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FIGHTING FOR 504: NEGOTIATING HEGEMONIC ABILITY THROUGH VERBAL
ADVOCACY AND DISABLED EMBODIMENT

By

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A THESIS

Presented to the Faculty of
The Graduate College at the University of Nebraska
In Partial Fulfillment of Requirements
For the Degree of Master of Arts

Major: Communication Studies

Under the Supervision of Professor Kristen Hoerl

Lincoln, Nebraska

June, 2020

FIGHTING FOR 504: NEGOTIATING HEGEMONIC ABILITY THROUGH VERBAL
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University of Nebraska, 2020

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In my thesis, I look at San Francisco's 504 sit-in for disability rights. I argue that both the verbal advocacy and the embodied actions of protestors demonstrate that dis/ability is constructed through a hegemonic process. I contend that combating hegemonic understandings of disability creates a tension between being a counter hegemonic movement and desiring the benefits of hegemonic legibility. To make these arguments, my thesis draws several conclusions. I argue that activists enacted a civil-rights framework to communicate the need for Section 504 to the public. I explain that activists adopted the role of educator to address problematic ideas about the meaning of dis/ability in the press and to the government. By these frameworks, activists demonstrated the need to seek hegemonic legibility, for it granted disabled people important institutional protections. By engaging in this protest, activists demonstrated that they wanted hegemonic legibility on their own terms. Activists established their terms by becoming a political force, which used both individual bodies to show the experience of being disabled and a collective body to make the movement accessible for diverse groups. While the individual body challenges the notion that being disabled equals being weak, the collective body challenges the very categorization of bodies as

“disabled.” As a collective body, disabled activists used and manipulated the space of the Health Education and Welfare (HEW) offices to communicate the need for an accessible world. By using space as an argument, disabled activists challenged the hegemonic meanings of dis/ability inherent in-built environments. While occupying the HEW building, activists demonstrated that the struggle to gain hegemonic legibility begins in supportive communities. During the protest, activists empowered and legitimized the disability rights movement by utilizing California’s Bay Area as a rhetorical and embodied resource. Despite the movement’s central tension between being a counter hegemonic movement and desiring the benefits of hegemonic legibility, this protest shows that strategically appealing to both hegemonic and counter hegemonic meanings allowed activists to restructure the meanings of dis/ability. This thesis illustrates that ability is a hegemonic process because disabled people use several resources to unsettle the boundaries between ability and disability.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

In 1977, as April was rolling over into May, several disability rights activists emerged from the San Francisco offices of the United States Department of Housing, Education, and Welfare (HEW). Many of the activists had been living in the building for nearly twenty-six days; they had promised not to leave until Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 was finally signed and implemented, with no additions to the regulations that had already been discussed (Cone, 1997). Section 504 states that “no qualified individual with a disability should, only by reason of his or her disability, be excluded from the participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any program or activity receiving Federal financial assistance” (Coppelman, 1977, para. 1). Essentially, this law acted as a first draft of the promise of civil rights for disabled people. The promise of civil rights was seemingly granted when the law passed in 1973, but disabled people were told that they needed to wait longer. As activists Kitty Cone (1997) explains, “after the law was passed, in order for it to become effective, regulations had to be issued defining who was a disabled person, what did otherwise qualified mean, what constituted discrimination and nondiscrimination in the context of disability” (para. 6). HEW—who was responsible for drafting and enforcing the specific regulations—dragged their feet on implementation. Section 504 gathered dust for four years, passing through three secretaries until HEW Secretary Joseph A. Califano Jr. inherited it in 1977 under President Jimmy Carter. By this point, disabled activists were tired of waiting for the promise of their civil rights to be officially granted. They gave Secretary Califano a choice: either he could sign the regulations by April 4th, or they could stage a large national protest in front of the nation’s HEW offices. When Section

504 was not signed on April 4th, protestors were forced to act. They staged marches across the United States, including locations in Chicago, Denver, New York, Washington D.C., and, of course, San Francisco (Shoot, 2017). However, the protests did not end with these large marches.

While some stories seem to indicate that the occupations of the HEW buildings were spontaneous, the sit-ins were planned by the organizers. Because public information about the plan may have prevented access to buildings, the plan to occupy did not spread beyond the circle of organizers. Many protestors were unable to bring food, medication, or extra clothing to the marches (Patient No More, 2015g). Despite the risks of going without medication, protestors were deeply committed to securing 504 regulations. While other occupations quickly dispersed on their own, the San Francisco protest was the only sit-in to endure for a significant amount of time. Because the San Francisco 504 sit-in lasted, activists and journalists were able to document the protest in detail. Therefore, my thesis focuses on this particular sit-in.

During the occupation, activists were aware of the power of their disabled bodies. Estimates put the number of protestors between 75 and 120, with these numbers fluctuating for the twenty-six days of occupation (Barnartt & Scotch, 2001, p. 165; Tanaka, 1977). Because the group in San Francisco was so large, the task of removing everyone was intimidating. Additionally, activists in San Francisco realized that their disabled bodies were protected from removal by HEW officials. As Barnartt and Scotch (2001) note, “HEW officials were reluctant to use force to evict visibly disabled demonstrators, fearing negative public reaction” (p. 165). Protestor Tarri L. Tanaka recounted, “We could not be touched and for the sole reason that we were ‘handicapped’”

(1977, para. 13). Therefore, disabled activists were allowed to stay in the HEW offices. By occupying these offices, disabled activists were demonstrating the importance of embodied protest.

Life inside the HEW offices was not without struggle, which manifested as bodily risk. As protest co-organizer Cone (1997) explained, “the conditions were physically grueling, sleeping sometimes three or four hours a night on the floor and everyone was under stress about their families, jobs, our health, the fact that we were all filthy and so on” (para. 25). The majority of occupiers needed medical supplies and special equipment to function. Electric wheelchairs needed to be charged. Activists had no place to sleep. The protestors could not properly bathe themselves without a shower. People put their bodies at risk to protest. Therefore, activists worked to alleviate potential concerns of involvement in the sit-in. Medicine that needed refrigeration was thrown into a makeshift fridge. Mattresses were brought in, provided by sympathetic groups; other people would just sleep on couches and benches, wherever they could find space. Local churches and other activist groups provided food, and protestors created a makeshift cafeteria from a room within the building. Activists adapted a bathroom sink for washing hair. The protestors made the space work for them, forming committees to address several issues. As Cone (1997) noted, “We set up committees to take on different tasks such as rally speakers, media, fund-raising, medics, monitors, publicity, and outreach” (para. 20). These committees allowed protestors to self-govern and to respond to needs that arose. The publicity team talked to the press to garner public support, which helped secure donations of food and mattresses. As this action demonstrates, activists were committed to making this embodied protest last.

As the occupation in San Francisco wore on, the federal government and HEW officials began to take notice. Representatives held a hearing in the HEW offices in San Francisco, where protestors gave statements about the need for Section 504 to be implemented and exchanged bitter words with HEW officials (*The Independent*, 1977). However, protestors found this hearing to be inefficient; so, they decided to send a group to Washington D.C. The goal was to bring their embodied protest to the federal government by directly confronting Secretary Califano and President Carter. Activists held candlelight vigils in front of Secretary Califano's home and the White House. They demonstrated across the street from President Carter's church (Williams, 1977). Eventually, these strategies of protest forced Secretary Califano to sign the Section 504 regulations. The institutions directly impacted by Section 504 had two months to implement the regulations. Disabled people would no longer need to wait for the guarantee of their civil rights. With new regulations finally implemented, the San Francisco 504 sit-in ended after twenty-six days. The embodied protest succeeded.

As April was rolling over into May, these disabled activists emerged from the HEW offices victorious and motivated to continue changing the world. As Cone (1997) noted, "Those of us with disabilities were imbued with a new sense of pride, strength, and community and confidence" after the Section 504 sit-in ended, for "We had shown ourselves and the country through network TV that we, the most hidden, impoverished, pitied group of people in the nation were capable of waging a deadly serious struggle that brought about profound social change" (para. 38). As Barnartt & Scotch (2001) explained, the Section 504 sit-in was of "great importance in the collective consciousness of the disability community" (p. 167). This protest would continue to motivate activists to

fight for disability rights. In the 1980s, activists would take sledgehammers to city curbs to demand accessible curb cuts. In Denver, activists would chain themselves to buses to gain accessible public transportation. In 1990, protestors crawled up the steps of the United States' Capitol to demand the passage of the Americans with Disabilities Act. And disabled activists would return to the Capitol during the Trump administration to defend the Affordable Care Act. By engaging in a number of embodied protests since 1977, disability rights activists have pushed beyond the promises of Section 504. Activists have demanded that all publicly and privately funded programs must be accessible. Activists have also demonstrated a refusal to accept long timelines for implementing accessibility measures; they use direct action to make public spaces accessible for all. In supporting the ACA, disabled activists adamantly declared their right to live in and be taken care of by the world. Through the decades following 1977, activists used the tactics and discourse from the Section 504 sit-in to secure disability rights for all.

The Section 504 sit-in may have been a pivotal moment in the history of the disability rights movement, but this particular protest was a continuation of the embodied protest work already present in San Francisco and the Bay Area. As St. John (2017) of the *Los Angeles Times* noted, “over more than five decades, the Bay Area has been the epicenter of protest movements like no other region in the United States” (para. 1). While every moment of the detailed history of Bay Area activism is significant, every detail cannot be recounted in my thesis, for, as St. John notes, the causes of activists in San Francisco included “Free speech rights. The Vietnam War. Racial injustice. The nuclear bomb. U.S. policy in Central America. Wars in the Middle East. The AIDS crisis.

Economic inequities. Police brutality. Animal rights. Tree preservation. Wall Street and even sugary soda pop” (para. 2). Therefore, I focus briefly on the movements that utilized embodied protest action.

Throughout the 1960s, student movements were actively involved in shaping the culture of the Bay Area. Across the country, “[t]he free speech, the civil rights and the anti-war movement were all present” (Reed, 2017, para. 2) on university campuses. At San Francisco State University, “activism began to develop in 1960 when students participated in demonstrations against the House Un-American Activities hearing in San Francisco” (Reed, 2017, para. 8). As an activist spirit continued to develop in the Bay Area, many students went to the South in support of the Civil Rights Movement. By participating in this movement, many student activists from the Bay Area became more energized. For example, when University of California, Berkley student Mario Savio returned from his civil rights work, his attempts to tell others about civil rights were shut down by the school administration (Gonzales, 2014). The Free Speech Movement began in response to this university action. For three months, activists fought the administration and the police who were called in to shut down protests. When police attempted to arrest a fellow student, activists "sat-in" around the police car, blocking it from moving for several hours (Gonzales, 2014). The Free Speech Movement on Berkley ultimately concluded when "800 people occup[ied] the central administration building” (UC Berkley Library, n.d.). By occupying this building, student activists demonstrated the effectiveness of embodied action.

Embodied action in the Bay Area extended beyond university campuses and onto the streets of Oakland, where the Black Panther Party was fighting for community

control. As Collison (2008) explains, BPP founders “Newton and Seale developed an intellectual orientation that viewed the black community as a colony exploited by white businessmen, the government, and the police” (para. 1). Therefore, the BPP engaged in community support and community defense as a response to the exploitative nature of white America. The most famous of the community defense programs “organized armed patrols that followed the police around the black community” (Collison, 2008, para. 3). By being present for police interactions, BPP members were demonstrating their version of embodied action. BPP embodied action also included taking care of the bodies of community members. The BPP also “set up free breakfast programs, medical clinics, and after-school programs” (Collison, 2008, para. 3). Their embodied action provided important community care in Oakland. Additionally, by engaging in their protest actions, the BPP became skilled organizers. The BPP was even present for the Section 504 sit-in, where their organizing skills proved invaluable to the success of the protest (Patient No More, 2017).

While the BPP worked to improve Oakland streets, Native Americans occupied Alcatraz Island to reclaim control over their land. The occupation began on November 20, 1969, when a group of eighty-nine native people arrived at Alcatraz on “small, crowded sailboat[s]” (The Attic, n.d., para. 4). The group called themselves the “Indians of all Tribes,” which “included Cherokee and Ojibwa, Mohawk, Sioux, and other native nations” (The Attic, n.d., para. 2). While other Native American actions focused on the rights of singular tribes, the Alcatraz occupation was enacted “in response to renewed assaults on tribal sovereignty” (Kelly, 2014, p. 170). Therefore, the occupation of the defunct federal prison served a significant embodied purpose. Alcatraz Island essentially

served as a representation of the standards of reservations, for "it lacked running water, sanitation, transportation, minerals, industry, agriculture, and educational facilities" (Kelly, 2014, p. 168). However, by occupying the prison, American Indians declared that "the first sight seen by ships entering the Golden Gate was Indian Land" (The Attic, n.d., para. 6). While the occupation eventually ended after 19 months, activists were able to secure changes to federal policy. Furthermore, as Kelly (2014) notes, this embodied action "transformed American Indian activism by crafting a compelling image of Indian militants seizing land from the government and re-appropriating the dominant language of American colonialism" (p. 169). The Section 504 sit-in organizers did not specifically cite the occupation of Alcatraz as an inspiration for their protest; however, the concept of occupation and embodied action resonated within the Bay Area. Activists were using an effective form to fight successfully for the enforcement of Section 504.

My thesis explores how protestors in the Section 504 sit-in used embodied activism to both secure Section 504 regulations and challenge the hegemonic constructions of dis/ability. At the time of the protest, activists were aware that Section 504 would affect all disabled bodies that interact with American institutions. The national focus on the protest scrutinized the meanings of dis/ability ingrained in the public imagination. Therefore, this protest offers a chance to explore the ways in which ability is a hegemonic process, one that involves disabled bodies working with and against the concepts of ability in an attempt to redefine what being disabled means.

The Section 504 sit-in highlights how ability functions in the public sphere. As many disabled people realize, ideas of what disabled bodies can do—and are allowed to do—are deeply entrenched in society. While activists fought for Section 504 with their

protest action, they also fought to change public perceptions of disability. As Cone (1997) alludes to in her statements on the protest, much of the resistance to hegemonic negotiations of ability from disabled bodies came from how the disabled activists used their bodies. Activists used their bodies as tools to change the situation for disabled people, putting their bodies at material risk in the process. This risk shows how hegemonic negotiations of ability impact bodies. Disability activists have responded to the meanings of ability by organizing together, which has enabled them to communicate the impacts of the hegemonic negotiations of ability on their bodies.

Building upon disability studies' emphasis on the disabled body (Dolmage, 2016; Siebers, 2008), and on scholarship in hegemonic ability (McRuer, 2010), my thesis explores how the boundaries between ability and disability fluctuate in response to embodied action by engaging in a rhetorical analysis of the Section 504 sit-in. Because these boundaries are an ongoing series of negotiations, the concept of hegemonic ability sees disabled bodies as actively involved in the process of changing the meanings of ability.

This project also centralizes the disabled body in spaces. Because disabled bodies cannot easily access built environments designed for abled bodies, disabled people find alternative ways to navigate the world. By alternatively navigating the world, disabled bodies disrupt the intended uses of space. Disruptions show that spaces must be built to accommodate disabled bodies. This demonstrates another way in which disabled people participate in the hegemonic negotiations of disability.

Throughout my thesis, I argue that both the verbal advocacy and the embodied actions of protestors demonstrate that the meaning of dis/ability is constructed through a

hegemonic process. Furthermore, I argue that combating hegemonic understandings of disability creates a tension between being a counter hegemonic movement and desiring the benefits of hegemonic legibility. In order to make these arguments, my thesis draws several conclusions. I argue that activists enacted a civil rights framework to communicate the need for Section 504 to the public and the federal government. I explain that activists adopted the role of educator to address problematic ideas about the meaning of dis/ability in the press and in governmental establishments. By utilizing both a civil rights and educator framework, activists demonstrated the need to seek hegemonic legibility, for this legibility granted disabled people important institutional protections. By engaging in this protest, activists demonstrated that they wanted hegemonic legibility on their own terms. Activists established their terms by becoming a strong political force, which used both individual bodies to account for the experience of being disabled and the collective body to make the movement accessible for a diverse group of people. In both cases, disabled bodies challenge common understandings of disability. While the individual body challenges the notion that being disabled equals being weak, the collective body challenges the very categorization of bodies into the umbrella term “disabled.” As a collective body, disabled activists used and manipulated the space of the HEW offices to communicate the need for an accessible world. By using space to argue for accessibility, disabled activists challenged the hegemonic meanings of dis/ability inherent in built environments. While occupying the space of the HEW building, activists demonstrated that the struggle to gain hegemonic legibility begins in supportive communities. In the Section 504 protests, activists empowered and legitimized the disability rights movement by utilizing San Francisco and the Bay Area as a rhetorical

and embodied resource. Despite the movement's central tension between being a counter hegemonic movement and desiring the benefits of hegemonic legibility, this protest shows that strategically appealing to both hegemonic and counter hegemonic meanings allowed activists to restructure the meanings of dis/ability in the public. This thesis illustrates that ability is a hegemonic process because disabled people use several different resources to unsettle the boundaries between ability and disability.

Ultimately, this project explores how the embodied protests of disability rights activists agitated for disability rights and pressured Secretary Califano to sign Section 504. Additionally, this project explains that protestors challenged hegemonic constructions of ability and made sense of their abilities and agency as a consequence of engaging in the protests. In order to explain how these activists used embodied action to advocate for themselves and to combat hegemonic ability, I analyze the materials provided by two digital archives that document the 504 sit-in. These archives feature photographs, documentary footage, and historical accounts from participants. In order to explore the Section 504 sit-in as embodied protest, I examine photographs and documentary footage. The photographs show bodies in the protest space, both marching outside the HEW building and occupying the offices. Similarly, the documentary footage allows me to see bodies in motion working to agitate for Section 504 while combatting hegemonic constructions of ability. At the same time, the documentary footage features contemporary interviews with protestors, demonstrating the beginnings of participants realizing the agency that disabled bodies have. Additionally, historical accounts, written immediately after the protests ended, show protestors referring to the historical

conceptions of disabled bodies in the public sphere. The protestors acknowledged how hegemonic conceptions of ability shifted during the Section 504 sit-ins.

In chapter 2, I review the relevant literature on ability and hegemony; the body as a material entity; and the generic elements of the sit-in. My review of the literature also considers how the built environment contributes to the hegemonic process for disabled bodies. The second part of this chapter explains the archives I am using and my approach to the archive, as a rhetorical critic.

In chapter 3, I argue that disabled activists became a strong political force focused on civil rights while educating the public on the experience of being disabled and the need for Section 504 Regulations. I contend that activists' verbal advocacy served three rhetorical functions: frame the Section 504 sit-in as a fight for civil rights, educate the public about the public on the material conditions of disability, and show disabled activists as a strong political force. In chapter 4, I argue that activists combatted hegemonic understandings of ability in the material world by engaging in embodied activism on several levels. Individual embodiment centered the needs of disability in the movement while collective embodiment demonstrated the need for a unified front. While remaking space opened up the possibilities of built environments, a focus on San Francisco gave the movement power and legitimacy. In my concluding chapter, I explain that the tensions of being both a counter hegemonic movement and desiring the protections of hegemonic legibility demonstrates that movements respond to hegemonic understandings from several different angles at once. I argue that both verbal advocacy and embodied action were necessary for the success of Section 504. I end by exploring how my analysis adds to social movements literature.

CHAPTER 2: DISABLED BODY IN PROTEST

Hegemonic Ability

In Siebers' (2008) words, the ideology of ability "is at its simplest, the preference for able-bodiedness. At its most radical, it defines the baseline by which humanness is determined, setting the measure of body and mind that gives or denies human status to individual persons" (p. 8). The ideology of ability focuses on the ways in which ability determines who can be a part of public life. The problems with the ideology of ability take several forms. For instance, Dolmage (2016) discusses two different manifestations of the ideology of ability in *Disability Rhetoric*. Disablism "negatively constructs both the values and the material circumstances around people with disabilities," justifying negative treatment of disabled bodies (p. 2). Fitting this into the ideology of ability, Siebers (2008) notes several ways in which myths about disability play into disablism. Myths say that "the disabled body is limited in what it can do and what it can be trained to do. It experiences new situations as obstacles" (p. 10). Negative constructions of disability do harm, including making the disabled body inferior to the abled body. This is ableism. As Dolmage (2016) notes, ableism "positively values and makes able-bodiedness compulsory" (p. 22). Because of how the world is constructed, the able body is compulsory in society. The consequences of this compulsory able-bodiedness are explored by McRuer's work on crip theory. As he explains, compulsory able-bodiedness "repeatedly demands that people with disabilities embody for others an affirmative answer to the unspoken question, Yes, but in the end, wouldn't you rather be more like me?" (McRuer, 2010, p. 372). The ideology of ability would rather disability not exist.

The ideology of ability is a powerful framework for studying how disability is seen in the public sphere. However, conversations about the ideology of ability present it as a static entity, an immovable force that disabled bodies cannot hope to change. I argue that ability is a process, a series of negotiations that come from disabled bodies interacting with a state and a public sphere that ultimately would rather those disabled bodies not exist. By looking at the manifestations of the ideology of ability as part of the ever-evolving process of ability, this project instead uses the phrase hegemonic negotiations of ability. I turn to Cloud (1996), who defines hegemony as “the process by which a social order remains stable by generating consent to its parameters through the productions and distribution of ideological texts that define social reality for the majority of the people” (p. 117). Hegemony acknowledges a world built around hierarchies, where those at the top convince the people below them to consent to this hierarchy. In order to secure this consent, “dominant social forces represent and incorporate some very real material interests of subordinated groups into their social relationships” (Artz & Murphy, 2000, p. 3). In the case of dis/ability, society shows that the norm is to be able-bodied. (Davis, 1997; Dolmage, 2016). Disabled bodies are also required to live up to the able-body norm, and this norm is enforced in several ways, including through literature (Davis, 2013), photographs (Garland-Thomson, 2002; Hevey, 2010), sports (Cherney, Lindemann, & Hardin, 2015), and laws (Barnes, 2010). While the norm of ability is deeply entrenched in society, Jasinski (2001) reminds us that “Hegemony is both an achieved condition ... and the process ... that produces the conditions” (pg. 284). While hegemonic negotiations of ability seem set in stone, there is room for disabled bodies to engage with this hegemony. As Lears (1985) explains, hegemony “is a society in constant

process, where the creation of counterhegemonies remains a live option” (p. 571). In this sense, “Hegemony as a process is neither good nor bad” (Artz & Murphy, 2000, p. 4). Instead, it is an active process, one where disabled bodies negotiate the meanings of dis/ability. Within disability studies, Kafer (2013) explores this process of negotiation by conceptualizing disability as a political force. As she notes, “Seeing disability as political, and therefore contested and contestable, entails departing from the social model’s assumption that ‘disabled’ and ‘nondisabled’ are discrete, self-evident categories, choosing instead to explore the creation of such categories and the moments in which they fail to hold” (p. 10). By exploring ability as a hegemonic process, we can begin to understand the ways disabled activists contribute to the evolving meanings of disability.

Studying Disabled Bodies

While hegemonic negotiations involve gaining consent from subordinate groups through a variety of means, disabled people can use their bodies as a tool to respond. As many people who have studied the body note, “The body is the medium or raw material through which we navigate the world, but it is also an entity that is invested with meanings” (Koust & Moore, 2010, p. 1). The body is both materially significant and discursively informed. Bodies gain meaning by moving through the world. In moving through the world, bodies also have the possibility of changing their conditions. After all, “speaking of and through [bodies] is ... a political and cultural act” (Koust & Moore, 2010, p. 1). In rhetorical disability studies, this idea of the body as both inscribed with meaning and a maker of meaning is found in *mētis* (Dolmage, 2016). The term *mētis* refers to a “cunning, adaptive, embodied intelligence” (Dolmage, 2016, 156). In Dolmage’s conception, all disabled bodies are imbued with the potentials of *mētis*, for

“bodily difference must be recognized as the engine for all meaning-making” (2016, 187). The disabled body, then, holds a significant amount of power. In this sense, the disabled body is “marking the world through the negotiation of everyday life” (Koust & Moore, 2010, p. 2). Dolmage (2016) says something similar by noting, “Mētis ... is the craft of forging something practical out of these possibilities, practicing an embodied rhetoric, changing the world as we move through it” (p. 149). By providing a framework for how disabled bodies interact with the world, mētis is a powerful tool for conceptualizing how the body can serve as a tool in the hegemonic negotiations of ability.

Of course, as Dolmage’s conceptions of mētis make clear, the body is an important site of meaning. The body itself is also an important tool for arguing. As Achter (2010) notes, “the body is a rhetorically useful and flexible argumentative locus that reflects the attitudes, values, and biases of a culture” (p. 49). Achter’s claims are part of a project about how the bodies of disabled veterans are constructed in society. In order to make his claim, Achter’s work converses with DeLuca (1999), who conceptualized the body as “a pivotal resource for the crucial practice of public argumentation” (p. 10). The bodies that Achter and DeLuca discuss are not simply bodies. Rather, they discuss “vulnerable bodies, dangerous bodies, taboo bodies, ludicrous bodies, transfigured bodies” (DeLuca, 1999, p. 10) and “wrong” bodies (Achter, 2010, p. 50). These are the bodies frequently left out of the conversation; they must fight for their survival. Based on these authors’ research, the body serves as an important resource for engaging with hegemonic negotiations of ability. As Achter (2010) says, “Public controversies involving bodies prove that the body is a forceful rhetorical form that captures and

expresses ideas in ways words cannot” (p. 49). Therefore, the body is an essential resource for arguing, “for it is the body that is at stake—its meanings, its possibilities, its care, and its freedoms” (DeLuca, 1999, p. 17). As *mētis* also suggests, these bodies play an active part in contesting hegemonic ability. Bodies that argue, DeLuca (1999) suggests, do more than just make a claim. They actively “[contest] social norms, [deconstruct] the established naming of the world, and [suggest] the possibilities of alternative worlds” (p. 10). As both arguing bodies and *mētis* suggest, bodies are powerful resources for changing the world. Disabled bodies that move through an inaccessible world engage in a powerful act of resistance, and this resistance is magnified by these bodies gathering together as protestors (DeLuca, 1999). However, we must consider what brings bodies together for political action.

Pain is a bodily experience that has the potential to act as a unifying force for disabled bodies. While pain is often considered as an individual and isolating condition, affect scholars have noted that pain is complicated. As Ahmed (2014) makes clear, pain indicates a kind of relation between bodies and the world. She notes, “affectivity of pain is crucial to the forming of the body as both a material and lived entity” (p. 24). This material entity is the body that experiences the world, that bears the burdens of pain. Disability scholars also see the importance of studying the complex idea of pain. On the one hand, pain is a personal experience. For disabled bodies, sometimes “[t]he great challenge every day is to manage the body’s pain, to get out of bed in the morning, to overcome the well of pain that rises in the evening, to meet the hundred daily obstacles that are not merely inconveniences but for physical suffering” (Siebers, 2008, p. 62). Siebers sees the importance of considering how individual pain impacts the experience of

having a disabled body. This consideration means acknowledging that embodied action puts disabled bodies at the risk of pain. By acknowledging this risk, we see that disabled bodies engaged in embodied action are simultaneously working against pain and against a system that causes a different kind of pain. Siebers (2008) notes “Society creates pain, but this creation backfires, producing an individual who struggles against society” (p. 62). While Siebers contributes the concept of individual pain to disability studies, I consider how hegemonic conceptions of ability produce collective pain. Bodies in pain share a common bond, and they organize around addressing this pain. As Ahmed (2014) notes, “Emotions shape the very surfaces of bodies, which take shape through the repetition of actions over time, as well as through orientations towards and away from others” (p. 4). Collective pain acts as an organizing force, for it connects bodies with similar experiences. Therefore, disabled bodies use embodied activism to engage in the hegemonic negotiations of ability to relieve this pain.

Sit-In as Protest Genre

During the Section 504 protest, activists found the sit-in to be useful when engaging with the hegemonic negotiations of ability. Varda (2019) explains the generic conventions of the sit-in, noting that “sit-ins involve the occupation of public spaces and demonstrate activists’ resolve through a performance of the embodied discourses of a movement” (p. 132). While Varda describes specific generic elements, this general overview demonstrates the importance of embodied action and occupation of space to the success of the sit-in. By engaging in a sit-in, activists argue that “the status quo is fundamentally unable to sufficiently address [activists’] concerns, or understand [their] perspective” (Varda, 2019, p. 134). When institutions resist the demands of activists, the

activists in turn “attempt to break the traditional institutions and ideas of the past” (Zagumny, 2001, p. 46). This argument against the status quo is made more apparent by how the sit-in works to “symbolically transform ... individual bodies to a collective to deny the free flow of business as usual” (Varda, 2019, p. 134). By using “body rhetoric” (Griffin, 1964), activists are able to disrupt public space as a united front, which draws attention to the goals of the movement. In other words, activists in a sit-in declare “the public(s) should pay attention to our act because our issue is important” (Varda, 2019, p. 134). By engaging in a sit-in, activists use their collective body in space to signal the need for institutional change. In this way, “sit-ins use all available means of persuasion” (Varda, 2019, p. 135).

While Varda briefly mentions space in his description of the sit-in, others have expanded on the centrality of control over space in a sit-in. In a metaphorical sense, Ritchie (1970) notes that the sit-in “has a special language that writes big on the walls of the Entrenched and the Indifferent” (p. 22). By participating in a sit-in in public space, activists can effectively communicate the goals of their protest. In a more practical sense, the specific spatial location of a sit-in also communicates the goals of a protest. In Turner's (2010) explanation of sit-ins in the urban South during the Civil Rights Movement, he notes how “urban areas provided the kind of targets necessary for a challenge to segregated public accommodations. Rural areas lacked the commercial establishments that often were the center of student demonstrations” (p. 49). High traffic areas benefited sit-ins, for, in the case of the Civil Rights Movement, “The point was to get in the way” (Blair & Michel, 2000, p. 34). Urban environments allow more eyes to see protest. As Blair and Michel (2000) explain, sit-ins “infringed upon or

inconvenienced the space of the everyday ... to call attention to participants and their political and moral claims to justice” (p. 34). By disrupting critical spaces, sit-ins communicate the importance of a movement. Furthermore, by applying pressure to a space that communicates hegemonic understandings, activists are able to directly engage in the hegemonic negotiations of ability.

Space, Place, and the Disabled Body

As work on bodies, pain, and sit-ins show, hegemonic negotiations involve the material world. As the 504 sit-in demonstrates, built environments are one aspect of the material world that affect disabled bodies. Dolmage (2011) considers how the space of Ellis Island helped construct disability in immigrants. He explains how spaces are often physical manifestations of cultural ideas at large, creating spaces that police the meanings of normality (Dolmage, 2011, pp. 25-27). These manifestations appear in both public space and spaces of significant political interaction, which West (2014) discusses by analyzing People in Search of Safe and Accessible Restrooms, a coalition of trans and disabled activists. He notes that “public bathrooms [and other public spaces] reflect cultural biases in their erection of potential barriers for individuals who want to participate in public life” (p. 86). Barriers of entry send a message that only certain bodies belong in a given space. Therefore, “This conceptualization of space and place [...] assist us in understanding the complex interactions of space, identity, and agency” (p. 70).

With these interactions in mind, I consider what bodies do to spaces that have barriers of entry. Siebers (2009) considers this as well, explaining that spaces “are built with certain social bodies in mind, and, when a different body appears, the lack of fit

reveals the ideology of ability controlling the space” (p. 124). Spaces leave certain bodies out of the conversation, making them invisible. Siebers (2009) makes this point in his discussion of a suit brought against the state of Tennessee regarding inaccessible courthouses. Since courthouses were inaccessible, disabled bodies could not defend themselves in court. As he notes, “when this inaccessibility represents a widespread feature of many other buildings, as it does, then one may rightfully conclude that prejudices against disabled people are at work in the architecture of society itself” (p. 124). By looking at how spaces manifest hegemonic conceptions of ability, we can examine how disabled bodies engage with space to engage with this hegemony. Siebers (2008) notes that “the social construction of identity is displayed whenever forbidden bodies and minds enter spaces” (p. 125). By having forbidden bodies, disabled people disrupt the uses of space and highlight the malleability of spaces. Because spaces enforce hegemonic conceptions of ability, the malleability of spaces when occupied by disabled bodies indicates that hegemonic conceptions of ability can be negotiated.

Reading the Archive, Constructing the Text

The bulk of my assembled text comes from two sources, both of which function as digital archives. To orient myself to the concept of the archive, I use Ray's (2016) definition, which notes that a "project archive" is "a unique collection of focal texts/objects, other primary sources, relevant secondary literature, records of site visits, interviews, and so on: in short, everything amassed in order to conduct a scholarly investigation” (p. 51). While this definition refers more to the archive assembled by researchers themselves, archives are constructed with established goals. Whether created by the researcher or constructed for another goal, the archive conjures a moment or a

series of moments. By observing these moments, scholars are able to analyze an otherwise fragmented text. Furthermore, archives allow scholars to analyze moments that were nearly lost to history. The digital archives I am using for this project serve as a way to remember the Section 504 sit-in.

The first archive was established by the Disability Rights Education and Defense Fund (DERDF), which dedicates itself to protecting the civil rights of disabled people. They collected documents and created documentaries for the protest's 20th anniversary. The second archive was established by the Paul K. Longmore Institute on Disability at San Francisco State University, which strives to educate the public on the history of disability in the United States, particularly in the Bay Area of California. Their archive is presented as a museum exhibit called *Patient No More*, and this exhibit illustrates the history of the Section 504 sit-in through quotations, documentaries, and several photographs. Although *Patient No More* is a physical exhibit, the Paul K. Longmore Institute created a virtual exhibit for those who could not visit in person. Both of these archives can be viewed via a Google search, and they are free to view. The goal of each archive is to spread information about the protest to the public. With this in mind, these archives are accessible for disabled people: images have alt text for screen readers, some places have audio recordings that read the text on the webpage, and all of the documentaries include audio descriptions of the images. These archives make the information about the 504 sit-in as accessible to the public as possible. Because both archives focus on disability activism, the inclusion of accessible elements is essential.

Many elements make up the two online archives. The *Patient No More* exhibit includes 38 black and white photographs and 15 video clips, each between 5 and 10

minutes in length. DREDF's 504 Sit-In 20th Anniversary page features one video documentary, one audio documentary, four photographs, and five historical accounts. While both of these archives provide invaluable background information, only some of the elements in these archives will be closely analyzed. The photographs in both archives come from several sources. The majority of the photographs in *Patient No More*—roughly 28—come from HolLynn D'Lil, who was actively involved in the 504 sit-ins. Other photographs in *Patient No More* came from local media. There are about 7 photographs from the *San Francisco Examiner*, whose own archive is held at the University of California, Berkley. Roughly five photographs in *Patient No More* come from Anthony Tusler, who was the Director of the Disability Resource Center at Sonoma State University at the time. The rest of the photographs in these archives come from different sources. Additionally, a few photographs are uncredited.

The subjects of these photographs are almost always protestors. Because the protests began as marches and became occupations, the photographs offer a comprehensive look at the protests. The protestors photographed marching outside the HEW building are holding signs with many different sayings, including "We shall overcome," "We will wait no more," and "Move the stairs or we'll level them." Many of these protestors use wheelchairs; however, some protestors are using other mobility aids; some are walking; and some are able-bodied allies that have joined the fight. Many are wearing buttons. Some buttons depict the universal symbol of access surrounding a symbol of a raised fist. Other buttons say. "Handicapped Human Rights, Sign 504." Additionally, some of the pictures feature organizers speaking to the crowd, demanding that their rights be secured.

The photos of the protestors inside the federal building show the life of the occupiers. A few of the photographs show people grouped together, discussing what needed to be done to make the protests successful, to make life easier for those inside the building, and to force HEW to sign the regulations. These photographs are often candid shots, although a few are staged, with everyone facing the camera and smiling. Several photographs are wide shots, which capture the protestors at work without disturbing the work being done. Other photographs from inside the building show protestors manipulating space to make it functional for long-term living. In a few instances, the pictures show protestors sleeping on a mattress on the floor. Some mattresses were shared, others were single-use. In other instances, photographs show the makeshift cafeteria and eating space. One picture of the protestors using space unconventionally comes from a couple of men leaning back in their wheelchairs, using a couch to support the wheelie position of their chairs while they read a magazine.

Beyond the photographs, I analyze the video documentary from DREDF's 20th Anniversary page. DREDF commissioned the documentary, for the producer was credited as Dan Veltri of Treehouse Video. The documentary itself is made up of photographs, interviews with activists filmed during the sit-ins, and voiceovers. Additionally, I analyze videos from *Patient No More*, which mainly feature activists reflecting on the Section 504 sit-in. Together, DREDF's documentary and the *Patient No More* videos offer different points of view. On one hand, the DREDF documentary shows protestors actively moving through the occupied space. This movement through space demonstrates how protestors made an otherwise inaccessible space work for them. Additionally, the documentary shows immediate reactions to the protest, which is a

helpful resource for explaining the connection between embodied action and the hegemonic process. Many of the protestors look tired, they seem frustrated, but they are fighting. These complex reactions can only be seen in video captured during the protest. On the other hand, the *Patient No More* videos are interviews done decades after the protest. These interviews allow protestors the chance to reflect. By looking back, activists make sense of how the Section 504 sit-in was part of the hegemonic negotiation of ability as they consider how their action changed the meanings of dis/ability in the public sphere.

Their reflection on the impact of the Section 504 sit-in is also present in the final artifacts of the protest that I analyze. DREDF's archive includes a series of historical accounts from protestors. Several of these accounts are digitized versions of editorials that originally ran in the periodical *The Independent*, which was operating in San Francisco at the time of the protest. *Voices of 504* features different snippets of conversations from protestors. *A Moving Wave* by Tarri L. Tanaka describes the protest as having the force of a crashing wave. *Remembrance of Things Past* by Michael Williams features a reflection on the time inside the HEW offices. Similar to the interviews present in the documentaries, the historical accounts provide a look into how protestors made sense of their contributions both to the fight for accessibility and against hegemonic ability. These reflections explain the goal of the protest from the perspective of the protestor, and the historical accounts provide insight into how activists acted during the sit-in. Taken together, these elements form a coherent text. By offering different perspectives, the artifacts construct a robust picture of the Section 504 sit-ins,

and this picture allows me to make sense of how embodied protestors engage in the hegemonic negotiations of ability.

Despite archival research helping create a fuller picture of a subject, this work should be approached with caution. As Morris (2006) reminds us, “archives are ... rhetorical sites and resources, part of a diverse domain of the usable past that ... functions ideologically and politically” (p. 146). Archives have their own political and ideological goals, and these goals impact how they are assembled. However, in the case of archives about the Section 504 sit-in, this idea should be balanced with the acknowledgment that artifacts from disability rights protests are difficult to uncover, for they are diffused across many sources. Both Section 504 sit-in archives gather several artifacts in centralized locations, and these archives are digitally accessible to anyone connected to the internet. While ideological and political goals exclude some artifacts, the service provided by these particular archives should not be ignored. Therefore, my practice of looking at these archives is not entirely critical. In order to effectively look at these fragments of a text, I keep in mind what Finnegan (2006) notes when she says that scholars “need to read the archive not on [their] terms, but on its own” (p. 117). When doing this project, I read my archival sources on their own terms. I acknowledge the work done by these archives, for this project is exploring what embodied action from disability rights activists means for the function of hegemonic ability.

CHAPTER 3: EDUCATING THE PUBLIC, DEMANDING CIVIL RIGHTS

In this chapter of my thesis, I discuss the verbal advocacy used by activists while demanding that Secretary Califano sign the Section 504 regulations. Activists' advocacy served three types of rhetorical functions. In my first point, I discuss how activists used verbal advocacy to frame the Section 504 sit-in as a struggle for civil rights. By framing the movement as a fight for civil rights, disabled activists attempted to garner public support while simultaneously motivating themselves to keep fighting. Of course, the struggle for civil rights also involves educating the public on the right ways to interpret disability. Therefore, my second point explores how activists educated the public on the material conditions of disability. In order to engage in this hegemonic negotiation about disability, activists focused on bringing the public to their side. Activists appealed to the public by constructing Section 504 as a civil right issue, focusing on educating the government and the press, and establishing disabled activists as a strong political force. Each of these appeals to the public responded to problematic meanings of disability. Activists noticed all meanings in the public before the Section 504 sit-in, and part of the protest focused on addressing public perceptions of disability.

Disability as Civil Rights

Throughout the Section 504 protests, activists related their movement to previous civil rights movements. One protestor told reporters, "this is gonna end up being a historical event for the country and beyond that" because, like "the Montgomery actions or Civil Rights Movements or Stonewall and the gay rights movements ... this is the event in which disabled people said that we would assert our rights" (Patient No More, 2015e). The rights of disabled people had been undermined by many public perceptions

of the meaning of dis/ability. One perception of disability turned having a disability into an individualizing phenomenon. Commonly referred to as the medical model (Wendell, 2013; Shakespeare, 2013), this consideration of disability “assumes that disability and handicap are caused by psychological or physiological abnormality or impairment, and therefore the impairment is the primary focus of attention” (Barnes, 2010, p. 29). By focusing on the specifics of a disability, this model of disability explains that society is not responsible for the needs of disabled people, because disabled people do not see public policies that address their needs. In other words, society should not be made accessible for all. Instead, disabled people must overcome their disability to join society, or able-bodied individuals could choose to make parts of society accessible. Either way, accessibility should not be mandated.

In reflections on the sit-in, disabled activists expressed the need to overcome the internalization of these ideological beliefs about disability. As 504 protest organizer Cone (1997) wrote:

People with disabilities, ourselves didn’t think the issues we faced in our daily lives were the product of prejudice and discrimination ... If I thought about why I couldn’t attend a university that was inaccessible, I would have said it was because I couldn’t walk, *my own personal problem* (para. 3, emphasis added)

Activist Tanaka (1977) described how “I did not acknowledge the actual discrimination ... there were so many times when anger rose as elevators stuck and stairs with no ramps appeared, but *I have never connected it with prejudice*” (para. 2, emphasis added). 504 activist Bonnie Regina described how “the image of disabled people up until that time had been that we were all little, pathetic children with *individual tragedies*, and nothing

much you could do about that” (Patient No More, 2015b, emphasis added). Activists’ discussion of internalization speaks to the power of control, which Stewart et al. (2006) discuss at length. As they note, “*power of control* enables legitimate institutions to regulate the flow of information and persuasion to members of organization and the populace” (p. 62). In the case of the Section 504 protest, societal institutions had communicated that disabled people must individually overcome their disabilities. Despite dragging his feet on signing the regulations, even Secretary Califano noted that society had made disabled people into “the oppressed and hidden minority” (Patient No More, 2017e). The audience for the protest was simultaneously society and disabled people themselves, and activists needed to alter the self-perceptions of disabled people to agitate for their rights. As Stewart et al. (2006) explain, “Enhancing the self-concepts of protestors is an essential rhetorical function of social movements ... They must see themselves as substantive human beings with the power to change the world” (p. 58). An important step for protestors is to “locate their proper places in the symbolic and social hierarchy,” which will allow them to “overcome their oppression and realize equality and justice” (Stewart et al., 2006, p. 60).

The Section 504 sit-in addressed the need for disabled people to overcome their own internalized understanding of disability by framing the movement as a struggle for civil rights. As Snow (2013) explains, framing is a significant part of social movements, for “frames perform a *transformative function* by reconstituting the way in which some objects of attention are seen or understood as relating to each other or the actor” (p. 1). By framing the Section 504 protests as a fight for civil rights, activists demonstrated an understanding of how ideological meanings of disability were connected to a delay in the

implementation of Section 504. By demonstrating that the disability rights movement is an extension of civil rights struggles, activists declared that they would no longer accept the individualized understanding of disability that was prevalent in the public sphere.

The framing of Section 504 as a civil rights issue took many forms. As Cone (1997) points out, “Section 504 was based on the language of previous civil rights laws that protected women and minorities” (para. 2). Section 504 was proposed as a redress of grievances, similar to other civil rights laws. As Cone again mentions, Section 504 “recognized that society has historically treated people with disabilities as second-class citizens based on deeply held fears and stereotypes that go way back” (para. 2). Part of the struggle for Section 504 involved activists giving this information to the general public. In order to give the public information about the need for the Section 504 protests, activists needed to “search for words to communicate the urgency of the problem and the need to take action” (Stewart et al, 2006, p. 52). One strategy, storytelling, works by “altering perceptions of the present” by drawing a connection to the past (Stewart et al, 2006, p. 53). Storytelling was enacted by activists at a hearing in the San Francisco HEW offices. At the hearing, Ed Roberts explained, “the basic issue here is are we going to perpetuate segregation in our society” (*The Independent*, 1977, para. 2). This statement told the public that, despite previous civil rights work, society is not free from segregation. This story is further developed when Roberts (1977) explained that implementing Section 504 would say “to each person with a disability in this country that they are equal in the eyes of the law and that they will have equal access to educational institutions, hospitals, to the institutions in our society which serve us all” (para. 3).

Many 504 protestors focused on access to institutions that the able-bodied took for granted in their framing of the movement as a struggle for civil rights. In her reflection of the event, Tanaka (1977) noted that she joined the protest in response to “the deaf being denied proper medical care and eight million children being denied education just because schools were inaccessible” (para. 3). Cone (1997) wrote that regulations would provide consistency for all disabled people, citing a court “case involving the right of a wheelchair user to use public buses in which the decision was that if a driver stopped and opened the doors that constituted nondiscrimination” (para. 7). As these statements indicate, Section 504 would allow disabled people to participate in public life. Therefore, activists focused on presenting these specific regulations to the public. By focusing on the parts of the law connected to previous civil rights legislation, activists demonstrated why the public should support their efforts to secure these regulations. In DREDF’s documentary, a newspaper clipping shows that the framing of the Section 504 sit-in as a civil rights struggle caught on in the public imagination. One newspaper headline declared, “Disabled lead new civil rights movement” (DREDF, 1997b). A civil-rights framing allowed activists to garner support from the public.

While framing the movement as a fight for civil rights allowed activists to find public support for the protest, a civil rights frame was important for internally encouraging protestors to keep fighting. Protest organizers made fliers that declared, “The Fed. Govt. is trying to STEAL our Civil Rights!! DEMONSTRATE! to Demand Signing of 504 Regulations” (Patient No More, 2015e). This declaration immediately tells potential protestors that their rights were being remade by an outside force. Therefore, this flier tells potential protestors to prepare for a fight as one unit, which is

made more apparent by using the phrase “*our* civil rights.” Anger motivated several activists to keep fighting. 504 protestor Kathy Cranmer explained that the general agreement among protestors was “if we starved in there, that’s what was gonna happen. If we got sick in there, we’d get sick in there. Whatever was gonna happen, we were just gonna be in there until this thing got resolved” (Patient No More, 2015b). This commitment from activists to put their material bodies at risk demonstrated the importance of the movement. By using the language of civil rights, protest organizers communicated to other protestors exactly what was at stake. Protestors were going to lose access to important institutions of health, education, work, and more. By using the term civil rights, activists were able to solidify different goals into one struggle.

However, a singular common struggle does not keep a movement together; instead, activists used strategies from the Civil Rights Movement to create group unity. The expression of this unity manifested as chants and songs. While chants like “Human rights for everyone! Sign 504 unchanged!” (Patient No More, 2015b) were specific to this sit-in, songs like “We Shall Not Be Moved” and “We Shall Overcome” (Patient No More, 2015m) were appropriated from the Civil Rights Movement. Songs were an important part of the Black Freedom Struggle. As Reed (2005) explained, “music was the key force in shaping, spreading, and sustaining the movement’s culture and through culture its politics” (p. 13). Messages of freedom and quality in songs communicated the specific goals of the Section 504 sit-in to the public. However, by singing “We Shall Not Be Moved” and “We Shall Overcome,” activists were able to sustain a unified movement. As Reed (2005) explains, “People enter movements as individuals, and must continue to feel a sense of individual commitment, but at the same time they must gain a

sense of collective identity as part of the group effort that is the defining feature of movements” (p. 32). By using civil rights songs to create unity, activists demonstrated a new understanding of disability, which demonstrated strength when disabled people were seen as weak. This new understanding was important to the movement. As Reed (2005) explains, “By acting out new definitions of their individual and collective selves, people helped make those selves become real” (p. 34). Disabled activists found strength in unity, and they were able to act out this new strength during the Section 504 sit-in.

Activists projected strength in several ways. Activists emphasized the power of the protest for disabled people. One protestor told a news reporter at the time that "it's the first really militant thing that disabled people have ever done, and we feel like we're building a real social movement. We have tried negotiations. They do not work. At this point, we are non-negotiable" (DREDF, 1997b). Describing the protest as militant emphasizes strength. In DREDF's documentary about the event, a collection of newspaper headlines demonstrate that the militant view of disability found traction in the public imagination. One headline reads, “Making War in a Wheelchair” (DREDF, 1997b). As this language declares, disabled activists were not just fighting for civil rights. Instead, activists were fighting for the ability to control their own future. Disabled activists would not be defined by the institutional meanings of dis/ability. Instead, they would be engaging in hegemonic negotiations with the understanding that their struggle was motivated by a need for civil rights.

One result of the appeal to civil rights on the part of the activists was support from other activist groups. One interviewee in the Patient No More videos is Elaine Brown, former chair of the Black Panther Party. There was a deep connection between the Black

Panthers and the 504 activists. In part, the involvement of the Black Panthers was the result of actively discussing the protest as a civil rights struggle. As Brown noted, “we had an understanding that our oppression was not the only form of oppression in America” (Patient No More, 2015e). Furthermore, the involvement of the BPP demonstrates that activists were using the history of San Francisco as a rhetorical resource. Because San Francisco has a rich activist tradition, tapping into civil rights language allowed activists to connect with other activists in the Bay Area. Brown’s above statement is indicative of the use of this rhetorical resource. Activists were able to frame their oppression as connected to other oppression. Before the protests, disabled people were made invisible by their individualizing experience. By pushing the 504 sit-in as a civil rights issue, activists framed the struggle as worthy of public attention. Rather than let disability be an individualizing experience, society should make itself as accessible as possible.

Disabled Activists Educating Society

While activists worked to frame the Section 504 movement as a struggle for civil rights, activists also emphasized the importance of educating the public on the proper ways to discuss disability. Activists openly discussed their efforts to educate others. In her reflection, Tanaka recounts several stories of struggling against a public that was uneducated about the needs of disabled people. In one account, she tells the story of struggling to find the elevator in a San Francisco BART station. She asked the attendant to put up signs. When the attendant shrugs off the request, Tanaka offers to post her own signs. In response, Tanaka (1977) notes that the attendant claimed he’d do it, “obviously to get me off his back” (para. 4-8). Tanaka also demonstrated the need to educate the

people who should be protecting the rights of disabled people. In the HEW offices, activists discovered that the bathroom doors were too heavy for some disabled people, so activists propped them open. Some HEW employees were concerned about the lack of privacy in the bathroom. When defending the decision to prop these doors open, Tanaka was told the following by an employee:

But people will always help you, so I don't see any reason for you to be disrupting business in the H.E.W. Building. I have a niece who is not as smart as her twin sister and you don't see her doing all this. She's so sweet and just accepts her place. Why can't you do the same? (Tanaka, 1977, para. 16-17)

The act of telling a protestor to know her place represents a discriminatory view of disabled people. This employee saw disabled people as pitiful second-class citizens. Activists engaged in this protest to combat these assumptions about disabled people. To combat these very real assumptions, protestors used this protest to educate people like the HEW employee.

Many activists took on the role of educators, explaining what life with a disability was actually like while pushing others to conceptualize disability in new ways. The protest demonstrated the importance of carefully educating the public in order to challenge the conventional meanings of disability. The targets of this education were the public, but, to reach the public, activists instead focused on educating both HEW officials and the media reporting the event.

The need for activists to become educators of the public was made even more pressing by the little ways in which understandings of disability were entrenched in the public sphere. In the language of Section 504, the law seemingly restricts the types of

disabled people who can fully receive protections. The law specifically states that “no otherwise qualified handicapped individual” (Coppelman, 1977, para. 2) shall be discriminated against. While the law in practice does not discriminate, the implication that there are non-qualified disabled people speaks volumes about what disabled people face. Even some of the proposed regulations operated under the assumption that disabled people would not be able to function in the public sphere. One controversial issue was the consortia, a proposition where “different universities in a geographical area [could] pool their resources to make one accessible program for handicapped persons, rather than having each university make its program accessible” (Coppelman, 1977, para. 19). Judy Heumann, one of the organizers of the protest, explained the problem with this regulation. As she explained, “every time you raise the issues of separate-but-equal the outrage of disabled individuals across the country is going to continue” (*The Independent*, 1977, para. 8). Heumann's statement reflects both the projection of strength from disabled people and the connection to civil rights issues discussed in a previous section. Additionally, Heumann's statement indicates that some institutions would continue discriminating against disabled people unless they were forcefully educated.

The perpetual need to educate the public on the material realities of disability haunted the halls of the HEW offices. As Michael Williams, a 504 protestor, notes in his reflection on events, “I glanced up and noticed the plaque on the wall. This building was constructed during the administration of F.D.R. President Roosevelt was never too good on the issue of accessibility. He never came out of the closet” (1977, para. 5). This quotation demonstrates the need for education. While HEW officials were telling activists to accept their standing in the public, a plaque referencing a disabled president hung in

the halls. Disabled people were able to lead the United States, so they should be treated as equal citizens. Therefore, activists framed part of their protest as educational.

One target of education was the HEW officials. DREDF's documentary shows a clip of Heumann expressing her frustration at the fact that government employees were not even familiar with Section 504. As Heumann told a reporter at the time, "I think that they should thank us for being here and welcome the opportunity that finally they're going to get educated about the law that they're supposed to be enforcing" (DREDF, 1997b). The education given to the HEW officials was less about changing a frame and more about survival. Activists needed the support of certain people in the fight to defend their rights, and the federal government was one of the pillars of support. Educating HEW officials, despite the necessity, was frustrating. As one activist said at a hearing, "while they sit around and think about how they're gonna enforce regulations, they don't seem to understand our lives are not changed ... that's my civil rights they are messing around with" (DREDF, 1997b). The education of the federal government was also helped by the framing of the movement as a civil rights struggle. The historical weight of the phrase civil rights established the law as fundamental to the survival of people with disabilities. The 504 protests were not some trivial protest; instead, the protest was a fight for protected rights. That is the message that activists attempted to educate HEW officials on.

The education of the media was less frustrating to activists than the education of the federal government. From the beginning, the activists fought to educate the media on how to discuss disabled people, what the lives of disabled people were like, and why the protest was significant. As discussed in the section on the importance of civil rights

history to the movement, San Francisco was an important place to launch this protest. Many disabled people saw San Francisco as the most accessible city in the United States, and many still do (Patient No More, 2015j). Because of the history of San Francisco, some news reporters were aware of the needs of disabled people. The backdrop of San Francisco became a rhetorical resource in the education of the media. Because the media was familiar with other protest movements, reporters were more aware of the struggles faced by disabled people. DREDF's documentary features a clip from a report of the protest's first night, when activists had established that a sit-in would be happening. In the clip, a reporter in the studio asks if the restrooms in the building are accessible. The reporter at the protest responded by saying:

they absolutely are not equipped to handle them. The regional director asked ... if he could get out of this room because he needed to go to the restroom. And the group here said "No. We have learned all of our lives to control our bladders. And you must learn that lesson now too. (DREDF, 1997b)

While this quotation illustrates how activists educated HEW officials on the life of disabled people, it also demonstrates that reporters developed an understanding about the needs of disabled people during the protest. Because reporters were connected to an area with other protest movements, they were more aware of the types of questions that should be asked. Therefore, the above clips showed that reporters were attempting to understand the needs of disabled people. However, coverage of the event was not always productive for disabled people. Some coverage used outdated terms, such as "cripple" and "the handicapped" (DREDF, 1997a). Therefore, activists worked to correct that language.

The work to correct problematic language in reporting was a complicated effort. To stay organized during the 504 sit-in, activists split themselves into committees. Each committee covered a different need of the protest. The media team worked closely with the reporters. As Cone (1997) explained, “the media committee met regularly to review the coverage and discuss how to make our purpose more clear, how to use the press to get particular issues across. It directed reporters to appropriate spokespeople, called news conferences and so on” (para. 20). Cone would later expand on this for *Patient No More*, where she explained, “we’d sit and watch the interviews ... we would call a news conference at the time ... and say we want to tell you the history of these words” (Patient No More, 2015l). The work done to educate the press involved a lot of work and involved connecting the usage of words and phrases with the material oppression of disabled people.

This approach was effective, and the education resulted in better coverage by journalists. A journalist who covered the event, Evan White, noted that any journalistic ignorance about disabled people was eliminated because “you don’t stay ignorant very long around people who are that politically aware and determined to change your head” (Patient No More, 2015l). This indicated the power of the work that activists did to change people’s perceptions. Hegemonic negotiations involved active work, and the educational work done by activists was part of that. The goal of this work became about asserting disabled people’s belonging in public space. As Eddie Jauregui signed to the camera, “We live here. We are part of your world. We exist” (Patient No More, 2015e). The goal of fighting hegemonic conceptions of dis/ability is to stake a claim to public

space, which demonstrates that disabled people exist. There is power in informing others that you exist.

Disabled People as a Political Force

The power of asserting the existence of disabled people is in direct opposition to the segregation that disabled people felt at the time of the protest. This segregation was also internalized, to the point that some disabled people avoided other disabled people.

As Joan Tollifson, a 504 protestor, told HEW officials during a hearing:

I was programmed not to associate with other disabled people. I felt that if I associated with other disabled people that would devalue me in the eyes of normals and the object was to pass as normal, and so I stayed away. And if I saw another disabled person I made no attempt to become friendly with them. In fact, I made an effort to avoid them. (*The Independent*, 1977)

Not every disabled person felt as isolated from other disabled people as Tollifson.

However, as activists in the protest often express, this protest was the first time that people with many different disabilities fought together. As activist Joe Quinn noted, “This 504 demonstration was perhaps the first, and last, best time that Deaf and disabled people got together about something” (Patient No More, 2015h).

Because the Section 504 sit-in created a group of diverse activists, the protest struggled with internal tension. Historically, Deaf communities and physically disabled communities had separate concerns. During the Section 504 sit-in, these communities often felt disconnected. Deaf protestors especially felt this tension, for Deaf leaders were not informed about the plan to occupy the HEW offices (Patient No More, 2017b). The movement struggled with representing a full spectrum of activists, and the Section 504

sit-in leadership made this struggle clear. As protestor Mary Lou Breslin explained, the face of the movement was mostly “white women in wheelchairs” (Patient No More, 2015h). While the protest claimed to speak for a diverse group of people, the Section 504 sit-in struggled to make all voices heard.

Although the Section 504 protest had internal tensions, disabled people still felt the power of unity both during and after the protest. The construction of disabled people as a political force is a powerful response to disabled people feeling isolated from each other. The ways in which activists discussed the beginnings of a political movement is found throughout the videos and accounts about the protest. Tanaka’s (1997) account, “A Moving Wave,” described the protest through the metaphor of a force of nature. She describes “being violently thrashed by the pull of the undertow” and being “sucked into the sea of a movement,” which culminated in her “repressed rage soon surfac[ing] the further I floated to the crest of the crusade” (para. 2-3). The metaphor of a crashing wave is used throughout politics. In the case of this movement, a crashing wave is a strong force, one that can push back against hegemonic constructions of disability. Of course, the metaphor also expresses a need for collective action, because a stronger wave has more water. Roberts, who gave a victory speech, expressed this in more direct terms, saying, “this is a cause that we’ve all invested our life in ... what we need to do is help raise the consciousness of our fellow Americans with disabilities ... We have to stop the warehousing the segregation of our brothers and sisters” (Patient No More, 2015c). By warehousing, Roberts is referring to the disabled people who were often thrown into assisted living centers, which kept them isolated from the rest of the world. The reference to the new and growing class consciousness of disabled people is important. As

Dubriwny's (2005) discussion on consciousness-raising notes, this is a process of collective rhetoric. As she explains, a "theory of collective rhetoric models a process of persuasion that envisions the creation of novel public vocabularies as the product of the collective articulation of multiple, overlapping individual experiences" (p. 396). By expressing their stories and engaging in a collective struggle, activists were able to see that disabled people could form a strong political force. Not only did activists establish disability as a political force during the protest, but they also wanted to extend this beyond Section 504.

In victory speeches, disabled activists expressed hope for the potential future of the movement. Activist Bruce Oka noted that "the signing of the regulations to 504 only means that the law is now *enforceable*. We have to make sure that the laws are now *enforced*" (Patient No More, 2015n). Oka's statement acknowledges that one part of the struggle for political power is demonstrating legitimacy, the other part of the struggle is the continuing enforcement of this legitimacy through vigilance. Cone noted that this protest showed "that we can wage a struggle at the highest level of government, and win" (Patient No More, 2015f). The inclusion of this statement serves several purposes. The statement reinforces the awakened class consciousness of disabled people. Additionally, this part acts as a kind of threat, one that demonstrates that disabled people are prepared for more long fights. Disabled activists would not let the results of the victory slip away. Protestor Ray Uzeta explained the fear of not staying politically engaged:

All the legislation that has been passed through in this country to break down barriers and create opportunities didn't happen out of the goodness of the hearts of elected officials. They happened because of the advocacy of people organizing

... legislation could be changed at any time. And so you always have to be vigilant and be ready to stand up and fight to protect what's been gained by other people that came before you. (Patient No More, 2015a)

As many activists point out, promises from people in power should not be taken at face value. While some may have the best of intentions, they may do little to address the problems faced by disabled people. Cone speaks to this, telling the audience, "we have shown that the promise of a politician like Jimmy Carter isn't worth a plug nickel unless the people get together and organize and force them to keep their promises" (Patient No More, 2015f). Ultimately, by banding together as a political force, disabled activists engage in the hegemonic negotiation of ability. The discussion of staying vigilant shows that meanings of dis/ability are not set. Rather, hegemony is a negotiation, and activists must constantly be engaged in this negotiation.

Conclusion

While working to educate the public on the experience of being disabled and the need for Section 504 regulations, disabled activists became a strong political force focused on securing civil rights for all disabled people. When activists educated the public about the realities of being disabled, they particularly focused on combatting problematic language. Language like "cripple" and "the handicapped" had previously been used to describe second-class citizens. The newly awakened political force of disabled people were no longer second-class citizens; their new class consciousness would not allow them to compromise on full citizenship status. By using a civil rights frame for the movement, disabled activists demonstrated why institutional discrimination was preventing disabled people from achieving full citizenship. The focus on discussing

institutional discrimination of disabled people was important for combatting outdated meanings of dis/ability.

Previously, disabled people were seen as a victim of personal tragedy. This personal tragedy made disabled people an object of pity when, in reality, the personal tragedy view of disability shifts pressure away from institutional inaccessibility.

Furthermore, this protest also combatted the notion that disabled people were weak. By unifying as one body, disabled activists showed that they could sustain a fight. The stamina required to occupy a federal building for a month does not show weakness.

Therefore, this protest demonstrates a new meaning of disability. This new meaning sees disability as made by society and no longer bound to concepts of strength and weakness. Instead, disabled people deserve institutional access.

Disabled people as deserving institutional access plays into the movement's civil rights frame. Because disabled people were being institutionally discriminated against, this protest argued that disabled people should be a protected class. Institutions should make themselves accessible, and the government should enforce this accessibility. The desire to have the government step in can create tension. In the protest, disabled people showed that they could force change themselves. However, they are simultaneously relying on others to enforce their civil rights. This tension demonstrates the hegemonic negotiation of ability in action. By protesting against hegemonic understandings of disability, the Section 504 sit-in was a counterhegemonic movement. Despite the inherent counterhegemonic position of the movement, 504 activists were fighting for disability to be accepted in hegemonic understandings of ability. In other words, disabled people wanted to be mainstream while simultaneously being seen as an agitative force against

institutions. The balance between being hegemonic and counterhegemonic is present in the embodied activism of the sit-in.

CHAPTER 4: COMPLICATING DIS/ABILITY THROUGH EMBODIED ACTION

While the previous chapter focused on the verbal advocacy done by activists during the protest, this chapter focuses on the embodied actions of activists. The goal of embodied action is twofold. On one hand, embodied action gives meaning to the disability rights movement by centering the material conditions of the body in the protest. On the other hand, embodied action demonstrates the complicated and fluid meanings of dis/ability, since bodies that are assumed to be unable to protest are actively combating hegemonic understandings of ability. The embodied action attains these goals by manifesting at different embodied levels. I focus first on the individual body, and my discussion centers around pain and the connection between protest signs and explanations of material conditions. I focus second on activists as a collective body. This collective body is made up of many disabilities and a diverse racial population. I focus third on activists remaking space within the HEW offices. Activists needed spaces to work for them, so they took charge of making space accessible. Finally, I focus on the importance of embodiment in San Francisco. My previous chapter began threading the importance of the Bay Area into my analysis, so this section will extend on this. Because embodied action takes so many forms, attending to all these elements paints a clearer picture of how activists used embodied action to demonstrate material conditions and complicate the meanings of dis/ability.

Individual Bodies

The Section 504 protests are important to the history of disability rights protests because activists were committed to centering the needs and abilities of the disabled body

in the action. The centering of the individual disabled body in the Section 504 protests gave meaning to the goals of the protest, which involved both securing civil rights and challenging the public meanings of dis/ability. Documentation of individual bodies demonstrates the material conditions that disabled bodies experience. Visual elements of the archive show the connection between the material conditions of the individual disabled body and the purpose of Section 504. The expression of these material conditions comes in many forms.

A common subject of the protest photographs is protest buttons and signs; these signs and buttons link phrases to actual bodies in action. By holding protest signs and wearing protest buttons, disabled people connect abstract phrases to lived experiences, which make visible the purpose of the protest. For example, one photograph captures Judy Heumann giving a speech on April 5th. Heumann, in her wheelchair, is sitting at a microphone in the foreground of the photo, with blurry figures of other activists in the background. She is wearing a coat and octagonal, wireframe glasses. Pinned to her coat is a button that says, “Sign 504” (Patient No More, 2017). The “Sign 504” button explicitly connects the material benefits of Section 504 to the material realities of having a disabled body. Together, the button and Heumann’s disabled body communicate the direct, tangible effects of securing the signing of 504 regulations. Similarly, the material conditions of activists were made visible by the protest signs that many people carried. One photograph shows a wheelchair user holding a homemade flag that says, “Sign 504” (Patient No More, 2017). Another photograph shows a large group of people. A woman is holding a sign that says, “Sign 504 Now” (Patient No More, 2017).

While simple statements connect the law to the material conditions of disabled people, more detailed signs provided specific confrontations to the material conditions of disabled bodies that are accepted by the public. One photograph shows three signs with this kind of foci. The top of one sign is partially obscured by an arm, with only the first three letters visible. These letters spell C-A-L, so the sign is most likely addressing Secretary Califano directly. Even without knowing the direct audience, the sign still warns those in power that if you “back down on affirmative action you might break your neck.” Another sign, hanging from the neck of a man to the right of the frame, says, “No More Negotiations Sign 504.” This sign connects the benefits of Section 504 to a body that would presumably be impacted by the regulations. In the center of the frame, a woman’s sign demands “Access to Work” (Patient No More, 2017). Even today, many disabled people are unemployed. While some might be unable to work, many others are facing ableist discrimination. As the woman’s sign points out, systemic ableism must be addressed. Section 504 is the first step. However, the sign declares that in order to truly fight systemic ableism, the public must reconsider their accepted vision of dis/ability. Disabled bodies need access to that which helps them address their material needs. The use of protest signs connects the work that disabled activists were willing to do in the protest to gain their rights to improved material conditions.

While some photographs explicitly connected the material conditions of the individual disabled body to the protest, other photographs attempted to not make the person as disabled the main focus; this protest declares that an individual's disability, while not defining them, must still be acknowledged. In the photograph of Heumann described earlier, her wheelchair is barely visible. Besides a wheelchair handle in the

bottom left corner of the frame, no visual indicators of Heumann's disability are present in this photograph. The subtle visibility of the wheelchair plays with the ideas that activists were pushing in this protest. Not only were activists trying to secure enforceable 504 regulations, but they also were putting disabled people at the forefront in a way that did not define their public image by their mobility aids. However, because disabled people may need specific devices to navigate the world, disabilities cannot be completely ignored. Disabled activists draw pride from their disability, so activists refused to hide their disabilities. This refusal to hide disabilities, while not becoming only a disability, is present in another photograph from *Patient No More*. In this picture, Deaf protestor Eddie Jauregui is being interviewed with his two daughters. Jauregui, his daughters, and the reporter are in focus in the foreground of the photograph. By looking closer at the picture, we see that Jauregui is signing and his daughters are holding cardboard signs with a drawing of hands. These hands appear to be signing as well (Patient No More, 2017). Like Heumann's photograph, Jauregui's disability is subtly present. From looking closely, any observer would know that Jauregui was Deaf. However, that is not the main focus of the photograph. Instead, Jauregui's Deafness is acknowledged as simply part of his reality.

When the realities of protestor's disabilities are made more apparent, the material conditions of the disability can symbolize how protestors were using their individual bodies behind the scenes. For example, protestor Michael William was part of the group that traveled to Washington D.C. to agitate against those who refused to sign the Section 504 regulations. On that trip, William was photographed in his power wheelchair. The wheelchair is weathered, which is made apparent by looking at the right armrest. That

armrest appears to have lost the cover of the padding, for the armrest is completely covered in duct tape. Even the duct tape is beaten up (Patient No More, 2017). In the fight for the acknowledgment of the material reality of disability, activists opened up the connection between disabled people and their mobility aids. Mobility aids are a feature of the material reality of many disabled people. Therefore, mobility aids are in many ways part of a person. In William's case, his wheelchair becomes a representation of the more invisible bodily risk taken on by protestors. William's wheelchair serves a kind of visual metonymy for the protest. The chair does this by making visible the somewhat hidden risks in which protestors were willing to engage to secure their rights. The wheelchair was weathered by time and use. In much the same way, activists were weathered by the length of the protest and the ways in which they were required to use their bodies.

Documentation of the protest reveals the more hidden bodily sacrifices in which activists were engaged during the protest. For example, some protestors engaged in a hunger strike while occupying the building. This hunger strike was made clear with a handwritten sign, which was posted prominently in the media relations station operated by protestors. The sign simply states, "The hunger strike is in it's [sic] 10 day! Remember to take vitamins and drink a great deal of fluid." The part specifically about the strike is written in large, neat letters. The reminder is written in small print in the bottom left corner. While the sign was photographed on day 10, numbers 6-9 are crossed out, suggesting that the hunger strike was being measured (Patient No More, 2017). The crossed-out days make the hunger strike felt by all activists, not just those participating in the hunger strike. The focus on hunger and the reminder to stay hydrated keeps the focus on those activists putting their bodies on the line for a cause. Hunger is a bodily feeling,

and bodies need to be taken care of with fluids and nutrients. By drawing attention to their material needs, activists emphasized the importance of accounting for their material bodies. Not all activists participated in the hunger strike, but most did sacrifice their material bodies during the Section 504 sit-in. In one of the videos from *Patient No More*, activist Bruce Oka explained, “a lot of us developed bedsores and things because people that needed to be turned at night weren’t getting that done ... Our disabilities were not able to be cared for properly” (Patient No More, 2015g). The Section 504 sit-in was not comfortable for those involved. Protesting for many disabled people involved harming their bodies in some way. While these disabled people pushed through their pain, they still described the pain in detail, framing it as a necessary evil. By putting their bodies at risk, activists communicated the material conditions of being disabled. Not only were these material conditions of disability and the protest expressed through bodily sacrifice, but they were also expressed through the connection between signs and bodies. Therefore, the individual body gives meaning to the goals of the protest by putting the material conditions of the disabled body in the public eye, which calls on others to support the needs of a larger disabled body.

Collective Embodiment

While the individual pain that activists experienced gave meaning to the Section 504 protest, the sit-in demonstrated a commitment to the presentation of a unified front of disabled activists. Collective protests project power, for, as Varda (2019) explains, “[t]he sit-in ... confronts the existing deliberative structure by positing an argument of a unified collective appeal to the public” (p. 135). As photographs from the protest demonstrate, Section 504 activists were committed to the presentation of a unified collective. One

photograph shows a group of protestors outside the HEW offices, with city hall towering in the background. In the center of the foreground is a man in a wheelchair. Attached to the back of his wheelchair is a sign that declares “We shall OVERCOME” (Patient No More, 2017). By referring to the civil rights song, the sign demonstrates a commitment to a collective disabled body, which is focused on securing civil rights for all disabled people. However, beyond securing civil rights for disabled people, the collective disabled body questions the meanings of dis/ability. Documentation of the protest’s collective body suggests an attempt to demonstrate a more inclusive meaning of dis/ability. Because the collective body questions who gets to be included in the meaning of dis/ability, the formation of a collective body is the focus of this section.

Photographs from the Section 504 demonstrate that the collective disabled body is made up of many people with different types of disabilities. In one photograph, taken from a similar vantage point as the "We shall OVERCOME" photograph, a crowd of protestors wander around outside the HEW offices. The photograph is striking, for it captures a wide spectrum of activists. While the most apparent indicator of disability in the photograph is several wheelchair users, a closer look at the photographs reveals that many people with different disabilities are present. A man is signing to the right of the photographs. Seemingly able-bodied people are scattered throughout the photograph. Some of the able-bodied activists are assistants, others are family members, and others are there in solidarity (Patient No More, 2017). Another photograph displays the range of dis/abled bodies that make up the collective body. While the last photograph was captured from a distance, this photograph was taken by someone imbedded in the crowd. The photograph shows two men in wheelchairs on the left of the frame. One man is

wearing glasses and a headband. Attached to his headband is a pointer, most likely used to point at a board. This board probably features letters and words, which allow the man to communicate with others. The second wheelchair user is wearing a suit and tie. A woman is standing between the men. Behind this group of three, some people are signing to each other. To the right of the frame, a man is holding the arm of a woman. In his other hand, the man is holding a white cane, used by Blind people to navigate the world (Patient No More, 2017). In terms of collectivity, these two photographs show that several people were committed to the promise of accessibility. Furthermore, these photographs demonstrate that dis/ability manifests in many different ways. Typical understandings of dis/ability often overlook some disabilities. As activist Gary Gray noted, in most depictions of disability, “you didn’t see people with cerebral palsy. You didn’t see people with muscular dystrophy. You saw quadriplegics. You saw MS” (Patient No More, 2015). By showing the different manifestations of dis/ability, this protest demonstrated that the definition is blurred. Ability comes in many forms, and the protest needed to address that fact.

By transitioning to a collective body, individual disability groups found new meaning in the growing disability rights movement. As several photographs demonstrate, activists did not settle for simply being a collective body of different disabilities; instead, the protest was made to be as accessible as possible. Two photographs in particular show commitment to accessibility for all participants. During the April 5th march outside the HEW building, organizers used a makeshift stage to deliver speeches. One photograph captures the view from behind the stage, while the other captures the view from the crowd. Both photographs clearly show an ASL interpreter (DREDF, 1997; Patient No

More, 2017), for public speeches are not inherently accessible to all. Therefore, the presence of ASL interpreters demonstrates an acknowledgment that the collective body is not uniform. Instead, accessibility looks different to everyone involved. For some bodies, accessibility involves ramps. For others, accessibility involves communicating through sign language. While my previous chapter explains the tensions between previously disparate disability groups during the protest, the photograph hides this tension. The presence of many modes of accessibility demonstrates a commitment to a collective body that can comfortably move through the protest. By making the protest more accessible, activists demonstrated how the interconnectedness of the movement problematizes the definition of dis/ability. The definition is problematized, for the group "does not arrive at its becoming once and for all through its stagnant signification within a particular moment in time," instead, the group "arrives again and again to its own becoming through a series of transitions" (Carillo-Rowe, 2008, p. 27).

The transition to a collective disabled body also involved making the movement accessible to disabled people of color. As my previous chapter notes, some activists were concerned about the diversity of the movement being masked by the "white women in wheelchairs" who organized the protest. However, the leadership of the protest did not reflect the movement as a whole. For example, one photograph shows a handful of people holding signs. The photograph shows a black woman wearing glasses. An Asian man holding a sign is walking behind the woman. A black man wearing a leather jacket stands to the right of the frame (Patient No More, 2017). By demonstrating the diversity of the movement, this photograph explains that dis/ability can impact anyone. Carillo-Rowe's work on differential belonging speaks to how movements can account for a diverse body

of protestors. Differential belonging explores how feminist alliance can make space for diverse voices in a movement. As she notes, “[t]his is a *politics* of relation, for it raises questions of accountability and imagination in the direction of social change (Carillo-Rowe, 2008, p. 29). For the Section 504 protest, accountability means creating a movement that fights for general accessibility while responding to the specific needs of disabled people of color. Accounting for the needs of less privileged people takes a lot of work, and the movement was never perfect in doing the work of differential belonging. As Carillo-Rowe (2008) notes, “[d]ifferential belonging works through a recognition that resistive work must be done on a variety of fronts to respond to both the political exigencies and opportunities of our institutional lives and the relational needs that arise from our intimate belongings” (p. 42). To be a strong collective body, the Section 504 sit-in needed to consider the needs of all members. While the protest was not always perfect, the presence of disabled people of color demonstrated that the fight for disability rights is an inherently diverse and inclusive struggle.

Images of the 504 protestor’s trip to Washington DC also conveyed the diversity of the collective body. Although the San Francisco sit-In brought the collective body into the public spotlight, Section 504 was no closer to being signed. Therefore, a group of San Francisco occupiers took a trip to Washington D.C. By traveling to the nation’s capital, the San Francisco protestors brought the tactics developed during their protest directly to those who had otherwise been ignoring activists. One photograph shows activists gathered around a stage in Lafayette Park. Someone on stage is raising their fist, and others in the audience are raising their fists as well. Several members of the audience are wheelchair users. However, some people in the audience appear to be able-bodied. This

gathering in the park demonstrates the diversity of the collective body, only now the collective body is directly agitating for Section 504. A photograph of the protestors sitting on a sidewalk directly across from the White House makes the direct agitation more apparent. Again, protestors relied on connections between abstract phrases and material conditions. The most prominent sign in the photograph features a quotation from Jimmy Carter. As the sign says, “No compassionate administration would force disabled consumers to take it to court before it would enforce the law. --- Jimmy Carter, September 6, 1976” (Patient No More, 2017). By using President Carter’s own words, this protestor demonstrated the direct impact that breaking a promise has on the collective disabled body. This instance demonstrates the importance of presenting a diverse movement as a unified body. While activists previously used their individual bodies to give meaning to the importance of the movement, the collective body demonstrates the importance of accessibility for all. By working together, activists show the myriad of ways that denial of civil rights and accessibility impacts all disabled people.

Photographs of protestors celebrating the success of the Section 504 sit-in demonstrate an awakening of class consciousness in a newly victorious collective disabled body. When the protestor’s victory was announced, activists took to the streets of San Francisco to celebrate. One photograph from this victory is a close-up shot of a woman. She is smiling, her fist raised triumphantly. Next to her, a man is holding a sign. The sign says, “You don’t have to see it to know it!” Everyone else in the photograph is smiling (Patient No More, 2017). The sign explains the feeling of the new class consciousness discovered by disabled people. An energy is moving through the crowd, made apparent by the celebratory expressions of the crowd. The feeling of victory is

expressed more in another photograph. This photograph shows the celebration in San Francisco from further away, which captures more people in the frame. The excitement of the celebration is captured by the giant “VICTORY” banner, which is the width of about six people (Patient No More, 2017). While the photograph is celebratory, one sign acknowledges an underlying feeling present in victory. In the background is a barely legible sign that declares, “We’ve only just begun. One world accessible to all.” As this sign indicates, 504 activists knew the fight for disability rights was only just beginning. While 504 made the world marginally more successful, those protections can be rolled back. The protections may not even be applied universally, for activists in marginalized areas may still struggle with accessibility. The sign indicates to the public that the collective disabled body will be vigilant. With a new collective consciousness, activists were prepared to continue fighting as one collective body.

Remade Meanings of Space

One strategy of challenging the meanings of dis/ability enacted by the collective body of activists was to remake the space of the HEW offices. While the HEW building was accessible by the standards of the time, the activists’ remaking of space demonstrated that the building was not nearly accessible enough. Furthermore, the remaking of the HEW offices for accessibility was a small demonstration of the larger problem of societal accessibility. By demonstrating that space could easily be made accessible for all, activists demonstrated that able-bodied people should be consulting the collective disabled body. Section 504 would allow disabled people to have more accessible spaces, and the Section 504 sit-in affirmed that access to space is a right. Additionally, the remaking of space was important for the meaning of dis/ability. The remaking of space

demonstrates the fluidity of the meaning of dis/ability. If dis/ability is defined by an ability to access a space, then remaking space shows that the boundaries of built environments. If strength determines one's ability, then activists problematize this meaning of dis/ability by structuring space in ways that find strength in creativity. Ultimately, this protest shows that if institutions are not built for all dis/abilities, then that is a failure on the part of the institution.

The remaking of space demonstrates that the meanings of dis/ability have little relation to individual bodies; instead, meanings of dis/ability are wrapped up in institutional structures. This protest provokes the meanings of dis/ability by finding power in what Robert McRuer (2018) calls, "Bodies out of bounds" (p. 11). Otherwise invisible bodies occupying public space inherently problematize the assumptions built into that space. This protest demonstrates how disabled activists used the supposed bounds forced on their bodies by institutions to remake space and the notions of dis/ability. As news coverage at the time demonstrates, disabled bodies did not belong in the HEW offices for extended periods. One clip shows the moment when "the handicapped started invading the building," while another clip describes the protestors as "the occupation army of cripples" (DREDF, 1997b). While these descriptions project power in the collective body of disabled activists, they also demonstrate an uneasiness. Activists were challenging notions of dis/ability and space in ways that made able/bodied people uncomfortable. Therefore, this section explores several ways in which activists restructured the uses of the HEW office space. The restructuring of space ranges from simply using space in ways deemed incorrect to completely remaking the meanings of certain spaces.

Photographs from the occupation show several instances of using space in incorrect ways. Two photographs show protestors using couches in an unintended manner. In one photograph, we see a presumably able-bodied man wearing glasses. He is leaning back on the couch, holding a newspaper or a magazine. Also sitting on the couch is a bearded man. Like the man with glasses, the bearded man is holding a newspaper or magazine. However, the bearded man is not sitting on the couch like the man in glasses. Instead, the bearded man is still in his wheelchair. However, the wheelchair is tilted back. The smaller front wheels of the wheelchair are no longer touching the ground. A pillow is propping up the bearded man's head. The photograph demonstrates the ways in which disabled people regard structured space. Instead of using the couch in an able-bodied way, the bearded man makes the couch work for him (Patient No More, 2017). Spaces and objects can be used in nonconventional ways. Even in photographs where a wheelchair user is sitting on the same couch in a supposedly able-bodied way, space is still being restructured. In this other photograph of the couch, three people are sitting together and talking. The wheelchair user is sitting on the couch, propped up by pillows. However, the wheelchair user has their legs stretched onto their chair, and the right armrest has become a footrest (Patient No More, 2017). In both photographs, wheelchair users find a way to reimagine the uses of space. Wheelchairs become extensions of a couch, which ultimately works to their user's benefit. By incorporating their wheelchairs into how they sit, these disabled people effectively extend the length of the couch. By using space in a supposedly incorrect way, these disabled bodies show that being disabled comes with benefits. Furthermore, these moments on the couch demonstrate that the boundaries of dis/ability are easily undone by reimagining the typical uses of objects.

Beyond using space incorrectly, disabled activists also restructured the uses of the HEW building to sleep. Several photographs show the set-up of beds during the protest. As is clear from the pictures, beds consisted of mattresses on the floor. These mattresses were placed wherever room could be found. One photograph shows a man sleeping on a floor mattress. He is laying on his back, a pillow resting under his head. The photograph is zoomed in on his face, with no indication of where in the building the mattress is placed (Patient No More, 2017). Another photograph shows a woman asleep on a mattress in a random office, with an office chair in the corner. The placement of the mattress demonstrates the remaking of space to fit any need. The mattress is placed in the middle of the floor. Against the wall behind the woman, we see a collection of coats, bags, and wheelchair chargers. Spaces were used by need, not by the planned design. The final photograph of mattress placement shows two people laying on a bed in the hallway. Someone's wheelchair is at the foot of the mattress, and the mattress itself is placed at the bottom of a staircase. Belongings are sitting on the first step of the staircase (Patient No More, 2017). This placement of the mattress is clever for a few reasons. First, protestors are blocking the staircase. Employees in the building who use the stairs would be forced to find another way to navigate the space. This reflects the experiences of many disabled people. As Tanaka (1977) noted in my previous chapter, navigating spaces often require diverting from the able-bodied path. Therefore, this photograph shows that dis/ability does not prevent someone from navigating a space. Rather, unplanned obstacles disrupt a person's ability to navigate a space. Second, the protestors are showing a complete disregard for the typical uses of space. For wheelchair users, stairs are completely unnecessary. Elevators and ramps must be used instead. Therefore, by putting a mattress

at the base of the stairs, disabled people are expressing the uselessness of certain spatial features and challenging how spaces are constructed. If spaces do not physically accommodate everyone, then clearly the meanings we assign to space must be reconsidered. The challenge to reconsider space is prominent in a photograph from the April 5th march. In the photograph, a wheelchair user wearing a cowboy hat is shown holding a sign. His sign reads: “Move the Stairs or We’ll Level Them” (Patient No More, 2017). As this photograph demonstrates, disabled activists were committed to challenging the notions of dis/ability. In a world that ties navigating built environments to being able-bodied, the presence of activists who not only navigate these spaces but remake them challenges the meaning of the term. By demonstrating alternative ways of navigating space, activists challenged the very boundary between ability and disability.

Photographs from the protest also show that activists were committed to completely restructuring space. Beyond simply disrupting space by placing a mattress in the hallway, activists also completely restructure the layout and meanings of space in HEW offices. In a newspaper clipping from the *Oakland Tribune*, the public was treated to a photograph of the makeshift cafeteria. The lunchroom was set up in the office of Joseph Maldonado, HEW’s regional director. The photograph shows food being served out of foil pans, metal bowls, and food boxes. People are standing behind the counter as activists serve themselves (Patient No More, 2017). The photograph demonstrates an attempt to completely restructure space to fit a practical purpose. Desks are moved around, allowing those who worked in the cafeteria to get behind them. Food is scattered across the desk, which was typically used for work.

The remaking of space in the cafeteria was not confined to moving desks to easily access food. Activists needed to figure out a way to keep food—and, more importantly, medicine—cold. While some kept these items cold by using the Styrofoam coolers that carried food into the building, some protestors came up with another refrigeration option. As protestor Herb Levine noted:

This stocky red-headed guy ... found a huge sheet of plastic, which ... got turned into the refrigerator because he put the plastic over the air conditioner, dropped it across the room, over a table, and down in front of the table. And so underneath was freezing. And that's where we stored food (Patient No More, 2015d)

This clever problem solving completely restructured the meaning of space in the offices. Not only could elements of space be moved around, but pieces could also be added to space. The addition of elements opens up the possibilities of space. By making a fridge out of a piece of plastic, disabled activists demonstrated that the uses of space were not limited by the built environment. Additionally, the creation of a makeshift refrigerator has little to do with accessibility. Instead, activists demonstrated a cleverness born from being typically forced out of spaces. To make spaces work, disabled activists needed to be creative. During this protest, this cleverness proved useful. Not only did this cleverness address the bodily needs of protestors by keeping food and medicine properly stored, but it also demonstrated that a simple reconsideration of space allowed disabled people to live comfortably within the HEW offices. As this makes clear, spaces can easily include a range of dis/abled bodies. The problem lies in considering dis/ability to be a stagnant category, not a fluid meaning. By challenging the meanings of build environments, activists are also challenging understandings of dis/ability.

The remaking of space extended to bathrooms as well. Because office buildings were not designed for extended occupations, many people could not shower. Therefore, disabled activists once again remade the space to make bathing possible. Regina described her bathing method noting, “I used a big orange juice can ... down in the women’s bathroom on the second floor, sitting over a drain, pouring soapy water over my head ... flooding the bathroom downstairs” (Patient No More, 2015g). Activists had little regard for space when the need to bathe was at stake. Other activists jerry-rigged a sink into a hair washing station. A sink with two nozzles was fitted with rubber hosing. This hosing extended out of the sink, essentially becoming a showerhead. (DREDF, 1997b). Once again, activists demonstrated the fragility of space, for a bathroom sink could be made into a shower with relative ease. The response to sink-shower demonstrated discomfort with this remaking of space. HEW officials removed the sink. When San Francisco Mayor George Mascone attempted to get the shower reinstalled, he was denied. As Mayor Mascone explained, HEW officials said they were “not running a hotel” (DREDF, 1997a). In this framing, spaces have defined limits. By using the space incorrectly by able-bodied standards, activists demonstrated a need for remade spaces. Spaces could not be limited by their designs. While spaces have limited uses, disabled activists pushed these potential uses past their conventional understanding.

Activists remade space, but the use of space also extended beyond the HEW offices. During the occupation, a delegation of protestors brought the movement to President Carter and Secretary Califano. Two photographs from this trip demonstrate a powerful use of space by the activists. Both photographs were taken in front of the fenced-off, White House lawn (Patient No More, 2017). One photograph was taken a

night. In the photograph, a woman is playing an acoustic guitar. She is surrounded by people holding candles. The photograph captures a candlelight vigil (Patient No More, 2017). The photograph is striking, especially when seen as a representation of the cause. While the White House fence presumably keeps the president safe, the picture makes the fence into a barrier. Metaphorically, this barrier represents the inaccessibility of public space for disabled people. Section 504 promised that all federally funded programs would be accessible. Since the White House represents public space that appears inaccessible to disabled people, demonstrators are exposing the broken promise of the law. Ultimately, protestors demonstrated how the meanings of space could be rearticulated. From disrupting to outright changing HEW's office layout, the protest relied on restructuring space. Not only did activists use this protest to agitate for regulations, but they also demonstrated that meanings of dis/ability can be influenced by built structures.

San Francisco: Connection to Legitimacy

As the previous chapter explained, disabled activists made explicit claims about the movement's connection to previous civil rights struggles. However, this chapter extends this argument further. As many protestors explain, San Francisco was perhaps the only place in the United States where this protest could be successful. As the *Patient No More* virtual exhibit demonstrates, protests occurred across the United States. However, only the San Francisco protestors were able to successfully occupy a regional HEW office. The success of the San Francisco protest was due in part to the area's deeply rooted disability community. Furthermore, California's Bay Area had an activist tradition. Together, these two factors contributed to the success of the protest. By using an embodied protest in a place as important to activism as San Francisco, activists were

able to legitimize the disability rights movement as something that challenged the structures of dis/ability in society. Because much of this protest relied on embodied activism making connections between the material conditions of the individual and collective body and the meanings of dis/ability, the location of the protest is also important. By enacting an embodied protest in a location known for embodied protests, disabled activists challenged the public to rethink dis/ability, much like other activists challenged the public to rethink other understandings of marginalized groups.

The clearest legitimization of the embodied action of the Section 504 protest comes from the presence of the Black Panther Party in the movement. A photograph of the Washington DC March prominently shows that BPP member Brad Lomax was an active participant in the Section 504 protest. Lomax, a wheelchair user, worked to make the Black Panthers serve disabled people in Oakland (Al-Mohamed, 2016). Due to his work within the BPP, Lomax would have supported any protest action done by disabled activists. However, because of Oakland's geographical relation to San Francisco, Lomax was able to actively contribute to the collective body formed during 504 sit-ins. Additionally, his commitment to having the Black Panthers serve disabled people educated party members. As Elaine Brown, chairman of the BPP at the time, explained, “our consciousness was raised around this issue of independence and the rights and freedom of people who were oppressed because of disabilities ... so we decided to put our energy into also participating in any efforts on the parts of people” (Patient No More, 2015o).

As Brown's presence in the *Patient No More* videos highlights, the solidarity around the disability rights movement in the Bay Area shows that the collective body

needs the support of others to be successful. Beyond the BPP, support for the movement came from a wide range of people, including Cesar Chavez, Governor Jerry Brown, and Mayor George Moscone. Several unions also supported the movement. The assistance provided by these groups allowed the Section 504 sit-in to continue. As activist Julian Bond (2014) explains, movements “commonly draw from a pool of preexisting social organizations for experienced leadership, organized likely supporters, communication networks, a financial base, and workers” (p. 14). In order to sustain the energy of the embodied protest and the collective body, the 504 activists needed high spirits. To help, groups like the BPP would provide many services. As protestor Bonnie Regina explains, “the Black Panther Party was there every day, providing really good food” (Patient No More, 2015d). Another protestor, Ralf Hotchkiss, described it as “like being in an around-the-clock soul food restaurant” (Patient No More, 2015d). Since activists could not last without the bodily need for food, this service proved invaluable. The service could not be provided in a place where these activists networks were not already established. Furthermore, BPP members showed a commitment to addressing the embodied needs of activists. The providing of food was one aspect of this commitment. Regina noted that the BPP also worked on “settling disagreements amongst the people that were getting frazzled and worn out ... they would talk to people and get them chilled” (Patient No More, 2015d). The BPP was essential to keeping the protest functioning. Since the Section 504 sit-in was the first major example of disabled activists working together on a large scale, they no doubt experienced organizing struggles. By garnering support from activist organizations like the BPP, 504 protestors were able to

sustain their individual and collective bodies. Furthermore, the guidance of other organizations provided disabled activists with the tools to continue protests elsewhere.

The collective body of the protest was also sustained by organizing support from the University of California, Berkley. Paul Grossman noted that “the graduate students at Berkley ... had done civil rights work before” (Patient No More, 2015j). While not all students had been directly involved in the disability rights movement before 1977, they were trained in activist work. However, many had been involved in the disability rights movement. 504 protestor Debbie Armstrong was a student at Berkley during the sit-in. As she mentioned, “I was immersed in the disability civil rights movement” (Patient No More, 2015j). Armstrong’s involvement in the protest demonstrates that the collective body of the protests was made up of organizers from around the area, and the body grew with each new connection to other social movements.

The Section 504 sit-in also gained power and legitimacy from the support of government officials. Although “sit-ins critique the inability of institutional actors to even recognize activists’ concerns within the existing deliberative structure” (Varda, 2019, p. 141), sympathetic institutional actors carry some authority. In the case of the Section 504 protests, local politicians offered support while the Federal government debated over the enforcement of the law. As the DREDF documentary shows, Mayor Moscone called Sectary Califano, demanding permission to keep the activists’ makeshift shower hooked up to a sink. While he ultimately failed, his support demonstrated a commitment from those in San Francisco to keep the protest going. Additionally, U.S. Congressmen from California actively supported the protest as well. Congressman George Miller held the hearing that happened at the San Francisco HEW offices during the occupation.

Congressman Miller also talked about Congressman Burton, who “made it very clear to the administration, you were not going to throw these people out of this building” (Patient No More, 2015o). Although the fight for Section 504 was ultimately a fight against the United States government, support from inside the system benefited the protestors. In many ways, the support of California politicians gave the protest a kind of legitimacy, one that supported the collective body while granting them some important power.

Ultimately, the legitimacy of the protest benefited from having an active disability community in the Bay Area. Protestor Jim Engvall, discussing San Francisco, explained that “a lot of disabled people were over there, because that was the first city that we could go to that was kind of accessible” (Patient No More, 2015j). Because many disabled people were gathered in one place, they were able to see how the world could be made more accessible. As Congressman Miller noted, disabled people in San Francisco were collectively discussing “what their rights to access were, what denial of access meant to a whole range of people in our community” (Patient No More, 2015j). As protestor Mary Lou Breslin noted, activists “were ... all collecting around the various disability centers where things were happening” (Patient No More, 2015j). Because of the presence of the collective body in San Francisco, disability activists knew the meanings of dis/ability were able to be changed. The change could be caused by a strong, collective body. As Gray explained “I saw people actively protesting. You didn’t see that in New Jersey. You didn’t see that in Illinois ... it was like a brand-new world” (Patient No More, 2015j). Heumann, who has since moved from San Francisco to Washington D.C., noted that the protest “couldn’t happen this way in D.C.” (Patient No More, 2015j). Therefore, the

success of the protest in San Francisco shows that, while a collective body can gather anywhere, a protest draws legitimacy and strength from the surrounding area. Because other activists were deeply entrenched in the Bay Area, the Section 504 protest was able to use their embodied protests to enact real change. For their protest to succeed, disabled activists needed to tap into the resources of the Bay Area. Because they were familiar with the needs of an embodied protest, other activist groups were able to help sustain the collective body of the movement. From the BPP to Congressmen, several groups in the Bay Area supported the embodied protest. Therefore, this protest ultimately shows that locations impact the success of embodied protest as much as the resolve of the activists. This protest also demonstrates that engaging in hegemonic negotiations of ability as a collective body requires force. In many cases, the force comes not solely from the strength of an individual protest; instead, the force comes from the networks of solidarity found in a given area.

Conclusion

By engaging in embodied activism on several levels, activists demonstrated how hegemonic understandings of ability can be combatted in the material world. The embodied elements of the protest demonstrate the unique situation of the Section 504 protest. While the sit-in courted support from the public, the focus was always on disabled bodies. Activists had some sense of the power in their disabled bodies. This power allowed the protest to complicate the hegemonic conceptions of disability. By showing the pain experienced by the disabled body—both individual and collective—activists presented their strength to the public. Furthermore, the disabled bodies of activists complicated the meanings of space. Space is not limited by a constructed

purpose. Instead, space can be problematized, particularly by the presence of out of bounds bodies. By existing in a space that typically excludes certain bodies, activists were able to demonstrate the impact that built environments have on ability. Finally, the success of this protest in San Francisco demonstrated the importance of community support. While activists built a strong foundation within the disability community of San Francisco, the connection to the other groups in the Bay Area allowed the protest to grow. The protest would not have found the same success had it not happened in San Francisco. By occurring in a space with a deeply rooted civil rights ethic, the Section 504 protest was able to succeed while legitimizing the protest in the eyes of the history of civil rights. By connecting the disability rights movement to other movements, activists were able to demonstrate that ableism, like all forms of oppression, was fought with solidarity.

The work done by the embodied activism of the Section 504 sit-in demonstrates that hegemonic understandings of dis/ability cannot be combatted by words alone. Instead, the embodied activism of this protest demonstrates counterhegemonic ways of being disabled. Hegemonic understandings of dis/ability could not withstand the power of a collective body. This collective body demonstrated that, despite being a physical manifestation of hegemony, built environments could be reimagined to accommodate all people. Furthermore, solidarity among groups excluded from hegemonic understanding allows disenfranchised people to bring counterhegemonic understandings to the public. Like verbal advocacy, embodied activism can also struggle with hegemonic and counterhegemonic tensions. In this movement, embodied activism demonstrated that disability will continue to be counterhegemonic. While new hegemonic understandings of

dis/ability will see disability as a protected class deserving civil rights, embodied activism shows that disability will find new ways of using space and moving through the world. The acting of finding new methods of embodiment is counterhegemonic.

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION

By focusing on San Francisco's Section 504 sit-in, my thesis illustrates that the struggle over the meanings of dis/ability is constructed through a hegemonic process. By analyzing both the verbal advocacy and the embodied actions of protestors, I demonstrate that combating hegemonic understandings of disability creates a tension between being a counter hegemonic movement and desiring the benefits of hegemonic legibility. Despite the movement's central tension, this protest shows that appealing to both hegemonic and counter hegemonic meanings allowed activists to restructure the meanings of dis/ability. My thesis illustrates that ability is a hegemonic process because disabled people use several different strategies to disrupt the stability of dis/ability.

In my analysis, I argue that activists' verbal advocacy communicated the need for Section 504 to the public and to the federal government. By demonstrating that disabled people do not fit into stereotypes, activists problematized the meanings of dis/ability. By framing the movement as an extension of the history of civil rights, disabled activists were able to justify the significance of the movement to the public. In the process of justifying the Section 504 sit-in to the public, activists also became educators. Both rhetorical strategies acknowledged the protection offered by hegemonic legibility in the eyes of major institutions. By focusing their education efforts on the media, activists adjusted public perceptions of the meaning of dis/ability. While education efforts also focused on the federal government, these efforts alone did not cause the Section 504 sit-in to succeed. Instead, activists organized disabled bodies into a political force. By organizing as a political force, Section 504 activists demonstrated that the disability rights movement is also hegemonic, because activists wanted civil rights on their own

terms. In the process of advocating for institutional protection of hegemonic legibility, disabled activists demonstrated the counter hegemonic goals of their movement. No longer would disabled people accept being defined as individualized, isolated, or weak; rather, disabled people demonstrated strength and collectivity. Activists used their verbal advocacy to show how dis/ability is not a static set of meanings; instead, the meanings of dis/ability involve active negotiations between activists and the public.

The embodied action of the Section 504 sit-in further illustrated the counter hegemonic elements of the movement. Embodied action took on several forms. During the sit-in, activists used their individual bodies to represent the material realities of being disabled in an abled body world. While the individual body is important to an embodied protest, the collective body of Section 504 problematized the very category of dis/ability. The collective body of Section 504 was a diverse union of disabilities and racial identities. By showing many meanings of dis/ability, this protest challenged the public to fundamentally reconsider a seemingly stable category like “disability.” The act of manipulating the built environment of the HEW offices was another way in which the collective body challenged hegemonic meanings through counter hegemonic action. By actively making the world inside the office more accessible, disabled activists showed that other built environments could be remade. The adaptations made by activists were simple, yet they challenged the hegemonic meanings of ability inherent in built environments.

Beyond the HEW offices, activists used the support of the Bay Area to demonstrate a counter hegemonic version of hegemonic legibility. When engaged in verbal advocacy, activists used the Bay Area as a rhetorical resource. This resource gave

the movement legitimacy by connecting the Section 504 sit-in to previous protest movements. Furthermore, by successfully engaging in a protest in the Bay Area, activists demonstrated the power of solidarity with other movements. In particular, the Black Panther Party actively supported Section 504 protestors. Without outside support, the Section 504 sit-in would have struggled. The movement's connection to other activist communities illustrates that successful counter hegemonic action needs strong networks of support. In supporting other activists within a community, established Bay Area activists demonstrated that, like all movements, "we have no choice but to venture bravely forth ... hand in hand, promising we'll do our best, particularly under the worst of conditions, to love and care for each other" (Milstein, 2020, p. 7). During the Section 504 sit-in, many Bay Area activists united behind disability activists, for hegemonic meanings of dis/ability were another form of oppression that needed to be eliminated (Patient No More, 2015e). By supporting Section 504, Bay Area activists gave disabled protestors a type of legitimacy, one founded in counter hegemonic action. From gaining this legitimacy, the disability rights movement was empowered to continue the fight for disability rights in the coming decade.

By analyzing the strategies present in the Section 504 sit-in, this thesis provides a framework for studying later disability rights protest. Throughout the 1980s, when a newly awakened generation of disabled people began fighting for their rights, activists used sledgehammers on city sidewalks to demand curb cuts. The sledgehammer protests focused again on disrupting space, for activists would occupy several lanes of traffic while chipping away at city sidewalks. These protests also demonstrated the material impact that disabled bodies have on space, for the sledgehammers impacted the speed of

curb cut installations in many cities. In Dallas, Texas, the local newspaper explained that “Most Texas cities have ordinances requiring ramps to be installed when any curb is disturbed” (Curb Cuts & Early Education Battle, 2018). Much like the Section 504 sit-in, the sledgehammer protests argued that the potential of space is never settled; disabled activists continually demonstrate the need to problematize hegemonic structures like space.

On March 12, 1990, disabled activists united to force Congress to pass the Americans With Disabilities Act. The United States Senate passed the bill, but the United States House of Representatives stalled on a vote. Because disabled activists were frustrated with the delay of the ADA, several crawled up the many steps in front of the United States Capitol, leaving behind mobility aids (Michaels, 2015). In addition to drawing attention to the material issue of living in a world without accessibility, this protest drew attention to the ADA’s delay. Following this protest, the House quickly passed the bill. President George H.W. Bush signed the ADA into law on July 26, 1990. The fight for the ADA was similar to the fight for Section 504. Activists once again felt the tension between being a counter hegemonic movement and desiring the benefits of hegemonic legibility. During the fight for the ADA, activists faced a new challenge: a firmly established neoliberal understanding of public engagement. This new challenge deserves the focus of a full project, for the nuanced strategies by protestors were different. However, an analysis of the movement would focus on how ADA activists made sense of their own tension under a new set of circumstances.

Beyond disability rights protest scholarship, my analysis of the Section 504 movement contributes to the larger field of social movement scholarship. First, I contend

that movements employ a variety of tactics. Because movements can use both verbal advocacy and embodied activism simultaneously, accounting for both types of strategies allow for a fuller understanding of a movement. Additionally, I challenge more rhetoric scholars to continue exploring the potential of the sit-in as genre. Varda (2019) offers insight into the specifics of the sit-in, but scholars should expand their analysis of the sit-in as genre. As my thesis demonstrates, the sit-in utilizes an actual collective body in order to agitate for change. By exploring how the sit-in forms and draws on the collective body, scholars would be able to expand the understanding of the sit-in. Finally, I encourage scholars to further engage with a movement's utilization of a location. From the particular space in which activists protest to the geographic place of the protest, location plays into the strategic considerations of a movement. In the case of Section 504, activists utilized the rhetorical and embodied resource of the Bay Area. Because many activist communities called the Bay Area home, the Section 504 sit-in was able to thrive. The success of the Section 504 sit-in encouraged other disability rights activists to carry the torch of disability rights. In much the same way, Minneapolis is home to a vibrant collection of activist communities dedicated to combating police violence (Bates & Villa, 2020). Because a strong activist foundation in Minneapolis caused early success, the uprising against the police spread across the country and the world. When scholars return to the 2020 Black Lives Matter protests, I encourage them to consider how Minneapolis as a rhetorical and embodied resource played a role in the movement. For all counter hegemonic movements, place plays an important role. Places contain long histories of hegemonic oppression and counter hegemonic responses. Each counter hegemonic movement in a place contributes to a strong foundation for future action against

hegemonic oppression. As a counter hegemonic movement grows, the movement can always return to the starting place, which provides a strong network of rhetorical resources and embodied support.

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