CHAPTER 2.

CRAFTING CRIP SPACE THROUGH DISABLED POLITICAL ADVOCACY: #CRIPTHEVOTE AS COMMUNITY LISTENING

Ada Hubrig
Sam Houston State University

This chapter is about disability advocacy shaped by community listening in digital spaces. For the author, disability advocates uses of hashtag activism illustrate new ways of listening across disabilities, bodies, and differences all directed towards building community, countering ableism and various forms of oppression, and exercising political agency for change.

> "Discovering a community of disabled people and learning our stories gave me a sense of what is possible"
>
> – Alice Wong, Disability Visibility

Too often, disabled people are considered arhetorical. We are expected to overcome our disabilities if we wish to participate in society (Hubrig "Fear"). As disability activist and badass Alice Wong put it, American political rhetoric and media depicts disabled people as "unmotivated and undeserving, passive consumers of taxpayer dollars who are out to 'game the system'" (27). Far from passive, disabled people put our collective crip genius to work not only to survive the ableist systems but also to organize and demand better ones, and I'm encouraged by the labor of fellow disabled people in creating community, resisting ableism, and demanding a better, more just future. Here I focus on the disability activist efforts of #CripTheVote, a social media hashtag (primarily on Twitter) as well as a blog space, where disabled people reclaim agency against interlocking ableist structures that ignore us, while proving new futures for disabled people are possible. As a disabled person personally invested and involved with the #CripTheVote community as well as a community literacy studies scholar, I am interested in reflecting on how #CripTheVote exemplifies community listening—and how

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community literacy studies more broadly can center disabled people and issues of disability.

In this chapter, I argue that for disabled communities, community listening[1]— "a literacy practice that involves deep, direct engagement with individuals and groups working to address urgent issues […] anchored by long histories and complicated by competing interpretations as well as clashing modes of expression" (Fishman and Rosenberg 1)—is particularly important: Unlike some communities, that are established by living in a particular area or membership in a particular identity group, the disability community is formed of people who self-identify as disabled, a process of self-identification that usually happens in relationship with disabled community members. I refer to this space where disabled community can be formed and push back against ableism as well as find political agency as *crip space*, or a space created to affirm disabled identity *by* and *for* disabled people. It is described by disabled writer s.e. smith as "A place where disability is celebrated and embraced, something radical and taboo in many parts of the world, and sometimes even for people in those spaces." While smith focuses on physical spaces, I purposefully choose to center the creation of *rhetorical* crip space in this chapter, with the goal of better understanding the rhetorical choices that make crip space possible.

To better understand #CripTheVote's creation of rhetorical crip space through community listening practices, I first offer a brief—and most certainly incomplete—overview of the work of #CripTheVote. Then I describe three community listening practices #CripTheVote takes up. These are: building community through difference-driven inquiry and empathic listening, pushing back against ableism directed at disabled people and our ways of knowing/speaking through respectful listening, and finally, taking stock of the inadequacies of the present moment and creating better futures through hopeful listening. While I don't think #CripTheVote itself is a panacea that will end ableism and the connected systems of oppression that prop it up, I am inspired by the labor and brilliance of fellow disabled people in doing this work, and hope by better understanding the community listening practices of #CripTheVote, even more of this labor can be done.

1 I pause to take up the trope of *listening* itself, concerned about the potential audism of equating *listening* with *hearing*. While many Deaf people do not consider themselves disabled but recognize the importance of Deaf culture (see Monts-Treviska in *Skin, Tooth, and Bone*), ableism and audism are related. In "D/dEAFNESS," Dany Ko points to ableism within Deaf communities and audism with disabled communities. This is another site of challenge in creating crip space, and Ko reminds us that "the beginning to a good alliance starts with sincere conversation" (92, in *Skin, Tooth, and Bone*), asking Deaf as well as disabled people to consider their own audism and archive (for more on this conversation, see Fink, et al., who take up audism in professional spaces in composition and rhetoric). I ask scholars doing writing about "listening" to think carefully about audism, and to be sure to avoid metaphors that uncritically invoke D/deafness as deficit.

A BRIEF OVERVIEW OF #CRIPTHEVOTE

I offer a necessarily brief overview of #CripTheVote: The #CripTheVote hashtag and organizing efforts connected to it were created by Alice Wong (creator of the *Disability Visibility Project*), Andrew Pulrang (creator of *Disability Thinking*), and Gregg Beratan (the Director of Development at New York's Center for Disability Rights) during the 2016 presidential election, as they felt issues of disability policy were being fundamentally ignored (Barbarin).

Rather than the three founders setting #CripTheVote's agenda, #CripTheVote collaboratively identifies which political issues are most pressing to disabled people. While disability issues have frequently been ignored in mainstream politics (see Hirschman and Linker), #CripTheVote actively seeks feedback from disabled people about what policies are most important to them. Through Twitter, Wong, Pulrang, and Beratan frequently hold Disability Policy Chats, where a series of questions are posed about disability issues, and disabled people throughout the United States are encouraged to respond. Discussions span issues from access and health care to the institutionalization of disabled people and a range of other issues with much more nuance than they usually receive in mainstream media. Andrew Pulrang discussed the importance of these chats for centering different topics in the disability community that might not otherwise get much attention: "with our chats, we would take a little time each month to look at a topic that's important but maybe has fallen off the radar." (qtd. in "Activism"). As a result, #CripTheVote not only broadens the range of conversation around disability issues but also demonstrates how issues the general public might not consider as connected to disability are disability issues, like mass incarceration, gun violence, and education.

Through #CripTheVote, Wong, Pulrang, and Beratan were able to take a survey of disabled Americans and found—in their survey of over 500 disabled Americans—that the top five policy concerns related to disability were access to healthcare, civil rights/discrimination, accessibility, employment, and housing (Barbarin). From this information, and the additional commentary around it, policymakers were able to work *with* disabled people to craft more inclusive policy positions (Moss). #CripTheVote has enjoyed a degree of success in making disabled constituents visible, as American political candidates take notice and take up issues of disability policy in their own platforms: In 2020, for the first time, every major candidate in the Democratic primary had put together a disability policy plan, and in some cases, disabled candidates even worked closely with #CripTheVote to add a section on disability policy to their official platforms (Luterman). In 2020, #CripTheVote hosted candidate chats with Democratic Presidential Candidates Julian Castro, Elizabeth

Warren, and Pete Buttigieg, which made it possible for disabled people to engage the candidates *and* their disability platforms directly, posing questions about their stances on important disability issues. Following these chats, each candidate collaborated with #CripTheVote organizers to revise their disability policies (Luterman) #CripTheVote also had a standing invitation to engage any candidate in a similar Twitter townhall (Luterman). Additionally, President Biden added a section on disability policy to his platform, working with many of the same policy advisors who helped craft policies for both Castro and Warren (see "Online"). While I don't pretend #CripTheVote is solely responsible for these changes, I do point to them as anecdotal evidence that the hashtag has had some impact on political considerations of disability. In what follows, I work to better understand the work of #CripTheVote, tracing how these disabled rhetors might challenge, inform, and (re)shape community listening practices.

#CRIPTHEVOTE AS COMMUNITY LISTENING

As a disabled person interested in disabled advocacy and crafting crip space that might affirm disabled identity and build better futures for disabled people, I'm working to understand the work of #CripTheVote and to learn alongside fellow disabled community members. To do so, I seek to understand the community listening practices #CripTheVote draws upon to craft crip space. The ongoing work of #CripTheVote—through hosted chats as well as asynchronous posting and engagement—offers a means to foster disabled community, labor that has its unique rewards and challenges, and labor that should inform our understanding of community listening. Disabled lives and ways of knowing are often dismissed in American capitalist, colonialist, white-supremacist culture. But, as Ruth Osorio notes in her study of the #ActuallyAutistic hashtag as a site of resistance, "Disability-focused hashtags offer a discursive space to craft subversive stories, organize activist interventions, and affirm marginalized identities." I suggest that #CripTheVote has created crip space where community is formed and disabled identity affirmed, all while bolstering disabled people's collective political agency.

In theorizing community listening, Jenn Fishman and Lauren Rosenberg outline their evolving understanding of community listening as literacy practices that seek to understand everyday issues by engaging those affected by those issues (1). I assert that #CripTheVote employs community listening practices—carefully attending to issues by directly and deliberately engaging those most impacted—to build community, counter ableism and oppression, and exercise political agency. In what follows, I place the work happening

in the crip space of #CripTheVote in conversation with community literacy studies to highlight three community listening practices through which crip space is crafted. As Lauren Rosenberg and Stephanie Kerschbaum have argued, more meaningful connections between disability studies and literacy studies are only possible by more careful attention to where disability and literacy "productively converge" (274). I look at these convergences through community listening practices of #CripTheVote, including difference-driven inquiry through empathic listening, pushing back against ableism through respectful listening, and finally drawing on political agency through hopeful listening. By putting existing community literacy in conversation with #CripTheVote, I hope to extend the scholarly conversations around community listening to be more mindful of disability.

#CRIPTHEVOTE AS DIFFERENCE-DRIVEN INQUIRY THROUGH EMPATHIC LISTENING

In creating a hashtag and holding space for conversations around disability, #CripTheVote creates a crip space that affirms disabled identity and builds community among people with different disabilities and differing embodied disabled experiences. As Wong has said of the creation of #CripTheVote with Beratan and Pulrang, "We wanted to carve a space for thoughtful discussion about disability by us and for us" (qtd. in smith). Wong goes on to describe how, during 2015 when #CripTheVote began, most candidates didn't mention disability. There was also very little mention of issues faced by the disabled community and scant media coverage of policies that impacted disabled people. Wong outlines how #CripTheVote creates community, and I take up this project of disabled community building through community literacy scholarship to both understand how disabled rhetors might meet the challenges of disabled community building and advocacy and to highlight how the work of disabled rhetors might challenge and inform community literacy studies, which has too-frequently ignored matters of disability (Hubrig, "We" 145).

One important dimension of #CripTheVote with implications for community literacy studies is the careful attention to difference by disabled rhetors. To create rhetorical crip space, #CripTheVote tends to multiple registers of difference. For one, disability itself is an incredibly broad category, with one disabled person not necessarily identifying with or understanding the concerns of another disabled person with a different disability. And, as s.e. smith argues, "[T]here's also a high degree of intersectionality within the disabled community, because disabled people are rarely 'just' disabled." As smith goes on to explain, disabled people are more likely to be non-cishetero than their

counterparts, and many disabled people are also BIPOC. Taking up these areas where disability intersects with other identities and, often, sites of multiple marginalization has been both a challenge for and goal of #CripTheVote (Mann 606).

As a community listening practice then, it's imperative to engage across these differences. To understand how community listening engages difference, Fishman and Rosenberg point to Linda Flower's work around intercultural dialogue. For Fishman and Rosenberg, intercultural dialogue "calls attention to how, when we listen, we must prioritize what others are saying and how they say it. We refer to the language people choose as well as the ways they embody that language and occupy the setting and moment in which they speak" (2). This attention to embodied difference is at the center of Flower's work: Flower describes how local publics are often called into being around a shared problem *and* underscores the importance of seeing difference in how the organization perceives the problem as an important site of rhetorical deliberation (309-310). Flower goes on to emphasize how those with truly dissenting opinions, those who understand this shared problem altogether differently, are frequently not consulted and—often because of systemic barriers—are left outside of the realm of deliberation. While Flower highlights how students are left outside the decision-making processes of universities, her argument about those missing perspectives seems especially salient considering the challenges for creating disabled community in a political system that has marginalized disabled people *while at the same time* underscoring the importance of seeking out multiply-marginalized voices *within* the disabled community.

I point to #CripTheVote's Twitter chat as an example of seeking out multiply-marginalized voices in action. Figure 2.1 depicts Wong posting the fourth question in this #CripTheVote chat session (labeled Q4), "How did your disability identity develop in relation to other identities you inhabit?" This question, posted with the #CripTheVote hashtag, allows others to answer, matching A4 (answer 4). It allows other users across Twitter to engage in conversations about difference while allowing #CripTheVote leaders to seek out multiply-marginalized perspectives on disability.

Here, #CripTheVote creates what Flower might recognize as a virtual deliberative Think Tank: Flower offers the rhetorical practice of a "deliberative Think Tank" as one iteration of which she calls "difference-driven inquiry." In a deliberative Think Tank, several different stakeholders are brought together to describe their differing understanding of a problem, working together to articulate the issue itself and possible solutions. Flower describes this process as resisting the "status quo version of the problem" that is often a "partial truth" (309) and argues,

Figure 2.1. Image Description: A tweet from Alice Wong during one of the #CripTheVote chats. "

> The alternative perspectives we actually need belong to members of the community who are rarely consulted, lack standing, or speak a discourse divorced from power. We find ourselves facing an adaptive problem but playing without a full deck of cards—because competing the competing perspectives we require are absent and an inquiry into them must be provoked. (309)

With issues of disability, too often disabled people are not consulted, and inquiry into disabled perspectives needs to be provoked. #CripTheVote *is* such a provocation, and the crip space created by Wong, Beratan, and Pulrang offers a space specifically to capture this nuance. As Wong suggests, "Disabled voters are concerned about the same things as all voters such as employment, healthcare, education, and inequality, but these issues might impact them differently and those differences and nuances are important to highlight" (qtd. in Barbarin). In listening for the range of perspectives and presenting disability issues in nuance and complexity, #CripTheVote opens possibilities for difference-driven inquiry across disabilities.

But such possibilities are rife with challenges, including that the disabled community doesn't always see themselves as a community at all. As Pulrang has said about the difficulties of creating coalitions of disabled people: "There are many reasons why the disability community has previously 'punched under its weight.' Maybe the biggest is that most disabled people don't even consider themselves part of a larger disability community" (qtd. in Barbarin). Pulrang traces the political ramifications of disabled people being denied community where because the constituency is divided, politicians don't feel any pressure to address disability in their platforms or proposed policies. Christina Cedillo has

stressed how the decentralized nature of the disabled community can make us invisible and has pointed to the importance of online spaces for creating disabled community because of this invisibilization, arguing that social media allows "disabled people to build embodied communities . . . where they challenge habituated beliefs and attitudes" ("#CripTheVote" 32). Building community is necessary, then, not just for the importance of community itself, but in being able to advocate for more equitable disability policies.

To meet the challenge of seeking out difference *while* crafting community, I once again turn to community listening practices to better understand the work of disabled rhetors. I understand #CripTheVote posts as practicing what Justin Lohr and Heather Lindenman call *empathic listening* as well as *disclosure* connected with empathic listening. Lohr and Lindenman identify the former as "a precondition for productive community listening" (82). Empathic listening as a community listening practice requires "allying with people whose life experiences are different from one's own" by mobilizing "community listening as the ability to recognize individual concerns as representative of larger collective concerns" (73). In the crip space created by #CripTheVote, empathic listening means fostering empathy across disabilities and lived experiences. For example, I am autistic and sighted. In conversations that have stemmed from #CripTheVote, I have discussed issues of political accessibility with disabled people who are neurotypical and blind. In these conversations, we have been able to inform each other's practices: me learning to better create image descriptions and alt text to better meet their access needs, and they learning to be more understanding of longer delays in responses to accommodate the time I might require as an autistic person to process their comments. While many of our access needs and concerns are quite different, we can talk *across these differences* and advocate for each other's access needs, while also attending to collective concerns.

Finally, for Lohr and Lindenman, an important site of emphatic listening is *disclosure*. While the word *disclosure* in disability studies often means to acknowledge the specific disability a disabled person has, often to gain accommodations (see Kerschbaum), it means something slightly different in community listening, though there is certainly some overlap. Lohr and Lindenman offer "emotional self disclosure" as a community listening practice, and they describe how sharing emotions or emotional information functions quite differently than sharing "facts" in creating audience motivation and fostering a "personal connection to the speaker" (76). Disabled organizer Tory Cross has remarked how this is a strength of online disabled community building because many disabled people have experience in creating online sites of community, recognizing "it's such a skillset to be able to quickly relate to someone and to connect to them emotionally" ("Q&A with Tory Cross").

Figure 2.2. Image Description: A tweet from Alice Wong as part of a #CripTheVote chat. "

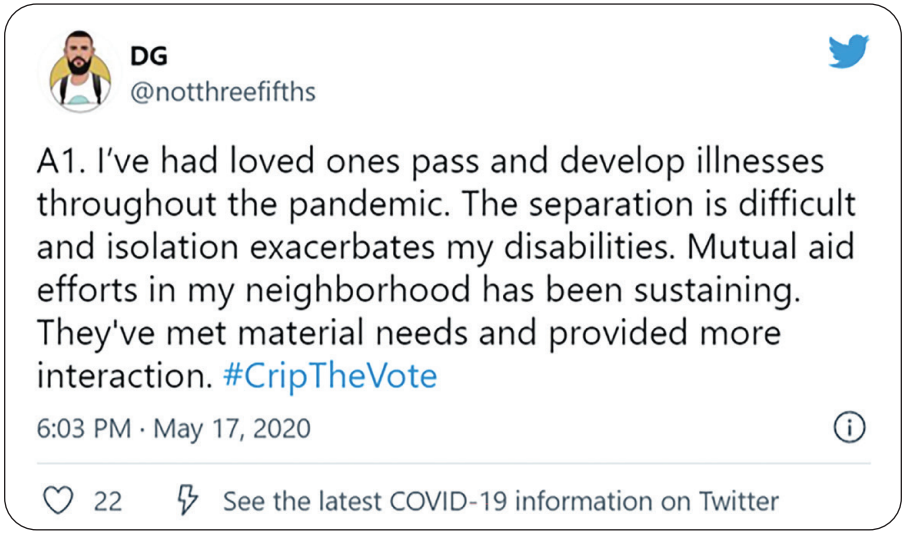

Figure 2.3. Image Description: A tweet from DG as part of a #CripTheVote chat, answering Wong's question in Figure 2.2.

We see how #CripTheVote consciously practices empathic listening and emotional disclosure in Figures 2.2 and 2.3, where Wong intentionally checks in with disabled people about their physical and emotional wellbeing during the COVID-19 pandemic, and DG responds with an emotional disclosure, explaining the emotional impact of isolation and the positive impact mutual aid has had. This exchange, characteristic of #CripTheVote chats, highlights how empathic listening creates space to share personal experiences and build community.

For #CripTheVote, this sort of difference-driven inquiry through empathic listening—as briefly demonstrated through Wong's check-in—helps foster disabled community across many sites of difference, including different disabilities and especially the perspectives of multiply marginalized disabled people. This, I argue, is the work of creating crip space, a place not just where disabled people can communicate, but where disability can be affirmed as a positive category. Crip spaces must be a community one would want to belong to—rather than reflect the deficit-driven narratives about disability that circulate outside of disabled communities. As Lohr and Lindenman argue, this kind of empathic listening across moments of disclosure both reifies agency as well as "foster[s] communal pride" (74). Building this crip space is the work of difference-driven inquiry through empathic listening.

#CRIPTHEVOTE, RESPECTFUL LISTENING, AND PUSHING BACK AGAINST ABLEISM

Along with creating community across disabled positionalities, #CripTheVote faces rhetorical challenges from *outside* the disabled community that inform their community listening practices. Disabled people are frequently seen as expendable and dismissed by political systems—and so are how many disabled people politically engage, such as through hashtags. Though both disabled peoples' rhetorical agency *as well as* our methods of engagement are frequently dismissed, crip space pushes back against this double dismissal, affirming our rhetorical agency and methods for engagement.

I start with the ableist dismissal of disabled peoples' agency. Under capitalist, colonialist logics, disabled people are often disregarded and considered expendable. As disability justice collective Sins Invalid argues, "The same oppressive systems that inflicted violence upon Black and brown communities for 500+ years also inflicted 500+ years of violence on bodies and minds deemed outside the norm and therefore 'dangerous'" (18-19). Sins Invalid draws attention to the ways ableism operates while centering how ableism cannot be understood apart from other forms of oppression, which disproportionately harm

multiply marginalized disabled people. These interlocking systems of oppression treat disabled people as expendable, and the rhetoric depicting us as expendable was only heightened during the COVID-19 pandemic, including commentary from elected officials who routinely described disabled people as expendable (Samuels). As Pulrang explains about the poor responses to disability during the pandemic, "It's part of disability rights rhetoric to say we're not valued, we're expendable. But it's not just rhetoric; it's real!" (qtd. in "Online"). From masking and social distancing policies that largely ignored disabled peoples' needs to the CDC director framing disabled deaths as "encouraging news" (Hubrig "Disabled Deaths"), the pandemic showcased many people's ableism—including some politicians and medical professionals—believed the loss of disabled lives were ultimately inconsequential.

The ableist devaluation of disabled lives is compounded by a frequent dismissal of online activism: In their own writing about "Crip Twitter," Sohum Pal pushes back against frequent critiques of hashtag activism as "slacktivism" or viewing online activist spaces as "a token act of support . . ." as "minimal-impact forms of virtue signaling." Focusing on disabled Twitter activism, Pal argues "such a register fails, first, by failing to consider the particular constraints that disability can place on forms of political action, and second by misunderstanding the metrics by which social movement can be judged." These restraints and barriers to political agency make #CripTheVote even more necessary. As Osorio has argued, "[F]or many disabled and autistic protestors, hashtag activism is the most accessible form of protest . . . . Traditional street activism—marches, rallies, sit-ins—are often inaccessible to disabled people." Importantly, this doesn't mean disabled people *don't* engage politically in these ways. In fact, many disabled people have done and continue to take part in disability activism in these ways. But for some disabled people, online discussions are a more accessible site of disabled activism. But the dismissal of this kind of activism is real, and harmful to disabled people who find political agency in this work.

Taken together, then, disabled people find ourselves in a double bind: both our political agency *and* our methods of engaging in the political are continuously brought into question. Addressing the dismissal of disabled bodyminds that casts disabled people as expendable, #CripTheVote also navigates barriers to access and communication, barriers which frame disabled people's participation as less-than. Taking up Krista Ratcliffe's work on rhetorical listening, J Logan Smilges has written about the intersections of disabled identity and the ableist assumptions of communication. Smilges draws attention to how expectations around listening are culturally created and how disabled people (Smilges centers on neurodiversity specifically) face political and social consequences if they are unable to *listen* in the ways that are culturally expected. Not only does this

ableism impact disabled agency, but I pause for just a moment to point out how these ableist assumptions about rhetorical agency have implications for community listening—and composition and rhetoric more broadly (for more on ableism in the privileging of modalities, see Cedillo 2018, Jackson, Price, and Yergeau). In short, disabled people's methods of listening are dismissed along with disabled bodyminds—a dismissal that itself deserves more scholarly attention across disciplines.

In response to the double dismissal of disabled peoples' rhetorical agency *and* our methods for political engagement, I suggest #CripTheVote reasserts agency within the crip space they've established by practicing—and demanding of others—*respectful listening.* Here I draw on the work of Tiffany Rousculp's rhetoric of respect: "A rhetoric of respect for individual concerns, rather than relying on institutional definitions" (29). Rousculp describes how this rhetoric of respect runs counter to normal institutional understandings that privilege certain ways of knowing and dismiss others. In my own calls for community literacy studies to take up disability justice as we continue to reckon with how the field has continued to devalue certain epistemologies, I have pointed to the importance of respecting different ways of knowing: "Disability justice challenges the notions of what *counts* as expertise, what counts as knowledge" ("We Move Together" 146). Respectful listening understands that to undermine *how* something is communicated is itself an act of violence, of dismissing othered bodyminds. Instead, respectful listening affirms the rhetorical agency and methods of disabled people by seeking to create spaces where disabled people may speak across differences and modalities.

Through *respectful listening* practices, #CripTheVote specifically challenges ableist rhetoric and the eugenic notion of the expendability of disabled lives. In her study of the #ActuallyAutistic Twitter Community, Osorio has examined how autistic people resist anti-autistic violence by self-proclaimed "advocacy" organizations that have historically spoken over Autistic people and promoted violent "cure" arguments. Like this self-advocacy Osorio notes, the crip space created by #CripTheVote is both used to challenge ableist narratives about disabled people and policies that impact our lives *as well as* "circulate liberatory arguments" (Osorio) where disabled identity can be celebrated and crip community can be formed. As Osorio argues, "Hashtags allow for rhetors—especially rhetors who have been denied a public platform—to collectively create, share, and build upon stories that are not represented in dominant culture." Likewise, respectful listening pushes back against ableist violence and creates sites for conversations about disability that affirm disabled identity by allowing disabled people to circulate our stories, to be in conversation with one another, and to challenge ableist attitudes *on our own terms*, in formats created by and for disabled people.

Figure 2.4. Image Description: A tweet from Sarah Blahovec.

#CripTheVote pushes back against the dismissal of disabled people *and* the invalidation of our ways of protest. Consider the pushback to ableist coronavirus policies in California in 2020 through 2022: Often accompanying the #CripTheVote hashtag, Wong created the hashtag #HighRiskCA (followed by accompanying hashtags for other states). #HighRiskCA, began to address ableism and eugenic logics in policies, practices, and public statements that framed disabled people as expendable, that drew attention to the ways in which policies—like California's vaccination rollout (see Figure 2)—failed disabled people, and particularly disabled people at high risk from the coronavirus.

In using the crip space #CripTheVote has created a community in this way, disabled people are pushing back against the dismissal of disabled lives and embodied experiences *while* pushing back against the dismissal of disabled activist methods. The disability community creates crip space *not just* in building disabled community, but also by changing expectations of what counts as participation. Respectful listening tends to these alterations in *how* discussions happen. Smilges writes about how neurodivergence highlights disabled listening practices, and suggests "as a matter of access, listening might be delayed, split into

multiple sessions, or moved." Their work highlights the work of respectful listening, of opening more accessible spaces for community listening to take place, as demonstrated by Sarah Blahovec's tweet in Figure 2.4, which shows how the #CripTheVote hashtag as well as the related #HighRiskCA hashtag is used to push back against California Governor Gavin Newsom's COVID response plan that ignored the needs of disabled voters. By chronicling and linking stories with these hashtags, they may be—as Smilges suggests—split into multiple sessions and still archived as a whole.

The work of community listening—and the specific community listening practice of *respectful listening*—is not just the work of affirming disabled identity but the modalities through which disabled people engage and communicate. Respectful listening means realignment of listening practices; it means challenging the ableism and other forms of oppression that dismiss the forms of engagement used by disabled and otherwise marginalized rhetors. This realignment is central to how I understand community listening and why I believe it is important. Romeo García argues that the importance of community listening is that it reclaims space for speakers to address embodied experiences, pointing specifically to the crisis of whiteness that permeates academic discourse (13). García describes how academic listening forecloses rhetorical space through which those *not* credentialed by or recognized by academic structures can join conversations. This sort of academic listening—which García identifies as an iteration of Ratcliffe's rhetorical eavesdropping—creates an asymmetrical relationship, through which the only way for the person whose way of speaking and knowing has been devalued to engage is to speak and act on the terms of those with power (13). Academic literacies often foreclose possibilities for those without academic credentials to engage, and academic epistemologies frequently dismiss disabled ways of knowing and being, especially for disabled people who are multiply marginalized, while community literacy offers possibilities to decenter whiteness and the violent colonial epistemologies that foreground "academic" ways-of-knowing. For García, the difference between academic listening and community listening is tending to these asymmetrical relationships. Community listening means recognizing the agency of those academic listening would ignore, that those who are marginalized are "shapers of language, discourse, and modalities of agency" (13). I argue that in *respectful listening,* #CripTheVote engages in García iteration of community listening, specifically a version of community listening that creates crip space in which disabled people, our experiences, stories, and perspectives, as well as our *modalities* of engagement.

#CripTheVote changes our understanding of disabled political agency, not just pointing to ways we make the forms of protest nondisabled people engage in and making them accessible, but in *reframing* political engagement altogether:

in using #CripTheVote to value and recognize the political contributions of disabled people as well as the modalities in which disabled people organize and engage. As political organizer Tory Cross has said of disabled people's rhetorical savvy online:

> There's this misconception that online connections aren't real life, but I'm a real person, and you're a real person, and we're talking online. That's real life! Disabled people are so talented at eliminating that fake line between IRL [in real life] and online when it comes to community building. I think people who are abled bodied or have never been really isolated from their community sometimes find it stilted or difficult to build across digital space. ("Q&A with Tory Cross")

Disabled people often find new modalities to communicate and exercise political agency. Respectful listening recognizes this not as a deficit but a strength, a site of rhetorical invention. As Sins Invalid highlights, against the backdrop of ableism and other forms of oppression, many disabled people are isolated from other disabled people, and this is especially true of multiply marginalized disabled people who may find their communities celebrate *one part* of their identity while denigrating others (17). Respectful listening affirms both disabled identity and the modalities through which disabled people choose to engage.

#CRIPTHEVOTE AS CRIP SPACE FOR *HOPEFUL LISTENING*

Finally, as a site of community listening praxis, #CripTheVote is a site where the labor of hope is carried out. To listen—both to craft this crip space for community listening and to engage with each other in this space—*is labor*. It takes organizational labor, effort, and time to read through threads from fellow crip community members and to respond over days that stretch into weeks, months, and years. It demands emotional labor to commiserate with others every time an ableist policy is brought to a legislative session or—on the most difficult days—these policies pass, to tell these stories, and to advocate for better futures for disabled people. But this is *hopeful* labor. Through building community among disabled people as well as resisting the limiting of rhetorical and political agency from those outside the disability community, #CripTheVote takes up what I'm calling *hopeful listening*. Hopeful not in the naive sense, but in the activist sense. Hopeful listening is listening that's done the required reading: hopeful listening is community listening that's brought a set of demands to the meeting.

In theorizing how #CripTheVote takes up hopeful listening, I draw on the work of Paula Matheiu, who describes hope as a community literacy practice,

as acknowledging "the present as radically insufficient," and a necessary precondition for creating a more equitable future (19). For Mathieu, hope—as a verb— "is to look critically at one's present condition, assess what is missing, and then long for and work for a not-yet reality, a future anticipated" (19). Building on Mathieu's framework of *hope* in community writing, I suggest hopeful listening is the twin acts of listening for acknowledgments of what is "radically insufficient" in the present and listening to demands for a more equitable "future anticipated."

Beyond building community and rejecting ableism, #CripTheVote is actively engaged in the work of hopeful listening, and I would suggest #CripTheVote has been taking up this work from the moment of its creation. In describing the early work of #CripTheVote, Wong explains how the hashtag was only originally intended to go through the 2016 election cycle, but the co-founders decided to keep it going. Wong states: "[T]his community, there's still a huge need for it, and it's only gonna continue onward. It's much more than just about voting; it's about political participation. It's about having a voice" (qtd. in "Activism"). And the participation only grew: after the 2016 election, #CripTheVote held a number of chats on specific policies that impact the disabled community like the Farm Bill and Snap, Opioids and Chronic Pain, Immigration, and many topics. These chats—hosted on Twitter usually monthly—featured disabled people sharing how these policies impacted them, pointing both to how current laws and policies fail disabled people and imagining new ways forward. The community was listening to each other, across differences and intersectional disabled identities, engaging in what I call hopeful listening. Based on my reading of—and participation in—#CripTheVote, I describe hopeful listening as using listening practices to create new rhetorical spaces to foster community by attending to difference. Writing after Cheryl Glenn, who describes her hopefulness surrounding rhetorical feminism and the dismantling of patriarchal structures (196-197), I argue that hopeful listening is not naive in assuming there will be a better future for disabled people, but rather consciously chooses to listen across differences, abilities, and modalities to consciously create new rhetorical possibilities that might lead to such futures for disabled people and communities.

But #CripTheVote has *demanded* political candidates engage with their acts of hopeful listening. In an interview with the Disability Visibility Podcast, #CripTheVote co-creator Gregg Beratan describes the political impact #CripTheVote has had. Beratan suggests: "Before this, disability was a "tickbox" and not a community politicians recognized as a constituency, more something they used to signal their own goodness . . . . Something used to say "look I'm so good, I care about the disabled."

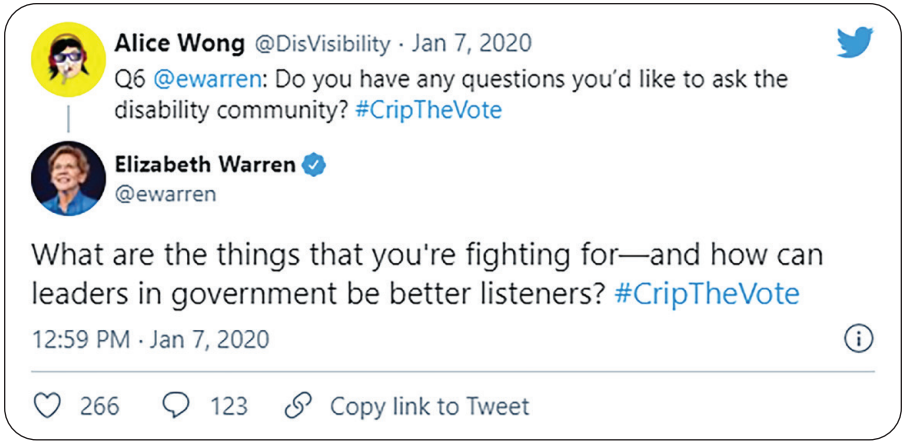

Figure 2.5. A Tweet from Alice Wong to Senator Elizabeth Warren.

Pulrang notes that #CripTheVote was meant to bring disabled people into conversations around disability policy, but then to push those conversations forward: "Our goal has been to foster discussion amongst ourselves, but then make those discussions noticeable to those running for office." (qtd. in "Online"). #CripTheVote has been successful in working alongside disabled organizers to have more nuanced, more meaningful conversations around disability with candidates and policymakers. In Figure 2.5, for instance, we see then-Democratic hopeful Senator Elizabeth Warren in conversation with a #CripTheVote chat, a conversation which led to Warren collaborating directly with disabled community members in drafting and revising disability policies in her campaign.

This move—a candidate in the presidential primaries seeking the input of the disabled community—itself marked a huge shift, as many candidates in past races only included simplistic, hollow orientations to disability if they mentioned the disabled community at all. As Pulrang noted about past candidates' political positions on disability, "[Y]ou can't really have disagreements over empty policy. You can't have disagreements over, 'I support the disabled.'" But #CripTheVote evoked political conversations about disability continue to evolve: In coordination with other disability organizers and activists, #CripTheVote has hosted conversations with political candidates and has offered critique of policy, compelling candidates to move from empty policy positions like "I support disabled people" to more robust policy plans in the 2020 presidential election as well as many down-ballot races. Pulrang draws attention to how these conversations around proposed policies and positions reflected the diverse positionalities of the disabled community: "one of the things I'll say about the better platforms . . . put out by candidates is there was a lotta love going around about the policies from various

candidates, but also criticism from the community and even within the community" (qtd. in "Online"). This is the work of hope in community literacy that, as Mathieu describes it, is "active and critical" (19). As a community listening practice, hopeful listening attends to the inequalities by seeking out marginalized perspectives on real issues, decentering the epistemic violence of more "official" ways of knowing that frequently ignore disabled (and otherwise marginalized) ways of knowing. Hopeful listening is a community literacy practice of putting marginalized perspectives *first* in collaboratively imagining more just futures.

#CRIPTHEVOTE, CRIP SPACES OF THE FUTURE, AND AN ABUNDANCE OF CAUTION

While I am grateful for the work of #CripTheVote, I understand that it isn't enough, and that disability community itself isn't a utopia that nullifies ableism and other forms of oppression. Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha underscores the limits of community in their writing on care webs, that "'Community' is not a magic unicorn" and that the only path forward for better futures for disabled people is "by not papering over the places where our rhetoric falls flat, where we ran out of steam, or where this shit is genuinely fucking hard" (35). In my optimism about #CripTheVote, I do not mean to paper over the difficulties, the shortcomings of disability community building.

I also know that the work of creating disabled community—while that space is invaluable and can be affirming of disabled identity—can also be deeply flawed and that disabled community can be as racist, sexist, trans and queer exclusive, etc., as any other space. I also recognize that as a white person, I have a great deal of privilege in these spaces. I try to listen to understand where disability community fails those less privileged, and I worry about the spaces in which current work like #CripTheVote recreates the same inequalities that the Disability Rights Movement hasn't fully grappled with, as Sins Invalid underscores, "The political strategy of the Disability Rights Movement relied on litigation . . . Rights-based strategies often address the symptoms of inequity but not the root" (15). Disability Rights frameworks have failed to fully grasp how their approach centers and privileges whiteness, a struggle shared with community literacy studies (García 13; Hubrig et al. 249; Jackson with Whitehorse DeLaune 40; Kannan et al. 29; Shah 11).

Despite these reservations, I'm optimistic about the work of #CripTheVote and the possibilities for community listening practices to further center marginalized perspectives, and I'm grateful to Alice Wong, Andrew Pulrang, and Gregg Beratan as the co-founders of that space as well as to the many disabled people who added their own stories, who flagged resources and articles, pushed back

against ableism, demanded better futures for disabled people, and otherwise created a crip space for disabled community through the hashtag. When coverage about politics minimizes or outright ignores disability issues, to take part in disabled community through #CripTheVote is a site of solace, a place where I know I'm not alone and others understand these issues.

In their introduction to the special issue of *Community Literacy Journal* on community listening that began the conversations from which this collection was created, Fishman and Rosenberg describe the "complex, messy work of authentic engagement with community writing" (5), pointing to the complexities and rewards for scholars committed to community literacy work. Attending the community listening practices of #CripTheVote, as a member of that community, continues to make me a better teacher, scholar, and human. Engaging disability through the crip brilliance of disabled people—disability on our own terms rather than through the deficit-driven language of accommodations—productively challenges institutional norms of ableism but also cisheteropatriarchy, capitalism, and white supremacy. As I've argued before, being attentive to issues of disability—and especially disability justice—can help realize a more just version of community literacy studies (Hubrig, "We" 151). #CripTheVote demonstrates the ingenuity of a community that is frequently written off by nondisabled people.

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