CLOSED CAPTIONING: READING BETWEEN THE LINES

by

CELESTE REEB

A DISSERTATION

Presented to the Department of English
and the Graduate School of the University of Oregon
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

June 2020

DISSERTATION APPROVAL PAGE

Student: Celeste Reeb

Title: Closed Captioning: Reading Between the Lines

This dissertation has been accepted and approved in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Doctor of Philosophy degree in the Department of English by:

Elizabeth Wheeler	Chairperson
Sangita Gopal	Core Member
Priscilla Ovalle	Core Member
Peter Alilunas	Institutional Representative

and

Kate Mondloch	Interim Vice Provost and Dean of the Graduate School

Original approval signatures are on file with the University of Oregon Graduate School.

Degree awarded June 2020

DISSERTATION ABSTRACT

Celeste Reeb

Doctor of Philosophy

Department of English

June 2020

Title: Closed Captioning: Reading Between the Lines

"Closed Captioning: Reading Between the Lines" argues that captions are a series of rhetorical choices created by captioners influenced by ideological networks which value specific types of bodies, pleasure, language, races, genders, affects, and sexualities. This dissertation is an interwoven and interdisciplinary attempt to explore how these ideologies are made visible in the space of closed captioning. The project analyzes the captioning for over 1,000 texts including film, television, online pornography, standup comedy, and the rhetoric regarding captioning to reveal how captioning reproduces normative logics. Current discourse of captioning enforces its façade of neutral technology, which obstructs viewing how it makes visible the production of normative logics through language. The dissertation examines how captioning and discourse about captioning reinforce heterosexuality and able-bodiedness; privilege *seeing* as the primary factor for affective experiences such as pleasure and horror, which limits their effectiveness; and reinforce values of whiteness. While captioning is an important technological element, it is important because of its role in people's lives. It is important

because people use it and make meaning from the captions. Therefore, each chapter

examines how captioning reveals something about people: how people perform gender

and sexuality; how and where people experience pleasure; how people use language to

dominate others; and how people embody film viewing. Captioning should not come with

the price of further marginalization of people, nor should it be a reproduction of

normative logics that isolated d/Deaf and hard of hearing viewers for so long. This

dissertation includes previously published material.

CURRICULUM VITAE

NAME OF AUTHOR: Celeste Reeb

GRADUATE AND UNDERGRADUATE SCHOOLS ATTENDED:

University of Oregon, Eugene, OR
Salisbury University, Salisbury, MD
Delaware Technical Community College, Georgetown, DE

DEGREES AWARDED:

Doctor of Philosophy, English,2020, University of Oregon
Master of Arts, English, 2015 Salisbury University
Bachelor of Arts, English, 2013, Salisbury University

AREAS OF SPECIAL INTEREST:

Film
Disability Studies
Rhetoric
Sound

PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE:

Graduate Teaching Fellow, University of Oregon, 2016-2019

GRANTS, AWARDS, AND HONORS:

Jane Grant Fellowship, Center for the Study of Women in Society, 2019
Ernest Dissertation Award, University of Oregon, 2018
Excellence in Teaching, University of Oregon, 2017
Sarah Harkness Kirby Award Nomination, University of Oregon, 2017
Wegelin Fellowship, University of Oregon, 2015
Francis B. Fleming Award, Salisbury University, 2015
Fulton Student Research Grant, Salisbury University, 2015
Fulton Student Research Grant, Salisbury University, 2013

PUBLICATIONS:

 "[This Closed Captioning Is Brought to You by Compulsive Heterosexuality/Able-Bodiedness]." *Disability Studies Quarterly*, vol. 39, no. 3, 2019, doi:10.18061/dsq.v39i3.6061.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

To my Mama

To Joshua

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION: WELCOME TO LINE 21

In a letter to the *Exhibitors Herald and Moving Picture* Dec 1ˢᵗ, 1928, Miss

Genevieve Plummer wrote, **"**The beauty of the moving picture is its silence. To leave the

noise and glare of the street and slip into the grateful dim quiet of a theatre- the silent

unfolding of an interesting picture with just enough appropriate music!" (24). As Miss.

Plummer notes, most moving pictures were never entirely silent. Sounds of orchestras,

pianos, and the general audience filled the theatres. However, the silence on the screen

provided an entertainment sanctuary for many who felt the stage was inaccessible. Before

the transition to sound, many d/Deaf and hard of hearing film patrons were passionate

about the new form of entertainment they could access.[1] For example, below are two

different letters published in film magazines before the transitional period:

> "I like going to the Pictures because I can read lips. In fact that is the only
> way I have got on for ten years, as we did not know the deaf and dumb
> school here, and so you will see that Pictures mean much to me, for they
> make up for the theatres and concert. Only once in all the years I have
> attended the Pictures have I seen a player of either sex use a very bad
> word. Some players only mumble, but I'm sure that they would speak
> plainly if they knew how deaf and dumb people can read their lip
> movements. Please don't think I am dumb; only deaf." E.F. (*Pictures and
> the Picturegoer* Aug 21, 1915, pg. 395)
>
> Dear sir:

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[1] While tied with the harmful assumption that deafness meant dumbness, as the common phrase deaf and
dumb shows, films used the deaf people's ability to understand film narratives as a selling point. For
example, ""Cashier's Romance."= This foreign dramatic film has some of the most remarkable
photographic effects, with rich soft tones, sowing the full expressions of the faces. This film had no lecturer
or voices behind the screen, but the audience was able to understand the minutest details of the plot but
watching, as do the deaf and dumb folks, the expressions of the faces of the motions of the lips." (*The
Moving Picture World* pg. 405)

> I wonder if the motion picture world realizes just what keen pleasure is afforded the deaf by their work! I, myself , am not totally deaf, but far too much so to enjoy a play on the stage, even with the help of my lip reading, for the simple reason that the plays are not arranged for the deaf, and too often the speaker has his back to the audience, or the lights are dimmed. But with pictures, there is the added pleasure of the ability to follow conversation, making the deaf person feel so superior to his hearing neighbors in the theatre! Occasionally a good picture play is made the foundation for conversational class work among my pupils and great pleasure is derived from such a discussion.
>
> Miss A.N. Gordon, The Muller-Walle School
> Baltimore, Md. (*Photoplay Magazine* June 192, pg. 107)

Both letters indicate that unlike other popular forms of entertainment of the time like the stage, that moving pictures were celebrated by the d/Deaf and hard of hearing.[2] By the end of the 1920s, patrons began flooding the columns of film magazines for a different reason: talkies. Letters expressed the frustration with moving pictures increasingly using sound. For many, it seemed that the entertainment format they had grown to love was replaced by one which privileged the hearing. Below is a small selection of letters sent to film journals during the time:

> "In the second place- and, Mr. Beaton, I wonder if you have any idea how many people in the country there are in this second place?- the movies as they are now are practically the only form of entrainment at which the hard of hearing or totally deaf person does not feel terribly handicapped." (*The Film Spectator* July 21st 1928 pg. 22)

> "I find a number of things militate against their use of speech, and will list them, according to the fan and motion picture enthusiast reports around here….2. The talking picture will take away from four million deafened people their only refined form of entertain… 4. The talkies are hard on the eyes, especially to deaf people or people sitting in back, because the viewers will watch the lips, whether they are lip readers or not 5. The talkies are too loud for the normal hearing people and if made softer, are too low for the others, partially deaf."- William W. Newcomb, Syracuse N.Y (*The Film Spectator* July 21st 1928 pg. 22)

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[2] Throughout this dissertation, I use d/Deaf. deaf refers to the audiological condition. Deaf refers to the culture of deaf individuals which uses its own form of communication. I acknowledge that people may view themselves as both part of a community and a deaf person; therefore, I use both.

"Think of all the deaf people who find pleasure in the movies."- Fred Kohler, Harrisburg Pa (*Exhibitors Herald and Moving Picture* World Dec 8th 1928)

"The purpose of this is to express my opinion and that of a party of friends on the synchronized movies. I had German measles several years ago and it left me partially deaf. Therefore, I can see how they will be to people who are deaf. We go to the movies and really get a great deal of enjoyment out of them, but if they did not have anything but pictures and no reading, we would surely not enjoy the pictures." -Betty LaSalle, Northampton Mass. (*Exhibitors Herald and Moving Picture* World Dec 8th 1928)

"I always read 'Watch This Colum' in the Saturday Evening Post and this week I notice you are to make Universal 'talk.' What about the thousands of deaf people whose lives have been brightened by the movies? I am one, and very much worried, as I suppose no words will be thrown on the screen so we will be no better off than if we went to a stage play." -Miss Mary A Smith Northampton Mass. (*Exhibitors Herald and Moving Picture* World Dec 8th 1928)

"I wish to second the suggestion of Mr. Peter Bylsma of Napoleonville, La. In your issue of June 3rd, in regards to producers inserting at least one subtitle in each reel of their productions. I have been an exhibitor of the same theatre for the last nineteen years. I have been hard of hearing for the last 10 years, and how I would cherish a few subtitles in each reel so I would know what the picture was about. Most of my hard-of -hearing patrons and all of the deaf patrons would enjoy pictures with the subtitle of bygone days" – An old Herald reader, John Egli, Manager, Hickory Theatre, St. Joseph, Mo. (*Motion Picture Herald* July 22 1933 pg. 60)

These individuals were not alone in sharing their displeasure over the introduction of the talkies. Many d/Deaf organizations protested talkies and petitioned Hollywood to continue producing silent films. Theatre owners recognized that the transition to sound was a detriment to their d/Deaf and hard of hearing patrons and their potential profits. Many inventions tried to make films accessible to d/Deaf and hard of hearing patrons.

The technologies for helping the d/Deaf and hard of hearing access the talking motion pictures take a broad form, from the familiar to the bizarre. The bizarre include multiple attempts to use water solutions or chemical solutions to submerge the deaf person's hand into the solution. This technique would allow the vibrations to speak

through the ripples in the liquids. Another invention that made an appearance several times throughout history included using a person's teeth to speak through by having them bite down on various appliances. One such invention was called the denitphone. Probably most common solution was the use of headphone inventions. There were many versions of this device, including theatrephone, acousticon receivers, audiophone, Ardente, and Mellaphone. Often, these devices were a pair of headphones with a wire to the speaker system that plugged into the theatre seat. Theaters often equipped an entire section or row with these technologies, some referring to them as "deaf man's row." When theatres introduced these viewing aids, large trade magazines reported their uses, such as *The Film Daily, The Phonoscope,* and *Exhibitors Herald*. *Kinematography* even maintained extensive listings of theatres and made special note of those that were deaf-friendly.

While attempts to retain d/Deaf and hard of hearing audiences through headphones persisted, it would ultimately still isolate large populations. By the late 1940s, fewer articles and letters focused on how the transition to sound had impacted previously active d/Deaf and hard of hearing viewers. Many individuals relied upon seeing foreign language films, which were subtitled, making them easier to understand. In 1947 a deaf actor, Emerson Romero, began trying to bring a new solution to the problem: captioning.

The process proved expensive, lengthy, and Romero had very little support from the movie industry who did not want to hand over their films for creating a captioned body of work. A few years later, others would begin tackling the issue of closed captioning. In Belgium, Titra Film Laboratories were etching directly onto finalized film prints. In England, J. Arthur Rank etched captions on glass slides. These etched slides

appeared on a smaller screen on the corner of the main screen. In the United States, Dr. Edmund B. Boatner and Dr. Clarence O'Conner, both superintendents of schools for the deaf, began working on a program that would result in the creation of Captioned Films for the Deaf Inc and the Captioned Films for the Deaf Program. Working with J. Pierre Rakow, they were able to convince the film industry to allow them to start captioning films. [3]

The 1950s and 60s would see some federal funding for captioning, but it was not until the 1970s when captioning for television would begin being implemented. In 1971, at the First National Conference on Television for the Hearing Impaired, a preview for an open-captioned version of Julia Child's *The French Chef* was screened.[4] In 1972, the National Association of Broadcasters discussed the use of captioned television with shows like *ABC News* becoming regularly open captioned. In 1976, the FCC reserved line 21 of the vertical blinking interval (VBI) on television for transmitting closed captioning, leading to the development of a line 21 decoder. It would not be until 1980 when the decoders, Telecaption, would be sold at Sears. Eventually, the Television Decoder Circuitry Act in 1990 would mandate that all new televisions over 13 inches would need to include caption-decoding technology. [5] While the Americans with Disabilities Act in 1990 Title III required that public spaces provide access to verbal information, making captioning a prime way to adhere to the mandate, it did not apply to

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[3] For a more in-depth history see Norwood and Downey

[4] Closed Captions refer to captions which can be turned on or off. Open Captions are captions which remain on the screen and users are unable to remove them.

[5] This would be followed by the 1996 Telecommunication Act requiring digital television to contain caption-decoding technology.

movie theatres. The majority of advancements that occurred in captioning history occurred on television.

Almost eighty years after movie theatres made the switch to sound were significant legislative mandates focused on making theatres d/Deaf and hard of hearing friendly again. Streaming sites like Netflix were sued in 2011 for not providing captions; the result of the case stated that streaming sites were required to provide captioning. The 2016 ADA ruling solidified that not offering closed captioning in a movie theatre was a violation of ADA. Films went from being inherently accessible to d/Deaf and hard of hearing audiences to requiring federal mandates to provide access. This project is not a historical excavation of captioning history, but this historical backdrop of captioning contextualizing how recent captioning as a requirement is and why there is very little discourse on captioning.

The history provided here primarily focuses on technology and federal mandates. That is exactly what the rest of this dissertation is not.[6] While these are important for the context of captioning, there already exists a wide range of scholarship focused on the technological, governmental, or educational role of captioning. These foci have mostly stunted other forms of engagement with closed captioning. Following in Sean Zdenek's footsteps, I approach closed captioning as a series of rhetorical choices. As he states in his foundational text, *Reading Sound,* "Definitions of closed captioning too often stress the technology of "displaying" text on the screen over the complex practice of selecting sounds and rhetorically inventing words for them." (xiii). It is from this position that he argues that captioners are making choices about which sounds are significant and that

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[6]While also important to the narrative of disability, this dissertation is also not focused on representation of deafness on screen.

"We not only can compare the choices made in each instance but also can ask questions about those choices and the approaches to captioning that inform them" (99). His book offers groundbreaking work in thinking through captions as rhetoric. However, Zdenek does not dedicate a large amount of space to investigating how ideological structures are part of the approaches that inform captioning choices.

"Closed Captioning: Reading Between the Lines" asserts that captions are a series of rhetorical choices created by captioners who live in ideological networks that value specific types of bodies, pleasure, language, race, genders, affects, and sexualities. While deafness as a disability is debated within d/Deaf and disability circles, I refer to deafness in disability frameworks because captioning is coded as a disabled space.[7] Normative society often disables d/Deaf and hard of hearing individuals through a continuous lack of access. Captioning, as coded as disabled space, creates anxieties for normative society.[8] This dissertation is an interwoven and interdisciplinary attempt to explore those anxieties. Current views of captioning enforce its façade of neutral technology, which obstructs viewing how it makes visible the production of normative logics through language. Normative logics are the dominant ideologies that privilege whiteness, heterosexuality, ability, and specific ways film viewing is embodied. The dissertation looks at captioning and rhetoric about captioning to understand how captioning acts as a site for understanding productions of power.

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[7] Throughout this dissertation I also use both people with disabilities and disabled people. Some people with disabilities argue for people-first language. Others argue that disability should not be stigmatized, and as a primary part of their identity and construction of self, disabled first is more apt. I cannot speak for all disabled people, so I acknowledge both arguments by alternating between the phrases.

[8] Due to Federal mandates for accommodation, discourse which aligns deafness with disability, definitions of CC which align deafness to disability, and the pervasiveness of medical models of disability, this paper uses deafness as an entry point into the framework of disability without trying to argue for or against it being labelled as a disability. Please see Owen Wrigley and Brenda Jo Brueggemann for more on this topic.

Each chapter in this dissertation examines trends in language, examples of captioning, and discourses focused on captioning. There are two particular difficulties in trying to connect these issues and begin unraveling how normalcy operates within the space of closed captioning. The first issue is one of methodology. The second issue, as will be discussed below, is untangling the dominant narratives being reinforced. The methodology obstacle begins with the fact that there is not an established archive or data set of captioning. While scholars like Zdenek use extensive examples, they are not all readily available nor are there enough current examples of works dedicated to closed captioning to pull a large sample size. The first step in making this project a reality required building an archive of closed captioning examples. 265 examples of television sex scenes, roughly 400 pornographic online videos, 260 texts featuring predominantly Black casts, and 98 horror films make up the captioning archive I created to make this project possible. Once these archives were complied, I began tagging them with key words to find different types of patterns. I did not set out looking for anything specific; but rather, I allowed the data collected to influence what types of rhetorical choices and relationships between screen and audience I analyzed.

By allowing the caption archive to dictate the foci of the dissertation, the project developed in a way that required a multidisciplinary approach. A wide array of disciplines and theoretical texts are used to help unpack how the rhetorical choices are contributing to larger systems of power. Unlike many projects that begin within a specific disciplinary field, I arrived at them through the captioning. By using different theoretical approaches in each chapter, the chapters are in some ways self-contained and could be read independently of the others. Each chapter becomes an example of how captioning

studies could be approached by other scholars. These chapters prove that disciplines invested in undoing systematic marginalization and those invested in the relationship between audience and text can all contribute to the re-thinking of captioning practices. After creating the archive and approaching captioning from numerous vantage points, I wanted to move from critiquing to creating. I wanted to bring imaginative solutions that would open the possibilities afforded to viewers. I created a phone application that uses the haptics as a companion for captioning. The phone application is also an attempt to show that my intentions are not rooted in disability voyeurism. As someone whose disabilities are not hearing related, I can use my position as a hearing person to unpack how captioning is operating since I can document the relationships between sound, image, and text. By focusing on haptics in the final chapter, I bring the body of the viewer back to the forefront of this project: not as a theoretical spectator or ideologically imagined audience but the tangible body. Similarly, to the opening of the introduction, by focusing back on the body of the viewer in the final chapter, the role of captioning is vital for some and this necessity should not be at the price of enforcing languages of power and marginalization.

The issue of power and marginalization brings me to the second difficulty in creating this project. The combination of approaches and the intersections of "normal" examined in this project reveals that ableism is fundamentally interwoven with issues of race, gender, sexuality, and embodiment. Each chapter unpacks the various ways that norms are reproduced through dominant logics. These dominant logics include whiteness including white speech, heterosexuality, pleasure, ableism, patriarchy, embodiment, and affects, which rely upon shared assumptions that they are dominant because they are

inherently natural and mythically good. We cannot begin to demand better captioning practices without realizing that we must also demand anti-racist, anti-sexist, pro-queer, anti-colonialist rhetoric and images of audiences. Across the chapters it becomes clear that the imagined spectator often discussed in film is oftentimes the imagined citizen discussed elsewhere. It is a white middleclass able-bodied heterosexual male who has rights to their body and land. The chapters all push back against the idea that there is a singular normal which captioning is invested in uplifting. By the end of this project, I hope it is clear how norms often reinforce each other. These chapters work to unpack how captioning is reinforcing multi-faceted dominant logics ranging from language, identity, and experiences of viewing. Captioning is meant to universalize media by making it accessible but often this accessibility is normalcy masquerading as progress.

The dissertation begins by examining captioning for television sex scenes. [This Closed Captioning is Brought to you by Heterosexuality/Able-bodiedness] examines three different incidents of closed-captioning in television sex scenes to argue that queering and cripping provide a framework to examine how the rhetorical choices in closed captioning reflect broader anxieties over bodies engaged in pleasure in a space coded as "disabled." The fact that captioning is still largely coded as a space of disability means the anxieties surrounding narratives of ability become visibly written into captioning. In considering closed captioning as a space coded as "disabled," what is made caption-visible (and what is not) can enforce a dual binary of heterosexuality/able-bodiedness against queer/disabled. This dual binary is examined in three different case studies, *Scandal*, *Queer as Folk*, and *Orange is the New Black*. The case studies and close analysis of the language indicate captioning is an attempt to control bodies within pre-

existing binaries, which default to using language to privilege heterosexuality/able-bodiedness over queerness/disability. This chapter has been previously published in *Disability Studies Quarterly.*

While sex and pleasure act as a bridge between chapter two and chapter three, in chapter three, the focuses is on how captioning for pornography positions sexuality and disability. The chapter entitled [Moans, Groans, and Slurping: The Politics of Closed Captioning] analyzes Pornhub's 2018 announcement that they would be adding closed captioning to their website. Despite this announcement, both Pornhub and mainstream new rhetoric about captioning online pornography reveal limited views on pleasure, sexuality, and who experienced pleasure. In effect, both Pornhub and news rhetoric work to disable d/Deaf and hard of hearing's access to pleasure by assuming that *seeing* is the primary way of experiencing pleasure. The rhetoric about pleasure does not take into account the complex role of language and pleasure nor does it take into account how captioning is functioning on the porn image. The news participates in the infantilization, agendering, and compulsive asexualization regarding the sexualities of d/Deaf and hard of hearing individuals. When examining how captioning is used for online pornography, I focus on three primary ways the captioning functions: slurping, orgasms, and dialogue. Slurping shows how captioning complicates the normative porn image by positioning female labor differently than the image does. Orgasms illustrate how captioning shows the gendered logic of sexual encounters. Dialogue reveals how language often plays an essential role in the production of pleasure. The chapter ends by examining users' interactions with these captions. Through looking at a wide array of texts, I find that captioning pornography reveals how captioning simultaneously upholds specific

gendered ideals while complicating others. Also, the public discourse is not aligned with the discourses for those who are using the captioning. Ultimately, captioning pornography pushes back against the visual and assumed able-bodied as the site of pleasure privilege.

Chapter four moves from gender, sexuality, and pleasure, to the surface of the body: the skin. Blackness is often written on to the skin through systems that uphold the marginalization of those without white skin. While systems like law, education, and economics are widely studied for upholding racist beliefs, language is another system participating in the production of anti-Blackness. In this chapter called "wRighting Race: Racialized Captions and Race in Captions," I look at what I call correcting patterns in captioning. I examine the linguistic correcting practice of erasing language associated with Blackness by replacing all languages with Standard American English, or as Geneva Smitherman calls it Standard White English. These corrections erase the cultural memories embodied in language. One of the most common miscaptioning corrections occurs when captioning the N-word. The term is homogenized into its -R ending, rather than, acknowledge variants which include the -A ending. The use of the -R ending forces the language of violence onto those who use the -A, which is linked with complex networks of survival and resistance in Black communities. It is not enough for captioning to correct Blackness through language, but it must do so while making whiteness an invisible status quo. I end the chapter by examining how notable vocal performances of white voices by Black actors go unmarked in captioning. These writing, righting, and rewritings of language serve to uphold whiteness through linguistic means of captioning.

The final chapter moves away from the body in identity terms and towards how sound and captioning are embodied. "Haptics and Horror" argues that captioning can not alone recreate the affective experiences of terror, horror, fright, and anxiety associated with the horror genre. Like the logic of pornography, seeing the horror is assumed to be enough to cause affective sensations, but this ignores the importance of sound in the genre. The vague descriptors found in the captioning show how captioning is not working to provide affective experiences to the audiences who rely upon captioning. The horror genre relies upon sound resulting in physiological reactions. Horror cultivates affective states that reside outside of language; thus, captioning cannot use language to make those states legible. Language, as a function of cognition, is at tension with the way horror uses sound to bypass logical thinking to tap into the core emotions. Captioning can be supported by haptic technologies, meaning technologies that simulate touch. In this chapter I argue that captioning inherently works against horror sound but by taking inspiration from *The Tingler* and videogame haptic technology, we can use vibrations to recreate affective experiences. Mentioned earlier in this introduction were bizarre inventions like the Dentiphone, which also used vibration as a means of communication with d/Deaf and hard of hearing audiences. Unlike invasive technologies, I propose what I hope is a less bizarre technology in the form of a phone application that is non-invasive and easily accessible. To demonstrate how this technology might work, I developed a phone application called Tingler, which uses vibration tracks paired with online short horror films. I argue that haptic technologies cooperating with captioning offers more complicated affective experience. The demonstration is meant to reveal that when thinking about film audiences, translation of sound into text is not the only important

aspect of film viewing. Film viewing is often a deeply embodied experience, and thus, thinking of a way to create those for various audiences can be a vital and creatively stimulating experience.

This introduction began with an overview of how d/Deaf and hard of hearing audiences experience moving pictures rather than starting with the history of captioning because ultimately, this project is about people, not a purely reductive technological history. Audiences who embraced the entertainment format only to feel left out by the late 1920s waited almost 100 years before theatres were forced to make moving pictures accessible again. While captioning is an essential technological element, it is essential because of its role in people's lives. It is important because people use it and make meaning from it. Therefore, each chapter examines how captioning reveals something about people: how people perform gender and sexuality; how, and where people experience pleasure; how people use language to dominate others; and how people embody film viewing. The project pushes back against assumptions that privilege seeing as a means to ignore possibilities for improving captioning and film viewing for d/Deaf and hard of hearing audiences. Captioning should not come with the price of further marginalization of people, nor should it be a reproduction of normative logics that isolated d/Deaf and hard of hearing viewers for so long.

CHAPTER II

[THIS CLOSED CAPTIONING IS BROUGHT TO YOU BY

HETEROSEXUALITY/ABLE-BODIEDNESS]

Reeb, Celeste. "[This Closed Captioning Is Brought to You by Compulsive Heterosexuality/Able-Bodiedness]." *Disability Studies Quarterly*, vol. 39, no. 3, 2019, doi:10.18061/dsq.v39i3.6061.

Let's talk about sex. Well, let's talk about the captions for sex. When examining closed captioning on television, I notice which sounds are *not* captioned.[9] One of the more noticeable gaps between captioning, image, and sound is in television sex scenes, which are often written as [groan] [moan] [heavy breathing] [grunt] [gasp]. These terms are the same exact descriptors which elsewhere are used to describe characters in pain or distress. Caption scholar Sean Zdenek notes that captions and sound rely upon context; therefore, many viewers can distinguish between pleasure and pain sounds in the captions based on the image.[10] Despite the potential to tell pleasure from pain, the frequency in which this handful of terms are used to describe sex in closed captioning (CC) indicates the more significant issue of language's failure to represent the sonic elements associated with bodies rhetorically. By examining the rhetorical choices in closed captioning, we can see the limits of defining, categorizing, and containing bodies and sexual acts through language.

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[9] While I use closed captioning, I am not currently D/deaf or Hard of Hearing. I am not equating my experience with CC as representative of those who rely upon this technology. Instead, I want to use my position as someone who uses CC and is hearing to draw attention to discrepancies in how CC represents bodies, sex, and sound.

[10] In his book *Reading Sounds*, Zdenek uses the example of Bella Swan from the *Twilight* film series who is often gasping for various reasons. While the context for these gasps changes, the captions themselves are often the same.

When we view closed captioning as a series of rhetorical choices, then word selection is politically motivated by anxiety surrounding the body and compulsions for "normal" since a person who is influenced by ideological structures is making these rhetorical choices. The focus on CC as a technological advancement, its educational applications, and its legal mandates has obscured scholars from closely investigating how CC reinforces values of normate culture, specifically in terms of heterosexuality and able-bodiedness.[11] *Normate*, as conceived by Rosemarie Garland Thomson and written about widely in disability studies, refers to systems which use the concept of normalcy to control bodies or put forth an identity to strive for, but is, in fact, a social construct that maintains power through unmarked concepts such as whiteness, male, young, and heterosexual.[12] Since closed captioning is a space coded as disabled or linked to disability, sex scene closed captioning highlights the tension between concepts of bodies, pleasure, sex, and identity.[13] To examine these tensions and the ideological work of CC, I have begun compiling a TV sex scene archive to find rhetorical patterns in the captions.

In this chapter, I will briefly describe the archive, which provides the framework for this project to argue that the lack of attention on CC allows CC to continually enforce a binary system that devalues sexual pleasure outside of heterosexual able-bodies. From

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[11] For more information on these aspects of closed captioning, see Downey, Ellis and Kent, Perego et al., and Robson.

[12] See *Extraordinary Bodies Figuring Physical Disability in American Culture and Literature* for more information on normate, for more on issues of normalcy, see Lennard Davis

[13] The relationship between D/deaf communities and the term disabled has a long and politically charged history. This dissertation recognizes that not all members of D/deaf communities acknowledge it as a disability; rather, some view it as a language community. Due to Federal mandates for accommodation, discourse which aligns deafness with disability, definitions of CC which align deafness to disability, and the pervasiveness of medical models of disability, this chapter uses deafness as an entry point into the framework of disability without trying to argue for or against it being labeled as a disability. For more information on this history, please see Owen Wrigley and Brenda Jo Brueggemann.

the archive, I have selected three different case studies to deconstruct the space of captioning. The three sex scenes selected are from the shows: *Scandal*, the US version of *Queer as Folk*, and *Orange is the New Black (OITNB).*[14] Each case study illustrates how hetero-sexual/able-bodied must use queer/disabled to reinforce itself as the normal default body when sex is captioned. By examining these patterns, we can disrupt ideas of normalcy that closed captioning enacts. I hope that by raising questions about CC, we can begin conceptualizing a queering of captioning that offers an alternative media experience. An experience that focuses not only on dismantling the influence of normalcy in captions but also one that focuses on a quality captions for all.[15]

[TV&A: Selecting TV Sex Scenes]

I was unsure of what would emerge when I began compiling TV sex scenes in 2016. I knew that to establish captioning's current relationship to images and sound that I would need to examine the overall patterns. To begin this undertaking, I complied scenes into a digital archive.[16] To find sex scenes, I consulted different Internet lists of television's [hottest] [steamiest] [sexiest] [and many other -ests] sex scenes. While watching the scenes, I kept the information on a spreadsheet, including:

- show name;
- show season;
- characters in the scene;
- episode title;
- context;
- type of sexual encounter;
- media format (DVD, streaming, live TV);
- terms used in CC;

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[14] As will be discussed in more detail, the example from *OITNB* is both an official caption example and an imagined caption

[15] Zdenek frequently speaks about the need for quality captions rather than current standards that focus on issues of style.

[16] I am hoping to make this archive public eventually

- sounds not included or that CC did not accurately portray;
- and timestamps.

From the clips complied, I recorded patterns in word choices and what types of information captioning frequently omitted. I want to stress that the work done in this chapter and archive are a starting point. This chapter examines the production and influences upon caption rhetoric and how this enforces specific ideological structures. While this chapter is primarily in the realm of production of captions and ideology, the need to understand how these captions are perceived remains an essential undertaking for caption scholars. As of 2019, the archive currently stands at over 265 examples of TV sex scenes, which is how I was able to understand specific patterns, common word usages, and how TV sex scenes often function in a TV show's narrative.

A common pattern that emerges is that the sex scenes' captions dramatically impact an understanding of the overall narrative, tone, and access to character arcs and relationships. For instance, if a song plays during a sex scene, it can tonally position the sex as a romantic encounter, an angry hate fuck, makeup sex, or an awkward one-night stand.[17] However, when extra-diegetic or non-dialogue utterances, what Zdenek calls non-speech information (NSI), are left out of CC, then it fails to achieve its ultimate purpose. According to the FCC, captions should aim to be "Accurate: Captions must match the spoken words in the dialogue and convey background noises and other sounds to the fullest extent possible." The FCC is not alone in demanding accuracy, many captioning guides such as those from the Described and Captioned Media Program and

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[17] For example, S3E6 of *Lost* titled "I Do" has a sex scene between the character Kate and Sawyer, who leading up to their sex scene have been arguing. The captioning captures the dialogue, which has a tone of frustration but fails to indicate a soft romantic song plays once they begin to kiss. The non-diegetic song helps position this scene as a romantic encounter and more than anger towards being trapped. Captioning frequently leaves out non-diegetic elements that impact the scene's meaning.

National Association of the Deaf (NAD) use language which reinforces the need for accuracy.[18] The FCC and others require that captioning convey "background noises and other sounds," and yet sex scenes are not captioned to the "fullest extent possible" [insert standard moan, groan, grunt].[19]

  While CC clarifies certain sonic elements, the archive shows that bodily sounds are continuously left ambiguous or undisclosed. Part of the issue is that sounds associated with sex, referred to as paralanguage [breathing] [gasping] [moan], are considered less important to caption than dialogue.[20] Zdenek notes that paralanguage, as a form of NSI, is "to a large extent, invented by the captioner" (which sounds n.p). While part of the issue may be the lack of guidelines regarding which NSI is important, the overall priority given to dialogue reinforces normate views of communication. Verbal dialogue is considered an indication of cognitive abilities, whereas paralanguage signifies a lack of cognitive abilities. In communication theory, paralanguage has even been associated with primal animality, further removing it from "human" qualities.[21] Unfortunately, comparisons between disabled bodies and animals have pervaded public consciousness.

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[18] The DCMP states, "Accurate: Errorless captions are the goal for each production." While the NAD says, "A caption viewer should not receive any more or less information than a hearing one."

[19] Throughout the dissertation, [ ] or ( ) are used to both indicate official captions from examples as well as disrupt reading patterns to force readers to engage with the image/style of captions in a way that not all readers encounter. I do not assume familiarity with looking at shapes of captions; therefore, this acts to replicate that shape within the chapter. When breaking down the logic behind captions, it can also be easier to communicate that logic by using the format of the captions themselves.

[20] It should be noted that dialogue's "superior" status is not limited to closed captioning. Across soundtrack studies, dialogue has been considered the most important sonic element. An issue that Zdenek also takes up in his scholarship.

[21] For more information on communication theories history of ableist and heteronormative scholarship, please see Karen Lovaas.

By selecting to prioritize dialogue over paralanguage, CC reinforces potentially ableist views of communication by sending the message that spoken dialogue is what makes you worth noticing or what makes you human. The need for d/Deaf and Hard of Hearing people to verbally speak fueled the oralist movement, led to legal battles regarding signed forms of communication, and the overall medical model of "curing" deafness.[22] Paralanguage in a written form, highlights the constructedness of rhetoric, of meaning, and shows that the body can produce noises without our intention. Captioning bodily pleasure as paralanguage draws attention to the body experiencing sexual pleasure within a space coded as disabled and with language coded as disabled.

In closed captioning, what is made visible through language and what is not visible, helps enforce a dual binary of hetero/able-bodied and queer/disabled. As scholar Robert McRuer states in his book *Crip Theory Cultural Signs of Queerness and Disability*, "compulsory able-bodiedness, which in a sense produces disability, is thoroughly interwoven with the system of compulsory heterosexuality that produces queerness…compulsory heterosexuality is contingent on compulsory able-bodies, and vice versa" (2).

From the archive, I selected three case studies that show how CC performs this ideological work. First, *Scandal* is a typical representation of TV sex scene's CC, as well as making several lists of [-est] sex scenes. While appearing straight forward, it includes captioning for sonic elements that are not heard on the soundtrack and use ambiguous descriptive terms. These choices show that CC uses its myth of objectivity to ease anxiety over the stability of the dual binary of hetero/able-bodied queer/disabled. Unlike *Scandal*,

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[22] For more on the history of deafness and disability rhetoric, see Brueggemann.

the second show, the US version of *Queer as Folk*, add CC terms to control sexual acts and bodies which act to challenge the binary. The last example from *OITNB* indicates the anxiety over *what exactly* is being captioned? How do sexual acts show the limits of language in understanding identity? Does CC capture what we do as sexual acts or who we are because of those sexual acts? Through these three (3) examples, we can understand how hetero/able-bodied needs queer/disabled and by understanding how this system operates, we can break hetero/able-bodied down as the "default setting."

[Just Your Average Everyday Heterosexual TV Sex Scene]

When heterosexuality and able-bodiedness are continuously enforced as the normal or the "default human setting," they lead to compulsive behavior.[23] These compulsions to perform heterosexuality and able-bodiedness work invisibly in the space of closed captioning, but cripping and queering are methods to help us decode these compulsions. Cripping and queering both set out to question concepts of normalcy and inform each other in dismantling systems that perpetuate these concepts. To examine how these compulsions towards normal are enacted in closed captioning and how queering and cripping disrupts them, I will turn my attention to S2E14 of the ABC show *Scandal* entitled "Whiskey, Tango, Foxtrot." *Scandal* is a political thriller that follows a crisis management firm lead by the character Olivia Pope (Kerry Washington). Another key element of the show is Olivia's on-again-off-again affair with President Fitzgerald Grant III (Tony Goldwyn). The episode is a typical example of how closed captioning works for television sex scenes. The closed captioning transcribes the dialogue, indicates song lyrics when related to them or if there is space for them, and

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[23] For more information on compulsive behaviors linked to heterosexuality please see, McRuer, Rich, and Warner

barely indicates NSI. The episode's captioning adds sounds that are not present in the soundtrack and uses vague terminology which reflects the need for hetero/able-bodiedness to reconfirm its own normalcy when they are positioned within a space coded as disabled.[24] These subtle changes from soundtrack into language are part of the system, which allows CC to uphold the dual binary by working subtly and going unnoticed.

Scandal is typical of closed captioning practices where sounds and dialogue are changed from the soundtrack into written language. Sometimes these changes relate to the use of slang, concision to take up less screen space, or using shorter synonyms. During this episode of *Scandal*, the change I am most interested in is the addition of [both moaning] into the episode's CC. While *Scandal* could be attempting to avoid ambiguity in its paralanguage by indicating who is producing sounds, it is doing this even when only one character or neither is heard [moaning] on the audio track. There are instances during this scene where Olivia can faintly be heard [moaning] at various moments.[25] When the CC [both moaning] appears on the screen, neither are heard [moaning] on the audio track. During the scene, we do not hear them moaning together at the same time, which is implied by [both moaning]. The caption is an example of what Zdenek calls sustained captions by changing the verb into its -ing form to indicate a continuous or repeating sound (Reading 40). While [moaning] occurs at various points through the scenes, the rhetorical choice made here also attempts to obstruct other readings or questions of the power dynamics associated with sex.

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[24] Or at least readily heard on multiple viewings and various volumes.

[25] It is unclear to me if President Fitzgerald Grant III also [moans] even when watching the scene multiple times.

While both might be enjoying the sex, one is positioned as sonically dominant.[26] Outside of the sonic power dynamic, the positioning of bodies in sex acts reflects other power dynamics.[27] The indication of power structures within sex and outside of sexual encounters is widely discussed within porn studies. For instance, the focus on the money shot or cum shot within porn has reflected both a patriarchal nature of society but also that sex is for men.[28] While television sex scenes do not have a cum shot, the performance of sex on screen reflects power structures outside of the sexual encounters involving race, gender, sexuality, class, and ability. If "porn can be seen as offering means to resist the notion of 'good sex' as monogamous heterosexual and private, produced through regulation and sexual stigmas" (Paasonen, Nikunen, Saarenmaa 13) then television sex scenes are a place where 'good sex' is enacted and performed.

By showing the power dynamics built into sexual encounters by indicating who is creating certain sounds, CC runs the risk of showing the instability of these structures. Captioning creates anxiety regarding sexual power dynamics' effect on power structures outside of sexual encounters. If women do not just "lie back and think of England" but actively enjoy sex and assert that pleasure through sonic dominance, then that challenges women as passive sexual objects. If women are sexually dominant and assert this through sonic dominance, then men might be positioned as the object. When object=women and women=subservient to men, then other power structures that rely upon traditional patriarchal roles are challenged if men take the place of the object in the above scenario.

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[26] It is important to note that this sonic dominance is often linked to gendered performance. This is discussed in chapter two.

[27] While the positioning of bodies during sex and their link to power if often examined in queer theory in terms of gay male sex, specifically about top and bottoms. For more information on tops and bottoms, please see Steven Underwood

[28] Please see Linda Williams *Hardcore* and *Porn Studies* for more information on sex and power structures.

Those systems are tied with gender, compulsive heterosexuality, and able-bodiedness. To avoid this potential threat, CC either does not mention who is producing sounds by leaving out the speaker identification or takes the *Scandal* route and democratizes the caption track. CC attempts to ease these anxieties surrounding power's ultimate instability by arguing that heterosexual/able-bodiedness is pleasurable to all or (both) since the sexual power is shared and thus is stabilized.

By making the rhetorical choice for [both moaning], the captioning is presenting a sexual encounter where both parties are equally in control and enjoying the sex; [both moaning] draws the audience's attention away from the fact that Fitz is taking Olivia from behind. By downplaying the position and power built into the sex scene, CC steers viewers away from its animal connotations. Male taking females from behind is often associated with how animals procreate, has given rise to sexual nicknames such as "doggy style," and has more carnal connotation than sex positions like missionary. If the captioning only stated that one person was [moaning] alongside this sexual position, it might stir up tension over the link between paralanguage and disability through the fear that paralanguage is close to animality, thus not reflective of cognitive abilities. As Dolmage says, "those without the ability to speak and those without the ability to "control" their bodies have been omitted from considerations of rhetorical capacity. The mean becomes codified as a normate position, and thus we get a picture of what bodies are allowed to be, to do, to look like, to express" (*Disability Rhetoric* 25). While CC wants to show Fitz as a sexually active, powerful man, it does not want to position him as a carnal unthinking beast.

If Olivia is [moaning] alone, then she might be viewed as more powerful and sexually active than Fitz, which would challenge his masculinity. The CC avoids any of this tension by enforcing a narrative where both parties are enjoying the sexual encounter, thus framing the paralanguage in terms of heterosexuality/able-bodied and not queer/disability. As both characters are considered strong leads, the captioning tries to draw attention away from the power dynamic discrepancies of their positions by using (both moaning). It can also ease racial tensions over a white man penetrating a woman of color. By focusing so hard in positioning this sex as between equals and equally enjoyable, the CC reinforces that heterosexual sex is democratic, by golly. Democracy, outside of being a key theme in the show, imposes a narrative of equality and stability, a narrative that is shared by hetero/able-bodiedness. The addition of (both moaning) shows that, regardless if it is true, this system of hetero/able-bodied sex relies upon repeating its universality, so not only is it the "norm," but when we all participate in it, we all benefit [all moaning].

[Both moaning] attempts to obfuscate the unstable nature of hetero/able-bodied dominance by drawing attention away from the fact that they need queer/disabled to define themselves, and that heterosexual and able-bodiedness are phantom ideals which can never fully be realized.[29] CC highlights the idea that phantom ideals exist because CC can never achieve a fully realized version of itself. The ability for captioning to draw attention to phantom ideals makes the binaries nervous because then their own ideal, which is not achievable, is brought to the forefront. For instance, [both moaning]

[29] The inability to achieve these ideas is explored by Rosemarie Garland Thomson, McRuer, and Butler. This can also be seen as connected to Derrida's idea of a pure body. For more information, see Penelope Deutscher.

is *not* achieved in the scene. Instead, it must create this myth to perpetuate the ideals of hetero/able-bodied. While hetero/able-bodied relies upon its invisibility to remain dominant, closed captioning relies upon a myth of objectivity to normalize the terms used in TV sex scenes. As Zdenek returns to throughout his book, a "captioner not only selects which sounds are significant, and hence which sounds are worthy of being captioned, but also rhetorically invents words for sounds" (*Reading* 1). He shows that captioning is far from objective and relies heavily upon subjectivity. As we shall see, this is also the reason sex is captioned in so many ways, but if captioning is subjective, then we can think about the structures which inform those choices made. The myth of objectivity has kept scholars from closely engaging with the ideological work that is performed invisibly in the space of CC.

No audio track can be transcribed "to the fullest extent possible" because the project itself is not objective. Definitions of closed captioning indicate that it is a phantom ideal that will never be realized. Let us compare two different definitions of closed captioning. First, "Closed captioning currently provides only the verbatim equivalent of the dialogue and ignores most nonverbal information such as music, sound effects, and intonation" (Rashid et al. 505). A second definition states, "Closed captioning (CC) is the verbatim translation of spoken dialogue from television and film" (Udo and Fels 207). Both references indicate a level of accuracy by using the term "verbatim," which implies a level of objectivity, but they also imply that closed captioning is a series of choices. As Zdenek states, "Every sound cannot be close captioned" (Reading 3). Therefore, choices are made about which sounds to caption. These choices are not made in a vacuum; but rather, reflect ideologies that have been internalized by the person

creating the captions. In talking about CC primarily in terms of technology, scholars have allowed the choices by the person behind the keyboard to go unnoticed. By seeing how CC tries to hide its own myth and phantom ideal, we can also see how it tries to hide hetero/able-bodied's phantomness. The compulsion to perform hetero/able-bodied will aim for [both moaning] because CC allows it to remain an idea that people can perform and strive towards. Ultimately, compulsions to perform "normal" will fail because [both moaning] will never be realized because it *was* never realized.[30] [both moaning] was never the reality of the scene. This dual binary is a system that exists only in its perpetuation of phantom ideals, which CC helps regurgitate.

The imposed [both moaning] works to repeat the binary logic to enforce the phantom ideals that lead to hetero/able-bodied compulsions, but so does choosing vague terminology in place of more accurate terms. In the same scene, the anxiety over captioning bodies sexually in a space coded as disabled becomes visible through the usage of the term [clatter]. The phrasing implies general sounds of objects being moved and background noises. [clatter] has less human connotations and more object-oriented. A less ambiguous term for the sonic elements of [clatter] heard on the audio track would be [Fitz belt unbuckling] or [Fitz pants unzipping]. [belt unbuckling] or [pants unzipping] are captions that I have seen elsewhere, and frequently they are used in conjunction with men urinating. Bodily waste can be associated with CC and disability, but not sexual pleasure? While [both moaning] allows the CC to present sex as a safe heterosexual/able-bodied act, [clatter] allows CC to avoid analyzing the genitals involved in that act. In

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[30] This concept is similar to Judith Butler's claims that gender and heteronormativity are unachievable because they are without origin.

other words, CC draws attention away from the character's sexual organs and bodies and focuses on the effects or rewards of hetero/able-bodiedness. Drawing attention to his zipper unzipping during sex would also be to draw attention to his penis.[31] [clatter] allows CC to endorse the verb of having heterosexual sex without having to conflate a space of disability with the penis that heterosexual sex is assumed to rely upon or that all sex involving a penis is heterosexual. The dominant way heterosexual sex is defined is as intercourse between a body with a penis and a body with a vagina. Of course, sex, sexuality, and bodies are more complicated than the linguistic labels which compulsive heterosexuality relies upon. The scene chooses to remove the potential threat of questions the linguistic constructions of what bodies participate in heterosexual sex/able-bodiedness by using [clatter].

[Forming Trust Issues with my Closed Captioning]

Unlike *Scandal*, which adds terms to reinforces its own hetero/able-bodiedness, *Queer as Folk*, adds terms to control sexual acts and bodies which challenge those concepts. In doing so, *Queer as Folk's* captions is still able to stabilize the dual binary even when queer sex is presented on screen. *Queer as Folk* is a Showtime series which follows the lives of several queer characters, primarily gay men.[32] In the first episode, several of the characters are at a gay bar and the character Michael (Hal Sparks) goes into a back room to ask their friend Brian (Gale Harold) when they can leave. As he enters the

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[31] Having fathered a child, it seems that the show is setting up its viewers to read Fitz as having a functioning sperm-producing penis.

[32] While audience members usually associated premium channels, like Showtime or HBO, with more explicit sex scenes, the captioning is not more explicit. The same vague terms are recycled on these channels as they are on TV channels, streaming TV sites or basic cable.

backroom, the caption [men moaning] appears.[33] In compiling the archive, this caption stood out because it was the first closed caption that attempts to specify the gender or sex of the characters in the scene. The caption I expected to see would be [moaning]. We would be surprised if *Scandal*'s CC said [both sexes moaning] [both genders moaning] or [male and female moaning]. *Scandal* does not need to specify sex or gender because heteronormativity assumes that there are only two and that those two perform heterosexual sex. While *Scandal* and *Queer as Folk* insert two different terms into the captioning [both] and [men], the compulsion behind them is similar. [men moaning] acts as a way to contain queerness through the space of disability in order to reinforce the default setting of hetero/able-bodied.

While many instances of paralanguage are left unidentified in terms of which character is producing the sounds, this example stands out as attempting to not leave any room for ambiguity. The use of the term [men] categorizes these bodies so that they confirm the dominant narratives surrounding sex, gender, and sexuality. Outside of the CC, viewers are unaware if these characters are men or identify that way. While viewers might assume that these are men since the characters are in a gay bar, the CC goes the extra step to impose this narrative, leaving no room for questions. As the camera pans across various bodies performing sexual acts, they are mostly too out of focus to determine what genitals are involved. Nor does Michael go around asking if these characters identify as men. Instead, CC relies upon internalized logic regarding how binary systems work. [Men/women] [hetero/able-bodied] [queer/disabled]. In CC, this

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[33] *OITNB* S3E4 [woman moaning] is used to show that the person Big Boo (real name Carrie) is fucking is a woman. Here we see similar impulses to the *Queer as Folk*, a way to mark the sex as not heterosexual.

logic looks like this: [penis]=[man] and [[penis]=[man] + [penis]=[men]] = [gay].[34] By inserting [men] into the caption, CC gets to say, "hey viewer, look at these nice neat boxes in which bodies and sex fit into and thus bodies and sex can be contained through language." As disability rhetoric scholar Jay Dolmage says, "rhetoric [is] the strategic study of the circulation of power through communication"(3). In this caption, we see the power of the rhetorical choice (men) circulating power through closed captioning to reinforce hetero/able-bodiedness by making this sex visible in terms of gender in a way that heterosexuality does not need to be made visible.

In comparison, [both moaning] needs no more explanation because it is assumed that the [both] is a male and a female, and thus, their sex is heterosexual. Hetero/able-bodied remains hidden in the choices that label hetero/able sex as [both] whereas *Queer as Folk* does not say [all moaning], although all of the men are assumed to be included in the [men moaning]. [all moaning] leaves room for these bodies to remain invisible and thus challenge the dual binary. McRuer argues that "because these systems depend on a queer/disabled existence that can never quite be contained, able bodied heterosexuality's hegemony is always in danger of collapse" (31). The binary looks for ways to stabilize itself through rhetoric; therefore, CC must use [men] instead of [all] showing that queer/disable must be labeled and made visible to enforce the invisible normalcy of hetero/able-bodiedness.

Hetero/able-bodiedness tolerates moments in which queer/disabled are visible because it verifies its own normalcy by remaining unmarked. In other words, by marking

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[34] A similar logic is proposed later for lesbian. While I do not ascribe to essentialist conceptions of bodies and gender, this is the logic that is re-stated repeatedly by dominant rhetoric.

the queer/disabled using language, which is a-typical in closed captioning hetero/able-bodied remains unmarked and can safely stay the hidden compulsive default. The default for people, according to hetero/able-bodiedness, is heterosexual and able-bodied. The default for televisions is usually closed captioning off. The term closed captioning comes from the fact that the captions are "closed" and must be turned on for them to be visible. Open captions are the system where the captions are permanently on the screen. To make captioning visible, users must manipulate multiple interfaces to have access to this closed-off space. In trying to activate closed captioning, the user must first acknowledge that this is not the default setting, or in other words, this is not the "normal" setting. Zdenek describes this as, "The invisibility of captioning is a result of the invisibility of disability" (*Which Sounds* n.p). By activating captioning, disabled bodies are forced to participate in a system where their need for CC enforces able-bodiedness as the standard, and queer bodies are forced to participate in a system where [men moaning] is used to confirm the standard setting of heterosexual [both moaning].

Closed captioning cannot erase the image of queer sex on screen, but it attempts to over categorize and contain it in terms of language. The insertion of [men] positions the sexual encounters as abnormal, which reaffirms the normalcy of not needing to define heterosexual sex through these terms. Introducing [men] attempts to contain and organize these bodies to gain control over them and force viewers to acknowledge that it is not standard. While the closed captioning can act to tolerate the existence of queer sex on screen, it can do so only to justify the normalness and compulsivity of hetero/able-bodiedness.

[What's in a Caption? Nouns and Verbs]

When *Scandal* says [both moaning] and *Queer as Folk* says [men moaning] what is being contained in the space of closed captioning? What is *really* being captioned? For viewers, CC appears to make the audiovisual elements of sex visible through written language. [moaning], which is paralanguage, is still considered actions that the body produces or performs; therefore, they are captioned as verbs. Zdenek states that "At the heart of almost every sound description is a verb" (41). These can be modified by placing a noun before the verb and/or an adverb after the verb. For instance, [both] is the noun before the verb of [moaning] same with [men moaning]. While the use of verbs to caption sex scenes aligns with standard practices, the verbs in TV sex scenes imply a set of nouns even when not mentioned in the caption itself. Linked with the verbs is a belief that the verbs signify which bodies are participating in the sexual acts, meaning they signify nouns.

The verb of performing certain sexual acts is thought to align with identity categories, a set of nouns.[35] Examining the first two case studies, we have seen that a body with a penis engaging in sex with a body with a vagina is performing the verb of sex. Sex, when not qualified with [men] or other nouns, is assumed to be heterosexual sex. Sex as a verb aligns with the noun of heterosexual according to the default logic in the dual binary of hetero/able-bodied. By not having to clarify the nouns involved in the verbs associated with the act of heterosexual sex, heterosexual sex can remain unseen, unmarked, and unquestioned. In contrast, bodies with a penis having sex with other bodies with a penis are marked as a different type of verb, something that needs to be

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[35] Terms such as heterosexual, lesbian, gay, or queer can act as both nouns and adjectives. Here I am discussing the noun form.

marked. The captioning for *Queer as Folk* shows that the verb gay or queer sex is directly tied to the noun of *being* gay or queer. Hetero/able-bodied nouns are those nouns because of the verbs they perform. Olive and Fitz are noun heterosexual because the verb of putting a penis into a vagina. Queer/disabled exist as a noun identity and a verb which is performed, but they exist as a second set of verbs as well when adding -ing to the end.

Queering and cripping are verbs that allow us to dismantle the ideas that any noun concept, especially those based on assumed verbs, is unstable. In doing so, queering and cripping question hetero/able-bodiedness concepts which require stability to assert dominance. Pulling from the work of Michael Warner and Adrienne Rich on societal compulsions, McRuer argues that "Cripping insists that the system of compulsory able-bodiedness is not and should not be the norm; cripping also imagines bodies and desires that fit beyond that system" (32). Here we could replace cripping with queering and able-bodiedness with heterosexuality. I want to use these two verbs, queering and cripping, to draw attention to the limits of CC language and the assumptions built into selecting certain verbs to indicate specific nouns.

The final case study, *Orange is the New Black* (OITNB), highlights CC's anxiety about using certain verbs in describing TV sex scenes because the dominant impulse is that those verbs also reflect identities. *Scandal* and *Queer as Folk* illustrate what CC does do in terms of word selection and the compulsions behind those choices. Two examples from *OITNB* are presented. The first example shows the official caption track from an episode, but the second example shows what closed captioning does *not* do and the compulsions behind those choices. To showcase these points, I first look at the official caption for Season 3 Episode 2 "Bed Bugs and Beyond." Next, I will examine an official

Netflix tweet with a different captioning from the same episode.[36] By doing this, we can see that CC uses many different rhetorical tools to help enforce the dual binary of hetero/able-bodiedness and queer/disabled, which are based upon assumptions regarding nouns and verbs.

   OITNB is a Netflix original show about a women's prison. One of the ongoing plots is the wild romance between Alex and Piper, which swings rapidly from having sex to having physical altercations. In this episode, the two women are seen arguing, physically fighting, and then having sex in the prison's library. The official Netflix caption that accompanies the sex scene is [gasps], [grunts], [grunts], [moaning], and lastly, in a shocking twist: [moaning]. [gasps] is used near the beginning of the scene when Alex slaps Piper across the face, so this NSI is used to indicate pain and surprise. The two women begin pushing each other, accompanied by the caption [grunts]. The caption does not give the speaker identification, so in the caption, it is unclear if Alex, the one pushed, or Piper, the one doing the pushing, grunts.[37] The struggle continues briefly but then quickly turns into Piper, removing her top, revealing a white bra underneath and the two women kissing. It is at this point that we get the second [grunts] as Alex pulls Piper's hair. The [grunts] here are ambiguous not only in speaker identification, but it quickly moves from physical pain to lust. The first grunt is pain, but the second grunt is pain and pleasure. The captioner is not indicating that the second [grunt] is out of both pleasure and pain and leaves it to the viewer's negotiation of image and text to figure it

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[36] While the Tweet's gif is not a standard form of captioning, as it is not representing an audio track, I will refer to it as a caption since the Tweet is presenting the words on the screen as a caption. By approaching this as a caption, it reveals even more information about the structures and limitations of CC practices for official caption tracks.

[37] After several listens it seems that Piper is the one who grunts

out. From an overall narrative perspective, the use of [grunts] might be an example of thematic captioning. Zdenek defines this as "Patterns and themes which might otherwise be latent in a film become manifest when captioned" (101). The [grunts] indicate how their relationship is often oscillating from pain, anger, punishment to sex, pleasure, and love. Thematical [grunts] is representative of both pain and pleasure capture the fact that their relationship is both loving and painful.

While thematically resonant, the [grunt] also continues a tradition of linking paralanguage with animality. [grunting] is often used to denote physical assertion, hard work, an abrupt forceful release of air from the body, or the noise an animal makes. The captioner uses a word that describes the noise a pig makes to position the sex as lustful and carnal. Again, we see paralanguage associated with animal sounds and a loss of control. A loss of control that is associated with disability and reflected in the idioms we use, such as "you are out of control." Metaphors and idioms act as a form of rhetoric that enforce dominant ideologies and behaviors where "metaphors are also incorporated into bodily experience" (Dolamge *Valley*, 115). In popular media, when someone loses control, they are often brought back to their "normal" state with a slap to the face and yelling "get ahold of yourself."[38] The metaphors surrounding control and paralanguage demand a return to a previous state which does not challenge rhetoric as a construction. [grunting] is only meant to be momentary, but once the moment has passed, the body will resume "normal" rhetorical functions. The enactment of metaphors surrounding control raises the question of what control, what influence, and in what manner is the body

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[38] Or throwing water on someone seems to achieve the same effect

controlled? [grunts] connotations of lack of control and animality indicate that the body is not as easily "controlled" by a sense of self or dominant power structures.

Part of the allure of representing sex on screen is to see a "loss of control." The women began fighting but lose control of their emotions and bodies, leading to a romp in the library. [grunt], when used in sex scenes, positions the sex as intense, lustful, and animal whereas [moan], [groan], [heavy breathing] retain a more human-like qualities and are often used in scenes that might be described as "love-making." [grunt] is more sonically aggressive, indicating a more physically aggressive type of sex. The overlap of sex and disability is discussed in Margrit Shildrick's book *Dangerous Discourses of Disability, Subjectivity and Sexuality*. In the book, she states, "it is precisely because of the inherent risk of losing self-control and self-definition that the domain of sexuality is so highly disciplined and regulated" (129). While the [grunting] might be acceptable momentarily for sex and pleasure, it is only acceptable because there will be a return to a "normal" state of body and rhetoric. A normal state which assumes defined gender roles and hetero/able-bodiedness but this [grunt] complicates the ideas of sex and rhetoric because the nouns performing the [grunt] are women performing the verb [sex] making them the noun [lesbian].

Women are thought to be less in control of their bodies and thus less stable. The idea of the noun [woman] has been viewed as less stable because it is assumed that woman is lacking. In *Rhetorica in Motion*, Jay Dolmage and Cynthia Lewiecki-Wilson argue that "the category of woman has been closely aligned with the category of disability as a term that has marked deficiency and disqualification (23). This lack or deficiency is not just a lack of bodily control, rhetorical skills, or cognition but also the

assumed lack of a penis. The word [grunt] brings us back to the issue of the bodies who are producing these sounds as "lacking" a penis, which is needed to have sex according to the hetero/able-bodiedness logic. A quick google search shows that over 328,000,000 search results can be obtained from searching "How do Lesbians have sex" whereas "how do heterosexuals have sex" only has 2,070,000 results. What this tells us is that people are very concerned over the noun [woman], which is assumed to mean a lack of penis performing the verb [sex] with other [woman]. Richard Dyer discusses this issue in *Heavenly Bodies*, in which he describes how sex and orgasm are only valid when done through vaginal penetration. So, what the hell are lesbians doing and how does rhetoric in CC reflect these anxieties? Historically, the focus on genitalia to define the [noun] of sex and thus sexuality was done through a medical model. It is the link between the use of medical models to uphold the hetero/able-bodiedness against queer/disabled and nouns and verbs that are discussed in the Netflix tweet, which references the scene discussed above.

On March 26th, 2016, Netflix's official US Twitter account tweeted out "ATTN: Netflix Closed Captioning Dept" accompanied a gif of two women kissing. The gif shows Alex and Piper from the scene described above in which I have already listed the captions from the official caption track. The closed captioning for the Twitter gif reads [lesbianing]. The term "lesbianing" itself is an inside joke in the show. In an earlier episode, the character referred to as Pennsatucky says, "She a lesbian. They're lesbianing together." Netflix tweeting out this gif of closed captioning draws attention to the word

choice in the scene for comedic effect.[39] Specifically, they are drawing attention to the

abnormality of the term. As Microsoft Word will inform you, lesbianing is not

recognized as an official verb. In tweeting this image, Netflix is using CC to reinforce

ideas of what "normal" verbs and noun identities are by making "abnormal" ones visible.

Pennsatucky's term indicates that the noun [lesbian] must perform something [a verb] to

be considered [lesbian]. Similarly to the insertion of [men] in *Queer as Folk*, this

example reinforces the impulse and normalcy behind [both moaning]. However, by

making CC visible in this Tweet, it raises the question of why this abnormality traverses

into joke territory? The language in the tweet shows the limits of language to capture sex

and identity in CC, which extends into legitimate CC since the tweet is relying upon

established logic and conceptions of CC.

The joke is understood because audiences understand that CC would never use

these terms to caption the scene. But why not? They are performing the verb of queer sex

that is associated with the noun identity of lesbian

[[vagina]=[women]+[vagina]=[woman]=Lesbian]. If, as hetero/able-bodiedness proposes,

this logic is correct, then why can't the verb version of the noun be lesbianing. In

discussing the way science is used to justify rhetoric and society, Dolmage says, "the

word retarded is given a reified and unquestioned status as a scientific term. But…all

scientific meanings are based on metaphor and use this to interrogate and challenge other

negative medical definitions of disability, revealing when possible their pseudoscientific

origins and the nastier intentions embedded in their rhetoric" (104). While [lesbianing] is

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[39] This was the only record of this captioning that I could find, so I assume that this was a joke by Netflix and never the original captioning.

not interchangeable for retarded in the above statement, Dolmage's arguments point to the more significant issue of rhetoric, which medical/scientific institutions produce to legitimize actions or power structures. In Carrie Sandhal's article from *GLQ* entitled "Queering the Crip or Cripping the Queer? Intersections of Queer and Crip Identities in Solo Autobiographical Performance," she examines how both issues of sexuality and disability "share a history of injustice: both have been pathologized by medicine" (26). The use of medical or scientific rhetoric has been used to justify marginalizing those who do not fit into the hetero/able-bodiedness ideal. [Lesbianing] has not gone through any medical or scientific model which would legitimize its status as a verb; instead, in this tweet, it becomes a punchline to reinforce hetero/able-bodiedness as the standard to achieve. The official caption track opts for [grunts] because thrusting [lesbianing] into the spotlight raises questions regarding the relationship between the overall construction of the term and identities, which are built into sexual acts, including heterosexuality.

CC and the dual binary do not want viewers to ask: If you are a lesbian, do you perform lesbianing, and can you lesbianing without being a lesbian? In transcribing [lesbianing], CC raises the question if the subject/noun of "I am a lesbian" is different from the act of performing the verb version of [lesbianing]. If [lesbianing] is something which can be performed, then its counterpart of hetero, which depends on queer, is also performative. Hetero/able needs people to believe that these verbs are not performed individually from their noun counterparts, but rather, they are inherently intertwined. However, if [lesbianing] can exist, then verbs and nouns are both intertwined and separate. They are something that can be embodied and performed. Hetero/ablest constructs of language cannot allow it to be a term and legitimize its existence because it

would disrupt the intertwining of nouns and verbs, which allows hetero/able-bodied binary to remain stable. Turning identity into its verb version in the space of closed captioning pushes hetero/able-bodied towards its collapse.

Queer sex is made visible in *Queer as Folk* to reinforce the normalcy of not needing to specify bodies for the sex scenes in *Scandal*. [lesbianing] operates similarity, but the key difference is that one is a closed captioning and the other is a joke. Even though both reinforce the normalcy of the hetero/able-bodiedness in the captioning for *Scandal*, the tweet shows us why [lesbianing] works in a way that [gaying] would not work as a joke. Lesbians are already seen as lesser in the hierarchy of bodies built into patriarchal hetero/able-bodied since the bodies that are thought to perform or participate in the verb [lesbianing] are women. The disregard for lesbian behavior and lesbian experiences is even reinforced in queer discourse, which has mostly privileged gay white males over other bodies. Even though both shows contain queer sex, CC shows compulsions for hetero/able-bodied are still tied together with other unstable binaries such as gender and sex. Language can reinforce these concepts, but also draw attention to how the logic works and potentially be the dual binaries undoing as well. The tense relationship between caption, binary, and bodies is exhibited in the choices which are made in CC and which choices are avoided.

[Up Next: Queering/Cripping the Captioning]

Now that we can see the way CC perpetuates hetero/able-bodied and sex scenes of hetero-sex are just as manipulated as queer sex, we can use queer/crip as techniques to examine these spaces and revolutionize them. First, this means disrupting concepts of paralanguage and hierarchies of communication, specifically concerning sex. To do this

means questioning scholarship, which says, "In a transnational cinema of universally recognizable car chases, sex scenes, and corporate logos, who needs language" (Downey 51). Since the transcriptions of sex scenes in films and television are similar to similar compulsions behind them, this type of argument reinforces hetero/able-bodied as operating unmarked in the space of closed captioning. The idea that sex scenes and paralanguage do not need space in the captioning since they are universally understood perpetuates ideas of normalcy that remain invisible and dominant.

An argument that sex scenes are "universally recognizable" seems to ignore that sex scenes contain more than just the verb "to do sex." Issues of power, gender, bodies, identity, aesthetics, and sexuality play out during these scenes. To recognize that sex and thus sex scenes are not universal draws attention to the fact that those beliefs which rely upon universalizing, such as heterosexuality and able-bodiedness, begin to fall apart. To ask the question, "who needs language," seems to avoid the fact that in terms of sex, identity, and bodies, language frequently fails and yet is relied upon. The systems which rely upon language to categorize and separate queer/disabled from itself often simultaneously reveal the limits of hetero/able language. Who needs language? Compulsive hetero/able-bodiedness needs language, but we can queer/crip closed captioning in order to destabilize language and thus hetero/able-bodiedness.

I am not the first person to point out interesting closed captioning moments and the need to change the current approach to closed captioning. In fact, there is an entire Tumblr dedicated to Netflix on this subject.[40] One of the more famous critics of Netflix's captioning is Sam Wildman who argues against censoring language saying "But if

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[40] This can be found at: http://awkwardnetflixcaptions.tumblr.com/

someone says "Kill that motherfucker!" then shouldn't everyone be able to have the same

shocked reaction to the word 'motherfucker' as anyone else?" But what about just wanting

to know about two people fucking? In this area, closed captioning seems to not only fail

the first rule of closed captioning by not aiming for accuracy, but it also changes

paralanguage to uphold compulsive hetero/able-bodiedness to the point where

experimenting with language to describe sexual scenes is absurd. Closed captioning

becomes a space where the anxieties surrounding bodies and language clash. According

to the National Association of the Deaf's website, closed captioning has "come of age,"

but this technological determinist attitude towards evolutionary maturity does not seem to

include a sexual awakening. So, while closed captioning might be coming, how are we to

know if it is cumming?

CHAPTER III

[MOANS, GROANS, SLURPING]: THE POLITICS OF CAPTIONING

PORNOGRAPHY

On June 22nd, 2018, Pornhub announced it was launching a closed caption (CC) category that would help serve its d/Deaf and hard-of-hearing viewers. Mainstream internet outlets and users relegated the closed captioning feature as an oddity, a marketing tactic, or a joke. In 2020, a deaf man is suing Pornhub over the lack of captioning. Again, mainstream news outlets are treating closed captioning for pornography as a punchline along with the man suing the company. They build these jokes regarding the use of CC for porn upon the historical marginalization and lack of sexual autonomy afforded to d/Deaf and people with disabilities.[41] While d/Deaf and hard of hearing individuals do not always identify as disabled, mainstream news reports and Pornhub disabled d/Deaf people's access to pleasure by limiting how pleasure is discussed and what types of pleasure is available. Public discourse argues that *seeing* porn and its visual aspects are where all users find pleasure. This discourse displaces the importance of sound. The focus on the visual aspects of porn is meant to delegitimize d/Deaf viewers' requests for captioning. Ridiculing d/Deaf people's requests for captioning is asking them to assimilate to limited ideas of how pleasure is experienced.

Outside of ignoring sexuality as part of d/Deaf life, these narratives also perpetuate a narrow conception of how individuals experience pleasure by limiting

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[41] While mentioned already, I want to remind the reader that deafness is not universally believed to be a disability. The mainstream discourse which positions deafness as a disability is where disability becomes associated with closed captioning. Closed captioning is a space coded as disabled. Deaf individuals are treated in disabling ways through a lack of access so when this chapter positions deafness as a disability it is doing so from the position that not creating access for d/Deaf individuals is a disabling maneuver and reinforces mainstream views of deafness as a disability and limits sexual autonomy.

pleasure to visuals. Mainstream discourses on sexuality, d/Deafness, and disability do not align with the complex functions of pornography captions or porn caption users' experiences using them. This chapter examines three aspects of pornography and captioning: 1) news reports on Pornhub's closed caption category, 2) captioning for pornography, and 3) comments from users using the captioning. The wide array of foci on captioning allows me to argue that captioning exposes anxiety related to who gets access to pleasure and how pleasure is experienced. The mainstream reports are not informed by the way the captioning is functioning on the pornographic image, nor are they informed by user comments on the captioning. By comparing these various aspects, captioning makes clearer how normative mainstream discourses ignore the complexities of pleasure, porn, and porn viewers.

This chapter argues that captioning matters in creating pleasure and can act as the pleasure *itself*. This repositioning of captioning requires rethinking who watches online pornography and where viewers find pleasure in the online porn image. Similar to Steven Seidman's argument that "Queers aim less to normalize gay identities than to free all sexualities from normalizing regulation" (321–322), I argue that a disability sexual studies approach does not ask for assimilation when asking for access. CC for pornography requires alternative ways of thinking about pleasure and the relationship between the political and sexual identity of those using captioning. The captioning found on these pornographic videos illustrate how gender, sex, and sexuality is performed while also providing alternative sites of pleasure that complicate the heteronormative visuals. I argue that captioning pushes back against normative sites of pleasure privilege by being

its own distinct site of pleasure, offering greater sexual autonomy to d/Deaf and hard-of-hearing viewers.

[Disgruntled Porn Seeker Makes Headlines]

This section discusses mainstream outlets' discourses, which position vision as the primary mode of experiencing pleasure while ignoring the important role that sound often plays in forming pleasure. The news reports' rhetoric positions seeing as a stand-in for able-bodied norms and deafness as a stand-in for disability. This analysis reveals how rhetoric surrounding captioning relies on humor to ease anxieties about d/Deaf and disabled people having sexual autonomy, as many view captioning as a space coded as disabled. Discourse about captioning largely ignores the complicated function the captioning itself serves as both a site of pleasure outside of the image and a complication of normative logics performed in pornography. Mainstream rhetoric about captioning limits views on captioning, sexuality, ability, and pleasure to uphold normative pleasure privileges. The rhetoric regarding captioning does not embrace captioning as a potential for un-disabling d/Deaf pleasure by offering sexual autonomy.

On June 22nd, 2018, Pornhub announced it was launching a closed caption category for its website to better serve its d/Deaf and hard-of-hearing viewers. By this time, the company had already released an audio caption category for blind users in 2016. Both initiatives fall under the Pornhub Cares division that focuses on philanthropic endeavors.[42] According to Pornhub, "The inaugural collection will include over 1,000 top-viewed videos from the site's straight, popular with women, gay, bi and transsexual categories." As of my viewing in Spring 2019, there were only 415 videos under the

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[42] Pornhub cares also works to support sex education for the elderly, educate on issues of domestic violence, and animal conservation efforts.

closed caption category on the website. By February 10th, 2020, there were 1,244 videos listed under the category, which is still extremely limited considering how many films are on Pornhub.

Initially, Pornhub reported that the captioning would "display descriptive and interpretive text aimed to help improve the experience for users who are not able to hear the video's original audio. This includes helping to distinguish between different people talking and emotional changes in their voice or non-vocal audio that's relevant to the storyline." The elements of CC that Pornhub's inaugural memo discusses are significant for captioning quality, such as speaker identification, volume, and non-vocal audio (or paralanguage). This range of what captions were going to include was one of the primary focuses for news reports about Pornhub's creation of the closed-captioned category.

While some outlets were positive about Pornhub's inclusion of the closed captioning, others tried to be positive but appear belittling.[43] On *Geek.com*, author Daniel Starkey's supportive moments still fall back on positioning captioning as a joke, stating:

> Making the world more accessible is just a good thing to do. Plus, the videos are hilarious — especially if you can take a step back and realize that porn is kind of a ridiculous, over-the-top, campy-ass farce. Then, you can watch someone with something that is way *disproportionately large* place that on, in, or near someone else. Then the rhythmic moaning starts. And, in all caps, white text over a black background scrawls across your screen. "OH. OH, OH! OH! OH! O-GOD!" (italics original).

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[43] See Gilmer, Nazim, and Ting

Starkey is right that porn is often farcical, that pornography can be funny, and that making the world more accessible is a good thing. The issue is that this rhetorical move to acknowledge captioning as an issue of accessibility while also displacing the threat of disabled sexuality by ending with a joke is a persistent pattern in articles discussing Pornhub's captioning. Joking about accessible pornography becomes compulsive in a society where the dominant narrative is that d/Deaf individuals and people with disabilities having active sex lives is ridiculous. Starkey was not alone is using compulsive joking to ease anxieties over the introduction of closed captioning for pornography.

Similar rhetorical maneuvers of humor to ease the tensions surrounding sexuality and disability appear across news sites. For instance, *The Daily Dot* starts their article, "If you've ever watched a video on Pornhub and could never quite hear what the girl was saying to the pizza delivery guy, you're in luck." (Nguyen). *Inquiry.net* begins their article with "Cringey porn dialogue can now be read through captions, thanks to a top adult video website." (Guno). *The Calgary Herald* and the *Montreal Gazette* reported "Ever had trouble hearing what the pizza guy said before delivering the sausage special to the lonely housewife from Topeka, Kan.? Well, Pornhub has you covered," and later in the same article, "So now, you won't have to be confused as to whether the Virgin U. sorority sisters are letting out "ohhhhhhs" or "ahhhhhhs" as they experiment in lesbianism for the first time." (Postmedia). *Gizmodo* similarly states, "Much of the captioning process will be straightforward, capturing the dialogue of the assuredly riveting plot unfolding on screen. (That plumber sure is ripped and making a lot of sexual innuendos, I wonder where this is going!)" and that it will "immerse the hearing impaired

in the events of the video, or for folks who get off on seeing text scroll across the screen. We're not here to fetish shame." (Dellinger). While *Gizmodo* is not here to fetish shame, they are here to use rhetorical moves that perpetuate belittling and infantilizing d/Deaf people's sexuality.

There are two general issues found in these types of reports. First, while the plot of pornography has frequently been the butt of jokes, many porn scholars and industry folks have pointed out that plot *is* one reason certain people watch specific types of porn. Outside of genre, demographics prove that plot is an important facet for some viewers, with women often being cited as consuming porn with plot. The dismissal of a plot as an important part of pornography assumes that the visual is the most important part of pleasure. The visual often define discussions of pleasure, primarily the visual of penial orgasm. This dismissive rhetoric limits discussions of pleasure by valuing sex as goal-oriented and prioritizing visual signs of orgasm.[44] Secondly, text as a site of pleasure is not unique, new, or especially kinky for many people. Written erotica or smut has been around much longer than online pornography.[45] Narrow views of the site of pleasure in pornography transform anything that is not a visual of sexual intercourse into a threat for how able-bodied people experience sexuality, gender, and pleasure. Humor often eases the anxiety produced when normative ideas are threatened, making it an apt strategy for these articles to use in their coverage of Pornhub's closed captioning.

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[44] See Golfus and Wilkerson for the limitation of goal-oriented sex.

[45] In researching this chapter, I have discovered that smut is also a scientific term relating to dirt and fungus. I want to be clear I am referring to written sexually charged often considered lowbrow obscene stories.

Jokes about sexuality and disability are part of a method of off-setting threats to normative heterosexual/able-bodied logic. Other strategies include saying "no homo" when men feel they have become too close or intimate with another man.[46] Compulsive joking occurs when someone is worried people will perceive them as too close to a marginalized group and they want to distance themselves quickly. The need to add this caveat that they are not, in fact, homosexual is built upon limited ideas of male bonding. Joshua Brown sums this up as "'no homo' serves as a defense to an interlocutor's presumed attack on one's masculinity. By using 'no homo,' one is preempting the verbal strike" (301). Similarly, this need to add a joke when showing any type of acknowledgment to d/Deaf people's sexuality because of limited ideas of embodiment might as well have been written as "no crip."[47] These joking news articles appear supportive enough not to appear ableist, but also clearly position themselves alongside heteronormative able-bodied dominance. The heteronormative narratives that circulate about porn, sexuality, and gender can make room for accessible pornography only by belittling the function and, thus, the users.[48] By exposing the ridiculousness of accessible porn, able-bodied heteronormative ideals that reinforce themselves through popular pornography can remain dominant and "natural." Porn's "natural" state enables seeing, heterosexual, able-bodied users not to question how their ability to access porn as

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[46] Also see Potts

[47] I use crip here because of similar histories of homo and crip as medicalized terms, derogatory, and used in many jokes. For more information on connections between queer and crip identities see Kafer, McRuer, Sandhal, and chapter one.

[48] Note that in all of the scenarios mocked in the articles they are heterosexual except for the lesbianism one but college lesbianism narratives are largely written for a male gaze

sexually autonomous individuals is also based on their political access throughout society.[49]

Popular discourse about accessible porn does not acknowledge that access to sexual autonomy is based on political access elsewhere. As Abby Wilkerson argues, "sexual democracy should be recognized as a key political struggle, not only because of the importance of the basic human right to sexual autonomy, but also because…a group's sexual status tends to reflect and reinforce its broader political and social status" (35). It is able-bodied heterosexuals who are taught relevant sex education, who have access to privacy; their fertility is not the subject of eugenics debates, they are not labeled economic burdens, and justice systems do not support their forced sterilization. Deaf and disabled people's access to sexual autonomy is inherently tied to their bodies as political identities. Denouncing accessible porn is a way in which mainstream discourse disables d/Deaf individuals even if they do not consider themselves disabled. The disabling of d/Deaf sexuality is connected to viewing deafness as a disability, which makes d/Deaf sexuality uncomfortable. Many people defuse this discomfort by relying upon humor without questioning why there is discomfort in the first place.

Humor is often used as a tool to delegitimize politics rights, gains, and identity; therefore, the joking is not only about discomfort but also de-politicization. The humor exhibited in mainstream discourse is neither in the disability tradition of using humor politically to push back against oppression, nor is it serving as a site of catharsis for

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[49] Nucci and Appel both argue about the ways in which sexual rights and access are important for those with disabilities. Both present different types of options from volunteer sex work to government funding for sexual access.

people with disabilities.[50] Instead, this humor is part of what Haller and Ralph call "phase two" of disability humor. In phase two, "non-disabled people [create] the jokes and humor about disabled people," and "phase two of disability humor [represents] a discomfort with people with disabilities gaining rights in U.S. society." (np). These jokes about pornography represent the discomfort that able-bodied people have with disabled people gaining rights to pleasure and sexual access. It is not only in the initial reports of Pornhub adding captions that we see jokes used to soothe the discomfort of disability rights but also in the news articles about the much more widely-discussed lawsuit.

The lawsuit filed in early 2020 by Yaroslav Suris against MindGeek, the corporation which owns Pornhub, RedTube, and YouPorn, received similar rhetoric of ridicule in the news. [51] The lawsuit claims MindGeek is violating the American's with Disabilities Act by not captioning their online porn videos. Pornhub is most frequently cited in news articles discussing the lawsuit, likely due to it already having a closed-captioned category. *TMZ* reports, "Suris says he and those in similar situations would shell out dough for Pornhub's premium subscription but calls it pointless without closed-captioning. #Priorities," and "It's sort of like buying Playboy for the articles." (Pornhub Sued). *Globalnews* reports: "When a delivery man and a college student are arguing over the price of pizza in a porn video, people who are deaf shouldn't feel left out of the discussion." (Elliott). *The Daily Mail* states, "The disgruntled porn seeker also said that he and others have purchased Pornhub's premium subscription, hoping that would alleviate the issue."). Many sources made sure to include the videos "Hot Step Aunt

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[50] Please see Albrecht, Burbach and Babbitt, Bogdan, Moran, and Reiger for more on disability humor

[51] It should be noted that far more news outlets wrote about the lawsuit than the initial move by Pornhub to caption videos.

Babysits Disobedient Nephew," "Sexy Cop Gets Witness to Talk" and "Daddy 4K --

Allison comes to Talk About Money to Her Boys' Naughty Father," which were all

named in his suit. If I were a sympathetic reader, I would read listing these names as

public outrage to show that Pornhub is, in fact, not captioning videos. If, on the other

hand, I had read dozens of news articles using phase two disability humor, I would read

these lists as a move to shame Suris for bringing deafness and sexuality into the public

discourse.

From wearing the letter "A" to joking about how d/Deaf and disabled people are

accessing pornography, shame has been a primary way to control deviant sexualities.[52]

As Michael Warner discusses, shame has been used to stigmatize and ostracize certain

kinds of sexual activity and, thus, certain kinds of people. He states that "Sexual shame is

not just a fact of life; it is also political" (3). While he primarily focuses on queer politics,

he makes a point to say that "like the related stigmas of racial identity or disability, it may

have nothing to do with acts one has committed. It attaches not to doing, but to being"

(28). Being d/Deaf is perceived as being disabled, which is meant to be shameful, with a

long history of disabled people being shamed for expressing any form of sexual identity.

The choice to list out the uncaptioned pornographic videos is not merely an educational

facet of journalism, but rather a rhetorical choice. Despite these uncaptioned porn video

titles being listed in official court documents, news outlets include them to further

characterize the lawsuit as farcical. Listing the titles acts as the modern-day equivalent of

reading a person's crimes in the public square for humiliation. Pornhub is not the one

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[52] Throughout history, there have been many different badges of shame including the colonialist method of forcing Adulterers to wear an "A" or those practicing incest being forced to wear the letter "I." See George Elliott Howard for more historical information.

being shamed for not captioning their videos. Instead, the news media uses these strategies to shame Suris, the 'disgruntled porn seeker.'

Joking about the role of captioning is part of larger narratives that try to control, ignore, or belittle the sexuality expressed by d/Deaf and people with disabilities. Mitchell Tepper, a disabled sexual health advocate, describes sexuality for those with disabilities as a counterpoint to heteroreproductivity:

A biologically determinate viewpoint of sex as solely the province of reproduction, and reproduction solely the province of the fittest, usually those with access to the full enjoyment of citizenship, has largely served to exclude people with disabilities. In addition, a social cultural viewpoint of sex as a source of danger leads to the presumed need to protect us. Disabled populations are not viewed as acceptable candidates for reproduction or even capable of sex for pleasure. We are viewed as child-like and in need of protection (285).

Tepper points out that discussions surrounding disability and sex are often based in reproduction (often leading to eugenics debates) or protection (often leading to infantilization). Tepper also discusses the limits of our discourses surrounding the role of sex, sexuality, and pleasure. This infantilization often means treating d/Deaf and disabled people as if they are not capable of sexuality. Their sexual expression can include identities such as asexuality, but consistent de-sexualization of d/Deaf and disabled people by calling it compulsive asexuality is built on fears surrounding bodily norms.[53] De-sexualization "refers to the ongoing process of creating distance between sexuality

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[53] Asexuality is a sexuality that d/Deaf, hard-of-hearing, and people with disabilities can have, but the process of forcing asexuality onto all people with disabilities erases sexual differences, differences in pleasure, and perpetuates desexualization.

and people with disabilities through the fear of disability reproduction and contamination" (Kim 483). By excluding disability and disabled people from sex education, popular discourse suggests that sex and disability are not compatible. To teach people and openly discuss the sexual lives of those with disabilities is to challenge the dominance of able-bodiedness as the site of reproduction and pleasure. We do not teach people about disabled people's sexual lives because mainly, society does not want them to have sex and society does not want them to have children.[54] Kristy Liddiard and Jenny Slater argue that "the threat of disability endangers the carefully constructed myth of the 'able' body and self which is foundational to a neoliberal social order where multiple forces are in play to keep all bodies 'tidy', manageable, and bound"(321). As Liddiard and Slater's article argues, disabled bodies must be contained. So how do we contain pleasure in relation to perceived disability when it begins to leak into our mainstream discourse? Humor and ridicule are the strategies of choice.

These fears surrounding and practices of ignoring sexuality and disability result in language that positions sexuality (expressed by someone *perceived* as having a disability) as too much, funny, a specific kink, or just unintelligible. Eunjung Kim argues that "once asexuality has been imposed, any signs of sexuality can be registered as excessive" (486). As Cinemablend says, "Maybe that kind of dirty talk, whether heard or just read, does it for some people. Everyone has their kinks!" (Carbone). Cinemablend makes it appear that asking for access to the sonic elements of porn is an excessive request, making it kinky. Despite many comments on online pornography mentioning plot or vocal performance, mainstream discourses position the captioning reporting the sonic as

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[54] See Hubbard for more on sexual reproduction and disability

excessive. For those for whom *any* sexual expression is registered as excessive, captions become a kink. Not only does labeling an accessibility issue as an excessive request further the rhetoric of disability and sexuality as at odds with each other, but it also shows how popular discourse limits of conception of pleasure.

Pleasure is not limited to the visual; instead, it is located in vast networks that include captioning. Textual pleasures from accounts of courtly love, romance novels, written erotica, smut, and cybersex have all served as sites of pleasure independent of visuals.[55] Other forms of sexual intimacy outside of visuals include phone sex.[56] It feels obvious to say that closed captioning is tapping into the same pleasures of reading sex and intimacy that people enjoy when they read erotica. However, this connection seems to be mostly missing from popular discourse because captioning is associated with disability. The very notion of disability and sex together makes the apparent connections between written erotica and captioning illegible in normative society. Feona Attwood examines "the ways in which new forms of communication technology are implicated in producing new forms of sexual practice – and how these relate to contemporary perceptions of what sex is" (280). She argues that cybersex creates "an atmosphere where talk is often explicitly sexual, and indeed functions *as* sex" (284, emphasis original). While she is talking about cybersex, these same statements can apply to captioning as a site of pleasure in its own right. While captioning serves as accessibility to the image and sound, it can also be its own site of pleasure distinct from the visuals or sound. The captioning functions as sex.

[55] For more information on cybersex, technology, and pleasure see Ross

[56] See John Stadler for more on the important role of phone sex

Understanding how the captioning acts as sex and its own site of pleasure require looking at the aspects of captioning not discussed in mainstream reports. Mainstream discourse contextualizes the anxieties surrounding accessible pornographic material to d/Deaf and hard-of-hearing audiences. The idea of captioning online porn makes it more egalitarian and welcoming to all those seeking pornographic pleasures.[57] Making pleasure accessible though captioning does not alleviate the issue of making pleasure widely accessible, due to Pornhub's captioning methodology. In the next section, I want to examine how public discourse is not acting alone in limiting who can access pleasure and how to do so. The choices Pornhub makes in selecting which videos are captioned demonstrates how certain pleasures are prioritized and valued. After examining how Pornhub, like the news reports, enforces certain types of pleasure, I will analyze what types of pleasure is found on the pornographic image.

[Pornographic Arrangements]

As previously mentioned, Pornhub's "inaugural collection will include over 1,000 top-viewed videos from the site's straight, popular with women, gay, bi and transsexual categories." Despite their initial claims about closed captioning, it took almost two years for the collection to reach over 1,000 videos. In February 2020, several videos in the closed captioning category are missing captions. This lack of consistency makes it difficult to determine how many videos in the caption category are legitimately captioned.[58] Because this category is based on a particular technological aspect of viewer

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[57] Stern and Handel suggested that "internet users can circumvent the legal and physical boundaries that once prevented access to sexual materials and information. Now, sexual material can be distributed and downloaded for free, increasing the power of both consumers and previously unempowered providers." (343).

[58] Such as "GIRLSWAY NATURALLY BUSTY LANA AND AUGUST FOOL AROUND!" or "FAMILYSTROKES- KINKY AUNT FUCKS STEP-NEPHEW"

interaction, the videos within the category are extremely varied. Pornhub allows users to filter through the category by combining it with others. For instance, a person could select the "closed captions" category and combine it with other categories such as "cartoon." Combing these two would show the viewer videos which fall into both categories. Another way to filter through the results is to select features such as: Most viewed, Longest, Newest, and Featured Recently. When selecting Most Viewed it can further be categorized by: Daily, Weekly, Monthly, Yearly, All Time, and this can be limited to a specific country. I could select the Most Viewed in Germany of All Time and it would give me different videos than if I selected Most Viewed in US Weekly. Outside of being in the CC category, I did not limit my initial searches in any other way. Each viewing session would consist of selecting random videos and a random combination of filters to try and see the widest possible range of videos. The way Pornhub has chosen to select videos is based on videos with the highest viewings. Therefore, when going to Pornhub's main page and selecting "Most Viewed" and "All Time," many of these videos will have the CC logo on the bottom, indicating that the video is captioned.

While this means that highly-viewed videos are receiving CC, it creates a specific type of closed caption archive. The result of Pornhub's method of selecting which videos receive captions results in upholding particular pornographic tastes. These tastes align with dominant ideal sexualities. For instance, by combining "closed captions" with "lesbian" results in only seven videos. Combing "closed captions" with "ebony" results in only 48 videos. "Interracial," which is typically black men with white women, only has 12 videos when cross-listed with "closed captions." Only one CC video features a fat

body as defined by the "BBW" category, and four videos overlap with "Asian."[59] Basing

the captioning on views means that the majority of the pornography available to d/Deaf

and hard-of-hearing viewers is white, heterosexual, cis, thin, and able-bodied. While the

rhetoric *about* captioning often displaces the threat of d/Deafness and disability through

humor, Pornhub also displaces the threat of non-dominant or non-normative pleasures

through its captioning choices. If a d/Deaf person wanted to watch a lesbian porn video

featuring Black women, it is not accessible. This methodology forces those using

captioning as the pleasure to consume primarily normative images. So, while the public

discourse made the captioning into an excessive kink, Pornhub's captioning itself is still

in line with mainstream viewers' values.

The news reports' rhetoric and Pornhub's limiting methodology both act to use

captioning in ways that ultimately uphold the restriction of pleasure and sexual autonomy

from d/Deaf and hard-of-hearing individuals. While these reports and pornographic

images are very normative in many cases, the addition of captioning can complicate the

visual aspects of normalcy. These visual images might uphold normative pleasure, but

captions can act as their own site of pleasure separate from the images, or at least push

back against the visuals. To examine how the captioning of pornography can resist

limited discourses of pleasure, deafness, disability, and sexuality, I will now examine

three significant patterns of closed captioning for pornography: [slurping], orgasms, and

dirty talk. While captioning does not undo the infantilizing of the reports or the normative

images of Pornhub, it resists easy homogenizing. These three case studies in porn

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[59] All of these numbers are from the original 412 videos which were the only ones available during most of 2018 and 2019.

captioning highlight ways that it is pushing back against how and where pleasure is experienced in pornography.

[Slurping]

Unlike television sex scenes that downplay body sounds, porn tends to highlight body sounds during sex. In the majority of the porn watched for this project, blowjobs were captioned as [slurping]. "Slurping" is not a delicate word, often causing a visceral response when hearing or even reading it. The word draws specific attention to the suction sounds and wetness that the person's mouth makes as they suck on a person's penis. In the blowjobs depicted in the porn videos watched for this project, this included mostly men with women. I use women and men here in very binary fashions since the porn watched for this project mostly feature cis-heterosexual couplings as a consequence of Pornhub's captioning method, discussed above. The use of the term [slurping] thus draws attention to two primary body parts: the penis and the mouth.

The penis, as the visually privileged body part in pornography, is often discussed in terms of the penis's visual orgasm. The porn archive I created shows very few men performing oral sex on women, and when this was on screen, it did not last for as long as women performing oral sex on men. While men performing oral sex on women was sometimes captioned as [slurping], this occurred significantly less than when depicting blowjobs. The visual pleasure privilege afforded to men's orgasms is used to justify the "money sho"t where the man ejaculates on the woman's face. In terms of the visuals, the penis ejaculating on a woman's face is often displayed through the use of a point of view (POV) shots. This shot means the penis on screen becomes a detached member standing in for the supposed penis of the person at home watching. The person at home is

presumed to be an able-bodied male who watches pornography to masturbate and gain pleasure through genital orgasm.

The sexual virility of men is often central to mainstream discussions of masculinity.[60] In defining masculinity through sexual ability, sexual ability is linked to gender performance, which is linked to sexual identity and political access. This is what Judith Butler calls the "heterosexual matrix," which "assumes that for bodies to cohere and make sense there must be a stable sex expressed through a stable gender (masculine expresses male, feminine expresses female) that is oppositionally and hierarchically defined through the compulsory practice of heterosexuality" (191). Implied in this matrix is the stable identity of able-bodiedness. Cisgender, able-bodied, heterosexual males have significant political access because they reinforce the matrix through their sexual identity; therefore, their political identity is tied to their sexual identity. In his work on gender and disability, Tom Shakespeare argues that while "femininity and disability reinforce each other, masculinity and disability conflict with each other" (57). This conflict results from considering d/Deafness a disability and results in its perceived de-sexualization. This de-sexualization is at odds with masculine ideals that men are active, in control, and are actively using their penis for heterosexual activities as prescribed by the matrix. While disabled men can be sexually active or find pleasure outside of penial orgasms, dominant gender logic sexually disables those other pleasures. The more sexually active a man is, the more he is seen as performing masculinity, and thus has more power within

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[60] This is also a racialized issue as there is a long history of white men fearing Black men's sexual prowess as a sign of their masculinity.

traditional frameworks. The fear of becoming disabled is often a fear of being emasculated, resulting in a lack of political access. [61]

When sexuality and bodies exist outside of ableist concepts, their connection to matrix formation under the guise of commonsense universality falls apart. For instance, Patrick White discusses teaching blind individuals sex education means teaching the blind heterosexuality. He states, "It is thus disturbing and disruptive even to consider that the blind might not experience sex and gender in the same way as the sighted, since it suggests that our ostensibly objective understanding of sexuality is wholly dependent on a specific sensory apparatus" (140-141). While blindness and deafness are not interchangeable, these sensory apparatuses include sonic cues that not only relate to issues of gender, but also pleasure. The commonsense logic relying on the dominance of visuals means d/Deaf and Hard of Hearing viewers should only find pleasure in the image. Captions such as [slurping] recognize that some viewers' sexuality and pleasure are shaped by various types of texts that do not adhere to normative pleasure logic.

The need for captioning acknowledges that some viewers are d/Deaf, displacing the hearing, seeing, able-bodied conceptions as the sole precursors to pleasure. The fact that real-life d/Deaf and hard-of-hearing viewers might watch porn feeds into the compulsive joking discussed earlier. Accessible porn means sexually active participants watching porn who use accessibility aids. This has wide-reaching implications within the heterosexual matrix. Tom Shakespeare argues that "One of the problems, for disabled men, and for men in general, is that male sexuality is conceived traditionally in a phallocentric and oppressive way" (57). The function of captions on screen showcases

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[61] For more information on disability and masculinity, see Abbott

shaky commonsense logic used to define masculinity and heterosexuality. Recognizing

the need for closed captioning in pornography necessitates an acknowledgment that not

all porn viewers are able-bodied, nor do they experience sexuality through the same

sensory apparatuses. Even the existence of the closed caption icon on porn thumbnails

forces disability into normative spaces of sexuality and pleasure. This demands a

reconsideration of how common sense is used to define a matrix that presumes only able-

bodiedness grants sexuality, gender, and pleasure.

   Although visuals of the penis are often associated with heteronormative porn, the

visual of the slurping act is not alone on the screen. It is accompanied by a black box with

white lettering saying [slurping]. While "slurping" might be the closest sonic translation

of the sound, it also implies a type of hungry feasting. Slurping is often referred to when

eating soup or ramen. It is associated with a type of excessive consumption or an

abandonment of societal norms.[62] This perceived loss of control by the woman on her

knees hungrily consuming the penis conveyed through [slurping] is its own pleasure, not

solely dictated by the image. The use of [slurping] takes the viewer inside of the woman's

mouth. It is this penetrative act that can be arousing in its own right. The mouth as a wet

space leaking drool also plays into the taboos of leakage.[63] This taboo and its visceral

anxieties become part of the arousing appeal of [slurping].

   While the image of a woman on her knees, performing oral sex, can reinforce

dominant gender binaries that position women as passive, the term [slurping] brings the

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[62] In many Western countries, it is considered rude to slurp food or drinks.

[63] This wetness is part of erotic patterns of pleasure "In cinema the audible moaning is the most salient sign of female pleasure, while in written erotic narrative, as well as in the Japanese erotic comics for women, the wetness and fluids play the most important role" (Johnsdotter 188)

body's sounds center stage. More accurately, it brings *her* body's sounds center stage. Rather than obscuring the body through vague terminology, porn's caption of [slurping] draws attention to the ways bodies function when engaging in this type of sex act. The term focuses on work and muscles in the woman's mouth, which are performing this sexual act. By seeing the closed caption, rather than hearing the sounds reinforcing the image, the caption makes women more active than the image alone suggests. If the visuals suggest her mouth is passively for a man's pleasure, sonically she is marked as an active participant through captioning. [slurping] is an active verb indicating an active player. Her mouth is the one performing the labor required to make this sex occur while his penis takes a passive role of *being* slurped. If the visuals often focus on the penial orgasm, [slurping] offers other types of pleasure and acknowledgment of sexual labor. The [slurping] brings the work done by the woman's mouth to the literal center by disrupting the visual since the caption appears center frame.

While [slurping] alone cannot undo the normative images or even the normative gendered logic that makes slurping appealing, captioning can complicate the image. The pleasure of [slurping], even within the gendered logic of control and politeness, is challenged by the site of pleasure existing outside of the heterosexual image. The very site of slurping as pleasurable is in a space coded as disabled. The other way that captioning blurs the normative logics in these pornographic images is that the captioning forces a viewer's attention to the woman's sexual labor. This sexual labor is indicative of multiple types of labor performed by women that are just assumed to be part of their daily lives such as cleaning and childcare. In their study on sexual and emotional labor, Breanne Fahs and Eric Swank show that "emotion work [appears] in some form for

nearly all women as part of their current or past sexual experiences, as women [describe] frequently enduring unsatisfying sex and lack of orgasm in order to provide their (typically male) partners with feelings of power, sexual skillfulness, and dominance" (61). Women's labor is a political issue that is tied to the types of sexual labor they are expected to perform.[64] Slurping makes visual the labor performed by women. This does not mean that some women do not enjoy giving blowjobs, but rather that [slurping] captions in such heteronormative pornographic images make clearer the hidden labor often performed by women. Having captioning on the pornographic video already requires rethinking of able-bodiedness, who watches porn, and places disability into a space of sexuality and pleasure. Slurping becomes a site of pleasure distinct from the visuals while also reproducing its own gendered logic while also highlighting women's physical work in performing sex. Slurping is complicated.

[Whose Orgasm is it Anyways?]

While women's work in pleasuring their male counterparts becomes clearly stated in the space of the captions such as [slurping], the female orgasm is less present in the closed captioning. While sounds of her orgasm take up a lot of the captioning space, they are not clearly marked as hers. The fact that a woman's orgasm has no visual signifier, unlike the man who produces semen, has been a source of anxiety surrounding sexual activities. The lack of a visual sign of the vaginal orgasm led psychoanalytic and feminist scholars to argue the fear of the vaginal orgasm represents anxiety of lacking or castration for men. The way vaginas operate within sex was of upmost concern post-WW2 with the following decades seeing the publication of *The Kinsey Report* (1948), the first issue of

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[64] I will also refer back to chapter one's lie back and think of England

Playboy (1953), and *The Feminine Mystique* (1963). [65] It was even assumed that the *only*

way a vagina could truly experience an orgasm was through vaginal penetration, with a

clitoral orgasm being less desirable than vaginal ones or even not a real thing. Due to the

lack of a visual vaginal orgasm, Linda Williams notes that ""oooh" and "aaah" may stand

as the most prominent signifier of female pleasure in the absence of other, more visual

assurances." (153). When women with vaginas in porn have sex, they sonically mark

their orgasm through para-language and other dialogue. Closed captioning thus becomes

a valuable tool to showcase their pleasure occurring in porn.

Ideally, as stated in the mission goal of Pornhub's use of CC, the CC would

indicate various tones and volumes which have become sonic signifiers of women

experiencing pleasure and orgasms. It would be helpful to know if she is getting louder,

which would indicate being closer to orgasm. Using Zdenek's term of speaker

identification (SI), the CC for Pornhub largely does not indicate who is making sounds

during the videos, which ultimately leaves the pleasure the women are experiencing, or at

least performing, vague and unmarked. Because of the lack of speaker identification, it is

not even clear that it is a woman who is making the sounds. The camera's focus on the

penis means that often the woman's face is not fully visible, making it difficult to rely on

seeing her mouth moving to make these sounds. It can be inferred that it is the woman

making the sounds because of dominant gendered concepts of how sex is performed.

Women are expected to perform sonically in ways that men are not. The common sense

of normativity has forced women to perform sex sonically to reinforce gender

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[65] For more information on this see Richard Dyer's *Heavenly Bodies*.

constructions, a construction that captioning makes clear when we look at the assumptions about whose "ooohs" and "ahhs" and whose moans and groans, we read.

The commonsense visuals of normative pornography fail here because the visuals require other sensory apparatuses to communicate a woman's orgasm. In this configuration, captioning has greater abilities to identify signifiers of female orgasm than the visual image alone. As noted by Sara Johnsdotter, "The cinematic medium has a limitation here that does not apply to written erotic narrative, where female pleasure and climax can be given evidence through a linguistic account" (187). She discusses written erotica's ability to communicate a woman's orgasm by semantically marking it as a type of cum. Similar to other written forms of sex, captioning is also able to exceed the visual limitations of the pornographic image by dedicating the majority of its time to marking the "ooohs," "ahhs," and paralanguage expressed by the women. So at the same time that captioning is often aligned with female sexual experiences, it is aligned this way because of normative logic of female performance.

Throughout porn, women make significantly more sonic utterances of pleasure than men. This vocal act is part of how women perform sexual experiences. There are times in which the woman will say directly, "You're going to make me cum just like that, yeah, yeah" to indicate that they are experiencing an orgasm.[66] Much of the space of the CC is dedicated to writing out phrases such as "Oh yeah," "oh God," "Fuck yeah," "Yes yes yes yes" or [panting] [moaning] [groaning].[67] Williams describes the allure of these

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[66] This direct line is from VIXEN KENDRA SUNDERLAND HAS SEXECUTIVE MEETING WITH HER BOSS.

[67] Rich Conte and Angelo Restivo refer to these utterances as "Pornoperformative vocalizations (paradigmatically, "suck that dick!" and "Fuck that ass!")" (158)

sounds: "The allure of the sounds of pleasure resides at least partly in the fact that they come from inside the body and are often not articulate signs (meaningful combinations of sound and sense; but, rather, inarticulate sounds that speak, almost preverbally, of primitive pleasures" (126). In some ways, CC reinforces paralanguage as linked to a loss of control, as "primitive," and reinforces the argument about paralanguage as stated in chapter one. Nevertheless, these sounds serve a crucial role in understanding pleasures within pornographic images and normative ideas of sexual performances.

The vocal performances by women in these pornographic videos represent the real-life vocal signifiers women are meant to perform when having heterosexual sex. Women are constructed "as "givers" or as wanting their partner's orgasm more than their own (or seeing their own orgasm as a physical impossibility) shows a clear gender and power difference in who *expects* to orgasm, who *does* orgasm, and interpretations of *meaning* surrounding orgasm." (Fahs and Swank 62). Fahs and Swanks' study shows that many women will use "oohs" and "ahhs" to fake an orgasm to bolster their male sexual partners' sense of masculinity. *Language and Sexuality* authors state:

> The woman, however, sets out to show that you can communicate an
> orgasm without actually having one, by producing the signs that conventionally
> mean 'orgasm' (these include both nonlinguistic signs like gasping and moaning,
> and linguistic signs like uttering (in English) 'oh' and 'yes'). Sexual experience,
> like other human experience, is communicated and made meaningful by codes
> and conventions of signification (15).

Sexual performance is well constructed within the heterosexual matrix that requires men and women to perform differently during sexual encounters. Captioning makes more

transparent the assumptions regarding these conventions of signification and points out their constructed-ness. Orgasmic sounds are not the only sonic cues of pleasure; dialogue or dirty talk are important places where captioning acts as pleasure.

[Dirty Talk]

While dialogue within porn is often the butt of jokes, the dialogue heightens the sexual tension, increases taboos, or invites the viewer into the pleasure experience. For instance, Williams notes that in hardcore feature-length pornography, the actress will "frequently call for the money shot in the familiar "dirty talk" of the newly voiced genre, saying, for example, that she wants the man to 'come all over her face,' to see it come out of his 'big hard cock,' or to feel the hot substance spurt on some specific part of her body" (101). The use of dirty talk and invitation to be ejaculated upon both position the actress as a willing participant who longs for men's ejaculation. Similarly, online pornography uses dirty talk and the invitation to watch the woman perform or to the man to ejaculate invites the at home porn viewer to masturbate and ejaculate as well.[68] The importance of dirty talk for sexual pleasure within d/Deaf communities was brought to the forefront when many news outlets reported on Crystal Rivers, who earns a living as a cam girl using American Sign Language to sign dirty talk. The use of ASL or captions helps to bring the dirty talk to viewers or participants who find sexual pleasure in language.[69] Language is, in fact, incredibly sexy. As discussed earlier in the paper, when newspapers cited language as a sexual kink, language has been used for pleasure for

[68] For a longer history of masturbation, see Steve Garlick

[69] The use of dirty talk as a form of pleasure in the written format alongside image is not unlike the pleasure of reading erotic or other captioned style pornography videos, such as those with still photographs and accompanying text.

much longer than online visual pornography. CC accurately portraying dirty talk is vital for porn viewers who enjoy the shared experience of sexual pleasure expressed verbally. Viewing the language offered by captioning pushes back against the visuals of porn as its sole site of pleasure.

Words can be sexually charged. Sexual innuendos and character relationships can build up sexual tension where the pleasure for the viewer is when sexual tension is finally released. This sexually charged language relies on specific terms often, such as "fuck" from the orgasm examples. Other examples include porn genres like fake incest pornography, which relies upon language to situate the actors' relationship as familial. In these videos, words like "mom," "sister," or "son" must be captioned accurately, because the pleasure is directly linked to the incest taboo. Although words like "fuck" and "cunt" are often used in pornographic dialogue, this shift initially occurred in the 19th century. Lisa Seigel explains that "not until the late nineteenth century did pornography rely on the systematic and conscious use of curse words. The language of sexual cursing became a powerful tool for layering dirtiness onto eroticism" (395). While terms like "fuck" are commonly used, they still retain their sense of dirtiness and impropriety. You probably would not go into the McDonald's play area and yell "fuck" loudly. Viewers knowing that characters are using terms that connote a sense of dirtiness is important for some people's pleasure.

Even writing the differences between [groaning] or [oooohhhh] can influence how pleasure is experienced in written form. On the website Literotica, the are several how-to ~~guides for writing in sonic cues~~ for sexually charged written stories. On one of the postings called "Dialogue This" by FireBrain, the author explains that personal taste can

dictate if someone finds utterances like [ooooh] more or less arousing than actions, i.e. [groaning]. These how-to guides give lots of examples for how to write out the dialogue between characters, so that is appealing to the reader, as Firebrain says, "Oh baby. Oh *God*, baby. Fucking stick that dialogue to me, stick it in my pisshole!" (italics original n.p). Other how-to guides for writing online erotica exist for smut, slash fiction, and fan fiction. We see in these examples that dialogue is an important facet for some online pleasures. Hundreds of thousands of online erotic stories and sexually explicit fanfiction show that sexually-charged language is widely experienced as a form of pleasure. [70] Women have often consumed written forms of pleasure.[71] The fact that captioning is viewed as an accessibility issues means that it is treated with suspicion and disregard. Maybe it is also because written forms of pleasure are heavily gendered and feminized. A world with freer sexual expression would see captioning as using technology to create new forms of pleasure that are within written traditions of erotica. Captioning can evoke these same types of pleasures, albeit differently.

While some closed captioning helps ensure that the excitement and willingness of sexual participation is communicated such as orgasmic sounds, it is equally important that the CC of porn indicates when resistance or various forms of aggression are communicated during the scene. For some viewers, degrading dialogue is part of what makes watching sex exciting. Terms like "slut" are frequently used to rhetorically position women as degraded subjects. For those seeking this type of sexual fantasy, the captions need to reflect these word choices. Variants of "slut" such as "whore" are also

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[70] See Byrne, Aidan J., and Samantha Fleming

[71] See Hardy

found in porn dialogue and in captioning. In the video "Vixen Kendra Sunderland Has Sexecutive Meeting with Her Boss," the boss refers to her by saying "You're a little whore." (Vixen). The use of the word "whore" here heightens the power difference between them as well as the age difference, as he appears to be much older than Kendra. Another degrading term often found in the dialogue is the word dirty. In "Vixen.com Naughty Blonde Fucks Her Sisters Man to Make Her Jealous," the sister's boyfriend says, "Ohhhh. You're such a dirty little girl" (Vixen). In "Pornfidelity-Cum Slut Peta Jensen Gets a Creampie after Brutal Fuck," the man says, "you dirty girl, you're a dirty girl" and then throughout the entire video calls her "dirty" as he shoves a condom into her mouth. The use of the word "dirty" and the use of the word "girl" are often found in hardcore porn. The term "dirty" acts much like the term "slut" in that it positions the woman as a degraded figure. The woman's own agency is denied her, as she is not referred to as a woman, implying a fully realized adult, but rather infantilized using the term "girl." The use of terms such as "slut," "whore," "dirty," and "girl" create a sexual fantasy where the pleasure is not solely achieved through sexual acts or visuals but through the verbal performance. Because the fantasy is not just linked to physical performance—although we do see rough sex performed—closed captions must capture the verbal performance at the core of this type of pleasure. So, while many mainstream outlets joke about dialogue, dialogue and sonic performance do remain an important facet of sexual pleasure, one that commenters care about.

[Pornhub Cares, Commenters Care]

As shown throughout this chapter, part of ridiculing the need for captions is based on the oversimplification of where pleasure is located in porn.[72] Mainstream news reports do not focus on how captioning is pleasurable, and Pornhub's captioning methods limit the types of pleasure available to caption users. The captions themselves prove that captioning acts as its own site of pleasure while complicating normative pornographic images. While the how and where of captioning pleasure has been explored, this chapter has not discussed *who* uses the captioning feature. Looking at who self-discloses their use of captioning in the comment section of porn videos reveals that captioning *is* important for pleasure. Unlike mainstream outlets or Pornhub as an authoritative figure, comment sections allow users to self-define their pleasures. Table 1 shows the comments I compiled from the original 412 videos listed on the closed captioning category for Pornhub. Not all videos' comment sections mentioned the closed captioning, but many of them did.

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[72]Even sound is largely missing from discussion of porn. Schaschek, Linda Williams and Mary Ann Doane have all indicated the importance of sound as well as the difficulty in pinpointing its relationship to pleasure, "The attempt to "foreground" the sounds of pleasure fails. As Mary Ann Doane points out in "The Voice in the Cinema" (1980, 39), sound cannot be "framed" as the image can, for sound is all over the theater, it "envelops the spectator." It is this non-discrete, enveloping quality that, when added to the close-miked, nonsynchronous sounds of pleasure, seems particularly important in the hard-core auditor-viewer's pleasure in sound" (Williams *Hardcore* 125)

Table 1. Porn Comments

Username	Video Title	Comment
malc0lm	Pornfidelity-Cum Slut Peta Jensen Gets a Creampie After Brutal Fuck	Captions aren't the most accurate...go figure
SKUNN3R	SUMMER VACATION WITH STEP MOM - DAVA FOXX - FAMILY THERAPY	Can't watch, so out of sync, my pussy dried up in seconds
Pizzaguy1 *in response to Skunn3R*	SUMMER VACATION WITH STEP MOM - DAVA FOXX - FAMILY THERAPY	Skunner, it gets in synch about a minute and a half into it. you quit too soon. This guy is in a lot of videos but here he sounds like a whiny bitch. "This isn't right or We shouldn't be doing this." Shut up and fuck her. Lol
hornymidget1521	PLAYING A GAME WITH HOT STEP SISTER - ANASTASIA KNIGHT - FAMILY THERAPY	Oh shit I just realized captions existed on PornHub. A, rare, startling appearance... Or som'thin' like that.
Pussykillaaa	StepSiblingsCaught - Making My Step Sis Cum Has Her Wanting More	Closed Captioning presented by..
Taurencompressor	CUM CHALLENGE HARD FUCKING COMPILATION	01:02 with closed caption really helped me understand what they were saying god bless the deaf (legit hard to understand what they are saying)
Icycle	MOM RIDES HER STEP SON AND BEGS FOR CREAMPIE	Nice girl, but absolutely irrelevant with caption
Clllsm	SISLOVESME - STEP-SIS PROMISES TO BE A GOOD GIRL IN BED	(Sucking sound)
Mountainmomma	BRATTY SIS - MY COCK SLIPS IN STEP SISTERS PUSSY AND SHE LOVES IT	I see they now have closed captioning. Deaf niggas be like (͡° ͜ʖ ͡°)

Table 1 (Continued)

Username	Video Title	Comment
StrokingInOz	HE CAME INSIDE ME!	i love that this is closed captioned
CockHawk06	HE CAME INSIDE ME!	nice to have caption for Slurping Sounds Moaning and Panting
LeannaDeckerFan	HE CAME INSIDE ME!	I find it hilarious that there's closed captioning available for this video. Imagine transcribing this.
Miss Banana *responding to LeannaDeckerfan*	HE CAME INSIDE ME!	Slurping sounds
Judyoo	"I'M GONNA CUM" - GIRLS CUMMING HARD DURING SEX COMPILATION	I love how this has captions
5footdong	STEP BROTHER CREAMPIES SISTER POV - MEANA WOLF	Slurping sounds from this video are satisfying
Sumhewman	TEENCURVES - CURVY BIG BOOTY MISTRESS GETS FUCKED HARD	I like how the subtitles just say screaming
Triplep3	YOUNG GIRL POV SUCK AND RIDE THEN GET HARDLY FUCKED AND CREAMPIED	Thank god for closed captioning
Penisplant	YOUNG GIRL POV SUCK AND RIDE THEN GET HARDLY FUCKED AND CREAMPIED	The closed captioning is really well done
oldeenglish800	EPIC MILF CAUGHT CHEATING; FUCKS TO KEEP SCUMBAG QUIET! (BRANDI LOVE)	This was pretty awesome. Closed captions did not disappoint. *Gobbling*
sanandreas92	TINY 75LB PIPER PERRI TAKES BIGGEST BLACK COCK IN THE WORLD!	I turned on the closed captioning
Harrielamar	TINY 75LB PIPER PERRI TAKES BIGGEST BLACK COCK IN THE WORLD!	Watching porn with subtitles is the funniest/stupidest thing ever
Tehshiz	GIVING HIS STEPMOM A MOTHER'S DAY GIFT - BRAZZERS	Closed Captions on porn?!?! What a time to be alive!

Table 1 (Continued)

Username	Video Title	Comment
irish1337	LESBIANX PHAT ASS ABELLA AND CHANELL VIGOROUS SCISSORING	If you dont watch with closed captions... you dunno what you're missing
Batsonawire	BRATTY SIS -BROTHER FUCKS STEP SISTER BETTER THAN HER BOYFRIEND S3:E4	The captioner for this video was on fucking point, thanks to all subtitlers who can actually spell
skipprans2974	BRATTY SIS - STEP SISTER AND BFF FALL FOR STEP BROTHERS SEX GAMES	I really wish there were ubtitles, like I can't have audio on right now and I don't have earphones
Yuhboyjesus	BRATTY SIS - LITTLE STEP SISTER WANTS TO FUCK WHILE BFS ON PHONE! S3:E10	Fucking thank god for the closed captioning... helps with my blindness,,,
Stormydick	FAMILYSTROKES - STEPSIS MISTAKES STEPBRO FOR BOYFRIEND	These subtitles lmao
batman02266	FAMILYSTROKES - HOT TEEN FLASHES PUSSY FOR PERVY UNCLE	we need some subtitles
nigjew42	YOUNG SLUT GIVES UP HER PUSSY TO RANDOM MIDDLE AGE DUDE	Ooooooooooooooooo some porn for my deaf ass to enjoy
Onlylownlyfowny	BRUTALX - COUPLE FIGHTING AND FUCKING	Did anyone else notice that the caption says couple but she repeatedly says she going to tell dad?!?
Magrurry	FITNESSROOMS DIRTY YOGA TEACHER ON GORGEOUS FITNESS MODEL	American Porn should Not have subtitles....
Thatmemehuman	EYE ROLLING CLIT ORGASM - BLONDE GIRL FUCKED AFTER SCHOOL	Why the fuck is there closed captions if nobody says anything like wtf

Table 1 (Continued)

Username	Video Title	Comment
cowluc0396	EYE ROLLING CLIT ORGASM - BLONDE GIRL FUCKED AFTER SCHOOL	Why tf are there captions in videos now
xrayray540x	DESTROY MY TEEN PUSSY WITH HUGE COCK AND CUM ON ME	Am I the only nigga watching this with closed captioning and it's the funniest shit ever
Hereisyourdatefor	CHEATING SLUT CAUGHT; EASILY PERSUADED INTO GIVING UP HER TIGHT LITTLE HOLE	seriously, we need captions?
Avmanm	INTIMATE SEX BETWEEN TWO COLLEGE STUDENTS	Closed captioning was brilliant
pornluvr64	FAKE DRIVING SCHOOL BUSTY JAILBIRD TAKES INSTRUCTOR ON A WILD RIDE!	I can hear them talking…why the captions?
Dpchasder	FAKE DRIVING SCHOOL BUSTY JAILBIRD TAKES INSTRUCTOR ON A WILD RIDE!	I love this series. I love Fake Taxi, I love the closed captioning, I love the British accents. They can't make enough of these vids
NinsegaR	FAITHFUL GIRLFRIEND CHEATS FOR 1ST TIME; NEIGHBOR DRILLS PUSSY JUST RIGHT!	I always found it funny that PornHub added subtitles. "Suck that cock, bitch!" Vigorous Slurping
sweetass1234	FAITHFUL GIRLFRIEND CHEATS FOR 1ST TIME; NEIGHBOR DRILLS PUSSY JUST RIGHT!	Yo this shit has captions? Finally my deaf ass can jerk off
dickbuttkiss1	STEP BROTHER GRINDING AND CUMS ON YOGA PANTS STEP SISTER WITH PENETRATION	Are we gonna ignore the fact that there is subtitles to this video ?
Twdlaa	BANGBROS - JULIANNA VEGA FUCKED AROUND THE HOUSE (AP13758)	I feel bad for whoever had to closed caption this. All those "yeah's"

Table 1 (Continued)

Username	Video Title	Comment
Ilikegingers	TINY TEEN FUCKED BY MASSIVE DRAGON COCK - SPONSORED BY BAD DRAGON	Captions: Ah, ah, ah, ah, ah, aah, mmm Deaf niggas: nut_busted.jpeg
ashslim9900	TINY TEEN FUCKED BY MASSIVE DRAGON COCK - SPONSORED BY BAD DRAGON	Anyone else notice there were captions for this video
Hakunamapasta	TINY TEEN FUCKED BY MASSIVE DRAGON COCK - SPONSORED BY BAD DRAGON	Thanks for the captions, they truly helped my experience
Charlygarci	SUPER SEXY BUSTY MISS TEEN COLORADO IN FIRST PORN EVER	Was it necessary to add subtitles for her moans? No it was not.
Blahblahblarg	I AM (LITERALLY) HURTING FOR A BIG COCK	I turned on the closed captioning so I could read the story.
Unclebadfeel	STEPSISTER DRAINS BROTHERS COCK TWICE	LoL the subtitles don't match the video audio
omichelle1992	STEPSISTER DRAINS BROTHERS COCK TWICE	What do you think about subtitles? A lots of people watch porn without sound. It could be more interesting
Ninjaaf	BRYCI - AFTER THE DATE	CLOSED CAPTIONS NANI!?!
Flegersia	GETTING MY TIGHT ASS FUCKED BY A THICK COCK (HUGE CUMSHOT!)	I only clicked on this video because it has subtitles
Stankyspud	BANGBROS - AUGUST AMES TO PLEASE ON MONSTERS OF COCK (MC16000)	I love captions. They make everything so much better.
port87	JANICE GRIFFITH FUCKS HER ROOMMATE HUGE COCK AND GETS CAUGHT	who else watches this on mute and closed caption

Table 1 (Continued)

Username	Video Title	Comment
aaron3234	BANGBROS - EBONY MILF NYOMI BANXXX GETS HER BLACK BIG TITS MASSAGED	thank god for the subtitles. i wouldn't have known what they were saying!
henry153	STUNNING PERFECT INNOCENT SHY TEEN ORGASMS UNCONTROLLABLY ON CHATURBATE	Why the hell are there captions? They don't help, all they say is "oh oh oh, ahhhh, uhm, mmmmm"
redhaze62	HOW MAKE HIM CUM IN LESS 2 MINUTES INSIDE MY TIGHT PUSSY - MIAQUEEN	Closed Captions? Accessible porn makes my dick ROCK HARD.
hamkachan12	SEDUCING MY STEP BROTHER AT CAMP	Appreciated the subtitles
wise666	MIA MALKOVA VS ALEXIS TEXAS - RIDING BATTLE #1 (NO MUSIC)	- subtitles enabled - *yes yes yes, oh fuck, like that...*
thephenom009	MIA MALKOVA VS ALEXIS TEXAS - RIDING BATTLE #1 (NO MUSIC)	how make subtitle of this video?
Unknown	FAMILYSTROKES - CURLY HAIRED EBONY TEEN GETS POUNDED BY HER STEPBRO	I love how they have closed captions
Krylock	BRATTY SIS - REVENGE FUCK WITH MY STEP SISTER & SHE LOVED IT! S3:E5	Anybody know how to turn off the fucking captions?
/watson13	PROPERTYSEX - HOT PETITE ROOMMATE BOUNCES ON SOME BIG COCK	look when you tag it as closed captioned i expect it ti be closed captioned
marcis3060	FAKE DRIVING SCHOOL THREE CREAMPIE CLIPS WITH BLACK GIRLS AND GEEKY BLONDE	how do you turn on captions?

By going through the comment sections on the current porn captioned for Pornhub, many of the comments fall into two general categories. Much like mainstream outlets, some do not understand why there are captions, and there are those who are utilizing the captioning function. Even for the comments that are joking about the captions, they acknowledge the captioning. By acknowledging the captioning, they must acknowledge varied types of porn viewers, implicitly acknowledging d/Deaf porn viewers. Even if they fail to see the value of captioning, they are forced to consider, even for a moment, the types of porn experiences outside of normative assimilation.

There are comments that question the function of captioning on the Pornhub videos. Commenter henry153 says "Why the hell are there captions? They don't help, all they say is "oh oh oh, ahhhh, uhm, mmmmm." Commenter Charlygarci wrote, "Was it necessary to add subtitles for her moans? No it was not." Another viewer, pornluvr64, asks "I can hear them talking…why the captions?" These comments echo some of the rhetoric explored earlier in this chapter. These comments on the videos see no value in captions as a site of pleasure nor do they seem to a recognize captioning as an accessibility tool. Others joke about the types of captions on the videos, such as [slurping]. Some commenters joke about deafness and/or the types of captions of the videos. What I found most surprising is that these comments were in the minority of comments focused on captioning. Out of the 64 comments recorded, only roughly 24 are generally cynical or dismissive of captioning.[73]

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[73] There is wiggle room with this number since this is based on my subjective reading of these comments. Some comments were neither positive nor negative. I am counting the comments that clearly state captioning is not needed or whose joke seems to reinforce phase two of disability humor.

Much more often were people generally writing positive comments about captioning for the videos. Taurencompressor commented, "01:02 with closed caption really helped me understand what they were saying god bless the deaf (legit hard to understand what they are saying)." This type of captioning shows how accessibility often benefits everyone, not just d/Deaf and hard-of-hearing viewers. Several others commented on their own use of the captioning, which was based on preferences of watching videos muted or for privacy. These types of comments do not belittle those using captioning for pornography, but rather position it as a positive experience. As discussed by Shildrick, "Indeed, promoting positive representations of people with disabilities, rather than devaluing them, uncovers a very different understanding of the body that opens up the parameters of sexuality for everyone, regardless of individual embodiment" (61). I would extend this thinking to include positive representations of accessibility tools and functions. Opening up the parameters of sexuality by acknowledging captioning as a site to enhance pleasure or as its own pleasure challenges normative conceptions of gender, sex, and sexuality.

Within the comment section for these videos, people can express how captioning is adding to or detracting from their personal pleasure. Commenter Penisplant mentions "The closed captioning is really well done." Another viewer Batsonawire thanked the captioners, "The captioner for this video was on fucking point, thanks to all subtitlers who can actually spell." Commenter Stankyspud stated "I love captions. They make everything so much better." Others commented on how the lack of closed captioning detracted from their ability to enjoy the video. These commenters, or these "disgruntled porn seekers," complain: "Can't watch, so out of sync, my pussy dried up in seconds,"

"we need some subtitles," and "look when you tag it as closed captioned i expect it ti [to]

be closed captioned." There are also people asking how to enable captioning to better

enjoy the videos. While mainstream articles would make it seem that more people are

likely to mock the captioning function, the comments in Table 1 show that many people

are using the captioning feature, be they d/Deaf or not. By showing support for the

captions through either praise or frustration, these users are making room for different

ways of finding pleasure in pornography and different kinds of pleasure seekers.

[Closed Caption-Curious]

Making pornography accessible is, in fact, #priorities. As explored throughout

this chapter, discourse around captioning for porn makes clearer the ways sexual

autonomy is linked with political access. The captioning for pornographic media

showcases how sexual performance is intertwined with a heterosexual matrix that values

able-bodiedness while also offering ways of unveiling sexual labor. Practically speaking,

captioning is currently serving as a site of pleasure for those who utilize online

pornography. Pornhub Cares. Commenters Care. By why care?

While pleasure is political, it is also deeply personal. So much of life being

d/Deaf, hard-of-hearing, or disabled, is answering to and relying on others. Accessing

pleasure allows for a person to engage with their own body outside of controlled

discourses. As Tepper states,

> Sexual pleasure can enhance an intimate relationship. It can add a sense of
>
> connectnedness to the world or to each other. It can heal a sense of emotional
>
> isolation so many of us feel even though we are socially integrated. It can help

build our immunity against media messages that can make us feel as if we don't

deserve pleasure (288).

I would expand this beyond sexual pleasure to multiple types of pleasure that can be

experienced through intimate digital connections. Captioning for pornography can create

a sense of connectedness to sexual pleasure, to people in the comment section, or to one's

own self by allowing for pleasure to be experienced (despite *The Daily Mail* potentially

calling you a disgruntled porn seeker.) This connectedness to the body helps to disarm

the shame and rhetoric of ridicule about deafness.

Of course, captioning pornography does not answer all of the issues surrounding

sexuality and disability rights. There are other material conditions linked to disability as a

marginalized political group that captioning alone does not fix. Abbott reminds us of this:

"Who will press the play button or control a computer mouse when/if they want to access

online dating sites or pornography?" (Abbott et al. 426). However, for those who can

access captioned online pornography, it can help shape or create new forms of sexual

autonomy. Feona Attwood sums up the role porn plays by saying:

> Some engagements with porn seem to relate directly to the body, as a way
>
> of making space for its demands, taking care of it, and intensifying its
>
> pleasures….There are also particular kinds of curiosity and intrigue: about sexual
>
> practices, bodies and feelings; about orientation, desire and identity; about
>
> looking and listening; about the forbidden and the filthy. Sometimes porn
>
> engagement is a response to existing and emerging fantasies and interests, or to
>
> anxieties about the body which may or may not be primarily sexual (3744).

For those whose bodies are often under so much external scrutiny, closed-captioned online pornography offers a space to experience pleasure, forge sexual autonomy, and create identities outside of a medicalized gaze justified by a heterosexual matrix. We must demand accessibility free from assimilation.

CHAPTER IV

WRIGHTING RACE: RACIALIZED CAPTIONS AND RACE IN CAPTIONING

Often when discussing captioning, I get asked: "isn't it just computers, now?" People's confusion as to how captioning could be racist, sexist, ableist, is intertwined with the idea that by being a technological function, closed captioning is neutral. People assumed that technology is free from the bias associated with humans. While captioning is a function of technology, but human fingers controlled by human thoughts do much of captioning. Captioning is a series of choices, choices informed (consciously or not) by the society the captioner lives in. Technology itself not neutral and often reveals deeply ingrained beliefs regarding people's places in the world. As cultural rhetorician Angela Haas suggests, "Just as the rhetoric we compose can never be objective, neither can the technologies we design. Technologies are not neutral or objective—nor are the ways that we use them. It takes just one short discussion of the slave branding iron and the technologies of the eugenics movement to make this clear" (288). While Haas does not explicitly talk about closed captioning, everything she states applies to this form of technology. Closed captioning is a technology that is not objective because it consists of rhetoric that is not objective.

As a subjective practice, captioning reflects and replicates structures of inequality found in the broader social world, including the differential marking of white-coded and non-white-coded speech. This difference becomes evident when considering works whose casts are primarily people of color. Examining major miscaptions for television shows, films, and comedy specials reveal that captioning often reinforces whiteness through rhetorical choices. In this chapter, I investigate the ways race, rhetoric,

and closed captioning collide, illustrating captioning practices' reinforcement of whiteness by positioning it as an unmarked norm while devaluing language associated with Blackness. To examine how closed captioning regurgitates logics of white superiority, I watched roughly 206 texts, including television shows, films, and stand-up comedy specials, which featured predominantly Black casts.[74] Shows featuring Black casts featured significantly higher rates of miscaptioning than shows featuring mostly white actors. I trace the racialization of captioning by first outlining two highly racialized English languages: Standard American English (SAE) and African American Vernacular English (AAVE). SAE often "corrects" language associated with AAVE or Black culture.[75] This compulsive correcting is intertwined with the belief that SAE is a superior language system as it is the language of whiteness. Captions perpetuate language as a tool for marginalization and reinforce racial hierarchies by making Black language fixable, illegible, or ignorable.

Through this subjective practice, captioning becomes a site where the racialization of language interweaves with ideological beliefs regarding the racialized body. For instance, in shows like *Nellyville,* the audio track is vastly different from the captioning for the audio. In the first episode of *Nellyville*, a reality TV show that follows the life of rapper Nelly as he raises his children alongside his niece and nephew, Nelly

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[74] While this chapter is looking specifically at media starring mostly Black and African-American casts, in future projects I would like to expand this data to include casts featuring largely Indigenous, Latinx, and Asian casts to see if the same issues regarding language and race are present.

[75] While note all Black people speaking AAVE, Black people are racizliaed within white dominant structures

discusses one of the children's desire to be a model. I have outlined the following

example, which depicts two different conversations:

Timestamp	Speaker	What the Caption Says:	What is heard on the audio track:
1:37	Nelly	I just want to make sure that she understand that it's tasteful	I just want to make sure that she understand education is first
1:39	Nelly	What are you saying?	What are your grades like?

A following is a conversation at the end of the episode as Nelly is driving

Chanelle back to the airport:

36:29	Chanelle (Nelly's Daughter)	Well, it's been real	You already paid for the semester

In the first example, Nelly's concern over his daughter's grade is changed in the

captioning track to be Nelly's concern over taste level. In both instances, captioning

removes the direct language connecting Nelly's concern for education. Throughout the

rest of the show, we see Nelly consistently discussing the importance of education. In the

last example, captioning changes his daughter's language from acknowledging that Nelly

has paid for her college education into an informal goodbye. Deliberate or not, these

choices to change his language reinforce racist portrayals of black father figures

disinterested in his children's well-being or black families dismiss their children's

education.

These examples exemplify a broader tendency to misrepresent the speech of

actors of color in captioning technology. These misrepresentations take the form of

changing word choices, correcting language not aligned with Standard American English,

or not captioning actors of color at all. Captioning uses [inaudible] or [indistinct] at a

higher frequency for predominately Black and African American shows than shows featuring white casts. Below are three examples of this captioning pattern which represents a broader sample:

Nellyville S1E5:

00:04:24	Yeah, because I can't deal with [inaudible]	can't deal with y'all
00:08:02	[inaudible]	Where the girls at?
00:08:42	[inaudible]	Oh, word
00:22:45	Is you all [inaudible]?	Is y'all ready or no?
00:32:46	Look at [inaudible]	Look at this here
00:08:35	[inaudible] the horseback ride.	Y'alls big asses used to horseback ride?
00:08:43	So y'all [inaudible] horseback riding.	So, y'all gangster ass go horseback riding
00:13:35	I can't [inaudible].	I can't rock my bucket

Braxton Family Values S1E2:

0:36:22	I'M NOT A HOOD RAT [inaudible]	I'm not a hood rat jack

Bring it! S1E1:

00:30:44	[INDISTINCT RAPPING]	She get it from her mama
00:31:37	[INDISTINCT CONVERSATIONS]	Make sure you twist that around

The findings in my captioning archive show actors of color captioned as [inaudible] or [indistinct] are consistent with Nicole Snell and Nicole MacFarland's research on closed captioning for shows like *Breaking Bad*. In their study, they found that

Black actors are miscaptioned at higher rates than their white counterparts, even when both are using Standard English. These examples so far indicate that captioning is not purely objective; instead, when it comes to race, the captioning becomes racialized.[76] Racialized captioning makes clearer the ways language in everyday life has racist undertones.

Not every miscaption is part of the racialization of captions. Throughout this chapter, I focus on what I call 'major miscaptions' as the primary group of patterns that reinforce the marginalization of people of color through language. I am defining major miscaptioning as a mistake that moves beyond misspelling or practices of closed captioning that use synonyms to conserve space. While some suggest that closed captioning should be a direct word for word translation, others have argued that focusing on the essence of the dialogue without overwhelming the screen suffices. In the 1980s and 1990s, it seems that captioning practices favored the conservation of space rather than precise translation. For instance, in the first episode of the Black television show *Family Matters*, Carl Winslow says, "I mean he does have that big apartment," but the caption states, "He has that big apartment." While the words that a person says can reveal things about their identity, I would not classify this as a major miscaption. The changes are in line with a captioning practice of conserving screen space, and none of the changes remove language that impacts character relationships, characterization or character arcs, or narrative. If a miscaption impacts one of these three categories, then I have labeled it a major miscaption and added it to the current caption archive.

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[76] See Colton and Holmes for more on racist captions and digital rhetoric

[SAE vs. AAVE]

The imposition of Standard American English is a rhetorical choice because, in closed captioning, there is no legal requirement to convert dialogue spoke into SAE. SAE is considered the standard spoken version of English within the United States and is what schools teach. In the United States, SAE is often code for White Middle-Class American English. Race-rhetoric scholars like Geneva Smitherman call it "Standard White English." Black Vernacular English (BVE) or African American Vernacular English (AAVE) are paired against SAE. Like many things considered the standard, SAE brings with it a level of ideological baggage. As Jane Hill points out in *The Everyday Language of White Racism*, the idea of Standard correctness is "social and political, not a grammatical, fact" (35). The political nature of SAE's superiority complex over AAVE is evident, for instance, in educational institutions that have historically placed AAVE speakers into special education classrooms.[77] Captioning, as a language institution, is a social and political fact.

The social and political facts of SAE and AAVE have been present throughout forms of entertainment, including stage, radio, film, and television. On the stage, blackface minstrel traditions used a "black voice." In the 1800 and 1900s, actors of European descendants would darken their faces, take to the stage, and use "broken" English to stereotypical images of Blacks.[78] Sonically, blackface minstrel traditions were exaggerated uses of Black vernacular, misuse of words, and "dialect indexical of southern

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[77] For more on how AAVE speakers are often placed in special education classrooms under the assumption that AAVE qualifies as a learning disability see: Artiles; Harry; Harry and Anderson
[78] See Morrison

plantation-style speech" (Lopez 17). These performances helped mark Blackness

sonically and linguistically.[79] The performance of a Black voice in entertainment

emerged alongside Black minstrel traditions as Mary Bucholtz has noted, "Originating

alongside blackface, its vocal counterpart, 'blackvoice'—that is, nonblack speakers' use

of linguistic features indexical of blackness" (256). [80] This *linguistic minstrelsy* tradition

would make the transition to the airwaves. [81]

Black vocal performances continued on radio programs such as *Amos n Andy*.

Performative Black voices eventually became indexical of Blackness itself and were

expected of Black performers. With the invention of television, there was a rise in Black

families on screens, especially in the 1970s and 1980s. As Marlene Fine and Carolyn

Anderson have noted, with shows like *The Cosby Show,* the Black characters on tv

needed to sound Black, but not too Black. Historically, entertainment formats uphold

SAE while linguistically marking Black characters as Black through specific sonic

performances. Language and sound have been racialized, which remains consistent when

these racialized components are translated into the space of closed captioning.

[Caption's Burden]

The white caption's burden is to fix the perceived inherent flaws in AAVE by

replacing them with SAE. For instance, the following examples come from the 1990s TV

show *Living Single*, which followed the lives of four women and two men, all of whom

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[79] Most often this use of Black vocal performance was seen in the minstrel tradition of the stump speech

[80] For more information on the history of Black entertainment and forms see Mel Watkins

[81] *linguistic minstrelsy*, a form of mock language that reinscribes stereotypes about African Americans and their language while participating in a longstanding and often controversial pattern of European American appropriation of black cultural forms B and (Lopez 681)

are Black. This table is only a small selection of representative examples of major miscaptioning from *Living Single*; in fact, almost every episode featured at least one major miscaption. As such, *Living Single* exemplifies a broader trend: the prevalence of major miscaptioning in shows with casts primarily composed of Black actors. Shows featuring predominantly white casts, such as *Friends*, *Designing Women*, and *Frasier*, go extended periods without major miscaptions. Shows like *Nellyville* and *Living Single* average multiple major miscaptions per episode.

Episode	Timestamp	What is captioned	What is heard
S1E4	19:18	We're not lying anymore?	We not lying anymore?
S1E7	00:37	Thank goodness you're here	Thank goodness you here
S1E18	10:18	Like those girls are natural	Like those curls are natural
S1E23	16:24	Oh Look, In Vogue is back	Oh Look, En Vogue is back
S1E24	10:18	I'm sure if it us, we'd act the same way.	Shoot, if it was one of us, we'd be actin the same way
S2E1	8:44	Uh, excuse me…	Uh, excuse me caramel corn
	8:45	I gotta go see what's wrong with him.	I gotta go see what's wrong with shorty
	9:01	Yeah, girl, I was tryin' to tighten up my feet	Yeah, girl, I was tryin' to tighten up my fade
	10:16	You had that serious after-sex look in your eyes.	Y'all had that serious after-sex look in your eyes.

	11:17	Now, what you all need to do is just figure out	Now, whatcha y'all need to do is just figure out
S2e3	5:40	I can't believe you all think so little of me.	I can't believe y'all think so little of me
S2E9	9:46	I, God, think you better go now	Aiight girl I think you better go now
S2E18	10:38	Oh sucker sucker now	Oh Suki Suki now
S2E21	3:21	Hey, Kyle, can you help us build our Barbarian castle?	Hey, Kyle, can you help us build our Bavarian castle?
	17:58	maybe iron myself some bakin'	maybe iron myself some bacon-

While almost every episode of *Living Single*'s first two seasons contain miscaptions, I have selected these examples because they represent two trends in captioning. The first trend is "correcting" language considered improper by SAE. For instance, changing the verb forms to be consistent with SAE construction, as seen in changing "we not lying anymore" to "we're not lying anymore." The removal of verbs like *is* or *are* is known as the coupla absence. In the book, *Articulate While Black*, the authors note that the coupla "gives Black Language its distinctiveness, setting it apart from other varieties of American English"(8). When whites misuse the coupla's absence to mock Blacks, whites portray Blacks as linguistically lazy, which ignores the basic rules of AAVE. Limiting the coupla and "fixing" the verbs erases Black linguistic distinctiveness by assuming that the linguistic features are symptomatic of Black laziness.

The second issue these examples raises is that the language often corrects terms that are part of Black cultural knowledge and exchange by making them terms more widely used in SAE. Black communities often use specific terms to refer to one another: shorty, homie, and dawg as more mainstream examples. These correcting of Black cultural knowledge will also play out in the following examples of the N-word. The next section uses compulsive correction to examine how captions semantically reinforce the marginalization of Black people through an examination of the film *Daughters of the Dust (*1991).

[Compulsive Correcting: Language]

The compulsion to "correct" AAVE amounts to the imposition of SAE—that is, white English—onto Black characters. This imposition builds upon the idea that linguistic deviation from SAE is wrong not just in speech but also in character. As Jane H. Hill has stated, from a linguistic standpoint, there is not a correct way to use language, but privileged groups use language as a social and moral marker. As Hill points out, "Not to acquire the "standard" is a sign of moral failing, or of an absence of proper ambition…even absolute control over a "standard" variety often does not bring economic or social benefits if a speaker is otherwise stigmatized (the study of race and gender discrimination is crowded with examples)" (35). When SAE is used to replace AAVE, it an assertion that AAVE is a flawed form of communicating which SAE can fix. As Hill suggests, as language is racialized, this becomes an extension that whites can fix Blacks, and Blacks are inherently in need of white saviors. Captioning assumes as a white savior complex for the misguided AAVE. The process assumes that captioning must primarily be made fully legible via SAE to white audiences at the cost of Black specificity.

While the chapter examines other examples of Black specificity through cultural references and the N-Word, I believe Julie Dash's *Daughters of the Dust* (1991) serves as a clear example of the erasure and racialization of current captioning patterns. The film follows several generations of a Black family from Ibo Landing off the coast of Georgia as several Peazant family members decide to move to the mainland. The film uses the Gullah language for narrative purposes; but also, for creating specific communities with audiences. I find the fixing compulsions especially troubling in a film that primarily focuses on Black experiences, Black audiences, and purposefully resists privileging SAE. The captioning for the film undoes the critical work and beautiful artistry so carefully crafted. The cultural legacy of whiteness undoes the cultural legacy of Blackness inherent to the film but also as a slap in the face to its legacy as the first feature-length theatrically released film by a Black female director.

Timestamp	What the Caption States:	What is heard[82]:
00:12:08	But when they come today to kiss	but when they come today fa kiss…
00:17:48	you old goober head	you ol' goober head
00:24:08	That's the challenge facing all you free Negroes.	That's the challenge facing all you Negro people who are free.
00:39:39	Who's out there?	who day out there?
00:40:44	What kind of belief is that?	What kind of belief that is?
00:42:17	That's the spot where the girl got drowned by her owner.	That's the spot where the girl got drowned by she owner.
00:43:03	She took me by the hand	She take me by the hand

[82] Even my own spellings of what is heard speaks to my limited position. Much of what I am writing here is based on phonetic spellings of words I am unsure of, my own potential impulses to correct, general mishearings, and a lack of knowledge of the Gullah language. I hope what this chart does show, limited as I might be, is that the captions are often correcting overall sentence structures and undoing language associated with Black identities.

00:43:19	So I wrote her a letter, put it beneath the bed	So I write her a letter, put it beneath the bed
00:43:23	with a glass of water, and I waited.	With a glass of water, and I wait.
00:43:28	I waited, and my Ma came to me.	I wait, and my Ma came to me.
01:08:17	Hey, Yellow Mary, they say you're a rich woman.	Hey, Yellow Mary, they say you be a rich woman
01:15:36	The minute those Ibo were brought ashore,	The minute those Ibo was brought ashore
01:15:40	they just stopped and took a look around.	They just stopped and take a look around
01:15:56	And they saw things that day that you	And they seen things that day you
01:16:07	Well, they saw just about everything	Well, they seen just about everything
01:16:12	that was to happen around here that day.	Everything to happen around here that to happen
01:16:15	The slavery time, the war my grandmother always talks about,	The slavery time, the war my gran always talk about
01:16:24	They even saw you and me, standing here talking.	They even saw you and me, standing here talk
01:17:01	seeing as it was water they were walking on.	Seeing as it was water they was walking on
1:17:22	They just kept walking, like the water was solid ground.	They just kept walk like it was solid ground
01:21:13	He has no shame!	He can't no shame
01:25:34	was here and who's gone on.	and who done gone on
01:28:36	between us who are here and those who are across the sea.	Between us who are and us who are across the sea
01:30:18	Some say the Ibo flew back home to Africa.	Some say Ibo fly back home to Africa
01:40:25	No, I'm not going to be watching from no heaven	No, I ain't gonna be watching from no heaven
01:41:52	Take me wherever you go.	Take me where you go

As seen in the actual lines spoken, the people in the film speak in a vernacular that is influenced by English and Gullah languages, the latter of which often dismissed as a form of broken English. [83] Gullah is a complex form of language with specific vocabulary and syntax structures.[84] The syntax of Gullah ties together multiple influences from various African languages, but, as the chart shows, this syntax is often 'corrected' into standard. By correcting these verbs, the captioning reinforces assumptions that Gullah and other Englishes spoke by primarily Black communities, are broken forms of a "pure" English. Much like the coupla in AAVE, the verbs used in Gullah are specific to Gullah. For example, "verbs likewise may take the same form in singular and plural" (Pollitzer 118). Despite Gullah having established patterns for verb tenses, the captioning shows that these tenses are frequently changed to conform to SAE. However, Gullah is neither pure retention of African languages, nor is it bad English; it is a sophisticated language system tied to a complex history of slavery and diaspora.[85]

By "correcting" the language, the captioning is erasing a history of slavery, colonization, resistance, creativity, and community built into the language. As Catherine Cucinella and Renee Curry discuss in their examination of Gullah in *Daughters of the Dust*, "The Sea Islanders as contumacious slaves never did assimilate to mainland slave conditions. These islanders never learned English, thus forcing the mainland white slave

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[83] Mark Taylor and Dan. T Ouzts state "Many early scholars made the mistake of viewing the Gullah language as "broken English" because they failed to recognize the strong underlying influence of African languages" (55).

[84] In William S. Pollitzer's book *The Gullah People and Their African Heritage*, using the revolutionary work done by Dow Turner on the Gullah language, he states that "Language is made up of more than words. Turner discovered affinities of Gullah to African languages in sound and intonations, syntax and morphology, and unusual word formations" (115).

[85] For more on Dash's novel and film African influence see M'Baye

owners in the vicinity to learn Gullah in order to do business" (200). The film's use of the Gullah language brings with it the position that whites were forced to learn Gullah if they wanted to do business; similarly, Dash's film forces whites watching to listen to Gullah to gain access to the narrative. Whites are not the primary audiences for this film; therefore, the language also serves the purpose of creating a space for Black intragroup relations.[86] When the captioning replaces Gullah with SAE, it is privileging whiteness as the mode of viewing and forcing it upon all viewers. Captioning's correcting assumes that all audiences would prefer the language and viewing position valued by whiteness than accept that not all language, film, and history belong to whiteness. The replacement of SAE erases the complexity of how the film uses language to create multiple viewing positions. Renee Curry argues that the film shows "Gullah as a site of interconnectedness between colonizers and colonized" (343). This interconnectedness of the film forces whites and Black viewers to recognize different histories revealed by language usage.

The captioning's use of SAE undoes the importance of forcing whites to recognize their relationship to the Gullah language, and its history while serving as an essential site for Black audiences. Black audiences are no longer privileged through language signified as Black and are forced to adopt white language priorities. Blacks are forced to read the ways SAE continuously corrects Black bodies through language and uses the compulsive correcting as a defense of using language as a moral yardstick which to judge the interior qualities of Black people. [87] Dash's choice to focus on the Gullah

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[86] Dash's audiences are "black women first, then the black community and white women." (66)

[87] In *Articulate While Black*, the authors state that Thus, we can see that the White practice of separating "good" and "bad" Black speakers of English is an enduring legacy of the African slave trade. Whites made use of exceptionalizing discourses to refer to their "runway slaves" as speaking "good" or "exceptional" (49)

language resists positioning Blacks and women as unintelligible unless reproducing

dominant ideologies, a departure from linguistic convention:

> Usually non-white or female others are positioned as visibly and
>
> unalterably different and as silenced, excluded from language. Unheard, these
>
> others are seen as weaker and more primitive, yet as threatening and powerful as
>
> well. In these cases where the racial, colonial, or national other is actually heard
>
> in mainstream films, her or his speech is usually an incomprehensible babel, part
>
> of the background, a block of sound. Because we cannot understand her or him,
>
> we are sure that s/h e is relatively unimportant. Only to the degree that s/he adopts
>
> the language of the dominant culture is s/he granted the "status of speech as an
>
> individual property right." (3)

The film resists these dominant power dynamics by placing Gullah-speaking

women in the foreground. Langauge does not exclude these women; instead, they keep

cultural memories and language alive.[88] These are not a static image of Black

victimization speaking a dead language. The women represent the dynamic complexities

of Black womanhood. The women speaking varying degrees of Gullah reflects their

relationship to Geechee ways. Characters like Viola, a devout Christian, tend to speak

less in Gullah and prioritize SAE forms of language. Her dismissal of Nana's spiritualism

and desire to move to the mainland are attempts to distance herself from the historical

memories of the island, including the trauma of slavery. Nana and Eula often speak

Gullah and are the two characters invested in preserving their specific cultural memories.

Captioning homogenizes these women through SAE undoing the connection between

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[88] Curry provides an in-depth analysis of how Dash uses women speaking to honor Gullah women (342).

historical memory, agency, and language. Whereas the film works hard to portray these Black women as un-silenced, the captions silence them as they do not speak. The words in the captions are not their words; instead, they are the whitewashed versions of a language formed from historical encounters of race, violence, and movement. The correcting instinct re/oppresses Black bodies through monitoring and imposing white ideals of language superiority.

The correcting re-enacts a type of domination onto Black communities, which have developed distinct vernaculars. However, dominant languages consider vernaculars themselves as bastard stepchildren. The captioning practice of "correcting" supposedly broken or incorrect languages such as Gullah and AAVE reinforces this implied power structure, forcing assimilation onto those departing from linguistic hegemony. The captioning reinforces this implied power structure by forcing assimilation onto those seen as dissenting from the linguistic rule. The persistence of non-standard uses of language shows that, despite a violent imposition of English onto groups of people, language plays an essential role in self-construction. This complex interplays among language, community, race, and history are undone by correcting patterns in captioning, which serves to perpetuate the belief that Standard is what all other languages aim to achieve. These captions become a stand-in for the ideology that people should want to speak standard because the standard is white, I mean, right.

[Compulsive Correcting: Culture]

Making sure that the captions enforce whiteness also requires the erasure of terms specific to Black culture. Many terms exist within Black communities that do not exist in the same historical context for whites, such as words like sister or brother. Other words,

like shorty, are used in Black communities.[89] In the captions for *Living Single,* the word

"shorty" is replaced with "him." The original phrase is spoken by one of the Black male

characters, Overton, when referring to his Black male roommate, Kyle. Part of the major

miscaption is that the use of shorty refers to their specific relationship. When Overton

uses the word, he is pulling from specific slang terms within the Black community to

indicate a more personal relationship with Kyle than the word 'him' alone suggests. This

personal relationship is partly being roommates and partly sharing the Black urban

community. Overton is also taller than Kyle, marking Kyle as literally shorter than

Overton, so the word signifies their joking, but heartfelt relationship. The captioning

avoids language that is often indexical of Black slang or Black male bonding for the more

widely accepted pronoun of 'him.' The correcting of shorty to him is also an attempt to

contain Black male bonding that exists outside of white confinements. Captioning tries to

make their relationship, which is structured by their Blackness legible to non-Black

viewers, erasing the cultural specifies of the show and the language used.

Such erasure of black relationships recurs with a failure to caption Overton calling

his Black girlfriend Sinclair his 'caramel corn.' Removing this term from the captioning

takes away part of their specific relationship as playful and overly loving, often using

terms of endearment for each other. The use of caramel corn encapsulates a sense of joy

and love not always represented in media portrayals of Black male-female relationships.[90]

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[89] Shorty is often used in Black communities, but connotations vary. Shorty began entering mainstream conscious with the rise of shorty in rap songs by artists like Biggie, A Tribe Called Quest, and Wu-Tang Clan. In early 1990s, shorty (later variations of shawty) was often used in rap music to refer to men, women, and children, not just women specifically. Although as Gwendolyn D. Pough has pointed out it became coded as infantilizing women.

[90] In films of the Black urabn films of the 1990s, women are often missing from the narratives or play into dominnering Black mother stereotypes.

Dominant narratives of Black life from white positions often assume Black lives are filled with broken homes and a lack of love.[91] Popular discourse shaped by the publication of the Moynihan Report reported that the Black matriarch and absent fathers were ruining the lives of Black families. Kimberle Crenshaw and Patricia Hill Collins have pointed out that in addition to the report, television programs such as *The Vanishing Black Family* perpetuate these same ideas. The refusal to caption terms like caramel corn for their relationship refuses to acknowledge the types of Black love which *Living Single* explores in various ways.[92] Caramel corn is a term that is specific to Black relationships as most whites do not refer to themselves as caramel given their much whiter cheddar corn appearance. There are other times where the captioning does not caption the terms of endearment, or they caption them wrong such as in S2E4, where Overton calls Sinclair his "theatre mouse," but the caption reads "theatre moss," a confusing and much less endearing term. With relatively few Black relationships portrayed on television at this time, the captioning erases an important example of Black love from television history.

These instances from *Living Single* reflect broader trends of disregarding marked language that clarifies specifically Black relationships. Changing these terms ignore how language communicates types of relationships and a sense of community. Outside of these issues, there were other issues in the captioning which show a lack of cultural awareness for terminology associated with Black life.[93] Does it raise the questions of what types of cultural literacies are expected from captioners? What is legible to

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[91] See Wanzo for more on how narratives of love and sexuality impact Black women

[92] The pattern of erasing Black relationships is also part of the examples from *Nellyville,* his dedication to his children is expressed in how talks about their future and education.

[93] For instance, the use of 'feet' instead of 'fade' indicates as lack of understanding the term fade for Black male hairstyles. Or spelling out In Vogue instead of Black musical group En Vogue.

whiteness typically shapes the choices for captioning. Issues of cultural legibility play out in one of the most polemic ways in the captioning for the N-word.

[Hard R, Soft A]

Their linguistic legacies directly shape the two variations of the N-word: nigger (-R) and Nigga (-A). Within American culture, -R is typically viewed in negative terms, primarily when used by a white person as it evokes the histories of abuse discussed below. -A is typically viewed in less hostile ways when exchanged between Blacks and can act as a form of address.[94] Elizabeth Stordeur Pryor examines these term's legacies and writes that:

> Prior to the 1770s, the labels nigger and slave were interchangeable, each describing an actual social category of involuntary black laborers. As African Americans became free in the North, however, nigger latched on like a shackle… By the 1820s, blackness, not slavery, marked people of color as occupying a fixed social class. Most significantly, the word nigger became a slur in conversation with black social aspiration. (205)

By the 1800s, the term was no longer a term of labor status, but as Jacquelyn Rahman states, "nigger became a convenient term for indexing the subhuman characteristics being ascribed to African Americans through this ideology" (144). This history is why when whites use the term, the legacy evoked is one in which Black is ideologically positioned as subhuman or less than whites. Whites used the term "to prevent such freedom of mobility, nigger emerged as a weapon of racial containment, a

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[94] For more on the historical uses of A and R, Andrews. For another longer history of the term see Kennedy. The term is not universally embraced within Black communities.

barometer against which to measure the increasingly rigid boundaries of whiteness and a mechanism used to police and cleanse public space" (Pryor 205). It is not just that whites historically used the -R version of the term; but, that this usage is ideologically born out of the desire to reduce Blacks to policeable, markable, contaminated bodies.

The history of -A is not inherently interchangeable with -R despite growing out of the -R because -A grows out of specific Black usage. Initially, Black salves used the -R ending. However, their use was ideologically different than when whites used the term, "the word nigger disguised a range of complex meanings and intentions: When addressing whites it might signal respect or manipulation or dissemblance; when addressing other African Americans it could signal reproach, but more often it indicated a shared social identity" (Pryor 216). The -R would undergo a process where the -R is replaced by an -A sound.[95] The change is not only a sonic one but also further shifted the ideological constructions of the term. Whereas -R represents the historical realities of slavery and violence towards Blacks, -A developed its own distinct meaning, including the ability of self-identify and forms of Black connection. Rahman defines the -A as intimately connected to survival, saying that the:

> core social meaning of nigga related to survival was part of the counterlanguage…that early Africans in America developed. The core meaning signaled Africans in their role as survivors and participants in the diaspora experience. Members of the African slave community shared in

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[95] Rahman states that the -A "ending grows out of the phonological system of African American English (AAE), which has a rule that can produce a schwa in lieu of post vocalic /r/ in an unstressed final syllable" (139).

knowledge of this core meaning, which endures in present-day uses of the

term. (141)

The specific Black qualities of the -A are tied to the specific history of Black survival, which is very distinct from the -R, which threatened that survival.

The two terms are not only phonetically different but ideologically opposed. When captioning uses the -R when -A is used, captioning is imposing the logics of white superiority onto typically Black bodies. -A represents a type of linguistic community born out of oppression that is not interchangeable with the language of the oppressor. I bring up this critical difference because one of the most pervasive "correcting" patterns involves changing the -A into the -R. I have not encountered examples where captioning changes the -R into -A. All of the examples I have encounter replace a distinctly Black term with a distinctly racist one.

The oppositionally meanings of -R and -A shift how viewers relate to the characters using those terms. Geneva Smitherman argues that there are at least four types of meanings associated with Black people's use of the N-word. She states that "It may be a term of personal affection or endearment…Sometimes it means culturally black, identifying with and sharing the values and experiences of black people…*Nigguh* may also be a way of expressing disapproval of a person's actions…Finally, the term may simply identify black folks-period" (*Talkin and Testifyin* 62). When -R or -A is used, viewers must navigate and decipher the terms complex systems of meaning associated with the word. I give multiple examples of what the -R and -A represent both historically and culturally because the term is inherently complex, and it is this complexity that must be navigated by a viewer when encountering the word. Three out of the four examples by

Smitherman are different, generally positive encounters with -A. -R generally only has

one meaning, a racist one. When viewers encounter -R and -A, they are being asked to

understand how the character's use of the term works along with these semantic

structures. For instance, in the film *Rush Hour*, a Black cop played by Chris Tucker and

an Asian cop played by Jackie Chan are forced to work together on a kidnapping case.

When Chris Tucker takes Jackie Chan to a Black bar, Chris Tucker enters by greeting

other Black patrons by saying "What's up my nigga?" but the captioning changes all uses

of the N-word to -R:

Rush Hour	00:30:25	Chris Tucker	Whats up my Nigger?
	00:31:03	Christ Tucker	Whats up my Nigger?
	00:33:15	Jackie Chan	Whats up my Nigger?
	00:33:23	Jackie Chan	What's up…my nigger?

While visually the joke that a non-Black person is trying to communicate with

Black people through the use of the N-word is achievable, the captioning chooses how to

present these relationships between Black characters. It is not just that Chris Tucker uses

the N-word but that his access to the word is constructed through a shared history of

Black survival as indicated by the -A.[96] When Jackie Chan uses the word, he is doing so

without sharing this history. When the patrons get mad at Jackie Chan, it is because he is

not authorized to use that word in this space. The means of Black address specific to

Chris Trucker's use of the -A are reimagined through the violence of the -R. The

captioning prioritizes the terms derived from white tools for oppression rather than make

space for specific Black language.

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[96] Rahman argues that the focus on survival as linked to the term from slave communities is present in the modern usage because they "use *nigga* as a tool to project a facet of identity as a culturally aware survivor in the diaspora" (147)

Other instances of not captioning the -R or -A correctly occur in not captioning it

at all. In films such as *Boyz n the Hood*, *Friday,* and the television show *Dear White*

People. -Speakers use -A, but the captions remove that term from the captioning. The

removal of it all together undoes the sense of character relationships:

Title	Timestamp	Caption Track	Audio Track
Boyz in the Hood	00:31:50	What you mean, you ain't skinny?	Nigga, whatcha mean you aint skinny?
	01:06:43	Would've done him some good.	Woud've done that nigga some good
	01:07:25	Don't be using God's name in vain.	Nigga don't be using God's name in vain.
	00:27:17	Well	Nigga well,
Friday	00:50:42	I'M TALKIN' TO YOU! NOW, WHO IS SHE?	Nigga, Im talkin' to you! Now, who is she?
	00:53:50	HOW MUCH YOU NEED?	Nigga how much you need?
Dear White People S1E2	00:01:31	-Pause. You look like a gay figure skater	My nigga, you look like a gay figure skater

These examples are spoken by Black characters speaking to other Black

characters. When removing the N-word, captioning chooses what language is worth

making visible and thus what types of relationships. Captioning negates all of the

complexities of the term brought up by Smitherman. The frequent use of the -A portrays

character relationships and information about the characters, while also connecting with

Black audiences. Films like *Boyz in the Hood* and *Friday* use dialogue to try and

authenticate itself as a Black product legible by Black audiences. Again, this correcting by ultimately erasing the intended term by either using the -A or erasing it, forces the viewing position into a position structured by whiteness.

Black male comedians also use -R and -A are quick semantic cues to align themselves with Black audiences. The limited amount of time for stand-up means that vocal and linguistic performance is used not only for comedic impact but also to develop a relationship quickly with the audience, the invocation of "recognizable ethnic terms of reference and address" forming "part of a strategy meant to establish solidarity and authoritative credibility with audiences" (Rahman 149). Black comedians like Mike Epps, Lavelle Crawford, and Katt Williams frequently use the -A to refer to other Black men in their specials. These comedians often reserve using -R for when they are drawing attention to white characters in their jokes or while making a point about racist structures. These comedians strategically use -A and -R as ideological shortcuts to Blackness vs. Racism. For instance:

Title	Timestamp	Caption Track	Speaker Position
Mike Epps *Don't Take it Personal*	00:32:44	And white people be talking about, "Those niggers are resisting arrest."	Speaking as a white person
	00:32:49	How the fuck a nigga resisting arrest?	Speaking as himself
	00:32:54	You just be riding and one nigga say, You know the police behind us?"	Speaking as himself

In this example, we see that Mike Epps uses the -R when portraying whites talking about police arrests. When he is speaking as a Black man, he switches back to using the -A.

This switching between -R and -A helps to position the speakers in the joke as either white or Black. Whites typically use the -R and Black use the -A. The -R, in this example, is used to joke about white's ignorance regarding the relationship between Black people and the police. Whites justify police violence against Blacks by claiming that Blacks resist arrest. The -R here invokes the history of policing Black bodies through prohibiting mobilization. The -A allows Epps to quickly change positionality and align himself with Black viewers who experience an often toxic relationship with police.

Similarly, in Lavelle Crawford's standup *Can a Brother Get Some Love,* Crawford uses the -A from a Black positionality when asking "[What's a real nigga?]"; conversely, when he later takes on the persona of a KKK member he says "[Hey, fat nigger]." This correctly-captioned switch from A to R shows how the -R is related to issues of white supremacy, whereas the -A is linked to cultural identity. In purposely using both variations at different points in the standup, Crawford and other comedians illustrate the political and emancipatory power of comedy. JP Rossing argues that "humor proves 'emancipatory' because it brings to the forefront perspectives and knowledge that challenge dominant realities, and therefore it bears potential for promoting critical questioning and reflection about racial oppression" (615). [97] When captioning uses the -R and -A interchangeably, it undoes the emancipatory structure of the humor.

The political importance of -R and -A associated with speaker positionality in Black comedy is undermined when the political realities of those terms are ignored and captioned interchangeably. In Richard Pryor's standup special *Live in Concert,* the

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[97] Other race and comedy scholars have stated this as Haggins (2007) claims, humor provides a forum "for the unfiltered venting of cultural and political anger"—a strategy for "howling about oppression and subjugation" (4)

comedian[98] uses the N-word several times. [99] While there are specific politically loaded jokes, for Pryor the entire use of bringing Black vernacular to his comedy was political. It was a move to distance himself from the respectability politics associated with other comedians at the time, like Bill Cosby. In the comedy special, all 41 uses of the N-words are captioned with -R despite many of them being said as -A. Here is a sampling of those uses in Richard Pryor's *Live in Concert*:

00:03:53	When there's a bunch of niggers around?
00:05:03	you be the only nigger some place
00:05:22	and niggers guerrilla their way in the place, man.
00:05:31	Niggers just run over 'em getting in here
00:06:44	Niggers be talking about
00:07:02	Niggers be walkin' down the street
00:08:44	"Don't worry, niggers. I'm with you. Go ahead."
00:10:44	They choke niggers to death
00:10:51	Wait. Niggers goin' yeah, we knew."
00:11:01	Can you break a nigger? Is it OK?
00:11:06	Yep. Page 8. 'You can break a nigger. 'Right there, see?
00:11:33	By the time they catch a nigger though, they too tired…
00:12:34	Mother fuck that nigger, man.
00:28:21	Preach Nigger Preach
00:28:33	Preach, nigger, preach.' What is that, actually?
00:31:09	Say, "Why in the fuck you gon' kill me 'cause that nigger dead?
00:43:46	They do. Niggers be in the woods, have a different attitude about the woods.
00:493:3	Cause that nigger ain't been hurt yet

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[98] He is often credited with importing the word from Black vernacular to mainstream comedy.
[99] For more see, Gregory S. Parks

Pryor is well known for bringing various aspects of Black life to the stage and for having political commentary built into his jokes. In Terrence T. Tucker's book *Furiously Funny: Comic Rage from Ralph Ellison to Chris Rock,* he describes Pryor comedy as a type of comic rage. He states that "Pryor's volatile mixture of humor and ideology, of rage and history, and politics and pathos is that core of …comic rage" (2). Comic rage's "use of black vernacular tradition acts as a constant threat to oppressive language, specifically white supremacy's consistent use of language to reconfigure itself through rhetoric's ability to fortify stereotypical narratives and foster destructive policies and ideology" (10). -R is the language of white supremacy, which Pryor indicates when he specifically used the -R for a joke where two police officers are discussing if they can physically harm a Black individual. One officer says, "Can you break a nigger? Is it OK?" to which the other replies, "Yep. Page 8. 'You can break a nigger. 'Right there, see?" Like other Black male comedians, Pryor is using the -R to show rage towards systems of white superiority which use law and justice as weapons again Black communities. Captioning lessens the poignant critique of police treatment when captioning does not contrast -R against the -A, as Pryor so carefully does in the standup.

Black humor and comic rage become a space where Black voices are allowed to assert truth through humor, but the captions subvert this work. Rossing argues that Black humor works against modes of production that value whiteness "Dominant modes of production frequently privilege White experiences while denying marginal voices the space to assert experiential truths" (622). Captions act as a containing mechanism for the emancipatory power of comic rage by forcing -R and -A into dominant modes of language production. It is not only the use and misuse of -R and -A in the captioning the

obscures the political power of language in Black comedy but also the use of vocal performances by Black comedians.

[Hiding Whiteness]

Rhetorical choices influenced by interpellated beliefs regarding racialized language and racialized sound construct racialized captioning. In her book, *The Sonic Color Line*, Jennifer Stoever argues that "aural and visual signifiers of race are thoroughly enmeshed; sounds never really lose their referent to different types of bodies despite being able to operate independently of them" (12). Captioning is enmeshed in a society where the production and listening to sound are politically racialized in an opposing binary between whiteness and Blackness. Black comedians use racialized forms of speaking and the audience's listening to force attention to the way race operates in daily life. Racial critique achieved not only through the use of -R and -A but also through shifting vocal performances to be indexical of white and Blackness.

While comedians use racialized vocal performance as a political tool, the captioning does not indicate these vocal performances when the vocal performance is a performance of whiteness. This issue of captioning is what Snell and MacFarlane calls "color deafness," defined as "the habit of production employed by screenwriters, subtitle producers, and closed caption transcriptionists as they routinely omit and insert racially significant sound information" (275). The way people speak, the language they use, and where those communications occur are part of the same institutions that perpetuate racism based on sight. Like color blindness, color deafness is problematic in that it ignores that color is very much relevant in people's lived experiences, which the joke's use of vocal performance illuminates.

Unlike historical parodies of Black voices by white performers discussed earlier, Black comics' use of white voices shows how perceptions of vocal performance are used to measure one's place in society. Whites have historically used linguistic minstrel performance to turn Black men into a joke; whereas, Black male comedians typically use a white voice to make evident the ways in whiteness is privileged, making a joke out of systemic injustice and opening up space for rage and relief. These two opposing linguistic traditions relate to the other popular entertainment that coincided with minstrel shows: elocution performances. Whereas minstrel shows used voice and language to degrade Blacks further, elocution shows show off white propriety and prosperity. As noted by Conquergood, "Whereas blackface minstrelsy was a theatrically framed mimicry and parody of blackness, elocution can be thought of as the performativity of whiteness naturalized" (112). These two popular forms of racializing vocal performances play out in current popular entertainment where Black male comedians use extreme forms of enunciating to mark whiteness. [100]

Through shifts in vocal performance, Black comedians draw attention to the differences in lived experiences of white and Black subjects and how vocal expectations reinforce the systems that create these differential experiences. Vocal performance thus becomes another critical strategy in both the humor and the political critique. Many Black comedians employ a white voice in their comedy. The vocal shifts allow the performer to play other characters, but the vocal change is intertwined with jokes that show how Black and white subjects are expected to perform and produce race. Though the shift into a

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[100] One clear example is from the show *Meet the Browns* S1E1 where when Mr. Brown puts on a voice that is meant to sound proper the captions read [ADDING "R" SOUND TO WORDS], this adding of the R over enunciates the words which align with vocal performances associated with upper class whiteness.

white voice is crucial to both the comedic and critical impact, it is often not registered in the closed captioning. Although captioning marks other vocal changes, such as accents or vocals associated with gender performance, it does not mark whiteness. As such, there seems to be an apparent resistance to marking a white voice in Black comedy stand-up. This resistance into marking the white voice and persona feed into systems that allow whiteness to remain unmarked and thus unquestioned.

While closed captioning is resistant to marking the adoption of white male voices, it often registers changes in voice or when specific accents are on screen. For instance, in Wyatt Cenac's stand-up special *Brooklyn,* Cenac talks about other nannies that he would run into at the park, and during the joke, the captioning indicates that he changes his voice: "It's like [Jamaican accent] Oh, good for you." In comedian Trevor Noah's stand-up special *Afraid of the Dark*, the following accents are marked: [vocalizing with French inflection], [French accent], [Russian accent], [German accent], [New York accent], [British accent], [Caribbean accent], [Indian accent], and [Australian accent]. While it is common to see geographical accents marked, in the same special, the following caption appears: [female voice] 'Oh, my God, he's so sexy. Oh, my God.' Captioning writes out geographically based accents or female vocal changes, but not that the female voice is a white female voice. The same can be true for vocal shifts that meant to mark queerness. For instance, in the *Kings of Comedy (2000)* stand-up special, Bernie Mac discusses his nephew acting gay. When Bernie Mac impersonates the young boy later during his set, the captioning reads [campy voice]. The use of "campy" here makes the queerness of the vocal performance clear, and it is a queer sonic vocal performance that is at the core of

the joke. [101] In instances where the vocal performance of Black comedians reinforces

sonic expectations of feminine or queer vocals, then captioning is likely to write out the

vocal shift.

When the vocal shift is indexical of white men, then the captioning refrains from

marking the changes.

Comedy Special	Time Stamp	What the Captioning States:
DL Hughley *Contrarian*	00:03:59:	We was all at the mall. White people were shook. "My God, there are a lot of black people in the food court."
	00:04:05	"Does that guy Tyler Perry have a new movie out or something?"
	00:04:11	"I'm not gonna walk through a drum circle to get to Sbarros."
	00:04:18	There's a guy with a plate in his lip in front of Panda Express."
The Original Kings of Comedy -DL Hughley	00:13:45:	WHITE FOLK QUIT A JOB AND GIVE A TWO-WEEK NOTICE. "I'M QUITTING IN TWO WEEKS."
	00:20:08:	WHITE FOLK APOLOGIZE FOR SHIT AND DO THE SAME SHIT.
	00:20:12	OH, I'M NOT RACIST. I'VE HAD THREE BLACK PEOPLE OVER MY HOUSE.
The Original Kings of Comedy -Cedric the Entertainer	00:44:04	AND IF THEY WERE LATE TONIGHT, THEY WERE PROBABLY THINKING, "OH, MY GOD. WE'RE LATE.
	00:44:09	OH, MY GOODNESS. I HOPE NO ONE'S IN OUR CHAIRS."
	00:44:14	MAN, I HOPE NO ONE'S IN OUR SEATS. I DON'T WANT ANY PROBLEMS."
	00:53:05	MEANWHILE, WHITE PEOPLE WALK RIGHT TO THE TROUBLE.
	00:53:08	"WHAT THE HECK IS GOING ON?

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[101] For more information on the idea of a gay voice see *Do I sound Gay?* Directed by David Thorpe

While I am focusing primarily on the examples from stand-up specials, other Black media share this performative features. Below is an example from *Martin* in which Martin is mocking the white men who try to talk to him at corporate parties:

Martin S1E1	00:03:23	Hey, listen, Martin.
	00:03:25	I just saw Boyz n the Hood, all right?
	00:03:30	I didn't know, Martin. I didn't know

In captioning, whiteness is both unseen and unheard. Scholars such as Jane H. Hill, Richard Dyer, and George Lipsitz have all noted that the systemic marginalization of people of color is partly done through not marking whiteness, allowing it to operate as an unseen and unquestioned dominant in a racial hierarchy. Stoever sums this up as "Whiteness…is notorious for representing itself as "invisible"-or in this case, inaudible (at least to white people). The inaudibility of whiteness stems from its considerably wider palette of representation and the belief that white representations stand in for "people in general, rather than "white people" in particular" (12). Drawing attention to whiteness as a category or a concept would mean to also draw attention to how whiteness created the racial hierarchy whose top it occupies and the way it uses the systems of everyday life to reinforce that power. When it chooses not to mark vocal changes that reveal the language, speech, and performances that help construct whiteness, closed captioning participates in the work of hiding whiteness.

Beyond resistance to revealing whiteness's constructed nature, another reason for captioning's reluctance to mark whiteness might also be because doing so would make a mockery out of the concept of SAE. Whiteness relies upon SAE's unquestioned status;

therefore, drawing attention to its construction through mockery is avoided. Richard

Pryor's *Live in Concert* has examples of the resistance of marking white maleness. The

following captions appear during a joke about a white man and white women trying to

find their seats in the auditorium only to be confronted by a Black man:

00:3:29	Right? They say, "Uh-uh, weren't we sitting here, dear?
00:3:37	[in feminine, nasal voice] "Yes, we were sitting right there."
00:3:39	[as African-American man] "Well, you ain't sittin' here now, motherfucker. Yeah."

The exchange stood out to me for a variety of reasons.[102] First, no vocal change

was indicated in the captioning when Pryor does the white male voice. When Black

males vocally perform as white, they rely upon those standards proposed by elocution

(aka the highest form of white vocal performance). This vocal performance includes

over-enunciating, an 'unaccented' speech, and nasally vocal tones. Bucholtz points out

that both masculinity and whiteness are part of unmarked social categories, which is why

the white male voice goes unmarked (*You da man* 443). The resistance to captioning

white voice is resistance to undermining the intuitions built upon white masculinity. If the

captioning were to mark a white voice, it makes it more transparent that the joke is not

solely at a white person; rather, the linguistic vocal performances of SAE which serves to

enforce whiteness as dominant. The jokes mark SAE and white masculinity as inherently

uncool and undesirable. White men envy Black cool, and so these vocal performances

serve as a reminder for what white masculinity can never be. By contrasting performative

vocal whiteness, which heavily relies upon SAE against an African American voice, the

joke positions whiteness as squarely square.

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[102] Eddie Tafoya views jokes like these are part of Pryor's ability to make fun of whites through their fears of Blacks.

Unlike white masculinity, which can not be made further visible at the site of humor, white femininity is mockable. The use of feminine, nasal voice shows that Pryor is performing what is perceived as a white woman's voice. The captioning can mark femininity, but it still refrains from marking whiteness. There is also the captioning of [as African American man]. As Pryor was an African-American man, it is strange to see that caption over his body on the screen. This caption refers to Pryor putting on a more stereotypical hypermasculine Black male voice by performing deeper bass tones. [103] Another example comes from the film *Bad Boys* when Will Smith begins speaking out loud after forcefully entering a house, Martin Lawerence stops him and yells in a more nasally tone than his typical voice, "Don't be alarmed. We're Negros." Then turns to Will Smith and, in his regular voice, says, "Too much bass in your voice. That scares white folks. Sound like them." Martin Lawerence then changes his voice back to a white voice to yell, "We were wondering if we can borrow some brown sugar." The captioning for the film does not indicate that a white voice is being performed, but it does reveal that bass is considered a sign of Black vocals qualities. Captioning that Pryor can put on another Black voice other than his own reveals that Blackness is something that must be labeled and is markable. However, whiteness, especially white masculinity, is not to be marked at all. By marking the performance of Blackness, captions indicate not only vocal differences but also a particular form of masculinity positioned against whiteness.

Unlike whites whose vocal performance goes unmarked in both captioning and society at large, society expects Black people to perform multiple voices. In an interview with James Lipton, Dave Chappelle says, "Every Black American is Bilingual," speaking

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[103] Smitherman, Hooks, Hall and Bucholtz have all discussed Black males and performing masculinity

street and job interview. The assumption here is that the street is not job interview vocal performance; therefore, the professional world excludes those speaking street. The keen understanding of how and why people of color are required to code-switch is part of the history of Black comedy. In his 2000 stand up special *Killin them Softly*, Chappelle examines racial tension by showing off his vocal abilities, his ability to code-switch and to change his voice by performing a white voice. In this special, Chappelle draws attention to the different lived experiences of Blacks and whites in America, but mainstream white audiences have mostly accepted his work. Mass consumption of Black comics like Dave Chappelle and Chris Rock becomes a way for white audiences to engage with the realities of oppressive structures that do not make the room or allow for narratives of Black life. Comics like Chappelle, Chris Rock, or Martin Lawrence thrust stereotypes into the spotlight to reveal the social injustices hidden beneath, often performing a white voice amid the joke.

The different audiences' reactions to these jokes became an ethical dilemma for Chappelle. In interviews, he speaks about watching many white audience members or white members of the production crew laughing, not with Chappelle, meaning at the horrors of racial injustice, but *at* Chappelle. Salita Malik explores the tensions of viewer positions stating, "The central question has always been one of whether images of Blackness in television comedy 'play on' or 'play off' the long-established Black clown stereotype, and whether we are being invited to laugh with or at the Black comic entertainer" (92). Chappelle explores this tension through the figure of his white friend named Chip. Chappelle uses stories involving Chip several times throughout the stand-up. In none of these instances is the vocal changes to a white voice marked in the

captioning. Chappelle's vocal performance not only distinguishes between characters but also represents differences in lived experiences. Like the earlier examples where some comedians use -R and -A to indicate differences, Chappelle uses this white voice to show that how people of color interact with the police are fundamentally different. The captions do not mark whiteness vocally. [104] The fact that Chappelle changes his voice in tone and syntax makes it audible that race is experienced differently for him and Chip. By not marking the vocal changes, the captions do not draw explicit attention to whiteness and the way that whiteness benefits from legal systems and law.

Institutionally, perceptions of white vocal performances are deemed safe, natural, and standard, meaning closed captioning does not need to mark the vocal performance. Later in the comedy special, Chappelle makes a joke where his speaker position is that of a terrorist on a plane. The captioning for this joke reads [Pakistani voice]. Contrasting this caption against the captioning for Chip reveals who the captioning marks and who remains invisible. When the vocal performance and the marking of an accent are part of larger narratives that reinforce the idea that Brown is dangerous, then the captioning marks the vocal shift. The captioning represents a reality where Black subjects who do not perform vocal whiteness risk rejection from institutions (discussed below) or even violence.

[Wrighting Whiteness]

I want to end by drawing attention to an example where the white voice is explicitly marked- the 2018 Boots Riley film *Sorry to Bother You*. The film follows a Black

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[104] He says his white fried and then we do get " " around the words but the use of " " is used even when he is referring to himself in telling stories therefore it does not fully aid in indicating he is performing a different character

character, Cassius Green, who uses a white voice to succeed in a telemarking job. Similarly to the comedy specials depictions of a white vocal performance, the white voice used by Cassius relies upon clear diction, even speaking tones, and SAE. Throughout the film, the captions of [white voice] appear when Cassius switches from his speaking voice to a white voice. The film's explicit critique of the way Black people forced to code-switch or perform markers of whiteness in order to succeed reflects real racist practices. The 2001 study, "Use of Black English and Racial Discrimination in Urban Housing Markets: New Methods and Findings," which found that when a potential renter was perceived as Black through voice, they were less likely to be helped find a home. The film critiques this real-world expectation that Black people use a white-sounding voice to achieve safety and stability. This study is just one institutional example of where not performing racialized voices in the right way or place can lead to expulsion from dominant infrastructures like housing or the earlier example of education.

Sorry to Bother You renders visible the audible phenomenon of the performative white voice to critique dominant racial norms; however, this is one of the very few examples in which captioning explicitly marks whiteness. Marking white vocalization in Sorry to Bother You draws attention to how captions generally ignore Black deployment of white voices in less overt contexts, even when these vocal changes serve as cultural critique. The compulsive rewriting of Black language acts to position white SAE as linguistically, morally, and racially right. Captions can push back against linguistic domination through acknowledgment of rhetorical choices and limiting correcting impulses. Lipp-Green argues that "Black English] is tangible and irrefutable evidence that there is a distinct, healthy, functioning African American culture which is not white,

and which does not want to be white. This is a state of affairs that is unacceptable to many" (53). Captioning practices that use captioning to represent the broader array of Black linguistic and vocal performances can index Black culture, which happily exists without desiring whiteness. Captioning, which recognizes the complexities of language, can also work to resists these homogenizing tendencies which write out Blackness.

CHAPTER V

HAPTICS AND HORROR

With over 100 policemen present, a Dance of the Tingler party hosted by Dick Osgood, green klieg lights, and a green marquee, the "screamier" of the 1959 film *The Tingler* secured William Castle's place as the king of gimmicks. [105] Advertisements in the August 5th,1959 issue of the *Motion Daily Picture* for the film included text reading "Guaranteed 'The Tingler' will break loose in YOUR theatre! Your audiences will receive instructions on how to guard against attack! First picture filmed in PERCEPTO!" (5). The hype for such a gimmick, as reported by the Motion Picture Daily, resulted in "over 5,000 people jammed the streets in front of the Broadway Capitol Theatre...two hours prior to the "world screamier" of "The Tingler," William Castle production for Columbia release at 12:01 am" (1). For specific film viewings, theatres installed Percepto units under certain seats. The Percepto unit transmitted a tingling sensation to the person sitting in that seat. The film stars legendary actor Vincent Price as Dr. Warren Chapin, who discovers that the root of fear is a parasite, which he names the "tingler." However, when a deaf-mute woman cannot scream, Chapin realizes screaming helps protect people against the tingle crushing a person's spine.[106] To ensure your safety, please scream now.

I first encountered the tingler when I was roughly ten years old. My mother and I drove two hours to a museum in Charlotte, North Carolina, where, once a month, they screened old films after closing hours. In my mind, I often replay the moment where Vincent Price says, "Ladies and gentlemen, please do not panic! But SCREAM! Scream

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[105] This appeared in the *Motion Daily Picture* Aug 6th 1950 page 11

[106] It fitting that the last chapter of this dissertation is also rooted in a film which uses cliched and stereotypically representations of deaf-mute characters.

for your lives!" as our entire audience began screaming together. After only experiencing silent theatre audiences until that point, the interactive nature of the film and the use of vibrating seats were a revelation. I was extremely jealous of people whose seats were rigged to vibrate. I introduce this chapter via *The Tingler* because these experiences profoundly inspire this chapter.

While Percepto was a gimmick, and probably more remembered than the actual film's plot, my fascination with the interactive and haptic nature of film inspired rethinking how captioning, image, sound, and feeling might work together. As Vincent Prince makes clear, screaming goes hand in hand with horror because the body reacts to horror. The body reacts not only because of small motors attached to chairs but, as will be discussed further, horror is about getting *inside* the body. *The Tingler* highlights the embodiment of horror, not just on-screen but in our seats. Steffen Hantke sums up the power of *The Tingler* as "*The Tingler* addresses, thematically and affectively, the experience of watching a horror film—that precarious balance between menace and safety, emotion and simulation, suffering and pleasure, sadism and masochism" (270*)*. The film's use of haptic technology inspires my thinking of viewing practices that would create more affective experiences for d/Deaf and hard of hearing viewers, or at least more affective than captioning alone provides.

While in the movie theatre, subwoofers and speakers can make the vibrations associated with the horror on screen felt in the seat, what about at-home viewing? In this chapter, I take inspiration from *The Tingler*'s application of Percepto in horror to find different ways for audiences to interact with films outside standardized and normative viewing practices. As horror is a genre built upon experiences that often escape language,

I am not convinced that captioning can use language to recreate the affective experiences of terror, horror, fear, or fright that the sonic elements of the genre create. I argue that by taking inspiration from Percepto, modern haptic technologies can be utilized alongside film viewings to create powerful affective experiences for viewers. [107][108]

While the tingler is one good theory for the cause of fear, I will also look in other places. I begin this chapter by examining the role sound and music play in creating the affective experiences associated with the horror genre. I briefly outline some of the history of sound in horror and how the historical tropes of horror are associated with fear. Next, I look at how biological, cognitive, and cultural connections between sound and fear influence how horror soundscapes are impactful. While visual elements elicit fear, sound plays a significant role in fear responses. I then turn my attention to the captioning for horror films to argue that captions can be limited in creating affective horror experiences. Language often fails to identify the sounds of horror because it is horror sounds' unidentifiableness that renders them horrific. These opening sections are brief as the goal of this chapter is to provide a basic outline of sound, horror, and captions to argue for the use of haptic technology for film viewing experiences. Finally, I end the chapter by returning to *The Tingler,* but this time in the form of a phone application. I

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[107] Haptic technologies are "Designating or involving technology (for entertainment, communication, etc.) that provides a user interface based on stimulation of the senses of touch and movement (kinaesthesia)" (OED).

[108] While the difference between affect, mood, tone, and emotion is highly documented within affect theory, I am less leaning into the theoretical conceptions of these terms. The affect/emotion divide is largely based on third person/first person experiences or subject/objective which are helpful models for certain discourses. For this chapter, I shift between a purely analytical stance, personal viewer, and observer which render affect, feeling, and emotion interchangeable at certain times throughout this chapter. I often used affective experiences because affect as less structured than specific emotional responses and includes the range of emotions potential experienced during a specific film scene. This choice to use affective experience is also linked to later discussion on embodied experiences which cannot always be labeled as specific emotions, rather complex interior reactions not easily named. For more on affect, feeling, emotion, and passions see Ngai

developed the phone application, aptly named, Tingler to demonstrate how haptic technology can support captioning. Through this case study in haptics and horror, I argue for filmmakers to seize the potential of different kinds of captioning as well as technology in creating film viewing experiences, not as gimmicks nor mandated accessibility requirements, but as creative options that further the genre's potential for affective impact. The same logic that privilege visuals for pleasure repeat themselves for affective experiences of horror. By doing so, it privileges specific kinds of film viewing and embodiments over others.

[Do You Like Scary Movies?]

1931 saw the release of two major horror films: Tod Browning's *Dracula* and James Whale's *Frankenstein* both produced and distributed by Universal Pictures. As some of the earliest sound horror films, they were part of a transitional sound period which required audiences to re-confront the mechanical nature of film viewing and their spectatorship. Audiences reintroduced themselves to the screen but the voices emerging from it could feel flat or dead. Theatres tried to avoid these issues but placing speakers right behind the screen to make the sound appear from the mouths on screen. Hans Eisler and Theodor Adorno called the sound in these early films as "speaking effigies." Robert Spadoni examines these technological aspects as crucial for understanding how horror films used sound because technological limitations and strict budgets would continue to shape how sound engineers developed horror sound. As he states, "The technically challenged sound transition cinema was the birthplace of the horror film." (124). Part of the sound which served the horror film during this time is that the technological limitations gave rise to the uncanny body in the horror genre. The early uncanniness

allowed the bodies on the screen to seem both dead and alive. For other genres that created characters who were unnatural, but for horror, these strange soundscapes strengthened audiences' emotional response to these not-dead-not-alive characters.

Standard sound principals during the transition period advised filmmakers to show the source of sounds to ease any confusion for the audiences. Other genres emerging at the time legitimized the source of the sound by showing the source, such as the musical genre. The musical legitimized its use of sound by focusing on backstage musicals. [109] However, for the horror genre, breaking the newly forming sonic rules helped the genre sonically define itself and begin crafting its affective qualities. The uncertainty of where music is originating continues as a prime source of anxiety when watching modern horror films. Captioning often reveals too much information about where a sound is coming from, which limits the tension, as will be discussed later in the chapter. Seung Min Hong analyzes the importance of horror film's sound sources. He argues that:

> essentially all of the monster horror films in the early 1930s used asynchronous, nonestablished sound in key scenes that highlight the frightening or mysterious sense of the monstrous figures… the sounds are heard off screen before the sound source becomes visible, which is opposite to the principle of visual establishment. At other times, the source of the sound is never shown at all (217).

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[109] For more see Rick Altman's *American Film Musical*

Viewer's inability to concretely identify the sounds in horror is part of horror's affectiveness. In other words, horror really does rely upon unidentified bumps in the night.

With limited budgets and technology, there were only so many bumps in the night that could be crafted. In his examination of horror sound design, William Whitting states that "low costs meant reusing many sonic cues. "Castle thunder," an effect from the Universal horror films of the 1930s, was used so much in the horror of radio, television, and film that it has become a recognizable acoustic cliché." (173). These clichés also include sonic cues like the Wilhelm scream. When captions include certain sounds such as [floor creaking] in an old house or [heavy breathing], viewers know that these are repeated sonic cues that represent danger. The repeated use of these sonic elements reinforces their link to the horror genre; therefore, seeing or hearing those sonic cues prompts the body for fear.[110]

Outside of specific sonic cues, many horror films at that time relied upon symphonic scoring. [111] Scoring gave rise to specific tones becoming associated with certain types of threats. Janet Halfyard describes this as "in horror films, the monsters are "Others" who are themselves outside the (human) system, so here we tend to find the humans represented by tonality, and the monsters by atonality (22). While many viewers might not be able to identify the tones, they associate these atonalities with threatening characters of circumstances. Captioning can not write out these atonalities. Typically, this will get written as something vague like [eerie music] or [ominious theme]; therefore,

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[110] Unless these cues are overused in which case they often lose the horror association and are used in satirical ways

[111] For more see Wierzbicki, 2012

d/Deaf and hard of hearing characters are not always sonically prepped for the horror.

Captions' lack of ability to caption atonality also means d/Deaf and hard of hearing

viewers are not privy to characters whose evilness is communicated through scoring.

Other times captioning might use music notes or write nothing at all, so d/Deaf and hard

of hearing viewers have no clues into potential threats communicated through atonality.

These practices of atonality would continue until about the 1960s where horror scoring

begins to shift away from established classical structures.

During the 1970s, horror sounds became less orchestrated. Whitting notes that

"early 1970s horror adopted the codes and stylistic tendencies of documentary and

cinema verité" (175). Films like *Night of the Living Dead* and *Texas Chainsaw Massacre*

employed sound effects of radio and broadcasts to add a sense of realism. *Texas*

Chainsaw Massacre also relies heavily upon diegetic sounds of tools and screaming. The

screaming at the end of the film foes on for an excessively long time, making the ending

claustrophobic and nauseating. The realism of the screaming digs at a viewer's soul, but

the captioning only briefly mentions [screaming]. It does not capture the intensity or the

length of the screaming.

Sonic realism continued with the rise of hand-held films such as *Blair Witch* with

used limited microphone ranges to add to the closeness of these events by using the limits

of technology as markers of authenticity. These types of sounds are what Whitting calls

"raw." The importance of raw is that "the deployment of a "raw" sound effect interacts

with filmgoers both cognitively and *physically* in order to create the visceral responses

necessary for horror cinema." (175). The sounds of the horror genre embed themselves

further and further into the body and are felt in the body, as with John Carpenters *The*

Thing. Not only does the film heavily rely upon synth music to make the viewer uncomfortable, but also screeching and squishy body sounds. Most concerning is that the captioning does not indicate any music is playing, nor does it expressly point out the sounds of skin ripping. The lack of captioning for body sounds is crucial to the film's overall atmosphere. Newer films like *Annihilation* and *It Follows* also use synth music to create an uneasy atmosphere. Nowhere in the captions is the sound mentioned, not even as [ominous music]. The soundtracks for films using synth make audiences generally uncomfortable, although describing the discomfort proves hard. This music is invasive but unidentifiable. The balance between these two is where captioning often fails. By failing, captioning is failing to replicate the sonic invasiveness of horror.

One of the most iconic and invasive horror moments in American film comes from Alfred Hitchcock's *Psycho* (1960), whose score was composed by Bernard Hermann. The infamous shower sequence evokes terror not only through images but by sonically stabbing the audience. Stan Link argues Hermann's music "'suture[s]' the viewer to an event whose terror lies not only in action and images but in the audibility of emotion…[and] "let[s] us know the victim by forcing us affectively to *become* the victim" (2). Music in horror acts to penetrate the viewer by focusing on sounds closely associated with the body. Link goes on to say that "The musical strategy of traditional horror scoring can be understood as creating such immediate, intimate connections between the elements of a frightening scene: killer touches victim touches viewer" (3). One factor that contributes to this touching is volume. Volume does not inherently help d/Deaf and hard of hearing individuals as hearing exists on a spectrum where, no matter how loud, certain tones are not heard. Captioning does not typically indicate volume

either. Volume can penetrate hearing individuals in a way captioning can not penetrate. Even for hearing, this penetration is achievable in a theatre setting more so than at home. Viewers are placed into other bodies through the sounds in horror films. Captioning makes specific body sounds legible such as hearts beating, breathing, or screaming, but they do not act on the body in the same ways as sound. Since the beginning of sound, the horror genre has been using these musical and bodily sounds to create affective environments, but why are these sounds frightening? Horror becomes an inherently haptic genre based on its ability to use sound to touch inside the viewer, which in turn demands physical reactions.

[The Fear is Calling From the Inside]

Horror film's physical reactions occur inside the viewer's body and sometimes release through reactions like shaking, screaming, or tensing the body. Horror is what Carl Plantinga calls an "auditory entertainment," a term Isabel C. Pinedo defines as "the process by which the human pulse synchronizes with music, or beats at equal time intervals to an external rhythm. The goal of musical pacing, in concert with the visual elements and narrative events, is to quicken the viewer's pulse and sense of agitation, generating emotional intensity in the viewer." (*354*). For horror, this synchronization helps to trigger freezing, flight, or fight responses, to quicken heartrates, and induce tensing of the muscles. This auditory entertainment applies to those whose assumed lack of auditory functions precludes them from audiovisual media. D/deaf and Hard of Hearing audiences experience auditory entertainment, albeit different than hearing individuals. The hearing ability exists on a spectrum, so some d/Deaf and hard of hearing viewers can hear the auditory entertainment and synchronize that way. Another way is

film's sonic vibrations can help a viewer's body to synchronize and generate emotional intensities. Theatres achieve this synchronization is more easily because of large speakers sending vibrations through the wall and floor. However, the majority of film watching does not occur in movie theatres.

I now turn my attention to how the body processes sound to create fear to understand why captioning is limited for the horror genre. This chapter is not to argue for a biologically determinist view that somehow a lack of auditory processing means horror films are rendered null. Instead, if captioning is tasked with making sonic cues legible, this proves particularly complicated for the horror genre where the root of fear stems from the illegibility of sound. Sound taps into the body by circumventing logical brain functioning to core physical responses. The other difficulty in attempting to use captioning to create affective experiences of horror alongside visual cues is that the horror genre presents a reversal of typical hierarchies in cinema. Fear privileges sound over visuals; therefore, I want to examine what types of physical reactions sound causes that captioning is tasked with recreating. Examining the way viewers embody horror sounds can help inspire ways of supplementing captioning to recreate more animated affective experiences.

As previously mentioned, when it comes to fear, sounds have typically been privileged over visuals. In Steve Goodman's book, *Sonic Warfare*, he states that "Sound is often understood as generally having a privileged role in the production and modulation of fear, activating instinctive responses, [and] triggering an evolutionary functional nervousness" (65). It seems evident that sounds such as screaming would trigger functions in the brain that would activate looking for danger. While certain sounds

like screaming *do* cause bodily responses, these fear-inducing sounds apply to music whose biological function is less clear to scientists.

While music plays an important cultural role, current scientific studies are unable to explain why music causes biological responses. The current assumption is that music has no biological or survival function and thus would not activate strong brain functions associated with self-preservation, flight, fright, or freezing. While it is clear from studies that music does play an important role in expressing emotion and causing emotional responses[112], it is less clear how this relates to fear as a survival measure. In the 2015 study, "Fear Across the Senses: Brain Responses to Music," the authors found that fearful music caused activity in the amygdala.[113] The activation of the brain's response to fearful music is not limited to personal musical tastes. Music and sound are experienced within the body before the brain can make rational decisions about processing the information. Films, consciously or not, tap into some of these biological functions of sound when they put scary sounds with scary images.

While it is clear that scary music paired with scary images causes a scared viewer, it is still debatable where this fear is located, in turn making it challenging to caption musical fear when the horror itself is unknown. While there are many arguments to be made, within music studies, it comes down to cognitivist versus emotivists. A general definition of a cognitivist is that :

> A "cognitivist" regarding music claims that music is, or maybe, expressive
> of various emotions, e.g., sadness, fear, anger, joy, etc., and when it is expressive

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[112] For more studies on music and emotion see: Juslin and Sloboda

[113] "revealed significant bilateral activity along the anterior STG" (402)

of, say, sadness we say that the music is "sad." Moreover, listening to sad music may indeed move us but not to sadness (Radford 69).

Musicologist and cognitivist Peter Kivy argues music moves listeners towards sadness because of cognitive recognition of the musical qualities, not an authentic experience of sadness. Kivy argues that "a piece of sad music might move us (in part) because it is expressive of sadness, but it does not move us by making us sad" (Robinson 351). For emotivists like Colin Radford, they believe that cognitivist "wrongly denies that sad music can move us to sadness" (75). [114] Emotivists believe that listeners experience the emotion, and are not just moved towards it. When we often lack the language to say why something moved us to an emotion or name an emotion we felt, it becomes unclear how to translate that into captioning. For emotions like fear, captioners are not transcribing something that has a direct sound to language correlation, like speech. Instead, captioners are transcribing music and sound effects, which require them to work through the process of what they felt or the film's intended emotion then work backward to name the sound. The process of locating fear in music is also a widely discussed issue in film and media. Unlike music alone, film sound often works alongside an image; therefore, the viewer-listener processes two different sets of information, something captioners must navigate.

In film sound studies, there are two primary approaches: those who consider the cultural implications of emotions and music and those who look at bodily reactions to sound. Famously, Claudia Gorbman argues in her seminal work *Unheard Melodies* that three codes can are used to read film music: pure, cultural, and cinematic. Horror sounds are often using cinematic codes, "music is codified by the filmic context itself, and

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[114] See also Scherer, K. R.; Zentner, M. R

assumes meaning by virtue of its placement in the film" (3). For instance, the cinematic code for castle thunder or the Wilhelm scream became a signifier for "scary." When audiences at the time heard these sounds in films, they knew that the intended emotion is fear because that is how other films used that sound. Other scholars such as Kevin Donnelly argue that music can "bypass culture's learned structures," (94) creating psychological effects and real emotions. Music direct impact on the viewer or listener moves beyond rational cognition. I believe that film viewing is a complex process that relies on both the cultural and cognitive aspects which form specific affective experiences. What affective experiences that rely upon sonic shortcuts: culturally, cinematically, and cognitively, is captioning charged with recreating?

Much like the studies on music and fear, studies prove that film viewing can cause bodily responses tied to affective experiences. For instance, in the study "Effects of Music on the Psychological Responses to a Stressful Film," when music was added to workplace safety videos, the authors concluded that "our results indicate the musical scores can alter electrodermal responses to a stressful film" (50). These changes included cardiovascular, electrical, and somatic responses. Similarly, film sound theorists Katherine Kalinak states that music's effect "is through its physiological impact, that is, through certain involuntary responses caused by its stimulations of the human nervous system" (9). These various studies provide an understanding that first, sound and music cause fear responses, which is felt within the body as physical reactions. Secondly, these responses are rooted in a complex system involving the cognitive, emotional, or cultural bodies watching the film. Thirdly, film and media's use of sounds for fear responses create affective experiences that audience members often seek when watching horror

films. All of the information combined presents a unique problem for the captioning for horror sounds because the captioning, unlike other types of narrative films, is focused on bodily responses. [115]

The Power of Captions Compels You

With all of the information provided thus far, I show how sounds for horror present a complex process of achieving specific affective results. Results that have been present throughout the genre's history, where fear resides in sound through the repetition of cultural sonic cues and the physical reactions elicited from within bodies. Before proposing haptic technology as an aid for captioning, I now want to look at what the captions for horror films are currently doing. For instance, table 2 shows how often vague terms are used to describe horrific moments.

Captioning for horror requires creative descriptors--conscious choices on what sounds add to the atmosphere, a process which often focuses on diegetic sounds rather than music. One of the more frequent captioning for music is [eerie music] or [ominous music].[116] While these might be fine adjectives for describing the music, they do not always help to create affective experiences.

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[115] I would say that comedy would also have this type of affective demands.
[116] See table 2 for examples of this pattern

Table 2 Horror Captions

Film	Timestamp	caption
Candyman	00:01:00	[ominous organ music plays]
	00:16:06	loud scary music plays]|-[screaming]
The Conjuring	00:00:02	[ominous music]
Wishmaster	00:14:47	[Djinn in Eerie Voice]
	1:0:325	Eerie Howling
The Incubus	00:02:12	*[suspenseful music]
	00:05:23	suspenseful music
	00:09:15	suspenseful music
	00:15:31	Dramatic music
	00:20:54	*intense dramatic music
	00:05:35	Eerie music
	00:07:38	Sinister organ music
Sorority House Massacre	00:15:15	Eerie music
	00:18:29	Forbidding music
	00:27:07	Eerie music
	00:27:57	Unsettling music
	00:32:03	Suspenseful music
	00:33:58	Ominous music
	00:38:17	Forbidding music
	00:59:45	Eerie music
Starslammer	1:05:12	Suspenseful music
Carrie	00:04:08	Eerie voice
	00:47:17	Dissonant, screeching music
	00:54:19	Disturbing Music Plays
The Witch	00:00:45	Eerie string instruments playing
	00:02:02	Ominous music
	00:04:43	Ominous chorus of female voices
	00:06:23	Ominous women's chorus singing
	00:07:14	Ominous humming
	00:08:17	Music intensifies
	00:09:23	Ominous intensifying music continues

Table 2 (Continued)

Film	Timestamp	caption
The Witch	00:30:12	Screeching Ominous farm animal sounds
	00:30:21	Ominous music
	00:41:25	Music intensifies chimes continue
Carnival of Souls	00:53:07	Playing haunting music
Scooby Doo 2	00:00:04	Eerie pop music plays
He's Out There	00:02:19	Ominous Music Playing
	00:04:20	Eerie Music Overlaps
	01:03:24	Eerie music playing
Autopsy of Jane Doe	00:03:14	Intense music
	00:32:40	Eerie music
St. Agatha	00:01:05	Ominous music
	00:01:14	Slow pace music
	00:03:48	melancholy music
	00:32:45	suspenseful music
Blackcoat's Daughter	00:41:27	Eerie creaking
Blood Rage	00:00:15	EERIE MUSIC PLAYING
Paranormal Activity	00:10:31	melancholy instrumental music playing
Friday the 13th	00:03:58	discordant, menacing theme plays
	00:05:19	suspenseful theme playing
	00:20:26	ominous theme playing
	00:21:01	urgent, menacing theme playing
	00:22:05	shrill musical sting
	00:23:10	eerily tranquil theme plays
	00:30:01	menacing musical sting

Part of the limitation for captions to maximize the potential of captioning to create affective experiences alongside the image is because horror sounds are often meant to be unclear, mysterious, or not fully identifiable. As Whitting argues, "Part of the effectiveness of a horror sound effect resides in its naming as well as its evocation of dark emotion. In general, the depth and shocking nature of any hidden horror depends on the conspiracy of silence that surrounds its origin" (69). Captioning tries to make visible something whose horror lies in its invisibility. While [eerie music] does not state the sound's source, it does prescribe the emotion. The captioning circumvents the body by organizing the emotion through rational language. Horror is closely tied with the irrationality of emotions felt in the body by avoiding giving explicit answers about sound and music. Captioning's challenge is creating an ominous atmosphere that would rely on implying the ominous rather than explicitly stating it.

The one benefit of labeling these moods as [eerie] or [ominous] is that it narratively indicates what the tone of the scene is. [Eerie music] or [ominous music] can heighten the expectation of something about to occur, which is an integral part of horror and sound. In other filmic examples like *Friday the 13th*, each time the killer is present, the caption indicates this through [theme plays]. While the captioning may not trigger some of the psychological reactions of hearing or feeling the music, it does indicate that a threat is present and heightens the tension. Captioning a killer's theme to heighten the tension is not standard practice. For instance, in my viewing of *Halloween* on cable television, none of the captioning indicated Myer's presence through something like [theme plays]. The lack of captioning for his theme undermined the threat of Michael Myers as it was not evident how close he always to potential victims. The only time

Myers was sonically legible in captioning was through [breathing]. Captions often indicate breathing or heartbeats to place the viewer inside of the killer's body. This positioning forces the viewer into the role of the killer, heightening the tension while they wait for the victim. The bodily sounds are an example of how horror captions can force the viewer into specific positionalities generating fear, excitement, tension, or anxiety.

While captions can communicate some horror sounds, other sounds are harder to recreate in writing. For instance, in *The Universal Sense: How Hearing Shapes the Mind*, Seth Horowitz states, "every vertebrate has a startle circuit…as it is a very adaptive way of putting an organism on guard" (111). He outlines how this circuit works "A loud, fast sound makes you respond with a highly stereotyped and very fast behavior (usually only involving three neurons): the sound activates the sacculus (normally a gravity sensor), which triggers high-speed motor pathways involved in posture control, making you hunch your head between your should and hump a little. In short, you startle" (191). This all happens in a matter of milliseconds. Captions' inability to communicate volume or pitch undermines this startle circuit. Captions stay on the screen consistently, and so while images can be startling, captioning functions more as a consistent static readable text than a moving image. Rarely in film is a startling image present without a jumpscare sound, often known as a stinger. Being a readable text that stays roughly in the same spot, same font, size, and color removes the potential for the startle circuit to activate. [117]

Sound effects for films are typically one sound masquerading as something else. The untrustworthiness of horror captions is heightened when the images and narratives are solidifying an atmosphere of paranoia and fear. As Whitting says about the

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[117] For more on the startle effect see Baird

mislabeling of horror sound effects, "The second reason for the mislabeling of sound effects deals with trust or rather the lack of it. It should come as no surprise that trust is also a major thematic concern of horror films, which constantly pose the question: "Whom do I trust?" (169). Captioning labels and names horror sounds, but this is at tension with the sound's construction as untrustworthy. There is also the inherent issue that sounds are not what they say they are-- [bones breaking] would need to say [celery breaking], but this would be especially un-scary. The captioning is doing what it needs to do, labeling what the sound is supposed to be, but this labeling provides answers which horror does not want answered.

Case Study: Tingler

At the heart of these issues is not only how sound operates in horror and how it causes fear, but the very nature of how the viewing experience is haptic. Horror is a bodily genre Linda Williams discusses. Williams notes that "Aurally, excess is marked by recourse not to the coded articulations of language but to inarticulate cries of pleasure in porn, screams of fear in horror, sobs of anguish in melodrama" (4). The visual of someone being murdered or a door creaking open play their part in creating the experiences of horror, but these affective experiences of horror are rooted in the body. It is the body that reacts by circumventing cognitive reasoning. Laura U. Marks explores the body's relationship to film her book *The Skin of the Film.* In the book, she describes how the concept of haptic visuality focuses more on the body than just optical visuality, stating "Touch is a sense located on the surface of the body: thinking of cinema as haptic is only a step toward considering the ways cinema appeals to the body as a whole" (163). This touching, I argue, can also be done through the sound and vibration. *Psycho*'s

tremolo touches the viewer through screeching strings. Other films use a killer's heavy

breathing and heartbeating touch viewers. While Marks discusses issues of memories,

coloniality, and cultural experiences, this move towards understanding how film-viewing

is a haptic experience that triggers the senses of the body is an important concept for

considering haptic technologies' ability to trigger multiple senses.

     Captioning for horror films, as noted earlier, provides a different affective

experience than hearing horror sounds. By recognizing how the haptic nature of horror

films is based in the body and the way it uses horror to infest it, haptics could serve a role

in evoking these experiences. [118] In *Atlas of Emotions*, Guiliana Bruno argues that "The

haptic allows us to come into contact with people and the surface of things. Thus, while

the basis of touch is reaching out-for an object, a place, or a person (including oneself)-it

also implies the reverse: that is, being touched in return" (254). I argue that this being

touched by media in return is especially real for horror films where the threat of touch

causes physiological responses. Touching, when written texts replace sonic

communication, can be supported through the use of haptic technologies.

     Discussion of film marketing views the gimmicks of Percepto, smell-o-vision, and

even 3D as cheap marketing ploys. However, other forms of media embrace the use of

haptic technology to construct horror experiences. Angela Ndalianis uses Bruno's work

to consider the use of haptics in videogame media. She states that "While video gaming

shares this haptic visuality with the cinema through the play's sensory and affective

connection to the fictional world, it also involves a literal haptic connection through the

player's interaction with the controller and, in turn, in the way command of the controller

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[118] For more information about the haptic nature of film see Petho

translates onto the body of the avatar who then participates in a haptic experience of the virtual space that surround it" (44). It makes sense that Ndalianis' work would include horror games as a site for understanding how embodiment and haptic technology. Horror videogames use haptic technologies available through the player's controller to communicate sonic cues. Videogames such as the *Resident Evil* franchise, *Silent Hill 2*, and *Dead Space* all use vibrations in the handheld controller to make sound tactile. [119] More recent technological developments such as virtual reality have allowed videogame makers to use VR to create intense affective experiences, as seen with the aptly named game, *Affected: The Asylum* and *Affected: The Manor*.

Vibration could function as a potential tool for embodied experiences for horror. As noted in the previous section, captioning for horror is often vague and that captions fail to affect an embodied experience. Sonic experiences already rely upon a listening that happens not in the ear but inside the body. In the book *Sonic Experiences*, Jean François Augoyard states that "Listening involves the vibration of the ribcage as much as the ear" (150). Once again, we return to *The Tingler* and Percepto. Sound is a vibration felt in the body; therefore, a genre experienced outside of language and inside the body requires thinking outside of language itself.

The way a viewer feels sound, not just hears it, is part of the construction of horror soundscapes. In using common technology, such as a phone application, bodies interact with haptic vibrations. Vibrations potentially activate fear and anticipation. I argue for vibration because it is directly tied to our fear senses.[120] The fear associated

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[119] For a more indepth examination of horror and technology in video games see Perron
[120] Goodman states that sound has "the power of audible vibrations to generate an affective ecology of fear" (42).

with vibration is felt within the body because it perceives these waves of sound as

dangerous. As Attali points out in *Noise: The Political Economy of Music:*

> beyond a certain limit, it becomes an immaterial weapon of death. The ear,
>
> which transforms vibration into electric impulses addressed to the brain,
>
> can be damaged, and even destroyed, when the frequency of a sound
>
> exceeds 20,000 hertz, or when its intensity exceeds 80 decibels.
>
> Diminished intellectual capacity, accelerated respiration and heartbeat,
>
> hypertension, slowed digestion, neurosis, altered diction: these are the
>
> consequences of excessive sound in the environment. (27).

While the phone application will not produce vibrations that impact the body in such

extreme ways, Attali shows that the body registers vibrations in extreme ways. Sound and

vibration both cause the body to react, evoking fear responses, and, when used in film,

can trigger affective responses.

Filmmakers are already using the vibrations of inaudible to create fear. Filmmaker

Gaspar Noe paired intense graphic scenes with infrasound to evoke horror. [121] As he

states, "We added Hz of infrasound… You can't hear it, but it makes you shake. In a

good theatre with a subwoofer, you may be more scared by the sound than by what's

happening on the screen. (Goodman 66). These unheard but felt frequencies are believed

to be part of why parishioners in churches have extreme reactions because of the organs

echoing in the church produce infrasound. While rumors that other horror films such as

Paranormal Activity also use infrasound, what this illustrates is that sound operates on a

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[121] "leaky, subbass frequencies under the auditory threshold of 20 hertz, often felt in terms of tactility or organ resonance instead of hearing" (Goodman 197)

wide scale, not all of which can be audible, described, or neatly contained through language. These sounds are not easily identifiable as a specific sound; instead, the sounds act within the body. Captioning will ultimately fail at making them legible.

By recognizing that horror's affective embodied experiences cannot be made legible in captioning, I believe that using haptic technology can reproduce these same cues. While vibration is still limited in terms of these lower frequencies and cannot communicate all sonic elements in a film, they can work alongside captions to recreate affective environments of fear. In other fields, haptic technology is already being used or tested for music vibrations, creating virtual braille, and a belt called *Hey Yaa,* which allows deaf people to use vibration to communicate. [122] I propose a phone application which uses vibrational elements of haptic technologies because it is accessible and non-invasive.[123]

The Tingler phone application[124] is rooted in my deep envy of those who have experienced the Percepto viewings of *The Tingler.* Many of us carry personal vibration devices in our pockets at all times. I am, of course, speaking about smartphones with haptic technology built into them. In their study "Deaf and Hard-of-hearing Individuals' Preferences for Wearable and Mobile Sound Awareness Technologies," the authors

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[122] For a longer overview please see Sorgini etal, and Hermawati,

[123] Unlike the Dentiphone, which sounds very invasive

[124] The phone application is currently available for Android users on the Google Play Store and Amazon App Store.
https://play.google.com/store/apps/details?id=appinventor.ai_celestereeb.Tingler&fbclid=IwAR3PrFOaYj-wqrH2JKlUF0tn0QOMoLlI3NWhG3K5F1IhWrdNdAH0_IlJuGE
https://www.amazon.com/CelesteR-Haptic-Horror/dp/B086GQ78VY/ref=sr_1_1?dchild=1&keywords=Tingler&qid=1586041901&s=mobile-apps&sr=1-1

found that "Almost all participants wanted both visual and haptic feedback and 75% preferred to have that feedback on separate devices (e.g., haptic on smartwatch, visual on head-mounted display)." (1). Whereas no one specifically asked for Percepto units in seats, taking the idea of using vibration for horror and the desire for haptic feedback on separate devices lead to the development of the Tingler phone application.

The phone application uses vibration to recreate the affective experiences of fear for horror films. [125] I take inspiration from Vivian Sobchack's concept of cinesthetic subjects and the nature of the body and film viewing. Films like horror elicit carnal responses often considered unruly and out of the viewer's control. As she states, "film experience is meaningful *not to the side of our bodies but because of our bodies" (*italics original 60*).* Through this app, I demonstrate how horror is a genre that uses sound to get *inside* of our bodies. The phone application begins with the user selecting which film they want to watch with vibration feedback. The two films I created vibration tracks for are: *Lights Out* and *Fear Filter*. Both short horror films use sound in distinct and strategic ways to incite fear. These films allowed me to test two different ways that vibrations can communicate sonic horror cues to the user.

I developed the application to be accessible for a wide range of technological literacy levels. The user starts the program, selects begin, and then has the option to choose one of the films. The first selection is the short horror film directed by David Sandberg, known as ponysmasher online, called *Lights Out* (2013). The film uses diegetic sounds of light switches, footsteps, breathing, and a final jumpscare at the end. The short film *Lights Out* uses footsteps and light switch sounds to cause tension and

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[125] I am not stating that there is no potential here but that horror seems the most obvious candidate

incite fear. The limited visuals conceal the unseen being's proximity to the protagonist. The footsteps allow the viewer to track the being's movements in the apartment. Each footstep escalates a slow tension that builds anticipation of seeing the being. The horror lies in the footsteps, whereas in *Fear Filter*, the being runs toward the camera. The footsteps are not the source of fear. In *Fear Filter,* there is the visual cue of the bunny face filter moving that indicates the danger is moving towards the protagonist. I selected these two films because they share overlapping elements, but also contain creative contextual choices about where the scenes build fear. *Fear Filter* does not use footsteps as the affective trigger, whereas *Lights Out* does. *Lights Out* has more vibrational moments where *Fear Filter* is much more limited. These two films show different ways that vibration can work with the existing sound structures in creating a horrific impact.

The 2019 film *Fear Filter,* directed by Tracy Kleeman, uses sound less for slow tensions and more for jump scares. For this film, I focused on using longer vibrational cues at three points in the short where the sound was part of a jump scare. Rather than *Lights Out*'s use of footsteps to build slow anticipation, *Fear Filter* focuses on activating the viewer's startle circuits triggered by vibrations. These vibrations tap into bodily responses to fear, which is not always nameable, especially when jumpscares cause them. Horror is an affective experience first before it is a cognitive thought process. Captioning is not part of the carnal responses to film because it is part of the self-reflectivity rendered visible in language after the knowledge produced by our eyes, ears, skin, and stomach. [126]

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[126] carnal responses to the cinema have been regarded as too crude to invite extensive elaboration beyond aligning them—for their easy thrills, commercial impact, and cultural associations—with other more "kinetic" forms of amusement such as theme park rides or with Tom Gunning's once historically grounded but now catch-all designation, "cinema of attractions."

As such, we must find other ways to maximize its potential for affective and more audience-integrated viewing practices.

I believe that it would be wrong to start this long-term project with the basis that d/Deaf and Hard of Hearing viewers *must* experience the horror genre in the same ways as hearing individuals. Privileging hearing viewership as the primary goal only reinforces normative ideas about the way films should be embodied. Instead, I think starting from a place of films as embodied affective experiences allows for multiple sites of interaction. The goal is not to make d/Deaf and hard of hearing know that sound is occurring because hearing people know it is happening. The goal is for viewers to be able to immerse themselves in the film's affective environment.

I want to end this chapter by saying what I would like to see next for haptics and horror. As I work to develop the phone application further, I would like to ensure that the Tingler application remains free and open to as many users as possible. Often for items considered an accessibility aid, those who would benefit from using them are priced out of accessing them. I will also be working to make the phone application available on iOS and not just android devices. I would also like to increase the amount of vibration tracks available to users. I would also like to encourage sound designers to consider how their work could be translated into haptic technologies so their desired affective experiences can be experienced by d/Deaf and hard of hearing audiences. Finally, it will be important to get insight from more d/Deaf and hard of hearing users.

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