

CANADIAN JOURNAL OF

# Disability Studies

Published by the Canadian Disability Studies Association · Association Canadienne des Études sur l'Incapacité

*Canadian Journal of Disability Studies*

**Published by the Canadian Disability Studies Association**

**Association Canadienne des Études sur l'Incapacité**

**Hosted by The University of Waterloo**

[www.cjds.uwaterloo.ca](http://www.cjds.uwaterloo.ca)

**An Editorial of Sorts**

Bridget Liang, PhD student, in Gender, Feminist and Women's Studies, York University

[b.jianjian@gmail.com](mailto:b.jianjian@gmail.com)

Catherine Duchastel de Montrouge, PhD Candidate in Science and Technology Studies, York University

[electrocrip@gmail.com](mailto:electrocrip@gmail.com)

**The "origins" story**

On a rainy Toronto afternoon in September 2012, Cath arrived late to the first years' orientation, dripping water all over the program's accessible classroom. She was a 2nd year M.A. student in Critical Disability Studies and agreed to introduce incoming students to the graduate students' association of which she was an executive. .

During the awkward "networking" and buffet portion of any grad program orientation, Cath's attention was drawn to this person with pink hair, wearing pink flannel, matching skin-tight jeans, Barbie pink lipstick and glittery purple eyeshadow.

Bridget was boisterously talking and cackling about something queer, and Cath thought to herself, "This is one of my people!" Like the cheesiest of fanfic tropes, they gravitated towards one another immediately. Later that same day, they bumped into each other on campus, and animatedly talked about terrible representations of disability, queerness in popular culture, and about fanfiction at the campus bagel shop. Through everyday acts of solidarity and kindness, shared stories and mutual support, Bridget and Cath ended up both living together on campus and becoming each other's chosen family.

And so began our friendship & kinship, continuously reaffirmed, between two queer and trans, fat, disabled academic fanfic nerds. (Gen fic only please!).

Flash forward a couple years in another shared apartment, off-campus this time: Cath has begun her PhD, and Bridget is finishing their major research project for their MA. There have

been many conversations about how ableist academia is, even in Disability Studies, and about how frustrating it is to realize how invisible disability is in Media Studies, including Fanfiction Studies.

While putting together one of her reading list for her comprehensive examination, once again Cath is confronted with the scarcity of published texts on disability and fan fiction. Cath suspects there are many aca-fans (academic fans, identities blur in fanfiction) that are interested in disability and fanfiction, that have presented on it, have written papers about it, have spent the same amount of time talking with their friends about it that she and Bridget have. What would it take to create a space that would bring those texts together? Where could this project of fannish and academic exploration take place?

### **Crip time and space**

This issue took more than two years to put together. Through those years, disability, poverty, job precarity, uncertainty, friendships, and chronic illness are woven in, and so is "crip time". Alison Kafer (2013) describes crip time as a shared experience of stretched temporality for many disabled people and disability communities.

*"Crip time emerges here as a wry reference to the disability-related events that always seem to start late or the disabled people who never seem to arrive anywhere on time... Operating on crip time, then, might be not only about a slower speed of movement but also about the ableist barriers over which one has little to no control." (Kafer, 2013, p.26)*

The making of this special issue saw us living in crip time, working through crip time, and reflecting on the pace of academic projects and collaborations with other disabled folks. More than this, we realized crip time made it possible for this special issue and those contributing to it, to develop and grow, in ways only crip time can allow, and to create a crip space of creativity.

Life encroached on our plans for this issue. Cath kept getting sick, and adjusting to living with a new chronic illness, a few years after a first union strike, there was another one, quite long this time. A cat companion passed away, a human companion left. Bridget's underwent bottom surgery and with it came a slew of issues we could not have foreseen as part of the healing process. Bridget was also trying to balance finding enough work to pay the bills while finishing their MA, because who'd hire a disabled, autistic, mixed race, and fat trans woman? Not many people, in the end. The stress of finding ways to survive economically was a strain on our energy and deeply affected how we could work on this project, but also on how we came to want to work on it, with our contributors, and with each other, to let us all breathe.

Throughout these two plus years we've felt many times that we were failing at "doing this right". We had to learn to work together as co-editors, to value our different ways of working and processing information. We made schedules we couldn't follow. Made new ones, with tasks, which ended up being intrinsically linked to our authors' own access needs. We were trying to navigate the essentially ableist processes of much of academic publishing, to instil some of the ideals of fanfiction spaces: working collaboratively with our contributors, supporting them, giving them time and space, respecting their voices, offering critiques. We stumbled at time. We had to backtrack, and change our approaches. We needed rest at others. Sometimes, the process went as it should but mostly it didn't. Many of our contributors also identify as disabled and we

needed to adjust ourselves to their needs and they to ours. It hasn't been seamless. We lost some contributors because of the ordinary ableism of life and the expectations of production in academia. We got discouraged, and were afraid we were letting people down by taking so much time to do everything. An important aspect of our special issue came from wanting to create a space for fan and disability knowledges in academia, to allow for different experiences to count as knowledge. We initially conceived of it as a creative and welcoming space, flexible enough to encompass different types of contributions, including fanfiction, and multimedia. What we have come to realize was that we were creating a stretched-out temporality, a voyaging bubble, where time was not counted in minutes and hours and days, but in embodied moments, unequally distributed. This is we think a particularly crip temporality, "a strange temporality" (Kafer, 2013, p.35), that reflects how time works in fan communities as well, what De Kosnik (2016) refers to as "fan time", or the time of fannish participation. Fan time is a queering of time, a way for fans to reclaim how and when they consume media and engage with it (p.158). But also how fans engage with each other. Fanfic authors come and go, stories sometimes are left unfinished or disappear. At times a fic doesn't get updated for months, or years. This is also true of reviewers, beta, and readers too (lurkers<sup>1</sup> as well, but less is known of them). Life happens. And yet, fanfiction persists, as do those who love it.

The temporality of this special issue then, has been as intermittent as Cath's symptoms, as lingering and resilient as Bridget's recovery, speeding up during periods of intense editing and planning, slowing down in periods when disability and life conspired to take over. And at times, fracturing with the urgency of personal crises, our own and those of our collaborators. It has pushed us to consider our work, disability, and academia, differently (Kafer, p.20). This project

---

<sup>1</sup> Lurkers are people who participate in reading and consuming fanfiction and comments but do not introduce themselves or contribute in writing, commenting or editing.

has been an exciting and challenging one for us, and in the end, we managed to bring together some really talented scholars and fans (categories blurring) in this special issue. This special issue also solidifies a focus of interdisciplinary scholarship that engages with disability and fanfiction, that includes multiple fields and areas of interest. Of course, researchers and scholars have already have been doing work about disability and fanfiction, presenting papers at conferences, just as many fans, disabled and abled, have been taking part in similar investigations in online fanfiction spaces. But there haven't been many publications in academic journals or interest in media or fanfiction studies, and disability studies about disability and fanfiction. We hope that the amazing contributions included in this special issue demonstrate the richness of the interdisciplinary field of fanfiction and disability. We are incredibly proud of all who have contributed to this special issue, and humbly thankful of all those who have supported it, with a special thank you to Jay Dolmage who has consistently and patiently cheered us on.

### **Overview of Disability and/in/through Fanfiction**

*Disability and/in/through Fanfiction* includes a mix of academic articles, based on research and scholarship, reflections on how disability manifest in fannish spaces, a documentary film, and fanfiction narratives. All are imbued with disabled fan sensibilities and perspectives.

Olivia Dreisinger's a documentary film "Disabled!" examines the role of disability in fanfiction, presenting a broad introduction to the subject. Dreisinger also addresses issues of sex and disability, specifically the issue of anxieties abled people feel over the representation of disabled people as "sexual citizens" in popular culture. Through interviews with fans and research, they explore whether fanfiction is a space where non-normative bodies can be desired, and where disabled people can claim desirability?

Cath Duchastel de Montrouge's article "Shipping Disability/Fanfiction: Disrupting Narratives of Fanfiction as Inclusive" also present the characteristics of fanfiction as literary and creative practices, some of thematic threads fanfiction studies have focused on, as well as highlighting how they create tensions with disability and disabled fans. She argues that conceiving of fanfiction as a disruption instead of as subversive or a transgression as it currently tends to be, enables us to focus on both fanfiction's capacity to empower and marginalize.

Chelsea Fay Baumgartner and Adrienne Raw's respective articles continue the exploration of online spaces where fanfiction and disability meet. Adrienne Raw's article, "Normalizing Disability: Tagging and Disability Identity Construction Through *Marvel Cinematic Universe* Fanfiction" theorizes that medical labels applied to disability and disabled people allow fanfiction tags to function as a normalizing force. She analyzes trend in disability-related trend in the MCU fandom in order to demonstrate this theory.

"Bodies of Knowledge: Politics of Archives, Disability, Fandom" examines how the structure of fanfiction spaces enable fans to resist oppressive ideologies about disability. Baumgartner also highlights the tensions categorizations of disability in these spaces create for fans and in discourse. Baumgartner weaves personal reflections of their relationship with disability and injury to their exploration of it in fandom and society.

Fanfiction offers spaces, communal and imaginative, to consider identities more fully. Jennifer Rogers' article "Authentic Representation and Author Identity: Exploring Mental Illness in *The Hobbit* Fanfiction" examines the importance of fanfiction authors' relationships to mental health issues to writing fanfiction that is considered authentic by fans. Rogers analyzes two fanfictions from *The Hobbit* fandom to answer the questions: Are representations of characters

with mental health issues accurately represented in fanfiction? And what function does disability play in fanfiction?

Derek Newman-Stille's article "From Slash Fan Fiction to Crip Fan Fiction: What Role Does Disability Have in Fandom?" also addresses issues of identity and explores how subversive representation of male homosexuality in fanfiction deploys disability tropes and stereotypes about disabled people. Newman-Stille's article also imagines what crip fan fiction would look like through a "critical making practice" such as fanfiction.

Hannah Orlove's *Star Trek: Deep Space Nine* fanfiction "Made from Something Different" is one such crip fanfiction, that reimagines Julian Bashir as an autistic character and tells of his encounter with a Deaf Bajoran Minister visiting DS9, and that allows readers to bask in "the shivering delight in recognizing something of yourself where you hadn't expected to find a mirror" (Orlove). Orlove's work brings to the fore the need disabled people have of seeing themselves reflected in pop culture.

Christa Mullis' "Autistic-Coded Characters and Fans in Fandom" explores the practice autistic fans have of reading certain characters as autistic, as "moving like me", as well as the negative reactions of allistic fans to these particular readings. Mullis examines the reasons behind the resistance allistic fans and creators have against autistic fans' feeling of resonance and appropriation to autistic-coded characters in media and fandom.

In "Gimp Sue Gets the Girl: Disability in *Twilight* Fanfiction" Olivia Dreisinger asks: What does it look like to represent yourself as a disabled character in fanfiction? Dreisinger is exploring one of the most controversial genres in fanfiction, the Mary Sue, a writer self-inserting

themselves in a fandom and becoming the main focus of the story. Dreisinger uses the lenses of queerness and disability to insightfully examine these practices by disabled fan authors.

Leetal Dean also examines a fan practice of giving gift fics as an act of care in "Those Crazy Fangirls on the Internet: Activism of Care, Disability and Fan Fiction". These gift fics are often requests by neurodivergent fans for stories about a beloved character going through something they're going through usually with a positive outcome. Dean uses this concept of Activism of Care to frame this practice of gifting fic as an act that "promotes social change in differently accessible ways from traditional activism". By writing these stories, it helps support the individual neurodivergent folks who are looking for a little care, but also produces positive narratives of neurodiversity. This activism of care builds communities of support and more understanding of neurodiversity in the face of negative stereotypes.

Bridget Liang's piece, "It's Not Weird Like Werewolves" blends together intersectionality, the concept of the monster, and desirability into fic. They discuss how monsters are often metaphors for marginalized folks and how the monster narrative until very recently needed to end with the monster's death (and thus, the death of the marginalized person). With the recent trend towards monster protagonists such as in *Teen Wolf* (both the 1984 movie and the 2011 TV show), we see this trend where the monster no longer is associated with the marginalized subject, but is drawn closer to the normate. And in response to this, Liang wrote a short *Teen Wolf* fic where the protagonist stays disabled when he becomes a werewolf and enters a gay relationship with his best friend.

"Enabling/Disabling: Fanfiction and Disability Discourse" by AmyLea Clemons challenges the practice of adding on disability to fan studies through formulating a disability-

centered perspective of reading fan fiction. Through using Stuart Hall's concepts of Encoding/Decoding, Clemons coins the terms Enabling/Disabling to examine how fans enable and disable each other in making disability representation. Fans engage in decoding texts and encode their own texts when producing fan fiction and other fan works. Enabling gives agency to fans to give feedback to creators by creating different (explicitly disability) narratives. Instead of accepting or rejecting the texts given to them, fandom enables disabled fans to tell better, more authentic stories that can enable more people to engage in disability positively. Yet on the flipside, Disabling examines how norms of whose bodies are acceptable to write about are reproduced. Disabling explicitly names this process of reproducing the same bodies as an act that continues to disempower disabled and other marginalized folks.

This special issue is just the beginning of the conversation. And as always, hit the like button, review, subscribe, and constructive criticism is greatly appreciated.