Disabled Women Riot!

A campaign on Disability-based violence against queer women, trans and non-binary persons with disabilities.

PART OF CREATE INITIATIVE BY CREA FROM MARCH 2022 TO MARCH 2023
CORE FOCUS OF CAMPAIGN

Sexuality changes, travels and transforms. Within the discourse of sexuality, the intersecting identities of disability and queerness impact and inform each other. These two identities interact to produce a community that wearily lies between queer and disabled forms of being.
How safe are disabled folks who don't fit into the cis, savarna, hetero-patriarchal idea of a person? How do we negotiate our disabled queerness in public spaces?

How is disabled consent violated on an everyday basis?
What parameters of dissent are "allowed" in a patriarchal, able-bodied framework?
How can feminist organisations be spaces of care for survivors?
How can organisations start their own storytelling campaign on Disability Based Violence?
How do we bridge the hierarchy between on-ground and online movements?
How do we honour lived experiences?
• Otherness prevalent among disabled queer identities.
• Subverting the cis hetero-patriarchal society that views able-bodied mandates as the norm.
• Viewing disability-based abuse through a queer lens. Additionally, differentiating between disabled cis abuse and disabled queer abuse.
• Perceived safety in public, community and intimate spaces.
Throughout the course of this campaign, various questions were asked and reflected upon.

Learning how to love, live and grieve with my disability.
Which identities are allowed inside a room? Which degrees of ability and disability are policed and which one's are easily granted entry? What are the politics of entering (and exiting) a room? Do our situated contexts restrict or free us? What does "free will" mean when someone has a disability?

NO HOMOPHOBIA ALLOWED BUT ABLEISM IS PERMITTED
Are we allowed to be our disabled queer selves within public spaces or are we made to achieve able-bodiedness?
What does safety mean for each individual? What does safety mean for me, someone who is physically disabled? What is the vocabulary of safety, what language are we forced to speak, to conform to an able-bodied cis world, so that we can enter a room? Whenever we occupy public spaces as disabled queer bodies, one thing is certain: The visibility or invisibility of our disabled queerness determines the way we're treated [factors such as, but not limited to safety, violence, microaggressions] as well as how we negotiate and navigate our bodies through the space we exist in.
Navigating consent in this able-bodied world...
"I’ve noticed that my abuse has been intrinsically connected to my physical disability, to logistics and to the social situation that I am in. Many times, I have across a situation where I’m at the mercy of someone else in a public space. This then translates to how I shouldn’t show dissent, should not disagree with them and should not be in a conflict situation. I should toe the line of the stereotypical idea of the ideal disabled woman—non-assertive, a “good” quiet and an obedient girl. I say a disabled girl here and not women because we are de-feminised and denied basic aspects of femininity, the concept of disabled womanhood and are lost in a sea of unheard marginalised feminist voices."
"I’m hypervigilant in public spaces and I recoil at the remotest dismissive tone because I need to protect myself from hostility and from abuse. I need to conjure up a mind-map of the entire place and devise an escape route if a situation demands. I have to be armed with all my disabled armor, in case anything happens.

When I engage in casual intimacy with someone, I need some sort of commitment and acceptance from the person. I need to know that I can depend on them if something goes wrong or if I flare up. Especially because I know I’m more susceptible to abuse because of my disability, it’s no secret."
“Our abled-normative society just cannot bear a person with little-to-no physical movements existing. Your worth is decided by how capable you are of being exploited by ableist, capitalist and patriarchal structures. Disabled people just aren’t a good eye candy, which is highly intolerable. Ableism starts with insulting words, jokes, and minor invalidation and then turns into toxic words and physical violence. It also does not help how other people get a free pass at ableism because of a family that normalises ableism towards each other. Meanwhile, being a woman (or being perceived as a woman) doubles the ableism.”
"I often think about whether I would be less accepting of my abuse if I was able-bodied. I spent so long thinking that abuse was somehow justified because the right to abuse me is the only thing I could offer to someone, with my disability.

I would be more forgiving of my abusers because they were forced to ‘deal’ with my illness. They had to take care of me, so it felt like the least I could do is give them what they wanted physically, even when I didn’t want to."
"Will I be able to survive with a disabled left hand my entire life? Am I too incompetent to be a human?"

There are multiple ways in which the able-bodied world dissects a "broken" disabled body. There are multiple instruments through which it achieves this - whether that's by the surgical knife, the hand of a holy man or able-bodied eyes that convince the disabled body to turn their disability into "positive ability". I reject all of them.
EXCERPTS OF NARRATIVES FROM INTERVIEWS CONDUCTED:
Public spaces seem daunting to me as a physically disabled and an autistic person. They make me feel less than, incompetent to survive in an able-normative system. The loud noises, the precarious roads, the stairways and the constant stares of unbelonging. It was only a few days back that I had decided to go on a solo date to a Cafe in Andheri using a metro. Well, can I ever escape the ableism and neurotypicality in public spaces? Can I escape the othering or the infantilization or the sexism that I face as a disabled woman?

While, I was navigating my way around, a cis-man decided to perceive me and my disability and assumes authority over my body and tells, "aap handicapped lag rahai hai, lift use kariye." Apart from using a very violating way to describe my disability, he also assumes access into my disabled experience and took the liberty to dictate what I can/can't do. More than that, there is a power imbalance that allows the able-bodied and patriarchal norms regulating my body autonomy and agency.

The spaces are created in a way to alienate you, and well the question of basic access to these spaces shouldn't have to be political or one which requires you to expend so much resources in fighting for a fundamental element-access and entry. For disabled people, fighting for access is an act of regular resistance. We barely get a break from it.
A queer disabled person recounts - My body carries with it histories of being intruded upon, prodded by doctors and abused by ex boyfriends who saw my body as an open book to be violated and used. My body has been stared at, declared a novelty, a medical marvel, a body that needs to be named, shamed and labelled. Nobody has ever let my disabled, queer body just "be", just exist in public spaces.

R, another person with a gendered and disabling experience says, "I still remember an incident that took place when I was going to school with my mom in an auto. There was a car in front of the school gates and the auto driver kept on shouting that he has an "abnormal" passenger and that they should clear the road. I felt like I wanted to disappear and almost started crying when my mom told me to just ignore his words."
I've noticed my movements when I'm boarding a rickshaw as a physically disabled woman. I clutch my crutch tightly, hold on to the sides of my auto rickshaw, and keep google maps on my phone open. I don't let myself relax, sit comfortably or listen to music as my hair gushes in the wind.

• Anonymous
"When I board a bus lifting up my tired and grieving disabled body, multiple ppl come to help me in lifting me up to the bus because I'm very visibly disabled. The act of helping a disabled person is seen as transactional where the disabled person is considered a recipient of help. During this process, I feel like my body no longer belongs to me. It belongs to an able-bodied world who chooses to view it in their own voyeuristic, sick way. I don't have control over this gaze or control over what my body cannot do."

According to an able-bodied gaze, the markers on a physically disabled body indicate that we need help. It's literally like the word, "HELP!" is marked across our forehead. Agency jaisi koi cheez hai hee nai (There's no such thing called agency of a disabled body)
As disabled queer folks, we depend on others for our livelihood. We survive and negotiate through dependence. We move ahead in life through community interdependence, and through interwoven histories of care. But what happens when dependence becomes hierarchical? What does asking for help, in this context, mean? Who has the privilege of asking for help, receiving help, extending help, and sustaining help? Who is perceived as dependable, and who is perceived as a recipient of help? What is their gender, what is their disability, what is their caste, what is their sexuality?

What happens when help is considered a transaction, and is done on the basis of certain conditions? Is this how the transaction of help and dependency works, amongst able-bodied and disabled people? Does this binary of help only extend between disabled and able-bodied folks, or does it include other folks with different disabilities as well?
The privilege of being helped: The markers of agency on our disabled queer bodies are never divorced from the nature of our disability or queerness, ie. whether visible or invisible. The way we're perceived to appear, move, talk, function in public and private spaces determines the amount and degree of help provided to us. The most important factor of them all: how our disability looks to the outside world - the dichotomy between visible and invisible disabilities is of relevance here.

Questions such as: Do we carry a mobility aid? Do we need to provide evidence that we require help? Or are we provided help regardless? Here, it is pertinent to ask: Is help a privilege and is it only provided to certain kinds of disabilities which are legalised and validated by a piece of paper given by the government?
The Heirarchy Of Help: Sometimes we require constant help from others. Whether in the form of accommodations, physical and emotional help, or whatever form and shape help takes for each of us. We have grown up viewing our disabled queer bodies as a burden. We have been continually told that we're a burden and that we must loathe ourselves. Our bodies carry with it histories of grief, rage, violation of agency, medicalization etc.

So, how do we approach the world full of conditional help, having a body that requires help almost all of the time? How do we perceive ourselves as people having the agency to make their own decisions despite receiving help and being dependent?

Most importantly, how does the Hierarchy Of Help work? If we asked for help once from a person, can we ask for help again from the same person without being perceived as a burden? Or do we have to form a mind-map, as we do for most things, when accommodations aren't available?
Our Sexual Assault may look different, but is just as valid!

**TRIGGER WARNING**: Graphic Description of assault.

#DisabledWomenRiot

#INEVERASKFORIT

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**TRIGGER WARNING**

In this anonymous narrative, a disabled woman describes how her assaulter took her inability to button up her shirt and requested him to do so, as a suggestion to violate consensual boundaries. This narrative reflects exactly how disabled women constantly live in fear of asking for help, and live in shame of their bodies functioning without it.
When I speak out about my abuse, people often ask me: If you're so scared of abuse, why be sexually intimate at all? You're anyway physically disabled and not supposed to engage in sex. But I say: Why the f*ck not? I'm disabled yes, and I'm also sexual. The two can mutually co-exist. Disabled folks deserve hot, messy, consensual sex. We deserve respect.

Dear able-bodied man, Buttoning my shirt just because I can't do it myself ISN'T a suggestion to unbutton and touch my breasts.

Was going through a bad breakup and was drunk at a party when I hit it off with a stranger. He was funny and from my hometown too. Frankly, I just needed a distraction. As we drank and spoke, I could sense him trying to get nearer to me and I was okay with that in the moment.
The intricacies of Disabled consent are often not as simple as black and white, yes or no. We need to put abuse into context: Disabled women are often seen as targets of abuse due to extreme hatred and ableism. Their bodies are seen as empty vessels meant to be dominated.
As a physically disabled woman, I feel like casual sex has always been inaccessible to me. When we’re disabled, we often need to depend on perceived safety, we are on our guard at all times, everywhere because of the violent ableist world.

Spaces like exploration of sexuality and hookups are often closed off and inaccessible to folx with disabilities.

Before I engage in sexual intimacy, I need some sort of commitment and acceptance from the person, I need to know that I can depend on them if something goes wrong or if I flair up. I know I’m more susceptible to abuse because of my disability. It’s no secret.
In this anonymous narrative, a physically disabled woman tells us about how she has been at the mercy of her able-bodied partners during abusive situations where she wasn't permitted to show any hostility, or put forward her own needs.

HOSTILITY AND PRIVILEGE

THE ACT OF SHOWING HOSTILITY AND BEING ASSERTIVE IS OFTEN A PRIVILEGE, WHICH IS INACCESSIBLE TO MARGINALIZED FOLKS. WE NEED TO PEOPLE PLEASE IN ORDER TO SURVIVE.

Anonymous, a physically disabled woman.
What does "feeling horny" actually mean, for a disabled person when they've grown up watching able-bodied codes of intimacy on screen?

How do we feel like we belong in a world that is full of able-bodied mandates of intimacy, independence, love, empowerment, desire?

Find the most accessible way to pleasure ourselves, whist we discuss how to overthrow this ableist government and make rest a compulsory national decree and dream about our disabled utopia?
How do Therapists approach disability based violence?
Start with working with the client to see where they are at emotionally.

Disability + Abuse may equal vulnerability or feeling of indebtedness.

Many a times, partner becomes an immediate caregiver so in that case person may not be ready to move out.

Start by stating that it’s okay to acknowledge goods parts of the relationship.

Gradually move on to slowly highlighting the fact that the relationship is abusive and there could be better possibilities.
Once, they are ready to move out or if crisis situation arise, help them with -

- Resource Access
- Finding Shelters
- Finding Jobs
- Connect them to NGO
- Connecting to Hotline Numbers
It all started with a social media campaign.
WORKSHOPS CONDUCTED WITH DIFFERENT NGOS
Some of us walk, limp, wheel or hop into the revolution. Each form of movement or non-movement is valid. Each form of revolution should be acknowledged. We "un-hide" the disability because our entire lives, the non-disabled world has kept our disability hidden - and allowed us to express it only on their terms. Our collective is a crip revolution, a form of disabled dissent. Our existence is a revolution. There will be no revolution without disabled joy and dissent.
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