that she would have known how to solve them as an abled person too (81). The growing acceptance of her impairment makes Mara realise that her political involvement is beyond her own individual experience of MS. Thus, Mara concludes: “I would have coped. Rose was wrong; I could face my fears” (81). Finally, Mara demonstrates with the creation of CAT that personal experience conflates with the social programme of the disabled agenda instead of destroying it.

1.3. Hate Crimes: Helplessness and Impaired People.

So Lucky also presents violence through a series of murders carried out against members of the disability community. The place of the crimes indicates that the murderers become progressively closer to Mara through the novel. In addition, Mara suspects that the victims are chosen from the email list of a non-profit organisation like hers. Thus, Mara is worried that she might become a victim of these crimes; yet, as a non-abled person she does not know how to protect herself: “The last time I had been this angry, this afraid, I trained my body to a blade. But now I had MS” (152).

However, Mara decides to take control of the situation when the police ignore her warnings; she installs an alarm system and buys a gun: “If they walked through the door now I would smile at them: *This is a Ruger*, I would say. *It will change your life* (...) I might have MS but I was not a helpless victim” (174, original in italics). Mara demonstrates that her impairment does not disable her since she is capable of coming up with a solution to fight against those who want to harm her. However, Mara still feels an intense fear that paralyses her. Despite the fact that the murderers are arrested before they can aim for Mara, she is still scared of the unpredictability of her illness:

Safe now. I turned off the light. Lay on my back. Stared at the dark. Safe. Free to begin again on my own terms. To do better. Free to find out who Mara RRMS was. That's when I heard the whisper: *You'll never be free*. "What?" I sat up. But there was no one there and the house was silent. *You'll never be free of me* (175, original italics).

Despite the fact that Mara does not want to be considered a helpless impaired person she faces several situations where she depends on the help of other people. For instance, she needs an airport guard to push her wheelchair through several controls and help her to board the plane. This dependency causes Mara a great deal of anxiety; the former quote shows Mara's inner voice that constantly tries to remind her that MS is in control of her life. Yet, Mara learns in the end of the novel how to face her fears. In fact, Mara realises that the illness is not what scares her but social exclusion and prejudice:

'I see you,' I said. 'I know what you are'. And I did. This was not MS. This was helplessness and self-loathing and second-class citizenship. It was the story of what it was to be a cripple in the world: Relying on the kindness of strangers. Smiling hard at the stairs and hoping for a miracle –having to hope, because there was no ramp. Feeling seen only as a target. Seeing yourself as a target because that's how others saw you. (177)

Thus, Mara concludes that she is not a helpless person because she is impaired: “I am not invincible. But I am not Less” (177, original in capital). The protagonist

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acknowledges thus her physical limitations but also points out that ableist attitudes construct most of these limitations. This is a first step to denying them.

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2. Masqueraded Identities: Ableist and Heteronormative Strategies

2.1. Coming Out Scenarios: HIV and MS

Robert McRuer came out as HIV positive in a meeting on “Interiorities”⁸ in January, 2004. He did so despite the fact that he is actually HIV negative. The reason that he claimed to have the immunodeficiency virus is because he wanted to “draw attention to the politics of looking into queer and disabled bodies (I wanted to raise questions, in other words, about what exactly people wanted or expected to see inside disabled and queer bodies)” (2006: 53). Secondly, the paper he presented was about TAC: South Africa’s Treatment Action Campaign. This association had launched a great amount of t-shirts with the message “HIV POSITIVE” in capital letters, playing with the meaning of the word ‘positive’. The t-shirts were produced because of the murder of a female activist who had disclosed her HIV-positive identity in South Africa. McRuer joined this campaign that was aimed to question and challenge coming out scenarios.

McRuer argues that coming out discourses, despite being liberating, also reinforce the existence of alternative identities against normative ones. The t-shirt movement blurred the lines between abled and non-abled people. HIV negative activists would be approached and be told that their manner of coming out was very brave (2006: 53). The fact that impaired and queer people still need to “come out” shows that marginalization and invisibility still maintain remarked binary oppositions. As already noted in the introduction, McRuer further complains that impairment is still more often masqueraded than queerness. In fact, he argues that Crip Theory is the result of the

⁸ “Interiorities” reflects on subjectivity and sociality. The aim of the meeting was to consider how social life conditions the formation, exposure and expression of the selfhood.

failure of Queer Studies: “crip theory is necessitated at least in part by queer’s theory ongoing inability to imagine such equations” (2006: 49).

Nicola Griffith’s novel challenges the discourses of coming out and portrays the different consequences that these scenarios have over the protagonist. Griffith does not narrate the coming out of Mara as a lesbian woman. The fact that she has been married many years to a woman and her new relationship with Aiyana is never questioned by other characters. For instance, her neighbours and workmates know about her sexuality and do not express any particular opinion about it. As noted before in this dissertation, Griffith has a particular manner of representing lesbianism: *So Lucky: A Novel* follows the lines of her previous work where the sexuality of their female protagonists is never explicitly acknowledged. However, the coming out as lesbian by Mara is implicitly described in this novel. Mara has a clear opinion on expressing identity; Aiyana reacts with surprise when Mara tells her that she has told her boss about multiple sclerosis. Nevertheless, Mara does not contemplate any other valid option since she refuses to deny her identity in any situation: ““Of course I told him. I’ve been out all my life. I’m not going back in, not about anything”” (29).

However, Mara’s coming out as an impaired person does have much more serious consequences on her life. Mara is fired the day after she makes a mistake in her office. Despite the fact that she has become a very valuable and capable worker in the non-profit organisation that employs her, her boss believes that multiple sclerosis will affect her performance at work: ““We believe it’s time to focus on your own health rather than helping others. You can’t guarantee that this, this emotional *lability* will never happen again”” (30, original in italics). Thus, I argue that the novel demonstrates McRuer’s theory of coming out discourses. Queerness and disability are both present in

the novel but the protagonist is only discriminated against because of her impairment. Nevertheless, I should point out that Mara works for a NGO that mostly helps gay HIV positive and AIDS people. Thus, we might consider that the protagonist could be discriminated against her sexuality in other contexts.

Mara's coming out process also shows her transition from helper to sufferer. Her senior position in the HIV organisation allowed her to be nicely treated in conferences and meetings. Likewise, her work is highly valued in the organisation. However, she is mostly ignored as an impaired woman when she goes to funding meetings for her new crip organization: "but I had not really understood that I now belonged to the other side of the divide. I was a crip, not one of the real people. My purpose was to be brought up from the deep, exhibited, and cast back" (86). Mara's job as a helper of HIV positive people allows her to acknowledge the differences between the social rights of the two illnesses. The protagonist points out that HIV carriers have reached better social recognition than MS sufferers. Indeed, she realises that the MS community is at a disadvantage in front of the HIV positive one: "<Why do we not have control of our own medical process and funding? Why aren't we in charge? Why isn't MS World like HIV?>" (62). In this sense, I argue that the queer movements in the eighties allowed the HIV community to advance in terms of visibility and acceptance. The eighties were a period of queer and HIV vindication: HIV, first diagnoses in 1981, had become a devastating disease especially for gay males. Thus, the disease became tightly related to male homosexuality. In this sense, the intersection between HIV and queerness helped the two groups to advance in their claims for social and political recognition. Alison Kafer defines this period as a "Queer Time"; she argues that gay communities were forced to think of "the here, the present, the now" (2013: 35). She further claims that

“the epidemic deflects attention away from the future altogether, attending only to this moment, finding urgency in the present” (35). In other words, Kafer resumes that illness pushed some gay men to live out of normative lives and consider queer discourses “on urgency and emergence” (36). Illness and sexuality made epidemic of the eighties a queer crip time.

Once Mara becomes disabled she realises that the MS community needs a platform to vindicate their rights: “—and we need money. We need time and attention. We *don't* need pity. Empathy, yes. Help, yes. Pity, never. You feel sorry for me? Donate right now” (65-66, original in italics). The fact that Mara needs to organise a new association points out McRuer's discourse on invisibility: whereas queerness is positively acknowledged in the novel, MS needs to come out to society as well as to request social rights for the community. This inequality is stressed by McRuer, who points out that previous studies such Queer Theory have neglected the opportunity to understand the diversity of identity markers:

Crip theory might function as a body of thought, or as thought about bodies, that allows for assertions like the following: if it's not even *conceivable* for you to identify as or with Brazilian, gay, immigrant workers with multiple sclerosis, then you're not yet attending to how bodies and spaces are being materialized in the cultures of upward redistribution we currently inhabit. (McRuer, 2006: 76)

Nevertheless, the main difference between her sexuality and her impairment is that MS becomes visually recognisable to the extent that she has to use crutches or a wheelchair. In this sense, Mara does not have to come out as an impaired woman since her illness becomes evident. Contrarily to HIV positive people, Mara does not have a choice when the symptoms of multiple sclerosis aggravate her health. Then, her illness becomes a mark forced upon her; she loses the opportunity of not displaying her identity at her will. In fact, the novel portrays the emotional devastating results of

compulsory visibility. Mara becomes invisible in social gatherings and her everyday life: At the airport, the guard

(...) pushed me through the busy concourse, nodded to the woman at the security gate. She nodded back to him—I did not exist—and unhooked the barrier ribbon, and he shoved me through to the head of the line. I wondered if they would even hear me if I told them I'd changed my mind, that I didn't want to fly after all. (82)

Thus, the novel notes that having visible impairments can be more harmful than having to come out as an impaired person. In the case of multiple sclerosis, a t-shirt would not be enough to blur the lines between healthy and impaired people. In fact, the illness becomes the label of the person who has the impairment. Several impaired people have noticed that abled-people tend to talk about people with impairments as if their illness was their identity i.e. it is common to talk about the blind or the deaf. Similarly, crosses and wheelchairs bring with them a social stigma; they define the individual as a whole. For instance, Kenny Fries recalls in *QDA: A Queer Disability Anthology* when a friend artist asked him if he could paint him having sexual intercourse. The aim of the project was to portray in the best manner a disabled person having sex. Fries agreed with only one condition: “Don't use a wheelchair to signify the man is disabled” (Fries, 2015: Location 481. E-book). His friend agreed and they proceeded to take the photos that would become the base material for the painting. Fries was relieved when he saw the photos: “I recognized the images of myself in both the photos and the drawing as very beautiful” (2015: Location 543. E-book). However, the art director did not like the result: he argued that the disability “didn't read” and suggested to cut one of Fries's legs in the images (2015: Location 543. E-book). Fries concluded that if his body could not be used as it was, it would not be used at all. The painting in the end was not released; Fries complains that as a man with a disability, he was “being defined *as* his disability

instead of being portrayed as a person *with* a disability” (2015: Location 553. E-book, original italics).

Similarly, Mara is defined *as* her illness by other characters when she uses a wheelchair or crutches. As noted before, these elements turn her into an invisible asexual character. However, the protagonist is determined to not be defeated by these prejudices: she resumes in the end of the novel that she will fight against ableist narratives and will teach others how to counteract normative discourses (177).

2.2. Real and Imagined Futures: Queer Crip Times

Alison Kafer theorises queer-crip intersections in terms of time. In particular, Kafer employs futurity to understand how heteronormative and ableist discourses contain alternative identities. She argues that these discourses envision a metaphorical future that disavows happy outcomes for homosexual relationships as well as the lives of impaired people (2013: 3). The idea behind this theory is that these alternative identities are compared to normative ones and are regarded as less valuable. A ‘good’ future is reserved for those who follow traditional paths materialised in ‘healthy’ bodies. In particular, Kafer claims that these discourses have been naturalised for the disabled community. In this sense, she states that in our current society being disabled is not a desirable option. No one yearns for a life with impairments since these represent in normative discourses a difficult way of life. Kafer argues that this concept is based on imagined futures that project negative images about being disabled; impairment is seen as an individual experience that the person must overcome. However, Kafer discusses disability and queerness as a political body that is defined by time and context.

Kafer aims to dismantle binary oppositions such as abled/ disabled by imagining all people as having diverse “bodies and minds with shifting abilities” (13). She uses the term *crip* to encompass this definition: only erasing the line between abled and disabled can eradicate the discrimination against those who are labelled as less valuable. Kafer further argues that *Crip time* is a *Queer time*: “*Queer time* is often defined through or in reference to illness and disability, suggesting that it is illness and disability that render time “queer” (34). *Queerness* also intersects with disability in location: for instance, homosexuality is also seen as an undesirable place: “queerness continues to be read through the lens of disability, with both queers and crips rendered unnatural, sick, degenerate and deviant” (45).

In particular, Kafer argues that the notion of the “child” is what dislocates queerness from positive futures. LGBTI+ parents are rendered as selfish since they place their desires over the happiness of their future children. Normativity imagines a difficult time for said child, who would suffer discrimination through all their life. In the case of disability, the future is also used to limit the capacity of an impaired person: abled people assume what a disabled individual can or cannot do. This particular employment of the future is described in Griffith's novel. Mara's boss assumes that she will not be able to continue with her work after being diagnosed with MS: ““There are lives at stake here. Vulnerable people who rely on our help. Are you up to the weight of that responsibility when your own health is fragile?”” (31). At this point of the novel Mara self-doubts her capacity: “All those lives relying on a failing body and a slippery brain full of holes. And it would only get worse” (31). Futurity is very relevant in the case of Mara since she has a degenerative illness. The first thing that Mara does after the diagnosis is to review some information about the average lifespan of people with

MS and the percentage of people that still works after a particular amount of years (11-12). The numbers are not encouraging and Mara's illness progresses rapidly due to stress. The uncertainty of the illness makes Mara to begin fearing her near future:

My wife had left me. My mother had moved back to London where I hadn't lived since I was a child. Aiyana was in North Carolina and would soon leave for the other side of the planet. *Victim. Sufferer.* Not incentives to come back. My job would not hold my hand or bring me tea on a bad day. Who would? What was this society for people with MS. People with MS, PWMS. Useless. You couldn't fund-raise without a catchy acronym. (14-15, original in italics).

In this sense, Mara reflects Kafer's theory on future and the drain that impaired people are supposed to signify for society. Kafer argues that one of the arguments used to invalidate the lives of impaired people is that they suppose an economic drain for a country. Mara raises the question whether she can contribute to society as a person with MS. As previously discussed, the novel affirms that it is possible for her to contribute to society. Her success with the non-profit organisation demonstrates that Mara is fully capable of performing her job. Furthermore, her boss later contacts her since he needs her help:

'Well, as I say, we could use your help with a couple things.'

'In what capacity?'

'Consulting.'

The squirrel was gone. 'New ED not working out?'

'Let's just say we might have been hasty.'

'So.' I lifted my face to the sun; it might be the last time. 'You're willing to pay an outrageous consulting fee to someone with, as you put it, emotional lability' (171).

Another significant element in the novel is the employment of a metaphor that Griffith created and named as the "Small Dog Theory of illness" when she came out as a "crip" in her website (2016: online). The writer uses this metaphor to describe the relationship between patients with their chronic illnesses. The idea is that the illness is like a dog; you have to tend it and then it will allow you to continue with your life normally. The

dog theory is connected to ideals of longevity and control. The metaphor is used to stress the fact that a person with a chronic illness is in charge of it.

Mara sees a small dog when she attends the MS meeting in her community centre. She is the only one who can see the dog besides an old woman of the group who tells Mara that she is the oldest because she is in control of her illness: "But if I take care of him he'll trot along sweet as pie till the next time he's tired or hungry or given the wrong food or gets too hot. I just don't forget I'm the boss. You understand me?" (59). The problem with this metaphor is that even with a positive attitude and the best care no one is capable of controlling their own illness. As previously noted, the metaphor connects with Kafer's idea of understanding illness as an individual problem. Instead, Kafer offers an alternative understanding of impairment, which she calls "collective affinity". She employs this term to define all the people that has suffered discrimination because they have been labelled as disabled. Thus, perceives the concept of disability as social problem rather than an individual one (2013: 11). Mara, as Griffith does, disregards the dog theory and the idea that one is in control of their illness: "I wrote a long, wandering email to Aiyana about the old woman's Small Dog Theory of illness: keep your illness tended and it won't yap and mess up your life. Only her MS wasn't my MS because what I was going through was not a small fucking dog" (69).

Despite the fact that the novel reflects Kafer's theory of futurity it does not portray discrimination in terms of sexuality. Mara's relationships are jeopardised because of her aggressive attitude but the novel does not show any concern about Mara's future as a lesbian woman. In fact, Griffith points out that Mara took control of

the situation when she was beaten up and thus, could maintain her relationships with women.

Nevertheless, as pointed out in this section Mara strives against futurity and what she is supposed to do and to be as an impaired person. In the same manner, she also strives against normative discourses placed in the past. Kafer also argues that ableist approaches employ “compulsory nostalgia” to envision an imagined past that is better than the one existing. “Compulsory nostalgia” works on the lines of creating a sense of loss. In particular, this loss is reinforced to those with acquired impairments: what they had is compared to what they miss at the moment. Then, there is a desire to return to what it was, to the desirable and normative identity. Mara readdresses this ableist discourse with the acceptance of the illness. For instance, Mara rejects the idea of doing yoga in the beginning of the novel since she prefers practicing karate. However, at the end of the novel Mara embraces yoga as well as a more peaceful style of life. She does not try to control her illness as the old woman had suggested but neither struggles against multiple sclerosis.

3. Conclusions and Further Research: Josie's Story

Josie is a 27 year-old woman that identifies as queer and medically disabled. Her life has been marked by sexism, ableism, homophobia and transphobia. Josie came out as bisexual when she was fourteen. Shortly afterwards, she was diagnosed with ulcerative colitis, which progressively advanced despite the medication: "she lost weight, then developed an eating disorder, was in pain and eventually became hospitalized" (Drummond and Hammond, 2014: 539). Her butch appearance made her life difficult during her university years; Josie had shaved her hair and wore army pants. She also had a girlfriend whom she brought to the residence where she stayed; she would kiss her goodbye so that all the residence knew about her sexuality. Josie remembers this period as one of the worst times of her life; exclusion and discrimination were a daily routine in the residence. For instance, girls would murmur and call her dyke when they shared the elevator with her. Josie's ostracism was also stressed by the fact that she had a bathroom of her own in the residence; this had been provided to her because of her medical condition.

Josie also experienced exclusion within the mainstream queer community: she acknowledges that "In the queer community there is sort of this fetishisation of mobility, like oh ya I'm gonna go to San Francisco and then I'll go to Vancouver, and then I'll sleep on a couch in Portland and then I'll go visit my friends...". In this sense, Josie further argues that "there is this huge primacy placed on mobility and people that are in pain, people that have disabilities can't fucking do that" (Josie cited in Drummond and Hammond, 2014: 541). Josie finally received a temporary ileostomy and thus, she decided that she would not have sex until the bag was removed. However, doctors finally concluded that the ileostomy should be permanent. The bag had a great

impact to her body image: she felt that it would come out during sex and felt uncomfortable in intimate situations. She finally decided to use electric tape to secure the bag to her body. This allowed her to enjoy again sexual intercourses and regain the confidence she had lost. In fact, Josie claims that this experimentation allowed her to enjoy sexual experiences differently because of her alternative body: “using electrical tape opened up the door to a more interesting sexual life by making it easier to introduce sex toys in the bedroom, as well as allowing her to see ileostomy in a positive way” (Drummond and Hammond, 2014: 543).

We could draw some parallelisms between Josie's story and Mara. Mara's identity is shaped through the intersection between sexual discrimination and ableism. The novel does not only revolves around Mara's illness but also explores her fears as a lesbian woman who has been abused by men. Likewise, Josie was discriminated because of her impairment as well as her sexuality. After reading several testimonies of queer men and women with impairments, we could conclude that all of them share a history of discrimination and prejudice. In fact, I argue that *So Lucky: A Novel* is not only about Mara's construction of her identity but mainly, the novel portrays her struggle to relate this identity with her wider society. In particular, the novel demonstrates an interconnection between fear and violence. In this sense, hate crimes constitute an intersectional experience for those who are queer and have impairments.

Secondly, Mara's sexual live is also affected by the diagnosis of multiple sclerosis. The novel portrays a few intimate scenes between Mara and Aiyana in the beginning of the novel; yet, once Mara is diagnosed with MS, the protagonist is never described having again sexual intercourse: “She was beautiful, she was fine, but when we got naked in bed together I started to weep and I could not stop (...) And so we

spent our last night together as chaste as when we first met” (30). However, Josie’s life account points out that Mara’s perception of her sexual identity is not as flexible as hers. Drummond and Hammond argue that “experimentation also emerged as a theme related to Josie’s presentation of her gender as fluid and shifting: moving from butch to femme identity” (2014: 543). Josie shifted to a femme style after the ileostomy since pants made wearing the ileostomy bag uncomfortable. Thus, she started wearing skirts and slowly grew to like a conservative female appearance. Drummond and Hammond conclude that “Josie’s experimentation with gender representation and finding ways of coping with the anxiety she felt in relation to her ileostomy, facilitated a progression towards a femme identity, which resulted in new sources of strength and empowerment” (549). Instead, I argue that Mara does not shift her body image nor changes the manner in which she displays her sexuality because of MS; the interconnection between discrimination against queer and impaired people is not represented through physical images or sexual representation. Mara does not doubt or change the manner in which she carries out her relationship with women. In fact, Mara never questions her sexuality or the manner she manages it.

In conclusion, the novel presents subtle intersections between queerness and disability. Despite these interconnections are theoretically possible, the novel does not present an intersection between some of them. For instance, notions of time such as futurity and compulsory nostalgia are only employed to define disability. Nevertheless, the fact that Mara is an impaired lesbian is a relevant identity in the story. The protagonist goes through the experience of disability through the lens of sexual discrimination. Her obsession to protect other women as well as her romantic relationships with them points out that lesbianism is a fundamental piece of her identity.

Further research would focus on the portrayal in literature of “invisible illnesses”. For instance, ulcerative colitis or Crohn⁹ are rendered as invisible since the individual who has them does not show any sign of impairment. Contrary to people with visible illnesses, those who have an invisible illness must strive first for social recognition of their maladies in order to receive the help they need.

The study of this kind of illnesses would provide new perspectives on the theorisation of terms such as impairment, disability and crip. As discussed in the previous section, Alison Kafer employs the term crip to define “collective affinities” which encompass “everyone from people with learning disabilities to those with chronic illnesses, from people with mobility impairments to those with HIV/AIDS, from people with sensory impairment to those with mental illness” (2013: 11). In other words, Kafer circumscribes within the term crip any person who has suffered discrimination because of their impairment. However, some illnesses are not overtly discriminated against since society does not recognise them as impairments. Further studies would analyse more closely the definitions of disability and impairment in order to understand the limitations and liberties of these concepts.

⁹ Crohn's disease is a chronic inflammatory disease that involves the digestive system but usually affects the small and large intestine. In serious cases, deep and large ulcers can develop, sometimes leading to obstruction. The most common symptoms are abdominal pain, diarrhoea, vomiting, fever, and weight loss.

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