

Runswick-Cole, K. (2017) (Re)imagining the research assemblage: towards scholar activism, Inaugural Professorial Lecture, Manchester Metropolitan University, Manchester, UK, 10th January, 2017.

Slide 1: (Re)imagining the research assemblage: towards scholar activism

Slide 2: Dedication

To my parents.

Slide 3: Acknowledgements

Special thanks to Jon, William and Imogen Runswick-Cole for your support, love and inspiration. None of what I'm talking about today could have happened without you.

Slide 4: (Re)imagining the research assemblage: towards scholar activism

Is scholar activism possible in the neoliberal university?

#scholaractivism

I'm going to spend the first part of this lecture doing what all good writers should always do and define the key terms in the title. And then, I'll introduce you, or perhaps re-introduce you, to disability studies before reflecting on the projects that I've been involved in (working in partnership with so many of you here) to try to think about scholar activism. I want to ask whether 'scholar activism' is possible in the current university context, a system which is increasingly driven by metrics and market forces – a neoliberal university.

So, to the first of my key terms ...

Slide 5: (Re)imagining

Who and what is imagined in the research assemblage?

#scholaractivism

The first key term that I want to clarify is "(re)imagining". Imagination is important to those of us who broadly locate our work in the discipline of social sciences. For most sociologists, the word imagination immediately invokes Wright Mills' (1959) seminal text *The Sociological Imagination* in which he asks us to look at social norms afresh.

For many of us in working in disability studies, when we try to imagine things differently, we are drawn to the work of Tanya Titchkosky. Tanya

has taught us to ‘watch our watchings’ and to ‘read our readings’ (2007) to think about embodied difference in new and imaginative ways. Tanya urges us to pay attention to social relations between people, and the organization of the material physical world (2011). She asks: “who are we when we belong, and where?” and she insists that there must always be a space for ‘questioning’.

Tanya, in what follows, I’m going try to heed your advice and to ask who and what is imagined in the research assemblage.

Slide 6: The research assemblage

Traditional research assemblages include: researcher, hypothesis, subjects, method, data, ethics & results #scholaractivism

Which leads me to my next key term: ‘assemblage’. Over the last ten years, I’ve been lucky enough to work with a number of PhD students (some of whom I’m delighted to say are here in the audience). I have to confess that I always wonder who ends up learning more in supervision - me or the student! (try not to be too alarmed by this if you are a current student, it works out in the end!) And working with Thekla Anastasiou, and her other supervisor Rachel Holmes, on a project exploring young children’s relationships with food, has certainly prompted me to think through this notion of the assemblage.

The term ‘assemblage’ has recently been taken up within an approach to social theory called New Materialism.

New materialism proposes a radical shift in the way we understand the world by de-centering from the human to see humans and all other things as abstract entities that can only be understood in relationship to each other (Fox and Alldred, 2015). But the term assemblage was initially developed by the French philosophers Deleuze and Guattari. Deleuze and Guattari described assemblages as 'machines' that bring elements together and link them in order to produce *something* (Deleuze & Guattari, 1988: 4).

I'm going to use this idea of the assemblage to think about the 'elements' that we bring together to produce something that we call 'research' and to try to read assemblages differently. I'm arguing here that we need to think again about the elements in research as well as the relationships are between them. I want to try to pay attention to who and what is imagined as being in the research assemblage. Who and what is there, and who or what is absent? Where are the boundaries drawn?

I also make a special mention of Deleuze and Guattari here because Neil Carey told me that no inaugural lecture is complete without a reference to dead French philosophers – so I can now tick that box!

Traditionally, when the research assemblage is imagined, the elements might include: the researcher, the hypothesis, the subjects, the method, the data, the ethics and the results. A traditional research assemblage is a sanitized environment, seemingly free from 'contamination' - notions of power, politics and emotion are absent, or perhaps obscured, in research in which the researcher remains detached and neutral in the process.

Slide 7: Enter Disability Studies

Disability queers the normative pitch #ScholarActivism

Disability research is and always has been enacted differently from this traditional conception of research. This is not surprising perhaps, when you realise that whenever this thing we call 'disability' enters the field (in research, education, health or social care) there is often a moment of disruption – 'disability queers the normative pitch' (Goodley and Runswick-Cole, 2014a).

Critical disability studies are an inter-disciplinary area of study, cutting across traditional divides with contributions to the field coming from psychology, sociology, education, feminist theory as well as literary theory and cultural studies (Mallett and Runswick-Cole, 2014). Unlike more traditional approaches to the study of disability, based in medicine and psychology, disability studies have been informed by and carried out with and by disabled people.

Critical disability studies are a political inquiry. They are premised on disabled people's rejection of any understanding of disability that locates (the *problem* of) disability solely *within the person* (Albrecht et al., 2001). In contrast, (the *problem* of) disability is firmly understood as a sociological concept, located in the social world, rather than as an individual, biological deficit (Mallett and Runswick-Cole, 2014).

You can see already that disability studies demand a different type of a research assemblage, contrasted with the version of research I described above. Working in disability studies requires us to re-imagine the research assemblage to include a host of actors: disabled people, their

families and allies, activists, practitioners, and more, and to pay attention to how they affect one another and to the power relationships at play.

And here is my first product placement moment! If you want to learn more about disability studies this is a good introductory text – other texts are available!

So, disability studies are not a sanitized or de-politicised project rather they are imbued with politics, emotion and a commitment to social justice.

And this leads me to my third key term: scholar activism

Slide 8: Scholar Activism

Should academics maintain a scholarly ‘distance’? #ScholarActivism

I am in debt to professor Roger Slee, Professor of Education at the University of South Australia for turning my attention to the idea of ‘scholar activism’.

Kitchin and Hubbard (1999) have argued that most academics seek to maintain a scholarly ‘distance’ between their activism and their teaching, research and publications but scholar activism is an umbrella term for the approach taken by an increasing number of academics who believe they have a role to play in creating social justice – and who do something about it (Farnum, 2016).

In disability studies, however, the relationship between scholarship and activism has always been entangled. Colin Barnes (2003) has described emancipatory disability research as research that aims to disrupt the usual power relations and demands that academics give up their power within research and give it to disabled people to control and shape the research agenda.

However, it seems that ‘the growing marketisation of education, [and] the all-consuming competitive working lives of academics’ (Chatterton et al., 2009:2) might become push factors for some to abandon activism in the neoliberal university.

Given these pressures, is it *still* possible to be an activist and a scholar in the context of a university? While we are caught up in the demands to publish (or perish), generate income, and to deliver public engagement and impact while engaging in excellent teaching, are the elements there within this contemporary, complex research assemblage to produce scholar activism? I’m going to suggest, that we have, at the very least, to try to strive towards this.

Slide 9: becoming a service user

Who holds the power? "Service user" or university? #scholaractivism

As many of you know my route into working in the university was a not a traditional one. While all families use services, our family, Jon, William, Imogen and I, use services which mean that we attract the label of ‘service users’. And it was my frustration with services (education,

health and social care) which led me into research. This means that at times (like this!) I still feel like an outsider in the university context, where 'service users' are still sometimes imagined as if they sit outside the academy and only inside it as subjects to be studied, within the traditional research assemblage.

In this faculty, service users play a crucial role in the education of practitioners, but despite attempts to recognize their knowledge as 'experts by experience', we could still argue that the power is held by the university who, *sometimes*, invites the service user in.

It was my experience as a 'service user' that led to my first research project, my PhD.

Slide 10: Parents as Advocates: parents who register and appeal with the Special Educational Needs and Disability Tribunal

Thank you to all the #BloodyAwesomeParents #BAPs for everything you've taught me #ScholarActivism

I wanted to understand more about other families' experiences of the special educational needs system and of their accounts of 'fighting for services' that often lead them to conflict with professionals. In this research assemblage were children, parents, teachers and a host of allied professionals and a raft of policies and legislation and complex power relationships. The accounts from families were moving and harrowing – trapped in a system that was, and sadly, still is, difficult to

navigate and which frequently constructs children as the problem. I later wrote with Sara Ryan about how parents moved from advocating for their own child to becoming activists in their local communities supporting other families in their 'fights'. And my aim for this project was that it would inform the policy and practice arena it was situated within.

Parents taught me how they came to understand disability – often moving from holding very traditional deficit models of disability towards understanding disability as being as Rod Michalko would say 'part of the natural variation' (2002).

Following this project, working with Nick Hodge, who I'd met when he was also doing his doctorate, we talked (a lot!) and then wrote (a lot!) about the complexities of parent professional partnership an issue which, despite our best efforts and those of many others, remains problematic in the current system.

And I thought a lot about mothering, culminating in a co-authored paper, again with Sara Ryan, in which we described the liminal place in which non-disabled mothers of disabled children found themselves in the disability community. This paper, which has been cited more than any other I have been involved with, was nearly rejected by *Disability & Society*. One of the reviewers was unhappy with non-disabled mothers of disabled children having a voice in a journal which allies itself with the concerns of disabled people, fortunately the third reviewer disagreed, and we could have our voice. The labour of parents in navigating a

space in the world for their children and themselves remains a particular interest for me.

I owe a huge debt of gratitude to all the parents I have met and who have taught me so much. Thank you: Rachael Clark, Denise Scott, Lucy Rutherford, Sara Ryan, Linda Derbyshire, Chrissie Rogers, Peter and Wendy Crane, and, again, Jonathan Runswick-Cole and all the Bloody Awesome Parents (BAPs) on Twitter, for all your support.

At the end of my PhD, I got my wish, a paper based on the research was cited in the Green paper “Support and Aspiration: a new approach to special educational needs and disability” which informed the Children and Families Act, 2014. But as my PhD thesis was effectively reduced to a sentence “we know that parents find the tribunal system stressful”, I wonder how much I can claim that my research influenced the system? Could anyone *really* claim that this is scholar activism?

Slide 10: Children, young people and families

Does Every Child Matter, post-Blair?

<https://doeseverychildmatterpostblair.wordpress.com>

#scholaractivism

When I started my PhD, I had a sliding doors moment. The person who was supposed to supervise me was on sabbatical and while that person was away I was to be supervised by a new, young lecturer. I remember climbing to the 6th Floor of the Education Building at the University of Sheffield to meet that young man: his name was Dan Goodley. Thank you, Dan, for being behind that door!

From the beginning, Dan has been a key element within my research assemblage! When I completed my PhD, we were lucky enough to work together on a series of projects working with disabled children and young people, their families and allies. Driven by a shared passion for our work, we sought to:

- Challenge the psychologisation in disabled children's lives which has so often cast them as 'less than' other children (Goodley and Runswick-Cole, 2010)
- Expose and theorise the systemic, cultural and attitudinal violence that continues, sadly, to haunt the lives of children whose development is judged to differ from the norm (Goodley and Runswick-Cole, 2011)
- And crucially, we sought to celebrate the disruptive potential that disabled children and young people bring to their families and communities and to use this to think again about how we understand childhood and, indeed, what it means to be human (Goodley and Runswick-Cole, 2014).

We worked with community partners in our research, and we began to understand that we must learn to communicate our ideas differently – beyond the usual ways of universities. We produced research summaries and impact cards, we wrote for practitioner journals and magazines, and we sought to speak to the communities we hoped to influence (see <https://doeseverychildmatterpostblair.wordpress.com>)

This work was taken up by the Department for Education, educational psychologists in training, community planners in Adelaide, Australia, and

in some small ways we began to feel that the work we did was making a difference. All this coincided with the drive to produce research with ‘impact’ – research that changes stuff in the real world –as the Research Excellence Framework, the mechanism by which universities are assessed for their research, began to bite. While I have mixed feelings about the role of impact in the REF, particularly with regards to ‘what counts’ as evidence and ‘how’ that evidence is assessed, it seems to me that the impact agenda can and should be exploited to support scholar activism.

Slide 12: Disabled Children’s Childhood Studies

Check out disabled children’s childhood studies here @tilliecurran @kirstyliddiard1: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=i0BxCP5TcVc> #ScholarActivism

At the end of project conference, for the research “Does Every Child Matter, post-Blair? The interconnections of disabled childhoods’, we invited disabled children, young people and their parents/carers to present in the university, from this sprang a series of conferences which we called “Child, Youth, Family and Disability” hosted first at Manchester Metropolitan University and then at the University of The West of England and at Cardiff University. From those conferences, disabled children’s childhood studies emerged. Working with Tillie Curran, at the University of the West of England, and then more recently also with Kirsty Liddiard, at the University of Sheffield, we have sought to develop this as a distinct area of inquiry distinguished by three guiding principles:

1. Different starting points – the view that studies of children’s impairments, or medical conditions, or evaluations of services for children, were not studies of disabled children’s childhoods.
2. Distinct approach to ethics and voice – which put children’s and families concerns first;
3. Troubles the hegemony of the norm – this means not judging disabled children’s lives in reference to some mythical notion of normal childhood.

Slide 13

It also led to the publication of two books

Slide 14: Impairment labels

It was also as a result of this work with children that my interest in labelling began to grow. Over numerous cups of coffee, Rebecca Mallett and I became particularly interested in how impairment categories come into being and how they affect the lives of people who attract a label. Meeting Anne McGuire and Patty Douglas in Canada was crucial to the development of this work, and last year *Rethinking Autism: disability, identity and diagnosis* was published, edited by me, Rebecca Mallett and Sami Timimi.

But was this work activism?

Slide 15: #Justice for LB

Follow @justiceforLB #justiceforLB #ScholarActivism

This question was brought into sharp focus for me on 4th July, 2013. Three days after we began a new research project “Big Society? Disabled people with learning disabilities and civil society” which asked how people with learning disabilities were faring in a time of cuts to services, and on the day when I was received a Manchester Metropolitan University award for research excellence, Connor Sparrowhawk died.

For those of you who don't know, Connor, the son of my friend and colleague, Dr Sara Ryan, died in an NHS Assessment and Treatment Unit. Connor, a much-loved son and brother, a cool dude, who also happened to have a learning disability and epilepsy, was left alone in a bath and drowned.

Connor was affectionately known as Laughing Boy (LB) by his family and a campaign for #justiceforLB, led by his mother, Sara, and George Julian and a whole collective of #JusticeforLBers was launched.

If those of us sitting in universities, working in disability studies had nothing to say to this campaign and to others like it, then we had to ask ourselves, what was the point of us?

But we, the disability studies assemblage, did have something to say and something to offer, academics from this university and across the globe, alongside many others, got behind the justice for LB campaign.

Slide 16:

Rebecca Lawthom and Dan Goodley had the brilliant idea of making a Justice for LB flag, which they took to Glastonbury to share Connor's story and the aims of the campaign.

Slide 17

That flag was draped over the lecturn at the Normalcy conference in 2014,

Slide 18:

Dan and I took the flag to Australia in 2015 where we shared #JusticeforLB with self-advocates and academics

Slide 19

When I travelled on alone to New Zealand, the flag came too and Paul Gibson, the Disability Rights Commissioner in New Zealand, heard the story and held the flag alongside self-advocates, professionals and academics.

Slide 20:

As part of our work on employment for people with learning disabilities in Malaysia, we talked with self-advocates about justiceforLB.

Slide 21:

Colleagues in disability studies at the University of Lancaster have tirelessly supported the campaign, Chris Hatton has used his skills to offer a forensic examination of minutes of meetings, big data and policy.

Slide 22:

Hannah Morgan organized for the Justice for LB quilt (a celebration of Connor's life) to take pride of place at the Disability Studies Association Conference in Lancaster in 2014.

Slide 23:

Many of us wrote blogs that were shared widely as part of #107daysofaction. We Tweeted at ministers. We raged with Sara and other parents who lost their children because of neglect. Colleagues here and elsewhere use the story of Justice for LB to teach a whole host of practitioners.

Slide 24:

If you chat to me on a bus or a plane, I'm still likely to talk to you about Justice for LB – and now, when I do, I meet people who already know the story – the solicitor on his way to Hamburg for a stag who knew about LB, the students at a guest lecture at Sheffield Hallam who had followed his story.

Slide 25: The Gingers

The final image is a photograph of ginger bread figures, they are brightly coloured, stitched pieces of fabric – each one is different. Each figure represents the life of someone who has died. Following the publication of a review into unexpected deaths of people with learning disabilities and mental health issues in Southern Health Trust (the Trust where Connor died), a report found that hundreds of people’s deaths went uninvestigated. The Care Quality Commission published a report before Christmas 2016 that revealed that this trend was repeated across the country. In 21st Century Britain, when no one seems to care about the unexpected deaths of people with learning disabilities, it is hard to escape the conclusion that some lives matter less than others.

Slide 26: Bring Brandon home

Post-Valuing People Now, Post Winterbourne JIP, post Transforming Care, people with learning disabilities are still excluded, marginalized and living in institutions, not homes. Just before Christmas, over the hills in Sheffield, a young man called Brandon Reid was forcefully removed from his family home by 12 police officers and refused permission to return home for Christmas. It is yet another example of the violation of the rights of disabled people in the UK, documented so clearly by the United Nation’s recent report (<http://www.ohchr.org/EN/HRBodies/CRPD/Pages/InquiryProcedure.aspx>). You can sign a petition to bring Brandon home here, sadly, too late for Christmas: <http://www.ipetitions.com/petition/get-brandon-home-for-christmas>

So, we, the disability collective, are doing something, but we know this is never enough. We have yet to disrupt the seemingly endless cycle of scandal in the lives of people with learning disabilities followed by a committee, an inquiry and a report and then we simply repeat.

Slide 27: Human Activism

As I explained, Connor died three days after the start of a new project: “Big Society? Disabled People with Learning disabilities and civil society” and his death and the campaign had a massive impact on our project.

From the outset, the project research assemblage included people with learning disabilities, family members, disabled people’s organisations and academics. Funding for the research paid our community partners – in other words we paid people with learning disabilities to co-research and to guide the project. This is still far too unusual, too often disabled people are expected to give their expertise for free, but in this faculty, I’m proud to say that we know that is not acceptable and funding bodies seem to agree with us, including this work for ESRC and Janice Murray’s and Juliet Goldbart’s work for the National Institute for Health Research. This follows a long tradition of participatory research in this Faculty led by Carolyn Kagan and Rebecca Lawthom.

In imagining a research assemblage which included a host of different elements, we continued to change the ways in which we communicated the research. We used summaries, animations, blogs and, of course, Twitter. We developed policy briefs so that we could give people clear

messages about the project's three strands: self-advocacy, employment and community inclusion.

And we developed a web hub and Twitter feed to continue to campaign on these issues beyond the lifetime of the project.

<http://www.humanactivism.org/research>

And we talked a lot about what it means to be human.

Throughout the #justiceforLB campaign, Sara argued that people with learning disabilities in the UK are not seen as fully human. This leads to the sorts of careless care that results in preventable deaths that go uninvestigated but also to acts of hate crime and exclusion that haunt the lives of people with learning disabilities.

In our work with disabled children, we spent a lot of time troubling the norm, we questioned what 'normal' child development meant, we asked "who wants to be normal anyway?" And I think that we rightly highlighted the positive disruption that disabled children can bring to the spaces of family, health, education and social care. We celebrated their potential and refused to analyse their lives with reference to a mythical norm.

But when we began working with our research partners on the Big Society project, we had to reflect again on the norm.

Speak Up Self Advocacy had developed award winning training which they have delivered to a host of practitioners including: social workers, the police, the fire service, nurses and more. The training is called “I am a person too”. It is shocking that we still need to educate people to understand that people with learning disabilities are fully human too. But our community partners reminded us that we did, and they taught us that to be treated equally sometimes people need to be treated differently.

This led to us imagining things differently, again, and to develop what we called a DisHuman reality:

Slide 28: Becoming DisHuman

Read the DisHuman manifesto here: <https://dishuman.com/dishuman-manifesto/> #ScholarActivism

A dishuman reality is

one which, we contend, simultaneously acknowledges the possibilities offered by disability to trouble, re-shape and re-fashion traditional conceptions of the human (to ‘dis’ typical understandings of personhood) while simultaneously asserting disabled people’s humanity (to assert normative, often traditional, understandings of personhood). (Goodley & Runswick

Cole, 2014, p. 6)

We were trying to articulate the tension self-advocates faced every day in wanting to celebrate their difference at the same time as claiming sameness as other people.

Working with Dan Goodley, Rebecca Lawthom, and Kirsty Liddiard, we began to articulate a manifesto for change - a DisHuman manifesto which seeks to trouble conventional notions of autonomy and independence and recognizes the interdependencies in all our lives – the assemblages that we all inhabit with other people and things.

Slide 29: More research assemblages

It has been a while since I've mentioned Deleuze and Guattari, so it must be time to bring them back in! Deleuze and Guattari tell us that assemblages are temporary, not fixed, they move all the time, with the elements within them changing and flowing inside and outside the assemblage. And so, from the big society assemblage flowed other research assemblages, including:

- work with Kirsty Liddiard, Esther Ignagni and Ann Fudge Schormans and others on intimate citizenship in the lives of people with learning disabilities. We travelled with Annie Ferguson, Jodie Bradley and Vicky Farnsworth from Speak Up to Toronto to a workshop with other self advocates in which we explored love, work and shopping. This work continues, as together we demand the right of people with learning disabilities to intimacy in their lives.

- I'm also continuing my work with children, parents and schools working with Patty Douglas and Anne McGuire on a digital story telling project focused on educational inclusion and with the wonderful Purple Patch arts, exploring the meaning of value in arts-based education.
- And I've been working with Hannah Smithson and Peter Hick on a project exploring young people with Special Educational Needs' experiences in the criminal justice system.
- Working with another Big Society partner, Keith Bates, from Boss Employment, and with three self-advocacy organisations, we are hoping to carry out some much needed research into the possibilities of self employment for people with learning disabilities in the new year.

Slide 30: Learning Disability England

These research networks also led to me becoming a member of Learning Disability England. As a 'service user' and as an academic, the emergence of Learning Disability England gives me hope. Learning Disability England is an alliance of people with learning disabilities, their families and carers and service providers committed to equality in the lives of people with learning disabilities. It also happens to be led by two people I admire enormously, Gary Bourlet and Alicia Wood.

If you would like to support the campaign for equality in the lives of people with learning disabilities, then please visit their website and consider joining Learning Disability England.

Slide 31: Living Life to the fullest

Follow <https://livinglifetothefullest.org> #ScholarActivism

Just before Christmas, Dan, Kirsty and I were delighted when the Economic and Social Research Council announced that it would fund “Living Life to the Fullest”, a research assemblage including disabled young people with life limiting and life threatening impairments, Purple Patch Arts and DMD Pathfinders. This builds on previous work we have done with children and young people who have short lives and together we will be re-imagining issues of disability, death, life and the human informed by the voices of young people who are often not imagined to belong to a research assemblage at all.

I want to pay particular tribute to Kirsty’s work on developing this project, her expertise in creative and participatory methods revitalized the original project proposal. So over to her to tell you about the project and with thanks to Jenny Fisher, who taught us how to use free animation software!

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=trifWzjpebo>

Slide 32: Devo Manc

So, research assemblages are made up of a host of elements including

human and non-human actors. And we have seen that they often include policy initiatives. Manchester is in the middle of change – the devolution agenda will require a radical re-imagining of how health and social care will be delivered across the city. The inquiry by the UN revealed the extent to which the impact of the cuts has fallen on disabled people. Funded by Manchester Metropolitan University, and working with Breakthrough UK and Venture Arts, we asked disabled people living in Manchester about their lives:

<https://vimeo.com/192324277>

<https://vimeo.com/192325021>

This is what life is like in Manchester, ten minutes around the corner from where we are now.

Nationally, people with learning disabilities still die 13-20 years before their non-disabled peers. The challenge for devolution Manchester is not to repeat the systemic failures which result in such health inequalities.

We have been told that the devolution train is moving fast, but not all bodies move quickly, and if we are not careful, not everyone will be able to board the devolution Manchester train. We need to make sure that we stand alongside the most marginalized people in society, locally, nationally and globally. The formation of an advocacy hub here in the Faculty, being taken forward by Jenny Fisher, to offer a platform to

support the advocacy expertise in the city offers us an opportunity to do just that.

I very much hope that there are people following along with this lecture on Twitter and if they are then Peter Matthews, Cara Courage and Nicola Headlam this next bit is for you.

During the Big Society project, we noted the absence of people with learning disabilities in cultural representations. When people with learning disabilities were represented in print or on the television it was most often in the context of abuse. And while it is, of course, important to document abuse and to challenge violence against disabled, we desperately need other cultural representations of disabled people too.

And so, enter, into my research assemblage, at least, *The Archers!*

Slide 33: Cultural Representations

@caracourage @networknicola @urbaneprofessor this is for you - #academicarchers as THE site for #ScholarActivism!?

The Archers is a radio soap opera in the UK that has been running for more than 60 years. Originally an everyday story of country folk which was intended to educate farmers about new methods, post-war, it has had something of a surge in interest recently following a dramatic story line featuring domestic violence and coercive control.

Last year, Peter, Nicola and Cara had the idea to host an interdisciplinary

conference about the Archers: The first Archers in Fact and Fiction Conference. This allowed me to combine two passions: *The Archers* and disability studies and to talk about cultural representations of disability within the Archers. Drawing on the work of Mitchell and Snyder (2000), I have argued for a sustained engagement with social oppression in the lives of disabled people in cultural texts, like *The Archers*. What has delighted me about this involvement with the conference, and book that followed, is that it has allowed me to share disability theory with a wider audience – so, perhaps, this is where scholar activism can really flourish!

Slide 34: Final words

The promise of drinks (in real glasses without foil tops!) that brought you here is about to be delivered (no cruel optimism here, for once), I hope that you are able to stay for a while so we can chat. And following a last minute bit of activism yesterday, if you have a nut allergy there will be food for you too!

But I want to end by thanking everyone here for the support you have given me. Without you, I would not be standing here. Despite the marketization of universities and the ever-increasing role that metrics play in measuring our individual successes (and failures), we need to recognize the interdependencies in all our lives and that our achievements are always the results of collective, rather than individual, endeavours.

In turbulent times, globally, nationally and locally, the need to come together to challenge social inequality has never been greater. As

members of the disability collective, we need to work out how we can speak to these issues. Sometimes, I think that we are good at shouting from the sidelines and we need to do more than that. The emergence, here at Manchester Met, of Metropolis: a research led policy think tank, offers an opportunity for us to speak to policy makers. We need to work out how far we can work within the systems and structures that need to change to end inequality, without becoming complicit within them. We need, at the very least, to have something to offer to the urgent debates that are raging here in Manchester, nationally and globally.

In the end, we need to work towards scholar activism.

Thank you.

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