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Making the *Muggle*

A Study of Processes of Othering in J.K. Rowling's *Harry Potter* and
how Teachers Can Use the Novels to Work with Issues of Ableism

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Abstract

The magical fictional setting of the *Harry Potter* novels is not one separated from our own. It features the same nations and the same history as the real world. Its society is parallel to ours due to similar traditions and hierarchies, such as heteronormativity, ageism, racism, and fascism. Some of these are clearly problematised in the novels, others are not. While issues of racism and blood status are clearly at the forefront of the story of *Harry Potter*, there are layers to the conflict which reveal that there is more to the discriminatory dilemma than the issue of blood purity. This essay aims to investigate how teachers can use J.K. Rowling's *Harry Potter* series to lead a discussion about othering and discrimination, focusing on the issue of ableism in particular.

The goal when studying processes of othering in *Harry Potter* is not necessarily for the reader to identify with the protagonists. Instead, textual silences will be interpreted to investigate whether the othering of people like the readers themselves, an othering the reader partakes in when empathising with the protagonists, can be compared to ableism in the real world, and how teachers can use *Harry Potter* as means to introduce the idea of able-bodiedness as a social construct. By applying crip theory to the text, it can be stated that the division between the protagonist and his non-magical Other is based on ableist ideologies, which result in a positioning of the non-magical as disabled in the magical society. This position is maintained by naturalising the link between impairment and character flaws.

Keywords: Harry Potter, othering, ableism, crip theory, disability studies, pedagogy, anti-oppressive education

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“Hogwarts ... is a school for people with special abilities—”
Albus Dumbledore, *Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince*, p. 225

“It’s real for us... Not for her.”
Severus Snape, *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows*, p. 544

1. Introduction

The 2011 World Health Organisation report reveals that about 15% of the world’s population is disabled.¹ In the USA, the disabled make up the biggest, and most economically marginalised minority.² Despite this, there is scarce representation of people with disabilities in mainstream narratives, and a lack of coverage of this topic in teacher programmes. Considering the very real danger of ‘saying the wrong thing’, and thus be made accountable for the oppressive attitudes which they may not even be aware that they are harbouring, it is easier for pedagogues to simply stay clear of the subject. However, if oppression is defined not only as the exclusion of basic needs and right but also as obscuring certain groups’ visibility, to silence the perspectives of disabled people by choosing not to foreground them is also a form of oppression that teachers must not neglect to problematise. Therefore, discussing the ableist formation of media, that is, the way that certain degrees of functionality are portrayed as “natural”, resulting othering of the disabled, should be considered a priority in an anti-oppressive curriculum.

The solution, according to Kevin Kumashiro, is to study not the oppressed groups, but the processes which result in oppression. Kumashiro demands that anti-oppressive education moves away from tendencies of studying the ways the “Other” differs from the “us” and instead look at what makes the “us” dependent on the idea of the “Other”.³

The Other of the international best-selling novels about the young magical orphan, Harry Potter, by J. K. Rowling is the non-magical, regular human being. This category of people is made the narrative’s Other through multi-layered processes of othering. While the issues of racism and cultural heritage are clearly at the forefront of *Harry Potter*, there are variations to the conflict that reveal more complex hierarchies in *Harry Potter*’s world than the issue of

¹ World Health Organisation, “World report on disability” Retrieved from http://www.who.int/disabilities/world_report/2011/report/en/ 2016-12-30 11.57

² “...[People] with disabilities make up 12 to 15 percent of the population”, Davis, Lennard J. *Bending over Backwards: Disability, Dismodernism & Other Difficult Positions*. 2002. New York University Press, New York & London. p. 87

³ Kumashiro, Kevin. 2002. *Troubling Education: queer activism and antioppressive pedagogy*. RoutledgeFalmer, New York.

blood purity. Many of the arguments used for separating magical and non-magical people are founded in ableist ideas. This study will attempt to show how a reading of *Harry Potter* through the lens of *crip theory*, the study of the processes that make those of atypical functionality “abnormal”, can help teachers address this theme in the classroom.

2. Aim

The aim of this essay is to investigate processes of othering in all seven of the original *Harry Potter* novels that rely on ableist ideologies that make the non-magical appear disabled. Narrative silences will be interpreted to investigate implicit ideologies about disability and able-bodiedness and how ableism—the “[discrimination] against people who are not able-bodied”⁴—plays a part in othering the non-magical in *Harry Potter*. Furthermore, discussion will be raised regarding how the othering of people like the reader themselves can be used to raise awareness amongst students of functionality as a social construct, and its consequences.

3. Background: Working with the Fundamental Values

The goals for working with the fundamental values with a focus on norms and values in the Swedish upper secondary school states that each individual student must be given opportunities to learn to:

- [...] consciously determine their views based on knowledge of human rights and fundamental democratic values, as well as personal experiences
- ...respect the intrinsic value and integrity of other people
- ...reject the subjection of people to oppression and degrading treatment, and also assist in helping people
- [...] interact with other people based on respect for differences in living conditions, culture, language, religion and history
- [...] empathise with and understand the situation of other people, and develop a willingness to act with their best interests at heart...⁵

These goals should permeate all subjects and activities in Swedish schools. Through this, teachers are to understand that it is an overarching assignment for the Swedish school to raise socially and politically aware adults who can apply perspectives other than their own. The goal

⁴ Oxford Dictionary of Psychology, Retrieved from <http://www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/acref/9780199534067.001.0001/acref-9780199534067-e-15> 2017-01-17 15.46

⁵ Skolverket. 2013. *Curriculum for the upper secondary school*, p. 10 Retrieved from <http://www.skolverket.se/publikationer?id=2975> 2016-12-19; 16.58

is to combat “[all] tendencies to discrimination or degrading treatment.”⁶ Anti-discriminatory education is promoted as standard.

In the curriculum for English for upper secondary school, one goal is to let students “develop their insight into living conditions, social issues and cultural phenomena” in parts of the world where English is used.⁷ Considering the role of the English language in the process of globalisation, it may be possible to argue that almost any living conditions and cultural phenomena are relevant to this goal. Combined with the course goals of English 6 and 7, according to which students will acquire strategies for source criticism, dismantling ideologies and implicit meanings, the English classroom then becomes a figurative smorgasbord for working with the fundamental values.

While reading texts and watching media from different parts of the world where English is used in order to discuss living conditions certainly has its merits, it is not always optimal to get students to learn how to empathise. These places and peoples may appear to students as remote, and it does not necessarily provoke what Kevin Kumashiro calls *disruptive knowledge*, which is a crucial component to obtain change.⁸

3.1. Why *Harry Potter*? Benefits of Reading Fantasy in the Classroom

While many scholars maintain that racism is the basis of oppression in *Harry Potter*,⁹ the division between magical and non-magical people is based on the presence or absence of magical *ability*, not the idea of magical and non-magical *races*. In the fictional world of *Harry Potter*, people are either born with or without magical powers; these non-magical people are called *Muggles* by the magical population. Witches and wizards live in hiding from *Muggles*, in accordance with the international magical law. Still, this magical population interacts with non-magical people often enough to warrant entire departments of their government-branch, the Ministry of Magic, dedicated specifically to dealing with them. In fact, the main purpose of this ministry is to keep the existence of magic hidden from non-magical people.¹⁰

Harry Potter is useful in the discussion about processes of racialisation. In her thesis *Magiska möjligheter: Harry Potter, Artemis Fowl och Cirkeln i skolans värdegrundsarbete*,

⁶ Skolverket. *Curriculum for the upper secondary school*, p. 4

⁷ Skolverket. 2011. *Curriculum for English for upper secondary school*. Retrieved from http://www.skolverket.se/laroplaner-amnen-och-kurser/gymnasieutbildning/gymnasieskola/eng?subjectCode=ENG&courseCode=ENGENG07&lang=sv&tos=gy#anchor_ENGENG07_2016-12-19_17.28

⁸ Kumashiro, p. 42

⁹ Eccleshare, Julia. 2002. *A Guide to the Harry Potter Novels*. Continuum, London. p. 75

¹⁰ *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone*, p 70

Malin Alkestrand explores the theme of “mixed race problems” through the example of Hermione Granger, who is a girl with magical ability born to non-magical parents, a so-called *Muggle-born*.¹¹ Amongst derogatory names and attitudes festers the idea that magical blood should be kept “pure” by keeping these *Muggle-born* magical individuals out of the magical society and denying them the right to carry magical instruments like wands, and pursuing a magical education.¹² By looking at the reception of *Muggle-borns* amongst people with traceable magical lineage—so-called *pure-bloods*—a discussion about the layers of racial tension can be provoked amongst students. Harry is first introduced to the racist ideologies of the magical culture via the character Draco Malfoy upon his first day of re-entering the magical society.¹³ Draco expresses the idea that there is a right and a wrong way to acquire magical ability. As Harry rejects Draco’s offer of friendship,¹⁴ as well as refusing the placement in the same House as Draco at Hogwarts,¹⁵ the reader is put in opposition to these ideologies and it becomes clear to the reader that the *explicit ideology* of the novels is anti-racist.¹⁶ This presents the magical society as ethical and justifies the reader’s wish to identify with it.

The benefit of reading fantasy with the purpose of dismantling processes of othering is that it makes the reader aware of commonplace things, structures and occasions which occur often in their own life, through a lens of displacement. Alkestrand makes use of the theory of *defamiliarisation* (my translation), first introduced by Viktor Sklovskij.¹⁷ In the school of *defamiliarisation*, the strength of using fantasy is the distance the genre creates to the reader’s reality, all while often mirroring certain structures and events in the real world.¹⁸ Reading fiction will allow the reader to be transported not only to a new place, but also to a new state of being. Through *defamiliarisation*, what is familiar to the reader becomes distant, while closeness to what may have seemed foreign before is achieved. With this comes a possibility to reshape ethical frameworks. It is through *defamiliarisation* that readers may gain new perspectives on already familiar concepts.¹⁹

¹¹ Alkestrand, Malin. 2016. *Magiska möjligheter: Harry Potter, Artemis Fowl och Cirkeln I skolans värdegrundsarbete*. Makadam förlag, Göteborg and Stockholm. p. 197-206

¹² *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows*, p. 168-169

¹³ *Harry Potter and the Philosopher’s Stone*, p. 84

¹⁴ *Harry Potter and the Philosopher’s Stone*, p. 116

¹⁵ *Harry Potter and the Philosopher’s Stone*, p. 130

¹⁶ *Harry Potter and the Philosopher’s Stone*, p. 117

¹⁷ Alkestrand, p. 84

¹⁸ Alkestrand, p. 12-13

¹⁹ Nikolajeva, Maria & Saxena, Vandana, qtd in Alkestrand, p. 88-89

If *defamiliarisation* is one strength of fantasy, the other would be what Molloy calls *recognition*.²⁰ According to Sheila Egoff, the strength of fantasy is its ability to “[transport] us to a world different from the real world, yet to demonstrate certain immature truths that persist even there.”²¹ Fantasy often follows the structure of allegorical narrative; a fictional narrative parallel to the real world. The narrative of *Harry Potter* in particular is set in a world very similar to our own, not only through the school setting (which naturally will appear familiar to students); it also shares similar societal structures, ideologies and conflicts with the real world.

The young protagonists of the *Harry Potter* novels learn quite early to question established structures and to mistrust those who cling to tradition without questioning it. Ron W. Cooley states that “[Harry Potter is] invariably placed in situations where the authority of [his] elders is demonstrably ‘in the wrong’, at best misguided, at worst corrupt.”²² Through the example of Harry Potter, readers learn to recognise certain signs of oppression, as well as see the consequences of combatting oppressive structures.

However, being aware of oppression and wanting to end it does not equate acting in a way that prevents it. Alkestrand uses the example of Harry’s friend Hermione’s commitment to the cause of the house elves, a race which lives in slave-like arrangements, to show how the outsider’s perspective can be useful to highlight oppressive cultural hierarchies, but still lead to turning in one form of oppression for another. Hermione does not aim to end the house-elves’ enslavement on their own terms.²³ This results in Hermione appointing herself the oppressed group’s custodian, much in the same way that magical people do with non-magical people. Hermione serves, in Alkestrand’s opinion, as a warning against a tendency by the powerful to interpret the needs of the oppressed.

Similarly, Kumashiro notes that encouraging students to do empathic readings where they are led to relate to the protagonist’s struggles, does not necessarily lead to a change in behaviour. The assumption that reading about the Other will lead to a better understanding of them is based on the idea that there is a fundamental difference between “us” and “them”. This does not challenge the students’ idea of who they themselves are in relation to the Other.²⁴ The

²⁰ Öhman, Anders. 2015. *Litteraturdidaktik, fiktioner och intriger*. 1st edition. Gleerups Utbildning AB, Malmö. p. 96-101

²¹ Egoff, Sheila. 2005. *The New Republic of Childhood*, qtd in Maier, Sarah E. “Educating Harry Potter: A Muggle’s Perspective on Magic and Knowledge in the Wizard World of J.K. Rowling” in Hallet, Cynthia Whitney (ed) *New Scholarly Studies in Harry Potter*. The Edwin Mellen Press, Wales. p. 9

²² Cooley, Ron. W. 2005. “Harry Potter and the Temporal Prime Directive: Time Travel, Rule-breaking, and Misapprehension in Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkanban.” in Hallet, C. W. *Scholarly Studies in Harry Potter. Applying Academic Method to a Popular Text*. p. 30-42. The Edwin Mellen Press, New York & Ontario. p. 29

²³ Alkestrand, p. 201-205, 220-221

²⁴ Kumashiro, p. 43

benefit, then, is that in the parallel magical world of *Harry Potter*, the defining Other has more in common with the reader in regards to opportunity and ability than the protagonist has. It can help students consider how they themselves may become Other through oppressive structures, and thus gain insight into how people whom they perceive as different from themselves may have been constructed that way through similar processes.²⁵

3.2. Teaching Without Oppression; Teaching Anti-Oppression

One of the problems of many approaches to teaching about oppression is that it is often conducted through education “about the Other”.²⁶ Identities and practices which do not abide by normative rules are discussed in a climate that maintains and reinforces assumptions about and expectations of the Other; this makes up a limiting framework for what new insights students may take from the text.²⁷ Though this appears benevolent, it is also a form of oppression.²⁸ At first glance it may seem like these frameworks are used for positive means, like admiration of the culture or support of the Other’s struggles. However, this benevolence often takes the form of exotification²⁹ or paternalism.³⁰ It creates limitations on the terms of the dominant culture. This is a form of problematic tolerance which does not actually benefit the oppressed groups, but instead establishes the dominant culture as the norm.³¹

Education about the Other also allows students to remain as bystanders in the process of othering. It permits them to not recognise the part we all play in oppressive practices and structures. It is not enough to read about the Other, but rather the underlying mechanisms of othering must always be central when teachers choose which texts and stories to share with their students. Because othering is necessary for the dominant culture to remain privileged³²

²⁵ Kumashiro, p. 64

²⁶ Kumashiro, p. 39-40

²⁷ Rosenblatt, L. 2005 *Making meaning with text: selected essays*. Heinemann, Portsmouth. p. 51

²⁸ Kumashiro, p. 33

²⁹ Exotification is a process that creates the Other for the benefit of the norm, in this case with basis in the idea of the *exotic*. Leaning on Edward Said’s *orientalism* (Said, Edward. (1978) *Orientalism*. 2003 edition. Penguin, London.), *exoticism* is the remodelling of the term to move away from exclusively referring to the “Orient”. It has most commonly been used to look at processes of othering founded in racism, but it is also useful to discuss other processes that create and maintain difference through fetishism.

³⁰ Paternalism is a form of oppression which refers to a person or an institution, such as the state, claiming guardianship over an individual on the premise that it is done for the individual’s own good, without the individual being given a chance to give informed consent. Paternalism “involves some kind of limitation on the freedom or autonomy of some agent and it does so for a particular class of reasons.” Dworkin, Gerald, “Paternalism”, *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Winter 2016 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), Retrieved from <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2016/entries/paternalism> 2017-01-17 15.40

³¹ Larsson & Rosén. “Väl villighet på de privilegierades villkor” *Pedagogiska Magasinet*. Retrieved from <http://pedagogiskamagasinet.se/valvillighet-pa-de-privilegierades-villkor/> 2017-01-17 15.10

³² Kumashiro, p. 37

and “changing oppression requires *disruptive* knowledge” (italics in original),³³ texts should not be chosen for the purpose of imparting new knowledge, but to disrupt what students believe they already know.³⁴

Kumashiro maintains that the process of othering is not necessarily all bad; to make place for the Other’s perspective, we must be able to define who the Other is.³⁵ The solution to oppression is not to become what is often called “colour-blind”; ignoring the reality of oppression and the function of processes of othering is not the way forward. It is crucial to be aware of the difference between teaching about the Other and teaching about oppression.³⁶ Teachers must aim to identify the structures which create the Other, without simultaneously prescribing the Other a definite function outside those structures.³⁷ It is not the qualities of the *Other* that should be highlighted, but the structures within society that create the *need* for the Other.

Learning about oppression also entails learning about one’s own privileges.³⁸ As this realisation takes shape, students may recognise similarities between the processes of othering in the fictional society and their own. Through *recognition*, students learn about their own privileges as part of a group that subjects other groups to processes of othering. This is what will lead the students down the path towards disrupting established knowledge.

Disruption of knowledge on which students have based their world view often causes what Kumashiro calls a “crisis”; this is because students who learn about oppression will likely (and hopefully) also become aware of their own role in oppressive structures.³⁹ Considering the many individuals in a classroom, it is impossible to predict all possible reactions; it is up to each pedagogue to handle this as their professionalism allows. This fortifies the argument that reading fiction which allows the reader to immerse themselves in a new mindset could achieve the desired disruptive effect. Using fiction to create distance to that disruption, through the act of *defamiliarisation*, it becomes easier for students to work through the crisis, because they are not asked to criticise their own participation in oppression directly, only an allegory of it.

It is also important to not overlook students who through their own impairment may already identify with the disabled Other, in media or real life. It is vital that teachers keep in mind the

³³ Kumashiro, p. 42

³⁴ Kumashiro, p. 42

³⁵ Kumashiro, p. 37

³⁶ Kumashiro, p. 45

³⁷ Kumashiro, p. 38

³⁸ Kumashiro, p. 46

³⁹ Kumashiro, p. 62-63

possibility that their students may already identify with the disabled subject of study, and act accordingly when regulating discussions and choosing material.

3.2.1. The Other's Other

When doing an empathic reading, it is important to be aware that there are also dangers to empathising. Anna Lindhé argues that reading literature does not only teach how to empathise with certain perspectives, but also how to block empathy for other perspectives. While literature helps us to understand the Other, it also “creates the Other—or the Other's Other—as an object towards which unethical emotions may be directed” (my translation).⁴⁰ Lindhé calls this the paradox of narrative empathy: certain empathies are arranged in a hierarchy, where the reader is encouraged to partake in an ethical activity through empathising with certain characters, but at the same time they are also part of an unethical activity, due to empathy for other characters being blocked.⁴¹ Lindhé argues that empathising through literature is not necessarily an ethical act, but because fiction always contains both the Other's perspective and that of the Other's Other, it can be used by teachers to question the same/Other binary.

Kumashiro agrees that narratives will portray one perspective as more important than the other, and will therefore “...represent the voices of some groups but silence those of others; and as a result will challenge some stereotypes but reinforce others.”⁴² This originates in the need to resist what upsets the status quo that keeps the Other separate, as well as the imagined majority's need to avoid looking at themselves through the Other's eyes.⁴³

Another danger that teachers face when choosing what texts to read in the classroom, both non-fiction and fiction, is the risk of neglecting students who will be inclined to identify with what the perspective presents as the Other. Teachers need to consider what can be done for students who find themselves likened to the Other's Other.⁴⁴ It is for this reason that *Harry Potter* becomes interesting; upon reflecting on the processes of othering in *Harry Potter*, the reader will come to realise that they have more in common with the Other's Other in *Harry Potter*; the non-magical. By reading the novels readers are given the chance to live through the process of othering towards people who are like them. Readers of *Harry Potter* have been told from the first chapter that they will be separated from a protagonist who they identify with

⁴⁰ Lindhé, Anna. 2015. “Empatins paradoxer i skönlitteratur och litteraturundervisning” in Jönsson, Maria & Öhman, Anders. (red) *Litteratur och läsning: Litteraturredaktikens nya möjligheter*. Studentlitteratur AB, Lund. p. 241

⁴¹ Jönsson & Öhman, p. 248

⁴² Kumashiro, p. 61

⁴³ Kumashiro, p. 57

⁴⁴ Jönsson & Öhman, p. 253-54

because of their inherent lack of magical ability. This process of making the reader themselves the Other of the narrative may be used by teachers to present the ideas that normalcy and identity “are really social constructs *maintained only through the Othering...*” (my emphasis),⁴⁵ and present student with the idea that anyone of us can be made the Other.

4. *Crip Theory: Disrupting Ableism*

If disruptive knowledge is the answer to *how* anti-oppressive education should be conducted, the next step must be to distinguish *what* knowledge will be disrupted. Applying *crip theory* makes it possible to guide students through a reading that does not only nuance the *Harry Potter* novels, but can also achieve a deeper understanding of the struggles people with disabilities face because of the ableism in our own societies. Most students will not be practiced in the perspective of the disabled. It is not a widely represented perspective and when it is represented, it is not easy to identify with, due to the manner of that representation. It is commonplace to allow people with disabilities one of two versions of representation in fiction; either they are morally defect villains, or a victim whose disabled condition makes their existence void of direct influence.⁴⁶ In either case, is it more the norm than the exception that both positions are presented as directly connected to the character’s disability, thus making it difficult for *normates*⁴⁷ to accept any similarities with the disabled.

To be able-bodied is to be without impairment, physically, mentally and/or socially. The reason why these three categories are relevant is because they are the means through which we interact with our surroundings. In the words of Lennard J. Davis:

Impairment is the physical fact of lacking an arm or a leg. Disability is the social process that turns an impairment into a negative by creating barriers to access. The clearest example of this distinction is seen in the case of wheelchair users. They have impairments that limit mobility, but are not disabled unless they are in environments without ramps, lifts and automatic doors.⁴⁸

To disrupt conventional ideas about disability, the school of *crip theory* becomes useful. Inspired by queer theory, *crip theory* maintains that it is through the study of the “abnormal”,

⁴⁵ Kumashiro, p. 57

⁴⁶ Davis, *Bending over Backwards*, p. 45

⁴⁷ “Normate ... is the constructed identity of those who, by way of bodily configurations and cultural capital they assume, can step into a position of authority and wield the power it grants them.” Garland Thomson, R. qtd by Davis, p. 38

⁴⁸ Davis, *Bending over Backwards*, p. 12

in this case the disabled, that the “normal”, in this case the able, is defined. It is the subordination of certain identities that allows other identities to become “normal”.⁴⁹

Robert McRuer argues that one of the strongest and most established norms is able-bodiedness.⁵⁰ Borrowing from Judith Butler’s argument that heterosexuality dislocates its own position as “natural” in the constant need for reaffirmation, he states that the able-bodied identity is also an impossibility.⁵¹ McRuer maintains that the able-bodied condition’s ability to first deteriorate and then be restored is necessary to establish the desirability of this state of being.⁵² If the able-bodied state was not flexible, it could not be put through a crisis which culminates in reaching this desirable condition. Thus, the very idea of able-bodiedness is dependent on the compliance of disabled bodies.

However:

...[because] all of this happens in a discursive climate of tolerance, which values and profits from ‘diversity’, ... the heterosexual, able-bodied subject, as well as the postmodern culture that produced him or her, can easily disavow how much the subjective contraction and expansion of able-bodied heterosexuality ... are actually contingent on compliant queer, disabled bodies.⁵³

In other words, the very existence of disability reaffirms able-bodiedness as the ideal. Disability provides a crisis through which the able body is created and refined. By subjecting the able to moments of disability, it is shown how adaptable the able body is and how much better it is to not be disabled.⁵⁴

Another aspect of establishing able-bodiedness as desirable is to couple disability with other undesirable traits and pass them off as naturally connected. McRuer brings up the example of the character Melvin, in the movie *As Good As It Gets*, whose “disability ... is conflated with his character flaws.”⁵⁵ Because “[the] film marks no separation between Melvin’s disability and his bigotry; on the contrary, they are repeatedly linked, narratively and visually, and the link is naturalised,⁵⁶ it is possible to discuss the construction of the impaired as “rightfully” disabled.

⁴⁹ McRuer, Robert. 1995. *Crip Theory: cultural signs of queerness and disability*. 200.6 New York University Press, New York. p. 6; Davis. Lennard J. *Enforcing Normalcy: Disability, Deafness and the Body*. Verso, London; New York. p. 23

⁵⁰ McRuer, p. 1

⁵¹ McRuer, p. 10

⁵² McRuer, p. 16

⁵³ McRuer, p 18-19

⁵⁴ McRuer, p. 17

⁵⁵ McRuer, p. 23

⁵⁶ McRuer, p. 23

Returning to the specific question of “why *Harry Potter*”, in the context of *Harry Potter*, another ability is portrayed as vital to the protagonist to function on the terms of his surroundings; the magical ability. Without magic, a person is disabled, because they cannot function in the magical society on the same terms as those with magical ability. Because this is an ability that the reader themselves does not have, it should not be difficult for them to identify with the problems that arise when moving through a world that is only accessible through that ability. This provides the disruptive knowledge that positions the reader themselves as the Other, and all within the confines of the safe distance created by fantasy.

However, the category of research that concerns itself with disability studies is less commonly encountered within literary critique of *Harry Potter* than the discussions about race, gender, sexuality, age, class etc., as well as in educational settings in general. This does not have to do with the inability of the novels to provide material for such a discussion. The novels are equally rich in material to fuel discussions about disability and ableism as many of the other well-discussed systems of oppression. Instead, the reason disability as a category of study is missing from the critique of *Harry Potter* could be that it is a relatively new political formation,⁵⁷ or possibly that teachers find it difficult to discuss disability without falling into the trap of othering people with disabilities.

5. Method

The strength of fiction as democratic education is that because its ideologies are organised around the plot, it should be easier for students to derive certain meanings from the structured narrative than from historical examples, which are often disjointed and disorganised.⁵⁸ Fiction often arranges stories so that the moral lessons become easily accessible, which can then lead to readers recognising similar patterns in examples from the real world and draw conclusions through the experiences they have gained from reading fiction.

These lessons are found in what Roberta Seelinger Trites calls *explicit* and *implicit ideologies*.⁵⁹ *Explicit ideologies* refer to the worldviews the author has knowingly based their own moral lessons on. *Implicit ideologies* are the worldview which the author introduce as unquestioned and “natural”. The *implicit ideologies* are often at odds with the *explicit* ones.⁶⁰ A work of fiction may be read by readers who do not align themselves with the *explicit*

⁵⁷ Davis, *Bending over Backwards*, p. 10

⁵⁸ Öhman. p. 21

⁵⁹ qtd in Alkestrand, p. 97-98

⁶⁰ Alkestrand, p. 97-98

ideologies, or are so well aligned with them that they see little reason to discuss them further, while *implicit ideologies* become what imparts new knowledge onto the readers.

Because *implicit ideologies* often appear in the text without the author's knowledge of them they will leave silences where the author's view of what is "obvious" becomes visible. Authors assume that readers will fill in the gaps themselves as it is often assumed that other people will share the same worldview and values. These silences are where the reader's social reality becomes more important than the author's purposefully constructed message. As readers apply themselves to the text, they will fill silences with their own experiences, and achieve a personalised reading. Kumashiro agrees that interpreting silences can affect the overall meaning of a text, because what is unsaid is often assumed, and what is assumed may vary with each reader and each reading, thus altering said "meaning".⁶¹ In both the case of *explicit ideologies* and *implicit ideologies*, the text is reliant on the reader's own experience to become relevant. Kumashiro also notes that "texts have meaning because of what they leave unsaid", similar to how "...identities have meaning because of what they are *not* (i.e. whom they exclude)" (emphasis in original).⁶²

By making use of these silences, teachers can apply strategies for steering the students' reading, navigating their interpretation of both the text's *implicit ideologies*, and illuminating their own strategies to fill the silences. Louise M. Rosenblatt states that "students should be led to discover that some interpretations are more defensible than others".⁶³ Applying chosen theories to known works of fiction, guiding students towards new conclusions—but not necessarily steering exactly *what* conclusions they reach, so that each reading remains personalised—about well-known texts are useful to reach the *disruption* Kumashiro promotes.

This kind of reading is often conducted by the more experienced reader, by deploying a certain mindset before heading into the process of reading. Öhman calls this the "critical reader", the reader who reads with resistance and does not "get lost" in the text, but who constantly demands answers of the text and reflects on its explicit and implicit meanings.⁶⁴ It is, as Öhman points out, a rather suspicious way of reading. It requires the reader to constantly work against the text, which does not allow for a very pleasurable reading. It appears that this way of reading naturally puts the reader in opposition to the text, and demands that they are constantly on their guard.⁶⁵

⁶¹ Kumashiro p. 62

⁶² Kumashiro, p. 61

⁶³ Rosenblatt, *Making meaning with text*, p. 108

⁶⁴ Öhman, p. 29-30

⁶⁵ Rita Felski, qtd in Öhman, p. 31-32

It is understandable why this method of teaching literature is attractive to teachers of upper secondary level students. While fiction draws the reader in with its promise of intrigue and entertainment, reading with emphasis on *implicit ideologies* demands that students acquire the coveted ability to relate critically to a text; a skill that is vital in order to become a politically aware subject. Martha C. Nussbaum points out that one of the strongest arguments for the use of fiction to teach democratic values is that fiction is produced for the purpose of entertainment, and can thus help ease the anxiety readers often encounters when confronting their own socialised problematic views.⁶⁶

Leaning on Rosenblatt's argument that reading literature is an act of exchange, reading becomes essential to the endeavour of fostering a democratic population. More specifically, Henrik Román maintains that this is because reading brings with it the ability to empathise with other people and see directly the effect of certain actions of our own upon others' lives, and prompting readiness to change.⁶⁷ Anders Öhman adds that through this realisation, fiction could be used as a means to prepare students not only for the way society works but also for how they may influence it.

Magnus Persson argues that by assuming that reading fiction automatically creates "good citizens", the question of *how* it does this is forgotten.⁶⁸ It is time, then, to spend some time looking at the processes that allow students to broaden their ideological horizon. Building on Rosenblatt's theory that reading becomes an experience unique to each reader, through their previous experiences,⁶⁹ teachers can use fiction to attempt to create meanings which are useful to their specific students. McCormick agrees that both the reader and the text "[contribute] to the process of reading, and that both parties are affected by different ideologies..." It is through a meeting between these ideologies that tensions arise which disrupt what students *know*, challenging their view of what is normal. McCormick states that "the most productive pedagogical situations arise when these different [experiences] cause tensions". (my translation)⁷⁰

Reading with a focus only on *explicit ideologies* will lead to missed opportunities to study the effect of less obvious expressions of oppression, which may in many cases be invisible to the author themselves. Reading *implicit ideologies*, ideologies not necessarily presented as the

⁶⁶ Nussbaum, Martha C. qtd in Alkestrand, p. 79

⁶⁷ Román, Henrik, qtd in Öhman, p. 17

⁶⁸ Persson, Magnus, qtd in Alkestrand, p. 81-82

⁶⁹ Rosenblatt, L. 1995. *Literature as Exploration*. 5th edition. The Modern Language Association, New York. p. 102; Öhman, p. 68-69

⁷⁰ Alkestrand, p. 72

theme of a text, opens possibilities to take away lessons from the text which are relevant to the reader without exclusively focusing on what the author wants readers to understand. Instead of seeing text as a negotiation between reader and author, teachers may interpret reading as a meeting between the text, the reader and the reader's world.⁷¹ Through discussions about the *implicit ideologies* and how different readers interpret the text differently, fiction becomes the path to awareness of how our own perspective differs from that of other people, and, more importantly, why it differs.⁷² Reading cannot be seen as an isolated endeavour but must be seen as a collective exercise in cultural exchange between the text, the reader and other readers.

According to Bachtin, though the reader brings their own set of values and experiences into the work of fiction, those values will change while reading, because the work “[introduces] something new” to the reader's previous experience. Thus, reading will broaden their understanding of the world.⁷³ Because of this ability in literature to add perspectives which readers previously could not gain access to, fiction becomes an exceptionally useful tool for identity studies, as the deconstruction of the processes which make people relate to the world differently. Thus, it is a necessity when striving to foster democratic values.

Following this thought, reading fiction could also allow the reader an overview of how their own behaviour is affected by, and in turn also affect, social hierarchies and ideologies.⁷⁴ Through a selection of text and questions constructed to prompt discussion of *implicit ideologies* that reinforce the norm/abnormal binary, teachers can help students dismantle these processes, taking important steps towards anti-oppressive education.

The division between magical and non-magical people in the seven *Harry Potter* novels will be examined to determine the basis of this othering, as well as the forms it takes. As the aim is to investigate attitudes towards characters with no magical ability or heritage—*Muggles*—and characters who lack sufficient magical ability despite their magical heritage—so-called *Squibs*—focus has been put on discussions *about* these groups of people and individual characters that fit into these groups, as well as interactions *with* such characters.

Through a selective reading of the original seven novels, *explicit* and *implicit ideologies* will be observed to show aspects of the series which teachers can use to incorporate disability studies and dismantle the processes which make us see disabled people as Other. By *explicit ideologies* I indicate ideals that are clearly accentuated in the text and which make up the central

⁷¹ Öhman, p. 69-70

⁷² Öhman, p. 20

⁷³ Bachtin, in Öhman, p. 43-44

⁷⁴ Alkestrand, p. 77

themes of the novels. *Implicit ideologies* are visible in the undercurrent of the novel; they are not necessarily pointed out by the narrative and need the reader to interpret them and make them relevant.⁷⁵

The goal in studying processes of othering and the oppression they lead to in *Harry Potter* is not necessarily teaching narrative empathy.⁷⁶ It is not a study of the Other in *Harry Potter*, but rather an invitation to the reader to dislocate themselves from the position of the assumed able-bodied reader. By looking at the narrative through the lens of *crip theory*, teachers can introduce the concept of functionality as a social construct.

6. Analysis & Discussion

6.1. Expressions of Oppression in the Magical Culture

“It’s people like *you*, Ron,” Hermione began hotly, “who prop up rotten and unjust systems, just because they’re too lazy...”

Hermione Granger, *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire*, p. 106

The magical society is an allegory for many western societies. Its complexity contains multiple identities and values, which often fall into conflict with one another. Oppression takes forms which are more difficult to discern than blatant name-calling and hindering people from participating the perceived superior culture. It is also the very idea that magical culture *is* superior, and desirable; that if non-magical people had the chance, they would covet the ability to perform magic.⁷⁷ Laws are presented as necessary to protect magical people from non-magical savagery, and at the same time as a means to protect non-magical people from concepts they would not be able to understand.⁷⁸ By looking at how the same laws can be used by people motivated by different ideologies, students may study the complexity of oppression, and question whether restricting laws are ever truly drawn for the “own good” of minorities.

Continuing the theme of the own culture’s perceived superiority, it can be added while the non-magical population’s ignorance is something that is being imposed on them by magical law, the magical community’s obliviousness is carefully constructed by witches and wizards themselves. Throughout the novels readers may discern a distinct disinterest in the non-magical

⁷⁵ Alkestrand p. 97-98

⁷⁶ Jönsson & Öhman, p. 242-243

⁷⁷ *Harry Potter and the Philosopher’s Stone*, p. 70

⁷⁸ *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets*, p. 40

way of life amongst most magical people. Despite that one of the most important duties of the Ministry of Magic is to oversee and regulate magical/non-magical relations,⁷⁹ and that Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry offering a class to study non-magical culture, most magical people are woefully ignorant of non-magical people and culture. Not only non-magical technology, but also the inconveniences caused to a life without access to magic by magical interference. Blowing up a wall, for example, is a minor inconvenience to a wizard,⁸⁰ who can repair it easily, but the process of repairing it and cleaning up after the explosion is not an easy task for a non-magical person.

The Weasley family are a *pure-blood* magical family, and though they disagree with the ideologies of many other *pure-blood* wizards,⁸¹ their way of thinking about non-magical people still includes patterns of oppression, primarily expressions of problematic tolerance.⁸² This results in the appearance of open-mindedness, but that open-mindedness is still founded in their own view of what is correct; they do not invite disruptive knowledge. Alkestrand notes that because Harry Potter's friend Ron Weasley has grown up with magic and has been socialised to see the customs of the magical society as natural, he cannot see the oppressive discourses the same way Hermione, for example, does.⁸³ Ron assumes that if given the chance, all people would choose to live a magical life.⁸⁴ Similar to Hermione, Harry also have not been brought up with these cultural values. He laughs at Mr Weasley not understanding *Muggle* technology since he finds it absurd that adults do not know these simple things. The Weasley children laugh as well, though this is because they do not think it is worth knowing about *Muggles'* way of life. This is a position which the reader is not immediately taught to question, because of the Weasleys' position as the good example of magical culture.

Within the mindset that one's own culture is superior, oppression takes on expressions which upon first glance seem benevolent, such as exotification and paternalism. The examples in the *Harry Potter* novels are rarely problematised in the text. Mr Weasley is portrayed as extremely fascinated by non-magical technology and artefacts; he gets excited about the prospect of interacting with non-magical people,⁸⁵ and he works with non-magical inventions through his job at the Ministry of Magic. The Weasley children describe Mr Weasley as being

⁷⁹ *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone*, p. 70

⁸⁰ *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire*, p. 37-39

⁸¹ *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets*, p. 66

⁸² Larsson & Rosén, p. 36-39

⁸³ Alkestrand, p. 202

⁸⁴ *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows*, p. 169

⁸⁵ *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets*, p. 60

“mad about everything to do with Muggles”,⁸⁶ and he is demonstrated as being truly enthusiastic to the point of reverence on several occasions.⁸⁷ This fascination shares several traits with exotification, and becomes a form of racial fetishism.

Exotification also takes the shape of a *selective understanding* of the target culture on the terms of the dominant culture.⁸⁸ Despite being portrayed as tolerant to a fault, Mr Weasley repeatedly shows the same lack of understanding of non-magical culture and technology as his fellow wizards.⁸⁹ This is portrayed as a comedic addition to the narrative, but it is not a harmless position. Mr Weasley’s exotification is in essence ableist, not racist, as it is the technology which non-magical people use “instead” of magic ability which has caught his attention. He is interested in that which fills the gap between a disabled person and an able-bodied one, but he is never described as interested in the reasons *why* non-magical people invent “substitutes” for magic, or any other part of non-magical culture.

Because the Weasley family is presented as the “yardstick for how families should be”,⁹⁰ these expressions of ableism become part of an *implicit ideology* that lets non-magical achievements be ignored or misunderstood,⁹¹ leading to the magical culture remaining unquestioned as the norm.⁹²

6.2. Ableism in the Magical Culture

“So you couldn’t use magic to get there?” asked Ron, looking thunderstruck, “you had to act like Muggles *all the way*?”

Ron Weasley, *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix*, p. 394

Magic is considered a necessity for a meaningful life. Using non-magical methods is something that symbols the removal of autonomy to magical people, a mark of immaturity, and removal of magic is often used as a punishment for students at Hogwarts.⁹³ Losing the ability or having the ability to perform magic taken away is seen as the ultimate punishment; this is evident both

⁸⁶ *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets*, p. 32

⁸⁷ *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix*, p. 122

⁸⁸ Sim, Gerald. (2014) *Film and Race: Rethorizing Politics, Ideology and Cinema*. Bloomsbury Academics, London, New York. p. 122

⁸⁹ *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire*, p. 39, 65, 72-73; *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix*, p. 114, 123

⁹⁰ Eccleshare, p. 95

⁹¹ *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets*, p. 69; *Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince*, p. 71; *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows*, p. 616

⁹² *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows*, p. 108, 337

⁹³ *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets*, p. 124; *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban*, p. 182; *Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince*, p. 272, 442

in the attitudes of magical people⁹⁴ and the institutionalised justice system.⁹⁵ It is possible to make connections to real world examples where removal of bodily autonomy is used as punishment, as removing the ability to do magic would cause a person within the magical society to become seriously hindered. So what happens to those whose lack of magical ability forces them to live in the margins (or completely outside) of the magical society?

Non-magical people of magical lineage, *Squibs*, are of no interest to the Ministry of Magic. While the Ministry keeps a registry of witches and wizards and their place of residence, *Squibs* do not appear in this registry. Neither do *Muggles*. These two categories are not considered possible contributors to magical society.

Looking at the structure of the language used about non-magical and magical people is also of interest to teachers who want to discuss the practice of studying that which lies outside the norm, but never the norm itself. While witches and wizards born to muggle parents are just called that; witch and wizard, possibly with the addition of the prefix *Muggle-born*, individuals who have magical parents but lack magical ability are called *Squibs*. Despite having the same level of magical ability as *Muggles*, a *Squib* is not called a *Muggle*, or a magic-born *Muggle*. They are a whole new category of being; not a witch/wizard, but not a *Muggle*. This may be useful to teachers who want to discuss such ideas from a safe distance where students will not identify with either the norm or that which lies outside the norm.

6.3. Who is the *Muggle*?

“You couldn’t find two people who are less like us!”

Minerva McGonagall, *Harry Potter and the Philosopher’s Stone*, p. 14

Rubeus Hagrid is the person to introduce the term *Muggle* to Harry Potter, the protagonist of the novels, and he does not only use it as a method of describing someone’s lack of magical ability; in Hagrid’s case he also uses it as a slur towards Vernon Dursley.⁹⁶ The more of a *Muggle* someone is, the worse. Though in Hagrid’s case, it is unclear whether he is referring to the Dursleys’ animosity towards magic, or their non-magical lifestyle in general. It is possible

⁹⁴ *Harry Potter and the Philosopher’s Stone*, p. 326; When Hagrid berates himself for having put Harry in danger, he exclaims that he “should be chucked out and made to live as a Muggle”, clearly the worst punishment for his mistake that he can imagine.

⁹⁵ *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban*, p. 198-199; At the magical prison “most [prisoners] go mad within weeks” and are “[drained] ... of [their] powers”.

⁹⁶ *Harry Potter and the Philosopher’s Stone*, p. 57, 63; *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets*, p 58

to discern, however, through Hagrid's attitude as well as that of other characters,⁹⁷ that being a *Muggle* does not only refer to someone's inability to do magic, but also has to do with their character. This is, as has been shown by McRuer, a recurring theme when creating disabled characters; by making them difficult to relate to due to character-flaws such as bigotry, able-bodied readers are discouraged from empathising with them.

The reader of *Harry Potter* is led into an oppressive position towards people of the same magical disability as themselves through the othering of non-magical people, primarily the Dursley family. This means that if students are proficient in exposing the techniques that aim to position them as separate from their fictional counterparts in the non-magical population in *Harry Potter*, they may learn to recognise the different symptoms of oppression that they witness or participate in themselves. Despite belonging to the category *Muggle* themselves, the reader is set up to agree with the notion that not having magical ability also comes with a set of undesirable traits. This is done through the process of othering which continues by supplying negative examples of non-magical people to identify with, and positive examples of magical people.

Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone does not begin by introducing Harry, but the family that he will end up spending the better part of his childhood with. The first information about the Dursley family the novels provides is that they are "proud to say that they [are] perfectly normal, thank you very much."⁹⁸ This is not only the introduction to the Dursleys, it is the very first sentence of the first book, and it is an effective positioning of the reader who will already be familiar with the setting of the Dursleys' reality. Alongside the immediate dislike for the extraordinary,⁹⁹ we are also shown a bit more about what kind of "normal" the Dursleys strive for. Mrs Dursley likes to gossip, and their son Dudley has a habit of throwing tantrums and getting away with it.¹⁰⁰ Dudley is used as a measuring stick by Harry's relatives for how a boy their age should behave. While his parents endorse that Dudley disregards the news and spends his time having tea with his friends, he is in fact "vandalising the playpark, smoking on street corners and throwing stones at passing cars and children".¹⁰¹ Mr and Mrs Dursley's unwillingness to see their son's flaws is portrayed as a testimony to their own flawed character. Many readers will recognise Dudley (and his parents) from encounters with the worst

⁹⁷ *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire*, p. 12, 456

⁹⁸ *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone*, p. 1

⁹⁹ *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone*, p. 5

¹⁰⁰ *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone*, p. 2, 6, 14

¹⁰¹ *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix*, p. 2-3

members of their age-group (or memories of these people from when they were at that age). This effectively estranges the reader from any inclination to empathise with the Dursleys.

To the Dursleys, Harry represents everything that is not normal, and Harry will grow up seeing himself as a person disconnected from his surroundings, because of how his relatives treat him.¹⁰² The first chapters of *Philosopher's Stone* describe the many ways the Dursleys mistreat Harry, and the ways they make sure he feels like an outsider. This is a recurring structure in all *Harry Potter* novels: the first chapters are dedicated to showing the many ways Harry is maltreated by his relatives, abused both physically and mentally. At one point his uncle even states that he wishes Harry to be executed.¹⁰³ Though the first chapters of books 4, 6, and 7 do not feature Harry or the Dursleys, they then reappear to torment Harry for a few pages before he returns to the magical society.

This re-introduction of the Dursleys at the beginning of each novel in the series accomplishes two things: the reader is reminded of how unnatural the lives and ambitions of Harry's relatives appear to him and vice versa, as well as that the magical is the norm and the non-magical the Other. Davis states that this is vital to an ableist narrative, since “[for] the norm to be established, the abnormal must also appear.”¹⁰⁴ Thus, the reader will readily welcome alternative routes of identification when they are presented. This path of identification will bring with it a set of problematic values, however, because they are presented by characters whom the reader empathised with, they become part of the implicit ideologies, and the reader is not necessarily encouraged to dismantle them through their reading.

When non-magical people's intelligence is dismissed, it does not appear completely without reason as of the first chapter of *Philosopher's Stone*—the one example of *Muggles* given at this point is the Dursleys. Considering how unpleasant they are, the reader will undoubtedly find it easy to agree that they are rather stupid.¹⁰⁵ It is the impression within the magical culture that non-magical people are unaware of magic because they cannot handle the idea of magic. It is not necessarily true for all non-magical people that they cannot understand magic, but through the example of the Dursley family the reader is inclined to agree with this view. It would have been more difficult for the reader to accept dismissive attitudes towards non-magical people had they not been presented by characters who act as a counterpart to the

¹⁰² *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets*, p. 2, 3; *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban*, p. 20

¹⁰³ *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix*, p. 31

¹⁰⁴ Davis, *Bending over Backwards*, p. 97

¹⁰⁵ *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone*, p. 10

horrible Dursleys. Already in the first chapter, the Dursleys have effectively been established as the Other and help readers distance themselves from the *Muggle* label.

As Harry grows older and becomes an accomplished wizard, the Dursleys' diminished importance in Harry's life is demonstrated by his lack of interest in them and his ability to ignore them. He has started to display the same frustrations with non-magical people as the rest of his kind.¹⁰⁶ This is not displayed as problematic, as it no longer necessary by the last instalment of the novels for the narrative to show how badly the Dursleys treat Harry and how little the reader can empathise with them; this has already been established. With the Dursleys at the forefront of the reader's mind, it becomes easy to disassociate with non-magical people in general. The injustices they are subjected to, such as "*Muggle-baiting*",¹⁰⁷ the act of goading non-magical people by subjecting them to magical interruption without explanation, no longer disrupt the idea that the people who issue them are inevitably villainous characters.

However, when Harry and the Dursleys go their separate ways, Dudley displays the first signs of being relatable to the reader by claiming that he does not share his parents' view of Harry as lesser than them.¹⁰⁸ Dudley has been humanised somewhat due to his negative reaction to the creatures called Dementors, which force people to relive their most awful memories.¹⁰⁹ This creates an opportunity for reflection upon how the nature of Harry's relationship with the Dursleys has coloured the reader's relationship with non-magical people throughout the narrative.

Because the Dursleys are, in effect, the same kind of non-magical humans as the reader, it will be possible to instruct a reading that allows students to reflect on their readiness to accept the discriminatory attitudes of magical people towards non-magical people. Teachers might, for example, ask the question "what if the Dursleys were nice people?" What function does their treatment of Harry and their general bigotry have in the process of creating distance and block empathy for the Other's Other?

By encouraging a sympathetic reading of the Dursleys, students may be made aware of the effect of othering upon their own interpretation of characters. That is not to say that students will necessarily sympathise with the Dursleys, but it must be a goal of the anti-oppressive classroom to always aim to problematise simplistic views of the world. The goal is to scrutinise and criticise norm/Other binaries as well as learn to recognise methods that reinforce this

¹⁰⁶ *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows*, p. 22

¹⁰⁷ *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets*, p. 40

¹⁰⁸ *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows*, p. 30

¹⁰⁹ *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix*, p. 28-29

manner of thinking.¹¹⁰ By studying the narrative processes that make the Dursleys the protagonist's Other, students will learn to dismantle processes of othering in other, similar cases.

6.3.1. The *Muggle* as Disabled

“It’s good that you’re separated from normal people. It’s for our safety.”

Petunia Evans (later Dursley) to her sister Lily Evans (later Potter)

Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows, p. 546

While the Dursleys remain ignorant of certain aspects of magical culture, their ignorance of the magical world is presented as self-inflicted. They vehemently reject any attempt by magic to enter their lives, whether it is actual magic or just knowledge of how the magical society functions.¹¹¹ Considering how they are repeatedly shown to be completely helpless in relations to what Harry and other magical people can do to them and their possessions, this might not appear strange.¹¹² The effect of the processes that make the *Muggle* the Other become evident when the reader, despite being shown several times how helpless the Dursleys are when confronted with the reality of magic, have difficulties empathising with their struggle. Instead, the reader is led to believe that their “medieval attitudes towards magic” is completely unwarranted.¹¹³

This seemingly voluntary ignorance can be compared to other instances when the disadvantages and unlikability of disabled characters is portrayed as rooted in a combination of choice and character. The refusal to accept explanations of the function of magic “represents that isolation as chosen, while the bigotry represents that isolation as deserved.”¹¹⁴ In the case of the Dursleys, their isolation from magical society then appears to the reader as having originated from their own prejudice, and not as a position that has been inflicted on them by an ableist society. It thus appears natural for people like the Dursleys to be isolated from the magical society.¹¹⁵

¹¹⁰ Kumashiro, p. 64

¹¹¹ *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire*, p. 27-29

¹¹² *Harry Potter and the Philosopher’s Stone*, chapters 3 & 4; *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire*, p. 42-45; *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix*, p. 13-15, 32; *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows*, p 26-27, 30-32

¹¹³ *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban*, p. 2

¹¹⁴ McRuer, p. 23

¹¹⁵ McRuer, p. 23

Being a member of the dominant group, and through his privilege being unable to realise that the Dursleys' rejection of all attempts by magic to enter their lives is founded in self-preservation as well as through societal hierarchies inflicted on *Muggles* by the magical government, Harry equates the Dursleys' ignorance with stupidity.¹¹⁶ He cannot see why anyone would choose to ignore magic when its existence has been proven to them. At first, their unfair treatment of Harry himself appears to the reader as baselessly prejudicial and extreme.¹¹⁷ Upon further reflection, the Dursleys' fear is shown to spring from their view of magic as dangerous.¹¹⁸ This view is not baseless: their experience with magic is comprised of Petunia Dursley's sister and brother-in-law, Harry's mother and father, being murdered, as well as Petunia herself being subjected to magical injuries at the hands of a young friend of her sister.¹¹⁹

The only other completely non-magical family beside the Dursleys that the reader encounters is the parents of Harry Potter's best friend, Hermione Granger. Their existence in the text is limited to a few lines, and there is very little opportunity for the reader to identify with them. The one time they appear in the narrative, they do not speak. Their reaction to being threatened by magic is similar to the Dursleys'; they are described as "shaking with fright" at the display of two adult wizards fighting in front of them.¹²⁰ It is based on the non-magical people's lack of ability to fend for themselves when confronted with magic that wizards repeatedly claim guardianship over them.¹²¹ Considering how helpless non-magical people are continuously displayed as, this paternalistic position is not necessarily written as immoral; characters who the narratives pass off as moral compasses do this as well.¹²²

Because of their previously discussed voluntary ignorance, the Dursleys are unaware that as *Muggles* they are protected by magical law, until the consequences of a magical person breaking such laws are demonstrated.¹²³ However, even after it has been revealed that Harry, as an underage wizard, cannot use magic outside of school, he still has the means of threatening his relatives with magic, through his connections with adults the magical world.¹²⁴ Therefore, Harry always has the ability to exercise power over his non-magical relatives. His inherent magical ability allows him to upend usual ageist hierarchies.

¹¹⁶ *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix*, p. 6

¹¹⁷ *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone*, p. 24-25

¹¹⁸ *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone*, p. 37, 39

¹¹⁹ *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows*, p. 545

¹²⁰ *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets*, p. 67

¹²¹ *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire*, p. 66, 444

¹²² *Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince*, p. 220-221

¹²³ *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets*, p. 22; *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix*, p. 26

¹²⁴ *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire*, p. 29-30; *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix*, p. 798-800

Using the *Muggle* as an allegory for people whose impairments lead to disability becomes useful because of the way the magical society creates obstacles that deny non-magical people access. The non-magical people of *Harry Potter* are not, however, disabled when partaking in their own society; this goes to show that disability is, like many other positions, constructed by the context. Magical people have constructed the separation between themselves and non-magical people and thus allowed non-magical people to remain fully functional within their own society. This can be perceived as benevolent, but also as a system of oppression where one group of people are being kept from accessing certain aspects of the world by a dominant group.

It may also be fruitful to discuss how non-magical people have bridged the gap between themselves and magical people by means of technological advancements. Similarly, real people with impairments have found many ways to coexist with able-bodied people through technology.¹²⁵ There are many examples to show how ignorant magical people are of the technological advances of the non-magic society.¹²⁶ In *Muggle Studies*, an optional course from year three and up at Hogwarts, magical children can learn about the non-magical Other.¹²⁷ In the phrasing of the essay-title students of this course are asked to submit, “Explain why Muggles need electricity”,¹²⁸ students appear to need to explain what shortcomings of non-magical people have caused them to develop non-magic ways of coping with their problems. Even Hermione, who has non-magical parents and has grown up with non-magical inventions as a reality, calls technical inventions “substitutes for magic.”¹²⁹ Much like wheelchairs, hearing-aids, artificial limbs and other aids would be a substitute to a fully functional body and neurology.

By introducing the idea that it is society that should change, rather than the multitude of individuals that are part of it, students can interrogate their own view of what is “normal” and in what ways those views make conformity necessary.

¹²⁵ Davis, *Bending over Backwards*, p. 27, p. 30

¹²⁶ *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban*, p. 3-4, 10

¹²⁷ *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban*, p. 60

¹²⁸ *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban*, p. 266

¹²⁹ *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire*, p. 462

6.3.2. Challenging the Idea of the *Muggle* as Other

“What are they like?”

“Horrible—well, not all of them.”

Harry to Ron on *Muggles*, *Harry Potter and the Philosopher’s Stone*, p. 106

Throughout the novels, the Dursleys have been who have been at the forefront of the reader’s mind when they think of *Muggles*, and the Dursleys’ averseness towards anything outside their sphere of normalcy often makes their reactions towards the magical intrusions on their lives seem blown out of proportion. Thus, the treatment of the Dursleys by magical people appears justified to the reader, as does the attitude of magical people towards other non-magical people other than the Dursleys. However, with the introduction of another example of magical/non-magical interaction, it is possible to discern a pattern in the attitudes towards non-magical people that is not as easy to pass off as comedic, and that does not allow for the ableist view that someone’s character and their disability are connected.

In chapter one of *Harry Potter and the Half-blood Prince*, “The Other Minister”, the non-magical Prime Minister (PM) functions as the eyes of the ignorant, to speed the reader up with happenings in the world of magic since the end of the last book. To accomplish this, the PM is written as bereft of all ability to orient himself in a world of magical catastrophes and warfare. The tone of the exchange between the PM and Cornelius Fudge reveals that the PM has been informed of what is happening with the magical community on a strict need-to-know basis. The difference between the Dursleys and the PM is mainly that when the PM falls victim to the same derogatory attitude towards non-magical people, the PM is given the narrative space to reflect on how this makes him feel like “an ignorant schoolboy”,¹³⁰ and that the PM does not deflect the attempts at explanation of the magical world like the Dursleys do.¹³¹ In contrast to earlier displays of paternalism, the PM’s annoyance appears justified due to his ignorance being enforced on him. The reader is now aware that magical laws exclude non-magical people from the goings-on of the magical population; the Ministry of Magic constantly makes decisions and compromises which affect *Muggles*. This paternalist position is further problematised through the disclosure that non-magical people have been harmed because of decisions made by Fudge.¹³²

¹³⁰ *Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince*, p. 4

¹³¹ *Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince*, p. 8-9

¹³² *Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince*, p. 10

Though the *Harry Potter* novels are later concluded without questions being raised about the necessity of the division between the magical and non-magical,¹³³ this chapter can be read as an invitation to begin bridging the gap between the reader and the non-magical Other. Moving forward, the instances when wizards treat non-magical people unfairly or disregard non-magical methods and culture are questioned with increasing ferocity. The main antagonist, Lord Voldemort, murders a woman for having taught the students of Hogwarts that magical and non-magical people are “not so different” and for insisting that it is a good thing that the *pure-blood* culture is diminishing.¹³⁴ The reader is thus invited to question the assumption that magical methods are better, that a lack of magical ability is always a disadvantage in and of itself and therefore, non-magical culture has no value.

6.4. The Magically Disabled

“And what on earth’s a Squib,” said Harry.

To his surprise, Ron stifled a snigger.

“Well—it’s not funny, really—but as it’s Filch...” he said.

Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets, p. 154

Having discussed how magical people in *Harry Potter* consider the lack of magical ability in the non-magical type of human a sign of inferiority, it will become interesting to investigate how these values have come to shape the way witches and wizards treat those of their own kind who do not show a lot of magical prowess.

As Harry asks Ron, upon their first meeting on the way to Hogwarts, whether all his relatives are magical, Ron replies that one of his mother’s second cousins is an accountant, which we are to take as him having a non-magical job, by which Ron may imply that he has no magical ability. Considering what we are later told about magical people’s view of non-magical culture, and the fact that the family “never talk about him”,¹³⁵ the treatment of this relative fit the usual ostracising of non-magical people born to magical parents. It is not clarified whether this choice to not keep in touch with his relatives is self-inflicted by the cousin, or something the family has chosen for him. Regardless, there is the assumption by either the cousin or the family that non-magical people, or people who chose to pursue a non-magical career cannot

¹³³ Nikolajeva, Maria. “Harry Potter and the Secrets of Children’s Literature” in Heilman, Elisabeth, E. (red) *Critical Perspectives on Harry Potter*. 2nd edition. 2009. RoutledgeFalmer, New York. p. 238

¹³⁴ *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows*, p. 10

¹³⁵ *Harry Potter and the Philosopher’s Stone*, p. 105

exist within the magical society. It can be derived that this is not considered strange from the fact that the Weasleys, who are meant to be the protagonist's point of reference for the "right" way to be a witch or wizard, also distance themselves from a relative who lacks the magical ability.

Individuals of magical parentage who are born without magical ability are called *Squibs*. Considering the need for magical abilities to function in the magical society, *Squibs* may represent a category of people that is best likened to real-world examples of people with disabilities. The fact that *Squibs* are encouraged to detach themselves from magical society, despite having grown up with the culture and being fully aware of the traditions of the magical society shows that it is the ability, not the culture, which is being valued in the case of *Squibs*. This is not a case of racism towards non-magical people, but an act of discrimination against those who are not adequate enough in magic to move effortlessly within the structures of magical society.

When it is revealed that Albus Dumbledore's sister, Ariana, is assumed to have been a *Squib*, and that she was locked away in the house for the better part of her childhood, readers are given insight into the historical treatment of *Squibs* in the magical society. Supposedly it was once commonplace to keep the existence of non-magical children born to magical parents secret, to send them to "Muggle school", and integrate them into the non-magical society, "rather than the magical one, where they must always remain second-class".¹³⁶ The reader is later told that the need for secrecy surrounding Ariana Dumbledore's condition did not, in fact, stem from her mother's "shame of having produced a Squib".¹³⁷ Instead, the decision to hide Ariana, who is unable to control her magical ability and cannot decide when or how to use it, is based on the need to protect her from becoming a danger to herself, her surroundings and the whole of the magical community.¹³⁸ Gellert Grindelwald, a friend of Albus Dumbledore, insists that if magical people "taught Muggles their place", people like Ariana would no longer need to be hidden.¹³⁹ Ariana would no longer be considered a liability, and thus not be disabled. This tale can serve as a base for discussions about historical attitudes towards people with disabilities, and how disability is circumstantial.

If the othering of the Dursleys is done via their flawed characters, and thus appear justified, it is possible to draw further parallels between the *Squib*-condition and representations of

¹³⁶ *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows*, p. 123-125

¹³⁷ *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows*, p. 176

¹³⁸ *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows*, p. 459-61

¹³⁹ *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows*, p. 461

disability in real world media by looking at the character Argus Filch, caretaker at Hogwarts. Filch fits the stereotype of the villainous and morally deprived disabled; he detests troublemaking students to the point where he wishes to inflict medieval torture methods on them.¹⁴⁰ It can be argued that Filch's attitude towards the students is dependent on his status as disabled, as he must clean up after the students' antics but can never prevent them. His job as the school's caretaker is constantly made more difficult by his lack of magical ability.

Filch attempts to remedy his inadequate magical ability by taking a mail correspondence course.¹⁴¹ This method does not appear in later books to have been effective. Still, Filch hopes that his condition is not permanent, despite the seemingly common knowledge that magical ability manifests before the age of seven.¹⁴² Filch demonstrates a desperation to overcome his disability. This makes the able-bodied condition appear equally important in this fictional scenario as it is portrayed in many real-life cases.

Filch also does not want it to be made known that he lacks sufficient magical ability. When he becomes aware that Harry Potter has seen the information about his correspondence course, he is outraged.¹⁴³ Firstly, he denies that the course is even for his own benefit, and secondly, he accuses Harry of harnessing prejudices based on his knowledge of Filch's lack of magical ability.¹⁴⁴ Based on these examples, it is safe to assume that being a *Squib* comes with a great deal of stigma attached, and it causes a lot of internalised ableism.

The stigma of the *Squib*-condition is also evident in the case of Arabella Figg, Harry's neighbour. Mrs. Figg is exposed as a *Squib* in the first few chapters of *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix*. Mrs Figg's use of magically coded figures of speech reveals linguistic habits originating from having grown up close to the magical discourse.¹⁴⁵ It might be this closeness to the magical society that has cemented Mrs Figg's view of herself as being "no use" in the threatening situation in which she encounters Harry.¹⁴⁶ She appears to channel the ideas of mainstream magical culture that those who are without magical ability have little value. Of course, the circumstances in which she reveals her identity to Harry are dangerous enough that not all fully qualified wizards might have been able to get themselves out of it unscathed, as not

¹⁴⁰ *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix*, p. 580, 621

¹⁴¹ *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets*, p. 133-134

¹⁴² *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows*, p. 176

¹⁴³ *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets*, p. 135

¹⁴⁴ *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets*, p. 148-151

¹⁴⁵ *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix*, p. 20

¹⁴⁶ *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix*, p. 20

all magical adults can produce the magic necessary to ward off Dementors, the soul-sucking creatures that guard the magical prison.¹⁴⁷

Despite her lack of magical ability, Mrs Figg does prove herself useful to the cause of keeping Harry safe and in school. As she testifies about the events of the night of her and Harry's meeting, she insists that *Squibs* can indeed see the creatures which attacked Harry, despite the fact that *Muggles* have been stated to not be able to see such creatures.¹⁴⁸ Whether this is true or not, we cannot be sure; as the protagonist's situation demands a witness she may very well have lied, but the conclusion can definitely be drawn that the Ministry of Magic knows little enough about *Squibs* to be unable to contradict her claim. This goes to show that it is foolish to rely on prejudice towards disabled people and mark them as "no use", simply because of their ability falling short of the norm.

6.5. Overcoming Disability

"Look at Neville Longbottom—he's pure-blood and he can hardly stand a cauldron the
right way up."

Ron Weasley, *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets*, p. 121

In the argument against racist ideologies as they appear in *Harry Potter*, Neville Longbottom is often used as an argument to show how magical lineage does not guarantee outstanding magical ability. This achieves the desired effect in discussions about racism, but when applying the lens of disability studies, Neville also functions as an example of how important it is to magical people that their young show the same ability as their parents. His relatives have put him through many difficult and near-lethal trials to force him to display the coveted gift.¹⁴⁹ This reaction to Neville's possible lack of magic shows desperation in trying to get him to become "normal".

As with the example of the Dursleys and Filch, Neville's lacking magical ability is often linked to his meek personality. He is often shown to be forgetful and inadequate, which is a constant source of ridicule in the narrative both to his friends and enemies.¹⁵⁰ Because of this,

¹⁴⁷ *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban*, p. 251

¹⁴⁸ *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix*, p. 132

¹⁴⁹ *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone*, p. 133-134

¹⁵⁰ *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets*, p. 121, 203-4; *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire*, p. 267, 337

Neville is aware of how his surroundings perceive him as substandard and this is an important aspect of how he comes to perceive himself.¹⁵¹

However, Neville's story is about the possibility to overcome disability. The reader is told that while Harry and Neville were both possible candidates for a prophecy made about a child who could bring about the evil wizard Voldemort's downfall, Voldemort first discarded Neville and chose to believe that it was Harry that was being indicated.¹⁵² The reader has already been introduced to Neville's ineptitude and may be inclined to agree with Voldemort that Harry was the more obvious choice. However, Neville manages to battle his magical incompetence under Harry's tutelage, and become second at defensive spells only to Hermione, who is recognised several times throughout the series as an outstanding witch.¹⁵³ As Neville takes up the mantle of leader of the resistance at Hogwarts in Harry's absence, he comes into his own and is recognised both by his peers, his relatives, and his enemies as fully magically capable.¹⁵⁴ When Neville meets Voldemort face to face, seventeen years after he discarded Neville as the possible candidate for the prophecy, Voldemort states that he can see value in Neville's abilities, thus highlighting Neville having overcome his presumed disability.

Neville provides a good basis for discussions about able-bodiedness as the ideal, and the inflexible, perfect able-bodied person's inexistence. Because of the constant need to confirm able-bodiedness as the ideal condition, overcoming disability must always be possible and the perfectly able-bodied cannot actually exist. The able-bodied ideal is dependent on the flexibility of able-bodiedness, otherwise it will be impossible to highlight cases where disability is overcome.

Considering Davis' statement that "...narratives involving disability always yearn for the cure, the neutralizing of the disability",¹⁵⁵ it becomes significant to examine the ideologies of Voldemort as a symptom of ableism, rather than racism. Voldemort's decision to interpret the prophecy of his downfall not as meaning Neville Longbottom, the child of a *pure-blood* witch and wizard couple, but Harry, who is a *half-blood* (only one parent has traceable magical heritage),¹⁵⁶ shows that to him, racism is merely a tool to gain a following amongst the *pure-bloods*. It is *pure-blood* propaganda, and not actually part of his personal ideology. Voldemort's goal for himself is to "overcome death", to reach that ultimate state of able-bodiedness which

¹⁵¹ *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets*, p. 195

¹⁵² *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix*, p. 775

¹⁵³ *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix*, p. 511

¹⁵⁴ *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows*, p. 468-79, 509, 598-599

¹⁵⁵ Davis, *Bending over Backwards*, p. 99

¹⁵⁶ *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix*, p. 775

eliminates every threat of disability through aging and the loss of life. He aims to remove this weakness in himself through the splitting of his soul into pieces which will remain as anchors to life even if his physical being is attacked. This would firmly link ableness to magic, as this immortality could not be achieved without magic. In that case, the ability to split one's soul should be a legitimate argument for the superiority of magical people, seeing as non-magical people do not have any means to overcome the final loss of able-bodiedness and life.

However, the soul is proven to be stronger when whole,¹⁵⁷ which is the natural state of the soul.¹⁵⁸ By splitting his soul, Voldemort cripples himself in the battle against Harry Potter. Based on this example, the question could be raised—is loss of disability truly something to covet? Is the removal of the final deterioration of able-bodiedness really desirable?

7. Conclusion

Fantasy is often regarded as a form of escapism but it also serves the purpose of allowing the reader the distance needed to be critical, which is an important aspect of education that aims to provoke the disruption of knowledge necessary to norm-critical, anti-oppressive education. The similarities between the fictional magical society of the *Harry Potter* novels and our own also allow the reader an outsider's view into established hierarchies and ideologies. Much like in the real world, racist, sexist and ableist attitudes are ingrained in the culture, and as some are not presented as the overarching conflict of the novels, they become more difficult to dismantle.

These *implicit ideologies* are not brought out to be questioned in the text. By steering students towards interpreting textual silences, students can become aware of similarities between the attitudes towards *Muggles* and people with disabilities. This is a perspective that many sources, fictional or otherwise, lack, and the disabled perspective is also more difficult for *normates* to empathise with, since ableist cultures take great care to portray disability as something undesirable. The benefit of the reading of *Muggles* and *Squibs* as disabled is that students may then discuss how, in the context of the fictional world of *Harry Potter*, they would become disabled themselves. This constrains the opportunity to disassociate with the oppression these characters are subjected to and gives teachers who want to use *Harry Potter* to discuss processes of othering an opportunity to focus on dismantling the binary of same/Other by applying *crip theory* to the examples presented in this study.

¹⁵⁷ *Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince*, p. 425

¹⁵⁸ *Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince*, p. 413

Robert McRuer calls for the need for people to “come out crip” and Simi Linton urges people to “[claim] disability”; to ransack themselves and admit that disability is something that unites us, not something that divides us.¹⁵⁹ This realisation can help ease anxiety over the own inability to be perfectly able-bodied, as we all as question the origin of discriminatory attitudes towards those who are impaired.

Only by accepting that the “perfect” able-bodied subject is a myth, can structures and attitudes that create disability be dismantled.¹⁶⁰ Identifying with the *Muggle* and the *Squib*, the disabled Others of *Harry Potter*, rather than the able-bodied magical people, would mean an opportunity for readers to claim disability in the context of the novels. By highlighting and discussing sections of the Harry Potter novels where processes of othering may lead readers to disassociate from characters due to their portrayal as Other, and as a disabled Other in particular, students will be given an opportunity to learn about both their own inability to be completely able-bodied, and see other people’s disabilities as a construct rather than a definite truth.

¹⁵⁹ McRuer, p. 32; Davis, *Bending over Backwards*, p. 34

¹⁶⁰ Davis, *Bending over Backwards*, p. 39; McRuer, p. 37

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