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Splitting Sexuality and Disability: A Content Analysis and Case Study of Internet Pornography featuring a Female Wheelchair User

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ABSTRACT

General social stereotypes characterize people with disabilities as asexual, invisible, and stigmatized. Therefore, sexualizing people with disabilities becomes taboo. The goal of this study is to explore how Internet pornography depicts a female wheelchair user. Using qualitative, inductive content analysis and a case study approach, I analyze 24 images from a specific, relevant website for a theme that appears most prevalent in sexuality and disability literature, the sexuality/disability split, wherein individuals’ sexualities are not pictured, felt, or acknowledged in concomitance with their disabilities. My results indicate that a sexuality/disability split does occur to some degree, but that the subject also challenges the sexuality/disability split. Finally, I show how these results apply to an emerging interactionist paradigm of feminist and disability theories.
INDEX WORDS: Content analysis, Disability, Disability theory, Feminist theory, Internet, Pornography, Wheelchair, Women
SPLITTING SEXUALITY AND DISABILITY: A CONTENT ANALYSIS AND CASE STUDY OF INTERNET PORNOGRAPHY FEATURING A FEMALE WHEELCHAIR USER

by

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INTRODUCTION

General social stereotypes characterize people with disabilities\(^1\) as asexual and invisible (Shakespeare, Gillespie-Sells, and Davies 1996). Therefore, sexualizing people with disabilities becomes taboo. The physical embodiment of disability, as well as how one’s disabled body is depicted or represented sexually, can be difficult to negotiate when one’s sexuality is not recognized and/or is a taboo topic. People with disabilities must be seen as sexual people in order to be seen as whole people.

As a young person paralyzed at the age of 10, no one - family, doctors, nor friends - discussed sexuality with me at any point in my adolescence. During my college years, with the advent of increased access to the Internet for many individuals living in the United States, I believed the best and most discreet manner of learning about sexuality and disability would be to gather information online. I found that there were many websites that discussed these issues, but that there was a lack of constructive and down-to-earth information. Most information was presented as either: experiential narratives, provided by people with disabilities themselves through message boards or listservs; groups of people with disabilities searching for similar information and a community with which to discuss similar issues; or advice to experiment and try different things because disabilities are often unique to each person. I found no “how-to” website. In addition to these basic categories of the results of my pursuits, I also learned of

\(^1\) In the United States, one group prefers the terminology people with disabilities in concordance with what is called “people-first language,” such that the individual is identified first and the disability is not labeled as the totality of the person. Another group argues that people-first language was developed by able-bodied people, most notably advocates for people with developmental disabilities (Albrecht, Seelman, & Bury 2003). This second group uses the terminology, as do people in the United Kingdom, disabled people, “emphasizing minority group politics” (Albrecht et al. 2001: 3). In my thesis I use the terms people with disabilities and disabled people interchangeably. Additionally, I use the term wheelchair user as a personal preference to signify not only the specificity of my case study, but also to counter the popular and antiquated notion/language that wheelchair users are “confined” to their wheelchairs.
devotees² and of pornography that featured wheelchair users. While many individuals in the general public do not know about these phenomena, I learned about them through simple Internet searches for information on sexuality and disability. When discussing research topics with my thesis advisor, she suggested I analyze Internet pornography that features female wheelchair users. From the literature on sexuality and disability, I found that this was an important issue already being studied and that my research would contribute to the discussion.

This study explores, through qualitative and quantitative content analysis, a case study of how one Internet pornography website depicts a female wheelchair user. Further, I include a review of the literature of how able-bodied women are portrayed in pornography, and compare my findings to those of other scholars. In order to examine how a female wheelchair user is depicted within Internet pornography, I analyze the depictions for one specific theme that appears most prevalent in pornography and disability/sexuality literature: the person/body split (Parritt and O’Callaghan 2000; Schriempf 2001; Zitzelsberger 2005), or what, in my analysis, I call the sexuality/disability split. Parritt and O’Callaghan (2000) discuss the person/body split as the main finding of their study on sexual and relationship therapists’ treatment and management of clients with disabilities. Specifically, they note that the therapists feel inadequately trained and uncomfortable thinking of people with disabilities as sexual individuals; they cope by separating their clients’ sexualities and sexual relationships from their clients’ disabilities, hence the person/body split (Parritt and O’Callaghan 2000). Schriempf (2001) and Fiduccia (1999) also discuss a variation of this theme regarding Ellen Stohl, a paraplegic woman posing for Playboy in the June 1987 issue. Schriempf (2001) argues that, although Stohl exercises agency in posing for Playboy, the poses separate her disability from her sexuality:

² Those individuals who are sexually attracted to people with disabilities. This attraction is generally based on disability alone.
In the porn shots, her disability is rendered invisible. Her wheelchair, her primary means of mobility, is absent. She does not pose standing, but always sitting or lying down; there are no visible indications of her paraplegia. Yet, they include photographs of her in her everyday life, doing things that are not typically perceived as things that disabled people can participate in. A distinction is being made between her life as a sexual being and her “life on the streets”; in one, she has a clearly depicted sexuality, in the other; she has a clearly visible disability. The two aspects of her self are neatly divided. The editors offer the everyday life pictures as proof of her disability, rather than present her sexuality in conjunction with her disability. Indeed, her disability does not matter because, in these pictures, it is divorced from her sexuality (Schriempf 2001: 56).

Finally, Zitzelsberger (2005) also discusses the sexuality/disability split in relationship to disabled women’s multiple visibilities: invisibility, visibility, and hypervisibility. Disabled women’s bodily differences from able-bodied women are indicative of the hypervisibility they experience. Zitzelsberger (2005) and others (Fiduccia 1999; Parritt and O’Callaghan 2000; Schriempf 2001) find that the women’s disabilities are visible to the public, but their lives and selves outside of their disabilities remain invisible.

Shakespeare et al. (1996) find that little research has been done on disabled people’s sexuality. The research that is available does not discuss the changes that have taken place within the disability movement in which disabled people resist marginalization, and fight for their rights (Shakespeare et al. 1996). Heider and Harp (2002) state that most of the academic research on Internet pornography addresses legal issues and rarely anything else. Both of these domains require and deserve more attention and more research. The Internet is a booming space for pornography (Barron and Kimmel 2000; Waskul 2004; Hughes 2004; Langman 2004), as well as an increasingly popular medium of expression for people with disabilities, as it is more easily accessible to people with disabilities than many outdoor activities. Finally, as I will discuss below, the problems of women with disabilities are not addressed by feminist theory, nor does disability theory adequately address the issues of disabled women (Schriempf 2001). My research contributes to an emerging interactionist
paradigm of feminist and disability theories (Schriempf 2001) by providing examples and analysis of images that show both the sexuality/disability split and an interaction of sexuality and disability in the case of one female wheelchair user’s pornographic website. It is sociologically important to examine the ways in which marginalized individuals and groups are depicted in such a new and growing medium as Internet pornography because of the sexuality/disability split found in Ellen Stohl’s *Playboy* pictorial and presented in sexuality and disability literature, the lack of sexuality and disability research as a whole, the lack of Internet pornography research, and the unique interplay among these areas.

I utilize the sexuality/disability split as the main theme for analysis. Additionally, I utilize the theoretical framework that Schriempf (2001) sets forth for an interactionist paradigm of feminist and disability theories to guide my analysis. The major research questions I ask are: What is/are the focus/foci of the depictions? How is the woman depicted regarding her sexuality? How is the woman depicted regarding her disability? Often, placing sexuality and disability together is classified as deviant (Shakespeare et al. 1996). The same is true of pornography. My goal in this thesis is not to classify pornography that features disabled women as deviant, but rather to explore the expression of one disabled woman’s sexuality.

My thesis begins with a synopsis of the theoretical framework I utilize and to which I contribute. Then I provide a review of the extant literature on sexuality and disability, as well as an overview of the literature on mainstream pornography to provide a comparison against which to analyze Internet pornography that depicts female wheelchair users. Next I discuss the methodology I use to sample, code, and analyze the website images. In addition, I provide a discussion of the strengths and limitations of my research design. I then discuss the major results of the coding process of the images. Next I analyze and discuss my results within the
sexuality/disability split, compare my results with the major themes of the literature on mainstream pornography, and apply the results to the interactionist paradigm of feminist and disability theories. Finally, I conclude by discussing possibilities for future research.
THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Feminist Theory and Disability Theory: Differences

While both feminist and disability theories contribute to understandings of the social world in many important ways, they virtually exclude the specific and gendered experiences of women with disabilities (Schriempf 2001). There is a developing theoretical intersection between feminist and disability theories that is attempting to “adopt…a new paradigm, one that requires and enables a mutual dialoguing between feminism and disability theory in order to disentangle the complex interweavings of misrepresentations, invisibility, and the multiple oppressions of being female and disabled” (Schriempf 2001: 57).

There are many explanations for the multiple oppressions of being female and disabled. Society does not expect disabled women to be mothers, wives, keep house, work for inferior pay, etc. – all the things that patriarchy has deemed as “appropriate” roles for able-bodied women. Women with disabilities are not, in these ways actually viewed as women; they are rendered child-like and helpless, seemingly unable to reproduce, have successful long-term relationships, contribute to a household, contribute to society, etc. To this end feminist theory does not address the needs of disabled women because they are socially infantilized. Women with disabilities do not assume that they will be able to be sexually active, that they will be seen or thought of as sexual to a partner of interest, or that they have any sexuality at all. This is far more pervasive than the ways in which able-bodied women sometimes doubt their sexual attractiveness; there are generally held assumptions that people with disabilities cannot and/or do not want to be sexual (Schriempf 2001).

Fiduccia (1999), Garland-Thomson (2002), and Schriempf (2001) discuss Ellen Stohl’s poses in *Playboy* and examine the differences between the sexual poses where no visible markers
of disability are shown and the social poses where the images show her wheelchair. They report that Stohl claims that having others (men) treat her as a sexual person, a sexual object even, makes her feel complete and adult, not childlike as people with disabilities are often rendered (Fiduccia 1999; Schriempf 2001). Schriempf (2001) notes that while feminist theory states that all sexual objectification is reprehensible, that stance is not entirely adequate in this scenario because sexual objectification is Stohl’s means of liberation. Garland-Thomson (2002) invokes Harlan Hahn’s concept of “asexual objectification” of disabled people to explain this problem well; Stohl is objectified by the pornographic nature of the images, but because she has a disability, visible markers of disability (i.e., her wheelchair) are not present thus perpetuating the stereotype of the disabled as asexual. Garland-Thomson (2002) and Schriempf (2001) find that Stohl sacrifices her identity as a woman with a disability in order to be viewed as sexual. The readers of Playboy do not have to confront her disability in a way that connects it to her sexuality; she is simply a woman, not a disabled woman (Garland-Thomson 2002; Schriempf 2001). The problem is that Stohl, as a woman with a disability, whether represented as such or not, is not actually seen as a sexual (i.e., whole) person by the general public. Like many other disabled women, she has to create, re-assert, and continually prove her sexuality in a way that able-bodied women do not (Schriempf 2001). Therefore disability theorists and advocates do not “find any victory in the (in)visible mainstreaming of a disabled figure within the pages of Playboy” (Schriempf 2001: 57), due to the separation of sexuality and disability, as well as the pornographic (i.e., generally controversial) context.

Schriempf (2001) acknowledges the invisibility, misrepresentations, and multiple oppressions of women with disabilities. These factors contribute to the asexualization, disempowerment, and stigma of women with disabilities in the mainstream public world
(Fiduccia 1999; Parritt and O’Callaghan 2000), thus further contributing to their difficulty in achieving healthy and satisfying private (and public) sexualities and sexual lives. Women with disabilities pose in *Playboy* magazine (Fiduccia 1999; Schriempf 2001) and female amputees own and pose for Internet websites (Fiduccia 1999). However, in both media, while the women appear to have agency through their ownership of the websites or by choosing to pose for pornographic photos, they also appear to perpetuate gendered roles that cater to (able-bodied) males who view the pornography (Fiduccia 1999; Schriempf 2001). For example, even when there are “girl-girl” pornographic scenarios, the focus is on pleasing men; penetration is reserved for men, and thus reinforces hegemonic masculinity and (hetero)sexuality (Fiduccia 1999; Jenefsky and Miller 1998). Given this research, it appears that pornography depicting women with disabilities is similar to that which depicts able-bodied women.

Feminist theory promotes women’s strength, autonomy, and self-reliance as vehicles through which we can gain liberation from men and oppressive social and structural forces. While feminism recognizes women’s vulnerability, it works toward a world in which we will not be vulnerable toward such oppressions as violence, discrimination, etc. However, feminism tends to neglect recognizing that disability often necessitates dependence. Disabled women are vulnerable and need assistance in their daily lives, have physical/bodily pain and issues, and have bodies that appear differently from the normative white, heterosexual, middle-class, nondisabled woman (Garland-Thomson 1997; Garland-Thomson 2002; Nicholson 1994; Wendell 1996).

Schriempf (2001) and Thomas (2004) review and summarize the two existing models of disability. The medical model views disability as a result of impairment and does not take into account any form of social oppression resulting from disability. The social model views disability as a form of social oppression and does not acknowledge impairment in any causal
relationship with disability (Schriempf 2001; Thomas 2004). While attempting to contribute to a bridge between feminist and disability theories, Schriempf (2001) advocates an additional bridge between the medical and social models of disability theory. She states that the social and medical models consider “impairment” and “disability” as separate concepts such that “impairment” refers to one’s physical difference(s) from the norm, and “disability” refers to the effects caused by society’s failure to accommodate individuals with impairments (Schriempf 2001). Where feminist theory has its arguments surrounding the dichotomization of the concepts of “sex” and “gender” (Nicholson 1994; Tuana 1996), disability theory has similar arguments surrounding the dichotomization of the concepts of “impairment” and “disability” (Schriempf 2001; Thomas 2004). Schriempf (2001) discusses the material-semiotic interactions between “sex” and “gender” and “impairment” and “disability” and argues that merging the two dichotomies, and by extension merging the medical and social models of disability, will help accomplish the goal of an interactionist paradigm of feminist and disability theories:

Interactionism is founded on the principle that everything is “always already” social and material. This is not an extreme constructivist position. Materiality always already impacts the social—that is, bodies are not presocial nor are social practices divorced from materiality. Layered upon this premise, other “elements” or “categories” are also seen as interactive. For example, to speak of biology as “interactive” is to understand that there is no simply “objective” fact of the matter to be uncovered by the process of scientific study—the biological will always be embedded in a social, human/environment context. Likewise, that which is “social” will be understood to be composed of and contributing to that which is “biological.” Thus, the lines between things like “sex” or “impairment” (“biological” entities) and “gender” or “disability” (“social” entities) become blurred. There can be no bio-social split in this account (Schriempf 2001: 68).

Schriempf (2001) uses the term “interactionism” to set forth the idea that all of these concepts (sex, gender, impairment, disability) “interact” with each other. They are both social and material; there are both biological and social things happening in sex, gender, impairment,
and disability (Schriempf 2001). The same is true of the concepts in the theme I am exploring: sexuality and disability. To this end, Schriempf (2001) is not arguing for a lack of distinction between these concepts, but rather, that we should no longer dichotomize these concepts.

**An Interactionist Paradigm of Feminist and Disability Theories**

Simply put, a feminist disability theory will include the experiences and issues of women with disabilities (Garland-Thomson 1997; Garland-Thomson 2002; Wendell 1996). More specifically, feminist theory is well positioned to address the concerns of disabled women because it deals with the broad, interdisciplinary issues regarding how we categorize the term *woman*, the lived experience of bodies, appearance, normalcy, sexuality, identity, intersectionality, activism, representation, (compulsory) norms, etc. (Garland-Thomson 1997; Garland-Thomson 2002). Additionally, disability is just as culturally pervasive as gender throughout structure, social institutions, identities, culture, politics, history, and embodiment (Garland-Thomson 2002). Feminist theorists strive to discern commonalities among women, but we must also find where there are differences between women and work to explore women in different contexts (Nicholson 1994). An interactionist paradigm of feminist and disability theories helps disabled feminists to explain issues of gender and disability, as well as the experience of “deviant” disabled women’s bodies contributes to the growing feminist theory (Schriempf 2001).

An interactionist paradigm of feminist and disability theories as set forth by Schriempf (2001) must acknowledge that while disabled women are not expected to be wives, mothers, housekeepers, etc. as able-bodied women have been, they also are not doubly oppressed. Rather, they experience many interacting situations wherein gender, disability, class, sexuality, race, etc.,

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3 There are issues of disability identity that arise when discussing not dichotomizing the concepts of impairment and disability (Schriempf 2001); however they are not a focus of this thesis and would best be addressed in a future research project.
all interact with one another to form the disabled woman’s embodiment and experience (Schriempf 2001). Further, an interactionist paradigm of feminist and disability theories creates a dialogue between both theories to understand how bodies that are influenced by the interactions of gender, disability, sexuality, and impairment are “formed in, created by, and acted upon by society, and also act within and impact society” (Schriempf 2001: 67). By employing interactionism to examine disabled women’s issues and explore bodies as locations for meaning and knowing, we can gain insight into understanding how disability is created (Schriempf 2001). Schriempf (2001) challenges us to do two things: to ask how impairment-disability and sexuality interact with one another; and to ask how impairment-disability and objectification interact with each other while impairment-disability is simultaneously invisible within the objectification of disabled women that occurs via the sexuality/disability split. The interactionist paradigm will allow for understanding of how impairment and disability interact and how that interaction enables seemingly endless oppression through “sexism, ableism, heterosexism, classism, ageism, and racism” (Schriempf 2001: 72).

The heterosexual model of intercourse and sexuality that situates genitalia as the only sites for sexual pleasure and satisfaction does not work for some people with disabilities. By using the interactionist paradigm to reconceptualize sex, women with disabilities, indeed all people with disabilities, would no longer have uncertainties about their ability to be sexual. The new paradigm can reconceptualize erogenous zones as areas throughout the body such that the sexuality/disability split would no longer occur. Upon reconceptualizing her sexuality after her paralysis, Ellen Stohl found that she had many erogenous zones, and that even in those areas of her body where she had no sensation (i.e., her feet), she could have erotic responses (Schriempf 2001). Schriempf (2001) does not discuss the ways in which Stohl’s (alternative/non-genitalia-
based) erotic responses are facilitated, or the ways in which she experiences them. However, I presume that these erotic responses occur from either: visual stimuli; or dull but profound sensations that occur internally when external, non-sensitive parts of the disabled body are touched in an erotic manner; or perhaps a combination of these two possibilities. In turn, with the promotion of multiple erogenous zones, the negative attitudes of able-bodied people toward the sexuality/disability split might dissipate, and this conception could be liberatory for able-bodied people as well.

**Sexuality/Disability Split Theme for Analysis**

I derive my main theme of the sexuality/disability split from the person/body split theme of Parritt and O’Callaghan’s (2000) research. I build on Parritt and O’Callaghan’s (2000) theme to show the specific split that is often made which stems from the discomfort that arises when individuals attempt to think of people with disabilities as sexual people. Parritt and O’Callaghan (2000) frame this split as occurring simply between a person and a body, while I specify the split as occurring between a sexual person and a disabled body. I do not mean to suggest that one’s person is entirely composed of one’s sexuality, nor do I mean to suggest that one’s body is entirely composed of one’s disability. On the contrary, I believe that it is these concepts that are in question in the split, and that for the purposes of my thesis, sexuality/disability is the best label for these concepts. My research contributes to the developing framework Schriempf (2001) discusses by showing more examples of the sexuality/disability split, an interaction of sexuality and disability that illustrates a greater need for a bridge between feminist and disability theories, as well as a bridge between the medical and social models of disability.

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4 I use the term *disability* within the label of sexuality/disability split as an umbrella term, not to downplay the interaction between impairment and disability but for ease of writing and discussion and because it is a more generally heard term. Proposing a new term that encompasses the interaction of both impairment and disability would best be discussed in another research project.
LITERATURE REVIEW

Sexuality/Disability Split

Parritt and O’Callaghan (2000) examine the experiences of sexual and marital therapists who treat clients with physical disabilities. They interview six therapists, all of whom are female, and four of whom have worked with one or more disabled clients in the past year. The main finding of the research “suggested that there was a splitting resulting from a tension which related to the therapists’ awareness of disability and a difficulty in integrating the ‘body’ of the disabled client and their ‘person’” (Parritt and O’Callaghan 2000: 164).

Zitzelsberger’s (2005) work explores experiences of embodiment of women born with disabilities. Foremost among the findings is that women with disabilities experience both invisibility and hypervisibility, both of which occur recursively. Women feel invisible as sexual beings, as intellectual beings, or as capable beings. Women also feel hypervisible in their actual embodied difference from able-bodied people, or as their disabled bodies make them different from the normative female body, especially if they have achieved something not generally expected of disabled women, such as motherhood or marriage, or if they happen to be stereotypically attractive (Zitzelsberger 2005).

Perhaps most relevant to my research is Zitzelsberger’s (2005) finding and discussion of the recursivity of invisibility and visibility. Zitzelsberger (2005) states, “[w]omen’s bodies may be highly noticed, yet their capacities, lives and desires unseen” (394), and “[p]articipants’ negotiations took place in the context of the paradox of the heightened social visibility of their bodies and the invisibility of their selves and lives” (396).
Earle (1999) utilizes in-depth interviews and correspondence with a small sample of 11 individuals that consists of six students with disabilities, three personal assistants,\(^5\) and two people who organize the personal assistance in the university. The goal of her research is to examine how university students with disabilities and their personal assistants view the concept of facilitated sex.\(^6\) The personal assistants are recently graduated university students (between the ages of 21 and 24) and have no prior experience in caring work. Earle (1999) finds that, although having personal assistants in a university setting can provide students with more freedom to explore their sexuality, the personal assistants themselves tend to make moral judgments regarding the types of assistance they will provide. While the students primarily present their sexuality as a “need” or part of their life, the personal assistants often interpret it as a “desire,” that which is unnecessary and something a person with a disability should not have, which disempowers and desexualizes the disabled students (Earle 1999). Further, some personal assistants might refuse to facilitate sex when they disagree morally with the students’ sexuality (if the student deviates from normative and hegemonic heterosexuality).

In their study of sexual and marital therapists, Parritt and O’Callaghan (2000: 160) find that the person/body split is created by the therapists’ “anxiety [regarding] asking clients about sex and disability,” and “perception of disabled clients’ sexuality as ‘different’” such that the therapists do not acknowledge the importance of the disability in the relationship and the individual’s life. The therapists only focus on the relationships between the couples and work on issues of the disabilities separately, and even sometimes pretend that the disability does not exist

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\(^5\) Personal assistants are those individuals who act as caregivers for people with disabilities. Earle’s (1999) research refers to personal assistants who provide personal (i.e., physical care such as bathing, dressing, etc.), social (i.e., assistance with transportation to social outings/events, dates, facilitated sex, etc.), and academic (i.e., assistance with school work, classes, etc.) support.

\(^6\) Facilitated sex can mean many different things from assisting people with disabilities in attending social events, to helping position a person or undress the person in preparation for sexual activity, to assisting in masturbation (Earle 1999).
(Parritt and O’Callaghan 2000). As a more extreme example of sexuality/disability split, the personal assistants do not have much understanding of impairment (as a medical diagnosis and resultant lack of functioning); therefore some believe that the people with disabilities are physically unable to be sexually active. One of the personal assistants believes that the students’ impairments prevent them from even understanding sexuality (Earle 1999).

The therapists and personal assistants in Parritt and O’Callaghan (2000) and Earle’s (1999) studies deal with their clients’ disabilities and sexualities in interesting ways. The therapists utilize coping strategies that were helpful in situations with previous disabled clients, colleagues, family, or friends with disabilities or chronic illnesses to distance themselves from their clients or manage their discomfort with their clients’ sexualities (Parritt and O’Callaghan 2000). The study does not find that therapists avoid clients with disabilities but reflects that therapists are not trained to work with clients with disabilities; instead, they learn through practical experience from working with their first disabled clients (Parritt and O’Callaghan 2000). One personal assistant, the only female personal assistant respondent in Earle’s (1999) study, utilizes an empathic approach to working with disabled students and notes that if she had a disability, she would want others to acknowledge her sexuality as well.

Some of the therapists in Parritt and O’Callaghan’s (2000) study believe that the person/body split is a result of their own issues with disabilities, and not simply that the clients also use this split as a coping strategy. Indeed, some clients already developed the split in their romantic relationships before beginning therapy, and present with it intact at the initial meeting between clients and therapists. However, the clients often feel relief when the therapists finally discuss the disability as part of the therapeutic process (Parritt and O’Callaghan 2000).

Zitzelsberger (2005: 400) also characterizes the women with disabilities in her study as agents
who perpetuate notions of in/visibility given “the women’s knowledge and engagement with imposing and negotiating (in)visibility.” For example, the participants are aware of hegemonic body ideals and negotiate their bodies to conform (as much as possible) to this standard, which also affects how they see themselves (Zitzelsberger 2005). People with disabilities then experience not only a person/body split and (in)visibility; they create such a split as well (Parritt and O’Callaghan 2000; Zitzelsberger 2005).

The students in Earle’s (1999) research seem to resist the person/body split. They highlight that others’ recognition of their sexuality is integral to their transition into adulthood. Further, students employ strategies such as: discussing sexuality when interviewing personal assistants; creating ground rules at the beginning of the relationship with the personal assistants; and having care plans that include the students’ social needs. The students hope that this will create a comfort level both for them and their personal assistants, as well as limit issues of the sexuality/disability split occurring with their personal assistants (Earle 1999).

Mainstream/Able-Bodied Pornography

While a thorough examination of the extensive literature on mainstream/able-bodied pornography is outside of the scope of this thesis, I briefly explore some of the main themes in this section. These themes include the positions of antiporn feminism, those of sex positive feminism, the content of print and video pornography, Internet pornography, and research on how the media differ.

Feminists have long argued on opposite sides of the spectrum regarding pornography. Some believe it to be the cause of violence and subordination for women, while others believe that it is sexually liberating for women (Queen 2002). Dworkin (1989), one of the major anti-pornography feminists, defines pornography as coming from the ancient Greek porne and...
graphos meaning “writing about whores” where porne specifically refers to the lowest class of whores, “brothel sluts” (Dworkin 1989: 199). MacKinnon (1993: 22) states that she and Dworkin define pornography as “graphic sexually explicit materials that subordinate women through pictures or words.” Dworkin (1989) highlights the frequent arguments that pornography can be defined simply as sexual representations or depictions of sex as evidence of the degree to which women are thought of only as whores. Such a simple, non-descriptive definition that does not even mention the violence and inequalities individuals often portray in pornography, Dworkin (1989) believes, translates to a general attitude that lowers the status and value of women to that of whores. Further, antiporn feminists believe that pornography endorses subordination, degradation, and objectification of women; leads to rape; and causes gender inequity (Dworkin 1989; Eaton 2007; MacKinnon 1993; Russo 1987). Finally, antiporn feminists argue that pornography polarizes men and women as dominant and submissive (Russo 1987).

More recently, one anti-pornography feminist endeavors to put forth a new, “sensible antiporn feminism” (Eaton 2007: 674). She states that pornography should be defined narrowly as pornographic content that is inegalitarian, that which eroticizes gender inequality so as not to confuse it with pornographic content that is liberating for women (Eaton 2007). Eaton holds that many antiporn feminists mistakenly label simple depictions of subordination or degradation as endorsing these behaviors. She argues that it is the depictions of women “enjoying, benefiting from, and deserving” these acts that qualify it as inegalitarian pornography (Eaton 2007: 682). Finally, she states that a sensible antiporn feminism realizes that inegalitarian pornography itself does not always lead to rape and that pornography is not the only cause of gender inequality, although it is a strong indicator of such an outcome (Eaton 2007).
Carse (1995) does something similar when discussing legal restrictions on pornography. Invoking Dworkin and MacKinnon, she narrowly defines pornography as that which harms, portrays demeaning and degrading images or speech of women, or intends to harm or injure the subject. She further recognizes that her definition does not encompass all sexually explicit material (Carse 1995). In 1999, Carse replies to a response by Concepcion (1999) to her 1995 article. Concepcion (1999: 97) criticizes, yet somewhat misinterprets, Carse’s 1995 article and delineates many positive aspects of pornography that she defines broadly as “a form of sexual expression.” In Carse’s (1999) reply to Concepcion (1999), she discusses how her thoughts on definitions of pornography have changed over the four years since she wrote the first article. She acknowledges that a broader definition of pornography is important because there are many materials that can be considered pornographic and that to discern which are subordinative is left to interpretation. However, while she states that pornography has many meanings, she also states that some of the meanings are harmful (Carse 1999).

On the other hand, sex-positive feminists believe that pornography has other purposes. Feminists for Free Expression (n.d), a group of feminists who work to prevent censorship of materials based on a notion of protecting women, state that there is no agreed upon or legal definition of pornography, however, they define it as “material designed to arouse.” Queen (2002) states that pornography allows individuals to acknowledge their desires, to realize their sexual fantasies, and allows individuals to feel that sexuality and sex are to be enjoyed. Further, Califia (1994) urges that pornography can be and has been used for sex education, entertainment, comfort, and to enhance sexual relationships. Sex-positive feminists believe that pornography can be liberating for women, allowing them the freedom to express their sexuality and feel
pleasure (Califia 1994; Feminists for Free Expression n.d.; Queen 2002; Russo 1987; Strossen 1995).

Some of the main themes found in research on print and video pornography are objectification, exploitation, and effects on gender-based power relations. Dworkin (1989) argues that some pornographic novels use the male penis as a symbol of power and manhood, and that pornography shows the link between male sexual pleasure and victimization, exploitation, and objectification. Additionally, Dworkin (1989: 113) claims that, “[m]ale supremacy depends on the ability of men to view women as sexual objects.” However, Bogaert, Turkovich, & Hafer (1993) study Playboy centerfolds from 1953 through 1990 and find that objectification, which they define as a lack of emphasis on personal characteristics, is not a major part of the centerfolds (Bogaert, Turkovich, & Hafer 1993). Cowan and Dunn (1994) find that college student volunteers who rate pornographic video clip materials (for themes that the researchers identify) believe that degree of degradation to women, dominance, objectification, and penis worship are the most degrading themes - more so than status inequalities, availability, and equal sex.7 They find that these themes portray women as subordinate to men, as sexual objects, and specifically that penis worship reinforces the androcentrism of pornography (Cowan and Dunn 1994).

Jenefsky and Miller (1998) find that pornography reinforces traditional gender roles. Examining pictorial narratives of sexual interactions between two or more women in Penthouse magazine, they find that although Penthouse magazine markets to heterosexual males, it has a preponderance of “girl-girl” sexual content. Rather than threatening hegemonic masculinity and heterosexuality, they find that it does the opposite by reinforcing such norms through the

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7 Equal sex is defined as that sexual encounter where “two people who did not previously know each other engage in various sexually explicit acts, without any difference in power” (Cowan and Dunn 1994: 13).
consistent focus on the viewer (male reader of *Penthouse* and/or male within the narrative of examined pictorials) and penetration for his satisfaction, not that of the women’s (Jenefsky and Miller 1998). Jenefsky and Miller (1998) find that the women who engage in “girl-girl” sex are enacting what they term performance (staging of “girl-girl” sex for pleasure of men), convenience or excursion (heterosexually-identified females performing “girl-girl” sex), imitation (“girl-girl” sex as imitation of heterosexual), and/or deviance (“girl-girl” sex with no references to heterosexuality).

The Internet is a growing medium for pornography (Waskul 2004). All new forms of technology (i.e., photography, VCR, DVD, etc.) have been and are being used to showcase pornography (Waskul 2004), however, the unprecedented increase in access that individuals have to pornography through the Internet is astounding (Hughes 2004; Langman 2004; Waskul 2004). Further, Internet pornography provides far more anonymity than visits to adult movie theaters, renting adult movies, and/or purchases or subscriptions to pornographic magazines (Chatterjee 2001; Langman 2004; Waskul 2004). However, while academics are aware of the prevalence of Internet pornography, very little research outside of that which deals with legal issues has been done on Internet pornography (Heider and Harp 2002).

Waskul (2004) details two major arguments regarding Internet pornography. He labels the first “skeptics,” the group that believes the Internet creates a loss of human interaction. The second he labels “boosters,” the group that believes Internet pornography is the “new dawn of sexual rapture” (Waskul 2004: 5). However, a third, less mentioned group argues that the Internet provides a space for sexualities that fall outside of the dominant heteronormative sexuality (Chatterjee 2001; Waskul 2004). Waskul (2004: 7) specifically mentions people with disabilities as members of this group who use Internet sex as “a meaningful context to cultivate a
positive sense of sexual self-worth.” Members of the third group also include individuals who create and view Japanese animated pornography (Dahlquist and Vigilant 2004), which the authors determine to be a solution to the boredom of routine, mainstream Internet pornography. Cybersex also presents a solution to the routinization of monogamous sex (Waskul 2004). Heider and Harp (2002) find that white men dominate the content and voices of Internet pornography. They state that while the Internet, as a new technological medium, has given voice to marginalized groups, the Internet has simply given these groups a format to communicate with each other. They find that much of Internet activity is dominated by pornography, which is still white male-dominated and white male-centered (Heider and Harp 2002).

Hughes (2004) finds that Internet pornography is a prime target for the sexual exploitation of women and children, as individuals often view them as objects or property to fulfill men’s desires, to cause arousal and ejaculation, as generally illustrated in pornography (Dworkin 1989). According to Waskul (2004), individuals who engage in televideo cybersex find a freedom in being naked, want compliments on their bodies, and want people to view them as sexual objects. He concludes that, although engaging in televideo cybersex disembodies individuals, other televideo cybersex participants identify them only by their bodies/embodiment (Waskul 2004).

Waskul (2004: 55) finds that, in televideo cybersex, men are still competing for women (there are fewer women than men participating in televideo cybersex), and “the traditional micropolitics of sex become paramount – even exaggerated – when genders interact in the nude on the Internet, or anywhere else.” Chatterjee (2001: 84), on the other hand, finds that Internet pornography provides a space for gender and sexuality performance, and a space where individuals challenge binaries of sexuality and “dominant cultural forms, … representations and
identities.” Further, she states that cyberspace makes it possible for the emergence of new sexual expression in a postmodern world, and that the Internet is a site for resistance and subversion (Chatterjee 2001). Finally, she argues that Internet pornography problematizes gender, the body, and sexuality such that the “representation of sex in cyberspace, then, becomes pure performativity” (Chatterjee 2001: 89).

Langman (2004) presents a unique perspective of violence within Internet pornography. He theorizes that because of the weakened economic system, decreased availability of jobs, and increased female presence in the workforce, men feel disempowerment, castration, and humiliation. Men find Internet pornography, specifically that which shows what Langman (2004) terms “grotesque degradation” of women, comforting. The types of pornography that Langman (2004) categorizes as displaying “grotesque degradation” are those that entail pain, excreta, etc. (Langman 2004; Hughes 2004). Langman (2004) theorizes that, while men who view this type of pornography feel comfort from their humiliation by degrading women, they also identify with the women’s pain as they feel the degradation and humiliation themselves.

Mehta and Plaza (1997) find that the most frequent themes in Internet newsgroup pornography are close-ups of different parts of bodies (43%), erect penises occurring with or without close-ups (35%), fetishes (33%), and masturbation (21%). They compare their results with other content analyses of magazine and video pornography and find that there is greater content of some activities (i.e., fellatio, homosexual sex, group sex, etc.) on the Internet than in videos and magazines, and suggest that there are different criteria for posting pornography to Internet newsgroups than other pornographic media. For example, users posting pornography to Internet newsgroups may post whatever material they like, whereas producers of magazine and video pornography must offer a wide variety of content for their audiences in order to sell their
products (Mehta and Plaza 1997). Barron and Kimmel (2000) also study three different media: pornographic magazines, videos, and Usenet images. They find that while their sample of pornographic Usenet images has fewer depictions of unequal power relationships than pornographic magazines or videos, those that do occur are characteristic of traditional gender roles (females submissive, males dominant). Barron and Kimmel (2000) find that, out of these three media, Usenet pornographic images contain the most violence, where videos have the second highest violent content, and magazines have the least. Men also perpetrate more violence in Usenet images than in videos and magazines. Across all media, victims of violence are more frequently female. Further, in Usenet images, not even half (47.5%) of the images feature consensual sex (Barron and Kimmel 2000).
METHODOLOGY

Sample Selection & Data Collection

My sample consists of one Internet pornography website that depicts a female wheelchair user. I selected a purposive sample (Schafer 2002) for content analysis (Weber 1990) based on a case study approach, both of which Zussman (2004) finds to be some of the best qualitative methods. According to Schafer (2002), given the nature of the Internet with websites appearing, disappearing, and changing on a regular basis, drawing a representative sample of a given population is very challenging. Therefore, he advocates purposive sampling when using websites in research (Schafer 2002). While some content analyses using purposive sampling of websites use already existing lists of websites for the population they study (Gerstenfeld, Grant & Chiang 2003; Schafer 2002), no adequate list exists for pornography featuring female wheelchair users. Furthermore, most of the websites that do have active links are paid membership sites which were outside of the realm of affordability, and some websites I found presented problems with connectivity and access even after I paid for membership. This purposive selection method means that my sample does not generalize to the population of female wheelchair users; however, it provides an important foundation for further research in this population. Additionally, I do not sample male wheelchair users given the specific and gendered experiences of women with disabilities. The website requires payment for access to the website content. While some content analyses of Internet websites analyze entire websites (Touchet, Warnock, Yates, & Wilkins 2007; Weber, Story, & Harnack 2006), my project is smaller in scope and given that I was the only researcher working on this thesis, I did not have the time or the resources to use the same methodology. I chose the website I analyzed through results from
entering simple search terms in the Google Internet search engine. This methodology has been used in other content analyses as an appropriate manner of gathering data (Touchet et al. 2007; Weber et al. 2006). The search terms I used were: “pornography and wheelchair,” “disabled porn,” and “sex and disability.”

I chose to study a website that belongs to a woman who calls herself “Texas Rose.” I chose her website because she states in her Frequently Asked Questions section (FAQ) that she has been a wheelchair user for many years and tells the story of her spinal cord injury. Additionally, her website has a low cost for monthly membership. Texas Rose’s website is hosted by a major amateur pornography website, Southern Charms. This website hosts nearly 800 amateur female pornographic models. Within Texas Rose’s pages, she has a biography that lists her age (43), birth date, marital status, height, measurements, likes and dislikes, etc. She also has links for her photo sets, videos, several computer desktop “wallpapers” that feature pornographic images of her, her email address so that members can contact her, links to similar websites, and a “wishlist” for lingerie items that members can send to her (she states that all items must be in their original, unopened packages and will supply her mailing address upon email request).

I sampled still images, not any videos or narratives within the website. I sampled eight sets of photos from the website. Texas Rose’s website has several sets of photos that are a collection of images that usually, though not always, proceed in succession with a storyline or theme. At the time of retrieval, Texas Rose’s website had 142 photo sets. In order to sample eight photo sets from her website, I used systematic sampling with a random start and chose every 18th photo set. The number of images within each photo set varied a great deal and this

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8 [http://www.google.com/](http://www.google.com/)
10 [http://www.southern-charms.com/sc-main.html](http://www.southern-charms.com/sc-main.html)
created difficulty in generating a comparable sample of images. Therefore I sampled the beginning, middle, and ending images of each photo set yielding a sample of three images per sampled photo set for a total sample of 24 images. I saved each photo set I selected for my sample on a flash drive/USB memory stick and kept a printed copy of each image for quick reference.

**Research Questions**

When analyzing for the sexuality/disability split theme, as mentioned earlier, this study focused on the following main research questions: What is/are the focus/foci of the depictions? How is the woman depicted regarding her sexuality? How is the woman depicted regarding her disability? When creating the code sheet, during the coding process itself, and during analysis of the images, I let these questions, the theme of the sexuality/disability split, and the interactionist paradigm of feminist and disability theories guide me.

**Coding**

I analyzed the images for one specific theme that appears to be most prevalent in sexuality/disability literature: the sexuality/disability split (Parritt and O’Callaghan 2000; Schriempf 2001; Zitzelsberger 2005). Within the theme of the sexuality/disability split, I specifically coded things such as the parts of the body that were the foci of the images; whether and how often the woman was pictured in or out of her wheelchair; whether and how often there were visible markers of disability (i.e., wheelchairs) pictured; the types of activities (sexual and non-sexual) in which she engaged; the settings of the images; her facial expressions; and her apparel. The elements in these categories were coded using simple abbreviations found in the code sheet in Appendix A. Initially, I created the code sheet with a nonexhaustive list of codes based on what I thought I would find in my sample from a cursory review of other pornographic
websites of women wheelchair users. During the coding process, I added more codes to the code sheet as I found more applicable information.

I underlined in red the codes that applied to each image on its appropriate code sheet and added those codes that were necessary as I found them applicable during the coding process. After completing the handwritten coding, I created a typewritten master code sheet that included the new codes I added. I then created typewritten code sheets for each image with the appropriate codes for each image highlighted in yellow. Finally, I entered the data from the codes into SPSS using the values 0=No and 1=Yes where 0=No meant that the code did not appear in the image and 1=Yes meant that the code did appear in the image. During data entry I found a few more codes that needed to be added and did so at that time. Overall, the code sheet and coding itself developed throughout the process and into data entry (Weston, Gandell, Beauchamp, McAlpine, Wiseman, & Beauchamp 2001).

Some images had overlapping codes. For example, in many images the focal parts of the body were naked but were not wholly or even partially visible. In those instances I coded for both naked and covered. During coding I also realized that the code for “covered accidentally” was not necessary, and I added a new code for “covered partially” when a part of the body was naked but covered in part by clothing or simply cut out of the image. For instance, sometimes the codes for “covered partially” and “naked” applied when Texas Rose was wearing only stockings (i.e., her legs were visible but covered by nude or fishnet stockings). Finally, on a few occasions, certain items such as jewelry were visible in one image within a given photo set but not in another image in the same photo set. In these cases, the item was probably still present but not visible from the angle at which the photo was taken, so I did not code the presence of the item.
Theoretical Constructs

For the purposes of this research, I define the major theoretical constructs as follows:

I refer to disability as needing to use a wheelchair as a mobility aid due to the disabled person’s inability to walk (paralysis). I did not seek a website depicting a woman with amputated limbs, given Fiduccia’s (1999) work that suggests subgroup differences between the physical bodies of female amputees and women who use wheelchairs due to paralysis.

I utilize a broad definition of pornography: visual images that show nudity; sexual posing/manner of display; sexual language that is used to describe the website images; images that depict nude women in wheelchairs performing activities listed in the code sheet (see Appendix A); any sexual images wherein female wheelchair users are pictured naked and appear to be enjoying themselves and/or not enjoying themselves.

I define sexuality as the individual and/or collective expression (external or internal) of one’s sexual self or selves, respectively. This expression includes that which is performed for reproduction, pleasure, spirituality, intimacy, and power.

Sex category refers solely to women in this study, those people who have apparently biologically female genitalia and/or breasts.

Reliability

As the only researcher, I completed all of the coding. According to Weber (1990), this is a strength of content analysis because it yields stability, or consistency, in the interpretation of the codes. However, because I was the only researcher, my codes did not have intercoder reliability (Weber 1990). The data and conclusions are biased leaving room for error within my interpretation (Weber 1990). I did not interview Texas Rose personally to gain her insights into
her participation in Internet pornography, nor did I gather information on who utilizes the pornography, the ways in which individuals utilize the images, nor how they perceive them.

Finally, a larger sample size would yield greater results. For example, I only sampled one website, and I only sampled three images per photo set. However, many of the images in the photo sets were similar, therefore a small sample of images within the photo sets was not unreasonable.

The limitations I have discussed are those that are associated with content analysis methods (Weber 1990). However, it is generally agreed that for particular types of research projects, content analysis yields interesting and appropriate results (Weber 1990).
RESULTS

The first category, and perhaps the most important, is visible markers of disability. Within this category, I coded for the presence of a wheelchair, or other mobility devices such as braces or crutches. No braces or crutches were present in the sampled images, but a wheelchair was pictured in eight of the 24 images (33.3%). Further, a wheelchair was partially pictured in two of 24 images (8.3%). Therefore a wheelchair was present in some form in ten, or 41.7% of the images. However, Texas Rose was only pictured seated in a wheelchair in seven images (29.2%). In the other three images in which a wheelchair is pictured, she is still seen in the images, she is simply not shown seated in the wheelchair. In that case there is visible indication of her disability concomitant with her sexuality. (For a detailed summary of the frequencies, please see Appendix B.)

The second category, focal parts of the body, measured many factors. The first part of the body I coded was the breasts. Texas Rose’s breasts were pictured naked in 16 images (66.7%). They were covered in eight images (33.3%). They were covered partially in 12 images (50%) wherein she may have had one or both of her arms placed in front of her breasts or she may have been wearing lingerie that covered her breasts in part. Finally, she was pictured wearing some type of lingerie over part or the entirety of her breasts in four images (16.7%). Her breasts were a major focal point in the sample images. They were pictured naked in over 50% of images. Even when she was wearing lingerie, she always showed some naked part of her breasts.

Her legs were also a major focal point; they were shown naked in most of the images (21 images; 87.5%). They were covered partially in 14 images (58.3%). Further, Texas Rose’s legs
were never pictured completely covered. She wore some type of lingerie, such as pantyhose, stockings, or fishnet stockings, on her legs in nine images (37.5%).

Texas Rose’s genitals were shown naked in seven images (29.2%). They were covered in 20 images (83.3%). As I discussed above, some of the images had overlapping codes in which a part of her body was naked but not totally visible. In those instances I coded for both naked and covered. She was shown wearing lingerie, such as underwear or a thong, on or over her genitals in seven images (29.2%) with her genitals spread in only one image (4.2%). There were no close-up images of her genitals in my sample. Genitals were not a major focus. They were only shown naked in 29.2% of images. This could be due to a small sample size, but it could also be due to the difficulties of positioning when one has a physical disability. For example, in the images in which her genitals were coded as naked, she was generally sitting upright, therefore her genitals were not easily visible.

Texas Rose’s head was shown in 22 images (91.7%). Her head and face were definitely major foci of the image. In the two images in which her head was not shown, other parts of her body such as her breasts, legs, and/or genitals were the foci of the images.

Texas Rose’s back and buttocks were not major foci of the images. Her back was shown naked in seven images (29.2%) and was covered in 19 images (79.2%). Additionally, her back was covered partially in three images (12.5%). Her buttocks were pictured naked in ten images (41.7%) and covered in 19 images (79.2%). They were covered partially in three images (12.5%). She wore some type of lingerie on her buttocks in seven images (29.2%).

A third category was race and ethnicity. I included this code in the case that there was another model in the images, but Texas Rose was always the main model in my sample. While there was one photo set in which another woman was present, Texas Rose was still present and
as the website owner and model of all other sampled images, I coded for her race only. Therefore the apparent race of Texas Rose in all 24 images (100%) was white.

Another category was position. She was pictured lying in six images (25%). She was pictured lying on a sofa or in bed, but she was never pictured completely lying down. Texas Rose was pictured sitting in 17 images (70.8%). Texas Rose was pictured sitting most often, presumably because of her paralysis. While she was pictured sitting in 70.8% of images, she was only sitting in a wheelchair in 33.3% of the images. Therefore she was pictured sitting in an office chair or in some sort of generic setting in other images where she was not sitting in her wheelchair. Usually she was sitting up somewhat but with her legs outstretched or she was lying on her side with her legs outstretched. Finally, in one image (4.2%) her position was unclear.

The fourth category was action. In the subcategory of non-sexual activities, she was pictured undressing in one image (4.2%), reading in one image (4.2%), posing in seven images (29.2%), sitting in an office chair in three images (12.5%), and applying sunscreen in one image (4.2%). She was never pictured transferring to or from a wheelchair. In the subcategory of sexual activities, within the further subcategory of receiving sexual acts, she was pictured with her knee tied with a stocking in one image (4.2%), and being tickled with a tasseled whip in the same image (4.2%). In the subcategory of providing/giving sexual acts, she was pictured holding and licking the nipple of another woman in one image (4.2%). In the subcategory of mutual sexual acts, she and another woman were pictured petting/touching each other’s arms in one image (4.2%). In the subcategory of solo sexual acts, she was pictured touching her breast in one image (4.2%) and touching her hair and her shoulder in another image (4.2%). In the subcategory of miscellaneous sexual acts, she was pictured holding her thong down to show her genitals in one image (4.2%). Finally, within that same subcategory, she was pictured blowing a
kiss to her audience in six images (25%). She often did this in the end image of her photo sets. Texas Rose was pictured doing equal amounts of non-sexual and sexual activities in the sample images.

Many of her non-sexual activities were sedentary. Further, they were comprised mostly of posing. Even when she was reading and sitting in an office chair, these images were mainly poses. These are activities that many people think of when visualizing a wheelchair user. This does not necessarily mean that wheelchair users cannot participate in less sedentary activities, but it is less frequent that they do participate in more physical activities.

I included codes for transferring to her wheelchair (from another surface such as a bed, sofa, motor vehicle, etc.) and for transferring out of her wheelchair. Texas Rose was never pictured doing either of these activities in my sample images. This is a daily occurrence for all wheelchair users. I assume that this did occur in other images that did not appear in my sample as in one of the photo sets in my sample Texas Rose was shown sitting in her wheelchair and later was shown sitting on another surface. Again, this absence could have resulted from my small sample size, but it is interesting nonetheless.

The sexual activities in which Texas Rose participated were mostly very tame and not overtly sexual. In the images in which she had a partner, she was with another woman. They used sexual props (tasseled whips, stockings, etc.) but in a tame manner; their interaction appeared playful. The image in which she held and licked another woman’s nipple was the most overtly sexual act that occurred in my sample. In six images, the end images in six of the eight photo sets, she blew a kiss good-bye to her audience, thus ending the photo set in a less overtly sexual manner.
Within the category of setting of the images, in the subcategory of outdoor setting, Texas Rose was pictured on the beach in two images (8.3%), in a yard in three images (12.5%), and in a pool in two images (8.3%). Within the subcategory of indoor setting, she was pictured in a bedroom in three images (12.5%) and in a bed in three images (12.5%) as well. She was pictured in an office in six images (25%), on a sofa in three images (12.5%), with a computer-generated background of roses in one image (4.2%), and in a generic or unclear indoor setting in six images (25%). The settings in which Texas Rose was pictured appeared rather plain. The office where she was shown looked like a home office that had nothing but a desk and a laptop. The beach setting was computer-generated as was the background of roses. The pool where she was pictured was a plastic children’s pool.

Texas Rose had several expressions in the sample images. She appeared happy in seven images (29.2%), excited in one image (4.2%), angry in one image (4.2%), sensual in eight images (33.3%), thinking in one image (4.2%), serious in one image (4.2%), concentrating in one image (4.2%), and having a flat or generic expression in one image (4.2%). There is a gap in the results in this category. I could not code for facial expression in the images in which her head was not shown, and the remaining image without a facial expression code did not show enough of Texas Rose’s face to ascertain a facial expression. Generally, her facial expressions conveyed happiness and sensuality. I coded her facial expression as sensual most often in the end images when she was blowing a kiss good-bye to her audience.

The final four categories related to Texas Rose’s cosmetic appearance: her clothing, jewelry, hair, and makeup. Because Texas Rose wore several types of clothing, I subcategorized them for the purposes of reporting the results here. For details of the items in these subcategories, please see the code sheet in Appendix A and the frequency table in Appendix B.
She wore some type of lingerie in 17 images (70.9%). She wore some type of outerwear in 14 images (58.5%). Finally, she wore high-heeled shoes in 13 images (54.2%) and socks in two images (8.3%). There was some overlap in this category as well. For example, in some images Texas Rose wore both lingerie items and general outerwear. I coded for all items she was wearing.

General stereotypes characterize women with disabilities as asexual and unconcerned with physical and sexual appearance. However, Texas Rose wore some type of lingerie in 17 images (70.9%). She also wore high-heeled shoes in 13 images (54.2%). Because wheelchair users are seated in their wheelchairs, many do not wear high-heels and the general public does not think of female wheelchair users as wearing high-heeled shoes.

Texas Rose wore earrings in 11 images (45.8%), some type of necklace in eight images (33.3%), eyeglasses in three images (12.5%), and sunglasses in one image (4.2%). She wore her hair up in nine images (37.5%) and down in 13 images (54.2%). Finally, she wore makeup in 15 images (62.5%). Texas Rose, again challenging the generally held belief that women with disabilities are not concerned with physical appearance and thus not sexual, wore some type of jewelry (earrings or a necklace, and sometimes both) in 19 images (79.2%). She wore makeup, another symbol of something that women with disabilities do not do, in 15 images (62.5%).
ANALYSIS & DISCUSSION

Sexuality/Disability Split: Texas Rose

One of the primary indicators of the sexuality/disability split is whether visible markers of disability are present in concomitance with the subject’s sexuality. Overall, a wheelchair, Texas Rose’s primary means of mobility and her only visible marker of disability, appears in ten images (41.7%) whether it is fully shown and she is sitting in it (N=7; 29.2%), it is fully shown but she is not sitting in it (N=1; 4.2%), or it is shown partially and she is not sitting in it (N=2; 8.3%). In the remaining 14 images (58.3%) there is no visible marker of disability/wheelchair to signify that Texas Rose has a disability. In this regard there is some indication of the sexuality/disability split.

The types of activities that occur when there is and when there is not a visible marker of disability can also indicate the presence or absence of the sexuality/disability split. Most of the overtly sexual activity or poses take place when there is no wheelchair shown. For example, when Texas Rose is sitting in her wheelchair her actions consist of posing, undressing, and blowing a kiss to the audience. When the wheelchair is partially or fully pictured but she is not sitting in it her actions consist of applying sunscreen, blowing a kiss to the audience, and holding her thong down to show her genitals, the most sexual action that occurs when her wheelchair is in view in some manner in the images. However, when her wheelchair is not pictured her actions are more varied and more sexual. They include reading, posing and/or sitting in an office chair, blowing a kiss to the audience, touching her breast, touching her hair and shoulder, mutual petting/she and another woman touching each others’ arms, another woman using a tasseled whip to tickle Texas Rose’s leg and holding her knee tied with a stocking, and Texas Rose holding and licking another woman’s nipple. In this regard, there is a sexuality/disability split.
However, while there is an obvious split between the more sexual images where her wheelchair is not shown and the lack of sexual images in the presence of her wheelchair as a visible marker of disability, there are photo sets where she appears sitting in her wheelchair in all sample images.

There is a distinct lack of overtly sexual activity in the sample images. Even what I refer to as overtly sexual activity is fairly tame. Further, the non-sexual activities in which Texas Rose engages such as reading, posing, and sitting in an office chair are rather sedentary. These non-sexual activities are indeed typical of wheelchair users and do not indicate a split between the reality of disability and the sensationalism that can occur in pornographic images. Additionally, the sexual activities in which she engages, because they are not very overt, are also more typical of wheelchair users, especially since Texas Rose is usually acting alone in the sample images. On the other hand, I did not find any instances of Texas Rose transferring to or from her wheelchair. As I discuss above, transferring to and from one’s wheelchair is absolutely necessary in a wheelchair user’s daily life. I assume that transfers do occur in images that are not included in the sample because in some photo sets she appears in her wheelchair and then on other surfaces, but I still wonder if these occurrences are shown as part of the photo sets. This is an important part of sexuality and disability, and because the photo sets are a succession of Texas Rose’s actions, transfers to and from her wheelchair should be included.

The parts of her body that are major focal points are her breasts, legs, and her head. I define these as the major foci because they are shown naked most often in the sample images. Nearly the same amounts of these parts of her body are shown naked whether or not the wheelchair is present. Therefore a sexuality/disability split does not occur here. Further, the images on Texas Rose’s website are not social; she is not pictured shopping, dining at a
restaurant, cooking, watching television, etc. She is pictured specifically for the purpose of pornography. However, while she may not always appear naked, she always appears in succession of reaching that point. Therefore there is no split in her social and sexual images/selves because there are no social images. Again, this shows the viewer that Texas Rose, her sexuality, and her disability are the main foci in a way that her life outside of these areas is not; she is not a woman who is sexual in some images but disabled and only social in other images, she is a sexual disabled woman in many different settings.

While the settings of the images are rather plain and unadorned, the viewer does see a home office, bedroom and bed, sofa, yard with a pool, and computer-generated backgrounds of a beach and a bed of roses. It is difficult to get a wheelchair on a beach due to the types of tires on wheelchairs meeting with sand. There are wheelchairs specifically made for use on beaches that are available to rent, but it is unlikely that pornographic photos would be taken on a real beach. Therefore Texas Rose created a beach scene in which to place herself for one photo set. However, her wheelchair was not placed in the images. This setting does create a sexuality/disability split because wheelchair users are rarely seen on the beach, especially without a wheelchair in view. Overall, because the settings are so non-descript, Texas Rose, her sexuality, and generally her disability are the main foci of the images.

Texas Rose wears some type of lingerie (underwear, bras, fishnet stockings, garter belts, etc.) in many images. Additionally, she wears high-heeled shoes, different types of jewelry, and makeup in many images. All of these displays are contrary to the stereotypical depictions of wheelchair users and show Texas Rose as a woman with a disability who is also attractive and sexual.
Comparison with Mainstream Pornography

As I discuss in the literature review, there are many differing positions and definitions of pornography. My purpose in this thesis is not to conclude or state an opinion on the merits or harms of pornography but rather to describe and analyze one case of a female wheelchair user depicted in Internet pornography. I use the term pornography as an umbrella term to encompass many of the facets of pornography from the literature review.

The authors whose work I review discuss exploitation and objectification. Texas Rose does not appear exploited. However, as defined by Bogaert, Turkovich and Hafer (1993) as a lack of emphasis on personal characteristics, she does appear objectified in at least two images. In these two images her head is not shown; the focus is instead placed on her breasts, genitals, and/or legs. Interestingly, even in one of those two images her genitals are fully covered by her underwear. In the traditional feminist sense of objectification, wherein pornography is defined as the subordination of women through sexuality explicit images and/or words that dehumanize women (Carse 1995; Dworkin 1989; Eaton 2007; MacKinnon 1993), Texas Rose does not appear objectified (other than in the two aforementioned images in which her head is not in view). In those two images we are unable to see her facial expressions, therefore we cannot discern what the experience may appear to mean to her. However, objectification may not necessarily apply for Texas Rose who, as a woman with a disability, continually has to create, re-assert, and prove her sexuality (Schriempf 2001). Her display of pornography may be a form of sexual empowerment for her; in one of the two images where her head is not shown, her wheelchair is still partially in view, therefore her disability is still shown in concomitance with her sexuality. Waskul (2004) finds that people who engage in televideo cybersex enjoy being naked and want to be seen as sexual objects; the same may be true of Texas Rose.
Texas Rose’s clothing choices display a feminine gender presentation throughout the images. She wears jewelry, makeup, high-heeled shoes, stockings, her lingerie are pink and black or have lace or little bows on them, she wears a bikini in one photo set, etc. All of these items are typically feminine clothing and accessories. This is not surprising given that gender roles become exaggerated in Internet pornography (Waskul 2004) and that Internet pornography is also another medium for gender performance (Chatterjee 2001). Texas Rose often blows a kiss in the final images of her photo sets. This is an interesting manner in which to end her photo sets. It is not overtly sexual and it appears as if she is doing it specifically for the (presumably male) viewers of the pornography. Therefore it seems as if she is performing these actions for her viewers, not necessarily for herself. However, this is again complicated by the notion that disabled women have to continually create, re-assert, and prove their sexuality and may do so in the form of pornography (Schriempf 2001).

While violence is a major theme within mainstream pornography literature, I find no apparent violence in the sample images. The sexual activity in the images is very tame. Indeed, even in the images in which a whip is shown or used, it is a whip with apparently soft tassels on it and it is used in what appears to be a playful manner. Further, when another woman has a stocking tied to Texas Rose’s knee, Texas Rose appears to be excited and laughing; she does not appear to be hurt or upset.

Finally, many authors (Califia 1994; Carse 1999; Chatterjee 2001; Feminists for Free Expression n.d.; Queen 2002; Russo 1987) view pornography as a site for free sexual expression for women. Indeed, they believe pornography can be used as a form of protest, resistance, and subversion of subordination that is found within more violent and objectifying pornography, as well as against social and sexual taboos (Carse 1999; Russo 1987). Texas Rose’s images, and
those of other female wheelchair users, can be conceptualized as another extension of women expressing their sexual freedom and resistance to social norms and to an ableist society that does not allow people with disabilities sexual freedom. Carse (1999) calls for us to be open to different ways of women sexually empowering themselves, to allow women to express and explore themselves sexually without being criticized for using pornography (when it is not misogynistic) as the medium to accomplish those goals.

An Interactionist Framework of Feminist and Disability Theories: Theoretical Application

Texas Rose’s images both challenge the stereotypes of female wheelchair users as well as deny the typical wheelchair user’s experience. Therefore no clear distinction of the sexuality/disability split is present throughout the sample images.

Schriempf (2001) discusses the heterosexual model of intercourse and sexuality that finds genitalia as the only sites for sexual pleasure and satisfaction; this works for some people with disabilities but not for others. Interestingly, Texas Rose’s genitals are not a major focal point in the sample images; in fact, even when her genitals are a focus, they are also at least partially covered. There is more focus on her head, breasts, and legs. In this way, the images challenge the heterosexual model of intercourse and sexuality.

The focus on her legs is also intriguing. Texas Rose’s legs are naked in 21 images (87.5%) and covered partially in 14 images (58.3%); they are never completely covered. Additionally, she wears some type of lingerie in nine images (37.5%). What is most interesting about these data is that the focus is on her legs. She cannot walk, presumably cannot feel her legs, yet she has several images of herself with exposed legs. Further, in over half of the images (13; 54.2%), she is wearing high-heeled shoes. Indeed, she wears high-heeled shoes in images both where she is sitting in her wheelchair and where her wheelchair is not in view. While this
choice of shoes could be a resistance to the stereotypes of female wheelchair users as unattractive, asexual, and childlike, it also seems to deny the realistic experience of disability. High-heeled shoes present practical difficulty for wheelchair users. They can be uncomfortable and can be damaging to our bodies. For example, wheelchairs are customized to fit an individual’s body so that he or she can sit comfortably and not have detrimental effects of poor positioning and posture due to hours of being in the same position. Therefore when a wheelchair user introduces something into the seating system that puts the wheelchair user in a position other than that which was originally intended, it can cause posture problems that in turn cause consequent medical problems as well as discomfort. High-heeled shoes are one such item that can complicate seating. Further, Texas Rose may be aware that her viewers, the paid members of her website who are presumably able-bodied men and unaware of such issues, want her to wear high-heeled shoes in the images. She provides her email address so that members can communicate with her, therefore they may make requests about her clothing choices. By wearing high-heeled shoes, whether through her own agency or by request of her viewers and whether she is sitting in her wheelchair or not, she does not portray the reality of the disability experience.

A similar example of Texas Rose’s images distorting and denying the reality of the disability experience occurs within the final image in the sample. In this image Texas Rose and another woman are on a bed. The other woman has a stocking tied around Texas Rose’s knee and is holding it with one hand while tickling Texas Rose’s leg with a tasseled whip. Texas Rose appears excited and to be laughing while this is happening. However, as a person with a spinal cord injury, Texas Rose should not be able to feel either the pressure of the stocking tied on her knee or the soft tickling of the tasseled whip. From this viewpoint, a sexuality/disability
split seems apparent like in the example of the high-heeled shoes. However, Schriempf (2001) proposes that, contrary to the heterosexual model of intercourse and sexuality, there are other erogenous zones that become apparent after paralysis, even in those areas where one does not have sensation. Therefore this image and the actions within it can indicate a split but also a resistance to hegemonic norms. Additionally, most pornography is not a representation of reality. Therefore these images that show the distortion of the reality of the disability experience may simply be an exaggeration of mainstream pornography. Without knowing specifically what this means to Texas Rose herself, we cannot conclude which applies.

So, what does this mean for an interactionist paradigm of feminist and disability theories? Texas Rose may be working harder to make her femininity and presence as a woman more apparent by wearing more feminine clothing, lingerie, jewelry, makeup, and high-heeled shoes because as a disabled woman her needs are not addressed by feminist theory. Indeed, she is not actually seen as a woman, she is seen as a child. She is attempting to make her invisible sexuality and gender hypervisible. However, her disability sometimes gets lost in the shuffle during those times when she wears high-heeled shoes and when her more overtly sexual activity and posing takes place without a visible marker of disability. From a practical point of view, not all sexual activities can occur while a wheelchair or other visible marker of disability is in view. Therefore, because in ten images (41.7%) a wheelchair is in view, a major sexuality/disability split does not occur. However, there are things that Texas Rose does in the images that do not fit with the reality of the disability experience. On the other hand, she challenges the heterosexual model of intercourse and sexuality, as well as the view of women with disabilities as unattractive, asexual, and child-like.
Texas Rose experiences myriad interactions in the sample images. She is a woman with a disability trying to be seen as such. She displays her “sex” and “gender,” her “disability” and her “impairment,” and how these four concepts that Schriempf (2001) addresses interact within pornographic images. She creates and asserts a sexuality all her own that encompasses her disability and her femininity. There are those indications of a sexuality/disability split that occur when she distorts and denies the reality of the disability experience through wearing high-heeled shoes and having more overtly sexual activity taking place without a visible marker of disability. However, there are also indications of an interactive display of sexuality, disability, feminist theory, and disability theory.
CONCLUSION

There are many possibilities for further research within disability and sexuality. Most importantly, future research should study the interactive process between sex, gender, impairment, and disability, as well as how these interact with sexuality in women to further the development of the interactionist paradigm of feminist and disability theories. Additionally, future research should address similar issues for men with disabilities. Garland-Thomson (1997) discusses how images of people with disabilities from freak shows and literature affect and form their identities and the how able-bodied people perceive disabled people. The same should be done with sexualized images of people with disabilities. More research should be done to explore the disabled women who participate in Internet pornography: why they participate; why they display themselves in the manners they do; how this impacts their income; their relationships with partners, family, children, etc. Further, future research should examine the viewers of the pornography: how they perceive the subjects; how much time they spend viewing the pornography; what draws them to this and other types of pornography, etc.

Finally, this thesis shows the case of an Internet pornography website and explores how one disabled woman negotiates her sexuality and disability within this medium. Further research opportunities abound for this specific population and for people with disabilities as a whole. The number of people with disabilities is only increasing, therefore these issues will continue to become more salient for the general population outside of people with disabilities.
REFERENCES


APPENDIX A. CODE SHEET

Date Coded: ____________________

Photo Set Sample #: _______

Image Sample #: _______

Photo Set #: _________

Image #: ____________
(1=beginning image, 2=middle image, 3=end image)

Perceived Photo Set Theme:

Description of Image:

CODES:

• Visible markers of disability
  o Wheelchair pictured (wcpic)
  o Wheelchair partially pictured (wcppic)
  o Wheelchair not pictured (wcnopic)
  o Woman in wheelchair (wcin)
  o Woman not in wheelchair (wcout)
  o Braces – for any part(s) of the body (brac)
  o Crutches (crutch)
  o Body divided by materials/objects (bodydiv)
  o Disparate Images – mirror reflections show differences from perceived reality (di)

• Focal parts of the body
  o Breast (brst)
    • Naked (nakbrst)
    • Covered (covbrst)
    • Covered “accidentally” (accbrst)
    • Covered partially (cpbrst)
    • Lingerie (lngbrst)
  o Legs (legs)
    • Naked (naklegs)
    • Covered (covlegs)
    • Covered “accidentally” (acclegs)
    • Covered partially (cplegs)
  o Genitals (gen)
    • Naked (nakgen)
    • Covered (covgen)
    • Covered “accidentally” (accgen)
• Covered partially (cpgen)
• Lingerie (lnggen)
• Spread (sprdgen)
• Close-up (closupgen)
  o Back (back)
    • Naked (nakback)
    • Covered (covback)
    • Covered “accidentally” (accback)
    • Covered partially (cpback)
    • Lingerie (lngback)
  o Head (head)
  o Buttocks (butt)
    • Naked (nakbutt)
    • Covered (covbutt)
    • Covered “accidentally” (accbutt)
    • Covered partially (cpbutt)
    • Lingerie (lngbutt)

• Race and Ethnicity
  o Apparent Race (race)
    • White (wrace)
    • Black (brace)
    • Asian (arace)
    • Hispanic (hrace)
    • Middle Eastern (mrace)

• Position (pos)
  o Kneeling (kneelpos)
  o Sitting (sitpos)
  o Lying (liepos)
  o Unclear (unpos)

• Action
  o Non-sexual acts (nsex)
    • Grooming (grnsex)
    • Creating art (artnsex)
    • Talking (tlknsex)
    • Cleaning (clnnsex)
    • Sleeping (slpnsex)
    • Dressing (drsnsex)
    • Undressing (undnsex)
    • Transferring to wheelchair (ttnsex)
    • Transferring out of wheelchair (tonsex)
    • Reading (rdnsex)
• Posing (posnsex)
• Sitting in office chair (soensex)
• Applying sunscreen (asnsex)

○ Receiving sexual acts (rsex)
  • Oral sex (orsnsex)
  • Penetration (prssex)
    ○ Vaginal (vprssex)
    ○ Anal (aprssex)
  • Petting (ptsnsex)
  • Knee tied with stocking (ktssnsex)
  • Tickling with tassled whip (tikrsnsex)

○ Providing/giving sexual acts (gsex)
  • Oral sex (ogsex)
  • Penetration (pgsex)
    ○ Vaginal (vpgsex)
    ○ Anal (apgsex)
  • Petting (pgsex)
  • Holding and licking nipple (ngsex)

○ Mutual sexual acts (msex)
  • Oral sex (omsex)
  • Penetration (pmsex)
    ○ Vaginal (vpmsex)
    ○ Anal (apmsex)
  • Petting (pmsex)

○ Solo sexual acts (ssex)
  • Masturbation (mssex)
    ○ Digitally (dmssex)
    ○ With object (omssex)
  • Touching
    ○ Breast (tbssex)
    ○ Hair and shoulder (hssseq)

○ Miscellaneous sexual acts (misex)
  • Blowing a kiss to audience (bkmisex)
  • Holding thong down to show genitals (thmisex)

• Setting
  ○ Outdoors (od)
    • Beach (bchod)
    • Woods (wdsod)
    • City Street (stod)
    • Suburban neighborhood (nhdod)
    • Yard (ydod)
    • Pool (plod)
  ○ Indoors (id)
• Bedroom (bdrmid)
• Bed (bedid)
• Kitchen (kitid)
• Office (offid)
• Classroom (clsid)
• Shopping mall (malid)
• Bathroom (bathid)
• Showerchair/tubchair (scid)
• Sofa (sofaid)
• Computer-generated background of roses (roseid)
• Generic/unclear (genid)

• Facial expression(s)
  o Happy (hapfe)
  o Excited (excitfe)
  o Sad (sadfe)
  o Scared (scarfe)
  o Angry (angfe)
  o Sensual (sensfe)
  o Thinking (thkfe)
  o Serious (serfe)
  o Concentrating (confe)
  o Flat (flfe)

• Clothing
  o Tube top dress (ttdcl)
  o Thong (thcl)
  o Bra (bracl)
  o Bikini (bikcl)
  o Underwear (undcl)
  o Blouse (blscl)
  o Jumper (jmpcl)
  o Garters (grtcl)
  o Garter belts (grtbcl)
  o Tank top (ttcl)
  o Shorts (shcl)
  o Socks (sockcl)
  o Skirt suit (skstcl)
  o Vest (vstcl)
  o Skirt (skcl)
  o Blazer/suit jacket (blcl)
  o Pantyhose (phcl)
  o Stockings (stockcl)
  o Fishnet stockings (fstcl)
  o High-heeled shoes (hhscl)
• Jewelry
  o Earrings (earjry)
  o Choker necklace (cnjry)
  o Pearl necklace (pnjry)
  o Glasses (gljry)
  o Sunglasses (sgljry)

• Hair
  o Up (uhr)
  o Down (dhr)

• Makeup (makeup)
## APPENDIX B. FREQUENCY TABLE OF ALL CODES

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