

Leaving Evidence

JANUARY 22, 2010 · 12:21 AM

Interdependency (exerpts from several talks)



It is from being disabled that I have learned about the dangerous and privileged “myth of independence” and embraced the power of interdependence. The myth of independence being of course, that somehow we can and should be able to do everything on our own without any help from anyone. This requires such a high level of privilege and even then, it is still a myth. Whose oppression and exploitation must exist for your “independence?”

We believe and swallow ableist notions that people should be “independent,” that we would never want to have to have a nurse, or not be able to drive, or not be able to see, or hear. We believe that we should be able to do things on our own and push our selves (and the law) hard to ensure that we can. We believe ableist heteronormative ideas that families should function as independent little spheres. That I should just focus on MY family and make sure MY family is fed, clothed and provided for; that MY family inherits MY wealth; that families should not be dependent on the state or anyone else; that they should be “able-bodied,” essentially. We believe the ableist heteronormative racist classist myth that marriage, “independence” as sanctified through the state, is what we want because it allows us to be more “independent,” more “equal” to those who operate as if they are independent—That somehow, this makes us more “able.”

And to be clear, I do not desire independence, as much of the disability rights movement rallies behind. I am not fighting for independence. I desire community and movements that are collectively interdependent.

As a disabled person, I am **dependant** on other people in order to survive in this ableist society; I am **interdependent** in order to shift and queer ableism into something that can be kneaded, molded and added to the many tools we will need to transform the world. Being physically disabled and having mobility needs that are considered “special,” means that I often need people to help me carry things, push my wheelchair, park my car, or lend me an arm to lean on when I walk. It means that much of my accessibility depends on the person I’m with and the relationship I have with them. Because most accessibility is done through relationships, many disabled people must

learn the keen art of maintaining a relationship in order to maintain their level of accessibility. It is an exhausting task and something that we have had to master and execute seamlessly, in many of the same ways we have all had to master how to navigate and survive white supremacy, heterosexism, our families, economic exploitation, violence and trauma. This is also one of the main conditions which allow for disabled people to be victims of violence and sexual assault.

As a child, I learned quickly how accessibility often operates. I learned how to hold multiple relationships at the same time and value them all at once. I learned how to build out and out and deepen relationships quickly, building bonds with strangers in a matter of minutes in order to be able to ask them to assist me with accessibility. I understood the importance of having many different kinds of people and relationships operating simultaneously for my own survival.

It is not a coincidence that this anti-ableist understanding of community aligned with and was actually a very politically queer and anti-heteronormative understanding of community as well. The idea that we can understand the richness and diversity of many different types of relationships at once, not merely having to base them on narrowly defined notions of biology and legal marriage-bonds. That we don't have to rely on the state to define our family, parents, children and lovers. That we can be the ones who define what love and desire look like and, in fact, that the current dominant models of relationship and love have been constructed by the very conditions and systems we are fighting against.

Interdependency is not just me "dependent on you." It is not you, the benevolent oppressor, deciding to "help" me. It is not just me who should be grateful for whatever I can get. (and we can think about this as it relates to service provision, as it relates to political organizing, right?)

Interdependency is both "you and I" and "we." It is solidarity, in the best sense of the word. It is inscribing community on our skin over and over and over again. It is truly moving together in an oppressive world towards liberation and refusing to let the personal be a scapegoat for the political. It is knowing that one organization, one student or community group is not a movement. It is working in coalition and collaboration.

Because the truth is: we need each other. *We need each other.* And every time we turn away from each other, we turn away from ourselves. We know this. Let us not go around, but instead, courageously through.

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