Bodies of Knowledge: Politics of Archive, Disability, and Fandom

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Abstract: The work of critical theory cannot stop when it leaves the classroom, but must encompass the lived experience of the everyday. This essay combines personal narrative, disability theory, and a discussion of archiving strategies to question the boundaries of disability, injury and impairment. Although fandom has an interesting and constructive relationship with disability, injury, and impairment, this paper does not focus on individual fan-works that feature these topics. This essay is instead an examination of the macro-structure of two different archives: *TV Tropes* and *Archive of Our Own*. *TV Tropes* is an informal encyclopedia of narrative devices that uses community engagement to read narratives in a critical yet accessible way. Employing the macro-structure organization of the database, users frame the linkage of pity and disability in an atypical manner that subverts mainstream ableist assertions. This shows us that the structure of the archive allows for opportunities to resist oppressive ideologies. Rather than subverting official archival methods, *Archive of Our Own* instead provides space for users to create intersectional spaces through personally generated tags. While these websites are examples of how diverse archival strategies can positively engage with disability narratives, the decision to separate the labels of disability and injury is indicative of tensions around the categorization of the body. Examining how the division can be broken in both theory and fandom creates new, productive models of activism.

Key Words: Disability, Fandom, Fan Culture, Archiving, Injury, Impairment, Life-writing, *Archive of Our Own* and *TV Tropes*

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Introduction

My cerebral palsy was caused by an injury to my brain at birth, but I have never thought of myself as injured. While I embody a certain form of disability, I have never theorized it. Such theorizing is written in the line of my spine, the memory of a walker, a fixity of expression as I try not to fall, but the presence of disability in my life has been a largely unexamined one. It has been too large to think about and too large to question. In my academic life, I focus on gender relations and the art and architecture of the Middle East. I have excluded my body from my scholarship. This is my first attempt at bringing my work and my body together.[1]

Creating new names and descriptions of disabled bodies is central to disability rights activism because of how critical classification resists the medicalization of personhood.[2] This work also challenges the assumption that impairment is inherently and completely negative. Noted scholar Rosemary Garland Thomson argues that disability is "constructed as the embodiment of corporeal insufficiency and deviance".[3] In connecting disability scholarship methodologically to wider narratives of oppression and hierarchical relationships, Thomson foregrounds the power that narratives, both the ones written about us and the ones written by us, play in our lives. Thomson argues that disabled people should be the authors of their own narratives rather than nondisabled writers structuring the disabled bodily experience.[4] Thomson glosses this to mean the difference between medical and personal narratives of disability.

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[1]Thanks to Marlene Evangeline Imana Iyemura.
[2]Barbara Barton, "Dreams Deferred: Disability Definitions Data, Models and Perspectives," *Journal of Sociology and Social Welfare* 36 (2009): 22.
[3] Rosemarie Garland-Thomson, *Extraordinary Bodies: Figuring Physical Disability in American Culture and Literature.* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997) 6.
[4] Rosemarie Garland-Thomson, "Shape Structures Story: Fresh and Feisty Stories about Disability," 2007, 114.

This paper examines the distinction between disability and injury in my life, its cultural construction in the west, and the way that this relationship is both challenged and maintained within English language fanish cultural production. I examine this continuum through an engagement with disability and fan theory. Additionally, I probe the ways that my subject position as a gay woman with cerebral palsy has affected these readings of theory through three personal vignettes. Older disability theory has universalized disabled experience to create a basis for obtaining rights, but has often brushed aside embodied experience.[5] Newer work argues that "thinking from the critical social and personal position of disability" re-invigorates theory.[6] Thus the personal narrative provides a way to access the subjective as well as the theoretical. Writing and structuring these personal italicized vignettes led me to examine my own internalized ableism. These moments of recognition complicate my opposition to ableism by demonstrating the internalization of bigotry.

What is impairment? What is disability? What separates these terms from the discourse of injury? Impairments are considered to be disabling conditions and many of them stem from injury.[7] Injury, however, is not considered to be synonymous with disability. When the American football player Ronnie Lott chose to amputate part of his finger rather than receive surgery to maximize his playing time, his resulting impairment did not make him a disabled athlete to mainstream sports media. As with Lott's amputation, not every deviation from the physical norm is thought of as impairment.[8] Myopia, or near-sightedness, is a common, chronic, and often progressive impairment that requires wearing corrective lens. Unlike the use of a wheelchair or

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[5] Lisa Johnson Merri and Robert McRuer, "Cripistemologies: Introduction," *Journal of Literary & Cultural Disability Studies* 8, no. 2 (2014): 130.

[6] Ibid., 134.

[7] Timothy Curry, J., "A Little Pain Never Hurt Anyone: Athletic Career Socialization and the Normalization of Sports Injury," *Symbolic Interaction* 16 (1993): 273.

[8] Ron Amundson, "Against Normal Function," *Studies in History, Philosophy, Biology and Biomedical Sciences*, 31 (2000): 35.

cane, wearing glasses is not a marker of disability. Myopia has become normalized whereas other chronic conditions have not. To better understand disability, we must also examine the boundaries of disability identity. When disability and injury are compared we can re-think the stability of the nondisabled body in productive ways.

Types of Cultural Archives

Disability is a culturally constructed identity that fits into a matrix of other constructed identities that form societal continuums of normalcy and deviance. These interlocking hierarchies support many different forms of oppression. My inquiry into the boundaries of impairment, injury, and disability is an examination of these concepts and how they are cross referenced in official, personal, and fan-archives. The structure of the archive shapes the information it contains and all of these archives treat disability, impairment, and injury in different ways. The organization and structure of information is central to modern theory, partially founded by Jacques Derrida. Earlier theorists viewed the world in stable, binary oppositions that archived the world in consistent patterns but Derrida argued that "what is no longer archived in the same way is no longer lived in the same way".[9] Derrida's emphasis on how different structures create different types of knowledge and different ways of understanding the world helps to explain conceptions of disability in medical, activist and fan-archives discussed in this text.

Various disability theorists use popular culture as a site to investigate the cultural meanings of disability. Katie Ellis, a scholar of disability, popular culture, and communication

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[9] Jaques Derrida, *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression*, trans. Eric Prenowitz, (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1995), 18.

studies, argues that science-fiction presents disabilities as signs of humanity's relation with technology and the future.[10]

Fandom as a practice cannot be separated from wider issues of ableism, racism, and sexism found in popular culture and daily life.[11] As an act of resistance, fandom is able to reject a creator's total control of the narrative.[12] A fan made text may have little to do with the canon of a given media property. The individual discourses created through fan engagement are too varied to quantify, but they are united by deep love and critical engagement with the original material.[13] To present fandom as a utopic, anarchic space of pure challenge to the mainstream conception of media is to ignore the way that certain tropes uncritically recreate stereotypes and hierarchical power dynamics.[14]-Fans have to be critical readers and consumers all the time.

This paper does not discuss individual fan works to maintain users' privacy.[15] Instead, it focuses on the macro text of two fan archives, *TV Tropes* and the *Archive of Our Own*.[16] Although analyzing the overarching structure of the archive is totalizing gesture, it avoids universalizing how fandom represents disability.

TV Tropes is an open source database that names and organizes clichés, character types, and plot elements in a wide variety of narratives. It functions as a subversion of an official archive through its emphasis on humor and structural transparency. When *TV Tropes* discusses disability, it uses the objectivity of a traditional archive to better categorize the non-objective

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[10] Katie Ellis, *Disability and Popular Culture: Focusing Passion, Creating Community, and Expressing Defiance*, (Taylor and Francis, 2016) 62.

[11] John Mucklebauer, "On Reading Differently: Through Foucault's Resistance," *College English* 63 (2000): 81.

[12] Lesley Goodman, "Disappointing Fans: Fandom, Fictional Theory and the Death of the Author," *Journal of Popular Culture* 48 (2015): 664.

[13] Goodman, "Disappointing Fans", 664.

[14] Alexandra Herzog, "The Power of "AH, E/B, Very OOC": Agency in Fan Fiction Jargon," *Current Objectives of Postgraduate American Studies* 14 (2013): 3.

[15] Kristina Busse, and Karen Hellekson, "Identity Ethics and Fan Privacy" (38-55). *Fan Culture: Theory/Practice,* eds. Katherine Larsen and Lynne Zubernis (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2012): 39.

[16] Pamela Banting, "The Archive as Literary Genre: Some Theoretical Speculations," *Archivaria*, 23 (1986): 120.

narratives of popular culture. As *TV Tropes* presents tropes without assigning a value to them it leads to ambiguities in how disability is treated on the website. In the discussion of disabled people as inspiring named as "Inspirationally Disabled/Disadvantaged" the moderators are aware that this trope may be frustrating but these commentators refrain from calls for activism or personal experience with these narratives. This distance keeps fandom at arms-length from personal experience which removes the urgency of change. "L is for Dyslexia," "Wheel Chair Woobie," and "Inspirationally Disadvantaged/Disabled" are three tropes that showcase how *TV Tropes* frames disability narratives as distinct from reality. However, the refusal to judge these fictional narratives implies that these narratives have few consequences for disabled people.

The *Archive of Our Own*, is a more traditional fan archive. It serves as a repository for works of fiction, art and essays about a given text.[17] What makes this archive different from *TV Tropes* is how it categorizes works of fiction. Users can create their own personal "tag" structure for a work of fanfiction. This can include identifying the work with warnings, personal reflection, and plot events. This allows users to create a discourse that refuses easy categorization. The labels of "disability!au" and "mild disability" offer variations on the singular tag of "disability". The diversity of the tagging system allows archive users to enter specificities and intersectionalities in identity. This is reflective of the similar movements in social justice activism and disability studies that value intersectional narratives over singular identity struggles.[18] The valorization of the personal and the subjective stands in contrast to the objectivity of *TV Tropes*. General tags relating to disability include, "disability"; "disability!au"; "mild disability". Tags can also refer to specific characters who may or may not be disabled in the original text.

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[17] While I use the word "text" this is a catch-all term for a variety of cultural productions that range from commercials and music videos to epic poetry.
[18] Lorella Terzi, "The Social Model of Disability: A Philosophical Critique," *Journal of Applied Philosophy* 21 (2004):144.

Bilbo Baggins, a central character in J.R.R Tolkien's *The Hobbit*, is not described as disabled in the original text but the tag "Deaf Bilbo" presents an alternative narrative. The specificity of the tagging structure also allows readers and writers control over what kinds of stories they engage with. The subjective tagging strategies found in *Archive of Our Own* differ from the objective categorization of *TV Tropes* and showcase how the goals of the archive create different organizational strategies.

Unruly Bodies in Official Archives: The Medical Model of Disability

Archives store and structure information through practices of cataloging.[19] As such they contain the assumptions of the people or institutions who create them. Archives are not uniform nor are they always intentionally created, but regardless of intentionality, every archival disability narrative both informs and is informed by the cultural understanding of disability.[20] Within archives, disability is categorized by its relationship to ability. Systemic biases permeate the categorization at every level, relating disability to additional concepts like laziness, ill-health, unintelligence, and the grotesque.[21]

Disability is an unsettling category in the archive because of the way that it challenges the stable nature of the 'able-body'. Its inclusion forces nondisabled individuals to contend with the existence and lived realities of disabled people. Margrit Shildrick is an interdisciplinary scholar of disability who situates it in relation to capitalism because of the importance of work in defining worth. Capitalism's usefulness is based on control over one's body and the ability to perform independent work. Shildrick states that capitalism sees "any compromise of control over

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[19] Linda Tuhiwai-Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies, 2nd Edition*, (Dunedin: Otago University Press, 2012), 58.
[20] Tuhiwai-Smith, *Decolonizing*, 58.
[21] Michael Foucault, *Archaeology of Knowledge and the Discourse on Language*, translated by A.M Sheridan Smith, (New York: Pantheon Books, 1971), 6.

one's own body, any indication of interdependency and connectivity, or of corporeal instability, are the occasion—for the normative majority—of a deep-seated anxiety that devalues difference."[22] The pressure to contain and structure disability within an 'us versus them' dichotomy is heightened because the very existence of disability disrupts western ideals of individualism. A key example of this trend can be found in Thomson's work on the circus freak show. Through the fantastical nature of the freak show, the congenitally disabled were exhibited as monsters.[23] Assigned otherness, these disabled people were read in opposition to the presumably nondisabled audience in attendance. She writes, "Indeed, extraordinary bodies have been so compelling—so valuable—as *bodies* throughout human history that whether they were alive or dead had little consequence."[24] Garland expresses the dehumanization of disabled people under capitalism where their value was calculated to the extent that it could be marketed The worries mapped on to disability partially explain the rise of the medical model. The medical model views disability as illness that must be cured. The mythical cure is championed while practical changes to environmental barriers or bigoted social attitudes are dismissed as irrelevant. The preoccupation with a cure is shown clearly in the World Health Organization which states that disability is an umbrella term covering impairments, activity limitations, and participation restrictions.[25] U.S. disability law prizes medical knowledge of disability over the lived realities of disabled people.

How to write proudly about a label that I've never really claimed? I was born three months early, on January 16th, 1991 after my mother's sudden labor. I spent the next three months in the hospital. When I was brought home, my parents were told that I might never walk, speak or lead a normal life. As I was growing up, I was told and told myself that disability was just a thread of who I was, not a limiting factor. When I was 9, I underwent surgery to lengthen the tendons and

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[22] Margrit Shildrick, *Dangerous Discourses of Disability, Subjectivity and Sexuality* (New York: Basingstoke, 2009), 1–2.
[23] Garland-Thomson, *Extraordinary Bodies*, 56.
[24] Ibid, 57.
[25] "Disabilities" *The World Health Organization*, 2016.

ligaments in my ankles, hamstrings, and hips. After my recovery and rehabilitation, I left behind my walker for good. Even now, thinking about using one again makes me afraid. It feels like a step backwards. I was a willing participant in the medicalizing of my body. I was astonished that the label 'disabled' could be a source of pride. This realization forced me to confront my own internalized ableism.

Theories of Disability in Fandom: *TV Tropes* and "L is For Dyslexia"

The facts-based structure of TV Tropes mirrors the form of an encyclopedia but its open-source content challenges traditional understandings of disability *TV Tropes* is a database of popular culture and a guide to the shorthand of narrative and its conventions. The site's administrators follow four clear goals to maintain a broader approach to narrative conventions.

1. The wiki is about tropes used to tell stories.
2. We will be accessible and fun to read.
3. The wiki is for reaching the reader.
4. In order to be accessible, we cannot be locked into a specific fandom's viewpoint.[26]

The medical model treats each form of impairment separately and does not support disability as a broader category of identity. This separation is also found in *TV Tropes* but crucially, it differs from a medical database in three ways. The site examines clichés and tropes involving disability as a reflection of the creator's understanding of disability. The trope "Hollywood Autism" does not name autism as a medical condition but how autism is portrayed in media.[27] The archive's emphasis on representation is relates directly to Thomson's concerns about disability as a cultural product.[28] *TV Tropes* scoffs at the objective and encyclopedic sources that it models itself on. Unlike a medical database, it is an open source project which privileges many voices,

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[26] "The Goals of TV Tropes" *TV Tropes*, accessed 4 July, 2018.
[27] "Hollywood Autism" *TV Tropes*, accessed 28 February, 2018.
http://tvtropes.org/pmwiki/pmwiki.php/Main/HollywoodAutism.
[28] Garland-Thomson, *Extraordinary Bodies*, 5.

rather than a singular school of thought. These site-wide trends carry over into the way that narrative devices pertaining to disability are discussed on the archive.

TV Tropes provides a forum for users to examine how they tell stories across narrative types, cultures, and historical periods.[29] In structuring the site as a catalogue of tropes and narrative devices, *TV Tropes* brings aspects of critical engagement with narrative to a mass audience. Any project of categorization requires a position that is outside its subject, allowing for an 'accurate' study. In structuring the website as an online encyclopedia that straddles the line between formality and informality it problematizes the 'reliability' of categorization by showing how it is done.

As it is meant to work as an informational resource, readability and accessibility are at the forefront of the archive's design. In practice, this means that once a user has decided that a particular trope should be used to explain a given situation, opportunities to change the meaning of the trope are limited. This would seem to restrict debate but when the structure is examined further, multiple readings of the same trope abound. A discussion of artificial limbs presents variations in the trope from realistic to fantastic, often within the same source text. Toph Beifong is a main character in the children's animated series *Avatar: the Last Airbender*. Widely considered a strong fighter across fandom several tropes she is listed under discuss her "bad-ass" qualities. In listing her as both a "Little Miss Badass" and a "Disabled Badass", the trope is able to critique how sexist and ableist structures minimize her physical prowess. Additionally, listing Toph Beifong under the label "Disability Superpower" makes her disability integral to her powers rather than separate.

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[29] "The Goals of TV Tropes" *TV Tropes*, accessed 31 March, 2016.

TV Tropes catalogues itself and narratives and the site itself with the same tropes. This allows user to scrutinize form and content. This allows the user to examine the principles and bias that organize supposedly natural distinctions such as race, gender and ability. *TV Tropes* encourages its users to limit description or analysis of a narrative. The goal is objectivity with a restriction to include "just the facts ma'am" as mentioned in the their guiding principles.[30] The trope "just the facts ma'am" is presented in the administrative section as a hyperlink to that trope in fiction. This shows that the site's design is inseparable from the way that it analyzes media.[31] his makes it difficult to separate the supposedly factual nature of the archive from cultural patterns that prize objectivity. *TV Tropes* teaches critical reading strategies, the same ones that I use to question the existence of separate categories for disability and injury.

The use of fact-based description appears to support objective understandings of disability despite the site's use of humor and meta-relations between form and content. The open-source nature of the project provides multiple narratives that prioritize personal and lived experience. This is best illustrated through the way that the learning impairment dyslexia is described on *TV Tropes*.

In the introduction to the trope "L is for Dyslexia" users talk back to the depiction of dyslexia and related impairments.

> Actually, "dyslexia" and the related condition "dysmetria" describe a wide range of cognitive problems, including things such as difficulty understanding directions, reading maps, and/or doing logical puzzles.
> In comedy, it's usually portrayed as jumbled, hilariously misspelled words (see the trope picture), sometimes used in order to spell rude words --if spelling something incorrectly a dyslexic wouldn't necessarily form recognizable words at all. In drama and televised series, it's sometimes the focus of a Very Special Episode.[32]

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[30] "Adminstrivia" *TV Tropes*, accessed 31 March, 2016.
http://tvtropes.org/pmwiki/pmwiki.php/Administrivia/TVTropesCustoms.
[31] "Adminstrivia" *TV Tropes.*
[32] "L is for Dyslexia" *TV Tropes*, accessed 31 March 2016,
http://tvtropes.org/pmwiki/pmwiki.php/Main/LIsForDyslexia.

The introduction presents the authors as knowledgeable about the topic of this disability. They use medical definitions like dysmetria, and contradict the presentation in media. When the anonymous users take issue with how dyslexia is presented in comedic works. Despite the playful title the authors critique the idea that learning disabilities are a source of comedy.

TV Tropes tries to link pages together through hyperlinks wherever possible to draw out patterns and allow for commentary. The trope linked to at the end of the introduction, "Very Special Episode" refers to the way that social issues in television such as disability are dealt with once and then are not brought up again.[33] In the context of disability, this is a reflection of the tokenization and disposability of disabled issues. Thus in creating this link, the author implicitly critiques the treatment of dyslexia through the structure of the archive.

In the "real life" section users list famous dyslexic performers and public figures such as comedian Eddie Izzard or King Carl XVI Gustaf of Sweden to provide positive role models. This list of real-life figures serves as an entry point to a related page, "Dyslexia: Useful Notes". Presented as an explainer to non-dyslexic readers, this page allows visitors to the site to have wide ranging discussions about the experience of being dyslexic. One anonymous user writes: "Never assume that people (online or off) who claim to be dyslexic are just too damned lazy to read or write properly and are trying to garner sympathy".[34] This reasserts the harm that disbelieving a person's disability causes. While medical knowledge frames the discussion, it does not police it. The use of the introduction and the "Useful Notes: Dyslexia" to question the way that this lived experience is presented in narratives is also related to Goodman's thesis about

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[33] "Very Special Episode" *TV Tropes*, accessed 31 March 2016,
http://tvtropes.org/pmwiki/pmwiki.php/Main/VerySpecialEpisode.
[34] "Useful Notes/ Dyslexia," *TV Tropes*, accessed 28 October 2016,
http://tvtropes.org/pmwiki/pmwiki.php/UsefulNotes/Dyslexia.

fandom as critique.[35] *TV Tropes* allows anyone to edit and create content and resists the

traditional formality of standard encyclopaedias. The inclusion of the community in the editing

process makes space for lived experience within an 'objective' setting. The communal nature of

this engagement also shows that fandom encompasses a wide range of activities and varied forms

of engagement. However, *TV Tropes'* accessibility can lead to very different conceptions of

narrative and character. While the ability to provide multiple readings is freeing for the user it

can also be a source of contention particularly with topics that are already fraught. The promises

and problems of *TV Tropes* openness' are negotiated through its engagement with disability and

pity.

Theories of Disability in Fandom: *TV Tropes* and the Problem of Pity

Prior to the disability rights movement, pity, mixed with discomfort was a common

response to the disabled, non-normative body.[36] *TV Tropes* engages with this history to chart

how this linkage is expressed and how it could be changed. Two responses to disability and pity

are expressed in "Wheel-Chair Woobie" and "Inspirationally Disabled". A "woobie" is a

fandom-specific term that designates a character who is designed to be cute through their

eliciting of pity in the audience. Disability remains so linked to sympathy and pity, that in the

introduction to the trope, "Wheelchair Woobie" the author states that visible disability functions

to "instantly mark" a character as unfortunate.[37] This notion of disability deriving from non-

disabled people's perceptions is a key claim of the social model of disability. The Union of the

Physically Impaired Against Segregation was an essential service provider and activist

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[35] Goodman, "Disappointing Fans", 666.
[36] Swain and French, "Toward an Affirmation Model", 569.
[37] "Wheelchair Woobie" *TV Tropes*, accessed 31 March 2016,
http://tvtropes.org/pmwiki/pmwiki.php/Main/WheelchairWoobie.

organization during this time and their pamphlet "Fundamentals of Disability" remains central to

disability studies. The collective writes, "Disability is something imposed on top of our

impairments, by the way we are unnecessarily isolated and excluded from full participation in

society. Disabled people are therefore an oppressed group in society"[38] In this world view pity is

what 'disables' individuals. The social model explicitly contests the foundations of the medical

model: the prejudiced attitudes of others are the *real* limiting factors for people with

impairments.[39] The resulting sense of community has helped to limit the social isolation that still

faces disabled people.

In the introduction to "Inspirationally Disabled/Disadvantaged" the moderators

emphasize the perceived nature of limitation, stating, "This trope is based in opinion".[40]

Therefore the website recognizes the cultural construction of the linkage between disability and

pity as something that can be changed through representations of disabled people that emphasize

the possibility of contentment. The relationship of disability and pity is clearly presented as

negative.[41]

> All [three variations of the trope] are seen as exploitative, with disabled characters often
> being little more than gimmicks to tug the heartstrings of able-bodied and able-minded
> viewers and make them feel "inspired" without actually challenging them to *do* anything
> about the systems that make life so difficult for the disabled in the first place.[42]

In the trope "Inspirationally Disabled/Disadvantaged", disability limits opportunities because of

the way that it is perceived by others in three different ways. In the first form, a disabled person

is thought of as extraordinary for doing ordinary activities. This is often played for comedy,

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[38] Union for the Physically Impaired Against Segregation, *Fundamentals of Disability*, 1976.
[39] Lorella Terzi, "The Social Model of Disability: A Philosophical Critique," *Journal of Applied Philosophy* 21 (2004):144.
[40] "Wheelchair Woobie" *TV Tropes*.
[41] "Inspirationally Disabled/Disadvantaged" *TV Tropes*, accessed 31 March 2016, http://tvtropes.org/pmwiki/pmwiki.php/Main/InspirationallyDisadvantaged
[42] "Inspirationally Disabled/Disadvantaged" *TV Tropes*.

pointing out unequal standards. However, dramatic portrayals of this trope remind us that disabled-accomplishment-as-extraordinary remains current.

The second form states that extraordinary actions are the only way to overcome disability. While the first variation states any accomplishment as extraordinary, the second version implies that only heroic achievement can make up for an individual's non-normative embodiment. The narrative of the heroic disabled figure is used to shame disabled people. The effects of this shame are often expressed through the often fraught relationship that disabled individuals have to 'heroic' disabled figures, commonly referred to as "super-crips".[43] Sally Chivers uses the figure of Terry Fox, a Canadian icon, and amputee, to discuss the status of the "super-crip". She states that, "Super-crip representation, while inspiring, causes harm to circulating conceptions of lived disability in that it reinforces the idea that disabled people can only achieve despite their differences and also in that it sets an unreasonably high standard for usual activity on the part of disabled people".[44] Chivers makes clear the way that the inspiring qualities that Terry Fox represents can be misused in ways that harm the disabled community that he was a part of.

The third variation on the inspirational role of disabled people is moral rather than physical. This take argues that person's disabled status makes them exceptionally pure, innocent, and moral. Like the second form of the trope, this seemingly grants disabled people special power. While evoking a holy level of purity, this often comes at the expense of agency and self-determination. The association with innocence is partly responsible for paternalistic structures that limit disabled people's ability to control their own lives and bodies. The trope "Inspirationally Disabled" recognizes the cultural linkage between disability and pity, but refuses

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[43] Sally Chivers, "Ordinary People: Reading the TransCanadian Terry Fox," *Canadian Literature* 202 (2009): 82.
[44] Ibid, 82.

the ableism that underlies it. *TV Tropes* lists the inspirationally disabled figure as a knowable

category but challenges its foundations by showing how it harms disabled people. In the

discussion pages, the forum-members engage with how to apply this trope in real-life examples.

A key concern for forum-members was maintaining a boundary between validating success and

not demanding disabled exceptionalism, something that was much more difficult to evaluate

within users' self-reported experience. Users decided to not discuss the "Inspirationally

Disabled/Disadvantaged" trope in real life to avoid misinterpreting another's experience. The

users' recognition of the complications inherent to applying these tropes on real life validate the

importance of self-definition and context in describing the relationship between disability and

pity. In refusing to name other people's experience the archive side-steps the institutional and

objective gaze of the encyclopedia for good. However, in not discussing how this trope is

expressed in reality it removes the urgency for change that the introduction suggests.

     TV Tropes' critique of mainstream narratives about disabled people is based on wider

theoretical strategies used in rights movement discourses. The marginalization of disabled people

was first challenged by disabled activists using the social model.[45] Allison Kafer, is an

intersectional disability scholar who situates disability in relationship to other identities. She

argues that disability rights often uses a single lens that ignores race, class, gender, and

sexuality.[46] Kafer argues that this isolates disability from other communities and ignores how

these other categories shape experience. *Archive of Our Own* because of its open tagging

structure allows users to easily combine concepts. The communal discourse and debates around

the complicated relationship between disability and pity must be placed in the context of the

larger disability rights movement.

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[45] Kafer, Alison, *Feminist, Queer, Crip*, (Bloomington, Indiana, 2013), 2.
[46] Kafer, *Feminist, Queer, Crip*, 12.

Theories of Disability in Fandom: *Archive of Our Own*

Archive of Our Own's tagging structure allows users to express authorial intent. It is a stakeholder for fan practices as transformative, valuable, and enjoyable.[47] Their use of open-source code, volunteer labour and community sourced content all stems from wider communal practices in fandom.[48] Like most fan fiction archives, the *Archive of Our Own* uses standard tags which refer to character, pairing fandom as well as statistics to sort works of fan fiction.[49] What differentiates the *Archive of Our Own* from other archives is the ability to search by non-standard or "free-form" tags.[50] These can include warnings, clarifications, pleas for trust, and the writer's feelings about the story. Recent scholarship in fandom studies has posited author's notes as an assertion of authorial agency.[51] "Free-form" tags in the *Archive of Our Own* function in a similar fashion to author's notes because they often contain similar information.[52] Tags are seen as integral to the meaning of a given fan-work which helps to explain the *Archive of Our Own* 's position that tags are almost unalterable. Policy states that: *We do not change the tags on a user's work unless they directly violate the Terms of Service, and then only with specific instruction from the Abuse committee.*"[53] Thus tags describe a themes or events in a given fan-text. The combination of structured and "free-form" tags highlights the role that archival practices have in knowledge creation on a general and specific level.

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[47] Ibid, 543.

[48] Casey Fiesler, Shannon Morrison and Amy S. Bruckman, "An Archive of Their Own: A Case-Study of Feminist HCI and Values in Design" in *Proceedings of the CHI Conference on Human Factors in Computing Systems*, *San Jose, California, May 7-12*, 2574-2584, New York: AMC New York.

[49] "Archive FAQ > Tags" *Organization for Transformative Works*, accessed 31 March 2016, http://archiveofourown.org/faq/tags?language_id=en#whatisatag.

[50] "Archive FAQ > Tags" *Organization for Transformative Works.*

[51] Alexandra Herzog, "But this is my story and this is how I wanted to write it": Author's Notes as a fannish claim to power in fan fiction writing", *Journal of Transformative Works and Cultures* (11:2) paragraph 1.

[52] "Archive FAQ", *Organization for Transformative Works.*

[53] "Wrangling Guidelines > Intro and General Concepts" *Organization for Transformation Works*, accessed 31 March 2016, http://archiveofourown.org/wrangling_guidelines/2.

Tags used in the *Archive of Our Own* exist on a continuum that moves from the general to the specific which creates relationships between concepts. All tags have a 'parent', which collects all the variants of that tag. In the case of 'free-form' tags the parent tag can contain numerous synonyms and sub tags which are related to the 'parent' tag. Thus, when one clicks on the parent tag "Disability", approximately thirty other variants of the word disability, sometimes misspelled, show up. The inclusion of the misspelled tags is another reminder of the archive's policy of not altering tags. Issues of identity, however, require sensitivity to the implications of synonyms. Thus, when dealing with disability issues tag wranglers are careful to avoid words that might harm such as "lame" or "cripple".[54]

The other 117 sub-tags related to disability are more specific. Common tags focus on type of impairment, character, or a combination of the two such as the tag "Deaf Dean", referring to Dean Winchester, a popular nondisabled character on the long running TV show, *Supernatural*. While more tags are present for physical impairments, learning disabilities, and invisible disabilities are also mentioned.[55] Other free-form tags that deal with disability are, "learning to live with disability"; "child with disability" and "disability feels" and create a more specific experience of embodiment.[56] These free-form tags are part of a reader's engagement with a work of fan fiction but are often unsorted. This means that they do not always appear as a searchable option. While affective responses are valued by the *Archive of Our Own*, logistical problems limit engagement with these tags. This leads to a focus on character and impairment rather than subjective responses of an author towards disability. The focus on impairment is

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[54] "Wrangling Guidelines> Wrangling Guidelines - Additional Tags (Freeforms)" *Organization for Transformative Works*, date accessed, 6 April 2016.
[55] "Tag Search-Disability" date accessed 6 April 2016,
http://archiveofourown.org/tags/search?utf8=✓&query%5Bname%5D=disability&query%5Btype%5D=
[56] Ibid.

value neutral. While this can provide a focused examination of disability it can also be used as superficial detail to bring characters together.[57] The freedom of the author to use tags for a variety of purposes and approaches shows the limit of archival strategies to get at the nature of representation. Nevertheless, though there is a seemingly limitless archiving structure, the system of tags and warnings remains connected with broader, more generalized theoretical concerns.

The clearest way that users engage with disability theory is through their use of warnings about disability. While there is no rule that authors should warn for concepts and narratives that might cause emotional harm, many do. When I searched for the tag "disability" on the *Archive of Our Own*, only one out of over a hundred tags considered disability to be something that might cause distress. By contrast, ableism was frequently connected to warnings and apologies on the part of the author. In acknowledging the way that ableism is harmful both in fiction and real-life, users connect fictional and real-life ableism. The politics of 'ableism' versus 'disability' on the *Archive of Our Own* also shows the futility of separating theory from the 'every day' because of the activist position taken by many of these authors. Merging the personal, political, and the pleasurable these stories provide models for readers who may not have access to a wider disabled community.

This essay has left me ambivalent about the boundaries between disability and injury in in my personal life, fan, and theoretical spaces. In many ways, I resist the relation of disability and injury because of the way that it seems to re-medicalize and re-inscribe the language of deficit. Although I was born with a brain injury that caused my disability, I am not suffering with an injury. Yet at the same time I can see that the artificial maintenance of these boundaries limits the potential for community building to challenge institutional ableism and the 'ideal' body. I want these experiences to be read discretely to allow for safe spaces for injured and disabled people; yet to combine in ways that showcase the intersectional nature of these identities. I am encouraged by the way that this paradigm is more and more present in spaces that are assumed to be outside academic discourse such as social media and fan spaces.

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[57] Lothian, "Archival Anarchies", 551.

Reclaiming and Creating Narratives: Disability and Intersectionality

The connections between the *Archive of Our Own* and the social model have wider implications than the linkage of theory and lived experience. The social model also structures the relationship between disability and injury. Disability and injury often have a causal relationship on the *Archive of Our Own* and on television. The recent Netflix drama *One Day At A Time* shows how veteran Penelope Alvarez's shoulder injury and resulting chronic pain are linked. The show further reaffirms this linkage through Alvarez's management of depression and anxiety that stem from her service. Notably both visible and invisible disabilities are linked in this way. Within the *Archive of Our Own*, this is reflected in the synonymous tagging system. "Permanent Injury" is the only filterable tag that is considered to have the same meaning as disability.[58] This suggests that no matter when disability occurs, it is permanent. In creating this link between injury and disability, injury remains a medical issue, while disability can be thought of in terms of social discrimination and barriers to be resisted.[59] Many recent theorists have argued that this re-empowers medical, legal and cultural institutions to maintain the ideology of deficit and limitation.[60] *Archive of Our Own*'s links to the social model are a potential limitation rather than a source of strength in this instance.

This causal linkage is partially challenged by *TV Tropes* as injury and disability are treated as discrete tropes. The three tropes that appear on indexes for both disability and injury are, "An Arm and a Leg"[61] "Career Ending Injury"[62] and "Crippling the Competition".[63]

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[58] "Disability" *AO3*, date accessed, 6 April, 2016, http://archiveofourown.org/tags/Disability
[59] Donoghue, 201.
[60] Terzi, 144.
[61] "An Arm and a Leg" *TV Tropes*, date accessed, 6 April, 2016,
http://tvtropes.org/pmwiki/pmwiki.php/Main/AnArmAndALeg
[62] "Career Ending Injury" *TV Tropes*, date accessed, 6 April 2016,
http://tvtropes.org/pmwiki/pmwiki.php/Main/CareerEndingInjury
[63] "Crippling the Competition" *TV Tropes*, date accessed, 6 April 2016,
http://tvtropes.org/pmwiki/pmwiki.php/Main/CripplingTheCompetition

Similarly to *Archive of Our Own* these tropes show the long-term, and often permanent, consequences of injury. However, the structure of *TV Tropes* presents the circumstances of injury and the effects of disability separately. One major difference is the possibility of "cure" as *TV Tropes* does present disability something that can be healed.[64] Unfortunately, the possibility of a cure is part of the narrative framework around disability which often requires disabled people to be fixed before they can be truly happy.[65] This is emblematic of *TV Tropes* presentation of tropes as devices, rather than something that the site or users endorse. Nevertheless, the consequences of these tropes are not discussed.

The social model of disability is critiqued for ignoring the intersectional nature of identity by scholars like Kafer.[66] Notably, Kafer argues that the social model is unable to account for a variety disabled experiences because it discounts the reality of impairment.[67] Her critiques are shared by Tom Shakespeare who is deeply versed in the British academic debate that the social model is part of. He argues that despite the original intentions of the Union of the Physical Impaired Against Segregation and their social model, has created a split between disability and impairment that needs to be bridged.[68] In reclaiming the embodied experience of disability, these scholars question the distinctions that I have made in my personal life between my body and my work. This gap allows for ableism to remain, because it posited that disability is a stable category that differs in kind, rather than degree, from the normal. If the embodied experience of

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[64] "Throwing Off The Disability", *TV Tropes*, date accessed, 6 April 2016,
http://tvtropes.org/pmwiki/pmwiki.php/Main/ThrowingOffTheDisability
[65] Amanda Joyal, "From Victorian Literature to the Romance Novel: Disability and the Courtship Plot" (M.A, University of Wyoming, 2012), 37.
[66] Ibid, 145.
[67] Kafer, *Feminist, Queer, Crip,* 7.
[68] Tom Shakespeare, "The Social Model of Disability: An Outdated Ideology," in *Exploring Theories and Expanding Methodologies: Where We Are Is Where We Need to Go* (Amsterdam: New York, 2001), 22.

'impairment,' regardless of duration, is connected to larger practices of ableism, there is a possibility of coalition building that can decenter nondisabled embodiment as natural.

A practical expression of the way that fandom structures can be used to do the work of decentering ableism is found in the tagging structure. Allowing multiple tags that might deal with gender, sexuality, disability, and class reifies the intersectional and cultural turn taken by theorists like Kafer, Thomson, and Shildrick. Additionally, the ability to create tags allows for re-interpretations of the canonically able body in ways that are similar to the practice of finding or creating queer narratives in fandom. The politics of the *Archive of Our Own*'s tagging system and wider structure provide a practical example of intersectional disabled identities. The ability to create narrative and connections through tags do allow for the possibility of intersectionality and instability in the category of the nondisabled body.

A limitation of my approach to the archive as a grander narrative is that I cannot discuss how this intersectional identity functions at the level of the individual work. Nor can I discuss potential limits within fandom spaces, as these narratives are too particular. Despite this, I have demonstrated the interlocking nature of different archives and the ways that they relate to concepts that are considered 'outside' their purview. Subjects move through these personal, sub-cultural, and institutional spaces without regard to arbitrary borders. The connectivity of these sites and shared elements of construction problematize arbitrary distinctions between the personal, political, and the theoretical. Offering possibilities of resistance that have been ignored by official channels, the process of breaking down these walls allows for a wider investigation of what it means to be an embodied subject. Fandom offers a productive opportunity for change in the multifaceted and intersectional world of identity politics.

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