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ALISON KAHER

DESIRE AND DISGUST

My Ambivalent Adventures in Devoteeism

Dear Alison,

...

Because of an overall almost total void of amputee women, when one does show herself, it is a major event. For instance (and please don't take this personally), if I were to see you unexpectedly, walking down the street, chances are good that it would send me into a state just short of shock—the adrenalin would start to flow, the heart rate would quicken, the palms would start to sweat, etc. This really happens! And, I would, in relishing the moment, do everything UNOBTRUSIVELY possible to savor it.

In the past, I've turned my car around . . . to have another look. I've followed someone around in a store/shopping center (at a safe and non-threatening distance) for a few minutes, stealing quick glimpses now and then. . . .

I just don't want you or any of your disabled sisters to perceive people like me, who have a genuine interest in you, as well as your "predicament," shall we say, and who could provide the love and care you deserve, as a bunch of wolves moving in for the kill. Nothing could be further from the

truth! To win the love and trust of a disabled lady by meeting her needs and providing for her in every way possible . . . would be the ultimate!

...

Give us a chance, and you'll reap the benefits IN SPADES!

A friend and admirer,

"Steve"

"Steve" and I have never met; our one-sided relationship consists solely of this e-mail and another like it a week earlier.¹ Lengthy descriptions of one man's sexual self-understanding, both messages offer a personal account of "devoteeism," a sexual attraction to disabled people, often amputees. For Steve, this desire for amputees "ebbs and floods, . . . but IT IS ALWAYS THERE," and he carefully explains the nature of this attraction. Noting that devotees "would infinitely rather go out with an amputee of average looks and build than a gorgeous 4-limbed woman," Steve encourages me to think kindly of devotees because they "can't get enough of [my] beautiful looks." For Steve, my "beautiful looks" are the result of my two above-the-knee amputations; the fact that he knows nothing else about my appearance, or my life in general, does nothing to dampen his desire.

It is a desire that others apparently share: although Steve was among the most articulate and thorough defenders of devoteeism to enter my inbox, he was not alone; over the course of a few years, beginning in September 2000, several other devotees wrote to me about their desire for bodies like mine.² Reading those e-mails, I did exactly what Steve had politely asked me not to do: I took them personally. Who were these men tracing me through the Internet? Was I one of the women they were following surreptitiously? I became increasingly suspicious of strangers, particularly those interested in learning about my disabilities.

My suspicions were shared, and expanded upon, by my friends and family. "There are people called devotees," I would explain, "who are sexually attracted to amputees." Their responses were immediate and unequivocal: "Ewww, that's weird. What's wrong with those people?" Although I confess to following this train of thought myself, wondering what was "wrong" with devotees, hearing it expressed with such consistency troubled me. What were my friends and family finding reprehensible—the surreptitiousness of devotee behavior or the desire for disabled bodies? The fact that many of them condemned devoteeism immediately, hearing only about the existence of the attraction and not its manifestations, led me to worry that what troubled them was the very casting of disabled bodies as inherently attractive. And if so, where did that leave me? Did my

friends and family unconsciously find my body so freakish that anyone attracted to it was immediately suspect? Did I share their derisive attitudes? What would it say about my self-image if I dismissed as disgusting and suspicious anyone who desired me? On the other hand, what would it say about my self-image if I were so desperate for sexual recognition that I accepted the kind of behavior mentioned in Steve's e-mail? Were these two choices my only options? Was devotee desire the only desire available to me?

Like many people, I initially discovered devoteeism when doing an online search for "amputee."³ It was 1996, fourteen months after my injuries, and these websites seemed to confirm my worst fears: my new body was apparently disgusting to all but a select few—the "devotees"—and even they felt the need to hide their feelings behind pseudonyms and nicknames.⁴ Their secrecy seemed evidence that there was something wrong and shameful about an attraction to bodies like mine. Otherwise, why not be "out" about their desires? After reading through several websites, I quickly shut down my computer, studiously avoiding any such pages in the future.

A few years later, in 1999, I returned to the question of devoteeism—this time with a slightly different lens. I wanted to examine why some women actively engaged in amputee-devotee communities, what benefits they derived from their involvement, and how they understood themselves in relation to devotees. What were they finding in amputee-devotee communities that I had missed? What motivated their involvement in something that many other disabled people had condemned as exploitative and ableist? My interest was partly a result of frustration with existing approaches to the phenomenon. Until very recently, medical journals contained the only analyses of devoteeism, analyses that relied heavily on the notion that a desire for disabled women is a pathological trait requiring therapeutic intervention.⁵ What are the cultural assumptions that ground such characterizations? If we cast devotees as "pathological," then what are we saying about the desirability of disabled women? What might the stories of disabled women contribute to these discourses of inappropriate desire?

What I found in the stories of amputees involved in devoteeism were tales of renewed self-assurance and empowerment. Women who had felt profound shame about their bodies reported significant gains in their self-confidence after discovering devotees. Such changes in self-perception then led to dramatic changes in behavior: one woman reported no longer feeling too embarrassed to leave her house, while another abandoned her practice of hiding her stump underneath baggy clothing and wraps.⁶ Hearing these stories, I realized I could

no longer simply dismiss devoteeism. In 2000 I wrote “Amputated Desire, Resistant Desire” as a way of thinking through these issues. This piece, although it contained ambivalences, was largely an argument for attending to the experiences of women in amputee-devotee communities; the essay challenged the assertion that a desire for disabled bodies is, in itself, a marker of pathology.

Once that piece went online, with my e-mail address attached, I began to receive e-mails much like the one with which I began this chapter. Devotees wrote to describe devoteeism, to detail their desires, and even to request dates with me and other amputees. As my inbox filled with messages from devotees, my initial discomfort with devoteeism returned. Although the e-mails were intended to flatter me, their constant refrain that devotees were the only people capable of desiring bodies like mine was disconcerting. This repetition, coupled with frequent accounts of devotees stalking amputees, made me increasingly uncomfortable about continuing any involvement in devoteeism, even as an outside observer.

Indeed, part of my discomfort stemmed from the fact that I was finding it increasingly difficult to locate myself “outside” of devoteeism. My inbox regularly turned up e-mails from strangers discussing my body with a disconcerting intimacy, an intimacy borne not of explicit descriptions of sex but of explicit reflections on my appearance and others’ (alleged) reactions to it. Devotees discussed my stumps with a troubling familiarity, even possessiveness, as if their (allegedly) unique desire granted them some kind of claim over my body. Whether I wanted it or not, I was being written into devoteeism through these e-mails. By the end of 2001, I decided to abandon this research. I could not bear the way this work was making me feel about my body, as if my stumps belonged more to the devotees in cyberspace than they did to me.

My discomfort remained coupled, however, with feelings of necessity. Amputees continue to wrestle with the complexities of devoteeism, and there is scant research addressing the topic from feminist or queer cultural studies perspectives.⁷ Thus, years later, I return to the topic yet again, this time to trace the root of my continued ambivalence. Although I remain deeply troubled by my interactions with devotees, I have encountered too many stories of female amputees finding pleasure and opportunity in devotee communities to accept such communities as exclusively exploitative. Moreover, as someone who is routinely met with hostile stares because of the oddness of my body, I can’t help but be intrigued by the notion of finding eroticism in bodies typically marked as undesirable. The form this eroticism takes in devoteeism, however, worries me, and I cannot shake my uneasiness about the phenomenon. Over ten years after my

first exposure to devoteeism, what is it about the devotees' desire that continues to trouble me? Why do I remain so ambivalent?

In this chapter, I attempt to answer that question, arguing that the rhetoric of devoteeism relies as heavily on *disgust* for disabled bodies as it does *desire*. Devotees typically define themselves not simply as people sexually attracted to amputees but as the *only* people sexually attracted to amputees. "Unlike everyone else," they claim, "we find you not disgusting but desirable." In so doing, they establish the groundwork for a devotee exceptionalism, according to which only devotees are capable of desiring amputees. I begin by tracing the logic of desire and disgust that pervades devoteeism, arguing that devotees' descriptions of their attraction often perpetuate the ableist assumption that disabled bodies are properly objects of disgust. In the second half of this chapter, I examine my own entanglement in this logic of desire and disgust, reflecting on the assumptions, fears, and desires that drive my research. Part of this self-reflection involves a turn to queercrip relationships, specifically the writings of lovers Eli Clare and Samuel Lurie, in the hope of articulating other models of desiring disability that are not reliant on fetishistic representations or the binary logic of desire/disgust.

Demographic analyses of devotees are rare and reliant on small sample sizes, but they suggest that devotees in the United States tend to be white, middle- to upper-middle class, well-educated men between the ages of twenty-five and sixty-five; anecdotal evidence provides the same profile.⁸ Most devotees are non-disabled men interested in disabled women, but, judging from the numerous websites catering to gay male devotees, there seems also to be a significant population of gay men involved in the attraction.⁹ I focus here exclusively on heterosexual male devotees, nondisabled men attracted to disabled women, for reasons that will become clearer below.

Throughout the chapter, I train my attention on "devotee discourses": websites produced by and for devotees, e-mails and conversations with self-identified devotees and amputees, and other community-generated texts. Concentrating on this material allows me to discuss devotee exceptionalism and its logic of desire and disgust without necessarily condemning any individual devotee's attraction to amputees. As someone whose own desires are too often cast as deviant—the sexualities of disabled people have long been rendered inappropriate, and queer sexualities continue to be derided as immoral—I am wary of preemptively dismissing another's desire as in need of correction. Rather, my goal is to highlight the dense undercurrents of disgust found in devotee discourse. How is devoteeism represented and constructed by people who identify with the attrac-

tion? What cultural assumptions undergird such constructions, and what are their effects?

DESIRE AND DISGUST: UNPACKING THE LOGIC OF DEVOTEEISM

According to *OverGround*, a devotee website, a devotee is “a person, male, female, straight, or gay, who is sexually and emotionally attracted to people . . . who have a specific disability, and whose reaction on encountering such a person is massive and overwhelming” (Child and King, “OverGround’s Manifesto” par. 1). This kind of reaction to disabled bodies is assumed to be limited to devotees; devotee discourses typically insist that amputees are attractive only to devotees. J., one of the most frequent contributors to *OverGround*, puts it bluntly: “We know we’re unusual, but your physical alteration doesn’t disgust us. So you have a stump . . . , we don’t find it disgusting. . . . Of all the people you meet, we are the ones who will never ever say, ‘Apart from that she’s very attractive’” (“Devotees” par. 10).

As evidenced in J.’s remarks, the interplay of desire and disgust plays an integral role in devotee logic. Within this framework, the site of an amputation can never be neutral: it is always the determining aesthetic factor of an amputee. Depending on one’s perspective—namely, whether one is a devotee—an amputation is charged either with desire or disgust.¹⁰ According to this logic, the key difference between a devotee and a non-devotee is the value afforded an amputation: devotees bestow attractiveness and desirability upon it; non-devotees are disgusted by it. But both are assumed to cast the presence or absence of an amputation as the determining factor in a woman’s sexual attractiveness. To desire her is to find her attractive solely on the basis of her amputation, and thus to be a devotee. Anyone who does not identify as a devotee is, by definition, a person disgusted by amputees. Within this logic, there is no position outside of the desire/disgust binary.

Once amputation is cast as the sole marker of attractiveness, then devotees become the only people capable of feeling that attraction. Devotee discourses constantly remind amputees that “no one else will ever love *all* of you, the whole woman” because, for devotees, the amputation is primary in constituting who the “whole woman” is. In the logic of devoteeism, “amputee” becomes a woman’s primary identity, an identity that ostensibly elicits disgust from all non-devotees. Indeed, non-devotees, as constructed within devoteeism, are incapable of feeling anything but disgust toward an amputation. Bette Hagglund, an amputee who founded the amputee-devotee social network *Fascination*, recommends

that amputees avoid relationships with non-devotee men for this very reason. “It may be better,” she suggests, “to get romantic with someone who is attracted to you without reservation and with full acceptance of your physical limitations” (“Fascination” conclusion, par. 1). These qualities, presumably, only devotees can

provide. This construction of devoteeism places the partners of amputees at risk of misrecognition. If my lover desires me, then she must be a devotee, even if she has never understood herself as such. But if she disavows devoteeism, refusing to ground our relationship on my status as an amputee, then her very desire for me is dismissed as inadequate. Despite any claims to the contrary, her refusal to identify as a devotee is cast as a rejection of my disability. 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.¹¹

Within this framework, self-loathing is seen as the only reason an amputee would refuse a relationship with a devotee. As one devotee explained to me, “I’ve found that it’s the amp ladies who don’t have confidence in themselves who are uncomfortable with the idea of devotees. They don’t like themselves and they think there must be something wrong with someone who likes them.”¹² J. takes this position one step further, arguing that women who reject devotees are so disgusted by their own disabilities that they need partners who share their revulsion. He writes on the website *OverGround*: “Some people who are physically impaired feel ashamed of their impaired bodies. . . . Despising themselves, they will tend to despise those who find them attractive, and will value the attentions only of those who feel an equal disgust” (“Twins” par. 8).

This logic casts sexual desirability as the only real problem facing disabled women; issues such as unemployment and underemployment, social marginalization, poverty, discrimination, and inaccessibility rarely appear in devotee discourses. In an *OverGround* interview with W. and K., a devotee-amputee couple, J. repeatedly asks K. about her experiences in rehab. His primary focus is the issue of “attractiveness”: “Were you concerned about losing personal attractiveness . . . ? Did you feel that your personal attractiveness was severely reduced by your amputation?” (“W. and K.”). K.’s answers are telling. Each time J. poses this kind of question, she explains that she had more pressing concerns: “As you know I had other problems . . . and at that time you don’t care much about [your attractiveness]. We were kept quite busy all day so my aim was learning to walk again.” When J. asks about the loss of attractiveness yet again, she chides, “as

you might remember this was secondary to me. I tried hard to walk again, and to work again. That was my main focus.”¹³ Rather than pursuing these issues, J. turns the conversation to K.’s feelings about devotee desire, suggesting that within the logic of devoteeism, desire and disgust are the only lenses through which to view disability.

LeRoy Nattress draws on this closed logic in his call for further research on devoteeism. He suggests that “more and better information” on the attraction will eventually lead to “increased awareness” and “reasoned acceptance” of devoteeism. Amputees will learn to recognize their “unique attractiveness to some men” and will thus be “helped to develop to [their] fullest potential, based not on the expectations of society, but on [their] choices and abilities” (4). But can the dating obstacles faced by disabled women best be addressed through increased acceptance of, and dependence upon, devotees? And, more importantly, are such obstacles the only hindrances to women’s full development? According to the devotee logic of desire and disgust, the answer to both of these questions is a resounding “yes.”

It is certainly true that the impact of an amputation or other impairment on a woman’s social life can be staggering. Many feminist and queer disability studies scholars have focused their research on sex and sexuality among people with disabilities: some have concentrated on issues of representation; others have explored political, economic, attitudinal, and architectural barriers; and still others have examined the effects of these histories and disabled people’s responses to them.¹⁴ What distinguishes this work from Nattress’s position is that it contextualizes these “dating obstacles” within a larger analysis of ableism and political oppression, recognizing that sexual marginalization is deeply connected to political and social marginalization.

In the devotee worldview, in contrast, amputees struggle because they hate themselves and lack suitable lovers, not because they live in a society structured around the needs of the nondisabled. Nattress, J., and others suggest that all an amputee needs to flourish is self-acceptance, a self-acceptance that can best come from a relationship with a devotee. By discussing an amputee’s well-being only in terms of physical attractiveness and romantic relationships, devotee discourses present disability as an individual problem. In so doing, they perpetuate one of the most entrenched assumptions of an ableist culture: that disability is a problem to be addressed only on an individual or familial level, not a social, political, or legal one. And within the closed logic of desire and disgust, it is a problem

that can be addressed satisfactorily only through participation in devoteeism; anything else is a recipe for self-loathing, denial, and inadequate relationships.

Perhaps most disturbing about the closed logic of desire and disgust is the way it serves to excuse exploitative behavior. Because devoteeism is presented as an amputee's only path out of disgust, practices that might otherwise be seen as threatening are cast as harmless, even beneficial. For example, many of the essays featured in *OverGround* describe individual devotees' encounters with amputee women. Often called "sightings," these stories are collected and shared among devotees, and they occasionally note the general location where a specific amputee has been spotted. In "Sightings," for example, John mentions that "a petite blond with a left БК [below-the-knee amputation] can often be found in a particular neighborhood shopping district" (par. 11). R. Amy Elman notes that *Amputee Times*, another devotee publication, explicitly urges its readers to report on the whereabouts of amputee women; one issue calls for a "national (or international) register of attractive amputees. This means that readers must report their sightings and the names and addresses of women they know about" (qtd. in Elman 266–67). Records of such sightings are popular because many men neither know any amputees nor have regular exposure to them. Reading about the sightings of other devotees not only offers them the vicarious pleasure of an amputee experience but also may guide them toward a sighting of their own.

These encounters are often as much "followings"—if not "stalkings"—as "sightings." Steve's e-mail, with which I introduced this chapter, provides an excellent example of this expansion: "[I]f I were to see you unexpectedly, walking down the street, . . . I would, in relishing the moment, do everything UNOBTRUSIVELY possible to savor it," including trailing at a "safe distance." Later in the e-mail, Steve bemoans "the nut cases" and "the dangerous ones" "who give a bad name and reputation to the devotee community" by failing to be as cautious as he is. Quick to distance himself from those "other devotees" who inconsiderately frighten amputees by following too closely or too overtly, he positions his behavior as harmless, even flattering. As Steve's disavowal suggests, the complaints of unhappy amputees have not gone unnoticed by devotees, and many have been quite explicit in their condemnation of abusive behavior.¹⁵ The problem, however, is ascertaining which kinds of behaviors constitute harassment; as illustrated by Steve's e-mail, many devotees do not consider tracking women to be harassment if it occurs at a "safe distance."

In his dissertation about devoteeism, Nattress offers a list of common strategies

for meeting amputees, including: following an amputee in order to photograph her and learn about her life; participating in organizations that serve amputees, such as shoe exchange or support groups; corresponding with a female amputee via e-mail, often pretending to be a female amputee oneself; and creating detailed records of amputee sightings (18–19).¹⁶ As this list suggests, taking surreptitious photographs, sharing stories about amputee sightings, secretly following women, and lying about one's identity are seen not as harassment but as acceptable behavior, presumably because such manifestations of desire are expected to be a welcome respite from the disgust an amputee typically experiences. The presence of such activities on this list—as well as the very existence of such a list in a dissertation by an “out” devotee—suggests that these behaviors are expected and accepted within devoteeism. Admittedly, most devotees acknowledge that if taken to extremes, these acts can be considered abusive. At the same time, they are quick to insist that such harassment is less the fault of the devotee and more the fault of an intolerant society that forces devotees to keep their desires hidden.

Thus, according to this framework, the way to eliminate such harassment is to increase awareness about devoteeism. Once men are more comfortable making their desires public, they will no longer pursue amputee women in such clandestine ways. This assumption may indeed be true; with greater social acceptance, many devotees may change their secretive behavior. The problem with this position, however, is that devotees are absolved of any culpability in sexual harassment. If disabled women would accept devotees, the logic goes, then devotees would no longer need to lurk in support groups or secretly photograph them. The *OverGround* contributor J. is quite explicit in attributing the responsibility for ending harassment to amputees. “Once you [amputees] put behind you the prejudice that . . . devotees are disgusting creatures,” J. writes, “you can understand why [they behave the way they do]. . . . And if you're friendly perhaps they will stop lurking and behave better” (“Why Devotees” par. 8). Interestingly, J. employs the language of disgust—typically used to describe the way non-devotees feel about amputees—to talk about devotees. In so doing, he accomplishes two things: first, he constructs a bond between amputees and devotees on the basis of their shared rejection by non-devotee culture as “disgusting”; second, he perpetuates the opposition of disgust and desire common to the logic of devoteeism, assuming that once devotees are no longer seen as disgusting, they will be seen as desirable.

Note that the disgust aimed toward devotees is assumed to be temporary; once society develops a greater understanding of devoteeism, it will no longer

cast the phenomenon as disgusting or pathological.¹⁷ Such optimism regarding the possibility of attitudinal change reveals a striking double standard considering devotees' pessimism regarding amputees. The disgust that non-devotees feel toward amputees is portrayed not as something that can be alleviated by increased awareness or social change but as something immutable, even natural. Changes in social practices and beliefs affect amputees only insofar as they alter the behavior of devotees, alleviating them of the need to pursue their desires undercover; non-devotee disgust toward amputees, on the other hand, is apparently so profound and far-reaching that it cannot be overcome.

Casting harassment as innocent, something devotees do only out of unrequited desire, completely ignores the ways in which such acts can disempower women. Some amputees express reluctance to see their prosthetists, whom they fear may be closet devotees getting secret thrills.¹⁸ Other amputees have tried, without success, to ban devotees from amputee-oriented activities and organizations (such as the Amputee Coalition of America) in an attempt to eliminate devotee harassment.¹⁹ For many women, organizations that could serve as valuable resource centers have become sites of potential exploitation.

Months after attending an amputee support group in 1997, I learned that the convener of the group was a devotee, and that he had given my name and physical description to other devotees. I discovered these facts when I met someone who already "knew" me through the organizer; my one-time attendance at the support group had apparently been enough to introduce me to an entire network of devotees. I felt exposed, vulnerable, and betrayed; since then, I have been wary of unknowingly sharing my stories with devotees. This wariness has, in turn, affected my encounters with amputees. Female amputees occasionally send me e-mail, asking me how I have adjusted to life as an amputee, what my daily routine is like, and what advice I would give them about devotees. I have yet to respond to a single one of these e-mails. I wish I could say that my feminist desire to support disabled women compels me to respond, but my sense of self-protection—justified or not—triumphs every time. After my support group experience, and after hearing numerous stories of devotees masquerading as amputees online in order to ask exactly these kinds of questions, I am too suspicious to reply with sincerity to a stranger. I am painfully aware that if these are real amputees writing me, then my cynical silence may appear as cruel indifference. In my lack of engagement, I may be cutting myself off from potentially productive relationships with other amputees. Even so, the risks of replying to these e-mails feel too great. Simply knowing about common practices of devotee

subterfuge places me in what seems like an untenable situation: open myself to potential exploitation or close myself to community.

Given experiences such as the ones I have described, it is not surprising that devoteeism elicits suspicion from many disabled women. This suspicion is not based in self-loathing, as some devotees claim, but in a rejection of the desire and disgust dynamic that pervades devotee discourse. That is, the ambivalence of devotees' own desire elicits such negative reactions. Disabled women understand how devotee exceptionalism—"we are the only ones who could ever love you"—perpetuates ableist assumptions about their presumed undesirability; it leaves unchallenged the notion that amputees are properly objects of disgust. Moreover, disabled women recognize the ways in which this exceptionalism is then used to excuse, if not to produce, exploitative and potentially dangerous behaviors: "I'm the only one not disgusted by you, so you should welcome my attention, whatever its form."

DESIRING DISABILITY: MY GORDIAN KNOT

I began this chapter by reflecting on my ambivalence about devoteeism and devotee-oriented research, detailing my trepidation about this topic. To depict this work as fraught with misgivings is to tell only part of the story, however, for desire factors into my experiences as well. I have not only had the intellectual pleasure of making connections among different texts and histories, I have also experienced the much more visceral pleasure of exposure to amputee bodies, bodies similar to my own. Analyzing devoteeism has exposed me to a world I otherwise would never have known existed, and I can't pretend to know the full effects of this encounter on my sense of self. Through this research, I have seen dozens of pictures of amputee women on the Internet. For someone who rarely sees a body resembling her own in other media, such an experience has been profound.

Analyses of devoteeism tend to overlook the access amputees gain to other disabled women through their involvement in amputee-devotee communities. Typing "amputee" into an Internet search engine brings up more sites about devoteeism than anything else; women who have no other connection to disabled people or disability organizations, and who are looking online for support and community, may very well find it on these amputee-devotee sites. While the ASCOTworld website is focused primarily on hosting amputee-devotee chats and selling photographs of amputees to devotees, the site often features infor-

mation on shoe-exchange groups and health care, serving as a support network for amputees. Similarly, although the primary goal of an ASCOTworld conference might be to introduce amputees to devotees, amputees will likely spend at least part of the weekend socializing with other women. Through this virtual and physical community, a new amputee might meet other disabled women who can serve as powerful mentors for her, modeling how to adjust to life with a disability.

This kind of mentoring may prove to be particularly important when it comes to sexuality, as studies suggest that a lack of role models dramatically affects the sexuality of disabled women. For many women, particularly those who become disabled later in life, it is difficult to learn to incorporate wheelchairs, prosthetics, scars, and stumps into their ideas of a “sexy” experience.²⁰ The photographs and videos of female amputees circulating throughout amputee-devotee communities might offer disabled women a powerful resource for integrating sexuality and disability. Devotee websites might be the only places where an amputee can easily find images of women who look like her, images of women being “sexy” while seated in a wheelchair, leaning on a cane, or donning a prosthetic. Indeed, prosthetics are often cast as more erotic than medical on these websites, a radical shift in meaning that could encourage amputees to incorporate medical equipment such as wheelchairs, canes, and prosthetics into sex play.²¹ Moreover, they might begin to recognize amputated bodies themselves as sources of pleasure. K. tells *OverGround* that she enjoys looking at the pictures of other amputees because “it’s interesting to see how other amputee women look” (J., “W. and K.”).

Sometimes, when I get dressed, I think about these women who insist upon the sexiness of their stumps. Over the years, I have become increasingly comfortable exposing the burn scars on my arms and back, and I like to flaunt my wide, wheelchair-pushing shoulders, but I still carefully conceal the ends of my stumps underneath skirts and shorts. What lessons could I learn from these women featured on the Internet? What lessons have I already absorbed from them? Thinking about my body while thinking about their bodies, and their relations to their bodies, is itself a kind of desire.

This pleasure—my pleasure—in both the sight and site of female disabled bodies raises difficult questions about my own entanglement in ableism and objectification. How am I objectifying the bodies of amputees in my quest for images that reflect my existence?²² How has discovering their photographs transformed the way I live in the world? Is my own empowerment a vicarious result of these women’s participation in devoteism? How does my desire—for sexual recognition, for identification, for community—rely on networks established to

serve devotee desire? What are the effects of my research on these women's lives, desires, bodies? What, if anything, do I owe them for the many pleasures I receive? My pleasure in seeing these bodies does not exist apart from power relations.

Nor does yours in reading this chapter. As an amputee, you may recognize yourself in my ambivalence; as a devotee, you have experienced an increase in your visibility; as a nondisabled, non-devotee, this exposure to devoteeism may have affirmed your physical and sexual "normality." Reading about amputees and devotees may bring the pleasure of recognizing that you are not like "them," that you are not "other," thereby buttressing your own ableist privilege in a nondisabled world. Rather than being trapped between the two poles of desire and disgust, nondisabled non-devotees are the unmarked norm within the framework of devoteeism: those whose bodies do not disgust, those whose desires require no justification.

Amputee, devotee, nondisabled non-devotee: even these designations are too simple, too narrow. What about the disabled person who isn't an amputee—how might other disabled people locate themselves in this logic?²³ What about the nondisabled non-devotee whose lover is disabled? Or what about a relationship between two amputees: one disabled body finding pleasure in another? Or, for that matter, an amputee discovering pleasure in her own body, incorporating her stump or stumps into her own sexual fantasies and desires? For me to ignore these possibilities would be to accept the devotee logic that only devotees can desire amputees; it would be to perpetuate the ableist notion that desiring disability can always and only be pathological.

The desire and disgust dynamic is hard to escape, however, as it is articulated within an ableist culture in which disability is used to justify social, economic, and political inequalities. In this context, devoteeism is like a Gordian knot: the more I attempt to unravel the strands of desire and disgust, the tighter the pieces hold together. This complexity, this tangle of desires and motives, is overwhelming, as illustrated by an encounter I had at the Oakland airport. Waiting outside baggage claim for my ride, I was approached by a well-dressed man in his thirties. After saying hello, he commented on my smile and asked me for my name and number: "Maybe we could go out for a drink sometime." Caught off guard, I said something about not living in the area. As he continued to make small talk, it suddenly crossed my mind that this man might be a devotee. I could feel myself immediately shutting down, wary of telling this possible devotee anything about myself. I gave vague answers to his questions and explained that I was involved

with someone else. Sensing my discomfort, he apologized and quickly walked away.

After he left, I began to question my assumption that he was a devotee. At that moment, I realized how implicated I was in the logic of devoteeism. I had somehow managed not to hear his praise of my smile and my self-confidence, assuming that it had to be my amputations—and only my amputations—that attracted him. In hindsight, this reaction seems like such a loss, not of a date (many women, I imagine, would hesitate before giving a stranger at the airport their names or phone numbers) but of something more profound: an awareness of myself as a sexual being, a recognition of my desirability. How sad that I was unable simply to feel flattered in his offer, to feel pleasure in this man's desire. How disconcerting that I was so quick to buy into the ableist assumption that my impairments eclipse all other aspects of my life. Do I subscribe to the notion of devotee exceptionalism, the idea that only devotees can find bodies like mine desirable? I want to say no, but my reaction to this man suggests otherwise.

The Gordian knot pulls tighter: assume for the moment that my reaction was correct, that this man was a devotee. Would it have been wrong for him to have been drawn more to the shape of my stumps than the curve of my smile? Is one desire, one attraction, inherently better than the other? Is there something wrong with finding it sexy the way my skirt skims the edge of my stumps, or the way my stumps shift when I push my handrims? Is it pathological to fantasize about moving one's hands across the ends of my stumps, or to desire that more than the feel of my breasts? To be clear, I'm not suggesting that I was wrong to be wary of this stranger, especially given my experiences with devotees. But I do want to acknowledge the ways in which this encounter has forced me to recognize my discomfort with seeing my stumps as sites of desire. Am I wary of such desire because of the ableist dimensions of devotee rhetoric, because of internalized shame about my body, or because of an assumption that desiring disability can only be pathological?

The questions continue, pulling the knot still tighter: why have I so consistently focused my research on heterosexual male devotees? Is it simply that these are the devotees I have encountered, or am I trying to insure that the image I associate with "devotee" bears no resemblance to the image of my female lover, no similarities to my queer communities? And if so, what or whom am I trying to protect? Would I have to alter my definitions of devoteeism if the term suddenly had to include my lover? Am I so reluctant to situate myself within devoteeism that I have drawn artificial boundaries around my research? Even more trou-

bling, has my attention to heterosexual amputee-devotee relations been a way to distance myself from the *amputees* in these communities, a way to reassure myself that I am not like them? Has my focus on heterosexual devotees allowed me to ignore my own unwillingness to accept my amputations as sites of desire?

Conversely, how much of my wariness of devoteeism stems from the relentless sexism and heteronormativity of devotee discourses? If devotees were not so insistent on describing women as “ladies,” or so certain that all of disabled women’s problems could be solved by a good man, would I be more accepting of their position? And would I be more open to devotees if they seemed more queer, more open to other “deviant” desires?²⁴

I have no easy answers to any of these questions.

It is this lack of easy answers that leads many disabled people to share in my ambivalence about devoteeism. We are reluctant to condemn the phenomenon, cognizant of the implications of condemning people who find disability attractive. Few of us want to deny the experiences of those disabled women who have found the attraction to be life affirming and empowering. Simultaneously, however, many of us feel a lingering sense of discomfort with devoteeism, as we are equally cognizant of the implications of devotee exceptionalism. People with disabilities are not eager to endorse the assumption that disabled bodies are inherently disgusting to all but a select few, or that abusive expressions of desire are better than no expressions of desire. These complexities have everything to do with the seeming monopoly devotees hold over representations of sex and disability. For an amputee like myself, almost the only place I can find images of bodies like mine is on devotee websites. To find traces of desire, I must wade through narratives of disgust, and that is what makes devoteeism so troubling.

But I continue to wrestle with these complexities because I continue to find the promise of desiring disability compelling. As I have argued here, current constructions of devoteeism are too wrapped up in exceptionalist logic, fetishistic reductions, and exploitative practices to meet this promise; devotee discourses too often cast disabled bodies as disgusting, accepting ableist rhetoric about the asexuality of disabled women rather than resisting it. Instead, I want to imagine a sexuality that is rich and robust not in spite of impairment, and not fetishistically because of impairment, but in relationship to it. How have disabled people crafted sexual identities and practices that take our impairments into account, not in order to overcome them, but to capitalize on them? How might impairments enhance sexual encounters, opening up new possibilities and experiences? How might the absence of an arm or a leg make maneuvering easier? How might

it enable new positions or closer touches or longer embraces? How can impairment be recognized in our discovery of potential erogenous zones or sites of erotic pleasure? And how might that eroticization happen without a simultaneous reification of disgust, or without the reduction of one's lover to an amputation, in which the absence of a limb is cast as the sum total of identity, existence, and worth? In other words, are there other models for desiring disability that don't rely on the closed logic of devotee exceptionalism?

I find one possible answer to that question in the work of Eli Clare and Samuel Lurie, lovers who explore the territory of disability and desire. Lurie is nondisabled, and he writes about Clare's hand tremors (Clare has cerebral palsy), not as something to be overlooked or passively accepted, but as something to be desired. For Lurie, each of Clare's tremors is a gift across his skin. "Immediately, my body started begging for that exact tremoring touch," he writes. "When I discovered that his right hand tremored more than the left, that's the one I pulled to me, to rub my chest, cheek, thigh. I didn't want a single bounce to go to waste" (84). In this language of desire, a dramatic reimagining of cerebral palsy, tremors become touch, each "bounce" a source of pleasure and delight.²⁵

The tremors that bring Lurie such pleasure had often been a source of psychological pain for Clare. In an essay lamenting the ways in which bodies marked by difference are "stolen" through physical violence and social isolation, Clare confesses, "Sometimes I wanted to cut off my right arm so it wouldn't shake. My shame was that plain, that bleak" ("Exile" 362). Clare describes the theft of his body, condemning the effects of ableism, classism, sexism, homophobia, and transphobia on his life; "gawkers," discrimination, and misrecognition have too often found their way under his skin. This shame, however, finds a powerful antidote in Lurie's desire: "*He cradles my right hand against his body and says, 'Your tremors feel so good.' And says, 'I can't get enough of your shaky touch.' And says, 'I love your cerebral palsy.' . . . Shame and disbelief flood my body, drowning his words. How do I begin to learn his lustful gaze?* Believing him takes more than trust" ("Gawking" 258; emphasis in original). Reading their essays together makes clear how both make themselves vulnerable to each other, mutually negotiating the terrain of their desire. Lurie recognizes this interplay, writing, "there was an utter magic in the combination of my wanting that very specific thing that for Eli was the root of so much of his own struggles with his body" (84). Seeing his tremors register as erotic touch, Clare began to see himself through a lens of desire rather than shame.

What, if anything, makes Lurie's desire different from the desire of the devo-

tees I've sketched here? And what, if anything, distinguishes Clare's response to it from the welcoming responses of some amputees to devotees? These are not simple questions, but they are ones that disability studies and disability rights activism need to engage seriously: how can we desire disability, disabled bodies, without falling into the exceptionalist logic of desire and disgust that pervades devoteeism? How can we eroticize extraordinary bodies without fetishizing impairment, without reducing human beings to spare parts and effacing the lived experiences of disability?

One key distinction between Lurie's and Clare's narratives and the narratives circulating within devoteeism is their engagement with the larger culture. Disgust appears in Clare's essays as a political reality, mutable and debatable, rather than as a natural and inevitable reaction to disability, as it is figured in devoteeism. He acknowledges that many people may approach disabled bodies with more disgust than desire, but he insists that such reactions be understood in terms of larger cultural histories and practices of representation. Questions about sexual desirability and self-esteem are seen as directly related to questions about social recognition, political power, economic access, and sexual autonomy. Clare not only challenges the gawkers but also condemns the institutionalization of disabled people in nursing homes, the coerced sterilization of people with cognitive impairments, and the segregation of disabled children in "special" classrooms. In stark contrast to devotee discourses, which present sexual desirability as the only real problem facing people with disabilities, Clare's narrative positions sexual oppression as inextricable from political oppression.

Versions of the tremor and touch story appear in several of Clare's recent essays, suggesting that Clare recognizes the revolutionary potential in his exchange with Lurie. What is exciting about this narrative, and what moves this exchange away from the realm of devoteeism, is Clare's hope that others might come to feel a similar desire, might begin to recognize tremors—or stumps, or scars, or sensory impairments—as sensual gifts. In a series of questions that refuse to posit disabled bodies as properly objects of disgust, Clare writes, "*If I touch you with trembling hands, will you wince away, thinking cripple, thinking ugly? Or will you unfold to my body, let my trembling shimmer beneath your skin?*" ("Gawking" 260; emphasis in original). "Let my trembling shimmer beneath your skin": finding the erotic in his trembling touch, Clare refuses the exceptionalist logic of devoteeism. He speaks directly to his readers, tempting them with the promise of his touch, encouraging them in their desires, never once suggesting that devotees are the only ones who could ever find him sexy. Disgust

isn't seen as naturally adhering to particular bodies, and desire isn't assumed to be the province of only a select few.

I recognize myself in Clare's narrative of shame and desire; I am painfully aware that I too have sometimes yearned to be free of a visibly different body, have wanted to shield my broken parts from public view. As with Clare, however, my shame is countered by a desire to reclaim my body from the gawkers, to revel in the bumpy scars that move across my skin or in the ease with which I can curl up into myself, and into my lover, with my abbreviated body. I am moved by Clare's and Lurie's accounts, excited both by the details of their specific negotiations and by the larger implications of those negotiations. I hear revolution in this "extra touching," an opening of possibilities in this reframing of cerebral palsy. I want more such stories that make my skin tingle with possibility, that demand recognition of my desires and desirability, that refuse to separate political oppression from sexual marginalization. I no longer want to wade through devoteeism's narratives of disgust, narratives that erase the specificities of my life and the breadth of my experiences, in order to find traces of desire. I want alternatives to tales of devotee exceptionalism; I want to imagine the possibility of radical social and political change that affects all of us. Devoteeism would then represent only one choice out of many, a choice that would no longer seem so fraught with ambivalence.

For now, however, the ambivalence remains, settling in deep around me, and my wanting only brings with it more questions. Even now, years and pages later, I cannot answer all the questions I've posed in this chapter, the questions I've tossed at you, the questions I imagine you have for me. These questions are lodged in my bones, prickling beneath my skin, poking at my desires. Even now, informed by feminist and queer theory, by the poetics of lovers like Lurie and Clare, by my own experiences of desiring and being desired, I remain gut-wrenchingly uncertain. 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 tended by my own struggles to come to terms with the substance of my desires and the terrain of my body.

Maybe this is all I can give you, this gut-wrenching, knotty ambivalence. Maybe at this point we are served more by a willingness to sit with the complexities than by an insistence on fixed positions or definite answers. If a feminist and queer disability studies is about fundamentally questioning the processes by which certain bodies, desires, and practices become normalized, then perhaps searching for a single answer to the question of devoteeism is a misguided ap-

proach. And an answer to what exactly? The question of devoteeism's appropriateness? The question of the desirability of my body? To give an answer would be to suggest that I'd untied the knot, when all I have are these strands, turning and twisting in my hands.

NOTES

I want to thank all of the amputees and devotees who have shared their thoughts and experiences with me. For helping me navigate these complexities, I am grateful to the participants in the Ed Roberts Seminar in Disability Studies at the University of California, Berkeley, 2006–2007, and, especially, Sarah Chinn, Anna Mollow, and Dana Newlove.

1. "Part II," e-mail to the author, 25 November 2000; "Your Article," e-mail to the author, 17 November 2000.

2. Although I still occasionally receive such e-mails, I received a large number of them on a fairly consistent basis from 2000–2002.

3. See Raymond J. Aguilera's "Disability and Delight: Staring Back at the Devotee Community" for another example of an amputee first encountering devotees online.

4. Contributors to devotee websites seldom post under their full names, relying on pseudonyms or disclosing only their initials. This practice stems from the stigma many men experience as devotees. Fearful of rejection or ridicule, they prefer to keep their desires private, identifying with devoteeism only among other devotees or under other names. As a result, many devotees use the language of passing and coming out to describe their participation in devoteeism; devotee discourses are full of "coming-out stories" in which devotees describe having first realized the nature of their attraction and/or how they explained it to their friends, coworkers, and family. Some devotees explicitly align themselves with LGBTQ populations, arguing that devotees deserve the same kind of social recognition and acceptance that has been granted to LGBTQ people. (Of course, the degree to which queers have attained—or desire—such recognition is debatable, and, as I suggest below, devotee discourses are marked by a heteronormativity that renders any allegiance to queer communities suspect.)

5. For an example of the medical approach to devoteeism, see Bruno. In the last few years, both the popular press and the field of cultural studies have discovered devotees, pretenders (nondisabled people who want to pass as disabled and/or use adaptive technologies such as braces or hearing aids), and wannabes (nondisabled people who feel they were born into the wrong bodies, often undergoing elective or self-surgery to impair themselves). Like the medical accounts that precede them, many of these stories are concerned primarily with tracing the etiology of these "conditions" (e.g., Elliott). While amputees figure in the medical texts almost exclusively as the unwilling and unwitting victims of devotee exploitation, they appear in these more recent texts as envy-

inducing reminders of the beauty to be found in fragmentation and separation (e.g., Lingis). None of these accounts of disability and desire attends seriously to the material effects of ableism on the lives of disabled people.

6. See Duncan; Duncan and Goggin; Hagglund; and Storrs, “Caveat” and “Amputees” for accounts of these kinds of behavioral and attitudinal changes.

7. Margrit Shildrick and Fiona Kumari Campbell provide two exceptions, each briefly addressing devoteeism in their recent examinations of disability and subjectivity.

8. On devotee demographics, see D. Dixon; Nattress.

9. For a discussion of devoteeism among gay men, including personal reflections on the phenomenon, see Aguilera; Aguilera et al.; Guter. Some nondisabled straight women identify as devotees, but they are in the minority; almost all of the postings on devotee websites involve male devotees, and only a few female devotees have attended amputee-devotee conferences hosted by organizations such as ASCOTworld. I can find very little mention of lesbian devotees, and several Internet hits on the topic consist of requests from male devotees for “sexy dyke amps” or feature explicit photographs of sex between nondisabled men and disabled women. I obviously cannot rule out the existence of lesbian devotees, but they do not play a role in the devotee discourses under discussion here.

As even a cursory Internet search of devoteeism makes clear, devoteeism is by no means limited to the United States or English-language websites and communities; as far as I know, however, there are no studies of the global devotee population.

10. It is this siting of desire in an amputee’s stump that leads most outsiders, including medical professionals, to cast devoteeism as a form of fetishism (a form of sexual desire in which sexual gratification is tied to the real or fantasized presence of an object or body part, often to the point of obsession). Devotees, however, resist this characterization for two reasons: first, they object to the medicalization of their desires, asserting that there is nothing pathological or diagnosable in their attraction for amputees; and second, they insist that they are not fixated on stumps, but are attracted to the “whole person,” so the label does not accurately apply. Although I am sympathetic with their first complaint—I, too, am reluctant to cast their attraction (as opposed to their behavior) as pathological—I have my doubts about the second; as I suggest here, their understanding of the “whole person” seems completely bound up in the stump itself.

11. When Paul McCartney’s (now defunct) relationship with Heather Mills first became public, devotee websites buzzed with the news that McCartney had finally “come out” as a devotee. Despite the fact that McCartney had never expressed a particular desire for disabled women, the mere fact of his involvement with an amputee was seen as irrefutable evidence of his “true” identity. In this characterization of the McCartney and Mills relationship, her status as an amputee is the only factor that matters.

12. Personal communication, 26 October 2000. For a brief reflection on the use of

the term “ladies” in amputee-devotee communities, and an extended analysis of gender roles within devoteeism, see Kafer, “Inseparable.”

13. I want to caution against reading K.’s remarks as an argument about the irrelevance of sexuality to rehabilitation. Disability rights activists and disability studies scholars have argued persuasively about the importance of holistic approaches to rehab, including information about sexual function and attention to sexual self-awareness. K.’s comments are noteworthy for their challenge to J.’s single-mindedness; I read them less as an argument about the place of sexuality in the recovery process than as a rebuke of J.’s approach.

14. See, among others, the work of Block; Clare; Kafer; O’Toole; Shakespeare et al.; Waxman-Fiduccia; and A. Wilkerson for examinations of sexuality and people with disabilities.

15. ASCORworld, for example, bans from future events any person who “acts out” or “maliciously causes trouble,” discouraging members from taking unauthorized photographs and loitering uninvited at amputee events.

16. Nattress’s complete list: (1) Seeing a woman on crutches or limping, following her to verify her status as an amputee, and then learning as much as possible about her. (2) Sitting in a public space where others have seen an amputee in the hopes of seeing, photographing, and possibly meeting her. (3) Collecting photographs and articles about female amputees. (4) Drawing pictures of amputee women or modifying existing pictures to make the featured woman into an amputee [a process known as “electronic surgery”]. (5) Keeping a detailed list of female amputees. (6) Developing programs or starting organizations that serve amputees. (7) Calling female amputees whom one has read about in order to learn what their lives are like. (8) Carrying on extensive correspondence with a female amputee, often pretending to be a female amputee oneself. (9) Asking an amputee one already knows for the names and numbers of other female amputees. (10) Writing fiction starring amputee women or women who become amputees. (11) Researching the amputee-devotee community or disability issues in order to meet disabled women. (12) Possessing and providing information on wheelchairs, prosthetics, and other assistive devices to women with disabilities (18–19). Few devotees, Nattress stresses, partake in all twelve. The difficulty in ascertaining which behaviors constitute harassment within devoteeism, and the ease with which secretly following and photographing women is accepted, is evident in the wide range of behavior in Nattress’s list. Writing fiction about amputees is a completely different kind of activity from following an amputee home, yet they are presented here, side-by-side, as if no such difference existed.

Number eight in Nattress’s list—masquerading as an amputee—begins to blur the line between “devotees,” “pretenders,” and “wannabes.” Pretending in Nattress’s schema, however, is more a means to an end—a way to meet female amputees, the object of a devotee’s desire—than an end in itself. For most pretenders and wannabes, the erotic attraction is to appearing and/or being disabled oneself, rather than to

being sexually or romantically involved with another disabled person (Bruno; Elliott; Harmon, this edited volume).

17. Opinions are mixed as to the best way to accomplish this increased social acceptance, but there appears to be agreement that such an increase is necessary. Although I do not have space to explore it here, the question of a possible link between the devotees' desire and the social taboos surrounding that desire merits exploration. Would devoteeism be as appealing for some of these men if it were no longer so esoteric or taboo? Are they as drawn to the possibility of social and sexual transgression as they are to disabled bodies? Is part of the pleasure of devoteeism found in bonding with other men around secret desires?

18. Gregson profiles an amputee who experiences this fear.

19. During the annual meeting of the Amputee Coalition of America (ACA) in 1996, female amputees held an emergency women-only meeting to discuss "the devotee problem" at the convention. Some women felt they were being harassed; others felt uncomfortable not knowing whether they were secretly being watched. During the meeting, attendees voted to urge the ACA to ban all devotees from future conventions and events. Immediately afterward, they invited LeRoy Nattress to present his research on devotees. Nattress explained to the assembled women that an outright ban on devotees was not only inappropriate but unfeasible. According to his research, 80 to 90 percent of the devotees in attendance were either spouses of amputees or professionals working at the conference (prosthetists, therapists, etc.). Based on Nattress's recommendations, the women decided to abandon their call for a ban and resolved instead to hold two women-only meetings at future ACA meetings (Nattress).

20. For a discussion of these difficulties, see Shakespeare et al. 74.

21. Non-devotee versions of such imagery might be easier to access for amputees involved in queercrip communities. For two queer meditations on the use of medical equipment in and/or as sex play, see Nomy Lamm's description of prosthetic legs as dildos (152) and Robert McRuer's analysis of performance artist Bob Flanagan (*Crip Theory* 181–94). For a sexually explicit and defiantly queercrip example of making a wheelchair sexy, see Loree Erickson's film *Want*, which powerfully combines footage of Erickson, her attendants, and her lover with a voice-over about living in an ableist society.

22. Most of the women depicted in professional pictures, such as those produced and sold online by ASCORworld, CD Productions, and other amputee-owned image sites, receive payment for their services. Unfortunately, many of the images that circulate among devotees were not produced under those circumstances. Collectors often have pictures of unknown amputees that they either bought from other devotees or downloaded off the Internet, and the Internet is littered with photographs of anonymous amputees. Because there are reports of amputees having their pictures taken without their permission, it seems likely that at least some of the pictures in circulation were obtained under false pretenses. Indeed, the proliferation of unauthorized

photographs renders it nearly impossible to determine whether or not the photo trade exploits amputees. Images that might initially appear the most exploitative—pictures of naked or partially clad amputees in sexually suggestive or explicit poses—may actually be less exploitative than the “candid” images of fully clothed amputees involved in mundane activities.

These facts render my pleasure in viewing these images particularly problematic. Most of the images that I find most intriguing are the ones of unidentified women smiling at the camera as they sit in the grass or work in their kitchens or move down the street. These photographs, unlike the “swimsuit and lingerie” and “donning and doffing prosthetics” photographs, are much more likely to have been obtained without the women’s permission.

23. Indeed, people with disabilities are not all similarly located in the rhetoric or logic of devoteeism. Amputation, paralysis, and deafness are commonly represented in devoteeism; autism, depression, multiple chemical sensitivities, and anxiety are not. Perhaps nonapparent impairments are more difficult to fetishize than those that mark the body or that necessitate some kind of adaptive (and readily apparent) technology. Perhaps also the rhetoric of disgust on which devoteeism relies so heavily requires some kind of visual marker. Thanks to Jen Patterson and Anna Mollow for bringing this difference to my attention.

24. For reasons that I hope are clear in this chapter, I have always been vigilant about not disclosing any details of my personal life to people involved in devoteeism, including my queer identifications. My silence, of course, is read as a sign of both heterosexuality and an acceptance of heteronormativity; as a result, I have been exposed to devotee discourses about the “causes” of homosexuality among disabled women. Amputees, I am told, occasionally turn to female lovers because they are unable to find men who will accept disabled partners. The specter of lesbianism thus serves as justification for increasing social acceptance and awareness of devoteeism; the proliferation of devotees would render lesbianism unnecessary, a goal “we” all are assumed to share. This twist on the sexist and heteronormative position that all lesbians are failed heterosexuals unquestionably affected my stance toward devotees, making it more difficult for me to accept them as “fellow deviants.” For a brief examination of heterosexism within devoteeism, see Kafer, “Inseparable.” For a satirical take on the assumption that disabled people turn to same-sex relationships because of an inability to find heterosexual partners, see Walloch.

25. Clare’s and Lurie’s stories are part of a small but growing number of memoirs, essays, and manifestos that present sex and sexuality as an integral part of the lives of disabled people (e.g., Finkelstein; Kleege; Linton, *My Body*; Lamm; O’Toole; *Want*). I focus on this particular example rather than others because it explicitly addresses the issue of desiring disability, of finding the erotic in a particular bodily sign of impairment.