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“I’m also prepared to not find me. It’s great when I do, but it doesn’t hurt if I don’t”: crip time and anticipatory erasure for disabled archival users

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Abstract

Using data collected through semi-structured interviews with disabled archival users, this article foregrounds disabled people’s relationships with time, specifically to pasts and representations thereof in archival material. It illustrates the ways in which disabled people use their knowledge of how disability is understood—in archives and in society—to anticipate their erasure in archival material. First, focusing on the *past*, this data illustrates the prevalence of disability stereotypes, tropes, and limited perspectives within the records that document disabled people. Second, in witnessing such representations (or lack thereof), disabled researchers described how they are affectively impacted in the *present moment*: witnessing the violence of the past is emotionally difficult for many disabled people researching their histories. Third, using past experiences of archival erasure, interviewees described coming to expect and anticipate *future* absences—anticipation as an affective mode helped them prepare to encounter forms of erasure, to protect themselves against possible harms, and to hope for something different, all of which reflects their experiences of how disability is understood in society. This data reflect the way anticipation is a central facet of *crip time*—the multiple ways that disabled people experience time, pace, and temporal moments—to show how disabled people feel through multiple temporal landscapes and approach historical and archival representation.

Keywords Disability · Disabled users · Temporality · Anticipation · Erasure · Affect · Representation

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Introduction

Disabled people have unique relationships with time. Our bodyminds each move through the world in particular ways: we may take longer to get somewhere, need to plan ahead, have time waiting—for diagnosis, for access or accommodations—or need to, as Moya Bailey illustrates, “move at the speed of trust” (2021). Ellen Samuels tells us how, “Disability and illness have the power to extract us from linear, progressive time with its normative life stages and cast us into a wormhole of backward and forward acceleration, jerky stops and starts, tedious intervals and abrupt endings” (2017). And that nonlinear, folded time—*crip time*—can connect past(s) to present(s) to future(s) in ways specific to disabled bodyminds. Carolyn Lazard writes about the temporal vacillation of managing pain and energy, “I’m learning to navigate this disease, anticipating flares before they spiral out of control. I try to remain in the present. My next flare may come in six days, six weeks, six months, six years—or never” (Lazard n.d.). To *anticipate*, as Lazard describes, is informed by past experiences of capacity and pain, which may allow them to imagine possibilities, conserve energy, and plan, thus allowing pasts to inform possible future moments.

Considering the ways that disabled people move through, reshape, and merge temporal moments, what then might crip temporalities look like within archives, where histories are represented? Alison Kafer, as part of *Crip Temporalities in Pandemic Times*, the plenary panel for the 2021 Society of Disability Studies posits, “What is the crip time of remembering? Or the temporality of preparing to remember? How does one take steps now to get ready for the future moment when one will delve into the past?” (2021). Her questions foreground not only the temporalities that are folded into planning, preparing, and anticipating future moments, but also the ways in which one might plan for a time to confront the past, and I am drawn to think about how these questions reverberate within archival landscapes.

This article considers disabled people’s relationships with time, specifically to pasts and representations thereof in archival material. It investigates the complexity of representation and addresses the ways disabled communities are impacted by and relate to their representation in archives. Using data collected through semi-structured interviews with disabled archival users, this article outlines three themes that emerged around the affective impacts of archives on disabled people, each illuminating experiences of time. First, focusing on the *past*, this data illustrates the prevalence of disability stereotypes, tropes, and limited perspectives within the records that document disabled people. Interviewees described their experiences of witnessing limited representations of the past in records. Second, in witnessing such representations (or lack thereof), disabled researchers described how they are affectively impacted in the *present moment*: witnessing the violence of the past is emotionally difficult for many disabled people researching their histories. They described the difficulty in witnessing the lack of complex representation as well as the complete absence of representation around disability in archives. Third, using past experiences of archival erasure, interviewees described coming to expect and anticipate *future* absences—anticipation as an affective mode helped them prepare to encounter forms of erasure, to protect themselves against possible harms, and to hope for something different, all of which reflects their experiences of how disability is understood in society. While witnessing the violence against disabled people represented in records, in combination with each researchers' past experiences—of ableism and of social and archival erasure—interviewees described how anticipation allows them to prepare for, guard themselves, and hope for different futures of archival research.

Literature review: representation, erasure and affect

Representations of disability

Archives and the materials they contain have the power to influence how we understand history, others, and ourselves. Many scholars in the field of disability studies have used records to illuminate pieces of disability history by exploring how disabled people have been historically documented for their deviance from "the norm" as well as addressing the scarcity of records (or difficulty in finding records) around disability. Susan Schweik, for instance, uses archival records to examine late nineteenth and early twentieth century legislation called "the Ugly Laws" (Schweik 2010). Under these laws, people found "unsightly" were often policed, arrested, and institutionalized, which created a plethora of arrest records, asylum, and medical documentation, as well as newspaper articles that reinforced the idea that disability is something to be feared, contained, and eliminated. Historian Kim Nielsen similarly uses records such as sterilization reports, "advertisements for runaway [disabled] slaves," asylum documentation, and American colony records to trace how concepts of disability—and the historic oppression of disabled people—have shaped contemporary legislation, attitudes, and experiences in the United States (Nielsen 2013, p. 59). These examples demonstrate the ways in which records produced around disability can create, represent, and/or reinforce harmful stereotypes around disability.

While not the only documents on disability, these types of historical records are often produced by those in power, and the voices of those whose lives were affected by such representations are often missing from records. Susan Burch identifies the multiple levels of erasure through the institutionalization of Native people, what she defines as "transinstitutionalization—the process of moving individuals from one variety of institution to another—as part of sustained containment, surveillance, and slow erasure" (Burch 2021, p. 16). Susan Wendell tells us that "The lack of realistic cultural representation of experiences of disability not only contributes to the 'Otherness' of people with disabilities by encouraging the assumption that their lives are inconceivable to non-disabled people but also increases non-disabled people's fear of disability by suppressing knowledge of how people live with disabilities" (1996). Not only has disability had a fraught relationship with archives and records, but such records have the potential to maintain harmful rhetorics that continue to impact disabled people's lives today.

Anticipation and crip time

Scholars within disability studies have illustrated multiple facets of *crip time* as it confronts, conflicts with, expands, and reimagines normative progressions of time. In their introduction to the special issue, *Crip Temporalities*, Ellen Samuels and Elizabeth Freeman describe the ways disabled bodyminds "cannot move through time along the smooth rails of normative life stages but are always being asked, 'Will you ever work again? Will you ever walk again? Will you ever get better?' As disabled people, we knew that medicine, too, conceives disability and illness in linear temporal terms, such as *prognosis*, *remission*, *recurrence*, *chronic*, and/or *terminal*" (Samuels and Freeman 2021). So, Alison Kafer writes "rather than bend disabled bodies and minds to meet the clock, crip time bends the clock to meet disabled bodies and minds" (Kafer 2013, p. 27). Samuels elaborates, "sometimes we just mean that we're late all the time—maybe because we need more sleep than nondisabled people, maybe because the accessible gate in the train station was locked. But other times, when we talk about crip time, we mean something more beautiful and forgiving" (Samuels 2017). Such writing on crip time illustrates the ways in which disabled bodyminds move within, meet, resist, and create unique temporalities.

Samuels identifies how crip time can mean time off, time writing, time sick and in bed, time spent at doctor visits, and how "*Crip time is time travel*" (Samuels 2017, author's emphasis). Along these lines, Robert McRuer, in his book *Crip Times,* "figures crip futures, often by bearing witness to crip pasts that are vanishing" (McRuer 2018, p. 230). In other words, crip time crosses, connects, and vacillates between pasts, presents, and futures.

And this vacillation can include anticipation—scheduling attendants, planning access needs, and, importantly, planning futures to come through experiences of the past. Anticipation as an affective state connects multiple temporalities, as Vincanne Adams, Michelle Murphy, and Adele E. Clarke characterize, it "fram[es] the life yet to come and the life that precedes the present as the unavoidable template for producing the future" (Adams et al 2009, p. 251). Anticipation, they note, has many dimensions—such as uncertainty, responsibility, preparedness, and hopefulness—and "enable[s] the production of possible futures that are *lived and felt* as inevitable in the present, rendering hope and fear as important political vectors" (2009, p. 248). Importantly, past experiences of harm and trauma can inform how one prepares or protects themselves from future harm.

Disabled people also use anticipation as a way to "continually keep uncertainty on the table" (Adams et al. 2009, p. 250). For example, Kafer illustrates, "For those who live with chronic fatigue or pain, for example, the present moment must often be measured against the moment to come: if I go to this talk now, I will be too tired for that class later; if I want to make that show tomorrow night, I need to stay home today" (Kafer 2013, p. 39). Drawing on previous experiences, disabled and chronically ill people plan futures based on their knowledge of their bodyminds of the past, allowing for them to be prepared yet also anticipating that things may not go as planned.

Anticipation and archives

Archives create many temporal ties—through connecting pasts, presents, and futures, records can bridge, disrupt, and explode time. Michelle Caswell, in her book *Urgent Archives*, critiques the normative, linear temporal expectations of archives. She defines *chronoautonomy*, how "minoritized communities construct their own archival temporalities in opposition (or in indifference) to dominant Western archival theory and practice," as well as outlines how archives, "are neither about the safety of the past nor the distance of the future, but about enacting political change right now" (2021, p. 95). Archives and the narratives of time they construct can assume, reinforce, or reimagine understandings of the past, the present, and the future.

In regards to anticipation, archivists have long been described as serving "the historian of the future" (Jenkinson 1937), planning for, anticipating, a future for records and their uses (for example Brothman 2001; Nesmith 2002; Schwartz and Cook 2002). Ciaran Trace notes how records can be created "in anticipation of the uses to which they may be put," giving examples of records and record keeping in law enforcement that show how "record production is inherently self-interested," and anticipates an adversarial audience (Trace 2002). Drawing attention to the inevitable decision-making around what is chosen to be kept in an archives, Terry Cook places a critical lens around "predicting all the possible future uses, for all these new kinds of users and researchers" (Cook 2011, p. 179). Yet, he notes, while co-creating archives and their futures, archivists can collaborate with communities to determine what is deemed "valuable" for the future.

Archival users, as well, come to anticipate their relations with records and with history. Heather Love, thinking through queer temporalities and queer history's pain, describes an affective orientation to history, where, "Contemporary queers find ourselves in the odd situation of 'looking forward' while we are 'feeling backward'" (Love 2009, p. 27). Love looks to "contradictory feelings: pride and shame, anticipation and regret, hope and despair," to think through the connections between contemporary queerness and queer historical subjects, some of which "do not want to be found" (Love 2009, p. 33). Love's work of connecting temporal moments highlights the complexity of looking to the past, how anticipation is folded into sometimes painful, joyful, or hopeful moments of connection to queer histories. Building on Love's *feeling backwards* as well as Jasbir Puar's *anticipatory temporality*—"a modality that seeks to catch a small hold of many futures, to invite futurity even as it refuses to script it" (Puar 2007)—Jamie A. Lee remarks on archival temporalities of *(un)becoming*. Through addressing "the archival body as a collection of *stories so far*," Lee works through their future possibilities, feelings, and connections. Describing a moment of witnessing records in the Transgender Archives, Lee remarks, "To me, [her] letters *feel* understanding and, in my reading of them, I linger. Anticipate. Expect" (Lee 2016, p. 45, author's emphasis). For some archival users, as these works show, connecting to history through archives is not only an emotional experience, but also is one of anticipating—drawing on pasts to imagine what an archive might hold.

Archival absences, erasure, and affect

While disabled communities have unique histories of oppression and documentation—contingent on place, space, and time—archival absences, partialities, and erasures are not unique to disability. Many have written about the ways in which archives are partial and erase, limit, or omit the voices of historically marginalized communities. Notably, Sadiya Hartman contends with the absence of narratives around enslaved women. Addressing a plethora of records, she highlights partial and missing perspectives, reading "against the grain" of archival documents to imagine how to understand archival subjects outside of dominant narratives of violence (1997, 2008). Hartman's work has been built upon by scholars such as Marisa J. Fuentes, who uses the robust archival documentation of Rachel Pringle Polgreen—an "extraordinary" and ostensibly hypervisible archival representation—to draw attention to how even seemingly thorough documented narratives still need critical examination as they can lack perspectives (2016).

Records can imbue absences in a number of ways—through the creation of records, their selection (or omission) for archives, and the many decisions that archivists subsequently make. Jarrett Drake, tracing the lineage of the erasure contingent on institutional processes and place, aptly describes how "archives directly impact the production of historical knowledge and thus facilitate forgetting and remembering in service to the state" (2021, p. 2). Stacie Williams and Jarrett Drake write about their accounts of police violence which might otherwise go undocumented since, "In many instances the state attempted to use the record as a means to erase or distort events so that the documentation matched with its version of the story" (2017, p. 3). Absences can be manifested through the creation of records but, as Rodney Carter complicates, "Silence is not necessarily a mark of victimization. It can, in fact, be a form of self-assertion; it can be an active resistance" (Carter 2006, p. 229). Thus, Carter makes a call to action for archivists to pay attention to the nuances of absences, to counteract "unnatural silences" while respecting "natural silences, those where the marginalized can assert their own power" (2006, p. 228). As silences, absences, and omissions can be introduced in the creation of records, archivists not only have opportunities to intervene but can also unintentionally create, reproduce, or magnify them. Kaisa Maliniemi addresses institutional racism in Norwegian municipal and state archives to highlight how, despite hundreds of records in Kven and Sámi languages, very few were documented in archival catalogs since people, "may have felt that these documents were irrelevant and therefore omitted them" (Maliniemi 2009, p. 20). What these works collectively show is that archival erasure is multifaceted: the creation of records that intentionally document some perspectives while erasing others, the treatment of records within archives and how archivists knowingly or unknowingly create or perpetuate partial perspectives, the intentional silences that communities or individuals create to protect themselves, and the subsequent impact on who can access records, all create different forms of erasure in archives.

The impact of that erasure is often felt by historically marginalized communities, whose voices and perspectives are omitted, ignored, or never documented in the first place. Recent literature has revealed how some marginalized groups are affectively impacted by under- or mis-representation in mainstream archives (read: large institutions) (Cifor 2016). Michelle Caswell, Marika Cifor and Mario H. Ramirez, for example, address the affective impacts that mainstream archives have on communities of marginalized identities. They describe this erasure of identity in mainstream archives using the concept of "symbolic annihilation," where members of underrepresented groups feel essentially erased in history through the ways in which they are not represented in public records (Caswell et al. 2016, 2017). To note, these studies, while they may have had disabled participants, participants were not identified as disabled within the published works *and* the studies sought to investigate communities marginalized by race, ethnicity, gender, and sexuality.

Filling a gap in the archival literature on marginalized identities—which has focused mainly on race, ethnicity, sexuality, and gender and not explicitly on disability—and foregrounding the multifaceted ways in which erasure can exist in archives, this article examines how disabled people experience, relate to and are impacted by their representation in archives. Furthermore, this study acknowledges the intersecting identities and the ways in which race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, size, class, and age all intersect with disability in complex and unique ways. This work builds theory through drawing on the empirical data around how disabled people feel about their portrayal in historic records and their experiences in archival spaces and thinks through the temporal landscape(s) of archives and disability.

Methods

The data for this article was collected through semi-structured interviews conducted during 2018 and 2019 with ten disabled archival users—scholars, researchers, artists, activists, and other community members—in North America. This study is approved by UCLA's Institutional Review Board (IRB). Research participants (a) self-identified as disabled; (b) had conducted research in an archive and found records about people with disabilities; (c) were 21 years of age or older. The interviews were conducted via video, phone, and in person, which both centered the access needs and comfort of disabled participants as well as permitted long-distance communication. Interviews were audio recorded with consent of each interviewee, and recordings were then transcribed, coded, and analyzed in an iterative manner to allow themes to emerge within and across interviews (Saldana 2015). This sample is not representative and does not seek to provide positivistic, generalizable solutions nor assume causality. Instead, this aims to explore in-depth, qualitative, and affective phenomena by collecting data from community members.

Participants had the option of being quoted anonymously, and all ten interviewees gave consent to be cited by name. Immediately before each interview began, I reviewed the consent form with each participant, where they could ask questions, and I also asked each interviewee for a short description of their positionality, how they would like to be described in writing, and I use these descriptions accordingly. As consent is ongoing, I continue to check in with each interviewee about the work that I produce for publication. Each interviewee had an opportunity to read, edit, and review this article and again could opt to be cited confidentially.

This research is deeply influenced by my personal experiences as a white, queer, non-binary Disabled person working in archives and in the field of disability studies. Therefore, this research is done in an interpretivist paradigm where I am part of the social situations and relationships being observed. Although I share some axes of identity with the interviewees, they also held a variety of racial, ethnic, age, size, gender, sexuality, illness, and disability identities, many of which differ from my own. Although there are common themes and experiences across disabilities, disabled people are not a single unified group, but have vastly differing identities, experiences, opinions and politics, and this diversity surfaced in the interviews.

Findings

While many themes emerged surrounding the representation, underrepresentation, and erasure of disability in archival material, the three findings discussed in this article all relate to the temporal relations created through archives. All three findings inform and are intertwined with one another, as they each emphasize a particular temporality. First, in addressing the *past*, many interviewees described a deep familiarity with encountering misrepresentations, partial representations, and missing representations of disability. Second, they described *present* moments: how, although encountering misrepresentations and erasures came as no surprise, they nonetheless felt a violence through the lack of complex representation and lack of records on disability altogether. Building on the previous two findings, the last finding illustrates how interviewees anticipated *futures*, how they expected a certain amount of erasure when conducting archival research. Together, these findings illustrate the ways that disabled people utilize anticipation—in life and in archives—as a way of preparing for encountering moments of misunderstandings, underrepresentation, violence, and erasure.

Finding 1: witnessing pasts: mis-representations in archival materials

A prominent theme that emerged from the interviews was the common experience of witnessing stereotypical representation of disability—as pitiable, as dangerous, as a medical “problem” to be eliminated, or as “inspirational” for overcoming their disability—that erases the subjectivity and agency of disabled people. Many interviewees spoke about their past experiences witnessing these forms of representation of disability and also seeing them within the language used and visual representation within records. Travis Chi Wing Lau, a gay, disabled, poet and scholar of color, talks through his experience looking at Edward Jenner’s medical books, which overlook the subjectivity of the sick and disabled people he documented while researching smallpox. Lau notes how many people were “described with such detail but often in terms that depersonalized and sort of de-individualized that person.” Cody Jackson, a white disabled, gay graduate student who was researching nineteenth century conduct manuals, spoke about how such representations work towards the eradication of disability. He states, “honestly, I think it [the record] was about eradicating both [queerness and disability] because I think the conduct manuals are about maximizing productivity and maximizing normality because when we see conduct manuals, they're usually reproducing norms." Megan Suggitt, a disabled, white undergraduate student who was researching a Canadian asylum for developmentally disabled children, likewise describes how records were:

> just perpetrating the stigma associated with disability… using the terms like 'feebleminded' and 'idiots'… I just feel like those are dangerous documents—the way they can be perpetrated, like disability always has this sense that it should be feared. And I feel still that those documents can instill fear in people visiting those archives and reading that information. I still feel like people gain a sense that this institution was good.

And Stefan Sunandan Honisch, Banting Postdoctoral Fellow and a multiracial disabled scholar, educator, and musician, expressed witnessing one frequent stereotype of blind pianists in photographs, documentary films, and textual sources, as well as the secondary literature:

> One of the tropes that's been most frequently at work in the representation of blind musicians, for example, is this idea of 'inner experience' [that is] uncontaminated or unaffected by the messiness of the real world; the ability, for example, of a blind musician to seek inward inspiration.

Honisch described encountering the trope of blind musicians "as turning away from the external world of the senses, and seeking inspiration" as well as tropes around blind musicians "heroically 'overcoming' adversity, and in so doing, becoming a figure of inspiration to others." Such stereotypical representations of disability—and other marginalized identities—were described as pervasive and were described as reinforcing stereotypes around disability—as dangerous, as deviant, or, alternatively, as inspirational (Wong 2014). And to research disability in history often means finding records that objectify and erase disabled people's lived experiences.

Many participants remarked not only on the lack of disabled perspectives in records but also on the palpability of the absence of records about disability. Disabled, white lawyer Lili Siegel described her experience using archives as an undergraduate and noticing the lack of representation of disability. "I didn't start out that way [looking for disability while doing research in archives], but it's hard not to notice absence, and *it's hard not to feel absent*. I think particularly in that first project that was about the way that people formed their identities as women in college and the fact that I wasn't even able to find disability in that and I was in college." Black disabled professor of English, Therí Pickens, remarks on sensing the lack of representation of disabled people in an archival collection, "We were like, 'listen, this isn't complete.' But I think the experience of disability does set you up to realize that there's a certain kind of, there are just sort of gaps there." Self-described "half-Indian, half-Polish, half-deaf, 100% archivist," Michelle Ganz also illustrates the noticeable lack of documentation around disability, stating:

> I would not be surprised if we found out down the line that there were records that talked about how disabled people were treated… There *were* people there of different races and there were people there of other levels of ability and *none of that is noted*. There were visible gaps in the record.

Blind historian Alida Boorn spoke about the sparse description of a disabled person in a record, “for him, it’s just, [the record described him as] ‘here’s this guy. He had rheumatic fever. He survived, he carried on and he was blind.’ And basically that said, ‘well, yeah, here he was blind and he did this work anyway.’ And that’s about it, period. I’m going, well *‘that’s not a lot.’*” Boorn’s reflection identifies both stereotypical representations of a disabled person—who is depicted as inspirational for overcoming disability in the few records she found—as well as the lack of records about disabled people. Jackson similarly articulates a connection between stereotypes represented and the absence of other records, “I think that a lot of the ‘overcoming [disability]’ narratives that we kind of erase the people who have been left behind by these very toxic and very violent systems that place value on our bodies.”

This first finding illustrates the plethora of ways interviewees encountered archival erasure—through the stereotypical ways in which disable people can be represented in archival material, which often lacks their perspectives, nuances, and agency, as well as the lack of documentation of disabled people overall. Many described their familiarity with these ways in which disability is portrayed—or not—in records.

Finding 2: present feelings: the violence of harmful or lacking representation

While familiar with stereotypical, partial, and lacking records around disability, participants also described how the copious amounts of harmful representations still took a toll on them. Many described the difficulty of witnessing the harmful ways in which disabled people were treated in the past, represented in records, as well as the violence they felt even from the lack of records.

Many spoke about researching disability and seeing how disabled people were treated was emotionally difficult to bear witness to. White, disabled non-binary scholar, Jess Waggoner spoke about researching a disabled woman who encouraged other disabled people to divest from each other once they were rehabilitated:

> That felt like a really violent offshoot of rehabilitation culture that I think we don’t always think about. We think about polio and post-polio syndrome and all of the attendant violences that can happen to your body and your mind when you’re being forcibly rehabilitated. But we don’t think about also the encouragement that you integrate back into able-bodied culture, and you don’t create connections with other disabled folks…. And there are so few spaces that encourage us to have a culture and a community and sociality now, so that, *to see in some ways the roots of this, it’s hard.*

Similarly, white, queer, disability rights activist, and author Corbett OToole talked about looking at institutional records from a Californian asylum. She states:

> When I looked at the archives, I mean clearly they were all labeled as disabled, which is why they were easy to find because institutional[ized] people, right?... *It was like every page was a new kind of horror.* As I would look through the records… I'd look to see what was there about the people and that's when I realized how incredibly capricious it was that they were even institutionalized.

Many records that interviewees described were produced by people and institutions in power, often in support of institutionalization, incarceration, and rehabilitation, which was difficult for them to witness.

And observing the ways that disabled people were treated was described as emotionally difficult and took a toll on many participants. Suggitt spoke about the impact that witnessing the violences of the past had on her research. She states, "It almost made me not want to go back after I looked at all the documents. I just couldn't physically do that to myself because I knew after talking to the survivors I had actual real history and then going there and seeing such a huge lack of information, '*I don't physically think I can do that again.*'" OToole similarly states, "it's a particular kind of hard work spiritually to do: to witness institutional stuff, trauma and abuse." The work of researching disability—learning different facets of the violence of disability history—as well as seeing harmful attitudes around disability reflected in records, sometimes made the research itself difficult, although many participants were familiar with the ways that disability can be represented in records.

The absence of records also took an emotional toll. Ganz describes, "I was really distressed by the fact that there is nothing—I couldn't even find case studies on hard of hearing in archives." OToole describes the impact of such erasure, "It's kind of all the feels about: How easy is it for us to get locked up? How we never get out, how people get locked up for all kinds of capricious reasons that have nothing to do with actual function or need. And that when bad shit happens or when we die, it's just we become—we remain—we become invisibilized." Suggitt describes the harm she experienced by finding very little documentation, "I left with empty answers. Like I left feeling defeated. I had no answers. I had no information. Just jumbled pieces of government documents." And Siegel, when asked what it felt like when encountering the absence of disability in archives, describes, "It feels deeply *traumatizing*…. the impact, the overall net impact of absence has been incredibly deep and difficult for me at different times." While familiar with ways that disability can be erased in historical records or not documented in the first place, the tangible absences of records also were emotionally difficult, and sometimes equally traumatic, for some interviewees to encounter.

These quotes illustrate how although disabled people may be familiar with the dominant forms of the representation of disability, participants still had an emotional response to witnessing people with disabilities portrayed in problematic ways as well as seeing how they have been treated in the past. The emotional toll is two-fold: through learning about the ways disabled people have been treated as well as how those attitudes are reflected within partial or absent records around the history of disability, disabled researchers described feeling the harms of partial, inaccurate, and absent records on disability.

Finding 3: imagined futures: expected erasure

Through their familiarity with ways in which disabled people are misrepresented in records, participants also talked about how they expect to be erased in history (in archives and otherwise). Interviewees specified both the expected erasure of disabled subjectivity in records as well as the expected absence of documentation of disability in history in general.

Interviewees remarked on the ways in which they expected erasure to take form in archival material as it can be shaped by dominant understandings of disability. OToole, for one, reflects "it felt like disabled people are raised that we're not important, that our history is not important because it wasn't." Pickens also spoke about how disability is perceived through archives and general discourse. She states, "There's too much in general discourse that allows for a pitiable stance [around disability] to make sense. I'm talking in these complicated ways about archival research and critical literature and even kind of thinking about popular discourse." Considering the ways in which disability is commonly understood—as pitiable, as a deficit, etc.—Pickens identifies how that discourse is reflected within archives and records' interpretations and does little to help complicate historical representations of disability.

Through their description of the dominant forms of how disability is understood, interviewees described how they were unsurprised by such tropes, devaluations, and absences within archives. Pickens elaborates, "I think living with a disability makes it so if you didn't know, you certainly find out that people are not interested in documenting things from the perspective of the disabled." OToole reflects, "To tell you the honest truth, I think that disabled people are so often erased that I almost don't notice anymore. Like, I notice it for a minute and you know, if it's particularly egregious I might write something about it. But in general it's so common". When thinking about the lack of disabled voices in archives and elsewhere, Lau questions on how to "articulate the perverse absent-presence of disability all over, especially in the archive". He elaborates:

> Yet again, you get an invocation of a disabled body but entirely removed of its subjectivity and agency. To me it's extremely perverse, but also something we've seen time and time again that I think goes to show the vast extent to which disability has been sort of invoked for all sorts of reasons other than for the wellbeing of disabled people.

Aware of the common ways that disability is and has been understood, as these quotes show, participants described the ways in which such attitudes become embodied within archival material.

Such common representations, misrepresentations, and erasures, then, are anticipated to some degree. Honisch expresses witnessing blind pianists portrayed as remote, socially isolated figures and describes his anticipation of the stereotype, "I had a very strong, almost emotional response to one photograph, in particular, [of the blind pianist Imre Ungár, with eyes closed] when I first saw it…. Through my research, and from engaging with the disability studies literature, I had become aware of certain tropes in the representation of blind pianists, in particular, and blind musicians, more generally. So part of me was guarded as a researcher in studying these materials, and [I tried to remain] alert to limits in how the relationship between blindness and music is imagined." Lau states in regard to looking at Edward Jenner's medical books:

> I wish I were surprised by him, *but I'm not…* our encounters are with these forms of objectification specifically in the forms of medical records that have no desire to see the subject of it or to see a self or fullness. It's really about quite literally medical objectification. And I see it here and I go, 'sounds like another day in the history of marginalized and oppressed bodies'.

Pickens, citing W. E. B. Du Bois, also illustrates this sentiment, "our epistemology, as a disabled person, is that you are aware of your invisibility … if you're going to look for another analog, 'double consciousness', of being a disabled person in the world… I think epistemologically absolutely: you expect a certain degree of erasure." She remarks about conducting research on Blackness and disability, "I look for 'me' I think in part because the scholarship I'm interested in is driven by interests that are both personal and professional, intellectual and emotional… but *I also am prepared to not find me*. It's great when I do, but it doesn't hurt if I don't". Siegel also reflects on how she prepares for encountering violent representations, asking, "How do I make sure it doesn't overwhelm me, but it does help me to bring it to spaces to try to do something useful with it?" These quotes illustrate an anticipatory nature of researching disability—of being aware, unsurprised, and prepared for partial or absent representations of disabled people in records.

Additionally, it is important to note that some interviewees described how the erasure that they anticipated was compounded by their other identities—disability was not the only axis of identity that people researched within archives. Specifically, interviewees who were queer and/or people of color described a compounded erasure. For example, Lau describes how even when he does find examples of disability,

> there still remains for me… a feeling that *my* story doesn't appear. There is often not a multi-identity experience. Often it's like 'I'm going to go see the disabled example of history or the queer example,' but for one to be say, queer disabled and Chinese or Asian, I don't know if I've ever encountered that.

And Ganz reflects on anticipating not being able to encounter her multiple identities in archival material, "I don't expect to find it [myself in history]. Does that make sense? Like, I know that there's never going to be research that focuses on someone who is uniquely made up as me." These quotes highlight the nuances—or lack thereof—of archival representation, that not all expected erasure around disability was limited to a single axis of identity, and what felt like disability representation in archives differs across individuals.

What is more, interviewees spoke about how expecting partial records or even the absence of disability in archives sometimes allowed them to maintain hope for finding something more. Waggoner describes how, although there was a lack of records about disabled 1940s memoirist Katharine Butler Hathaway, they continued to dig deeper in an archive, "I was looking for more materials on her because I felt like there was definitely more to her than just her memoir and it was true." And Lau describes the possibilities that opened once he lowered expectations and anticipated sparse documentation, "I set the bar really low. I said, I'm just going to call up any box that could remotely relate to this. And I think that's probably the most exciting experience to me above the archive is the moment that you let go of wanting to find a thing is when you actually find the most remarkable and unexpected things." Expecting the erasure of disabled people in archives not only facilitated researchers in preparing themselves to experience such erasure, but also helped them maintain hope for the possibility of finding more.

Building on the first two findings, this theme illuminates how the common experience of witnessing dominant, problematic, and harmful understandings of disability produces an anticipatory affect around erasure. As this data indicates—while sometimes painful to witness—erasure in some form is often expected. Through the ways in which interviewees described experiencing dominant tropes of representation of disability and how it feels deprioritized and misunderstood in society, they also articulated how they came to expect and acutely perceive it. The very lack of records on disabled people, or records that deny the subjectivity and agency of their subjects, is a palpable part of the process. And thus, when researching disability and experiencing the violence of the treatment of disabled people across time, disabled researchers anticipate not to find disabled people represented in complex ways or at all.

Discussion

Together these findings illustrate some of the complexities of the ways in which disabled people can relate to historical documentation and experience multiple temporalities. (1) As disability is often understood and portrayed through stereotypes, participants described that they were familiar with prominent tropes and misrepresentations of disability within records. They depicted frequent encounters with the ways historic records embodied different forms of erasure: many described a familiarity with stereotypes of disability, as Honisch stated how "I had become aware of certain tropes in the representation of blind pianists", describing how this research led to publications on such tropes (Honisch 2016, 2019). And Lau noted how disabled people are often, "described with such detail but often in terms that depersonalized and sort of de-individualized that person". Interviewees also highlighted the ways in which they were accustomed to disabled people being absent in records, as Ganz articulated, "There were visible gaps in the record," and Boorn noted, "that's not a lot." To encounter erasure—in some form—of disability in records that document the past was a familiar experience to these disabled researchers. (2) Yet, while accustomed to some forms of erasure, they nonetheless felt an inherent violence in witnessing them. OToole described how “It was like every page was a new kind of horror,” violence which took an emotional toll, how Suggitt remarked that, “I don’t physically think I can do that [return to the archives] again.’” And while OToole articulated how “it’s a particular kind of hard work spiritually to do: to witness institutional stuff, trauma and abuse,” the palpable absence of records also took a toll, where Ganz described, “I was really distressed by the fact that there is nothing.” With their deep familiarity with forms of erasure and harm, (3) interviewees described often expecting to be erased. Reflecting how disability is understood in dominant society—as OToole made note of “disabled people are raised that we’re not important, that our history is not important”—interviewees expected, as Pickens stated, “a certain degree of erasure,” where “I also am prepared to not find me.” Such impressions of erasure were articulated in how interviewees spoke about their past experiences, witnessing how disability has been and is understood—in archives and in society—which is often reflected in archives today, and thus is an expected facet of archival research. In other words, experiencing the *past(s)* represented in archives, interviewees reflected on their *present-day experiences* around feeling their way with and through archival materials, which informed how they anticipated and imagined archival *futures*. However, as the above quotes show, these temporalities are not linear, but vacillate and are entangled with personal and archival moments throughout time.

These findings echo Caswell, Cifor and Ramiriez’s use of symbolic annihilation, where disabled archival users described feeling a sense of erasure through the ways they are misrepresented, underrepresented, and erased in archives, as reflected in the first two findings. However, this data expands the scope of symbolic annihilation in archives in ways unique to disability and ableism: interviewees not only felt their erasure in history but also deeply knew the different forms of erasure of disability in archives in such a way that they *anticipate encountering them*. This research therefore adds an additional affective dimension of anticipation, which is informed by the symbolic annihilation that they may have experienced before (in archives and in life), that forms their imaginaries around future experiences.

Writings around crip time and anticipation align with the findings of this research, as anticipation can be used as a strategy to forecast moments to come, to avoid surprise, be a mode of trauma prevention, and be a way to maintain hope for alternative futures. These facets of crip anticipation are not mutually exclusive, nor are they the only ways in which anticipation functions in disabled peoples’ lives. However, by focusing on them in this article, I illustrate some of the ways in which disabled interviewees described their anticipatory moments in archives—their connections to futures, which not only span their personal pasts and experiences, but also those of disabled people preceding them, represented in archival materials.

Central to a future—anticipated—imaginary, is the way in which one draws on the past. Disabled people use the past to inform how they plan for the future. Kafer describes “the experiences of those with PTSD [post-traumatic stress disorder] or MCS [multiple chemical sensitivity] who live in a kind of *anticipatory time*, scanning their days for events or exposures that might trigger a response. Such scans include moving both forward and backward in time while remaining present in this moment: What has caused reactions before? What might cause reactions now? What reactions lie ahead?" (Kafer 2013, p.38, emphasis mine). Such anticipation draws on past experiences in order to plan for the present and future. Likewise, interviewees described being incredibly familiar with partial, problematic, harmful, inaccurate, and/or absent representations of disabled people, as they had experienced many times before—in archives and in society. Reflecting on such entanglements, Pickens stated, "I think living with a disability makes it so if you didn't know, you certainly find out that people are not interested in documenting things from the perspective of the disabled." And OToole remarked how, "disabled people are raised that we're not important." Illustrating both the pervasiveness of the ways that disability is understood through a limited, often medicalized lens, this research illustrates how past moments in disabled interviewees' lives help them expect similar moments in archival research. Thus, participants described how they anticipate encountering problematic, partial, and absent representations of disability when researching in archives, as Lau stated, "I wish I were surprised by him, *but I'm not*."

For disabled people, anticipation can be a temporal method of preparation: Margaret Price articulates "that real-time enactment of accommodations rarely operates in just the way we anticipated or were promised," thus disabled people not only plan accommodations in advance, but anticipate those very accommodations' failures or limits (2009). Similarly, anticipation in this research formed as a way to facilitate some interviewees in *preparing* for disappointment, harm, or other responses to archival mis- or under-representations. Anticipation helped some interviewees protect themselves, as Honisch noted, "part of me was *guarded* as a researcher in studying these materials, and [I tried to remain] alert to limits in how the relationship between blindness and music is imagined." It also rendered the expected harm unremarkable in ways—OToole noted how "disabled people are so often erased that I almost don't notice anymore," and Lau said, "I see it here and I go, 'sounds like another day in the history of marginalized and oppressed bodies.'" Interviewees looked to their past experiences of witnessing disabled people in archival materials to inform the ways in which they anticipate and therefore prepare for potential harm, guard themselves, and can then be unsurprised by encountering misrepresentations and absences.

Anticipation can function not just as a way to prepare one for what they might expect, but also to prepare for potential trauma. María Elena Cepeda, through a Latina feminist *testimonio*, articulates how academia's ableist structures necessitate preparing for moments of productivity as well as slowness and rest: "I save my energy whenever possible and attempt, to the extent possible, to anticipate the conditions that render it difficult if not impossible to work" (Cepeda 2021, p. 310). Cepeda's writing echoes with anticipation as a mode of preparation as well as one of protection against possible harm. OToole's words emphasize the difficulty of archival research, how "it's a particular kind of hard work spiritually to do: to witness institutional stuff, trauma and abuse." And many interviewees described the violence and possible trauma of witnessing mis- and under-representations repeatedly, which can be embedded even within the absence of records. Siegel, for example, noted, "it's hard not to notice absence, and *it's hard not to feel absent*," which "feels deeply traumatizing." Lau touched on this violence and the ways it can be anticipated, "it's extremely perverse, but also something we've seen time and time again that I think goes to show the vast extent to which disability has been sort of invoked for all sorts of reasons other than for the wellbeing of disabled people." Anticipation, as these quotes show, helped some participants prepare for encountering harmful representation as well as possible trauma.

Moreover, crip time, anticipation, and preparation for possible harm are complicated and sometimes compounded by other axes of identity and ways of experiencing time—differences which are not applicable to all disabled experiences. La Marr Jurelle Bruce, writing about black musicians, locates the interlockings of crip time, queer time, and black time (Warren 2016) to define *madtime*. With particular regard to histories of antiblackness, Bruce underscores "the psychosocial adaptation for living in perpetual jeopardy"—identifying how, "To be paranoid is to comport oneself with radical caution and obsessive vigilance; it is to anticipate and pay painstaking attention to potential threats, even the most unlikely far-fetched, and unReasonable…. It would seem that this is a case of black people going mad in order to not lose their minds or their lives" (Bruce 2021, pp. 192–3). Bruce's attention to the ways that crip time forms and is informed by black experiences amplifies how anticipation and preparation are connected to very real bodily harms. And such experiences of time and uses of anticipation also have impacts on representation. Darlene Clark Hine, for example, writes about "behavior and attitudes of Black women that created the appearance of openness and disclosure but actually shielded the truth of their inner lives and selves from their oppressors," attesting to how absences can be intentionally created (Hine 1989, p. 915). In a different context, Joyce Gabliola, myself, Michelle Caswell, and Jimmy Zavala demonstrate how some communities of color subvert documentation as a strategy of survival from very real threats that they face through their visibility (Gabiola et al. 2022). Anticipation, as a temporal strategy of preparing for and avoiding harm, is therefore connected to and informed by specific histories of violence for communities of color and thus the documentation of those histories.[1]

As an additional layer(s) to crip time, the ways in which multiply marginalized interviewees—in particular disabled people of color—anticipated erasure were also intertwined with their multiple identities. For example, Lau remarked on "a feeling that *my* story doesn't appear….for one to be say, queer disabled and Chinese or Asian, I don't know if I've ever encountered that." Ganz spoke about how "I don't expect to find it… I know that there's never going to be research that focuses on someone who is uniquely made up as me." And Pickens identified how her personal identity overlaps with her research, "I look for 'me' I think in part because the scholarship I'm interested in is driven by interests that are both personal and professional, intellectual and emotional… but *I also am prepared to not find me*." An attention to the ways that disabled people of color have different—and specific—relations to temporalities, anticipation, and historical documentation further highlights how erasure and therefore the anticipation of that erasure is compounded in multifaceted ways.

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[1] To add, fat bodies are regulated by heteronormative constructions of time, as they "fail to 'keep up' with normative tempos," around marriage, reproduction, and death, which can open up unique temporalities and "challenge dominant life timelines" (McFarland et al. 2018).

Lastly, as some interviewees described, anticipation functioned not only for preparing for or avoiding trauma, but also for making room for hope and future possibilities. Adams, Murphy and Clarke write that "Anticipation predicts where there is opportunity now for what was previously impossible," as a way to "continually keep uncertainty on the table" (Adams et al 2009, p. 250). Siegel, anticipating possible trauma, asked "How do I make sure it doesn't overwhelm me, but it does help me to bring it to spaces to try to do something useful with it?" While recognizing the possible trauma or difficulty in witnessing harmful or absent records on disability, she described how it shaped the ways she expected it, prepared for it, and could also attempt to transform it. Anticipating erasure, Lau, "set the bar really low… [and] let go of wanting to find a thing [which] is when you actually find the most remarkable and unexpected things." And Waggoner, knowing the ways that disabled people are difficult to find in archives, reflected, "I felt like there was definitely more to her than just her memoir and *it was true*." Anticipation, in these examples, allowed for interviewees to imagine alternative futures. Anticipating the erasure of disability in archives through knowing how disabled people have been overlooked in history also made space for interviewees to continue looking for something different, the possibility of finding more, or having a chance to use records for meaningful purposes.

Anticipation, as a facet of crip time, is a way we've learned to navigate the world and a strategy to protect ourselves. Wielding our knowledge of how ableism functions, how access can fail, and how we've experienced past harms or successes, compounded by various axes of identity, disabled people can utilize anticipation in archives in a way that, as Pickens describes, "you expect a certain degree of erasure." Therefore, anticipation expands understandings of symbolic annihilation within archives to think about how it not only is experienced in the present moment, but also connects past experiences of erasure and harm to shape future imaginaries.

This research, in a way, might offer somewhat of a counter to affect theorist Lauren Berlant's *cruel optimism*, where an object of desire—and all the promises of happiness, change, and success that come with it—in actuality becomes the obstacle to such goals. Berlant emphasizes that the optimism that comes with sustaining the fantasy of change, that things are going to be different, becomes cruel when the thing that possesses possibility actually prevents the attainment of the goal (Berlant 2011).[2] Perhaps what these interviews demonstrate is a form of not-so-cruel—or even kind—pessimism,[3] where harms, failures, and erasure are expected in ways that protect disabled researchers as well as open up new possibilities for archival engagement—to render historical harms unremarkable, erasure as a prominent possibility, returning to the archives as optional, and alternative traces of representation possible. Within archives, crip anticipation connects multiple pasts, presents, and futures: researchers could bring their past experiences into the present archival

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[2] This is an incredibly short description of Berlant's complex concept, where optimism does not always feel optimistic and she addresses the past's relation to the future and the distribution of sensibilities that discipline the imaginary about what the "good life" is and how proper people act," (Berlant 2011, p. 53) as well as how "we need to think about normativity as aspirational and as an evolving and incoherent cluster of hegemonic promises about the present and future experience of social belonging that can be entered into in a number of ways" (Berlant 2011, p. 167).

[3] This term explicitly came from an email exchange with Michelle Caswell.

moment as a method of preparing for encountering the past. While witnessing the violence against disabled people in combination with each researchers' past experiences—of ableism, racism, sexism, homophobia, fatphobia, classism, colonialism, and therefore of social and archival erasure—anticipation allows them to prepare and guard themselves against harms while also having hope for different futures of archival research.

Conclusion

This article, through interviews with disabled archival users, complicates the ways in which symbolic annihilation might be embodied, felt, or imagined by disabled people. While some findings echoed the violence with which minoritized archival users can feel devalued through the ways in which they encountered problematic, partial or absent representation of disability in archives, this data expands the concept of symbolic annihilation to think about the affect of anticipation. Anticipation, for these interviewees, functioned as a way of preparing themselves for the violence of archives, but did not necessarily alleviate it nor help them avoid trauma. Furthermore, this research complicates notions of anticipation through the specific lens of lived disabled experiences, whereby disabled people feel anticipation in unique ways—to plan our lives, access needs, and bodymind fluctuations, as well as to connect past experiences to thinking through present and future moments. This research extends crip temporalities of anticipation to not only consider the ways that disabled researchers described anticipation and prepared for harmful or lacking archival representations but also the ways that they utilized their knowledge around how disabled people have been treated for centuries on top of their personal experiences of being mis-understood and mis-treated to understand themselves within history. Anticipation, furthermore, is not simply about the reproduction of the past but also can introduce slivers of hope to imagine something different.

This article, invested in amplifying the voices of disabled communities, does not pose any solutions to anticipated archival erasure. Instead, it aims to illustrate the nuanced ways in which disabled people relate to our histories and show how our relationships to oppression, erasure, and archives are variegated, unique, and complex. Our stories—historical and contemporary—need to be told and told in ways that do not generalize across our varying intersecting identities, disabilities, and experiences. In thinking about how we might want to be remembered in future, I'm drawn to think of other scholars' notions of time such as M. Jacqui Alexander's identification of "palimpsestic time,"—where the "new" and "old" are continuously "rescrambled" and relayered as history informs the present (Alexander 2006, p. 190)—and José Esteban Muñoz's call, "that this world is not enough, that indeed something is missing" (Muñoz 2009, p. 1)—which answers a longing to read queerness into spaces even where it is absent. Likewise, a crip anticipation makes space for disabled researchers to simultaneously feel and prepare for the harms of the past while also allowing us to imagine something different, and uniquely crip, about the future. So to answer Kafer's questions posed at the beginning of this article—"How does one take steps now to get ready for the future moment when one will delve into the past?"—perhaps archival anticipation is an avenue for us to hold a not-so-cruel pessimism at the fore: to endure the present, draw on our unique individual and collective knowledges of the past, and propel us toward a very crip idea of futurity.

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