

Transcription  
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**Episode: Queer Silence with J. Logan Smilges, Travis Chi Wing Lau, and Margaret Price**  
Link: [z.umn.edu/ep53](http://z.umn.edu/ep53)

**Intro clip from J. Logan Smilges:** I want people to come away from this book feeling more generous toward iterations of queerness that they don't understand, and to be comfortable with the fact that they don't have to understand it.

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**Travis Chi Wing Lau:** Hi everyone listening. My name is [Travis Lau](#). I am a faculty member here at [Kenyon College](#), and I'm coming to you from Columbus [Ohio]. Just as a visual description, I am a Chinese-American man wearing glasses, with a black t-shirt with a little key on it in brackets, and a blue cardigan, in front of my bookcase that is horribly, horribly in disarray. I'm really excited to be here celebrating Logan's book [Queer Silence: On Disability and Rhetorical Absence](#), and I am joined by a very dear colleague of mine, [Margaret Price](#), who I'm going to invite to introduce themselves right now.

**Margaret Price:** Thank you so much, Travis. This is Margaret Price. I'm an associate professor at [Ohio State](#), where I also direct the disability studies program. I'm really excited to be here to talk about Logan's amazing book. And I am a white, genderqueer person in my home office.

**Lau:** Excellent. And our guest of the day, Logan, would you like to introduce yourself?

**J. Logan Smilges:** Thank you. Yes, I am Logan Smilges. I'm an assistant professor in the department of English language and literature at the [University of British Columbia](#), and I am a white, nonbinary person with a shaved head and a mustache, and I'm wearing this kind of cut-off, brown, buttoned shirt that is not particularly seasonal, but I keep my apartment so warm that it still feels good.

**Lau:** Excellent. Well, I think Margaret and I, in our preparation for this conversation, were sort of thinking widely about your book, which goes in so many different directions. I think as a way of starting this conversation, I wanted to ask you about what it was like to navigate really different disciplines and putting them in conversation with one another. From my reading, I see that the work is intervening in queer studies, trans studies and disability studies, and other disciplines beyond that. I was curious what it was like to put these fields in dialogue. What I

found was interesting is working through the tensions between those fields and doing so in a way that sort of opens up possibilities for what these fields can really do together, rather than interdisciplinary as a buzzword, but like really doing the interdisciplinary work in the book.

**Smilges:** Sure, I'd be happy to talk about that. I think that, like many emerging and junior scholars as well as more established scholars who have been working in what we might consider marginalized fields or fields that are connected to marginalized communities, I find disciplinarity rather stifling. I tend to adopt methods and methodologies based on how well they help me to answer the questions I'm asking, and how well they serve the communities to whom I hold myself accountable. These are communities that sometimes I am a part of and sometimes I'm not a part of. It was really important to me that I draw on the knowledge, insights, and conversations that are already taking place in these communities. I think in a way, my interdisciplinarity was a form of citation politics that allowed me to really pay respect to the variety of people and loci of experiences and epistemologies that allowed me to make the arguments and ask the questions that I was trying to ask in the book.

**Lau:** That's so fantastic. I think one of the things that most moved me about reading your work in its completed form and its earlier incarnations is just how you describe it, that these conversations are happening well outside of academia and are happening in spaces that often aren't taken seriously enough by academia. I love that they find their way into this work and are treated as sources of not just value and insight, but also there's a kind of credit being given to communities that are shaping the academic work that we do. I think that interplay is really unique to the fields that you're engaging in, and it comes out so beautifully in the book.

**Price:** I do have a related question, actually. I'm sorry, I'm going to just go off our plan immediately as my first move. Logan, it was occurring to me as I was listening to you talking about the different disciplinary homes that the book visits, and the different community homes, really, this book is talking to a lot of different audiences and it shifts through a number of different registers. It's narrative in places; at times, it's really richly theoretical, even takes some time to get through — like I needed to do some rereading or some slow reading and really thinking about what was being said. I would love to hear you say, what were you hoping readers would take away from the book? What is the thing you would like to say, this is what this book is offering, and maybe especially for people listening to or reading this podcast who haven't had a chance to read the book yet.

**Smilges:** I love that question because, well one because it's your question and I love you, but also because I think it gets at one of the motivations that I had behind writing it, or one of the challenges that I had navigating the multiple motivations that I had writing it. On one hand, I think the shortest answer to your question is that if there's one thing I want people to take away from this book, it's a posture of generosity. I want people to come away from this book feeling

more generous toward iterations of queerness that they don't understand and to be comfortable with the fact that they don't have to understand it. I think perhaps an addendum to that answer is that I fervently believe that disabled people and the field of disability studies deserve theory, that we are worthy of complicated arguments that are not just complicated for no reason but are complex and nuanced and require a rich vocabulary that might take some time to work through. What I hope comes across when people read the book [is that] there's a lot of scaffolding. I do my best to hold people's hand, but I hold their hand for a long time. We go a really long way. It gets really dense at parts. And I think, just as I hope that readers come away from the book being more generous toward iterations of queerness, I also hope that they can offer some generosity to me as well for trying to do something that, it's not nonexistent in disability studies but doesn't happen often. And so it was a lot of experimentation, and I might not have always gotten it right, but I did my best.

**Price:** This is Margaret again. What exactly is that thing that you don't see happening often?

**Smilges:** I think sometimes — and this might lead us in something of a different direction, but it's something that I think about a lot — is that the language of access and accessibility can sometimes be misappropriated in a way that cuts short people's capacity to deal with specific language or to use specific language. What I mean when I say that what I don't see often in disability studies is sometimes I don't see a careful reckoning with language that we might consider theory out of concern that it won't be accessible, and so my hope is that perhaps that there are ways to navigate this tension between access and theory by offering more scaffolding, by inviting people into conversations slowly, carefully, gently, but inviting them nonetheless because we deserve to be here.

**Lau:** I love that so much.

**Price:** Agree. Yeah.

**Lau:** In some ways, I wanted to draw on this a little bit, and I share your frustration with what can sometimes — and I want to be clear about what I mean by this — what can sometimes fall into an anti-intellectualism framed as an accessibility problem. Right? That theory is inaccessible; therefore we need to reject it, because it's not accessible to our communities. I think this is related to your question, Margaret, about audience and how we do this work of welcoming people in. And one of the ways that you do this, Logan, is through personal experience and writing through the personal, which to me is a facet and characteristic of almost all the fields that you intervene in. There's a theorizing from a standpoint — or if we take [Rosemarie Garland-Thomson](#)'s revision of that, a sit-point. I'm curious about how the personal works for you in this particular book and what the challenges and opportunities or potentials were in theorizing through the personal as a way of doing that welcoming work.

**Smilges:** This is Logan. So I'm actually going to answer your question about my use of the personal with an anecdote. To give it some context, this conversation is happening in the immediate aftermath of what many people thought would be Twitter's last day. Last night, while people were kind of panicking about the app potentially not being around for much longer — I think some people are still thinking that, but it feels a little bit less pressing in the morning hours — but last night my DMs were busy. Lots of people wanted to come out with last-minute confessions and pleas for some type of sensual attention or erotic investment, and then there were other folks, too, who wanted to express gratitude for the book, that they'd either read or just started reading. Far and away, the most common comment that I have received about the book, both in my DMs last night and also over the past several weeks since the book has been out, has been, “You talk about yourself so much. There is so much of you in *Queer Silence*. I'll admit that this reaction has somewhat caught me off guard. One because, as with many folks who are writing books, I think we hold ourselves up and we hold ourselves up with other texts that we're drawing on, and I surrounded myself with text where people talk about themselves all the time. So I don't think I realized how out of the ordinary perhaps it is to use so much of myself in the book. But then second, I think I'm surprised because for me, drawing on my personal experience has long been a way to situate myself in relation to the topics that I'm writing about. And so in part, I suppose the anecdotes offer a way into the theory, they offer a way into some of my claims and arguments. But their primary purpose is to clarify my standpoint. Something that I will admit makes me uncomfortable sometimes is when scholars will attempt to do this kind of positionality work by listing their identities and then just moving on. I'm never sure quite what the work of listing identities is meant to do, because identities are absolutely useful as a kind of shorthand for our relations to power; they gesture toward our relations to power, but they don't offer much complexity, much nuance. And so by moving toward narrative, by moving toward a kind of story of myself, I'm really trying to offer a richer description of how I see myself in relation not just to the power dynamics that I'm talking about in the book but to the people who populate the pages.

**Price:** This is Margaret. That's really helpful for me to think about, and I love the way that queer silence is challenging not only ideas, making interventions, not only at the level of theories and ideas, but also how you're sharing those ideas. One thing that I am interested in — this is me going off our planned questions again, because what you're saying is just really interesting and really generative for me — I want to ask specifically about your audience of rhetoric people. I'm a rhetorician myself. I was trained in rhetoric and composition, and a lot of the work I do is in a subfield that's often called disability rhetoric. Now, as you know, a lot of work has been done in rhetoric about silence and what silence means. Someone that I actually went to graduate school with, Mary Reda, did [a beautiful study of so-called “quiet students”](#) that was a really interesting examination of that. There have also been some interesting studies of concepts like absence, not being there or not being noticed — a lot of which you speak to. So the question I want to ask is,

for your audience of rhetoricians, specifically people who study rhetoric in the ways that rhetoric is the study of making meaning in the world, what particularly are you offering to rhetoric as an intervention, as new readings and new possibilities for silence? I did what I always do. My students always call me on this. I asked a question in the most difficult-to-follow way possible. Basically, I'm just asking, what do you hope rhetoricians will take away here about queerness about silence and about queer silence?

**Smilges:** This is Logan. So I wanted to make two primary interventions in rhetorical studies, which we might understand as two things I really want rhetoricians to take away from the book. The first is something of a reconceptualizing of how meaning-making works. This kind of comes in the form of a framework that I call the rhetorical matrix which is suggesting that one way we can envision meaning-making is as something that emerges through silence. I'm laughing right now because Margaret did this wonderful thing on the camera where she showed a diagram from the book that illustrates, literally illustrates, the rhetorical matrix.

**Price:** Yes, I was going to ask you about this diagram, too. I was really interested in thinking about what rhetoricians might take away.

**Smilges:** Yes, and one of the things that I hope they do take away is that we can think about meaning-making, we can think about signification not only multimodally, like across modalities, but we can also think about it within and across multiple spectrums that occur within each modality, which is to say that if a particular text is not drawing on the visual, it could very well be because it is signifying more intensely in another modality. And so by centering silence, absence, invisibility in the field of rhetorical studies, I think it offers us a way to be more generous — once again to be more generous — toward how signification comes to be, to how meaning is made, because it is constantly asking us to look in new directions. And then the second intervention I make, and I'll try to keep this short, comes in the form of what I call rhetorical energy, which is really signification before it has condensed into a meaning that is legible to us. And so I kind of read rhetorical energy alongside affect, which was a really helpful term and body of work — referring to affect theory — to help me think about how significations are constantly flowing through us, around us, without us necessarily being able to pin them down at any given time. So by rhetorical energy, I'm referring to this flow of discourses that's constantly remaking our body-minds, resignifying our body-minds to those around us in a way that we're not always able to articulate, but that sometimes queer people are able to regulate or modulate in ways that can help them survive and in their conditions, their material conditions, a little bit longer or a little bit better.

**Price:** Yes, this is Margaret still speaking. That was basically my follow-up, was to ask you to talk more about this beautiful quotation from the book that I had written down, and you went ahead and did. I want to just read the quotation because I think it explains the relationship

between the rhetorical matrix and rhetorical energy so well. So I'm reading from the manuscript copy I have, page 59, and you write, "The various expressions of signification that make up the matrix, such as verbal, visual, material and embody-minded, can all be distilled from rhetorical energy. Indeed all forms of signification feed rhetorical energy because signification relies on its affectivity to be perceived." This to me was a really great example of what you're talking about in terms of theory. This is a complex idea. It's actually expressed in quite simple languages. These are fairly simple sentences. And there's a few really key terms that I have to pause with, including affect and signification and embody-minded, to really understand it. What I loved about the concept of rhetorical energy, as I was sort of sitting with it and trying to take it in and understand it, is that I think it gets at the ineffable in rhetorical exchange and circulation in ways that rhetorical theories often gesture at but don't necessarily explain in quite such concrete terms, and I really appreciated that.

**Smilges:** This is Logan. Thank you. I'm so touched that you spent time thinking through what I spent lots of time thinking through as well. I think maybe one thing I can comment on the quote that you read is that I very much do see the rhetorical matrix and rhetorical energy working together and in concert with each other. I introduced them separately because I think that they each deserve their kind of own conversations and that they can be talked about independently. And yet, as I suggest in the book, rhetorical energy is what animates the rhetorical matrix. Rhetorical energy is the signification that floods through and across various modalities in such a way that ultimately kind of come into being or condense or materialize as the meaning that we are then able to recognize as rhetorically significant.

**Lau:** This is Travis. As the nonrhetorician in the room, I wanted to think about the exchange you both just had and something that I — this sounds strange but — felt in the experience of reading this book, which is a kind of plenitude and fullness. So I was thinking about energetically how the book itself kind of models the fullness of what we might describe as queer or crip rhetorical energies. I wonder if the word plenitude or fullness resonates with you, Logan, in terms of thinking about it as an embody-minded sensation, but also a kind of metaphor for thinking about our communities that have been traditionally seen as reduced, small, or without energies.

**Smilges:** This is Logan. Absolutely. I, yeah, appreciate the words plenitude and fullness, in part because they get at one of the distinctions that I hope to make with rhetorical energy, which is that a person — we can take a queer person — can be full of meaning without necessarily having much agency over that meaning. This is one of the tricky things about rhetorical energy. On the one hand, it would suggest that some people are hyper-visible because they are layered in so much signification. Sometimes their meanings change as our bodies move from room to room, from group to group, the significations that append us shift. And yet, just because we are on display doesn't mean that we necessarily have much agency over how we are being taken in by others, over how we are being perceived. As I suggest throughout the book in various ways,

there is something deeply satisfying, safe, sometimes pleasurable about being able to cling to invisibility, cling to silence, cling to absence in ways that refuse the kind of significations or at least kind of modulate or regulate the significations that are attached to you, in order to glean agency where you can find it. Sometimes you can find it not by how well people are listening or how well people are seeing, but rather through the opposite, through your capacity to just go away, to not be found.

**Lau:** I love this. I had not quite put these pieces together, but now it's coming through to me so clearly now, a sense of silence or absence as a kind of refusal — both political and in terms of power — to refuse to be hailed, to refuse to be legible. I find that such a moving rewriting of the narrative surrounding things like absence and silence. Where I was going with this question to follow is actually about legibility and something that, as a literary scholar, I've been thinking about in terms of what your book is modeling. So if we're thinking about this issue of legibility, or in some cases, queer, trans or disabled people refusing legibility, one of the challenges and also provocations that your book is modeling for us is, what does it mean to do works of reading if we are refusing legibility to one another or making ourselves legible in certain ways? I was really struck, too, by the ways in which you read layered or complex text, so to speak — I mean text in a really broad wide-ranging way. What does it mean to read against, say the issue of legibility, if something is refusing to be legible: how do we read it, and how we do that kind of close reading? Does that make sense at all?

**Smilges:** I think it does. This is Logan. I think it does make sense. I'll try an answer. I'll try it out, and then you can tell me if it's just not relevant to what you're asking. The first kind of thing that comes to mind is in the chapter where I talk about Grindr. For folks who don't know, Grindr is a dating app primarily for men who have sex with men, but that gets really complicated in erotic spaces when you've got people who aren't men, who are attracted to men but don't necessarily identify as straight, so it's for lots of different people who might fall into the category of queer. On the app, there are many folks who kind of fuck around with the profile pictures. Some folks want to show their face. They want to be identifiable because the face is, we can think about it as carrying a kind of social currency that immediately makes you legible. People are able to identify you as not just a queer person but as you, you are a queer person; whereas other folks might want to channel some anonymity by showing their torso or a different part of their body. They might not even upload a picture at all, performing what I call a blank profile. There is a tendency, not only in mainstream queer discourses but also in the history of queer studies, to attribute these forms of anonymity to the metaphor of the closet, to say that these people aren't out or they don't want people to know who they are. I am very clear in the chapter by saying I don't think that's a very helpful assumption to make. We actually cannot read intention into these users' behaviors. There are lots of reasons for this, and some of the reasons I offer include the fact that Grindr is a kind of iteration of the power dynamics that we find outside of the app, which include white supremacy, which include sexism, which include ableism. All of

these structural forces impact how users experience their relationships forged on the app. Sometimes by withholding legibility, by refusing their own kind of induction into identifiability, users are able to protect themselves or regulate the kind of interactions that they're having with others that's safe or that feels good. Is this starting to get at what you were asking, Travis?

**Lau:** Yes, absolutely. In some ways, you preempted what I was hoping you'd discuss, which is the chapter on Grindr. I was just thinking about sort of the plethora of sources that you engage with and Grindr being that particularly fraught source in the ways that it is simultaneously a nexus of all sorts of different modalities and ways of thinking. I was really struck by the book's engagement with such vastly different forms, and by form, I mean rhetorical forms but also visual forms. I wanted you to sort of meditate on what I felt was a really challenging critical object — the Grindr profile — as something that is already so overdetermined, especially in queer spaces, as this kind of recognizable stereotypical manifestation of gay or queer interaction. I think you actually preempted the question I was hoping to ask. I'm curious, though, if you have anything else you might want to add about the challenges or experiences of close reading across form or close reading across different kinds of objects — some objects that might be in some ways at odds with one another or maybe are — ephemeral is a weird word or — fleeting in a way that's difficult to read in sort of a nontraditional way. So I'm thinking like something not as familiar or commonplace as a common textual object. What does it mean to read something outside of text?

**Smilges:** This is Logan. I think it's helpful to note for folks who have not read the book: Travis is correct in that I'm all over the place in terms of my object selection. I'm talking about the app Grindr. I'm talking about documentaries. I'm talking about dancers. I'm talking about a photoethnographic project. And as I mentioned before, I'm talking about myself sometimes, too. My reasons for taking this kind of multi-pronged or variously pronged approach was first because I wanted to nod toward the range of textual forms that the range of queer iterations might take. So if we know that queerness — at least as I argue — that queerness is often taking shape in ways we don't expect, then I think it behooves us to turn toward modalities or textual forms that we might not typically read or consider within the field of queer studies. I think also I really wanted to prioritize texts, kind of broadly conceived, that allow people, like real people, to come through with as little mitigation as possible. So rather than turning to literature, which I think serves so many wonderful purposes, I wanted to turn toward texts that were a little bit more ethnographic, that captured humans humaning. I found that dating apps and performance art and documentaries got me a little bit closer to that kind of work.

**Price:** This is Margaret. This is also a question about the forms you're working with and the methodology that you articulate in chapter one. When we were preparing together, I identified myself as a methodology nerd, and I'm also a qualitative researcher as well as someone who does discourse analysis, so I'm familiar with doing interviews, surveys — both discourse analysis



without the word critical appended, I'm used to doing critical discourse analysis. Often folks who know about discourse analysis assume it's only the study of language or written texts, but actually, discourse analysis has really opened up in the last few decades to include texts of all kinds, encompassing the many different modalities that you outline in your rhetorical matrix. So I have a couple of questions as a methodology nerd. The first one is just a simple question that I'd like to ask which is, what was your favorite stuff to work with? Like what did you just really enjoy getting into, or what bobbed up to say, oh yeah, this is definitely going in the book?

**Smilges:** This is Logan. I'll make a quick note before answering that question which is that I've started stimming, and I want to make that note. I've started making that note when I have reported conversations like this because I think it's an important thing to make visible and to acknowledge for what it is. So I've started stimming. My favorite thing to talk about was the documentary on ex-gays. When I saw that in 2015, I think, I knew I had to talk about it. I knew that I had to write about it because there's so much happening in that film, some of which I get to talk about in the book. Lots of stuff I don't get to talk about in the book. But I knew I had to because it was one of the few mainstream televised or filmed sources, archives, of what I'd experienced. My jaw was on the floor while watching it. I actually rewatched it not too long ago. When I did, I was kind of struck by how much TLC, the TV channel who had put together the project, had really put their own spin on it and had tried to make parts of it kind of humorous and tongue-in-cheek, which is a shame because I remember at the time being struck by the sincerity with which so many of the men in the film approach their decision to be ex-gay, and the sincerity that their wives feel toward that decision. It's a kind of sincerity that I really wanted to meditate on in the book, not because I think that more people should be ex-gay, but because I think there's something lost when we dismiss that decision. It was called by commentators at the time as stupid, and the ableism that is built into those forms of dismissal or disavowal I think actually [does] a lot more harm — not just to ex-gays themselves but to other folks — than it does if we actually just really engage with why these men are making the decisions that they are for themselves.

**Price:** Thank you. That's so interesting. I had a guess about what I thought you would say was your favorite sort of text or artifact to work with. And that was not my guess.

**Smilges:** Oh no! What was your guess?

**Price:** I thought, well the Grindr chapter, I found the most fun. I sort of facilely assumed that it would also have been the most fun or interesting material to work with. So continuing on this thread of the methodology of what is the certain strands of research — [I] might call it the corpus of the book, which is an interesting choice of word, obviously, because corpus means body — I'm also wondering, did you find yourself having to answer, at any point, readers, like reviewers or people who were helping you put together the book? Did you find yourself having to answer

the question, how does this stuff belong together? Like, help us with the throughline. For example, how do trans elders help illustrate the same set of points as people using blank or nondirectly representational pictures on Grindr? Did you find yourself making those arguments in your head? I'm speaking in part from the experience of having written a first book that was really sprawling in terms of content. I really just threw everything with the kitchen sink into the book I wrote. I did find myself having a lot of conversations in my mind about, "no this is why it hangs together. Like here is the throughline." I wondered if you'd had a similar experience, or what your experience was, as a writer putting those items together and thinking, yes, this is meaning-making. These are resonating against each other in a significant way.

**Smilges:** Sure. I'll say first that the reviewers I had were incredibly kind, and both of them knew right away what I was trying to do, celebrated me for the strengths that I was able to bring in that initial draft, and were really encouraging with the recommendations that they made for revision. I'm not sure if I'm allowed to say their names, but I really appreciated them both. In terms of the throughline, I guess I have two answers. One is deeply personal. I mean, I feel an attachment to all of the texts, or objects, that I deal with. I use Grindr. I have used Grindr in a rural space where most of the people are not using profile pictures or using representational photos. I have been ex-gay. I was in conversion therapy. As I get older, I find myself increasingly thinking about transition in a way that doesn't quite fit the existing temporal frameworks of a lot of mainstream trans discourse. I actually am pretty confident that before I die, I will end up transitioning into a woman, and I look forward to that time. I'm also not ready to do it right now. I'm actually experiencing a lot of joy in this kind of nebulous space that I'm in. So I see in a lot of these trans elders a model for how I've been thinking about my own transition over time, over my life. And then, finally, I see myself in a lot of the kind of neuroqueer intimacies, as I call them, among the disabled performance artists in the ways that they come together to desire a different world, even if they're not necessarily coming together with people with whom they share much in common. So I felt myself resonating with all of these different populations. I think the second reason, the second piece of the throughline, is that once again I wanted to get at the range of queer iterations that don't quite cross the threshold of queerness as it's typically understood in the field of queer studies. So all of these chapters, or most of the body chapters, are looking at approximations of queerness that, through their approximation, at once fall outside of a kind of queer scope, and yet by falling outside [thus] allow the field of queer studies to maintain a kind of coherence that a lot of queer scholars don't feel the need to recognize or don't feel the need to acknowledge. I think that there's a way in which these structuring disavowals allow queer scholars to claim a kind of mobility for the field that isn't true and yet continues so long as these abjected populations remain outside the purview of the field. Yes, as Margaret just wrote in the chat, at one point I called that stance properly radical. Yes, all of these populations are not quite properly radical.

**Price:** Right, yeah, I'm not sure I got it quite right. I turned right to it as if by magic. It's on page 209, and you wrote, "I mean to dwell in the potentialities that don't pass radical muster," and I

just thought, again, it's a really complex idea. I had to read it several times, and it's phrased very simply, which to me is really a hallmark of your writing. So as you're talking about those throughlines that are kind of shimmering through the book — maybe we could say there's some of the rhetorical energy of the book — I realized that I was learning something I don't think I had realized about the book which is that's yet another way that it messes with genre boundaries in a way that's really helpful and interesting. You know, there aren't demarcated sections that we would point to and say, “this section is the personal and this section is the theoretical.” *Queer Silence* really mixes those up in a way that I really appreciate.

**Smilges:** Thank you. I don't want to impede conversation, but I will say that I don't think I realized how much of myself I was disclosing in this book. I'm glad I did. It feels freeing. It feels liberating. But I just don't think I realized. And now I go back and I'm reading what I wrote, and I'm listening to people's feedback, and they are reciting parts of my life to me. And I'm like, “oh, how'd you know that.” And it's like, oh, right, because I told you.

**Lau:** This is Travis. Since you brought up the term disclosure, I had a question in mind, but now that you've brought disclosure I kind of want to think a little bit about that and what it means to be an author and in something like a monograph do something like disclosure and the politics surrounding that. Now that you've shared different experiences in which people have responded to your work precisely because you've disclosed certain aspects of your experience, I was curious about whether or not, in the process of your composition of the work, you had anxieties or reservations about the disclosure process or you felt like disclosure was a kind of rhetorical strategy or an aim of this book to do the kind of work that it was trying to do in its conception. I always find disclosure a fraught thing. I tend to be the person who overshares in the room. I've talked to some people who say, “I couldn't imagine disclosing the things that you've disclosed.” I wonder if you faced those kinds of doubts or conversations with yourself and others in the decisions that you made for this book.

**Smilges:** I love talking about disclosure. First, I am also an oversharer. I'm autistic, so I really struggle with boundaries sometimes. Actually, that's not true. I don't struggle with boundaries. I just have boundaries that are different than other people, and I'm very quick to establish intimacies, which would allow me to feel comfortable disclosing parts of myself to others, and if they're not ready, I understand. Sometimes that involves me having to apologize now and then, but it's not always a fault of my own. However, with this book, I was very intentional about the disclosure, even though, as I just said a moment ago, I don't think I realized the depth of what I disclosed. But in terms of the broad strokes, I was very intentional about it. As I think a lot of disabled people know, even those folks who have entirely or semi-invisible disabilities, there always comes a point where you no longer have the choice to disclose. So a conversation about disclosure is not whether you disclose, it is when you disclose, and I have spent so much of my life forestalling disclosure, trying to identify the time that is most comfortable, most appropriate,

and safest for other people. Almost inevitably, I wait too long, and I will have a meltdown, or I will respond in a way that someone doesn't expect, or I will do something that indexes disability in a way that then forces me to disclose when I'm not ready or in a situation that isn't really disclosure so much as it is just my disabilities are now visible. I remember one particular date that I had with someone where we were out at a Thai restaurant. It was too loud, it was too bright, and I was too tired. I had a meltdown that kind of transmogrified into a panic attack, and then I was left on the floor, knees up to my chest, and my poor date wondering what is going on. I really do think that that was a fault of my own, because I should have disclosed earlier, and I waited too long. So for this book, I wanted to lean into my own autistic tendencies and say, I'm going to disclose all of it now because I deserve to be able to, and if it makes you uncomfortable, that's actually a "you" problem, and something that you need to work through — "you" being the reader. So far people have responded with so much love gentleness and generosity that I don't regret that decision at all, even as I acknowledge that the choice I made to disclose is inevitably shaped by a lot of the privilege that informs my life as well, as someone who is white, as someone who has a tenure-line, well-paying job. I was talking with [La Marr Jurelle Bruce](#) the other day about his recent brilliant book, [How to Go Mad Without Losing Your Mind](#). In that book, he waits until the final section, the conclusion or epilogue, to disclose his own madness. That decision was very much shaped by his own experiences as a black person. I think that whenever we talk about disclosure, it's not only a conversation about, well do you have a choice to disclose or not, but also what other factors, what other conditions in your life are shaping that choice, however marginal or not.

**Lau:** Thanks so much for that. This is Travis. I've been thinking a lot about what we shorthand as the politics of disclosure, and I feel like those conversations get really quite reductive, especially as they sometimes become really utilitarian in relation to things like the accommodations question in higher education. So I really appreciate you offering nuance about that. And of course, true to true to you, you did it via personal anecdote, which I thought was very fitting. So the question I had in mind that's going to maybe pivot in a different direction. For those of you who might not know, I actually got to know Logan via a writing group for a number of us junior faculty, put together by Stephanie Kirschbaum, whom we adore. I got to see early versions of this work in different incarnations prior to the moment of its composition as "the book." As someone who is in the process of thinking about a monograph-length work, I was curious about, now in retrospect, what you saw were transformations in the book over time and maybe unexpected developments or changes in the process of writing this book. Something that I hope our listeners, whether or not those of you are in academia or pursuing other kinds of work, [gain] is a reminder that this kind of work — particularly to produce a book — takes an immense amount of time and labor that is often not seen. I wanted to offer you a chance, Logan, to share that process with folks who maybe don't know all of the changes, transformations, and even sort of institutional shifts that you've been through, that have made this book possible and have changed it in ways that maybe you didn't foresee or plan.

**Smilges:** This is Logan. Yes, Travis. You've been around a while. You've seen this book in many stages. The first thing that comes to mind, with regard to its evolution, has to do with the sharpness of the interventions, including the critiques. In earlier iterations of *Queer Silence*, I spoke into a void a bit, in that I was making my arguments without necessarily situating them alongside folks that I was, in my head, actually responding to. As I continued to revise the book, especially as I continued to revise it alongside folks like you, Travis, I felt my confidence grow. I felt like, you know what? Actually, I'm strong enough to name names. I'm strong enough to say when there are arguments out there in the ether that people are reading that actually aren't good and deserve to be responded to, particularly arguments that circulate in queer studies about disability, whether explicitly or implicitly, that deserve to be named and frankly called out. When I was revising the book, both prior to submitting it to the press when I was kind of finishing up the first draft of the manuscript, and after I received readers' reports, I spent a lot of time thinking about how do I, at once, maintain my own posture of generosity toward people that I might not agree with, while also standing firm in the fact that there are real problems in the field of queer studies that cause real material harm to disabled people and other populations and need to be named. So striking that balance was challenging, but I think, frankly, was productive, I hope, in reaching the kind of final draft.

**Price:** This is Margaret speaking. That's such a helpful way for me to think about that very difficult process of trying to intervene in fields where we have lots of friends and we maybe also have not friends and we are known. I think disability studies can be like that. I think queer studies can probably be like that. That's not a field I spend as much time running around in, so to speak. I know for sure rhetoric is like that. It's really interesting to think through what it means to lovingly call in and call out people who, in some cases, we respect, and in a lot of cases, we also love. And that's a really important thing to grapple with I think for every book and really almost everything we write. It leads me to the last thing I wanted to ask you about which was the idea of neuroqueer intimacies. I just loved these sections. I dwelled on them. I took them in. I wrote down phrases and ideas that felt especially important to me. I love the idea of crafting intimacies. I'm actually knitting right now. I've been knitting throughout this conversation, and the idea of crafting is — the verb is — a complicated one for me. It's one that I think a lot about. I wanted to ask you about how you understand the phrase neuroqueer intimacies. I'm going to read from a paragraph, if that's okay, on page 208. One reason I love this paragraph is it feels typical of your writing in it. It's lyrical. It has a lot going on but it's also funny and familiar. I'll say my question now so I don't spring it on you at the end. The question I want to ask you is a pretty simple one. How do you see neuroqueer intimacies intersecting with or relating to other kinds of intimacies, including access intimacy? Access intimacy is a construct coined by [Mia Mingus](#) that essentially identifies the experience of having one's access needs met readily in an intimate way, whether by a person you are intimate with or sometimes a person you're not at all intimate with. The experience of access is what causes the intimacy. So that's my question. Just how do you see

neuroqueer intimacy intersecting with that or other ideas about intimacy? Here's the paragraph on neuroqueer intimacy that I love so much. "Not all neuroqueer intimacies are performances, but performance is a useful analogy for the body-minds of marginalized people who are always on display. For many queer people, being on display is to be simultaneously seen and unseen, to be dripping with rhetorical energy that marks our non-normativity and simultaneously over-determines our personhood." This is Margaret breaking it into the middle of the quote to say, thank you for seeing me. Okay, this is [Margaret quoting *Queer Silence* author] Logan again. "We become the sum total of our perceived deficits. We are in excess of lack overflowing with all that we are not, all that we can't do, all that we can't be, all that we can't become. To push back against these assumptions, discourses and energies is hard work. It's labor and laborious. It's exhausting to justify our own existence. So neuroqueer intimacies offer a reprieve, a chance to stop pushing back and to take a break together."

**Smilges:** This is Logan. I love that paragraph, so thank you for reading it. To answer your question about the term neuroqueer intimacies, I think it's useful to identify [Jennifer Nash](#) as the person who really gave me the language of intimacy to grapple with. For her, intimacy appears in a much longer discussion about intersectionality and its role in black feminism. Something Nash is thinking a lot about is how can people who don't share much in common still find [a] reason to form solidarity or establish coalitions. This question resonates with a concern that I often have, which is that too often do people rely on perceived similarity to justify the help that they give one another. It's, "I see myself in you, thus you deserve help." That kind of egotistical — I think I can call it an egotistical — support feels deeply icky to me. So Nash's discussion of intimacy is this wonderful alternative, where the reason we come together is not what we have in common right now, but rather the world that we're moving toward. And that is where I derive the phrase "desiring together." What are we desiring together for the future? Maybe we don't have it right now. Maybe we don't have anything in common right now. But we want to because we're going in a similar direction. When I talk about intimacy, I'm talking about that desiring together. There are absolutely resonances between how I'm talking about intimacy and how someone like Mingus is talking about access intimacy. I think where I differ in shades [is that] I just offer an alternative temporality. I'm not thinking about the present necessarily or in the same way as much as I'm thinking about how the future informs our present, how our desire for the future informs our right now. It's the right now that is really conditioned by the word neuroqueer, which I draw on [\[M. Remi\] Yergeau](#), who does such a nice job talking about how neurodivergent people, particularly autistic people, find ways to make meaning that aren't necessarily acknowledged or recognized by others. In this chapter, I'm talking about all the ways that queer people — broadly conceived, including neuroqueer folks — are building intimacies through activities, through practices, through moments, through touches that aren't special. They're banal. They're quotidian. They're fleeting. And yet they're everything. I think that there are so many of us who resonate deeply with that sense of gratitude for interactions and relations that would be so meaningless to someone else, and yet they make our lives entirely worth living.

**Lau:** It feels wrong to follow up after something so beautifully articulated. The final question that I have for you, Logan, is in some ways drawing from your turn to the future and thinking about futurity. So this is a question that's sort of related to new work that I know you're working on. I was really struck by, in the concluding epilogue, your emphasis on shame and negativity and thinking about that as a way of being, a way of life, and a framework for analysis. For folks who are listening who don't know about this yet, Logan's also working on a book called [Crip Negativity](#). I wanted to think about how this first project is transitioning into this new work and how this meditation on shame or negativity has become this new work that you're exploring. Are these books in dialogue with one another? If they are, in what ways? And if they're departing from one another, in what ways? I'm very curious about that.

**Smilges:** This is Logan. To answer your question, Travis, yes, I have a second book coming out, and it's done. It is out of my hands now. Copy edits are over, submitted. It'll be out in May [2023], and it's called *Crip Negativity*. The purpose of the book is to triangulate strands of critical negativity in queer studies, black studies, and crip theory to speculate on what negativity might bring [to] the field of disability studies. It is, in lots of ways, emerging out of a longer meditation on that epilogue on shame, which is certainly a kind of driving form of negativity in my own life. But I actually want to focus on how it differs from *Queer Silence*. In *Queer Silence*, I kind of reference the fact that the category of disability is troubled. I do this in the introduction. I say, it actually doesn't name everything that we want it to name. Sometimes it names things it shouldn't be naming. And yet, throughout the book, I largely leave the category uncontested — very intentionally so — because I think that there are fields — such as rhetoric, such as queer studies — that have yet to grapple with the category in an ethical way. I leave the category uncontested so that these fields can start to reconcile with it. In *Crip Negativity*, however, I sit for much longer in my discomfort, my growing discomfort with the category of disability, and I really take a lot of the critiques that I aim toward queer studies with regard to how it disavows populations in order to secure its own coherence. I turn that critique on to disability studies in order to ask, “What has the field necessarily disavowed by claiming disability as its central object?” I should note that I'm not alone in doing this work. There are lots of folks who have been doing this work for a while — particularly transnational, including trans of color, but also just crip of color — disability scholars. I think perhaps the name that most often comes to mind when having these discussions is [Jasbir Puar](#) for her work on debility. As I absolutely say in *Queer Silence* and as I reiterate in *Crip Negativity*, I think that Puar initiates some excellent conversations but also takes us in some wrong directions. The purpose with *Crip Negativity* is to say okay, we know there are some problems with disability, and yet I'm not sure the solution is to just disavow disability and move on to debility. I'm not sure that that actually does the political work that we think it does, especially for the many, many, many disabled folks — explicitly, categorically disabled folks — who through their categorization, through their interpolation as disabled, actually invite debility. Often one thing leads to another. They are not

entirely separate, and so part of the work of *Crip Negativity* is to rethink what might it mean to launch a categorical critique of disability in the field of disability studies, while also being accountable for how that word, how that category, continues to operate and perhaps must continue to operate in the field and in many of our lives.

**Lau:** This is Travis. I'm so excited for this project and just the generosity — I think that's the word that you use from the start — generosity with which you engage with a field in a way that is not so much just sort of this, what can easily become a kind of toxic positivity sometimes, when people want to engage with the field because [of the thought that] it's sort of better to be endlessly positive about it rather than to critique it in actually a more substantive and generous way. I think you've modeled for so many of us what that work looks like and what the value of that is. I'm just so glad to be able to be in the space with you both as people I admire and love and who have shown me what it means to do this work across time, distance, but also to think about ourselves as constantly changing in terms of our relations to one another and the objects of our study. I just want to say again just how incredible it is to have put out a book in the middle of a pandemic, and I want to celebrate that as fully and heartily as possible. It's been honestly a gift to witness this, Logan. For those of you listening, I really appreciate you all joining us in the celebration of this book. Margaret, do you have any closing words you'd like to add?

**Price:** No, that's all. I just have loved this conversation. Thank you so much for shepherding us. Logan, I have learned so much, including about the new book, which I am really excited about.

**Smilges:** This is Logan. Thank you both so much for doing this. I am on the verge of tears over here because I'm just really grateful for both of you, your own generosity toward me, and toward the book. One final note I'll make is to say that I know that there are lots of people who, for lots of different reasons, did not write a book over the pandemic. I would just want to name that that's okay. The reason that I was able to do this is because I have zero domestic responsibilities, and often my OCD drives me into really unhealthy practices, or relationship, with my work and labor, which is something I talk about in *Crip Negativity*. So I just want to say that, as happy as I am to have written this book, I also acknowledge that, as with everything we do, my capacity to produce it was shaped by lots of different conditions.

**Lau:** Thanks so much for listening, everyone, and I think that will wrap up our conversation for today. Thank you, Logan, and thank you, Margaret.

**Price:** Thank you, everyone.

**Smilges:** Thank you.