

Experience, Research, and Writing

Octavia E. Butler as an Author of Disability Literature

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IN A JOURNAL ENTRY ON November 12, 1973, Octavia E. Butler writes: “I should stay healthy! The bother and worry of being sick and not being able to afford to do anything but complain about the pain and hope it goes away is Not conducive to good (or prolific) writing.”¹ At this time, at the age of twenty-six, Butler had not yet sold her first novel. She was just on the cusp of what would be an incredible writing career, starting with her first novel, *Patternmaster*, published a mere three years later. But in 1973, Butler was an essentially unknown and struggling writer who regularly battled poverty, health, and her own harsh inner critic. From the outset of her career, Butler’s texts have been lauded, critiqued, and read again and again in relationship to race, gender, and sexuality. Only recently, however, has her work been taken up in respect to disability.² Therí A. Pickens argues, “Situating disability at or near the center of Butler’s work (alongside race and gender) lays bare how attention to these categories of analysis shifts the conversation about the content of Butler’s work.”³ Building upon Pickens and other recent work on Butler and disability, I seek to change conversations about Butler’s work among feminist, race, and genre studies scholars while also encouraging more attention to Butler by disability studies scholars. In this article, I use evidence from Butler’s personal papers, public interviews, and publications to position Butler as an author of disability literature due to her lived experiences, her research, and her writing.

Disability studies is an interdisciplinary field that understands disability and ability as socially constructed concepts that vary by time, location, and culture. Within disability studies, literary critics have begun to shape an informal canon

of disability literature.⁴ By canon I mean that certain texts appear regularly in literary disability studies scholarship and postsecondary courses. While these texts range in publication dates and author gender identities, they are overwhelmingly white, British, and American in terms of author identity and content. Although the whiteness of disability studies has been critiqued⁵ and there has been increased attention to work by writers of color, there is still much work to be done. More scholarship on writers of color in literary disability studies will both expand and complicate our knowledge and expectations of disability literature.

Within this generally white informal canon of disability literature, some common texts include *Richard III*, *Jane Eyre*, *The Sound and the Fury*, and *Of Mice and Men*. These texts are considered part of disability literature because of the presence of major disabled characters and the texts' existing place in other more established canons. More contemporary books representing disability, such as *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night Time*, *The Diving Bell and the Butterfly*, *Call Me Ahab*, and *Exile and Pride*, have become staples of literary disability studies because of their mainstream popularity and/or the fact that the text was written by a disabled person about living with a disability.

No disability studies scholar has attempted to officially define or delimit disability literature, let alone its canon. However, the much-discussed nature of some of the texts mentioned above certainly suggests two key parameters for understanding what constitutes disability literature today: the representation of a character, ideally a major character, with a disability, and an author who has a disability or who has some particular knowledge of disability rights, culture, and experiences. This is reflected in the "About Us" section for *Wordgathering: A Journal of Disability Poetry and Literature* that describes the journal as:

[A]n online quarterly journal of disability poetry, literature and art dedicated to providing a venue where the new work of writers with disabilities can be found and to building up a corpus of work for those interested in disability literature. While it gives preference to the work of writers with disability, it seeks the well-crafted work of any writer that makes a contribution of the field.⁶

Wordgathering's statement here represents the overarching tension within disability literature to prioritize the work of disabled writers without ignoring what David Mitchell and Sharon Snyder have called disability's "unusual literary history" in which disability is frequently represented in literature by nondisabled authors—to the point where narrative seems to depend upon disability to function, such as *Moby Dick's* Captain Ahab whose disability is the

cause for his madness and endless quest for revenge.⁷ Therefore, unlike African American and other ethnic literature, what has come to constitute disability literature is not based primarily or exclusively on the identity of the author, but also on the content of the narrative.

NOTES ON POSTHUMOUS LANGUAGE AND EDITING

Before discussing the role of disability in Butler's lived experiences, research, and writing, I must add two notes about my language and editorial choices. First, I recognize the difficulty of identity, especially with regards to people no longer living. Similar to critiques in queer studies, which caution against applying anachronistic identity labels to nonnormative sexualities of the past and/or applying contemporary identity labels to people who choose to not use those terms, disability identity is fraught with changing historical and cultural notions of what constitutes disability and with contemporary concerns about identifying someone as disabled when they do not identify as such.⁸ In this article, therefore, I choose to refer to Butler as a *person with a disability* as distinct from a *disabled person* in order to respect how she identified (or rather, did not explicitly identify) in life, while also recognizing the role disability played in her lived experiences.

I use this specific language for the purposes of this article—in most of my other writings I use these terms interchangeably—in line with the logic of person-first language, which has mostly fallen out of favor in disability studies. As Simi Linton explains, person-first language was an early attempt by disability rights activists to move away from terms such as “epileptic,” “Down syndrome patient,” “victim of muscular dystrophy,” and “wheelchair bound,” which overemphasize disability as the predominant identifying factor for an individual, while also often connoting suffering, pity, dependence, and passivity. Person-first language proponents, therefore, insisted on being recognized as a person first, with “disability as a characteristic of the individual as opposed to the defining variable”—as in “a person with epilepsy,” “a person with Down syndrome,” “a person with muscular dystrophy,” “a person who uses a wheelchair,” and so on.⁹ According to Linton, however, since “the early 90s *disabled people* has been increasingly used in disability studies and disability rights circles [. . .] Rather than maintaining disability as a secondary characteristic, *disabled* has become a marker of the identity that the individual and group wish to highlight and call attention to.”¹⁰ Given how I read the role of disability in Butler's life, which I discuss in the next section, I believe that it is best to refer to her as a person with a disability, rather than as a disabled person. In no place in her writing, interviews, or personal papers have I been able to find her use the word “disabled” to refer to herself, and this term was

being used quite widely during her lifetime. That said, her archive does include discussions of her dyslexia and various physical and mental health concerns she experienced throughout her life. She was, therefore, a person who had at least one recognized and acknowledged disability, whether or not she would have ever called herself disabled.

Second, throughout this article I quote journals, drafts, commonplace books, and other personal materials from the Octavia E. Butler Papers at the Huntington Library. Many of these materials are handwritten or typed on a typewriter. I have chosen to not correct any spelling, grammar, or punctuation in any quotes from these materials and I maintain all original line breaks and emphasis of words or phrases. All underlining and capitalization in quoted material comes from Butler and in the case of italics, which appear once Butler started using a computer, I have indicated whether the emphasis is original or added. My reasons for these transcription choices are multiple, political, and torn. There are often technical errors in Butler's writing. I have chosen to leave these errors in because they are a reflection of her dyslexia (and class and education) and therefore these errors are central to the claims I make. Moreover, leaving Butler's writing unedited underscores the incredible work she did to make sure the writing she submitted for publication and release would meet standard expectations of correctness. She worked hard to ensure her success and this included being meticulous in editing writing that would be seen by others. In his recent book on Butler, Gerry Canavan chose to edit Butler's archival materials, writing that as more scholars begin to work within and publish on Butler's personal papers, each will have to decide what is most appropriate for their own project, and to be true to Butler's life and identity while also respecting her wishes and legacy. For me, who is writing about Butler's personal and professional relationships to disability, editing her writing would be a disservice to what I am trying to do.

Additionally, my verbatim transcriptions lack the designation of "sic" that is common in much scholarly, legal, and journalistic writing. Sic is the Latin adverb for "thus," and typically, according to Brian Garner, it "is intended for the reader (or a typesetter following copy), who may be confused by whether it was the quoter or the quoted writer who is responsible for the spelling or grammatical anomaly."¹¹ However, as Garner notes, "Some writers use *sic* meanly—with a false sense of superiority. Its use may frequently reveal more about the quoter than about the author of the quoted material."¹² Although sic does not inherently indicate judgment, it is often used as a way of making clear to readers and editors that the error is not one's own. The use of sic is incredibly vexed in relationship to quoting people with cognitive, learning, and communication disabilities, people for whom English is a second language, and people with lower levels of formal education. Rather than mark my distinct difference from Butler, using sic to demonstrate I recognize and mark all the

writing quirks within her archive as incorrect, I instead leave her work unedited and allow for the possibility of her errors being read as my own. I argue that this choice can be read as a scholarly form of what I have elsewhere referred to as identifying *with* rather than *as* crip.¹³ Rejecting the will to normalize Butler's writing opens up the possibility that I, as the author, will be interpolated into and through disability—and this is a possibility I accept and embrace.

Despite the above statement, making the choice to leave Butler's writing unedited was not easy. My first instinct when transcribing her work was to correct it, in part because of my own bias as an academic writer and in part because of my desire to protect an author I love from the ableism of my readers. I worried that people would think less of Butler upon seeing the errors. I worried I would be doing a disservice to her legacy, that by not editing her personal writing I would be somehow partially undoing the work she did to prevent errors in her published writing and professional correspondence. Discussions with other disability studies scholars doing archival work and other Butler scholars familiar with her papers, politics, and legacy, however, have made clear to me that her writing must remain as it appears in the archive to do justice to the complexities of Butler as an author and as a black woman with a disability from a working class background.¹⁴ Each reader must then grapple with their own biases that might arise when confronted with the errors within the writing below.

LIVED EXPERIENCES

The fact that Butler had dyslexia was public, but it was not necessarily common knowledge among fans and scholars.¹⁵ Beginning as late as 1990, she disclosed her disability in several interviews, often referring to herself as “a bit dyslexic” and saying little more.¹⁶ Butler talked more at length about her dyslexia when explicitly asked about it in a 1997 interview. Joan Fry asks, “I was wondering if ‘Speech Sounds’ had anything to do with your dyslexia?” and Butler responds, “Not at all, because dyslexia hasn't really prevented me from doing anything I've wanted to do, except drive. I can read, for example, but I can't read fast. I never had a problem reading because I was lucky enough to be taught before I got into school by my mother and grandmother.”¹⁷ While Butler did not disclose much in interviews, her personal papers reveal more intimate details about growing up with dyslexia.

In a partial draft of the essay “Positive Obsession,” Butler explains how her imagination allowed her to become her “other selves” in the face of boredom and, she writes, “later when my dyslexia became a problem in school and my teachers told my mother that I was lazy and just not trying, I became in my imagination, the genius.”¹⁸ The painful social and educational repercussions of a seemingly unrecognized, undiagnosed disability for young Butler is detailed

further in what appears to be a draft fragment of her unfinished memoir, a plethora of materials mixed in with notes and drafts for the Parable books.¹⁹ Throughout the two pages I quote here, the last word of every line is repeated as the first word of the next line. I have left these extra words in my transcription, which, I believe, comes across as a kind of stuttering that can be disruptive but also poetic, providing emphasis. Here I invite readers to sit with their own discomfort and biases in taking in both the content and style of Butler's writing. She states:

[. . .] I never heard the word dyslexia while I was growing growing up. I wouldn't have applied it to myself if I had heard heard it. I could read, after all, and when I did hear of o of dyslexia, it was only in connection with nonreaders. But But there were other words that I heard all the time. For For instance, "lazy," "inattentive," "day-dreaming," and and "stupid." The first three of these, my teachers said said to my mother or to me. The fourth, I said to myself. I I said it often.

I felt that I understood my schoolwork better than many many of my classmates, but my work was often unfinished, very very messy and in spite of my grandmother's efforts, poorly poorly spelled. [. . .] In arithmetic, I jumbled numbers and got got strange answers. On the school ground, I was a total loss loss. I've hit a baseball exactly twice in my life. Gym teachers teachers looked at my size and decided I wasn't really trying.

Oh, but I was trying—desperately. I developed a liking for for individual sports; short, pity papers, and every possible possible avoidance of math classes, plus an awareness that I learn best from what I hear rather than what I see.²⁰

In this fragment, it becomes clear that Butler's dyslexia strongly impacted how teachers perceived her intelligence and efforts in school and this in turn shaped how they treated her.²¹ It is important to remember that Butler was a poor, dark-skinned, tall black girl. These additional identities and characteristics likely further negatively shaped teachers' perceptions of Butler's abilities. The manifestations of Butler's dyslexia in her schoolwork, combined with the words and treatment she received from teachers, impacted her self-perception. It is clear that she internalized their insults and low estimations of her intelligence and work ethic. In fact, Butler continued to apply these words to herself as an adult. For example, in a journal entry dated August 26, 1972, she refers to herself as "undisciplined and lazy."²² In another entry from November 23, 1983, Butler writes: "I am too alone, too slow, too lazy, too undisciplined, too little in my big body. I talk too much—and too little—saying too often the wrong thing."²³ These and other journal entries in Butler's papers suggest that she thought of herself as tending toward laziness and therefore believed she had to

be hard on herself, often creating intense reading and writing schedules. In her essay on black science fiction authors and disability, Nisi Shawl speculates about the influence of dyslexia on both Butler and Samuel “Chip” Delay, writing, “[P]erhaps the need for a concentrated focus when using the written word has contributed to Chip’s and Octavia’s excellence? Could problems in this area have filled them with determination to do that hard thing better than they were expected to? [. . .] I’m sure dyslexia influenced them in some way—maybe in more ways than one—but I’m not sure how.”²⁴ Based on what is now available through her archive, it seems necessary to read Butler’s early school experiences as a poor black girl with dyslexia as influencing her later private perception of herself as lazy and undisciplined.

As the quoted journal entries above suggest, Butler could be quite self-deprecating. Indeed, at times in her life, she experienced depression and contemplated suicide. My goal in discussing these experiences is not to diagnose Butler or affix any identity label she did not use in life, but instead to trace her bodymind experiences as documented in the archive in order to understand how the intersections of disability, race, gender, and class may have influenced her research and writing. Indeed, the archive demands scholars think critically about how the intersectionality of oppressions produced Butler’s lived experiences and shaped her writing. I use the term “bodymind” here after Margaret Price who defines bodymind as “a sociopolitically constituted and material entity that emerges through both structural (power- and violence-laden) contexts and also individual (specific) experience.”²⁵ Additionally, I use the term bodymind because Butler herself understood and employed this concept without using this word exactly. In a journal entry dated June 22, 1969, she uses the hyphenated word “mind-body” and later, on March 17, 1999, Butler writes that “dichotomies that become so important to us are false. Mind and body for instance.”²⁶ Bodymind is the most appropriate word here, both from a disability studies and Butler studies standpoint.

Early in her life and career, Butler seemed to have a constant yet often mild feeling that, as she wrote in an undated journal entry at age seventeen, she “wouldn’t really mind death.”²⁷ This sentiment is further detailed in a journal entry dated June 22, 1969—her twenty-second birthday. She writes:

For the better part . . . no, the better remembered part of 22 years I’ve spent most of my time either wishing I was dead or wishing the (insert the usual list of negative derogatory adjectives here) person I am would change to the kind of person I wish to be. Somehow, magically, immediately, permanently. I am not dead. The changes that have come have been small and slow. There are times when in a welter of self pity I wonder why I don’t have the guts to kill myself.²⁸

Butler's negative self-talk and thoughts of death appear with regularity into the early 1980s. To take just a few examples, on April 6, 1974, she writes:

It occurs to me that if I do suicide, it won't be a planned thing. I won't clean the house and return the library books and destroy the personal material etc etc etc, then calmly do myself in. It will be sudden. I will realize perhaps that I am in a place where it would be easy to die. Then somebody else will have to clean up the mess.²⁹

On May 7, 1981, she reflects:

I can also recall a time when I believed I'd know when I'd 'made it,' succeeded because then I would want life more than death. Just a little success tells me how wrong I am. It isn't likely I'll ever want life more than death. I was too mal-formed growing up. Too much worthlessness, too much shame.³⁰

Again, on May 26, 1983, she confesses:

I feel so afraid, so utterly stopped by my own inadequacy—my slowness, my weakness, my timidity, my fear. I dislike myself so much, have disliked myself for so long. . . Self-contempt has become a terrible, ugly, stupid, and lovingly embraced habit. The only thing I've ever wanted as much as I've wanted to be a writer is death [. . .] Sometimes all that makes life bearable is knowing it will end.³¹

These quotes, while excruciating to read in their raw pain, reveal Butler's early and midlife struggles with depression and low self-worth. While the sentiments depicted above certainly lessen in Butler's later journals, they do not disappear entirely.³² It is important to note, however, that Butler's later journals and commonplace books become increasingly more work focused, perhaps because by 1998 she had decided to leave her papers to the Huntington Library and she may have become more self-conscious in her writing about personal matters.³³

I read the depressive thoughts and feelings expressed in these entries as intimately tied to the previously discussed self-deprecating language and the litany of insults she received early in life from teachers. I suggest, therefore, that Butler's experiences of dyslexia, in conjunction with her race, gender, and class, played a significant role in shaping her sense of self, her self-worth, her regular bouts of depression, and her thoughts of death. We can further trace the intimate relationship of race, gender, class, and disability in Butler's life by exploring her experiences of intermittently poor health.

Several documents in Butler's papers from the early 1970s indicate that while working temp jobs and attempting to transition into a full-time writing career

Butler struggled financially, made decisions that were likely not beneficial to her health, and desired to access healthcare but did not receive such access.³⁴ A journal entry from August 27, 1972 states, “I hate my present situation. It is physically and mentally debilitating. It is literally destroying me,” before detailing her goal of writing from 2:00 a.m. to 5:30 a.m. each day while still working her full-time job.³⁵ A journal entry a few weeks later on September 11, 1972 further details both how Butler was maintaining her working and writing schedule and how she could not afford to address her continued health concerns. A then twenty-five-year-old Butler writes:

I am stuck. I will have to make firm decisions about how long I will work there and how I will manage to budget in my most pressing problem, my dental work. The magnitude of the dental work—the necessary, not the cosmetic—may be frightening. \$500. or more. [. . .] If the problem were solidly cosmetic, I would live with it the way I have until now.

What about my medical problem, if that’s what it is? How long can I continue to exist on No Doz? I have no idea what a doctor would cost. The only way to find out for sure (as in the case of the dental problem) is to go and be examined. That in itself costs more money than I have.³⁶

Less than two months later, on November 7, 1972, a clearly pained Butler writes, “Somehow soon—after the next paycheck I have to see a doctor. There is no sense in this. [. . .] See a doctor. Get a full examination.”³⁷ About a year later, after several entries trying to figure out when she would have enough money to quit her job so she could focus on writing for a few months, on October 17, 1973, Butler states that she gave notice at her job, but is now worried she might have to rethink her plan because of urinary problems that have become painful.³⁸ This collection of entries during the early 1970s make clear that Butler’s goal of being able to live off of and focus exclusively on her writing, combined with her poverty, often involved making choices that could have been damaging to her long-term health. Throughout Butler’s journals she details practices that might impact her health, like getting little sleep, regularly using caffeine pills to stay awake, and not going to the doctor until a problem is so painful it cannot be ignored. These choices, which directly stem from Butler’s class status at the time, in addition to her race and gender identities that impacted the kind of jobs she could seek and attain, likely contributed to Butler’s later life experiences with disability. In particular, it seems possible that Butler’s habitual dependence on caffeine pills could explain, in part, heart problems she later experienced.³⁹ I share these particular entries, therefore, to provide some context for reading the shifting abilities of her bodymind that began in the 1990s and continued until her death in 2006.

By the 1990s, Butler was firmly established as the first black woman science fiction writer and as a result she was more financially stable. Book sales, invitations for paid speaking engagements, and winning the MacArthur “Genius Grant” in 1995 (\$285,000 over five years) contributed to Butler’s growing economic stability. Beginning in 1993, however, she also started to experience extreme lethargy alongside menopause and uterine fibroids. On June 13, 1993, for example, she writes, “Yet I’m barely functioning [. . .] I’m not sure what’s wrong with me. I know only that I have scary physical problems and little energy. Now, a little reality: It’s summer and already hot. I’m in minapause. I have (a) fibroid(s). I hope that’s all. It’s enough.”⁴⁰ A year later, on June 14, 1994 she writes, “I feel worse. [. . .] dizzy, drowsy, like my old version of motionsickness. Closing eyes helps. Problem with being menopausal is that you can’t tell what should be blamed on the time of life, what on eating a food that disagrees, and what on something completely different. [. . .] I wish I felt well.”⁴¹ In an undated journal entry in 1999, Butler writes, “I don’t know why I’m still tired. It’s not real weariness, of course, but it feels real. It feels bad, but not painful. Just bad.”⁴² Finally, in a hauntingly prescient journal entry on June 23, 1999, just after she turned fifty-two, she considers her health and whether or not she should move to Seattle, writing:

I’m not writing, not working on the novel, not getting on with the one thing that matters to me. But also, I have pains and too much tiredness. [. . .] I fear that because I don’t understand what’s going on with my health. Maybe I’m just getting old. What if. . .? I always assumed that getting checked over would put an end to my worries. That was two physicals ago, yet nothing is solved.

Here is the thought that haunts me: Maybe I don’t have that much longer to live. Should I, then, spend a year of time I have left moving to another city. And (Or?) if I’m ill and going to need help, ought I to go where such help would be less available?⁴³

What these journal entries reveal is how Butler’s aging bodymind, likely in conjunction with her early life experiences with poverty, little sleep, lots of caffeine, and no healthcare, began to develop new disabilities.⁴⁴ While her dyslexia made reading a slower task and her other physical health concerns came and went in her young adulthood and mid-life, in Butler’s later life, lethargy and pain made writing, the one thing she loved most, increasingly difficult to do and do well. This continued to be a recurring problem for the rest of her life.⁴⁵

By the year 2000, Butler was on a number of heart medications that came with secondary health effects such as brain fog,⁴⁶ which she discusses in multiple journal entries as well as in communications with friends. On February 4, 2000, Butler believes that her “loss of passion is due to the blood pressure

medicine” and a few months later, on July 12, 2000, she describes not being able to write enough, write well enough, or learn enough, ending the entry by stating, “If the HBP [high blood pressure] meds are spacing me out, making it harder for me to do the only thing I care about—the thing I’ve spent my life doing, well then they are. I still have to take them.”⁴⁷ Over a year later, on May 15, 2001, Butler laments, “I’m taking a medication that flattens out the world for me. It makes sex an exercise in futility and writing an exercise in frustration [. . .] I don’t know what to do, but this is horrible. There has to be an alternative.”⁴⁸ Later still, on March 13, 2002, she reiterates her frustration and concern, writing:

I’m not functioning as well as I should be on any level. I’m not thinking or coping with the daily necessities very well.

Why? It isn’t all the medication. That’s part of it, certainly, but that’s not all. The rest is a combination of laziness and giving in—*letting* the medicine’s effect rule. It’s hard not to, but it isn’t impossible.⁴⁹

These entries in the early 2000s indicate that Butler’s heart medications were causing brain fog, which impacted her ability to work and write. This brain fog may have potentially been more difficult—or more frustrating—for Butler because of her dyslexia. Butler’s March 13, 2002 journal entry offers a particularly revealing example of how Butler’s internalized ableism and low self-perception continued to operate throughout her life. When medications prevented the mental clarity and focus to which she was accustomed, Butler returned to self-blaming language, referring to herself as lazy and as giving in. Here we can read the influence of the ideology of ability⁵⁰ and compulsory able-bodiedness⁵¹ on Butler’s frustration with her inability to control her changing bodymind and to maintain the level of able-bodiedness and able-mindedness she had previously experienced.

The secondary health effects of Butler’s heart medications, combined with her dyslexia, aging, and earlier health problems due to poverty and lack of access to healthcare seemed exceptionally worse in the final two years of her life.⁵² On May 26, 2005, she writes “Today I passed out for the first time in my adult life,” describing how, just an hour after taking her newest medication, Metolazone, she stood up from the kitchen table and felt dizzy, grabbing a “tower of boxes” for support, but nonetheless ending up “on the floor, intensely confused, scarily confused, and lying down” not knowing where she was.⁵³ During her fall, Butler knocked over the boxes she had grabbed and hit her head. She writes, “I’m not at all sure what I hit my head on I suspect it was the office fire extinguisher. I wound up with a lump over my left eye. It might have been the edge off the table, but then I think it would have been worse.”⁵⁴ Butler’s first adult experience of losing consciousness occurred about nine

months prior to her death on February 24, 2006. Her death was attributed to head injuries from a fall. In her final months, Butler seemed acutely aware of her decreasing abilities. On December 7, 2005, she writes, “I’m reduced to this. I do nothing. I’ve done nothing. I’ve done nothing creative since I came home from the tour, since I finished *FLEDGLING*.”⁵⁵ Butler seemed to experience increasingly disabling health effects in her final months, which her journals explicitly connect to side effects from her heart medications.⁵⁶ Throughout her entire life, therefore, Butler experienced a range of disabilities and health concerns.

This extended exploration of the role disability played in Butler’s lived experiences is intended to offer a basis for arguing that these experiences likely impacted her intellectual engagement with and representation of disability in her work. While personal experience with disability alone is not, in my estimation, enough to constitute someone as an author of disability literature, in this case I believe Butler’s lived experiences of disability throughout her life influenced her research on and representation of disability throughout her career.

RESEARCH

As an author of speculative fiction, Butler was meticulous about ensuring that the information in her novels was scientifically and historically correct. She was a regular reader of the *New York Times* and *Los Angeles Times*, an enthusiastic patron of the public library, and a thorough researcher, doing archival research at the Maryland Historical Society for *Kindred* and a hands-on research trip to Peru for *Lilith’s Brood*. While Butler frequently mentioned these research trips in speeches and interviews about her books, her papers further highlight the vastness of her research and intellectual interests. In this section, I will discuss the appearance of disability in Butler’s research materials and how her particular belief in the importance of obtaining knowledge on a subject before writing about it played out in regard to disability. This archival evidence builds my argument that disability is a central issue in Butler’s experiences, research, and writing, and, as a result, we should consider her an author of disability literature.

Butler’s papers contain both folders with research specific to individual book projects and a number of boxes with more general “subject files”—over 150 folders in which she saved mostly newspaper articles, but occasionally other print materials, based on categories of her own making. These folders are in addition to what is labeled in the archive as “research” files that are additional materials in the collection organized topically by the archivist rather than by Butler herself. For her own general subject files, Butler would handwrite the names of the articles she saved on the outside of the manila folder she kept

them in for her reference. An initial look at the Octavia E. Butler Papers' finding aid would suggest that only four of the subject folders, two labeled "Handicaps" and two labeled "Blindness," together containing a total of 109 items, were about disability. This seems relatively small in comparison to the seven folders labeled "Women," containing 210 total items, and the ten folders about "Black People," "Latinos," and "Racial Minorities," containing 226 total items. However, a closer look at the names of the articles listed on each manila folder in her subject file boxes reveals that articles on disability appear regularly in many other categories, particularly the folders labeled, "Medicine: Physical Health" and "Medicine: Mental Health." In total, I count approximately 250 articles about disability across Butler's self-organized subject files spanning over a twenty-year period. These articles range from more medical and scientific articles about symptoms, treatments, and discoveries to more human-interest-type stories about how people with disabilities live their lives, face oppression, and use adaptations and accommodations. The most frequently appearing disabilities are blindness and visual impairments (approximately fifty total articles), cancer, deafness/hearing loss, and AIDS (approximately twenty articles each). Other less commonly appearing disabilities include mental retardation, amputations, epilepsy, diabetes, conjoined twins, paralysis, and dyslexia. Additionally, Butler saved about ten articles about euthanasia, often referred to as "right to die" debates, which sometimes featured people with disabilities. The quantity and diversity of Butler's collection of articles on disability, disease, and disabled people demonstrates that, like issues of gender and race, disability was a major subject of interest for her.

Butler's research was fundamental to her writing process. In a motivational note to herself in 1976, she writes, "Speak and write only of things you've earned the right to speak and write about through experience and/or study."⁵⁷ As this note suggests, Butler believed in having a thorough understanding of anything she wrote about, which included writing about her own life experiences as well as about things she had extensively researched. This commitment to research- and experience-based fiction enhanced her ability to represent disability. Although medical and scientific articles appear more often in her subject and research files, Butler was still interested in and aware of the lived experiences of people with disabilities in terms of oppression, accommodations, and self-perceptions. For example, Butler mentions in a letter that the main character in her unpublished novel, *Blindsight*, which I will discuss later, was inspired by her blind friend whom she met in a writing class.⁵⁸ In addition to her articles on the causes and treatments for loss of sight, Butler's papers contain several newsletters and annual reports from the Braille Institute, a single page of Braille text, and a note about reading a book about the "psychodynamics" of blindness.⁵⁹ Later, in an undated note reflecting on the process of writing *Blindsight*, Butler writes, "Everything that leaves me living and

intact teaches. Blindsight taught me about blindness [. . .] I have done so much thinking about sight, writing about it.”⁶⁰ Another note circa 1984 further suggests Butler understood disability from beyond a simplistic individualized medical perspective. She writes:

We have learned not to humiliate, encarcerate, or otherwise afflict the handicapped. We have learned this because any one of us, at any time may become handicapped or have a friend or relative become handicapped. This is not the case with regard to race, religion, or ethnicity. Surprises happen in these categories, but they are rare and usually in some way voluntary.⁶¹

While the sentiment that we as a society have learned to treat people with disabilities humanely may be a bit too optimistic, Butler’s statement about the temporary nature of the nondisabled bodymind reflects both a truism of disability studies and her own experience with varying levels of ability and health throughout her life.⁶² Together, these items from the archive demonstrate Butler’s more holistic approach to disability research, which included the medical and biological without privileging it. This particular approach to and understanding of disability comes out quite clearly in the way Butler drafted and edited her representations of disabled characters.

Butler researched many medical, scientific, and biological details of the realist disabilities she represented, and she worked out these same elements for the nonrealist disabilities she created. That is, she used her research on real-world disabilities like blindness, cancer, deafness, and AIDS to inform the creation of fictional disabilities like hyperempathy and Duryea-Gode disease. The medical, scientific, and biological details Butler developed, however, tended to get cut from early drafts, informing the final text without dominating it. Instead, the social, personal, and interpersonal elements of disabled characters tend to be more prominent in the published final works. For example, in her research for *Kindred*, alongside her photocopied pages and notes from histories of Maryland and slave narratives, Butler also kept copies of several pages from a book entitled *Biological Foundations of Language*. On one page, Butler underlined a sentence about fissures in the brain interfering with speech production and wrote in the margin, “Here is Carrie’s Problem: Dysarthria (impaired speech)—caused by a lesion to the grey matter described on page 63. A congenital lesion.”⁶³ On the following two pages, Butler also underlined several sentences about dysarthria and wrote in the margin, “Dana will finally settle on some kind of brain damage. She cannot know, of course, but she can question intelligently. Fever? birth? Blow to head?”⁶⁴ While this medical information about what Butler intended to be Carrie’s disability is interesting, it never appears at all in the text. Instead, readers learn that Carrie is the only child of Sarah’s whom the Weylins have not sold because, as Sarah

states, “Carrie ain’t worth much as the others’ cause she can’t talk. People think she ain’t got good sense.”⁶⁵ Later in the text, Dana’s husband Kevin also reveals that he assumed Carrie was cognitively disabled because she communicates nonverbally.⁶⁶ Here it is clear that although Butler researched and developed the diagnostic backstory for Carrie’s disability, she ultimately chose to leave it unnamed and unexplained, allowing instead the discriminatory treatment Carrie experiences as a disabled black female slave to be the more prominent issue around this secondary character.

A similar trend appears in the way Butler developed two of her nonrealist disabilities, hyperempathy of the Parable series and Duryea-Gode Disease (DGD) of the short story “The Evening and the Morning and the Night,” as well as the drugs that caused their creation, Paracetco and Hedeonco, respectively. Early notes and drafts for *Parable of the Sower* include a notecard that details the genetic expression of hyperempathy as an x-linked, dominant trait that can also be caused by mutation through use of the drug Paracetco. Butler writes out the various genetic possibilities for giving birth to a child with hyperempathy, such as “A sharer woman with two sharer parents will mother only sharer children” whereas “A sharer man (who must have inherited sharing from his mother) married to a non-sharer woman will pass sharing on to his daughters, but not his sons,” and “A sharer woman with only one sharer parent has the usual autosomal dominant’s 50% chance of having sharer children.”⁶⁷ In a similar fashion, in one draft Butler includes about two and a half typed pages of details on how Paracetco worked initially as a treatment for Alzheimer’s, how it became an addictive, abused street drug that destroyed many lives, and how it created the new genetic disability of hyperempathy. This description of Paracetco includes information Butler had clearly researched in order to make the biochemical workings of the drug scientifically feasible, including the statement that Paracetco “was made up of, among other things, newly synthesized derivatives of acetylcholine.”⁶⁸

For the short story “The Evening and the Morning and the Night,” Butler researched and combined aspects of three realist diseases: Huntington’s disease, phenylketonuria, and Lesch-Nyhan.⁶⁹ In her notes for the story, Butler writes about sex-linked traits and recessive genes, while early drafts include detailed information on how Hedeonco, a fictional cancer drug, worked.⁷⁰ For example, one draft reads:

Hedeonco was a bio-synthesized protein that deactivated oncogenes that had gone wrong and began the cancer’s growth, and stimulated antioncogenes that normally protected the cells against such runaway production. And as the cancer shrank and vanished, a tiny, unnoticed change took place in the patient’s gametes. Eventually the change expressed itself in the children of patients.⁷¹

Once again, this detailed medical, scientific, and biological information was mostly removed from the final text, at least in such explicit form. Instead, similar to the representation of Carrie in *Kindred*, there is much more focus on the social, personal, and interpersonal elements of hyperempathy and Duryea-Gode disease in the published texts.

In both the Parable series and “The Evening and the Morning and the Night,” the reduction of explicit scientific and medical information is due in part to Butler’s choice to change from omniscient narrators in early drafts to the first-person voices of the main characters, Lauren and Lynn, in the final versions. While Butler tends to write in the first person or from a limited omniscient perspective, this choice is particularly beneficial in the representation of disabled characters because it ultimately privileges and centers their personal bodily, mental, and social experiences of disability rather than allowing the voices of doctors and researchers to dominate readers’ understanding of these nonrealist disabilities. This choice of narrator can also be read as a way that Butler rejected a purely medical model of disability, while still being greatly informed by medicine and science as a writer of science fiction.

Butler’s robust and multifaceted research on the many disabilities and diseases she represented—or which inspired her nonrealist disabilities—undergirded her development of these narratives. Disability plays a major role in the research Butler performed, both in terms of her general intellectual interests—as reflected in her subject files—and in terms of her specific research for a number of her narratives. The prominence and importance of disability in Butler’s lived experiences and research continues in her writing, in both her published and unpublished work.

WRITING

From primary characters like Dana from *Kindred*, Lauren from the Parable books, Lynn from “The Evening and the Morning and the Night,” and Shori from *Fledgling*, to secondary characters like Carrie from *Kindred*, Obsidian from “Speech Sounds,” and Naomi from “The Evening and the Morning and the Night,” disabled characters widely populate Butler’s narratives. Additionally, issues of what constitutes disability, ability, disease, and health permeate texts like *Dawn*,⁷² with the Oankali’s attraction to human cancer cells, *Mind of My Mind* and *Patternmaster*, with the labelling of people without psychic power as “mutes,” and *Clay’s Ark* and *Patternmaster*, with the children of humans infected by an alien disease considered monsters or animals.⁷³ Therí A. Pickens argues that Butler’s “work not only engages race, gender, and disability in content, but also in form,” creating aesthetic qualities such as “open-ended conclusions that frustrate the narrative cohesion associated with the novel form, intricate depictions of power that potentially alienate the able-bodied reader,

and contained literary chaos that upends the idea of ontological fixity.”⁷⁴ In terms of Butler’s writing, therefore, disability appears with respect to content, form, aesthetics, and themes. In order to understand Butler as an author of disability literature, we must read the roles of disability in Butler’s texts as intimately linked to the ways disability appeared within and impacted her lived experiences and research. There is not space here to closely analyze disability in each of Butler’s texts, thus, this section presents an overarching view of disability in Butler’s writing, with particular attention to her unpublished work. I build upon Pickens’s work on the role of disability in Butler’s aesthetics of the novel to demonstrate how disability is central to Butler’s writing in a number of additional ways, revealed in her personal papers.

Disability appears explicitly in the content of much of Butler’s published work. Disabled protagonists and secondary characters abound. Notes and drafts of both published and unpublished texts indicate Butler developed many more disabled characters than those that already populate her published work. Butler often created character profiles for everyone who appeared in her fictional worlds. For example, as part of a story concept for *Parable of the Talents* that was later cut, Butler planned to have Lauren unable to have children and instead purposefully adopt children who have hyperempathy or who are otherwise disabled. The character list for this story concept includes full names, races, birth dates, adoption dates, disabilities, and personality descriptions for eight planned potential characters. The profile for Philip Omolara Bankole notes he was born and adopted in 2035, after being abandoned at a few days old. He is African American and Asian, has a bilateral cleft lip and cleft palate, and is “Bright but likes to fight. [. . .] Big, tall, Loyal.”⁷⁵ In early drafts of *Kindred*, Butler planned to have Dana’s husband Kevin be black instead of white and have his ears cut off for attempting to escape—as readers hear happens to Alice’s husband Isaac in the final version of the novel.⁷⁶

The most notable disabled character to appear in Butler’s unpublished body of work is Aaron Taylor Garrett, the blind psychometric cult/religious leader in Butler’s completed but unpublished novel *Blindsight*.⁷⁷ Butler worked on the novel from about 1978 until 1984. It underwent repeated revisions after multiple rejections from publishers. Butler’s archive contains several complete versions of the novel, varying in length, which have sometimes very different plotlines, but always involve the same central characters and very similar thematic concerns. Again, Butler’s notes and drafts for this novel reveal the importance of disability in her writing and her informed perspective on disabled people. As indicated in the previous section, she did extensive research on blindness and the experiences of blind people. In notes for the novel on July 29, 1979, Butler tries to flesh out Aaron’s character, writing, “What makes him him? His ability and his blindness are NOT enough.”⁷⁸ In regard to finding the central challenge of the novel, Butler elsewhere writes, “What is Aaron

Taylor Garret's problem? Is it that he's blind? No, he was born blind. He can and does live blind."⁷⁹ Further, in general writing notes on January 23, 1989, she also remarks that "A handicap is probably not enough of a W.O. [worthy opponent] for a novel. How I Made It In Spite of Blindness, Deafness, mental problems, inability to walk, etc. is good for autobiography, but not for a novel. The handicap may be in effect, the ally of the W.O., but not the W.O. itself."⁸⁰ These quotes demonstrate how Butler viewed disability as an important aspect of a character's life, identity, and experiences, but not as their defining attribute or downfall. This view of disability is similarly reflected in how Butler lists disability as one of many characteristics in her character profiles. Disability, as Butler approaches it, is not a story in and of itself, but it can help to make a better, more interesting story.

Disability plays a key role not only in terms of characters in Butler's work, but also in terms of the themes—the larger abstract concepts and questions that get expressed and explored through representations of and discussions about disability. For example, how humans handle changing and adapted bodies is a regular theme in much of Butler's work, particularly in *Lilith's Brood* and *Seed to Harvest*. Butler began developing this theme in explicit relationship to disability in her unfinished third Parable book, tentatively titled *Parable of the Trickster*. In this text, Butler planned to have a group of Earthseed believers attempt to fulfill "the destiny" by traveling to an extrasolar planet and beginning human life there. Butler worked with several possible challenges the community would face, primarily in regard to adapting to the environment or to what the environment was doing to their bodies. One of the earliest storylines involves the entire community going blind and learning to adjust to the change.⁸¹ In another storyline, the main character Imara develops "a contagious kind of insanity" for which she is "oppressed, disparaged, and forced into harmful medical treatments until" more people in the community develop the same intensely real hallucinations and it becomes Imara's job to help them accept the change and adapt.⁸² Butler also toyed with having people on the colony all beginning to have seizures.⁸³ Afterward, they "regress" for hours or days where they can't control their bodies and some end up with permanent disabilities such as blindness and paralysis. The disabled group in this draft refers to themselves as "imps," short for impaired—a term remarkably similar to how disabled people in some activist, artist, and scholarly communities refer to themselves as "crips."⁸⁴ Here it is clear that disability, in some shape or form, was central to Butler's vision of both the content and the thematic concerns of the third, ultimately unfinished, Parable book.

In addition to these examples, in other texts, disability-related themes emerge as directly related to Butler's personal experiences with disability. For example, we might consider how Shori's amnesia in *Fledgling* relates to Butler's later life experiences with brain fog, experiences she had during and after

writing the novel. More explicitly, in notecards for speeches, Butler refers to her dyslexia as part of the inspiration for the short story “The Evening and the Morning and the Night.” She writes, “I have an interest in medicine. I once thought of becoming a nurse. But I’m dyslexic. I can’t always trust what I see. I have fast, but sometimes off reflexes. I don’t drive to avoid killing people. I understood quickly that I shouldn’t become a nurse—to avoid killing people.”⁸⁵ The connection between Butler’s own disability and the thematic concerns in the short story is not as direct as, for example, creating a character with dyslexia, but nonetheless, Butler makes clear here that her lived experiences of disability influenced her writing.

Disability is strongly present throughout Butler’s body of work, from her published texts and her early notes and drafts to her unfinished and unpublished works such as *Blindsight* and *Parable of the Trickster*. Disability appears not only in the form of disabled primary and secondary characters, but also in terms of thematic concerns, often in direct relationship to more commonly discussed matters of race and gender. By exploring not only Butler’s published work but also her drafts, notes, and unpublished work now available in her archive, it is even more apparent how disability played an important role in Butler’s development of characters, storylines, and themes. Ignoring the mutually constitutive nature of disability, race, gender, and class in Butler’s writing obscures the complexity of her approach to creatively representing power and oppression in a variety of forms.

CONCLUSION: FRAMING FUTURE CONVERSATIONS

In this article, I have compiled evidence from Butler’s published work, public interviews, and personal papers, drafts, and research files that collectively demonstrate that disability was and is an important part of Butler’s lived experiences, research, and writing. Pickens has previously contended that “scholarship on Butler neglects a fuller engagement with ability and embodied knowledge as significant within Butler’s discussions of power—separate from yet interacting with racialized and gendered discourses.”⁸⁶ I agree and further argue that disability studies scholars have also mostly overlooked Butler’s work, perhaps due to perceptions of Butler as primarily or exclusively an author of African American, feminist, and speculative fiction literature. While in many ways I believe the preponderance of representations of disability in Butler’s writing alone could give disability studies and Butler scholars reason to explore disability in Butler’s oeuvre, the ways in which disability also played a major role in Butler’s lived experiences and research interests cements her position as a major author of disability literature.

Understanding Butler as an author of disability literature is important for Butler scholars, especially those coming from critical race and gender studies

perspectives, for Butler's experiences and representations of disability are intimately connected to her experiences and representations of race, gender, and class. For example, a scholar might be inclined to read Butler's self-deprecating language in her journals as indicative of her struggle to love herself as a masculine-presenting, dark-skinned black woman in a racist and sexist world. However, as my discussions of her experiences with dyslexia in school demonstrate, disability also largely influenced her self-perception, especially in regard to her use of terms like "lazy" and "undisciplined." An understanding of the role of disability in Butler's lived experiences, research, and writing can change the way we read the roles of race, gender, and class in her life and career as well. It is important to take such an intersectional approach to an author who insisted upon complexities and nuance in her work.

Similarly, considering Butler an author of disability literature is significant for disability studies scholars because the field has much work to do in terms of research on race and disability. Further, literary disability studies tends to focus on texts by white western authors and develop theories about how disability is represented in literature generally via how disability appears in these white texts. We have yet to strongly interrogate how methods and approaches may need to change when analyzing work from marginalized groups, such as in African American literature. In terms of teaching, literary disability studies courses often draw from this very white informal canon of disability literature, perhaps including a text by Toni Morrison to diversify the list. Little attention has been paid to Butler despite the prevalence of disability in her work. I hope that my introduction here of the role of disability in Butler's lived experiences and research, in addition to her writing, will open up even more conversations about her in literary disability studies scholarship and classrooms. I also hope that the process I have modeled in exploring Butler's lived experiences, research, and writing will prove useful in discussing other writers we may seek to identify as authors of disability literature.

We have only just begun to understand the role of disability in Butler's life and work given the extensive materials now available to us through her papers. This article, therefore, is merely a start to what I hope will be a continued robust conversation among disability studies scholars and Butler scholars alike. This understanding does not replace or overshadow our previous conceptualizations of Butler as a black feminist speculative fiction author, but rather enhances and provides additional nuance to these other ways of reading her life and work.

NOTES

1. Octavia E. Butler, "OEB 928," Octavia E. Butler Papers, The Huntington Library, Art Collections, and Botanical Gardens, San Marino, CA (henceforth referred to as "Butler Papers), 1969–1974.

2. See, for example, Therí A. Pickens, “‘You’re Supposed to Be a Tall, Handsome, Fully Grown White Man’: Theorizing Race, Gender, and Disability in Octavia Butler’s *Fledgling*,” *Journal of Literary & Cultural Disability Studies* 8, no. 1 (2014); Claire P. Curtis, “Utopian Possibilities: Disability, Norms, and Eugenics in Octavia Butler’s *Xenogenesis*,” *ibid* 9 (2015); Megan Obourn, “Octavia Butler’s Disabled Futures,” *Contemporary Literature* 54, no. 1 (2013).
3. Therí A. Pickens, “Octavia Butler and the Aesthetics of the Novel,” *Hypatia* 30, no. 1 (2015): 174.
4. Some foundational work in literary disability studies canon building includes Rosemarie Garland-Thomson, *Extraordinary Bodies: Figuring Physical Disability in American Culture and Literature* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997); David T. Mitchell and Sharon L. Snyder, *Narrative Prosthesis: Disability and the Dependencies of Discourse* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2001); Ato Quayson, *Aesthetic Nervousness: Disability and the Crisis of Representation* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007); Alice Hall, *Disability and Modern Fiction: Faulkner, Morrison, Coetzee, and the Nobel Prize for Literature* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012); Lennard J. Davis, *Enforcing Normalcy: Disability, Deafness, and the Body* (London; New York: Verso, 1995).
5. Chris Bell, “Introducing White Disability Studies: A Modest Proposal,” in *The Disability Studies Reader*, edited by Lennard J. Davis (New York: Routledge, 2006).
6. Michael Northen, “Wordgathering: About Us,” accessed May 16, 2017, <http://www.wordgathering.com/about.html>.
7. Mitchell and Snyder, *Narrative Prosthesis*, 52.
8. Historically, people with disabilities have also been referred to as crippled and handicapped, or by disability specific terms such as mute, dumb, lame, or retarded. Disabled people have more recently also been referred to by a plethora of “nice” words like handicapable or special needs. The term generally preferred and used among disabled activists and academics, however, is disability. For more on the problems with these other above terms and why disability is the one word non-disabled people should use, see Simi Linton, *Claiming Disability: Knowledge and Identity* (New York: New York University Press, 1998), chapter 2.
9. *Ibid.*, 13.
10. *Ibid.*, 13; original emphasis.
11. Bryan A. Garner, *A Dictionary of Modern Legal Usage*, 2nd ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 806.
12. *Ibid.*, 806; original emphasis.
13. Sami Schalk, “Coming to Claim Crip: Disidentification with/in Disability Studies,” Article, *Disability Studies Quarterly* 33, no. 2 (2013), <http://dsq-sds.org/article/view/3705/3240>.
14. Thank you to Ayana Jamieson, Moya Bailey, Therí A. Pickens, Jess Waggoner, Susan Schweik, and the audience members from my first presentation of these

- materials at MLA 2016 for each helping me develop my ideas and rationale around the choice to not edit Butler's work.
15. Scholars who mention Butler's dyslexia include: Gregory Jerome Hampton, *Changing Bodies in the Fiction of Octavia Butler: Slaves, Aliens, and Vampires* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2010), xvi; Sandra Govan, "Disparate Spirits yet Kindred Souls: Octavia E. Butler, 'Speech Sounds,' and Me," in *Strange Matings: Science Fiction, Feminism, African American Voices, and Octavia E. Butler*, edited by Rebecca J. Holden and Nisi Shawl (Seattle: Aqueduct Press, 2013), 16, 110; Nisi Shawl, "Invisible Inks: On Black Sf Authors and Disability," in *Shattering Ableist Narratives*, edited by JoSelle Vanderhooft (Seattle, WA: Aqueduct Press, 2013).
 16. See, for example, Octavia E. Butler, *Conversations with Octavia Butler* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2010), 36, 39, 86.
 17. *Ibid.*, 127.
 18. See "OEB 2355," Octavia E. Butler Papers.
 19. I use undiagnosed tentatively. I have yet to find archival evidence of Butler receiving an official diagnosis. However, Nisi Shawl writes that Butler received a diagnosis prior to high school; information that, Shawl informed me in email communication, she received directly from Butler herself in a private conversation. See Shawl, "Invisible Inks," 42.
 20. See "OEB 1857," Butler Papers, 1994.
 21. While the concept of the school to prison pipeline emerged well after Butler was in school, work in this area illuminates how race, gender, and disability collectively shape the experiences of black children in school. See Monique W. Morris, *Pushout: The Criminalization of Black Girls in Schools* (New York: The New Press, 2016); or Nirmala Erevelles, "Crippin' Jim Crow: Disability, Dis-Location, and the School-to-Prison Pipeline," in *Disability Incarcerated: Imprisonment and Disability in the United States and Canada*, edited by Liat Ben-Moshe, Chris Chapman, and Allison C. Carey (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014).
 22. See "OEB 946," Butler Papers, 1972.
 23. See "OEB 3226," Butler Papers, 1983–1984.
 24. Shawl, "Invisible Inks," 43.
 25. Margaret Price, "The Bodymind Problem and the Possibilities of Pain," *Hypatia* 30, no. 1 (2015): 271.
 26. See "OEB 928.," "Oeb 1069," Butler Papers, 1999.
 27. See "OEB 920," Butler Papers, 1964.
 28. See "OEB 928."
 29. See "OEB 986," 1974.
 30. See "OEB 3222," Butler Papers, 1980–1984. Additionally, in an entry on May 28, 1980, Butler states: "I feel no passion of hatred or anger when I say my litiny of self-depreciatory or other negative things. I feel no passion, but I feel satisfaction, odd comfort in the midst of discomfort, as though I should be running myself down, as though I'm getting what I deserve for being so bad and worthless."

31. See "OEB 3226."
32. See, for example, "OEB 3246," Butler Papers, CA, 1990–2004. In a journal entry from July 12, 2000, she discusses killing herself and hopes that she does it in a quick and effective way that doesn't involve a hospital or nursing home.
33. This information is confirmed in a 1998 draft of her will. See "OEB 6781," Butler Papers, 1998.
34. See, for example, "OEB 1517," Butler Papers, 1980? Within, a note from 1971 details her goal of earning at least \$500 per month from writing in order to be able to get a bachelor's and a master's degree (in anthropology with an English minor) as well as a desire to attend to her unnamed "physical problems. Note that the finding aid dates the folder containing this note as "1980?," however, the note ends with the statement "The time between my acquiring my Masters and now should be 5 (five) years or less. I could be handed that degree in June of 1976," thus my dating this specific note as circa 1971 instead.
35. See "OEB 946."
36. See "OEB 947," Butler Papers, 1972.
37. See "OEB 954," Butler Papers, 1972.
38. See "OEB 928," Butler Papers.
39. The science on caffeine and heart health is mixed; however, several studies do suggest that high and long-term caffeine consumption can negatively impact the heart. See, for example, Robert Rauh, et al., "Acute Effects of Caffeine on Heart Rate Variability in Habitual Caffeine Consumers," *Clinical Physiology and Functional Imaging* 26, no. 3 (2006); Niels P. Riksen, Gerard A. Rongen, and Paul Smits, "Acute and Long-Term Cardiovascular Effects of Coffee: Implications for Coronary Heart Disease," *Pharmacology & Therapeutics* 121, no. 2 (2009); Elizabeth Mostofsky, et al., "Habitual Coffee Consumption and Risk of Heart Failure: A Dose-Response Meta-Analysis," *Circulation: Heart Failure* 5, no. 4 (2012).
40. See "OEB 3266," Butler Papers, 1993.
41. See "OEB 1825," in Butler Papers, 1994.
42. See "OEB 1069." In this same file on March 4, 1999, she writes she had a good writing day the day before, "But today, all I can think of is that I want to go back to bed. I'm sleepier than I should be. It's as though I used up my energy walking. I'm going to take a nap, then go out."
43. See "OEB 2081," in Butler Papers, 1999.
44. These journal entries also provide some important information about how diagnosis and improved class status do not always automatically improve things for disabled people. While there is not space here to discuss it, the ways in which diagnosis, medical care, and class status do and do not change material circumstances for disabled people, especially disabled people of color, is an important issue for disability studies scholars to take up and consider.
45. For a later life example, see Octavia E. Butler, "OEB 3279," Butler Papers, 2005–2006. In an entry on October 1, 2005 she states, "I'm lethargic and almost

- indifferent. Almost. Fact is, I know this is wrong, so I do care. I need to write—or I recall needing to write and want it again.”
46. I use the term “brain fog” to refer to a lack of mental clarity or focus, including confusion and forgetfulness. This term is used often by people with various mental disabilities.
 47. See “OEB 3246.”
 48. See “OEB 1122,” Butler Papers, 2001.
 49. See “OEB 1136,” Butler Papers, 2002. On March 6, 2002, Butler similarly writes, “I am frighteningly worthless today. Yesterday I got tangled up in a simple non-problem and took maybe a half an hour to work it out. I should be coming out of this by tomorrow. The worst is feeling overwhelmed by things that are simple, that are even familiar.”
 50. See Tobin Siebers, *Disability Theory* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2008), 8–11.
 51. See the Introduction of Robert McRuer, *Crip Theory: Cultural Signs of Queerness and Disability* (New York: New York University Press, 2006).
 52. See, for example, “OEB 1156,” Butler Papers, 2005. On January 24, 2005, she writes “I don’t seem to be getting better really. [. . .] Pretty much everything is exhausting.”
 53. See “OEB 3155,” Butler Papers, 2005.
 54. Ibid.
 55. See “OEB 1170,” Butler Papers, 2005.
 56. See, for example, “OEB 3279.” There, on February 11, 2006, she writes, “I can’t go on this way. I hope it’s just something that will improve with the coming spring.”
 57. See “OEB 1514,” Butler Papers, 1976.
 58. See “OEB 4179,” Butler Papers, 1979.
 59. See “OEB Box 275 Folder 4,” Butler Papers, ca 1980; “OEB 1060,” Butler Papers, 1998.
 60. See “OEB 3219,” Butler Papers, 1979.
 61. See “OEB 3228,” Butler Papers, 1984.
 62. There is an often-repeated truism in disability studies that everyone will become disabled if they live long enough, or, stated differently, that disability is an equal opportunity minority group that anyone can join at any time. This sentiment is useful in introducing disability studies to people and perhaps convincing them of its importance. However, it is also important to consider who is more likely to become disabled and why, incorporating issues of race, gender, class, and nation into discussions of the open-endedness of disability. See, for example, McRuer, 203–208; Nirmala Erelles, *Disability and Difference in Global Contexts: Enabling a Transformative Body Politic* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 17.
 63. See “OEB Box 289 Folder 8,” Butler Papers, pre 1979.
 64. Ibid.
 65. *Kindred* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2003), 76.

66. Ibid., 242.
67. See “OEB 1708,” Butler Papers, ca 1990.
68. See “OEB 1722,” Butler Papers, ca 1989.
69. Octavia E. Butler, *Bloodchild and Other Stories*, 2nd ed. (New York: Seven Stories Press, 2005), 69.
70. See “OEB 516,” Butler Papers, ca 1983.
71. See “OEB 511,” Butler Papers, ca 1983.
72. Note that *Dawn* now appears in *Lilith's Brood* (New York: Aspect/Warner Books, 2000).
73. Note that *Mind of My Mind*, *Clay's Ark*, and *Patternmaster* now appear together in *Seed to Harvest* (New York: Warner Books, 2007).
74. Pickens, “Octavia Butler and the Aesthetics of the Novel,” 168.
75. See “OEB 3266.”
76. See “OEB 1189,” Butler Papers, 1976; “Oeb 1212,” Butler papers, 1976.
77. The style of *Blindsight* provides an interesting addition to Pickens's arguments about how disability impacts the aesthetics and form of Butler's novels. Since Aaron is a blind narrator, the text relies less on visual description than one would typically expect.
78. See “OEB 3260,” Butler Papers, 1979–1980.
79. See “OEB 3221,” Butler Papers, 1980–1983.
80. See “OEB 3239,” Butler Papers, 1988.
81. See “OEB 1049,” Butler Papers, 1998; “OEB 2078,” Butler Papers, ca 1999; “OEB 2170,” Butler Papers, ca 2001.
82. See “OEB 2055,” Butler Papers, ca 2001; “OEB 2215,” Butler Papers, 2000; “OEB 2153,” Butler Papers, ca 2001; “OEB 2123,” Butler Papers, ca 2001.
83. See “OEB 2150,” Butler Papers, ca 2001.
84. For more on the politics of crip, see Alison Kafer, *Feminist, Queer, Crip* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2013), 6–17.
85. See “OEB 3101,” Butler Papers, ca 2001. Elsewhere, noting again her dyslexia, her interest in medicine, and her choice not to drive, she refers to “The Evening and the Morning and the Night” as her “personal responsibility story.” See “OEB 3087,” Butler Papers, ca 1993.
86. Pickens, “‘You're Supposed to Be a Tall, Handsome, Fully Grown White Man': Theorizing Race, Gender, and Disability in Octavia Butler's Fledgling,” 34.