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Intersections of disability justice, racial justice and environmental justice

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ABSTRACT

This paper argues that environmental justice (EJ) scholarship, activism and policy that aims to 'be intersectional' by definition needs to include disability and ableism and, moreover, will benefit from specifically considering disability as a category of analysis. Incorporating intersectionality into EJ work means considering the implications of intersectional theory for collective liberation, for explanations of the sources and consequences of multiple systems of oppression and for theorizing connections among related justice struggles. This paper first takes each of these in turn, providing an explanation of what constitutes an intersectional approach. It then demonstrates how a disability justice approach further enriches ongoing work at the intersections of EJ and racial justice.

Overview

This paper contains material about police brutality and state violence. (A content note about potentially traumatic material is used to alert those for whom it might be relevant.)

Environmental justice (EJ) work striving to be 'intersectional' must consider disability as a category of analysis. Throughout this paper, 'work' refers to scholarship, activism and policy. The first two sections of this paper outline my view about the most important elements of intersectionality as a 'broad-based knowledge project' (Collins 2015, 3) and of disability justice and its underlying concepts. These sections also explain how racial justice is an integral part of intersectional work and disability justice work. Intersectionality as a knowledge project includes activism for collective liberation, analysis and explanation of phenomena, and as a field of study and traveling theory (Collins 2015). The remainder of the paper, 'Applications: bringing intersectionality and disability justice to EJ work', takes each of these strands in turn in order to explore the implications of taking disability seriously in the context of EJ work. For example, intersectional EJ work accounting for collective liberation would not rely on 'disability fear' to forward the movement, such as the implicit stigma in some framings of autism. Accounting for disability justice also leads to more complete explanations of EJ issues. Cases highlighted include Hurricane Katrina, during which people with disabilities were disproportionately affected, and generational continuities in terms of lead exposure. As a traveling theory that offers opportunities for movements to connect, intersectionality offers a framework for understanding EJ, disability justice and racial justice as not separate but rather interconnected and at times the very same project. The deaths of Eric Garner, Freddie Gray, and Korryn Gaines, three people living at the intersections of racism and ableism, highlight the importance of attending to the politics of disability, race and the environment.

Intersectionality as critical praxis, analytical strategy and field of study

Critical praxis for collective liberation: basements and the 'but fors'

Intersectional analysis has a long history rooted in Black women's liberation movements, from Sojourner Truth's 1851 speech about being both Black and a woman, to the Combahee River Collective's 1977 statement about 'interlocking oppressions', to Kimberle Crenshaw's germinal essays (1989, 1991), which serve as a key signpost and foundation for contemporary analysis (Collins 2015; May 2015; Carastathis 2016; Strand 2017). The fundamental point running throughout Black women's work was that without addressing both racism and sexism, they would remain oppressed. That is, feminist movements that centered White women and left racism unchecked were insufficient. Black liberation and anti-racist movements that centered Black men were also insufficient, if they left sexism unchecked. Black women living at the intersections of multiple systems of oppression questioned the assumptions of any single-issue movements that had implicit in them

a normative 'representative' of that movement (e.g. a White gay man, a Black heterosexual man, a White cis-het woman and so forth). As Audre Lorde (1984, 138) put it, 'There is no thing as a single-issue struggle because we do not live single-issue lives'.

Philosopher Anna Carastathis (2013) recuperates one of Crenshaw's early metaphors in order to illustrate this point. Crenshaw's (1989) metaphor of a basement with a trap door illustrates how single-axis or limited-axis movements may fail people facing multiple systems of oppression. By system of oppression, I mean historical and institutionalized patterns that disadvantage a particular group of people based on their social identity. Systems of oppression include racism, sexism, heterosexism, ableism and so forth. In the 'basement' metaphor, 'all people who are disadvantaged on the basis of race, sex, class, sexual preference, age, and/or physical ability' occupy a basement with 'those on the bottom being disadvantaged by the full array of factors, up to the very top, where the heads of those disadvantaged by a singular factor brush up against the ceiling' (Crenshaw 1989, 151). In Crenshaw's initial work on intersectionality, which examined why Black women facing discrimination did not have legal recourse, White women and Black men could say they would be out of the basement '*but for*' *the ceiling*. However, Black women faced two 'but fors' – racism and sexism – and became legally invisible. Truly intersectional work aims to address all of the systems of oppression that might leave someone in the metaphorical basement. The 'Applications: bringing intersectionality and disability justice to EJ work' section of this paper will include examples of how EJ work can avoid perpetuating ableism, the system that oppresses people with non-normative bodies and minds.

Analytical strategy for explanation: intersections and traffic patterns

The dominant metaphor used in intersectionality theory is that of the traffic intersection (thus the name 'intersectionality') (Carastathis 2013). In Crenshaw's 'intersection' metaphor, no driver will take responsibility for the harm caused by a traffic crash at an intersection, and responsibility cannot easily be attributed. Crenshaw writes: 'sometimes the skid marks and injuries simply indicate that they [the injuries] occurred simultaneously, frustrating efforts to determine which driver caused the harm' (Crenshaw 1989, 149). The point here is that a single-axis lens of analysis will lead to an inaccurate explanation, or at best an incomplete one. In the legal cases Crenshaw analyzes, Black women are left unprotected by antidiscrimination law because the courts cannot determine whether sexism or racism was responsible. To extend the metaphor: if neither the sexism truck driver nor

the racism truck driver can be deemed 'at fault', the injured party is left with no recourse. Though the metaphor is imperfect – a provisional metaphor for intersectionality, which Crenshaw (1991, 1244) called a 'provisional concept' – it is generative in its illustration of how the theory relates to the academic and intellectual project of explanation. First, it may be impossible to ascertain the cause of the skid marks and injuries – or material effects – of the metaphorical traffic crash. Indeed, one of the chief explanatory insights is that often systems of oppression can never be fully separated as variables. Analysts may be able to make claims about their weight in the aggregate, but not for a particular individual who is leading a multi-issue life, or community facing multiple systems of oppression. The inability to isolate a single issue as the sole cause for harm demonstrates the utility of the basement metaphor and attention to the 'but fors'.

Second, not being able to isolate which proverbial driver is solely at fault and can be charged necessitates scaling out from the point and moment of the traffic crash for a more adequate and complete explanation. The traffic intersection metaphor implies auto-traffic, and broader questions include: Why is there such traffic in the first place? What historical processes led to auto-traffic, with cars and trucks moving so quickly and carelessly that drivers skid and people are injured? What contributed to the specific conditions of this particular intersection? Critical scholars such as Angela Davis (1981), Cedric Robinson (1983), Anibal Quijano (2000), Silvia Federici (2004), Maria Lugones (2010), Chandra Talpade Mohanty (2013), Laura Pulido (2016a) and many others have explained throughout their careers the ways in which colonialism and capitalism are racialized and gendered. The purpose of this paper is not to rehearse those arguments and debates but to flag their wide aperture of analysis and the importance of those analyses for work that aims to be 'intersectional' and also to describe the role of ableism. Below I will elaborate how attention to ableism contributes to explaining environmental injustice: what happens at the traffic intersection and how it came to be.

Field of study and traveling theory

Intersectional theory has traveled among varied interest groups, social movements and academic disciplines. As Patricia Hill Collins (2015, 6) writes, 'By the early 2000s, heightened interest in intersectionality fostered a blizzard of journal articles, special editions to journals, edited volumes, and undergraduate anthologies'. Yet in some cases, as the theory has traveled, some scholars have deracinated intersectionality's structural critique of power, privileging the commonplace standards of their own 'home'

disciplines (e.g. political science), and thus reproducing the power dynamics intersectional work was intended to challenge (Tomlinson 2013). The 'radical critique' intersectionality offers is that outlined earlier: liberation does not occur for multiply marginalized people without dismantling multiple systems of oppression, and explanations of social phenomena are incomplete if they do not consider those multiple systems. Near the end of this essay, I return to the idea of the radical critique as a means for bridging varied disciplines and issue areas. As EJ scholars, practitioners and activists continue to look to this traveling theory, they will face questions about 'how many more systems of oppression' or 'how many more marginalized social identities' to consider in their work. My own political view is that environmental sociologists and others doing EJ work and seeking to 'be intersectional' must by definition strive to account for all of the systems keeping people in the basement and the origins of traffic in the intersection. The purpose of this paper is not to convince readers who do not share this view about what intersectional praxis demands but rather to explore its implications for EJ to deepen its engagement with disability as a category of analysis.

Disability as a category of analysis

Ableism and disablement

Ableism is the systemic oppression of disabled people, which includes stigmatizing differences related to abilities, disabilities and impairments, the construction of disability difference as pathology and disabled people as unwanted 'Others' in society, and the marginalization, segregation and violence that follows (Russell 1998; Campbell 2009; Brown 2012). Ableism is shorthand for how ways of talking about and representing people interact with the material realities of people with widely varying body and mind differences (in some cases, 'impairments') and the environments they inhabit and shape. The important point here is that when I write 'ableism', I am writing about a system that has also created the very category of people it refers to. As gender has emerged from the interaction of sexism and 'biological sex', and as race has emerged from racism and phenotypic difference, disability has emerged from the interactions of ableism and variation in bodies and minds, or 'bodyminds'.[1] Though this paper focuses almost exclusively on the United States and happenings and movements mostly closely tied to it, ableism manifests in myriad ways in different places especially with respect to colonial, post-colonial and neo-colonial contexts (Erevelles 2011; Meekosha 2011; Grech and Soldatic 2016). Ableism and the disability category also have been deployed to support sexism, racism

and xenophobia (Ehrenreich and English 1973; Baynton 2001; Fjord 2007).

If ableism is the system, disablement is the process by which people become categorized as 'disabled'. It is somewhat akin to gendering (Bondi and Davidson 2003) and racialization (Brahinsky, Sasser, and Minkoff-Zern 2014), the processes by which people become categorized as 'not a "real" man' or as 'woman' or as 'non-White'. The process of disablement is the interaction between the social construction and the social production of disability. By social *construction*, I mean the ways in which language and culture, such as social norms, shape ideas about what bodies and minds are 'normal' and the ways in which ideas about the normal lead to social conditions in which people are disabled by their environments (Garland-Thomson 1997; Oliver and Barnes 2012). Societal and cultural constructions include built environments, educational opportunities and ideas about independence. By social *production*, I mean the ways in which historical processes, ranging from human reproduction and genetic variation to the development of industry, have led to the diversity of human bodies and minds: material differences (Abberley 1987; Gleeson 1999; Oliver and Barnes 2012). Socially produced material differences include the physical pain of aching joints following years of labor, the effects of radiation exposure on a growing fetus and the changes in brains exposed to different levels of lead. Models from contemporary thinkers in disability studies who sit at the intersections of multiple marginalized identities, such as Alison Kafer, author of *Feminist, Queer, Crip* (2013), and Lydia X.Z. Brown, co-editor of *All the Weight of Our Dreams: On Living Racialized Autism* (Autism Women's Network 2017), account for the material realities and lived experiences of disabled people and people living with disabilities, as well as the social structures that shape those experiences. These models implicitly adopt anti-essentialist materialism (Feely 2016) or feminist new materialisms (Barad 2007; Alaimo and Hekman 2008; but see Todd 2016), meaning that they conceive of disablement as a simultaneously material and discursive process.

Disability justice

Disability justice is the framework of the social movement to end ableism in conjunction with ending other systems of oppression. Disabled, queer and trans people of color have led the development of the disability justice framework since 2005, which the performance group Sins Invalid has elaborated in a booklet, *Skin, Tooth, and Bone – The Basis of Movement is Our People: A Disability Justice Primer* (Sins Invalid 2016, 5, 12). The disability justice movement distinguishes itself as a departure from the disability rights movement,

which focuses on civil rights within the liberal tradition. Four key elements are of particular relevance to intersectional EJ. First, the disability justice movement commits to 'collective access', which ranges from considering access to public events and in social movements to what it means to have a society and environmental conditions in which each person can access their version of wellness (Sins Invalid 2016, 18–19). Second, whereas the disability rights movement works within the existing political–economic system (liberal capitalism), disability justice activists are explicit about their anti-capitalist politics. They link this to a commitment to 'collective liberation'.

Third, disability justice includes a commitment to addressing multiple forms of oppression rather than being 'single issue identity based' (Sins Invalid 2016, 11–12). Patricia Berne's statement in the primer expresses the expansiveness of the disability justice framework in contrast to the rights framework that centered 'white experiences … and people with mobility impairments':

> While a concrete and radical move forward toward justice for disabled people, the Disability Rights Movement simultaneously invisibilized the lives of people who lived at intersecting junctures of oppression – disabled people of color, immigrants with disabilities, queers with disabilities, trans and gender non-conforming people with disabilities, people with disabilities who are houseless, people with disabilities who are incarcerated, people with disabilities who have had their ancestral lands stolen, amongst others. (Sins Invalid 2016, 11–12)

Berne's statement includes many of the 'but fors' that might keep someone in the proverbial basement, such as xenophobia, homophobia and colonialism. This is the 'collective liberation' piece of intersectionality.

Fourth, Berne explains 'able-bodied supremacy' in the context of multiple systems of oppression – tracing out the development of the proverbial traffic patterns:

> The histories of white supremacy and ableism are inextricably entwined, both forged in the crucible of colonial conquest and capitalist domination. We cannot comprehend ableism without grasping its interrelations with heteropatriarchy, white supremacy, colonialism and capitalism, each system co-creating an ideal bodymind built upon the exclusion and elimination of a subjugated "other" from whom profits and status are extracted. 500+ years of violence against black and brown communities includes 500+ years of bodies and minds deemed dangerous by being non-normative – again, not simply within able-bodied normativity, but within the violence of heteronormativity, white supremacy, gender normativity, within which our various bodies and multiple communities have been deemed "deviant," "unproductive," "invalid." (Sins Invalid 2016, 13–14)

Opening the aperture from single-issue analysis reveals a wider and more complete macro-social analysis. Above, I referred to critical scholars who explain how colonialism and capitalism have produced contemporary racism and sexism; scholars offering further detail and analysis about the elements of Berne's statement and specifically demonstrating the role of ableism in these processes include Brendan Gleeson (1999) and Nirmala Erevelles (2011) and authors in two recent collections of scholarly essays (Grech and Soldatic 2016; Malhotra 2016). They further expound on some of the elements Berne alludes to, such as how ableist ideas and language were part of the project of constructing women and people of color as less than human, less capable, less intelligent – suitable to be dominated, exploited, colonized – and how ableist logics continue to underpin neo-colonialist projects.

Disability justice activists have not shied away from questions of EJ. For example, Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha, also a member of Sins Invalid, has specifically linked the disablement in her home community to environmental injustice:

> When the wind blew from Norton's ceramic abrasive tile plant, you wanted to puke at my school, 500 yards away. Every year, another teacher came down with alopecia. Another teacher got breast or colon cancer. I was nineteen when my mother was diagnosed with stage four ovarian cancer …. The first girl I ever kissed grew up in Leicester, where there was a little uranium leak in the 80s. She found out she had invasive cervical cancer at 28, in her first Pap smear in 10 uninsured years. (quoted in Chandler 2013, 47)

Disability studies scholar Eliza Chandler quotes this material from a Sins Invalid performance in her paper examining the relationships among land, the social production of difference and disablement. Chandler reconciles the tension between Piepzna-Samarasinha's testimony with her own disability pride perspective by encouraging people to focus on environmental injustice as the problem – not an individual's disability as a 'problem in need of a solution' (Chandler 2013, 49). The idea is that instead of focusing on the injuries of Crenshaw's traffic crash analogy, the focus should be on the conditions that created crash-prone traffic in the first place. The remainder of the paper turns to these distinctions and to the ways in which considering ableism, disablement and disability justice will strengthen EJ work.

Applications: bringing intersectionality and disability justice to EJ work

The remainder of the paper provides examples for how incorporating critical attention to disability can strengthen EJ work. The applications loosely correspond with the three domains of intersectionality described: activism for collective liberation, analysis

and explanation of phenomena and as a field of study and traveling theory.

Critical praxis and collective liberation: accounting for disability

As described, doing intersectional work means not leaving anyone 'in the basement'. This includes not perpetuating ableism in EJ work. EJ leader and Africana women's studies scholar Valerie Ann Johnson (2011) has pointed out the ableism, however unintentional, of some EJ work in her essay 'Bringing Together Feminist Disability Studies and Environmental Justice'. Johnson's initial motivation for considering disability in EJ was considering access to the movement itself, when she attended an EJ conference with her daughter, who has an intellectual disability. She noted that EJ work has largely focused on race, ethnicity and socioeconomic status. She also writes about a more pernicious issue: the EJ movement has 'tend[ed] to conflate disability, disease and environmental injustice', often with the 'implicit assumption that we want healthy environments so that we do not end up damaged (i.e. disabled) and other underlying biases and prejudices regarding what is "normal"' (Johnson 2011, 3). Some EJ work and, more often, the environmental health research supporting it perpetuate disability stigma: ideas about 'damaged' and 'normal'.

For example, although Autistic self-advocates and their allies describe and explain autism as difference and variation, not disease, autism is often included with other diseases as a potential and unwanted consequence of toxic exposures. However, autism is a form of *neurodivergence*, a term first coined by Kassiane Asasumasu (Sibley) to describe the 'state of having a brain that functions in ways that diverge significantly from the dominant societal standards of "normal"' (Walker 2014). In one of the less subtle cases of environmental health research's ableism, Philip J. Landrigan, Luca Lambertini and Linda S. Birnbaum (2012), all experienced and award-winning scientists, published an editorial in the National Institute of Health's journal *Environmental Health Perspectives* describing the agenda, 'A Research Strategy to Discover the Environmental Causes of Autism and Neurodevelopmental Disabilities'. The agenda itself implies that autism is a sign of damage. Further, the editorial states: 'Treatment of [autism and neurodevelopmental disabilities] is difficult; the disabilities they cause can last lifelong, and they are *devastating to families*. In addition, these disorders place *enormous economic burdens on society*' (Landrigan, Lambertini, and Birnbaum 2012, 258, emphasis mine). This framing continues the ableist framing of people with disabilities as 'devastating' and 'burdens' to society and focuses on families rather than on neurodivergent

people themselves. I am not suggesting that considering families and communities as webs of relationships is unimportant or to be avoided. Rather, subsuming neurodivergent people into the family unit without considering their independent needs for liberation and flourishing repeats the sexist move, for example, of subsuming women into a family unit by focusing only on households and not the gendered distribution of resources within the household.

Critical scholars have also stigmatized autism. For example, in his book *Toxic Exposures*, environmental sociologist Phil Brown (2007, 98) described the value of theorizing knowledge production in environmental health as such: 'By understanding what impedes construction of a new body of knowledge about environmental factors in breast cancer, we can be helpful as science and the public turn attention to environmental factors in other diseases, including asthma, Parkinson's, and autism'. Instead of maintaining his focus on breast cancer and the other conditions in the book, which he explores in detail, Brown relies on cultural fears about autism, as well as Parkinson's and asthma, as a way to justify the research program. In my view, the research program is already good and worthwhile, and there is no need to introduce autism. Rather than being treated as a complex and multifaceted way of being neurodivergent, autism in these cases is framed entirely in terms of negative traits and impairment – perpetuating disability stigma, ableism and prejudice against Autistic people.

The focus on etiology in the case of the *EHP* editorial and off-handed mentions elsewhere in and around EJ work distract from the more important societal and cultural factors that exacerbate the disablement and oppression of Autistic people (Davidson 2010). It also ignores the shakiness of the evidence about autism as an 'epidemic'. The United States Centers for Disease Control and Prevenetion (CDC) has reported increased prevalence, from '1 in 150' in 2000 and 2002, to '1 in 88' in 2008, to '1 in 68' in their 2014 'Surveillance Summary' (Biao and the Autism and Developmental Disabilities Monitoring Network Surveillance Year 2010 Principal Investigators 2014), to which Brown (2007, 229–230) refers as well: 'The current era is full of mysterious diseases and conditions and unclear etiologies: lupus and other autoimmune disease, a growing number of allergies, unexplained increases in autism and neurological and developmental disorders'. Yet, these numbers are based on data about 8-year-old children living in 11 communities and do not represent the entire population of children in the United States. Within its own reporting, the CDC acknowledges the role of diagnosis and writes in plain language: 'We don't know what is causing this increase. Some of it may be due to the way children are identified, diagnosed,

and served in their local communities, but exactly how much is unknown' (ibid.). Autistic self-advocate and academic Nick Walker also attributes the observed increase to 'awareness rather than prevalence', which medical geographer Soumya Mazumdar et al. (2013) substantiate with their findings that neighborhood-level resources have played a key role in increased diagnosis.

Fear of disability as difference, therefore, does not belong in an intersectional EJ. Though some EJ work and the environmental health research that complements it relies disability fear, it does not have to (May and Ferri 2005; Di Chiro 2010; Kafer 2013; Clare 2017, 55–56, Fenney 2017; Gibbons 2017). As Johnson (2011, 3) states, 'What is needed is to disaggregate the possible results of environmental injustice (i.e. exposure to toxic substances emanating from landfills or hog operations that injure the body) from the person, however they are embodied'. Yet, it is not only necessary to disaggregate the results from the person. Intersectional EJ also must explain how environmental injustice came to be in the first place for individuals and communities: how did it come to affect that particular person or group (traffic crash with skid marks and injuries) and how was it that there were those patterns at all?

Analytical strategy for explanation: deepening understanding of EJ issues by critically attending to disability

Attention to multiple systems of oppression and axes of social difference also enhances the capacity for explaining a phenomenon, in this case environmental injustice. Here, I turn to three ways in which thinking about ableism and disablement can enrich explanations of environmental injustice.

Differential exposure and vulnerability – the traffic crash

Exposure. People with disabilities are specifically exposed to and vulnerable to environmental injustice as a result of ableism. Just as people occupying marginalized race and class positions are geographically segregated, so are people with disabilities more likely than those without to be geographically segregated, unemployed or underemployed, and poor (Russell 1998; Hemingway and Priestley 2006). This makes people with disabilities more likely to live in areas with disproportionate burden of environmental bads, such as near current or legacy factory sites. Moreover, those most likely to be subject to and bear the greatest burdens of environmental injustice often occupy multiple marginalized social locations. Scholars have demonstrated this with respect to disability, gender and race in the case of Hurricane Katrina. Hurricane Katrina, established in the academic literature as an

issue of EJ (Sze 2006), climate justice (Schlosberg and Collins 2014) and racial justice (Elliott and Pais 2006), illustrates how disability status contributed to the lived experiences of people in New Orleans, and why Hurricane Katrina also presented issues of disability justice (Finger 2005; NCD 2005). Public health researchers found that those, who did not evacuate 'lacked public transportation, misjudged the storm, were limited by their own or a family member's physical disability, and were more likely to be lifetime New Orleans residents' (Brodie et al. 2006, 1407). Among those who were evacuated, 27,000 people moved from the Superdome in New Orleans to the Astrodome in Houston, Texas. Some of the arrivals had lost their mobility devices and, until donated wheelchairs arrived, had difficultly accessing the restrooms in the large arena, while other arrivals who see and hear with different strategies than typically seeing and hearing people had to adapt to the new environment until accessibility was addressed after several days (Bloodworth et al. 2007). Lack of access to disability-aware spaces and underestimation of disability-specific supplies meant that evacuees were further harmed even after leaving the hurricane area. Evacuation exacerbated previous chronic health conditions as well given the extent to which low-income people relied on public hospitals decimated by the storm (Brodie et al. 2006). A disability justice framework understands that it is not people with disabilities who are 'unprepared' but rather ableism that has contributed to a larger system that has failed them and their families (Fenney Salkeld 2016; Kim 2016, 198–212).

Likewise, Hurricane Katrina created conditions for further disablement. For example, demographer Narayan Sastry and economist Jesse Gregory (2013) explicitly focus on disability as an 'effect' of Hurricane Katrina – making disability the dependent variable and accounting for age, race and sex as independent variables. Their analysis of data from the American Community Survey revealed that the increase in disability in New Orleans was disproportionately concentrated among young and middle-aged Black women, with the young faring the worst. Sastry and Gregory draw on the extant literature to review the potential factors contributing to multiple marginalization – young black women were caught at the intersection of race, gender and age in such a way that adverse outcomes compounded. As Black people, they were more likely to live in dwellings and communities that suffered the most damage, leading to loss of property and neighborhood ties. As women, they were more likely to be left with children after households broke up, and the difficulties children in their care faced post-hurricane may have been sources of stress and consequent mental health effects. As young people, new mental and physical impairments were more

disabling, the researchers speculated, because of their effects on ability to work, having younger children not as easily able to help with daily tasks such as shopping, and more limited access to financial resources. In their explanation, the researchers imply a contextual model of disablement as a result of historical processes.

Vulnerability. People whose bodies diverge from the 'normal' or 'standard' may face greater exposure to environmental injustice than other people. For some people, their bodily differences may also make them especially vulnerable to the effects of certain environmentally unjust conditions. For example, people who are immunosuppressed or have biological variations such as 'slow acetylation' bear a greater burden when exposed to air pollution, pesticides, industrial chemicals and a host of other *toxic trespasses*, a phrase Sandra Steingraber (2010, 279) uses to describe involuntary human exposure to a pollutant. As she explains, people who are slow acetylators have low levels of the enzymes that detoxify aromatic amines, a class of organic compounds used in pesticides and strongly associated with bladder cancer (2010, 268). Slow(er) acetylation becomes a disability when high level of aromatic amine exposure is part of society and culture. Biological variation compounded with racialized, classed and gendered exposures to toxics demonstrates how disability status ends up being created and then exacerbated through a political–economic context. As mainstream discourses shape an understanding through which the most 'vulnerable populations' are 'expected' to be further impaired or harmed (Fjord 2007), a critical and intersectional EJ lens can direct attention toward the political processes that lead to unnecessary occupational and everyday exposures to compounds such as the aromatic amines used in dyes, pesticides and plastics.

Intergenerational effects at the intersections

Intersecting processes of racism, classism, sexism and ableism do not only lead to differential exposure and vulnerability to environmental injustice in the present. Such processes also have intergenerational effects such that populations subject to systemic oppression experience further marginalization. For example, Sarah Maslin Nir's (2015a, 2015b) two-part exposé of the nail salon industry amplified what groups such as the Asian Health Services in California have been addressing for years: multiply marginalized workers are exposed to toxics that affect both their own health and their children's health. In the nail industry, the intersection of workers' undocumented status, language spoken and country of origin, combined with employers' ethnic prejudices, contribute to an 'ethnic caste system' and poverty trap. The nail salon

workers themselves suffer from respiratory and skin ailments that meet the criteria of unwanted illness rather than a form of bodymind diversity. Furthermore, exposure to nail salon chemicals leads to intergenerational effects, as nail workers' babies – if they manage to carry them to term at all – experience abnormal fetal development at disproportionate rates. Both the nail salon workers and their children have disablement and continued marginalization inscribed in their bodies.

Similar geographic segregation and generational continuity is at work in the case of anti-Black racist housing and public works policies. For example, childhood lead poisoning disproportionately affects people in racially segregated industrial and post-industrial urban areas. As public health researcher Tamara Leech et al. (2016, 151) point out in their review of the literature, the clustering of lead exposure is 'much more than the clustering of houses with lead paint'. In addition to the more well-known issues of lead paint in houses and lead in drinking water, lead exposure is geographically distributed as legacy particulate matter, similar to pesticide exposure (Steingraber 2010). Just as rural populations living near high-pesticide areas experience 'pesticide drift' (Harrison 2011), urban populations are exposed to lead deposited over decades in the surface layer of urban soils, making children in post-industrial urban areas particularly exposed to the 'periodic resuspension of dust particles' from lead-saturated soils (Leech et al. 2016, 153). Even without the clear point cases of malfeasance and injustice –such as when the Kennedy Krieger Institute knowingly left children in Baltimore exposed to lead – the geographic segregation of people in toxic environments leads to pernicious material consequences. Furthermore, as climate justice activist Denise Abdul-Rahman said to the editors of *The Black Scholar (2016)The Black Scholar (2016)*, the disabling effects environmental injustice can create pernicious path dependencies:

> The more inequality manifests, the more environmental injustice is perpetuated. The production systems run by the 1% accelerate carbon pollution and co-pollutants. These pollutants are hosted and burdened by black, brown, and vulnerable communities. The very same communities already burdened with environmental injustices, over policing, poverty, brownfields, toxic water, all of which are an assault on our health and wellbeing thus making us ill equipped to being climate resistant.

Abdul-Rahman's noting that environmental injustices further make people 'ill equipped to being climate resistant' emphasizes how disablement and vulnerability are social phenomena with continuing consequences.

Traffic patterns

What has led to the traffic patterns of environmental injustice? Some EJ scholars have debated whether race or class is the 'primary cause' of the pattern of low-income minority communities bearing 'a disproportionate share of environmental hazards' (Elliott and Pais 2006). Danny Faber (2008), Laura Pulido (2016a; 2016b) and Malini Ranganathan (2016) locate the primary causes to be political, economic and cultural processes, not the effects of those processes – the effects being 'race' or 'class' or other produced/non-essential social identities. Their analyses are radical, by definition, in that they seek to identify the root cause of a phenomenon. Faber (2008) explains how processes of capitalist development, globalization and especially neoliberalism have contributed to environmental injustice. Pulido (2016a, 2016b) and Ranganathan (2016) provide more intersectional analyses and write about 'racial capitalism' and 'racial liberalism', respectively.

Pulido (2016a) explains how producing social difference (through processes such as gendering, racialization and disablement, as described above) is central to creating value. Devaluing certain populations – to make their 'labor cheap' or 'free' and exploitable (see e.g. Wright 2006) – also makes it possible to make those populations 'involuntary receptacles' for chemicals (Steingraber 2010) and to create 'value' through treating people as disposable (Dillon 2014; Stanley 2015). This is precisely what happened in Flint, Pulido argues. When the state of Michigan was in a fiscal crisis, new governor and former venture capitalist Rick Snyder put a number of cities under 'emergency fiscal management'. The municipal Emergency Fiscal Manager for Flint sought to return Flint to 'financial solvency', rejected a renegotiated agreement with Detroit for access to its water supply, and sought to turn to sourcing the city's water from Lake Huron to save the city money in the future. However, such a plan could not be implemented immediately and the manager decided to use the Flint River as the water source in the meantime, even though it was known to be contaminated. The governor and the emergency manager looked to the people of Flint to absorb the costs of infrastructure (unrepaired), deindustrialization (which moved wealth elsewhere) and financialization (in the form of laws privileging bond holders above all others) in their bodies.

Ranganathan explains a more contemporary companion of racial capitalism and colonialism: racial liberalism. Liberalism promises individual freedoms and equality. Yet built into the promise is the premise of the individual liberal subject. The premise comes with assumptions about which people count as individuals, and which are 'outsiders to liberal subjectivity', deemed 'other' or 'less than' (Ranganathan 2016, 3).

'Behind the liberal notion of individuality', as Ranganathan (2016, 6) points out, 'lies a series of social credentials and preconditions that separates the deserving from the undeserving' – maleness and whiteness, and I would argue, normative ideas of able-ness. How the Flint water crisis came to be in Ranganathan's telling is not simply a story of contemporary environmental racism but tied to racialized *histories*: of segregation, abandonment and the relationships among people, property and capital.

Although Pulido and Ranganathan do not name 'intersectionality' per se or make the 'classic' citational nods, intersectional theorizing forms the basis of their analyses. Ranganathan (2016, 13–14) explains:

> Given the intersections between racism, capitalism, liberalism, colonialism, and sexism, for example, such thinkers [of the black radical tradition] have urged us to simultaneously critique the whiteness and sexism of Marxism while recovering its potential for anticapitalist action; simultaneously critique the liberal discourse of "freedom," while recovering its potential for genuine emancipation; and simultaneously theorize the politics of social justice both within and against racial liberalism. Similarly, radical EJ movements could be deepened via an explicit unmasking of racial liberalism while also accepting and strengthening liberalism's potential for fighting structural environmental discrimination.

Theorizing ableism also has much to contribute to such an analysis. Ableist logics are part of constructing other humans and nonhumans (Pellow 2016; Taylor 2017) as less than, as other, as exploitable. They are also part of EJ concerns: ableism allows for the perpetuation of the idea that some people are always 'out of place' and it is natural that they are segregated – whether in institutions, prisons or sacrifice zones (Kitchin 1998; Gilmore 2007; Lerner and Brown 2010).

Field of study and traveling theory: integrating environmental, racial and disability justice

Third, as a traveling theory and field of study, intersectionality offers an opportunity for EJ scholars to locate their work within the broader ecosystem of contemporary social movements that have continued to adopt intersectional frameworks (see Collins 2015 for a broader discussion and history). David Pellow (2016), for example, takes on the intellectual labor of demonstrating how movements for racial justice and EJ might theorize their shared struggles and collective liberation. In 'Toward a Critical Environmental Justice Studies: Black Lives Matter as an Environmental Justice Challenge', Pellow (2016, 222) explains that 'police brutality' and 'environmental politics' are 'closely intertwined' forms of violence: the production of a racialized 'other' makes it possible for people of

African descent and people of color to be subjugated, segregated, the subject of police brutality and associated with 'trash' – such that 'locating pollution in their communities actually makes cultural common sense' (Pellow 2016, 230). The production of a racial 'lesser than' or 'other' relies on ableist logics and allows for permitting toxic trespass such that people themselves become 'sacrifice zones' (Giroux 2006).

Likewise, Dillon and Sze (2016) also offer a rich analysis of the linkages between the EJ literature and critiques of anti-Black racism. Their first example is a classic EJ case: Bayview Hunters Point in San Francisco, historically one of San Francisco's African-American neighborhoods, now racially diverse but primarily non-white and one of the poorest neighborhoods in the city, and the site of the city's hazardous waste-producing industries and sewage treatment plant in addition to toxic brownfields and legacy contamination. They focus on the act of breathing, 'in solidarity with the Black Lives Matter movement', and in particular on asthma in the neighborhood, where asthma hospitalization is four times the city average (Dillon and Sze 2016, 4). In this case, poor people of color are subject to what local medical researchers have called an 'asthma epidemic'. Their disablement is a product of the intersections of historical legacies of racism and classism, and the system of ableism can contribute to further harm and even death.

Dillon and Sze's second example chillingly demonstrates how ableism functions in conjunction with racism to kill people. They skillfully relate how an essentialized idea about disability was marshaled to blame Eric Garner for his own death. Garner was murdered in July 2014 by NYC police officers when they put him in an illegal chokehold during an encounter related to selling untaxed cigarettes. Garner repeated 'I can't breathe' 11 times while in the chokehold and died from a heart attack en route to the hospital. The medical examiner ruled his death a homicide, meaning intentional actions caused death, even if death was not the intention, and also listed asthma, obesity and hypertension as 'contributing factors'. Not only were Garner's chronic illnesses located at the individual level rather than identified as embodiments of racial segregation, but when listed as contributing factors to his death diluted the focus on the chokehold; as Dillon and Sze (2016, 7) put it, 'the state criminalized Garner's own body: his chronic illnesses and his socially-produced difficulties in breathing became the causes of his death'. In other words, whenever the state, police and media and other commentators focused on Garner's illness and disability, the emphasis effectively distracted from the political causes of his death. Though Dillon and Sze do not use the term intersectionality, their paper demonstrates the importance of intersectional analysis. Two phrases

from their paper illustrate the linkage. In their abstract, the authors write: 'we discuss the conditions of Eric Garner's death and the politics of identifying responsibility for his killing'. This politics of identifying responsibility recalls the traffic crash where different single-issue analyses fail to account sufficiently for the outcome, its aftermath and the pursuit of justice. Especially because bodily diversity and disability often continue to be coded as individual, essentialized and stigmatized 'problems' (ableism), the police were able to deflect attention from the racism of the murder. Dillon and Sze (2016, 3) also refer to the 'mutual constitution of urban environments, social difference, and embodiment – including health outcomes and forms of violence'. This phrase acknowledges how social difference (race, class, gender, disability and so forth, as socially produced) and embodiment (a person's body, mind and experience with/in them) are part of historical and spatialized processes of racialization, capitalism, colonialism and so forth.

Two other cases of Black people murdered by the police also illustrate the intersections of racial justice, EJ and disability justice. Freddie Gray died in April 2015 at the age of 25 during a 'rough ride' in a police van in Baltimore City. Korryn Gaines was 23 when a police officer in Baltimore County shot and killed her in August 2016. Both of them had histories of lead poisoning. *Washington Post* reporter Terrence McCoy (2015) wrote about Baltimore's history of uneven lead poisoning to explore how environmental injustice contributed to the specific conditions and time and place of Gray's death. Lead poisoning, which has disproportionately harmed poor Black communities through racist segregation policies, may have contributed to Gray's history of being in and out of school and the juvenile justice system. It is also impossible, as McCoy points out, to look at the 'skid marks' and determine the sole cause – lead poisoning, poverty, racism. Another *Washington Post* reporter, Tom Jackman (2016), speculated about the role of lead poisoning in Gaines' history of 'agitated' behavior. He wrote 2 days after her death: 'The police killing of Korryn Gaines in Baltimore County on Monday has the potential to be America's next explosive racial powder keg. Or it could be defused by viewing it through the race-neutral prism of mental illness and the tragedy of lead-paint poisoning'. By setting up an either–or (either racism or ableism) dichotomy, Jackman falls into the trap of single-issue analysis. An intersectional analysis would begin with 'and', 'how did it contribute' and possibly 'to what extent'. The tragedy of lead-paint poisoning and mental illness – whether closely or distally related – is not race-neutral. Lead poisoning disproportionately affects poor Black communities and has consequences for educational attainment (and poverty), mental health and neurocognitive ability. Gaines was

aware of the injustice and filed a lawsuit in 2012 claiming that a 'sea of lead' paint contributed to 'neurocognitive impairment' (ibid.). Indeed, she framed her own defiance of state power partially in terms of the environmental injustice she had experienced; as she wrote in an Instagram post, 'They can try to come get it [my weapon(s)] they gon leave with more Lead than they poisoned me wit' (Jackman 2016). Jackman's supposing that the idea of lead-paint poisoning could be 'race-neutral' relies on a depoliticized framing of disability, similar to emphasis on Garner's disabilities at the expense of concentrating on police brutality. Such depoliticized framings of disability ignore both the sociopolitical process of disablement and the ableism and racism of a system that did not address Gray's, Gaines' or Garner's needs in life and preventable deaths.[2]

Rather, attending critically to disablement and the disability experience – rather than referring to disability as part of 'tragedy' leading to (preventable) death – reveals how racial justice, disability justice and EJ are intertwined. Lawrence Brown, Professor of Public Health at Morgan State University in Baltimore, plainly explains how lead poisoning, disablement, and disability and racial justice intersect:

> Lead interrupts the stress reaction and so it distorts the way people view threats and so I think that's absolutely germane to both Freddie Gray and Korryn Gaines. If [lead poisoning] is in fact disturbing and exaggerating the threat then you can understand why Freddie Gray is running and why Korryn Gaines has a shotgun when the police are knocking on her door. (Woods 2016)

As described in 'Intergenerational effects', lead poisoning is an EJ issue, spatially distributed clustering with lead particulate matter not only in houses and drinking water but also throughout the soil and then resuspended in the air. In a short piece for BET.com, Russ Green (2016) points to environmental injustice and ableism as intertwined issues in Gaines' death:

> If Gaines was acting out due to lead paint poisoning, doesn't that mean the system failed her at least twice? Clearly this is an *intersectional issue*: the failures of elected officials to protect impoverished children from lead-based paint and police being called to resolve issues with impacted people absent of proper training and consideration of their impairments. (Emphasis added)

Perhaps we can call Green's theorizing 'everyday, available theory' because it is not behind a paywall. Likewise, Keri Gray and Dustin Gibson, who work as consultants, activists and organizers, explain in their publicly available toolkit, 'We Can't Breathe: The Deaf & Disabled Margin of Police Brutality Toolkit' (2016), people with disabilities are more likely to face police brutality. Police practices are oriented around ideas of 'normal' behavior and do not consider

neurodivergence (e.g. autism, ADHD) or mental illness or impairment, often using force and causing otherwise preventable deaths. Gray and Gibson also use the term 'intersectional' to describe their work to ensure that multiply marginalized people are not left facing one injustice as activists address the other. Gray and Gibson, like Green, attend to how both racism *and* ableism contribute to preventable deaths. EJ work that centers the experiences of multiply marginalized people will not miss a 'but for', will more fully account for the multiple systems that contribute to environmental injustice and also will allow people addressing EJ issues to collaborate and more effectively build relationships and coalitions with other social movements.

Conclusion

This paper examined the resonances among EJ, disability justice and intersectional praxis to demonstrate that projects seeking to wed intersectionality and EJ, the remit of this special issue, must consider ableism, disablement and disability as a category of analysis. Critical EJ scholars have traced how different systems of oppression become a part of a person's embodied experience. Disability justice activists have written about how traces of those systems become inscribed in the body. Long-time member of Sins Invalid Aurora Levins Morales writes:

> Society has written deep into each strand of tissue of every living person on earth. What it writes into the heart muscles of five star generals is distinct from what it writes in the pancreatic tissue and intestinal tracts of Black single mothers in Detroit, of Mexicana migrants in Fresno, but no body stands outside the consequences of injustice and inequality… (Morales 2013)

Morales' poetic rendition echoes Dillon and Sze's phrasing about the mutual constitution of environments, social difference and embodiment. It also once again highlights how lived experiences of asthma or chronic pain or skin irritation or PTSD or anxiety – among many other experiences – may not easily be attributable to a sole 'ism' or single system of oppression as its cause. Embodiment of social and political processes – colonialism, labor relations and classism, racialization, gendering, disablement – is at the core of EJ work.

EJ work can increase its explanatory capacity by incorporating a disability lens into the analysis. Disability status can lead to differential vulnerability and to differential exposure, as illustrated in the examples of Hurricane Katrina and pesticide-based agriculture. Environmental injustice also can lead to further disablement. The key to recognizing that historical and geographical processes lead to disablement without further perpetuating bodymind

normativity is to keep the focus on the political–economic processes that contribute to environmental injustice. Furthermore, EJ work that incorporates the theorization of disablement as a process, like racialization and gendering, will foreground how *social* identities have been politically created and stabilized and not take disability as 'given' or 'tragedy' but as a social identity. Intersectional EJ must eschew stigmatizing disability.

Theorizations of EJ may grow by incorporating the framework of collective access. Collective access would mean that everyone has access to participate in the movement and also access to live in a world where they can thrive. In the case of chemical sensitivity, for example, a focus on *access* would mean reducing the prevalence of certain chemicals in public space with larger society-wide benefits – a reduction of environmental 'bads' for everyone (Gibson 2009; Alaimo 2010, 124, 168–169; Kafer 2013, 160–161). Incorporation of the disability justice framework into critical EJ work would further strengthen the EJ project as multi-issue and, moreover, perhaps add an additional layer to thinking about environmental bads and environmental goods. Since the 1990s, people doing EJ work have theorized that not only was the disproportionate siting of environmental 'bads' (e.g. toxic sites) in certain neighborhoods an EJ issue but also the disproportionate lack of environmental 'goods' (e.g. parks). EJ might grow to include a theorization of EJ itself as fundamentally an access issue: how can everyone have access to a healthy world in which to live, work and play?

Notes

1. The ethico-onto-epistemology underpinning these paragraphs comes from Karen Barad (2007), a feminist physicist who resists myriad binaries (e.g. structural vs. post-structural) and describes material-discursive intra-actions. For the sake of simplicity, I use 'interactions' in this paper.
2. For an account of how uncritical attention to disability can distract from a materialist analysis of the root causes of preventable deaths such as Freddie Gray's, see Erevelles (2016, 112–115). Sexism in particular also shaped Korryn Gaines' life and death; little has been written on this, but see Jones (2016).

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