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Interrogating access: a critical disability studies approach to information practices research

Emma May

*School of Communication and Information, Rutgers University,
New Brunswick, New Jersey, USA*

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Abstract

Purpose – This paper aims to explore the relevance of theoretical developments from critical disability studies to information practices scholarship, particularly that which is attuned to how systems of power and inequality create barriers to information. More specifically, this paper aims to interrogate the solutionist ethos that underlies the narrow focus on information access within research concerning information practices and marginalization.

Design/methodology/approach – The paper follows a critical interpretation synthesis (CIS) review format, which aligns with the overarching interpretivist research objectives. The CIS review method opens up modes of interdisciplinary analysis that question dominant narratives and assumptions within the literature. In the paper, several concepts from critical disability studies are discussed due to their relevance to key concerns of information practices research. These include the political/relational model of disability, bodymind and crip politics. The theoretical framework of political/relational information access outlined in this paper connects and draws comparisons between the above concepts.

Findings – The paper develops the political/relational model of information access, which interrogates dominant narratives that situate information as a resolve for marginalization. Extending insights from critical disability studies and activism, the framework underscores how access to information and information more broadly are sites of collective contestation that are constantly in flux. Political/relational information access situates information and access as political and relational entities through which to collectively refuse the hierarchies of value and normalizing logics attached to them.

Originality/value – The connections between critical disability studies and information practices research have been previously underexplored. The literature review develops the political/relational model of information access, which extends insights from critical disability studies to the growing areas of critical inquiry within information practices scholarship and library and information science research more broadly.

Keywords Access, Disability, Information practices, Marginalization, Critical disability studies, Disability justice

Paper type Literature review

Introduction

Research on the interrelated topics of social justice, inequality and marginalization has become more commonplace within library and information science (LIS) research in the last decade (Chen *et al.*, 2023; Cooke *et al.*, 2016; Gibson and Cooke, 2021). This review extends these efforts by examining and building upon the canonical theory of information poverty (Chatman, 1996) to account for information practices within disability communities that have been largely left out of the human information behavior (HIB) literature and LIS research. While the embodied turn within the field has led researchers to examine the body as a sense-making mechanism (Olsson, 2016) and site of transformative knowledge production (Floegel *et al.*, 2021; Wagner and Kitzie, 2023), it has not engaged with related insights from the critical disability studies literature. The critical disability studies-informed framework presented in this paper is significant because it disrupts the norms that undergird deficit frameworks and provides reinterpretations of information access as a site of collective struggle and radical imagination against the limits and harms of such norms.



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The aim of this review is to develop a synthesizing theoretical framework that brings together crucial concerns of information practices and critical disability studies. This paper explores how critiques of the Cartesian split and understandings of access as a political and relational entity within critical disability studies can contribute to the growing HIB literature that critiques deficit frameworks in the context of marginalization. The critical disability studies-informed approach presented in this paper provides reinterpretations of information access as a site of collective struggle and radical imagination against the limits and harms of normalizing logics.

This paper extends conceptualizations of the body as a sense-making mechanism and a site of knowledge production. In information science research, sense-making describes how people “construct information needs and uses for information” through cognitive and social behaviors (Dervin, 1983, para. 2). Understanding the body as a sense-making mechanism reinterprets sense-making “as an embodied social process, involving emotion and rationality” (Olsson, 2010, p. 241). These perspectives arise from the embodied turn in information science research, wherein researchers consider how embodiment is key to conceptualizing the social aspects of information and how knowledge is produced through and between bodies (Cox *et al.*, 2017; Olsson, 2016; Olsson and Lloyd, 2017). Recent work has explored how bodies can be understood as transformative sites of knowledge production that challenge the status quo and both bring to light and disrupt systems of power and oppression that marginalize people along the lines of race, class and gender and their intersections (Floegel *et al.*, 2021; Wagner and Kitzie, 2023). The Cartesian split refers to a dichotomization between the body, physicality and matter on the one hand and the mind, cognition and knowledge on the other (Cox *et al.*, 2017; Flynn, 2021; Olsson, 2010).

Hartel (2019) argues that “the embodied turn is the next logical step in a progression from mind [to] heart [to] body within LIS research” (para. 30). As this quote illustrates, the embodied turn within LIS research nonetheless maintains a problematic split between the body and the mind. This dualistic perspective of body versus mind is critiqued within critical disability studies (Flynn, 2021; Kafer, 2013; Paterson and Hughes, 1999). Critical disability studies explores the material realities of disablement, disability and the norms around them (Goodley *et al.*, 2019; Hall, 2019). As a theoretical approach and perspective, critical disability studies challenges systems of power and inequality that categorize and hierarchize people due to their adherence to these norms (Minich, 2016; Schalk, 2017, p. 1).

Except for a few cases (Brilmyer, 2018, 2020, 2022; Clark and Lischer-Katz, 2023; Gibson and Martin, 2019; Watson and Schaefer, 2023), the field of critical disability studies has seldom converged with LIS research. Examples of relevant work on the topic of disability in LIS include studies regarding the inaccessibility of libraries (Clark and Lischer-Katz, 2023; Jaeger *et al.*, 2015; Kumbier and Starkey, 2016; Wentz *et al.*, 2023), which often focus on barriers to technologically-mediated information access (Billingham, 2014; Stewart *et al.*, 2005; Tatomir and Durrance, 2010; Wentz *et al.*, 2023). This review engages with information practices scholarship that examines how people engage with information in their everyday lives and how these engagements are shaped by various sociocultural forces (Fry, 2006; Savolainen, 2007, 2008). In contrast to the broader realm of HIB research, information practices research explores explicitly how social, cultural and economic factors influence everyday information engagements and how these practices are both affective and embodied in certain respects (Cox *et al.*, 2017; Fisher and Landry, 2007; Olsson, 2016). Recent work within information practices scholarship has also closely examined how systems of power create barriers to information and enforce hierarchies of knowledge (Espinoza Vasquez and Oltmann, 2023; Gibson and Martin, 2019; Kitzie *et al.*, 2022). Traditionally, this work has explored how marginalization impacts information access (Chatman, 1990, 1996, 1999; Gibson and Cooke, 2021).

As such, this review aims to highlight the relevance of theoretical developments from critical disability studies to the literature on minoritized [1] communities and their information practices. More specifically, this review aims to interrogate the solutionist ethos that underlies

the narrow focus on information access within research concerning the information practices of minoritized communities. This solutionist ethos reflects dominant assumptions within the field that there is a “right kind” or “right amount” of information that can serve as a counteractive to marginalization (Haider and Bawden, 2007, p. 3). By reconceptualizing information, information access and knowledge production as sites of collective struggle and radical imagination, the proposed theoretical framework of political/relational information access complicates the critical purchase of information in the context of marginalization.

Background

Information practices

This review critiques the information practices literature on marginalization that emerges from social constructionist perspectives (Berger and Luckmann, 1966; Fry, 2006). Social constructionism concerns how groups create and construct meaning together (Berger and Luckmann, 1966; Olsson, 2016; Talja, 1997; Vakkari, 1997). Information practice is a subdomain of information behavior research that concerns how individuals develop collective social practices around information (Savolainen, 2007; Vakkari, 1997). Core tenets of social constructionism underpin information practices research by emphasizing how sociocultural contexts affect the ways that individuals collectively engage with and “deal with information” (Savolainen, 2007, p. 126, as cited in Kitzie et al., 2022). Kitzie et al. (2022) also note how the information practices approach borrows from social constructionism in its exploration of how people create meaning and “further intersubjective understanding” through practices that ultimately “become second nature over time” (p. 495). As a foundation of information practices research, Olsson (2005) notes how social constructionism can be utilized as a lens to understand how people make meaning through information not in isolation “but rather as inextricably linked to ongoing networks of shared understanding, social conventions, and knowledge/power relations” (p. 14). Many within the field view social constructionism as a mechanism to uncover the power relations at play within information behavior (Gibson and Martin, 2019; Wagner and Kitzie, 2023), which they argue is of lesser concern in information behavior research that employs a cognitivist approach (Dervin, 1997; Olsson, 2005; Talja, 1997). The aforementioned critiques of the cognitivist approach note how it maintains a narrow focus on internal cognition rather than exploring how external phenomena such as sociocultural factors and power relations affect information behavior (Costello and Floegel, 2021; Kitzie et al., 2022; Olsson, 2005). Such critiques also emphasize how the cognitivist approach furthers the reductive schism between body and mind (Olsson, 2005). However, in creating and maintaining divisions between cognitive, social and embodied approaches to information behavior research, the discipline nonetheless enforces the schismatic perspectives it attempts to critique (Table 1).

Information poverty

The theory of information poverty explores how individuals who face various racial and socioeconomic barriers struggle to obtain information critical to their everyday lives (Chatman, 1996). The theory suggests that those who perceive themselves as in need of information act in accordance with prevailing social norms and therefore do not seek assistance or further information to protect themselves, making them either “unwilling or unable to solve a critical worry or concern” (p. 197). Information poverty has been critiqued by scholars within the field, as it does not fully examine how structural inequalities create barriers to accessing information (Espinoza Vasquez and Oltmann, 2023; Gibson and Martin, 2019; Kitzie et al., 2022; Stewart-Robertson, 2022). However, other interpretations of Chatman’s research corpus have noted how Chatman was nonetheless confined by the dearth of frameworks available at the time that adequately addressed the complexities of information related to marginalization (Gibson and Cooke, 2021; Gray, 2021).

Table 1. Definitions of key concepts and their connections to information practices

Concept	Definition	Proposed or existing connection to Information Practices
The embodied turn	A subfield of Information Science research that examines how the body and embodiment affect the ways that people interpret and engage with information (Cox <i>et al.</i> , 2017; Olsson, 2016; Olsson and Lloyd, 2017)	A growing, interdisciplinary subfield of HIB research
Cartesian split	Also referred to as mind-body dualism, the Cartesian split is a dichotomized understanding of the body, physicality and matter as inherently in opposition to the mind and cognition (Cox <i>et al.</i> , 2017; Flynn, 2021; Olsson, 2010)	This dualistic perspective is reflected in schisms between embodied and cognitive approaches
Social constructionism	A theoretical perspective that groups of people construct meaning collectively in conversation with broader institutions, systems, and sociocultural contexts	Social constructionism is a foundational theoretical perspective of information practices research
Social model of disability	Disability occurs as a result of everyday societal barriers. The social model makes a distinction between disability as produced by societal oppressions and impairment as an individual-level physical attribute (Oliver, 2004, 2013)	Similar to information practices, the social model largely extends social constructionist perspectives
Political/Relational model of disability	Disability is a site of collective contestation and struggle. It is contextual and located in exclusionary institutions and structures rather than at the individual level (Kafer, 2013)	Can be extended into information practices research to further examine how information and information access are highly contextual and a site of collective contestation
Critical disability studies	An interdisciplinary field that examines how disability and disablement are produced through systems of power and inequality as politicized and ever-evolving historically, socially, and culturally contingent phenomena (Hamraie and Fritsch, 2019; Kafer, 2013; McRuer, 2006).	Theories from critical disability studies can be applied to information practices to expand notions of access, underscore the politics of information, and challenge binaries around body and mind
Access	A relational and communal practice of envisioning and creating more livable worlds (Brilmyer and Lee, 2023; Hamraie, 2018; Hamraie and Fritsch, 2019)	Can be extended into information practices research to generate a broader understanding of information access that challenges binaries between accessibility and inaccessibility; builds upon existing work within the field that highlights the communal and collective information practices of minoritized communities
Bodymind	A concept from critical disability studies that refers to the mutual constitution and inseparability of bodies and minds (Price, 2015)	Can be extended into information practices research to bridge divides between embodied and cognitive approaches that differentiate between body and mind

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More recent literature extends the theory of information poverty through concepts such as information precarity (Wall *et al.*, 2017) to account for the ways that social, political and economic forces collide to limit the information resources available to certain groups

(Espinoza Vasquez and Oltmann, 2023; Stewart-Robertson, 2022). The concept of information marginalization similarly acknowledges the role of structural forces in creating and sustaining barriers to access to information while also emphasizing how individuals actively resist marginalization by calling attention to such inequalities and their uneven impacts (Gibson and Martin, 2019). Additionally, the information deficit concept builds upon the information poverty theory to examine how sociocultural and systemic factors contribute to information seeking and avoidance (Peterson-Salahuddin, 2024a). Despite these critiques, Chatman's groundbreaking work continues to contribute to the field, especially today, as scholars increasingly grapple with how power and inequality affect information, technology and society more broadly.

This review echoes Gibson and Martin's (2019) perspective that the advancement of the LIS field necessitates that researchers and practitioners alike address issues of power and inequality through critical perspectives and foster and engage in interdisciplinary work. As such, this review develops a synthesizing theoretical framework connecting critical disability studies and information practices. The following section focuses on extending insights from critical disability studies on the contours of disablement, access and bodymind into information practices research.

Research questions

This review aims to develop a synthesizing theoretical framework to guide future HIB research. The synthesizing theoretical framework will connect critical disability studies literature with LIS research more broadly. The review will explore how concepts from critical disability studies (Cartesian split and access as a political/relational entity) can contribute to the literature that critiques deficit frameworks in HIB. These insights will be extended into the synthesizing theoretical framework that reinterprets the concept of information access.

- RQ1. With a focus on its foundations in social constructionist thought, what are the limits of information practices to examine information behavior in the context of marginalization due to ableist oppression?
- RQ2. How do insights from critical disability studies speak to crucial concerns of information practices research?
- RQ3. How can understanding access as a political and relational entity, which stems from critical disability studies and disability justice activism, extend into information behavior research and expand notions of information access?

Methods

The paper is not a traditional systematic review. Rather, it follows a critical interpretation synthesis (CIS) review format. The review type was chosen due to its compatibility with the overarching interpretive research objectives, which include critiquing, extending and generating theoretical frameworks. Additionally, the selected review type allows for mechanisms of analysis that question dominant narratives and assumptions within multidisciplinary literature, make connections between various approaches and reveal the socio-political dynamics that impact the topic of inquiry (Efron and Ravid, 2018). Due to its iterative nature, CIS entails dynamic and flexible search processes. For example, as CIS is primarily concerned with generating a theoretical framework, identifying and including all relevant literature is beyond the scope of the review format. Rather, the point of CIS is to develop a theory based on inductive approaches that thematize existing literature and establish areas of critique (Depraetere *et al.*, 2021). The previously discussed elements of CIS align with the interpretivist perspectives and theoretical objectives that underpin this review.

There are downsides to the flexible and exploratory aspects of CIS. One disadvantage is the need for more concrete and systematic guidelines regarding its methods and associated search strategies (Depraetere *et al.*, 2021; Dixon-Woods *et al.*, 2006). For its search strategy and overall review method, this review will follow the six activities of CIS outlined by Depraetere *et al.* (2021) for systematic guidance and procedural clarification. These activities include (1) drafting evolving research questions, (2) literature search, (3) selection of literature, (4) quality appraisal, (5) data extraction and (6) creation of a synthesizing theoretical framework (p. 672).

The review began with drafting broad research questions addressing concerns of information practices, marginalization and critical disability studies literature. Due to their open-endedness, these questions encompassed multiple disciplines and literatures. The second step of the review consisted of an iterative literature search. The author consulted relevant electronic databases such as Proquest LIS Collection, Library Literature and Information Science Full Text and Library, Information Science and Technology Abstracts. Additionally, the author manually searched titles and abstracts in peer-reviewed journals in Information Science and Disability Studies (e.g. *Journal of Documentation*, *JASIST*, *JCLIS*, *Disability Studies Quarterly* and *Disability and Society*) with attention to articles that discuss marginalization, information access and in/accessibility both individually and jointly. The date range of 2000–2024 was used for this journal scan to locate research from the past two decades. The reference lists of particularly relevant articles were scanned to locate additional literature. To maintain consistency, the author utilized the following terms across searches. The search included articles that explore information practices and marginalization: (marginaliz* AND info* pract*), (ineq* AND info* prac*), critical approaches to accessibility (crit* AND access* AND disab*) and disability and embodiment: (embod* AND disab*) and (disab* AND bodymind). Reflecting the flexibility of CIS, there were a few exclusion criteria that guided the search. Nonetheless, all articles examined were (1) written in English; (2) discussed topics related to information practices and power, inequality and marginalization or (3) critically engaged with disability, embodiment and in/accessibility. The synthesizing theoretical framework of political/relational information access challenges binaries between body (embodied) and mind (cognitive) and accessibility and inaccessibility.

Similarly, the third activity of CIS involves the selection of literature based on relevance. For this review, relevant work either (1) explored information practices and their connections to power, inequality and/or marginalization; (2) critically engaged with disability topics through the lenses of access, identity formation, relationality and embodiment. The fourth activity of CIS is “quality appraisal,” which examines “the content of the paper, its likely relevance and theoretical contribution” to the emergent theoretical framework. Relevance in terms of subject matter and congruous theoretical aims is of utmost importance, as articles with traditionally unsatisfactory research design and implementation may be helpful in synthesizing literature and developing theory. Data extraction involved a reflexive approach to analyzing the connections, dissonances and overall connections between discussions around central themes of the body, mind, access and marginalization in HIB and critical disability studies literature. Lastly, the theoretical framework was developed. The theoretical framework of political/relational information access developed in this paper connects and draws comparisons between the cross-disciplinary conversations around central themes of the body, mind, access and marginalization.

Critical disability studies

Critical disability studies is an interdisciplinary field that examines how disability and disablement are produced through systems of power and inequality as politicized and ever-evolving historically, socially and culturally contingent phenomena (Hamraie and Fritsch, 2019; Kafer, 2013; McRuer, 2006). The field is informed by poststructuralist, queer, feminist and postcolonial theoretical traditions, particularly in the ways that it challenges norms and the value-laden binaristic categorizations of ability in contrast to disability (Goodley *et al.*, 2019; Price, 2015; Schalk, 2017). Critical disability studies critiques prevailing medicalized

perspectives that situate disability as a taken-for-granted naturalistic fact (Meekosha and Shuttleworth, 2009). Instead, critical disability studies extends an interdisciplinary approach that conceptualizes disability as a sociopolitical category produced through systems of power and inequality that are interrogated and continually in flux (Ben-Moshe, 2020; Clare, 2017; Kafer, 2013).

Models of disability

The models of disability, as they are discussed and debated in the critical disability studies literature, provide a valuable critique of the social constructionist paradigm that is prevalent in research within the field of information practices. Scholars within critical disability studies and disability studies more broadly have long critiqued the medical model of disability. Research employing the medical model, the majority of which resides in the biomedical sciences, often emphasizes the importance of fixing – or curing – supposed disability-related impairments and privileges exclusionary constructs of “normality” that are interrogated in critical disability studies scholarship (Clare, 2017; McRuer, 2006). The medical model purports disability as a biomedical phenomenon and strictly an impairment representative of aberration from normality (Mankoff *et al.*, 2010). This model ignores the multiple social and cultural factors that influence disabled people’s [2] complex lived experiences (Oliver, 2004; Shakespeare, 2010). Within disability studies, more broadly, the social model of disability emerged as a critique of the medical model of disability to account for how social forces and inequities create and reinforce disablement (Barnes, 2019; Oliver, 2004). Coined by sociologist and disability rights activist Michael Oliver (1983), the social model of disability explicates how disablement occurs as a result of interconnected systems of domination and social forces that together create and reinforce the everyday barriers that disabled people face, especially in terms of employment as well as governmental benefits and services (Burchardt, 2004; Oliver, 2013).

The social model of disability argues that disablement is a result of environments that create barriers for disabled people through social constructions of normality (Goggin, 2018). The social model extends social constructionist perspectives that view social reality and its associated norms, beliefs, representations and values as created and negotiated through shared processes of meaning-making (Priestley, 1998; Siebers, 2001). Furthermore, the model’s social constructionist foundations echo those of information practices research and HIB research more broadly, wherein social reality and its associated barriers, norms, beliefs and values are understood as constantly negotiated and constructed through various collective practices and sociocultural contexts (Berger and Luckmann, 1966). The social model of disability posits that disability is not a permanent, taken-for-granted social fact. On the contrary, disability and disablement are understood as created and reinforced through the barriers and systemic ableism that disabled people face in their everyday lives. In other words, the social model views the origins of disability in the systems and societal structures that produce and reinforce disablement rather than an individual-level medical label purported by the medical model. Although it accounts for some shortcomings of the medical model, the social model and its constructionist underpinnings have been critiqued by scholars within critical disability studies.

Critiques of the social model and the social constructionist paradigm

The social model and the social constructionist paradigm that provides its foundations have been critiqued within disability studies. The social model and its paradigmatic assumptions locate disability and disablement within exclusionary attitudes, institutions and environments (Donohue, 2003; Oliver, 2013). Disability activists and critical disability studies scholars alike have noted how the social model and the social constructionist perspectives that underlie it do not examine how disablement occurs outside of social forces and societal barriers (Clare, 2017; Kafer, 2013). Both scholars and activists challenge binaristic understandings of

impairment and disability while emphasizing that the eradication of social and structural barriers would not render disability irrelevant to embodiment, especially in the case of chronic illness (Brilmyer, 2018; Hunt, 2024; Kafer, 2013). The political/relational model of disability accounts for these concerns.

The political/relational model of disability was introduced by critical disability studies scholar Alison Kafer. In this model, disability is understood as simultaneously political and relational. In explicating the model, Kafer (2013) notes that it situates disability as political, as it is “a category to be contested and debated” (p. 3) and relational in the sense that it highlights how “disability is experienced in and through relationships; it does not occur in isolation” (p. 8). As summarized by Brilmyer (2018), the political/relational model “frames disability as a pluralized political site that is ever-changing and always in relation to other people, environments, and attitudes” (p. 101). Additionally, the political/relational model departs from previous models of disability that lack an analysis of power. Extending this analysis, Kafer notes that the political/relational model underscores how “the problem of disability” is revealed in “inaccessible buildings, discriminatory attitudes, and ideological systems that attribute normalcy and deviance to particular minds and bodies,” rather than simply aberrations or isolated social constructs (p. 6). Moreover, the model suggests that these concerns are best tackled through social transformation and political activation rather than individualized medical interventions. This model does more than examine the systems of power and inequality that produce disability – it reinterprets disability as a politicized identity and a site of political action and societal transformation that is constantly reinscribed through collective contestation and struggle.

The burgeoning area of LIS research concerning disability can draw from these insights, particularly in how disability is understood as a means to imagine, build and enact upon a politics of solidarity toward collective liberation. As critiques of the social model of disability and its constructionist underpinnings note, disablement would nonetheless exist despite the hypothetical dismantling of social and societal barriers. This critique draws attention away from the processes by which people collectively make meaning and develop practices in the context of ableism and marginalization more broadly, but rather how these very concerns are contested, created and sustained by systems of power and inequality. Moreover, the political/relational model of disability and critical disability studies literature emphasize how access and disability are similarly relational and are not an objective quality of someone or something. They also point to embodiment and the material implications of disability, illness and marginalization as sites worthy of exploration.

In contrast to constructionist perspectives that situate ableism within social structures and shared systems of meaning-making, the political/relational model of disability locates disability as a political category that challenges the dominant ideological systems and structures that disenfranchise disabled people. Moreover, this shift involves reconceptualizing knowledge production as more than a set of processes involving intersubjective and contextual negotiations around shared systems of meanings, as commonly understood in information practices research (Talja, 1997, p. 4). Such a shift involves challenging the systems that delineate knowledge and its connections to informational phenomena in the first place and highlighting how people marginalized by these systems create knowledge on their terms. In other words, this approach moves beyond asking *how* information inequalities and the marginalization of certain types of knowledge are created through systemic processes but rather focuses on how such processes are *challenged* (i.e. political) and how they are mutually, contextually and collectively constituted (i.e. relational).

This refocus on the political and relational aspects of disability can be extended into information practices and HIB research that builds upon social constructionist analyses of power, inequality and marginalization. The political/relational model of disability highlights how disability and impairment are not individualistic issues. Rather, they are created and sustained by systems of power and inequality. Further, the political/relational model

challenges analyses that render disability and impairment as separate entities, as disability would still exist despite the hypothetical eradication of ableist barriers in society. The information practices literature can draw from the understanding of disability as evolving and about various individuals and contexts. It moves focus away from examining societal barriers, which one could argue nonetheless extends a deficit approach, and instead examines the ways that disability and marginalization are ever-changing sites of contestation.

Reinterpreting access

In critical disability studies literature, access has been reinterpreted as a relational and communal practice (Brilmyer and Lee, 2023; Hamraie, 2018; Hamraie and Fritsch, 2019), citing critical theories of access that “approach access as an ‘interpretive relation between bodies’ rather than an objective quality” (Titchkosky, 2011, as cited in Hamraie, 2018, p. 456). In other words, access is more than an attribute assigned to something. Access can, therefore, be understood as relations between people. In furthering a redefinition of access, Hamraie (2018) follows disability activist Mia Mingus’s call to reimagine access through the lens of disability justice. Disability justice is a social movement founded by queer, disabled activists of color. The movement centers on an intersectional and anti-capitalist approach that reveals the connections between white supremacy, ableism and capitalism that impede collective liberation (Berne, 2017; Berne et al., 2018; Sins Invalid, 2020). In rethinking access through principles of disability justice, Mingus challenges dominant approaches of access that value normality and sameness (Mingus, 2010, as cited in Hamraie, 2018). In contrast, reinterpretations of access guided by disability justice seek to dismantle systems of power and domination, rather than uphold them.

These developments counter dominant understandings of disability and access as individualist endeavors by highlighting the collective and radical world-building aspects of access-creation and the ways that ableist oppression is connected to systems of power and domination. Recent developments have explored how the relational aspects of access-creation are established through technology (Brilmyer and Lee, 2023; Hamraie and Fritsch, 2019; May, 2024). Access and its creation are understood as a form of world-building (Brilmyer and Lee, 2023), wherein disabled people radically reimagine access through communal technological engagements that challenge dominant understandings of disability as an isolating, apolitical and highly individualized experience (Hamraie, 2018; Hamraie and Fritsch, 2019). Moreover, literature stemming from critical disability studies and disability justice activism alike underscores how disability is more than a social category but a politics that entails experimental, communal world-making practices that center our various relations and interdependencies with one another (Piepzna-Samarasinha, 2022). These insights from critical disability studies and disability justice activism can be extended into a critique of how information behavior research engages with the concept of access. Building upon critical disability studies and disability justice activism, access can be understood as more than an individualistic quality of an object; access is a set of constantly contested relations. Within information practices research, examining access as such challenges binaristic understandings of the accessibility/inaccessibility of information and information technology and instead emphasizes how people create more livable worlds together.

Bodymind and crip politics through an interdisciplinary lens

The concept of bodymind originating in critical disability studies, which draws from the interdisciplinary lenses of queer theory, critical disability studies and materialist feminisms, can augment research on minoritized communities and their information practices. Following the second research question about extending insights from critical disability studies into information practices research, the body-mind concept can be discussed with information practices scholarship that utilizes materialist analyses of power and challenges dualistic understandings of embodied and cognitive approaches. Critical disability studies scholar Margaret Price extends the concept from Babette Rothschild’s work in the field of trauma studies

to disability studies in the foundational article “The Bodymind Problem and the Possibilities of Pain” (McRuer and Johnson, 2014; Price, 2015). According to Price (2015), the term describes how “mental and physical processes not only affect each other but also give rise to each other” (p. 269). Price defines bodymind as “a sociopolitically constituted and material entity that emerges through both structural (power- and violence-laden) contexts and also individual (specific) experience” (p. 271). The concept accounts for how body and mind, though commonly understood as opposing entities, often function together and cannot be separated.

In this foundational work, Price introduces a “crip politics of body-mind” as an interrogative positionality that challenges normative understandings of humanity, knowledge and their supposed correlations, which are often linked to interlocking ableist, racist, sexist, capitalist and heterosexist notions of value. Crip politics refers to “a way of getting things done—moving minds, mountains, or maybe just moving in place (dancing)—by infusing the disruptive potential of disability into normative spaces and interactions” (p. 269). Building upon queer theory, the verb to crip – and its active form of crippling – actively challenges normative ways of being and thinking, which also acknowledges how such notions are constantly in flux (Kafer, 2013; Rice *et al.*, 2017). Moreover, crip is a reclamation of a traditionally oppressive term that, through its reappropriation, calls into question the sway of normality as it is understood in opposition to disability and disablement (Dolmage, 2012; Kafer, 2013; McRuer, 2006; Price, 2015). Price (2015) further explains how the body-mind concept is derived from feminist materialist analyses within critical disability studies (Erevelles, 2011; Titchkosky, 2011).

The concept of body-mind extends an interdisciplinary analysis that locates its origins in poststructuralist understandings of identities as continuously evolving formations and frictions, the centering of the body within feminist scholarship and activism and materialist approaches that underscore how the body is produced differentially according to systems of power and inequality, such as racism, classism and sexism, which reveal themselves at both the individual and societal levels (Erevelles, 2011). In other words, the bodymind not only interrogates the normative dualism between the body and mind but also critiques the separation of systems of power and inequality from their material outcomes in everyday lived experience. The concept of bodymind, similar to the political/relational model of disability, situates disability as a site of struggle and contestation that brings to light how systems of power and inequality create and sustain ableism in its many formations.

The existing LIS literature, including that within information practices research and HIB more broadly, replicates Cartesian dualism as critiqued through the body-mind concept. The embodied turn in information behavior research centers the body and embodiment as both a conduit of information and a central factor in information-related experiences (Floegel *et al.*, 2021; Hartel, 2019; Olsson, 2016). Research within the embodied turn examines the corporeal aspects of information, focusing on how the body can be understood as a site of knowledge production and connected to information practices (Cox *et al.*, 2017; Floegel *et al.*, 2021). Hartel (2019) notes that research on information behavior and embodiment often coincides with that concerning information practices, which is in part due to the fact that “its enthusiasts likewise use theories of practice to account for the cultural shaping of the body.” The embodied and information practices approach to information behavior originated as critiques of the cognitive approach, which has its foundations in social psychology (Dervin, 1997; Talja, 1997). The purposive split between cognitive and embodied approaches in HIB research nonetheless maintains a reductive differentiation between body and mind, addressed within the concept of bodymind that originates within critical disability studies. Information behavior research that employs an embodied or practices approach examines how external phenomena such as sociocultural conditions, systems of power and inequality influence information behavior (Kitzie *et al.*, 2022; Talja, 1997). It is important to note that by reinforcing divides between embodied and cognitive approaches, even more critically leaning scholars reinforce the binaristic perspectives they aim to critique. Concepts such as bodymind and the political/relational model of disability help researchers within HIB better engage with concerns around

Political/relational information access

This paper argues for extending insights from critical disability studies scholarship and disability justice activism into information practices research and information behavior research more broadly. This paper is aligned with [Kitzie et al.'s \(2022\)](#) assertion that information practices literature often reflects and reinforces “the status quo at the expense of capturing lived experiences” that theorize marginalization as a result of an informational deficit (p. 495). [Kitzie et al.](#) further explain that “such works assume that people experience inequity because they lack the ‘right’ information and look to the pastoral power of institutions like libraries to ‘save’ these people by giving them this information” (p. 496). [Kitzie et al.](#) highlight [Gibson and Martin's \(2019\)](#) concept of information marginalization and [Floegel and Costello's \(2021\)](#) creative queer world-building engagements as exemplars of information practices research that grant “agency to those experiencing marginalization” by positioning them as agentic knowledge producers that respond creatively to systemic barriers (*ibid.*). However, [Kitzie et al. \(2022\)](#) note that these information practices ultimately “do not undermine structural conditions producing a state of information poverty” (*ibid.*). In response to the third research question, the political/relational model of information access developed in this paper is informed by an understanding of access rooted in critical disability studies scholarship.

This review proposes the synthesizing theoretical framework of political/relational information access to highlight how access to information and information more broadly are sites of collective contestation. The theoretical framework of political/relational information access requires more than simply acknowledging how power and inequality figure in the values embedded in information. In contrast to the social constructionist approaches that underpin information practices literature, political/relational information access underscores how marginalization is political and, therefore, a site of collective struggle and radical imagination against the limits and harms of normalizing logic. While social constructionist approaches highlight how systems of power and inequality shape the ways that people interact with information, constructionist theories do not explore how these interactions are grounds for collective contestation against oppressive systems. For example, while [Gibson and Martin \(2019\)](#) note that their study on information marginalization is grounded in critical disability studies, the authors nonetheless cite literature about the social model of disability that extends a social constructionist point of view that has been extensively critiqued within critical disability studies ([Hunt, 2024](#); [Kafer, 2013](#); [Oliver, 2013](#); [Thornycroft, 2024](#)). [Gibson and Martin's \(2019\)](#) analysis emphasizes how “the normative order of social practices and constructs” shapes how people and information are understood and prioritized (p. 486). However, the social constructionist perspective champions a binaristic understanding of individuals and social structures. Additionally, it does not account for the ways that people interrogate these systems and how the eradication of social barriers would not render disability irrelevant to embodiment.

By applying the political/relational model to conceptualizations of access within information behavior, the political/relational model of information access interrogates how dominant approaches to information practices research not only extend deficit frameworks but also critique how conceptualizations of access are embedded in and reproduce “normalizing logics” that narrowly focus on access to information as a means to fix or eradicate marginalization altogether ([Goggin, 2018](#), p. 83). Following existing work ([Gibson and Martin, 2019](#); [Kitzie et al., 2022](#); [Peterson-Salahuddin, 2024b](#)), political/relational information access emphasizes how information access does not counter marginalization. Echoing prior information practices research ([Costello, 2017](#); [Gibson and Martin, 2019](#); [Wagner and Kitzie, 2023](#)), political/relational information access notes how information and

access to information are relational processes shaped in collectivity. Further, contributions to the growing critical realm of information practices research often prioritize notions of agency (Greyson, 2018) over liberatory practices that involve collective and relational contestations over what counts as helpful information in the first place. The synthesizing theoretical framework of political/relational information access highlights how systems of power and inequality are embedded in and reproduce hierarchies of information and reframes information access and information more broadly as political and relational entities through which to collectively refuse and dismantle the hierarchies of value that are attached to them (Kafer, 2013).

Conclusion

This review examines how theoretical developments from critical disability studies can provide insights to reveal and interrogate how power and inequality operate within the information practices of minoritized communities. Moreover, this review posits how theoretical developments originating in critical disability studies, such as the political/relational model of disability, reinterpretations of access, access-creation as a relational endeavor and the concept of body-mind, can be applied to information practices research to refuse the solutionist ethos that underlies narrow political visions of information access as a resolve for marginalization. The theoretical framework of political/relational information access outlined in this paper highlights how both information and access to information are produced through systems of power and inequality and how they are political and relational entities, continually evolving as they are shaped through collective contestation.

The political/relational model from critical disability studies provides blueprints for interrogating normative assumptions of information access beyond critiques of deficit frameworks. Furthermore, political/relational information access moves beyond the privileging of agency and acknowledges how power is claimed through collective contestation rather than individualistic acts. The reconceptualization of access and access-creation as relational moves beyond the one-dimensional understanding of access as a stagnant and “objective quality” (Titchkosky, 2011, as cited in Hamraie, 2018, p. 456). Lastly, the concept of bodymind, in particular, challenges the divisions between various subdomains of information behavior research, such as the cognitive, embodied and practices approaches, which nevertheless reinforce a reductive mind-body dualism. The synthesizing theoretical framework of political/relational information access highlights the radical potential of gaining collective power through jointly contesting and dismantling the normative logic surrounding notions of what constitutes information and the values and assumptions embedded within it. Potential limitations of the review include its information science focus. However, the objective of the review is to explicate the relevance of critical disability studies to information practices research in order to expand notions of access and more critical engagements with topics including disability and systemic ableism. Additionally, the interpretive foundations of this review differ from systematic and meta-analysis review approaches.

Implications and future work

As the critical realm of the field gains traction, it is crucial that information behavior research engage in interdisciplinary work that interrogates the normative assumptions embedded in how we understand information, access and knowledge production more broadly (Mestre, 2024). Following existing work that highlights the collective, embodied, world-building aspects of information practices (Costello and Floegel, 2021; Gibson and Martin, 2019; Wagner and Kitzie, 2023), the synthesizing theoretical framework of political/relational information access can help us further explore how information and access to information are mutually negotiated and problematized.

A future research agenda extending insights from critical disability studies can challenge binaries between mind and embodiment, hierarchies of knowledge and the values embedded within information. Following critical disability studies, such work should be interdisciplinary and reflexive and prioritize the experiential knowledge of disabled people themselves (Garland-Thomson, 2018). Examples of future work include exploring the information practices of disability communities and how they facilitate nonconventional forms of access, applying the theoretical framework of political/relational information access in the context of affective and embodied information interactions and applying conceptualizations of access from critical disability studies to move beyond dominant discussions around access as it relates to technologically-mediated “solutions” to disability.

Notes

1. The terminology of minoritized is extended from Muñoz (1999) to describe how identities are produced and contested as a result of systems of domination such as white supremacy and heteropatriarchy.
2. The author is disabled and uses identity-first language to refer to themselves. They prefer to use identity-first language because they understand disability as a political orientation that is integral to their identity. Perspectives on identity-first language (e.g. “disabled people”) and people-first language (e.g. “people with disabilities”) differ between individuals and communities (Bury *et al.*, 2023; Sharif *et al.*, 2022).

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Further reading

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Corresponding author

Emma May can be contacted at: emma.may@rutgers.edu